Formed, Not Fixed

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Preacher: Sam Bunnell

[0:00] How many of you have ever been to a macaroni grill? We got an amen on that one. We haven't gotten one amen during the whole service to this point.

! I'm just kidding. No, you have. Listen, macaroni grill is not bad. It's solid, right? If you give me an option between Olive Garden and macaroni grill, I'm going macaroni grill every time.
Okay. And that's nothing necessarily against Olive Garden. You know who's not choosing macaroni grill? Well, my lovely wife sitting right down here. She doesn't do macaroni grill.
She had, correct me if I'm wrong, she had one bad experience there when she was younger, and that place is dead to her forever. Which is interesting because I read this week that macaroni grill has gone from over 200 locations down to about 10 that are still open.
So apparently Holly's not alone, all right? But we do that. We form opinions quickly. Now, would you look down at yourself for a second?
[1:05] Where are you sitting right now? Why are you sitting there? Did you walk in the first Sunday and there was like a holy light around that seat and you're just drawn to it and you didn't dare move?

I don't know. But we form opinions quickly. We form habits slowly. And we don't even always realize that it's happening.
Because the truth is, if we tried to move you out of your spot, some of you might say, preacher, you move me out of this seat.
You might as well move me right on out of this church. Or maybe you move right on out of this church. Look, we do form habits and they just creep up on us sometimes.
How many of you have strong opinions about something now that you didn't care about 10 years ago? Yeah, that's right. Thank you. That was more of a rhetorical question, but I appreciate y'all participating.
[2:07] I do too. Yeah, awesome. You're a vocal crowd this morning. I love it. This is good. Before we had kids, I didn't care about car seats.

I didn't care about strollers. And then Austin came along and that was quite a while ago now, 11 years ago. And suddenly, I had strong opinions about car seats and strollers.
Whereas I could not give a rip before. And then all of a sudden, it mattered to me greatly. And I wanted to get the absolute best one that I could possibly afford. Which wasn't that great, but it was still as good as I could do, you know?
And so I researched and I did the comparisons and all this. And now, I once again don't care about car seats or strollers. They outgrew that stuff, man.
And they have a whole lot better technology now than they had 11 years ago. But it just, it doesn't resonate with me. I've moved on from that stage of life. We are, we all go through stages like that.
[3:18] And sometimes your political leanings or your sports teams or whatever you happen to have strong opinions about can morph over time. Truth is, we form opinions in seconds.

We form habits without noticing. We'll form political opinions after reading one headline. Have you noticed on social media sometimes, you see an article pop up and you go to comment on it and something pops up that says, do you want to read the article first?
That happened to me. I was going to comment on something. It was actually something I already knew about and I went to comment on it and it wasn't some crazy comment. Don't worry. But a little notification popped up.

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Would you like to click on the link and read the article before you go and comment on it? But you know, we do that. We form food preferences after one bad experience. Nobody has to teach us how to form reactions.
They just happen. Here's the truth. You never have to try to form your soul because it's already happening and it's been happening.
[4:35] I want to share a quote with you from Dallas Willard, which is one of my favorite authors on the topic of spiritual formation.

And that's what we're going to talk about today is spiritual formation. How is your spirit being formed? We know how our opinions are being formed.
We know how our feelings are being formed. We know how our preferences are being formed. But how is your spirit or your soul being formed?
We're going to talk about that. So Dallas Willard says this, everyone gets a spiritual formation. It's like education. Everybody gets an education.
It's just a matter of which one you get. What kind of an education do you get? Do you get, I think it was my grandfather who had a second grade education, but he went on to be a very, very successful businessman.
[5:33] Life provided the education that his schooling days missed. He had a, he grew up in a really, around the turn of the 20th century, the early 1900s, and went through a tough time in the Depression and all this.

So he had to drop out of school. He had to go work. He had to provide, help provide for his family. And so some of you have situations like that or you have situations in your family history like that. And life doesn't always provide you the school education that you would want it to. Maybe you wanted to go on to college and you didn't. Maybe you wanted to go on and get a master's degree and you didn't.
I'm getting ready to start my doctoral degree. So y'all pray for Holly during this time. Pray for me too if you think about it, but that's going to be fun. All right.
So this is a quote I wanted to get across to you. Everyone gets spiritual formation. It doesn't mean it's good. It doesn't mean it's correct.
[6:34] But you're all getting one. Your spirit is being formed. Your soul is being formed. And this leads us to the next quote. John Ortberg, another great writer on spiritual formation, said, Very often God's will for you will be, I want you to decide.

