
Alright, what is up everybody? Are you guys good? Good. It's good to see all of you. If you are visiting or if you're a guest today, we are so glad you are here. We want to welcome you. I hope you hang around for the next several weeks as we begin this new series to kick-off a brand new year.

We are one church meeting in multiple locations, so I want to greet those of you here meeting at our Northwest campus, as well as those of you at North, West, and Downtown. It's so, so good to have you guys.

Each one of our campuses got to hear from their campus pastor last weekend—kind of a New Year's message. And those guys just did an incredible job. Can we express our appreciation for our campus pastors and the great, great job those guys did?

Well, before we jump into the content I want to tie a bow on 2017 and just kind of report to you a couple of things we were talking about at the tail end of the year, and where things game in at.

We had nearly 800 people go all-in last year in 2017, put their trust in God and follow Jesus. They made that public through baptism. That just never gets old. We celebrate that stuff around here all the time.

And we had 23 Christmas service across four different locations. I just recovered yesterday. We had a little over 16,400 people who came to our Christmas services. It was just incredible to see. I heard so many stories from many of you telling me about that coworker or family member or friend you invited and they came, and just the experience they had.

Who I really want to thank are those of you who served, those of you on staff and volunteers. There were over 1,000 of you who served in every area to make those services possible and special. You represented Jesus really well to all kinds of people who came to any one of our campuses. I genuinely want to thank you for that. Can we give it up for everybody who served?

Then I was talking to you about our year end giving all month long and what we wanted to do with that. We will be planting churches in Peru, and seeking out what God wants us to do to meet the needs in our own city.

I just want to give you three numbers. About 18 months ago we put a budget together for 2017. We estimated it to be somewhere around 16 million dollars for the year. In

December alone you gave around 2.9 million dollars, putting our overall giving for the year at just over 18 million dollars, which is incredible.

2017 projected giving: \$16 million

December giving: \$2.9 million

2017 total giving: \$18 million

I know those numbers sound really, really big and they are. I want you to know that you gave more than we anticipated and we take the stewardship of those dollars very seriously. As we were budgeting for 2018 we actually set our budget lower than what came in so we have a margin to be generous as a church.

We are going to be planting these churches in Peru. We are leaning in saying, "God, to whom much is given, much is required. How can we meet the needs of foster care families, adoption needs in our city? How can we step up and be a blessing?"

We are praying about and pursuing opportunities on the west side to get our West campus in a permanent facility in the foreseeable future. So West, we have not forgotten about you. We know you are setting up and tearing down in a middle school. So we are seeking out those opportunities. And we are praying about when and where God wants us to launch our next campuses.

I just want to thank you for your ongoing generosity. What your weekly generosity does is enable our church to speak to needs as they arise. We know there are going to be, unfortunately, some tragedies in 2018. There are going to be some hurricanes, some wild fires, and just some things that are going to pop up. As a church, we want to be able to speak to those things and be a blessing all over the world.

My desire is that we would have the kind of church that everybody in our city would be grateful that we are here, even though they don't believe what we believe. And every time they would meet somebody from Traders Point they would go, "I don't believe what they believe, and I don't value what they value, but those are some of the nicest, most genuine, authentic, gracious people I've ever met in my life. In fact, they are the best tippers in the world. They seem to be so genuine and so real."

I would love for this verse to be true of everybody in our church and our church collectively. Proverbs 11:25, "The generous will prosper; those who **refresh others** will themselves be refreshed." So when you give to a need of somebody and you feel good about it, that's what this is talking about. It is this idea of being refreshing. So I want to thank you for that.

Lastly, I mentioned a few weeks ago that our staff and elders were going to take the first week of this year to pray and fast, asking God to reveal some things in our

individual hearts and asking him to lead out in where he wants us to go, as a church, in 2018.

And so this past week we've been doing that. When I say fast I mean refraining from something we would normally enjoy—maybe a meal, maybe social media or entertainment—and take those moments when we would normally be doing that other thing and redirect them toward God, asking him to guide our steps. This past week was really powerful. The staff and elders were doing that. We opened up the worship center here at Northwest from 11 to 1 every day to do that.

