

Trusting God's Goodness in Adversity

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Sure great to learn a new song. Isn't that a command?

Sing a new song unto the Lord. Thank you, praise team. To know that we'll be learning some new songs through eternity, right? I bet those angels have some songs they're going to teach us.

That heavenly praise team. That's going to be great. Look forward to. Well, to have wisdom is better. Amen. The wise person trusts God in good times and bad.

And we're looking at Ecclesiastes 6 and just a couple of verses in chapter 6 and part of chapter 7 today. I've really enjoyed our time together in Ecclesiastes over the last few months, bringing a couple of messages from this little Old Testament book that oftentimes gets neglected.

So I'm glad the Lord led me to study a little bit from Ecclesiastes. It's been a blessing to me. So we'll continue today to think about our search for meaning in this present life that we live under the sun, in this fallen condition that we find ourselves in.

[1 : 20] And, you know, when it comes to, particularly when it comes to facing adversity today. That's the focus of this passage is how do we live our lives wisely in the face of adversity?

Because we all face adversity, right? We live our lives to one degree or another. We have difficulties, hardships, misfortune, hard times, calamities, disasters even, trouble, and sorrow.

Sounds depressing, doesn't it? You might be thinking, maybe I should have stayed home from church this morning. Did I have to hear this message? But there's some good news. There's good news here for us.

Living your life by purely earthly standards is vain. It's vanity of vanities, says the preacher. However, the antidote, the antidote to a vain life, a life of vanity, is a God-centered life.

Living a God-centered life. So looking at life through a God-centered lens while trusting in Him makes all the difference. It makes our lives coherent and fulfilling.

[2 : 23] Amen. So we're going to look at starting with verse 10 of chapter 6 and we'll read down through 14 of chapter 7. So follow along with me this morning.

Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. The more words, the more vanity.

And what is the advantage to man? For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow?

For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. It's better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.

For this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

[3 : 26] The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools. This also is vanity. Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.

Say not, why were the former days better than these? For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.

For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. Consider the work of God.

[4 : 28] Who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider. God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

Amen. These are the words of the Lord for us this morning. Thanks be to God. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. Lord, we ask you to teach us again from these wise sayings of Solomon.

Teach us the way of wisdom for our lives. As a songwriter has said, the way of understanding lies in not how much we know, but the pathway is a person that we've come to love.

And so we don't pretend that it all depends on us, for it's not how much we love, but how much he loves us. And we thank you for the good news of the gospel, that we are dearly loved with fatherly love by God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Just bless us. Come now, Holy Spirit, and speak to us individually. And as a church, we pray from your word in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You can be seated.

[5 : 45] Sometimes I have to catch myself. I might sing so hard that if I'm preaching, I don't have many, you know, voice left at the end of 30 minutes, but I have to sing quietly.

You know, I'm preaching Sundays. One of mankind's many problems is that, you know, we have a hard time seeing any good in suffering, any of the good that comes out of suffering, at least when we're going through it.

You know, even for Christian people who believe in the providence of God, as we just confessed, and we just sang about the sovereignty of God, even for us who believe that it's easier to sing those words and to say those words than to really embrace what they mean.

You know, there was a young couple in their mid-20s who suffered some great disappointment, and at the time they thought of it as a totally negative experience. But in looking back later, much later, they had a different perspective.

My parents tell this story. We heard it as kids. You know, they both grew up on farms in rural Ontario, Canada, where there's a lot of fertile soil, good farming there, and it's what their parents did and what their parents before them did.

[7 : 11] And I think my dad was given a temporary waiver even from the draft for World War II because of farming. And my parents, they hadn't been married for many months before the Canadian Armed Forces finally called his number and he was sent off to war.

So big disappointment. Married for a few months, gone off to war. Not a part of his plan. He was gone for two years and two months. Came back after the war in 1946 and just was eager to resume his dream of owning his own farm.

