Your Time is in God's Hands (Part 1)

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[0:00] In his life in Genesis 20. He's once again found himself in a place where he is tempted with fear of man.! On a very literal scale.

And he is going to basically sacrifice the virtue of his own wife of all these years so that he can literally save his own skin.
And now we need to talk about that and think carefully about how that parallels so much of how we live our life when we sin. Because each of us have repeated the same sin in our life before.
And we find ourselves saying, I did it again. Lord, forgive me. That's where Abraham is. Only the stakes are much, much, much higher in terms of what God has promised to do for him and his wife. I'm going to bring an heir into the world and that heir is going to form more of the bloodline where millions of people are going to come to the same faith you have in me.
[1:04] They're going to come to that same faith. And that's going to carry on and go way beyond the people that I choose in terms of what Abraham will be the patriarch of, Israel, the Jews.

And include people like us, Gentiles. So there's a lot at stake in what Abraham is doing with Sarah. And of course, I'll expand on all of that when we get to that particular passage in Scripture.
Today, though, I have you back in Ecclesiastes. And I'll go ahead in full disclosure. So believe it or not, it doesn't seem that long to me. But I preached this message back in 2020.
The fall of 2020. So it's been six years since we... And it doesn't seem... We were in that little bitty room back there. That was our worship area.
We didn't have this anymore, right? We had left this space to go into that space. COVID had shrunk everything. And boy, what a testimony that is. You'll just have to ask some of our people who've been here, what was COVID like for you guys?
[2:08] And just listen to how they tell you the faithfulness of God on this church. We grew during COVID. We had to leave that little space and get back into this one.

And then blow the walls out. It's just such a great testimony of God's goodness to us. Now, what I want to do with you today is talk about... Can you wake me up, guys?
Yeah, it goes to sleep sometime. Good. There you go. Thank you. Your time is in God's hands.
Now, this is a big statement encompassing a good bit of theology that relates directly to how you live moment by moment in your life, in your job, in your relationships, family, friends, co-workers, how you make decisions in your financial situations, how you determine goals, vacations, you name it.
Everything about your life is covered under that statement. Your time is in God's hands. Now, you either believe that or you don't. And, more importantly, you either live it or you don't. And it makes a big difference in living this before the Lord in how you live, not wasting your life, but investing your life in the treasures of heaven.
So, let me read the text for this morning out of Ecclesiastes chapter 3. We're only going to do, as you see there on the screen, verses 1 through 8.
[3:34] And then my intention is to bring the rest of chapter 3 to you next week before we then get back into Genesis. He says, Solomon, we believe, is the author here, there is an appointed time for everything.

Now, that pretty much encompasses it, doesn't it? Everything. Universe, your life, my life. There is a time for every event under the sun.
In fact, your Bible may say, instead of event, it may say, and there is a time for every delight under heaven.
There is a time to give birth and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal.

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A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones.
[4:37] A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. A time to search and a time to give up as lost. That's a tough one. A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to tear apart and a time to sew together. A time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war.
And a time for peace. Now, I want to draw your attention to many of the nuances of this particular passage of Scripture because it's easy to kind of pass over and say, yeah, he's just saying there's a time for everything.
Yes, yes, he is saying that, but there's so much more here. And so, I want to start this morning by offering you an illustration. Just last week, Suzanne and I watched a movie that actually had come out in 2020 and it included actor Tom Hanks.
And here's the deal. Hanks was interviewed right after the movie had come out. The movie was Greyhound. Have any of you seen Greyhound?
[5:50] All right, just a couple. Okay, you guys saw it recently? All right, what did you think? Yeah? Yeah? Okay, yeah. So, it was based on a true account, accounting of what it was like for ships to cross the Atlantic Ocean trying to give supplies from the U.S.

and other countries to Britain during World War II. And they had to run the gauntlet of all of the U-boats, the German U-boats. And so, this is what it was all about.
Hanks was a captain on a U.S. Navy destroyer during that time. And he was in charge of escorting a large convoy, merchant convoy across.
There was a time, a place, when they got to a certain coordinate in the Atlantic, they would lose their air cover. And air cover was vital to helping protect these convoys.
But at that time, we didn't have any long-range aircraft that could meet that. So, they had this window, and I think it was about 72 hours where they would be without.
[6:57] And the U-boats knew that. And they would pack up, and they would attack the convoy. That was the deal. And so, Hanks was there with a couple of other destroyers, and he was trying to ward off these U-boats.

So, it was life or death. Very intense. From the minute the thing opens up just about to the end, it's constant action out on the high seas. Now, when he was interviewed about this, I want to share this with you because it relates so well to what we're talking about with the Lord.
And what Hanks says has so much to do with how people today live their lives. And it is heart-rending tragic in my estimation.
Here's what Hanks said in his interview. World War II. The war created this loss of certainty. That's the issue in everyone's lives.
This loss of a prescribed calendar within you that said, hell yeah, I'll finish college. I'll enter the workforce.
[7:58] I'll find a mate. I'll have children. And I'll get on with my life. This puts forth the question, what would I have done if I were in the same circumstance?

