

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

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[0 : 00] So you've got a big old book of Daniel, and it is actually the first book after the book of Daniel, if that helps.

Hosea chapter 4. We'll come back to Ecclesiastes in just a moment. Ecclesiastes, or Hosea 4, beginning in verse 1.

This is, remember, the issue of Hosea trying to be faithful to an unfaithful wife, and the picture throughout this book of the Bible is the adulterous, the spiritual adultery that Israel is committing against God as Israel's husband.

And so Hosea has an unfaithful wife, and that physical depiction of adultery and Hosea's life with his wife sinning against him is the picture of Israel sinning against the Lord.

And we pick it up in chapter 4. Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel. So God is hearkening these people to listen to him as he tells them the truth.

[1 : 33] This is the definitive authoritative word of Almighty God on the issue. For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land.

Because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. Now that's a very, very bad, tragic, and dangerous place to be.

There is instead swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery. They employ violence so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.

So this would include the priests and the leadership of Israel as well as the people of Israel. And the void of a lack of truth turning their backs. It's not that the truth hasn't been brought.

Turning their backs on the truth, the leadership in Israel now find themselves in this terrible void being filled with sin. And so in all of their relationships toward the Lord, toward one another, they have these terrible realities of violence and bloodshed following bloodshed.

[2 : 45] And swearing and hating. It's just a vile time. Therefore, the land itself mourns. Everyone who lives in it languishes. Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky and also the fish of the sea, they disappear.

Yet let no one find fault. And let none offer reproof. For your people are like those who contend with the priest. So you will stumble by day.

And the prophet also will stumble with you by night. I will destroy your mother. So all that Israel has turned to in the way of idols and hope will be destroyed.

They will live lives constantly stumbling over themselves. They are their own anchor. Verse six. My people then are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Now I'll ask you, lack of knowledge is what in this context? It is a lack of knowledge of God and his ways. So this is not a lack of knowledge of human wisdom.

[3 : 56] This is a lack of understanding who God is relating to God in that understanding and then living out of that understanding for wise life. They say, nope, you don't have that.

And you were destroyed for a lack of it because you have rejected knowledge, the knowledge of God. I also will reject you from being my priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

Church, who did the forgetting first? God or the people? The people. The people. And so God's response to their sin because they have stiffened themselves against the Lord and his ways is for God to say, if that is what you choose.

And so God walks away from them. And this is a terrible, terrible place for these people to be. The title of my message for this morning, God's wisdom, turning trials into treasure.

Turning trials into treasure. And this will be an abbreviated kind of message from what I what I thought I might do as we work through it. But still, we'll see how far we get as we deal with it.

[5 : 12] The question on the table, then, as you turn to Ecclesiastes chapter seven. The question on the table for us. Is this how can we know God?

This is what the people in Hosea's time were being destroyed by. They didn't know the Lord. It's not that they didn't know about God. Knowing about God and knowing God are two different things.

You can know about certain people in your life. Oh, yeah. I heard about that guy. Oh, yeah. She she was mentioned to me in another conversation the other day, but I've never met her.

But I know about her and I know some things about her. There's a whole world of difference between knowing about God. He exists and knowing God in a relationship. So the question is, how do we have a relationship with God?

How can we know him personally for who he reveals himself to be? It isn't my idea of God. It's knowing God for who he has said.

[6 : 16] This is who I am. All right. How can we know him like that? We can know God as he has made himself known to us in the Bible.

The Bible is God's written record of introduction. If you will. The Bible tells us about God. It also tells us how to know God, have a relationship with God and then how to live a life that pleases God, making everything about our life about him.

That's the Bible. Backwards and forwards. Ultimately, then the Bible points you and I to know God in his ways through a relationship of faith in his son, Jesus Christ.

I'm going to say it very definitively, friends. We all know this and we subscribe to it. We cannot know God in this personal, intimate way apart from a relationship of faith with his son, Jesus Christ.

If you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you cannot be rightly related to almighty God. Now, we believe that. Faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, following Jesus in obedience to his commands are what Christians mean by knowing God in your heart.

[7 : 37] You've heard that phrase. Knowing God in your heart. And living for his glory. It's all about having a relationship with Jesus.

What I'm describing you so far, friends, is this. If you can hang on to this. It is God's spiritual work. God's spiritual work in you.

Yielding practical displays of holiness and godliness in your life. Please note the order. I come to know God.

I come to be born again in faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I realize that I need God's forgiveness. And he offers that forgiveness to me through a relationship.

And that relationship is with his son, Jesus Christ. And that relationship is cemented as God gives me the gift of faith so that I can look to Jesus wholly and completely for my soul.

