

# Directions For The Discouraged

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Date: 18 October 2020

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 0 0 ]      Once again a very warm welcome to you this evening and thank you for joining us for the service from Stornoway Free Church. Before we begin the worship I do have an intimation to read out, it's mainly for the members of the congregation itself. There are two or three things on this that I've been asked to intimate. First of all by way of thanks, in August, at the end of August, a collection was made of envelopes that could not have been handed in and that some contributed amounted to over £30,000. Our most sincere thanks on behalf of the Deacons Court especially are due to all those who have contributed to the funds of the congregation over the past few months, whether it's by free will offering envelope, standing order, BACS transfer or by cheque.

This is really hugely encouraging to have the support that upholds the gospel financially. And at a recent meeting of the Deacons Court it was agreed to repeat the facility for depositing free will offering envelopes and it was also agreed to use that opportunity to raise funds for the congregation's benevolent fund and to issue also the 2021 free will offering envelopes. If I can mention each of those just briefly regarding the free will offering envelopes, on Wednesday 21st October and Saturday 24th October the church hall on Kenneth Street will be open from 2pm to 4pm to receive free will offering envelopes from those who've kept them and wish now to deposit them. If you do wish to avail yourself of that opportunity please come along during those times or else arrange someone to take the envelopes for you. You can also contact your district elder or deacon if you'd rather do that or can't come yourself. Now with regard to the congregation's benevolent fund, the benevolent fund has been set up many years ago to meet with unexpected costs in the community usually in families that they had to face but in more recent years due to the cumulative effect of austerity and reductions to benefit,

Deacons Court decided to support local charities like the Ilan Shear Foodbank and I can tell you over the months from April to June of this year donations totalling £3,000 were made to the foodbank from the congregation's benevolent fund. We understand that the demands on foodbanks everywhere during the current crisis is likely to be considerable so that means that the the benevolent fund has been reduced because of those contributions and we usually do augment each year the benevolent fund with a retiring collection taken at the time of harvest thanksgiving service. Now that's not likely at all to be in the church in the usual way so anyone who wishes to contribute to the benevolent fund even outwith the congregation they're free to do so again you've got that opportunity to to do that on these same dates 21st October and 24th October from 2 p.m in the church hall you can also make a contribution by forwarding a check made payable to Stornoway Free Church Benevolent Fund and you can send that to the Treasurer at

Murdoin MacPhail at 12a Jameson Thrive Stornoway HS12LF all these details are on the Facebook page notices and also on the website so you can access them there. Thirdly the 2021 free will offering envelopes due to the current restrictions on movement and visiting homes the Deacons Court has decided that free will offering envelopes for 2021 will not be delivered to homes throughout the congregation in the usual way but will be available for collection during these same dates and times mentioned above 21st and 24th of October and we are intending to repeat all of these above events these ones referred to at some point either in late November or early December to give another opportunity to contribute to what's been mentioned there just now. If you have any questions on that you can please contact any of your office bearers or myself or Kenny if you're unsure about any of it so again we give thanks to God and we give thanks to yourselves for your contribution. Now we're going to begin our service singing in Psalm number 63 that's in the Sing Psalms version on page 80. Psalm 63 verses 1 to 6 and we're singing to the tune Menzer

O God you are my God alone I seek your face with eagerness my soul and body thirst for you in this dry weary wilderness. Verses 1 to 6 of Psalm 63 to the tune Menzer O God you are my God alone I seek your face with eagerness my soul and body thirst for you in this dry weary wilderness I've seen you in your holy place your power and glory held my gaze far better is your love than life and so my lips will sing your praise

[ 6 : 00 ]

I'll bless you Lord throughout my life and raise my hands to you in prayer I'll bless you Lord throughout my life and raise my hands to you in prayer my joyful lips will sing your praise my soul is fed with richest feasts upon my bed I lie awake and in my thoughts remember you I meditate throughout the night and keep your constant love in view let's read now from God's word from Ecclesiastes sorry first of all from Philippians I'm sorry that's the first reading is from Philippians chapter 4

Philippians chapter 4 and verses 4 to 13 Philippians 4 at verse 4 rejoice in the Lord always again I will say rejoice let your reasonableness be known to everyone the Lord is at hand do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus finally brothers whatever is true whatever is honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is commendable if there is any excellence if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the God of peace will be with you