Isn't that frustrating when God does that? Isn't that irritating? It's like, God, just tell me what to do and I'll do it. He says, Nope. That's the whole point of spiritual formation. Is my spirit is forming your spirit on how to make choices according to my will.
So he says, I want you to decide. Because decision making is an indispensable part. You can't do away with it. Of character formation. God is primarily, watch this, in the character forming business, not the circumstance shaping business.
We would much rather God be in the circumstance shaping business, wouldn't we? We love that. When he just steps in and just fixes everything.
Often he doesn't because he's far more interested in forming our character rather than just shaping our circumstances. So this reframes our thinking.
[7:54] It reframes our view of God. It reframes our view of reality, of the life that we're living, of our decisions. We spend most of our time asking God to change our circumstances, but he's more interested in shaping our character.

How does he do that? Through decision making. Through tension. Through putting limits on things. Through moments that we didn't necessarily choose, but he's allowing us to go through it, to walk through it, to shape our character.
So we need wisdom for these decisions, don't we? Thankfully, we have books of wisdom in the Bible, and we've been working through one in Ecclesiastes.
So take your Bibles out. Let's go back to Ecclesiastes. The writer of Ecclesiastes was called Koheleth, or the teacher. He's called the teacher. We've identified him as King Solomon. Historically, the wisest man who ever lived, gained his wisdom from God. This is godly wisdom that Solomon had. We're going to go to chapter 7. Ecclesiastes chapter 7, beginning in verse 1.

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[9:07] We've been working through Ecclesiastes. We've got a couple of weeks left is all. And we're ramping up now. We're hitting the homestretch and getting toward chapter 12.

If you've ever read Ecclesiastes chapter 12, by the way, you can sneak ahead and read ahead. It's okay. It's all right to do that. You don't have to wait until we get there. You can read ahead if you'd like.
If you know what happens in chapter 12, he hears the conclusion of the whole matter. He gets to the summary of it all. There's been some wild concepts that we've dealt with in Ecclesiastes.
It's a very unique book. And now we're up here in chapter 7. So, beginning in verse 1. A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume.
The day you die is better than the day you are born. Has anybody ever noticed the graveyard? And I think Tim Tebow and other public speakers out there have given this illustration before.
[10:10] I know I heard it from somebody. But I want to draw attention to it now because of what Solomon says. The day you die is better than the day you were born. Why? Have you ever noticed the two dates on a gravestone out in the cemetery?

You've got the day you were born, the day that you died. Well, to me, those are the two most inconsequential dates. On the day you were born, nothing had happened yet.
It's the beginning of it all. And then the day you die, it's all over. And you can't do anything left. What matters is the little dash in between, right? 1985 is when I was born.
And then the dash. And then I don't want to know what the next date's going to be. We'll leave that up to God. But he says the day you die is better than the day you were born. Because like we said, the day you were born, nothing had happened.
You had no reputation. Any reputation you had was strictly handed to you from your parents or those who came before you. And so you have to build it all yourself.
[11:12] And on the day you die, that's what you have. That's what you've accomplished. It's what you've earned. It's what you've merited on this earth. So it's more important.

Then he says, verse 2, better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. That's what you wanted to hear when you woke up this morning, right? I'd rather be at a funeral than a party.
And somebody looks at you, oh, wow, you must be in a great mood. And we've got to kind of take this in context. Solomon had been to all the parties. He'd thrown all the parties. He'd hosted them. He had all the wealth. He had everything that there was to achieve. He'd had all the good times. He'd been through all the success. And he says, you know what matters more? You know what's more consequential?
Looking back at someone's real legacy rather than celebrating the triviality of the moment. He says, after all, everybody dies.
[12:13] So the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter. For sadness has a refining influence on us. Do you see what he's talking about here?

Spiritual formation. Character over circumstances. He says, sadness has a refining influence on us. Verse 4, a wise person thinks a lot about death.
While a fool thinks only about having a good time. I like to have a good time. For me, a good time is standing up here and talking about God's word.
And about God himself. That's a good time for me. But I also like to watch football. And I like to watch Bearcat basketball win like 14 million playoff games.
It's great. So much fun. A wise person thinks a lot about death. But a fool is only thinking about having a good time. Verse 5, better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fool.
[13:18] It's fun being praised by a fool. And I think subconsciously we realize it. When somebody gives us a compliment that we know we didn't really deserve.

