

Ecclesiastes Illustrations-Multiple Sources

Ecclesiastes 1

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Ecclesiastes 1:7

All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full.

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

The complaint of this chapter is the tiresome monotony of existence. Always the same tedious routine! The jaded soul of the worldling, who has put God out of his life, sees nothing fresh or interesting anywhere, and yawns with weariness. King Solomon had everything that the world could give to make his years rich, glad, and useful. But his heart turned away from God to things, from the only true God to idols, from the spiritual to the sensual, from heaven to earth; and he became a jaded voluptuary, who records his experiences on these pages, to warn coming generations. His words remind us of Byron's lament at his life being in the sere and yellow leaf; of the closing sentence of "Vanity Fair"; and of entries in the journals of the world's greatest wits and courtiers.

All the rivers of earthly joy may be flowing into your heart, but they will never fill it. They may recede, or dry up, or ebb; but if not, still they will never satisfy. The pleasures of this world after a while become monotonous, and pall on our taste. The appetite grows with its food. But in Christ there is perennial interest. The water that He gives rises up to eternal life. In his love and service there is always satisfaction and blessedness. We need not go outside of Him for new delights; and to know Him is to possess a secret which makes all things new.

I know of a gentleman, who has everything that wealth can give, but who is kept in a perpetual state of irritation, because he cannot eradicate the daisies from his lawn. There is a freckle on every flower, a stain on every leaf, a drawback in every lot, that we may be driven to find perfect fruition in God only.

Ecclesiastes in Review

Where is Meaning?

1. Not in Wisdom
2. Not in Withdrawal
3. Not in Weeping
4. Not in Wine
5. Not in Wind
6. Not in Works
7. Not in Words
8. Not in Worship without Obedience
9. Not in Wickedness
10. Not in Weapons of War
11. Not in Writing
12. But Walk Uprightly

Conclusion:

1. Fear God
2. Keep His Commandments - Source unknown

A Time Sensitive Outline of Ecclesiastes

- 1:1–6:9 Can't change the past.
- 6:10–11 Don't know the future.
- Therefore, enjoy life one day at a time.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 12:13-14

What's The Point?

What's the point? This question came to mind as I watched my grandsons' dog fetch a ball for me again and again.

What's the point? That's what the writer of Ecclesiastes asked as he thought about the monotonous cycle he observed in nature and in life—the same things happening year after year, generation after generation.

What's the point? That's what a retired businessman was asking, in effect, when he told me he would just as soon die as live any longer. He had seen and done everything he had wanted to do. Now he had reached the place where life held more pain for him than pleasure.

What's the point? Here it is. A few years before a friend of mine died, he said, "Life is a wonderful experience. It's marvelous to see that God keeps nature going in its pattern. It's wonderful to know that we're here to love God above everything and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It's comforting to believe that all our sins are forgiven because of what Christ did on the cross. And it's exciting to think about the eternity God has for us. It sure is great to be alive."

Life can be depressing when God is left out. But how exciting it is when He is at the center! —Herbert Vander Lugt

The life that counts is linked with God
And hopes in His unfailing love;
It walks with joy where Jesus trod—
The life that counts is from above. —Anon.

When we focus on Christ, everything else becomes clear.

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-9

That which has been is what will be (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

All of us are bound to repeat ourselves as we go about our daily routines. We eat, sleep, work, and clean up. Then we do the same things again. When the cycle seems endless, we ask, what's the point of it all?

God, however, would have us view this another way. Repetition holds an important secret for the Christian. Part of God's plan for us is that we yield to His guidance in ordinary recurring events.

The world is like a stage on which the drama of eternity is unfolding. Like a great curtain, the sun rises and falls for every performance. And we, the actors, make a decision every time we "repeat our lines." Either we respond impatiently to the repetitious cues—just to get our part over with—or we use our role as an opportunity to get to know the mind and purpose of the Director. Sure, the circumstances are routine and we often feel that "we've been through it all before." But glad participation in redundant activities forms character, strengthens faith, increases hope, and develops endurance. Through the normal course of events, God says to us, "There is more to your earthly existence than the meaningless round of duties."

Repeatedly trusting the Lord is the surest way to make life routinely fresh. —M.R.D.II

If life is a grind, use it to sharpen your character.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11;

Hebrews 11:1-6

THE CURE FOR FUTILITY

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." - Hebrews 11:1

A terminally ill man in the hospital told me that life had given him a raw deal. He felt cheated because he had worked hard but would not be able to enjoy retirement. Besides, he was lonely. He and his wife didn't have a good relationship, and his children and grandchildren seldom visited him. His former business associates ignored him. He was bitter and didn't want to hear about God.

The writer of Ecclesiastes also felt a sense of futility. He observed hardworking people caught up in a monotonous and pointless cycle, only to die and be forgotten. He wrote, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (1:2). But he recognized that this was not the whole picture. Throughout the book he said that life gains meaning when God is acknowledged.

And the writer of Hebrews, penning his words after the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, declared that faith instills hope and helps us to understand the truths that give meaning and purpose to life.

Do you feel as if life has cheated you? If you do, look in faith to Jesus. He was unjustly nailed to a cross so you could be forgiven of your sin and have a life that is fulfilling (Jn. 3:16; 10:10). As you choose to live by faith for Him, He will deliver you from those feelings of futility.-- Herbert Vander Lugt

Jesus is all the world to me,
My life, my joy, my all;
He is my strength from day to day,
Without Him I would fall.-- Thompson

Christ turns life right-side-up in an upside-down-world.

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-9

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Ecclesiastes 1:1-9 Routinely Fresh

All of us are bound to repeat ourselves as we go about our daily routine. Time after time we eat, sleep, work, and clean up. We can lose our enthusiasm for life if "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

There is another way to view life, however. The world may be likened to a stage on which the drama of eternity is being unfolded. We are the actors. The sun rises and falls like a great curtain day after day, and every time we "repeat our lines" we make a decision. We either respond to the cues of our daily circumstances just to get our part over with, or we look at our role in life as a wonderful opportunity to know and enjoy the goodness and wisdom of the great Director (Eccl 5:18-20; 12:13-14).

As we gladly participate in this repetitive activity, character is formed, faith is strengthened, hope is increased, and endurance is developed. Through the normal course of events, God is saying to us that there is more to our earthly existence than the meaningless round of duties.

Part of God's plan for us is that we yield to His guidance in ordinary events that occur over and over again. Repeatedly trusting the Lord throughout this month, this week, this day, and this hour is by far the surest way to make life routinely fresh. —Mart De Haan

I wonder what I did for God today:

How many times did I once pause and pray?

But I must find and serve Him in these ways,

For life is made of ordinary days. —Macbeth

If life is a grind, use it to sharpen your character

Ecclesiastes 1 Temporary Success

Temporary success may often crown the efforts of the godless, but even their greatest achievements cannot bring complete satisfaction. That was Solomon's theme when he said, "...the expectation of the wicked shall perish." If unrepentant sinners should view their most brilliant accomplishments in the light of eternity, they would find them to be as lasting and as valuable as bursting bubbles.

The 119th-century Bible scholar G. S. Bowes pointed out the ultimate futility of ambition that isn't accompanied by dedication to God. Citing four powerful world rulers of the past, he wrote: "Alexander the Great was not satisfied, even when he had completely subdued the nations. He wept because there were no more worlds to conquer, and he died at an early age in a state of debauchery. Hannibal, who filled three bushels with the gold rings taken from the knights he had slaughtered, committed suicide by swallowing poison. Few noted his passing, and he left this earth completely unmourned. Julius Caesar, 'staining his garments in the blood of one million of his foes,' conquered 800 cities, only to be stabbed by his best friends at the scene of his greatest triumph. Napoleon, the feared conqueror, after being the scourge of Europe, spent his last years, in banishment." No wonder Solomon warned of the poor prospects for anyone who strives to succeed without relying on God. - H.G.B.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 Just Living?

I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. —Philippians 3:8

There's a gulf of difference—far wider than the Grand Canyon—between living for something and merely living. But what is a worthy purpose for our existence?

Ty Cobb, one of baseball's all-time greats, made a revealing admission: "For years I ate baseball, I slept baseball, I talked baseball, I thought baseball, I lived baseball." But then he added, "When you get beyond those years of playing professional baseball, you can't live on baseball."

Certainly there is a vast multitude of purposes to which we can devote our energies. But in the end none of them will prove sufficient. One purpose alone gives enduring motivation to life. The apostle Paul stated that lasting purpose this way: "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

Knowing Christ, trusting Him, abiding in fellowship with Him, and serving Him—this is the one driving purpose that saves life from being little more than a monotonous march of meaningless days (Eccl. 1:1-11). Even when we are old and infirm, we can serve Him through a ministry of example and intercession. This makes life a joyful journey with our Savior and Friend, the Lord Jesus, whose face we will see when we reach our eternal home.

Those searching to know life's true meaning

Can find it in only one way:

By serving the Lord with commitment

And living for Him day by day. —JDB

Life's purpose is found in a person—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 Treadmill

The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. --Proverbs 4:18

In bad weather I get my exercise on a treadmill. But it's so boring! When the odometer says I've walked a mile, I've actually gone nowhere.

Life without God is like being on a treadmill. Generations come and generations go (Eccl. 1:4). The sun rises and sets day after day, year after year (v.5). The wind follows a repetitive course as it blows and swirls over the earth (v.6). Rivers flow into the sea, but it is never full (v.7). Like these natural phenomena, life is always moving but never arriving, always encountering changes but never finding anything really new. Then comes death. People without God are without hope and know they will soon be forgotten. What a dismal prospect!

How different for those who know God! Yes, they too sometimes experience routine, monotony, and difficulty, but instead of being on a treadmill they are on a journey. That's how Ernest Pike, an 83-year old friend of mine, viewed his life. Shortly before he died, he greeted me with a smile and said, "All my Christian life I've been preparing for heaven. Now I'm about to go there."

You too can have that hope. Admit you are a sinner. Receive Jesus as your Savior. He'll transform your life from a monotonous treadmill into a meaningful journey. —Herbert Vander Lugt

If we commit ourselves to Christ

And follow in His way,

He'll give us life that satisfies

With purpose for each day. --Sper

Life without Christ is a hopeless end; life with Christ is an endless hope.

Ecclesiastes 1:7 Spurgeon - Morning and evening

Everything sublunary is on the move, time knows nothing of rest. The solid earth is a rolling ball, and the great sun himself a star obediently fulfilling its course around some greater luminary. Tides move the sea, winds stir the airy ocean, friction wears the rock: change and death rule everywhere. The sea is not a miser's storehouse for a wealth of waters, for as by one force the waters flow into it, by another they are lifted from it. Men are born but to die: everything is hurry, worry, and vexation of spirit. Friend of the unchanging Jesus, what a joy it is to reflect upon thy changeless heritage; thy sea of bliss which will be for ever full, since God himself shall pour eternal rivers of pleasure into it. We seek an abiding city beyond the skies, and we shall not be disappointed. The passage before us may well teach us gratitude. Father Ocean is a great receiver, but he is a generous distributor. What the rivers bring him he returns to the earth in the form of clouds and rain. That man is out of joint with the universe who takes all but makes no return. To give to others is but sowing seed for ourselves. He who is so good a steward as to be willing to use his substance for his Lord, shall be entrusted with more. Friend of Jesus, art thou rendering to him according to the benefit received? Much has been given thee, what is thy fruit? Hast thou done all? Canst thou not do more? To be selfish is to be wicked. Suppose the ocean gave up none of its watery treasure, it would bring ruin upon our race. God forbid that any of us should follow the ungenerous and destructive policy of living unto ourselves. Jesus pleased not himself. All fulness dwells in him, but of his fulness have all we received. O for Jesus' spirit, that henceforth we may live not unto ourselves!

Ecclesiastes 1:14 Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Nothing can satisfy the entire man but the Lord's love and the Lord's own self. Saints have tried to anchor in other roadsteads, but they have been driven out of such fatal refuges. Solomon, the wisest of men, was permitted to make experiments for us all, and to do for us what we must not dare to do for ourselves. Here is his testimony in his own words: "So I was great, and increased more

than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." What! the whole of it vanity? O favoured monarch, is there nothing in all thy wealth? Nothing in that wide dominion reaching from the river even to the sea? Nothing in Palmyra's glorious palaces? Nothing in the house of the forest of Lebanon? In all thy music and dancing, and wine and luxury, is there nothing? "Nothing," he says, "but weariness of spirit." This was his verdict when he had trodden the whole round of pleasure. To embrace our Lord Jesus, to dwell in his love, and be fully assured of union with him—this is all in all. Dear reader, you need not try other forms of life in order to see whether they are better than the Christian's: if you roam the world around, you will see no sights like a sight of the Saviour's face; if you could have all the comforts of life, if you lost your Saviour, you would be wretched; but if you win Christ, then should you rot in a dungeon, you would find it a paradise; should you live in obscurity, or die with famine, you will yet be satisfied with favour and full of the goodness of the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 1:14 Setting the Record Straight - Joe Stowell

"I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Ecclesiastes 1:14
Baseball fans will always remember the 2007 season—an interesting summer of baseball to say the least! Tom Glavine joined the elite club of pitchers who have won 300 games, the Yankees' Alex Rodriguez hit his 500th home run, and Barry Bonds broke Hank Aaron's record for most home runs in Major League history.

I've been a baseball fan since I was a boy. Growing up near New York City, I was a Yankee fan when Yogi Berra was behind the plate, Whitey Ford was on the mound, Moose Skowron was on first, and my hero Mickey Mantle was in center field. Through the years I've taken great delight in telling anyone who would listen that I was at the game when Mickey Mantle wowed all of baseball by hitting the ball out of Yankee Stadium—a hefty swing that hasn't been repeated to this day!

What I find interesting is that telling that story now has lost some of its impact. Years have passed, and no one seems to care how far Mantle could hit the ball. The passing of time has a way of making what was once significant no longer all that significant. As Barry Bonds will someday find out, the passing of time will crown someone else Home Run King and Bonds' achievement will be mere history.

In his class-act speech played on the giant screen in center field the night Bonds broke the record, Hank Aaron said, "Throughout the past century, the home run has held a special place in baseball, and I have been privileged to hold this record for 33 of those years. I move over now and offer my best wishes to Barry and his family on this historic achievement."

So here's the sobering lesson. No matter how important your accomplishments are now and how much applause they generate, time will eventually erase the headlines of your life. Ultimately, all that will be left is your name and dates on a seldom-visited tombstone.

Unless, that is, you live your life to do something of significance for eternity. Like the preacher says, "Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last!" So here are some suggestions for living a life that counts forever.

Give meaningful portions of your time, gifts, talents, and money to advance the eternal cause of Jesus in your town. Remember, that wiggly six-year-old in your Sunday school class may be the next Billy Graham! (See Matthew 25:21)

Encourage your children to consider going somewhere in this world to win people to Christ and to plant churches that will propagate the eternal power of Jesus to save those who otherwise are eternally lost. (See Matthew 9:36)

Raise a godly generation to carry the eternal values and principles of God's Word into their world. (See Psalm 119:89-90)

Be like Jesus: live to win a lost friend to the eternal joy of heaven. (See Luke 19:10) Love and obey God with all your heart. Look forward to His appearing and receive a crown of righteousness when you get to heaven. (See 2 Timothy 4:8)

As Jesus taught us when He told the story of the rich fool, "This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? . . . Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (Luke 12:20,33).

YOUR JOURNEY... Think of a few of your greatest accomplishments. Do they carry any lasting value? Why or why not? Review the points above and evaluate how you are doing in those areas. How are you using your resources for eternal purposes? Your time? Gifts? Talents? Money? Pray through the Scriptures listed in the points above, and ask the Lord to help you develop His perspective regarding your accomplishments for His kingdom.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 Knowing Too Much

He who increases knowledge increases sorrow. --Ecclesiastes 1:18

Gerrit and I were teenage friends when we attended Christian High School. One day he became unhappy with the large assignments, so he reminded his teacher that Ecclesiastes says, "He who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (1:18).

Apparently our teacher wasn't impressed. The assignments stayed large and our sorrow increased.

Gerrit, of course, had misapplied Scripture to ease the discipline of learning. Yet the passage makes a significant statement about the pain of gaining too much knowledge if not accompanied by "the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7).

Yes, modern science has brought many benefits. But that same knowledge also makes us aware of the possibilities for global disasters such as a nuclear holocaust or unstoppable germ warfare. Many become so scared by television programs portraying these dangers that they won't watch them.

A proper fear of the Lord is the antidote to the pain associated with accumulating knowledge. This fear is not an emotion; it's a worshiping, trusting, submitting relationship to God through Christ. When we live in fellowship with Him, the more we learn, the more we will honor Him. And that certainly isn't something we should be afraid of. —Herbert Vander Lugt

With knowledge comes both good and ill,
Some blessing and some harm;
But those who learn to fear the Lord
Can live without alarm. --DJD

The heart of education is education of the heart

Ecclesiastes 1:14 Gone With The Wind

Read: Ecclesiastes 1:2-9,14

All is vanity and grasping for the wind. —Ecclesiastes 1:14

The epic film based on Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone With the Wind* opens with these lines:

"There was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South. Here in this pretty world, Gallantry took its last bow. . . . Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered, a Civilization gone with the wind."

Not only does a way of life disappear but also the dreams that drive the main characters. Throughout the Civil War, Scarlett O'Hara is preoccupied with her love for Ashley Wilkes. But by story's end, she is disillusioned.

Solomon saw the futility of seeking satisfaction in people and things. Despite amassing wealth and knowledge, completing great projects, and marrying many wives, he said, "All is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Eccl. 1:14).

Why does chasing transitory things leave us unfulfilled? The biblical answer is that we were created to find our ultimate fulfillment in God. Jesus promised, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

People and things come and go. But the spiritual satisfaction Christ offers sustains us in this world and will endure into eternity.

What comes from man will never last,
It's here today, tomorrow past;
What comes from God will always be
The same for all eternity! —Spencer

Invest your life in what pays eternal dividends.

Ecclesiastes 2

Ecclesiastes 2:23

All his days are but sorrows, and his travail is grief. (r.v.)

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

What a glimpse this is into a heart that has put God out! Solomon's power turned away his heart, so that he was not perfect with God, as David, his father. He drifted from God; and plunged into pleasure and laughter; into building and planting; into the pursuit of science and learning. "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. And, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind" (r.v.). Nothing can satisfy us but God. We were made for Him; and the heart, as Augustine says, must be for ever restless till it finds rest in Him. Thus the shell, brought home from the sea-shore and placed on the shelf, sighs each time you place it to your ear for the ocean whence it came.

We have no need to envy those who prosper in this world, but are without God, and without hope. Their days are sorrows, and their travail is grief, and at night their hearts take no rest. But if we are to avoid their inward anguish, we must avoid their fatal mistake, and learn to take God into our lives. The river of life, which is the Holy Spirit, flows at our feet; but we must stoop to take it freely.

Dr. Gordon records the story of a traveller in Barbary, who saw a beautiful clear spring of water, over which was inscribed the

legend; "Drink, and be gone." Robbers infested the region, and were constantly on the track of the traveller, ready to waylay and rob him. Therefore he must snatch the cooling draught and hasten on. Shall we refuse ourselves all pleasure in this world? Shall we write Touch not on every innocent gratification? No; but as soon as we have tasted of the pleasant draught, and lingered long enough to refresh our jaded souls, to hasten to life's serious tasks.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 Pleasure's Aftermath

I said of laughter--"Madness!" And of mirth, "What does it accomplish?." --Ecclesiastes 2:2

There are two words in Ecclesiastes 2:2 that describe living for pleasure without thought for God. The first word, laughter, means "superficial gaiety," which is called "madness."

I observed firsthand the truth of those words when I was 16. I worked in a meat market with some hard-drinking men. They were destroying their health and enduring needless pain. On Monday they would come in sick, miserable, and unable to do their job efficiently. But when Saturday night rolled around, they would repeat the previous week's insanity.

A few years later I saw illustrated the truth of the second word, mirth. It means "thoughtful pleasure." An elderly man had carefully built a successful business and had more money than he could spend. He told me he was unhappy and felt unloved by his heirs. He dreaded dying. His life of "thoughtful pleasure" had left him empty, cynical, and closed to the gospel.

After trying every form of pleasure-seeking, Solomon concluded that it is "vanity and grasping for the wind" (v.11). It's not sinful to enjoy life, but the aftermath of living only for pleasure is emptiness.

Have you left God out of your life? Trust Christ as your Savior and experience life's greatest pleasures. —Herbert Vander Lugt

Earthly pleasures vainly call me,
I would be like Jesus;
Nothing worldly shall enthrall me,
I would be like Jesus. --Rowe

Worldly pleasure is anything that crowds Christ Out of your life.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 Tantalized Sinners

I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure All was vanity and grasping for the wind. --Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

In Greek mythology, King Tantalus offended the gods and was punished in the underworld. He was placed in a lake in water up to his chin, but whenever he attempted to satisfy his burning thirst the water receded. Over his head were branches laden with choice fruit, but when he tried to satisfy his hunger they eluded his grasping hands.

Tantalus, therefore, became the symbol of utter frustration. Even today his name is remembered in the English word tantalize.

