

## Ecclesiastes 2:12-26 "A Moment Of Clarity In A Life Out Of Focus"

I heard this story a couple of weeks ago - about a young boy, five or six years old, in the back yard of his house, and he had his baseball hat on, a ball in his hand and his bat. And he was playing make believe like you can do when you're young. He yelled out very loudly, for no one in particular to hear, "I am the greatest batter in the world!" He threw up the ball, and he swung, and he missed, and he said, "Strike one." So he put his hat on a little tighter, and he spit into his hands and choked up on the bat and said, "I'm the greatest batter in the world!" Threw up the ball, swung, missed, "Strike two." He looked at the bat to see if it had been broken or something. He thought maybe something was wrong. He dug in his heels and cried, "I am the greatest batter in the world!" And he threw up the ball, and he swung, and he said, "Strike three." Without batting an eye, he yelled out, "I am the greatest pitcher in the world!" (Laughing) Optimist.

But the two weeks we've spent here in this book with Solomon - on his quest to find life under the sun, life without God, to find purpose in life without Him - I think would have Solomon saying, of that story, "What purpose is that stupid game? It is nothing but vanity and a grasping for the wind."

We have, before us, the journal of a pessimist - someone who experimented with life, and he tried to find things to find fulfillment in life apart from God. Though he knew God, though God had greatly blessed him - he was the wealthiest, the wisest, certainly the most powerful man on the planet at the time - yet Solomon later on, his wives turning his heart from God, set all of those things apart and sought to find life with all that he had, with all that he could observe, with all he could experience. And with every passing day, that frustration in his search became more pronounced, and that hole inside his heart grew large. It's kind of like buying cotton candy at the fair. It seems like an awful lot of candy to get for \$1 - until you take a bite out of it, and you realize it's just an ounce and a half of sugar and food coloring. Spun, blown up, but it's just fluff; you just take a bite, it's gone, where'd it go? I don't know.

So, this morning, we continue with Solomon, and our text begins, this morning, with the words, "Then I turned myself to consider." And it's a phrase that kind of

marks a turn for Solomon because he has been experimenting, he's been doing it. But now he kind of takes a break from the doing to observe. He figures, "I don't have to do everything to learn everything. Maybe I can just do some proper analysis and be objective and observe life, and through comparison, I can learn what is better - one or the other." And so this morning, down to the end of the chapter, he makes comparisons between two different things - the life of the wise man and the life of the fool, the life of the laborer and one who doesn't think so much about labor at all. And he views both wisdom and gain (or wealth) from the standpoint of death because, literally, everything that Solomon begins to observe, he always factors in death as part of life under the sun. It's hard to get away from. Is it better to be wise, or is it better to be a fool? Is it better to work hard or not so hard? What does life under the sun tell us? And then at the end of the chapter this morning, verses 24-26, Solomon, for a moment, breaks through the clouds, and he'll do this a half a dozen times in his pursuit of life before he makes the right conclusion. He will take a minute, and he will look beyond life under the sun - above the clouds - and see the Lord that he once knew as a young boy. And he'll come to some right conclusions but then quickly, unfortunately, fall back away from what he had drawn on and remembered, and he'll be back to the quest until he wears out every rabbit trail.

So this morning, we've entitled our message "A Moment of Clarity in a Life Out of Focus" because that's Solomon indeed.

Verse 12, Solomon says, "Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who succeeds the king? Only what he has already done. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all. So I said in my heart, 'As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?' Then I said in my heart, 'This also is vanity.' For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool!"