They were able to get good financing, you know, because he was a veteran. And they had an agreement with an old widower to buy his farm, an old farmer named Grady. And they purchased a nice used car.

This was a 1930s Model A Ford. Ford, my dad told how he bought a can of red paint and he painted the rims of his car so they could ride in style, you know.

I don't have a picture of their car, but I imagine it looks something like the picture up here. We have a picture of that Model A Ford. It probably didn't look that good, but, you know, it's what he could do.

[8 : 26] He wanted to ride in style as they got dressed up and they made their trip to the farm where the papers would be signed and the deal would be completed. And they got out of the car and went into the kitchen and sat down with the farmer.

And they noticed he was a little uneasy and finally he hung his head and he said, I'm really sorry. You know, I've been on this farm my whole life. I just can't part with it. And my parents said, you know, at that moment, they just felt crushed in their spirits.

And they drove home with such discouragement because the plans they had were not working out. They were really struggling with believing, you know, that this big letdown was really the arrangement of a gracious, loving, heavenly father.

You know, how could they look for the relative good in the disappointment and the sadness that they were experiencing? But we know since God does nothing by chance, nor does he abandon his children to chance or to fortune, but he leads them according to his holy will, as the confession says, that we can look for the good even in the relative good, even in times of great disappointment and trouble.

And Solomon in this passage shows us two ways that we can do that. First of all, he says, we can trust in God's fatherly care in good times as well as the bad by remembering that his ways are beyond our ability to understand.

[9 : 55] All right, his ways are far beyond our ability to comprehend, first of all. Secondly, we can trust in his fatherly care because we believe that he's working for our ultimate good, right?

He's a good God, both in times of prosperity and in times of adversity. We believe that God works all things for good to those who love him and who he has called according to his purpose.

The last verse that we read, verse 14, Solomon says, in the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider, God has made the one as well as the other.

So that man may not find out anything that will be after him. So we trust in God's goodness and his fatherly care in good times as well as in the bad times by remembering that his ways are not our ways, right?

He is God all by himself. His ways are often beyond our ability to understand. His ways are not our ways. They're often beyond our ability to understand.

[11 : 04] And Solomon starts off in this section in the end of chapter six, reflecting on the providence of God. In verse 10, he says, whatever has come to be has already been named and it's known what man is and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.

So who is the stronger one here that he's talking about? Well, of course, it's God, the creator, right? Who names everything. And what is man? Man is just dust.

He's made from the dust. We come from the dust. We're created from the dust of the ground. And when life is over to dust, we return, right? We say at the graveside when at a funeral, to dust to dust, ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

The creator of a piece of artwork has the privilege of naming it, right? Because he's the owner. He's created it. The secular worldview is opposed to a God-centered worldview.

And humans are tricked into believing that we are the owners, that we can dispute with God. You know, from this perspective, we have the right to argue with God if indeed God exists, you know, the secular person says.

[12 : 23] But Solomon says disputing with God is vain. He says the more words in verse 11, the more vanity. And what is the advantage to man of arguing with God?

In verse 12 of chapter 6, he poses two questions. And he says, who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which passes like a shadow?

And he answers this first question in our passage by listing a number of proverbs or wise sayings to show what really is good for man. His second question is really a rhetorical question that doesn't require an answer.

Who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? Of course, no one can tell us, right? What will be after us under the sun. We don't get to take our cell phones with us in the casket when we get put into the vault.

We can't get any updates. You may put a lot of things in your will where you want your most prized possessions to go.

[13 : 32] But for all you know, they could all be packed up and taken to goodwill, right? Because, you know, don't they say one man's treasure is another man's junk? Or is it the other way around?

You know, the point is you can't know what will come after you. You have no control. After this brief life that he says passes like a shadow, think of a bird flying over and the shadow falls on you.

It's just for a second and it's gone. You know, only our loving Heavenly Father knows the answer to that question. We don't, we can't control anything about the future when we're here or when we're gone.