Outside of a relationship with God, many things in life are tantalizing but unrewarding. The author of Ecclesiastes pursued happiness through knowledge, pleasure, riches, and work. Nothing satisfied the hunger in his soul. So he wrote, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (1:2). It was only when he focused on knowing and pleasing God (12:13-14) that he found life's true purpose.

If you are among those who have been tantalized by what you thought would bring you happiness and peace, and you feel frustrated and worn out, come to Jesus. He promised, "I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). You will discover with joy that He has everything you've ever hoped for—and much more. —Henry G. Bosch

If we commit ourselves to Christ
And follow in His way,
He'll give us life that satisfies
With purpose for each day. —Sper

Only Jesus, the Living Water, can satisfy the thirsty soul

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 Are You Losing Touch?

I looked on all the works that my hands had done . . . and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. --Eccl. 2:11

A number of years ago in Rochester, New York, 30 people competed in a charity fundraiser called a Touch-A-Thon. A new car was to be given to the person who could touch a red spot on the car for the longest time, not counting the 15-minute breaks that were allowed every 4 hours.

After four days, one man and one woman were left. But then the woman reached into her purse for a fingernail file and took her hand off the car. She lost touch and lost the prize.

King Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, also tells about losing touch—but in his case he forfeited something of inestimable value. He had started out well by living for God, but then he began seeking personal profit and pleasure. As he surveyed his wealth and his fame, it dawned on him that in reaching out for those things, he had let go of his contact with God, his true source of meaning and

lasting happiness.

Are we justifying what we are doing, not realizing that we may no longer be living in close fellowship with the Lord? Do we need to stop worrying about trivial things and reestablish our contact with eternal values through repentance and faith?

We can't afford to lose touch with God. —Mart De Haan

Keep me in touch with You, dear Lord,
Through every day in all I do;
For if I go in my own way,
I'll lose the joy of knowing You. --Hess

If we walk with God, we'll be out of step with the world

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 Sunshine Chaser

I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. —Ecclesiastes 2:10

Diana and Dave love to ride their jet skis on the lake, skimming across the water on warm sunny days. But one morning the weather was cool and mostly cloudy, and Diana couldn't convince Dave to go out. So she went on her own. It was so cold that she flitted back and forth across the lake, trying to keep herself in the sunshine for some needed warmth. But every time she reached a sunny area, the clouds moved and it quickly turned to shade. Realizing the futility and silliness of chasing the sunshine, she finally gave up because it didn't bring her what she wanted.

King Solomon did another kind of chasing that couldn't bring him satisfaction (Eccl. 2:1). In the first 11 verses of Ecclesiastes 2 alone, he mentions that he chased after pleasure, laughter, wine, wisdom, houses, gardens, money, possessions, and music. But his evaluation was that "all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (2:11). Those pursuits were empty—"vanity of vanities" (1:2). He wisely concluded: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (12:13).

Are you chasing after some of the same things that Solomon was? It's a vain pursuit. Purpose and satisfaction come only from knowing and obeying God.

Chasing after empty pleasure
Will not satisfy one's heart;
But to those who follow Jesus,
Life's fulfillment He'll impart. —Sper

Only God can fill an empty heart.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 The Pleasure Is Mine

I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure . . . All was vanity and grasping for the wind. —Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

I always look forward to summer. The warm sunshine, baseball, beaches, and barbecues are pleasures that bring joy after a long, cold winter. But pleasure-seeking isn't just seasonal. Don't we all enjoy good food, engaging conversation, and a crackling fire?

The desire for pleasure isn't wrong. God has built us for it. Paul reminds us that God "gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Other passages welcome us to the healthy pleasure of food, friends, and the intimacy of a marriage relationship. But thinking that we can find lasting pleasure in people and things is ultimately an empty pursuit.

Ultimate pleasure is not found in the short-lived thrills our world offers, but rather in the long-term joy from a deepening intimacy with our Lord. King Solomon learned this the hard way. "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure," he admitted (Eccl. 2:10). But after his pleasure-seeking spree, he concluded: "All was vanity and grasping for the wind" (v.11). It's no wonder he warned, "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man" (Prov. 21:17).

What we are really looking for is satisfied only in a fulfilling and growing relationship with Jesus. Pursue Him and taste His delights!

The world is filled with so much good
That brings us joy and pleasure,
But true fulfillment only comes
When Christ we love and treasure. —Sper

Are we living for our own pleasure, or living to please our heavenly Father?

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 The Smart House

Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established. —Proverbs 24:3

A group in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, is developing a "Smart House." This computer-equipped home can be programmed to monitor the baby, make the coffee, start the shower, dim the lights, and turn on the music. It senses whether people are in a room and adjusts the heat and lights accordingly. If the vacuum cleaner is running when the doorbell or telephone rings, the computer

automatically shuts it off.

Imagine owning a dream house like that! You could have a taste of the life of Solomon, who in his day had anything a person could want (Eccl. 2:10).

Remember, however, that when Solomon filled his life with luxuries, he also filled it with emptiness (v.11). When he lived for riches and comfort, he ran into the same kinds of problems that put For Sale signs in front of thousands of homes today. The wealthy who have forgotten the Lord are plagued by divorce, alcoholism, and depression.

But Solomon finally came to his senses (12:13-14). He came back to his own principles. He remembered that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and that a real dream home is any house, no matter how big or small, that is built on the wisdom of God (Prov. 24:3).

Look away from earth's attractions,
All earth's joys will soon be o'er;
Rest not till thy heart exclaimeth:
"I have Christ! What want I more?" —Walker

Be smart—ask for God's wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-17 The Hunger Of A Black Hole

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. —John 14:27

A black hole is a swirling mass deep in outer space that like a ravenous beast swallows any bit of matter that comes close to it. The human heart is like that. Professor Diogenes Allen of Princeton Seminary states, "There is an emptiness at our core that is like a black hole. . . . There is an emptiness in us which threatens to suck us down as well, although what it is actually doing is dispelling an illusion. It is not destroying us, but revealing to us that we are already a dead thing trying to give itself life by taking all within its reach. But the core of us remains an emptiness."

What can satisfy the black hole of the human heart? Wealth, pleasure, travel, fame, learning, art? These can no more fill that inner void than a fistful of pebbles can fill the Grand Canyon.

In an attempt to find peace for his soul, King Solomon experimented with every resource imaginable. He wrote, "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure" (Eccl. 2:10). But what was the result of his search? He concluded, "All is vanity and grasping for the wind" (v.17). Solomon's ultimate realization was that fulfillment can be found only in knowing and living for God (12:13).

Where are you looking for peace and fulfillment?

Why do we keep on trying
The fare of this world's sin
When God has set before us
The joy of Christ within? —JDB

Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in God.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 |What Brings Happiness?

All was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun. —Ecclesiastes 2:11

After studying the effect of the post-World War II economic boom in Japan, Richard Easterlin concluded that monetary growth does not always bring more satisfaction. More recently, economists Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers conducted surveys in more than 100 nations and concluded that life satisfaction is highest in the richest countries.

So who's right? Let's check with the writer of Ecclesiastes. He should know! He was a truly rich man (2:8). He had the means to try everything in this world—and he did! He gave himself to pleasure (vv.1-3), grand projects (vv.4-8), entertainment (v.8), and hard work (vv.10-11). But he concluded that it was all "vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (v.11).

Lasting satisfaction doesn't come from possessing tangible things like savings accounts and material goods. Recent events have shown that these things can suddenly lose value. To find true happiness, we have to find it in Someone who is not from "under the sun." And that is our Savior, Jesus.

Hymnwriter Floyd Hawkins wrote: "I've discovered the way of gladness, I've discovered the way of joy, I've discovered relief from sadness. . . . When I found Jesus, my Lord." Only He can give joy that is full (John 15:11).

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
All its joys are but a name;
But His love abideth ever,
Through eternal years the same. —Crosby

To know happiness, get to know Jesus.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 True Satisfaction

A man stopped at a travel agency and said he wanted to go on a cruise. "Where to?" he was asked. "I don't know," was his reply. So the travel agent suggested that he take a look at a large globe that was in the room. He studied it for some time, then with a look of frustration he exclaimed, "Is this all you have to offer?"

The world in which we live has many things that appeal to us. Apart from what is sinful, we can and should enjoy its pleasures. A delicious meal graced with the good fellowship of friends warms our hearts. The beauties of nature inspire and fill us with wonder. Good music refreshes our souls. And work itself can be fulfilling.

Even in a sin-cursed world we can find great enjoyment. And yet these pursuits do not bring full and lasting satisfaction. In fact, people who live only for self-gratification, no matter how lofty their achievements, will always long for more. It makes no difference how deeply they drink from the wells of this world's pleasures, their thirst is still not satisfied. They must agree with Solomon that "all is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

Only by living for Jesus Christ do we experience true satisfaction. —Richard De Haan

The world is filled with so much good
That brings us joy and pleasure,
But true fulfillment only comes
When Christ we love and treasure. —Sper

Putting Christ first brings satisfaction that lasts.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 Breathtaking

A man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life. —Ecclesiastes 8:15

A popular slogan says, "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." I see the phrase everywhere, on everything from T-shirts to pieces of art. It's a catchy phrase, but I think it's misleading.

If we measure life by breathtaking moments, we miss the wonder of ordinary moments. Eating, sleeping, and breathing seem "ordinary" in that we do them every day, usually without much thought. But they are not ordinary at all. Every bite and every breath are miracles. In fact, having breath is more miraculous than anything that takes our breath away.

King Solomon may have had more breathtaking moments than anyone. He said, "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure" (Eccl. 2:10). But he expressed cynicism about it by saying, "All of it is meaningless" (v.17 NIV).

Solomon's life reminds us that it's important to find joy in "ordinary" things, for they are indeed wonderful. Bigger is not always better. More is not always an improvement. Busier doesn't make us more important.

Rather than look for meaning in breathtaking moments, we should find meaning in every breath we take, and make every breath meaningful.

All that I want is in Jesus;
He satisfies, joy He supplies;
Life would be worthless without Him,
All things in Jesus I find. —Loes
Breathing is more miraculous than anything that takes our breath away.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 The New Religion

Driving through Ireland to a Bible conference, I saw a fascinating billboard. It was large and white with nothing on it but a woman's red shoe and the bold caption: "Is Shopping The New Religion?"

The pursuit of possessions continues to be one of the most powerful motivations that people can experience. But can the accumulation of things bring true satisfaction?

In Luke 12:15, Jesus answered that question with a firm and uncompromising "No!" During a discussion on material wealth, He said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Life must always be more than just the inventory of the things we own.

King Solomon also attempted to find satisfaction in the pursuit of things. He discovered it to be full of emptiness (Eccl. 2:1-17). If we have placed "the abundance of the things" we possess at the center of our lives, shopping may, in fact, have become a substitute for God—a new religion. But such endeavors will always result in emptiness.

David prayed, "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:16). Only God is able to bring real satisfaction to our lives. —Bill Crowder (Our Daily Bread)

O Lord, help us to be content
With all that we possess,
And may we show our gratitude
With heartfelt thankfulness. —Sper

You are rich when you are satisfied with what you have.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 Why Do I Sigh?

I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. —Ecclesiastes 2:20

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, a 15-year-old girl yawned continually for 5 weeks in 1888. No details were given as to the reason for the girl's plight.

It made me wonder why we yawn. Why does a person suddenly stretch his mouth wide open, take a deep breath, and give forth a sigh? The answer is that shallow breathing, warm stuffy air, or nervousness can deplete the oxygen in the body. So our Creator-Designer equipped us with a deep-breath reflex that sends a rush of oxygen to the rescue. Aside from this technical explanation, a yawn or a sigh usually signals nervousness, tiredness, or boredom.

Then there's the "sigh" of the soul. Reading Ecclesiastes, we can almost hear Solomon sigh as he tried one thing after another in an effort to find meaning. Time after time his spirit reacted to various situations, only to cry, "All is vanity." Everything he touched produced emptiness (1:2; 2:11). He finally realized that nothing satisfies except to fear God and keep His commandments (12:13).

Lord, help us see that our sighs of disappointment with the pleasures and things of this life are meant to bring us to You. You alone give eternal significance to everything we pursue. —Mart De Haan

Christian, are you disappointed
With the world and all around?
Turn your eyes from earth to heaven,
Where true joys may all be found. —Anon.

Once we've feasted on the goodness of God, nothing else will satisfy

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 Work: A Narcotic

A friend told me that he feels closest to God when he's the busiest. He explained that when demands are the greatest, he finds himself most reliant on the Lord's strength. He pointed out, however, that unless he takes time for daily worship, his work can quickly become an escape.

Many people engage in activity for activity's sake and use busyness as a device to avoid facing reality. Just as alcohol can deaden the senses to personal relationships, family obligations, and community responsibilities, so also constant work can be a narcotic. It dulls our sensitivity to the deeper issues of life.

About 3,000 years ago, the author of Ecclesiastes discovered this. He sought satisfaction by busying himself with building houses and planting vineyards. But then as he thought about the work he had done, he realized it was full of emptiness (Eccl 2:10-11).

We can make the same mistake, even in the name of the Lord. Could this be the reason some of us try to keep the church running by our own efforts but forget that fulfillment comes only from hearts full of God? Are we laboring without those vital times of worship and reflection? If so, it's time now to worship before we get caught again in the trap of working merely for work's sake. —Mart De Haan

Lord, teach me how to work each day,
That every deed I do
May not be driven by false pride
But render service true. —Anon.

Never take on more work than you have time to pray over.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-16 Not Enough

The writer of Ecclesiastes said that pleasure, material possessions, and even great knowledge do not bring lasting satisfaction. Jesus went even further. He said that a person who possesses everything this world has to offer but doesn't prepare for eternity is spiritually destitute. We all need more than fun, finances, and fame to be fulfilled.

Thinking about this made me consider some prominent people who had committed suicide. One was a baseball star, several were entertainers, and two had inherited great wealth. I also recalled a highly esteemed scholar and his wife who both took a lethal

overdose of drugs when they learned that she had terminal cancer. These people had failed to find meaning in their existence. Because we were created in God's image, our lives do have meaning for both time and eternity. God made us for His glory and placed us on earth to honor Him. We have the remarkable ability to reflect on Him and on eternity. Believing that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave meets our need for meaning. Salvation brings assurance that we're forgiven. We have an eternal purpose and the hope of heaven. This is enough to bring deep peace and joy to our lives. Have you found this to be so? —Herbert Vander Lugt

For Further Study

Perhaps you're looking for
that elusive sense of satisfaction.

Check out [Why In The World Am I Here?](#)

Hold loosely the things of earth. —ten Boom

Ecclesiastes 2:12ff Nest Eggs

The rich get richer and the poor get poorer—and it seems that compound interest would virtually guarantee it! Not so, according to investment counselor David Dreman. Writing in *Forbes* magazine, Dreman noted that most large fortunes diminish and sometimes disappear in only two or three generations. He observed, "Why most nest eggs dissipate over time is a major problem..." (Today in the Word)

Ecclesiastes 2:12-17 Two Lives, Two Views

How does a wise man die? As the fool. --Ecclesiastes 2:16

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16 reminds me of the story about two brothers whose lives went in opposite directions. The younger one broke the hearts of his parents by his godless lifestyle. He became a bitter cynic and died relatively young. Few people mourned his passing.

The other brother believed on Jesus as a child, became a minister, and raised a lovely family. He had a far more satisfying life. When he died in his eighties, he was mourned by his family and friends.

But a skeptic might say, "The godly man is just as dead as his brother. So what!" That was the view Solomon expressed when he wrote, "How does a wise man die? As the fool!" (v.16).

Even though Solomon later abandoned his cynicism and saw the wisdom of living obediently for God, he didn't have the benefit of knowing about Jesus and the hope He offers. The apostle Paul, for example, while facing imminent execution, could speak of joyously anticipating the day when he would meet Jesus and receive from Him "the crown of righteousness." This reward is reserved for "all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

As Christians, we don't have to face death with the perspective of the godless. We can do so with joy! —Herbert Vander Lugt

While some view death as ending all,
The Word of God does not agree--
Eternal pain awaits the fool;
Unending joy the wise will see. --Sper

Those who are prepared to die are prepared to live

Ecclesiastes 2:13 The World Wide Web

I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. —Ecclesiastes 2:13

Brewster Kahle has a vision for the Internet. He dreams of universal access to all human knowledge. As Digital Librarian and Director and co-founder of Internet Archive, Kahle believes we have only begun to tap the vast potential of the Internet to change and improve our world. "My interest," he says, "is to build the great library. . . . It is now technically possible to live up to the dream of the Library of Alexandria." He's referring to a huge vault of writings in ancient Egypt that was said to house all the world's knowledge.

But knowledge is not the same as wisdom. King Solomon was a man of vast knowledge (1 Kings 4:29-34). In his better moments, he used his God-given capacity to collect information and insight from every corner of life. In unguarded moments, however, he showed that all the knowledge in the world does not keep a person from missing the purpose of life (Eccl. 1:16-18). In spite of his knowledge, Solomon married many women, and when he was old he built altars to their gods (1 Kings 11:1-11). His foolishness eventually led to his downfall.

Wisdom is the application of knowledge. Don't get caught in a web of knowledge without true wisdom that comes from the fear of the

Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). —Mart De Haan

True wisdom is in living
Near Jesus every day;
True wisdom is in walking
Where He shall lead the way. —Anon.

Wisdom gives wings to knowledge

Ecclesiastes 2:15-26 Heaven On Earth?

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. —Colossians 3:2

The Singapore developer of an extravagant condominium advertised its new project as, "Rediscover Heaven on Earth." I suppose it meant to convey to prospective buyers that their purchase would be so luxurious that it would be like living in heaven while here on earth.

Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, was an extremely wealthy man (Eccl. 1:12). He tried to find heaven on earth and had the means to live as luxuriously as he could wish (2:1-10). Yet he wasn't satisfied. So disillusioned was he with life, he described it with just one word—"vanity" (or "meaningless"). And he repeated the word eight times in chapter two alone. As long as he looked only at life "under the sun" (2:18), he felt hollow and dissatisfied. All of his striving was ultimately futile. There would come a day when he would have to relinquish his possessions and leave them to someone else (v.18).

If you are a Christian, you can look to Christ's promise of a heavenly home He has gone to prepare (John 14:2). That's why Paul advised those who are enjoying what God has given: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). Don't try to find heaven on earth. You won't—no matter how hard you look!

Lightly hold earth's joys so transient,
Loosely cling to things of clay,
Grasp perfections everlasting,
Where Christ dwells in heaven's day! —Bosch

Those who have their hearts fixed on heaven will hold loosely the things of earth.

Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 Is Work Your God?

The ability to work is a wonderful gift, but are we taking it too far? In the past, people left their jobs at the office, but now they come home to e-mail and phone messages.

Dr. Dave Arnott, associate professor of management at Dallas Baptist University, says, "I don't know whether work is taking over family and community, or whether family and community are giving up their place to work. But I know the movement is going on. Everyone's job seems to be who they are." We tend to equate our identity with what we do for a living.

The president of the Families and Work Institute says, "How busy you are has become the red badge of courage. . . . It's become a status symbol," even though people complain about it.

Making a god out of work is not a new problem. In the first commandment, God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). That includes our jobs. Through God's gift of work, we can honor Him, care for our families, and help people in need. Work is not to be our main source of fulfillment; that must come from God Himself.

No matter what our occupation, we must keep work in perspective. God and family are more important than dedication to a job. Work is a gift, not a god. —David C. McCasland

Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 Frustrated Or Content?

I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun. --Ecclesiastes 2:18

King Solomon, who had studied diligently and worked hard for worthwhile earthly goals, realized that at his death his fortune would go to people who had not worked for it and might misuse it. This caused him to become resentful because of all the "sorrowful" days and sleepless nights (2:23) he had invested. He's not alone in feeling this way.

A highly successful lawyer told me he often wonders why he works so hard. He said his sons and daughters had been misusing his money and making a mess of their lives. He knows they will probably waste everything he leaves them. Another man who had worked hard and managed his money well said sadly, "All my hard work! And my kids can hardly wait for me to die."

Solomon, however, did not remain in this dejected state. He found meaning and satisfaction through faith in God. He said that inner contentment is a gift of God to His children. This enables them to enjoy the fruit of their labor (v.24). God replaces frustration with contentment!

The more room we give to God in our lives, the more we will have "wisdom and knowledge and joy" (v.26). Paul summed it up this way: "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). —Herbert Vander Lugt

O Lord, help us to be content
With all that we possess;
And may we show our gratitude
With heartfelt thankfulness. --Sper

Contentment is the soil in which true joy thrives

Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 56,000 Hours

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. --Ecclesiastes 2:24

By age 50, a person who has worked fulltime since college will have put in about 56,000 hours of work. Whether you're teaching school, working as a nurse, running a press, or whatever else you do, that's a lot of time.

Keep that in mind and look at what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2:17. "I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity."

Think of 56,000 hours of worthless activity. That's 28 years of a career spent "grasping for the wind."

But wait. There's more. Keep reading in chapter 2. Hope shines through the otherwise dull efforts of the workplace--there can be satisfaction in work. Joy comes when work is done to please God (Eccl. 2:24-26; Col. 3:23-25). So all of our work, when done as a service to our Lord, has significance.

An airline employee who was struggling through a long delay in a flight's departure kept her composure as the passengers grew angrier. When someone asked her name so he could write a letter of commendation, she replied, "Oh, I don't work for this airline. I work for Jesus Christ."