Now understand, this is life under the sun for Solomon. This is apart from God. This is the best man can do with what he can understand. And Solomon, in analyzing, in observing - "I set myself to consider," he determines that, being a man who is wise, he should have some distinct advantages in this life. And he says that of himself in verse 15, but he uses the term "wise" in opposition to the word

"fool," and so the comparison is one between someone who carefully plans, makes plans, if you will, walks circumspectly, is conservative in his approach to life, it is well thought out, it is structured; because the term "fool" here is that one that is used to describe someone who lives kind of the carefree, the careless, the unplanned, the seat-of-the-pants, kind of come what may. And that's who the fool is to Solomon. That someone lives this life, as he observed, with reckless abandonment. "I'll take whatever comes my way. I'm not too worried about the consequences of my way of life." His favorite song is "Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be." And Solomon's initial conclusion was that wise is better, even like light is better than darkness. There's just no comparison. Wisdom has advantage over being just simply foolish. There's a benefit to being smart about the way you live your life. In fact he says in verse 12, "What really can I give to the next king when it comes to success?" He said, "At best, I can get him to do what I did to be successful." In other words, "I can pass my wisdom along to the next fellow that comes around. I can help prepare him for what lies ahead."

He says in verses 13 and 14, "The wise man in this world lives with an alertness. His eyes are open. The fool just stumbles along in the dark. He doesn't give a thought to his choices. He seems to just bumble his way through." And Solomon says, "There's benefit in wisdom." To be wise in this life will have you anticipating what you're up against. You'll see the pitfalls that are in front of you. You'll be able to gain wisdom and navigate around the problems, while the fool (verse 14) - he just walks in darkness; doesn't really know where he's going, he's unable to anticipate the bumps in the road, he doesn't read the "Road out" sign and turn around, "Road closed." He just, "Ah, it doesn't matter to me." You probably know people like that. So, Solomon, in his wisdom, decides that he would rather be wise and live life with both eyes open. However, it doesn't take long for Solomon, looking at life, to say, "But there's a bigger picture." And he takes a couple of steps back, and he broadens his view, if you will, and he carries those thoughts in his mind to their natural conclusion. And then Solomon decides - maybe there is no benefit, really, to living so wisely in this life compared to the life of the fool because ultimately (verse 14), the same thing happens to them both. They die. Death is the great equalizer. Death is the great leveler. It is the going rate. Everyone dies. And so Solomon looks around, and he goes, "Well, there're some advantages to being smart now. I can pass along some of my wisdom. I don't get into trouble like other guys. But, in the end, we're both dead. And the wise man dies like the fool." And he says in verse 15, "So why do I think that being smart now is really an advantage? Not in the big picture, not in the long run. If I become wise and educated and wealthy

and influential, I'm going to die. And that's just like that guy who just bumbles along. Doesn't take life seriously. How am I really any wiser than he?" The wise man great benefit here - but how about forever? And Solomon wasn't able to get by that. There's no long-term advantage here. In the larger scheme of things, there's no benefit to being wise or being foolish.

In fact, he adds in verse 16, "When all is said and done, no one's going to remember either one of us." Not for very long. The effect of the life of the wise and the fool are both nominal. They're temporary. They're both going to die. So really, what advantage is there? There's no long-term consequence. That was his perception of life under the sun, apart from God.

Now, we try very hard in this life to not believe verse 16. We put tombstones on people's graves, not tomb cardboard, because we want them to remember who lies here. Rodney Dangerfield - his tombstone says, "There goes the neighborhood." (Laughing) Cute line. For now. It'll be forgotten, it'll fall over, stuff will grow over it. Nobody will remember who he is 100 years from now. There're some pretty impressive gravestones around the world. If you've ever had a chance to go to India and look at the Taj Majal, it's a pretty big gravestone - built to the wife of an emperor - that unless you go there, you probably know nothing about. We find the pyramids of Egypt being elaborate places of burial. Some we've been able to figure out who they are; most we have no clue, we have no idea. It's a losing battle to try to make yourself a legacy because there're a few generations that come and go, and you're forgotten. Time tarnishes everything. It makes you forgettable and fuzzy and hazy.

