

ADRIAN ROGERS

# LEGACY

C O L L E C T I O N



E C C L E S I A S T E S

These transcripts are taken straight from live audio recordings of Adrian Rogers during his tenure as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. As such some of the transcripts may contain stutters, stammers, transcription errors, and other authentic remarks as would be common in a live setting.

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# Ecclesiastes

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# It's Time for You to Get a Life

*By Adrian Rogers*

## **Main Scripture Text: Ecclesiastes**

*“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”*

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

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## **Introduction**

Well, amen. Would you take God's precious Word and find the Book of Ecclesiastes. It's not all that hard to find. Psalms is just about in the middle; then, if you'll turn to Psalms and turn right—Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. And I want you to take your Bible and leave it open for the entire message, because we are going to cover an incredible amount of Scripture. The title of our study today is, “It's Time for You to Get a Life.”

Listen to what Solomon said here—by the way, who was the author of this incredible book—and chapter 1, verses 1 and 2: *“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity”*

(Ecclesiastes 1:1–2).

The scene is the Rose Bowl in California. The University of California and Georgia Tech are both undefeated. What a game it is! Georgia Tech has the ball. It's late in the second quarter—almost the halftime. Georgia Tech is pressing hard on their own 30. Thomason has the ball; and, he charges, and he fumbles. Roy Riegels from California picks up the ball. He lifts his head. He knows this is his golden moment, and he begins to run with that ball. Yard after yard, he is running; he's pumping his legs. His balance is there. His head is down. He's got the ball. He's making the move. He's running, running, running, running. The sad thing is that Roy Riegels is running in the wrong direction. When he picked up the ball, he got confused. And he's turned around, and he is running in the wrong direction. For 67 yards, he runs. The opposing team is leading the interference. Finally, Roy's teammate catches him on the one-yard line.

Can you imagine how he felt? Can you image the humiliation, as he went back and sat on the bench? Well, Solomon was something like that. The ball of life had been thrust into his hands; and, in confusion, he begins to run toward the wrong goal. And Satan was leading interference for him. Now friend, many of us are like that. Many of us are confused and perplexed, and we really do not know what life is all about.

Now the Book of Ecclesiastes is the journal of King Solomon. Now King Solomon had everything. I mean, you talk about a man that had everything! Listen, folks. He had it all: He had power; he had popularity; he had prosperity; he had prestige; he had pleasure—anything his heart could desire. He had it all; and yet, it was a washout for him. He learned how to have a living, but not a life. He was drawing his breath and dying at the same time. And I think that, if he'd been living today, somebody might say to him, "Hey, man, get a life!"

Now what you have here in the Book of Ecclesiastes is his journal and his record of some of the perplexities that he had—some of the mistakes that he had. And we're going to open the Bible and look, today. Somebody said, "You need to learn from the mistakes of others; you don't have time to make them all yourself." And so what we're going to do is to look here and see three basic things that are in this book.

Now this book has 12 chapters; and so, we're just going to dip in and dip out. But we're going to stay, basically, in the Book of Ecclesiastes. And I want you to learn, now, about the life that we need to live—the life that God wants you to live—as we're in this series of messages of "A Lifestyle for the Last Days."

## **I. The Complex Mystery of Life**

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call the complex mystery of life—the complex mystery of life, if you will. Again, verses 1 and 2: *"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of*

*vanities; all is vanity*” (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2).

Now why does he say, “*Vanity of vanities*”? (Ecclesiastes 1:2). For emphasis. When the Bible wanted us to know how holy the sacred place was, in the tabernacle, what does it call it? The Holy of Holies. When our Lord wants to emphasize the truth, what does He say? “Verily, verily, I say unto you...” When we talk about the majesty of Jesus, we say, “He is the Lord of lords.” What Solomon is saying is, “Hey, this is king-sized. This is vanity of vanities.” He said, “I can’t figure life out.” Life is a puzzle; life is a mystery. And every thinking person knows that it is. And I want to tell you, if you think you’ve got it figured out, you don’t.

Some college students were asked to give a definition of life. Here are some that won honorable mention:

“Life is a joke that isn’t even funny.”

“Life is a jail sentence that we get for the crime of being born.”

“Life is a disease for which the only cure is death.”

That sounds cynical, doesn’t it? And I’m afraid many college students are just like that. But life is empty. Life is vain apart from God. Now I’m going to tell you a secret. God engineered it that way.

Did you know that God does not want life to make sense to you? That may surprise you, but God, in His infinite wisdom, makes life a mystery. Let me give you a New Testament verse that’ll back up what I’m about to say—Romans chapter 8—put it in your margin—verses 20 and 21: “*For the creature*”—that literally means, “the creation”—“*was made subject to vanity, not willingly,*”—that is, “we didn’t choose it”—“*but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope*” (Romans 8:20). In plain English, God made everything confusing. God took all creation, and God said, “There it is, but you’re not going to be able to figure it out.”

Now He did that not because He doesn’t love us, but because He *does* love us. And God knows that, if you and we, in our wisdom, and ingenuity, and sagacity, could figure it all out, we would never come to Him—if we could find meaning apart from Him. And so this vanity—this confusion, this mystery—is a tool that God uses to draw us to Him. This word *vanity* appears almost with monotony here in the Book of Ecclesiastes more than 30 times. And what is Solomon saying? Life without God is a dead-end road. You will never, never, never, ever figure it out—I don’t care who you are. And every wise person knows that he cannot figure it out. And yet, man has a desire—he wants to know the deepest meaning of life.

Go over to chapter 3, and look in verses 10 and 11: “*I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time:*”—now, notice this next phrase—“*also he hath set the world in their heart,*”—a better translation may be, or at least another translation may be, “He hath set

eternity in their heart”—“so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end” (Ecclesiastes 3:10–11). No one can figure it out. You say, “I’ve figured it out.” You haven’t. God put eternity in our heart. God put something in man’s heart that He did not put into the hearts of other creatures, other animals. God gave us a desire to see life from an eternal perspective, because nothing seems to make sense here on this earth.

When Joyce and I took a vacation, one time—which I loved, but she didn’t like it that much. She endured it; I loved it—we went to an island down in the Bahamas. They didn’t have any restaurants on that island, so you can understand why I liked it better than she did. But we both had a good time. We lived in a little cottage. It had no air conditioning. There were no automobiles on that little island; only, we had a little boat there, in front of the island. We could go from place to place in that little boat with an outboard motor. And a beautiful beach—hey, it was great! For recreation, we went out and would lie on the dock at night and just look up at the stars. Super! Man, it was wonderful. Well, get off of that. Anyway, what did we do for recreation? We had an incredible jigsaw puzzle—I mean, a big one, king-sized. It was the face of a great big pig. And we worked from time to time, just sitting there, putting the pieces of that *pigsaw—pigsaw—jigsaw* puzzle together—putting it all together. *Pigsaw* is not a bad name for it. And anyway, can you imagine the joy to put the last piece in place?

Now I want you to imagine a puzzle like that with the last piece missing—or two or three pieces, or half a dozen pieces, missing. Or, I want you to imagine a puzzle like that, where somebody slips in some pieces from another puzzle, and you’re trying to put it together. That’s what life is like—that’s what life is like. God has life confusing. And friend, it’s very confusing. And you’re going to find out that, sometimes, you think that you’ve got it all worked out, because everything is going so smoothly. Just wait a while—just wait a while. You know, God has a way of putting the good and the bad together. Have you noticed that?

Look, if you will—go over to chapter 7, and look in verse 14: “*In the day of prosperity be joyful,*”—are you having prosperity, right now? I’m happy for you. Rejoice—“*but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him*” (Ecclesiastes 7:14). What does that mean? You can’t figure it out. I mean, God takes good times; and then, God takes bad times. Now when everything is working out fine, you say, “Boy, do I have a great philosophy of life! I’ve got a... I know, man, I’ve got it. I’ve got the world by the tail in a downhill pull. It is all making sense to me now. I’ve finally got it figured out.” And then, adversity comes.

Brother Whitmire, you remember down in Merritt Island—we had a tornado come through Merritt Island. There was a lady who lived in a trailer—house trailer—perhaps a block from the church. That house trailer was absolutely devastated. In that house

trailer, she had a parakeet. She had no children. She had no other pets. This parakeet was like one of her children. She loved that parakeet. And the house trailer was gone. The tornado took the whole thing and took the bird—gone. She was heartbroken. About three or four days later, somebody saw a parakeet sitting in a tree. Would you believe they coaxed that bird out of that tree into their hand? And would you believe, by fortuitous circumstances, they found out this woman had lost this bird, and they brought the bird back? Miracle story—miracle story. Then, you know what happened? The cat ate it. True story. The cat ate it. I mean, after all this miracle—all this good stuff—then the cat ate it. Figure that out. That’s what Solomon is saying.

You know, the Chinese tell a story about a man who had a prize horse, and the horse escaped. And they said, “Oh, how sad!” But then, the horse went out, and began to consort with some other horses, and led them back to the corral. They said, “How wonderful! Look!” And then, the man’s son tried to train one of the wild horses and broke his leg. He said, “How bad!” But then, a war came, and the boy didn’t have to go off to war. “How good!”

That’s the way life is. God takes the good; God takes the bad. And God puts one against the other, and they both seem to happen at the same time. If you’re having a good time right now, you’ve got a problem, right now. If you’re having a problem right now, you’ve got some blessings, right now. It’s not like we have 40 miles of good road and then 40 miles of bad road. It’s like it’s a railroad track. Over here is the good rail, and over here is the bad rail. And that’s the way life is. God just sets the one against the other. And Solomon says, “You can’t figure it out.” He tries to figure it out. He says, “Where is the answer?”

## A. **Where Is the Answer?**

### 1. **The Answer Is Not in Nature**

And he found out it’s not in nature. Go, if you will, look in chapter 1, verses 1 through 7: “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh...*”—do you know what’s happening today? Births and funerals—births and funerals. There’s a whole bevy of babies being born today; there’s a world full of funerals today. There’s rejoicing in the birth of babies; there’s weeping when others go. And what he’s saying—“*One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever*” (Ecclesiastes 1:1–4). Man’s supposed to subdue the earth. The earth stays here, and man goes.

And then, he says, “*The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the*

north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.” Here it comes; there it goes—over, and over, and over again. “All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again” (Ecclesiastes 1:5–7). The rain comes down. The rain runs into rivulets. The rivulets run into streams. The streams run into the ocean. The sun evaporates the water. It goes up to the clouds; it comes down again into the rivulets—over, and over, and over again. What’s he saying? Nature doesn’t tell us anything about the meaning of life.

*Ol’ Man River—he don’t say nothin’.  
He jus’ keeps rollin’ along. (Oscar Hammerstein II)*

You’re not going to get the answer in nature; it’s not in nature.

Look in verse 8—he says here, “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing” (Ecclesiastes 1:8). If we ever had a generation that could prove that... I understand, now, we’re going to have 500 channels on cable. Men, get your remote ready—500 channels! But nobody will be satisfied with that. “The ear is not full of hearing” (Ecclesiastes 1:8). You hear these kids going down the road with these boomboxes—and shaking buildings as they go past. It’s a wonder their ears are not bleeding. But they’re not satisfied. The answer’s not in nature.

## **2. The Answer Is Not in History**

The answer’s not in history. Look, if you will, in verses 9 and 10—chapter 1: “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). You say, “Now wait a minute. There are a lot of new things under the sun. We’ve got pacemakers. We’ve got laptops. We’ve got laser surgery.” Friend, the seven deadly sins are still just as deadly. We still have war. We still have sorrow. We still have greed. We still have immorality. We still have unhappiness. There’s no less dishonesty. I mean, the outward things change in inward things.

I have a treadmill upstairs, and I like to watch the news and get on the treadmill. So I’m running on the treadmill and watching the news. And all these incredible things are happening there in the news. And I’m running, running, running, running, running, running, running, running; and, I get off right where I got on. That’s the way life is. I mean, the news is coming—*da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da*—and we get right back where we got on. There’s nothing new under the sun.

## **3. The Answer Is Not in Science**

The answer is not in nature. The answer is not in history. The answer is not in science. Look in verses 13 and 14: “I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven...” By the way, Solomon was a

brilliant man—brilliant, absolutely brilliant—besides the wisdom that God gave him before he backslid. And he said: *“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit”* (Ecclesiastes 1:13–14). You talk about the adventures we have—the things that we have. I mean, you don’t understand the meaning of life.

You see these kids today with cell phones. Man, I used to think that was the ultimate... Listen. You’re no one, if you don’t have a cell phone. Isn’t that right? I mean... And it’s kids in the mall, or wherever they are—they’re walking with this cell phone, you know. “Hey, man. What’s up?” He doesn’t know what’s up, and he doesn’t know what’s up. They don’t—they haven’t got a clue. They’ve got a phone, but they don’t know what’s up—they do not know what’s up. Why? History may tell us what; science may tell us how. But neither tells us why.

## **B. Apart from God, Life Is Meaningless**

Now what I’m trying to say is that the answer, friend, is not in these things.

### **1. Apart from God, Wisdom Is Meaningless**

The more a man learns, the more he realizes he doesn’t understand. Bertrand Russell said, “Philosophy proved a washout for me.” You see, apart from God, God has engineered that your life is going to be meaningless.

Look now in chapter 2, verse 14: *“The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness:”*—now, it’s much better to be wise than it is to be a fool—*“and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all...”*—now, here’s a man who looks where he’s going. Here’s a man who lives with sagacity and perspective. Here’s a fool, a happy-go-lucky. But notice—*“I...perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as a fool”* (Ecclesiastes 2:14–16).

Here’s a man that goes off to school: He studies, and studies, and studies, and studies, and studies; he gets a Ph.D.; he learns all of these things; he walks this way; his eyes are in his head. Here’s another guy: He couldn’t care less; he doesn’t do anything. And they both somehow get through life. They die. They go to the ground, and they’re both gone. Solomon said, “Wait, what happened to all this knowledge?” Down into the dirt—it’s gone, gone, gone.

On another vacation, my kids and I were on the beach. You can tell I love the beach. And we made a sand alligator—incredibly beautiful, about eight feet long. And we crafted that out of sand, and we worked on it all morning long. It was great. We just

could hardly wait for people walking down the beach to come and see our alligator. We went off to do something and came back—do you know what had happened? The sand was perfectly smooth. The water had come up and taken our sand alligator away, and it's like it never had been there. That's what Solomon is saying. "Listen," he is saying, "apart from God, wisdom is meaningless."

## **2. Apart from God, Wealth is Meaningless**

He's saying, "Apart from God, wealth is meaningless." Look in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2: *"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease"* (Ecclesiastes 6:1–2).

Remember when you were young? You couldn't afford anything but beans and rice, but you had a cast iron stomach. And now you can eat prime rib, but the doctor won't let you. Isn't that amazing?

That's what Solomon is saying. And so somebody eats the things that you have worked for. He's saying, "Apart from God, wisdom is meaningless. Apart from God, wealth is meaningless."

## **3. Apart from God, Work is Meaningless**

"Apart from God, work is meaningless." Look in chapter 9, verse 11: *"I returned, and saw under the sun"—and saw under the sun—"that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all"* (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

You would think that, if a man is wise; if he works hard; if he does so, and so, and so, and so, that he's going to be wealthy. And if a man isn't, he's not going to be wealthy. But Solomon said, "Don't forget time and chance." Maybe you've got beaucoups of money. Maybe you're Madam Got Rocks—Mr. Moneybags. You say, "Boy, look what I did!" Time and chance—time and chance. There are people there in the Sudan—got more brains than you have—but they don't have the time and the chance that you've had. And there are some people who just—hey, man—they fell into it.