All we can do is trust in God that he's a good God. And we have to trust him in the present. You know, when we face difficulties and disappointments when we face misfortune and calamities, disasters or trouble or sorrow, especially during those times, we as his people, we say in God we trust.

That's a biblical statement. In God we trust. It's more than just a motto that we put on our coins and on our license plate, right? Again, it's easier to believe in God we trust when things are going well.

[14 : 56] When things are going according to our plan, it's easier to believe that he's watching over us with his fatherly care, keeping everything under his control when things are going well for us.

When they're going according to our plan, but we can't treat the Heavenly Father like a good luck charm, right? We can't think, for example, that as long as I opt for having that motto on the license plate, I won't break down.

My car won't break down. I won't get into an accident because it says, in God we trust. You know, speaking of that motto on the license plate, 10 years ago when we moved back to Chattanooga after living in Jamaica, I went down to the courthouse downtown to get Tennessee plates for my vehicle and in speaking with the helpful lady at the tag office, you know, she asked me, do you want in God we trust on the plate or not in God we trust?

And the way she said it, you know, I thought she was offering me two options. One would be in God we trust and the other would be not in God we trust. And so I said to her, really?

You can put that on your plate? Not in God we trust? And she kind of looked at me with that look, you know, you're not from here, you know. And then she burst out laughing and she said, no, you have two options, in God we trust or nothing.

[16 : 28] So, you know, according to Solomon in Ecclesiastes, we humans, we only have two options, right? Either it's in God we trust or in God we dispute with.

We can dispute with him, we can argue with him in our brief lives, which he reminds us, you know, it's like the shadow of a bird flying overhead.

We can trust in him whatever he allows into our lives or we cannot. We can dispute with him. And what advantage is that, Solomon says, of what advantage is that to us?

You know, is there some place in your life where you're disputing with God? Maybe. You don't think of it as arguing with him. But, you're not resting in his good fatherly care, believing that nothing happens to you by chance.

You know, are you facing any adversity, disappointment, any trouble, maybe in a relationship? Sometimes the greatest trouble we face is in our relationships with other people.

[17 : 37] In our marriages, we can experience disappointment in various ways. Disappointment with a spouse, with family members, with coworkers, with a boss, with church people, even, right?

With our leaders, with a stressful job, even disappointment with ourselves. You know, we can be disappointed in our own weakness and sin in areas where it's hard to overcome anger or lust or addiction or doubt or pride.

We can be disappointed with our income, disappointed with our body type, just about anything. You name it in life, right? We can find something to be disappointed about.

And as sinful human beings, we can even be disappointed with God. We can say to God, maybe not in those words, but we can think, you should have done this differently.

You know, why did you do it like that? You know, did you forget that I was here? Did you forget that I, you know, I had this thing and it didn't work out?

[18 : 45] And it's really, all of that is just a form of disputing with God, right? Because we're not happy with what He's doing.

We know that one remedy for us when facing adversity is to practice the means of grace that He has given us. So go to Him in prayer, faithful reading of His Word, worship, service in the church, fellowship with other faithful Christians, partaking of the Lord's Supper, just this routine, this rhythm of life that God gives to Christians as there are means for us to receive more of His grace.

and part of that is what we're doing today as we come and sing and worship and God's Spirit is here working with us. You know, how did the Lord Jesus trust in God's fatherly care in times of trouble that He faced and hardship?

Well, we know He often escaped to a quiet place to spend quantity time with the Lord. Quality and quantity time. He spent a lot of time, a lot of times His disciples were looking for Him.

They couldn't find Him. But they knew that He was someplace praying and depending on the Father. His life demonstrated this humble dependence on another person.

[20 : 06] And Jesus said, I do nothing apart from my Father. Nothing. I can't do anything apart from the Father's help. And we need the same humble dependent trust in the Father to recognize that He cares for us.

He orders our lives. He's in charge. He's the owner. We just need to trust in God's good fatherly care. Not just in the good times when things are going according to our plan, but in the bad times, in the difficult times, in sickness, even in the death of a loved one.