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have you have revived your concern for me you were indeed concerned for me but you had no opportunity not that I am speaking in being of being in need for I have learned in whatsoever situation I am to be content I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need I can do all things through him who strengthens me we pray God will follow with this blessing of that reading of his word let's now engage in prayer let's call upon the Lord in prayer Lord of gracious God we thank you that we have this opportunity once more of worshipping you together of drawing near to you of singing your praises and calling upon your name and of giving your minds to your word and his teaching we give thanks for the promise that we have been reading in your word in regard to making our concerns known to God that you have united that with the peace of God which passes all understanding that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lord we give thanks for the many wonderful promises of your word promises that comfort our hearts and times of adversity and promises that have been so wonderfully enjoyed through the centuries of your church's life Lord we thank you tonight Lord that we form part of that great line of believing people who reach back through the mists of time to when men first began to call upon the name of the Lord Lord we bless you for all that you have been to your people down through these ages and for the fact that you are unchangeably the same as we come to meet with you tonight in worship Lord lift us we pray up towards those great truths that your word sets out for us lift our minds above that which would discourage us above the things of this present order and especially such times as we live in when we know that there is much that perplexes us causes us anxiety and brings us sometimes even to be despondent we ask Lord that your truth tonight will with its light reach into our hearts shine into our darkness we pray enlighten our minds in further knowledge of you and of your will and of your word and we ask that you would be pleased to receive our worship as we offer it to you in the name of Jesus Christ your son we give thanks for our acceptance in him for the way that you have come toward us in him or the emphasis in your word that you who are high and holy as the most high that you have come to descend to us in the person of your son and through his wonderful incarnation and taking our humanity to himself and our sin we bless you oh Lord that you have come to reveal to us and to execute in us that redemption that you purposed from all eternity bless us tonight then we pray as we once again come to your word and when we come to some of the difficulties some of the dark matters that are brought before us in it some of the references that we find difficult to understand and sometimes even to accept

Lord God give us a receptive heart we pray give us to trust in your wisdom to trust in your knowledge and to trust in your capacity to do us good even when we fail to understand your doings we thank you oh Lord that we also are able to pray for others along with ourselves we pray tonight for the people we belong to and not only for ourselves as a congregation and as families and for our individual lives we pray tonight Lord for our nation and indeed for the whole world of humanity that we belong to we pray especially at this time as we so often do in these days oh Lord for our present circumstances we pray in regard to the restrictions that are laid upon us through this COVID infection Lord we pray as this pandemic has overtaken the world and when we find Lord so much about it that causes us to be despondent and uncertain

[ 13 : 08 ] Lord we pray that you would lift up our eyes as the psalmist himself did to the hills from where does my strength come he asked my strength comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth and Lord we ask that as the creator of all things we pray that you would rescue us help us to see our need of you help us to see that we cannot manage life on our own that we cannot especially overcome these great providences and grievous providences that come the way of the world from time to time oh Lord we pray that as we cry unto you tonight help us to continue to do so until you will come and manifest your power and help us to trust in you as one who alone is able to conduct us safely through the things of time and into eternity remember as we pray in our lives as families and homes bless our children bless our young people Lord be with them during these critical times as well teach them your ways show them your paths give them to know Lord that as they put their trust in you so you will deal with them in accordance with your covenant promises we ask that you bless parents and grandparents who seek to raise young people in the knowledge of the Lord we ask Lord that that may have a permanent and everlasting effect through your blessing through the work of your spirit we ask your blessing for all tonight who mourn the passing of loved ones we know Lord that even in recent times we have had bereavement amongst our families and congregations in our communities we pray for them we ask oh Lord that you'd continue to protect us from this virus we give thanks for the measure of protection you have given us in the island so far we pray that that will continue not Lord we don't ask this in a selfish way but we ask Lord out of thanksgiving and out of a concern that you would continue to protect us and remember other areas of our country oh Lord where conditions are much different to what we here experience especially in these areas of the country where the virus has once again come to show an alarming increase oh Lord bless them we pray who suffer from it and the families affected bless the health services who deal with it grant Lord that they may not be overwhelmed that you would bless and encourage those who may feel at this time that they are near being overwhelmed and oh Lord we ask that you would further equip them with health with strength themselves to deal with those who are ill grant your blessing Lord we pray now to us as we confess our sin we do pray Lord that you would receive us graciously and forgive and pardon our iniquity and cleanse us from all the defilement of our sins keep us in that straight path of obedience to you receive our thanks for Jesus' sake

