

Ecclesiastes 6:10-7:14 "Living Wisely in the Shadowlands"

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[0 : 00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, you tell us in your Word that sometimes your Word is like a series of pointy sticks which you stick into us to prod us in a direction which is far better for us. And Father, we confess that we don't like that. We usually think we know better than you, and we don't like having pointy sticks jabbed into us. But Father, that is your Word. And we know because of Jesus that you love us and you desire the best for us. So we ask, Father, that you would work your Holy Spirit in our lives, that your Word would do its work within us, that we might know Jesus, and that we might grow in wisdom and learn how to live a better life until we see you face to face.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. I'm just pausing here because I forgot my phone. I'm actually going through withdrawal symptoms even now.

[2 : 29] You know, it's just really hard to handle not having a government tracking system on me at all times, and to which I, of course, keep powered up. Anyway, there you go. I've said, oh, there we go.

Having a stopwatch on my phone and then not pressing start isn't going to help anybody. One of the things we talked about last week was a disappointment with God.

And if you're here outside of the Christian faith, you might not know that a lot of Christians struggle with disappointment with God. And maybe you are here considering leaving the Christian faith, and I would suggest that lots of times when that happens, it's connected to disappointment with God. And last week we looked at one sort of form of the disappointment of God that takes, it's what I call developing a type of quid pro quo mindset when it comes to God, which is I do things for you, God, therefore you are supposed to do things for me.

And so, you know, we think to ourselves, you know, think of all the money I gave Lord, and now I'm having financial trouble. You know, think of how I was, you know, did all this stuff with Sunday school or with the sound system or with the women's group or the men's group, and now here I am having these relationship problems. We sort of expect in part of us that we can put God in our debt, that we can bind him and control him, and that if we do things, God is required to do things for us. One of the great struggles for this congregation was that there was a group of people who I think really believed deep in their hearts that within the first two years of us walking away from our building because we wanted to be faithful to Jesus, that God owed us a new building. And if we didn't get that new building, it's either because someone like me wasn't faithful enough and praying enough, or because God wasn't faithful enough. But it's a real problem. And by the way, this type of problem is an aspect of lots of disappointment in life, the disappointment of life that comes from different idols that we follow, that we've been worshipping money, we've been worshipping power, we've been worshipping looks, and we put all of this effort into these things, and then things just don't work out that way, and we're disappointed in life. It's a human problem which also affects Christians. But today, the book of

Ecclesiastes is going to look at another source of our disappointment with God in terms of pointing forward to a better way to live and a better way to understand life. So if you'd take your Bibles and turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 6, Ecclesiastes chapter 6, we're going to start reading at verse 10.

[5 : 06] We're going to go down to chapter 7, verse 14. I'll see if we get through all of it today. There's an awful lot in there. This is a book, by the way, Ecclesiastes, which was written almost 3,000 years ago.

I mean, we don't often appreciate it that much, but what we're engaged in today is something very ancient. When we read the book of Ecclesiastes, on one hand, we are doing what Christians and Jewish people have been doing for 3,000 years, which is gathering on the Lord's day to open His Word and hear from it. And the other things in our service for Christian worship, to have a worship service gathered around the Word, saying a creed, which we just read, which comes from the early 300s, the Lord's Supper, which has been done almost continuously by Christians for 2,000 years. We're engaged in something very ancient. And so in an age which values superficiality to take some time to look at a book that's still being read for wisdom 3,000 years almost after it was written, that's, I think, a wise thing to do. But it's going to begin in a type of odd way. So let's look at how it begins.

It's Ecclesiastes 6, verse 10. And most of us, including me when I read it for the first time, don't really know what it's talking about. I had trouble figuring out what it was saying. And here's what it says, It says, Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. Well, I'll read that again. It's Ecclesiastes 6, 10. Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. So this is confusing. So what's really going on here, it's actually a very simple idea and very profound idea. Nowadays, when Christians talk about God, we tend to use a lot of abstract words. And that's a completely valid and important way to do it. I'll talk about how God is omnipresent. I'll talk about him being omnipotent. I'll talk about him being transcendent, or imminent, or simple. And there's a variety of words like that that we use that are abstract, and they have their place. They're very important. But what's happening here is a functional description of God that's relevant for human beings to know something about themselves. So it's a functional definition of God designed to help you become... Now, I read two newspapers a day. I look at the news and all that stuff.

