

“Enjoy Your Life” // Ecclesiastes 3:1–14 // Ecclesiastes (Life Without God) # 2¹ // Su1130

Text read live at campuses:

3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

6 a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

8 a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

9 What gain has the worker from his toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. 12 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

Pastor: *This is the Word of God for the people of God.*

Congregation: *Thanks be to God.*

Ecclesiastes 3, if you haven't already turned there. As you do that, Summit Church, that song we just sang at all of our different locations, “The Lord's Prayer,” was written by our Summit Worship team here. They don't do it for your applause, but could we express our appreciation to them for how they lead us and enrich our walk with him?

Ecclesiastes 3... One of the things I hate most is trying to assemble a piece of furniture that I bought online. You dump out all the pieces, stare at the instructions, and five minutes in I'm wondering, “How much money did I actually save doing it this way?” I'll spend an hour trying to figure out what the difference is in pole B and pole C, and why there's SO. MANY. EXTRA. SCREWS. And inevitably, when I'm almost finished, I'll realize I put some piece on backwards and have to take the whole thing apart and start over. Anyone else?

That's exactly how the Teacher in Ecclesiastes feels about his life. He looks around at all the pieces—the joys, the tragedies, the injustices, the unanswered questions—and he asks, “How does any of this fit together?”

¹ Sources consulted: Bobby Jamieson, *Everything Is Never Enough: Ecclesiastes' Surprising Path to Resilient Happiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2025); David Gibson, *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Alistair Begg, “[A Word to the Wise](#)”, October 20, 2002, Truth for Life website; Tony Merida, “[Introduction to Ecclesiastes](#)”, January 19, 2020, Imago Dei Church; Tim Mackie, “[The Book of Ecclesiastes Summary](#)”, June 10, 2016, The Bible Project. And others as noted throughout.

I don't know anyone who has any age on them who understands how all the pieces of their lives fit--we all have mysterious chapters, things that seem painful or pointless and impossible to explain.

And we wonder, **"If there is a good, sovereign God directing all of this, why doesn't he show up more often? Why doesn't more of this make sense?"** In the 1980's a Jewish Rabbi named Harold Kushner wrote a NYT bestselling book called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (PIC), prompted by the tragic and untimely death of his teenage son. It became a classic book in our culture, one still referenced to this day. In that book Rabbi Kushner reasoned, after the death of his son, that God had to either be loving enough to want to stop pain but powerless to do so; or, he was powerful enough to prevent pain but just didn't care enough to bother himself with our problems. That last option didn't seem right--Rabbi Kushner said he couldn't believe in an *uncaring* God--so he concluded that God had created a world that he was now incapable of intervening in.

Ecclesiastes 3 provides a different answer. I should add that Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 is one of the most recognized passages in the Bible--for some of you, it was all you could do when we were reading it not to sing at the end, "To everything turn, turn, turn; there is a season..." Go ahead, Boomers, get it out of your systems).² Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 is a popular passage to read at funerals, even for people who aren't Christians.

These **8 verses are a poem about the cyclical nature of life**. For all of us, Christians or not, life unfolds in seasons, some good and some bad. There's a time for birth and a time for death; a time to laugh and a time to weep; a time to build up and a time to tear down. All told, **Solomon gives us 14 of these dualistic pairs**, or 2 sets of 7, which is a Hebrew way of signaling perfection; completion.

In other words, ***THIS IS LIFE***. *The seasons, the cycles--this is life*. And just like the actual seasons, none of us can change or control them. **Listen, I love the fall here in NC**--it can't get here soon enough for me. The temperature is perfect; the leaves start to change and there's no pollen. Spring is... OK--the pollen just about ruins it for me. The muggy, humid summer months are something I could forever leave behind. ***My wife is almost the exact opposite***. But of course our preferences don't change anything in regards to when the seasons come or how long they last.

In the same way, all the money in the world can't stop life's biggest changes: kids growing up; bodies aging; friends moving away; relationships falling apart; economies crashing; prostates developing cancer; a loved one dying. Money can do a lot; but it can't change the biggest seasons of life.

THIS IS LIFE! You parents know what it's like to talk with one of your kids and they're complaining about something unfortunate happening to them, or something unfair, and what do we say? "Well kid, that's just life." When we say that, we're just summarizing Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.