Sammy could hardly make a "C" in school. But they had the class reunion about 15 years later. Sammy came up in a car so long it had to have a hinge to get around the corner, wearing incredible clothes, all big diamonds on his fingers and everything. And they said, "Sammy, where'd you get all that dough? How'd you do that, Sammy?" He said, "Well," he said, "you know," he said, "I found out that I could make a widget for a dollar and sell it for two dollars, and everybody wants one." And he said, "I just sold them. I keep selling them." He said, "You know, that two percent really adds up."

Sometimes, people who are not too bright do real well. Sometimes, people who are very smart don't do that well.

What he is saying is, "You're not going to figure it out." Apart from God, wisdom is meaningless. Apart from God, wealth is meaningless. Apart from God, work is meaningless. You will not get it figured out. Those, my friends, are the complex mysteries of life.

## II. The Challenging Adventure of Life

Now I want you to see, secondly, I want you to see the challenging adventure of life. Do you think I'm trying to make you a cynic? No. Beware, lest you become cynical. Now look, if you will—God tells us that life is an adventure, and you need to live it with enthusiasm and joy. Just because you can't figure it out doesn't mean that you're not to go through it with joy. I'm going to give you a number of verses in a hurry, and I'm going to read them. And I want you to jot them down, if you want to.

Ecclesiastes 2:24: *"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God"*—to eat, and drink, and enjoy things.

Look, if you will, in chapter 3, verses 11 through 13: *"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God"* (Ecclesiastes 3:11–13). It's a gift of God.

Notice Ecclesiastes 3:22: *"Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion."*

Look, if you will, in Ecclesiastes chapter 5, verses 18 and 19: *"Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God"* (Ecclesiastes 5:18–19).

And Ecclesiastes 9, verses 7 through 10—I'm not going to read that, because I'm running out of time. But verse 10 says, *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest"* (Ecclesiastes 9:10). God says, "Look, this is life. Charge it. Get with it. Enjoy it." Now he's not talking about the Epicurean philosophy we talked about a few Sundays ago—"eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die." That's not what he's talking about. But he is saying, "Don't drop out." He's saying, "Don't get cynical. Don't

get bitter. Attack life.”

If God has given you things, enjoy it. Jesus did that. Jesus lived life to the fullest. The Bible says of Him, “Thou hast anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows” (Hebrews 1:9). Jesus was not some sanctimonious religious recluse. Little children loved to come and sit in His lap. They crucified Him, because they called Him a wine bibber and a glutton. Of course, He was not. But Jesus was a man who enjoyed life, and He enjoyed life to the fullest. And that’s what you ought to do. Jesus had a life full of zest.

Now let me tell you how to live life. Remember this: God is good. Say *amen*. God is good. That’s what we preached about two Sundays ago. The devil wants you to get a warped view of life.

#### A. **Because God Is Good, We Should Live Life Joyfully**

God is good, so live life joyfully. Ecclesiastes 2:24: *“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.”* Chapter 3, verses 12 and 13: *“I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God”* (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13).

Now even if you are bewildered and perplexed and you have problems—and you will have problems—don’t let it make a cynic out of you. Friend, when you go to lunch today, eat your food and enjoy it. You go to work tomorrow—enjoy your job. You’re married—enjoy your wife; enjoy your husband; enjoy your children; enjoy your grandchildren. Enjoy your friends. Attack life, and squeeze all of the juice out of life that you can. It is the gift of God. Stop wanting a better life, and enjoy the life that you have.

Chuck Swindoll said, “Have you ever noticed a man never earns enough; a woman is never beautiful enough; clothes are never fashionable enough; cars are never nice enough; gadgets are never modern enough; houses are never furnished enough; food is never fancy enough; relationships are never romantic enough; life is never full enough?” A wise man said, “To whom little is not enough, nothing is enough.” God has blessed you. Friend, if you don’t enjoy life, not only is it a shame—it’s a sin. The Bible says, *“This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it”* (Psalm 118:24).

There are going to be some hard times. And because there are going to be hard times, you’re a fool if you don’t enjoy the good times—you’re a fool if you don’t enjoy the good times. I mean, there are two tracks. Enjoy the good.

#### B. **Because God Is Sovereign, We Should Live Life Confidently**

Now since God is good, we should live joyfully. Since God is sovereign—listen—we

should live confidently. Look in chapter 3, verse 14: *“I know that, whosoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him”* (Ecclesiastes 3:14). What does that tell us? God is in control.

I have a motto on my desk. I look at it almost daily. It says, “Adrian, trust Me. I have everything under control.” Now it may seem vain to you, but it is not vain to God. Remember our verse—in Romans 8, verse 20: “For the creation...” —“For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him that hath subjected the same in hope” (Romans 8:20). And then, verse 28: “And we know that all things are working together for good to those who love God, who are the called, according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

If it doesn’t make sense to you, that doesn’t mean it doesn’t make sense to God. God is sovereign. If you cannot understand God’s ways, you can know God’s heart. Somebody said, “When we cannot trace His hand, we can still trust His heart.” God is God. Let Him be God. But remember, God is sovereign, and God is in control. And not a blade of grass moves without His permission. That’s what Solomon is teaching.

Dr. Einstein—Professor Einstein—was absolutely brilliant. He came up with the theory of relativity. They say only 12 men have been able to understand it. I can’t vouch for that; I don’t know who the other 11 are. Somebody asked Mrs. Einstein, “Do you understand the theory of relativity?” She said, “No, but I understand Dr. Einstein.”

You see, you can know Him. You don’t have to know what He does. God is good, so enjoy life. God is sovereign, so live life not only joyfully, but confidently.

### C. **Because God Is Holy, We Should Live Life Reverently**

And then, thirdly, God is holy, so live life reverently—reverently. Look again, if you will, in Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verses 13 and 14: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). You love God—you live life joyfully; and you live life confidently. But you do not live life recklessly. Remember, God is—God is—watching. Life—life, friend—is a complex mystery. Life is a challenging adventure.

## III. **The Comprehensive Test of Life**

And I want to move on to the last thing: Life is a comprehensive test—life is a test. You’re here to be tested. You’re going—everything is going to come into judgment. Look again, if you will, at verse 13: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). Three things, and I’m going to finish.

## A. Learn to Rejoice

First of all, you learn to rejoice—learn to rejoice. Look, if you will, in Ecclesiastes 11:9: *“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”*

Are you young? Live it up! Sometimes they tell us that youth is for fun; middle age is for work; and old age is for God. That’s not true. Man, every age is for fun, work, and God. But if you’re young, live it up. Don’t tell these kids, “Why don’t you grow up?” No—no. Learn to rejoice. Never let anybody take the childhood out of your heart. There ought to be a little boy in every man. Learn to rejoice.

But he says, “Now know this.” He’s not saying, “Live high, wide, and handsome.” He’s not saying, “Young people, sow your wild oats.” That’s not what He’s saying. He’s saying, “Have the joy of the Lord. But remember, God is watching.” Play by the rules. God’s laws do not restrict us; they liberate us. Learn to rejoice.

## B. Learn to Rest

Number two: Not only should we learn to rejoice, but we need to learn to rest. Look, if you will, in verse 10: *“Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh”* (Ecclesiastes 11:10). The word *sorrow* there, in verse 11, actually, it’s *vexation*, and it comes from two words that mean, “anger and resentment.” Get the anger out. Get the resentment out. Get the bitterness out. Learn to rejoice, and get that stuff out of your heart and in your life. Learn to rejoice, and learn to rest. And you can’t rest with anger and resentment. If you’re full of anger right now, get on your knees. Get rid of it. Ask God to take it out—and that resentment.

## C. Learn to Remember

And then, learn to remember. Learn to rejoice. Learn to rest. Learn to remember. *“Remember now...”*—chapter 12, verse 1—*“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them”* (Ecclesiastes 12:1). To remember doesn’t mean, “to call to mind.” It means, “to honor, to obey, to serve.” Remember God. That’s what it’s all about. *“Hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Friend, listen. Life is a mystery; life is an adventure; and life is a test. And it’s soon going to be over.

Now Solomon lived before Calvary. Everything that he wrote is by divine inspiration. But we know some things he didn’t know, because we have the New Testament. We have an understanding that even Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, did not have before he died.

**Karl Barth was a brilliant theologian. Towards the end of his life, he took a trip; it was the trip of a lifetime. He traveled in the continents. He went to the great cathedrals. He**

went to the great universities. He lectured. He preached. He studied. He taught. He interchanged ideas with the doctors of law, and philosophy, and theology. It was a fitting climax to the life of a man who'd been a brilliant scholar. He came back home. This man who'd seen it all was in a classroom with younger men there, and there was a time of questions. One young man lifted his hand and said, "Dr. Barth, in all of your travels and all that you've seen, what is the most profound thought you have ever had?" The old man smiled, and he said, "Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

What is life all about? Jesus said, "I've come that you might have life, and that you might have it abundantly" (John 10:10). And apart from Him, friend, it is vanity of vanities—apart from Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. If you're not saved, God brought you here today to get saved. And I tell you, I promise you on the authority of the Word of God, God will save you today—I mean, save you; make you over anew. It's a miracle if you'll trust Christ.

Would you pray a prayer like this? "O God, I am a sinner, and I'm lost. And life is a mystery I cannot solve. But Lord, I know that You're in control. And I know that, one day, I'll face You, and I want to be right with You. Jesus, I believe You're the Son of God. I believe You died on the cross and paid my sin debt with Your shed blood. I believe the Father raised You from the dead. And You promised to save me, if I would trust You, and I do trust You, right now, this morning. In this place, this moment, right now, I trust You, Jesus. Come into my life. Forgive my sin. Save me, Jesus." Pray it from your heart: "Save me, Lord Jesus."

Did you ask Him? Then, thank Him. Say, "Thank You for doing it. I receive it by faith, and that settles it. You're now my Lord, my Savior, my God, my Friend. Thank You for saving me. And Lord Jesus, I'll not be ashamed of You. I will make it public. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be, and give me the courage to stand for You. In Your name I pray. Amen."

# It's Time for You to Get a Life

*By Adrian Rogers*

## **Main Scripture Text: Ecclesiastes**

*“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”*

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

## **Outline**

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- I. The Complex Mysteries of Life
  - A. Where Is the Answer?
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    - 1. Apart from God, Wisdom Is Meaningless
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- II. The Challenging Adventure of Life
  - A. Because God Is Good, We Should Live Life Joyfully
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- III. The Comprehensive Test of Life

### Conclusion

## **Introduction**

Well, amen and amen. What a great song service today! Thank you, Brother Jim, and choir, and orchestra, and all. Now find God's Word, and I want you to find the Book of Ecclesiastes. Okay, now, the way you find that is, open your Bible in the middle, and you'll find Psalms. And then, turn right, and go through Proverbs—and, you'll come to Ecclesiastes. And once you have found it, just leave it open, because we're going to stay there. And really, I'm going to give you so much Scripture today that you're going to think you're drinking from a fire hose. But I'm trying to get the whole message squeezed into the limited time that we have. So I want you to pay attention and lend me your eyes; lend me your ears; most of all, lend me your hearts, as we listen together.

Now the title of the message is, “It’s Time for You to Get a Life.” Now the kids say, “Get a life.” Well, that’s not altogether bad, because Jesus said, “I’ve come that you might have life, and that you might have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Many have existence; they don’t have life. They’re just drawing their breath, drawing their salary, fighting to live, and living to fight; but they don’t really live. And I want you, in this series of messages that we’re talking about today, living in a contemporary world, facing the problems that we face, challenges to the cross—I want you, somehow, to have a philosophy of life, a worldview, that will carry you through—a lifestyle for the last days. And that’s what we’re going to be talking about here, in this passage of Scripture.

Now let’s set the stage. Look, if you will please, in chapter 1, verses 1 and 2: “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*” Now who was that? That was Solomon. Solomon, who was the wisest man who ever lived and then backslid—it’s a pathetic story—but Solomon, who had fabulous, fabled riches; Solomon, who had a prodigious memory and mind; Solomon, who was given so much, is going to say something that’s going to amaze you. Look in verse 2: “*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity*” (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2). And the word *vanity* means, “emptiness, futility; that which is vain; that which is battered; that which really doesn’t matter.” I mean, he sounds like a cynic. He’s just saying, “*Vanity of vanities*” (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

Now why does he say, “*Vanity of vanities*”? (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Well, he’s doing this for emphasis. For example, if the Bible wanted to emphasize holiness of the holy place in the tabernacles, it’s called what? The Holy of Holies. If Jesus wants you to listen and really pay attention, He says, “Verily, verily.” If we want to know what a great God our Jesus is, we say, “He is Lord of lords.” And what he’s trying to say there—what he is saying here for emphasis—is, “*Vanity of vanities.*” Not just vanity—“*vanity of vanities; all is vanity*” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). “All is futile; all is empty.” What an amazing statement from such a man who had so much: a king’s son—and a king himself—in Jerusalem.

The scene was the Rose Bowl, many years ago. Two undefeated teams were playing in the Rose Bowl—Georgia Tech and the University of California. And it was a titanic battle. It’s late in the second quarter. Georgia Tech has the ball, and Georgia Tech is on its own 33-yard line. And there’s a man named Thomason who takes the ball, and he fumbles it. And a man from the University of California picks up the ball and begins to run. The crowd goes wild. This man, who’s a center and not used to running the ball, had picked it up; and, he’s moving down the field, pumping as hard as he can, moving to the right, the left. He’s balanced. His legs are right. He’s shunting off his man and that man. He is making the run of his life. He is running for the goal line. Sixty-seven yards he runs. One problem: He’s headed toward the wrong goal. In the confusion, Roy Riegels has gotten turned around, and he is running to the wrong goal.

His teammates are shouting at him, trying to bring him down. The opposition is leading interference for him. Poor Roy is running the ball, and he gets down to the one-yard line, when one of his own teammates finally catches him and puts him on the ground. Can you image the humiliation? Can you image what he must have felt, as he went back and sat on the bench, forever known as “Wrong Way” Riegels, running the ball the wrong way?

In a very real sense, he’s an illustration of Solomon. The ball of life was put into Solomon’s hands, and Solomon, in confusion, began to run the wrong way. And the devil himself was leading interference for him. And now he is writing this book to explain it to us so that we might learn some lessons about life—what life is all about—so we won’t have to say, “Vanity of vanities: all is vanity, saith the Preacher.” So I want you to learn. A wise person said, “We need to learn from the mistakes of others, because we don’t have time to make them all ourselves.”

Now here was a man. Now remember, he had everything that many people in this world crave: He had power; he had position; he had prestige; he had prosperity; he had pleasure—he had it all. But he did not have a life. And now he’s going to tell you what he has learned. And thank God for the wisdom that enabled him to find the right goal again.

## I. The Complex Mysteries of Life

There are three thoughts that I want to lay on your heart—and then, some sub-thoughts. But first of all, I want you to see what I’m going to call *the complex mysteries of life*. Verses 1 and 2 tell us about the complex mysteries of life: “*Vanity of vanities*” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Now let me tell you this: You will never, ever, ever figure out life. I don’t care how smart you are. You’re not wiser than Solomon. He could not figure it out. Life is a mystery.

