Ecclesiastes 9:1-18 "Counterintuitive Good News"

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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.
Please bow your heads in prayer for a moment. Father, sometimes when we come to your Word, we know we really need the help of your Holy Spirit and the help of others to understand it. Sometimes we think we don't, but Father, you know the truth is we always need the help of others, and we always need your help through the Holy Spirit for us to understand your Word. And so Father, as the collect earlier prayed, we ask that you grant us quiet minds. And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that you desire us to know Jesus and to follow Him in the real world, the real world as it really is. And so Father, we ask that you just bring home to us deeply how much Jesus loves us and cares for us and how He walks with us so that we can flourish in this world. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.
So a couple of weeks ago, on a Friday afternoon, I had some news which was exceptionally, not exceptionally, that's too strong a word. It was very, very, very disheartening. And sort of caused me a little bit of a bout of depression for a period of time. It was one of those times when, and by the way, this is, it's an organization I'm involved with, so you can't be thinking, oh, is this something that Josiah is doing? No, it's another organization, not this church, but I'm involved in several other organizations. And it was just very disheartening. I had, it had been something that I had been working on for years. It involved, it had brought forth very, very good fruit. And I discovered that it was being actively undermined behind the scenes. The good work now made to look as if it wasn't good work, it never existed, it wasn't good work at all. People who weren't really competent or qualified were going to move in a completely different direction. And this was being completely hidden from me. And it was very hard. It was very hard to hear that. And it sort of threw me for a loop.
[3:28] The Bible text that we're going to read today and study today, despite its oddities, is actually very helpful for people who go through situations like that. When you sort of are a bit betrayed, your work is denigrated. People who, you know, aren't competent get the promotions and get the praise and the applause. And it's also a text where, in a sense, if you wonder what God would say to you, like if you go to, if God all of a sudden appeared to you and you asked him, God, what on earth is going on with this? The text that we're going to read actually gives us a big part of what God would say to you about why that's happened in your life, why he's allowed it to happen. So let's have a look.

It's a text written approximately 3,000 years ago and still read today. It's Ecclesiastes chapter 9. The entire chapter, we just read 12 verses, but there's 18 verses. We're going to look at all of the verses. And I mean, it's probably written by Solomon. It's not for sure whether it was written by Solomon. But if it wasn't Solomon, it was a Solomon-like figure or a Solomon-like thought exercise about 3,000 years. And it's still being read for its wisdom. And it's an angular wisdom.

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And by angular, I mean, it's not smooth. It's not polished. It's not shiny. It doesn't just effortlessly fit into your life. It requires some digesting and meditating upon. But once you do that, it's very, very wise and very helpful. And here's how it begins. Chapter 9, verse 1.
But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know. Both are before him. Now just pause here for a second. This is a really good example. It's very shocking. You know, love or hate, what does that mean? It's one of those times where the Bible text, especially when you're reading wisdom literature like this, you need to pause and contemplate it a little bit, meditate upon it, and maybe get some help. But what it means here by love or hate, it has several different meanings. It doesn't just mean one. There's a type of a helpful way for you to think about it in different ways. One way is, if you just observe the world, and you don't have any divine revelation, you don't know about Jesus, and you just observe the world, would you conclude that God hated human beings or loved them? Now that's an interesting question, isn't it? What would you conclude just from empirical data, just by looking at the world? Does God love us or hate us? That's one way to understand what he's saying.
[6:12] The other way to understand is this, is that will we love the future or hate the future? We don't know the future, but will we love it or hate it as it unfolds? That's another way to look at it. Both of them are very, very interesting questions to ask ourselves. I mean, one of the things I think was, once again, a Scottish pastor whose name I've forgotten said that one of the problems with human beings is that we pretend that the one certainty which we know for sure won't happen, and we're very certain about a whole piles of things that we don't have any idea at all whether they'll happen.

