

God's Wisdom: Turning Trials Into Treasure (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] The title of my message, God's Wisdom Turning Trials into Treasure, it's from Ecclesiastes. I took our church through the book of Ecclesiastes back during the time that I described to you when COVID had hit.

I was preaching through Ecclesiastes when we were back in that little room. The question that I want to ask as we get started is, how can we know God?

Now, I'm not saying, how can we know about God? I'm saying, how can we know God? How can we have a relationship with Him? How can we know God personally for who He is?

We can know God as He has made Himself known to us in the Bible. That is the way that we know God, is through Scripture.

Scripture is where He's chosen to make Himself known to us. Ultimately, the Bible points us to know God and His ways through the relationship that we can have by faith in a person.

[1 : 02] And that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what I just said to you would be like speaking in a foreign language to the Polish people.

I could just get up there and babble for all that I just said being something that they could understand and take in. You're telling me that there is a way that I can have a personal relationship with this thing you're calling God.

First of all, there is a God. And second of all, you're saying, I can know Him personally. I can have a relationship. That's right. And you're saying that happens through another person.

And you're calling that person Jesus. That's right. They would have nowhere to put that at all in their concept of faith. Faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord and following Jesus in obedience to His commands are what we Christians mean when we say we can know God in our hearts and we can live for His glory.

To know God in my heart and to live for His glory means that I have put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord and I am seeking to follow Him in obedience out of love for Him.

[2 : 25] I am showing Jesus my love by what He has told me I can do to show Him my love. If you love me, you will obey my commands. You will keep my commandments.

And so that's how you and that's how I show love to Christ. We can say lots of stuff with our mouth about how we love God and we love Jesus.

But where the proof hits the road, the rubber hits the road, is if you and I are walking in obedience to what Jesus has commanded us to be as His followers.

He has described for us what it means to follow. We don't have to guess. We don't have to make it up. We don't have to be cute. We don't have to be clever. Jesus has told us this is what it looks like for people who are Christians, born again with the Spirit of God living in them.

This is what it looks like for them to follow Jesus Christ as His learner. The Scripture outlines that for us. And just as a quick commercial plug, Greg and I are intent on teaching about this some more when the time rolls around on the 17th for our Wednesday night midweek meetings, I'm going to teach you through what I taught in Poland.

[3 : 43] We decided to take those nine lessons and move through those between September 7th and when Thanksgiving hits. Now for those of you who have been asking yourself, particularly those of you who have just been saved or you want to do more with this, this is the time in our church where your pastors step forward and try to come alongside of you and offer you biblical counsel and teaching about what your walk with Jesus needs to look like, what your spiritual growth entails, consists of, and what would be your responsibility and privilege in contributing to that walk with Jesus Christ as you grow and become more conformed to His image.

That's Wednesday night. So if you don't make plans to be here on Wednesday night and you could make plans to be here because it just means adjusting your priorities, you're going to miss out on an important and I would like to think loving contribution your pastors want to make to your spiritual growth.

Now let me say this. It is God's spiritual work, please hear me, it is God's spiritual work that yields practical displays of holiness and godliness in your life.

Now do you join in that work? Yes, you do. But Jesus said, apart from me, you can do what? Nothing.

And so again, I say to you, listen to how I say it, it is God's spiritual work that yields practical displays of holiness and godliness in your life.

[5 : 31] If the Holy Spirit doesn't live in you, there is no chance for you to exhibit a spiritual growth or a Christ-likeness, which is the goal of all Christian living, to become more like my Lord and to display His character in my life.

That's how I glorify Him. I showcase Him living in me so that all that I think, say, and do reflects Jesus, His priorities on life.

I talk the way He wants me to talk. I think the way He wants me to think. I prioritize the way He wants priorities in my life. Jesus, what are your priorities?

That's what I want. I want to adopt the same view of life that you have. And I want to be faithful in that. Alright, let me say it again in this way.

I think it went to sleep. Wake up thing. There you go. The knowledge of God in your heart fosters the character of God in your life.

[6 : 35] That is saving knowledge. That's not just factual knowledge that lots of unbelievers have and even the demons have. This is saving knowledge.

This is the knowledge that God has brought to you by the Spirit's power to open the eyes of your heart to see your need for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus alone. It's that knowledge.

It's the knowledge of His wisdom that teaches you how to walk in life in a manner that pleases Jesus. Something you wouldn't know apart from the Spirit. That knowledge in your heart is what fosters the character of God in your outward life.

People hear Jesus living in you. People see Jesus living in you. And people watch how you prioritize your life, where you give your life.

Now the antithesis is also true and very dangerous. The lack of heart knowledge, saving knowledge of God, leaves your soul spiritually bankrupt and your life empty.

[7 : 39] There are lots of people that are living that kind of life. I met all kinds of them in Poland. But I didn't have to go to Poland to do that. Chasing the good life only proves its elusiveness.