Some college students had a contest for the best definition of life for the school paper. Here are three that won honorable mention—one said, “Life is a joke that isn’t even funny”; another said, “Life is a jail sentence that we get for the crime of being born”; another said, “Life is a disease for which the only cure is death.” That’s cynical. But what these students were saying is, “I can’t figure it out.” But friend, that’s not by chance that life is that way. I’m going to tell you something: God engineered it; God planned that you couldn’t figure it out.

Take your Bibles, and, well, just let me give you the Scripture—Romans 8, verse 20—God says, “For the whole creation is made subject unto vanity”—“the whole creation”—it was made subject unto vanity. God got in there, and God just confused it all. Why? The Bible says He did this “*by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope*” (Romans 8:20). God mixed it up; but then, God gave us hope.

Now we would never want hope, if it weren't for the confusion, and the perplexity, and the vanity, and the heartache, and the tears, the fears, and the consternation of life. We would never want hope. You know, if we could dope it all out, if we could figure it all out, if we could say, "I understand it all," then we'd never come to God. We would just rest in our own understanding, and we would never trust in the Lord with all of our heart. And so God gives us this seeming futility. And in this Book of Ecclesiastes, this word *vanity* is used no less than 30 times. It's kind of a dreary monotony. But what he is saying—and listen to me clearly: If you're a sophisticated person here, thinking you've got it all doped out, life without God is a dead-end road. You will never figure it out—you'll never figure it out.

Now man has a desire to know—he wants to know. Ecclesiastes chapter 3, verses 10 and 11: "*I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.*" Confusion? God gave it. Why? Because He wants you to be exercised in it. "*He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart*" (Ecclesiastes 3:10–11). Many translations give it—and can, amply so: "He hath set eternity in their heart." Man is not like an animal. Man has a desire to get up and look over the wall. Man wants to know, "What is it all about? How can I put this puzzle of life together?"

Some years ago, Joyce and I took a vacation on an island in the Bahamas. Only about 300 people stayed on that island—no automobiles on the island. Joyce wasn't exactly thrilled with it, because there were no restaurants on the island. But I—we—just had a great time. No air conditioning in that little house, no television, and no automobiles. The only way we'd get from here to there was a little boat out by the wharf. And for our recreation we did two things. Number one: we had a gigantic jigsaw puzzle; it had the face of a pig on it—a great big pig. And number two: At nighttime, we'd just go out, and lie on the dock, and look up at the stars, and just look at God's candelabra in the sky, and just talk. It was wonderful—just really great. But we made the jigsaw puzzle. We worked on that puzzle and worked on that puzzle.

And you know, it's fine to see all the pieces fit together. But can you imagine having a puzzle like that and thinking you're just about finished, and then there are two or three pieces missing? That would be frustrating, wouldn't it? Or, somebody else has taken pieces from another puzzle and put them in that box. That would be frustrating. That's what life is like. All the pieces don't always just fit together.

Now if things are going well—I mean, you're sailing along; you're happy; there's no sickness, no sorrow, no disappointment, no financial problems, no family disagreements—you probably have your little theory of how life ought to be lived, and you say, "I've worked it all out. Why can't you?" Just wait for a while—just wait for a while, and your little philosophy will come tumbling down. If you're not having any

problems right now, just wait. There are those in problems, those getting out of problems, those just fixing to get into problems. That's all it is—three categories of people right here. I mean, you're going to have problems.

Now it's not like that there is only good or there's only bad. The good and the bad happen together. Look, if you will, in chapter 7, verse 14. Turn to it—chapter 7, verse 14: *"In the day of prosperity be joyful,"*—are you having prosperity right now? I'm happy for you. Enjoy it. I'll talk more about that later—*"but in the day of adversity consider:"*—start thinking—*"God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him"* (Ecclesiastes 7:14). That is, he's not going to be able to dope it out. God takes pleasure, and God takes problems; God takes prosperity, and God takes necessity—and, He sets the one over against the other.

Now it's not like life is, you have 40 miles of good road, and then you have 10 miles of bad road, and then 40 miles of good road. No! It's more like railroad tracks—one side is adversity and the other is pleasure. And they seem to run side-by-side. Have you ever noticed that? I mean, in those of you who are having the best of times, you've still got some problems, don't you? And those of you who have some problems, you still have some blessings. And folks, it doesn't seem to make sense.

I told you before about something that happened to us down at Merritt Island, where Jim and I used to work together. I've been working with Jim since 1964. You'd think it would be more, wouldn't you? I mean, if preaching could change a man, he'd be a saint. Truth of the matter is, he is a saint. But we were down there together, and there was a tornado that blew through Merritt Island. That part of the country doesn't normally have tornados. And near our church, about a block away, there was a lady who lived in a house trailer. She had no children; she had a parakeet, which was a prize pet to her. And that tornado obliterated that house trailer, and her parakeet was gone. Her life was saved, but she lost everything. But the most precious treasure to her was that bird, swept up in that maelstrom, that tornado.

But you know what happened? A few days later, somebody saw a parakeet sitting in a tree, blocks from the place, coaxed the bird out of the tree, and the bird came to that person's hand. And that person began to ask around, "Does anybody know anybody who's lost a parakeet?" And they found out it belonged to this lady, and they brought the parakeet back. Glorious story—except for this: that the cat in the new house ate it. You say, "Pastor, I wish you hadn't told me that story." I mean, here it is, "Oh, how wonderful! Look, we've got the parakeet back. The cat ate it." You figure that out; you make sense out of that. What does that do to your philosophy of life?

The Chinese tell a story about a man—a rich Chinese man. But he had a horse—a prize horse. And the horse got out of the stall, and they said, "Well, that's bad luck." But then, after a while, the horse came back, leading some other horses with him—some

wild horses. They said, “What wonderful luck!” Then, the son of the Chinese man tried to break in one of these horses, and he was thrown and broke his leg. They said, “What bad luck!” But then, war broke out, and the boy didn’t have to go to war. They said, “What good luck!” I mean, what does God do? Life is like that. He sets one over against another, and you will not be able to figure it out.

## A. **Where Is the Answer?**

### 1. **The Answer Is Not in Nature**

Now Solomon tried. He thought, maybe, perhaps the answer is in nature. Look in chapter 1, verses 1 through 7: “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?*” Now watch this: “*One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever*” (Ecclesiastes 1:1–4). People are coming and going. Old Mother Earth just stays here. I mean, today, you know what’s happening? All over the world, babies are being born. All over the world, funerals are being held. Here they come; here they go—here they come; here they go. And Solomon says, “What sense is there in that? It just all seems to run in a cycle.”

Notice, in verse 5: “*The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.*” Sunset, sunrise; sunset, sunrise. “*The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.*” I mean, blow hot, blow cold; good weather, bad weather. It happens; it happens; it happens; it happens. Notice in verse 7: “*All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again*” (Ecclesiastes 1:5–7). The rain comes down, and the rain falls on the land. And the water runs into little rivulets, and the little rivulets run into streams. And the streams run into the rivers, and the rivers run into the ocean. And the sun sucks it up and puts it in the cloud, and the rain comes down again. Around, and around, and around it goes. And what he says: “Hey, that doesn’t tell me anything. Nature doesn’t tell me anything.”

Look, if you will, in verse 8—well, that’s something—he says here: “*All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing*” (Ecclesiastes 1:8). I understand, now, we’re going to have 500 channels on cable TV. Men, get your remote ready! Five hundred channels—and yet, the eye is not full; the ear is not full. You see these kids going down the road with these incredible speakers—boom, boom, boom, boom. The buildings shaking on either side. It’s a wonder their ears are not bleeding! But they can’t get enough—always wanting more, always wanting bigger, always wanting to see. But the eye is not full—the ears. Listen. The answer is not, friend, in

nature.

## 2. The Answer Is Not in History

The answer's not in history. You think you can study history? A wise man said, "The only thing we learn from history is we don't learn anything from history." Look, if you will, in verse 9: *"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time,"*—"it hath been already of old time"—*"which was before us"* (Ecclesiastes 1:9–10).

You say, "Now wait a minute. We've got microwaves. We've got cell phones. We've got laptop computers. We have laser surgery. We have space travel." No, that's not what he's saying. He's saying, "In spite of all these things, the same seven deadly sins are just as deadly. We still have heartaches. We still have pain. We still have sorrow. We still have grief. We still have dishonesty." You talk about progress. I want to ask you a question: Have we made any progress? I'm talking about progress; I'm not talking about gadgets—that which has been.

Listen up. By my television, in an upstairs room, I have a treadmill. Now sometimes, when I can't go outside, I get on that treadmill, and I'll turn on the news. And I'm running away, running away, watching the news. It's incredible all the things that are happening in that news—I mean, from all over the world, and things—it's just unfolding. All kinds of events are just happening. I'm running on that treadmill. And you know what happens? I turn off the news, get off the treadmill, and I'm right where I started. I mean, I'm running; all that's happening. But friend, there is really nothing new. I mean, I just about stopped watching the local news, because it's just the same thing recycled—just different names, different faces, different places. But there is really nothing new in this world. The answer is not in nature. The answer is not in history.

## 3. The Answer Is Not in Science

The answer is not in science. Now he tried that; and boy, he was brilliant. Chapter 1, verses 13 and 14: *"And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit"* (Ecclesiastes 1:13–14). This man knew botany. He knew geology. He knew astronomy. He knew philosophy. He was a scientist. And man has a lot of new inventions, but he doesn't figure anything out.

You see these kids today with cell phones. I used to think, "Man, if I could just get a cell phone, I'd be somebody." Man, you're nobody, if you don't have one today. The kids, you know, they're walking around with a cell phone. "Hey, man, what's up?" He doesn't know what's up, and he doesn't know what's up. "Hey, what's up?" They haven't got a clue as to what's up. They don't know. They've got a cell phone, but they don't

have a brain. History tells us what. Science tells us how. But friend, neither tells us why. Life is a challenging—a perplexing—mystery.

## B. **Apart from God, Everything Is Meaningless**

### 1. **Apart from God, Wisdom Is Meaningless**

Now apart from God, all this wisdom is meaningless. Look, if you will, in chapter 2, verse 14: *“The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness:”—*a wise man sees where he’s going. A wise man makes plans. A wise man prepares. A fool? He just goes on. But notice what Solomon says—*“and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then I said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise?”* That foolish man’s going to die, and I’m going to die. Same thing that happens to him is going to happen to me. What good did it do me? *“Then said I in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten”* (Ecclesiastes 2:14–15).

When we were on the beach—I took my kids, grandkids—we sat there, one morning, and made an alligator in the sand—about half as long as this road I’m on—a beautiful alligator. You’d think he’d get up and bite you. And we crafted that alligator; and then, we set off to watch people who would just come by and look at the alligator we’d made in the sand. Well, we went off somewhere and came back. Do you know what happened? The tide had come up, and the sand was just smooth—no alligator at all.

That’s what Solomon is saying. “Look,” he said, “what—all this work I’ve done; all this study I’ve done. I’m going to die and go to the grave. And here’s a fool—he doesn’t study at all, and he dies and goes to the grave. There seems to be no difference.” Apart from God, wisdom is meaningless.”

### 2. **Apart from God, Wealth Is Meaningless**

Apart from God, wealth is meaningless. Look in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2: *“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease”* (Ecclesiastes 6:1–2).

Here’s a man—when he’s a kid, all he could get is beans and rice. But he has a cast iron stomach. Now he can have anything he wants, but the doctor won’t let him eat it. He can’t eat any prime rib. He passes the steak, so forth—says, “Give me tofu.” Joyce will get me for this.

### 3. **Apart from God, Work Is Meaningless**

What’s it all about? He is saying, “Look, wisdom without God is meaningless. Wealth

without God is meaningless. Work without God is meaningless. Look, if you will, in chapter 9, verse 11: *“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all”* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). You know what he’s saying? You can be very smart and very poor. You can be ignorant, and time and chance can make you very wealthy. You ever watch “The Beverly Hillbillies”? I mean, that’s what it’s all about. Now now, you may be Mr. Moneybags; you may be Madam Got Rocks; you may have a lot of money—but don’t get puffed up. There are people smarter than you in Sudan who don’t have what you have. You have what you have because of time and chance. And there are other people who are not necessarily smart who just make a lot of money.

The class reunion was being held. Sammy came up in a car so long it had to have a hinge to get around the corner. Sammy was wearing a thousand-dollar suit, had gold and diamonds on his fingers, had people waiting on him. Sammy was a “C” student—could barely make “C’s.” They said, “Sammy, where did you get all that money?” He said, “Well, I found out I could make something that cost a dollar to make and I can sell it for two dollars, and everybody wants one.” And he said, “You know, that two percent sure adds up.”

That’s what Solomon said: “Hey, look, I can’t figure it out. Why, wisdom without God is meaningless.” He’s saying that wealth without God is meaningless. He’s saying, “Work without God is meaningless.” Now this is the perplexing problem—the challenging confusion and complex problems of life.

## **II. The Challenging Adventure of Life**

Now here’s the second thing: Not only is there the complex problems of life; there is the challenging adventure of life—the challenging adventure of life. Now you would think that, if life is just a puzzle and we can’t figure it out, then why not just get cynical? No, you cannot get cynical. God put you here to enjoy life. It is an adventure. It is not a mystery to be solved; it is an adventure to be lived.

And Ecclesiastes 2, verse 24: *“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God”* (Ecclesiastes 2:24). Now this is not the pagan philosophy of, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die.” But what Solomon is saying is, “Look, if God blesses you, enjoy the good.”

Jesus did that. Do you have the idea that, somehow, Jesus was some sort of a pale, sanctimonious, religious recluse—had milk for blood? No. The Bible says of Jesus, “Thou hast anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows” (Hebrews 1:9). Jesus was the kind of man that little children loved to come and sit in His lap. I know He

wasn't a sourpuss. As a matter of fact, when they crucified Him, they said, "He's a friend of sinners." And then, they said, "He's a wine bibber and a glutton." Of course, He was not. But Jesus was the life of the party. Jesus enjoyed life, and so should you. Life is an adventure. It is a challenging adventure. And so you cannot drop out of life. You are to live it to its fullest.

#### **A. Because God Is Good, We Should Live Life Joyfully**

Now since God is good, live life joyfully. Look again in chapter 2, verse 24: *"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God"* (Ecclesiastes 2:24)—*"from the hand of God."*

Now friend, don't become a cynic. Today, when you go home for lunch, enjoy your food. Enjoy your job tomorrow, when you go to work. Enjoy your wife. Enjoy your family. Enjoy your children. Enjoy your grandchildren. Enjoy your friends. They are from God. Squeeze the best out of life. You say, "Well, I'm waiting to be blessed." You are blessed—you are blessed. You say, "I've got some problems." Yes, you do. We've already mentioned that. May I tell you—and I don't want to insult you—but you are a fool, if you endure the bad without enjoying the good—I mean, if you just live half a life, if you don't understand the good things that God has given you.

