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In the Hands of the Almighty

Living Wisely Under the Sovereignty of God — Ecclesiastes 8:1–9:12

✦ The Controller who let Go!

On **April 13, 1970, 200,000 miles from earth**, the **oxygen tank in Apollo 13's service module exploded**.

The mission was lost. The question was whether the crew would survive. **Flight director Gene Kranz**, who had never failed a mission, faced the most complex problem in human spaceflight with inadequate equipment, inadequate time, and inadequate information.

What made Kranz exceptional was not his intellect or his experience. It was his capacity to act decisively within the limits of what he actually controlled and to release completely what he could not control.

'Failure is not an option' is what people remember.

What Kranz actually believed is less quoted: ***'You work the problem you have, not the problem you wish you had. And you trust the design.'***

Ecclesiastes 8–9 is the Preacher's most sustained

meditation on this exact dynamic.

There are things genuinely within human agency and things genuinely beyond it, and wisdom is knowing the difference and trusting the Designer who governs what lies beyond the boundary of human control.

I. Wisdom in the Face of Power.

The Shining Face of Wisdom.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:1,** *"Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed."*

The Preacher opens the chapter with an observation about the transformative effect of wisdom on the face that wisdom *'makes his face shine*.'

This is a biblical image of divine reflection.

Moses's face shone after being in the presence of God (**Exodus 34:29**).

The wise person who has been in the presence of wisdom bears its mark visibly.

'Who knows the interpretation of a thing?'

The Hebrew word (***pesher***) means the explanation or meaning behind something. It is the same root used in **Daniel** for interpreting dreams.

The wise person is the one who can read a situation and explain what is really going on.

'The sternness of his face is changed.'

Wisdom softens the hard, harsh face. The wise person is not grim, rigid, or defensive. Wisdom brings a brightness and a gentleness that others can see.

> **Exodus 34:29,** *"Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him."*

Moses did not know that his face shone. True wisdom is never self-advertising.

The radiance came from time spent in God's presence, not from effort to look wise. The face that shines is the face that has been with God.

Honouring authority without surrendering conscience.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:2–4,** *"I say, 'Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. 3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, For he does whatever pleases him.' 4 Where*

> *the word of a king is, there is power; And who may say to him, 'What are you doing?'"*

The counsel about authority is sophisticated and realistic. Three principles.

- **Honour your oath to God by honouring legitimate authority.** The oath to God is the ground, not the king's rights.
- **Know when to stay.** Patience with difficult authorities rather than hasty departure.
- **Know where the line is.** *'Do not stand for an evil thing'*. There is a moral boundary that even royal authority cannot cross.

V 4 explains why this wisdom is needed.

'Where the word of a king is, there is power.'

The king's word carries force, and no subject can call him to account. The wise person does not pretend that power is harmless, but he respects its reach and chooses his words and his battles carefully.

> **Daniel 1:8,** *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."*

Daniel's response to Nebuchadnezzar is the most precise biblical illustration of **Ecclesiastes 8:1–9**.

- He honoured the king's authority.
- He did not simply walk out, rebel, or protest publicly.
- He navigated the system with wisdom.

But he maintained his line, *'he would not defile himself.*'

The wisdom that made his face shine was the wisdom that knew where the limit was and held it with dignity.

> **Acts 5:29,** *"But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"*

The apostles show the same boundary in the New Testament.

Submission to human authority is the normal pattern of the believer's life. But when a human command collides with God's command, the oath to God (8:2) takes priority.

A Time and Judgment for every matter.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:5–7,** *"He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment, ⁶ Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, Though the misery of man increases greatly. ⁷ For he does not know what will be; So who can tell him when it will be?"*

Wisdom is not only knowing *what* to do but *when* and *how* to do it.

'Time and judgment' mean the right moment and the right way. The wise heart does not act on impulse, but it reads the moment and chooses the fitting response.

This echoes **Ecclesiastes 3:1**, *'To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.'*

Yet **V 6–7** add a sobering note.

Human misery is heavy, and no one knows what will be or when it will come.

Even the wisest person cannot see the future. He can only act wisely in the present and trust God with what he cannot see.

> **Nehemiah 2:4–5,** *"Then the king said to me, 'What do you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. [5] And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'"*

Nehemiah is a living picture of **Ecclesiastes 8:5**.

He carried his burden for Jerusalem for months before he spoke. When the king finally asked, he prayed first, then answered with respect and clarity.

The right request, at the right time, in the right way before the right authority. That is a heart that *'discerns both time and judgment.'*

II. The Four things beyond Human Control.

The Limits of Human Power.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:8,** *"No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it."*

The Preacher catalogues four absolute limits of human power.

