

## THE HEALTHY SOUL, PART 12: THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE

Genesis 1, Jeremiah 29:8-14, Ephesians 2:4-7 (NASB)

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The new federal budget shows a deficit of a record \$1.65 trillion. A \$1.65 trillion stack of \$100 bills laid on its side would stretch about half way across the country. The official federal debt is about \$14 trillion, but in January of this year the U.S. Treasury said the actual existing debt is \$20.7 trillion. That's an increase of \$3 trillion dollars in one year. The Social Security system was predicted to be in red ink in 2016, but the Congressional Budget Office says it will have a deficit of \$130 billion this year which will continue to increase. A number of states are trying to figure out a legal way to declare bankruptcy. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have yet to post all of the accumulating losses from decades of writing marginal loans.

On the international scene there is talk from our commercial partners to dump the US dollar as the medium of trade for oil. That would devalue the dollar instantaneously and cause the collapse of mortgages, businesses for many years. I could go on listing bad economic news, but taken together it may mean that America is facing the toughest economic times it has seen in more than half a century. It would affect not only financiers and investors but every single person. The freedoms most of us enjoy from prosperity would be severely curtailed and those who are living on the financial edge would fall off by the millions and find themselves, at least temporarily, without food and shelter.

Will this happen? Maybe. America has been living on borrowed money for so long and so deeply that many people seem to have forgotten what our real treasures are. Many people are going to swoon at the idea of canceling their cell phone plan, cable TV, or vacation. I'm not sure that qualifies as suffering. The healthy soul has learned that the best things in life don't cost a lot of money, and some of them do not cost anything. To state it the other way, if you want to have a healthy soul and your heart is set on luxuries and creature comforts you will never find what you seek. There is so much that could be said on this subject that today's study will merely point us in the right direction, and then it will be up to each one of us to find the specifics for ourselves. If we do the following three things we will be well on our way to enjoying the best things in life.

### TREASURE WHAT GOD HAS MADE

The first thing is to teach yourself to treasure what God has made. The things God makes beat the things we make every time. One might simply start in the book of Genesis to compile ideas about the wondrous things of creation: **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day"** (Genesis 1:1-5). The earth may not have been chaos in the negative sense, but I am thankful that God made order out of formlessness and emptiness. In fact, I hate disorder. That is what has gotten me onto the rules committees of large deliberative bodies of hundreds and thousands of people. I don't love the rules, but I hate when a group of good people gets so tied up in knots in the conduct of business

that their good intentions are stymied. They hate it, too. Go clean your garage or basement if it is formless and void--it will be a God-thing!

The real key to seeing the treasure of what God has made is to watch for the phrase: "**And God saw that it was good.**" The first thing that receives such a pronouncement is light. I love light, don't you? God did not have to create darkness, it is simply the opposite of light, and he never called the darkness good. Even real estate values reflect the goodness of light because properties in sunny climates usually cost more, sometimes a lot more. So appreciate every sunny day as a gift from God. But it is not your due to have sunshine on your face. It is an act of common grace directly from the hand of God. Remarking on such blessings is also an easy way to give God glory among those who do not yet know him. You can say in a group of complete strangers: "Thank God for this sunshine!"

It will not be possible to go day by day through this entire chapter in this study, but you should do it on your own. I will simply point out several more treasures which stand out to me on a personal level. On the third day of creation "**...God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them'; and it was so**" (Genesis 1:11). Immediately I get two things I have learned to love, fruit and wood. When I was a kid I never really appreciated the goodness of the lowly apple. It just seemed like an extraneous food. At this point in my life I would rather eat an apple than a dessert. The things God makes are better by far than the things we make. We are promised that the eternal state will be full of fruit (Revelation 22:2)! So go eat an apple and thank God.

I have also come to love wood. A nice piece of wood just comes to life with some sanding and a little finish such as on a piece of furniture, an instrument, a dashboard, or whatever. I receive a guitar magazine which always features some lovely acoustic instrument made of woods like cocobolo, ovankol, koa, and sapele. Apart from the occasional furniture purchase, what does my love of the wood which God has made cost me? Nothing. And just look at the beams and ceiling of our church to see the attraction.

The fifth day of creation begins: "**Then God said, 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens'**" (Genesis 1:20). The Hebrew literally says that God made the swarmers in the water and the flyers in the sky. I'm still working on my appreciation of fish, but I am really starting to love birds. Did you ever wonder what all those old bird watchers are doing out in the fields as they seek, often in vain, to see some birds? They are treasuring a part of God's creation, whether they would admit that or not. Jesus said "**...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**" (Matthew 6:21). Since the birds they treasure are out there, they are out there.

These good things are part of God's blessing on everyone. The Apostle Paul explicitly used such examples in sharing Christ with people who had no prior knowledge of God. We can do that also. So if the economy goes bad and we all have to tighten our belts and live more frugally it does not mean that we need to be impoverished. Let us all wake up to the common grace of God as seen in the goodness of his creation.

## TREASURE THE GOODWILL OF GOD

The second thing is to come to treasure the goodwill of God. He does not charge for being good to us. He does it because he is good by nature, and cannot do anything else. The bulk of the Old Testament is the story of God's goodwill expressed toward the particular nation of Israel, but by studying that story we gain an understanding of his character and what we should expect from him.