Charles Swindoll—Chuck Swindoll—said this: "Have you ever noticed that man never earns enough; a woman is never beautiful enough; clothes are not fashionable enough; cars are not nice enough; gadgets are never modern enough; homes are never furnished enough; food is never fancy enough; relationships are never romantic enough; life is never full enough?" And friend, it never will be for you, unless you realize, "To whom little is not enough, nothing is enough." God gives you these things to rejoice. Not only is it a shame, it is a sin not to enjoy life. You need to say, "This is the day the Lord hath made; I will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

#### **B. Because God Is Sovereign, We Should Live Life Confidently**

Listen. Since God is good, live life joyfully. Since God is sovereign, live life confidently. Look in chapter 3, verse 14: *"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him"* (Ecclesiastes 3:14)—that you should be reverent. God is in control. I have a little motto on my desk that says, "Adrian, I'm in control. Trust Me." We need to trust Him.

Now you may not be able to figure it out. But because it doesn't make sense to you does not mean that it does not make sense to God. We told you, in Romans 8, verse 20, that, "God hath made the creation subject to vanity, that we might hope in Him" (Romans 8:20). But then, he says, in verse 28: "And we know that all things are working

together for good to those who love God, who are the called, according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). And God is there. And you love God, you live life confidently, trusting in this great God. And enjoy the life that God has given you. It may not make sense to you, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t make sense to God; and, it doesn’t mean that it will not one day make sense to you.

Mrs. Einstein was asked, “Do you understand the theory of relativity?” Einstein, with his brilliant mind, had worked out this theory of relativity, so complex, I understand, that only 12 men—living men—can understand it. I can’t vouch for that, because I don’t know who the other 11 are. “Mrs. Einstein, do you understand the theory of relativity?” She said, “No, I don’t, but,” she said, “I understand Professor Einstein.”

Friend, you may not be able to understand all the things that God does; but, where you cannot trace His hand, you can trust His heart. You can know the heart and mind of Almighty God. God is sovereign, and we need to live life confidently.

### C. **Because God Is Holy, We Should Live Life Reverently**

And listen, friend. God is holy, and we need to live life reverently. Look, if you will now, in Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verses 13 and 14: “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:*”—you want to get to the bottom line? You businessmen, do you want the bottom line? Here’s the bottom line; here’s the conclusion of the whole matter—“*Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

## III. **The Comprehensive Test of Life**

Now I said you live life joyfully, and live life confidently, but you don’t live life recklessly, because life, friend, is a mystery; life is an adventure; and life is a test. Life is a comprehensive test. And one of these days, we’re going to stand before God, and the Bible tells us that God is going to bring every work into judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Listen to what he says—Ecclesiastes 12, verse 13: “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:*”—bottom line—“*Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). To fear God doesn’t mean to be afraid of Him; it means to respect God and reverence God.

Karl Barth was one of the greatest theologians—had one of the greatest minds of our generation. Karl Barth had studied in all the great centers of learning. At the end of his life, he took a trip. It was sort of the grand trip that a man like that would take. He went across the ocean, went to the great universities, went to the great centers of learning, went to the great cathedrals, preached in them, consulted with all of his peers and fellows, gathered information, and shared information. It was a fitting climax to the

life of a scholar with a prodigious mind. Finally, he came home. And they gathered around him to listen to see what he had gathered. Young students were there. One student said to him, “Dr. Barth, of all that you’ve seen, all you’ve heard, all you’ve learned, what is the most profound thought of it all?” The old professor smiled and said, “Here it is: ‘Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’”

That’s it. That, friend, is the bottom line—even beyond Solomon’s bottom line, because we live this side of Calvary. Solomon said all that he said by divine inspiration, but we, who have the New Testament, know things that even Solomon did not know. Jesus said, “I’ve come that you might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

And I’m going to tell you, you’ll never figure it out; you will be perplexed. And if you’re not careful, you’ll become a bitter cynical old person who will throw up your hands and say, “What is the use?” Unless you come to Jesus Christ and trust Him, all you are looking forward to is getting sicker, dying, and going to a hole in the ground. But friend, if you know Jesus, and you say, “For to me to live is Christ” ... (Philippians 1:21). And Jesus said, “I’ve come that you might have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus does love you. The Bible tells us that He does.

## Conclusion

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. You know, I told you earlier in this service that you need to be saved. And if you’re saved, you’re saved by God’s power divine, as you put your faith where God has put your sins—on the Lord Jesus Christ. The good news is that salvation is a gift—none can earn it, and none deserve it; but God gives it to all who will trust Him—salvation. There is none so bad they cannot be saved. Do you think you’ve done things that God can never forgive? You’re wrong. There’s none so good they need not be saved. Do you think that the gospel is for the thief, and the harlot, and for the drunkard, but not for you? The worst sin on earth is human pride that refuses the Savior. You need Jesus, and Jesus will save you.

And if you’d like to be saved, I want to guide you and lead you in a prayer. Now you forget anybody else is here, precious friend. This is your soul. Don’t let the devil draw your mind away. Don’t let the devil snatch away the seed that’s been sown. I’m going to guide you in a prayer. And if you make this prayer the desire of your heart, Jesus will save you, for the Bible says, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Romans 10:13). I invite you to pray this way:

“Dear God...”—that’s right; just speak to Him—“Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. I know You love me, because the Bible tells me so. I need to be saved. I’m a sinner. Pride may be my worst sin. I am a sinner. I need to be saved. Jesus, You shed Your precious blood on the cross to pay my sin debt. Thank

You for doing it. I could not be saved apart from what You did at Calvary. Thank You for Your shed blood. I believe that You died for me. You paid my sin debt. I believe You were raised from the dead by the Father. You promised to save me, if I would trust You. I do trust You, right now. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.” Pray that; pray it from your heart: “Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Now take control of my life. I give my life back to You. Forgive my sins. Cleanse me. And begin now to make me the person You want me to be.”

Did you pray that prayer? Then boldly, by faith, pray this way: “Thank You for doing it. Thank You. I receive it by faith. I don’t look for a sign. I don’t ask for a feeling. I stand on Your Word, and that settles it. Thank You for saving me. Now Lord Jesus, I will make it public. I will not be ashamed of You, because You died for me. Give me the courage now to obey You and make it public. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

# What to Do When Nothing Makes Sense

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Main Scripture Text: Ecclesiastes 1:1–2**

*“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”*  
ECCLESIASTES 1:2

## Outline

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## Introduction

Find the Book of Ecclesiastes—Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. Psalms is about in the middle of the Bible, and find the Book of Psalms, and turn right, and go a little place, and you'll find Ecclesiastes chapter 1. And when you've found it, look up here, and let me tell you a story.

The time is many years ago. The scene is the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. The University of California and Georgia Tech are in a titanic battle. It's late in the second quarter. The first half is about to come to a conclusion. Georgia Tech has the ball, and Georgia Tech is pressing hard on the 33-yard line. Thomason is carrying the ball for Georgia Tech. And he is hit, and he fumbles the ball. And the center for California picks it up, lifts up his head, and starts with that ball toward the goal line. He is running brilliantly. His legs are apart. He is alert. He goes this way and that way, and he's headed toward the goal line. Only one thing is wrong: He's gotten confused, and he's

headed toward the wrong goal.

And the opposing team figures out what has happened—that, in his confusion, Roy Regals has headed toward the wrong goal, and his opponents are leading interference for him, and his teammates are trying to tackle him. And he’s going down the field, and he runs 67 yards toward the wrong goal with his teammates trying to tackle him and his opponents leading interference for him. Finally, he is stopped on the one-yard line, tackled by one of his own teammates.

Can you imagine—I say, can you imagine—the humiliation of this man—the cat calls, the hoots, the boos, the confusion, the jeers that were his, as he is running with the ball toward the wrong goal? He just got confused, spun around. What he thought was his moment of glory was something that would put him in the annals of football history, never to be forgotten. *Wrong Way Roy*—headed toward the wrong goal.

And I think there are a lot of folks in this congregation who are kind of like that—spun around in the game of life. And you think you’re doing so good, but you’re heading toward the wrong goal, and the devil is leading interference. Solomon was like that. Solomon had the ball of life thrust into his hands, and he was running with the ball; and, it dawned on him that he was confused. He was running toward the wrong goal.

Take this book, and look, if you will, in chapter 1, verse 1: *“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”* Now let’s just stop right there and say this man who wrote this book had great privileges. As a matter of fact, God had given him a special gift of wisdom, and his father was King David, Israel’s greatest king—Solomon—probably Israel’s most glorious king. And he was a man who had the ability to try and to do everything, and he did try to do almost everything; but, the end of it all—this king, King Solomon—the end of it all for him was confusion, and disillusionment, and frustration. And he gives this right here, in the next verse: *“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity”* (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2).

Now you know what the word *vanity* means? It means “emptiness”; it means “futility”; it means “confusion”; it means “it doesn’t make sense”—“nothing, nothing, nothing makes sense.” *“Vanity of vanities.”* Why does he say, *“Vanity of vanities?”* Why doesn’t he just say, *“Vanity?”* Well, this is emphasis: When the Bible wants to emphasize something, it just repeats it. When Jesus wants you to listen, He says, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you.”* Or, when the Bible wants to speak of the holiness of God, it says, *“Holy, holy is the Lord.”* And so he’s just saying this for emphasis. Solomon wrote a song—the most beautiful song—so he calls it *“The Song of Songs.”* And now he’s just saying, *“Vanity of vanities.”* He’s saying this for emphasis.

Now what I want to tell you today is there’s going to come a time in your life when you’re going to throw up your hands like Solomon, and just say, *“Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”* *“All my life I thought I was doing well, and I found out I’ve been running toward*

the wrong goal.”

Now I want us to have three thoughts today, and I pray God that you’ll get these three thoughts down in your heart and in your life, because we’re going to take the entire 12 chapters of this book and look at them. So we’re going to have to pick and choose, and we’re going to have to go in a hurry. And it would behoove you to take a Bible, if you have one, and keep it open in your lap, because, friend, I am going to tell you, as surely as I’m standing here, the time is coming when you’re going to say, “Vanity of vanities; nothing makes sense.” And all that you thought was right and good is going to seem to cave in on your head.

## I. The Perplexing Riddles of Life

Now here’s the first of the three thoughts I want to give to you: Number one is what I want to call the perplexing riddles of life. You think you’re going to have things all straightened out? No, no. Look again, in verses 1 and 2: “Vanity of vanities. All is vanity, saith the Preacher” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). What Solomon said was, “Life is vain; life is futile. You will never, never, never figure it out.” And he says this for emphasis. Life is a mystery. Don’t think that education is going to help you to solve that mystery.

Some college students, for the college newspaper, got in a contest to give a definition of life. Here are some definitions of life that won honorable mention: One college student wrote that, “Life is a joke that isn’t even funny.” Another wrote, “Life is a jail sentence we get for the crime of being born.” Another said, “Life is a disease for which the only cure is death.” These are educated young people. And then, Erma Bombeck—she’s gone to Heaven—but she said, “If life is a bowl of cherries, why do I always get the pits?” And many people feel that way.

Now listen. I want to tell you something. Do you know who engineers all of this futility? Do you know who engineered all of this vanity? Do you know who caused nothing to make sense? You say, “Satan.” No, God—God. God is the One who makes everything vain.

Put in your margin, Romans chapter 8. Let’s get over into the New Testament for a moment. Don’t turn to it; I’ll read it to you. Romans chapter 8, verses 20 through 21: “*For the creature*”—and that literally means “the creation”—“*was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him*”—and it’s talking of God—“*who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*” (Romans 8:20–21). Plain English: God said, “I’m going to send confusion into the world. I’m going to take all of creation, and I’m going to make it vain—subject to vanity—where nothing, according to the normal sense, will make sense.” And by the way, this is a refrain that’s found all the way through the Book of Ecclesiastes. This term *vanity* is found no less than 30 times in

these short 12 chapters.

Now why does God make life where nothing seems to make sense? Why are there the perplexing riddles of life? Why does God do that? Why did God subject the entire creation to vanity? He says, that we might be turned to hope (Romans 8:20). Do you know that if you could figure everything out, you probably wouldn't turn to God? If everything just made sense to you, if you had a philosophy of life that worked always, you wouldn't turn to God. But God wants you to long for more than what you can understand. God wants life to be a mystery.

Look in Ecclesiastes 3 now, and begin in verse 10—turn to it: *“I have seen the travail, which God hath given the sons of men to be exercised in it.”* Who gave it to them? God gave it to them: *“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart”* (Ecclesiastes 3:10–11). Now I'm reading from the *King James*. This may be translated, “God hath set eternity in their heart.” And some of you may have that translation. God has put eternity in man's heart. God has put something in man that makes man say, “I need more than this veil of tears, this world of vanity. There is something more.” Man is not like an animal. An animal lives, eats, breathes, dies, and never kind of wants to look over the wall. But man knows there's more. Nothing makes sense. And if God is not there, then, really, we are in trouble.

You see, have you ever worked a jigsaw puzzle? Our family, from time to time, will get a jigsaw puzzle, and we'll all work on it. But how would you like to work on the jigsaw puzzle if one piece is missing? Isn't that the worst thing that ever happens? You're right down at the end; and then, one piece is missing. You can't get that final piece. Or, even worse, if somebody takes a piece from another puzzle, and slips it in the box—that's terrible; that's frustrating. That's what life is like. There is a missing piece, or a wrong piece, and God wants us to begin to search for that missing piece.

And so in life, just when you think you've got it all figured out—everything is going right; everything is good; you've gotten down all the principles, the nine points, this thing, that thing; you say, “Man, now I finally understand it”—and then, it'll all go upside down on you. And this is not to say everything is bad; it's just to say everything is not good. The good and the bad come together in life—have you noticed that?

Go over to chapter 7. Look in chapter 7 and verse 14: *“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider...”*—“begin to think.” Do you know, when you're having a good time, you don't really think. You're just joyful—*“but in the day of adversity [think]: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him”* (Ecclesiastes 7:14). What does that mean in plain English? God gives you joy, and God gives you pain and misery. God gives you health; God gives you sickness. Some people will take exception to that. God gives you wealth; God gives you poverty. God gives you understanding; God gives you confusion. Just

when you think everything is right, then here it comes. Have you ever been there? And who does that? Read it again: *“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other”* (Ecclesiastes 7:14). You’re going to have good days and bad days. And when everything is going fine, you’re going to say, “Man, I love my philosophy of life.” But then, it’ll get all confusing to you.

Brother Jim and I pastored down at... He was the Minister of Music and I was Pastor down in Florida at Merritt Island. We had a tornado come through Merritt Island. And the tornados are devastating. And there was a lady who lived in a trailer house, and she had a little parakeet. She loved that parakeet. The house trailer was devastated; the parakeet was gone. And she missed the parakeet more than she missed the house trailer. But do you know what? Many days after the tornado, a person looked up in a tree, and there sat a parakeet; and, she was able to coax that bird out of that tree, set it on her finger. And she began to inquire around, “Has anybody lost a parakeet?” And they determined this lady had lost a parakeet. It seemed so miraculous. They brought the parakeet back home. It was news in the newspaper: “The parakeet has been found after the tornado, sitting in a tree.” Somebody trying to make good out of all of this.

You know what happened? She took the parakeet back; and, in a day, the cat had caught it and ate it. The cat ate the parakeet. I mean, “Oh, how wonderful! Look at this! The parakeet has been found... The cat ate it!” Now you figure that one out. I mean, for everything good there seems to be something bad.

The Chinese have a story about a man who had a prize horse, and the horse got loose and ran off. And everybody said, “Oh, that’s terrible.” But after a while, he came back, and he had some wild stallions with him. They said, “That’s wonderful.” But then, the man’s son got on one of the wild stallions to break it in, and instead he broke his own leg. They said, “That’s terrible.” But then, there was a war, and the young man didn’t have to go to war. And they said, “That’s good.” Just when you think it’s good, it’s bad; just when you think it’s bad, it’s good. Folks, I’m going to tell you, life is that way, and you might as well accept it. That is a truth, and God has engineered it that way.