So, for instance, in my story, I was pretty certain that things would develop in a certain way, but why was I certain about that? I don't know the future. On the other hand, death will happen to all people. This will be another text talking about death later on, and that's certain, but why would you won't think about it? But that's the beginning of this, a bit of a pause to question this, and then it's going to go a little bit deeper, and once again, a very surprising way. Look at verses two and three. Sort of completes that first little bit of a unit. It is the same for all. So, you know, actually, I'll read verse one again. But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. In other words, all of life is in God's hands.
Whether it is love or hate, man does not know. Both are before him. Human beings don't know. Verse two, it is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, death, to the good and the evil, death, to the clean and the unclean, death, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice, death. As the good one is, so is the sinner. As he who swears is he who shuns in oath. This is an evil. Why is it saying this is an evil? That's interesting. We're going to talk about it in a moment. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, now you think here he's going to maybe give some words of comfort, but he actually presses into another painful truth about human beings. And just before I read this next little bit, human beings, I've talked about this off and on throughout the years, but human beings are in fact schizophrenic about how they view themselves in the world. By that I mean most of educational and a lot of religion and spirituality, in fact, actually the one thing which is unique about the Christian faith is the Christian faith teaches that human beings are fallen, that evil has touched every aspect of human beings. Most others actually assume that human beings are fundamentally good.
But why are we schizophrenic? Well, we assume human beings are good when we do counseling and therapy, but when we watch movies, it's a very different thing. When the zombie apocalypse comes, when the aliens invade and want to destroy us, the very, very first thing that you see in movies is that all order breaks down. People pillage and rob and steal and do whatever they're completely and utterly selfish.
[9:20] And if you saw a zombie movie or an alien movie where every single human being acted with unbelievable courage and kindness, you'd say, that's a crappy movie. That's not how the world is.

That movie sucks, is what you'd say. And in fact, if you watched a movie and everything is perfect, you instantly realize this is one of those dystopian films where some evil intelligence is making everything look perfect because that's not how the world works. Isn't that true? So keeping that in mind, listen to what he goes on to say.

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He's talked about the same event happening. And so, verse 3 continues, also the hearts of the children of men, human beings, are full of evil. And madness is in their hearts while they live. And after that, they go to the dead.
That's why I gave the thought experiment first. At first, our mind wants to reject that. But in fact, when it says full of evil, what the word full there means, not is that, I mean, it would be obviously ridiculous that only evil things are said or done, but that the reality of evil touches every single aspect of who we are. There's not some part of me within the very center of whom I am which evil has not had some scarring or twisting effect on me. And the whole text of this doesn't matter if you're righteous or unrighteous, if you're sacrificed or don't sacrifice, if you make oaths or don't make oaths, you're all going to die. And then this statement about what human beings are like. And just sort of, I want to just take a time out here. For Christians, these two things can suggest important and should suggest two huge truths. And it's by describing the, excuse me, I'm allergic to mold. And yesterday, because of the snow coming,
I raked up all my leaves and put them in bags. And I'm paying the allergic price today of having all those leaves in my hands and right in my face. And the first one is this, God does not weigh our merits. But how does that sentence conclude? He pardons our offenses.
[11:47] Those verses about the fact that the same thing happens to those that we think are rich and poor, righteous and unrighteous, that's another way to bring the emotional truth home to us emotionally. But the way that God relates to human beings is that he doesn't weigh my merits.

No, no, he pardons my offenses. The other thing is a very, another very important scriptural truth that when we think that we're fundamentally good, we think that the wages of our life, in other words, what we're due, not a gift, but what we're due because of what we've done, we think that because of the goodness of our life, what's due to us is success. But the Bible, mindful of this, says the wages of sin are death. And the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.
That text from Romans is reflecting this profound wisdom. And this text brings that these things home to us emotionally. And in a sense, then prepares us not only for what's going to happen, not quite as clearly. What comes is actually in some way a way to help us understand both of those things, that God doesn't weigh our merits, but instead he pardons our offenses. What we actually deserve, what we've earned is death, but God actually gives us eternal life as a gift. That logic is what's going on in the rest of the text. But before we get to there, there's another thing that he wants us to bring home to us. And actually, the way the text is structured, just so you know, it is verses, I think it's one to six, are giving this hard news. And then verses seven to ten are giving us good news.
And then eleven to eighteen is making sure we actually understood both the bad news and the good news. That's sort of the flow of the text. So it continues in verse four. And a really surprising thing here in verse four. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. And just sort of pause here. In the ancient Jewish world, dogs were unclean scavengers that you'd run from, you'd throw stones at them, you'd kill them. Now obviously, I mean, good grief, we love dogs. So probably a better way to contextualize the text is to say that in verse four, but he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living skunk, now you get the idea, is better than a dead lion. And the lion was considered the greatest and the noblest of the animals. Verse five, for the living know that they will die. Now there's a depressing thought, but he doesn't mean this to be a depressing thought. He's setting this up for good news.
For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun. In other words, once you're dead, you have no way of affecting the world. Indirectly, this is a text that warns you that if you're involved in paranormal things or seances, and you think you can talk to your deceased loved ones, it's all a lie. You're either being fooled by a huckster, or it's a demon that's speaking to you, not your dead loved one. Now what's going on here a little bit in the text? So what's going on with this text is this? It's important. Once you understand why the text says that these things are evil, you'll realize that this is a really important way to understand how reality really is.
[15:38] God did not create death, human death. God did not create human death. Human beings created human death.