I remember being in high school and having to take history class, and I hated it. I figured it was just a study of a bunch of guys everyone's forgotten about. Who was the tenth president of the United States? If you're a history buff, you might know; but for the most part, who cares? They come, they're gone. His name was John Tyler, by the way; 1841-1845, had a couple of wives. No one cares. You remember that guy, John Gilbert? How many of you women remember John Gilbert? I just want to find out. You have to be pretty old, I think. John Gilbert was Valentino's competition in the twenties in the silent movies. He was like a ladies' man, like the women would swoon. He was a household word less than 100 years ago. And you all went, "John who?" (Laughing) "Is he, like, on the TV?" No. Silent movie guy. He's come. He's gone. How many of you remember who won the 1955 World Series? Now again, if you're a baseball buff, maybe you will. You've

made it your concern to know. I was raised back East, so I was raised a Yankee fan - which isn't a nice thing to say in Dodger-town. But tough, I have the pulpit. But in 1955, the Dodgers played the Yankees in front of 64,000 people, and the Dodgers beat them in Game 7, 2-0, and a guy named Johnny Podres pitched. He did a great job, three-hitter or something - I forget - but you don't know that. You know how I knew that? I went and looked it up. (Laughing) So I could show you that we don't care - because we don't care. And that was Solomon's problem. It just killed him, you know? The fool dies, the wise guy dies. There's no long-term benefit of me being so smart and going to school and applying myself and denying myself and sacrificing for myself and making good choices. And then what? We just both end up dead, and there's that guy just whistling Dixie, never had a job in his life, lives off the handouts of others, seems to be happy, and he dies too. And we're both forgotten. What good is that?!

And so he says, in verse 17, this, "I hate life!" That's pretty depressed, isn't it? "I hate life." This is the low point of the passage. "I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me," that it just left me empty and frustrated. The word "vanity" means "that which is left when everything is burned away." What do you have left? What does it leave you in the end? And the word "grasping for the wind" is a very poetic kind of language in these books of poetry that suggests frustration that you can't overcome because you can't hold the wind, you can't grab the wind. It is very expressive, and Solomon uses it a lot. In fact, you will find here - in verses 17 and 18, verse 20 and verse 22 - those are the words Solomon uses to describe life under the sun.

So, here's a guy that hits such a depression that he says, "Life is just overwhelming in distress." After all of the personal experimentation in chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2, and now the objective observations in the end, things weren't getting better for Solomon. But I want you to remember, this is a guy who had everything - more money than you'll ever hope to see, more influence than you can all collectively apply, more wisdom than we all have since God enabled this man. He had the potential for the greatest joy that the world had to offer and implying that if he took and he used it all, he'd end up a great, happy man. And he says, "I hate life!" That oughta slow you down trying to get what the world offers for you. "I hate life. It is a distressing way of life." And he sat at the top of the heap, and he climbed to the pot at the end of the rainbow, and he made the top of the Forbes 500 list, and he hates life. Life under the sun. The horizontal life. And where he was hoping he would find some joy and meaning and purpose, he found life

to be insipid and meaningless and tasteless. Vanity. Grasping for the wind. Futile - in finding any satisfaction.

And then he says, "I hated," verse 18, "all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity" - emptiness.

Now you remember, as we've gone through some of what we've already studied, that Solomon lived his life through kind of entrepreneurial endeavors. He even, for a time, decided he could find real meaning in building and gathering and buying and owning and creating. And it hadn't worked so well for him here, so now he's observing. Now, Solomon wasn't a laborer. He was one of those visionary kind of managers, a businessman who made sure that others did the work. But he oversaw the labor. He was a man who led. He made things better. He was a workaholic by anyone's standards, if you read through all that he wrote, but he sought to find fulfillment first in the task, the start-up, the challenges, the battles. And that didn't work. And then he turns to look at it a little bit differently, and he says to himself, "Well, look, if I can't be satisfied with the process, maybe I can take all that I've earned and lay it aside for who follows me - my progeny, my children, the grandchildren. Maybe I can live that kind of life - not selfishly so, but for the sake of others. I can store up. I can lay up. I can maybe be satisfied with that. If the here and now doesn't do it, perhaps knowing that, later on, it'll meet many needs will do it." And he thinks about that for a while. "How magnanimous is that? I'm gonna lay up for my children." And he ponders it, and he comes away with, "Yeah, that's a great idea. That'll be very satisfying. Unless.....my kids turn out to be idiots, fools. They just take all the hard labor and work and saving and sacrifice, and years of building and sixteen-hour days and all that it took to build what I have, and they just waste it away. Oh no, what if that happens?" "Can a person," he writes, "really appreciate something they've never had to work for themselves?" And Rehoboam, his son, was a wing nut. I mean, he was a little loose

