

Forever-Always Start With God

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[0 : 00] Let me invite you to turn to Ecclesiastes as we continue to move through this wonderful, wonderful Old Testament book dealing with the matters of life, the issues of life.

What more could you want? God's view and God's wisdom on dealing with the matters of life. The title of my message for this morning, forever, always start with God, forever, always start with God. And I want to ask you a couple of things as we get our minds around what I'm going to share with you before we read through our text for this morning. Now, deep down over the course of the years of my ministry, I've been doing this for almost 30 years or right at it.

If I count being an intern in a church when I was saved and all that deep down, what I found is that no one. No one truly wants to live alone.

Now, you hear all kinds of stuff and I have. I've had people tell me, you know what I wish I could do now? This is in the throes of people coming and sitting down and they feel overwhelmed. They feel completely taxed and wiped out.

[1 : 02] They're at the end of their rope and resources and they say things like this to me. I wish I could find a cabin out in the middle of nowhere and resource myself for 10 years and tell the world, see ya.

And just live alone and I won't have anything. I hear that. Sometimes I hear people say, if I could just stop the merry-go-round and just get off for a little while and just be by myself and have some time.

Me time, me time, me time. And I understand what they're saying and so do you. Now, I know though, I know from scripture that in reality, nobody truly, really wants to be all alone.

You take somebody and put them in solitary and it'll drive them crazy in no time. And these are the testimonies not only of prisoners in our penal system, but also of prisoners of war who've been isolated for many years.

It messes with your heart and your mind. Now, the reason for all of this, the reason that we can know this for absolute certain is scripture. Part of being made in the image of God is to be in relationships.

[2 : 12] Father, think Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we are made in that image. The image of God in that way. So people who say that they want to be left alone, people who want to fence themselves off from others, I think then what they really want is to be spared the inconveniences and hurts of being in relationships.

That's what they want. They've been hurt. And sometimes that's very real. And it's very deep. They don't want to be bothered with the messy of being with and around other people.

Because we're messy people. And we make messes, don't we? And we do that with each other. We even do it with people we love. I see people in here who are married. I've been married for a long time too.

We hurt the people that we love. And we can treat the people that we love the most in some of the most terrible ways and regret it deeply. Right?

This is the mess of life that we all have to deal with. Well, Solomon. He has made it clear over the course of eight chapters that if anything, life is messy.

[3 : 24] People are sinful. People do sinful things to themselves and to other people so that I suffer because I'm a sinner and I sin.

And I suffer because you're a sinner and you sin against me as I sin against you. And on and on it goes. So in each of these sinful attitudes and sinful actions that are involved in the relationships that we have in a broken world and all of that, we all share a common problem when we sin.

I want to highlight that. We are always, always doing what we want to do apart from God. When we sin, it is always, no matter what the issue, an issue of I'm doing what I want to do apart from God. And that's the problem. It's the apart from God thing that makes it such a problem. You with me? So here's the question bearing on our current passage that we'll read in just a minute.

I'm going to throw it up here on the screen for you if we can. The first question that we're going to deal with, we can do that. What wisdom or perspectives guide us in these attitudes and actions I've been referring to when we face life's ever changing situations apart from God's wisdom and perspective on things?

[4 : 58] Before I give you the answer, let's personalize that. Let's put it this way. What wisdom or perspectives guide you in the sinful attitudes and actions that you do in life's ever changing situations apart from God's wisdom and perspective?

And the answer is very straightforward for every one of us. And it's undeniable. The wisdom and perspectives of man. You have two choices. I'm either living by the wisdom and perspectives of the world or man, or I'm living by the wisdom and perspective of the Lord.

That is it. That's the way the Bible breaks it down. We are either living in our own wisdom and perspective or we borrowed from others.

But it's still man, right? In the bottom line. Any wisdom apart from God is that of man. God tells us that he calls the wisdom of man foolishness.

In reverse order, man calls the wisdom of God foolishness. And that's what we live in. I'd like to give you an example of this.

[6 : 13] Now, as I thought through this with how this would be impacting you, I thought of so many examples that I could share with you at this point that would illustrate what I'm talking about.