In fact, this poem expresses the word picture I gave you last week that I came up with as I was reading through Ecclesiastes earlier in the year. Imagine life, I said, as if you were sitting on a beach and on some days, the ocean brings you good, pleasant waves and other days, big, angry ones. There's nowhere else you can go--you have to stay on the beach--and nothing you can do to change, predict or control what that ocean brings. The ocean is too vast, too uncontrollable. So, you might as well enjoy the days of good waves to the fullest, because you can't bottle them up and save them for later; and on the bad days, you should pray for strength to endure them and thank God they don't last forever.

² The Byrds, who sang that song, were not a Christian band, but that was the most popular song in 1965.

Vv 1–8 are an encapsulation of our lives, but sadly, whenever this poem is read at funerals, or sung by hit bands in the 1960s, people usually stop at vs 8. And that's tragic, because, you see, vv 9–22 *explain* and interpret the poem in vv 1–8: “*Because life goes in cycles and seasons for all of us,*” the Teacher says, “*and none of us can control, change, avoid or hold onto those seasons,*” he asks, “*What gain has the worker from his toil?*” Remember this is the **guiding question** of Ecclesiastes: *What gain is there? What permanence? What can you hold onto?*

For the next 13 verses Solomon gives us counsel on how to make sense of such a life. I'm going to give you three pegs he organizes his counsel around:

I. (vs 11) Trust in a Redeeming God with a Beautiful Plan

Look at vs 11: “*He has made everything beautiful in its time...*” The Teacher says that in all these pieces, all these seemingly disconnected strands, there is a good God piecing together a beautiful piece of art that you likely are unable to see yet.

You may look at your life and feel like it's a bunch of random hardware and there's no difference between pole B and pole C, but God knows what he's doing.

Tim Keller said life sometimes feels like we're walking *in the midst of shrubbery, a garden, and someone standing on top of a building tells us that the shrubs we're walking among form a word. But we don't know what the word is and can't even tell what letter we're in!* History only makes sense, he says, *from the perspective of the air, from eternity.*

Wisdom doesn't mean grasping how life always makes sense; wisdom is trusting that God makes sense ***even when life doesn't.***

You see, look at the rest of vs 11: ...Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

- IOW, some things you won't understand until you have the perspective of eternity.

Is that so hard to believe? I mean, ask yourself: ***How many of you can look back at some season of your life where you really wanted God to do something,*** you were really praying for him to to change something--but he didn't, and at the time you couldn't understand it, but now in your older age, from a wiser perspective, you're grateful he didn't change that thing you wanted him to change because you can now see the good that he produced through it? Raise your hands if you have at least one of those.

- I have a bazillion of those--things I didn't want to go through; seasons I'd have preferred to avoid; seasons I prayed God would take me out of.
- But now I see how God was at work in them and the good that came through them and, in one sense, I would never want to go through them again, but in another, I wouldn't trade them now for the world.
- It turns out that great theologian of the 1990s, **Garth Brooks**, was right all along: we can all thank God for unanswered prayers. Amen?

You see, we all recognize that the most beautiful, rich stories require chapters of pain. Think about it: in the best movies, the hero usually has to go through something terrible, something they never wanted; and yet the things he or she learns through that tragedy makes him or her so much richer and better of a character in the end.

- **Spider-Man has to lose Aunt May** or Uncle Ben or MJ or somebody, make up your mind, Marvel writers--but only through that loss does Spiderman learn that love requires sacrifice and that mercy, though harder, is ultimately better.

Already you can see how he's done that with *SOME* of the painful things in your life. Ecclesiastes asks: If already, with only a little bit of time and perspective, you can see some of the good things God is bringing through pain, don't you think given the perspective of eternity, you'll see the reason for all of it?

You know, it's interesting: Revelation says in heaven Jesus will wipe away every tear from our eyes. LISTEN: That means we enter heaven with tears. But in that moment, from the perspective of eternity, we'll better understand. Eternity heals every broken heart.

Listen, I know that some of you struggle to trust God with chapters you can't see any purpose for. That's what Rabbi Kushner struggled with.