Now God does it deliberately. Don’t get the idea that life is all good, or don’t get the idea that life is all bad. And don’t get the idea that, for a while, everything will be good, and then, for a while, everything will be bad, like you have 40 miles of good road and then 40 miles of bad road. If you will open your eyes and realize, life is more like a railroad track—one rail good and one rail bad, and it runs that way all the time—all the time. There are joys, and there are problems. Is that not true? And we say, “Why? It doesn’t make sense.”

And so Solomon said, “I’m going to figure it out. I’m going to find the answer.” Now Solomon was brilliant; and so, he’s looking for some clues to the perplexing mystery of

life.

## 1. It's Not in Nature

And he finds out, first of all, it's not in nature. Look, if you will, in chapter 1, verses 1 through 7: *"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to its place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again"* (Ecclesiastes 1:1–7).

Now Solomon studied nature, and he found out that nature can tell you something about God—that is, His power. But it doesn't answer the riddles of life. Everything runs in cycles. One day, a group of people is born; the same day, a group of people dies. One day, the sun comes up; the same day, the sun sets. When it comes up here, it's setting somewhere else. The rain falls from Heaven; the rain goes upon the earth. It runs into little rivulets; little rivulets turn into streams; little streams turn into rivers; the rivers run into the ocean; the sun takes it back up again; and it rains again upon the earth. It just goes around, and around, and around. And we sing

*Ol' man river  
...Don't say nuthin'  
He just keeps rollin'  
He keeps on rollin' along.*  
—OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II

And the answer is not in nature. If you study nature, you're not going to understand.

## 2. It's Not in History

And then, he says, "The answer is not in history." Begin looking in verse 9: *"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us"* (Ecclesiastes 1:9–10). What he's saying is exactly what we say today: "Ain't nothing new!" You say, "What about all of the science and everything we have?" Really, in spite of man's inventions and his so-called progress, it's just the cycle. We've just invented new ways to be mean, new ways to be wicked. We can get there faster, but we still don't know where we're going. History is like a broken phonograph record. It just keeps repeating itself. And the answer is not in nature. The answer is not in history.

### 3. It's Not in Science

The answer is not in science. Look, if you will, in verses 13 and 14: *"I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven:"*—that is, he was a true scientist—*"this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit"* (Ecclesiastes 1:13–14). Man has many new inventions but no clue as to what life is all about. History may tell us *what*; science may tell us *how*; but neither tells us *why*. We just can't figure it out.

### 4. It's Not in Philosophy

And then, the answer's not in philosophy. Look, in chapter 1, verse 15: *"That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow"* (Ecclesiastes 1:15–18).

Everybody's telling us the answer to the world's problem is education. Well then, the happiest people ought to be at the university— isn't that right? They're not. So often, that's where the trouble begins. The more a man learns, the more he knows that he does not know. And he knows that this world is bankrupt, and philosophy can't make it right. In verse 15, he says, "That which is crooked can't be made straight" (Ecclesiastes 1:15). And all the great philosophers have finally thrown up their hands, and said, "I can't understand the mystery of life." Schopenhauer said, "Life is a curse of endless cravings and endless unhappiness." Huxley said, "It looks like we're a cancer on the globe." Bertrand Russell said, "Philosophy proved a washout to me." And it did to Solomon.

### 5. It's Not in Wisdom

And he's just saying, in chapter 2, verses 14 through 16—I won't read it to you—he's just saying that wisdom is vain. No matter how much you learn, it's just vain. When death comes... Well, let me just read this to you. Look, if you will, in chapter 2, verse 14: *"The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness:"*—well, we'd think it's better to be wise then, wouldn't we?—*"and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise?"* Solomon said, "I studied. The fool didn't study. Then, we both died. *"Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as*

*the fool*” (Ecclesiastes 2:14–16).

Here’s a man over here who has a Ph.D. Here’s a man over here who has a *tweedle-dee-dee*. And this man over here is brilliant. This man over here dies, and this man dies. What happens to all that brilliance?

I said to Dr. Lee, former pastor of this church—I said, “Dr. Lee, before you die, couldn’t we take your brain and put it in my head?” He said, “My boy, that would be like putting a grand piano in a closet.” I think he was teasing. But Dr. Lee’s brain is not with us; it’s gone. All of that study, all of that knowledge—it goes down to the grave!

And so wisdom, apart from God, is vanity. That’s what he’s saying.

## **6. It’s Not in Wealth**

And then, he’s saying, “Apart from God, wealth is vanity.” Look, in chapter 6, verses 1 through 2: *“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease”* (Ecclesiastes 6:1–2).

Here is a man. He reaches the top. Man, he’s got more money than he can spend, but he can’t digest his food. He’s got stomach ulcers. He’s got high cholesterol. There was a time when he didn’t have anything. All he could afford was rice and beans. And now he can afford filet mignon, but he can’t eat it.

## **7. It’s Not in Work**

The answer is not in wisdom. The answer is not in wealth. And the answer is not in work. Look, in Ecclesiastes chapter 9, verse 11: *“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill;”—but now, watch this—“but time and chance happen to them all”* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Do you think that the man who works the hardest is going to be the most successful? A lot of it has to do with time and chance. It’s time and chance. A man just gets there at the right time, and he has the right opportunities. All the smartest people are not the most successful, and all the most successful people are not the smartest. Do you notice that? I mean, I’m talking about success in this world.

They came to the high school reunion, and the people were dressed normally. But Sammy came. He’s driving up in an automobile so long it looked like it had to have a hinge in the middle to turn the corner. He had his own chauffeur dressed in finery and everything. Sammy was not the best student. As a matter of fact, he was at the bottom part of the class. And they said, “Sammy, where’d you get all that money?” He said, “Well, you know,” he said, “I just discovered a little thing that everybody wants and everybody needs. I could make it for a dollar and sell it for two dollars, and everybody wants one.” He said, “You know, that 200% sure adds up.” Time and chance. The

answers to the riddles of life are so strange—so strange.

## II. The Pleasant Rewards of Life

Now here's the second thing I want you to see. We're talking about the perplexing riddles of life—that life is so full of vanity; it's so full of inequities and things. There's just the confusion that happens. But now, notice here. Don't become cynical, because, secondly, there are the pleasant rewards of life. I'm not asking you to be cynical. There are some wonderful rewards. God wants you to enjoy life—He really does! Look, in chapter 2, verse 24: *“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God”* (Ecclesiastes 2:24). I hope you'll have a wonderful Sunday dinner today; and, when you do, thank God for it—*“from the hand of God.”*

Look, in Ecclesiastes 3, verse 11: *“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set [eternity] in their heart, that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11–13). If God has given you a beautiful home—and I'm going to get to this in a moment—if God has given to you a wonderful family, if God gives you clothes and a car, thank Him for it. It's a gift of God.

Look, in chapter 3, verse 22: *“Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion”* (Ecclesiastes 3:22)—*“that is his portion.”* Just rejoice in your work. Look, in Ecclesiastes 5—ha, you stopped turning pages—Ecclesiastes 5, verses 18 and 19: *“Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God”* (Ecclesiastes 5:18–19).

Let me give you another one—chapter 9, verses 7 through 10: *“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments always be white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might”* (Ecclesiastes 9:7–10).

Now this is not the pagan philosophy of “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die.” Solomon had already tried that. But what he is saying is, “Don't become a cynic.

Just because of the perplexing riddles of life, don't overlook the pleasant rewards of life." God is a good God, and the Bible tells us, as we're going to see in a moment, that "God gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). God is saying, "Enjoy life." God is not saying not to have a good time. God is not saying that, if you're serious about life, that you can't have a good time. You're not to be some pale, sanctimonious recluse—not if you're a Christian.

Do you know what they crucified Jesus for? One of the things was for going to parties. They said, "This man is a winebibber and a glutton" (Matthew 11:19). He was neither, but Jesus was the life of the party. Little children loved the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus knew what it was to sit down at a banquet. He knew what it was to say to His disciples, "*Come and dine*" (John 21:12).

### **III. The Profound Responsibilities of Life**

Now what we're talking about is a philosophy of life. There are the perplexing riddles of life—things you cannot understand; yet there are the pleasant rewards of life. Now let's get to the third point that ties it all together: There are the profound responsibilities of life. Now put all of this together. Remember that God has engineered confusion in the world. God has engineered confusion. God has subjected everything to vanity so you can't figure it out, apart from Him. He does that to bring you to Him.

So here's the key there. Look, if you will, in Ecclesiastes 12. Now let's get back to the end of the book. Chapter 12, verses 9 and 10: "*And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth*" (Ecclesiastes 12:9–10). Now he's saying, "I'm going to tell you something now that you can depend on—something that you can live by."

I want to give you about four propositions, and I pray God that you'll take them into your heart now. We're talking about when nothing seems to make sense. Here are some things that do make sense.

#### **1. God Is Good, so Live Life Joyfully**

Number one: God is good, and you can live life joyfully. Again, look, if you will, in chapter 2, verse 24: "*There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God*" (Ecclesiastes 2:24). If God has given you riches, enjoy them. If God has given you children and grandchildren, rejoice in that. If God has given you a new suit, wear it thankfully. God is constantly showering you with good things. And since God is good, and God is the author of these good things, attack life. And especially, when you're young—don't tell the young people not to have a good time. Tell

the young people to have a good time. That's what he's saying: *"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not"* (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Be grateful for what you have. You see, the good life, the life that really satisfies, exists only when you stop wanting a better one. Enjoy what *is* rather than longing for what *might be*. God is good.

Let me give you some ancillary verses. Psalm 84, verse 11: *"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly"* (Psalm 84:11). And 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 17: *"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Timothy 6:17). If you are wealthy, I'm happy for you—if you can see your wealth comes from God, and if it can give you joy. But if you're not wealthy, just take what God has; and, whatsoever state you're in, learn to be content (Philippians 4:11), and to say, "This is the day the Lord hath made; I will rejoice" (Psalm 118:24). And this is the only life you're going to live, so enjoy it.

And folks, remember the two rails: the good rail and the bad rail. Come up. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you're a fool if you endure the bad without enjoying the good. Now God is good. That's the first principle. Enjoy life.

## **2. God Is Sovereign, so Live Life Confidently**

Number two: God is sovereign. So not only should you live life joyfully; you should live life confidently. Just because it doesn't make sense to you, doesn't mean it doesn't make sense. Look, in chapter 12, verses 9 through 11: *"And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads..."*—do you know what a *goad* is? That's what you stick on an ox, prick him with, to make him pull the load—*"The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies,"*—he's talking about a peg that you'd tie the sheep to, so he wouldn't run off—*"which are given from one shepherd"* (Ecclesiastes 12:9–11). He's saying that God's Word, here, is to spur us on, and God's Word is to keep us close. And so God is sovereign. Live life confidently.

I want to tell you, God is in control. Now remember when I read to you in Romans 8 that the creation was made subject to vanity? But that's Romans 8:20. Romans 8:28 says, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."* Just because it doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean it doesn't make sense. And a wise man has said, "Where we cannot trace God's hand, we can trust God's heart."

I told you about Mrs. Einstein, married to Einstein—they say the most intelligent man who ever lived; I don't know if the most wise, but the most intelligent. Somebody asked

her, “Mrs. Einstein, do you understand the theory of relativity?” She said, “No, but I understand Dr. Einstein.” Now you may not be able to understand the mysteries of the universe, but you can know God.

And therefore, what we cannot understand, we can still undergo. God is a sovereign God. Not a blade of grass moves without His permission.

### **3. God Is Great, so Live Life Humbly**

Here’s the third thing. God is good; live life joyfully. God is sovereign; live life confidently. God is great; live life humbly. Look, in chapter 3, verse 14: *“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him”* (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Have reverence before God. You can’t add to anything God has done. You can’t take anything from what God has done. James Barrie said, “Life is a long lesson in humility.” We need to lay our intellectual pride in the dust and say, “We will never, never, never, never figure it out apart from God.” *“Vanity of vanities; all is vanity”* (Ecclesiastes 1:2). But God is great. Live life humbly.

### **4. God Is Just, so Live Life Reverently**

And then, last of all, God is just, so live life reverently. Look now, in chapter 12, verses 13 and 14: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:”—this is the bottom line. A preacher stood up to preach on Sunday morning and said, “I let my wife edit my notes this morning, so in conclusion.” Solomon now is coming to the conclusion of the whole thing, and here’s what he says here, in chapter 12, verse 13—“hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

Now God is good; enjoy life. God is sovereign; have confidence. He’s still on His throne. God, my friend, is great. Bow your heart before Him. But remember this—are you listening?—God is a just God. And one day, you’re going to stand before Him. One day, you’re going to stand... *“Hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). And how do you do that? Let me give you a little New Testament truth: by bowing the knee to Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

There was a great theologian—and I don’t agree with everything he said, but he’s recognized as one of the world’s greatest minds—and, at the end of his life of teaching in the university and so forth, he was given a trip around the world. And he went to the great universities to study and to lecture. He went to the great churches to teach and to the great cathedrals to make pronouncements. And finally, this man, who had saturated his mind with so much wisdom, who was so respected, came back to the United States

and was in a theological class with some young students there. And one of them said to him, “Doctor, in all of your travels, all of your studies, what is the most profound thought you’ve ever had?” He gave a smile, and this is what he said: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” That’s it!

Friend, you take all the perplexing riddles of life; you take all of the pleasant rewards of life and the profound responsibilities of life; and the best thing, the wisest thing, you could ever do is to give your heart to the One who loves you so much. He died for you. If I had a thousand lives, I’d give them—every one—to Jesus. There’s much I don’t understand, but there’s one thing I know that I know: Jesus loves me, and loved me enough to die for me.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? And I want you to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord today. And I’m telling you, on the authority of the Word of God, that Jesus Christ will save you instantaneously. He will keep you eternally, if you’ll trust Him. That we can be certain of, for Jesus said, “*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37). He’ll never turn you away, if you’ll trust Him.

Would you pray a prayer like this: “Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. I confess that I am a sinner. I confess that my sin deserves judgment; and, unless I get saved, I’ll be eternally lost. I also confess there’s nothing I can do to save myself. But Father, You told me that, if I would trust in Jesus, You would save me. Jesus, I do trust You. I believe You’re the Son of God. I believe You died on that cross for my sins. Thank You for paying my sin debt, so I won’t have to pay it. Thank You, Jesus, for dying in my place. I believe that God raised You from the dead. I put my trust in You now. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Come into my life. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me, Lord Jesus”?

Did you ask Him? Then, pray this way: “Thank You for doing it, Jesus. I receive it by faith, and that settles it. You’re now my Lord, my Master, and my God. And Lord Jesus, because You died for me, I will live for You—not in order to be saved—that’s a gift—but because You’ve saved me. I will live for You. And Lord Jesus, I will never be ashamed of You. I will confess You as my Lord openly and publicly. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

# The Principles of Prosperity

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: January 21, 1996**

**Main Scripture Text: Ecclesiastes 11:1–10**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Principle of Investment
  - A. Examine Your Motive for Investment
  - B. Seek Wise Counsel
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- II. The Principle of Diversification
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Conclusion

## Introduction

**W**ould you take God's Word and turn to Ecclesiastes, please—chapter 11? As you're turning, I want to tell you what we are going to be talking about today: "The Principles of Prosperity." And I have good news—good news. Would you like some good news? Here's some good news: God wants you to prosper. Now you say, "I'm not certain about that, Pastor." Well, I want to give you some scriptures, in case there is the shadow of any doubt. I want to give you some scriptures.