But I think you're probably thinking of things. You probably have some things in mind. Yeah, I see this working out in my life the same way. I'm in a lot of trouble when I'm trying to do it my way or I'm trying to do it somebody else's way with the issue being neither of those ways have really anything to do with God in his wisdom.

I'm in trouble out of the gate. You can probably think of those. But I want to share this one with you because I want the reality of this as it affects perhaps thousands of lives to come home to you.

All right. So just one example of man's wisdom and perspective apart from God. It comes from a book, a very popular book that claims that answering the following questions will help you to identify if you have suffered from some type of abuse in your childhood.

Now, before I read these, don't put them up there yet. Before I read these off to you one at a time, I want to make a caveat here. All right. Every single household across the globe is a dysfunctional household.

[7 : 32] So everybody's in the boat. Me too. All right. We come from one and we raise up one ourselves. So we're all dysfunctional.

All right. We'll start there. And so now I want to read these off. These are questions that should help you identify if you have suffered from some type of abuse in your childhood.

The first question. Do you feel that you are sometimes bad and have something to be ashamed of? Do you feel that there is something wrong with you deep down inside?

And if people really knew you, they wouldn't even like you. Next question. Do you ever feel that you have no sense of your own interests, talents or goals that sometimes you're just not sure what you want to do with your life?

Do you have trouble feeling motivated that it's hard to get going at times? Before you have coffee. Do you sometimes feel you have to be perfect in order to be accepted?

[8 : 43] Now, if you answered yes to any one of those questions, much less yes to every one of them like I did, it is likely, quote unquote, that you have been sexually or physically abused as a child.

And that is the popular literature for psychotherapy today dealing with abuse in children.

Abuse is a serious issue in life and it needs to be understood and addressed with great wisdom.

Agree? Agree? So we're certainly not making fun of that reality.

It's it's I've dealt a lot with this. I dealt a lot with this. I had a little girl, six years old, come in one time. Her mother brought her in and.

We got to know each other and it was my way to just get down in the floor and we were laying on our tummies together and gave her some crayons. And we were just coloring and doing pictures

that we did that for about 15 minutes or so and just talked about mommy and daddy and what was going on at school.

[9 : 58] And then we came to the issue that her mother had identified for me that she wanted me to start touching on. And that little girl had been abused at school on the playground. Physically.

You with me, parents? And so that had been proven. And it was in the process of being dealt with. But her mom was concerned.

What's this doing to her? She's only six. And I'll never forget what she told me when she finally started talking about it. And she said that this person who was also six.

Began to touch her in her place. That her mama had taught her that. Don't ever let anybody do that to you. This is your. Oh, you come tell mama if there's an.

Oh. In your life. And I remember that was my first abuse case for a little child. When I was in my training for my degree for marriage and family counseling, we have to go through clinicals that teach us how to deal with our own personal issues.

[11 : 08] So that we won't put those off on our counselees. And I remember identifying very quickly that people who came in dealing with abuse against children.

I had a hard time with. I had a really. I had a little boy at the time, three years old. And boy, that really pushed my buttons. Had a lot to work through myself in that.

How do you help people like that? How do you deal with people like that? So as I say this to you, I'm not making fun of abuse at all. But I have a big problem with questions like we just read off that come to the conclusion that if you answer any one of those questions in the yes, in the affirmative, it is almost certain, quote unquote, that you've been abused as a child, either physically or sexually.

I think that's a good example of wisdom apart from God. Now think about where that takes you. If you're a hurting person. Where does that take you?

But life's like that. So much of what we say, think, do can have serious consequences. So, folks, we're sobered by that to the degree that we need God and his wisdom to help us see ourselves and our world and others rightly.

[12 : 20] And when I say rightly, I mean God's way. That sounds so straightforward to a group of Christians sitting in a church service. Go out there and try to live that in the world. Well, let's see what God has for us today from Solomon's writings.

I debated about this. We're going to do one verse today. What can I say? But I'm going to read the entire chapter of Ecclesiastes 9 because that's the context, the greater context of what we're dealing with.

For I have taken all this to my heart. And explain it that righteous men, wise men and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man doesn't know whether it will be love or hatred.

Anything awaits him. That's our verse for today. But now here's the context. It is the same for all. There's one fate for the righteous and for the wicked, for the good, for the clean, the unclean, for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice.