- **The breath** (***ruach*** wind, spirit, life). No one can hold on to the spirit when it departs.
- **The day of death.** No one can postpone the appointment.
- **The time of war.** There is no discharge from that battle, soldiers could be released from earthly service, but not from this one.
- **Deliverance through wickedness.** Evil cannot rescue those who trust in it.

Whatever power a person accumulates, these four remain beyond them.

The list is designed to calibrate human ambition precisely. Not to crush it but to locate its actual scope.

Human agency is real, significant, and worth investing in fully. But it operates within a defined sphere, and the boundaries of that sphere are non-negotiable.

> **Proverbs 16:9,** *"A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."*

The man plans genuinely, actively, with real investment and real responsibility. But the Lord directs the final outcomes belong to the One who set the four limits of Ecclesiastes 8:8.

This is not fatalism, but the most psychologically liberating posture available to a finite creature.

Invest fully in what is yours to do and release fully what is not.

> *The revelatory insight of Ecclesiastes 8:8 is that the four things beyond human control are precisely the four things humans spend the most energy trying to control.*
>
> *We invest enormous resources*
>
> *in extending life (the day of death),*
> *in managing conflict (the time of war),*
> *in protecting our freedom (the spirit), and*
> *in using moral compromises to secure our position (wickedness as a deliverer).*
>
> *God says: none of these are yours. The fear of God is the*

release from the futile effort to control the uncontrollable.

Power that destroys its holder.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:9,** *"All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt."*

The Preacher sums up his observation of power. There are times when one person rules over another *'to his own hurt.'*

The Hebrew can be read both ways.

The ruler harms those under him, and the ruler ultimately harms himself. Both are true.

Power used for oppression wounds the oppressed, but it also corrodes the one who wields it. The tyrant is never as free as he appears.

> **Esther 7:10,** *"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided."*

Haman is the perfect illustration of **Ecclesiastes 8:9**.

He used his position to plot the destruction of Mordecai and the Jewish people. The very gallows he built for another became his own.

Power that is used to hurt others eventually turns on the one who holds it.

III. When the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

The wicked praised and forgotten.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:10,** *"Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity."*

The Preacher watches the funeral of wicked people who had been regular visitors to the *'place of holiness'* religious in appearance, corrupt in practice.

They received an honourable burial. Their deeds were quickly forgotten, and the city carried on as if nothing had happened.

Many ancient versions read *'praised'* rather than *'forgotten'* the wicked were even commended at their funerals.

Either way the point is the same.

Religious respectability can hide a wicked life, and the world often fails to tell the difference. *'This also is vanity.'*

> **Proverbs 10:7,** *"The memory of the righteous is blessed, But the name of the wicked will rot."*

Proverbs supply the long view.

The city may praise or forget the wicked in the short term, but God keeps the true record. In the end, only the righteous leave a blessed memory.

Delayed Justice emboldens sin.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:11,** *"Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."*

Here is a profound insight into human nature. When punishment is delayed, people conclude that it will never come.

The heart becomes *'fully set'* literally *'full'* to do evil. Delay is misread as permission.

This is true in the courts, in families, and in our own hearts. Every sin that seems to go unpunished makes the next one easier.

> **2 Peter 3:9,** *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."*

Peter explains the delay the Preacher observes.

God's slowness to judge is not weakness or indifference. It is mercy time given for repentance.

The tragedy of **Ecclesiastes 8:11** is that people treat God's patience as an opportunity to sin, when it was given as an opportunity to turn back.

It will be well with those who fear God.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:12–13,** *"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked; Nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, Because he does not fear before God."*

This is one of the great statements of faith in the book.

The Preacher admits what he sees a sinner may do evil *'a hundred times'* and still live long. But he sets against it what he knows: *'yet I surely know.'*

- Sight says the wicked are winning.
- Faith says it will be well with those who fear God.

The wicked man's days are *'as a shadow'* long in the evening, but without substance, and gone when the light fades.

> **Psalm 37:1–2,** *"Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. 2 For they shall soon be*

cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb."

David gives the same counsel from a pastoral angle.

Do not fret. Do not envy. The prosperity of the wicked is as short lived as summer grass.

The Vanity that cannot be explained.

Ecclesiastes 8:14, *"There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity."*

This is the Preacher's most direct engagement with the problem of **theodicy,** the justice of God in the face of apparent injustice. He is brutally honest. He cannot explain it.

- The righteous suffer as though wicked.
- The wicked prosper as though righteous.

