

What is Life About? (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] is something to be said about a singing church, a singing people. People who don't have joy don't sing.

Why would you? But when there's joy in your soul, don't you want to sing? I pray there's joy in your soul this morning. I'm going to have us in the book of Ecclesiastes this morning.

It's been quite some time since we were in this book of Scripture. And I pointedly want to deal with a theme this Sunday and God willing next Sunday.

So I'm resurrecting some of this, as it were, from previous messages. And the title of my message, What is Life About?

Big question, isn't it? Well, this is particularly what Ecclesiastes as a book is about. It's why it's in Scripture. Ecclesiastes is helping us understand something of the wisdom of God as He answers life's biggest questions for us.

[1 : 13] And we're going to be in Ecclesiastes 7, and I'll begin reading in verse 15. We'll only deal with a few verses this morning. Solomon is the author that we believe wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.

Conservative scholarship holds to that view. And he begins in verse 15 of chapter 7, I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility.

There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?

Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

[2 : 17] It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other. For the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.

Now, what in the world is that all about? That's just as clear as mud, isn't it? And that's one of the things that's interesting about this particular book of Scripture.

Kind of like Proverbs, you can read some of the Proverbs and come away scratching your head and going, yeah, I don't really have a clue what that's trying to say. So we'll unpack this together, and in the way of doing that, I want to ask you several questions from several different aspects or categories of your life.

Now, what I'm going to ask you at this point in the way of my introduction has to do with the way that we live as human beings. So this is all common to all of us. Nobody escapes what I'm about to ask you about here.

So we're all going to be sitting in here this morning kind of evaluating the level of how each of these categories is affecting us in this moment, because we come in and out of seasons of life dealing with these things that I'm about to mention.

[3 : 30] The first question I want to ask you is how much of your daily life is taken up with adjusting to change? Let's think about that for a moment.

I'm talking about changes in your schedule. In other words, changes in the plans that you'd made or that you'd counted on for that day or for that week.

They're on the calendar. It's fixed. This needs to happen. And then something happens and it changes. And you have to scramble around or alter what's going on. You have to make phone calls.

Sometimes that happens because something comes into your life and you've got to rearrange it and call the people and say, yeah, I can't do that. I'm going to have to shift that or whatever. Sometimes it happens because of what people do to you, right?

They have to contact you or they just don't show up. How does change affect you and how much of your daily life is spent dealing with the changes that come at you in life?

[4 : 36] Maybe there are changes that relate to your job or the roles that you have in life as a husband or a wife, a father, a mother.

And then there's this one and this one is particularly interesting to me as I age, as I'm in my 60s now. Look, changes are happening.

I look in the mirror and go, dude, what is that? Those are bags, man. What's going on with you? There are all kinds of things that happen to us in the way of change in our bodies and it's not a small thing to grow old and have to deal with the way your body is changing.

And for some of us, those changes are significant. I mean, they have a huge impact on our ability to even go to work and function. Yeah.

So it's real. Change can be good. Change can be challenging. Change can also be very hard. Very hard. Now the question is, how much of your daily life is taken up with you having to face the reality of change?

[5 : 48] Next question, how much of your daily life is concerned with you responding to adversity? Responding to adversity. So we're talking about things like this, what God calls trials or tests in the Holy Spirit.

Adversity as far as time constraints. We only have so many hours in a day. We only have so many hours we can function before our bodies shut down and let us know, you better rest or...

We have adversity in the way of unmet expectations. We live with those every day of our lives. Unmet expectations that we have toward people, toward situations and circumstances, even toward ourselves.

How about adversity that comes from the limitations of your own body, your own limitations intellectually and spiritually, the limitations of others which put you in touch with your weaknesses and theirs.

And I'm thinking of our married couples right now. Any of us who've been married for any length of time, we understand that our marriage reveals our own personal weaknesses in life. Does it not?

[7 : 04] Yeah. Those marriages also reveal weaknesses in our spouse. and that requires us to respond to those realities.

Weakness in me, weakness in her. It creates adversity. It's hard. There's financial adversity in your life and in mine.

There's emotional and relational and spiritual adversity as you own up to your sins each day and repent. that's hard. There's adversities in our culture and in our community life.

We're in an election year for the President of the United States. There are wars going on in different parts of the world and those wars threaten to spill over into other countries and inflame us possibly in war.