If you found yourself at a draftable age during World War II, chances are you were going to end up in some capacity serving in the military. Many, many, many, many women served in the military. Many, many, many women were deeply impacted by the loss of husband or father or fiance or brother or uncle. On and on it went.
So in light of the uncertainties of life, and in this case, during a season of what we call world war, he's asking the question, how do we know what to do in any given situation or season?
What should we trust ourselves to? Especially in times like this that are in such upheaval in our world. Well, get this now.
[9:02] Hanks then, Tom Hanks, was then asked to comment on, any unique takeaways for homebound viewers during this period in our modern history.

He's talking about COVID. So many people now, this was when they thought it was going to be the Black Death coming over the entire world. And many people did die. Folks, don't hear me say that that didn't happen.
But it didn't turn out to be the Black Death that they thought it was going to be. And we're now, all kinds of things are now being released all these years later about all of these. Anyway, what a mess.

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Now he's asked, what kind of takeaways can you offer homebound viewers based on the movie and the message of the movie? And here is what he said.
How would you like to live by this? We're currently in the middle of something that is perhaps as stressful and anxiety-causing as some aspects of World War II itself.
[10:01] We didn't know we were going to be releasing Greyhound at the time of a worldwide pandemic. But it ended up being a thematic match to what's going on right now.

When we're in the middle of something with no end in sight, just like Krauss, the main character, is in the movie, we can trust, listen, what can we trust, folks?
Procedure, luck, fate, and instinct. And we might be able to pull through. That's his philosophy of life.
That's his philosophy of life when life slaps you upside the head. Gets hard. When you have to face the reality of losing people you love.
When you find yourself having to deal with a sense of loss in so many different ways in life. When you're having to make hard decisions. When you're facing uncertainties.
[11:02] He says, well, this is what you can trust to get you through. Maybe you might be able to pull through. Trust procedure. I mean, what is that?

Trust luck. What is that? Fate. And here, instinct. In other words, trust yourself. And maybe you'll pull through. Maybe.
Issues and doubt. How would you like to live your entire life in this world like that? Well, that's what most of the people out there do live their life by, isn't it?
You know them and I know them. Now, here's the question on the table. Does God, our Lord, have something surer than trusting your life to procedure, luck, fate, and instinct?
Yes. Solomon says yes. Absolutely, he definitely does. And so, here are what I'm going to call three biblical views of God's use of time to control every event of your life and by which you can trust God in everything.
[12:08] Now, here's a caveat. When I make that statement, I'm making a statement out of the Bible. I'm going to show you and I, yes, I am talking about did you have a flat tire?

God was, was all over that. Did you drop something and break it in the kitchen? You say, there's, yes. Every event, every event, you know, we, I'm going to self-disclose here for a second.
So, I haven't made it a secret. I struggle with patience sometimes. I, I can get as prideful in a moment as anybody. And so, I'm driving and people get in front of me, Alonza, and they upset my moment.
And they get in the way of my agenda. Right? And they need to get out of my way kind of thing. And my sweet wife, when this happened recently, quietly said, you know the Lord put that person right there in front of you.
Just saying. And we laugh, but you know what? If that statement's true, then did God just quit ruling over Jeff's universe while that happened and so that was just chance?
[13:21] No. But see, Christians, we're tempted not to think like that because it sounds unscientific. How can God be in every detail of my life?

Well, He is, friend. He is. And you better thank God that He is. He is. And we tend to think maybe God's not in this if it's hurting me, if it's painful, if I'm not happy, if it's not joyful, if it doesn't seem fulfilling, then God's not in it.
That is not true. That is not true. That statement, three biblical views of God's use of time, time to control every event of your life.
You know, God is not constrained by time. He's not bound by time. He's outside of it. Try to think about that. You just can't put God in your time matchbox.
We're constrained by time. We live on a 24-hour clock, don't we? You go longer than a little while without sleep and watch what it does to you. God doesn't sleep, nor does He slumber.
[14:28] Never, ever. He's always on station. Now, we'll only deal with one of these three biblical views this morning and then my intention next Lord's Day, Lord willing, is to do the remainder of it and close out the chapter.

Alright, so let's talk about then this first point that will dominate today's discussion here, the God of time in these first verses. Now, verse one is comforting and confidence inspiring to me personally. There is an appointed time. Alright, now think about that for a second. There is an appointed time for everything and there is a time for every event under the sun.

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So, the main idea of the chapter rests here. I just put it on the screen for you. There is an appointed time for everything and there is a time for every event under heaven.
So, this statement then is inferred by what we just read and here it is. An appointed time for everything and every event must have what?
[15:39] An appointer. Amen. Capital A. The phrase under heaven in your text there, the end of verse one, under heaven, that points us to the appointer.