there in the head, you know? He wasted, literally, everything his father left for him.

If you look historically, before the war, parents traditionally handed to their children businesses that were just enough to survive the family. There wasn't a lot extra, but there was the opportunity to work. After World War II, a new thought entered the hearts of Western civilization - we can lay up for our children things that they don't necessarily have to earn. And it became this great drive to give a life to your children that was better than the life that you had been living. You don't find that so much prior to World War II.

But Solomon, in his thinking, thought that through and wondered how many of that kind of life and understanding would leave the father, if you will, or in his case - him, disappointed when the hard-earned money and the hard sacrifices to get there now is used frivolously by someone else without an awareness of its value at all. And he said, "I hate life, and I hate having to go to work now when I think about that." And he says that in verse 18, "It is nothing more than frustration and emptiness, and I hate the toil because some will work with labor and wisdom and knowledge and skill, and they'll go, 'Here you go,' and they'll give it to a wing nut." That's what he says. And he comes to the conclusion about his labor - that he had come to the conclusion about when it came to living wisely. And that was, "It's futile. I hate it. I hate it. I hate life. I hate labor. It is fruitless."

He says something pretty interesting about gain. He says in verse 18, one of the frustrations is you can't keep it. You can't keep it. You ask the fool that, there in Luke 12, where he sat back, and he said, "Oh. My business is going great guns. I'm gonna build a bigger storage facility, and then I'm gonna put my feet up and enjoy life." And head for Hawaii. I'm pretty sure that's what it says in the original Greek - head for Hawaii. Look it up. I could be wrong. But here's what the Lord said to the guy. "You're a fool! Today your life will be required of you, and then whose shall those things be of which you now take such great joy?" Who's going to have that? You're not.....because you can't put a UHAUL behind the hearse that's taking you to the graveyard. You can't take it with you! "What do you got?" "My stuff." "Tough. You're going to have to leave it here." Frustrating. Frustrating.

Paul said to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:7), "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." You come in empty, you go out that way. In fact, to the believer the Bible teaches us that we are to be good stewards of that

which God has entrusted to us - that it belongs to Him and not to us - and that we will answer for the way we use what God puts in our hand. And we can use it foolishly, or we can use it wisely. According to Matthew 6, we can use it in a way that we can convert it into spiritual benefit and send the fruit ahead, and there it will be stored - where moth can't come in and corrupt, and rust won't corrupt, or thieves won't break through and steal. There is a way to convert monetary, temporal gain into spiritual eternity. Beyond that, you can't keep it.

And he says in verses 19 and 20, "And I can't protect it." Not only can't I keep what I have worked so hard for, I can't really protect it because if I have to hand it off to my son who is a fool - or my daughter who is a fool, and she takes this earned estate, and she loses it in a few years, how can I protect the labor? How can I find joy in doing this, knowing what it might end up to be? I really have no assurances. Now if you've ever sat down to try write a will, you'll find that lawyers - even boilerplate estate planning folks - have all kinds of clauses, now, worked into wills to try to protect you from that kind of foolish kid. They will write things like, "Well, he can have the money IF he finishes his second year of college, IF he has a job during the summer, IF....." It doesn't work. They get it eventually. And if they don't get it, the lawyer will get it. Someone will get it. You won't get it. So, those clauses do you very little good, although I guess you sleep better at night. I don't know.