How do we deal with these adversities in our lives? What do we do with those things coming at us? How do we interpret them?

[8 : 11] What is your faith response to the adversity in your life? And then finally, how about how much you deal with a sense of suffering?

Now you see all these are related. Change, adversity, suffering, they're all related. How much of your daily life is spent dealing with some aspect of suffering?

It might be physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, but some kind of suffering. It may be a broken heart, grief, sadness. It may be suffering from fear, worry, anxiety, from sorrow, loneliness, insecurity, anger, lack of control, from being mistreated or mistrusted, misrepresented, marginalized, maligned by other people.

You may be suffering from your own failures or the failures of others to be faithful toward you in some aspect of life. And so you suffer as a result.

We all suffer as broken people in a broken world around other broken people. The liberals hate it when they hear me talk like this. They hate it.

[9 : 30] They can't stand it when I start talking about brokenness in life and us being broken people. Don't you tell me I'm broken. I'm a princess. I'm a this.

I'm a that. I'm the other. Here's what happens. Adversity comes. Now what? Trials come. You get cancer.

Somebody in your life dies suddenly. Your bank account's drained by some decision that you made that you didn't see coming. Now what do you stand on?

Now what's your life about? What is life about? Well, it's not about that stuff. But sometimes we live that way. If you bring all of that together, the change, the adversity, the suffering, and you bring all of that together in your daily life, you can ask the question very legitimately, what in the world is my life all about?

There's got to be more than this. Suzanne, I'm reminded of a show, a drama, that we have watched and recently one of the characters who was somewhat of a party personality, you know, living life very shallowly and that kind of thing and older, gray-headed, should have known better.

[10 : 57] And adversity came into his life in the drama in the way of all of a sudden he developed a cough and fast forward he found out he's got throat cancer. And as he confronted the different people in his life that were close to him with that reality, it stunned them.

And in one scene in particular, he was sitting there with his head hung low and he started recounting that party life and he looked up at the other character and he said something to the effect of, what's that all about anyway?

That's the question, isn't it? What was that all about anyway? What does my life add up to? Well, now that I have you thoroughly depressed, let's give you the truth because the truth dispels the lies and gives you hope.

And the truth is in Jesus. In truth, it might surprise us to realize how much and in how many forms we encounter this change, adversity, and suffering in daily life.

And so as we face off with this each day and ask the question what my life's about, we better turn to the right people to listen to. We better turn to the right source to get those answers or we could be in a lot of trouble.

[12 : 17] Solomon is going to help us take a really honest look at ourselves in what it means to live as these broken people in a broken world around other broken people.

What are we supposed to do with that, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived apart from Jesus? You got anything to help us out with that? We want to get at God's loving counsel, God's loving wisdom for us as we face these things in our life.

So we're going to take a careful look this Sunday and Lord willing next Lord's Day at this particular topic and take it apart. I have three different elements I want to bring to you regarding this question and answer, but we're just going to deal with the first one today.

So a critical element to understanding the aim of Solomon's teaching in the section of Scripture we'll be looking at is allowing the context of verses 13 and 14 of chapter 7 to set the tone for how we interpret the overall thrust of verses 15 all the way through verse 29.

So if you'll revisit the text with me and let's go back up from where I read in verse 15 and look at verses 13 and 14. Consider the work of God.

[13 : 36] Now that's the starting place. Consider the work of God. For who is able to straighten what God has bent in the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider, consider, God has made the one as well as the other so that man will not discover anything that will be after him.

That's what he says just before he asked this thing in verse 15 and moves down through the text of verse 16, 17, 18. What is he talking about?

Consider the work of God. Who is able to straighten what God has bent? We'll talk about all that. In the day of prosperity you have Solomon's counsel.

When you're blessed and you feel a sense of prosperity and things are going well, what does he tell you? Be happy. Well, what about in the day of adversity when things aren't going so well?

When it's hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel? Well, then he tells you it's not about being happy. Look, what does he say? Consider. Consider. Think. Think. Reflect.

[14 : 51] Remember. What? God has made the one as well as the other. And then he gives you the purpose. He deals with you in this way so that man will not discover anything that will be after him.

And we want to deal with that. And let me put this up on the screen for you as we jump into the text together. The Bible always gives us the reality. The Bible never lies about or glosses over the reality of what it is like to live on this planet as a human being.