[8 : 39] And say, I cannot save myself. But God has made a way for me to be saved through Christ Jesus. I want to believe in Jesus. I want to yield to you. Please forgive me for my sins that I've sinned against you, God.

And make me right with you. And in that moment, Jesus Christ saves you. And you become a child of God. It is a spiritual work that God does within you.

On the other side of that, you now live in the process of God making your life more and more like Jesus. So that your speech, your attitudes, and your actions all begin to reflect that change that God has made in you spiritually.

That is what it means to be a Christian. You are saved and born again. And then God brings you through a process of growing you into likeness to Jesus over the course of your lifetime.

And then the greatest part is still to come. You die a physical death. And then God raises you to spiritual life, just like he did Jesus out of the grave.

[9 : 44] And sets you in heaven for all eternity to enjoy a sinless existence with your Savior. See, that's one of the beautiful things about the Christian life.

Death ushers us into the best part. That's why we're not afraid of death. God has conquered death for us. All right? I'm going to preach a little sermon here in the next few minutes that is a theology of death.

I told someone earlier this morning it's actually a theology of funerals. Have you ever been to a funeral and thought, how should I act? What should I say? Is it a celebration?

This is a Christian. Everybody says we should be happy. This person's going to heaven. But I'm looking around and everybody's crying. And the immediate family is just broken to pieces. And but we're told it's supposed to be a celebration.

How am I supposed to act? What am I supposed to say? I know some people who tell me I absolutely avoid funerals at all costs. It's too awkward. It's too hard. So we need to understand what God would have us understand about this.

[10 : 52] Issue of death. All this is that I've been talking about. I want to do a little quick contrast with you because the antithesis of what I've been saying is also true.

But it's very dangerous. And it's this. The lack of heart knowledge of God leaves your soul spiritually bankrupt and your life empty.

So chasing the good life only proves its elusiveness. Because you'll never catch it. The good life is found in a relationship with Jesus.

Anything apart from that and you're chasing your tail. Now Ecclesiastes 7. We're ready to read. Verse 1. 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. Now think in terms of the theme of death for the rest of the reading. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting.

[11 : 54] Because that is the end of every man and the living takes it to heart. But sorrow then is better than laughter. 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.

And this too is utility. Oppression makes a wise man mad and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of the matter is better than its beginning. Patience of spirit is better than a haughty spirit.

Do not be eager in your heart to be angry. Anger resides in the bosom of fools. And do not say, why is it that 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.

[13 : 01] Consider then the work of God. For who is able to straighten what he has bent? In the day of prosperity, 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. Now in this particular message, we're probably going to get through four verses of that. But there's the larger context.

Did you see the flow of better than, better than, this is better than? And that's what we're dealing with throughout this particular passage of scripture. We are faced with Solomon's answers to the question that he posed back up in chapter 6, verse 12.

Will you look there? This is how chapter 6 ended. For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime? During the few years of his life.

Now the answer is an answer the world hates. And rejects. Because the answer is this. God. God knows.

[14 : 07] God always and most fully knows what is good. What is better. And what is best. In terms of pursuing the good life.

I'm looking at Brooke right now and I'm thinking, man, you're so privileged to hear this. You know, we all are. But I'm thinking, she's so young. And all these young ones. If you're going to chase the good life.

Chase it in Jesus. Chase it in your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Look to him. Are you listening? Believe on Jesus. Chase Jesus.

And as you get like this and start to have gray hair, which that will happen one day. You won't regret the life that you've lived chasing the Lord Jesus Christ.

And to clearly show the absolute need that we all have for God to tell us. For God to instruct us.

[15 : 02] In other words, this is not something you can discover. This is something that has to be revealed to you. Shown to you. And so it's a privilege that God does tell us.

And instruct us in what is good and better when living through the complications of the seasons of life. So our passage kind of gives us a cold shower of contrasts.

A cold shower of contrasts in this list of Proverbs. And the first category that we'll deal with is God's eternal perspectives on turning trials into treasures.

Trials into treasures. Now, the first point that I want to give you, I'll mark out this way and then we'll see how many we can do next time. The first one is this. Adversities, realities.

Adversities, realities. There are a number of ways we could couch this. Trials, adversities, limitations. Now, any of you who are adults, you have come to realize something about life.

[16 : 06] Life is full of limitations. And when you meet resentful, bitter, cynical people, grumpy people, you are usually looking at someone who has not learned to navigate the limitations of life.

Okay? Life is full of change. Life is full of hardship. Life is full of unexpected things. Life is full of limitations. So I'm kind of couching all of that under the umbrella of adversities.