It tells us that God is controlling all of these activities according to His timetable and His purposes. All of life is purposed and is under the control of the God of heaven and earth.
That is what under heaven means. Under the control of the God of heaven. Amen. Now, we want that. That's a lot better than luck.
It's a lot better than instinct. So, folks, I'll say it again later. Think about where you are in your life right now. What are you facing? What have you faced? What's been happening? Do you find yourself in a struggle?
See, I am aware that there are many of you in this room right now who are facing some type of trial or struggle or challenge in your life. It might be related to work.
[16:46] It might be related to a relationship, to family, to finances, you name it. To job. I realize that. You're being strained.

You're being challenged. And you need to think in terms of what we're saying right here. An appointed time for everything and every event must have an appointer.
All of life is purposed and is under the control of the God of heaven and earth. There's no aspect of what you're facing right now in any detail that God is not in control of.
He is not. Now, listen, He is not just allowing. He is ordaining and purposing. He's designing. It's not like He's sitting back with His hands in His pockets and going, I already know how this is going to turn out.
I don't really have to do anything. I'm just letting this thing play out. God is not constrained with His hands in His pockets. God is designing. He's speaking.
[17:50] He's creating. And these circumstances and events are all part of how God is managing time. The constraint of time in your life to bring about His purposes in your life.

Now, I hope that that fills you with a sense of joy and purpose so that when you get up in the morning you're thinking, I have this time and God is working within the scope of this time and I need to make this about Him and what He's doing in these purposes.
That's where you start to reap the benefit of what Ecclesiastes is teaching us this morning. In fact, at this point, look at this verse that we read in our call to worship this morning about 20 minutes ago or so.
Whatever the Lord pleases, He does. There you go. In heaven and in earth. In the seas. And in all the deeps. You know, I wish, don't you wish you could have been there when the interview happened with Hanks and he made the statement about luck and instinct and all that and you just say, I'm sorry, look, can I share something about that?
Can you just listen to this real quick? Whatever the Lord pleases, He does in heaven and in earth and Mr. Hanks in the seas and in all the deeps. Not to be prideful, but to speak truth into a hopelessness.
[19:17] Because luck and fate and instinct are hopeless. If that's the end of all things that you have for your life and all you can do is hope on those things and then just hope you'll pull through, how depressing.

No wonder the mental health field is worth multiple billions of dollars. People don't have any peace in their soul because they're trusting in themselves.
Now look, the first eight verses that we read just a few moments ago, these first eight verses of chapter 3 in Ecclesiastes, they're arranged in a parallel literary structure and that is because they want to convey the main idea of God's perspective on time.
Folks, you and I as disciples of Jesus, we need God's perspective on time. We need to think about our time God's way. We need to have His mind.
Remember from last Sunday? Romans 12, 1 and 2? That God is using His truth to renew our minds? To do what? To think His thoughts after Him. We need to think about life God's way.
[20:24] That is Him renewing our minds as believers. He's teaching us His perspective on life. Every bit of it. From work to salvation to marriage to parenting to working to finances, whatever it is.

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Nothing escapes that. God wants you to think about all those things His way. It's liberating. It brings peace and comfort. It doesn't mean that you'll always know exactly what to do in exactly every circumstance.
What it means is you'll be able to trust God to guide you as you seek Him. And that's the key to it. Seeking Him. Now, here is how one of the commentators that I really appreciated so much in my study through this all those years ago.
Here is how Dr. Barak breaks down the passage to show the emphasis that we're talking about in terms of God's control of time and how God uses time for His purposes in your life.
Alright? Now, that looks very complicated. It's not. It is very sophisticated. More so than what meets the eye. These are the verses broken down into these parallels.
[21:43] Alright? Now, if you count them here on the screen, there are 14 pairs of opposites. If you go down the columns instead of across, you see 7 on the left, 7 on the right.

And they parallel each other. They're pairs of opposites. And Walt Kaiser, another commentator, identifies them as 14 illustrations of the comprehensiveness of the plan of God.
So here you have the plan of God related to time put forward in a sophisticated, comprehensive way. It may not seem that way at first, but boy, the Hebrews reading this would have immediately resonated with, wow, this is deep.
This is profound. So we need to mind that. This concerns the entire scope of our lives. Dr. Barak refers to these lists as inverted series of parallels.
Inverted series of parallels. Now, you'll also notice on the chart here rather readily that the word time is used repeatedly.
[22:49] It's not difficult to discern the major theme. It's time. The word is used 29 times in these verses. 29 times. Now, what is more obvious is that for each verse there is a negative, which is an unfavorable aspect of life, and there's a positive or a favorable.

So we have unfavorable and favorable aspects of the quality of life. And they seem to switch around so that favorable qualities begin verse 2 and then unfavorable ones begin verse 3 and so on.
Do you see that? It's not hard. That's not hard. It gets more complicated as we go or sophisticated. Now, there is a pattern here. Hebrews, the Hebrew people, particularly Hebrew writers and those under the inspiration of the Lord or the leading of the Lord, they would use these kind of literary devices to convey certain themes but also to convey the main ideas of these literary themes that they're putting forward.
Here, the literary theme is God's control of time. And they want us to know some things about this. So this is designed to be an intricate display of back and forth movement.
You see, we have this and then there's a time for that. Then there's a time for this and then there's a time for that. The back and forth, ebb and flow. And that's supposed to mimic the natural course of the changes of life and the changes in seasons.
[24:28] We are a people living under change. The seasons change. Our lives change. What happened to you here? You didn't see that coming and now you're there and what do I do?