BTW, philosophers and thinkers have given this question a name. They call it "the problem of evil," and it's the #1 reason people lose their faith. People have talked about this problem for all of recorded human history. In fact, the classic version of this question was put forward by the Greek philosopher Epicurus in the 5th century BC, and it goes like this:

"If God is all-loving, he would want to eliminate evil. If God is all-powerful, he would be able to eliminate evil."

Evil exists.

Therefore, either God is not all-loving, or he is not all-powerful."

And at first glance, I'll admit--it sounds airtight. But there's a crucial missing premise in the argument. You see, the argument assumes that if God is all-loving and all-powerful, we'll always be able to perceive what his love and power look like in action. But why would we assume that? I mean, a God who is infinitely loving and infinitely powerful would also be infinitely wise--and, just think about it: if his wisdom is

as far above mine as his power is above mine, why would it surprise us that some of what he's doing is beyond our grasp--at least for the time being?

Think for a minute about how much greater God's power is than yours. One of the stars in the night sky is **UY Scuti (PIC)**—which, by the way-- coolest name ever for a star, right? **UY Scuti**. It sounds more like a rapper name than a star name. UY Scuti. If I ever become a rapper, I call dibs on "UY Scuti." UY Scuti is 1,700 times larger than our sun. They say if you put UY Scuti in the place of our sun at the center of our solar system, its outer edge would extend past Jupiter. Its energy output is millions of times greater than our sun's, which puts out the equivalent of 100 million megaton bombs every minute! God created UY Scuti simply by saying, "Let there be light."

Contrast that with my power: I spend 5 minutes trying to open a pickle jar and eventually have to hand it to Veronica. If the gap between God's power and mine is that great, why would I assume the gap between God's wisdom and mine is a lot smaller? I can't properly assemble IKEA furniture--and I'm questioning the God of the universe?

This is where I think people like Bart Ehrman over at UNC make a crucial mistake. You see, Dr. Ehrman always explained to his freshman class at UNC that he lost his faith because of the presence of **"purposeless evil"** in the world. *Tragic things for which Dr. Ehrman could see no discernable purpose*. But notice the assumption behind that phrase: how does he know it's purposeless? The only way he could know suffering is purposeless is if he possessed enough knowledge to rule out every possible purpose an infinitely wise God might have. That's an awfully big boast for people who can't always open a pickle jar.

So, I'll ask again: *If already, with only a little time and distance, you can look back and see the purpose behind some of the pain, don't*

you think that given an eternal perspective, you might see the reason for all of it?*

Ecclesiastes 3 says we CAN'T avoid the bad chapters, and we really shouldn't want to, because it's part of how God makes everything beautiful. "He has made everything beautiful in its time." BTW, we can see that even more clearly than Solomon did, because we know that 1000 years after Solomon wrote this, God himself entered into the world and experienced our pain. On the cross he absorbed the ultimate source of all our pain--sin, and then he defeated it through the resurrection. And now we see he's doing similar things in our pain. Every cross in the moment feels pointless... but then God transforms it through resurrection, making everything beautiful in its time.

Here's the 1st big question of Ecclesiastes 3: Are you willing to trust the God of the cross and resurrection with the seasons of your life?

I think I've told you about one of my **worst parenting experiences**... It was when my first daughter went in for a third round of vaccine shots. If I remember right, she was about a year and a half old. Veronica usually took the kids to the doctor but she told me that this one I had to do it alone and she didn't tell me why. Five minutes in I figured out why. When the doctor stuck her with that first needle she let out a cry of despair that would have woken the dead. So, the doctor said, "Hey, for the next few shots, I need you to hold her still." So, I took her in my arms and I comforted her. When I held her, I felt her whole body relax; she felt so safe. She was with her daddy. And then, as I held her still, the doctor gave her the 2nd and 3rd shots. That look of betrayal in her eyes is something that will haunt me for the rest of my life. As she screamed she looked at me as if to say, "How could you? Not only are you not protecting me from that evil man, you're enabling him?" And of course I wanted to explain to her that this was for her good, but she couldn't grasp that yet.