I'm going to say these terms right now, and I don't mean them... I really literally don't know if it's a term that the left shoots at the right, or the right shoots at the left, or they both insult each other with. So don't... I literally don't know, okay? So don't take it as I'm trying to give you some type of code, of left-wing code or right-wing code. But you maybe have heard people saying about other people that they're not... they're reality deniers. Those other people, they're reality deniers. We're the reality embracers. We're the reality acknowledgers. So I don't... you can tell me afterwards if it's a left-wing slur against right-wing or right-wing slur against left. I don't know the answer to that. But it's relevant here. Because how it begins, and it's going to be important for the rest, it's a functional definition of God to help you become a reality embracer, an acknowledger, and stop being a reality denier. So here's how it goes. If you think of it in this way, now listen to it.

Whatever has come to be has already been named. So in the Old Testament, which our Jewish friends call the Tanakh, to name something is a sign of authority and sovereignty over it and power over it.

[9 : 07] And so what it's saying here is that there is a being who has named everything that exists in the past and present and future. In other words, there is someone who actually has a God who actually has authority, sovereignty over every single thing that has existed, is existing, and will exist. He is named it all. He has sovereignty and authority over it. There is a God who is like that. And this same God knows what a human being is. And it means here, you can take it both in a singular sense, in particular, or a universal sense, that this God who has named everything that exists, also actually is the one who knows what human beings are like. Who knows what I'm like. Not just in general, but very specifically. So if you ask my wife, she'd say there's still lots of stuff she hasn't figured out about me. That there's lots of stuff about me, which is a mystery to her, even though we've been married many decades. And I'll be honest with you, there's things about me that I don't understand as well. You know, sometimes the question is, why do you do it? And I'd have to say, well, I don't really know why I did it. It was wrong that I did it.

I don't really know why I did it. But what this is saying is that God knows me better than Louise knows me. But God knows me better than George knows me. And it's the same of you. That God actually knows that every human being is a bit of a mystery to themselves. Unless you just don't, you think superficially about yourself. Every human being is a bit of a mystery to themselves. And a lot of people are mysteries. But God, human beings aren't mysteries to God. I am not a mystery to God.

He sees and understands me better than I see and understand myself. So it's a functional definition to help us be a reality embracer. There is a God who is sovereign over all things, who knows what human beings are, and he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. It's clunky language because it's quite literal. The he here is referring to the fact that human beings can't dispute with God because God is stronger than me. Like, I do dispute with him in my mind, and maybe with my lips, but I can't really. He's stronger than me. And so this is a functional definition of God. And the question really is, in a sense, why would you believe in a God that's anything less than that? So you might be an agnostic in doubt that such a God exists. You might be an atheist who believe you know that such a God doesn't exist, and that's fine. We can have conversations around that. But for people who are religious and spiritual in different ways, why would you worship or trust or serve anything, any God or deity that is less than that?

Like, why bother if that being or deity, like, if God is just like a force, or if God is just like the all or the everything or some type of a spirit in the world? I mean, we can control energies, and the all is sort of, well, yeah, yeah, there's the all, but the all is sort of irrelevant to me.

And why would you do anything if it's the God that exists? Why would you act as if that the God you worship or serve, who's less than that, like, why would you bother? It doesn't make any sense.

[12 : 25] And that's sort of the functional point which is going on here. But then it is, the problem comes, and this is the reality enabler, we're not reality embracer versus the reality denier, and this is where the Bible becomes a mirror to us, is that I, in a sense, believe this about other people, that this is what God is like, but I don't really believe it about myself. I give myself a pass. Like, that's what 611 is saying. Look at it. The verse, the more words, the more vanity. And what is the advantage to man?