Amen now children I'd like to just say another word or two to you about worship we began looking at that a few weeks ago we looked at whom do we worship and we saw God alone is to be worshipped and we asked then the question well as God is to be worshipped why is he to be worshipped and we saw he's to be worshipped because he's our creator and because he's also our saviour through Jesus Christ and tonight I want to ask the question how do we worship God and one or two verses that help us to look at that from John chapter 4 this is Jesus talking to the woman of Samaria as we usually as he spoke to the woman of Samaria in chapter 4 of John and verse 23 this is what we read the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father is seeking such people to worship him

God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth how do we worship God we worship him firstly of course through Jesus Christ but through Jesus Christ we worship him honestly and sincerely on another occasion in Matthew chapter 15 we find Matthew describing another occasion when Jesus met with the scribes and Pharisees who had no time for Jesus and who were accusing him of breaking certain of the commandments or rules that they themselves had made up and what he said to them at that time was that he was comparing them to those that Isaiah spoke of this people draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me what God meant by that was that worship is a lot more than just an outward use of words we can do that we can read the Bible we can sing the words of the Psalms whatever we're singing to God but what God wants is the worship that comes from our hearts worship that is honest and sincere with our heart with our soul is really engaged so we do it honestly and sincerely we do it secondly with what God commands because God has specified in his word in the Bible what things we are to use in God's own worship and there are four especially four elements of worship that we might say are always part of worship as far as possible first of these is praise we sing praise to God and although we give praise to him in prayer as well it's especially in singing praise that we praise the Lord and express our thanks and our indebtedness to him the second element is that of prayer we've just been praying to God and that is always a part of our worship whether we're worshipping God by ourselves on our own or as a congregation or as a group of people in a family we always include prayer we pray for God's blessing we express our thanks to God in prayer we pray that God will guide us we pray that he'll protect us all the things that are right for us to pray but that's part of worship the third element along with praise and prayer is reading reading God's word we always include reading the Bible in our worship whether again it's individual or together but it's always an important feature of our worship where you find worship described in the Bible people described as gathered for worship there's always a reading of God's word and along with that fourthly comes hearing God's word of course you hear it when it's read but you also hear it when it's preached and that's the business that God has given to us as preachers of the gospel he's called us to preach the gospel that's to preach the word of God that's really just trying to take what's there in the word of God and explain it as God gives us the ability to do so and so these four things are always part of worship especially worship when we're gathered together praise and prayer and reading and preaching and along with that sometimes we have baptisms and also the Lord's

Supper and they fit into our worship as well because God requires that we do these as part of our worship for his own glory so that's how we worship God honestly and sincerely but Jesus was saying there of course they worship him in spirit and in truth we need God's Holy Spirit so that we will worship God properly and we will worship him in spirit and in truth not just honestly and sincerely but through Jesus and by the Spirit of God helping us and guiding us through our worship so let's now say the Lord's Prayer together again we'll say just thinking over the words as we pray them because they are a real prayer that God has given us to say our Father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever

Amen Now our second reading is in Ecclesiastes chapter 6 this is the passage we're going to look at tonight the whole chapter Ecclesiastes book of Ecclesiastes chapter 6 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun and it lies heavy on mankind a man to whom God gives wealth possessions and honour so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires yet God does not give him power to enjoy them but a stranger enjoys them this is vanity it is a grievous evil if a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years so that the days of his years are many but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things and he also has no burial I say that the stillborn child is better off than he for it comes in vanity and goes in darkness and in darkness his name is covered moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything yet it finds rest rather than he even though he should live a thousand years twice over yet enjoy no good do not all go to the one place all the toil of man is for his mouth yet his appetite is not satisfied for what advantage has the wise man over the fool and what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite this also is vanity and a striving after wind 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 the more words the more vanity what is the advantage to man for who knows what is good for man why he lives the few days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow for who can tell man what will be after him under the sun now I must confess that preparing to preach from this chapter was challenging to say the least it's a chapter that has many difficult references in it it's a chapter that is itself full of things that are difficult to understand and deal with yet of course because it's there in the Bible it's a chapter that must profit us and benefit us as we come to look at it and I hope that will be the case tonight and that we will be able to take from the chapter things which will encourage us because what he's really doing is in a sense addressing discouragement and giving directions to the discouraged now there's much in the Bible as you well know that addresses the discouraged in fact a feature of some of the biggest doctrines that God gives us to know in the Bible one of the features of the use of those doctrines is that they are addressed to our discouragements for example the way in which the Thessalonians were taught by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4 that they should not worry about those who had passed on who had died no longer in this life with reference to the coming of Christ again there was obviously a question at least in Thessalonica what's going to happen to those when Jesus comes will they be part of what happens at his return and of course