God, in fact, came in human form and lived on this planet and died on this planet. So all of this is particularly true during times of adversity and in light of our mortality or the transient nature of life, the fact that we're here one day and gone the next in God's eyes.

So what we need to do is consider the work of God and that deals with what life is about. To consider the work of God is for you to take a biblical view of what life is about.

You're letting God define for you the purpose of your life. That's what it means for you to consider the work of God. In other words, you're not allowing the circumstances of life or the things that are coming at you to define how you view those things or perceive them much less how then you're going to respond to them and move through them.

[16 : 27] You're letting God do that because you're considering and you're saying to yourself, what has happened to me right now is the work of God in my life. Whether it is prosperity or adversity, it is the work of God in my life.

I'm going to consider that because that's going to have everything to do with the way I interpret this and then the way I respond to it. You see? So what God is doing is calling us to a careful, a prayerful approach to how we live life, particularly when adversity is slamming up against us because that's when we become more vulnerable, isn't it?

Some people will argue and say, well, now, wait a minute. We're pretty vulnerable if we're riding that wave and everything's going great and we relax everything and we think, oh, man, I got this.

That's dangerous, isn't it? I got this. Oh, take heed lest you fall. Don't get all pride, prideful about it. All proud. If you'll look with me then at chapter 6, verse 12.

Chapter 6, verse 12. Again, we're just putting all of this into context. For who knows, this is another question, for who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his feudal life?

[17 : 45] Now, look, Solomon's not being cynical. He's being real. Here's a guy who's tried everything, done everything, at this particular time in the world, Solomon was probably the wealthiest person on the planet.

Israel was probably the place to be if you wanted to live the high life. Very prosperous. God had super-blessed Israel and Solomon.

It had never known a time of prosperity like this and never would again until Jesus comes back and saves them. Look what he says.

Who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime? That's a great question. We're not going to find that answer in mankind. We don't know. He will spend them, he will spend these times, this brief time, like a shadow.

That's God's viewpoint. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun? Did you notice that? This is a question driving at the heart of what life is about.

[18 : 53] It's asking, who knows how to define the good life in light of how fleeting and fading, how changing, how short-lived life truly is?

Who really has a grasp on answering that question? What is the good life all about? If you went out here and surveyed 100 people at random and asked them what's the good life about, some of the answers would sound similar, but you'd get all kinds of answers, wouldn't you?

About what constitutes the good life. Solomon says, your life is like a shadow. It's transient in the eyes of God.

It's just barely a blink and it's gone. It's here and then it isn't. And you cannot know all that you want to know about how your life will go.

You can't. It's impossible. No one can tell you and you can't figure it out for yourself. Notice how 6.12 ends.

[20 : 02] Look what he says. He will spend them like a shadow for who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun. That should sound familiar.

Look back over with me now at 7.14. Chapter 7, verse 14. What does it say? At the very end of the verse, so that man will not discover anything that will be after him.

Same theme. In other words, what is he telling us? You cannot discover God's future plans for your life. After him means after this moment.

You can't look what's coming next. You can make predictions. You can make plans. But none of us know if we're going to make it home today.

We don't know that, right? You've heard the stories. You've seen this happen in friends and family members and co-workers. They're here today and gone tomorrow and you're thinking, oh my goodness. We didn't see that coming.

[21 : 02] That's life. Right? We're not in heaven yet. And so there are things that we cannot know. There are things we cannot discover.

And this is where God's wisdom comes to your aid. Right at the point of what you don't know and can't control, the wisdom of God steps in to tell you what to do about that.

Well, what does he say to us about it? Look, I'm going to throw it up here again. So consider the work of God. That's the answer.

You say, Jeff, that answer doesn't change my circumstances. It doesn't even necessarily make everything better. No, that's not what it's designed to do. It's designed to change you and your attitude toward what's going on.

It's designed to do a work in your heart, a work of faith. So consider the work of God and accept that God's work to straighten or to bring good in your life and God's work to bend or to bring adversity into your life are in his caring control.

- [22 : 11] Both are. Both. It's not a either or. It's both. God's behind both of them. So he says, consider, remember, own that you will never fully grasp, change, or be able to predict or control how God works in your life.

Now this is going to become really important in a minute because he's going to tell us this. You cannot good your way into changing your life. And you cannot bad your way into changing your days.