Remembering that His ways are beyond our ability to understand. We can't comprehend what He's doing most of the time. He might give us a glimpse occasionally or in hindsight.

We get the blessing of hindsight is always 20-20. We can look back and say, oh, okay, I understand what you were doing, Lord. His ways are beyond our ability to understand.

We also need to trust in God because we believe that He's a good God and He's always working for our ultimate good. So remember, Solomon asked two questions in verse 12 of chapter 6 and no one can answer the second question.

[21 : 24] You know, who can tell you what will come after you? But Solomon has some answers for that first question. Who knows what is good for man while he lives the days, the few days of his brief life?

And that's what he does in chapter 7. He takes some time to answer this question with a series of Proverbs, a series of wise sayings. Nine times in these few verses he uses the same Hebrew word that's translated good or better.

So he says, there's some good things for you to think about. Some things that are better for you in answer to this question, who knows what is good for man? So he really wants to get us to think about, you know, what's good and what's better.

That's the purpose of a proverb is to make us stop and think about something. The wisdom literature, you know, if you went downtown to the soccer stadium after the big game this evening and you just asked a bunch of people on the sidewalk there this question, what would you say is good for a man or a woman during the days of his or her life on the earth?

Okay, you might get some answers like, well, I think it's good material success is good for man or woman. Beauty or attractiveness is good.

[22 : 49] Intelligence is a good thing. Academic achievement is good. Enjoyment of pleasure because you deserve it. That might be an answer you would get.

Self-actualization of being true to yourself is a good thing. Some might say choosing your own identity is good. Having autonomy over your body, maybe over your sexual identity.

Loving yourself, living for today. Man, eat, drink, and be merry. Right? That may be, somebody might say, you know, finding the thing that makes you happy. That's the answers of the secular worldview on what is good for a man or woman in this short life that we live.

So, we know how many people would answer the question, but how does God answer the question? What does God have to say to the answer to that question? How does the Holy Spirit move Solomon to answer these questions, to write words there for our benefit?

He names some things in the Proverbs. He says, a good name is better and more valuable than costly treasure. Right? So, it's, we know we can buy costly treasure, but money can't buy a good name.

[24 : 10] Right? And if we lose a good name in our short lives, because of the shortness of life, it's hard to get it back. Right? So, a good name is better and more valuable.

He says, a serious reflection on one's short life is good for a man or a woman. He says, a sad face is good. A sad face is good if it leads to more joy in one's heart.

He says, it's good to humbly receive a wise person's rebuke. Well, you wouldn't hear that on the street. He says, patient waiting and delayed gratification are good things.

A gentle spirit is a good thing to have. We'd really be surprised, right, if someone on the street said having a sad face is a good thing. Solomon starts out in verse 1 with a startling statement.

He says, a good name is better than precious ointment and we understand that but then he adds, the day of death is better than the day of birth. So, what does he mean the day of death is better than the day of birth?

[25 : 17] You know, we laid my dear mom to rest just this past Saturday and we had a wonderful family reunion. All of her grandchildren were there, all of her grandchildren except one who was very pregnant, eight and a half months pregnant.

Even one granddaughter traveled from Spain. The granddaughter that was pregnant actually gave birth on the same weekend so it's good that she didn't try to travel and my sister sent this picture of another one of her many grandchildren when she got back to Florida.

There's the little Sophia that was born on the weekend that we sent great-grandma home to be with Jesus. So, it's kind of bittersweet, you know, sadness on the one hand that she would no longer, my mom would no longer be around to enjoy her children and her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren but joy on the other hand that we added another one to the family.

But how is it that Solomon says the day of a funeral is better than the day of birth? You know, from a God-centered worldview the day of death marks the end of sin and suffering and tears and sorrow that we all face in this life and the day of birth it's just the beginning, right?

It's the good times, yes. We know that child is going to face some good times but there's also going to be some trouble. There's going to be some difficulty in her life and in verse 2 he continues with the same theme of death when he says it's better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting for this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart.