This is the observation that has tested the faith of every thoughtful person who has lived for more than a few years with their eyes open.

The Preacher's response is not philosophical resolution but theological confidence. **8:12**, *'Yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God'.*

He holds both truths simultaneously.

The apparent injustice is real and cannot be explained, and the God who governs all things is good and will ultimately set them right.

> **Psalm 73:1–3,16–18,** *"Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me — until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end."*

Asaph's Psalm 73 is the most extended biblical parallel to **Ecclesiastes 8:14**.

His feet almost slipped the apparent prosperity of the wicked was more than he could intellectually process.

The resolution came not from argument but from encounter, *'I went into the sanctuary of God.'*

In the presence of God, the long perspective replaced the short one.

The prosperity of the wicked was seen for what it is temporary, unstable, *'set in slippery places'* (73:18). The apparent injustice of 8:14 is not eternal.

IV. Joy Commended, Mystery Accepted.

The Commendation of Joy.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:15,** *"So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labour all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun."*

After wrestling with injustice he cannot solve, the Preacher does not sink into bitterness. He *'commends enjoyment.'*

This is not the careless hedonism of the rich fool in **Luke 12:19**, who said *'eat, drink, and be merry'* while forgetting God.

The Preacher's joy is received *'all the days of his life which God gives him.'*

God is the Giver, and the gift is received with gratitude.

Joy is the believer's answer to unanswered questions. We cannot fix every injustice, but we can faithfully receive every good gift.

> **1 Timothy 6:17,** *"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy."*

Paul confirms the Preacher's theology of joy.

God *'gives us richly all things to enjoy.'*

Enjoyment is not a distraction from faith that it is one of the ways faith responds to a generous God.

The Unsearchable Work of God.

> **Ecclesiastes 8:16–17,** *"When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, [17] then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labours to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it."*

The Preacher searched day and night, losing sleep in the effort to understand what God is doing in the world.

His conclusion is repeated three times.

Man *'cannot find out,' 'will not find it,' 'will not be able to find it.'*

Even the wise man who claims to know is mistaken. The full pattern of God's work is beyond human discovery.

This is not a failure of the intellect. It is the proper recognition of the difference between the Creator and the creature.

> **Romans 11:33,** *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"*

Paul reaches the same conclusion, but it leads him to worship rather than frustration.

What the Preacher experiences as a limit, Paul celebrates as glory. The God whose ways we cannot trace is the God whose wisdom we can trust.

V. In the Hand of God.

Held, not Abandoned.

> **Ecclesiastes 9:1,** *"For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them."*

This verse is the heart of the whole passage, and the source of this message's title.

Having admitted that he cannot understand God's work, the Preacher declares what he *can* know: *'the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God.'*

The *'hand'* in Scripture speaks of power, possession, and protection. The righteous are not left to chance or to the whims of kings. They are held.

'People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.' You cannot read God's favour from your circumstances.

- Prosperity does not prove His love.
- Adversity does not prove His anger.

This frees the believer from constantly interpreting every blessing and every trial as a verdict from heaven.

> **John 10:28–29,** *"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. [29] My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."*

Jesus takes the Preacher's confession and fills it with gospel certainty.

The Preacher knew the righteous are *'in the hand of God.'* Jesus reveals that it is a double grip that the hand of the Son and the hand of the Father and that no power can break it.

> *We cannot always see what God is doing, but we can always know where we are. The four things beyond our control (8:8), the injustice we cannot explain (8:14), the work of God we cannot find out (8:17) all of it lies outside our hands. But we ourselves lie inside His. That is what it means to live in the hands of the Almighty.*

VI. The Universal Destiny.

One event happens to all.

> **Ecclesiastes 9:2–3,** *"All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. ³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead."*

The Preacher returns to his most difficult observation: death treats everyone equally. *'One event happens to all.'*

The observant and the irreverent, the moral and the immoral, the faithful and the faithless all die.

This is not a theological complaint about God. It is an observation about the current order of creation that awaits its final redemption.

> **1 Corinthians 15:21–22,** *"For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."*

Paul's resurrection theology is the New Testament answer to the 'one event for all' problem. *'As in Adam all die'* this is **Ecclesiastes 9:2–3**.

The universal fate the Preacher observes is real. But *'in Christ all shall be made alive'* the universal fate is not the final word.

- Death is real.
- Resurrection is true.

The playing field that death seems to level is restored to genuine distinction by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Madness in the Heart.

V 3 goes deeper than death. The real problem is not only that all die, but that *'the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil.'*

'Madness is in their hearts while they live.' Knowing that death is coming, people still live as if it were not. That is the madness irrational, self-destructive choices made by people who know the end.