Because God's in control of all that. And God's in control of when you die. That doesn't mean that you go out here and smoke four packs a day.

Because you're like, well, God's got that, you know, and be a chimney. Or you do whatever you want to do and live in license like that. That's foolishness. And Solomon's going to tell us in just a minute, don't be a fool.

Don't be a fool. And live away from the Lord. Use some sense about this. Look to Christ and contemplate. Consider carefully the wisdom that God is bringing to you, especially in these seasons when you're not sure and you don't have control.

- [23 : 27] This is when the wisdom of God is going to benefit you most. So, again, look at verse 14 with me. Just rehearse this with me. In the day of prosperity, you need to just be happy.

Settle in and be happy. In the day of adversity, then, think. Carefully consider God has made prosperity as well as adversity.

And the reason that he's done that is that man will never be able to discover anything that will be after him. Man is not capable in those moments of doing anything that's going to change the course of what God has for him.

And so, that doesn't depress us. That's not determinism in some psychodynamic way like Freud talked about. This is simply an acknowledgement of the reality that God is God and I'm not.

God is God and I'm not. So, don't worry. Don't be anxious. Don't be fearful. Don't be a control freak.

- [24 : 33] Fill in the blank. Fill in the blank. There is a way for us to turn our hearts to what's important. Those things are not the way to turn your heart.

Adversity and suffering and change will tempt you those ways to exert more control or whatever and he says, don't do that. In the moment, day or season of God blessing you with prosperity, carefully consider the work of God, be happy and enjoy it.

That's good. Enjoy it. Times are good. Likewise, God's wisdom teaches you that in the moment, day or season of God bringing adversity into your life, consider that in his wise plan for your life, listen now, God has made the one as well as the other.

You don't have to stand there and go, where's God in this moment of grief or darkness or depression or hardship or change. Where's God?

God's gone nowhere. He is still on his throne. He's still working in your life. He's still working his purposes and designs in your life. It is so important for us to ground ourselves in that conviction.

- [25 : 45] God is still God and God is still doing a good thing in my life and I can't base that on the feeling that I have right now. Have you ever been so sad, so grieved in your heart over something that's happening in your life, so heartbroken about that that it was hard for you sometimes to think, to even think?

You just felt like you needed to pull away and just cry it out? Have you ever been there? Somebody nod at me. Yeah, okay brother, me too, me too. I have suffered such heartache that I didn't know if I could put another foot.

I didn't know if I get up tomorrow. How am I? The pain was so real it does feel like your heart is just going to just burst. It's real. How do you function like that?

What do you look to? Solomon's telling us. He's telling us that in that kind of grief and that kind of heartache, here's what you need to think about.

Here's where you need to put your heart. Here's what you need to bank on. Even in that depth of sorrow and grief, God is still God and He's still doing a good work and He's still going to work His purposes and designs in your life.

[26 : 56] Now let me, I'm going to go off script for a second. I'm going to give you something to think about. So, every single one of us may face this in life where we have something that comes into our life and we just don't understand how it happened or why.

We just ask ourselves, Lord, this is so strange and it came out of nowhere and Father, is there something in my life you're wanting to show me or am I not seeing something?

I mean, this is hard. This is, and it seems maybe even to you, you might even say it's unjust. Here's how we say it. What do we say? Not fair. Greg said it.

It's not, this isn't fair, Lord. You know, we can be like that. I want you to consider something because this is what Solomon says, consider. As you think about the greater realities of how the scripture teaches us to go through trials, think about this.

You know, it just might be, and I say that not cynically, it just might be that it isn't as much about you as what God is using your life to do for someone else.

[28 : 05] Isn't that true? Because people are watching. Unbelievers are watching your life. Believers are watching your life.

You have people of all persuasions watching your life, interacting with your life, and they're going to see how you respond to these trials and adversity. It's, where is your faith?

How deep does your faith go? How far will your faith take you? Can you get to a certain place in your suffering and in adversity when your faith doesn't work anymore? Maybe what God's doing is using you in a way that ministers to other people as they watch you go through it.

Is it okay with us if God acts like God like that? You see where I'm going, right? Yep. Yep.

Here's what Solomon's saying. Your response is the same because you won't be able to figure that out. And it doesn't matter.