But we lie to ourselves and we convince us. Yeah, man, totally. Somebody that we should know better than to take the word of says, Man, you're doing great. You are just killing it.
And you know inside, no, I'm really not. I'm not at all. I'm mailing it in. I'm not doing well. But somebody's like, Oh, yeah, man, no, nothing's wrong.

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You're doing awesome. And we value that more than somebody who we know we should be listening to. And they come to us gently but kindly and say, Look, I love you.
But you got to work on this. I can see you're struggling and I want to help you. Better to be criticized by a wise person that there's legitimacy to the criticism rather than just to accept empty praise from a fool.
[14:24] Verse 6, a fool's laughter is quickly gone. That moment where they're patting you on the back and everything's great and the party's going strong. It's over fast.

Like thorns crackling in a fire. Throw it in and they're gone. This is also meaningless. Verse 7, extortion turns wise people into fools and bribes corrupt the heart.
Do you see this? Dishonest dealing. It can turn someone wise into acting like a fool. You can be bribed and your heart is corrupted.
Your character can be bribed. You can be talked into compromising the character that God is interested in shaping and forming in your heart.
Verse 8, finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride. We're getting real Proverbs-y in here, aren't we? He finally kind of goes back, reverts back to what he wrote in the book of Proverbs.
[15:28] And he starts dispensing this wisdom. But man, this is so valuable because this comes toward the end of his life. And after his long reign of success. And it says, finishing is better than starting.

Patience is better than pride. Solomon was living this. He was wanting to finish well. He's realizing everything I did to this point. What does it matter?
What good does it really do if I don't finish well? If I don't really understand the lessons that wisdom was trying to teach me? Patience is better than pride.
I don't necessarily think of those things as opposites. Opposite of patience would be impatience, right? Opposite of pride would be humility, right?
Well, he's tying patience and humility together. And he's tying pride and impatience together.
Control your temper. For anger labels you a fool.
[16:32] Fool is not a nice thing to call somebody. You're not going to make any friends by sincerely calling them a fool. And we don't like it when somebody else says we're being foolish.

But when we don't control our temper. Whether it's face to face with someone. Or behind their back. Or online. Or are you ready?
In our own heart. What if we are just angry in our own heart? We are indulging foolishness.
Do you know what else the fool has said in his heart? There is no God. Scripture teaches us that.
It says the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. And when we indulge in anger in our hearts, we are acting as though there is no God.
[17:37] In that moment, we are placing ourselves as God. Or above the real, true God. So control your temper.

Well, good luck with that. How do you do that? Through the Holy Spirit of God. When we submit our anger from the heart to God, then he takes over and he controls it.
And then it's a posture of, God, you are in control. I'm submitting this where I feel angry because I was wronged. Or I saw injustice. Or something set me off.
Something triggered me. But I'm surrendering that to you. I'm not going to place myself in your seat. With your position of power.
I'm going to say no. Anger, vengeance, belongs to God. Not to me. So I'm releasing that to him.
[18:40] Control your temper. For anger labels you a fool. Verse 10. Don't long for the good old days. This is not wise. I love that. He just throws that in there.

Because that's what we want to do. We experience something good. And we love it. We want to go back to it. We experience something bad like macaroni grill. And we never want to go back there. But look.
You experience something positive. And you want it again. You experience something positive many times in a row. And we call that the good old days. This was the season of life I loved.

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I long for the good old days of the Dallas Cowboys. Because that's how I remember them. I want to go back to that. The truth is. Troy Aikman. And Emmitt Smith. And you know.
Michael Irvin. And Jay Novacek. And Daryl Johnson. We should stop. Anyway. They aren't coming back. The good old days are not coming back. If the Cowboys are ever going to get back to winning again.
[19:38] Then it's going to have to be with different guys. Those guys aren't coming back. Jimmy Johnson's not coming back. Anyway. We can long all we want for the good old days.