And vanity here is a type of thinking yourself way better than you actually are, and it's also, at the same time in the original language, it's implying that to just speak more words at God and dispute with God is a vain pursuit. Why? Because he's stronger than you. It's not going to work at all. So what's going on here is not making a comment about the number of words. It's not saying, George, if your whole sermon was just three emojis on the screen and then you sat down, that would be way better than preaching for 30 minutes. Or that the best emails that you could send each other is one emoji with no text. Those are the best. It's not saying anything about that.

It's referring back to this idea of disputing with God and arguing with God, complaining about God, complaining about the way things are. So, um, as other, you know, God should know better. God, why are you doing this? Uh, just a sense of discontent with God, which we put into some types of words.

And, um, it's going to get developed more as the rest of it goes, but the, what the source of this problem is this, and this is the source of our, that this, the type of disappointment with God that's being talked about in this section, much of your life, much of my life, much of your life is organized around thinking that you know the future, that you can manage the future, and that you will not die.

You go outside, you meet a hundred people, and this describes each one of those hundred people. And if you look in the mirror, it describes yourself. You live your life organized around thinking that you know the future, that you can manage it, because it's predictable, you'll be able to do things in it, and that you will not die. There will not be an end to your life. And so, when things don't work out that way, when there's a market crash and you lose 30% of your savings in a couple of days, uh, when in fact, uh, you know, the, the kids that you've, uh, you know, you've lavished your, your attention and love on completely and utterly rebel against you and say to your face that they hate you and they wish you were dead, uh, when relationships and friendships that have gone on a long time come to an end, these are all in some ways different ways that we think that we know the future, we think the future will go in a particular pattern, and we think we'll be able to control it, and we'll be able to get the types of things we want, and we don't think we'll ever die and have to take death into account.

[15 : 41] And then when reality just doesn't match those expectations, we feel disappointment with life, disappointment with reality, and if we're a Christian or some other religious or spiritual person, you feel disappointment. And that's a real thing.

Just by, um, I was talking to a guy about a month or so ago about something to do with this, because it was, I mentioned Ecclesiastes talks a lot about the, the topic of death, and, uh, it was really interesting. I, you know, he said about three or four things, and after he'd said about three or four things, I stopped him and said, you do realize that in every sentence you just said to me, you talked as if your death is optional.

You weren't actually able, like I said, you know, part of Ecclesiastes is bringing you face to the face with the knowledge that you're going to die. And then he, he said, well, that's sort of reasonable. He said a variety of things, but every single one of the cases, none of them did he say, and I am going to die. He always talked as if it was an option. And of course, who's going to pick the option of dying? I mean, very few people. I know in Canada there's an increasing number, but that's a whole other sermon topic about what's going on there. So our disappointment with God is, uh, is, uh, is, uh, that these things just don't happen the way that we think they're going to happen.

Um, yeah. So the rest of the book is going to ask, it's going to ask, sorry, there's, I've lost my place in my notes. So the next questions are going to, uh, introduce a section where it's a series of, uh, uh, sticks that prod us to, to consider the fact that we think that life is that to challenge our assumption that life is organized, that we can organize our life around thinking we know the future, we can manage the future, we can succeed in the future, and we will not die. And it's going to, and, and if that doesn't happen, we're disappointed. And it's going to try to have us to live a wiser life. And so these next two questions in verse 12 will help us. It goes like this, verse 12, for who knows what is good for man or for a human being? Well, a human being lives the few days of their vain life. And vain here means that your life is very brief. And then it has this very powerful image, which he passes like a shadow. For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? For those of you who love C.S. Lewis, you'll know that in several of his essays, and it has its greatest telling in the final book of his Narnia Chronicles, The Last Battle. He refers to this world that we live in as the Shadowlands. And I don't know if he got that from Plato, or if he got that from reading Ecclesiastes, or some other source, but it's, it's very interesting.

It, it sort of just says that at the end of the day, the impact, the real impact that we have on the world is a little bit like the impact a shadow has in passing through a room.