I thought about how Solomon despaired - both from being wise and diligent and disciplined in this life and from being successful here - that if that's all there is, that's not enough. It just brings you hating what you do, hating what's coming. You can't keep it, you can't protect it, and he says in verses 21-23, "I can't even enjoy it - knowing what's going to happen to it. The very possibility of this being wasted takes away my joy. I have to take my hard-earned dollars and hand them to someone who's done none of those things." Now you know, if you've watched TV, there are some heirs and heiresses running around our world who are living off their parents' money, acting like absolute buffoons, have no skill, have no contribution to life, do nothing more than spend someone else's money, and they draw attention to themselves for their foolishness. I don't need to mention names - you can fill in the blank. It'll spare me later on with lawsuits and radio. Well you know who they are, and they're just fools. And you look, and you say, "Really?" And I think of the parents who worked hard to gain and then to watch this. No wonder that Solomon shook his head and went, "I hate this! I hate this!" "What good," verse 23, "is working all day, working up a sweat, and then worrying up a storm at



night - as to what's going to happen to it? I lose sleep worrying about the future. Who will get it? What will be done with it?" And Solomon says, "Ah, forget it! Forget it!"

Now fortunately, we don't end here in this pessimism, and there's plenty of it to be found here. We get a couple of verses where Solomon rights the ship, and for a moment, he breathes in through his nose. He has some spiritual eyes, and he comes out from all that fog, and says, "Well, wait a minute. I should learn from this. I should be able to apply this."

Three verses left - that bring a moment of clarity. We read in verse 24, "Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?" Now, it is a poor translation, and unfortunately, the New King James sometimes heads in that kind of a direction. But I hope that you, in reading this, wouldn't say to yourself, after hearing Solomon - what he just said - say, "Oh yeah, that's the right conclusion. Just eat and drink and be merry. And if you have a lot of money, you can do it better than anyone else." Because that's not what he is saying at all. In fact, many translations read in verse 24 the words that "nothing in me can find that, through eating and drinking, my soul can find enjoyment in my life or in my labor." Literally, what he is saying is, "God hasn't made me to find satisfaction in this life." Or, "Nothing around me and nothing in me, by creation, has left me in a position where I can enjoy life just because of life itself."

And verse 25 will say the same things. You might even, in your margins in verse 25, have the words, "more than I" be marked with an asterisk or a number or a letter, and it'll take you to a place where it will tell you that most Bibles interpret the words written here - "more than I" - "without Him." It isn't very different in the Hebrew; it isn't as different as it might sound in English. But he literally says, "Who can eat or have enjoyment without Him?" It is Solomon's recognition of the fact that, if this is all there is in life, that's not - not only is it not satisfying, God didn't make us to find satisfaction in it. That's his point. You weren't created to find your fulfillment in this world.

Now, this is one of six conclusion statements that Solomon will draw in this book. And all of them emphasize the importance of accepting the life that God has given you as a gift from God and then enjoying it as the will of God. You can see it here,

chapter 3 beginning in verse 12, chapter 5 beginning in verse 18, chapter 8 in verse 15, chapter 9 in verse 7, chapter 11 beginning in verse 9. And then you'll get his conclusion at the end. Now, it's not fatalism, but it is times where Solomon, on this dark walk through the world where he tries and tastes everything for us so we don't have to go that way - he then shakes his head loose sometimes and goes, "Oh, yeah, the Lord." And he will turn to seek and to understand the goodness of God, which is, I think, why the Jews, every Feast of Tabernacles, where they celebrate the care of God and the provisions of the Lord, read this book to remind themselves that life isn't in the world. It's by the precious hand of God.

So verse 24 is Solomon's first conclusion - you're not created, if you will, to find satisfaction in eating and drinking and being merry. Literally, it reads, "There is nothing in man that he should drink or eat or find enjoyment in the toiling of his life." No matter what you produce, no matter what you have, no matter how far you get in life - if God isn't involved, you're not satisfied. And God did that purposely because He wants you to come to Him, not die in your sins and find out too late that this life is not all that there is, nor is it a place you should be hunting for your life. That's why you see the wealthy so dissatisfied in life - because there isn't anything that can fully satisfy them until the Creator moves into His creation.