So on one hand, all death is an evil. All death is an evil. It's not part of what God created. He didn't create human death. That was created by our archetypes, our ancestors, our federal heads, Adam

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and Eve, when they fell. And I want you to understand, if you had a magnet, a very powerful magnet, and then you had some pieces of iron here on the table, and if you took, put one of the pieces of iron on top of another piece of iron and picked up the first piece of iron, the second piece of iron would just stay on the table, right? Because it's just iron.
But if you take the magnet and connect the magnet to one piece of iron, it'll pick up the iron, right? And then depending, I guess, on the iron and the, you know, there's engineers here in the room, you can ask them afterwards how it would all work. You could pick up that, that piece of iron is now, has some magnetism in it. So you could use that piece of iron, you could put it on another piece of iron, and that second piece of iron would be picked up. And then depending on how strong the magnet is and whatever things about iron, you might be able to pick up three or four or five or six pieces of iron. And each piece of iron is just connected to the other piece of iron. And that's all, they're all connected only because the first piece of iron is connected to the magnet.
And God made human beings to be like that. I am made out of dust. I get my life as a gift from God. And when human beings separate themselves from God, it is like the first piece of iron pulling itself away from the magnet. And if that happened, everything should fall apart. Human beings are not life in ourselves. We receive life always as a gift and ultimately from being connected to God.
[17:44] And so on one hand, what could have happened, what should have happened, is when Adam and Eve chose to separate themselves from God, to become like gods themselves, in a sense, they should have died immediately and gone back to dust. But God in his mercy, because his heart is not that, that God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but rather that he or she will turn from their wickedness to God and live. So as an act of grace, death came in by human beings, not by God. It's an evil.

And all the disintegration that happens as a result of being separated from God, that is all an evil. It's not part of God's plan. But God does not bring his judgment immediately.
Death is always an evil, but it's also a mercy. Because it should be that if human beings reflect upon the reality of their death and the other types of things that the book of Ecclesiastes wants you to reflect upon, that you would come to the conclusion, surely there must be a God, and surely, given that I will die. Hopefully, God, if you are there, hopefully you are a God of mercy, not a God of hate, but a God of love. Have mercy upon me.
Provide for me before I completely and utterly fall apart. And so when we see in this text, we see that God did not create death. That's behind it. Human beings did. And death is always an evil. And life is an unqualified good as a gift from God. All life is good.
Human life is a good. And the goodness doesn't come because the state decides that human being life is good. And the fact of the matter is, is that most stories do not tell you, most overarching stories of how the world is, does not tell you that life is good. Richard Dawkins is very helpful.
[19:56] The world is, the universe is completely and utterly indifferent to human beings. Completely and utterly indifferent to human beings. For Islam, you're created to be his slave.

Ancient religions, you're created to be a slave. In Eastern religions, human life is a tragic accident. And we have to get back to where we no longer have individual existence. It's only in Christianity, only in Christianity, that you have an overarching story that life, human life, is a good.
An unqualified good. And that explains this really surprising turn that it takes. That, you know, for the average Canadian to be reminded of the fact that you're dead, they might sort of say, well, it sort of is the case that it's better to be a live skunk than a dead lion. Like, I appreciate that. But the fact that we're going to die, and I'm to live in light of my death, doesn't seem like a very, something that's going to give me any type of reason to enjoy things. It's going to be depressing. Well, that's why you need to listen to the rest of the text. Look at the huge shock of the next bit, the next few verses, the beginning of the good news. Verse 7. Go eat your bread with joy. And here it doesn't just mean bread. Bread here is a metaphor for all your food. Go, later on today, eat your nachos covered with chicken, and with a whole pile of guacamole on the side. Eat it with joy. If you're going out and have some poutine, put on some meat on top of that poutine. Or if you're a vegetarian, some tofu or tempeh or something like that, and make it nice and spicy and enjoy it all. And look at this. This is in the
Bible. And drink your wine with a merry heart. For God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head, which sounds a bit gross to us. But here's the point. All of the things that are going on in this text, and even the fact that there are good things that come to us in life, that we do have food that we should enjoy, that we have wine that we

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should enjoy. He's saying here, listen, don't enjoy your food with a long, unpleasant, unhappy face, just down in the dumps, thinking about the... No!
Enjoy it lustily. Receive these good things is what they are. Good things that come from the hand of God, for which you should enjoy and give thanks.
[22:25] Enjoy your steak later on today. Enjoy your tofu for the vegetarians. Enjoy it. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. In other words, dress up.