You can long. Let's bring it home to First Baptist Henrietta. There have been good old days in the history of this church. It's been around a long time. Hasn't it? We're about to celebrate our 150th anniversary.
How many churches survive 150 years? It's a pretty short list. So great job. That's awesome. Truth is. It wasn't you back then.
It was some of your parents or grandparents or great grandparents. But the good old days are gone. God's saying don't long for the good old days.
Be grateful that they happened. Then ask God. Bring new. Good new days. Not good old days. Do something now for us.
[20:32] I love the way that Henrietta and Clay County celebrates their history. We've been through a few pioneer reunions now. It's awesome to watch.

You need to celebrate what God did. You need to appreciate and understand and recognize the people on whose shoulders you stand.
But you don't go back and try to recreate all that. You say, God, do something new now. And that's what God is continually telling us. He says, I will pour new water out.
Streams in the desert will run. I will do a new thing. He says, behold, I am doing a new thing. Do you not see it? That's what God wants to do.
So when you walk into church and you see more new faces than faces you recognize, don't say, man, I just don't know what's happening to this church. Say, God, thank you for sending us new people, new faces.
[21:36] Help me to go get to know them. So then they become familiar. And then together we continue to see you do a new thing. So that's a very practical application for our church.

But don't long for the good old days. This is not wise. By the way, just as a little caveat, let me throw this in here. The good old days are never as good as you think they were. Hindsight is never 2020. Okay. We never see the past completely clearly. The only one who truly sees the past completely clearly is God. He's the only one who has a completely accurate view of the past.
We tend to gloss over the past. So be thankful for what God did. Learn from it. And then ask him to do something new.
Wisdom is even better when you have money. Verse 11. Wisdom is even better when you have money. Solomon lived that. He had plenty of money to go along with his wisdom.
[22:39] He had all the wealth with the wisdom. And he said, both are a benefit as you go through life. Yes. So Solomon's being realistic. He's not trying to...

Do you understand what I mean when I say Jesus juke? Everybody. He's not trying to get unrealistically spiritual on us and say, all you need is wisdom. You don't need any wealth. He says, yeah.
Now, realistically in this life, you need both. You need wisdom and wealth. He says, wisdom's better when you have money. Both are a benefit as you go through life. Verse, what does he say? 12. Wisdom and money can get you anything.
Almost. Put a little caveat in there. Wisdom and money can get you almost anything. But what does he say next? But only wisdom can save your life.
I would put it this way. Only Jesus can save your soul. And only wisdom from God can save your life on this earth.
[23:45] Wisdom is the principal thing. Proverbs chapter 4. Therefore, get wisdom. And with all your getting, get understanding.

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Wisdom can save you far more than money can. Money can be incredibly helpful. It's the most helpful tool that we have on this earth.
But it is a tool. Money is not the root of all evil, right? But the love of money is the root of all evil. The scriptures teach us. So when we have an inappropriate relationship with money or an inappropriate view of money, then it becomes a tool that works against us, not for us.
So only wisdom can save your life. Because wisdom will help you know how to look at, how to treat, and how to handle your money. Verse 13.
We're almost to the end of our little passage here this morning. Accept the way God does things. Can we just say that again? Accept the way God does things. Let's say it together. Ready? Accept the way God does things.
[24:53] Now, will you? Will I? That's hard to do. Accept the way God does things. What we want to do instead is complain about it.

Us and the children of Israel. You read through the Old Testament about God's people wandering through the desert. And what did they do continually? Complain. Man, you go to the disciples who walked with Jesus.
What do you frequently see happening? Complaining. Arguing. That's what we do. It's human nature. So Solomon says, something I've learned in my life is you just might as well accept the way God does things.
Because it's pointless to fight against it. He says, for who can straighten what he has made crooked? We're going to get into this. We got two truths that we're going to get into here, which I hope can give us some really strong takeaways from this passage.
But he says, you can't straighten what God has made crooked. God might have a reason for making that crooked. And we're over here fighting tooth and nail to try to straighten it out. And God's like, nope, ain't happening.
[25:57] I made it crooked. You're not going to be able to straighten it. Enjoy prosperity while you can. But when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. And then he finishes this little section by saying, remember that nothing is certain in this life.

So with that in mind, let's go to truth number one. Wisdom values formation over feelings. There are a couple truths I want to take away from these 14 verses. We just read 14 verses.
Good job. The teacher stacks these better thans together. Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. Sorrow is better than laughter.
Sadness has a refining influence on us. He's not anti-joy. He's not anti-anything that's superficial. And he's only into the deep thinking. That's not what he's saying here. But funerals can clarify far more than parties can.
Sorrow can refine us far better than laughter can. Hard moments slow us down long enough for us to see and accept the truth.
[27:03] Then he presses further. Verse 5, better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fuel. Correction can shape you. Flattery softens you.