Now, if you would, I'll introduce this to you. That's all I can do is give you my introduction today. If you'll turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 7. We're going to read this together and at first, for those of you who've never studied the book and even for some of you who went through it with me years ago, you may not remember.

This might sound a bit enigmatic to you. You read through this and go, yeah, I'm not sure I'm catching the point here. So let's just move through this in reading it and then I'll give you a couple of quick ideas about it and then we'll close out.

So Ecclesiastes chapter 7. Verse 7, A good name is better than a good ointment and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting because that is the end of every man and the living takes it to heart.

[8 : 58] Now, if you just stop right there, that's not terribly intuitive, is it? You read that and go, what? How in the world is death better than birth? I don't find myself celebrating my death, upcoming death, but I have a celebration every year about my birthday.

Right? So, we read this and go, hmm, but, at the end of verse 2, we see how important Solomon is telling us this is. And the living takes it to heart.

This is counsel you need to take into your heart. Sorrow is better than laughter. What? For when a face is sad, a heart may be happy.

The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure. It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools.

For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This, too, is futility or vanity. For oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

[10 : 07] The end of a matter is better than its beginning. Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. Do not, then, be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.

Do not say, Why is that the former days were better than these? For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.

Wisdom, along with an inheritance, is good and an advantage to those who see the sun. For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

So, verse 13, consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what he has bent? And, of course, the answer is no one.

In the day of prosperity, okay, be happy, but in the day of adversity, consider, God has made the one as well as the other, so that man will not discover anything that will be after him.

[11 : 24] Now, everybody right now is like, wow, that's so deep, right? No, this is hard to grasp, isn't it? It's difficult to come to terms with, and yet, we know this is very important, and he's trying to put across something that we need to hold on to, and that can make a significant, if not profound, difference in the way that we are motivated to live a life to please God.

That's what this is about. It's not meant to depress us or confuse us. It's meant to inspire us. Listen, in Ecclesiastes 7, 1-14, we are faced with Solomon's answers to the question that he posed in chapter 6, verse 12.

I'm going to put it up here on the screen. Here it is. For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life?

There is the question, folks. Who knows? Who's to say? What authority will we go to and listen to and submit to, subscribe to, that can tell us what is good for me during my lifetime, during the few years of my futile life?

Who can tell me? Who can make sense of it? Who can give me a definitive answer about what I should be investing my life in so that I don't waste it?

[12 : 59] And of course, that question is asked from the perspective of what God says is important. Not what we decide is important, but what God has already determined is a productive life.

Right? You with me on that? So, he's not asking us to go seek out some sage on some mountaintop sitting there contemplating his navel. That's not what he's saying.

He's saying, no, the answer's already been given to us. The answer is one that the world hates and rejects on the whole. The answer is God knows.

that's who you go to. God always and most fully knows what is good, better, and best for you and for me in my life.

Now, the problem is this. Does it always feel like God knows what is good, better, and best for you in moments of adversity?

[14 : 00] Does it always feel like God is up there and he's got me? He knows. Have you ever said to yourself, Lord, where are you? Because it doesn't feel like you're here.

I'm having a hard time seeing how this is your will for my life because it doesn't feel good. There are many things about it I don't understand.

There are many unknowns. Whenever I think about where I am right now and what's going on, I get a lot of darkness and the darkness brings fear and worry and anxiety and Lord, I'm losing joy here.

I don't have a lot of hope. Folks, I have dealt with this in my own life and I deal with this just about every week of my life as I minister to God's people.

This doesn't mean that people, God's people, are bad in the sense of, oh well, if they would just, they wouldn't have that. We all have this. So nobody's looking down their nose at anybody in here right now, least of all me.

[15 : 05] What I'm simply saying is it matters who you listen to. It matters who you go to. And Solomon here is dealing with the answers that bring us to the place of understanding that God has a purpose and a plan in the adversities of life, even in the greatest enemy that we face.

We face all these hardships that go on all during our lives. We have marital problems. We have kid problems. We have job problems. We have health problems.

All kinds of things. Sometimes they pile up on each other in seasons of life. And then we die. There you go.

Be encouraged, brother. And death is the final limitation, is it not? And Solomon here is saying, you know what? We cannot afford to miss the fact that God has a purpose in every single bit of that.

He stays God through all of it. And you stay His child through all of it. And so what's the difference maker? Then what's the difference maker that keeps me out of the spiritual gutter of discouragement, darkness, and depression and helps me live through, not necessarily above, but through those times with God remaining God in my life?

[16 : 28] Well, that is the question, friends. And this is what the wisest man who ever lived apart from Jesus is trying to communicate to us in this text.

Now, to clearly show the absolute need that we all have for God to instruct us, for God to tell us in terms of what is good and better when living through the complications of these seasons of life, the passage kind of gives us a cold shower of contrast.

That's what I'm calling it. Because when you see it for what it is, it's like getting under a cold shower and be kind of braced into reality. You kind of go, oh, yeah, I see.

This is a cold shower of contrast that he gives us in a list of Proverbs through the passage I read. I want to emphasize it for you again.