From her perspective, her loving father had suddenly become cruel. But you and I know there was another explanation: her loving father had a good reason for allowing the pain, one she simply couldn't understand yet. ***The problem wasn't with my love but her perspective.***

Every day, when you encounter suffering you can't explain, you're confronted with those same two explanations. Either your loving Father has ceased to be good, or there is a wisdom beyond what you can presently see.

Wisdom is not being able to explain how life always makes sense; it's trusting that God makes sense even when life doesn't.

The Teacher urges us to trust a redeeming God with a beautiful plan, who will make everything beautiful in its time, just like the resurrection promises he will!

#2 he encourages you to...

II. Enjoy life as a gift (vs 12–13)

12 "I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man"

This is maybe the most repeated and most surprising theme of Ecclesiastes: God really wants you to *enjoy* your life. (And "do good"--which means fulfill the purpose God has for you: God has a specific mission and calling for you that he wants you to fulfill. 'Enjoy life and do good' is basically the whole message of Ecclesiastes in a verse. We'll focus on that last idea--do good--in later chapters. For right now, I want to zero in on that first part: **"I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful..."**) **That's his gift to you right now.**

You see, I grew up in a Christian subculture that emphasized self-denial and sacrifice: deny the impulses of your flesh, pick up the cross, and lay it all down for the mission. Give it all away. And--hear me--that is a crucial--indispensable--part of following Jesus. Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me!"

BUT, I realize now that in our haste to emphasize this part of the discipleship message, we overlooked another crucial part--namely, that God is a Creator who "gives us richly all things to enjoy" and he delights in our enjoyment of these things. You see, we focused on only half the truth: the part about what we were to deny but were largely unaware of what we were supposed to enjoy.³

Here's the whole truth: *God created the world first for us to enjoy, and only secondly to die to.*

You see, consider this: Jesus "denied himself" more than any other human ever had. Right? He took on the role of a servant and voluntarily died on a cross. And yet, look at how he lived the rest of his life: he attended parties; he made excellent wine, the best party wine people had ever tasted; he enjoyed woodworking; he noticed birds; he admired flowers; he enjoyed amazing meals with friends.

- Scholars point out that almost all the stories in the Gospel of Luke center around meals; in fact, one of them said, *"Jesus basically ate his way through the Gospel of Luke."* Now, y'all, that's a Savior I can follow, AMEN?
- Jesus once compared himself to the bridegroom at a wedding--and there's no one at a wedding happier than that guy.
- **Hebrews 1:9** says that Jesus was *"...anointed with the oil of gladness beyond his companions."* Jesus was always the happiest person in the room; he'd be the happiest person you would ever

meet. Get your mind around this: the most self-denying person who ever lived was also the most profoundly alive. The Savior who carried a cross also knew how to enjoy the world as a gift.

God didn't create taste buds because calories needed somewhere to land; he did so because he's generous, and the God who invented strawberries, and warm chocolate chip cookies and mountain sunsets and jazz music and Labrador retrievers and smoked brisket is not embarrassed or surprised when we enjoy them. I mean, not to make this PG-13, but God invented sex! You ever think about that? God didn't look down from heaven and say, *"Hey, wait a minute--they're enjoying this? I meant it only for procreation! Now we've gotta have to make some rules!"*

No, God delights when we enjoy his gifts and he is glorified when we enjoy them.

- **Imagine you spent months picking out the perfect birthday gift for your child.** He opens it, looks at it, and says, "Thank you, Daddy," and then puts it back in the box and up away on the shelf because he thinks enjoying it would be selfish. As a parent you wouldn't say, "Now you're really honoring me." No, you'd say, "Son, go enjoy it! That's why I bought it!"
- In a similar way, God gives us friendships, meals, laughter, vacations, children, music, hobbies as expressions of his fatherly love that he wants us to enjoy.⁴

So, Solomon says: Enjoy each day to the fullest! Not as the hedonist, for whom pleasure is the whole substance of life, but as the Christian,

³ And, as the theologian J.I. Packer said, "a half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth."