And this is why Dr. Baric refers to this entire section as a poem on time. It's a Hebrew poem on time. Now, a much less obvious element, but a super critical one, is the deliberate literary structure called a chiasm.
Some of you may remember this from six years ago. It's formed like this. I'll come back to this in just a second. This is an example of a chiasm from verse 1.
The entire eight verses form a larger chiasm. The Hebrews would use this to show emphasis. So they would take the guesswork out of it and they would write in such a way that once you read it as a Hebrew, reading it in the original, you would see this pattern and you would immediately grab the theme and the point of what he's saying.
So in verse 1, we have a chiasm. For everything, an appointed time, a time for every event. You say, okay, that doesn't look too complicated. No. But what a chiasm does is point you, I said, to the main idea.
[25:51] What's the main idea? It's what's in the middle. Everything in a chiasm is designed to show you that what is highlighted in the middle is the point. So what's the point? An appointed time.

That's the point. Remember, what is the issue about an appointed time? It has an appointer. And that's what they want you to see. If you accept and subscribe to an appointed time, then you have

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to acknowledge an appointer.
And that's what He's wanting you to do. He's wanting you to see that God is sovereign over time. But He's sovereign over the time of your life. In every detail.
God is working. So folks, that's comforting when you're facing something that is perplexing, challenging, difficult. Something you're weeping over. Something you're uncertain about. Something that's stretching you. And to know, God has got me involved in this right now. And He has purposes that He is working out in my life. I may not even see or recognize all of them, but I can know that the great appointer is working these purposes in my life in the time right now that I'm in.
[27:03] And I don't want to waste it. I don't want to waste it. How do we waste it? Fighting. Worrying. Being filled with anxiety. Making it about me. Manipulating.

Controlling. Pushing the elements. Neglecting God. Being distracted. Being despondent. Being apathetic. These are all the ways that we work against God's purposes in these events in time in my life and your life.
Alright, you with me? You're seeing this? Now just catapult to chapter 20 in Genesis and ask yourself how might some of this have affected Abraham if he had kept this in his mind?
Knowing that God is an appointer and that everything has a purpose. And Abraham, God made you a promise, brother, and He's going to fulfill it. So as long as God's protecting you, you don't have to worry about any pagan kings taking you out because of your wife.
Because God's made you a promise. He's going to keep you alive to fulfill it. If you'll just trust the Lord, Abraham, things are going to move forward. You don't have to sneak back behind the scenes and work out this terrible, sickening plan to sacrifice the virtue of your wife to save your skin.
[28:15] You coward. This is where we live. What a difference it might have made in Abraham's life. I don't want you to think that this is something that is just academic.

This is a chiasm. These first eight verses form a larger chiasm. And what's the idea from it? What are we talking about in here?
If you go down the list in column form this way, go from top to bottom, you'll see that it starts out with two positives, and then notice the next four are negative.
Then you'll have two positives and two negatives. Go over to the other. You'll have two negatives, four positives. It's a two, four, four, two pattern.
You could do this all day with this thing. This isn't the Da Vinci Code, people. This is Hebrew literary wisdom.
[29:14] And God led Solomon to write like this to convey the deeper elements of God's control of time in your life. And it is so wonderful. It's so sophisticated.

We could sit here all. I read and read through commentaries about all this, and it was mind-boggling how they crisscross and all these patterns that they form. But at the end of the day, all of this is supposed to convey to us that there is a great appointer of time.
And so we need to look to Him in what He is doing in any given moment in time in our lives, because for God, it's not a moment. Remember, He's outside of time, which is just, I think it's wonderful.
time is a fixed reality of God's creative wisdom for His world.
It is orderly, purposeful, and founded on God's design for how life works, Mr. Hanks. It has nothing to do with luck, chance, fate, determinism.
[30:23] It has nothing to that. But now let me ask you about this. As you look through this list again, just let your eyes glance over 1 through 7, or 2 through 7, a time to give birth, a time to die, etc., etc.

As you go down through there, as you read over the verses, do they tell you how to do these things in life? How to live in light of these facts? The answer is no, right?
You're not being told how. Well, what are you being told? The point is not about telling when or how to do these things as you live out your daily life. That's the rest of Ecclesiastes.
That's the New Testament for believers. How to live this out. No. The point is about God's determination of things and man's accountability to God for those things.
God determines, and then we are responsible as his stewards and servants to respond to God in what he's doing. You with me? That's critical.
[31:28] That's the whole sermon in a nutshell. This is God's design for time in your life. God is saying this, I'm up to something, friend.