About 3,000 of you signed up for the email subscriptions where we would send Bible readings to you to kind of prompt those times. If you missed it or if you would like to jump in on that go to this link and we will send those verses to you.

tpcc.org/dailybiblereading

I would encourage you to take sometime in the month of January to do that, if you haven't already.

If you have a Bible or a Bible app, go ahead and meet me in Ecclesiastes chapter 1. It is in the Old Testament. Today we are beginning a new series of messages I've been praying about for several months. I'm really, really excited about these messages and they are called *Under Review*.

Maybe you've heard that theme on Monday night football or in some other sport where there is a play that happens in real time—and things move really, really fast when you've got world class athletes on a field or on a court—and you don't really know what happened. You're kind of like, "Okay, that happened really fast. What call should we make?"

So was he inbounds or out of bounds? Was his foot on the line, or behind the line? Was it an incomplete pass, or was it a fumble? I don't know. It depends on what team you're cheering for. And that's not very objective. So let's call a time out. Let's put the play under review. Let's examine what happened so we know what really happened, so we know what to do next. Oftentimes the decision that is made when a play is under review can reverse the initial decision, or it's a game changer for the rest of the game.

Now, for those of you who are not sports fans, relax. This is not a series about sports. I'm just borrowing the idea. This idea can be true for almost anything in life. The policy, the application, the idea, that something needs to be put under review. What we mean by that is: let's examine where we've been so we can make a determination about the future. Here's how I want to say it all series long.

We need to review where we've **been** so we can know where to **go**.

Maybe you've made some New Year's resolutions this past week. Maybe you made a set of goals you want to go after during the New Year. I think that is fantastic. I hope you achieve all of them. One of the things that is true for me, and maybe it's true for you, is oftentimes I don't achieve all my resolutions or accomplish all of my goals. And part of it is because I haven't done a thorough enough evaluation of where I've been to determine where I need to go. I need to place my life under review from time to time.

The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes does this. So we're going to be walking through the content of this book of the Bible over the course of the next several weeks together. Now Ecclesiastes, if you have never read it, is one of the most unique and complicated books in the Bible. In fact, I think it even rivals the Book of Revelation for being one of the most difficult to read or understand, but for very different reasons.

Revelation is difficult to read and understand because of the apocalyptic literature in there. Apocalyptic literature is something we don't use anymore, so it is difficult to understand. Ecclesiastes is difficult to read and understand because of its structure and its tone.

There are so many moments in this book, and we're going to see this in a few minutes, where the author sounds hopeless and depressing. You're welcome. We're going to spend multiple weeks in this, and there are going to be times when he seems moody, brooding, and cynical.

If you've never read Ecclesiastes before and somebody just read this to you off a sheet of paper or a phone, you would probably not guess it was from the Bible—maybe a thesis from a philosophy class, or the journal entries of somebody on a deserted island, but not from the Bible.

Ecclesiastes kind of rambles and repeats itself at times or at least it appears to do so. The author has kind of a short attention span. Like he will be ranting about something and all of the sudden he is like, "Squirrel." And he goes over here and is ranting about this thing over here.

You're kind of like, "Man, it doesn't seem to have much of a structure around it. It appears to be unpredictable and unexpected." There is a practical reason for this. The ancient middle-eastern mindset would oftentimes communicate in such a way that was called spiraling. So we communicate chronologically. We communicate in a line. But they communicated in a circle. He is spiraling around something, so it appears to be somewhat random.

But there is also, I think, another reason. Ecclesiastes just mirrors life. Life is kind of like that. It is unexpected, and at times it seems to kind of ramble, and seems to repeat itself. What I love about Ecclesiastes is it just says it like it is. There is no filter. It just

places it out there. For that reason, and maybe that reason alone, some of you are going to love this. And some of you won't.