If you just go back into seven, notice how he does this. Remember, contrasts. A good name is better than. Do you see that?

[17 : 32] Better than. Go down to the next section. The day of one's death is better than. Verse two, it is better to.

Verse three, sorrow is better than. Going down into verse four, you have the contrast of the house of mourning and the house of pleasure.

Then in verse five, you have it begin, it is better to. Dropping down to verse eight, the end of a matter is better than.

Patience of spirit is better than. Then you have some more do's and don'ts, and then you get down to verse 13, where he tells you in all of this contrast of better than this and not that, and don't do this and do this instead, think this way and not that way.

He says, consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what God has bent? Whatever God has determined to be the purpose, plan, and will for you in this adversity, you cannot change it.

[18 : 43] You can ignore it, you can neglect it, you can be apathetic about it, you can be angry, you can be rebellious, but one thing you're not going to do is alter God's plan and purpose that he has for you in the adversity.

In the day of prosperity, then, you need to be happy. In the day of adversity, which is going to come, you need to consider. Consider has the idea of give careful thought to.

God has made the one as well of the other, and so what is he telling you? God is in control of these circumstances and situations, trials, adversities of your life, even to the point of the day of your death.

He knows, but you don't. But he does. And so all of that leading up to your death is God in control, doing what he needs to do in his purpose and plan with you as a Christian to conform you to the character of his son, Jesus Christ.

And all of these events in your life are ways that God is using to put the pressure to squeeze so that you become more and more of the diamond of Jesus under that pressure.

[19 : 50] Now how you respond to God in that pressure is the difference. Not how you respond to the circumstance, the adversity, the hardship, the trial, the unknown.

The more you concentrate on the unknown, the darker it gets because you are constantly reminded of the fact that you're not God, and if you just sit there, that's hopeless.

So what do you need to do with your eyes? Whoop! You need to put them on the hope. And the hope is Jesus. The plan of God through Jesus Christ to use the matters and situations of life to conform you to his son.

Folks, that absolutely redefines and reconstitutes what it means to be a human being on this planet where people suffer and die. And without Jesus, we don't have hope through any of that, do we?

We're just trying to cope. We're just trying to get by. So this list of contrasts becomes the cold shower waking us up to the reality that God has a purpose and a plan.

[20 : 54] And if we're not careful to consider God in that purpose and plan, you'll never be able to figure out all of the ins and outs and details of why something's happening to you.

So don't go there. God will reveal some things to you and some things he won't and you'll come through it like Poland. There are some things I can know about our trip to Poland and how it affected me and what it revealed about my heart in times of getting squeezed because it was a tough, tough trip in many ways.

And there are other things that I cannot know. I cannot grasp. So I need to step back and be content with saying, Jeff, you've been told to consider God in this matter.

So put your faith, put your hope, put your focus on the Lord and let God instruct your heart about what he's doing in your life. What is he showing you? What can you know? Well, I can know this about me and when this happened.

I can know this was going on in my thought life when that happened and I know that I acted in these ways. That's clear to me. Well, and then what does that suggest to you about your walk with the Lord?

[21 : 59] Right? And then we bring that to God. We bring that to God. How do you do that, Jeff? Well, you'll have to wait for some of that for next week.

I want to thank you very much for your kind attention about Poland. I always get excited and take longer than I say I will. But that's okay, right?

I'm very close to these people and the need that they have and I'm very glad that God has awakened my soul to that reality.

So let me invite you, if you would, to join me in a quick word of prayer before we transition into our final song and then Greg will come and dismiss us.

Pray with me if you would. Father, I thank you for this group of people here who are my friends. I thank you that by your Spirit's leading, they chose to be here with us today worshipping.

[23 : 02] I thank you for the word of truth even briefly that you've brought to us from Ecclesiastes. If nothing else, you've shown us that your word does truly contain all of the wisdom in the way of living life to please Jesus that we need.

It is completely sufficient to show us what it means to live a godly life, a God-pleasing, God-like life. And I am so thankful to you, Lord, that you're patient with us, that you meet us in our weakness, you come to us in our time of doubt and darkness, you meet us in times when we have to look into the mirror and think in terms of our failure.

God, thank you that you love us and you don't stop loving us and you reach out to us in the kindness of your heart and embrace us and pull us to yourself so that we can know you and your son and walk with you and know the certainty and hope that one day you will bring us to your side and you will wipe away all the tears, all the doubts and fears and all the darkness will be dispelled for eternity.

We'll never have to know that or face that again. You'll give us a new body that will last for eternity. It'll never get sick or sorrowful or suffer.

We are reminded that this is not our home. Our home is with you and that one day we will face death and you will use death as the entryway to bring us into eternal life.

[24 : 38] Thank you that that is a fixed reality for us in heaven as we look to Jesus by faith. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your living word in Jesus Christ and we thank you for the hope that we have in his cross, in his resurrection and in him living in us.

It's in his name that we pray and for his glory. Amen.