- Death is the symptom.
- The corrupted heart is the disease.

> **Jeremiah 17:9,** *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"*

Jeremiah gives the diagnosis that the Preacher describes.

The human heart is not merely weak, but it is deceitful. It is why we need not only a better example but a new heart (**Ezekiel 36:26**).

A living dog is better than a dead lion.

> **Ecclesiastes 9:4–6,** *"But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. [5] 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. [6] Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun."*

In the ancient world, the dog was a despised scavenger, and the lion was the king of beasts. Yet the Preacher says the lowliest living creature is better off than the noblest dead one.

Why?

Because *'for him who is joined to all the living there is hope.'* Life means opportunity to repent, to love, to work, to believe.

'The living know that they will die.'

Even the knowledge of death is an advantage, because it can make us wise (**Psalm 90:12**).

'The dead know nothing' is spoken from the perspective of *'under the sun.'*

The dead have no more share in the affairs of this world no more reward, no more influence, no more opportunity. The Preacher is not giving a full doctrine of the afterlife he is urging the living to use the time they have.

> **2 Corinthians 6:2,** *"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."*

Paul turns the Preacher's observation into an evangelistic appeal.

The living has hope because the door of grace is still open. The time to respond to God is now, while we are *'joined to all the living.'*

VII. The Command to Live.

Eat, drink, dress, and love with Joy.

> **Ecclesiastes 9:7–9,** *"Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do. 8 Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labour which you perform under the sun."*

In the face of death's universality, the Preacher does not counsel resignation or despair. He issues an imperative of joy.

Go, eat with joy, drink with a merry heart, live joyfully with your wife.

These are not consolation prizes for those who failed to achieve something great. They are the actual goods that God provides and approves ('God has already approved what you do').

'Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil.'

In a hot climate, white garments and anointing oil were the signs of celebration and festivity.

The Preacher is saying that let your life carry an atmosphere of gladness, not only on special days but *'always.'*

'The wife whom you love' marriage is presented as one of God's chief gifts under the sun, to be enjoyed faithfully all the days of life.

> **Proverbs 5:18,** *"Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth."*

Proverbs echo the same instruction. Faithful, joyful love in marriage is not a lesser calling. It is part of the portion God gives.

> *Here is the most revelatory positive teaching in Ecclesiastes: the command to enjoy ordinary life is not the Preacher's fallback position when bigger meaning fails. It is the primary content of what God is actually offering every day. The bread you eat with joy is not a distraction from the meaning question it is its answer.*
>
> *God gives bread.*
> *God gives a spouse.*
> *God gives honest work.*
>
> *Receiving these gifts with full attention and full gratitude is not settling for less than the extraordinary. It is the extraordinary.*

> **John 10:10,** *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*

Jesus is the fulfilment of the Preacher's call to live.

The Preacher could commend joy *'under the sun.'* Jesus offers abundant life that begins now and does not end at the grave.

The thief steals joy through sin, fear, and despair. Christ restores it not only in eternity, but in the ordinary bread, work, and love of today.

Whatever your hand finds to do.

> **Ecclesiastes 9:10,** *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going."*

The call to joy is joined to a call to wholehearted work.

'Whatever your hand finds to do' the task in front of you, the opportunity God places in your path today.

'Do it with your might' not half-heartedly, not with an eye on the clock, but fully.

The reason is urgent. In *'the grave'* (***Sheol***), the place of the dead, there is no more work, planning, knowledge, or wisdom. This life is the workshop; the opportunity will not return.

> **Colossians 3:23,** *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men."*

Paul lifts the Preacher's counsel to its highest motive.

We work with all our might not only because life is short, but because we work for the Lord. Every ordinary task becomes an offering.

> **John 9:4,** *"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."*

Jesus Himself lived by the urgency of **Ecclesiastes 9:10**.

The day of opportunity is limited. The night is coming. The wise use the daylight they have.

VIII. Time and Chance.

The Race is not to the Swift.

> **Ecclesiastes 9:11,** *"I returned and saw under the sun that— The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favour to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all."*

The Preacher lists five human advantages:

- **Speed:** the race is not always won by the swift.
- **Strength:** the battle is not always won by the strong.
- **Wisdom:** the wise do not always have bread.
- **Understanding:** the intelligent do not always become rich.
- **Skill:** the talented do not always win favour.

None of these guarantees the outcome.

'Time and chance happen to them all.'