[29 : 10] It doesn't matter why God's doing it or for whom. What we know is God's in it because He's the God of prosperity and He's the God of adversity and He has His designs and His plans and where we rest is this.

God is in control. And so when things are sailing along grab it and enjoy it while you can. That's okay.

But don't forget God in the process and act like it's all you. This is where Solomon has us right now. God has one in His hand as well as the other.

So this is no willy-nilly way with God. God's not messing around with us. We're not little puppets that God likes to play with.

That's not what's going on here. Your suffering is not arbitrary in the mind of God. Your suffering is not arbitrary. Your sorrows and your hardships don't put you in a place where you're all alone.

[30 : 20] You say, Jeff, well sometimes it can feel like it. Yeah, well, again, what do we need to do when those kinds of feelings begin to assault us? Consider the work of God.

In other words, run to the truth. Don't let your feelings lie to you. You may feel sad, you may feel down, you may feel alone.

Does that mean that God has abandoned you? What does the truth tell you? God is still God and He's still working. And so I need to consider my circumstance in terms of the work of God.

And there are limitations to what I can know as I consider that work. I can only go so far. And I need to rest. And so now we're talking about contentment.

A faith that allows you to be rested in your soul. So that's why I say, you doing this may not change your circumstances one single bit, but it'll change you.

[31 : 21] In your circumstance, it'll change you. And that's the work God wants to do. God is not going to turn the heat down until the work that He purposes is done.

He will turn it up. Am I right? Give me some amen, brother. Amen. Any of us who've lived long enough in the Lord know that God will do this.

All right, according to the end of verse 14, while you must consider this, you will still not discover, you will still not be able to fully know how or why or even when God's going to work any of these things in your life.

And so from verse 15 all the way to the end of the chapter, Solomon is building on this reality about your life. You can only go so far and your knowledge of what I'm doing in your life at any given time.

So don't waste your time trying to fix it. No, nobody heard me say that, did they? That went right over your head. So stop wasting your time trying to fix it.

[32 : 31] We're such fixers, aren't we? Oh my goodness. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't address the issues or look into the problem or whatever, but we need to do that understanding that we are to consider the work of God, not try to take control or manipulate or whatever.

So let me give you a little help with that. Let me show you how this is building in terms of the text. That's what I just told you and here's the first one that we need to consider.

God is in careful control of your life. God is in careful control of your life. This is one of the realities that Solomon is building on.

We are halfway through the book of Ecclesiastes by the time we get here. There's a grammatical syntactical shift right as chapter 6 ends and chapter 7 begins.

So this is kind of a halfway point. He's taking stock. The second thing, by His wisdom, He brings both prosperity and adversity to your life.

[33 : 41] None of that is happening apart from the wisdom of God. So we don't believe in serendipitous kinds of things. We don't believe in luck. We don't believe in chance.

We believe in a sovereign God designing these things for our lives. And then finally, you can never work out the full measure of God's ways in doing any of this.

And so don't twist yourself into a knot trying to figure it all out and control a different outcome. The outcome is going to be what God wants. So be faithful.

Say, Jeff, what are we supposed to do? Sit on our hands and act like nothing's going on? No. Be faithful. Be faithful to the truth. Consider the Lord and His work in this and then get in on it.

Submit to it. Don't fight it. Don't try to fix it. So through Solomon's writing, he's going to provide us with three critical insights into this wisdom regarding what life is about as we live in and out of these seasons that God designs for our life concerning both prosperity and adversity because our temptation is to think when we're in adversity, it's harder and it's worse.

[34 : 55] But in prosperity, we face, again, that temptation toward ease, toward kind of drifting and coasting and ignoring and kind of pushing God out to the periphery so we marginalize the work of the Lord.

We're not as apt. But then he brings us into this adversity and it slaps us back into reality and realizing, no, look, I need to depend on the Lord all the time. And freshens our awareness, right?

Here's what you want to do. You don't want to live your life needing God to come up and give you a little oh, oh, yeah, okay. Right? You don't want that.

You want to keep those eyes fixed on the Lord and not be earthbound about this stuff. Take on the priorities of heaven. This is what the men discussed yesterday as we talked through this.

All right, so I told you just one. I'm not going to take a long time here. This is what we'll deal with now. This is the first one that we're going to deal with. This is what Solomon tells us. Life is not about excesses.

