

MEANING (LESS)
“Life without Meaning”
(Ecclesiastes 5-6)

“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.”

Ephesians 1:4-5 NLT

Ephesians 1 tells us clearly that, when God created us, He created us with a plan for our lives. There are no random, accidental people in the world. God made us all and gave us freedom so we could love Him by our choice, because if we can't choose, it isn't love.

God has a specific plan for each of us. Jesus tells us, “The very hairs of your head are numbered.” So, we aren't just numbers...we're names. We're people made in God's image. We're part of God's plan to love the world.

In fact, it goes further in Ephesians 2 and tells us in verse 10 “we are His workmanship...” The word the Bible uses there is “poema.” I met a guy recently who named His daughter “Poema.” It means “masterpiece.” We are God's master work.

And even more than that, we are unique! Every person. That means there's nobody in the world quite like you. Now there may be some other people who look like you in some ways. We all have doppelgangers out there; people who weirdly kind of look like us. A few years ago, I apparently reminded people of the guy on America's Got Talent who was a ventriloquist. “You look just like that guy.” I always thought I looked just like Tom Selleck or Kevin Costner. But no, I look like a ventriloquist.

But we're all unique, and God has a custom-designed plan for YOUR life that nobody else fulfills! You are unique. Nobody does you like you!

But in spite of this, we choose to go our own way. That's what sin is. It's not just being evil, like Putin. Sin means we go our own way. We turn our back on God's plan, revealed in His Word.

And then at some point, we hit the wall. And we wonder, “so what is life about? What does it mean? Why does it all seem so pointless?” We neglect our Creator; we reject His Word. And then, life is just empty. It's meaningless.

That's where Solomon found himself. Like so many of us, Solomon thought he knew more than God. He knew better than God. He could find meaning in life without reference to God.

And Ecclesiastes is his testimony to life “under the sun” or, life without God.

Worship without Meaning

a. An authentic consistency (“Watch your step”) 5:1

Our spiritual walk has a great deal to do with our worship. If we are walking in the counsel of sinners, our worship is just going to bring conviction to our lives. If we are thinking scornful thoughts, we are going to mock the things of God.

I did that in my life, in a time when I had wandered far from God. The preacher was one of the best in the state at that time. He was anything but boring. But I was bored. I was empty. What was inside of me, and how I was walking, affected my worship.

b. A Quiet Spirit. (“Watch your mouth”) 5:2-3

Solomon’s counsel if you don’t want your worship to be meaningless is, “Come to listen, not to talk.” Be still in the presence of God. Don’t come to give your opinion. Come to learn. Don’t make promises or vows that you don’t intend to keep. Watch your mouth.

Singing? Sometimes we lie in worship.

c. An eager obedience. (“Watch your heart”) 5:4-7

Don’t try to manipulate God. If you make a vow to God, keep it. If you make a promise, “don’t delay” in fulfilling it. “Don’t let your mouth cause your flesh to sin.” Bring a prepared heart.

For worship to be authentic, we must be sincere. What’s your motive for coming to church? i. Are you coming to impress others? ii. Are you coming to try to manipulate God? (Counseling—divorce). Because what you bring into worship is pretty much what you’re going to be getting out of worship. If your reasons for coming are genuine, your worship will be too. But sometimes our worship has no meaning.

Wealth without Meaning **5:10-20**

I’ve shared these thoughts before, and I’ll remind you again this is adapted from another preacher. * I’ve taught this passage before for a stewardship message, so this is a review for some of us.

Solomon was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived. Maybe, if his wealth was calculated in today’s economy, he would have been the richest man. He had so much gold he used it to decorate his palace. Silver in his kingdom was so common it was almost without worth. He was a rich guy. So, as Boomers remember the old commercial said, “When EF Hutton speaks, everybody listens.” Maybe we should hear Solomon the same way.