The last part of verse 25 - "without Him." In other words, for life to sustain us with the kind of joy and hopefulness that we want, God is going to have to be involved because I can't, on my own, find life in just eating and drinking and working and toiling and gaining and being wise and disciplined. It's not enough. There's an emptiness that xxxxxxxx us.

We are told in verse 26 that God gives both wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is walking with Him, who is good in His sight. God gives enjoyment to man as a gift, and then wisdom and joy and knowledge mean something because I learn to walk with God. God wants me to enjoy life. And sometimes we talk to people, and you think that they've grown up their entire life thinking God is some cosmic killjoy, you know? "Why are you laughing? This is serious." "I'm serious, but God is happy." God wants me to be filled with joy. He wants my life to be satisfied. Paul said it to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:17), "God gives us richly all things to enjoy." Man, that's the will of God. Solomon gets that. There ought to be joy in our labor. I tell you what - I love what I do. I don't think I've ever gotten up on a Sunday morning and went, "Oh, no! Sunday again," and complain about it. I get to do what I love to do, and I love that God is allowing me to do it. It is a thrill. It is a thrill.

I was saved in 1973, and I went to Calvary Downey. I had a chance to teach there yesterday at a conference, and to just see the place forty years later - still just plugging along, enjoying the Lord - it's a thrill. Real satisfaction in serving the Lord, in being where you're supposed to be. That's what God wants for you. But without Him, life, man, is horrible! There's only temporary salve. There's no healing, there's no hope, there's no joy. Maybe you'll wake up tomorrow morning and go, "Oh, I hate Monday. If every day is a gift from God, I'd like to return Mondays." (Laughing) It doesn't mean that all aspects of your life go so easy, but I wouldn't trade what I do for anything in the world. Life is a gift from God. You walk with Him, you enjoy everything. You go out to dinner with friends - oh, what a pleasure. Sit on the beach and watch the sunset - oh, God is so good. He gets involved - everything satisfies. He's not involved - everything frustrates. And the goodness of God is He makes it so, so that you'll come to the right conclusion about Him.

And he says in verse 26 that God will provide for those who seek Him. You know, there's an interesting irony in the acquisition of wealth in the Scriptures - which I find to be almost like God gets the last laugh. Solomon says here (and remember, this is by observation), "I see and I know that God makes provision for, blesses with joy and wisdom and knowledge to a man who is good in His sight; but" to the wicked guy, to the evil man, "to the sinner," his job in the world, which he thinks is smart - I'm gonna gain and get wealthy and powerful, I'm gonna find my place in life - from the Lord's perspective, Solomon says, "he gets the task of gathering and collecting so he can give it to somebody who loves God." I find that to be such an interesting picture, and it isn't just found here. It isn't just some ludicrous kind of statement. The sinner - he has to work at gathering and collecting. He's not going to enjoy it. Why? Because he may have to leave it to the idiot. He's not going to enjoy his wisdom because he's gonna die. There's no joy in this. His life is all about gathering and collecting. But for the saint, it's all about using for God's glory, isn't it? It doesn't turn your head, it doesn't light up your life. He lights up your life. And I find it so interesting that you can, indeed, so often serve God first, and as we read there in Matthew 6:33, then He'll add all of these things to you. He said, in the context, "Don't you worry about stuff like the world does - what you're going to eat, what you're going to wear, what you're going to have. That's what the world preoccupies itself. You just preoccupy yourself with this - you seek first the kingdom, and then I'll give you everything else." In other words, you don't have to make profit and gain your goal. You just have to make Jesus your goal, and He'll take care of the rest. And I find that to be extremely important.