⁴ J.I. Packer points out that the Christian gets double enjoyment out of each worldly pleasure--they enjoy the thing itself and they enjoy God through it! It's one of the most boring and deflating things to me about an atheistic, evolutionary view of the world: things only taste good because our bodies have evolved to think that to trick us into eating them. Music only sounds good because somehow that keeps us safer and more likely to survive than we are without it. We feel love for our kids because evolution has determined that that feeling is useful for propagating our DNA. No, all these things are beautiful because a beautiful artist designed them all!

for whom life is a gift. Remember: The Hedonist says, “Eat, drink and be merry for this is *all* we have.” Ecclesiastes says, “No, eat, drink and be merry for this is what we have.”⁵

- Solomon says, these gifts are NOT *all* we have (no, God is the basis of our lives; I have eternity with him.) But these are gifts God gave us now to enjoy, so, enjoy each one to the fullest--just never mistake one of God’s gifts for God himself.

2. Enjoy life as a gift. (And, BTW, don’t miss how Ecclesiastes presents point 1, “trust God,” together with point 2, “enjoy life.” Vs 11–12 go together as a pair. You’ll never **enjoy life** until you **trust God**. The anxious person *can’t* enjoy life today because he’s worried about tomorrow. He’s trying to cling to things in the world--to stockpile them. Or they are looking around at what everyone else has and comparing themselves to these other people and in both cases the joys of life become “hevel.”

- As my friend **Bobby Jamieson** says, **“Enjoy is a present-tense verb, and to do it you must be present and not tense.”**⁶ Which is SO CHEESY, but it makes the point.
- BECAUSE I trust him as my sufficiency for today and as my supply for tomorrow, I can enjoy the abundance he puts into my life today.

Vs 12: “I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live...”

I told you last week, **I’m 53 now**--and sometimes I look at Veronica, my wife. (She’s way younger than me, of course--I mean, when we got married, we were only 4.5 years apart, but somehow now I’m two decades older than her. It’s like we’re in that movie *Interstellar* where I age at one rate and she ages at another.) But, we’re both still

⁵ David Gibson

⁶ Martin Luther said that the point of Ecclesiastes is “forbidding vain anxieties, so that we may happily enjoy the things that are present... lest we permit the present moment...to slip away.” Quoted in Jamieson, chapter 13, “Enjoy,” p 139.

healthy, and sometimes I look at her now and think, “I know this era of youthfulness and energy won’t last forever.” And it’s easy now to look forward to something in the future: some financial goal we want to hit; being able to purchase something we’ve always dreamed of owning; the freedom of retirement, the joy of grandkids. But I bet you when we get there, we’ll look back from that point and wish we’d better enjoyed the days of our youth and health; not taken for granted what it’s like to be full of energy and go wherever we wanted. And of course, one day, one of us will bury the other one, and I bet at that moment we’d give anything just to go back and be able to take a hike through the woods together again or fall asleep watching Seinfeld together one more time.

And so, I want to enjoy every moment I have right now with all its blessings--to the fullest. Not because this is *all* I have--no, I have God--but because it is what I have, *right now*.⁷ These *ARE* the good ol’ days. EVERY era is ‘*the good old days*.’ Every day is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And until you think that, you’ll never be fulfilled.

Please, stop thinking happiness and contentment is found in a future state that you might get to: marriage, kids, career success, wealth, when you’re done being sick. If you think that, when you get there, you’ll find it is hevel. There is no future state that will make you happier than you are today. Contentment is about how you relate to God today, not about things you might own tomorrow. **You get that?** *Contentment is about your posture toward God, not the amount of your possessions.*

And only when you think that will you stop rushing through the days and just start enjoying them. Life, I’ve heard it said, **is like a snow day**. You can’t schedule it. You can’t control it. And sometimes the timing of a snow day feels perfect, and other times it’s super inconvenient. What you should really do when it comes is enjoy it. Go out and play

⁷ From David Gibson

with your kids in the snow.⁸

1. Trust in a Redeeming God with a Beautiful Plan. 2. Enjoy every day of life as a gift...

III. Embrace Life Above the Sun as the Only Satisfying Answer for Life Under the Sun (vv 16–17; 11)

For the rest of the chapter the writer muses about how maddeningly disappointing it is when you cling to life under the sun for satisfaction.