Imagine the value of 56,000 hours of work done with that attitude! There's nothing better! —Dave Branon

O what can I give to the Master,
The One who from sin set me free?
I'll give Him a lifetime of service
To thank Him for dying for me. --K. De Haan

Daily work takes on eternal value when it is done for God

ECCLESIASTES 2:24

The 19th-century British author Charles Kingsley wrote, "Thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do that day which must be done whether you like it or not."

Consider what these three people gave to the world by working with diligence: Noah Webster labored 36 years and crossed the ocean twice to produce his dictionary. John Milton rose at 4 o'clock every morning to compose and rewrite his poetry. Edward Gibbon spent 26 years writing his famous history, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

What we do may seem insignificant by comparison. But if we work "heartily, as to the Lord" (Col. 3:23), He will use our labors to provide for our needs and the needs of others. Any kind of wholesome work can be a blessing. —H. G. B.

To LEAVE LASTING FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME, WEAR WORK SHOES.

Ecclesiastes 3

Ecclesiastes 3

He hath set eternity in their heart. - Ecclesiastes 3:11

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

The Preacher has been enumerating the various extremes and alternatives of existence, and the natural conclusion might seem to be that since each neutralizes the other, it might be as well for a man to do nothing at all. But a deeper thought is suggested. Man is greater than the changes around him; he has eternity in his heart, and therefore all the varied circumstances of human life resemble the wheels of some great machine, the cogs of which turn in different directions, but the effect is a forward motion, and the manufacture of a fabric that will outlive the machinery that made it. We are greater than circumstance, or change, or things. We have the capacity for the Eternal and Infinite. As the sea-shell sighs for the ocean, so our hearts cry out, though sometimes inarticulately, for God, for the living God. Christ said that foxes have holes and the birds their nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head; and this is true in another sense. The noblest men are those least able to rest anywhere short of God.

God made man in his own image; and nothing more surely attests the greatness of our origin than those faculties of the soul which are capable of yearning for, conceiving, and enjoying the Infinite, the Immortal, and the Divine. And every appetite in nature and

grace has its appropriate satisfaction.

Let us come to Him who has the words of eternal life, who is Himself the Bread that endureth unto eternal life. He that cometh to Him shall never hunger; he that believeth in Him shall never thirst.

“Here would we end our quest; Alone are found in Thee The life of perfect bliss — the rest Of immortality.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1 Seasons Of Life

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. —Ecclesiastes 3:1

When I was a pastor, I served many women who were moms. I called on them in the hospital and rejoiced with them for their precious babies who had come into the world. I counseled with anxious mothers and tried to assure them that God was watching over their rebellious teenagers. I stood with mothers at the bedside of injured or ill children and felt their pain. And I cried with them in their grief when their son or daughter died.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, also experienced times of joy and sorrow. What joy she must have felt when the Christ-child was born! (Luke 2:7). What excitement when the shepherds and later the wise men came to worship Him (vv.8-20; Matt. 2:1-12). What uneasiness when Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35). And what heart-wrenching grief as Mary watched her Son dying on the cross! (John 19:25-30). But her seasons of being a mother didn't end with that terrible scene. She rejoiced that He rose from the grave.

Mothers, and all of us for that matter, experience many great joys and intense sorrows. But when we submit our lives to the Lord, every season of life can serve His eternal purposes.

Thank You, Lord, for motherhood
With all its vale of tears,
For happy moments never dimmed
Through all the many years. —Strecker
Being a mom is a sacred partnership with God.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 Seasons Of Motherhood

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. —Ecclesiastes 3:1

As a pastor, I've ministered to many women during their seasons of motherhood. I have called on mothers in the hospital and rejoiced with them for their precious baby who had come into the world. I've counseled with anxious mothers and tried to assure them that God was watching over their rebellious teenager. I've stood with mothers at the bedside of an injured or ill child and felt their pain. And I've cried with them in their grief when their son or daughter died.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, also experienced these times of joy and sorrow. What joy when the Christ-child was born! (Luke 2:7). What excitement when the shepherds and later the wise men came to worship Him! (vv.8-20; Matthew 2:1-12). What uneasiness when Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul! (Luke 2:35). And what heart-wrenching grief as Mary watched her Son dying on the cross! (John 19:25-30). But her seasons of motherhood didn't end with that terrible scene. She rejoiced that He rose from the grave. And because she trusted Him as her Savior, she is now in heaven with Him.

A mother experiences great joys and intense sorrows. But if she submits her life to God, every season of her motherhood serves His eternal purposes. —Herbert Vander Lugt

Thank You, Lord, for motherhood
With all its vale of tears,
For happy moments never dimmed
Through all the many years. —Strecker

Motherhood is a sacred partnership with God

Ecclesiastes 3:1 A Time For Action

The woman chuckled as she told me about the time she woke her husband to tell him she was in labor and needed to go to the hospital. He jumped out of bed, dropped to his knees, and said, "Honey, let's pray." She told him that it was not the time to kneel and pray. It was time to get dressed and head for the hospital. It was time for action!

I think this was the type of message God gave Moses when He said of the Israelites, "Why do you cry to Me?" (Exodus 14:15). Not long before that, Pharaoh had permitted the Israelites to leave Egypt, but then he changed his mind (vv.5-6). Wanting to bring them back, he and his army chased after them (vv.7-9). The Israelites were terrified when they saw the Egyptians approaching. They were trapped at the shore of the Red Sea, with nowhere to go! But Moses assured Israel that God would deliver them. Now was a time for action—not crying to Him. It was time to "go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (v.16).

There's a proper time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1), including a time to pray and a time to act. When we see someone who lacks food and clothes, it's right to provide what they need (James 2:15-16). Sometimes we need to trust God and take immediate action.
—Herbert Vander Lugt

Lord, when I sense Your call to serve,
Help me to follow through;
I must not just stand by and pray
When there is work to do. —Fasick

If God has already told you what to do, you don't need to ask Him again.

Ecclesiastes 3 EXPECTED -- SOONER OR LATER

"The living know that they will die." - Ecclesiastes 9:5

I heard a popular senator who was swept out of office after only one term. His defeat came as a complete surprise to opponents and supporters alike. In his concession speech, the losing candidate wryly commented that recent events reminded him of an epitaph he once saw on an old tombstone. It said:

I EXPECTED THIS -- BUT NOT SO SOON.

Death is certain for all! The Bible says, "It is appointed for me to die once" (Heb. 9:27). For some of us that day is closer than we think. The sensible person faces up to the fact of death and makes provision for this final episode of his earthly life.

There's only one way to prepare for eternity -- trusting Christ as Savior. Those who come to God through Him will enter heaven when they have drawn their last breath. But for unbelievers, that fateful moment will seal their never-ending doom.

Are you ready for the inevitable? Jesus said, "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (Jn. 5:24). If you've never done so, place your faith in Christ, acknowledging that He died for your sins and rose victorious from the grave. Then, whether the expected comes sooner or later, you'll be ready! -- Richard W. De Haan

Sooner or later, yes, sooner for some,
Darkness will all then be past;
Sooner or later our savior will come --
With Him will your lot be cast? -- Koch

Live each day as if it were your last - it could be!

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 A Season For Everything

To everything there is a season. —Ecclesiastes 3:1

In the 1960s, the folk-rock band The Byrds popularized the song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" It climbed to the top spot on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and gained worldwide popularity. People seemed captivated by the lyrics. Interestingly, though, except for the last line, those lyrics are from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes.

"To everything there is a season," proclaims the writer of Ecclesiastes, "a time for every purpose under heaven" (3:1). He then lists some of the seasons in human experience: birth and death, gain and loss, tears and laughter, mourning and dancing. Just as the seasons in nature change, so do the seasons in our lives. Our circumstances never stay the same for long.

Sometimes we welcome change in our lives. But often it is difficult, especially when it involves sorrow and loss. Yet even then we can be thankful that God does not change. "I am the Lord," He said through the prophet Malachi, "I do not change" (Mal. 3:6).

Because God remains the same, we can rely on Him through the shifting seasons of life. His presence is always with us (Ps. 46:1), His peace has the power to guard our hearts (Phil. 4:7), and His love provides security for our souls (Rom. 8:39).

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing. —Luther
God's unchanging nature is our security during seasons of change.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 Times And Seasons

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. —Ecclesiastes 3:1

The Rev. Gardner Taylor has been called "the dean of American preaching." Born in Louisiana in 1918, the grandson of slaves, he overcame the segregation of his youth to become the pastor of a large New York congregation and a leader in the struggle for racial equality. For 6 decades he traveled the world as a much sought-after preacher.

But at age 89, Rev. Taylor's health gave way and he could no longer accept speaking engagements. He told Rachel Zoll of the

Associated Press: "I at first felt rather crestfallen." But then he spoke of his belief that "there are seasons and eras, and we have to see what they are as best as we can, and to find what is positive in them."

In an effort to face the challenges of life, we often turn to Solomon's words: "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Eccl. 3:1). But we readily admit that we would rather laugh than weep, dance than mourn, and gain than lose (vv.4,6).

Yet we know that as we embrace the lessons and opportunities of every season that comes to us, we find that "God is our refuge and strength" (Ps. 46:1).

Whatever season we're in, it's always the season to trust in Him.

Just as the winter turns to spring,
Our lives have changing seasons too;
So when a gloomy forecast comes,
Remember—God has plans for you. —Sper

Whatever the season of life, attitude makes all the difference.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 Tick, Tick, Tick . . .

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. —Psalm 90:12

Do you have a clock or watch available with a secondhand on it? Stop and follow that hand as it ticks away 1 minute. Those seconds, of course, are the way we measure time, and time is the very essence of our lives. By the time you reach the age of 75, the clocks and watches of this world will have ticked away a total of nearly 2.5 billion seconds.

Bernard Berenson, an internationally famous art critic, had a zest for life. Even when he was in ill health, he cherished every moment. Shortly before he died at age 94, he said to a friend, "I would willingly stand at street corners, hat in hand, asking passersby to drop their unused minutes into it." Oh, that we would learn to appreciate the value of time!

We certainly don't want to be so time-conscious that we become driven workaholics, neglecting our families, never relaxing with our friends, too busy to smell the roses or admire a sunset. Yet Paul urged us to redeem the time (Ephesians 5:15-16), and Moses prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

Let's ask the Lord to help us appreciate the value of time. May we wisely invest our seconds, minutes, hours, and days, realizing that beyond time lies eternity.

We do not know how long we have
Till time for us is past,
So let us live as if this day
Is going to be our last. —DJD

To spend time wisely, invest it in eternity.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 Time: Handle With Care

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. —Colossians 4:5

If you had to buy time, would there be any difference in the way you would spend it? Would you use the minutes, hours, and days of your life more wisely?

Of course, we can't put a price tag on the minutes and hours we possess. They are given to us freely. But that doesn't excuse us from using them carefully and wisely. The giver of time is God Himself, and that places a far greater value on our time than any monetary figure could suggest. We must therefore take advantage of the opportunities time provides to serve the Lord and to do His will.

This doesn't mean that we have to be working every single moment. It's necessary to take a break every so often, to stop and smell the roses along the way, or to enjoy the beauty of a sunset. We use our time wisely when we combine the appropriate "stops" with the proper "steps." According to Solomon, there is a time for all of God's purposes to be accomplished (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

I'm so grateful that the Lord doesn't sell time. He provides it as a gift of His grace. So let's spend our days "redeeming the time," using the opportunities to live for God (Colossians 4:5).

Yes, time is precious. Handle with care! —RWD

We do not know how long we have
Till time for us is past,
So let us live as if this day
Is going to be our last. —D. De Haan

To spend time wisely, invest it in eternity.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 Seasons Of Ups And Downs

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. —Ecclesiastes 3:4

Most of us would agree that life has its ups and downs. Wise King Solomon believed this and reflected on our responses to fluctuating circumstances. In Ecclesiastes, he wrote: "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (3:1-4).

Solomon's father, David, was called "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Yet David's life illustrates how life is filled with seasons of ups and downs. David wept over his and Bathsheba's first child who was fatally ill (2 Sam. 12:22). Yet he also wrote songs of praise and joyous laughter (Ps. 126:1-3). With the death of his rebellious son Absalom, David experienced a time of deep mourning (2 Sam. 18:33). And when the ark was brought to Jerusalem, David, in spiritual ecstasy, danced before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:12-15).

We do a disservice to ourselves and others when we portray the Christian life as peaceful and happy all the time. Instead, the Bible portrays the believer's life as consisting of seasons of ups and downs. In what season are you? Whether a time of joy or sadness, each season should motivate us to seek the Lord and trust Him.

Dear Lord, help us to turn to You not only in sadness
but also in joy. We know You give us both good times
and bad to draw us to You and help us grow.
May we learn to trust You in all seasons of life. Amen.

Every season needs faith to get us through it.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 Thankful For Seasons

I grew up on the West Coast of the US. The possibility of snow for Christmas was so remote that my mom would point to fog in the early morning as evidence that the holidays were just around the corner.

My wife and I now live in the Midwest. There's a lot of snow when the yuletide season comes around. And I couldn't be happier with four distinct seasons. But I don't find that same response from many who have grown up in the Midwest. I find it amusing that they don't share my appreciation for the wonderful cycles of change God has built into nature for our good.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Solomon acknowledged the cycles of life. He observed a time to sow and to reap, to weep and to laugh, to mourn and to dance, to gain and to lose, to keep silent and to speak, to love and to hate.

Just as God determines the weather, He also controls the cycles in our lives: "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Eccl. 3:1). Do we resist those seasons and complain about the "snowy" conditions on the horizon? Or do we trust God and thank Him for whatever He has planned for us?

Whatever our situation is today, we can be thankful for God's seasons. —Dennis Fisher

Just as the winter turns to spring,
Our lives have changing seasons too;
So when a gloomy forecast comes,
Remember—God has plans for you. —Sper

Rather than praying for a change in circumstances, pray for a change of heart.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 "GOOD AND BAD LAUGHTER"

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh.- Eccl 3:1,4

Doctors and psychologists tell us that laughter is good for us. This is undoubtedly true, because the Bible says that "a merry heart does good, like medicine" (Prov. 17:22).

But the Scriptures distinguish between good and bad laughter. The author of Ecclesiastes declared that the laughter of people who have no place for God in their lives has no more value than the noise of crackling thorns in a fire (Eccl. 7:6). God disapproves of any humor that belittles people or makes light of immorality. Sin is never a laughing matter.

Joe E. Brown was a top-notch movie and Broadway comedian of the World War II era. When entertaining American troops in the South Pacific, he was asked by a soldier to tell some "dirty jokes." He responded, "Son, a comedian like me lives for applause and laughter . . . But if telling a dirty story is the price I must pay for your laughter, then I'm not interested. I've never done an act that I couldn't perform before my mother, and I never will." The soldiers rocked the jungle with their cheers.

Lord, give us a merry heart. And help us be discerning so that we will laugh for the right reasons and about the right things. --
Herbert Vander Lugt

Laughter is like music
That lingers in the heart;
And when its melody is heard,
The ills of life depart. -Anon.

Wholesome laughter has great face value.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 Longing For Spring

Nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives. —Ecclesiastes 3:12

It's been a long, cold winter, and I am eager for warm weather. I'm tired of seeing bare trees and lifeless brown leaves covering the ground. I long to see wildflowers poke through the dead leaves and to watch the woods turn green once more.

Yet even as I anticipate my favorite season, I hear my mother's voice saying, "Don't wish your life away."

If you're like me, you sometimes hear yourself saying, "When such and such happens, then I will . . . or, If only so and so would do this, then I would do that . . . or, I would be happy if . . . or, I will be satisfied when . . ."

In longing for some future good, we forget that every day—regardless of the weather or our circumstances—is a gift from God to be used for His glory.

According to author Ron Ash, "We are where we need to be and learning what we need to learn. Stay the course because the things we experience today will lead us to where He needs us to be tomorrow."

In every season, there is a reason to rejoice and an opportunity to do good (Eccl. 3:12). The challenge for each of us every day is to find something to rejoice about and some good to do—and then to do both.

Just as the winter turns to spring,
Our lives have changing seasons too;
So when a gloomy forecast comes,
Remember—God has plans for you. —Sper

Every season brings a reason to rejoice.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 THE BEAUTY OF LIFE

"He has made everything beautiful in its time." - Ecclesiastes 3:11

Author and scientist Carl Sagan says that the material world is the only reality. If we accept this premise, then nature has been cruel to us, giving us, as someone has cynically phrased it, "the endowments of a god and the career of an insect."

King Solomon declared in Ecclesiastes that from a purely human standpoint everything is meaningless (1:2), but he also considered God's view. He observed the creative and destructive cycle of our existence (3:1-8) and concluded that everything is beautiful in its time (v. 11). He knew that when we see life from the perspective of eternity we will see the beauty of God's ways.

But Solomon also realized that God hasn't given us the answers to every question (v. 11). He advised us to accept life's good things with gratitude, and to face its difficulties with faith, not despair.

Shirley De Jong, who at 58 knew she had terminal cancer, followed this advice. With her husband she enjoyed doing what her strength permitted. She looked back over her life and spoke of the beauty of each stage. She saw her illness as the means by which God would soon take her to heaven.

Real faith enables us to see that even a terminal illness can be "beautiful in its time."-- Herbert Vander Lugt

Lord, of the days that are left to me,
I give them to Your hand;
Take me and break me and mold me to
The pattern You have planned.-- Snell

The more a diamond is cut, the more it sparkles.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 Relevant Routine

Every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. —Ecclesiastes 3:13

Here we are at the beginning of a new week. For many people, Monday represents the start of another monotonous cycle of work. Maybe it's a mountain of washing and ironing, an endless quota of parts from a machine, the same dull routine on the assembly line, or the tedium of sitting at a computer.

Monotony can be a breeding ground for envy and discontent, or it can be the training ground for the development of character and a life of service. It all depends on whether we can see God in the ordinary duties of life.

There was a woman in Boston who for 40 years did the same cleaning tasks in the same office building. She was interviewed by a

reporter who asked her how she could stand the monotony of doing the same thing day in and day out. The woman said, "I don't get bored. I use cleaning materials that God made. I clean objects that belong to people God made, and I make life more comfortable for them. My mop is the hand of God!"

Are you looking for the Creator in your occupation? He's there. He uses the hands, bodies, and minds of people who accept their tasks and do their work for Him. Any routine task is relevant to God's work in and through us—for time and for eternity. —Dennis J. De Haan

For Further Study

Are you wondering what God's call on your life should look like?

Read How Can I Find Satisfaction In My Work?

If you want to leave footprints in the sands of time, wear work shoes.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 The Mystery Of Time

He has made everything beautiful in its time. --Ecclesiastes 3:11

Time is a tyrant that has us under its control. Little by little it makes us feel and look older as it relentlessly pushes us toward the day when we will die. Time determines when we plant or reap, when we laugh or cry, when we keep something or throw it away (Eccl. 3:1-8). And sometimes it seems as if we are just helpless pawns in a cosmic game.

But once we understand that the God who established time and controls everything is our Friend, it all looks different. Solomon said that "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:11). This enables us to trust God to weave His loving purposes for us into the tapestry of time. There are times when its beauty can be clearly seen, but at other times His design remains a mystery to us because of our human limitations.

I have a friend who finds himself in this dilemma. He's still quite young, but he has an incurable disease that doctors say will allow him no more than 2 years to live. We are praying for healing, but he is ready to go to be with Christ. The other day he cheerfully said, "I'm in a win-win situation. I can't lose either way." The "why" remains a mystery to him, but he is thoroughly convinced that God "has made everything beautiful in its time." —Herbert Vander Lugt

God gives to us the gift of time
To use as best we can,
To live each moment in His will
According to His plan. --Sper

The right view of eternity reveals the real value of time

Ecclesiastes 3:7 Don't Say It!

Read: Proverbs 10:8-21

[There is] a time to keep silence. —Ecclesiastes 3:7

In Discipleship Journal, Cynthia Heald told of a time she and her husband Jack were talking about remodeling their house. He said he wished he had his brother-in-law's skill for carpentry. "For a brief second," Cynthia wrote, "I was ready to make a snappy reply by saying, 'Maybe my next husband will be more handy.'" She went on, "For once in my life I thought before I spoke and asked myself, 'Will this benefit Jack?' Of course the answer was no! So I was quiet for a moment and responded in a much more positive way."

The Bible tells us that we can accomplish much good with kind, thoughtful, and wise words (Prov. 10:31-32; 16:23; Eph. 4:29). We can all think of times we have been blessed by the gentle, encouraging words of a brother or sister in Christ.

Ecclesiastes tells us that there is also "a time to keep silence" (3:7). Sometimes we can accomplish more by not saying anything. We avoid inflicting pain, creating conflict, or damaging someone's reputation or future.

When we're tempted to say something critical, damaging, confidential, boastful, whiny, or patronizing, we need to stop and think of the effect. Let's follow Solomon's advice about "a time to keep silence" and don't say it!