[35 : 57] It's about fearing God. That's what he's saying. That's number one. So where you get that Jeff? Well, again, 15. He says, I've seen everything during my lifetime of futility.

There's a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness. Figure that. And there's a wicked man who no, he doesn't perish. He actually sees his life prolonged in his wickedness.

I mean, come on, where's the fairness there? Now, verse 16. Do not be my translation says excessively righteous and overly wise.

So that's where this comes from. Life is not about excesses. It's about fearing the Lord. You can't excess your way through life and glorify God.

Glorifying God, reflecting his character is the reason we're here and not in heaven yet. So you can't excess your way through your life and glorify the Lord.

[36 : 57] When you face adversity, when you face sorrow, suffering, the inequities of life, the fact that life's not fair, it's just not. This approach of trying to go excess in everything, it will find you bouncing from one extreme to the other.

Now, do you know people like this? Do you know people who bounce from one excess, one distraction to the other? Never settled, never satisfied.

They don't find happiness in that one, so they flit over here to the next one, and then they race over there to that one. Right? This is a life of excess. Solomon engages in a bit of hyperbole here with us to make his point.

He really hasn't seen everything. Only God sees everything. But he makes his point. When it comes to the issue of God working, that is, when God is straightening or bending, prosperity or adversity, in the lives of the righteous and the wicked, in Solomon's own fleeting life, he says, you know what?

I think I've seen it all. I think I've seen it all. Boy, have I seen so much in the way God works in this. So the issue is this. Solomon is kind of saying to his readers, hey, hey, hey, listen to me.

[38 : 16] Listen to me. I've got something to say here. I've seen it. It's very important. I know what I'm talking about. People living in right standing with God and seeking to do what is right, they still suffer sorrows and they still die while living faithfully to God.

there is this perplexing reality then of the wicked and they live long lives and they even prosper in their wickedness. So like it or not, that's the reality.

Now, how do we account for what's going on here? Because that can make us bitter. We see that and we go, that's not fair. Look, do you know how much money I give to God every month?

Do you know what I could do with that money if I just kept it for me? But no, I give it to God. And then I see this joker over here, he gives nothing, he didn't even care about God, he gives nothing.

And look, I just heard the other day, he just got this bonus, and look at that new boat sitting out there. Solomon says, hey, whoa, wait a minute.

[39 : 29] His answer is in 16 and 17. Don't be excessively righteous and don't be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? Do not be excessively wicked and don't be a fool.

Why should you die before your time? What's he talking about? Again, the point here is don't go to excess in trying to live righteously or in trying to live wickedly while counting on either approach to life to change God's plan.

I can change God's plan and by either living real righteously and being holier than thou, yeah, man, I can make sure God blesses me.

Have you been under that theology before? I can live a life in a way that is this, that, and the other, and as I do this, I kind of obligate God to bless me.

I put him in the corner and say, hey, dude, I did my part, right? You don't know that that's taught? Have you not heard this?

[40 : 32] Somebody give me something. Okay, I know some of you have sat under this theology before. God bless, yes, it's the prosperity gospel, and it's no gospel.

It's not good news, because what it teaches you is this, this was explained to me one time by another guy, he said, Jeff, do you know why our church gives in the way that it does and designates so much of it to the pastor?

I said, no, I don't have any idea. He said, we do that because we've been told that if we will bless God's man, God will be obligated to bless us. How's that even work?

Where's the heart there? God will do this, not because I love the Lord or necessarily even love my pastor, I'm doing this because I'm putting God in a box and I'm telling the Lord, I've done my part, now you show up and do yours.

And this is taught. This is not what Solomon's saying. He's saying exactly the opposite. Don't go to these excesses in your life trying to manipulate God to do what you want him to do.

[41 : 51] In either case, whether you're excessively righteous or excessively wicked, in either case, it would be an illusion for you to think that you were in control.

Remember, consider the work of God. So Solomon's not saying that prolonging life is in the control of the wicked. That goes against Scripture.

The issue for Solomon is that God is in control. In other words, God decides who lives and who dies. God controls the details of how, when, where, and why you die.

And there's nothing that you can do to manipulate your way into either a longer life or a shorter life as if you're in control to tell God how that's supposed to be done, when it's supposed to be done.

Have you not read of biographies of missionaries who've died at young ages serving faithfully in the Lord and they died of some horrible disease?