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I'm up to something whether you get it or not. I'm up to something. Now, are you going to use these circumstances and the details within to respond to me?
To worship me? To relate to me? Or are you going to make it about the circumstance itself and you trying to manipulate it? Which one do you want to live like?
One has you in control and the other has me in control, which is the reality. God is in control, not me. God is in control.
God is in control. And I find out real quickly when I try to play God in those circumstances, don't I? And it starts to spin on me. And then I do stuff to try to bring it back in, only to find out that this one spins over here and I grab this one and this one goes and I grab that one and then I got no more to grab.
[32:31] Now what? God, I can't do all that. And we look ridiculous. God ordains, God purposes, God orders, God commands, decrees, appoints the events of your life and my life.

So you are accountable to God for how you live in response to Him because God controls time. He controls the events of your life within the bounds of the scope of the time that you have to live in any given moment or day.
Because none of you know how much longer you're going to live once you walk out of this building. None of us know that. All right? Remember this now. We are accountable to God for how we live in response to in response to Him in these circumstances, these details.
I want you to remember this as well, dear friends. This is from last week. This is the theme that carries over. The Bible teaches that a meaningful life is a selfless response to God for a selfless sacrifice by God.
Do you remember that? Boy, hold on to that one. If you want to live a meaningful life, a purposeful life, a life of peace within your own heart and spirit, you need to live it as a selfless response to God because of the selfless sacrifice He made for you in Christ Jesus.
[34:03] Your entire life needs to be ordered and defined by that truth. So this is how we each live in response to God in each of these seasons of life that matter most.

Alright, now listen. Why is this emphasis on responding to God so important when it comes to these different times and seasons of life? Look, a time to give birth and a time to die.
Am I making that about God? Am I making the birth... We have... Where's Abby? There you are. How many more weeks? Six more weeks for number three.
Bless the Lord. That's all in the Lord. The time of death is in the Lord. We have life happening and we have death happening.
What is it in the Lord that I need to be thinking about and ordering my life by? There's a time for me to plant and there's a time for things to be uprooted that have been planted.
[35:08] Do you see that? Do you understand metaphorically what he's saying here? It's not just literal. I rip up plants all the time and move them around, Mitch. Oh my goodness. Right?

No. Metaphorically, there's a time that things will be planted in your life and they're planted and you enjoy them. You enjoy the beauty of what they are as they root and grow in your life like your kids or whatever.
Seasons of your marriage. Times that you share together. But there's also a time when those things will be uprooted. They're not forever, folks. We will not be married forever.
We will not have our children with us forever. We will not be their parents forever. Et cetera, et cetera. Why is the emphasis on responding to God so important when it comes to these different seasons of life?
Here's the answer. I don't have a slide for it. Just listen. Because no one knows when any of these things will be ordained by God for his or her life. Because you don't know when it's going to be a season of planting and uprooting.
[36:18] Life or death. Sowing or having it ripped apart. You don't know. I don't know. But he knows. So why waste your life trying to control the uncontrollable?

You are not God, beloved. So don't act like it. That is a one-way ticket to misery. And you'll make the people around you miserable.
There's no freedom in you trying to be your own God. There's none. Mr. Hanks was wrong. Not because I say it, because the Bible says, Mr. Hanks, that's wrong.
That's a terrible philosophy for life. Trust in luck, chance, fate, instinct, and maybe you'll pull through. Mr. Hanks, I got news for you. I know I'm going to pull through.

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The worst that can happen to me is that I die. And then I get paradise forever. Win, win. Win, win. Yeah. We don't make light of death.
[37:21] We just don't fear it. Death has no grip over us anymore. We all will die. But then we will be brought to live again for all eternity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the promise of the resurrection. And we hold on to that with all of our hearts. One day it's God's time for you to keep only to find that the next day God has ordained that you throw away what you're keeping.
Now that's a hard one. We tend to think that we hold on to stuff. We set patterns. We get in a routine or a rut or whatever and we take comfort in that. And so now it's like sacred.
It's unchangeable. Oh, don't mess with that. It'll freak me out. Well, there's a time to keep as it says here. And there's a time to throw away. Maybe it's time to get rid of that because it's become an idol or an anchor.
You see? It takes wisdom to know that. You've got to walk closely with the Lord for that to be something that you understand. We do that here at the church as pastors.
[38:27] Pastor Greg and I are not married to any one kind of ministry or you might call it a program or whatever in our church. Those ministries serve the better way of discipleship in our church family.

But if there's any given ministry that lives its life and outlasts its life, we're going to say, hey, what now? And that goes and now we're doing this because this is what's better for discipleship in our church.
Are you with me? So even your pastors are challenged by this and we're not stuck in, well, that ministry has to stay here because if it goes away, it'll offend this person and that person and that person.
What we do is go to those people and say, please don't be offended. We're doing what's best for the church, for God's people. We're not fixed or married to any one thing.
except teaching the truth, right? That'll never go away. You labor and labor planting and the very next day it's now God's plan for you to uproot what was planted.
[39:29] See, you don't know. In one moment of your life you're with someone you love and care for and in the next moment that person dies. One day you're weeping and mourning and then God brings change into your life and gives you reasons to laugh and dance.