There are some silent people
Whose praises should be sung;
They preach a mighty sermon
By guarding well their tongue. —Posegate

If you hold your tongue now, you won't have to eat your words later.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-17 Eternity In Our Hearts

He has put eternity in their hearts. —Ecclesiastes 3:11

I once came across a scene of beauty outside Anchorage, Alaska. Against a slate-gray sky, the water of an ocean inlet had a slight greenish cast, interrupted by small whitecaps. Soon I saw these were not whitecaps at all but whales—silvery white beluga whales in a pod feeding no more than 50 feet offshore. I stood with other onlookers, listening to the rhythmic motion of the sea, following the graceful, ghostly crescents of surfacing whales. The crowd was hushed, even reverent. For just a moment, nothing else mattered.

The author of Ecclesiastes would have understood the crowd's response. He sees with dazzling clarity the beauty in the created world and that God "has put eternity in their hearts" (3:11). Such an elegant phrase applies to much in human experience. Surely it hints at a religious instinct. Our hearts perceive eternity in ways other than the religious.

Ecclesiastes presents both sides of life on this planet: the promise of pleasures so alluring that we may devote our lives to their pursuit, and the haunting realization that these pleasures ultimately do not satisfy. God's tantalizing world is too big for us. Unless we acknowledge our limits and subject ourselves to God's rule, unless we trust the Giver of all good gifts, we will end up in despair.

Amid the measured music

What watchful ear can hear

God's voice amidst the garden?

Yet hush! for He is here! —Charles

To make the most of today, keep eternity in mind.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 The Trail

He has made everything beautiful in its time. --Ecclesiastes 3:11

High in the mountains near our home is a trail that threads its way, rising and falling down the side of a steep canyon. It leads to a stream that passes first through a castle-like heap of boulders, then flows gently through deep, mossy woods. It's a peaceful, quiet area where wild flowers bloom in fragile beauty—a secluded, seldom-visited place.

Even if no one ever saw this place, it would still be beautiful, because God creates beauty for its own sake. But the marvelous thing is that He created this beauty for anyone who will receive it, as a visible expression of His creativity and His love. This is my reason to look into nature, my reason to explore.

I worship and thank God for this restful hideaway. With David, I exclaim, "O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions" (Psalm 104:24).

I feel sorry for those who worship nature itself and who do not know God, its Creator. When they come to places like this, they have no one to thank.

We who know God recognize Him in creation, and can always thank Him for showing His love in such beautiful ways. —DHR —
David H. Roper

The wonder of creation speaks

To everyone in different ways,

But only those who know the Lord

Can for His handiwork give praise. —Sper

Creation is filled with signs that point to the Creator

Ecclesiastes 3:14-22 The Search For Justice

I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.

—Ecclesiastes 3:16

A trial has just ended, and the reactions to the verdict could not be more different. The family of the alleged murderer celebrates the declaration of a mistrial due to a legal technicality. Meanwhile, the grieving parents whose daughter has died wonder about a justice system that would allow such a decision. As they stand weeping before a mass of microphones and cameras, they exclaim: "Where is the justice in this? Where is the justice?"

We've seen this scenario played out in the news or on TV crime dramas. We instinctively long for justice but cannot seem to find it. The wisest man of his day, Solomon, faced a similar frustration and disappointment. He saw that imperfect human beings could never administer perfect justice. He wrote: "I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there" (Eccl. 3:16).

If all we trusted in were imperfect people, we would lose all hope. But Solomon wisely added in verse 17: "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."

The search for justice can be satisfied only by trusting the God who is always just.

Though sin seems to triumph and wrong conquers right,

Though lies can put justice to flight,

God's truth is eternal, His Word shows His might,
And He will bring justice to light. —Gustafson

Someday the scales of justice will be perfectly balanced.

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3 An Instructed Faith

When I witness to people about Christ, I often hear this response: "I'm all right, I have a strong faith." But our discussions soon reveal that all they have is faith in faith. Genuine saving faith, though, is based on the truth of God's Word.

Billy Graham made this clear during an interview on a TV talk show. He said he eagerly anticipates death because he expects to be with Jesus. He went on to explain that his confidence rests on what the Bible says about Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection. The interviewer, an agnostic who admits his fear of death, respectfully said, "You're not afraid because you know something I don't know."

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3 reveals the need for a God-instructed faith. It depicts the unpleasant side of life: injustice everywhere and the inevitability of death (3:16,18-21). It expresses that nonbelievers, seeing no reason for hope, must conclude that nonexistence is better than life (3:22-4:3). But it also shows the believer's confidence that God will ultimately make all things right (3:17).

A Bible-instructed faith focuses on Christ--His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Only that kind of faith can bring salvation and comfort. And it gives us confidence that we will spend eternity in heaven. —Herbert Vander Lugt

The godless ponder death with fear--
For what's ahead they cannot see;
But those who put their faith in Christ
Look forward to eternity. --Sper

To put your fears to rest, put your faith in Christ

Ecclesiastes 4

Ecclesiastes 4:1

Behold, the tears of such as were oppressed.

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

"Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers, Ere the morrow comes with years? They are leaning their young heads against their mothers, But that cannot stop their tears. The young lambs are bleating in the meadows; The young birds are chirping in the nest; The young fawns are playing with the shadows; The young flowers are blowing toward the west— But the young, young children, O my brothers, They are weeping bitterly! They are weeping in the playtime of the others, In the country of the free."

It is a sad, sad world, and perhaps must get sadder yet. It may be that we have not yet reached the darkest hour. Oh the tears of the oppressed; the tiny children; the terror-stricken fugitives from the Turk, the European trader, and the drunken tyrant of the home! Through all the centuries tears have flowed, enough to float a navy.

There need be no difficulty in accounting for them. Our race has elected the service of sin and self. Turning our back on God, for whom we were made, we have turned every one to our own way, and are inheriting the ancient curse of travail, tears, thorns, and death. It is quite true that many suffer innocently and vicariously, because we are members one of another; and by the mysterious arrangement of the Almighty the whole race is bound together by mysterious but indissoluble cords. In Adam all die, all suffer, all sorrow and weep, just as in Christ shall all be made alive. The pain must last, till the Stronger than the strong comes to divide the spoils, and met the captives free.

How comforting it is to realize that God knows our sorrows, puts our tears into his bottle, is afflicted in all our affliction. and bears us on his heart.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-8 Emptiness at the Top

In this text Solomon exposes the emptiness of many who make it to the top. This is not a plea for mediocrity. The problem with the people he's talking about soon becomes clear; they have no fear of the Lord. For people like this, tyranny can become a calling card. Since they view people as pawns, it's easy for the powerful to become abusive. Sadly, those whom they oppress often have no one to help or comfort them (v.1). Their lot is so painful Solomon concludes that the dead or unborn are better off than the oppressed. If all of this sounds familiar, it's because these verses capture much of the history of the human race. That's why those

who strive for success must also strive for compassion.

Another reason many successful people feel empty is that they see others as competitors to be beaten rather than as companions to be embraced. It isn't easy to make friends under those conditions. That's why those who strive for success must also strive for companionship.

The overachiever can also feel empty because success may bring with it a pack of problems he hadn't expected. For these people, Solomon's advice in verse 6 is worth heeding. That's why those who strive for success must also strive for contentment.

Solomon's final picture (vv. 7-8) is a sad one: a successful person alone with his money. Yet his loneliness and frustration drive him even harder. A person like that needs help! That's why those who strive for success must also strive for cessation—knowing when enough is enough. (Today in the Word)

Ecclesiastes 4:1-8 The Rat Race

Godliness with contentment is great gain. --1 Timothy 6:6

A sign by the roadside carried this message: "I'm getting sick of the rat race. The rats keep getting bigger and faster." Many men and women, no doubt, feel that way. In spite of amazing advances in technology, people's frustration level seems as high or higher than ever. The core problem is that sinful human nature hasn't changed.

Almost 3,000 years ago, Solomon made three insightful observations about the rat race of life in his day. First, he said that a desire to outdo one's peers was the motive behind much human industriousness, and this was a no-win situation (Eccl. 4:4).

Second, those who dropped out of the rat race became lazy and unproductive. This kind of idleness is foolish and self-destructive (v.5).

Third, Solomon said that people became so obsessed with making money that they didn't form healthy relationships. This made them go through life without purpose or meaning, never satisfied with all they had worked for (v.8).

Remember, "Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, . . . with toil and grasping for the wind" (v.6). To avoid compulsive grasping or self-destructive escapism, put God at the center of your life and be thankful for what He has given you. Then you'll succeed in the rat race of life. —Herbert Vander Lugt

The secret of contentment is
To let the Lord supply;
Just do your part and put God first
And on His Word rely. --DJD

He is rich who is satisfied with what God has given.

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 Designed For Companionship

A threefold cord is not quickly broken. --Ecclesiastes 4:12

We do not function well as loners. I have seen an old high school friend become an unhappy recluse. I know of a man who became angry with his church board, stopped attending services, and rejected all who tried to reach out to him. He said he needed no one except God. Yet he was a miserable old man who cried and cried when he became terminally ill.

In Ecclesiastes 4:8 we read about a lonely person who devoted all his energy to the pursuit of wealth. He didn't have time for friends or family. He worked very hard, yet his wealth didn't satisfy the void in his life.

After depicting the lonely man, the author of Ecclesiastes illustrated the advantages of fellowship and partnership (vv.9-12). He did so by referring to the value and productivity of two laboring together (v.9), of one helping the other when one falls (v.10), of two keeping each other warm on cold nights (v.11), and of two protecting each other when attacked (v.12). The closing example, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken," was a proverbial way of saying "there is strength in numbers."

God has designed us with a need for one another. So be sure to have friends, and be a friend. That's the only way to fulfill God's design for companionship. —Herbert Vander Lugt

I went out to find a friend
But could not find one there;
I went out to be a friend,
And friends were everywhere! --Anon.

The time to make friends is before you need them

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 Hold Hands and Jump!

Two are better than one. —Ecclesiastes 4:9

When Leo and Amy opened a 300-seat, fine-dining restaurant, Leo admitted he was “scared of everything.” Amy equates their leap of faith in starting their business to holding hands while jumping off a mountain. But if you’re going to do something scary, “you want to do it with someone you know and trust,” Leo continued.

Chris and Karie, another couple who took a risk to own and run a restaurant together, say they have “a good working relationship, as well as mutual admiration for each other’s work.”

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, knew how crucial it is to have companions in life. He wrote, “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). When one falls during a difficult time, another provides comfort and support (vv.10-12). We need our spouses and friends to help us through the scary times and to provide emotional support. Loners make life harder for themselves (v.8). But those who recognize their need for others find help and encouragement.

If you need to take a leap of faith—something involving finances, a career change, a new ministry—invite someone trustworthy to hold your hand as you make that jump. Or give that same encouragement to someone close to you. Because two really are better than one. —Anne Cetas

We are dependent on the strength
We draw from one another;
Words spoken give encouragement,
Love practiced draws us closer. —Sper

Those who trust God can help others to do the same

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Four Reasons Why Two are Better Than One

First, two together reap a greater profit (v. 9).

Second, friends offer encouragement and help (v. 10).

Third, a friend offers special warmth (v. 11).

Fourth, a friend gives us strength (v. 12). (Today in the Word)

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 We Need God And People

Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray. —Psalm 5:2

In 2006, while promoting the film Rocky Balboa, Sylvester Stallone surprised Christians with what he revealed. He said that his faith in Jesus Christ had not only influenced the writing of the first Rocky film but that his decision to create the final movie was inspired by his renewed affiliation with Christianity. As part of this transformation, Stallone realized that a poor choice had previously guided his life—self-reliance. He says, “You need to have the expertise and the guidance of someone else.” Stallone learned something that many people are beginning to acknowledge—we need God and we need other people.

The Bible confirms our need for God and others. David expressed his reliance on God through crying out to Him and pleading with Him in prayer. “Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray” (Ps. 5:2). And in Ecclesiastes we read that Solomon encouraged a proper reliance on others. In fact, he said helping each other can strengthen us, but individualism and self-reliance are dangerous and make for weakness. Two acting together are better than one self-reliant individual (4:9-12).

God gave us each other. Let’s passionately rely on His power and draw from the help of others.

Christian fellowship provides us
With encouragement and love;
It will help us in our journey,
Till we reach our home above. —Sper

We can go a lot further together than we can go alone.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Benefits Of Friendship

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. —Ecclesiastes 4:9

Cicero was one of the greatest thinkers of the Roman Empire. He was a skilled orator, lawyer, politician, linguist, and writer. Still today he is quoted for his clear prose and practical wisdom.

For instance, of having friends he wrote: “Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief.” He understood the double benefits of friendship along life’s journey.

Nearly a millennium earlier, King Solomon had written about the value of friends as well. In Ecclesiastes we read, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up” (4:9-10). Certainly a life without friends makes our sojourn lonely and hard to bear.

That famous Roman and that Jewish king were right: Friends are important. Friends serve as confidants, counselors, and burden-

sharers.

Think about your friends. Have you been neglecting those God has provided to share your joys and sorrows? If so, seek out one of your friends for fellowship this week. Remember, “two are better than one,” because a friend can double our joy and divide our grief.

A friend is “trust,” a friend is “warmth,”

A friend is “always there”

To add to every happiness,

To lessen every care. —Anon.

Friends are flowers in the garden of life.

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Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 Helping With Hurdles

Two are better than one For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. —Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

When my daughter Debbie was a little girl, she took ballet lessons. One dance exercise involved jumping over a rolled-up gym mat. Debbie’s first attempt resulted in her bouncing off this hurdle. For a moment she sat on the floor stunned, and then she began to cry. Immediately, I darted out to help her up and spoke soothing words to her. Then, holding her hand, I ran with her until she successfully jumped over the rolled-up mat. Debbie needed my encouragement to clear that hurdle.

While working with Paul on his first missionary journey, John Mark faced a major hurdle of his own: Things got tough on the trip, and he quit. When Barnabas tried to re-enlist Mark for Paul’s second journey, it created conflict. Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance, but Paul saw him as a liability. Ultimately, they parted ways, and Barnabas took Mark with him on his journey (Acts 15:36-39).

The Bible is silent about John Mark’s response when Barnabas helped him over his ministry hurdle. However, he must have proven himself, because Paul later wrote that John Mark “is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

When we see a believer struggling with an apparent failure, we should provide help. Can you think of someone who needs your help to clear a hurdle?

Lord, I want to show the kindness of Your heart today. Please show me who I can help and in what way. I want my words and deeds to convey Your love. Amen.

Kindness picks others up when troubles weigh them down.

Ecclesiastes 4:11 A BIRD ON A CHIMNEY

... how can one be warm alone? Ecclesiastes 4:11

It was a bitterly cold morning. The night before had been one of those quiet ones when not a breeze stirs, and no cloud dims the brilliance of the starry heavens. Driving up the street from my home, with the sound of crunching snow under the tires, I could see trails of vapor ascending straight up from chimneys all over the neighborhood. These smoky columns appeared a frosty white as they glistened in the rays of the morning sun. Suddenly my eyes were arrested by one chimney in particular. There was a dark object

on top of it. As I came closer, I recognized that a bird (and a wise old fellow he was) had perched there to soak up some heat. In that "cold, cold world," he had found a place of warmth, while his other feathered friends were no doubt shivering in their frigid sub-zero surroundings. As I saw him there, I was reminded anew that we, as believers, live in a spiritually cold world that is no "friend to grace." Wise is that Christian who avails himself of those warming influences provided by God Himself, such as Bible study, prayer, and the assembling together with those of like precious faith. What a blessing is afforded to those who meet regularly with other believers for fellowship and worship. Much of the spiritual coldness we see today is because folks neglect this sacred duty which has been especially ordained by God Himself for the benefit of those who are chilled in their soul by the adverse winds of this hostile world. The author of Hebrews admonishes us not to for-sake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is," but rather to exhort one another more and more, as we see the day of Christ's return approaching (Heb. 10:25).

The writer of Ecclesiastes asks, ". . . how can one be warm alone?" I would make an application of this to believers today. If a person refuses to gather regularly with others for the teaching of the Word, the breaking of bread, and the joys of Christian fellowship, ". . . how can [he] be warm alone?"

With joy we hail the sacred day
Which God hath called His own;
With joy the summons we obey
To worship at His throne. — H. Auber

"Floating" church members make for a sinking church!

Ecclesiastes 4:13-1 Fleeting Success

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. --Colossians 3:2

Having many friends and being rich are great blessings, but popularity and success do not guarantee a happy life. To make this point, Solomon called attention to an elderly king who ignored the wishes of his subjects and was replaced. His young successor was popular at first, but he also fell into disfavor. Solomon concluded, "Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Eccl. 4:16).

Life at the top is fleeting. Presidents and prime ministers may have extremely high approval ratings for a while, but they don't last. About 20 years ago I knew several top executives who were highly successful because of their winning personalities and outstanding abilities. Yet they lost their high-salaried positions because they could not keep up with the rapid changes their jobs demanded. Today, because of company mergers and corporate downsizing, many of their replacements have also lost their positions.

How we view popularity and success depends on what we value most. If we set our hearts on earthly things, we will eventually be disappointed. But if we set our hearts on Christ and live for Him, we will find that He is faithful to provide for our every need. Many have made this discovery. Have you? —Herbert Vander Lugt

You will surely find at the journey's end,
Whatever the world may afford,
That things fade away, but success is seen
In the life that has served the Lord. --Anon.

The master key to success is knowing the Master

Ecclesiastes 5

Ecclesiastes 5:1

To draw nigh to hear is better than to give the sacrifice of fools. (r.v.)

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

This is certainly half of our business, when we kneel to pray. It is a drawing nigh to hear. One has truly said that the closet is not so much an oratory, in the narrow sense of making requests, as an observatory, from which we get new views of God, and new revelations of Him.

We are all inclined to be rash with our mouth. We rush into the presence of God, leave our card as on a morning call, and then plunge into the eager rush of our life. We have spoken to Him, but not stayed to hear what He would say in reply. We have suggested many things to Him, but have not sought for his comments, or suggestions, in return. We do not take time to fix the

heart's gaze on the unseen and eternal, or to abstract our mind from the voices of the world, so as to hear the still small voice that speaks in silence and solitude.

"Only the waters which in perfect stillness lie Give back an undistorted image of the sky."

Keep thy foot; take off the shoes from thy feet, when entering the Presence-chamber, whether alone or with others. Walk warily and reverently; behold He is near, before whom angels veil their faces with their wings. Come into his presence with holy fear. Let there be no irreverence in demeanor. One writes of the late Mr. Gladstone, "The House of God seemed to be to him at all times just what its name implied; and it is impossible to think of him at any service missing a response, or forgetting an 'Amen.' Devotion, earnestness, and concentrated attention were the regular attributes of his nature when engaged in worship. He realized in the simplest fashion that worship was communing with God."

Ecclesiastes 5:2 On Listening

Read: Exodus 16:1-8

Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. —Ecclesiastes 5:2

God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason," the saying goes. The ability to listen is an essential life skill. Counselors tell us to listen to each other. Spiritual leaders tell us to listen to God. But hardly anyone says, "Listen to yourself." I'm not suggesting that we have an inner voice that always knows the right thing to say. Nor am I saying we should listen to ourselves instead of to God and others. I'm suggesting that we need to listen to ourselves in order to learn how others might be receiving our words.

The Israelites could have used this advice when Moses was leading them out of Egypt. Within days of their miraculous deliverance, they were complaining (Ex. 16:2). Although their need for food was legitimate, their way of expressing the need was not (v.3).

Whenever we speak out of fear, anger, ignorance, or pride—even if what we say is true—those who listen will hear more than our words. They hear emotion. But they don't know whether the emotion comes from love and concern or disdain and disrespect, so we risk misunderstanding. If we listen to ourselves before speaking out loud, we can judge our hearts before our careless words harm others or sadden our God.

Lord, help me to think before I speak, to
check my heart. Help me to control my tongue
and to express myself clearly so that I won't
cause dissension. Set a guard on my lips.
Words spoken rashly do more harm than good.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 A Portrait of a True Worshiper

First, we are to enter the place of worship to listen (vv. 1-3).

Second, we are to enter worship intending to keep the commitments we make to God (vv. 4-6).

Third, we enter worship in awe of God (v. 7). (Today in the Word)

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 Unkept Promises

We live in an era of unkept promises. Nations sign important treaties and then break them at will. And many couples show little regard for their wedding vows. In this kind of society, we who are God's people should be known for keeping our promises.

The brilliant Christian scholar and writer C. S. Lewis took that truth seriously. He was determined to pay what he had vowed. His biography tells of the suffering he endured because he kept a promise he had made to a buddy during World War I. This friend was worried about the care of his wife and small daughter if he should be killed in battle, so Lewis assured him that if that were to happen he would look after them. As the war dragged on, the man was killed. True to his word, Lewis took care of his friend's family. Yet no matter how helpful he tried to be, the woman was ungrateful, rude, arrogant, and domineering. Through it all, Lewis kept forgiving her. He refused to let her actions become an excuse to renege on his promise. -H.V.L.

Ecclesiastes 5:5 KEEPING OUR VOWS

Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.—Ecclesiastes 5:5

I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. Psalm 116:14

The night before a scheduled attack, many soldiers wrote letters to their parents. The chaplain who censored the mail was unable to read them until after the battle had taken place. When he did, he found two were in the same handwriting—one penned before and one after the brief but intense engagement. In the first, the young soldier wrote his mother, ". . . I vow to God that if I come through tomorrow, I am going to be a better man." The second letter, written after the danger was over, was addressed to a friend in another regiment. ". . . I've just come through a scorcher up front. . . . If you can get leave and meet me in Paris, boy, we'll go out on the town!" The vow made in the face of great danger had been quickly forgotten.