Celebrate it. And that continues. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life. And here vain means vaporous. Your life is short and uncertain that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life, your allotment. And in your toil, which you toil under the sun, whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might, for there's no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol for which you are going. And Sheol is the word for the place of the dead in the Old Testament before these truths are more developed. So you have this very, very profound sense that God gives gifts. Who is God? God is love, not hate. And he gives gifts. And he gives gifts to be received and enjoyed with thanks. And not with long faces and tears and your grubby clothes.
Life is brief, but he still gives gifts. And what we're going to see is that that's the basic structure of reality. You got your life as a gift. And the gifts of God are everything from very, very, very tiny gifts. For me, gosh, that first coffee in the morning, those first few sips taste really good. That's for me. It tastes really good. Even bad coffee tastes good to me for the first couple of sips, you know. And so the gifts that God gives, it's not as if he just gives small gifts or medium-sized gifts. He gives gifts, everything from very, very tiny things to very, very, very, very huge gifts, all the way up and down the ladder of size and magnitude and wonder and glory of these gifts. He is the one who gives these things. And we are to learn this pattern of existence that he does not weigh our merits. And the wages of what we've accomplished, they're certain types of things, but he doesn't part, he doesn't, he doesn't weigh our merits, but he pardons our offenses. That's a gift.
He doesn't give us the wages that we deserve. He gives us eternal life. That's going to be a gift. And all of these gifts, small and large, the pattern of life that we receive, these things. And now the question is, do you really believe that?
And he's going to give some thought experiments to actually try to bring home as to whether or not we actually really believe it. That's what happens next. Look at verses 11 and following. Again, I saw that under the sun, the race is not to the swift, I mean, not all the time, obviously, nor the battle always to the strong, nor bread always to the wise.
[25:06] In other words, you know, lots of food to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For a human being does not know his time, like fish that are taken in an evil net, because death is an evil, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of human beings are snared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them. These things just happen very suddenly, it's time and chance. Just a couple of weeks ago, I came within about five or six feet of dying, not making this up. I was standing at the corner of Metcalf and Slater, and it was about 4.30, and so the cars on Slater are going, you know, 50 kilometers an hour, trying to make it through all the lights, 60 kilometers an hour, and I'm just standing there in the corner, I'm not jaywalking, I'm standing there waiting for the light, watching the traffic, all of that, being a very, very good boy, good man. And there's three lanes of traffic going this way, and the guy in the middle lane, without checking his side, decided to try to make a left-hand turn when there was a car right beside him, and the next thing I know, these two cars come within an inch of hitting each other, and in their attempt to miss each other, they stop or swerve about four feet from me, and I tried to move, and there's no way you can move so fast to avoid two cars, and I would have either died or been severely injured at the corner of Metcalf and Slater.

Completely unexpected. He's saying the poem, the nautical analogy of I am the captain of my soul is actually not really a true analogy. The real analogy is you never know when you're going to get caught in a net and when you die. And it continues on, I have also seen this example, verse 13, of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few people in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city, yet no one remembered that poor man. When I was still part of the Diocese of Ottawa, this is like a long time ago, the Diocese of Ottawa had this big strategic plan. It was costing piles and piles and piles of money, and they thought it was going to transform everything. And I was one of a small number of critics who made

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objections about competence, about the money, about how churches change, and a range of things. And I was part of three or four people who would actually speak out in public in these meetings with 300 people about it. And I was, people didn't want to associate me, they thought I was a complete fool and an idiot and all of those types of things. And then the bishop who sponsored it dies suddenly, there's an election, and two years later at a synod, the newly elected bishop got up and said every single thing that I had said and cancelled the program.
And nobody afterwards said, George, way to go, you were right. They just all thought he was right, and they forgot what I said. That's what life is like, right? I've gotten over it. Years of therapy, I got over it. Okay, years of therapy, I got over it.
Yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might. Verse 16, I say wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. Verse 17, the words of the wise, heard and quiet, are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.
Fools. Algorithms, be warned. You can attract hundreds of thousands of fools validating big mouths. It's better to have 20 views and be wise. That's what it's saying amongst other things.
[28:55] And having a couple of million views, I won't say the, I almost said a bad word in public, which would be bad from the pulpit. Verse 19, wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. We all know that these things are true, right?