Not in a good way. Correction can strengthen you. Can sharpen you. Can make you better. Flattery does the opposite. Verse 6, a fool's laughter is quickly gone like thorns crackling in a fire. Think of this. What is he evoking here? Quick noise. Bright raging fire.
Bright flash. There's no substance there. It's just it's there and then it's gone. Then he warns in verses 7 through 9. Oppression can twist wisdom. Anger lodges in the heart of fools.
Patience is better than pride. What is he saying? Formation requires restraint. Formation requires restraint. Remember formation is happening in you.
[28:00] It's happening to you. It's happening in you right now. It's been happening in you. Since you were very young. Your soul, your spirit, your body is being formed.

It's all being formed continually. So formation is already happening. So how is God trying to form us? Through restraint. Then in verse 10, this is the diagnostic.
Don't long for the good old days. It's not wise. Nostalgia can unfortunately produce spiritual avoidance. Avoidance. Because we're refusing to engage with the Holy Spirit for right now.

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And instead we're leaning on what happened in the past. So that is a pitfall. It's a trap. Don't fall into that trap. Nostalgia is not always wrong.
But recognize for what it is and recognize the dangers to it. And don't let it go too far. Don't let it ensnare you. Don't let it trap you. When we romanticize the past, we resist the present work of God.
[29:08] So the teacher is telling us, stop wishing you were somewhere else. Stop wishing you were someone else. Stop wishing for something else. Let this moment shape you now.

James chapter 1. Just a couple of verses in James. Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way. By the way, this guy understood what troubles were like. He was the half-brother of Jesus.
He lived through a lot. So when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.
Verse 4. So let it grow. It has a chance to grow through endurance. So let it grow. For when your endurance is fully developed.
What kind of language is this? Formation. Spiritual formation. When it's fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. Usually when you see this word perfect in the New Testament, or it might be the verb form of it, perfect.
[30:16] It usually means being made complete. Being complete. Because none of us are ever going to be sinless. That's where our mind goes when we think perfect. We think something is 100% without sin, without wrong, without error of any kind.

That's not usually what Paul or James or whoever's writing about this means. It usually means reaching completeness in Christ. That's what spiritual formation is all about.
God is changing us to look more like him. He's changing how we talk to look more like how Jesus would speak. He's changing where our feet would take us to where Jesus' feet would take him.
We try to get there without going through the process of spiritual formation. It starts on the inside. You can't skip ahead. Spiritual formation is slow work.
It goes on for decades. It goes on for lifetimes. It's a journey. It's a marathon, not a sprint. So let it grow with endurance so it can fully develop.
[31:23] And then 2 Corinthians 3 and verse 18. Paul's writing this time. He says, the Lord, by the way, who is the Spirit, just reminding us, this is the part of God, the Trinity that we're talking about here.

The Holy Spirit makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. How many of you love change? I didn't think we'd get any hands raised.
I like some kinds of change. I like to change my clothes. It gets smelly if I wear the same outfit every single day. I like to change my food.
I would get real bored if it was the same meal every single meal every single day. We change some things just fine. Other things we have a whole lot harder time changing.
Because we're good with it. Guess what? God's all about change. And he's changing you. And he's changing me. The Spirit's doing it. He's all about change.
[32:26] So if you don't like change, take it up with God. He's the one changing things, all right? The Lord, who is the Spirit, makes us more and more like him. That's what his goal is.

The change is for the better. The change is from being like us into being like Jesus. So this is the formation that God's doing.
What does this leave us with? This truth. Comfort feels good, but formation is good. There's an alternative to positive, Holy Spirit-driven spiritual formation in your life.
And that alternative is comfortable. The alternative is just to ignore it. It's to allow other things, easier things, to form you. Things that are more familiar.
Things that are less challenging. Things that are less demanding. But that's not good for you. It's easy. It's comfortable.
[33:26] But spiritual formation by God himself, by the Holy Spirit, that's what's helpful for you. That's what's good for you. Truth number two. And we'll be done with this one.