The writer of Psalm 116 had already experienced deliverance when he wrote his song of praise. He had been in deep distress

because he had stood at the very door of death. Rejecting the counsel of men that no help was available, he had cried out to God in faith and hope, pledging allegiance and worship to Him. The Lord had restored him to health, and now he was determined to fulfill the vows he had made. First, he would go to the house of God; and in the presence of the worshipers pour out the drink offering, the "cup of salvation," as a testimonial of his full surrender. Secondly, standing in awe at the thought that a simple person such as he, was precious to God, he would publicly acknowledge Jehovah's mercy (Ps116:14-16). Thirdly, he would pre-sent an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord, something of worth to display his love and gratitude. Unlike the fickle soldier, the Psalmist did not forget the vows he had made while in distress.

Are you keeping your vows to God?
Salvation's cup of blessing now
I take, and call upon God's name;
Before His saints I pay my vow,
And here my gratitude proclaim. — Psalter

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 In God's Presence

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. --Proverbs 1:7

As a farm boy in North Dakota, I often had a sense of awe when I looked at the sky on a clear day or when I listened to the rolling thunder of an approaching storm. God seemed so great, and I felt so small. I often had the same feeling when I entered the church sanctuary or heard my father pray. Today, though, I admit that at times I tend to be quite casual when I think of God, pray, study the Bible, or engage in worship.

When we assemble to worship, sing, pray, and listen to the message, we often do these things half-heartedly and with little sense of the fear of God. Ecclesiastes 5 speaks to those issues and warns us not to make promises to God carelessly and superficially!

We are inclined to hear only part of what God is saying to us through His Word. But genuine hearing includes careful listening accompanied by obedience. Unkept vows are also a serious matter (vv.2,4-6). Just as many dreams have no basis in reality, the careless speech of the fool in God's presence is empty (vv.3,7).

Always keep in mind how great and holy God is, and how small and sinful we are. Thank Him for His mercy and grace. This solemn contemplation of the Lord's character will help us obey the admonition to "fear God" (v.7). —Herbert Vander Lugt

A house of worship is a place
For praise and reverent prayer;
Let holy thoughts your spirit fill
Each time you enter there. --Bosch

The fear of God is the beginning of true worship

Ecclesiastes 5:8-12 Selfish Desire for Wealth

First, Solomon notes that a selfish desire for wealth can lead to oppression.

A second danger to remember is that love for money leads to dissatisfaction.

Third, Solomon notes that a love for money leads to anxiety (vv. 11-12) (Today in the Word)

Ecclesiastes 5:8-17 Stockpiling Or Storing?

Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. —Ecclesiastes 5:16

Rugs, lamps, a washer and dryer, even the food in the cupboards—everything was for sale! My husband and I stopped at an estate sale one day and wandered through the house, overwhelmed by the volume of belongings. Dish sets littered the dining room table. Christmas decorations filled the front hallway. Tools, toy cars, board games, and vintage dolls crowded the garage. When we left, I wondered if the homeowners were moving, if they desperately needed money, or if they had passed away.

This reminded me of these words from Ecclesiastes: "Just exactly as he came, so shall he go" (5:16). We're born empty-handed and we leave the world the same way. The stuff we buy, organize, and store is ours only for a while—and it's all in a state of decay. Moths munch through our clothes; even gold and silver may not hold their value (James 5:2-3). Sometimes "riches perish through misfortune" (Eccl. 5:14), and our kids don't get to enjoy our possessions after we're gone.

Stockpiling possessions in the here-and-now is foolish, because we can't take anything with us when we die. What's important is a proper attitude toward what we have and how we use what God has given. That way we'll be storing up our treasure where it belongs—in heaven.

Whatever we possess on earth
We have to leave behind;
But everything we give to God
In heaven we will find. —Sper

Letting go of earthly possessions enables us to take hold of heavenly treasure.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-12 True Satisfaction

By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life. --Proverbs 22

Becoming rich and famous does not guarantee contentment. If it did, multimillionaire athletes would not jeopardize their careers by using illicit drugs. If it did, a wealthy lawyer would not have tearfully told me that he would gladly trade everything he had for a change in the behavior of his sons. If it did, the occurrence of multiple marriages among celebrities would not be commonplace. Obviously, contentment must come from a source other than wealth and fame.

In Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon said that because sinful people rule the world, we shouldn't be surprised when the poor are oppressed and when justice and righteousness are denied (vv.8-9). The life of those who love money is not as rosy as it seems. They are never satisfied with what they have, and they face the emptiness of watching other people consume their riches (vv.10-11). The humble laborer, content with little, can sleep soundly, while the rich man lies awake at night worrying about his money (v.12).

How about you? Are you frustrated or satisfied? Paul wrote that we are "not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Only when we trust in the Lord will we find true and lasting satisfaction. —Herbert Vander Lugt

You may have much gold and grandeur,
Yet by God be reckoned poor;
He alone has riches truly
Who has Christ, though nothing more. --Anon.

Discontentment makes rich men poor; contentment makes poor men rich!

Ecclesiastes 5:9-20 Work And Its Rewards

It is good and fitting for one . . . to enjoy the good of all his labor. —Ecclesiastes 5:18

In a conference for Christians who were 50 and older, we were talking about work. After we studied the last few verses of Ecclesiastes 5, one person said, "I wish that someone had explained these verses to me when I was younger. Perhaps I wouldn't have been so driven in my work. Maybe I would have relaxed more and let myself enjoy life."

There is virtue in honest, hard work—no one would argue with that. But some Christians have the idea that work is all there is to life. To relax, to enjoy life, to spend a little of their hard-earned money somehow makes them feel guilty and lazy. So they keep driving themselves till they are stopped—often for health reasons.

The author of Ecclesiastes learned that it is "good and fitting" for us to enjoy the benefits of our work (5:18). When he spoke of eating and drinking, he was talking about a joyous feast—a banquet with plenty of good food available and all the family gathered around to enjoy the festivities.

The Bible clearly teaches that God expects us to work (2 Th. 3:10). He also wants us to enjoy some of its rewards. Whether the Lord has blessed you with great riches or just enough to pay the bills, take time to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

If you're working hard to make a living,
Never taking time to smell the roses,
Now's the time to heed the Bible's wisdom:
Find some joy before your life's day closes. —Hess

Work to live—don't merely live to work.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-17 Working For The Wind

What profit has he who has labored for the wind? —Ecclesiastes 5:16

Howard Levitt lost his \$200,000 Ferrari on a flooded Toronto highway. He had driven into what seemed like a puddle before realizing that the water was much deeper and rising quickly. When the water reached the Ferrari's fenders, its 450-horsepower engine seized. Thankfully he was able to escape the car and get to high ground.

Howard's soggy sports car reminds me of Solomon's observation that "riches perish through misfortune" (Eccl. 5:14). Natural disasters, theft, and accidents may claim our dearest belongings. Even if we manage to protect them, we certainly can't haul them with us to heaven (v.15). Solomon asked, "What profit has he who has labored for the wind?" (v.16). There is futility in working only to acquire belongings that will ultimately disappear.

There is something that doesn't spoil and we can "take with us." It is possible to store up eternal heavenly treasure. Pursuing virtues such as generosity (Matt. 19:21), humility (5:3), and spiritual endurance (Luke 6:22-23) will yield lasting rewards that can't be destroyed. Will the kind of treasure you seek expire on earth? Or, are you seeking "those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God"? (Col. 3:1).

Dear God, please give me a passion for the
unseen, eternal rewards that You offer.
Make me indifferent to the temporary
pleasures of this world.

Treasures on earth can't compare with the treasures in heaven.

INSIGHT: The book of Ecclesiastes is often viewed with skepticism, and its message is considered dark and hopeless. Today's passage exemplifies much of the book—the emptiness of riches and the transitory nature of things of this earth. But as with many great stories, this book saves the best for last. After all the reflections and lessons learned, the writer's final conclusion is to "fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (12:13). The things of God are what truly matter.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20 I Want More!

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. —Ecclesiastes 5:10

Things were going along as well as could be expected in the Sunday school class for 2-year-olds. But then along came "Charlie." As soon as we took him from his mother's arms, he squirmed and fussed. Like a broken record, he whined over and over, first for his mommy, then for his daddy.

Then a nickel fell out of his pocket, and his tune suddenly changed. As he clutched the five cents in his chubby little fist, Charlie cried over and over, "I want more money!" Finally, one of the other adults thought he might quiet Charlie down by giving the youngster a penny. Quickly the cry became, "I want another penny!" Then it switched back to, "I want more money."

I couldn't help but think how childish adult his words were. Sure, money has its place. But as the wise man who wrote Ecclesiastes realized, those who love money will not be satisfied with it (5:10). The best way to live, therefore, is to work hard and be thankfully satisfied with whatever increase the Lord gives.

Yes, loving and trusting God makes a whole lot more sense than being like Charlie, who responded to his restlessness with the cry, "I want more money!" If we have the Lord in our life, we need nothing more.

When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that God has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings—money cannot buy
Your reward in heaven nor your home on high. —Oatman

To be rich in God is better than to be rich in goods.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 The Greed Problem

Read: Isaiah 5:1-10

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. —Ecclesiastes 5:10

When I was 15 years old, I spent as much time as I could in the library reading articles and books about social justice. I was troubled by the fact that thousands of men who were willing to work hard could not find a job. I was trying to find out what form of government could best provide economic justice.

Through a better understanding of the Bible and after some experience in the workplace, I gradually began to see that human greed, not an economic system, is the culprit. A poor person may envy the rich and strive to gain great wealth, but if he succeeds he discovers that he still wants more. One translation of Ecclesiastes 5:10 states it this way: "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income" (NIV).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God expressed His grief over what greed did to His people (Isa. 5:1-10). He loves justice, but He saw the rich oppress the poor. He loves righteousness, but He heard cries of distress from the lips of the wronged. And He pronounced judgment on the greedy who kept buying more and more with no concern for others.

Lord, give us thankful hearts that are content and willing to share what we have with those less fortunate.

I do not ask for treasures here,
To hoard, decay, and rust,
But for the better things of life—
Humility and trust. —Meadows

Money is a good servant but a poor master.

Ecclesiastes 5:13-20 How To Enjoy Things

As for every man . . . to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. —Ecclesiastes 5:19

In his book *Daring To Draw Near*, Dr. John White writes that several years earlier God had made it possible for him to acquire a lovely home with many luxuries. His feelings about the house fluctuated dramatically.

When he reminded himself that it was a gracious gift from God, he felt joy and thanksgiving. But when he would begin to compare it with those of his friends, he would feel proud because he had such a fine house and his joy would evaporate. His home would actually become a burden. All he could see were the many hedges and trees to care for and the endless odd jobs to do. White said, "While vanity clouds my eyes and burdens my heart, gratitude clears my vision and lightens my load."

The writer of Ecclesiastes saw God at every turn in the enjoyment of material things. The power to eat the fruits of our labors and even the strength to receive and rejoice in them is from Him (5:18-19).

From beginning to end, all of life is a continuous gift-giving by God. We deserve nothing. He owes us nothing. Yet He gives us everything. If we remember this, we need not feel selfish or guilty. Whatever material blessings we have are a gift from our gracious God.

Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
My daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart,
That tastes those gifts with joy. —Addison

God, who has given so much to us, gives one more thing—a grateful heart. —Herbert

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 Too Strict

Read: Genesis 3:1-6

God . . . gives us richly all things to enjoy. —1 Timothy 6:17

The tempter knows his craft. After all, he has been practicing it since the world began. He tries to get us to forfeit God's blessing by urging us to ignore God's laws or by slyly getting us to add to them. He knows we can fall into a ditch on either side of the road.

In his chat with Eve, he first suggested that God didn't want her to enjoy any of the trees in the garden (Gen. 3:1). Eve jumped to God's defense, explaining that it was only the fruit of the middle tree that was off limits (vv.2-3). But then she added that even touching the tree would bring death (v.3). God, though, hadn't said anything about touching it.

Some of us try to defend God by being more strict than He is. We believe we are holier if we go beyond His commands. As a result, we miss out on the orchard because we are denied a single piece of poisoned fruit. Not only will we not touch that tree, but we also will not touch the tree next to it or a tree that looks like it. By doing so we dishonor God.

God has given us all good things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). He's not pleased when we focus on what is prohibited and fail to enjoy all His blessings. It is not only a shame but also a sin not to enjoy life.

For Further Study

What do these verses say about enjoying life?

Genesis 1:28-31; Psalm 36:7-9; Ecclesiastes 2;

Acts 14:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 2:20-23

The joy of living comes from a heart of thanksgiving.

Ecclesiastes 6

Ecclesiastes 6:1

Under the sun.

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

The Preacher constantly refers to what is done under the sun; and is not this the clue to so much that is puzzling in this book? If your horizon is limited to what the sun shines on, it is impossible to get the true standpoint of vision, or discover the real policy of life. If this world and the time-day are all, we are entangled in an inexplicable maze. It is impossible to believe in the existence of a benign and wise Creator unless there is more than we can see, larger than we can grasp. We have no choice but blank materialism, unless we believe there is some one and something over and above the sun, and that the sun and his attendant train of worlds is but a speck in the vastness of his existence.

O Christian soul, let you and me get beyond the sun, which one day will be no more, to the Lord, who is an everlasting light. Let us sit with Him in the heavenlies, and thence look down upon man and his little life. What inconsiderable atoms do kings and empires appear; even our affliction seems to be but light, and for a moment! Not on this side of the sun, but on that lies our true portion and home, our enduring substance.

In order to live as we should, the sun must be under our feet, a position which is only possible to those who are in Christ Jesus. "I knew a man in Christ," says the Apostle, "caught up into the third heaven, and he heard unspeakable things." Would you be unworldly, seek to become other worldly. Do you want the sun to grow dim? — ask for the light which is above the brightness of the sun.

Set your affections on those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-6 The Difference God Makes

[Do not] trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. --1 Timothy 6:17

One evening a news program devoted its entire broadcast to the problems of many young athletes who suddenly become multimillionaire sports celebrities. They start out buying expensive cars, living luxuriously, and partying. Then they get into immoral conduct and illicit drugs. Soon their careers are in shambles.

The writer of Ecclesiastes could have empathized with these young athletes. In chapter 6, he illustrated the emptiness of a life that has wealth and riches but does not include God. Two men are portrayed. The first is either a workaholic or a playboy. He is a quick success but is unhappy and dies with no heirs (vv.1-2). The second lives longer and has many children but is also unfulfilled and dies unloved (vv.3-6). The writer concluded that it is better not to have lived at all than to be rich and famous but miserable!

The apostle Paul said that when we give God control of our lives, earthly blessings can be enjoyed, for He "gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). And when we use money to do good, we are using it for God's eternal purposes, and we "lay hold on the true life" (a literal translation of verse 19). A bright future and a joy-filled present—that's the difference God makes! —Herbert Vander Lugt

You may have much gold and grandeur,
Yet by God be reckoned poor;
He alone has riches truly
Who has Christ, though nothing more. —Anon.

To be rich in God is better than to be rich in goods.

Ecclesiastes 6:7-12 Are You Full?

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing. --Romans 15:13

As a boy, I laughed and cried as I read *The Adventures Of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. I gave little thought to the author of these books, though, until I saw a dramatized version of Mark Twain's life.

Twain had his share of tragedy. He blamed himself for his younger brother's death in a steamboat accident at age 20, and for the death of his only son, who died from diphtheria at 19 months. He grieved bitterly over the deaths of two of his daughters—one from meningitis at age 23 and one from a heart attack at age 29.

But instead of turning to God, Twain became bitter and pessimistic. When he died at 74, he was desperately lonely, unhappy, and hopeless.

Mark Twain had an emptiness that could not be satisfied with money and fame. His success as a writer only increased his misery and sense of loss. His life illustrates the folly of living without God, which is described in Ecclesiastes 6:7-12. If only he had trusted Christ for salvation and looked to Him for comfort and fulfillment!

Have life's hardships left you feeling empty and bitter, or have they strengthened your relationship with God and made you better? Turn in faith to Christ, and "the God of hope [will] fill you with all joy and peace" (Romans 15:13). —Herbert Vander Lugt

The sun that hardens clay to brick
Can soften wax to shape and mold;
So too life's trials will harden some,
While others purify as gold. —Sper

Life's trials should make us better—not bitter

Ecclesiastes 7

By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad. - Ecclesiastes 7:3

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

Who does not know that our most sorrowful days have been amongst our best? When the face is wreathed with smiles, and we trip lightly over meadows bespangled with spring flowers, our heart is often running to waste. The soul which is always blithe and gay misses the deepest life. It has its reward, and it is satisfied to its measure, though that measure is a very scanty one. But the heart is dwarfed, and the nature, which is capable of the highest heights, the deepest depths, is undeveloped; and life presently burns down to its socket without having known the resonance of the deepest chords of joy. "Blessed are they that mourn."

Stars shine brightest in the long dark nights of winter. The gentians show their fairest bloom amidst almost inaccessible heights of snow and ice. God's promises seem to wait for the pressure of pain to trample out their richest juice as in a wine-press. Sorrow brings us nearest to the Man of Sorrows, and is the surest passport to his loving sympathy. Only those who have sorrowed know how tender his comfort can be. It is only as the door shuts upon the joys of the earth that the window is opened to the blessedness of the unseen and eternal. Let sadness cover your face, Jesus will enter the heart, and make it glad, for the days in which you have been afflicted, and the years in which you have seen evil.

Is your face sad? Are you passing through bitter and trying experiences? Be of good cheer. Out of the sorrows that make the face sad will come ultimate joy. This affliction is working out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And the day is not distant when God will wipe tears from off all faces.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 A Good Name

On Memorial Day in the United States, thousands of people visit cemeteries and monuments to remember and honor their loved ones. They ponder a name carved in stone and recall the person for whom it stands.

This kind of reflection on the lives of those who have gone before us can encourage us to evaluate the way we are living today. When people hear our name, do they think of someone who is faithfully living for Christ?

King Solomon observed: "The memory of the righteous is blessed" (Proverbs 10:7). "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (22:1). "A good name is better than precious ointment" (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

A solid reputation and loving relationships are high achievements. Honesty, integrity, and generosity in life are more valuable than the most expensive funeral. Perfume fades, but the aroma of our lives lingers on.

By our attitudes and actions, we are creating the memories that will be associated with our names in life and in death. Today we have an opportunity to renew our commitment to Christ and to the making of a good name—a name that honors Him and encourages those we love for years to come.

Do you have a good name? —David C. McCasland

This is the wish I always make,
The prayer I always pray:
Lord, may my life help other lives
It touches by the way. —Anon.

The memory of a faithful life speaks more eloquently than words.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-6 Helpful Wounds

It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. --Ecclesiastes 7:5

I enjoy being in the company of people who have a sparkling sense of humor. Lighthearted conversation sprinkled with laughter is always great fun.

I also like serious discussions about important spiritual, moral, and political issues, especially when the participants express different points of view with intensity and feeling.

But I don't enjoy conversations when I am being rebuked, either directly or indirectly. It's hard to face my failings, shortcomings, and sins.

As I look back on my life, however, I must confess that some of the reprimands have brought me moral and spiritual benefit. Miss Grevengood, my favorite teacher when I was in the 8th grade, told me how disappointed she was about my misconduct in another teacher's class. When I was 17, Henry Vanden Brink gently rebuked me for laughing at an obscene picture that someone showed me. And on another occasion, an elderly minister scolded me in the presence of friends for irreverently injecting a Bible verse into a humorous situation. These early lessons have stayed with me.

Rebukes hurt, but they are helpful. They are good for what ails us. So receive them gratefully. Remember, "Faithful are the wounds

of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). —Herbert Vander Lugt

When others give us compliments,
They are so easy to believe;
But it is hard to take rebukes,
Though they are helpful to receive. --Sper

A rebuke can be a better teacher than a compliment

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 The Upside Of Sorrow

Sorrow can be good for the soul. It can uncover hidden depths in ourselves and in God.

Sorrow causes us to think earnestly about ourselves. It makes us ponder our motives, our intentions, our interests. We get to know ourselves as never before.

Sorrow also helps us to see God as we've never seen Him. Job said, out of his terrible grief, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5).

Jesus, the perfect man, is described as "a man of sorrows," intimately acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). It is hard to fathom, but even the incarnate Son of God learned and grew through the heartaches He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). As we think about His sorrow and His concern for our sorrow, we gain a better appreciation for what God is trying to accomplish in us through the grief we bear.

The author of Ecclesiastes wrote, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (Eccl 7:3). Those who don't let sorrow do its work, who deny it, trivialize it, or try to explain it away, remain shallow and indifferent. They never understand themselves or others very well. In fact, I think that before God can use us very much, we must first learn to mourn. — David H. Roper

When God leads through valleys of trouble,
His omnipotent hand we can trace;
For the trials and sorrows He sends us
Are valuable lessons of grace. —Anon.

We can learn more from sorrow than from laughter

Ecclesiastes 7:1-4 FUNERAL OR BIRTHDAY?

Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. Ecclesiastes 7:2

If you visit some of the old New England churches, you'll notice that many of them have a cemetery in the churchyard. The windows in the sanctuary are filled with clear rather than stained glass so that the pastor would see the graveyard as he preached. As he communicated his message to the congregation, a very serious message was being communicated to him.

Two hundred fifty years ago, Christians believed that the central mission of the church was to bring men and women into a right relationship with God. That's why they constructed their church buildings with see-through windows. They wanted their pastors to be continually reminded of the seriousness of their calling. Everyone who sat in the pews before them each Sunday would eventually fill a place in the cemetery and ultimately stand before God to be judged.

The preacher of Ecclesiastes also lived with the reality of death. He argued that it is better to go to a funeral than to a birthday party, because when we think about death we deal with the bedrock issues of our lives.

Only those who've trusted in Christ for eternal life can live well -- because they're prepared to die. -- Haddon W. Robinson

Considering mortality
Gives life the proper view;
Preparing for eternity
Makes sense of all we do.--Sper

You're not ready to live until you're ready to die.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-6 LAUGHING GAS

"Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better."-- Ecclesiastes 7:3

Laughing gas, or nitrous oxide, is used to reduce the pain of surgery. Because it produces an insensitivity to physical suffering, its effects are usually pleasurable. Patients under its influence have been known to sing and laugh hysterically before losing consciousness.

A person's deceitful heart can also anesthetize him to the effects of sin, giving him the delusion of well-being. Although giving the impression of strength and exhilaration, his lightheartedness represents only a brief evasion of tragedy.

Such a condition was described by the author of Ecclesiastes, who explained that just as the crackling of thorns in a fire is a sign of their destruction, so the gaiety of the sinner's conduct reflects his shallowness and the certainty of his doom (7:1-6). He is not aware of the sacredness of life nor of the inevitability of God's judgment upon his wrongdoing.

Have you been unwilling to admit your guilt before God, laughing away your time by seeking the immediate pleasures of life? If so, you need to visit the "house of mourning" (vv. 2, 4) and acknowledge your desperate, sinful condition. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation. Then your foolish laughter can be turned into true joy.-- Martin R. De Haan II

Better is the wail of mourning
From repenters who are grieving
Than the gaiety and laughing
Of doomed sinners disbelieving.-- Sper

We learn more from sorrow than from laughter.

Ecclesiastes 7:6 LAUGHTER

"Like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool."-- Ecclesiastes 7:6

Your dog may be a great companion. You may hunt together, play together, eat together, even sleep on the same bed together. Yet, although you and your dog may share life, you will never share a laugh. As far as we know, humans are the only creatures of God who enjoy humor. Laughter is a distinctive of human beings.

Laughter also can tell something about you. Show me what amuses you, and I can make a good guess about the sort of person you are. If you laugh at filthy stories, you give yourself away. If you scoff at virtue, you have embraced vice. If you laugh at another's failure or misfortune,

you have a cruel streak inside of you. If you can laugh at your own stupidities and mistakes, you handle life with some skill.

I believe Christians have a greater capacity to enjoy healthy laughter than others. After all, we live with the promise of eternal life and with knowledge that God can use even our setbacks to move us forward.

Proverbs 15:13 tells us that "a merry heart makes a cheerful countenance." But the Bible also says that the laughter of fools who are living only for this life is like the "crackling of thorns" that are burned in a fire (Eccl. 7:6).

Ask yourself, "What makes me laugh?"-- Haddon W. Robinson

To know the Savior brings great joy,
The kind that nothing can destroy;
And though a smile should light your face,
Coarse humor surely has no place.-- Dennis J. De Haan

What we laugh at reveals our character.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 Beware Of Jumping To Conclusions

Read: Joshua 22:10-34

Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. —Ecclesiastes 7:9

The e-mail contained nothing but Bible verses, and it came from someone I didn't know very well at a time when there was disagreement among members of a church committee I was on. I assumed that the verses were aimed at me in an accusing way, and I was angry that someone who didn't know all the issues involved would use Scripture to attack me.

Before I could retaliate, my husband, Jay, suggested I give her the benefit of the doubt instead of assuming the worst. "Perhaps there's an innocent explanation," he said. I couldn't imagine what it would be, but I followed his advice and called. "Thank you so much for calling," she said. "My computer has a virus and it spewed out e-mails using pieces of our Sunday school lesson to random people in my address book." Gulp. I'm thankful that God used Jay to keep me from creating a problem where none existed.

By jumping to a conclusion that was logical but untrue, I came dangerously close to unnecessary conflict. The Israelites did the same thing. They were ready to go to war because they wrongly assumed that the altar built by their brothers was a sign of rebellion against God (Josh. 22:9-34). To avoid making wrong judgments, we must be careful to get the facts right.

When you're forming your opinions,
Do it carefully—go slow;
Hasty judgments oft are followed
By regretting—that I know. —Anon.

To avoid an embarrassing fall, don't jump to a wrong conclusion.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Look at David's Lord and Master; see his beginning. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Would you see the end? He sits at his Father's right hand, expecting until his enemies be made his footstool. "As he is, so are we also in this world." You must bear the cross, or you shall never wear the crown; you must wade through the mire, or you shall never walk the golden pavement. Cheer up, then, poor Christian. "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." See that creeping worm, how contemptible its appearance! It is the beginning of a thing. Mark that insect with gorgeous wings, playing in the sunbeams, sipping at the flower bells, full of happiness and life; that is the end thereof. That caterpillar is yourself, until you are wrapped up in the chrysalis of death; but when Christ shall appear you shall be like him, for you shall see him as he is. Be content to be like him, a worm and no man, that like him you may be satisfied when you wake up in his likeness. That rough-looking diamond is put upon the wheel of the lapidary. He cuts it on all sides. It loses much—much that seemed costly to itself. The king is crowned; the diadem is put upon the monarch's head with trumpet's joyful sound. A glittering ray flashes from that coronet, and it beams from that very diamond which was just now so sorely vexed by the lapidary. You may venture to compare yourself to such a diamond, for you are one of God's people; and this is the time of the cutting process. Let faith and patience have their perfect work, for in the day when the crown shall be set upon the head of the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, one ray of glory shall stream from you. "They shall be mine," saith the Lord, "in the day when I make up my jewels." "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."

Ecclesiastes 8

Ecclesiastes 8:4

The King's word hath power. (r.v.)

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

When our King speaks it is done. He spoke in creation, and power went with his word to call all things out of nothing. He spoke in his earthly ministry, and power accompanied every word, in giving eyes to the blind and life to the dead. He spoke, and the paralyzed had power to walk. He spoke, and the winds dropped, whilst the tumultuous waves were hushed to rest. He spoke, and men knew their sins were forgiven, to be remembered against them no more for ever. He spoke, and the dying thief passed into Paradise.

Whatever He bids you do by his word, be sure that He will enable you to do it by his power. He works in us to will and to work of his good pleasure; that is, He never directs us in any path of obedience or service without furnishing a sufficient supply of grace. Does He bid you renounce some evil habit? The power to renounce it awaits you. Claim it. Does He bid you walk on the water! The power by which to walk only waits for you to claim it. Does He bid you perform irksome duty? There is such transforming power issuing from Him as to make duty a delight, if only you will avail yourself of it. Whenever you are called to stand up to speak the word of your King, be sure to seek and obtain the power — that shall prove your best credential. Take the power of the King with you: it is his signet-ring, by which men will be convinced that you have been entrusted with his word.

"Sustain me, that with Thee I walk these waves Resisting! — Breathe me upward, Thou in me Aspiring, Who art the Way, the Truth, the Life— That no Truth henceforth seem indifferent, No Way to Truth laborious, and no Life, Not even this life I live, intolerable!"

Ecclesiastes 8:15 Breathtaking

Read: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

A man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life. —Ecclesiastes 8:15

A popular slogan says, "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." I see the phrase everywhere, on everything from T-shirts to pieces of art. It's a catchy phrase, but I think it's misleading.

If we measure life by breathtaking moments, we miss the wonder of ordinary moments. Eating, sleeping, and breathing seem "ordinary" in that we do them every day, usually without much thought. But they are not ordinary at all. Every bite and every breath are miracles. In fact, having breath is more miraculous than anything that takes our breath away.

King Solomon may have had more breathtaking moments than anyone. He said, "I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure" (Eccl. 2:10). But he expressed cynicism about it by saying, "All of it is meaningless" (v.17 NIV).

Solomon's life reminds us that it's important to find joy in "ordinary" things, for they are indeed wonderful. Bigger is not always better. More is not always an improvement. Busier doesn't make us more important.

Rather than look for meaning in breathtaking moments, we should find meaning in every breath we take, and make every breath meaningful.

All that I want is in Jesus;

He satisfies, joy He supplies;

Life would be worthless without Him,

All things in Jesus I find. —Loes

Breathing is more miraculous than anything that takes our breath away.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9 Stay At Your Post

If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post; for conciliation pacifies great offenses. —Ecclesiastes 10:4

Eric was stunned by the certified letter he had received. He had been fired! His record with the company was good, and the reasons given for his dismissal were without substance.

As he related his story to me, Eric explained, "I said to myself, 'Don't panic. Think this through. How would God have me respond?'" After praying and consulting a Christian lawyer, Eric felt that God was leading him to apply the truth of today's text to his situation. So he stayed at his post and continued to see clients and place orders. To meet his financial needs, he drew on his personal reserves. Company officials were unprepared to deal with someone who kept at his job after being dropped from the payroll. Eight months later, the president offered Eric a new contract with the best terms ever.

Not everyone can or should do what Eric did. But we can learn from his example. We don't need to be "afraid of sudden terror" (Prov. 3:25). We don't need to panic.

When a trial turns our life upside down, we can "stay at our post" by seeking God's wisdom through prayer, Scripture, and mature Christian counsel. We can resist despair, remain confident that God is at work, and continue doing what is right and good. God will do the rest.

When through life's darkened maze I go
And troubles overwhelm my soul,
Oh, grant me, Lord, Your grace to know
That You are surely in control. —DJD

A crisis cannot break the one who relies on God's strength.

Ecclesiastes 8:6 God's Timing

Read: Exodus 13:17-22

For every matter there is a time and judgment. —Ecclesiastes 8:6

Pastor Audley Black's church near the south coast of Jamaica has been in a building program since at least 2005. That was the first time I visited his church and saw that they were expanding. The last time I was there—in the spring of 2011—some of the walls were up. By that summer, they had started on the roof. When I suggested to Pastor Black that perhaps the church would be done by 2013 when I thought I might return, he said it was a possibility.

There was no hint of disappointment that this project could take 8 years or longer! No, Pastor Black and his people are excited about what God is doing, and they're patient with His timing.

We are often not that patient. We want our church to grow quickly, our young people to mature right away, and our problems to be fixed today.

Maybe we need to be reminded that some things take time—God's time. For instance, when the Israelites first left Egypt, God sent them on the long route to the Promised Land (Ex. 13:17-18). During that time He prepared them, taught them, and challenged them. In our microwave world, we want everything done instantaneously. But sometimes that's not God's plan. Let's seek God's help and learn to accept His timing.

He does not lead me year by year,
Nor even day by day;
But step by step my path unfolds;
My Lord directs my way. —Ryberg

God's timetable may move slowly, but it does move surely.

Ecclesiastes 9

Ecclesiastes 9

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. - Ecclesiastes 9:11

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

This is true in another sense than the Preacher meant. His conclusion was that time and chance happen to all alike in the race and

battle of life. To no it means that God comes to those who are not swift, but, like Mephibosheth, lame on both feet, and gives them the prize which they could not win; that He bends over those who are not strong, and gives them the victory which they could not procure. The Gospel is full of promise to younger sons, bruised reeds, lame and helpless souls, to babes and sucklings, to those that have no might; whilst it hides its secrets from the wise and prudent, and withholds its rewards from the swift and strong.

You are not swift. Long ago the spring was taken from your life, and the elasticity from your feet. For many years you have lain by the Beautiful Gate, seeing the happy souls pass to the inner shrine, and coming out entranced. You have been content to live on their alms. But better things are in store. He who knows your case will even now give you perfect soundness Though you cannot win the prize of your high calling by running, it shall be yours by receiving and taking. It is a gift; and though you have not legs you have surely hands.

You are not strong. But it is well. Many of us are too strong for God. He has to weaken us by touching the sinew of our thigh. When Jacob went from fighting to clinging, he became a prince with God. Isaiah left it on record that God gives power to the faint, and increases might to those who have no power. And the great Apostle of the Gentiles gloried in his infirmities, because he had discovered that when he was weak then he was strong, since the power of Christ was only perfected in weakness.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:1

A CERTAIN courthouse in Ohio stands in a unique location. Raindrops that fall on the north side of the building go into Lake Ontario and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, while those falling on the south side go into the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. A gentle puff of wind at the peak of the roof can determine the destiny of many raindrops—a difference of as much as two thousand miles.

Using this as a metaphor for the spiritual life helps us see the importance of little things. The smallest word, action, or choice can set in motion a series of events that can change the course of life—our own and that of others. It can also affect someone's eternal destiny.

There are two sides to this truth. An unkind word or a thoughtless act can do much damage. But a kind word, a helpful deed, or a wise choice can accomplish much good. Every day we make seemingly unimportant, insignificant choices. But they're not. And the reason we need the Holy Spirit's guidance in each one is because He can see what we cannot—the future consequences of every word and deed.—RWD

Lord, when I feel weak, unimportant, and worthless, empower me with the awareness of how much good I can do with a kind word or deed. And when I feel strong, important, and powerful, humble me with the awareness of how much damage I can do with a cruel or cutting comment. May I make a big difference in the world with small acts of kindness..

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12 Live For The Moment

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is neither work . . . or wisdom in the grave. --Ecclesiastes 9:10

Just weeks before he was to collect a \$1.5 million inheritance, a 43-year-old Australian construction worker died when a wall fell on him. Witnesses said the backhoe operator had taken shelter from a brisk wind when a brick wall collapsed on him.

This may be the kind of untimely misfortune that caused Solomon to wonder about the futility of life (Eccl. 9:2). He knew that we face uncertainty throughout our lives (v.12), and that security seems impossible to come by. He had discovered that the desire to have things is soon replaced by the fear of losing them. So he concluded that if we are wise we will live for the moment.

Yet living only for the moment was not Solomon's ultimate resolution to his dilemma. Eventually he came to realize that there is only one solid foundation for living with uncertainty. After facing his own sins and distractions, he concluded, "Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13). That's the only wise way to live for the moment--realizing that God will give eternal value or loss to everything we are now doing or thinking (v.14).

Life is uncertain, but God's judgment is certain. So, live for the moment--but always with eternity in view. That way you'll honor the Lord in everything you do. --MRDII

What comes from man will never last--

It's here today, tomorrow past;

What comes from God will always be

The same for all eternity! --Spencer

Eternity is in the moment--

seize it!

Ecclesiastes 9:4 Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Life is a precious thing, and in its humblest form it is superior to death. This truth is eminently certain in spiritual things. It is better to be the least in the kingdom of heaven than the greatest out of it. The lowest degree of grace is superior to the noblest development of unregenerate nature. Where the Holy Ghost implants divine life in the soul, there is a precious deposit which none of the refinements of education can equal. The thief on the cross excels Caesar on his throne; Lazarus among the dogs is better than Cicero among the senators; and the most unlettered Christian is in the sight of God superior to Plato. Life is the badge of nobility in

the realm of spiritual things, and men without it are only coarser or finer specimens of the same lifeless material, needing to be quickened, for they are dead in trespasses and sins.

A living, loving, gospel sermon, however unlearned in matter and uncouth in style, is better than the finest discourse devoid of unction and power. A living dog keeps better watch than a dead lion, and is of more service to his master; and so the poorest spiritual preacher is infinitely to be preferred to the exquisite orator who has no wisdom but that of words, no energy but that of sound. The like holds good of our prayers and other religious exercises; if we are quickened in them by the Holy Spirit, they are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, though we may think them to be worthless things; while our grand performances in which our hearts were absent, like dead lions, are mere carrion in the sight of the living God. O for living groans, living sighs, living despondencies, rather than lifeless songs and dead calms. Better anything than death. The snarlings of the dog of hell will at least keep us awake, but dead faith and dead profession, what greater curses can a man have? Quicken us, quicken us, O Lord!

Ecclesiastes 9:5 EXPECTED -- SOONER OR LATER

"The living know that they will die." - Ecclesiastes 9:5

I heard a popular senator who was swept out of office after only one term. His defeat came as a complete surprise to opponents and supporters alike. In his concession speech, the losing candidate wryly commented that recent events reminded him of an epitaph he once saw on an old tombstone. It said:

I EXPECTED THIS -- BUT NOT SO SOON.

Death is certain for all! The Bible says, "It is appointed for me to die once" (Heb. 9:27). For some of us that day is closer than we think. The sensible person faces up to the fact of death and makes provision for this final episode of his earthly life.

There's only one way to prepare for eternity -- trusting Christ as Savior. Those who come to God through Him will enter heaven when they have drawn their last breath. But for unbelievers, that fateful moment will seal their never-ending doom.

Are you ready for the inevitable? Jesus said, "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (Jn. 5:24). If you've never done so, place your faith in Christ, acknowledging that He died for your sins and rose victorious from the grave. Then, whether the expected comes sooner or later, you'll be ready! -- Richard W. De Haan

Sooner or later, yes, sooner for some,
Darkness will all then be past;
Sooner or later our savior will come --
With Him will your lot be cast? -- Koch

Live each day as if it were your last - it could be!

Ecclesiastes 9:8 On Wearing White

When I was growing up, wearing white in the US after Labor Day was a serious fashion blunder. So even though I love white clothes, every year I dutifully start putting them away at the end of August.

Late one year, while following a Bible-reading schedule, I came to Ecclesiastes 9:8, which states, "Let your garments always be white." I smiled, imagining for a moment that the author was giving permission to wear white all year. But Solomon was not talking about fashion. He was instructing us to find joy in everything we do and to express it in ways that show faith in God even at times when life doesn't seem to make sense.

One way we can do this is to observe the "fashion advice" of the apostle Paul. First-century Christians in Colossae had become confused. They were overly concerned with man-made rules, so Paul reminded them of the holy laws of God and gave them these instructions: "Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12).

These are the commands of an infinite God, not the rules of finite humans. So if we put on these "clothes" every day, we'll never be out of season. —Julie Ackerman Link

Help us, O Lord, to live our lives
So people clearly see
Reflections of Your loving heart,
Your kindness, purity. —Sper

Christlikeness is always in season

Ecclesiastes 9:9 Marriage Before Love

Read: Genesis 24:61-67

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun. — Ecclesiastes 9:9

A man went to his pastor for counseling. In his hands were pages of complaints against his wife. After hours of uninterrupted listening, the pastor couldn't help but ask, "If she is that bad, why did you marry her?" Immediately the man shot back, "She wasn't like this at first!" The pastor, unable to hold back his thoughts, asked, "So, are you saying that she is like this because she's been married to you?"

Whether or not this story is true, it does suggest an important lesson to be learned. At times, feelings toward a spouse may grow cold. But love is much more than feelings—it's a lifelong commitment.

Although most people choose to marry only because of love, in some cultures people still get married through matchmaking. In the lives of Isaac and Rebekah recorded in the book of Genesis, love came after marriage. It says in chapter 24 that Isaac married Rebekah and then he loved her (v.67).

Biblical love is about our willingness to do what is good for another. Husbands are instructed to "love their own wives as their own bodies" (Eph. 5:28).

So, walking in obedience to the Lord, let's keep our marriage vows to love "till death do us part."

"For better or for worse," we pledge,
"Through sickness and through strife";
And by the help and grace of God
We'll keep these vows for life. —D. De Haan

Love is more than a feeling, it's a commitment.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Just A Job?

Read: Ephesians 6:5-9

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. —Ecclesiastes 9:10

Three men were hard at work on a large building project. Someone asked them, "What are you doing?" "I'm mixing mortar," one said. The second man said, "I'm helping put up this great stone wall." But the third man replied, "I'm building a cathedral to the glory of God."

Those three men could just as well have been working on a car, in a factory, behind a counter, or on any legitimate product or service a man or woman might provide.

Most people work to earn a living, attain success, or amass wealth. Such reasons, however, must not be the Christian's primary motive for working. Like the third man in our story, we need to see that what gives work eternal value is not the product or service of our labor but the process of laboring itself—doing the job faithfully to the glory of the Lord.

God commands us to work because it is good. But work also gives believers the opportunity to represent Jesus Christ to unbelievers. By performing our God-given tasks to the best of our abilities, we bring honor and glory to His name. And we demonstrate to fellow employees the difference Christ can make in a life. Is our work just a job? Or are we doing it to the glory of God?

Man's work can make of him a slave
And lead him to an early grave,
But if it's done as to the Lord
His labors bring him great reward. —DJD

We are given time to build for eternity.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," refers to works that are possible. There are many things which our heart findeth to do which we never shall do. It is well it is in our heart; but if we would be eminently useful, we must not be content with forming schemes in our heart, and talking of them; we must practically carry out "whatsoever our hand findeth to do." One good deed is more worth than a thousand brilliant theories. Let us not wait for large opportunities, or for a different kind of work, but do just the things we "find to do" day by day. We have no other time in which to live. The past is gone; the future has not arrived; we never shall have any time but time present. Then do not wait until your experience has ripened into maturity before you attempt to serve God. Endeavour now to bring forth fruit. Serve God now, but be careful as to the way in which you perform what you find to do—"do it with thy might." Do it promptly; do not fritter away your life in thinking of what you intend to do to-morrow as if that could recompense for the idleness of to-day. No man ever served God by doing things to-morrow. If we honour Christ and are blessed, it is by the things which we do to-day. Whatever you do for Christ throw your whole soul into it. Do not give Christ a little slurred labour, done as a matter of course now and then; but when you do serve him, do it with heart, and soul, and strength.