[ 25 : 54 ] Paul was saying of course they will because there's such a thing as the resurrection they'll be raised from the dead and go up to meet with the Lord in the air and so Paul finishes that passage wherefore he says encourage one another with these words Paul has given us even the biggest teachings the biggest doctrines of the Bible of his truth so as to encourage us to direct us to give to us something of an indication as to how he would have us to live and approach life remember we're looking for Ecclesiastes is looking for the meaning or purpose to human life and in this passage in chapter 6 he deals with three puzzles we might call them three puzzles of human life but he deals with them in a way that shows that these puzzles are very often perplexing and discouraging and really gives us at times much pain it's important for us to remember that the starting point throughout Ecclesiastes is life under the sun and we've taken that to be indicative of life if you leave God out of the picture life here on earth and just confining it to that without really paying reference to God at all that's really how he's approaching this chapter as well and of course all of these chapters move towards the final emphasis in Ecclesiastes in the final chapter to remember our creator

Ecclesiastes sometimes makes the dark things of life almost intolerably dark but the reason for that is so that we will become convinced all the more of our need of God amongst this darkness and these dark things that he sometimes makes so dark and so difficult he just drops down just like you would find perhaps a hook with a little bit of bait on it going down into the darkness of the ocean and here is Ecclesiastes just dropping these little references to God not in any way expanding them all the way through although he's more and more coming to introduce God to us but as he deals with these dark things and as he drops these little references to God the design of that you see and this is what we have to pray for that the more we come to appreciate the darkness of our darkness the darkness of our sin the darkness of life without God the more we will appreciate our need of God and be convinced that we simply cannot face life in this world or in eternity without him so what are these three puzzles well we can just divide it this way first of all he speaks about material abundance without enjoyment that's verses 1 to 6 material abundance without enjoyment then he speaks thirdly secondly about much toil without fulfillment verses 7 to 9 thirdly many questions without answers verses 10 to 12 material abundance without enjoyment much toil without fulfillment many questions without answers let's look at these very briefly verses 1 to 6 material abundance without enjoyment without enjoyment here is the man

God is saying God is giving him wealth possessions and honour so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires yet God does not give him power to enjoy them but a stranger enjoys them now you've opened your Christmas presents on Christmas morning we've done that as adults we've done it as children as well and you know what it's like when a child opens a present and realises that's exactly what I asked for I'm so pleased about that and the package is opened and for a time the child is just delighted with that but you know very well it soon wears off just as it does for ourselves as adults something new is given to us we enjoy it it's wonderful then we hear about an improved version of it we hear about something as an alternative and we want something else we want it to be supplemented we want it to be replaced by something better that is what we're like that is what life is like that's the realism that Ecclesiastes is dealing with and that translates very often into an appetite for things in a wrong kind of way remember how Lot's wife is spoken of in the Bible in the passage in Genesis but also Jesus mentioned her in the Gospel of Luke remember Lot's wife he said and Luke 17 where Lot's wife is an example of not really looking back or hankering back to things that would actually trip us up in our spiritual journey apparently there's we visited