[42 : 53] I think of one that I read not too long ago. He lost, I think, three wives on the mission field. Two or three wives on the mission field to disease. Serving the Lord faithfully.

And then he himself died a horrible death faithfully in the Lord. David Brainerd was one of the most godly men I've ever read about in his life. I think he died in his thirties. A missionary.

Faithful people die serving the Lord faithfully. But the ultimate example of this is who? Jesus. What did Jesus ever do wrong? He served the Lord faithfully.

He did exactly as the Father told him to do in every single category, area, and moment of his life. And what happened to him? He went to the cross and he died. He was tortured to death.

Faithfully. Faithfully. Serving God. We got no complaint. Amen? We got no complaint. And so we're looking to the wisdom of Solomon to help us put this into perspective.

[43 : 57] God is in control and he decides. You say, Jeff, look. Doesn't the Bible say somewhere that righteous living brings a long life while wicked living shortens your life?

Alright? The Bible does teach that righteous living can prolong your life. Well, wait a minute now. That sounds contradictory. The Bible does teach that righteous living can prolong your life while wicked living can ruin it and shorten it.

So we need to clean that up. Look with me, if you would, at Proverbs. Just go back one book. Proverbs chapter 10. And look, it's very clear.

Verse 27. The fear of the Lord prolongs life. That is, going through your life with a high and holy reverence for who God is and living your life according to that prolongs your life.

You see that? But, the years of the wicked will be shortened. Now, that sounds pretty clear, doesn't it? If you look with me at verse 29.

[45 : 09] The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity. Well, that sounds like people who are iniquitous ruin their lives.

And it sounds like people who are looking to the Lord are given the stronghold in the Lord. Established in Him. Okay. How about 12:21?

What does it say? Thematically, 12:21 ties in. Thematically. No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble.

All right, let me ask you. If you've been made righteous in Jesus as a child of God, has any harm ever befallen you? You ever suffered? Well, then the Bible's lying, isn't it?

God forbid. No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble. So, when you see verses like this, you have to interpret that with other Scripture.

[46 : 10] You have to understand it in the greater whole of what Scripture is teaching. So, obviously, the point that's being made in Proverbs there is not that harm does not befall the righteous.

There's something else going on there. How are we to understand this? Is there some kind of contradiction? Well, ask yourself again the question that begs at the center of all of this.

Who is in control of how long you live? God. That doesn't change. There's no Scripture that changes that. So, what are we looking at?

Well, one of the commentators that I consulted in this time, Dr. Barak, a professor of theology and Hebrew out at the Master's Seminary.

Dr. Barak points out that because God is in control of when you die, now I quote, the length of a person's life does not depend upon his or her spirituality.

[47 : 10] The length of your life when you die doesn't depend on your spirituality. It depends on God. That takes the onus off of you. There's nothing that you can do that's going to manipulate God into giving you more days than He's designed and purposed for you.

And there's nothing you can do to shorten them up. Because ultimately, you don't know. So, how would you evaluate it? Isn't that the point? You can't know the answer to that.

There is no way for you to know you're going to die and go to heaven and then it's done. Then you're going to know. But until then, was I supposed to die on March 13th of 2059?

Or did I do something to, maybe I could have lived to 62? I don't know. Right, you don't know. So quit. Stop it. Consider that God is in control.

Consider that God is working. And let that be enough. And then get in on God's program for all of this. God can choose to give a person a long life.

[48 : 19] Whether they're wicked or righteous. He can give a person a long life who's obeying His Word. And that same person who's obeying the Word still might die sooner and younger than a wicked person.

That's up to the Lord. This is not the point of life is trying to extend it. Why would you want to do that? Solomon is simply pointing out that we cannot know how the Lord will handle the length of our lives whether we're obedient to Him or not.

That's up to Him. That is a matter of life unknowable to us. And yet, man, how much money is made in marketing trying to help everybody eat the right thing and get this piece of exercise thing and go over here and join this particular club and do these things and boy, that will, you know, extend your...

Solomon says, you know what? I've seen the exceptions to these general principles that we just looked at from Proverbs. I've seen exceptions to that.

The righteous die young in their righteousness. He's seen the wicked live long in spite of their wickedness. What is this reality and how does it relate to my life?

[49 : 46] I'm trying to help you with that. God's blessings in this life for righteous living and His judgments in this life for wicked living may or may not correspond to your expectations.