Now we are going to be studying from Ecclesiastes chapter 11, so you just might put these in the margin: Psalm 1, verse 3—the Bible says, concerning the righteous man, *"And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither;"*—now listen—*"and whatsoever he doeth shall"*—what?—"prosper" (Psalm 1:3); Joshua 1 and verse 8: *"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success"* (Joshua 1:8); 3 John, verse 2: *"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in*

*health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 1:2); Psalm 35 and verse 27: “Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the LORD be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant” (Psalm 35:27)—God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His servant; 2 Chronicles chapter 20 and verse 20: “Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chronicles 20:20); Nehemiah chapter 2 and verse 20: “Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us” (Nehemiah 2:20).*

Need anymore? I’m telling you, folks, that God has a plan for you, and it is prosperity. Just make sure it’s real prosperity that you get. I didn’t say that you were going to be a millionaire. I didn’t say that you were going to live a life of luxury. I said you would prosper. So many times, we look at a man who has gone through several marriages, whose kids are rebellious, who has an ulcer, addicted to some alcohol or something like that, and he’s got a big bank account; we say, he’s prosperous. He’s not prosperous; he’s a miserable failure. I’m talking to you about prosperity—the kind that God wants you to have.

Somewhere, years ago, I read of an old prospector who’d been out mining for gold out in Nevada somewhere—out in the west somewhere—and he’d found what he thought was the mother lode. But what he found was what they call *fool’s gold*. It was mica; it wasn’t gold at all. He had loaded down his old burro with it, and started out across the desert, ran out of water, and he and the old burro died. They found him there—the old burro lying down, the saddlebags full of nothing but fool’s gold. But the old prospector wrote before he died, “Died rich.” He had nothing but fool’s gold in the saddlebags. Now a lot of people have, even, real gold, but they are very much like that old prospector. They don’t understand what real riches are.

Now when I am talking to you about prosperity, I’m not talking to you about the key to Fort Knox, necessarily, but I am talking to you about financial and fiscal responsibility and blessing. I’m talking to you about being and doing more than just drawing your breath and drawing your salary.

I think one of the saddest things I read was where a Cook County sewer employee up in Chicago said this—he said, “I dig the ditch to get the money to buy the food to get the strength to dig the ditch.”

And that is the way some people are living. I mean they are fighting to live while they are living to fight. They are drawing their breath, drawing their salary; they are miserable in their lives.

What is prosperity, and how can we have prosperity God’s way? Well, you have the Book of Ecclesiastes, written by the wisest man who lived, outside the Lord Jesus, whose name was Solomon. Let me give you eight principles of prosperity right out of

this 11th chapter, and I want you to write them down, because you can use them, if you will.

## I. The Principle of Investment

Principle number one is the principle of investment—investment. Look, if you will, in chapter 11 and verse 1: *“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shall find it after many days”* (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Now what’s he talking about? He’s talking about making investments; that’s what *casting your bread upon the water* is. Now Solomon, who wrote this, knew very much about investing; and, how he invested was this: He cast his bread upon the waters.

You might put in your margin, 1 Kings chapter 10, verses 22 and 23, and it tells exactly how Solomon did this. The Bible says, *“For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. So king Solomon exceeded all of the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom”* (1 Kings 10:22–23). Now what does that mean? Well, Solomon was a trader; he was an investor. He would invest money in ships, and he would set them to sail out across the sea. He was casting his bread upon the water. And they would go out and stay out for as long as three years; for when they came back, they came back with incredible riches. I think, probably, this is where we get the statement, “when your ship comes in.” This is what we are talking about. Solomon was an investor, and you need to learn to invest.

The Lord Jesus taught us to invest. Remember the parable in Matthew chapter 25, where He gave the parable of the talents, and He said, “This man gave to his servants some talents. He gave to one man five talents; one man, two talents; and one man, one talent (Matthew 25:15)? Remember that? Surely, you do. And I’ve tried to find out how much a talent would be worth in today’s money, and the sources that I’ve read said that a talent would be worth about \$400,000. Five talents would be 2 million dollars. Here is a man given 2 million dollars to invest, and he invests it and got more talents—five more. And the other invested two and got two more. But you remember the story of the man who had the one talent? He refused the principle of investment. As a matter of fact, he just simply put his talent in the ground; he hid his talent in the ground.

Now listen. Matthew 25, verse 24: *“Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.”*—“There it is, Lord. You gave me a talent; I gave it back to You.” You think God will be satisfied with you if you give back to God simply what God gives you? He will not. That’s not good stewardship. *“His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap*

*where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury”* (Matthew 25:24–27). That is, “You should have invested this money. You should have made it grow.” And then, here’s what our Lord says; this is what Jesus is saying to everyone of us: *“For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”* And then, He said, *“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 25:29–30).

Now learn this: You are a steward. And what is the responsibility of a steward, when his master entrusts to him goods? He is to make those goods grow. He is to invest them. You are not simply to hold your own.

One of America’s military heroes was General Patton. General Patton told his troops this—he said, “I don’t ever want to hear anybody say or get any message from anybody who says, ‘We are holding our position.’” He said, “The only thing we’re going to hold is the enemy.” He said, “We are to be advancing.”

And so many of us just think that if we simply hold our position that we are being biblical. We are not. We are stewards. We are to invest and see our investment grow.

Now when you invest, let me give you some principles.

#### **A. Examine Your Motive for Investment**

Number one: Examine your motive for investment. If your motive is greed, or if your motive is pride, may God have mercy upon you. Put this verse in your Bible: 1 Timothy chapter 6, verses 6 through 9: *“But godliness with contentment is great gain...”*—*“Godliness with contentment is great gain...”* If you’ve got Jesus, friend, you are rich. And to whom little is not enough, nothing is enough. To whom little is not enough, nothing is enough. *“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich...”*—it doesn’t say, “They who are rich”; it says, “Those whose determination is to be rich”—*“they that will be rich shall fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition”* (1 Timothy 6:6–9). And then, in 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 17, Paul told Timothy, “Here’s what you tell your church members: *‘Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy’*” (1 Timothy 6:17). Isn’t that good advice?

Now so, when I’m talking about investment, I’m not talking—when I’m talking to you about casting your bread upon the water—I’m not talking to you about feeding your greed. I’m telling you that we are stewards, and what we are doing is managing what

God has given to us. And as good stewards, we need to make it grow; and therefore, we need to take what God has put in our hands, and we need to prayerfully ask ourselves, “How much of this shall I use? How much of this shall I give? And how much of this shall I invest for the glory of God?” Good question.

### **B. Seek Wise Counsel**

Now number one: Examine your motive. Number two: Get wise counsel. Now folks, when I’m talking to you about the principles of prosperity, don’t come to me and ask me about some investment. I am not an investment counselor; I am a practitioner of truth. I’m telling you the truth of God’s Word, and a part of the truth of God’s Word is that you should get wise counsel.

For example, put these verses down—Proverbs chapter 13 and verse 20: *“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed”* (Proverbs 13:20)—and, by the way, your wife can spot those fools, sometimes, easier than you can, mister; Proverbs chapter 15, verse 22: *“Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established”* (Proverbs 15:22); Proverbs 14, verse 15: *“The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going”* (Proverbs 14:15). We’re going to have some seminars this evening. I hope you’ll come to them, because some of them will help you in this particular area: to be wise, to get wise counsel.

You see, in investment, you need to be wise, not shrewd. If you are around some shrewd person, get away from them and walk with wise men. Now let me say: Any counsel that you get can only guide you; you’re the one that must make the decision. Don’t let anybody else make your decision for you. Let them guide you; but you make the decision, and you pray. And the Bible says, “If you lack wisdom, you ask God, and God will give you wisdom” (James 1:5). Examine your motives. Get wise counsel.

### **C. Beware of Any Get-Rich-Quick Schemes**

And above all things, in every investment, beware. Are you listening—not to Adrian, but to God’s Word? Beware of any get-rich-quick schemes. Now listen. Listen to this. The Bible says, in Proverbs chapter 28 and verse 22: *“He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye...”*—*“He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him”* (Proverbs 28:22).

Now what is the first principle? The first principle is the principle of investment. Have you got that? Investment—that’s the first one. Cast your bread upon the water (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

## **II. The Principle of Diversification**

Now here’s the second principle: The second principle is the principle of diversification.

Look, if you will now, in verse 2: *“Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth”* (Ecclesiastes 11:2). I looked this up in another translation earlier this week, and it says this: *“Take shares in several adventures; you never know what will go wrong in this world”* (Ecclesiastes 11:2).

What do we say in our nomenclature today? “Don’t pull all your eggs in one basket.” Just don’t do it. Just diversify as you make your investments. Put some *here*, and some *here*, and some *here*, and some *here*. That’s the reason that some investment people have come up with things they call *mutual funds*, which basically—for most, who are novices, who don’t know how to invest in stocks and bonds—a mutual fund is probably a good thing. But open yourself up to new ideas and new opportunities. Let God speak to you. That’s what verse 2 is saying; it’s the principle of diversification. First, investment; number two: diversification. Don’t invest everything in one thing. Got it? Got it.

### III. The Principle of Preparation

Let’s go on. Number three—here’s the third principle: It’s the principle of preparation. Look, if you will, in verse 3: *“If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves...”*—folks, when enough moisture gets up there, it is going to rain—*“[when] the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be”* (Ecclesiastes 11:3).

What’s he saying? He’s saying, “Get ready. Sooner or later, there’s a storm that’s going to come. Sooner or later, there’s going to come a rainy day, and it’s going to blow over some trees. And when it blows over those trees, the way the tree falls—that’s where it’s going to lie.” That’s what he’s saying. And you don’t know when it’s going to storm; but you just know that, sooner or later, it’s going to storm.

You know, a few months ago, Joyce and I were asleep—another winter. I thought somebody dropped a bomb on our house. It was when we had that ice storm. I woke up, and a great huge pine tree had fallen in on my garage. It was laden with ice—the roof. I went out there and looked, and great big limbs were sticking down through my garage roof. The wind blew; the clouds were full; the ice came; the tree fell; and there it was. Now folks, I had homeowner’s insurance, and I’m glad I did. Things happen. You need to get ready for the foreseen and the unforeseen.

Now some of you just say, “Well, I’ll just trust God.” Well, you ought to trust God, and I’m going to talk to you about that; but the Bible teaches that you are to make preparation. And if you say, “I will just trust God,” but you don’t make preparation for the foreseen and the unforeseen, that is not trust; that is presumption. The Bible says, *“Keep back thy servant...from presumptuous sins”* (Psalm 19:13). The devil tried to

tempt the Lord Jesus to do just exactly this thing. He said, “Jump off the pinnacle of the temple, and God will take care of you. Just cast yourself upon God” (Luke 4:9). Jesus knew better than that. Jesus said, “*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*” (Luke 4:12).

The Bible teaches the principle of preparation. Put in your margin, Proverbs chapter 6, verses 6 through 11. Listen to it. We’re going to learn a lesson from an ant—an *a-n-t*, not an a-u-n-t—an ant. Listen to it: “*Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler...*”—the guide; doesn’t have anybody who says, “You’ve got to work,” nobody cracking a whip over the little ant’s back. Notice this—“*Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat*”—that is, her food—“*in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man*” (Proverbs 6:6–11). Just like a woman who is pregnant—going to have a baby—one of these days, you’re going to have trouble, mister, if you don’t make preparation. And just as like some time a thief will break in your house and steal, the circumstances—the vicissitudes—of life will come upon you, as much as if a man put a gun in your face and were to rob you.

What does the ant tell you? What does Solomon tell you here, in verse 3? Prepare for a rainy day. Are you saving? You ought to be saving. You say, “Oh no, I’m just trusting the Lord for the future.” Well, listen to Proverbs chapter 21, verse 20: “*There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up*” (Proverbs 21:20). Save some of everything you make. The ant is known for wisdom and work. You say, “Well, I’m trusting God.” Faith and prudence are not in competition one with the other.

I read something that was so sad. I had to read it and reread it, getting ready for this. Did you know that the average 65-year-old man in the United States of America, when he is 65, if he were to cash out everything, you know how much he would be worth? One hundred dollars. I’m talking about a 65-year-old man. Let’s say he begins his work when he is 20 or something—worth a hundred dollars—that’s the average. And he’s looking to somebody else or something else to take care of him, because he’s not learned the lesson of the ant. What a pity! So few people understand this principle of prosperity, which is preparation.

#### **IV. The Principle of Venture**

Now here’s the fourth principle. Ready for it? It’s in verse 4: “*He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap*” (Ecclesiastes 11:4). Now in verse 3, it says, “You know, it can rain.” Well, you say, “Well, if it can rain, then I’m

just not going to do anything. I'm just going to not make any venture." The fourth principle is the principle of venture, *v-e-n-t-u-r-e*; or, if you want to put down another word—risk, *r-i-s-k*.

Did you know that the Bible encourages you to take a risk? You say, "Oh, isn't that like gambling?" Not at all—not at all. Every farmer that puts his seed in the ground takes a risk. Isn't that true? Do you think a farmer is guaranteed a good crop every time he sows? He's not. He's got to risk. There may come a flood. There may come a drought. There may come some pestilence and wipe him out. But if he thinks that way, he will never ever plant. If he becomes a part of the society of wind-watchers and cloud-examiners, he's not going to plant. This is what it says—look at it: "*He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap*" (Ecclesiastes 11:4). If you don't sow, you are not going to reap. You have to take a risk.

Now what is the difference, therefore, between taking a risk and gambling? Now we have those who tell us that we need gambling in Tennessee, and we need gambling in Shelby County. Shelby County needs gambling like a duck needs a bathing suit. What is the difference? All business involves risk. You have to venture, but what is legitimate business? Legitimate business is *win-win*. I make a widget. You need a widget. I sell you the widget. I sell it for a dollar. I get the dollar. You get the widget. You win, and I win. You've got the widget. I've got the dollar. That's *win-win*. All business is built on that principle. All gambling—*all* gambling—is built on *win-lose*. There can be no winners without losing. You see, listen. Gambling is bogus; it's a fraud. It is pleasure and profit at somebody else's loss and sorrow. It's completely antithetical to the spirit of the Bible.

Everybody says, "Look over there in West Memphis. Oh, what they've got over there—yeah, take a look at that gambling establishment!" Folks, let me tell you something: That's the only place in the world—or one place like it—where the windows clean the people. The Bible encourages risk, but the Bible is totally against gambling; and the spirit of love is against it. Who wants to profit at somebody else's loss? Legitimate business is, "I help you, and you help me; and, we both gain." But there is a risk.

Remember the story of the man who hid his talent in the ground? Why did he say he hid his talent in the ground? He said, "*I was afraid*" (Matthew 25:25). Friend, you've got to get out on the limb, because that's where the fruit is. That's what the Bible is teaching, right here. The Bible is not against risk. As a matter of fact, to preach the gospel, you have to take a risk. The Bible says, in Acts chapter 15, verse 26, that these "*men...have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 15:26). That is, they risk their lives to get out the gospel.