1. *The more we have the more we want.* (5:10)

If you or someone you know has been addicted to gambling, you understand the allure of having more. A gambler’s heart is never contented with the first round of winnings. It leads to the need for a second. And a third.

This is the promise and illusion of materialism. There is no end to the itch. We want more. We NEED more to make us happy, or so we think. I think a great name for a gambling house in Las Vegas would be “The Mirage.” Oh wait...there is one of those! It’s all a mirage, and they tell you that going in with huge neon lights.

Materialism is a mirage. A promise that never delivers. A puff of smoke than vanishes. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (Luke 12:15). Materialism says, "that's a lie."

2. *The more we have, the more we spend.* (5:11)

"The more loot you get, the more looters show up." (The Message)

The more we have, the more we need, the more we have to have, the more we want."

My hamster, Diggy, was busy last night. She was really working her wheel hard. She does that when she's stressed. Well, and also when she isn't! But I noticed this morning, after she worked all night, she's still the very same place.

So, with us. We have more, we spend more to keep it, we need more, we want more and then the wheel starts over. It never ends.

3. *The more we have, the more we worry.* (5:12)

John D Rockefeller was the world's only billionaire at age 53, but he was continually sick and lived on a diet of milk and crackers. Until he learned how to give his money away. As a philanthropist, he lived to be 98! Guess the lesson is, if you're worried about money, give it away!

If the world works so hard to keep everything they have and end up miserable, maybe if we'd work equally hard at giving away, we'll be fulfilled and happy! That's what Rockefeller learned. Maybe we should take the hint.

4. *The more we have, the more we lose.* (5:13-14)

I worried less about stuff when Pam and I were first married and living on a shoestring budget. My living room suit, brand new, cost us \$188. They were miserable to sit on. But I never worried about stuff when I was renting an apartment, sharing food with our seminary classmates and owned 2 beat up cars. When you own stuff, you worry more about what you could lose! I never gave two thoughts to the stock market...until I started investing in it!

5. *The more we have, the more we leave behind* (14-17)

The trick to surviving the money trap is to learn that, for the Christian there is no own. There's only loan. "You are not your own..." We invest what we have here in eternity. We will one day leave it all behind for something or someone. Maybe our family, or maybe the government. Or maybe you could figure out how to bless the work of God's Kingdom here on earth and see that your investment is awaiting you in glory!

"But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither rust nor moth corrupt, and thieves don't break in and steal." (Matt 6:20-21)

(*Jeremiah, Heaven...)

a. God gives us the ability to make money (5:18)

Solomon here is alluding to Deuteronomy 8:18 where it says, "It is God Who gives us the ability to produce wealth." You may argue, "No, it's not. I'm going to work every day. I'm putting in the hours."

But who wakes you up in the morning, and gives you grace for your body to function? Who opened the door so you could get the job you have? Who allows you life and breath to earn a living?

b. God must give us the ability to enjoy the money we make, or it will destroy us! (5:19-20)

Work without Meaning

A dimension of how God created us is to work. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." Work is not a curse. Work was part of what God created, and He gave Adam and Eve jobs in the garden BEFORE sin came. But remember you are bigger than your job. You are a human BEING, not a human DOING.

Your job was never intended to make you miserable, to take away your personhood, or to be a way to do things that aren't ethical or legal. It was meant to bring you fulfillment and even joy.

If you are looking at the right ends for your labor and can enjoy the process and not just the weekend when you're off, you can find enjoyment in life. If you are working to fulfill the will and purpose of God in your life, your job can be a source of great satisfaction.

a. **Work has no meaning when we can't enjoy the proceeds** (6:1-2)

If we work and never stop because we're working for the "end game," for money, then we will never enjoy the fruit of our labor. Sometimes we find ourselves laboring hard just to pay off debt we've accumulated buying things we couldn't afford.

Occasionally we need to stop and ask the hard question: "Do I need more money? Do I have to sign up for overtime again this weekend, taking me away from time with my family?" How much money is enough?