As the good man is, so is the sinner. As the swearer is, so is the one who's afraid to swear. Now this is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men.

[13 : 36] Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards, they go to the dead. Wow. For whoever is joined with all the living, there's hope.

Surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know they will die, but the dead do not know anything. Nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.

Indeed, their love, their hate, their zeal have already perished. They no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun. Or in this life is what that means.

Go then, eat your bread in happiness. Drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life, which he, God, has given you under the sun. For this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you've labored under the sun.

[14 : 40] Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. There's no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you're going. I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to discerning, nor favor to men of ability.

For time and chance overtake them all. Moreover, man does not know his time like fish caught in a treacherous net or birds trapped in a snare.

So the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them. Also, this I came to see as wisdom under the sun and impressed me. There was a small city with a few men in it and a great king came to it.

He surrounded the city and constructed large siege works against it. He's making war against the city. But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom.

Yet no one remembered that poor man. And so I said, well, wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.

[15:46] The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Well, that's where we're headed. That's where we're headed. But for now, we want to deal with what he's talking about in chapter nine, verse one, because it's a critical juncture in Solomon's writing in this particular book up to this point of his teaching.

This marks a very important transition from eight to nine, setting up the tone and the tenor for the remainder of what he wants to say all the way through chapter 12.

So this particular section of the book frames what he's going to say for the rest of it. And if you look at eight, 16 and 17, where he left off last time, it might help a little bit.

When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth, even though one should never sleep day or night, we covered that last time. And I saw every work of God.

[16:53] I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done in this life. That is by God under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, my translation says, he will not discover.

And though the wise man should say, oh, no, but I know he cannot discover. And all of that has to do with the idea there are injustices and inequalities in life.

God distributes prosperity and adversity according to his purposes and his will. And there's no finding out why God does that in many of the situations we face.

And so Solomon is like, you know, at the end of the day, everybody dies. The righteous don't get a pass on death. And it just doesn't seem right. It doesn't seem right also that wicked people prosper and righteous people have to face suffering and adversity and ridicule.

And many of them die as a result of faithfulness. How's that right? And he's saying, you know what? At the end of the day, we just can't know what's behind all of the workings of God in people's lives.

[18:01] So then what do we do? What should be the response of my heart toward a God that we believe is in control of all of life and always does the right and good and highest and best thing?

If we really believe that's the God we serve, then what do we do with all the injustice and evil that we see in the world? Have you ever had an unbeliever challenge you with something like that?

I don't ever want to come to your God because. And then they rattle off some bad thing that happened and they say, where was he when that happened? And that's what we're talking about.

Even Christians struggle with that reality. One of the wisest men to ever live struggle with that reality. And I'm grateful as a Christian man that the Bible doesn't circumvent that, doesn't skirt it.

It hits it head on. We have 12 chapters in Ecclesiastes hitting that topic. Boom, boom, boom over and over again. So what what is his conclusion?

[18:57] Imagine man can't discover the work that God's done in this life, even though a man should try to seek it laboriously. He can't even though a wise man would step forward and say, well, I know what this is all about.

It in truth, he doesn't. He doesn't. He really doesn't. He can't put God in his matchbox and have a matchbox theology for life. You don't you don't do that to the big old God we serve.

And then he comes to chapter nine, verse one and transitions right into this. For I've taken all this to my heart and explain it, that righteous men, wise men and their deeds at the end of the day are in the hand of God.

And what Solomon has to deal with now is, is that enough? Is knowing that enough to carry him through life in a faithful way to the honor of the Lord?

Is that enough? Man doesn't know then. Man doesn't know whether it's going to be love or hatred because anything awaits him. Anything.

[20 : 07] Now, as you heed Solomon's counsel in chapter nine, as we follow his example, as it were, of taking all of this to heart, which is what he says he's done. Let me put this up on the screen for you.

Solomon shows us five important matters of life where God's wisdom makes the difference in living out God's perspective, especially in the difficult times of life.

We're only going to deal with one of those today. And it's this one. We'll put this up on the screen as well. One God worth knowing. That's verse one. The first of these five matters of life that help make the difference in living out God's perspective is this.