[27 : 07] So, laying it to heart, reflecting on our lives when we go to the funeral home and we see our loved one laying in the casket, right? It makes us think about our own mortality and it should make us think it's good to go to a funeral and to be sober and think about our lives.

We don't think too much about that when we're living especially when we're young and healthy, right? We don't think about death or the brevity of life but one of the things that Solomon says is good for us is to reflect on the day of our death knowing that it's inevitable.

all of us are facing that and it should make us wiser in the way we use our time and what we see as important in life. When we accept that our death is coming knowing that it will be here sooner than we realize it helps us to keep a proper perspective on our lives.

In verses 3 and 4 he gives a couple other startling proverbs he says sorrow is better than laughter for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

So the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. He's not saying that it's a bad thing to enjoy a good laugh you know to enjoy a good joke because his theme one of the themes throughout the book is that we are to enjoy our lives to the full while keeping God's commandments.

[28 : 44] What he's talking about in the house of mirth is the kind of meaningless entertainment that produces silly laughter you know like a person who's drunk too much wine right that kind of laughter the house of mirth you know how in the world does a sad face make the heart glad?

Well if the sadness of death makes us treasure our days and makes us live our lives to the full in loving and caring for other people then that's definitely a good thing and on the other hand if we go on living in denial about our mortality we just you know put our heads in the sand then only entertain ourselves to death to try to escape reality then we have what he says the heart of fools who love loud and silly laughter more than quiet reflection Regina Spector has a hit song entitled Laughing With maybe you've heard it really neat song I love the lyrics could have been inspired by some of these wise proverbs about mourning better than silly laughter and she says God can be funny God can be funny at a cocktail party when listening to a good God themed joke

God can be funny when told he'll give you money if you just pray the right way and when presented like a genie who does magic like Houdini or grants wishes like Jiminy Cricket or Santa Claus God can be so hilarious but no one laughs at God she says in a hospital or in a war or when they're freezing or starving or so very poor no one laughs at God when the cops knock on their door and say I have some bad news sir no one laughs at God when the airplane starts to uncontrollably shake but God can be funny at a cocktail party you know with a God centered world view we know that even in the hospital bed right even in the hospital bed he's working for our ultimate good even when we face poverty or hunger he's ultimately working for good for those who love him and are called by him for his purposes even if we find ourselves drafted in an awful war you know that's brought about by the devils and wicked men we trust that God is still in control he's still in control as we confessed even of those wicked men and he does his work very well and justly though men may act unjustly so even if your airplane starts to uncontrollably shake and you're going down you can trust in your heavenly father in his fatherly care because we know and we believe that nothing can happen to us by chance that would not be really an accident from a

God perspective right from a God centered world view nothing can happen to us except by the arrangement of his gracious fatherly hand and he watches over us with fatherly care R.C.

Sproul wrote a book not a chance basically he was saying there's no such thing right it doesn't exist because of the providence and the good sovereign care of our God Jesus said that not even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of your loving father and are you not worth much more than the birds as God's children we take comfort right that in the day of prosperity we can be joyful and in the day of adversity we can trust him whether it's just that everyday adversity can't find a parking space you have to drive around the block you know five times or if it's a terrible disaster that comes into your life we can consider that God has made the one as well as the other and we can say in God we place our trust you know Rosemary Miller is known for praying for parking spaces when she goes out right and you think who does who prays but she lives in

[33 : 12] London so you understand parking is hard to find if she has to go downtown in London but even that right even that God we can pray for parking space we can pray for the little things that God is in control where do you need to stop and consider these wise sayings of Solomon you know where are you needing to trust in the face of disappointment or trouble or conflict you know in what situation are you wondering God what are you doing what are you doing in this situation you know are you considering that in the sadness you may be facing that his plan is really to increase gladness in your heart that that's what he's doing through the difficulty gladness in understanding more of his love and his fatherly care for you you you discouraged with some some of the ways that the world is going or the