Pompey some years ago just on a holiday trip and came to see Pompey and one of the features of Pompey as it's been excavated is as the volcanic ash fell so quickly on top of that town people were wouldn't use the word frozen because of course they were essentially they were just burnt or asphyxiated to death by the ash but many of the bodies were just left preserved if you like like stones but with the shape of the body even sometimes with the expressions on the face and where the hands were reaching out to something and there's one of a woman there that was obviously heading for the exit but her hand was stretched out towards a bag of pearls and she was overtaken by just like Lot's wife by the volcanic ash that took her life that's what we're always like as human beings and we were always looking for just that little bit extra we saw the last time in chapter 5 how that's so important to recognise that we have to enjoy the things we have rather than just hanker for more and keep on hankering for more here is the man who had it all but God does not give him he does not give him the power to enjoy them now that reminds us of something very important even if we have everything we could possibly desire like this person in order to enjoy these things properly in other words make a proper use of them and really benefit truly from them we need

God in our lives we need the blessing of God God has to make them profitable to us we cannot actually find enjoyment and fulfilment and satisfaction in material things themselves without God coming to bless them to us without God making us benefit from them properly here's the man who had it all but he didn't enjoy it he didn't have the enabling from God and of course we can never separate God enabling us to enjoy things as chapter 5 says we rightly can and should that can never be detached from our trusting in God from our giving our life over to God to be ruled and led by him in chapter 5 verse 19 this is what we read and looked at briefly everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possession and power to enjoy them so to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil this is the gift of God and if that's not the case then these difficult verses in chapter 6 all the way down to verse 6 then they really are something which we need to reckon with if we don't enjoy them as the gift of God and in the proper fashion seeking to glorify

[ 34 : 07 ] God through them well it's better he says not experiencing life at all that's really what's behind these very difficult references God is not being callous to speak about stillborn children about lives that are shortened and the average he's not being callous God is not cruel God is not really set out here by Ecclesiastes as if he didn't care it's just his way of saying as Jesus in fact himself said on one occasion better never to have been born than to be in the position of one who would betray him well better for that man never to have been born what he's saying here is if we're going to waste our lives if we're not going to benefit from God's gifts it would be better in a sense he says that we were not born at all and when you come to think of the difficulties the trials the pains of life not to benefit from them what he's saying there's no point what is the point for everyone at last goes to the same place even though we live a thousand years so really

Ecclesiastes is leading us there step by step to God back to God the fear of God that he referred to earlier in chapter 5 and verse 7 God is the one you must fear we mentioned briefly that the fear of God is to live in respect in honour in obedience in love love is really at the heart of the fear of God not hatred not being afraid in the wrong way of God but to love God and when you love God you have the beginning of enjoyment there that's the root that's the secret of enjoying the good things God gives the things of this life itself even to love God to recognise God and his place in blessing them to us we read in Philippians chapter 4 these verses that Paul himself referred to being content he's talking there about the Philippians actually having made a collection for him or having sent material things to him to benefit him he says very kind of you

I know that you weren't previously able to do it but he said I'm not speaking of being in need for I have learnt in whatsoever situation I am to be content you see Paul is saying and this is long after he's been converted 20 years at least but what he's saying is I have learnt it didn't come to him overnight there were struggles in Paul's own life and reckoning with God's providence but he's now saying I have learnt I've come to learn to be content I know how to be brought low to do without things in other words I know how to abound to have an abundance in any and in every circumstance I have learnt the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need why I can do all things through him through Jesus through God who strengthens me that's the key also that we're given in Ecclesiastes he's making the darkness seem so intolerably dark the difficulties seem so insurmountable the problems seem so great and us so incapable of surmounting them or benefiting from them and if we don't bring



God into the picture that's how it is but when you do enjoyment begins when God has his rightful place in your life and in mine material abundance without enjoyment secondly he's talking about much toil without fulfilment from verse 7 to verse 9 now he's saying here he's recognising that we have to work in order to provide for ourselves he's saying here very bluntly all the toil of man is for his mouth yet his appetite is not satisfied what you eat today is not going to be sufficient to stave the hunger of tomorrow we have to work in order to eat to provide for our family and for many other reasons besides now the bible isn't here giving us a negative approach to work the bible is actually very firmly against laziness against indolence against the kind of attitude that says i'm just going to take it easy i don't need to work work is just something for the skivvies of this world 2nd

Thessalonians chapter 3 and verses 6 to 12 you find Paul there actually dealing with that same question of work where he says we command you brothers in the name of Jesus that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition you received from us for you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us because we were not idle when we were with you nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it but with toil and labour we work night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you it was not because we do not have that right but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate for even when we were with you we would give you this command if anyone is not willing to work let him not eat for we hear that there are some among you walking in idleness not busy at work but busy bodies nosy about other people's lives and not bothering even to work now of course that doesn't at all mean that