The following verses from the book of Jeremiah refer to the time in Israel's history when the nation had strayed far from God. They had been openly disobedient to him for centuries, and finally he allowed them to be carried off by the Babylonians into seventy years of captivity. Realize that although the nation had departed from God, there was still a large class of people called prophets who were paid by the king to tell him the words of God but who did not know them. We pick up the prophecy in Jeremiah 29:8: **"For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,' declares the LORD"** (Jeremiah 29:8-9).

It is a most great treasure to have a God who always tells us the truth, and how sad to have impostors pretending to speak the truth of God and yet speaking falsely. The Bible says: **"Also the Glory of Israel [God] will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind"** (1 Samuel 15:29). In the middle of our endless political campaigns we all wish there was some source of truth to sift through the many claims, some of which are preposterous and many of which are in direct contradiction. Some of the contradictions are spoken by the same person!

God never contradicts himself in that way. He grants knowledge of the truth to those who will listen to him and learn from him. One example is A. W. Tozer, one of the great devotional writers of the twentieth century, who never went to college. Another example is William Tyndale, one of the fathers of the English Bible, who taught himself Greek and was busy learning Hebrew when they martyred him. What was so objectionable about Tyndale that he should be executed? He refused to back down from providing the Bible in English to the common man who had never had direct access to the truth of God's word before. Tozer and Tyndale are examples to teach us that we already have access to the truth of God's word, and it is the greatest of treasures.

And those who absorb the truth of God's word discover that it becomes a window to every kind of learning. It did not cost Tozer much money to become one of the best-educated Christian minds of his time. It did not cost Tyndale much money to learn Greek. Neither can an economic collapse prevent any one of us from the pursuit of knowledge. That pursuit may range from theology to welding, from needlework to astronomy. Thank God and learn to treasure your mind and the reliability of every word of the Lord.

Jeremiah's prophecy went on: **"For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'"** (Jeremiah 29:10-11). What value shall we place upon hope? What is the significance to the human soul to have an infallible God declare that his plans for you and me are for blessing in our future?

There is no amount of money that can buy the goodwill of God. If you have hope you can live with a measure of peace in your life. If you have no hope, or only fallible sources of hope such as your own determination, you will not have peace. Many of the crazy, self-destructive things we do as human beings are because we do not have hope.

And let us ratchet the scale of God's goodwill to the top. Jeremiah, after watching the miseries of Israel being taken into captivity, and after being abused by the many unbelievers among them, wrote about what brought him out of his sense of despair: "**The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, /For His compassions never fail. /They are new every morning; /Great is Your faithfulness**" (Lamentations 3:22-23). The goodwill of God finds its highest expression in love. We have the faithful love of God! Fresh every day! Never ending!

This is the measure of the loss to the human soul caused by unbelief. What could replace in the soul an unerring source of truth, a perpetual source of goodwill, and an always-renewing source of unconditional love? A soul without these things is an impoverished soul. And yet they cost nothing in terms of money. That means that the wealthiest, most lavish lifestyles on earth cannot make up for the loss of the treasures of God. It also means that we cannot be deprived of the most valuable things on earth because of a lack of money.

#### USE THE KEYS TO THE TREASURE

In some measure, anyone can treasure what God has made because he gives it freely to everyone. But the goodwill of God--his truth and love and hope--are not part of common grace. They are not given to everyone because they are deeds of special grace. No one has them who does not fulfill God's requirements to receive them. The keys to the treasure are found back in the prophecy of Jeremiah: "**Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart**" (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

Seeking God with all our hearts is the key to the treasure. Calling upon the name of the Lord, coming to him in humility, and praying to him with faith, these are evidences of seeking God with all our hearts. But Jeremiah did not have the revelation from God which we now possess in the New Testament era. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "**But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**" (Ephesians 2:4-7).

What would you pay for life itself? Those who have trusted in Christ have been granted the boon which surpasses all other boons, that we may pass from spiritual death to eternal life. And that eternal life grants us a quality of life based upon the knowledge of God himself by direct personal experience.

We who believe have also been granted union with Christ as we are "**seated...with Him in the heavenly places.**" We are not merely connected to our Lord, we are given to be in him. Spiritually, that places us with him on his throne as sons and daughters of the King of Kings, far above every other

created being.

Paul tells us that by faith we also have been granted perpetual divine favor, now and forever. What would you pay to have God always on your side, extended his omnipotent power to guide you, protect you, and provide for you? This is an unspeakable gift!

It is in Christ Jesus that the riches of this life are found. No economic rally can increase them, and no financial decline can decrease them. We cannot pay for them, for Christ has paid for our riches in full with his own blood on the cross. Through him the mercy and great love of God reach to us.

It is as if we are the characters in a treasure movie. We have the secret key in our possession all along because God has not hidden it from anyone. Somehow, in the providence of God, we see that the key is in our pocket and all we need to do is take it out, fit it into the slot in the doorway to God's treasure room, and turn the lock. We step inside, ignite the torches, and suddenly we are surrounded by riches which are beyond understanding.

Ask God for eyes to see them. They are not sports cars, jewels, or mansions. They are the things God has made for us to enjoy in him. They are his truth, goodwill, and love. Most of all, the riches of this life are found in "**His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**" Have you confessed your sins and trusted God for those riches? Whether the financial markets rise or fall, you can have access to the best things in life. Don't turn them away! As you embrace God's good gifts you will find health for your soul.

[clip: NATIONAL\_TREASURE\_vault\_scene.avi, 3:27 min., from *National Treasure* DVD, beg. of ch. 17, 1:53:20-1:56:48]