There is one God worth knowing. Solomon says this in verse one. I have taken all this to my heart. So Solomon is pointedly conveying the whole hearted body and soul efforts that he has thrown in to this search. He has thoroughly.

[21 : 13] He has deeply assessed this matter at hand. He has spent eight chapters telling us about these efforts that he's made and the results that he's coming to in all of it.

He's at the end of his life looking back on all that he's done and all the kinds of things that have happened, all the effort that he's gone to to try to to wring out every drop of joy, purpose and meaning in life.

And he's and he came to the place where he said, you know what? It's all futility. It's all vanity. It's all empty. And people would think, man, want a cynic.

And so now he's spending 12 chapters of this book explaining to us what he means by that. And let me remind you of the end game so that you don't sit out there and grow cynical about life.

That's not what he's wanting you to do or bitter or resentful. Or anything like that. If you look at chapter 12. Verse 13. The conclusion when all has been heard is fear God and keep his commandments because this applies to every person.

[22 : 25] God will bring every act of judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. In other words, you're going to die and you're going to have a holy God to answer to. Let that matter.

Let that help you take measure of your life. And in taking measure of your life, look to the Lord. Make it a win-win for yourself.

Don't shoot yourself in the foot and rob yourself of this life and the next one. Because the next one, you don't get to die again and get out of jail.

Whatever the next life holds, it's for eternity. That should sober us. Right?

That should cause us not just to tremble, but to look to this God and say, OK, you got my attention. I'm definitely listening. What would you require of me then? This is just where Solomon wants us.

[23 : 25] And if we're there, he's like, yes, good. He shows us then the depth. He shows us this intensity of effort in this first cause of verse one.

Here's how he says it. I have taken all this to my heart. I put my whole heart into this. I put my entire being into all of this. Now, in the ESV, the English Standard Version that many of you have, I'm in the New American Standard Version.

But in the ESV, the all this, I'll put this up on the screen for you. The all this is mentioned twice in this opening clause.

It expresses the emphasis a little more clearly in the ESV than does the NASV, the New American Standard. He says, but all this I laid to heart, examining it all.

Do you see the repetition and hear the repetition there? So there's an emphasis here we need to take note of. The question is, all of what? You're a good Bible student. You've recognized repetition in the verse.

[24 : 32] You've got to explore that. So now you're going to ask the question, all of what?

Everything Solomon's been saying and will go on to say till the end of the book about the matters of life.

The real hardcore issues of living in a broken world as a broken person among broken people. What do we do with all of that? Everything that concerns the way you and I live and move and have our being.

It's the whole of what it means for you to exist as you live out your daily life. So here's what he says. I have taken life apart and put it back together again, as it were.

And I've done all of this to great effort and at great expense to myself over the course of my entire life. Now, as an aged man, searching out the value and meaning of life.

I've done this with a view toward God. And I've also done this with a view apart from God. I've measured both of them.

[25 : 33] And I've thrown everything I've had into that reality. In other words, we might say it in the vernacular like this. I've done the math. I've done the math and I've drawn the line and I can tell you what it all adds up to.

And so let me put this one up on the screen. The only thing that makes any sense to Solomon at all after examining it all is righteous men, wise men and their deeds are in the hand of God.

Now, friends, that is relationship with God. Being in the hand of God is relationship with God. So Solomon is telling us that's the difference.

The difference isn't that we always know as Christians what to do or what to say or how to get out of a certain situation or how to alleviate the pain and the suffering that comes into our life through certain situation.

That's not what he's saying. He's saying the difference in all of this is that we are in the hand of God. We have a relationship with Almighty God, a God who loves us and cares for us and whom we can trust.

[26 : 52] Now, we think, man, I don't I don't know if that makes the difference for me in the worst case scenarios of my life. That's a problem. And again, Solomon's not running from that problem.

If you're suffering with that, join Solomon. You're in good company. He's suffering with that. He wants the reality of a relationship with God to make the difference in his life.

And he said, there's times I've struggled with that. Can you relate to that? If you're human, you should be able to. That's what he's dealing with. But this isn't only his conclusion.

This is also his starting place as well. That's what I think is being emphasized here in verse one.