For example, in v 16 he talks about how often this world's justice systems let us down: **Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.**

There are few things in life more bewildering than to encounter wickedness in the places that justice is supposed to reign. Perverted courts, abusive pastors. Law courts are supposed places of respite and refuge, where we experience a little bit of heaven, and when someone gets denied justice in court because someone else manipulated the process with their money--whether it's parents denied justice for their child's killer or groups whose rights and dignity get trampled on--we ask, *'Will things never be right'?*

The Teacher says, "In that moment, you have to look to life 'above the sun' for an answer: **'I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.'**" (Ecc 3:17)

Pastor Ray Ortlund recounts hearing an interview with a woman involved in rescuing girls from the sex trade, and the interviewer asked how she could endure hearing such horrific stories every day

and her answer was: "I believe in a God of judgment. I believe there is a God who will have the final word for all these girls."

If you're only counting on justice "under the sun" you're going to be disappointed. The simple fact of the matter is--and you see this the older you get--the good guy doesn't always win. The honorable business partner sometimes gets cheated; the faithful parent gets blamed. Human justice systems disappoint. And if all you have is hope "under the sun," you're going to seethe with rage, you're going to languish with despair. That can literally poison your soul. BUT, if you believe what Solomon clung to, that God has the last word, it will give you a sense of peace. This doesn't mean you ever stop fighting for justice here, it just gives you a way to not end up in madness or despair.

There's one other way Solomon points to "life above the sun" as the only answer for **"life under the sun,"** and it's back in vs 11, **"...he has put eternity into man's heart."**

There's something eternal inside of you that only something infinite can fill. I want you to think about that--in your heart (feel it), there is a gap that only eternity can fill.

Let me illustrate it this way: every time you shower, you use about 15–20 gallons of water. (For me, it's probably 15 gallons; for each of my daughters, I'm guessing it's closer to 50.) And that may sound like a lot, but that's just a small percentage of the water we use daily. The average American family of four uses about **400** gallons of water every day. If I had on stage a bucket large enough to contain the 400 gallons you use every day, it would need to be about the size of a pick-up truck bed. I tried to actually back a pickup truck in here, but the production team all threatened to quit, so you'll just have to use your imagination.

⁸ Adapted from Jamieson, Chapter 13, "Enjoy," p 141

A pickup-truck-bed sized bucket. Now, I want you to imagine a bucket that could hold the water from a mid-sized lake. Let's take Hyco Lake, just north of here. Lake Hyco contains about **25,000,000,000⁹** gallons of water, and to hold all that water in a bucket, your bucket would need to be the size of Manhattan with sides 6 feet tall. Imagine that.

If you wanted a bucket that contained all the water on earth--the total amount of water on earth is **366,200,000,000,000,000¹⁰** gallons--If you wanted a bucket big enough to hold all that water, you'd need to construct a wall around the continental U.S. that reached 103 miles high--basically, a bucket the size of the US that extends halfway to the space station.

Now imagine a bucket so big that all the water in the earth wouldn't even cover the surface area of the bottom. That bucket, Solomon says, is your soul. Some of you wonder why, after obtaining so many things you've wanted, why you're still unhappy. It's because you have an eternity-sized bucket in that heart of yours and you keep trying to fill it up with little dixie cups of water. **"Our hearts are restless,** Saint Augustine said, **until they find their rest in you."**¹¹

(v 11) We crave permanence. We crave justice. We crave beauty that doesn't fade. We crave love that never ends. We crave significance that death can't erase. These aren't bugs in the system; illusions created by Darwinistic evolution that help us survive. They're evidence that we were built for eternity.

Some of you are trying to fill that void with little Dixie up size amounts of water.

⁹ 25 billion

¹⁰ 366 quintillion, 2 hundred quadrillion, seven hundred thirty-five trillion, three hundred thirty billion

¹¹ One of the greatest philosophers in history, Blaise Pascal, said that each of us carries an "infinite abyss" inside us. We spend our lives throwing finite things into it—money, romance, success, experiences—but the hole isn't just large; it's infinite. Only an infinite God can fill it.

- That promotion at work--a Dixie cup.
- That vacation, another Dixie cup.
- Every championship... Every romance... Every new house... Every new grandchild... Every standing ovation... Wonderful gifts. *Real* gifts. Good gifts from a good God. But still Dixie cups.