[ 40 : 00 ] God doesn't understand the problems of unemployment or that he's not sympathetic to those who cannot find work or have lost their work and that's especially relevant during this crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic but what he's saying is as a principle this is important to human life we work so that we will eat so that we will benefit materially and financially from that and in fact work was indeed an important aspect of the creation setting that man was given when God created him in Genesis chapter 2 verse 15 we read that God having made man he placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and to dress it work didn't begin after man became a sinner after man became entered into enmity with God and lost his fellowship with God work was always a part of man's existence of man's humanity that's what

God intended always for him that's what he required of him but what he's saying here is there is no real fulfillment in work itself any more than there is in the mere possession of material things there is no fulfillment in work itself without God without the blessing of God without reference to God if you just extract work and look at work as a concept in itself and you just leave God out of the picture doing what Ecclesiastes is doing looking at it under the sun it very often becomes a weariness it becomes tedious it becomes a drudgery this is what Paul again refers to in Colossians where he speaks there of how the basic flaw for most for many people if not most people is that they don't refer to God or make work something that has an important reference to God and to a relationship with God what did he say to

Colossians well this is what he said whatever you do work heartily as for the Lord and not for men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as you reward you are serving the Lord Christ the basic flaw in a secular approach in an unbelieving approach in an atheistic approach to work is that it has no reference to God and therefore because it has no reference to work being as unto God and serving the Lord Christ very often it really leads to weariness drudgery boredom lack of fulfillment and that's what what Ecclesiastes is actually saying here his appetite is not satisfied just by simply having work to do looking at work in itself I'm just referring to something that

John Murray principles of conduct the name of the book by Professor John Murray and he was dealing with that passage in Colossians which is a proper attitude to work a believing attitude to work in the fear of God whatever you do work heartily as for the Lord and not for men you are serving the Lord Christ no consideration is more relevant to our modern labor situation from whatever angle it may be viewed than the necessity of having the worker imbued with this attitude of soul its widespread absence is our basic economic ill in other words John Murray was saying what a huge difference it would make throughout the world if people in that work approached it in a way that said I'm doing this for the glory of God I'm doing this because God has given me this privilege

I'm doing this because I want Jesus to be glorified through it I'm serving the Lord Jesus Christ whether I'm actually at the top of a boardroom whether I'm manager of the biggest company in the world whether I'm CEO of it or whether I'm just way down the bottom of the ladder as far as labour is concerned makes no difference Paul is not concerned with these things he's saying whatever you do work heartily as to the Lord and not to men and when we do it transforms as John Murray puts it not only our attitude to work but the whole work situation itself it is as he put the absence of that is our basic economic ill isn't that the case as you look out over society today so he's talking about material abundance without fulfilment secondly much toil abundance without enjoyment much toil without fulfilment and thirdly very briefly he's talking here about many questions without answers in verses 10 to 12 now again he's not suggesting for a moment that we shouldn't be asking deep questions it's not wrong to ask questions it's not wrong to have a sincere inquiry again going back to the garden of Eden there was there in the language that's used as it describes the garden rivers that flowed out of it they're set before man there the prospect of something that he can investigate and explore and find answers to as life goes on it didn't happen because man fell but there's nothing wrong in asking questions even questions that may not have an answer and sometimes life is like that we ask questions understandably we would like to have an answer for them but we can't find one and not even the bible gives us certain answers to certain questions that we ask but what it does say consistently is that when we don't have answer to the questions that we ask much as we would desire that does not give us grounds to disbelieve or to reject faith in God some people you'll hear them saying well if it's the

[ 46 : 37 ] God of the Old Testament that you believe in I can accept some of the things Jesus said but if it's the God of the Old Testament and if it's the God that leaves people to suffer that sees children in the world suffering and in poverty and so the sayings go and does nothing about it and does not intervene I don't want to know that God that's putting me right off God of course there's no easy answer to these questions why does God actually allow that why does God leave that to be the case there's a lot of the answer involves human responsibility and human abuse but it's not an easy thing to answer these questions however what Ecclesiastes is saying is when you don't have the answer to the question there's no point in standing up and arguing with God or arguing that there can't be a God and certainly not a kind God here is in verse 10 what he 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 and the one stronger than he and commentators take to refer to