You don't know which season the Lord will purpose for you in any moment of any day of your life. You don't know and I don't know and I can't tell you because I'm not God. But now look, I'm going to put it up here on the screen.
What is the one constant, unchanging, stable reality about your life as a believer? What is it? The gospel, she said. God.
The truth. God. I'll stand up here and wait for you to give me another one that is constant, unchanging, and stable as a believer.
I'll just wait for you to tell me what that is. Our hope. In whom? The scripture. Who wrote it? What's it always come back to?
[40:34] What is the only stable reality as a believer in your life? G-O-D or J-E-S-U-S. That's it, folks. There's nothing else on this earth about your human life that's going to bring you the peace and stability and freedom as Sophia so wonderfully exclaimed the day she was brought to Christ a few days ago.

That the burden had lifted, the freedom had come, the peace that she had wanted filled her soul. And that will go with her the rest of her life on this earth and then she'll find the fulfillment of it in heaven.
What a promise. Now that is why responding to God and not the circumstances is the most important consideration of the application of wisdom in your life. Everything in your life changes except for God.
Think about that. So, prayerfully, I say up here on the screen, condition yourself to respond to God in these ever-changing seasons of your life.
It doesn't mean, folks, I'm in a circumstance, I'm facing something difficult or challenging or whatever. It doesn't mean that you don't work the issue, work the problem, work the circumstance.
[41:45] It doesn't mean that you don't involve yourself in living life in that circumstance. That's not what I'm saying. It means that you're not defined by the circumstance. You're defined by your faith

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in God and your primary response to the circumstance isn't to the circumstance.

It's to God because you know who's behind it. So, I'm making it about Jesus. I'm making it about God in this moment. I'm not going to get depressed.
I'm not going to get fearful. I'm not going to be full of anxiety. I'm not going to manipulate and control. I'm not going to get prideful. I'm not going to chew everybody out and get grumpy because things aren't going my way on my timetable, happening on my agenda.
You're not going to do those things. You're going to repent of those things. Deny those things. You're going to speak the truth to yourself in love. God is in control. He is working. He is working His purposes in my life, in this trial, in this season of my life.
And right now, it's a season of. And you pick one. What is it? Where are you? Are you mourning? Or are you dancing? See? The emphasis is you're responding to God.
[42:58] God. Now you say, how? All right. Here is what it might look like in any of these seasons. And I'm just picking one, folks. Here's an example.

So you pick one of these seasons that you're in or that you've been in recently so that the illustration will work so you can relate. And I'm going to pick a hard attitude of gratitude.
A hard attitude of gratitude to apply to you being in one of these seasons. Especially as they ebb and flow in your life. So here is what we're rehearsing. We're applying a spiritual truth to our life to make it useful in responding to God.
So I'm in one of these circumstances and I want to apply thankfulness. to how I respond to God in this circumstance. What might that look like?
What might that look like? Well, when you pick one of these, it's going to fall within one of the times listed in verses 2 through 8. And now we're going to apply God's wisdom in being thankful to Him.
[44:10] Here is what is very helpful to me. I use this in counseling quite a bit. Here's what Susan Lutz, author of a little booklet titled Thankfulness, says about this.

About making the application of thankfulness in your life in these different seasons you'll find yourself in. So this would apply across the spectrum of whatever it is you're facing.
How do you apply thankfulness? Look, being thankful helps us to interpret our lives. That's what you see in verses 2 through 8 here.
In light of God's faithfulness. That's verse 1, under heaven. God is being faithful to you. As soon as you are thankful, you start to see not only your situation, but yourself.
In other words, you see your own heart through God's eyes, His perspective. This means you learn how to apply what Jesus has done to the specifics of your life.
[45:10] You're learning to apply this attitude of gratitude to the way Jesus is specifically working in your life in that moment. Whatever it is. A sense of loss.

And then maybe a little while later, it'll be a sense of adding to instead of taking away. But whatever it is, you're learning to apply an attitude of gratitude to God, a thankfulness.
And that puts perspective, God's perspective on your life. So you step back and you say, you know what? I have not been acting in gratitude to the Lord. My mind has not been fixed on being thankful to God.
There are so many things going on around me that I could be thankful for and should. But I've been so fixed on this one thing that I haven't been thankful. And you know what it's doing?
It's making me bitter. It's making me bitter. In fact, if I'm honest, I'm starting to get angry with the Lord. Folks, we have no right to be angry with God about anything.
[46:09] But you hear people say that. I'm mad at God right now. If it's a badge they should wear. Like he gets it. Yeah, he gets it all right. Being mad at God is a sin.

Being disappointed with God is a sin. That says more about you than God. And so right now, we're allowing this attitude of gratitude that we want to apply to this circumstance to give us a perspective on ourselves.
Where am I in that attitude of gratitude? Is it there or not? Now I need to repent. What do I need to ask God's forgiveness for that's kept me from this thankfulness in my heart toward Him?
I've gotten resentful and grumpy toward other people because of this. I've let this circumstance just so dominate me in this moment and wear me down that I don't even have the patience and kindness to speak to people in a godly way.
And so I spout it off at my wife or my husband or my kids or the person at the thing or I get out of my way because I'm it's like there's no God in heaven.