There are a bunch of scholars who say that they believe this particular book of the Bible was written with nonbelievers in mind first. Meaning, if you are not a Christian, if you are not sure what you believe about God or where you stand with him there is going to be a lot in here you'll resonate with.

Regardless of where you may be in that spiritual journey, I think it's going to have wisdom for all of us. This is one of the books of wisdom literature in the Bible. So the author is giving us—wherever you may be on that spiritual journey—he is going to give us some wisdom.

So let's start in chapter 1, verse 1. He kind of identifies himself without telling us his name. He says, "These are the **words** of the Teacher, King David's son, who **ruled** in Jerusalem." So he is telling us who he is, but he never specifically gives us his name.

Now one of the reasons why it is important to understand who wrote this is because when you know who communicated it, it helps to know the interpretation. Sort of like—have you ever gotten a text message from somebody and you don't have their name in your contact list? And it's just like a random number that pops up on your screen followed by a short paragraph of text and you have no clue what they are talking about.

So you kind of very tentatively type in, "Who is this?" And they go, "It's your mom, stupid," or whatever. As soon as they text back their name you are like, "This makes sense. Now that I know who wrote it, I know how to understand it."

It's the same thing with this book of the Bible. Solomon, without telling us his name, tells us who he is. Number one, he says, "I'm King David's son," and David had a few sons. Let's narrow it down even more. It says, "I ruled in Jerusalem," and there are not very many who did that. And as we read here there are not very many of David's sons who had the resources and the experiences that his son Solomon had. Next to Jesus, Solomon was the wisest man to ever live. But that does not mean he didn't do some very foolish things (and he did).

He wrote over 3,000 proverbs. He wrote 1,005 songs in the book Song of Songs. He oversaw the building of God's temple, which took him seven years. And get this—he had 700 wives and 300 girlfriends. I don't even know how you keep up with that. Valentine's Day would have been a nightmare. The point in mentioning all of that is that he had no limitation to his resources, power, and experiences.

Kind of frame this up. If you were to take Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Stephen Hawking, and Hugh Hefner and somehow fuse them into one man, that's our boy Solomon. If there

was anyone who was ever set up in the history of the world to find meaning, fulfillment, and purpose it would be this guy.

He had acquired volumes of knowledge, he had amassed vast amounts of wealth, he had pursued all these incredible experiences and yet he still came up short. My personal opinion is he wrote the book of Song of Songs as a young man, he wrote Proverbs in middle age, and I believe he wrote Ecclesiastes as an older man.

He is basically putting his life under review, and he is saying, "I'm not condoning all I have done. I'm actually telling you all I regret. I'm actually telling you I pursued all these things, I had all these opportunities in front of me, and yet the meaning of life and the fulfillment I was looking for just kept eluding me. So learn from my experience."

In verse 2 he is going to say this word—he is going to say over and over again. "Everything is **meaningless**," says the Teacher, "completely **meaningless!**" He is going to say that word about 38 or 39 times throughout the whole book.

I said that word a few times this last week, waking up to negative 12 degree temperatures. I looked out the window and was like, "Meaningless, this is awful."

It's a difficult word to pin down. This isn't a very good translation of the original Hebrew word, primarily because we don't have a good English equivalent. This is about the best we could do in translating it, but this doesn't fully capture it. It actually comes from the Hebrew word *hevel*.

hevel: breath, vapor, or puff of smoke

So the big idea behind this is that life is like a vapor. It's like your breath on those negative 12 degree mornings; it is there and then it is gone. Don't misinterpret it because he is going to use the word a ton. The reason he is using it over and over again is to get our attention. He is trying to communicate something to us.

Don't misunderstand. When Solomon says life is meaningless, that does not mean life has no purpose because that would actually contradict the conclusions he is going to make all throughout the book. He is not saying this to lead us to despair. He is saying this to give us some perspective. And that is very, very different. He goes on in verse 3.

"What do people get for all their hard work," and here is another phrase he is going to use over and over again—about 29 times in the book, "**under the sun?**" What do we get for being under the sun?

So every time he uses this phrase it is a reference to your Outlook Calendar. It's a phrase for your daily activities, your routine. We've all got one. We wake up, take a shower, eat some breakfast, and have a daily commute. We go through our activities

during the day. We have some dinner, meet some friends, maybe we watch a little TV, we get up and maybe we do it all again. That's what that phrase is—everything under the sun, our daily routines.

And then he says something very, very sobering but it's meant to give us perspective. "Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles. Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea. Everything is wearisome beyond description.

"No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. History merely repeats itself. **It has all been done before.** Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, 'Here is something new!' But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, **no one will remember** what we are doing now."

It's a sobering thought, but it is true. He is basically saying: There are generations that came before us and we don't remember who they were or what they did. There are going to be generations who come after us who won't really remember who we are and what we did.

And every generation has a little bit of what C.S. Lewis called chronological snobbery. It's this idea that we think we've got it all figured out and we'll fix what previous generations broke. We'll discover and lay out what previous generations couldn't. And then the generations behind us will think the same things about us. And he's like, "It's going to go by really quickly. The earth is still here, but there is a new set of people."

I follow this account on Instagram called History Photographed and it is these pictures of rare moments in history. It's really interesting. This picture came across my feed a few weeks ago. It's a picture of the streets of New York City in the early 1900's. Somebody colorized it.

I was kind of looking at it and immediately it jumped out at me that all these people seem to be really busy, and they seem to have their nice clothes on and rushing to maybe an appointment, off to work, or to meet a friend. I thought to myself, if I could just zero in on one lady, I wonder what was going on in her day. I wonder what her relationships were like, and I wonder what she was worried about. I wonder what her New Year's resolutions had been that year and how she was doing with them.

I thought, "You know what? I bet everybody on that day, they are living their life under the sun and everything is consuming them." And then I had this sobering thought, "No one in this picture is still with us. They are all gone, and nobody remembers what happened

that day like where she was going. And their family members probably don't even remember who they were." This is what Solomon was saying.

Mark Twain would say it way more bluntly and not as nice. "The world will lament you for an hour and forget you forever." Thank you, Mark Twain. I sure appreciate that.

I don't like that and I don't like how it is phrased, yet there is some truth to it. I can vaguely remember my great grandparents, but I can't tell you the names of my great-great grandparents. And you probably couldn't either. Even if you could—and if you did the Ancestry.com thing over the holidays that doesn't count—even if you could, could you tell us what they enjoyed? Could you tell us what their laugh sounded like? Probably not. And that's not been, when you look at the history of the world, all that long ago.

And he basically says, "Listen, this is true for everybody listening to this right now regardless of how old or young they are." The reality is in about 75 years from today all of the knowledge you've been acquiring will be lost to a bad memory. Your experiences will be forgotten. Everything you've been striving so hard to acquire will end up in somebody else's hands, a garage sale, or a garbage bag.

The people at your funeral, they'll come, they'll mourn, they will pay their respects and say a few nice things about you—at least we hope they do—but then they're going to rush back off to whatever they had going on that day. And maybe later that night they'll forget all about you as they watch whatever they're watching on Netflix that night.

I know what some of you are thinking right now. You're saying, "I thought church was supposed to be a happy place." Welcome to Depression Point Christian Church where we aim to please.

I want you to hang with me. Solomon is taking us on a journey. He knows what he is doing. He is the wisest man to ever live. He knows what he is doing. He is basically saying: I'm trying to awaken your senses, sober you up, so you can see what you cannot readily see—what is right in front of you. And he does what I think is a pretty effective job of it.

What he is going to do largely in chapter 2 is he is going to take us on this journey. He is going to say: Here is my life experiment. I had all these resources and opportunities in front of me. So I started to pursue where I could find meaning, fulfillment, and purpose. He says: First stop was knowledge. It was the intellect. I thought if I could learn as much as I could, that's the secret to life.

Look at what he says in chapter 1, verse 13. "I devoted myself to search for **understanding** and to explore by wisdom **everything** being done under heaven."

So back in 1 Kings right after Solomon had become king, God gives him the opportunity to ask for anything he wants. Instead of asking for a thing, he asks for wisdom. And God is so pleased with his answer that he gives him all the wisdom in the world, and then some. In fact God even says this to him in chapter 3, verse 12. "I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else **has had** or ever **will have!**"

In other words, nobody can rival the knowledge and intellect that Solomon had acquired. He wins at Jeopardy every time, he aced his SATs, he got a full ride academic scholarship, and all of that. The point is I know there are some very bright people listening to this right now. At every one of our campuses we have some very smart people, and that's fantastic. You're not as smart as Solomon. You're not even in the same ballpark.

Now listen to where his intellectualism led him in chapter 1, verse 16. "I said to myself, 'Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them.' So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. **But I learned firsthand** that pursuing all this is like **chasing the wind**. The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow."

So Solomon said: Look, I had all this wisdom and I even tried to add to it by doing study on my own. And so Solomon read all these books, and he acquired all this knowledge. He had a subscription to *Wired* magazine and two other science journals. And his brain is like a sponge absorbing all kinds of information because he thinks by learning as much as he can that's where fulfillment, meaning, and purpose can be found.

And his conclusion was that he was chasing something he could never fully grasp. It was like he was running after the wind, and he couldn't quite get it. He would get right up to it and he would try to wrap his arms around it, and it would evaporate right in front of him.

I think the reason why is this: Information never guarantees transformation.

Now information is not bad, but it never guarantees the transformation you and I are looking for. There are some extremely smart people in the world today, but that doesn't mean they are happy people. And knowledge very rarely has the power to change the human heart.

Just because you know something doesn't mean you're going to do anything with it, that it's going to change anything about the way you've been living. The reason I know that is that we all know some things that we never do. Just because you know some stuff doesn't mean that it's going to guarantee that it's going to change anything about your behavior.

So we all know we shouldn't text and drive, but many of us still do. We all know we should save some money for the future, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we are. We know about that apple cider cleanse. Oh yeah, everybody's talking about that—we ain't doing that. We all know some things but knowledge, in and of itself, doesn't necessarily change anything. This is the conclusion Solomon came to.

So he said: I exhausted that pathway. That didn't lead to what I thought. So let me try something else in my life experiment. He says: What about if I just had a good time? So he says in chapter 2, verse 1, "I said to myself, 'Come on, let's try **pleasure**. Let's look for the "good things" in life.'"

In other words, let's have an incredible party. Maybe that's where I can find meaning, fulfillment, and purpose. This is starting to sound like some of your college years, isn't it? Like your freshman year, "I'm going to study," and then your sophomore year it's like, "Let's just party."

So Solomon gets on his private jet and heads off to Vegas for the weekend. He's down there in the snake pit at the Indy 500 drinking something out of a funnel and inhaling something out of a bong. He assumes, like so many, that if he can smoke it, shoot it, slam it, sip it, or sleep with it, then he can find the satisfaction he's been looking for.

So he decides to just saturate his life with as much pleasure as he possible can: wine, women, and song. And listen, Solomon doesn't just party, he *partees*, alright? And I know what some of you are thinking. Some of you are like, "I'm not so convinced. I don't know. He's probably not just partying right. If he was to come with me to some of my raids, or to the night club I go to, then he'd actually find fulfillment."

Guess what? You've never been to a party like the one Solomon threw. You read all about it in 1 Kings. It talks about all the food he had in his palace. Some scholars believe he had upwards of 15 to 20 thousand people in his palace on a daily basis and all they were doing was partying: wine, women, the finest foods, songs, and all of that.

This was the conclusion Solomon came to in chapter 2, verse 1. He says this: "But I found that this, too, was **meaningless**"

In other words, the party ended and he woke up the next day. And he was tired of waking up in the back of a chariot, next to a stranger, with a hangover and another bad tattoo. And he's like: You know what? This ain't working. This isn't where I'm going to find meaning and purpose either. And it just left him feeling really, really empty.

So his life experiment leads him down another pathway. He says: Okay, if the world of intellect isn't it, and partying isn't it, maybe I'm going to find my meaning and purpose in good old fashioned hard work. And he becomes a workaholic.

Look what it says in verse 4. “I also tried to **find meaning** by building huge homes,” and notice there is an s at the end of that word, “for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards.” So if you think you’ve got a nicely landscaped yard, Solomon is like: Take a look at my vineyard: “I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves.”

Actually, the craters of these reservoirs are still there today. You can go to the southwestern side of Jerusalem. There are all these craters in the ground. They are referred to as Solomon’s pools. They weren’t so much his swimming pools, but they were his reservoirs to water all the national parks and gardens and to provide water for all these buildings he built.

He basically comes to this conclusion in verse 8. He says: I had everything a man could desire. Can you imagine having that much power? That many resources to just go, “Whatever it is I desire I can demand it, and I can get it.”?

So Solomon threw himself into his work. That’s what some of us have done. Some of us couldn’t find it in the world of knowledge, some of us couldn’t find it in the party scene, so we just said, “Forget relationships. Forget all that. I’m just going to find my sense of meaning in my career and hopefully that’s where I’ll get it.”

And in verse 9 he says this: “So I became **greater** than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in work, a reward for all my labors. But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. **There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.**” So this is his conclusion of the matter. It’s his life experiment and it’s taken him down these different paths.

You and I may not have the position, the platform, or the resources Solomon had but the thirst within us to find meaning, fulfillment, and purpose is the same. Our desires are the same. So we’re chasing after whatever it is that might bring fulfillment into our lives. We’re doing it even right now. Even this week we’ll be doing it. That’s not a bad thing. God has placed that within you. God has placed that desire for something more within you.

The question is: Where are we going to find it? Have you ever found yourself just kind of like restless, and maybe bored? You’re just like, “I need a fix,” so you just like say, “Well, maybe if I buy something. If I find something shiny or new or upgrade that thing,” and maybe it gives you a little bit of a fix for a moment but it dissipates and goes away. We’re always in that mode of trying to fulfill that thing that is empty within each one of us.

Nobody has ever walking into their closet and said, “I need a new pair of jeans because my last pair just disintegrated. I need a new pair of jeans right now.” No, we go and buy a partially disintegrated pair of jeans just because we need another fix. We don’t buy things, most of us, out of need. We buy them because we’re looking for something to bring meaning, fulfillment, and purpose to our lives.

So I want you to finish this sentence right here. Maybe you can pull out your phone, take a picture of the screen to take this with you and meditate on this next week.

If I could only get more of _____, then life would be better.

How would you finish that sentence? Listen. There are no wrong answers here—just honest ones. And be really honest, where you are now at the beginning of 2018. And it could be a number of things. Actually, it is for me.

If I could only get more of _____, then life would be better.

Now we are starting to get at that thing you’re chasing after to get meaning, fulfillment, and purpose into your life. I’m just telling you, that whatever you are filling that blank with, if it’s anything under the sun, if it’s anything finite, if it’s anything future generations will have forgotten about long, long ago—then it’s not going to fulfill you.

And the reason why I know that is because of these two little words right here. Once you get what you get that you think will make your life better, we always ask this: Now what? Well, now what? I finally caught up to that thing I was running after. I got it, now what? Because it didn’t do for me what I thought it was going to do.

So I got into the college I really wanted to get into. Okay, well now what? I finally got the guy or the girl of my dreams, and I’m actually realizing they’re not as perfect as I thought they would be. Now what? I finally got the job, the promotion, or the income. Now what? I finally bought the house, took the trip, or achieved the goal. Now what?

You see, the thing about Ecclesiastes, the frustration and the depression and the cynicism that’s just kind of existing in this book is not because these are explaining Solomon’s current state of mind, it’s because he is going: I know what it’s like to be chasing after this stuff, and that always leads to cynicism and depression and to just feeling like man, life is a punch in the gut, and when am I going get that thing that’s finally going to fulfill me?

He is not trying to depress us. He is trying to draw our eyes up to see something that is more lasting, and more fulfilling, and more eternal than what is just right in front of us. And the answer here isn’t that you would just suppress all of your desires, or that you would feel bad about wanting them. I know many of you may have heard that in church

before. That is not what I'm going to say and that is not the conclusion Solomon comes to.

In fact, the conclusion Solomon comes to at the end of chapter 2 just might surprise you. Check this out. "So I decided there is **nothing better** than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work." Well that is unexpected given what he just said. But then this next sentence is the key. "**Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God.** For who can eat or enjoy anything **apart from him?**" And that is the key.

What is he saying? He is basically saying intellect, your knowledge, having a good time—he is saying finding satisfaction in your work and doing something worthwhile, all of those things are not bad things in and of themselves. In fact they are very, very good things.

But when we turn those things into ultimate things, when we try to find meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in them and in them alone they will always dissipate right in front of us like a breath or a vapor. We'll catch up to them, wrap our arms around them, and they will evaporate right in front of us and leave us right back where we were before.

He says: No, no, no, the key is to acknowledge the author of those things. That God is the one who gave us the knowledge. He is the one who invented a good time. God is the one who invented work (actually work came before the fall, not after. It was something where God said: This is something that will give you a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction). Just don't chase those things apart from me.

Here is what he is doing. He is not trying to lead you to despair. He is trying to get you to see beyond the sun. Instead of just waking up and with our head down chasing after whatever it is we are chasing, we look up periodically living our lives from an eternal perspective. To recognize there is a God beyond the sun who sent his Son down under the sun to give us meaning and purpose and to help us to know there is way more to this life than what we're learning, what we're experiencing, and what we do.

And maybe you've never heard that before. Maybe you're like, "I just thought all this was like, anything that's fun I should just stop it and feel guilty about working hard." No, no, no, just do it through the right perspective. You invite God into those things and you say, "God, help me to actually use my knowledge, not just to puff myself up and make other people feel bad because they're not as smart as me, but to actually use it to help others.

"To actually enjoy myself so I can encourage other people in the process. To do something worthwhile to make this world a better place, knowing that I'm going to spend far more time in eternity than in the eight or nine decades I'm going to spend on this planet."

Jesus said it himself in John 10:10. I don't know that we believe him, but we should. "The thief's purpose is to **steal** and **kill** and **destroy**." Here is what we may not believe. "My purpose is to give them a **rich** and **satisfying** life."

So Jesus says he died to give you that. That's what he is offering to you. And this is why, as Christ followers, we should be the most joyful, most authentic, happiest, most generous, most gracious people on the planet—because we are living our lives through an eternal perspective.

Is life still hard? Absolutely. Will you have days where you'll wake up and shake your fist at those negative 12 degree temperatures and say, "Meaningless."? You bet. But we live our lives through an eternal perspective of a heavenly Father who sent his Son to give us something we can never achieve on our own.

So here at the beginning of a brand new year, can I just ask you, "What words are you saying to yourself?" You know what I'm talking about, the pep talk that you give yourself in the mirror every morning. The words you say to yourself in the car as you drive to work. Where are you finding meaning, purpose, and fulfillment? God simply wants you to continue to lean into those things, continue to pursue those things, but to his glory. If you ever wonder what that means, it simply means acknowledging him and inviting him into those things because he wants to bring meaning to them.

I hope you'll join us as we continue this journey in the next few weeks.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you right now and I thank you for this sobering book of the Bible that leads us to hope and leads us to joy. I pray that you just bless our study in it. I pray that as we journey through this and put our lives under review, that we could examine where we've been so we know where to go.

And I pray most importantly that we would invite you, an eternal God, a good, good heavenly Father, into all our pursuits, no matter what they may be because you, and you alone, bring meaning to them.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.