It's not always the smartest who gets the rewards. It's not always the most competent who gets the promotion. There are situations where your advice, you're low in the organization and they take your advice. They're successful. Somebody else claims credit for it. Nobody remembers you. And we all know that one person can do really bad things and then do a whole pile of good work that you do. We all know that these things are all true. But here's the question, two questions connected to it. Why, when we laugh at this, do we think that we're the wise one, not the fools? Why is it that when we hear the text about the fast not getting it, we think, yeah, yeah, because I'm the fast guy.
I'm the wise guy. I'm the one who's ignored. Why do we never think in all of those examples that we're actually the sinner that makes everything bad, the fool that goes to the algorithm and on and on? Why is it that that's how we hear the text?
Here's the truth. You are far more deeply sinful than you imagine. I am far more deeply sinful than I imagine.
[30:32] And God is vastly more kind and good than we could ever possibly imagine. Boy, I think I should go to God and say you need to weigh my merits.

I would be heading for a big fall. God says, yeah, your merits? Let's just replay your life. And then let's ask even a hundred of your peers how do you think they should be evaluated after they go through everything in your mind, all of your emotions and all of those types of things.
You see, this is where it's pointing the way to the gospel, that the Bible here is revealing to us that we are vastly more sinful. If we listen to this, not just in a superficial way, but we listen to it and take it to heart, that we are far more deeply sinful and in need of God to do something for us.
And God is vastly more kind and good than we can ever imagine. All of eternity will be spent and we will never exhaust the deep goodness and mercy and beauty and kindness and love and justice of God.
Life is an undeserved gift. And given what we human beings are, new life can only be a greater undeserved gift that we need to receive.
[31:59] And that is what Jesus, that is who Jesus is. If life is an undeserved gift, why on earth would any of us think that new life could be anything other than an undeserved gift?

And that's what Jesus is portrayed as. He is the undeserved gift which is offered to us, that not only is a gift of new life, but deals with the source of the problem as to why we need new life, which is sin and death.
And all of those are dealt with by his perfect life on earth and his death upon the cross as the Lamb of God, a symbol of innocence, who dies to take away the sin of the world.
He does not weigh our merits, the message of Ezekiel, but pardons our offenses. The wages of sin are death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
And so here it comes in discipleship, discipleship and living as a follower of Jesus. So the Christian life begins when we realize that this is who Jesus is. We acknowledge our need and our sin, and we believe that God has provided some means by which a gift that can come to us that we receive purely and utterly by faith, not weighing our merits.

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[33:13] And we consider that if we ask him to come into our life to be our Savior and Lord, we will have union with him, and he will come in, and he will begin to change us, and our life will begin to be changed.

And then we have a decision to make as to whether or not that is how we, whether we will call out to him to be our Savior and our Lord. And then as we have him as our Savior and Lord, he gives gifts.
Everything from small gifts and all the way up, he gives gifts. All the way up and all the way down. And these things about, and the gifts that he gives us about life and blessings, they're all realistic gifts.
They're gifts that are given in light of the fact that sometimes life is very, very unfair, and sometimes all these other types of things happen, and sometimes our lives are very, very short. But we know that when we die, we are with Christ, and in the meantime, he still continues to give us gifts.
And so he's telling us, with all of these stories, by the way, he's not telling, if you're that wise person who really did in that situation give the advice, if you really did good things and they're derided and people don't pay any attention to you, this text is not telling you to be fatalistic about it.
[34:25] And last week I talked about how human beings, we think we're the center of the universe in the sun, but we're really a moon circling a planet which circles the sun.

And partly what the fear of God is, is the deeper and deeper awareness that I am a moon, and the sun is the sun, and that is good. And the moon receives its gravity from bigger planets and from the sun, and the light from the sun shines off the moon and reflects to others.
And there's no reason for a moon, when it's disheartened, and when it's treated unjustly, that we cannot pour out our heart to God with tears about the injustice.
This text isn't teaching us fatalism. And it's not saying that you necessarily have to accept it. If you're in that particular job and you're never being valued, maybe you should switch your job. The text's not saying, stay in that job and allow people to kick you and treat you like a doormat forever. It's telling you, here's what it's telling you. It's telling you this. Work and creativity and toil are goods that come from God, and do them to the best of your ability.
[35:38] And if you are surrounded by ungrateful fools, work hard and wisely anyway. If you are surrounded by people who never respond to emails or never do this or never do that, work wisely and well anyway.