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[47:32] She has more to say. Listen to this. Take hold of what she says next. God not only encourages us to be thankful for the good things He gives us, He also calls us to be thankful for who He is.

And that's our starting point. That's our baseline she says. That's something we do first as a way of life. Man, that is so rich.
What a life transforming way to think about this gratitude. For lack of a better term, we should front load thankfulness because of what we know about Him.
That's it. You say, well, I don't know there's a lot in my life to be thankful for. Do you know Christ? Are you a believer? Have you been saved from death and hell by Christ Jesus?
Then you have got a boatload to be thankful for. A boatload. You say, Jeff, what robs us of that perspective? Us! Don't blame it on life.
[48:36] This is about how you view life. Folks, the tender heart of God will balm your heart even in the most distressing issues and seasons of life.

It's hard to think about anything being more distressing than death. Losing someone we love and now we're left here to survive. I remember when this happened to my dad.
My dad died unexpectedly during COVID and I remember my mom months after that happened weeping on the phone with me and saying Jeff, I don't know what I'm here for anymore.
I don't know what I'm here for anymore. That's what it does folks. It plays with our perspective. And I was able to minister. Mom, are you still breathing? Mom, do you love the Lord?
Do you still love the Lord? Well, he still loves you. Mom, as long as Jesus leaves you here to breathe, he's got a purpose for you. That purpose didn't end in dad. You hear me?
[49:41] It didn't end in dad. It didn't end in your loved one. For reasons good to God, he's left you here to go forward. For God to continue to work in your life.

You have a testimony now that touches the hearts of many, many, many, many people at the deepest level of their soul. Loss. Use it. Use it for Christ's glory.
Use it to minister to others. To be loved by your church family and to love. And let God balm your heart in it.
It's never too late to front load thankfulness because of what we know about our God. Now, folks, look on the screen.
These are not coping strategies to get you through hard times. I'm not up here psychologizing you. These are not some kind of Christian spin on reality designed to help you make your own truth about what you'd rather believe about some aspect of your life.
[50:50] So you're going to fool yourself. Psych, we used to say. No. This isn't about escaping reality. What these are, these are spiritual truths from Scripture and they nurture and build into your life as you follow Jesus in loving obedience.

Did you hear that? That's a mouthful. Listen again. What I'm talking to you about now in this passage about time are spiritual truths that you nurture and build into your life as you follow the Lord in loving obedience.
These are ways that we fulfill Paul's mandate from Ephesians 4.1 to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we've been called. And they're practical applications of Jesus' call for you to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.
I can go on to say this and sum it up this way. They are heart attitudes. They are heart attitudes, are heavenly heart attitudes, human actions for honoring God.
They're God provided perspectives for biblical behavior. Can I say that again? You see it there in the middle of the screen? They are God provided perspectives for biblical behavior.
[52:05] God is teaching you how to think in these circumstances and seasons of life. Think about Him. Think about His purpose, His sovereignty and then respond to Him in it.

So you can step back and ask yourself, am I making this about Jesus? This season of loss? This season of uncertainty? This season of challenge? Difficulty?
Boy, am I being stretched? There are so many answers I don't have. What am I doing in my walk with God in this? Am I grateful? Do I even take time to be thankful in these moments?
How am I sobering myself to the spiritual reality that God loves me and is at work in my life? And He's using this season to shape me into the character of Christ.
You see how I'm making that about Jesus? It doesn't mean I don't work the issue. I have to live in the real world just like you. I just don't let that real world stuff define me.

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[53:07] I don't want that, man. I've been there, done that, and I know what that does to me. I'm type A. I'll grab that thing by the neck and choke the life out of it. And you know what I do when I do that?

I make everybody around me miserable because they got to get on my agenda while I choke this thing. Nah. No good.
Heavenly heart attitudes. God provided perspectives to help you face these things. It's a God first outlook I say. It's a God first outlook on life.
Now you go back to verses 1 through 8. Look down the list. Which verse, and I'll move toward a close here, which verse seems most unclear or challenging to understand. You don't have to say it. Just look down through those. Which one immediately you say, I'm not sure I understand this one. Right? Now I'll tell you what it was for me and for most people. It's verse 5.
[54:10] A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones. You mean the Lord is giving us a clear moment that if we want to, we can hurt somebody, we can pick up a stone as it were, and beat them with it?

Oh, yes! No, that's not what he's saying. Remember, this was written to Hebrews. And so Hebrews are going to understand this proverb. A helpful cross-reference for this is 2 Kings chapter 3, 19 and 25.
We're not going to turn there, I'm just going to tell you for the sake of time. That passage talks about using stones on an enemy's field to make it more difficult for him to cultivate it.
Remember, this was an agrarian society. Now, at first, we might think throwing stones is the negative or unfavorable action of this verse. But if we were to look again at the chart, what you would see is Dr.
Barak has marked throwing stones as a positive. What in the world? Well, it's because in Old Testament times, there was an emphasis on gathering stones to ruin a field, and throwing stones was about helping clear it.
[55:17] So, throwing stones meant you were going into the field and gathering the stones and throwing them out of the field to make it cultivatable. The opposite would be you're gathering stones because you're walking over to your neighbor's field and dumping them in his field.