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Wisdom refuses the illusion of control. This is kind of what he's talking about in the next part. Look down at verse 11 of Ecclesiastes chapter 7. Wisdom is even better when you have money.
Yep. We get that. Both are a benefit. Wisdom can get you almost anything. Only wisdom can save your life. Resources help. There's no denying that. The more resources you have, theoretically, the more good you can do.
Doesn't always work out that way. But in theory, resources can be very helpful. So we're grateful for the resources that God allows us to have. And we don't get jealous over the resources that God hasn't allowed us to have.
But wisdom is far more important than the resources. Both are helpful. Both are good. But wisdom preserves. Then comes this. See it as the hinge here.
[34:27] Accept the way that God does things. Verse 13. For who can straighten what he has made crooked. This is the center of gravity for the children of God.

Accept. Not fix. We ask this of our children, don't we? When they want to argue, when they want to fight, and we know that we're doing the right thing, we just want them to accept it.
Look, you don't have to understand it all. You don't have to even like it. But you just have to go along with it. Because I'm the dad or I'm the mom and I'm in charge, okay? Just accept that. And as they get to be teenagers, they want to accept less and less.
We can't always fix it right in the moment. They can't always control things. Let's stop talking about human kids and talk about all of us as God's kids.
I'm not assuming every person in here has embraced Jesus as their Savior. I'm not assuming every person in here has made the choice to be a follower of Jesus.
[35:37] If you haven't, I urge you to do that today. Don't wait. Don't put it off any longer. God is calling you. He's opened the invitation up for you. For anyone, don't resist Him any longer.

Just say yes. Say yes to Jesus. Look at who He is. Open up the Bible. Look at Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You'll see who Jesus was.
If that draws you, you say, I want Him in my life. I want to follow Him. Then say yes to it. Don't put it off any longer. But for those of us who have said yes to Jesus, as imperfect followers as we are, this is the center of our universe.
Acceptance for what the Holy Spirit wants to do. Not forcing it. Accepting it. Matthew chapter 16. Would you go over to Matthew chapter 16?
We've got it up on the screen here. Verse 21 down through 23. Jesus, for sake of time, I'm going to go ahead and read while you look. But Matthew 16, 21. Jesus began to tell His disciples plainly that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem.
[36:44] He would suffer many terrible things at the hand of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. Yeah, we know exactly what He suffered. Easter Sunday is coming up, and we're going to talk all about, leading up to that, how He suffered.

But then He triumphed over it, didn't He? It says He would be killed, but on the third day, He would be raised from the dead. That's how we can have faith in Him. He's not dead. He came back to life. He won the victory over death. Verse 22. Peter took Him aside. You ready for this? Peter took Jesus, God Himself, aside and began to reprimand Jesus for saying such things.
He started lecturing Jesus, y'all. Heaven forbid, Lord, he said. This will never happen to you. He thinks he's having Jesus' back and saying, Jesus, you might be having a bad day, but listen, this stuff is never going to happen to you.
Jesus turned to Peter and said, get away from me, Satan. Ouch. You are a dangerous trap to me. You are a dangerous trap to me. You're seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God.
[37:54] Peter didn't want to accept it. Said, no, I won't hear that. I love you. I've committed my life to follow you. I see that you are the Son of God.

We're not going to let that happen to you. Come on, Jesus. We got your back. Don't say that kind of stuff. He would not accept what God Himself was teaching him.

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So keep that perspective as we go back to Ecclesiastes 7, verse 14. Enjoy prosperity while you can. But when hard times strike, realize both come from God. Even when Jesus is saying he's going to die, that comes from God.
So anything that happens in your life, don't let it pull you off course. Learn from Peter's mistake and learn to accept. So, you ever heard the old line from a country song?
It says, this much I know is true. God bless the broken road that led me straight to you. Anybody ever heard that song? There's more theology in that lyric than most people probably realize when they sing through it.
[39:05] I think I've sung it at weddings before for people. But usually they romanticize and they skip over it. But there's a lot of truth there. Even the curviest, most crooked paths, the ones we would never knowingly choose, God can use to lead us straight to what we need.