[18 : 53] Now that's a depressing thought for Canadians, which I'm going to get to in a moment. Why is Ecclesiastes depressing us? Shouldn't religion and spirituality make us feel positive and upbeat, not depress us? But the question is in verse 12, who knows? Well, the question is that somebody does know, God knows. What is in fact good for a human being while he lives in a brief life?

Vain here means like vapor, a life that's just very passing, and which in a say he walks through like a shadow. And then the question for who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

Well, the implication is we, God can tell us what happens after because God has named everything that exists, but I'm jumping ahead. So now he gets into these questions to try to prod us, to stick us, to make us try to think in a different way, a wiser way. And the first one is like this.

I'm going to stop. I'll read the, just the first part of chapter seven, verse one. It goes like this. A good name is better than precious ointment. Now what's going on here? It's a thought experiment.

And the thought experiment is like, as I imagine, it's a little bit like the book by Dickens, A Christmas Carol. But God appears to, let's say, we'll just use Jono, just because he's here and he's my mate, he's my brother in Christ. And God appears before Jono and says, Jono, I'm going to show you, I'm going to give you a chance and a vision to see what's going to be said about you at your funeral.

[20 : 27] And then God says, by the way, mate, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is you're going to live another 35 years. The bad news is Jesus isn't going to return for more than 35 years.

You're going to die before he returns. And Jono goes to his funeral, where you go to your funeral, and what would you rather have said about you at the funeral afterwards? Would you rather have said, Jono was a really good person? Or would you rather hear them say, Jono had a lot of expensive stuff?

Which, of course, is completely useless now. What would you rather have said at your funeral? Boy, Jono, I'm going to miss him. He was a really good person. Or, you know, the thing about Jono, he had a lot of expensive stuff. I mean, when you put the question to you very bluntly, most people would say, I'd rather be thought of as a good person. It's actually pretty dismissive to be just said about me that I had a lot of expensive stuff. But then, see, the next thing for us is that we're not going to learn the lesson from this, because what we want to do next is think to ourselves so we can have it both ways. Without realizing, as the rest of the thing is going to go and point out, that actually, if you want to start living your life in such a way that on your funeral, at your funeral, people say, the thing about Louise, the thing about Daniel, the thing about Laurier, the thing about Deborah, is they were a really good person, and not that they had a lot of expensive stuff, then that means you're going to have to change your life now. Like, it means you're going to have to be financially generous, which means you're going to have less money to buy expensive stuff. It doesn't mean you can't buy some expensive stuff, you can't just buy as much. It means you're going to have to learn how to forgive. It means you're going to have to learn how to be patient. It means you're going to have to learn how to forgive. It means you're going to have to learn how to have some resilience in dealing with hard times. So, there's a whole pile of things you're going to have to learn if, in fact, on your deathbed, not on your deathbed, but at your funeral, people say, this person was a really good person, not they're a person who has a really had a lot of stuff. And then look at the second part of the verse, which is a shocking thing. And these two things really are the introduction to the five verses which follow. A good name is better than precious ointment, verse, half of the verse, and the second one, and the day of death than the day of birth, right? So, a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death is better than the day of birth. Now, that doesn't make any sense to Canadians.

I mean, death is depressing. In the different coffee shops that I've been to over the years, if I happen to mention to them, if they say something about, like, what are you doing today?

And I don't hide things from them. I'll say things like, and this is partially how you have Christian conversations with people. They say, oh, what are you going to be doing next? I'll say, well, I'm going to go read the Bible and pray. They go, like, oh, you're going to go read the Bible and pray?

[23 : 42] Like, why wouldn't you say that if that's what you're about to do? Like, why is it we would hide that, right? But sometimes they say, well, I'm going to be doing a funeral in an hour, and they go, oh my, you can just see they sag. That must be so hard, so terrible. Because for Canadians, it's, there's nothing that can go with that. But there's this idea here that, you know, if you want to know what is good, the part of the process to knowing how to have a better life, do good, have a good, some good things happen, have a better life, the part, hard part of it's going to be that you need to spend more time thinking about the day of death than the day of birth. There's a Scottish pastor by the name of, I think his name is David Gibson. If I don't have his name right, that's my problem. But he summarizes this section in a very, very brilliant, beautiful way. I'm just paraphrasing it because he, I had to look up some of the words because they were Scottish words that I didn't know what they meant in Canadian English in 2025. But he basically said, a body in the casket will teach you vastly more about wisdom and the good life than a baby in its car seat.