And then he comes out to cultivate and where did all these rocks come from? Oh, my enemy. That's what it means. You might have a similar level of uncertainty about verse 7.
Look at that one with me. A time to tear apart and a time to sew together. That sounds so violent. A time to be silent and a time to speak.
What are we talking about? Well, the most credible explanation that I found is that tear apart refers to tearing a garment. And Jews would do that when they were greatly grieved or deeply hurt over something in life.
So, sewing together would then bind or heal the tear. So, we would say it like this. There are some things in life that are so grievous to us that it just tears our heart.
[56:29] But then there are times when that is sown back. Healed. Time. Time. God uses time to heal if you will make it about Him.

You might find people that have gone years with something that has just torn their heart. Somebody hurt them. Disappointed them. Whatever. And their heart was just torn. It rended their heart. And you find that they've grown bitter and resentful over time.
They've grown hard. You hear it in them and see it in them. They've grown cynical. Even about the Lord. See, that's a person that's not making that tear about what God's wanting to do in their life and being their own.
God has hardened them because they don't have the perspective of the Lord. If they would look to the Lord, God would bring them to a place where God would sow that wound. So heal it.
That's what this is talking about. Being silent is what most likely happens when someone is deeply hurt. See, this speaks so deeply to the pains we carry as human beings in this broken world.
[57:37] You're silent. You're deeply hurt. The pain is so deep you can't find words to express it. Sometimes you even avoid people. People that love you and care about you because you don't want to talk about it.

You don't have the words and you don't want to stand there and go, I don't know, and get emotional. But folks, listen, even though you can't bring yourself to talk about it, there is and will be a time to speak.

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And that would represent them moving through the grief and the pain as they talk about it and process it. And that needs to happen in conjunction with your brothers and sisters. Don't avoid them. Invite them in.
Sometimes it's just, let's just sit here and cry together or let's just sit here and be quiet together. People get awkward about that. We got to fill the moment with our voices. No, we don't. I'll just sit here with you for a little while.
That takes a lot of love to be quiet. All right, up on the screen, what does all this mean as we take in the emphasis of this pattern?
[58:42] Well, I can say this, we're not like Mr. Hanks. We're all we can hope for in the difficulties of life is to trust ourselves to procedure and luck and fate and instinct.

No, look, I say up here on the screen, we can deal with the uncertainties and hard realities of life by knowing God. Remember, that's what we front load. We're thankful because we front loaded the fact that God has allowed us to know Him and His Son.
And that's special. And we live like that. So, your situation right now, even as you left for church today, as you're listening to this message, your situation is ordained by God.
It's ordained by God. Whatever it is, I don't have to know what it is to say that. Whatever you're dealing with, working through, being challenged by, or even being blessed by, here's the deal. God is controlling the timing, duration, and details of the ebb and flow of your life. You see that? Now, here's my last statement.
[59:43] Listen, God is controlling the timing, duration, and details of the ebb and flow of your life. You either believe that or you don't. You either live by that or you don't. You're either defined by your circumstances and yourself, or you're defined by God in that truth.

And here's what we can say. Because that is true, you need to respond to God in the matters of life. He is behind them and He is controlling them.
I hope you are grasping the point. You're responding to God because God is the appointer making the appointing of whatever those details are.
So if you know, look, Solomon, you and I are doing something and I'm doing something in your life and you know, you know that I'm doing it. Okay?
And the circumstances are happening and I'm the one behind creating that for you. Alright? So one of the things you want to do is you can either choose to respond to those things and do that and I just keep, you know, or you can come to me and you can respond to me.
[60:53] You can respond to me with, hey, what's going on? Or you can respond to me with, hey, man, help me understand or what's with this? This is how we respond to God.

Lord, I want to be faithful. I don't understand all these details, but I want to be faithful to you. So please help me apply wisdom to be faithful.
That's the whole rest of this Ecclesiastes. How to live in the wisdom of the Lord. Alright? We can't know everything about God and what He does in our lives, but I know we have to live with unanswered questions, but God has answered the most important question of all.
Who or what is in control of what happens to me? God. And He promises to always do what He does for His glory and for your good. Let's pray.
Father, we take these truths that have sobered our hearts and reminded us of who you are and who we are, and we ask you to help us to apply them in the wisdom of loving Jesus well and of being loved by Christ.
[62:02] Help us to have a deep sense as we leave today that we are deeply loved by you so that you are ordaining and purposing and appointing every detail of our lives within the constraints of what it is for us to live in time.

And so you have a purpose. You have timing for each one of these. Help us to surrender ourselves to whatever it is that you're doing as we surrender to you. I pray for my brothers and sisters to be made strong in this, to resist the schemes of the devil, to undo this in their lives, and to help them to walk in a faithfulness with you knowing that you yourself are faithful to us, long suffering and good, and full of loving kindness for your people.
Thank you for reminding us of your sovereign care and control over every area of our lives. May we live to your goodness and glory in all that we speak, in all that we do, in Jesus' name, amen.

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