And you were made to hold an ocean. ***When are you going to understand this?*** You weren't created for things down here. **Jonathan Edwards** said, **"The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied."** All the joys of the world--strawberries and jazz music and grandchildren exist only to awaken in you a hunger for the One who made them. As expressions of the One who made them, they're good gifts. As substitutes for him, they're hevel.

Jesus is the One your soul is missing. Your heart will always feel restless until you find your rest in him. ***That's why Christianity isn't first and foremost about giving you advice for how to live better under the sun.*** It's about introducing you to the only One big enough to satisfy the eternal void God put inside you.

That's why in here I don't primarily preach Christian philosophy or a code of ethics to live by, I preach JESUS.

Conclusion / VAMP

Which brings me to the good news of Ecclesiastes. 1000 years after Solomon wrote this book, one of Solomon's great great great grandsons, the Son of God himself, entered into Solomon's hevel. And mine and yours. Jesus experienced every season of Ecclesiastes 3. He was born. He laughed. He wept. He built up. He was torn down. He loved. He lost. He was betrayed. He died. And then in the greatest miscarriage of justice the world has ever known, the only truly righteous man was condemned by an unjust court. He experienced wickedness in the courts of justice in ways very few of us ever will, but

he did it joyfully because his heart was filled with infinite love for us, the kind of love that can satisfy that eternal hole in our hearts.

And that brings me back to where we started: Some of you have all the parts of your life spread out on the floor and you can't figure out why you can't make it all work: You've got '*Career.*' '*Marriage.*' '*Kids.*' '*Money.*' '*Vacations.*' '*Friendships.*' Every piece spread out on the floor and you're wondering why life still won't come together. It's because you've left out the one piece that brings it all together: ***Jesus.***

There was a **story I used to tell when I was a youth pastor**--I heard it as a true story—I guess I can't verify that—but it went like this:

Dr. Leo Winters was the most notable ER doctor in Chicago, and he got a call late one evening about a young boy who had been severely injured in an accident. After asking a few questions, Dr. Winters knew he had to go immediately. His hands might be the only ones capable of saving this boy's life.

So, he got dressed, jumped in his car, and headed for the hospital. Time was critical, so he decided to take a shortcut through one of the rougher parts of Chicago. At a red light, his car door was suddenly yanked open. A man in a gray hat and an old flannel shirt grabbed him and shouted, "Give me your car!" Dr. Winters tried to explain: "I'm a doctor. There's a boy dying at the hospital. I have to get there—"

But the man shoved him out of the car and sped away. But by the time Dr. Winters finally found another way to the hospital, it was too late. The boy had died about thirty minutes earlier.

When he walked in, the nurse told him the boy's father was devastated. "He's terribly upset. He doesn't understand why you never came." Dr. Winters said, "Well, where is he? I want to go and at least explain why I was so late." She said, "He's in the chapel."

Dr. Winters walked down the hallway and entered the dimly lit chapel. There was only one man inside, head in his hands, weeping. And when the man looked up, Dr. Winters recognized him immediately. He was wearing the same gray hat and the same old flannel shirt.

The father had carjacked the one man who could have saved his son.

Some of us are doing something tragically similar to God. We keep pushing away the very One we are looking for—the only One big enough to satisfy the eternity he put inside our hearts. It's not the new marriage, it's not the new car, it's not the new job, it's not the promotion, it's not the change, it's not moving to Florida or retiring in Hawaii; it's just Jesus.

BOW HEADS

I want to offer you a chance to surrender to Jesus...

I want to give you a chance to tell Jesus you trust him... to come down here, to kneel in prayer around our altars, and make a declaration that you are going to trust in a redeeming God with a beautiful plan, and make the most every day, every moment he gives you...

Bullpen

I mean, already from this 53-year old perspective I look back on my life and thank God for prayers he didn't answer. There were several girls in high school whom I asked God to make fall in love with me and want to marry me and now I thank God he said, "No, that's not what I want. Or what you want." Because, I mean, (PIC) what kind of girl would've married this guy? God had to make some changes in me before he brought along the girl he wanted me to marry. (God was like, "No, no, no... believe me, you DON'T WANT the girl who would fall in love with that guy. But trust me... I've got something beautiful I'm working on for you." It turns out that that great country music theologian of my generation, Garth Brooks was right all along: **"We can ALL thank GOD for unanswered prayer!"** And all God's people said...