But where is the might of a Christian? It is not in himself, for he is perfect weakness. His might lieth in the Lord of Hosts. Then let us seek his help; let us proceed with prayer and faith, and when we have done what our "hand findeth to do," let us wait upon the Lord for his blessing. What we do thus will be well done, and will not fail in its effect.

ECCLESIASTES 9:11

The newspaper headline read, "Jockey Beats Horse Over Finish Line."

The jockey beat the pack by 20 lengths and his horse by one length when he was catapulted out of the saddle and over the finish line. His horse, who had tripped, followed soon after. But the victory went to the second-place finisher named Slip Up. A race official said that the jockey "was so far in front that only a freak accident would stop him, . . . and that's what happened."

Life is filled with unpredictable experiences and events. They seem like stones dropped into the gears of human ingenuity. A strong, healthy man drops dead. A rising young athlete contracts a crippling disease. A person of means suddenly loses everything.

The author of Ecclesiastes reflected on the fact that man is not the master of his destiny, as he so often thinks he is. What can we learn from this? Not to trust our own strength, wisdom, or skill, but to depend on the Lord who alone knows the end from the beginning. —M. R. D. II

LIVING WITHOUT FAITH IN GOD IS LIKE DRIVING IN THE FOG.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 The Testimony Of A Tortoise

Read: Philippians 3:7-16

The race is not to the swift. —Ecclesiastes 9:11

Remember the tortoise and the hare in Aesop's Fables? The hare boasted that he was the swiftest animal in the forest. When he challenged the others to a race, only the tortoise dared to try. To the hare, it seemed an unfair contest, since he would win easily. But off they started, with the tortoise soon trailing far behind.

On the way, the hare decided there was time for a nap, but the tortoise kept plodding along. When the hare awoke, he couldn't see the tortoise anywhere, so he laughed and said, "He still hasn't caught up with me!" But as he ran toward the finish line, he saw the tortoise crossing it. Slowly and steadily, the tortoise had won!

Like that foolish hare, some believers are "fast movers" whose Christian lives are full of stops and starts. But they often complain that they're getting nowhere fast. The better testimony would be "I'm getting somewhere slowly." This is more realistic, for true learning, growing, and overcoming are gradual experiences.

A philosopher once said that the essential thing in heaven and on earth should be "long obedience in the same direction." Like the apostle Paul, make it your lifelong aim to press on toward your goal in Christ (Phil. 3:14). You'll be the one to win the prize.

Not to the strong is the battle,
Not to the swift is the race;
Yet to the true and the faithful
Victory is promised through grace. —Crosby

There are no shortcuts on the road to spiritual maturity.

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 It's Not Over Till It's Over

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. —Ecclesiastes 9:11

The newspaper headline read, "Jockey Beats Horse Over Finish Line." The jockey beat the pack by 20 lengths and his horse by one length when he was catapulted out of the saddle and over the finish line. His horse, who had tripped, followed soon after. But the victory went to the second-place finisher named Slip Up. A race official said that the jockey "was so far in front that only a freak accident would stop him, . . . and that's what happened."

We've all experienced life's unexpected happenings. The author of Ecclesiastes took note of them when he said, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (9:11). He reflected on the fact that man is not the master of his destiny, as he so often thinks he is.

Life is filled with unpredictable experiences and events. They seem like stones dropped into the gears of human ingenuity. A strong, healthy man drops dead. A rising young athlete contracts a crippling disease. A person of means suddenly loses everything in a bad deal.

What can we learn from this? Not to trust our own strength, our own wisdom, or our own skill, but to depend on the Lord who alone knows the end from the beginning.

Life's race is not over till He says it's over.

There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;
But come what may, I'll simply trust

And leave it all to Him. —Overton

Living without faith in God is like driving in the fog.

Ecclesiastes 9:17 Words of the Wise

My niece's husband recently wrote these words on a social media site: "I would say a lot more online if it weren't for this little voice that prompts me not to. As a follower of Jesus, you might think that little voice is the Holy Spirit. It isn't. It's my wife, Heidi."

With the smile comes a sobering thought. The cautions of a discerning friend can reflect the wisdom of God. Ecclesiastes 9 says that the "words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard" (v. 17 nkjv).

Scripture warns us not to be wise in our own eyes or proud (Prov. 3:7; Isa. 5:21; Rom. 12:16). In other words, let's not assume that we have all the answers! Proverbs 19:20 says, "Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise." Whether it is a friend, a spouse, a pastor, or a co-worker, God can use others to teach us more of His wisdom.

"Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning," declares the book of Proverbs (14:33). Part of recognizing the Spirit's wisdom is discovering how to listen and learn from each other.

Dear Lord, thank You for Your Word that teaches me how to love You and others. Thank You also for the people You place in my life to remind me of Your truth.

True wisdom begins and ends with God.

INSIGHT: The author of the book of Ecclesiastes is unknown. Many believe it to be Solomon, the legendary wise son of King David. However, we are only told that the author is "the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (Eccl. 1:1). This description would fit King Solomon. J.R. Hudberg

Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:1 Big Little Things

One sinner destroys much good. —Ecclesiastes 9:18

In Ohio stands a courthouse that has an unusual location. Raindrops that fall on the north side of the building go into Lake Ontario and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, while those falling on the south side go into the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. At precisely the point of the peak of the roof, just a gentle puff of wind can determine the destiny of many raindrops. It will make a difference of more than 2,000 miles as to their final destination.

The spiritual application is clear. By the smallest deed or choice of words we might set in motion influences that could change the course of others' lives here and now, and could also affect their eternal destiny.

There are two sides to this truth. An unkind word or a thoughtless act can do much damage. On the other hand, a kind word, a helpful deed, a pat on the back, a sincere testimony for Christ, an invitation to church, or a solemn warning may accomplish much good. Any one of these little things could encourage, give renewed hope, and even be used of God to bring a person to Christ.

So let's remember that courthouse, that puff of wind, and those tiny raindrops. Let's pay attention to the big little things in our lives that can point others to Christ!

In all the little things of life,
O Lord, please help me be
A person who can show the way
And guide them all to Thee. —Anon.

Life's big turning points often hinge on little things.

Ecclesiastes 9:16-10:10 Tiny Evils, Big Fall

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, . . . so does a little folly of one respected for wisdom and honor. —Ecclesiastes 10:1

It started as a seedling on the slopes of the Colorado Rockies some 500 years ago. For centuries it had stood tall, enduring violent winds, lightning strikes, blizzards, even avalanches. Now, however, the once-towering tree is just a mound of decaying wood.

What caused its demise? A horde of beetles had attacked it, gnawing away until that skyscraper of nature surrendered to those tiny pests and toppled over.

That's also the tragic story of many Christians. For long years they stood tall for God. They resisted temptations, weathered crises, and were bold in the strength divinely provided. But little sins began to eat away at their lives—little lies, little compromises with greed or lust, sins that gradually eroded their character. And suddenly they fell.

Song of Solomon 2:15 states, "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines." This colorful Old Testament verse should sound a loud alarm in our consciences. We must not tolerate the little evils that eat away at the roots of our lives. Otherwise, our once-strong witness for Christ will become a silenced casualty of sin. Let's confess those "tiny" evils to God now, before they lead to a big fall.

Nothing between, like worldly pleasure,
Habits of life, though harmless they seem,
Must not my heart from Him ever sever—
He is my all! There's nothing between. —Tindley

A big fall begins with a little stumble.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18 No One Remembered!

He by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man. —Ecclesiastes 9:15

In a commentary on Ecclesiastes 9:15, Martin Luther cites the story of Themistocles, the soldier and statesman who commanded the Athenian squadron. Through his strategy, he won the Battle of Salamis, drove the Persian army from Greek soil, and saved his city. A few years later, he fell out of favor, was ostracized by his countrymen, and was banished from Athens. Thus, Luther concludes, "Themistocles did much good for his city, but received much ingratitude."

The crowd, for some reason, seems to ignore or quickly forget the good that the poor and humble man accomplishes through his wisdom. No matter. "Wisdom is [still] better than strength" even if "the poor man's wisdom is despised" (v.16). It's better to be a quiet, honest sage who, though forgotten, leaves much good behind, than a swaggering, strident fool who, though many applaud him, "destroys much good" (v.18).

Accordingly, what matters in the end is not the recognition and gratitude we receive for the work we've done, but the souls of those gentle folk in whom we've sown the seeds of righteousness. Put another way: "Wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:35). Whom have you influenced through your wise and godly wisdom?

Help me to walk so close to Thee
That those who know me best can see
I live as godly as I pray,
And Christ is real from day to day. —Ryberg

A wise person sets his earthly goals on heavenly gains.

Ecclesiastes 9:18

"One sinner destroyeth much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18)

Robert G. Lee

This is true in another sense than the Preacher meant. His conclusion was that time and chance happen to all alike in the race and battle of life. To no it means that God comes to those who are not swift, but, like Mephibosheth, lame on both feet, and gives them the prize which they could not win; that He bends over those who are not strong, and gives them the victory which they could not procure. The Gospel is full of promise to younger sons, bruised reeds, lame and helpless souls, to babes and sucklings, to those that have no might; whilst it hides its secrets from the wise and prudent, and withholds its rewards from the swift and strong.

You are not swift. Long ago the spring was taken from your life, and the elasticity from your feet. For many years you have lain by the Beautiful Gate, seeing the happy souls pass to the inner shrine, and coming out entranced. You have been content to live on their alms. But better things are in store. He who knows your case will even now give you perfect soundness Though you cannot win the prize of your high calling by running, it shall be yours by receiving and taking. It is a gift; and though you have not legs you have surely hands.

You are not strong. But it is well. Many of us are too strong for God. He has to weaken us by touching the sinew of our thigh. When Jacob went from fighting to clinging, he became a prince with God. Isaiah left it on record that God gives power to the faint, and increases might to those who have no power. And the great Apostle of the Gentiles gloried in his infirmities, because he had discovered that when he was weak then he was strong, since the power of Christ was only perfected in weakness.

One mischievous boy can break up a school. One false alarm can cause a panic. One match can start a conflagration. One false step can cost a life or ruin a character. One broken wheel can ditch a train. One quarrelsome worker can create a strike of ten thousand men.

One undiplomatic word can provoke a war involving thousands of lives and destruction of millions of dollars in property. One hasty act of legislation can entail untold hardships. One wayward daughter can break a mother's heart. One lie can destroy a person's character. One false witness can send an innocent man to jail. One vote can decide an election.

One kind word at the right time may save a person from suicide. One sermon may fire a man's soul and set the course for his future life. One drink may start a person on the road to alcoholism. One wrong example may lead dozens down the wrong path. One decision for Christ will determine future destiny.

Ecclesiastes 10

Ecclesiastes 10

If one do not whet the edge, then must be put to more strength. - Ecclesiastes 10:10

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

If this is true, as we know it is, may we not often use it as an appeal to God? There are times with all who work for God, when they are blunt, through much usage. The brain is blunt, and cannot think. The heart is blunt, and cannot feel. The voice is blunt, and has lost its ringing note. How often the evangelist, towards the end of a series of services, feels blunt! Sometimes also there are private sorrows, of which we cannot speak, which take off the edge. At all such times let us turn to God and say, "Put in more strength. Let thy power be magnified in my weakness. Give more grace, so that thy work shall not suffer." I suppose Paul meant this when he said that he gloried in infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Surely more work is done by a blunt edge and Divine power, than by a sharp edge and little power.

This, however, does not justify us in seeking to be blunt. And when we are conscious that the edge is going off, it becomes us to seek a fresh whetting. The time is not lost in the harvest-field when the reapers whet their scythes with musical tinkle. A day in the country or a week by the seaside are very pleasant whetstones. Solomon says that friendship, the face of a friend, will sharpen a blunt edge; and full often we have been sharpened and quickened by seasons of holy fellowship. But after all, nothing gives us such a keen edge as the devotional perusal of the Divine Word. Let us appropriate the words of the prophet, and each one ask to be made a new sharp threshing-instrument having teeth, that we may thresh the mountains, and make them small, and give our God as little anxiety as possible.

Ecclesiastes 10:1-15 A Little Foolish

I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. —Ecclesiastes 2:13

It was a clearcut case of arson. The perpetrator had torched his own home. But he would never be brought to justice. Why? The criminal was a jackdaw, a member of the crow family. He had picked up a red-hot cigarette and dropped the "prize" into his nest. The jackdaw's name comes from an old English word used to ridicule foolish, thievish, and overly talkative people. The bird lives up to its reputation. On the ground, it struts about with a swagger; in flight, it has a flair for showy aerial displays. And at roosting time, the jackdaw loves being part of the noisy crowd.

Some of the most enjoyable people have a similar zest for life. Their love of a practical joke and a good laugh makes them the highlight of any party. But, like the jackdaw, these happy-go-lucky individuals can come up short on discernment. They can "start fires" of irritation in their own homes by being foolish rather than sensitive to the feelings of others.

Let's learn from the freewheeling jackdaw and from the author of Ecclesiastes (2:13). Although fun and games have their place, a joke is never funny when it comes at another's expense. Be careful to distinguish between refreshing fun and insensitive foolishness.

It's good to smile, to laugh, to play,
For joy-filled hearts drive clouds away;
But foolish ways and thoughtless fun
Can lead to sin and hide the sun. —Anon.

A wise man is like a pin: his head keeps him from going too far.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9 Stay At Your Post

If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post; for conciliation pacifies great offenses. —Ecclesiastes 10:4

Eric was stunned by the certified letter he had received. He had been fired! His record with the company was good, and the reasons given for his dismissal were without substance.

As he related his story to me, Eric explained, "I said to myself, 'Don't panic. Think this through. How would God have me respond?'" After praying and consulting a Christian lawyer, Eric felt that God was leading him to apply the truth of today's text to his situation. So he stayed at his post and continued to see clients and place orders. To meet his financial needs, he drew on his personal reserves. Company officials were unprepared to deal with someone who kept at his job after being dropped from the payroll. Eight months later, the president offered Eric a new contract with the best terms ever.

Not everyone can or should do what Eric did. But we can learn from his example. We don't need to be "afraid of sudden terror" (Prov. 3:25). We don't need to panic.

When a trial turns our life upside down, we can “stay at our post” by seeking God’s wisdom through prayer, Scripture, and mature Christian counsel. We can resist despair, remain confident that God is at work, and continue doing what is right and good. God will do the rest.

When through life's darkened maze I go
And troubles overwhelm my soul,
Oh, grant me, Lord, Your grace to know
That You are surely in control. —DJJ

A crisis cannot break the one who relies on God's strength.

Ecclesiastes 10:1-15

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Some of the most enjoyable people have a similar zest for life. Their love of a practical joke and a good laugh makes them the life of any party. But, like the jackdaw, these happy-go-lucky individuals can come up short on discernment. They can start fires of anger, resentment, and distrust in their own homes by being careless with their words, attitudes, and actions.

Although fun and games have their place, a joke is never funny when it comes at another's expense. We can learn from the freewheeling jackdaw and from the author of Ecclesiastes 2:13 to distinguish between carefree fun and careless insensitivity.—MRDII

Lord, sometimes what I consider a clever twist of phrase sounds to others like a cruel attack. Help me keep in mind not only what I want to say, but how others might interpret it. May I never value cleverness over kindness.

Ecclesiastes 10:7 Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Upstarts frequently usurp the highest places, while the truly great pine in obscurity. This is a riddle in providence whose solution will one day gladden the hearts of the upright; but it is so common a fact, that none of us should murmur if it should fall to our own lot. When our Lord was upon earth, although he is the Prince of the kings of the earth, yet he walked the footpath of weariness and service as the Servant of servants: what wonder is it if his followers, who are princes of the blood, should also be looked down upon as inferior and contemptible persons? The world is upside down, and therefore, the first are last and the last first. See how the servile sons of Satan lord it in the earth! What a high horse they ride! How they lift up their horn on high! Haman is in the court, while Mordecai sits in the gate; David wanders on the mountains, while Saul reigns in state; Elijah is complaining in the cave while Jezebel is boasting in the palace; yet who would wish to take the places of the proud rebels? and who, on the other hand, might not envy the despised saints? When the wheel turns, those who are lowest rise, and the highest sink. Patience, then, believer, eternity will right the wrongs of time.

Let us not fall into the error of letting our passions and carnal appetites ride in triumph, while our nobler powers walk in the dust. Grace must reign as a prince, and make the members of the body instruments of righteousness. The Holy Spirit loves order, and he therefore sets our powers and faculties in due rank and place, giving the highest room to those spiritual faculties which link us with the great King; let us not disturb the divine arrangement, but ask for grace that we may keep under our body and bring it into subjection. We were not new created to allow our passions to rule over us, but that we, as kings, may reign in Christ Jesus over the triple kingdom of spirit, soul, and body, to the glory of God the Father.

Ecclesiastes 10:9 Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

Opressors may get their will of poor and needy men as easily as they can split logs of wood, but they had better mind, for it is a dangerous business, and a splinter from a tree has often killed the woodman. Jesus is persecuted in every injured saint, and he is mighty to avenge his beloved ones. Success in treading down the poor and needy is a thing to be trembled at: if there be no danger to persecutors here there will be great danger hereafter.

To cleave wood is a common every-day business, and yet it has its dangers; so then, reader, there are dangers connected with your calling and daily life which it will be well for you to be aware of. We refer not to hazards by flood and field, or by disease and sudden death, but to perils of a spiritual sort. Your occupation may be as humble as log splitting, and yet the devil can tempt you in it. You may be a domestic servant, a farm labourer, or a mechanic, and you may be greatly screened from temptations to the grosser vices, and yet some secret sin may do you damage. Those who dwell at home, and mingle not with the rough world, may yet be endangered by their very seclusion. Nowhere is he safe who thinks himself so. Pride may enter a poor man's heart; avarice may reign in a cottager's bosom; uncleanness may venture into the quietest home; and anger, and envy, and malice may insinuate themselves into the most rural abode. Even in speaking a few words to a servant we may sin; a little purchase at a shop may be the

first link in a chain of temptations; the mere looking out of a window may be the beginning of evil. O Lord, how exposed we are! How shall we be secured! To keep ourselves is work too hard for us: only thou thyself art able to preserve us in such a world of evils. Spread thy wings over us, and we, like little chickens, will cower down beneath thee, and feel ourselves safe!

Ecclesiastes 10:12 Things Said In Secret

Read: Ephesians 4:25-32

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious. —Ecclesiastes 10:12

Some say that anonymity is the last refuge for cowards. Judging from mail and comments I've read that have been submitted anonymously, I would agree. People hiding behind the screen of anonymity or a false identity feel the freedom to launch angry, hurtful tirades. Anonymity allows them to be unkind without having to take responsibility for their words.

Whenever I am tempted to write something anonymously because I don't want to be identified with my own words, I stop and reconsider. If I don't want my name attached to it, I probably shouldn't be saying it. Then I do one of two things: I either toss it out or I rewrite it in a way that makes it helpful rather than hurtful.

According to Ephesians, our words should edify and impart grace (4:29). If I'm unwilling to use my name, there's reason to believe that my motive is to hurt, not to help.

Whenever you're tempted to say something in secret—perhaps to a family member, co-worker, or your pastor—consider why you don't want your name to be identified with your words. After all, if you don't want to be identified with your words, God probably doesn't either. He is gracious and slow to anger (Ex. 34:6), and we should be the same.

O Lord, help us to turn aside
From words that spring from selfish pride,
For You would have Your children one
In praise and love for Your dear Son. —D. De Haan

Anonymity can be a coward's way of hiding behind hurtful words.

Ecclesiastes 11

Ecclesiastes 11

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand. - Ecclesiastes 11:6

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

We are all tempted to look too much to the winds and clouds. We study the faces of people, their moods and circumstances, and say, "It is not a favorable time to approach them about their souls. He does not look to be a likely case, or in a likely mood." But how do we know? If we are always waiting for favoring conditions, we shall resemble the farmer who is ever looking out for perfect weather, and lets the whole autumn pass without one handful of grain reaching the furrows; or who is always studying the clouds, seeking for a spell of hot summer weather; and presently the chance is gone, and the crop lost.

In fact, we can never tell what God is doing in the secrets of the heart. He may have been prosecuting his deep and wise designs with the souls that appear most untoward and unprepossessing. He may have led them to such a point that they are most eagerly yearning for the hand to lead them into the light. The eunuch in his chariot, might not, from a distance, have seemed specially ripe for the Christian evangelist; but, on coming near, he was discovered to be an enquirer. Saul of Tarsus was the least likely man in all Palestine to be a Christian; but God had been at work with him. Let us dare then to trust God, not looking for winds or sunshine, but scattering everywhere the precious seed of the Gospel.

"Say not, the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain;
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been things remain.

"For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main."