Starting place. You know, his conclusion at the end of the day, when all things have been said and heard, fear the Lord and keep his commandments.

But that's where he starts as well. And I want to show you how I get that. And I want to take you back into the context of the book and show you how he has been repeatedly telling us that very thing.

[28 : 00] That life apart from God isn't really worth living. So turn to God and recognize that your life is a gift from God and live it that way.

If you really, really appreciate someone in giving you a precious gift, how does that gift giving from that person cause you to feel toward them?

Does it help you bond with them and bind with them? You know that they've given you something very precious, very meaningful to you. You know they put a ton of thought into it.

And they give it to you and it's like, wow. And it just touches you deeply. What does that do for how you feel toward them? This is where we're at right now. This is where we're at in the text.

God has given you life through Jesus Christ. Now Solomon believed in Messiah. We're taking it into the New Testament understanding. The fuller picture of we have relationship with God through Christ.

[29 : 01] How precious is that? How precious is it in the time of adversity? Suffering. How precious is it when you don't understand what God is doing in your life?

See, this is the sobering reality of what this man is bringing before us in the wisdom of God, because he knows this is what will make the difference in your life during those times.

It will help you take measure of your suffering and glorify God, not become cynical, resentful, bitter, hate the world, close to yourself away from reality. So let me show you real quickly in the context of the flow of the book.

Chapter two, verse 24. This is just by way of reminder. The idea here that I'm tracing with you is that our lives are in the hand of God.

Okay? That's what we're looking at. 2.24. There is nothing better for a man or a woman, a person, than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good.

[30 : 07] In other words, there's really nothing better in this life that doesn't get any better in this life than enjoying this life. Even in the mundane stuff. Just enjoying your life.

This also I've seen that it is from the hand of God. What? Life and the enjoyment of it. Both. Both of those come from the hand of God.

Verse 25. For who can eat and who can have any enjoyment without him? Isn't that good? All right. Let's look at another one. 3.13.

Chapter 3.13. Verse 13. Moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor. It is the gift of God.

And then notice at the end of verse 14 in chapter 3. This is all about fearing the Lord. And here, fearing the Lord is not a terror that makes you shrink back from God.

[31 : 06] It's a high and holy reverence for God. You hold God in such a high and holy reverence that it helps define your life. Okay.

How about 5. Chapter 5. 18 and 19. Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting. So here it is again where Solomon is taking careful measure and letting us know where he's come out.

To eat, to drink, and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life. Notice. Which God has given him.

For this is his reward. This is a gift from the Lord. It's a reward. It's a blessing. That God gives you life and then gives you the way to enjoy it. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, he has also empowered that man or woman to eat from them.

And to receive that reward and rejoice. This also is the gift of God. So that's where we understand not only is life a gift from God, but the ability to enjoy it is a gift from God.

[32 : 14] Do you know anybody in your life that has just about everything they want in life and they're miserable? God, ah! God can give you lots of stuff in common grace or through whatever, but that doesn't mean that it's going to enjoy.

You're going to enjoy it. But the word of God says God is the one who gives that life and the enjoyment. And then finally in chapter 6. Chapter 6 verse 2.

Just the God has given thing. A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires. Yet God has not empowered him to eat from them.

For a foreigner enjoys them. And when you remember, this is vanity. This is severe affliction. That again is what we talked about when we were discussing the reality of God's goodness and grace in allowing us to enjoy life.

And then from chapter 8 verse 15. So I commended pleasure. For there's nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and drink and be merry.

[33 : 25] And this will stand by him and his toils throughout the days of his life, which God has given him under the sun. Isn't it terrible that hedonism says eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you may die.

And they say that as do your own thing and grab it as much as you can. Whoever you have to walk on and whatever you have to do. Because this is all there is. When they're quoting from Ecclesiastes.

And that isn't anything close to what is being said here. Eat, drink and enjoy your life. Enjoy the woman that you're with or the man that you're with. And the kids and the grandbabies.

And all the stuff God puts into your life. Yes, grab it and enjoy it and wring it out. But just remember that's all a gift from God. And live like it. Live like it.

This is why we're to follow Solomon's counsel and his example. And consider the work of God.