That's what he's, that's what's being said in this section. A body in the casket will teach you vastly more about wisdom and the good life than a baby in its car seat or crib.

Or to make it right, rhyme a bit that a body in the casket will teach you more than a baby in a basket. Several weeks ago, I talked about how, you know, everybody has a view of the world. Everybody has a philosophy of life. It doesn't matter if you spend your time in bars. It doesn't matter if you spend your time studying philosophy, getting a PhD or teaching it. Everybody has a view of the world, a philosophy of life. And if I was to say that your view of the world and philosophy of life, if it doesn't account for how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, you'd all say that's ridiculous, George. That nobody's philosophy of life has to include a discussion of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. But, as I said a couple of weeks ago, every philosophy or life or view of the world has to take account death. And not just death in general, but your death.

Your own death and the death of your loved ones. And if your philosophy of life, if your view of the world doesn't take that into account, it can't be thoughtful and wise.

Like, it literally cannot be thoughtful and wise. Because death is not an option.

[26 : 28] So here it says, a good name, verse chapter 7, verse 1, is better than precious ointment. And the day of death is better than the day of birth. And it continues developing this theme. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. For this, that is, the house of mourning, is the end of all human beings, and the living will lay it to heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. Now, that's, what does that mean here? What it means here is this. First of all, actually, I'll read verse 4, and then I'll go back. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. Now, it's not just saying that going to funerals will make you wise, because the fact is, and I know I might be offending some people, and I might make some of you feel uncomfortable. But I'm only talking about this because this is what Ecclesiastes is talking about. And I'm, it's partly, a big part of my job is for you to hear this Bible text addressing you. I need to hear it address me first, but I need help each of us hear the Bible address each of us concretely. If you go to most Canadian funerals, and you listen to what they say, you will leave more foolish than when you came in. And I say that because much foolishness is said at Canadian funerals. They'll quote a famous poem from written in 1910, and it might have been true of one Christian talking to another Christian, but they'll, it's a very common thing, a group of secular Canadians talking to other secular Canadians about not being sad at death, because all that the person who's died has just done has gone into another room. Just, just the next room, the next room over. So don't be sad.

Or you'll be told that they're looking down on you, the loved one. I just, okay, this is bad. For a whole pile of people who don't like Trump, Trump dies, would it be reassuring to know that Trump was looking down on you? If you die the day after Trump does, would it be reassuring that you're going to go to a room with Trump next door for all eternity? Now, for, on the other hand, for those of you who hate Trudeau or Carney or whatever, that's the exact same thing. Would it be comforting for you to think that you can't escape Trudeau's look and you'll spend all eternity in the next room? Like, really? Really? And then why on earth would you believe that? Like, what makes you think? What evidence is there that you, that anything like that will happen? It's, it's ways to avoid thinking about the casket. There is no evidence for it. And, and this is where it comes home that it's, so what's really more important even than just thinking about a body in a casket, this is what's really struck me these last couple of days, is that do I spend time thinking that I will be in a casket?

And not just me, but that someday Louise will be in a casket, that my kids will be in a casket, that my grandchildren will be in a casket, that I will be in a casket, a dead body.

And that's what I'm talking about. See, death isn't optional. And for Canadians, the idea that you're going to die and the idea that you can't control the future, George, these are just completely and utterly depressing thoughts. And that's where the writer, the teacher of Ecclesiastes says, exactly, if you don't have that period of sadness, you will never know gladness. That's what it means.

[30 : 23] Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness, the face of the heart, the face of, by sadness of face, the heart is made glad. That, that earlier step of considering the fact, George, that you will die, you will be in that casket. And how should I then live if that is in fact a truth about me?