(And now all the millennials are singing in their heads, "Do you wanna build a snowman?" See, I've given a song for each generation in our church).

You were created for God. Why are humans so complex and mysterious and hard to satisfy? Because we're created in the image of God, and only God himself can complete what is missing. It's like

it this way,

"What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him... though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself."¹²

¹² Pensees, #148.

In other words, every one of us has an 'infinite abyss' inside us. We spend our lives throwing finite things into it—money, romance, success, experiences—but the hole isn't just large; it's infinite. Only an infinite God can fill it.

There's a time now for him to build his church, and one day soon there'll be a time for him to return and bring total shalom."

All designed to teach we're not God: There is a God, and you're not him.

J.I. Packer points out that the Christian gets double enjoyment out of each worldly pleasure--they enjoy the thing itself and they enjoy God through it! It's one of the most boring and deflating things to me about an atheistic, evolutionary view of the world: things only taste good because our bodies have evolved to think that to trick us into eating them. Music only sounds good because somehow that keeps us safer and more likely to survive than we are without it. We feel love for our kids because evolution has determined that that feeling useful for propagating our DNA. No, all these things are beautiful because a beautiful artist designed them all!

Or maybe most famously, C.S. Lewis, "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."¹³

- You were created for him
 - **Ecclesiastes 3:19–20**, "For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has

¹³ Mere Christianity

no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.” Is this true? Remember, this is the Preacher speaking from the perspective of this world being all there is.

- He, or the Narrator, corrects it in vs 11
- You’re created for eternity! That’s why nothing on earth satisfies.

And he wants us to ENJOY them. He

- Goose’s death in Top Gun taught Maverick what really matters in life and makes the final reconciliation with Rooster at the end of movie 2 that much sweeter. We’re not saying the death of Goose was good, but without it, Maverick would remain a gifted but shallow pilot, and he would never become the self-sacrificing mentor he became.

[17] I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

Some of us have spent our whole Christian lives trying to be responsible with God’s gifts--*utilizing* them--turning into money or ministry success--instead of simply receiving them. We use them; we manage them; we steward them, but we rarely *enjoy* them. \Life in God’s world is gift, not gain. Stop clutching at life like you can make it permanent. Open your hands. Receive today’s gifts. Laugh hard. Eat gratefully. Love deeply. Take the walk. Watch the sunset. Thank God. Tomorrow isn’t yours. Today is.

life itself; they are gifts *in* life. Gifts God gave us to enjoy, not the substance of life itself.

- I feel like so much of parenting is us telling kids to trust us, that there’s a reason for us making them do stuff they don’t want to do...

Trust God! These times--the good and the bad; a time to be born and a time to die; are the times of your life. But, as David Gibson says, “The times of my life are not the only times.” Eternity is coming.

But it’s short: It’s “not worth comparing to the glory that shall be revealed.”

- **In the light of eternity, even the worst suffering here is light and momentary**
- Don’t want to make light of your pain, but in light of eternity...
Romans 8:22–23, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.”
 - Childbirth

Matt Chandler: What pain?

Maybe after “Wonderful servants of life, but never its substance...” Say “We’ll see in a couple of weeks that these gifts become dangerous only when we ask them to become gods.” (then move on)

Gibson: Death changes us from people who want to control life for gain into people who receive life as gift.

Jamieson: Not striving, but receiving. Grasping is the way to break something...holding gently and loosely is the way to enjoy it.

G. K. Chesterton, “We are perishing for want of wonder, not for want of wonders.”

Lewis, “The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet... My whole, more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us... what we delight to do... I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.”

Break the heart of the worshippers
Jamieson, control!
Here’s Rusty
Counterfeit gods

There is a mystery
Eternity in our hearts
Judgment is a good (vs 16–17)
Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy

- Gibson: “Satisfaction lodges in my heart when I accept the boundaries of my creaturely existence and accept the seasons of my life as coming from his good and wise hands. I can be in a season of sorrow without doubting His fatherly care.”