Look back at chapter 7 verse 13 if you would friends.

[34 : 28] Consider the work of God. For who is able to straighten what God has bent. In the day of prosperity be happy. In the day of adversity consider this.

God has made the one as well as the other. God has made prosperity and adversity. He's in control of bringing both of those into your life. And you will never be able to search out the deeper meanings of God working in those ways.

So don't try. Don't waste your life doing it. Well then what do we do? Eat, drink and be merry and enjoy your life. It is the gift of God. Now come to chapter 9 verse 1.

The wise and the righteous. See it here? And their deeds are in the hand of God. So this is deep analysis because it's the analysis of always start with God.

Always start with God. It's deep wisdom. Solomon is careful and adamant to let us know that while he himself has poured his whole self into this examination.

[35 : 44] He's applied his mind, his will, his feelings, his passions, his goals in life. He's taken all of that and kind of dumped it into the mixer and hit the button. Also though, and even more importantly, he has done all this, all this with God and his ways as his foundation.

No matter what he says and what he analyzes, he always comes back to, I have to lay all of this at the feet of Almighty God. When all is said and heard, life is in the hand of God.

So basic, so fundamental. In other words, all of this is being weighed and understood and interpreted and applied to his life by what God has made known to Solomon in God's wisdom. And Solomon says, you know what? I need to learn to live my life stopping where God stops and starting where God starts. And anything that happens in between, I need to use those as my measuring stick.

I can't transgress or go farther than what God has allowed me to know. This is where he stopped. So I have to stop there. And this is where he began.

[37 : 05] And so I need to root myself in that beginning. And measure my life accordingly. That's wisdom. It's deep wisdom. It's the kind of wisdom that defines your life and changes your life.

I'll tell you, folks, when you spend the time I have around hurting people who have had some of the most horrendous things happen to them that I could never in a hundred lifetimes stand in this pulpit and tell you.

Some of it is so vile and sickening, I would never put that on you. I wish I didn't have it in my head. At other times, it's just the stuff of life where people just suffer.

Or they lose the people they love in tragic circumstances. Overnight, in the prime of life, why did daddy die?

Why did God make daddy die? Why isn't mommy here anymore? Why did God allow this to happen to our marriage, Jeff?

[38 : 11] Where was God when he was doing this or she was doing? You see what I'm saying? Why did God do that? When that kind of stuff hits your life, you better have something solid to stand on.

Something that takes you through the platitudes. People mean well, but religious platitudes and Bible bullets are not going to get you through that. Righteous, wise people know something critical about their lives.

Righteous, my life is in the hand of God. Righteous, wise people, and I'm saying that righteous slash wise. Righteous, wise people are learning to settle in their hearts that living in the hand of God is enough.

It's enough. And they're training their hearts and their minds in that reality. It's enough. Can I encourage you in that? Say, Jeff, I don't think I'm there.

I'll get in the boat with you. I'm not either. This is a life process. Yes. And you'll go through one thing and you'll deal with it in the Lord and you'll try to apply what we're talking about today.

[39 : 28] And it won't be long before you'll have another one. And it may be even more intense. And what is God doing? Well, I can't tell you everything he's doing, but I could tell you some things because they're written down in the book.

One of them is he is helping you to be comforted with the same comfort that you will comfort others with. That's one. He's also creating a deeper sense of patience and dependence in your life.

That's another one. And on it goes. We can know those things. And I wonder sometimes when I offer this counsel to people, because I'm just like you, I want to have the thing to say.

Hey, this person is a mess in front of me. They're sobbing their heart out. They're broken. They haven't eaten in days. And they've come to their pastor for help and counsel.

And sometimes all I can do is hold them or pray for them or weep with them. You know. There just aren't any magic words, but there's truth.

[40 : 30] Your life is in the hand of God, friend. Cast your burden and your heart on a sovereign God who cares for you. That's what Peter says. Well, throw this slide up there for them, if you would, Andrew.

Both adversity and prosperity come into the lives of people from God's hand. So this is a statement of ownership. Those who are in the hand of God belong to God.

And they're loved and they're cared for by God. So in the teaching of the New Testament regarding having a relationship with Jesus, God's people, God's people know that they do not have to earn.