It's depressing and saddening when we think about it at first, but there is the possibility of gladness as a result of doing it. And then, and then it actually has this whole thing about hearing the rebuke of the text, which is very uncomfortable for Canadians. That's what's going on here in verses five and six, where it says, it is better for a man or a woman to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools. This also is vanity. In other words, it's far better for you to hear this than to hear that famous song, is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friend, we should just get drunk and dance because that's all there is. Famous song of the sixties, which is still played. If that all there is, this is far wiser. Not the mirth of people in a bar singing a song like that and saying, I will drink to that and is there a light for my cigarette. That's the, that's not hearing the wise rebuke of Ecclesiastes.

Now, the next thing then is, so if the meditating upon the fact of your death is going to help make you wise, the next little bit, which I have to deal with shortly to bring things to a conclusion, there's a warning here that wisdom has to do its full work and, and wisdom and its wisdom, the wisdom you get from thinking upon this is not invulnerable, that you can lose wisdom by, in a variety of different ways. That wisdom is a true good and life is better with wisdom than without, but wisdom can be lost. And in verses seven to ten, it's going to give you a variety of wisdom killers.

And that's what here is verse seven, surely oppression drives the wise into madness and a bribe corrupts the heart. And it's not talking about a wise person being oppressed and it's not talking about a wise, what it's talking about is that if I get some wisdom, but then I start to oppress people, it means that wisdom will flee from me. If I start using bribes or receiving bribes, it will take my wisdom far from me.

Verse eight, better is the end of a thing than its beginning and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Just very, very briefly, it's saying that patience is something that is in keeping with wisdom, but pride will kill wisdom.

[33 : 19] Verse nine, be not quick in your spirit to become angry for anger lodges in the heart of fools. That just as oppressing people, taking bribes and showing favoritism is not wise and will reduce and kill wisdom in you.

To be, not to be patient, but impatient, to be filled with pride will kill wisdom in you. To become anger driven will kill wisdom in you. And then here's a really surprising one, nostalgia will kill wisdom in you.

Say not, verse 10, why were the former days better than these? For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Nostalgia is self-indulgence. It stops you from acting. It stops you from assessing things that are going on.

It means that you turn your eyes away from the bad things that went on in the past and make it all look like it was good and it makes the the evil things of today look far worse. It's something that will kill wisdom in you.

And then it says, listen, you've got to try to hold on to it. Look at what it says in verses 11 and 12. Wisdom is good. Wisdom is good with an inheritance. If you have money. Wisdom is good if you have money.

[34 : 29] And it's an advantage to those who live under the sun. For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money. And the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

And so it's saying to us, listen, wisdom is worth it. Like this idea that we're going to see the problem is for most Canadians, because most Canadians think to themselves that our life has to be organized, thinking that we know the future and that we can manage it and that we can be successful with our goals and that we will not die. And then to realize that in fact things come up in our lives that we can't control people and they change in radical ways. We're going to get into that more in a moment and that we will die.

The average person says, well, what's the use of anything? Like how can there be anything good if all of those things are going to happen? And the Bible wants to remind us that in fact wisdom is always better than foolishness and life is better than death. And to manage even the shortness of life and even the fact that you're going to die, it's always better to do that with wisdom than without.

But wisdom can be lost. So be careful about these types of vices around pride and impatience and anger and nostalgia, which is a surprising one, but it's a really important one for Canadians.

And let me know, I mean, maybe a whole pile of you millennials, you haven't started saying how things the following generations aren't as good as you guys. Maybe you haven't said that yet. Maybe you already have it. I can tell you that baby boomers say it all the time. What's the problem with all these millennials? And I can tell you, you millennials, you're going to be saying it about the next generations because it's a human problem. So this little bit, but maybe God just threw it in here just for Canadian boomers. I don't know. And generation Xers or whatever other those generations are because we regularly say it, you know, but it's a positive good.

[36 : 22] Good. And then the thing is all wrapping itself up. Consider the work of God. Verse 13. Who can make straight what he has made crooked? And then verse 14. In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider.