You know, we're on the radio all over the country, and it costs hundreds of thousands of dollars a year - it's very expensive. But the fruit is so great that we hate to stop. We don't want to stop. The gospel goes out - I talked to a fellow yesterday. He came up to me, and he said this to me, and it just thrills my heart. He said this, "I just got out of jail last week. I've been in for seven years at Chino. I listened to you on the radio and gave my life to Christ." And I went.....I'll pay it next year. Every dime. What a joy to hear this young man who had gotten in big trouble - but saved now! Ooohhh! So, we have this choice. We can worry about the finances to pay for that and do fundraisers and constantly be asking on the radio, "Can you give? Can you help?" We decided God doesn't need beggars. If the Lord is in it, the Lord can pay the bills. So, we have determined we will never ask for money from anyone. If it's His work, it'll work. And it has. We've paid every bill, every month - without fail. We've never had to drop a radio program because we couldn't afford it. We've never been unable to keep up with the rising costs that those things incur. We just sit around going, "Lord, we just serve You. You take care of the business." And He does. It blows my mind. And we get checks in the mail from people that aren't saved. "Oh, I listened to you. You were very encouraging. It was a very good speech." (Laughing) "Here's \$25,000." And you go, "Cool!" (Laughing) Steady xxxxxxxx. And God has paid everything - it is the coolest thing to watch.

And Solomon saw it, and I get it. Unfortunately, sometimes, ministries think it's their job to raise funds and beat people into giving and, "Come on, help out. If you don't give, we don't go." Well then, go away. I hear that sometimes on the radio. "Oh, it's the summer months. We're really tight. It's Christmas time. Ohh, if you just give - we want to stay on the air." Really? You should get off the air until you learn that God takes care of His people.

But it's been awesome to watch. We do the same thing at church. We don't ask for money. We take offerings on Sunday. We try to teach you about giving when we run into it. But beyond that, it's the Lord's church, man. He pays the bills. If I gotta be out here shilling for the Lord, "Come on. For \$10, I'm gonna give you one of these, and for \$20 - oh wait, there's more. Today and today only...." (Laughing) I just want to find another God to serve. You know? One who can pay His own way. He's Almighty God after all. What a great truth.

I thought about Voltaire. Voltaire was a seventeenth century outspoken critic of Christianity who, oftentimes in his speeches, would say, "Within 100 years,

Christianity will be abolished." Fifty years after he died, the Geneva Bible Society bought his house to print Bibles and distribute them all through Europe. (Laughing)  
There you go!

So, look. Here's the deal. You have to take your hopes and aspirations for life, and all that you're living for and all that you're aspiring to be, and you have to set them aside - Solomon's conclusions and observations and experiences - and say to yourself, "Am I on track, or am I really going to go the same way he's gone?" You have to choose, you have to decide - because without God, life is going to be empty and frustrating. That's it. Even if, for the short-term, you feel like you're the king of the world.

I've been reading these biographies lately, and I read last week Fannie Crosby's biography. She was 94 years old when she died. She spent almost her entire life completely blind, lived in relative poverty. But she was the most prolific hymn writer in the history of the Christian church. I didn't tell Gerard I was going to be sharing that example, but you played "Blessed Assurance" which she happened to have written. He chooses the music, I don't; so it's interesting how the Lord does that. But she wrote "To God Be The Glory." And when she was seventeen years old, her mother and she were praying together, and her mom said, "Maybe we should pray the Lord give you sight," and she said, "Mom, if I had a choice I'd rather remain blind. For when I die, the first face I will ever see will be of my Lord." Awesome woman. She had it all, though she had nothing. Solomon had everything, and he had nothing. Absolutely nothing.

So, it doesn't matter what level of success - if your satisfaction is here, it's going to be short-lived. If God is involved, if you have nothing, you'll still be fine. You'll be full. You'll be blessed. So Solomon turns from participation to observation, but his conclusions remained the same. Only a moment of clarity at the end - I can't find life apart from God being in it. Life that is a gift from Him. How He provides for me, then I can rejoice in His provision and not in the life that I see before me.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
June 2, 2013