United States of America is going or Washington DC or Nashville or Chattanooga or your church or your small group or your job or your marriage or your relationships or your family you know can we as individual Christians and as a church family take comfort that God is watching over us he hasn't forgotten about us you know he's watching us with his fatherly care and nothing can happen to us by chance there are echoes of Solomon's wise sayings in what Jesus teaches us in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 remember Jesus gives some wise sayings that are good for characteristics for men and women to have characteristics that you probably you won't likely hear on the street from people out there with a secular world view Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are those who mourn there you have it for they shall be comforted blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God you see it's our it's our union with Christ he is the one who is true wisdom and our union and our relationship with Christ is what empowers us to have these characteristics it's what empowers us to look at our adversity in a different light to look at the trouble with a

God lens with a Jesus lens and looking beyond what we can see in our own circumstances you know and focusing our gaze on Jesus by faith and what he's already accomplished and we have a benefit really over Solomon because Solomon didn't have the gospels Solomon did you know he had an experience reading about Christ and the in God's plan of redemption it had not yet been revealed to him but we understand you know what Christ has done for us and that our resurrection is sure because we're united to him in his resurrection you know my parents sometimes look back on that day that they experienced such hurt and disappointment and not being able to purchase that farm and in hindsight they believe that God was actually demonstrating his fatherly care for them by closing that door instead of pursuing their dream of being successful farmers they both ended up at London

Bible College studying for the ministry and after completing their training God led them to move to Jamaica in 1951 where they served the Lord in church planting for 25 years you know their dream was to have a great big herd of cows but God said no I have some sheep I have some sheep that need a herder a shepherd and there was a whole host of Canadian missionaries you know after World War II there was a move of missions a lot of soldiers went away you know got uprooted from their their families and were gone for years and came back and God moved and raised up a movement of missions and they went with a number of Canadian couples families to a little farming community in Jamaica to one of the parishes in Jamaica St.

Elizabeth that's known as the bread basket of Jamaica so they grew up as farming kids right and they went to a place where there were farmers and those are the places where they planted churches and there's about 20 churches just in St.

[38 : 15] Elizabeth alone today why Jamaica you know why did they end up there well it has to do with God's fatherly care again his providential work when my father was drafted into the Canadian army providentially his regiment was sent to Jamaica where they had German POWs and a lot of Canadians you know Canada was in the war a couple years before the U.S.

when Poland when Germany invaded Poland Canada got into the war and so Canadians had been fighting and Canada lost 50,000 soldiers during the war another 50,000 were wounded but Private McKillop was in Jamaica you know guarding German prisoners of war and in his last year of Bible college he learned of a mission that was looking for church planters for Jamaica and he knew what his calling was so God was working through those difficulties Solomon says in verse 13 of chapter 7 consider the work of God who can make straight what he's made crooked in other words you may see a windy crooked trail you know if you've been on a trail around Chattanooga you know there's switchbacks back and forth nobody can flatten the trail out so that you can see the horizon at the end right who can make what straight what God has made crooked because you can't see the end of the path you can't straighten it out you have to trust

God that he sees you and that he's put the crooked path there right for you to go through those switchbacks and he's actually on the crooked path himself he's walking with us on this uphill and downhill and over rocks and twists and turns and his ways are beyond our ability to understand so he sees the bigger picture God sees the much bigger picture that's beyond our horizon beyond our comprehension and you can trust in his fatherly care because you believe as a Christian that he's always working ultimately for your good right do you believe this amen let's pray father we thank you thank you for your word thank you for Solomon and these wise proverbs that he's given us to help us to reflect on our lives we pray holy spirit that you'll continue to make us reflective people to think about our lives not just to go about our days in an unthinking way and just through the busyness of life we sometimes go 100 miles an hour and we don't slow down and think about the important things what's good for men and good for women good for our kids so continue to teach us we pray and bless your people bless your church in Jesus name amen to