God has made the one as well as the other. Why? So that human beings may not find out anything that will be after him. It's a positive good for us that we don't know the future. It is a positive good for us that the future isn't a straight line that we can discern, but it's a crooked line that we can't discern.

It is a good thing for us to know that there will be times when some things will happen which we should just receive as a gift. And there will be other things that we can, that then we just, but we can't control things.

I mean, this is filling into the, one of the main messages of the whole book, that there are things that happen. Can I control the future? No. Can I enjoy a cup of coffee right now? Yes. It's not just living for the moment. It's to receiving, understanding that the heart of all reality is going to be for us as human beings because we didn't create all things, we don't sustain all things, we won't bring all things to their proper end, we are going to die. We are ones who constantly are just receiving. And some of the things that we receive are gifts, and we should be grateful and receive it and enjoy it. But now that we've got to the end of this, we start to see why this book is written in the Bible and why it's an important book to consider. Because if this really grabs you, if you spend time contemplating the fact that one day you will be in a casket, you will be a corpse in a casket. Then all of a sudden, as that becomes more real to your heart, you appreciate the shock of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You understand the shock of the claim that Jesus makes that he will die upon the cross, a shameful death, but that on the third day he will not just return to life, he will defeat death, he will defeat that which causes death, and that he will rise from the dead. And that what he does is not just a private victory for himself that we will marvel at, but that the entire purpose he came is that for those who understand that their future is a corpse in a casket, and have come to understand that God is greater and stronger than them and they cannot fight against it. The cry of our heart and the question of our heart is surely death is not the final word. And surely if wisdom is better than evil, evil cannot be the final word.

There must be a final word which is a wise word, and death cannot be final. O God, who are sovereign, and all-powerful, and wise, and the giver of all good gifts, is there a gift that you will give for me and my mortality and the certainty of my death. And John the Baptist comes a thousand years after that saying, God has kept his word, the one he has promised has come, and one day he is standing there and he looks at the person who is his cousin and he sees a man walking and he says to his disciples, behold he is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And he is the one who will die on the cross.

[40 : 06] He is God's greatest gift. It is the gift of wisdom. It is the gift of life. It is the gift of the true and greater blessing. It is the gift that all lesser gifts of joy point to. The real life of Jesus upon this earth, his real death upon the cross, his real burial in the tomb, and his real resurrection, which is something he can share and will share to lowly people like you and me, who call out and say, Lord have mercy upon me. Take me to yourself.

My only hope of thinking upon myself lying in a casket is this. To know if I look at myself in the future and I to say that as my eyes closed on this world, as my eyes closed on the shadow lens, my eyes were opened on the other side with a call from my savior who died for me, for whom I'm in union with. And he says, George, come higher up and come higher and farther in with me.

Invite you to stand. Bow our heads in prayer.

Father, we give you thanks and praise that you do want to help everybody to have a better life and live a better life. But most of all, Father, you want us to think about these deep things, not so we will learn new abstractions, but that we will come to the concrete, real reality of your son, Jesus, that great gift. Emmanuel coming and living amongst us, taking vapor into yourself, so to speak.

And Jesus walks amongst us, a man, but fully God, fully man, but one person who dies is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Father, we thank you that you don't want us just to come to new abstractions and new insights, although you do want us to come to those things, but most of all, you want us to come to Jesus. We thank you for that. And we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit, your Word, and as we contemplate the reality of our life and its frailty and the fact that we will die, that this Father will make us more and more in love with Jesus. Trusting and knowing, Father, that as who he is and what he has accomplished for us becomes more real to our hearts, that just as he became poor, that we might become rich, that we will be generous, that just as he died, that our sins will be forgiven, we will learn to forgive, that just as he has been patient with us, that we will learn to be patient with others, that just as he spoke the truth, that we will love the truth, that we will become more like him, and that on the day of our death in Christ, people will say not just that we were a good person, but that we were a good person who knew Jesus. Father, that is our cry and our prayer, that that will be how we will be known. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.