Ecclesiastes 11 SOWING AND REAPING

"Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."-- Galatians 6:7

The principle of sowing and reaping is often used to warn about the inevitable consequences of evil deeds. But it can also be used as an encouragement to believers in their service for Christ.

A. B. Simpson said, "I believe the toils and prayers of 20 years ago are not lost. We may not see the results of our labor and sacrifice immediately, but in due time they will issue into beauty and glory.

"The love you give, the forgiveness you show, and the patience and forbearance that grace your life will surely produce much fruit.

The friend you long to bring to Christ may refuse to be reconciled to Him. His heart may seem to be very hard, and your prayers and efforts may appear to be lost; but they are not! They will come back to you a hundredfold -- perhaps long after you have forgotten them.

"Give God time! The results are working themselves out slowly but surely. There must be seedtime and summer before the autumn reaping."

This agrees with Solomon's words: "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (Eccl. 11:1).

Keep on sowing! In His own time, and in His own way, the Lord will send the harvest!-- Richard W. De Haan

Keep on working through the seasons

In the sunshine and the rain;

Earnest prayer and faithful sowing

Yield a wealth of golden grain.

God promises no loaves to loafers.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 God's Promise Keeps

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days."—Ecclesiastes 11:1

WE must not expect to see an immediate reward for all the good we do; nor must we always confine our efforts to places and persons which seem likely to yield us a recompense for our labors. The Egyptian casts his seed upon the waters of the Nile, where it might seem a sheer waste of corn. But in due time the flood subsides, the rice or other grain sinks into the fertile mud, and rapidly a harvest is produced. Let us today do good to the unthankful and the evil. Let us teach the careless and the obstinate. Unlikely waters may cover hopeful soil. Nowhere shall our labor be in vain in the Lord.

It is ours to cast our bread upon the waters; it remains with God to fulfill the promise, "Thou shalt find it." He will not let His promise fail. His good word which we have spoken shall live, shall be found, shall be found by us. Perhaps not just yet, but some day, we shall reap what we have sown. We must exercise our patience, for perhaps the Lord may exercise it. "After many days," says the Scripture, and in many instances those days run into months and years, and yet the Word stands true. God's promise will keep; let us mind that we keep the precept, and keep it this day.

Ecclesiastes 11:3 Rain Without Clouds? Never!

Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook

"If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth."—Ecclesiastes 11:3

WHY, then, do we dread the clouds which now darken our sky? True, for a while they hide the sun, but the sun is not quenched; he will shine out again before long. Meanwhile those black clouds are filled with rain; and the blacker they are, the more likely they are to yield plentiful showers. How can we have rain without clouds?

Our troubles have always brought us blessings, and they always will. They are the black chariots of bright grace. These clouds will empty themselves before long, and every tender herb will be the gladder for the shower. Our God may drench us with grief, but He will not drown us with wrath; nay, He will refresh us with mercy. Our Lord's love letters often come to us in black-edged envelopes. His wagons rumble, but they are loaded with benefits. His rod blossoms with sweet flowers and nourishing fruits. Let us not worry about the clouds, but sing because May flowers are brought to us through the April clouds and showers.

O Lord, the clouds are the dust of thy feet! How near thou art in the cloudy and dark day! Love beholds thee and is glad. Faith sees the clouds emptying themselves and making the little hills rejoice on every side.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 Watching The Wind

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. —Ecclesiastes 11:4

When it comes to telling others about Jesus, I'm sometimes like a cautious farmer who keeps his eye on the weather, looking for the perfect day to plant his crops. The season passes and he sows nothing. The opportunity is gone; the harvest is lost (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

I hesitate and wonder, "Is this person ready to listen to the gospel? Is this the time to speak?" You can never tell what's going on in the depths of another person's heart. Some may be dwelling in darkness yet longing for someone to lead them into the light.

The Ethiopian eunuch in his royal chariot seemed to have it all together (Acts 8:27). He enjoyed prestige, wealth, and power, yet inwardly he was empty and searching. He was reading Isaiah's promise of the suffering Savior and trying to come to grips with his words. Right at that moment, Philip took the opportunity to tell the eunuch about Jesus (v.35).

I have a friend who often leads people to Jesus. I asked him once how he knew they were ready to receive the gospel. "It's easy," he replied. "I ask them."

So I must stop worrying about the wind and the clouds and get on with it—scattering the seed wherever I go, regardless of the weather. You just never know.

—David H. Roper

Toiling through the changing seasons
In the sunshine and the rain,
Zealous sowing with compassion
Yields a wealth of golden grain. —Anon.

Sowing the seed of God's Word is never out of season

Ecclesiastes 11:6 Spurgeon - Morning and Evening

In the evening of the day opportunities are plentiful: men return from their labour, and the zealous soul-winner finds time to tell abroad the love of Jesus. Have I no evening work for Jesus? If I have not, let me no longer withhold my hand from a service which requires abundant labour. Sinners are perishing for lack of knowledge; he who loiters may find his skirts crimson with the blood of souls. Jesus gave both his hands to the nails, how can I keep back one of mine from his blessed work? Night and day he toiled and prayed for me, how can I give a single hour to the pampering of my flesh with luxurious ease? Up, idle heart; stretch out thy hand to work, or uplift it to pray; heaven and hell are in earnest, let me be so, and this evening sow good seed for the Lord my God.

The evening of life has also its calls. Life is so short that a morning of manhood's vigour, and an evening of decay, make the whole of it. To some it seems long, but a four-pence is a great sum of money to a poor man. Life is so brief that no man can afford to lose a day. It has been well said that if a great king should bring us a great heap of gold, and bid us take as much as we could count in a day, we should make a long day of it; we should begin early in the morning, and in the evening we should not withhold our hand; but to win souls is far nobler work, how is it that we so soon withdraw from it? Some are spared to a long evening of green old age; if such be my case, let me use such talents as I still retain, and to the last hour serve my blessed and faithful Lord. By his grace I will die in harness, and lay down my charge only when I lay down my body. Age may instruct the young, cheer the faint, and encourage the desponding; if eventide has less of vigorous heat, it should have more of calm wisdom, therefore in the evening I will not withhold my hand.

Ecclesiastes 12

Ecclesiastes 12

The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words. - Ecclesiastes 12:10

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily

The wise preacher or teacher is not content with merely teaching the people knowledge, he will ponder and seek out and set in order the lessons of Divine wisdom; and when these are settled, he will go on to find out acceptable words. We must be careful to secure the "apples of gold," and no less careful to place them in the "pictures of silver." Not that we are to make beauty of language an object in itself; but having conceived high and holy thoughts we should give them a worthy expression, so that the Royal word may ride forth in a becoming equipage. It is unfit that the vessels of the sanctuary should be carried only in badger skins; their first covering at least must be "all of blue." If we are stewards in God's household to give his children food, let us serve it up suitably. The linen should be clean, and the table garnished.

Remember, however, that the words of the wise are as goads and nails. They must have points, sometimes to prick to duty, at other times to stick fast in the memory. In every sermon or lesson there should be points. To arrest and compel attention is more important than to please the ear. Do not refine and beautify it to such an extent that there may be nothing left to stir the conscience and lacerate the heart.

Words that best fit the enunciation of God's truth are given from the One Shepherd. We are enriched by Him, not only in all knowledge but in all utterance. He who made the mouth can put his words into the mouth. Ask Him to speak to you, that you may speak in accents borrowed from his tone; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.

Ecclesiastes 12 Richard De Haan

Recently an elderly couple from Montana visited me in my office. Their presence emphasized the "generation gap"—not the kind you usually think of, however. We had sweet Christian fellowship and agreed on spiritual matters. We saw eye-to-eye concerning world affairs. In fact, we thoroughly enjoyed the moments we were allowed to share on "common ground." Yet, as I said, there was a

“generation gap”—a physical one. “Father Time” had exacted his toll upon these dear friends. Their steps were faltering, their eyesight failing, and their hearing diminishing.

I usually move at a rather brisk pace, but as I slowed down enough to walk beside them, I felt I was almost standing still. In addition to that, I had to repeat my words again and again to accommodate their deafness. They reminded me of the Preacher’s description in Ecclesiastes 12 of the time “when the keepers of the house tremble, those that look out of the windows are darkened, and the sound of the grinding is low.”

I prayed silently, “O Lord, help me always to be patient and understanding with all who are aged, not in a condescending way, not out of pity, but because of a genuine respect for these who have walked life’s pathway before me, endured its trials, and waged its battles.” May all of us who still enjoy the vigor of good health and do not yet feel the frailties of the declining years, treat these elderly saints with proper esteem. Also let us do everything we possibly can to bridge the gap and gladden the hearts of those who have earned their place in God’s “gallery of honor!”

Ecclesiastes 12 Smithsonian Scavengers

God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. --Ecclesiastes 12:14

The Democratic Convention was over. All the delegates had gone home. But in an obscure storage area at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History the moments were being preserved. Two Smithsonian historians had mingled among the Madison Square Garden crowd, scavenging memorabilia that will evoke the spirit of the convention for many years: Mylar confetti, souvenirs, banners, handmade signs, memories.

Those who work to preserve the spirit of the past are involved in a godlike activity. They remind us that everything is significant. Everything!

But we often forget that. Aging bodies, changing circumstances, and all kinds of losses make us wonder if anything really matters. What’s the point if we lose it all in the end?

Solomon wondered about that too. For a while he thought everything was destined to become useless and forgotten. But when he came to his senses and remembered his Creator, he saw that everything is significant, either for good or for evil. God will judge every deed and motive (Eccl. 12:14).

Solomon concluded, “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (v.13 KJV). The only way to find fulfillment is by obeying God. --MRD II

God rules as Sovereign on His throne,
He judges great and small;
And all who would despise His rule,
Beneath His rod shall fall. --DJD

Everything in life has eternal significance--for good or for evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Grim Reaper

According to an old fable, a man made an unusual agreement with Death. He told the Grim Reaper that he would willingly accompany him when it came time to die, but only on one condition—that Death would send a messenger well in advance to warn him. Weeks winged away into months, and months into years. Then one bitter winter evening, as the man sat thinking about all his possessions, Death suddenly entered the room and tapped him on the shoulder. Startled, the man cried out, “You’re here so soon and without warning! I thought we had an agreement.” Death replied, “I’ve more than kept my part. I’ve sent you many messengers. Look in the mirror and you’ll see some of them.”

As the man complied, Death whispered, “Notice your hair! Once it was full and black, now it is thin and white. Look at the way you cock your head to listen to me because you can’t hear very well. Observe how close to the mirror you must stand to see yourself clearly. Yes, I’ve sent many messengers through the years. I’m sorry you’re not ready, but the time has come to leave.”

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 Land Of Eternal Spring

I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken. —Psalm 37:25

The former president of Columbia Bible College in South Carolina, J. Robertson McQuilkin, pointed out that God has a wise purpose in letting us grow old and weak:

“I think God has planned the strength and beauty of youth to be physical. But the strength and beauty of age is spiritual. We gradually lose the strength and beauty that is temporary so we’ll be sure to concentrate on the strength and beauty which is forever. And so we’ll be eager to leave the temporary, deteriorating part of us and be truly homesick for our eternal home. If we stayed young and strong and beautiful, we might never want to leave.”

When we are young, happily occupied with all our relationships and activities, we may not long for our celestial Home. But as time passes, we may find ourselves without family and friends, afflicted with dim vision and hearing difficulties, no longer able to relish

food, or troubled by sleeplessness.

Here's the advice I give myself: Be grateful that, as the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:17, "God . . . gives us richly all things to enjoy" in life's summer and autumn. And rejoice too that with the onset of life's winter we can anticipate that we'll soon be living in the land of eternal spring.

There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way,
To prepare us a dwelling-place there. —Bennett
The promise of heaven is our eternal hope.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 The Bottom Line

Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. —Ecclesiastes 12:13

A phrase we often hear is "the bottom line." It comes from the world of business and finance, where it refers to a company's or individual's cash or asset balance. Usually it appears as the final line of the last page of a report or balance statement, so it is referred to as the "bottom line." It tells you how you stand on the most important aspect of the report—how much money you made or lost.

These words appear in other aspects of society too. For example, a coach may tell his players that the bottom line for their team is the all-important win column, not building up personal statistics or impressing the crowd.

So what is the bottom line for a follower of Christ? The author of Ecclesiastes spelled it out clearly in these words: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment" (12:13-14). A healthy reverence for God and doing what He says day after day is absolutely essential in the Christian life.

Let's trust God enough to do what He says, no matter how difficult it may be. Then the bottom line of our lives will not be loss, but the gain of God's approval.

For the Christian, life is simple,
Having but one single aim,
To receive the Lord's approval,
Doing all in His dear name. —Chisholm

Obedience is the measure of our love for God.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 Living Or Just Alive?

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth. --Ecclesiastes 12:1

What matters is not how long you live, but how well you live. Some people live for 85 years and do very little. Others live only a relatively few years, but they fill that time with service to God and others, and their influence lives on.

Many people are concerned only with prolonging their stay here on this earth, and so they strive to add years to their lives. Every year we spend billions of dollars for medicines, vitamins, and special diets to stay alive. And yet we forget that it is not the quantity of life but the quality of life and what we accomplish for the Lord that makes life meaningful. Only when we devote our lives to our Creator (Ecclesiastes 12:1,13-14) do our days on earth count for eternity.

Today, let's seek to fill the hours with service, worship, and work for the Master. If this is our last day (and who knows, it may be), rather than wasting it in dreaming of a long life, let it be occupied with producing abundant fruit and being a blessing. Instead of just drifting aimlessly through our allotted hours and days, let us truly live.

Yes, the only life that's worthwhile (be it long or short) is the one spent in service for the Lord and in bringing blessing to others. — M.R. De Haan

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise! —Havergal

It is better to add life to your years than to add years to your life.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Leftovers

Leftovers are such humble things,
We would not serve to a guest,
And yet we serve them to our Lord

Who deserves the very best.

We give to Him leftover time,
Stray minutes here and there.
Leftover cash we give to Him,
Such few coins as we can spare.

We give our youth unto the world,
To hatred, lust and strife;
Then in declining years we give
To him the remnant of our life.- Author Unknown

Ecclesiastes 12:6-14 Wise Words

The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. —Ecclesiastes 12:11

Now in my sixties, I reflect back on wise spiritual leaders who had a positive impact on my life. In Bible school, God used my Old Testament professor to make the Word come alive. My Greek teacher relentlessly employed high standards to goad my study of the New Testament. And the senior pastor in my first pastoral ministry shepherded me in building vital ministries to help others grow spiritually. Each of these teachers encouraged me in different ways.

King Solomon wisely observed some ways that spiritual leaders can help us grow: “The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd” (Eccl. 12:11). Some teachers prod us; others build solid spiritual structures into our lives. Still others, as caring shepherds, are there with a listening ear when we hurt.

The Good Shepherd has given leaders a variety of gifts: exhorting, developing, and shepherding. Whether we’re a leader or a learner, though, He desires that we maintain humble hearts and a love for others. What a privilege to be led and used by our Shepherd to encourage others in their walk with Him.

Give us the wisdom we need, Lord, to encourage
others in their spiritual walk. We know we need Your
Spirit’s power to do that. Use the gifts You have
given us to help others along on their journey.

May our words reflect the heart of God and His wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 The Four Calls

The Spirit came in childhood and pleaded, “Let me in,
”But oh! the door was bolted by thoughtlessness and sin;
“I am too young,” the child replied, “I will not yield today;
There’s time enough tomorrow.” The Spirit went away.

Again He came and pleaded in youth’s bright happy hour;
He came but heard no answer, for lured by Satan’s power
The youth lay dreaming then and saying, “Not today,
Not till I’ve tried earth’s pleasures.” The Spirit went away.

Again He called in mercy in manhood’s vigorous prime,
But still He found no welcome, the merchant had no time;
No time for true repentance, no time to think or pray,
And so, repulsed and saddened, the Spirit went away.

Once more He called and waited, the man was old and ill,
And scarcely heard the whisper, his heart was cold and still;
“Go leave me; when I need thee, I’ll call for thee,” he cried;
Then sinking on his pillow, without a hope, he died!

Ecclesiastes 12:6-14 What’s the Point?

Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. —Ecclesiastes 12:13

Scientists once thought that the vertebrate with the shortest life-span was the turquoise killifish. This small fish lives in seasonal rain

pools in equatorial Africa and must complete its life cycle in 12 weeks before the pools disappear.

But researchers from James Cook University in Australia have now found that the pygmy goby has an even shorter lifespan. It lives fast and dies young. This tiny fish lives in coral reefs for an average of 56 days. Its rapid reproductive cycle is designed to help it avoid extinction.

What's the point of a life that goes so fast and ends so quickly? It's a question asked by one of the wisest men who ever lived. In his later years, Solomon, the third king of Israel, wandered from God. He became spiritually disoriented and lost his sense of direction and purpose. He looked at all of his accomplishments and found them worthless. Until he remembered his God (12:13-14), he forgot that we live not merely for ourselves but for the honor of the One who made us to worship and enjoy Him forever.

Significance is not found in the number of our days, but in what our eternal God says about how we have used them.

God gives to us the gift of time
To use as best we can,
To live each moment in His will
According to His plan. —Sper

Life is short. Live for God.

Ecclesiastes 12:6

One of Fanny Crosby's hymns, based on a combination of the thoughts in Ecclesiastes 12:6 and Revelation 22:4, 5 was so personal that for years she never let others see it. Professor Kenneth Osbeck says its revelation to the public came about this way.

"One day at a Bible conference in Northfield, Massachusetts, Miss Crosby was asked by Dwight L. Moody to give a personal testimony concerning her faith and Christian experience. At first she hesitated, then quietly rose and said, "There is one hymn I have written which has never been published. I call it my soul's poem. Sometimes when I am troubled, I repeat it to myself, for it brings comfort to my heart." She then recited while many wept, "Someday the silver cord will break, and I no more as now shall sing; but O the joy when I shall wake within the palace of the King! And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story—saved by grace!" At the age of 25, Fanny Crosby's wish that the face of Jesus would be the first she would ever see was realized."

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 What's The Point?

What's the point? This question came to mind as I watched my grandsons' dog fetch a ball for me again and again.

What's the point? That's what the writer of Ecclesiastes asked as he thought about the monotonous cycle he observed in nature and in life—the same things happening year after year, generation after generation.

What's the point? That's what a retired businessman was asking, in effect, when he told me he would just as soon die as live any longer. He had seen and done everything he had wanted to do. Now he had reached the place where life held more pain for him than pleasure.

What's the point? Here it is. A few years before a friend of mine died, he said, "Life is a wonderful experience. It's marvelous to see that God keeps nature going in its pattern. It's wonderful to know that we're here to love God above everything and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It's comforting to believe that all our sins are forgiven because of what Christ did on the cross. And it's exciting to think about the eternity God has for us. It sure is great to be alive."

Life can be depressing when God is left out. But how exciting it is when He is at the center! —Herbert Vander Lugt

The life that counts is linked with God
And hopes in His unfailing love;
It walks with joy where Jesus trod—
The life that counts is from above. —Anon.

When we focus on Christ, everything else becomes clear.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Six Words From Solomon

Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. —Ecclesiastes 12:13

SMITH magazine, an online community that "celebrates the joy of storytelling," invited readers to submit six-word memoirs that describe their lives. Thousands responded with brief biographies ranging from the light-hearted "Sweet wife, good sons—I'm rich" to the painful "Sixty. Still haven't forgiven my parents."

Based on Scripture, I tried to imagine how King Solomon might have summed up his life in six words. As a young man, he could have written: God has given me great wisdom. But in his later years, he might have said: Should have practiced what I preached.

During a reign distinguished by peace and prosperity, Solomon developed spiritual heart problems. When he was old, "his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David" (1 Kings

11:4). The result was God's displeasure and a sad end to a previously exemplary life (v.9).

The multiple times Solomon used the word vanity (or meaningless) in Ecclesiastes may indicate his disillusionment about life. This once-wise king who had it all, lost it all, and pondered it all, ended the book with this final conclusion: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccl 12:13).

Those are six words worth heeding.

The pleasures of this sinful world
Are meaningless and vain;
But if we love and follow God
True purpose we will gain. —Sper

Obedience to God is the key to a life of blessing.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 When To Judge

God will bring every work into judgment . . . whether good or evil. —Ecclesiastes 12:14

Many people believe that Christians are told never to judge others. As "proof," they quote Jesus' words in Matthew 7: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (v.1). But a closer look at what Jesus said shows that there are times when we must make judgments.

In verses 1 to 5, Jesus warned us how easy it is to be blind to our own faults while we pick at the faults of others. In verse 6, however, He showed us the necessity of judging. He told us, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

To follow Jesus' teaching, we must learn the difference between judging people and evaluating situations. But who among us is wise enough to consider any situation without condemning or judging the persons involved? That is why, in verses 7 to 11, we are told to earnestly ask, seek, and implore help from our heavenly Father. "Your Father who is in heaven [will] give good things to those who ask Him" (v.11).

Whenever we must make judgments, we must prayerfully bear in mind that our God is the one who "will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). —Albert Lee

If you are called upon to judge—
A situation to discern,
Don't shy away when duty calls,
But to God's Word for wisdom turn. —Hess

The righteous Judge gives discernment to those who ask Him.