Hear me carefully, friends. They do not have to earn God's favor to receive God's blessing. They don't have to earn that. God's favor on their lives by Christ is by grace through faith in Christ.

Right? Are we on that theological page together? This this Solomon is not saying be a good boy, be a good girl, and maybe God will give you some cookies.

[41 : 38] No, that's not what we're saying. At all. Hear me. Hear me carefully. God's unconditional, undeserved, but forever love given to people in their spiritual union to Jesus is their confidence.

In other words, I can say it this way. It is a relationship of faith and trust with a person, not an idea or an ideal or a concept or a plan or an alternate philosophy.

It's a person and he's the Lord of glory and his name is the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. That is where our confidence resides in a person, in a relationship.

I want to remind you that that relationship cost our Lord his life. So the greatest gift that he's ever given us is himself.

Union with Jesus. Is the special reality of Christian life. Union with Jesus. I'm spiritually united with him.

[42 : 49] I live in him and he lives in me. And God says nothing can ever tear that out of God's hand because God holds that reality in his own hand.

Friend, you are in the hand of God. God. No matter what this earth assaults you with, nothing can change that.

One day you're going to die. All praise be to God. Then there won't be any more tears or sadness or suffering or confusion.

This isn't the end. Except of sin. Isn't that wonderful? Amen. Well, Solomon trusts in God.

He trusts in the promise of a Messiah. Did Solomon know Jesus? No, but he knew Messiah. And he trusted in Messiah. And he trusted in the promise of God. Or Solomon couldn't have the wisdom and the grace of God on his life.

[43 : 56] And we know that's true, right? And so what comes next out of the text in verse 1? What does it say? Look at your text with me again. For I have taken all of this to my heart.

And here's how I explain it. Righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Now notice. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred. Anything awaits him.

Now here's the question bearing on this text. Is it God or man who is doing the loving or the hating in question here? So are we supposed to interpret this as you're going to go through your life and you just never know what people are going to throw at you?

Love or hate? That seems to fit. But in the greater flow of the book of Ecclesiastes, the wider context, and in the context of this chapter, as I'm going to show you in subsequent messages, I believe it's best understood as God is the one doing the loving and the hating.

In other words, commentators make cases favoring each of these views. I just want to put that out there for you. I opt for God doing the loving and the hating. And the reason concerns that greater context.

[45 : 08] It's the greater emphasis or weight of the passage where, and here it is, God's control is the primary theme in the affairs of mankind, not what men do.

That's comforting to me. God has control over what happens in your life. If when someone is mean to you, when someone hurts you, maligns you, takes from you, bruises you, you have to know that all of that is under the control of almighty God.

Now, careful to caveat. God doesn't make people sin, does he? We're very clear about that in scripture. He doesn't tempt us and he doesn't make us sin.

He tests us. And part of that testing is living in a broken world with broken people doing broken, bad things to us. And God saying, now, let's be like Jesus in this.

Let's live for the glory of the Lord Christ in this scenario. And here's what happens. You chafe at that and you say, I don't like this.

[46 : 17] And you get up, you become a brat and you're just a little baby and you fold your hands and you have yourself a little stompy fit. And guess what happens? Your great God and compassionate, loving Lord says, we're just going to do that spanking again.

So here's some more discipline. You're going to do it again. And again. Because he's conforming you, because he loves you, because he wants you to flourish.

And Solomon says, here's what we don't get to do. We don't get to go to God and say, yeah, well, you know what? I wouldn't do it that way. Ooh, that's not where we want to live, is it?

But we do do that and we need to repent. All of us. God is the one who is in control. That's the primary theme when it comes to the affairs of man.

So Solomon trusts God. He looks to God in times of adversity, prosperity. He knows that because God, God has his life in his hands, he can believe God and trust God for the best and and see his life as God's gift.

[47 : 28] In this in this second part of verse one, Solomon never knows what's coming. We don't know what awaits us tomorrow. You're going to get out of here and you're going to drive down the road and you have no idea what's going to come into your life.

You just don't even know, do you? I don't either. Do you understand that drives some people crazy? Crazy. They drink or they hobby or they medicate their way through their entire life because they cannot handle the fact that they don't know what's coming.