Likely, they won't. Because what do we know? We don't know unless we come to the truth of Scripture and let it tell us what's right, what's worthy, what's...

Listen to this. What's treasurable? What's precious? What's worth investing my life in? What's life all about? The Bible is the only place we can go to answer that.

Life is all about honoring Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory. That's the main thing. Alright? Final thing up here. Look.

What God plans to do or not to do with each person is a knowledge which is beyond us in this life. So, when God acts in a person's life, don't allow what God chooses to do with you or with others to ruin you.

[50 : 51] Don't allow it to throw you into conflict and confusion and discouragement and depression and fear and anxiety because you'll never fix it and figure it out.

Instead, consider that God is working. And in some of the cases that God is working, it may have more to do with God using you to showcase His goodness to other people than something He wants to do in you.

I don't doubt at all that He's wanting to do something in you but it may have more to do with something over here. We're always trying to put ourselves at the center of it and that's a problem.

Now, Solomon pulls all this together in verse 18. It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other for the one who fears the Lord comes forth with both of them.

Boy, this is really good stuff right here. Avoid the excesses, avoid the extremes of trying to control your life through either godly obedience or ungodly disobedience with the idea that you're going to manipulate God into doing something good for you that you want.

[52 : 02] Don't do that. Don't dive into those excesses one way or the other because neither of these approaches are going to allow you to control your life or your death.

Neither one of them. Instead, here's what he says in verse 18, instead, enjoy your life as God's gift to you so that you're living your life back to God in gratitude.

You're in a constant state of thankfulness to God for your life. Whatever's going on. You see? Grasp the good of God's gift and don't let go of the truth.

Do you trust God to care for you? The fear of the Lord in this context means this. It means living with a humble trust in God's care for you.

It's humility. It's humbling for you to live under these circumstances that you cannot control, you cannot explain, and you cannot change.

[53 : 09] it builds humility in you to live under a sovereign God working in your life like that and you have no ability to change it up.

So you don't get desperate and just give up on life. You look to the Lord and you consider that He's working even though you can't explain it all and understand it. You consider that God is working and boy, what a hope-filling thing that is.

You mean God is making purpose out of this? Yes! And that purpose is going to stand for eternity? Yes! Who else can say that? There are a lot of people out there who are suffering and they're suffering in God's design and they give God no credit, no honor, no explanation.

In fact, what they do is cuss Him out. They curse Him. They hate Him. Whereas Christians are called to follow the Lord and trust the Lord in this and so Solomon is saying this isn't either or, folks.

Look, he's saying this in verse 18. Enjoy your life and pursue godliness. Grasp one and don't let go of the other because the one who fears God has both.

[54 : 22] So enjoy your life and pursue godliness. Grab one, hold on to the other, fear the Lord because in doing that, you got them both. Now get on with it.

See, this is this is charge, baby. This is go. Verse 18 sounds and seems so straightforward until you try to live it out.

It's simply impossible without Jesus. But that's why the Lord takes us through these trials and tests using change, adversity, and suffering in our lives. We need God to get us beyond self-reliance, self-sufficiency, personal insecurity, and the fear of man so that He can lovingly bring us to consider His work in our lives.

That's what it's all about. So what's your life about? Will you pray with me? Will you pray with me? Father, Father, we would in our prayer now consider the work of God.

This has been a wonderful time of sitting under Your Word, singing Your praises, taking the table together, and just simply being reminded that in the course of life, as we face the issues of life, we can trust Jesus.

[55 : 48] Who else? And so, Father, please, help us in our weakness. as the man in Scripture said, help my unbelief. Help me to have the faith.

Help me to grow in repentance. Help each of us to face life trusting You, leaning on each other. And as we go through these seasons of trials and heartache and hurt, as we experience surgeries that have to have done so that we can function physically, help us to lean on each other and trust each other and allow others into our life to help us through that time.

As we face the hardships in relationships with unsaved family members and coworkers and just the stuff of life in the world, help us to lean on each other and bear one another's burdens.

Help us to have the humility to let each other in and not be prideful about this. And most of all, we pray that You would help us to honor Jesus, to showcase His character in our lives as we consider the work of God in moments of prosperity and in seasons of adversity.

Help us to apply the wisdom of Scripture so that we can bring glory to You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. Amen.