Adversities, realities. People constantly push against these limitations. It's our human nature to push against what we don't like, what we don't want to accept.

Now, let me offer this to you. Death. Death. Death. Death is our most sobering limitation. Now, folks, as I look at you this morning, let me say with joy, humility, and all compassion, a truth that we all need to come to terms with.

You, every minute you live, you, every minute you live, are closer to death. Death is going to overtake you. It's inescapable. You are going to die.

[17 : 18] You are going to die. You might die in an hour. You might die in 50 more years. That's not the issue. When isn't the issue? You can't know that, and I can't know that.

What we can know, and we need to know, is that every one of us will die. And we need to let that sober us.

Not rob our joy. Not cause us to go drink ourselves silly or take drugs or find a hobby to distract us or lose ourselves in our jobs so that we don't have to think about reality.

No. We need to think about all of this in the Lord. We are finite creatures on a course to meet death. We just don't know when. Let me offer you this quote.

I'm sorry I don't have a slide for you on this. I'll try to pull this together for next week and do a quick review. Listen to this. Your life won't go on forever.

[18 : 22] But death is not just a line you crossed when your time is up. Death is an evangelist. Death looks us. He looks us.

That is death. Death looks us in the eye and asks us to look him right back with a steady gaze and allow him to do his work in us.

Death wants to teach us. Death wants to teach us that the day of our coming death can be a friend to us in advance. The very limitation that death introduces into your life can instruct you about life.

Think of it as death's helping hand. End quote. So Solomon wants to sober us with the reality of death.

And here is how he does it. In verse one. 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.

[19 : 25] So what we have in mind here is the idea perhaps of a funeral. And some people think that maybe this ointment thing is an ointment that they would do when they embalmed the body as it were.

Not an embalming like we do. But getting the body ready for burial like they did with Jesus when they put all the spices and all that kind of thing. Some people think that that might be lending itself.

I can see some of that. Definitely. That being compared to the time of death. But in the first half of the verse. The emphasis seems to be on superficiality.

Contrasted with the depth and purpose of an honorable life. And here's what I mean. Smelling good on the outside is fine. But not if what is on the inside is rotten.

You can perfume yourself all you want. But if you never take a bath. You're just trying to cover up the stinky part. That's not good. That's what they used to do back in Victorian time. Like yak.

[20 : 27] Right? Trying to perfume a shallow and selfish life can only work for a little while. Here's what we're talking about.

Compare it to a good name. A good name suggests a life that people think fondly and admirably about. You with me? He's got a good reputation.

She's got a good reputation. The second half of the verse seems a little more contrary to what we might immediately think is true. It doesn't seem as intuitive.

How can death be better than birth? Well, one way to think of this verse is to consider that birth is joyful. It's full of potential. Full of plans.

Full of hopes. Full of dreams. Death, on the other hand, is about ends, hurts, mourning, sadness, loss. All right. Now, you with me? That's true, right?

[21 : 28] When a baby comes into the world, everybody wants to go to the maternity ward. How many people go to the hospital and say, oh, goody, I get to go to the morgue? No. If you do that, I'm like going the other way.

I'm not following you. But if you say, let's go see the babies. I'm like, as a grandfather, yes, let's go see the babies. And coo at them and spit all over the glass and make them do crazy stuff.

Why is it that we're looking at a passage that tells us death is all about ends and hurts and mourning and sadness and loss. And we're all going to face death. And so we need to go through life with this somber, morbid outlook on life, knowing that what's the use?

We're all just going to rot and die anyway. No. How do we answer this question? Well, if you've been listening carefully to what Solomon's been saying, we can go back to his question in chapter six, verse 12.

For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, suggesting there is good. There's good to be had in this life.

[22 : 32] We just need to know who to listen to. We need to know where to go for the answer. And if we've been following along as we've been going through Ecclesiastes, we will see the answer repeatedly.

Go back to chapter two, if you would. Chapter two, verse 24. We are answering the question. Who is it we can go to to answer the question, the good life for us?

What man can know that? Two twenty four. There is nothing better for a man than to do what? To eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good.

Now, that's a life being lived in the goodness of God's gift. Look, this also I have seen. That it is from the hand of God. Let me ask you again.

Where does your enjoyment in life come from? What does it say at the end of verse 24? The hand of God. It is a gift of God.

[23 : 30] Folks, your ability to enjoy your life, your ability to have a perspective on life, even in the trials where you are enjoying your life and tasting what is good and having the right priorities comes from God.

It's his wisdom that gives you the ability to do that. Verse 25. For who? Who can eat and who can have enjoyment without? God.