'Chance' (***pega***) means an occurrence, an event that meets you. From below, it looks random. But the Preacher has already told us that the righteous are *'in the*

hand of God' (9:1). What is chance from man's perspective is providence from God's.

David, a shepherd boy with a sling, defeated Goliath, the champion of Gath. The battle was not to the strong.

This humbles the gifted and encourages the ordinary. Your gifts are real, but they are not your security.

> **Proverbs 16:33,** *"The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD."*

Proverbs answer the question of *'chance.'*

Even what appears to be the roll of the dice is governed by God. There is no such thing as pure chance in a universe ruled by the Almighty.

Caught like fish in a net.

> **Ecclesiastes 9:12,** *"For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them."*

The passage closes with a vivid image. A fish swims freely until the net closes. A bird feeds contentedly until the snare springs.

'Man also does not know his time.' Calamity, illness, loss, and death often come suddenly and without warning.

The point is not to live in fear, but to live ready. If we do not know our time, then today is the day to be right with God, to love our family, and to do with our might what our hand finds to do.

> **James 4:13–15,** *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; [14] whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. [15] Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"*

James applies **Ecclesiastes 9:12** to everyday planning.

Plan but plan humbly.
Work but hold your plans open before God.

'If the Lord wills' is not a religious phrase but it is the honest confession of a creature who does not know his time but knows the One who does.

> *Ecclesiastes 8–9 leaves us where Gene Kranz stood in Mission Control: working the problem we have with everything in our hands, and releasing what lies beyond our control. The race is not to the swift, the day of death is not in our power, and the work of God is past finding out.*

But the righteous and their works are in the hand of God. That is enough to eat our bread with joy and work with all our might.

Conclusion.

✦ The Last Letter of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

On **April 9, 1945 three weeks before** the end of **World War II** Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged at **Flossenbürg concentration camp.** He was **39 years old**. His crime was resistance to the Nazi regime.

In the months before his execution, from his prison cell, he wrote some of the most profound theological letters ever composed.

In one, he wrote to **his fiancée Maria**, *'I wonder if you know how deeply I feel the goodness of ordinary things. A good meal. Your letters. The small garden I can see from my window. These are not distractions from the big questions. They are the answers to the big questions. God is in them.'*

Bonhoeffer had found what the Preacher commends in Ecclesiastes 9:7–9. The capacity to receive ordinary gifts as extraordinary encounters with the God who gives them. In a death cell. With the certainty of execution approaching.

'God has already approved what you do' **(9:7).**

Bonhoeffer's meal in prison was as divinely approved as Solomon's feast in Jerusalem. The approval is not about the size of the gift. It is about the nature of the Giver.

What are the bread and wine of your life the ordinary, God-given goods that you are currently consuming without receiving?

QUESTIONS

Question	Discussion Focus
Daniel refused to cross his moral line even before a king with the power of death (**Daniel 1**). What is the line in your life the place where even the most compelling human authority cannot take you?	Identifying the non-negotiable in practical terms.
Psalm 73 says the resolution to the prosperity of the wicked came in the sanctuary. Have you ever experienced a shift in perspective in the presence of God that changed how you were viewing an injustice?	Testimonial: the sanctuary as the epistemological corrective.

Paul says 'in Christ all shall be made alive' (**1 Corinthians 15:22**) the resurrection is the answer to the 'one event for all.' How does the bodily resurrection of Jesus change the way you face your own mortality?	The resurrection as the theological answer to Ecclesiastes 9:2–3.
Bonhoeffer found extraordinary goodness in ordinary gifts from a death cell. What ordinary gifts are you currently receiving without full attention? What would it change to receive them with Bonhoeffer's intentionality?	The practice of gratitude as a form of theological reorientation.
Proverbs 16:9 says humans plan, but God directs. Where in your life are you trying to control what the Preacher says lies beyond human power? What would release look like?	The practical application of divine sovereignty over the uncontrollable.
Ecclesiastes 8:11 says	God's longsuffering as an

delayed judgment makes the heart 'fully set' to do evil. Where have you mistaken God's patience for permission?	invitation to repentance (**2 Peter 3:9**).
Ecclesiastes 9:1 says the righteous and their works are in the hand of God, and that we cannot read His love or hatred from our circumstances. How would believing this change the way you interpret your current trials?	Security in God's hand rather than in favourable circumstances.
Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, 'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.' What task in front of you right now deserves your full strength?	Wholehearted work as an offering to the Lord (**Colossians 3:23**).
Ecclesiastes 9:11 says the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Which of your gifts or advantages are you most tempted to trust in place of God?	Humility about human ability; trust in providence over 'chance.'