God he's really saying here whatever has come to be has already been named otherwise he's taking us under the sovereignty of God the knowledge of God the wisdom of God what God himself has in completeness and perfection and many words of arguing with him many words of challenging him many words of asking questions and disputing with God it's not going to change anything it's not going to actually change God's will not going to actually change his mind or his purpose here's the question the key question for Ecclesiastes that he's asking and would have us to ask is who knows what is good or what is best for human beings secularism would say I do I have that capacity as a human being I know what's best for me and I want to be left to be free to explore that and to seek that that will be fulfilled

Ecclesiastes is saying only God does but God does perfectly who knows what is good for you tonight and what is good for me God does only God does but you don't need anybody else to know because within God's knowledge exists everything you require by way of providing for you remember how Paul wrote again this text just came to my mind just now in Romans chapter 12 where Paul is dealing with how we are to offer ourselves our very selves to God our bodies he puts it there I appeal to you brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice and then he goes on to say don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind you see that's transformed from focusing on self and being governed by self be transformed that by testing you may discern what the will of God is then what does he say what is good and acceptable and perfect because God's will for us as his people is good is what is acceptable what is beneficial what is good for us life can seem intolerably dark life can feel desperately burdensome and it is at times and ecclesiastes is honest you know that's one of the great things about the bible it's sheer honesty it's realism there are no pretenses here it doesn't try to pull the wool over your eyes it doesn't try to suggest things are different to what they really are it doesn't pretend that human life is easy all the time it doesn't pretend hide from us the fact that there are areas of darkness of pain of perplexity in human life but what he does say is even if it feels frustrating and pointless and empty it makes a huge difference all the difference in the world if you include God in it if you include

God properly in it if you include believingly that God is the master of the situation and that he knows what he's doing even if we don't that he is in charge of it even if we cannot be that he will bring good out of it even when that's impossible for us all the puzzles of life friends amount really to showing us our need of God our material abundance without enjoyment we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us much toil without fulfilment we can actually work as to the Lord and not for men and that's the key to our contentment and fulfilment and the many questions without answer well we relate that to God we bring them to him we tell God as the psalmist so often honestly does Lord how long shall this be tell me you know one of the great things about a proper living believing relationship with God is that you can pour out before him whatever is in your heart in whatever way you want to do it and it's guaranteed that God will understand that God will help that God indeed is delighted to come to our aid may he bless to us once again his word let's pray

Lord our God we give thanks that your word directs us to yourself it is your word it shows us ourselves and our sinfulness the darkness of our mind it shows us too Lord the perplexing and difficult things that we have in providence help us never to doubt you to doubt your wisdom help us never to discount your help help us never to conclude as some do that God cannot exist seeing such things are in existence help us to trust you help us to cleave to you daily help us to see our lostness without you help us Lord to see how poor we are without your riches grant these mercies to us now and receive us for Jesus sake Amen we're going to conclude our service now singing once again in Psalm 43 this time in the Scottish

[ 53 : 57 ] Psalter Psalm 43 and verses 3 to 5 the last four verses to a tune Belmont send thy light forth and thy truth let them be guides to me and bring me to thine holy hill even where thy dwellings be and the Psalm goes on to reckon with the perplexing vexing disquieting thoughts that he has in him he's honest enough to express it to God and still come to say still trust in God for him to praise good cause I yet shall have he of my countenance is the health my God that doth me save so Psalm 43 O send thy light forth and thy truth O send thy light forth and thy truth let let let them be guides to me

I bring me to thine holy hell in where thy dwellings be then then will thy to God's altar go to God my chiefest joy God my God thy name to praise my heart I will employ why art thou there cast down my soul what should discourage thee and why with vexing thoughts art thou disquieted in me still trust in

God on him to praise good because I yet shall have he all my countenance is the hell my  
God that taught me same now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the  
Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore Amen once  
again we're grateful to you for joining us for this service I trust God will bless to us his own  
truth his own word and that he will keep you in these days to come safe and well and to  
his name and his glory be all the praise thank he

God he to be the K he seed in Power and on his name and that he can fab to and he can  
you