And the answer is no one. No one. How about chapter three, verse 12? I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime.

Moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor. Look, it is the gift of God.

So here here is an enjoyable life. Here is a person who's eating and drinking and working with gusto. And taking it in and enjoying their job.

[24 : 37] Enjoying the fact that they can sit down to a good meal and enjoy the drink that they're drinking and the fellowship around the table. In other words, you're taking in the good things of life.

You're not a dark, morbid, cynical party pooper. You have an enthusiasm about life. You're glad to be alive.

Now, look what it says. It is the gift of God. Verse 13 and then verse 14 puts a cap on it. I know that everything church.

How much of life? Everything. God does will remain forever. There is nothing to add, nothing to take from it. For God has so worked that men should.

What does your Bible say? Fear him. Mine says fear him. Anybody got a different word? Fear before him. That revere, revere, there it is.

[25 : 37] Revere captures the idea of the awe, the reverence. God wants all mankind to revere him. To have a holy reverence of him.

And in that reverence, you find the joys of life. So God makes the drink sweeter. God makes the labor purposeful, meaningful.

God brings together the eating in a greater purpose. That's why I told you at the beginning, when we gather at my house today, laugh, talk, catch up, enjoy the food.

Have a good time. And then remember, all of that is happening so that you can be built up to go out into your mission field and share that joy and feel sorry for people who weren't there today.

And say, boy, you know what? Next time we do this, I want to grab two or three people and bring them with me and just let them be around these people. Had a guy tell me yesterday.

[26 : 34] He was at my house doing some work. And he told me he had some questions for me about the Bible, which was awesome. Because we've had him over several times and now that's happened.

But he said, you know, I was I visited a church while he was on a skiing trip. And out in Colorado, he said, we visited a church because so and so's mother or whatever said we're going to church.

So we went to church. And he said, you know what? I went in and all these people, they just met me and talked to me and all this.

And I wasn't sure if he was going to. I said, so did that seem genuine to you? He goes, oh, yeah, it was awesome. I'm like, I like these people. I want to come back and see these people.

And I said, man, dude, that is exactly the prayer I make when people come to our church. That not only will they be welcome and talk to in very normal ways, but that they'll leave thinking that was genuine.

[27 : 33] That wasn't a put on. Those people weren't tripping all over themselves to put on a good face. They genuinely wanted to meet me and talk to me. Every Christian ought to live a life like that.

So that people see the genuineness that Jesus brings. Can you imagine a Christian being fake? Is that Jesus? It's not Jesus in that moment, is it?

Jesus ought to help us be those kind of people. Greg, I'm not going to make it. I'm going to have to stop in just a little while. Why do I do this? I told you I didn't know how far I'd get.

I need to show you one other passage before we move on. Five, chapter five, verse seven. We're still answering this question about the good life. We're still answering this question about what do we do with death and how do we balance the good life with the reality that we're all going to die one day?

And that should sober us. But the sobering shouldn't make us bitter or cause us to run from reality. How do we turn the limitations and adversities of my life into the treasures that God wants them to be?

[28 : 43] Chapter five, verse seven. For in many dreams and in many words, there is emptiness. In other words, in the interpretations of men apart from God, there's loss and emptiness and vanity and yuck.

Rather, what does it say? There it is again. Revere God or fear God. OK, and then verse 18. Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting.

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

You see, all of this, including your very life, is a gift from God. And what we've been looking at in Ecclesiastes is that you would live that gift of your life from God back to him as a gift to him.

God gave you the gift of life. What's the highest, best gift you could give God back in the way of gratitude? Well, the best thing that he's given you.

[29 : 51] I'm going to ask you, do you want to give God your very best? Do you want God to have the very best and highest gift you could ever give God? Do you have that kind of sense of indebtedness to God?

Do you have that kind of gratitude and enthusiasm about your life with God? Then the highest and best gift that you can give to God in light of what he's given you is to live your life back to him as a gift of love.

The life he's given you in Jesus, give it back to him by living for him. That's what I mean. It's not saying to God, no, no, thank you.

I don't want it. I'll give it back. No, you live it back to him. Live it back. Live it back to Jesus. Jesus. And people around you will be like, what in the world is this person's deal?

Have you ever have you ever been around somebody going through a really, really difficult time and wondered how in the world they were able to stay steady? It's not that they didn't cry. It's not that they didn't struggle.

[30 : 56] They're real people. But you saw steadiness to them. In other words, their life just didn't come unglued. They didn't just come apart at the seams. It's like the seams are sewn with something that just doesn't it won't it won't let go.