When we are off-track from the purposes of God, He will not allow us to have joy from the things we accumulate. Oh, maybe we can look to others like we're living it up as we climb in and out of our leased Lexus, but in truth in the middle of the night, we know it's like sand in our mouth. It's nothing fulfilling or exciting. It's dull, monotonous, and we don't enjoy the things we have and use.

Unless God gives us the power, we can't enjoy anything.

b. **Work has no meaning when you lose the honor of your family:** Nobody wept when he died. (6:3-6)

Solomon tells a sad story that is repeated far too often. A man works hard...too much...in the name of "providing" for the family, and then one day he comes home and realizes his family is grown. Or his family is gone. Or the family barely knows him.

Sadly, Solomon says, this man would have been better off never born. As it is, he faces the end of his life with a family that provides him "no burial." Now that doesn't mean the family just leaves his body where they found it.

Not having a burial basically had nothing to do with burial processes. It had everything to do with being eulogized; being remembered fondly and emotionally by the family. The man in Solomon's illustration left the world without a tear being shed for his passing. This, he said, is the ultimate insult and a grievous evil.

Howard Hughes, the world's wealthiest man in his day, lived as a recluse only speaking in letters to his assistant. He lived with the motto "Every man has his price...otherwise a man like me could never exist." When his employees and closest associates were able to speak about him, they universally revealed their absolute disgust for him.

He "had no burial." No one cared that he no longer lived. What a tragic end to a life.

c. Work has no meaning when you sacrifice your soul for income:

We are a soul with a body, not a body that contains a soul. That means the essence of who we are is far more invisible than visible. Far more spiritual than physical. And yet the most of our years are spent living for the part of us we can see to the neglect of the invisible and unseen and most important part of us: Our soul.

Jesus told of a man who was a successful and productive farmer who needed more storehouses for his crops. At the end of a particular day, he sat back in his office chair and began to inwardly congratulate himself. What he didn't realize was that this was his last day. All the things he had worked for to feed and clothe and care for his body suddenly meant nothing. "This day your soul (the essence of who you are) is required of you." But you know, the man had lost his soul already to the accumulation of stuff. (6:7)

What are you sacrificing for the work you are doing? It's one thing to spend time. It's another to spend...your soul. Rule of life: Never sacrifice the eternal for the temporal. It only leads to pain.

d. Work has no meaning when you don't REALLY know how to live (6:8).

Why are you living? Are you making a living, or making a life? You make money with your job. You make a living with your life, and by having the right allegiance in life to the One Who created you!

e. Work has no meaning when you don't know how to die. (6:9-12)

No doubt Chapter 6 is a self-portrait of Solomon. At the end of life, Solomon realized to his sorrow that the path he thought would lead to joy and fulfillment led to emptiness and sadness.

What do you want to leave behind of yourself? Do you use your time in the workforce to love people as Jesus would? Or do you just go through the motions? Do you want people to remember you for more than the fact that "you were always on time for work?" (Eulogy..." He was never late for work a day in his life.")

Your work, no matter how productive, or powerful, or wealthy you become, cannot take the place of simply knowing God and accepting that He is the One Who is in control of everything. Not you. You may be a CEO, or the clerk on a sales floor. But God is the One

Who controls life. The sooner we accept that, the sooner we will find the meaning we are all searching for!

You see meaning comes to us and everything we do when we know Who made us, Who put us here, Who created us, and Who we will one day stand before. Meaning comes when we honor the Bible as the guidebook for our life.

We have a choice to make today. Will we love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, or will our life be lived without meaning? A puff of smoke in the wind? It is a clear decision we must make.

God is waiting for you to decide. But some may still argue. (6:10-12) Solomon reminds us that there is no use arguing with God about how He has wired the universe He created. We simply learn to live within in or destroy ourselves trying to kick down gates and make our own way.

God is in heaven...you are on earth. Remember your place...and live joyfully under God's loving pleasure!