Now when I say there is the principle of venture, I want to come back and underscore, and reiterate, and emphasize that I'm not talking about foolish chance. I am

not talking about an inordinate gain to get rich quick. You do that, and you're going to get in trouble. Let me tell you again. Put these verses down—Proverbs 14, verse 18: *“The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge”* (Proverbs 14:18); Proverbs 21, verse 5: *“The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want”* (Proverbs 21:5); Proverbs 27, verse 12: *“A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished”* (Proverbs 27:12); and then, the one I have already given you, in Proverbs 28 and verse 22: *“He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him”* (Proverbs 28:22). But there is the principle of venture. I mean, look around and see. There are opportunities, and don't be afraid to step out and to venture.

## V. The Principle of Trust

But now, let's move on to the fifth principle. There's the principle of trust. Look, if you will, in verse 5: *“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all”* (Ecclesiastes 11:5). Now what does that mean? It means, folks, there are some things we don't know. How do we know who's known the mind of the Spirit? Who knows the ways of God anymore than we understand how a baby is formed in its mother's womb? That's one of the greatest miracles of the ages—is the precious little baby being formed in its mother's womb.

There are some imponderables in life that are under the sovereign control of Almighty God. And so therefore, you have to trust Him; you have to say, “Lord, I just look to You. Lord, I realize I've got to make investments. I realize, Lord, that I must diversify. I realize, Lord, that I must make preparation. I realize, Lord, that I must be willing to venture. But after I've done all that, Lord, who knows?” Isn't that right? “Who knows what's going to happen; so, Lord, I just trust You. I'll trust You.” You see, there comes a time when you have to say, “God, it's in Your hand. I will trust You, God.”

Let me give you some verses—Isaiah 58, in verse 11: *“The LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not”* (Isaiah 58:11)—that's a pretty good recipe for prosperity—God's guidance; Psalm 32, verse 8: *“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye”* (Psalm 32:8); Psalm 37, verse 23: *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way”* (Psalm 37:23). What do all of these verses mean? There's one, most likely, we'll deal with tonight—one of my favorites and your favorites: Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6: *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths”* (Proverbs 3:5–6).

People are so uptight because they're worried about their finances. There comes a time when you say, "Lord, it's in Your hands. I don't know what the future holds, but I know You, Lord, and I know that You love me." And *"It is vain...to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for he giveth his beloved sleep"* (Psalm 127:2). Amen?

I heard of a woman who called a doctor one morning. She said, "Doc, you've got to get over here in a hurry." He said, "What's wrong?" She said, "I've got an emergency over here. It's my husband." She said, "He woke up this morning, and, he took his vitamin pill, first of all; then, he took his appetite depressant; and then, he took a tranquilizer; and then, he took some antihistamines; and then, he took some Benzedrine; and then, he lit a cigarette, and there was this explosion."

We're just so keyed up. There comes a principle of trust. You don't know, but God knows. Would you just relax, and say, "Lord, I'm Your child; You'll take care of me as I obey You"?

## VI. The Principle of Work

Now here's the next principle—principle number six; and I'm sorry about this one, but it's the principle of—here's a four-letter word: *work—work*. Verse 6: *"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good"* (Ecclesiastes 11:6). So again, it's the principle of diversification; and, it is married, now, to the principle of work.

Somebody says, "Well, man, I'm looking for a formula that works." Well, stop looking. There's not one that works. You done the work? No? That's the trouble—to be looking for some formula that works.

A man came to work, and he had two big shiny black eyes. And his boss said, "Man, look at those black eyes! Who gave you those?" He said, "Nobody gives 'em to you; you have to fight for 'em."

Friend, we've got people today who are just wanting somebody just to give us this or give us that. The Bible says, in Proverbs 14, verse 23: *"In all labour there is profit"* (Proverbs 14:23). Proverbs 20, verse 4: *"The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing"* (Proverbs 20:4). Proverbs 28, verse 19: *"He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough"* (Proverbs 28:19). And then, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verses 10 and 11—that I think all of us know: *"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat"* (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Now there's something terrible happening in America today, and that is, we're encouraging people not to work, to stay on welfare rolls. That, my friend, is a crime

against the person who's paying for this welfare, and against the person who's receiving it. If you think I'm hard-hearted, if you accuse me of being hard-hearted against the poor, and all that, you don't know my heart. There's no one that cares for, I don't believe, the poor, and is, in his way, more generous there, maybe; but I have a heart of sympathy for these people. But we're doing something terrible in America. We are teaching... We are depriving some young people, by government example, of the joy of honest employment. And even those who receive welfare ought to have something to do.

In 1992, over 33 billion dollars in tax dollars—33 billion—was spent on food programs alone; 33 billion dollars—that's in 1992—for food alone, without one single hour of work being required to get it. Now if you were to pay those people at the rate of \$11 an hour, that would have amounted to 3 billion hours of work. What could 3 billion hours of work do for the person who does it, and do for the society where they live? But what we've done is, we have failed to understand God's Word. I'm not talking about those who cannot work; I'm talking about those who will not work. The Bible says they should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). They need the dignity of work. They need the joy of work. They need the reward of work. They need to learn how to work. And America, today, will take a little teenage girl that has it hard at home, and we say to her, "Listen, child. If you'll just get pregnant without getting married, have a baby, and promise not to get a job, we'll give you money. But now, remember—you get married, or if you get a job, it's all off. You've got to be unmarried. You've got to have a baby, and you can't work." We're paid. That's wrong, folks. It's wrong to that young lady. It's wrong to society. It's wrong to her offspring.

There's a principle of work, and we need to get that back in our heart and in our mind. Now it's not just these folks in the poverty areas that have problems. I'm talking to a lot of people right here, today. Do you know what you've substituted for work is credit? More that half of all Americans carry credit cards. There are more than one billion credit cards out in the world, and 328 billion dollars in credit debt. Twenty-five percent of every dollar is consumer debt that you pay—25%! So many people—their salary is pre-committed before they get it. They call 'em *credit cards*. They ought to call 'em *debt cards*. I mean, I'm talking to folks, right now, who are saddled with that. And the Bible says, in Proverbs 22, verse 7: "*The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender*" (Proverbs 22:7).

One couple took all the credit cards—they got so sick of it—they put them on a piece of aluminum foil and turned the oven up to 350 degrees, 450 degrees—got that oven real hot—and put those credit cards on that foil, and they all melted and turned different colors. They peeled it off, and hung it on the wall. They've got this mosaic of these melted credit cards just to remind them of how foolish they'd been.

You go out and buy a dinner for \$20—for \$20—and put it on your charge card, and then pay the minimum amount. You know how much that dinner's going to cost you? It's going to cost you more than \$50. You just pay the minimum amount on your credit card. You say, "Well, can I just make the payment?" That dinner's going to cost you \$50, if we're talking about just the routine interest. If you go out here, if you've got your cards charged up to \$2,000, and you say, "Well, I've got one. Let me charge \$2,000. And I'm making the minimum payment." Do you know how long it's going to take you to pay off that credit card of \$2,000? It's going to take you... You're going to be paying for the next 17 years, paying the minimum payment. You know how much you're going to pay? Over \$5,000, at 16.08% interest. Don't do that.

Now using debt to buy some things that are going to accrue in value like a house—certainly, that's permissible. But if you think that you can have instant gratification— instant pleasure—using credit cards to buy consumer goods, thinking it's going to bring happiness, it's like trying to put out a fire with gasoline. There's a principle of work.

## **VII. The Principle of Perspective**

Now very quickly, there's a principle of perspective. Look, if you will, in verses 7 and 8 of this thing: *"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 11:7–8). Now what's he saying? He's saying, "Enjoy life, but remember the bad days are coming. Remember, sooner or later, you're going to get sick; you're going to die. Just keep that in perspective." Enjoy life. God wants you to enjoy life. If you have good things, enjoy them.

Jesus was not a recluse. Jesus was accused of being a winebibber and a glutton. Of course, He was not. But Jesus was a man of joy, and so forth. The Bible teaches, in Ecclesiastes 2, verse 24: *"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God"* (Ecclesiastes 2:24). God is showering you with blessing. If God prospers you, if God gives you a home, enjoy it. If you sit down to a Sunday dinner, thank God for it, and eat it. If you are surrounded by your wife, and your children, and your grandchildren, rejoice. You've got brothers and sisters in Christ, today—thank God for them. If there's beautiful music, let it bless your heart. God is good. Don't you forget that! *"The LORD thy God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly"* (Psalm 84:11).

The Bible says, in 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 17: *"[It's] God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Timothy 6:17). But remember this: Remember the principle of perspective. This is not all there is. One of these days, we're going to get sick. One of

these days, we're going to wind down to the grave. That's what this verse says: *"But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 11:8). That is, if in this world only we have hope, we have all been most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:19).

## **VIII. The Principle of Accountability**

Now here's the last principle—and I only have time to touch on it, but we'll touch on it more next week—and it is the principle of accountability—the principle of accountability. We are stewards. Look, now, in verses 9 and 10: *"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 11:9–10). That is, grow up—grow up. Put away pessimism; put away sin; live wisely—because we are stewards. And soon, and very soon, we're going to stand before God. And God is going to say, "What did you do with what I entrusted in your hands?"

You need to pray, and say, "God, how much of this do I need to use? How much of this do I need to save? How much of this do I need to invest? How much of this do I need to give? For, Lord, none of it is mine. Lord, it is all Yours. And I know, soon, and very soon, I'm going to stand before You. And I am a steward." Now listen to me. Listen well. What you call your own is not yours. You are a steward. You're only a manager. Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities. Did you hear that? Owners have rights. That's not you. You're the steward. He's the One that has the rights. You are the manager. You're the manager.

Now let me say this: I'm talking to you about prosperity, and the wisest One who ever walked this earth, walked in saddled shoes, and He said, *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36–37). Your soul is worth more than all the stocks, the bonds, the rubies, the diamonds, the emeralds, the schools, the education, the military, the government—put it all together—your one soul is worth more than all of that. Don't be like the old prospector and say, "Well, I died rich. You die without Jesus, and you die in poverty. And if you have Jesus, you're already rich."

## **Conclusion**

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. No one's stirring. If you know the Lord, begin to pray for those around you who may not know Him. Please don't move; don't gather your books. No one leave unless it is an

emergency. How many, this morning, would say, “Pastor Rogers, I have been saved by the grace of God, and I know that I know, thank God, I know it—If I died right now, I’d go to Heaven?” While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, if you can give me that testimony, would you lift up your hand? Praise the Lord. Take them down.

Now if you couldn’t lift your hand, let me talk to you. I think you’re saying, “Pastor Rogers, if a man can know it, I want to know it. I couldn’t lift my hand, but I want to know it, if you can know it.” Well, you can know it. You can receive salvation today. It’s a gift, because Jesus suffered, bled, and died for you. He paid your sin debt with His blood on the cross. And the Bible says, if you will trust Him, you can be saved. The Bible puts it in a sentence: *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”* (Acts 16:31). But that word *believe* means “trust.” Trust Him. Trust Him right now.

Would you pray a prayer like this? Pray it from your heart: “God, I know You love me, and I know You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me, and You promised to save me, if I would trust You. I do trust You, right now. I turn from my sin. I open my heart. I receive You, now, as my Lord and Savior. Come into my life.” Invite Him in, right now, friend: “Come into my life; forgive my sin; and save me, Lord Jesus.”

# A Perspective on Life

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Main Scripture Text: Ecclesiastes 12:10–13**

*“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”*

ECCLESIASTES 12:13

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G. God Is Just; Therefore, We Should Live Righteously

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## Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and turn, please, to the book of Ecclesiastes. Somewhere in the middle of your Bible you’ll find Ecclesiastes, chapter 12. And in a moment, I want to read verses 10 and 11. But I want to talk to you today on this subject: “A Perspective on Life.”

For many people, life is, indeed, perplexing and problematic, and many people are living life cynically. I’ve told you before of some college students who were asked to give a definition of life. And here are some of the entries that won honorable mention. One said, “Life is a disease for which the only cure is death.” Another said, “Life is a jail sentence that we get for the crime of being born.” Another said, “Life is a joke that isn’t even funny.” We’re all familiar with Emma Bombeck, who said, “If life is a bowl of cherries, why do I always get the pits?” People are trying to figure out what life is really all about, and, and where do you really get a perspective on life, a philosophy of life that is more than just simply “pop psychology?” Well, friend, we’re going to find it this morning in the Word of God.

Look, if you will, please, in chapter 12:10: “The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The

words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.” God says that His words are like goads. Do you know what a goad is? That’s something they would use to make the oxen pull the plow. It was something to push him on, to goad him on. And then the Bible says that His words not only are like goads, but they are like nails fastened. What he is saying is this: “I’m going to give you something that can push you on and something you can hang your life upon,” a sound philosophy of life. He’s going to give us a perspective on life. And if you ever listen to a message, I want you to listen to this one this morning.

Now the very first thing. Go back to Ecclesiastes 1. And, incidentally, we’re going to look in a cursory way at the entire book of Ecclesiastes. And so, we’re going to be going back and forth through this book this morning. So keep it out and keep it open if you would, please.

## **I. The Perplexing Riddles of Life**

But I want you to see, first of all, the three things that I really have to say. I want you to see what I’m going to call the perplexing riddles of life. Do you have it? The perplexing riddles of life. Look, if you will, in chapter 1:1: “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” Now what he is saying here is that life is vain. Life is futile. Life doesn’t make sense. Now when he says, “vanity of vanities,” he’s just putting an exclamation point after it. It’s just a Hebrew way of saying this is doubly true. When the Hebrews wanted to say the most holy place, they said, “Holy of holies.” When they, they wanted to show how great our God is, they said, “Lord of lords.” And here the writer of Ecclesiastes, when he wants to show you how vain this world is, he just simply says, “Vanity of vanities.” Nothing seems to make sense. The philosophers down through the ages have tried to unravel the mystery of life. Ah, sweet mystery of life. But they’ve not been able to do it.

Look, for example, in chapter 3:10 and you’re going to find out what makes man different from the animals. Chapter 3:10. The writer of Ecclesiastes says, “I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.” That is, to be puzzled by it. “He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart...” Do you see the word world? That may be translated “He hath set eternity in their heart.” That is, a man is not made for this world only. God has put eternity, “...so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” Now what does that mean? The animals don’t have eternity in their heart. But men are perplexed. They always want to find the meaning of life. They want to tiptoe and look over the wall. They want to see what’s out there. They want it to make sense. But nothing in this world seems to make sense. We can’t get the puzzle altogether.

On our last vacation Joyce and I did some things that we've not done for a long time, if ever. One thing, we just went out on the dock in front of our little cottage and, at nighttime and we just lie down and look at the stars. That's an exercise in beauty and humility all at the same time – to see and behold this vast universe that God has made. Another thing we did, though, was to get a jigsaw puzzle and work late at night just putting the pieces together. And we sat there and had sweet fellowship just building that jigsaw puzzle. But, you know, I was thinking how, how terrible it would be to be sitting down with a jigsaw puzzle and not have all the pieces. And there were many times I really thought we didn't have them all. I told Joyce, I said, "There is one missing. I know it is missing." But it wasn't. But I thought, you know, it would be even more perplexing if somebody had put the pieces from another puzzle in our puzzle. It would just be so confusing. That's the way life is. It seems like there's some pieces that don't belong there at all, and it seems like there are some pieces that are missing. And yet, man knows there is more. He's not like an animal. He cannot be satisfied. There are these perplexing riddles of life.

Now, sometimes you think you have it all figured out. Sometimes you say, "Yep, everything is going just right." Turn, for example, to chapter 7:14. Look at it. "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider...." Now life is not all adversity, nor is life all prosperity. Sometimes we get the idea that life is like a road, and af, we have forty miles of good road and then we'll have forty miles of bad road, or maybe three miles of good road, forty miles of bad road, or forty miles of good road and three miles of bad road. But it doesn't seem to be that way. Life seems to be more like a railroad track, and over here is one rail, adversity, and over here is another rail, prosperity, and that's just the way life runs. I mean, there's the good and the bad and it just comes together. And, and, and sometimes we say, "Hey, this is wonderful." And sometimes we say, "This is terrible." Sometimes we say, "I understand this." And sometimes we say, "I don't understand that." And just when we think we have it all figured out, there goes our theory.

Down in Merritt Island, where I used to pastor, we had a tornado to come through town. And one of the things that happened was this: There was a lady who lived in a house trailer down there, Brother Whitmire. You were down there at the time. And when the tornado came through, it obliterated that house trailer. The loss of the trailer did not bother this lady as much as the loss of her pet parakeet who was in the trailer. He was gone; so far as she was concerned, gone forever. But would you believe after a few days somebody saw a parakeet sitting in a tree several blocks away. And would you believe that they walked up to that parakeet and he hopped on their shoulder. And would you believe through a myriad of circumstances they found the owner. And she was thrilled. I mean, it, it was like a miracle. She had gotten that bird back. They brought

it in with great fanfare and joy, had it in the house for several days, and the cat ate it!  
Fact: The cat ate it.

Oh, we say, “Isn’t life wonderful?” Then we say, “Isn’t life the pits?” I mean, how are you going to figure this out? What you think may be good may be bad. What you think may be bad may be good.

The Chinese tell a story of a man. He had a prize horse, and the horse got out. His friends came to commiserate with him. But later on, the horse came back, bringing a bevy of wild stallions with him. They said, “Well, that’s not bad news. That’s wonderful news.” But the old Chinese’s son got on one of those wild horses and tried to train him, and he broke his leg. They said, “Isn’t, isn’t that terrible?” But there was a war. And when they came to conscript the soldiers, they let him stay home because he had a broken leg. And they said, “Isn’t that wonderful?” And on and on the story goes.

You see, dear friend, life – there’s, there’s adversity and then there’s perplexity, and it just doesn’t seem to make sense. And the Bible says that God does it on purpose. Look, if you will, in chapter 7:14: “But in the day of prosperity be joyful, in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other....” God does that, dear friend. God’s the one who is doing that. “...to the end that man should find nothing after him.” I mean, God is the one who makes it all where you cannot understand it.

Now, sometimes you think you have it all understood. You’ve been to one of the institutes and you’ve got nine principles, and you’re going to put them into your machine and turn the crank and out’s going to come a result.

One of the young preacher boys was telling me that he was at Mid-America Seminary here and they were talking about theology and philosophy and eschatology and all of those esoteric things. And the professor called upon a young man who stood up and made a recitation. He had everything fitted into every slot. Chung, chung, chung, chung, chung, chung, chung. He had all of his eschatological ideas all right on out. He knew the meaning of the toe on the left foot of some beast and the toenail on that toe. He had it all. And then he sat down. And someone said, “Professor, what do you think about that?” And the old professor just smiled and said, “That’s a young man’s theology. That’s a young man’s theology.” There are times we think we have it all figured out. We think that we know.

#### A. **In Death**

Now, there, there are a lot of examples of how confusing and how ironic life seems to be. For example, look, if you will, in Ecclesiastes 2:14 in matter of death. The Bible says, “The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness...” So here’s a wise man and a fool side by side. “...and I myself perceived that one event happened to them all.” That is, the wise man dies and the fool dies. “And I said in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more

wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.” It just doesn’t make sense. I mean, life and death can make life look so vain. Wise and fools alike die. Here’s a man who lives all of his life doing good, working hard, investing much, and then he dies. It’s over.

Again, on our vacation, we had our granddaughter there, and we made the most incredible alligator in the sands you’ve ever seen. I mean, I expected him to get up and walk away. Michelangelo had nothing on us. That alligator, almost half as long as this rug, just an incredible alligator. But when we came back the next day, the wind and the waves had done their job and it was gone. That’s the way life is. I mean, we work, we fashion, we craft. Ha! Look what we’ve done. And then a fool or a wise man – it’s all gone in matters of death. It seems so inequitable.

### **B. In Digestion**

And then in, why, even in matters of digestion. Look, if you will, in chapter 6:1: “There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth...” That is, brother, if he wants it, he can buy it. “...yet God giveth him not the power to eat thereof...” When he was a young man on his way up, all he could get was beans and rice. But he had a cast iron stomach. Now he can buy whatever he wants, but he can’t digest it. Isn’t it strange? I mean, he could have caviar, filet mignon, whatever he wants, but the doctor has him on a strict diet. The ironies of life. In death. In digestion.

### **C. In Discipline**

In discipline. Look, if you will, in chapter 9:11. Just keep turning now. It’s fun. Look. Chapter 9:11. Here’s what the preacher said. “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches of men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.” You would think that the wisest, the strongest, the fastest would always come out on top, but that’s not true. Some of the shrewdest, wisest, hardest working people have very little. We know some of them. And some of those dear friends, who couldn’t pour water out of a boot with the directions written on the heel, ah, some of these people, they seem to prosper. I mean, it, it just doesn’t make sense.

I heard about the class reunion. And the high school people had been there after ten years having their first reunion. And old Sammy, who almost flunked out, he came driving up in a car so long you almost had to have a hinge to turn the corner, a very expensive suit. He had just had the look of wealth all over him. And they said, “Sammy, what happened to you? Where’d you get all that?” He said, “Well,” he said, “You know,” he said, “I discovered a little thing that I could make for a dollar and sell for two dollars,

and everybody wants one.” He said, “You know, that two percent sure adds up.” Now my dear friend, sometimes that’s just the way it is.

I mean, the, the ironies of life. The inequities of life. Whether it be in death or digestion or discipline, friend, you might as well face it. Life is full of riddles. Now isn’t that true? I mean, isn’t that true? Just the time you think you’ve got it all worked out and you’ve got your philosophy all worked out, then something happens that just blows it all to smithereens. I never have known what a smithereens was, but anyway, that’s what happens.

Now turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 1 here and go back. Here is the writer, Solomon, and he’s, he’s on a search trying to understand the mystery of life, the vanity of life. And, first of all, he says, “Well, maybe it’s in nature.” Look, if you will, in chapter 1:3: “What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about into the north; it whirlleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; and yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” He’s saying life just goes on. In nature. You look at nature. It doesn’t tell you what the answer of life is. The rain comes down from heaven. The rain runs into little rivulets. Little rivulets become streams. Streams become rivers. Rivers run into the ocean. That’s evaporated. Goes up to the clouds. It rains again. Nature does not have the answer. Nature explains nothing. He’s saying that history doesn’t have the answer. Look, if you will, in chapter 1:9–10. He says, “The thing that hath been is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.” What’s he saying? Nothing new. History just repeats itself. History is like an old cracked phonograph record. It just keeps repeating itself over and over again. But we can’t understand the clue to life. We don’t have a clue to life from, from nature nor from history. Or it’s not science. Look, if you will, in chapter 1:13: “And I gave my heart to seek and search out wisdom concerning all things which are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. And I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” He’s says, “Why, I gave myself to know, ah, science, but I couldn’t figure it out.” You see, history tells us what. Science tells us how. But none tell us why. He just can’t figure it out. And so, he says, “Well, maybe it’s in philosophy.” Look in chapter 1:17: “And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: And I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” Do you

think that learning is the answer? Well, if that's so, the, the most educated would be the happiest, and the most wise would be the most content. But the more man learns, the more he knows he doesn't know. And the more man tries to understand, the more he knows he doesn't understand. And the philosophers know that they don't have the answer. Look, if you will, in chapter 1:15: "That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." The philosophers know that they don't have the answer. I like what Dr. Robert G. Lee said. He said, "Philosophy is a chunk of cloud bank buttered with the night wind." Well, so, you see, first of all, first of all, my dear friend, the perplexing, perplexing riddle of life. Vanity of vanities. It never completely makes sense. I hope you'll accept that. It never completely makes sense. Vanity of vanities.

## **II. The Pleasant Rewards of Life**

Okay. Second thing. Not only the perplexing riddle of life, oh, but the pleasant rewards of life, the pleasant rewards of life. In spite of the enigmas, in spite of the conundrums, in spite of the puzzles, in spite of the inequities, in spite of the ironies, life is wonderful! And that's what the writer of Ecclesiastes is telling us. Look at it. Chapter 2, for example, and verse 24: "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. And this also I saw, that it was from the hand of God." Look, if you will, in chapter 3:12-13: "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God."

Look, if you will, in verse 22: "Wherefore I perceive there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion...." What are all of these verses telling us? They're telling us to enjoy life. Look, if you will, in Ecclesiastes 5:18: "Behold that which I have seen: It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all of his labor that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion." That's what the Bible says clearly. "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and, ah, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God." The gift of God, my dear friend. And, finally, Ecclesiastes 9, look, if you will. I'm giving you all these verses because I want the point to be driven home to your heart. Ecclesiastes 9:7: "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart: for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife, whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is the portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun." Now this is not pagan Greek philosophy of an Epicurean that says eat and drink and be merry,

for tomorrow you die. He's not just saying live it up with wine, women, and song. Just, just do your thing. He's not saying that. But he is saying, my dear friend, that life comes from God, and God is a good God, and God wants you to enjoy life. A Christian is not one who lives the life of a recluse. We're going to see he's one who attacks life with enthusiasm.

### **III. The Profound Responsibilities of Life**

The perplexing riddles of life. The pleasant rewards of life. Ah, but the third thing, the third thing: the profound responsibilities of life are also taught in this book. Go to chapter 12 now and see the conclusion of it. Look, if you will, in verses 13-14: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter...." I mean, now he's going to wrap it up and put a string around it. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Do you see the word *duty*? The profound responsibilities of life. This book tells us four things about God. And there are four "therefores" that follow this.

#### **D. God Is Great; Therefore, We Should Live Humbly**

First of all, God is great, and, therefore, we should live humbly. This verse tells us fear God, fear God. That doesn't mean that you're going to understand God. But, oh, the reverence that we must have before God. Fear God. Lay your intellectual pride in the dust. You'll never ever figure life out. James Barry said, "Life is a long exercise, a long lesson in humility." God is a great God. Therefore, we should live life humbly.

#### **E. God Is Sovereign; Therefore, We Should Live Confidently**

Number two: God is a sovereign God. Therefore, we live life confidently. Go back to chapter 3 here for just a moment and look, if you will, in verse 11. Look at it. Chapter 3:11: "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time...." Oh, I love that. Oh, He's in charge. "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: he also hath set eternity in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." God is in it all! You may not understand it, my dear friend, but not a blade of grass moves without His permission. Not a drop of rain falls but what God is over all. And so, God is great, and I, I live life humbly. But God is sovereign, and I live my life confidently. You see, God knows He's doing. It may all, be all vanity to you, but it's not to Him. By the way, in your margin, I want to give you two verses here. Just put them in your margin. One is Romans 8:20 and the other is Romans 8:28. I love them. With all that we've said, you know, Solomon says, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." But now listen to Romans 8:20: "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope." The creation is made subject to vanity

(Romans 8:20). But Romans 8:28 says what? “And we know that God works all things together for good to them that love Him, who are the called according to His purpose.” The King James says, “...all things work together for good.” But, literally, God works all things together for good. God is sovereign, so I live confidently. I don’t have to understand it. I just know God. Warren Wiersbee said, “We don’t live by explanations; we live by promises.” You know, Einstein formulated the law of relativity – complicated and obtuse. I understand that other than Einstein there are only ten people who understand that law. It’s myself, and I don’t know who the other nine are, but.... Somebody asked Mrs. Einstein, said, “Mrs. Einstein, do you understand the law of relativity?” She said, “No, but,” she said, “I understand Dr. Einstein.” Pretty good. See, you don’t have to know how God runs this mighty universe to know God. Isn’t that wonderful? We can love and know God. There are things that God knows and loves that are far beyond us.

#### F. **God Is Good; Therefore, We Should Live Enthusiastically**

Thirdly, listen. God is great, so live humbly. God is sovereign, so live confidently. And, my dear friend, God is good, so live enthusiastically. Look, if you will, in chapter 2:24 again. Look at it. Chapter 2:24: “There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This I also saw, that it was from the hand of God.” God is a good God. And don’t you let the devil tell you otherwise. Look, if you will, in chapter 3:12 again: “I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God.” It is the gift of God. Now, my dear friend, listen. Are you perplexed and bewildered? Don’t let it make a cynic out of you. And, and don’t let it cause you to fail to enjoy the good of life. There’s enough difficulty in this life that comes to me, that when the good comes, folks, I’m going to enjoy it. If there’s food on your table today, go home and eat it and enjoy it. If you’ve got a job, go to your job and work and thank God that you have that job. Oh, my dear friend, if you’ve got grandchildren, pick them up and kiss them. If you’ve got a wife, just love her, love her. Look, if you will, in chapter 9:10. Look at it. Chapter 9:10. Well, verse 9: “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, and the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun.” And then, verse 10. I’m saying live life enthusiastically. Watch it. “And whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, with thy might...” Attack life. Squeeze all of the juice, the best, out of it. It comes from the hand of a good and a loving God. Psalm 84:11 says, “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” First Timothy 6:17 says, “He gives us richly all things to enjoy. Psalm 118:24, one of my favorite verses, “This is the day which the Lord hath made; I will rejoice and be glad in it.” You’ve only got one life to live. Dear

friend, when joy comes your way, remember that it comes from God. And remember that sorrow will come, too. And so, when the good comes, love it, enjoy it. It's from God. So is the sorrow.

#### G. **God Is Just; Therefore, We Should Live Righteously**

But, oh, my dear friend, listen. God is a great God. Live humbly. God is a sovereign God. Live confidently. God is a good God. Live enthusiastically. The word *enthusiasm* literally means "in theos, in God." And, last of all, God, my dear friend, is a just God, so we must live righteously. Go back to chapter 12 and look at it. I'm not talking about a happy-go-lucky life. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter (verse 13): Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." As a matter of fact, I don't think you can really be aware of the goodness of God unless you're aware of the holiness of God. *And God did not put you here on earth, primarily, to make you happy, but to make you holy.*

#### **Conclusion**

The conclusion of the whole matter is to fear God and keep His commandments. God is a just God and, therefore, we should live righteously. And in order to do that, we must receive Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. The key to all that I've said is in the Lord Jesus Christ. And with Christ in your heart, even, dear friend, when you cannot understand, you can undergo only through Christ. Heads are bowed. Eyes are closed. Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Oh, my dear friend, He is the embodiment of this God, who is a great God; the embodiment of this God, who is a sovereign God; the embodiment of this God, who is a good God and a just God. Would you like to receive Christ as your personal Savior? Do it today. Do it now. Say, "Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Give me a new nature. Make me your child. Give me a home in heaven and a purpose for living while I'm here." Lord God, I pray that many in this building today will say an everlasting yes to Jesus Christ and be born again. In His wonderful name, amen.