Folks, that's living in the hand of God. That's what that is. So give God the glory, right? Amen. If we carefully consider that Solomon here is emphasizing the issue of death for every person in these first verses or so, the idea that you will one day attend your own funeral.

You ready for that? Then his point is more the issue that your death is a better teacher and revealer about the real you than your birth.

That's why death is better than birth. Because at death, we get to see the real you because we look back on a life at birth. It's all potential and uncertainty.

Right. But we don't know you. You're four days old. And it's like, yeah, I got no idea. For all I know, this could be the next serial killer. God forbid.

[32 : 13] For all I know, this could be the person who's going to go out on the mission field and be the next William Carrie. Or whatever. We don't know. But boy, you come to your death and you look back on whatever you've lived, whether it's six years or 65.

Death is better a revealer. I think that's more the emphasis. If you're a Christian. If you're a follower of Jesus by faith, then death is not about potential or plans or hopes or dreams.

It is about a new beginning and fulfillment. Death is about a new beginning and fulfillment if you're a Christian. So it's about promises kept.

It's about the completion of you living as a. A human being. And not a dead one. Nobody, nobody dies a physical death and stays dead.

Everybody dies a physical death. Everybody gets raised to new life. But will you live life with God or will you live eternity apart from God?

[33 : 24] Apart from God is hell. With God is heaven. It's real. And we taste it here. We taste it here.

So it's about gaining a life free from death. Suffering, pain, sorrow. Free from the changing, perplexing, vexing, rotten ways of this life.

You say, Jeff, how do we in the world do we escape that? Death. Hello. We escape it through death. Micah, look forward to your death. It's escape.

Escape to what? It's your final escape. It's your wonderful escape into the joys and the bliss of being with God forever. No more aches and pains or sickness or disease.

Age in a Christian's life is supposed to help us get better and better prepared to say, I'm ready, I'm ready. If you've ever had the hard, deep trial of watching someone you care about suffer as a Christian, and then they say to you, I'm ready, I'm ready.

[34 : 38] Don't tell them, Mom, don't talk like that. Say, Mom, I understand. God's got you ready. God's got you ready. And all of this racking of pain and suffering and disease.

Can I get personal with you? Kristen Wirth has shared with us that her father is dying. And it's going to be any time now. He's eaten up with cancer and there's no cure.

And he's having a tough time. And she's asked us to pray for her and to pray for him. What do you say to a person like that? If they're a Christian, you say, this is exactly the kind of thing that God uses to make us want heaven.

And long for the day when we'll throw off this body of disease and take up our eternal bodies. You say that. If they're not a Christian, you say, put your hope and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and let God make this death purposeful.

Don't waste your death. You see, it's too late to say, don't waste your life. But it's not too late in Jesus Christ to say, don't waste your death. Don't waste your death.

[35 : 48] Die to the glory of Jesus. And go be with him for all eternity. Do you realize that deathbed conversion is real? There's hope in Christ right up to the last breath.

How long have I been going, brother? I'm so wound up, I can't stop. Anybody know? How long? Four more minutes. Or let me ask you this.

All right? Let me ask you this. Would you rather have, think of birth, think of death. Which is better? God says death is better. All right, listen. Let me ask you. Would you rather have potential and the question mark of the unknown as in birth?

Because you have no idea. What's it going to be like? What's going to happen? Am I going to? Or would you rather have the certainty of heaven guaranteed? Gained.

Your highest hopes met and exceeded. The complete fulfillment of a secure eternity with treasures beyond your comprehension. Comprehension.

[36 : 54] Death then looks back on an earthly life and tells you the truth about you. It's much better than it's much better than at birth. Because it causes you to do this.

If you allow it to sober it, it causes you to say, what is my life counting for? What does my life matter for? And that should sober you? And that should sober you. So we take a serious look at your own forthcoming death.

And we consider that you have only one limited lifetime at making good on your life. So make it count for eternity. It's not about as much making it count here.

It's making it count for eternity. And it'll count here. That's the way it works. This is the theme that's driven home to our hearts.

Even as the passage continues. I had no idea we would just do one verse. But there's one verse. One verse. Look at it again. And then I'll stop. A good name is better than a good ointment.

[37 : 58] Because you're looking at a life lived well. A life lived well. So this is not veneer. This isn't just perfuming your life to try to cover up the stinky reality that you lived for self.

And you could care less. And even though you tried to do good things, it really never was about God. No. A good name. A life well lived is better than that.

And the day of your death is better than the day of your birth. Because your death looks back on that life of honor and reputation. And it speaks a story to the glory of God.

And that's what you want. That's why I say make the most of your death. Praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord.