

# When People Hurt You

Ecclesiastes Part 5

Ecclesiastes 3:15-4:3

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Summary: Understand that God controls all things so you can enjoy life by fearing God. But what about oppression? Focus on Judgment Day. And what about death? Realize you are mortal so that you can enjoy life while you have it (you will die, so in the meantime, live!). When you are oppressed, be like Joseph and focus more on the good God is doing rather than the evil people are doing.

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**Ecclesiastes 3:15** Whatever is, has already been, and whatever will be, already is. God repeats what has passed. **16** I also observed under the sun: there is wickedness at the place of judgment and there is wickedness at the place of righteousness. **17** I said to myself, “God will judge the righteous and the wicked, since there is a time for every activity and every work.” **18** I said to myself, “Concerning people, God tests them that they may see for themselves that they are like animals.” **19** For the fate of people and the fate of animals is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; they all have the same breath. People have no advantage over animals since everything is futile. **20** All are going to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust. **21** Who knows if the breath of people rises upward and the breath of animals goes downward to the earth? **22** I have seen that there is nothing better than for a person to enjoy his activities because that is his reward. For who can enable him to see what will happen after he dies?

**Ecclesiastes 4:1** Again, I observed all the acts of oppression being done under the sun. Look at the tears of those who are oppressed; they have no one to comfort them. Power is with those who oppress them; they have no one to comfort them. **2** So I admired the dead, who have already died, more than the living, who are still alive. **3** But better than either of them is the one who has not yet existed, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

## Introduction

### Review

We are in the midst of a verse by verse study of the book of Ecclesiastes, and we had to leave off last time in the middle of a section. We stopped half-way through chapter 3. If you are just joining us in this study, I will tell you the biggest thing we have seen so far is that the message of Ecclesiastes is this: How do you deal with life in a fallen, cursed, futile world? Two things: Fear God, and enjoy life. Those are the

two themes that run throughout the book – fear God, and enjoy life. And how do you enjoy life in a futile world? By trusting God with the things that are out of your control. You have to trust that what God is doing is beautiful. That is the point he makes in powerful fashion in the beginning of chapter 3. God makes all things beautiful in their time. He schedules every event that ever happens, life and death, peace and war, loving and hating – everything. And His timing in bringing those seasons of life is beautiful. Most of the time we can't see that beauty – and we won't see it until we go to heaven. But that is actually a good thing, because the less we see it, the more it requires faith. And the more we exercise faith, the more we honor God and benefit ourselves. It benefits us, because the more we trust Him, the more ability He grants us to enjoy life – even when life is hard.

Seeking that kind of enjoyment from God is a good thing to do. It will never lead you into sin, because getting that gift of enjoyment from God requires that we please God.

### **Ecclesiastes 2:26 To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness**

It is an enjoyment of life that is based on the fear of God, so it is always the kind of enjoyment that brings glory and honor to Him and delight and joy to us.

## **More of God's Control**

It is not a hard concept to understand in theory, but it is a very hard concept to believe enough that you actually live that way. So Solomon is going to keep hitting it from one angle after another after another so we can see it from all sides. That way, no matter what situation we face in life, we will know how this principle fits. So in verse 14 he is back to talking about God's control. Believing God is in control of everything is absolutely critical for this to work, so he keeps hitting that.

**Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that all God does will last forever; there is no adding to it or taking from it. God works so that people will fear Him. 15 Whatever is, has already been, and whatever will be, already is. God repeats what has passed.**

That last phrase in the verse is literally “God seeks what has been chased away.” We drive something away - we work to put an end to it, and sooner or later - here it comes back again. We have some power to make small changes in our little realm, but we are absolutely powerless to fundamentally change the overall big picture. Therefore, fear God. Whatever you observe happening - your response should be to take seriously the God who controls it all.

## **What about Sin?**

But there is one giant problem with all this. He is saying “Enjoy life, because everything comes from God and He makes all things beautiful in their time.” What about sin? Does this mean God causes sin? How does God want us to think about the beauty of His timing when it comes to sin? That is a major problem, but the author of Ecclesiastes is not going to shy away from it at all. He hits it head on. And he does so by singling out one particular sin that seems like the one that bothers him the most. He will bring this up again and again in the book. This sin is such a horrible reality, and yet it is so prevalent – it is the biggest threat to Solomon's whole message of “Trust God and enjoy the ride.” It is the problem of oppression and injustice.

**16 I also observed under the sun: there is wickedness at the place of judgment and there is wickedness at the place of righteousness.**

The **place of judgment** and the **place of righteousness** no doubt refer to the law courts - the place where justice is supposed to prevail. The primary purpose of human government is to maintain justice - protect the innocent and punish the guilty. And Solomon looked at the human justice system and was appalled to see how much corruption and injustice there was.

## The Horrors of Oppression

We won't have to wait long for him to bring this up again.

**Ecclesiastes 4:1 Again, I observed all the acts of oppression being done under the sun. Look at the tears of those who are oppressed; they have no one to comfort them. Power is with those who oppress them; they have no one to comfort them.**

When you hear about human rights violations on the news that is one thing. But if you take the time to do what the Preacher says here and really take a hard look at their tears - take the time to consider what life is like for them, it is overwhelming. Many of us have done that with Pastor Saeed in Iran – we have given thought to what it is like for him. But he is just one of millions who are being treated in horrific ways. In Somalia they take their little girls - 95% of little girls ages 4 to 11 undergo the savage and barbaric act of female genital mutilation. Children in Uganda are kidnapped by the LRA, forced to murder their parents, and beaten with 50 strokes of the cane if they took too long to do it. Those showing nervousness are shot. The unspeakable atrocities of human trafficking and the sex trade and the unbelievable beatings those girls undergo immediately after being kidnapped. There are horrors that go on that are too painful for us to even think about. And these people have no one to turn to. The power is in the hands of the oppressors. The justice system totally fails them.

## Judgment Day

How do we explain that? If God is in control, what are we to make of the wickedness of man and the horrible things man does? What is the right way to think about evil and sin and injustice when it comes to this doctrine of the sovereignty of God? We know for sure that God is sovereign over everything that ever takes place, and we know that God is not guilty of causing evil. How those two things fit together is, from what I can tell, beyond the human mind's ability to comprehend. But if you want to know the right way to think about things like injustice and oppression, here it is:

**17 I said to myself, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, since there is a time for every activity and every work."**

How do we square the whole "God makes everything beautiful in its time" principle with the problem of injustice and oppression? By focusing on the fact that God will judge every evil, reward all righteousness, and make all injustices right someday. And His timing in when He does it is perfect and beautiful. That is where our mind should go when we think about injustice.

And so whether you are the one being oppressed or you are doing the oppressing - either way the conclusion is the same: fear God. If you are mistreating people and taking advantage of them, be afraid of Judgment Day. And if you are being mistreated or abused, you need to realize - human beings are not going to be much help. The only one who can help you is God, so He should matter more to you than anything else. Whether you are rescued or left at the mercy of evil people depends totally on what God decides, and so you want to be on good terms with Him. You want to take Him seriously and make it your goal to please Him and avoid dishonoring Him at all costs. He is your only hope, so live in fear of Him.

## What about Death?

So when it comes to enjoying life by fearing God, the existence of evil seems to be a problem. So the Preacher shows us the right way to think about that – focus on God's ultimate justice that will come on Judgment Day and put your hope in that. But now there is another problem – another reality that would seem to throw a wrench in this philosophy of enjoying life by fearing God: death. Death, and all the hard things that go with it – sickness and disease and the decay and corruption of our bodies – how do you enjoy life when death is a reality?

## Just as Mortal as Animals

He is not going to shy away from that one either. He has already brought up the topic of death a few times, and now in verse 18 he brings it up again with brutal honesty. The Holman translates verse 18 in little bit of an odd way.

**18 I said to myself, “This happens concerning people, so that God may test them...**

The phrase “This happens” is not in the Hebrew, and no other version translates it that way. A more literal translation is simply this:

**18 I said to myself, “Concerning people, God tests them that they may see that they are like animals.”**

How is that? In what way are we like the animals?

**19 For the fate of people and the fate of animals is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; they all have the same breath. People have no advantage over animals since everything is futile.**

Not only are we mortal - we are just as mortal as the animals. Does that mean we are animals? No. If we were just another species of animal then it would not make any sense to say we are similar to the animals. Human beings are not animals. But we are similar. How? Are we like animals in every way? No, just in this one way that he mentions, namely, the fact that animals and people **have the same breath**. That is the word RUACH. It can be translated breath, wind, or spirit. Here they translate it **breath** because it is talking about our life breath. It is what animates your body. Think about it - what is it that makes a body alive? Is it just the right mix of chemicals and proteins and all the various physical components of your body? No, because one minute after you die all those components are still there. You have all the DNA and proteins and cells and everything, and yet obviously something is very different one minute after death as compared to one minute before death. Scripture refers to that difference as our life breath. It is the difference between a dead body and a living body. And the point here is we have the same life breath as animals. We are just as vulnerable to becoming dead as they are. When it comes to the biggest problem we face (mortality), we have zero advantage over the animals. If an animal takes a bullet to the head, it dies. If a human being, made in the image of God, takes a bullet to the head, he dies. If you see a rat running around, it is just a matter of time before the life span of that thing is over and that little body will stop moving and start rotting. That is how it is with rats, and that is how it is with kings and movie stars and you.

**20 All are going to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust. 21 Who knows if the spirit of people rises upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?**

The way that verse is translated is a bit misleading I think. It is the same word (RUACH), but for some reason instead of translating it the way they did in verse 19 (**breath**), they translate it **spirit**. I don't see any good reason to assume a change of meaning. He is still talking about life breath.

Verse 21 is troubling to us at first glance because we have this concept in our heads that when a person dies, his soul either goes up to heaven or down to hell. But that is not what the writer has in mind here. In the Old Testament, death is always pictured as going down - even for believers. We all go down into the grave.

So what does it mean to have your breath go up or down to the earth? I am convinced it is talking about living as opposed to dying. If your breath goes up that means you are still on your feet. You are still alive. But if it goes down into the grave, then you are dead. I'll give you an example:

**Proverbs 15:24 The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave.**

Instead of going down to the grave he goes upward. So the point is not that he is saying, “Who knows if animals go two different places after we die?” That would be a flat out contradiction of what he just said.

## **20 All are going to the same place; all come from dust, and all return to dust.**

There is no question where we go when we die (in this life) - we all go down to the grave, six feet under. That is established. What you don't know is if you are going to go first or your dog. If a man rides a horse into battle, he has no way of knowing if he will come back and the horse will be killed in battle, or if it will be the other way around. It could easily go either way. (In fact, horses are actually a little tougher. Human beings are really pretty fragile critters if you think about it.) And whether you outlive your pets or not, eventually you are going to stop breathing someday.

## **You're Going to Die, so...**

“Darrell, this sermon is not helping me enjoy life at this point.”

Is this morbid? Is it morbid and joy-killing to think about the fact that we are going to die? Is the solution for us to just put death out of our mind? That is what most people do. Most people just live as though death is not an issue. We don't like to think about it, so we just pretend it is never going to happen to us. And when it does happen to someone we love we are shocked and stunned - even though death is the most certain thing there is! It is the most certain of all realities in this life. The death rate in the United States - despite all the medical advancements, has not changed. It is still one each. Every one of us is going to die. And yet, if you bring that topic up in conversation, people are horrified. On Thursday I went to the dentist. I was behind on my sermon, so I had my computer on my lap during the procedure so when she left the room or was doing something else, I could get a little work done. So at one point she leaves the room, I open up my laptop, and when she walks back in she sees the heading I had for this section. And at that time it was, “You're Gonna Die!” in giant red letters across the top of the screen. She walks in and sees that and says, “Oh, wow. That's...” and she didn't know what to say. I explained to her that I was working on a sermon on Ecclesiastes and it was a passage about death. And she said, “Oh, well, I hope we don't die.” And I said, “Well, we're all going to die.” And she said, “Well yeah, but hopefully not right now.” And I was happy to agree with her on that point. The idea that we are all going to die is the most certain reality in the world, and yet it is a shocking and offensive thought to most people because the way most people deal with the threat of death is simply by putting it out of their mind.

So why does Solomon bring this up? If his objective is for us to enjoy life, why have a whole section on how we are all going to die like animals? Is he going to point us to the hope of the resurrection? No. That is our great hope, for sure. But that is not what Solomon is talking about here. His focus in this book is about life under the sun - this life - life in a cursed, fallen, futile world. How do you enjoy life under the sun when you know you are going to die like an animal? What does he say? What is Solomon's conclusion?

**22 I have seen that there is nothing better than for a person to enjoy his activities because that is his reward. For who can enable him to see what will happen after he dies?**

## **...in the Meantime, Live!**

Solomon wants us to enjoy life under the sun, but one of the things that will hinder that - make life impossible to enjoy, is if we forget about death. Why? Because what we will do is waste our whole life saying, “I'll be happy when...”

“I'll be happy when I get this income, when I get married, when I finish school, when I...”

Our hope is always in that next thing and the next and the next. I'll be happy when I hit that next stage of life. Right now I don't really have time to serve God or enjoy His gifts. Right now I need to scramble to reach my goals, and then I will get serious about God. And it is always that next stage of life.

And then when we finally get older and the next stage does not seem as appealing, we want to accumulate way more money than we will need so we don't cut it close in our retirement years. And we want to make a difference and make our mark so we have a lasting legacy. None of that is wrong within the bounds of wisdom and pleasing God, but when it becomes your hope, you will find that you get to the end of your life and you forgot to *live!* You try to make yourself bigger than you are, and take up a space in the timeline of history that is bigger than the lifespan God gave you, and life becomes an exercise in futility. You will work too many hours, and you will neglect relationships, and become proud and mistreat people, and all for what? Nothing! You reached all your goals, but for what? Once you are in the grave someone might come and just undo all the work you did. Where does it get you?

So I think Solomon's point here is simply this: You are going to die, so in the meantime – live! We are all going to die like animals, but until that happens we have some time to kill, so let's live! Live life to the fullest. Enjoy life through the fear of God. When Solomon brings up death it is not to make you depressed. His purpose is joy! He wants you to enjoy life, but he knows that if you take the typical head-in-the-sand approach to death and just refuse to think about it, you will ruin the little bit of time you do have on this earth. You will live like there is always a tomorrow, and that is not the path toward joy because it tends to blind you to what can be enjoyed today.

### ***Acknowledging Reality***

Does that mean you go through life giggling 24/7? Several times in this study the question has come up about sorrow. Solomon is telling us to just trust God and enjoy the ride in life - but what about times of sorrow? Is Solomon living in a fantasy world? Does he not understand reality? No one is more honest about the harsh reality of sorrow than Solomon.

**Ecclesiastes 4:1 Look at the tears of those who are oppressed; they have no one to comfort them. ... 2 So I admired the dead, who have already died, more than the living, who are still alive. 3 But better than either of them is the one who has not yet existed, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.**

He comes right back to that. He has to, because telling us to enjoy life because God makes everything beautiful in its time is meaningless if he does not deal with the elephant in the room – namely, suffering and evil! There are things people go through in life that are so incredibly painful that they literally wish they were dead. And it happens to millions of people all day every day all over the world. When Solomon tells us to enjoy life, he is not naive about our hardships. And he is not telling you to paint on a smile in times when it is appropriate to weep.

Remember, this is wisdom literature. It is proverbial. These are general principles, not absolute rules. Of course there are times for weeping, but generally speaking, life is filled with moments that could be enjoyed. That is a gift from God, and the man or woman who ignores those is a fool. God did not provide them to be ignored.

## **God's Purpose Trumps Man's**

And I realize that still sounds to some of you like a contradiction. How can you enjoy life as coming from the hand of a good, loving God while at the same time acknowledging the wickedness of men who sin against you as being real wickedness? Because if it is appropriate to be distressed over the evil things that are done to me, and I have lots and lots of really evil things being done to me all the time, how can I also enjoy life in general?

### **Two Actors**

One answer to that question is to remind ourselves about Judgment Day when God will make it all right. But that is not the only solution.

But there is more to it. Thinking about God making all things right someday should be the hope that carries us through hardship. But it is also crucial that we remember that God has made all things beautiful in their time, which points both to His control and His goodness. It is essential that we have that perspective – even when people sin against you. In fact, *especially* when people sin against you. When horrible things happen to you, there are two things taking place. On the one hand, evil people are doing evil things. On the other hand, God is doing beautiful things ... in the *same* action. It is not just that God comes after the fact and makes it eventually work out for good. He plans it and orchestrates it from the very start for a good purpose.

### ***The Life of Joseph***

We read in Genesis about a young man who seemed to have a very promising life. God was blessing him more than all the people around him, and he really had a lot going for himself. But then something terrible happened. His family became so envious of him that they began to hate him. They rejected him, and treated him horribly. They ended up selling him into slavery. Imagine yourself being sold to human traffickers – not kidnapped by traffickers, but sold by your own family into the slave trade, and taken away to a foreign country where you become the slave. And then things get even worse. You try to honor God and be the best slave you can and you continue to follow His way and obey His commands, and because you do that, you end up being unjustly accused and thrown into prison. You have no legal counsel, no way to make an appeal, no hope of ever getting out of this horrible prison the rest of your life. Year after slow, agonizing year creeps by, and you are just wasting away in this horrible prison – all because you obeyed God and wicked people didn't like it.

Joseph's brothers did all that to him, but years later, when he was in a position of power and they came to him for help, look what he said:

#### **Genesis 50:20 You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.**

What does that mean, **God meant it for good**? If you have read the book of Genesis, you know exactly what that means. God gives Joseph the ability to interpret dreams, and eventually uses that to bring Joseph to Pharaoh, he interprets the dreams about the coming famine, and Pharaoh makes him second-in-command in Egypt so Joseph can store up food to carry the nation through the famine. And God did all this, not so much to rescue the Egyptians from the famine, but to rescue the people of God. The Jewish nation was just one family at this time, and that family would have died out in this famine. But many years ahead of time God began carrying out this elaborate plan to bring Joseph to the right position at the right time to save the Jewish nation, which would someday bring the Messiah into the world to bring salvation to all of mankind.

So God meant it for good – the good of saving God's people from dying out in a famine. But let's ask another question – God meant it for good – meant *what* for good? What was it, exactly, that God intended for good?

#### **Genesis 50:15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"**

They are scared to death that Joseph is going to kill them because of all the wrongs they had done to him. Now skip down to verse 19.

#### **19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended it for evil, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**

So, what was it exactly that God intended for good? It was all the wrongs that his brothers did against him. All those sins they committed against him. Mocking him, mistreating him, throwing him down a well, attempting to kill him, selling him into slavery – all those horrible wicked sins that "ruined" Joseph's life, God *intended*. What does "intended" mean? It means God did it, and He did it on purpose – for a particular reason. God appoints and determines every season and time in your life – including mistreatment. It is not that the brothers just did it, and God came along afterward and tried to make the

best of a bad situation. That is not what Romans 8:28 means when it says God works all things together for good for us. That does not mean God is hands off, lets evil men do their thing, then comes along afterward and tries to patch things up and put a good spin on it. It means He intends those things. God plans them. God causes them to happen to you.

“But how could God cause it to happen to me if it’s sin? Wouldn’t that make God guilty of sin?”

No. God is the author of the action, but not the evil part of the action because God is only doing good. In the exact same action, human beings are doing something evil while God is doing something good.

Imagine you get infected with a rare, virus that will eat out your internal organs in a matter of hours causing an agonizing death. But you don’t know you have this virus yet. The symptoms have just begun, so at this point you just have a little stomach ache. It gets worse, so you go to the hospital, and they run some tests. There are two doctors working on you. One of them is a believer, but the other one hates Christians and wants to kill you. So his plan is to fill a syringe with poison and inject you with it.

Meanwhile the other doctor figures out that you have this disease, and he finds the only medicine that will cure you. It is a compound that would normally kill a person, but in this case, because of the disease, it will actually save your life. So he gives it to the bad doctor, knowing that the bad doctor wants to kill you. So the bad doctor takes what he thinks will kill you, puts it into a syringe, and injects you with it, and much to the chagrin of that bad doctor, it ends up saving your life.

So, two doctors – both did exactly the same thing. They both are responsible for you being injected with this chemical. But when all the facts come out, the bad one goes to jail and the good one is rewarded as a hero. Why? They both did the exact same action. Why is one punished and the other rewarded? Because it is possible, in the exact same action, for one person to mean it for good and actually accomplish good, and the other to mean it for evil.

When someone at church gossips about you and betrays your friendship, that person is doing evil. Is God involved? Yes, He is causing the whole thing. Why? Because He wants you to suffer? Because He wants you to experience pain? No, because this poison that the person is giving you is something that God knows will ultimately benefit you. Being gossiped about and betrayed by a friend at that point in your life is exactly what will turn out to be the best thing that could have happened to you, and God knows that, and so like that good doctor He gives you exactly what is best for you, but He allows an evil person to administer the medicine. So how can God punish that evil person? He can and will because that person did not intend good. They intended evil, and so they deserve to be punished, even though what they did will end up being for your benefit.

When your husband treats you harshly and is insensitive or unfaithful or somehow really hurts you – who is behind that? It is God. It is bitter tasting medicine, but God knows this hardship in your life at this moment is exactly what will be best for you. You can’t see it now, but it will turn out to be the best thing that could have happened for you. When your wife is unreasonable and gets angry at you again, and makes your live seem like hell on earth – that is medicine from God that is going to turn out to be best thing for you. When you lose your job, when your boss tells you off in front of everyone, when your parents are unfair, when your kids disobey you, when someone scams you out of some money, when harsh words are spoken to you, when nobody is there for you in your time of need – those are all things that human beings are intending as evil, but every single one of them is medicine from a good doctor that is exactly what is best for you at that moment.

## **The 10 to 1 Ratio**

Now, all of that is the sovereignty of God 101. That is just basic. But just knowing that is not enough. There are many Christians that believe all that with all their heart, and yet they are still filled with anxiety and frustration and anger when people do evil things to them. Why? Because even though God intends it for good, the reality is – those evil people still intend it for evil. How do you get past that? Yes, God meant all the hardships that happened to Joseph for good, but that does not change the fact that Joseph’s own brothers intentionally did horrible things to him for the purpose of harming him. So how



does Joseph not get angry with them? How does he not become bitter? He knows they meant it for evil – he says that in verse 20 - **You meant it for evil**. What keeps Joseph from saying, “God, I love You for the good You did, but I’m so angry at them for the evil they intended”? All these years with no apology, or any effort to come rescue him. They are not one bit repentant or sorry until now when they need food. Years in prison, and yet bitterness never sets in.

**21 So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.**

How can he do that? How can he not be bitter toward them for what they did? Here’s how: (Please, listen very carefully to this. This is a principle you are going to need every day of your life, and understanding it could mean the difference between a miserable life of anger and bitterness and a happy life of joy and enjoyment of God’s gifts.) The reason Joseph had love for them and was not angry or bitter was because when he looked at those two realities: that they meant it for evil and God meant it for good, that second one totally eclipsed the first one in his thinking. The good that God was doing meant more to Joseph than the evil they were doing.

If your spouse does something that really hurts you, and it puts you into a bad mood, what does that mean? It means the evil your spouse intended means more to you than the good God intended. If Satan causes the wind to blow a door shut and it slams on my fingers, and that makes me mad, what does that mean? It means the evil Satan intended means more to me than the good God intended and carried out. The good thing God did for me in that trial is small in my eyes, and the evil thing Satan was doing is huge in my eyes. So in essence I am saying Satan matters more than God. If you are bitter toward your spouse, it is because in that area your spouse matters more than God.

You see, it is not enough to just know that the good doctor was giving you life-saving medicine and the evil doctor was trying to hurt you. That, in itself, won’t keep you from bitterness and anger. You have to also care more about what the good doctor is doing than what the bad doctor is doing.

“How do I do that? How do I make the good things God is doing matter more to me than the evil things people are doing to me?”

It is hard because you can see the evil part, but most of the time you cannot see the good that God is doing. So how do you come to the point where invisible good matters more to you than obvious evil? What should you do if you think about the good God is doing and it only has a tiny impact on your emotions, and you think about the evil people are doing and it has a huge impact on your emotions? When that happens, it means your soul is not really persuaded that the good is really all that good. And the only way to change that is to spend more time focusing your attention on the beauty of the goodness of God in what He is doing than you spend thinking about the evil.

People think they don’t have control over how they feel, but that is not really true. You have control over what you spend your time thinking about, and how you think about it – and that is what determines your emotions. How did Joseph make it through all those years in prison without becoming bitter? Maybe he did it by having ten thoughts about the good God was doing for every one thought of the evil that people were doing. He had no way of knowing what that good could possibly be, so he had to rely totally on faith – trusting that God only does good things. But I think that is what Solomon is teaching us to do here in Ecclesiastes. He wants us to enjoy life – not by pretending evil is not evil, but by choosing to spend more of our mental energy focusing on God’s part, because God’s part matters so much more than man’s part. Do we deny that there are horrible injustices taking place? No, we acknowledge that, and we spend whatever time is necessary to deal with that. But as soon as possible we return to thinking about the beauty of God’s purposes, so that we can get back to enjoying His goodness. And if God really does matter more to us than people, then that is reflected in how much time I focus my attention on God’s goodness and the beauty of His plan than on the evil people are doing. Remember, fearing God means God matters to you. And if God matters more to you than people do, then you will spend far more time thinking about what He is intending in this trial than about what they are intending.

If you are upset and full of anxiety because of how someone has treated you or is treating you, I want to urge you to adopt what I call the 10 to 1 ratio. Ten thoughts about the good God is doing, for every one thought of the evil that people are doing.

“But I don’t know what is good about what God is doing.”

You don’t have to. All you have to know is that God only does good things. So those ten thoughts about God are going to be thoughts about His nature – what He is like. And about His deeds in the past – all the wonderful things Scripture shows us about His goodness in the past. And the wonderful things He promises to do in the future, and in the present. You don’t have to know why a person does something as long as you fully trust that person to do good. The only time you need to see the good is if you don’t really trust the person. So ten thoughts about God’s goodness, wisdom, trustworthiness, beauty and love for every one thought about the evil that the person is doing. That will enable you to trust and fear God. And from there, be alert to every detail of life that can be enjoyed, and receive that enjoyment from God in a way that increases your love for Him. And you will have a joyful, God-glorifying life.

**Benediction: 1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.**

## James 1:25 Questions

- 1) Of the hardships in your life, which are the easiest to see as coming from God’s hand? Which are the hardest?
- 2) Ask the group to help you find a passage of Scripture to write on a card to carry with you that will help remind you, in those times when it is hard to see a hardship as coming from God, that the good God is doing is more worthy of your thoughts and attention than the evil the person is doing.