Along the way we learn to trust Him. Along those broken roads, along those curving paths, filled with trouble, we learn to trust Him.
Because somehow, they get us straight to Him. They get us straight to what He wanted. And that's what Solomon learned. And that's what he's teaching us in Ecclesiastes.
Not just in Ecclesiastes, also in Proverbs. Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. If you grew up in church, you probably heard this verse a time or two. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't rely on your own understanding.
In all your ways, know Him. Your Bible might say acknowledge. I like that it even goes a little deeper than just acknowledging God. Yeah, God, I see you. You're up there. But knowing Him in all of your ways, and then He will make your paths straight.
[40:19] This is the secret. So this leaves us with this truth. Surrender is not being weak. It's being wise. Surrender is not wisdom, is not weakness.

It's wisdom. So accept it. Surrender it. Refuse the illusion that you're in control. Recognize what Solomon did, and be wise.
Well, surrendering to this spiritual formation from the Holy Spirit leads us in a direction, not to perfection. This is the year of what, church?
Yes, it is. It is the year of 2026. And in our church, we're saying this is the year of, it's on the screen. One more time together. Ready? It's the year of?
Direction, not perfection. Y'all, if you want this to be a perfect year, it's not gonna happen. If you want this to be a perfect church, it's not gonna happen. If you want me to be a perfect pastor, you hit the gold mine, man.
[41:24] Just seeing if you were paying attention. It's never gonna happen. Trust me. And by the way, you're not gonna be the perfect people either, all right, in the church. None of us are ever going to achieve perfection, but we can continue to be formed, and that is directional language.

We can be formed by the Holy Spirit. It's always forming, not always fixing. So, how do we do this? Practically, what does this look like?
If you wanna write things down, write these four things down. Take them home, pray over them, let the Holy Spirit apply them or not, into your life. Number one, name what you can't control.
Name what you cannot control. Say it plainly in prayer. God, I can't straighten this. You've allowed it to be crooked. I can't straighten it. Be specific about what it is.
Name what you can't control. Number two, recognize nostalgia. When it creeps up in your mind, when it creeps up in your heart, in your conversation, in your thoughts, recognize it.
[42:24] When you catch yourself saying things like, I just wish things were like they used to be. I wish we could just go back to how it used to be. Pause and ask, what is God forming in me now? Not what was he forming in me then?

I might have preferred that season, but what does he want me to take away from this season right now? So, recognize nostalgia for what it is. And then three, welcome hard truth.
Ask someone you trust, is there something I need to hear that I'm not aware of right now? That's verses five and six from Ecclesiastes. Seven, lived out. Welcome hard truth.

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Now, if you're the one dispensing the hard truth, be gentle about it. Be kind. Be loving. Do it how Jesus would, not how your flesh wants to do it. But accept and welcome hard truth.
And then number four, slow your reactions. Verse nine talks about this. Control your temper. Pause five seconds longer than you would have before. When responding this time.
[43:25] Formation lives in that pause. It lives in that moment. Ecclesiastes chapter seven pulls the mask off the illusion of control.

We were never in control. We never were. The goal was never meant for us to fix everything in our life. It was for God to form us in this life.
He's readying us for his kingdom. He's readying us for eternity. He's readying us for the future. We get the promise of a beautiful eternity with God.
He's getting us ready for that right now. Let him do the formation work in you. God calls you this morning to surrender, to accept, to surrender everything under the sun to the one who lives above the sun.
And that's what we've been asking every Sunday during this study of Ecclesiastes. Let's do it one more time, okay? How do we live under the sun? We look above the sun. Let's pray.
[44:27] God, I pray for grace for us. I pray for wisdom for us. I pray for acceptance of what you have allowed to enter our lives. I pray that we would surrender.

That we would look above the sun and remind our hearts, which are so easily deceived, so easily led astray, that you are in control. What feels crooked to us might be the very tool that God is using to straighten us out.
We're constantly trying to fix things. We often forget that God might be using what seems broken to form us.
I pray for every heart in here. I pray for every trouble in here. Every fear, every hurt, you care about those things.
Because you care so deeply, you came down and experienced it all yourself. You lived among us. You endured the loss, the hurt, the pain, the rejection, the betrayal.
[45:44] You endured it all. Help us to turn to you, the suffering servant, the suffering son, and remember that you were victorious over all of it.

You promised us victory. But the road to victory is not always smooth. Sometimes there are seasons of parties and joy and happiness and laughter. Sometimes there are seasons of struggle.
Speak to our hearts individually this morning. Be specific. Help us to name what we can't control. Recognize nostalgia when it pops up. Welcome the hard truth. Slow our reactions to be controlled by your spirit, not our flesh.
It's in Jesus' name we ask it.

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