So they blunt their affect in order to deal with what comes. And you just feel like, wow. We don't look down on us for that.

Us. We do that. I do that. I have done that. We take those people and say, look to Christ. With the unrighteous, unwise, God may act in love or hate towards them.

Anything awaits them as God's enemies. Right? The Bible. And that's why we fear for them and pray for them and evangelize them. So Solomon.

[48 : 46] Here's the thing, friends. Solomon isn't cynical. OK. I've read the commentators and boy, I tell you, some of them are just they take a view of this book and say this is just full of cynicism and resentment and bitterness.

They don't even ascribe the authorship to Solomon. Those. So I only have a couple of those and I just read it to make me mad. But. As I as I read through that, I realize, no, he's not cynical.

He's this is this man is not depressed. He's not moody. He's not gloomy. He's not suicidal. About the paradoxes and perplexities of life. But he's disturbed.

It bothers him. And he takes it to God. He's he's not saying he's a victim. This isn't victimology here. This isn't just Solomon having a pity party.

I think that that's some of that's happened. Notice this, too, now. He's not blaming his parents. He's not blaming society.

[49 : 50] He's not blaming anyone else for his sins and his problems. And here's here's the kicker for me. He's not blaming God. He's just not doing that.

Who else does this remind you of in the Bible? Who said it? Job. Immediately, my thoughts went to Job. Same thing. Boy, here's a guy that if he had every right to curse the Lord and say, yeah, well, you know, I'm hanging this up.

It was Job and he didn't. He didn't do it. I think Solomon is sobered. I think he's odd. That's why he keeps saying fear the Lord.

Fear the Lord. That's the that's the ticket right there. He's odd by what God's revealing to him as he affirms what he's always known. Knowing, serving and worshiping God means living the truth that all of life.

He's God's gift for us to enjoy. Okay. So what's the takeaway? Here's the takeaway as we move through the remainder of the book together. Here's the takeaway.

[50 : 57] I'll throw it up here for you. When you move from your experience to God. When you move from your experience to God. You always distort God. When you see God and life through those experiences, you distort God.

The Bible turns this upside down. Don't start from your experiences and work up to God. Start from God and work down to your experiences, whether past or present.

Define who God is and then bring that to bear on what's happening in your life. That's John Butler. So friends, the entirety of your life is in the hand of God.

So you need to know God as he's made himself known to you in scripture and in Jesus Christ. So that you can interpret and live all of your life by what God knows, what God values.

His purpose is for you. In last week's message, I asked you to keep the big picture of the book of Ecclesiastes in mind. And this is what I want to close with. So let me put this quote up here for you now.

[52 : 01] This is from Deepak Raju. And this is what he said. The main point is that finding purpose in life apart from God is futile. That's our word vanity.

The things of this world, pleasure, work, achievement, possessions, friends, etc. are all meaningless when pursued as ends unto themselves. The true purpose and joy in life is found in God.

That just sounds so basic telling that to Christians. But in the throes of the adversities and prosperities of life, we can be pulled away from that. Right. God richly blesses you and you just kind of forget about God.

It can do that. Or God sends adversity into your life and you're tempted to say, I just don't know if this is worth it. So my final encouragement.

By God's grace, I pray that we would all start with God, stay with God, and then be sent from this world. With the Lord Jesus Christ ringing in our hearts.

[53 : 02] Amen. Let's pray together. Amen. Well, Father God, again, as we.

We began all of this and prayed that you would enlighten our hearts and open our minds to the truth of the word. Solomon has helped us to cover some very basic, rudimentary, fundamental things.

And I think the fundamentals are important, Father. So I pray for your people now. On their behalf, I ask you. Help us all to grasp and to live and to be defined by the fundamental truth of life.

We are in the hand of God. Life is a gift from your hand. And you keep us in grace in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for the life that we have in him.

Thank you for our spiritual union to Jesus. Help us forevermore start with God. By considering carefully and measuring carefully in our lives. What will this do in the way of helping me glorify God?

[54 : 01] And then let us proceed with faith and confidence and humility and gentleness. Help us to trust you, Father. And to look to you for this wonderful life that you've given us.

In Jesus. It's in his name we pray. Amen.