Work wisely and well. Work wisely and well. And if that means changing jobs, change jobs. And when it says earlier that God approves of what you do, I got this from a fellow by the last name is Ortland, Eric Ortland.
You know how transformative it is? I've tried it this week. It's very transformative. Before you begin to do your work, in light of this text, just think. I'm about to try to do some work today.
And God is looking at me smiling. And whether that work is going to be working as somebody in Tim Hortons, whether it's a social worker, whether you're going to design and write an opera, whether you're going to prepare to do an acting thing, whether you're going to be managing a whole pile of people in the civil service.
Just think. This text is saying that as you begin to go, whether you're baking a cake to bring to your neighbor or just for yourself and your loved ones, just think. God is looking at you.
[36:59] And as you begin to take this on, he's smiling at you. He's saying this. Now, I began by saying, and I'm going to close with this, the final thing.

What would God say to me if I asked him about that thing which so disheartened me for about 24 hours? And here's what he would say to me, I think.
And it happened on a Friday. And one of the things you need to know about our, we have a family tradition that on Fridays, some or as many kids as possible of our kids come home for Friday night. And it's pizza and it's pop and it's potato chips. And for the adult, something a bit stronger for those who want something a bit stronger. And on Friday nights, I have, you know, maybe four or five of my kids and grandkids coming over.
And I think this is what God would say to me. So, George, you're really, really, really upset and disheartened and sad by the news that you heard on Friday afternoon.
[38:00] And I would say, yes, God, I am. And he would say, did you have a good cup of coffee after that? And I'd say, yes. He said, did you have like a night later on where your adult kids willingly wanted to come home and spend time with you and have lots of fun?

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Did you see them? I said, yes. Did you enjoy them? I did. Was the pizza good? It was really good. Was the wine good?
It was cheap, but it was good. Was everybody having fun? Yes. Do you enjoy seeing your grandchildren have fun? Yes.
Did you have a good night's sleep? Pretty good. What was breakfast like? It was really good. He said, I'm not keeping track, but after that bad news, didn't I give you 50 things that are full of pleasure and joy?
Why is it you didn't want to enjoy any of them? Because that one thing you wanted, you didn't get. Now I have no answer to that question.
[39:19] Because the fact is, I allowed my demand for this one thing to mean I couldn't enjoy all the things that God gave me.

So brothers and sisters, God is calling you to come to us. For those of you who are here who haven't given your life to Christ, God is calling you to give your life to Jesus.
And it is really worth it. It is such a wise and beautiful way to live. And there's no better time than now to say, Jesus, be my Savior and my Lord, to acknowledge it. And for those of us who are Christians, God is calling you to receive gifts from him, to be thankful for the greatest gift, which is his son and being reconciled to him.
And all those other gifts of food and work and creativity that you get to do on every day to receive and to do them with thanks and gratitude for what he is.
And he wants you to do it with a smiling face, not a long face. You will not live forever. But in the meantime, there are so many things that you can get and receive right now that are good.
[40:27] I invite you to stand. I invite you to bow your heads in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise that even though we don't know ourselves very well and we're trying to learn about ourselves better, that you know us perfectly.

And even though you knew us and know us absolutely perfectly, you did not turn your face away from us in hatred, but you loved us. You sent us your son to be our savior.
You send good things throughout the day, moments of pleasure and moments of joy and all pleasure and all joy ultimately comes from you. You are the source of it all.
And we ask, Father, that you would tune our hearts to when disappointment comes, Father, to honestly pour out our hearts to you and even with tears, expressing our sadness and our disappointment and the injustice of it.
And, Father, we give you thanks and praise that you desire us to do those things and might guide us in ways to deal with it and to move on to different places. But we ask as well, Father, that you deliver us from being so fixated on a particular good that we do not receive or enjoy all of the other goods that you give us in a period of time, that you would tune our hearts to receive the joys and the pleasures and the tasks and the abilities that you have bestowed upon us to receive them with joy, to do them well for your glory, and to give you thanks for all that we do.
[42:10] And we ask that you would do these wonderful works in our lives, and we ask this in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior, and all God's people said, amen. Amen.

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