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Alright, good to see everybody today. You guys good? Good. Good to see you. I want to welcome all of our guests and those of you visiting with us at all of our campuses. And I just want to say hello to North, Downtown, West and anybody watching online today. Man, it's so good to have you. Would you just kind of show them some love right now. Make them feel welcome.

Really, really good to be back with you after being away for a couple of weeks. Didn't Petie Kinder do a great job continuing this series a couple of weeks ago? Petie is a great communicator, one of our teaching pastors, and a great leader around here. He oversees all of our campuses and he's just a good, good friend. I appreciate him.

You guys enjoy Kenny Hart last week? Did you guys enjoy having him? Isn't he great? Man that guy is as much fun to hang out with as you would think he would be. Can I just say that if Kenny got up here and just read the phone book, I would rededicate my life to Christ? I really would. He's just that good.

Thank you for showing those guys so much love and listening so well to them.

I want to encourage you before we jump into this last week to go to this link sometime today or tomorrow and check this out. We are [tpcc.org](http://tpcc.org) and our 2017 annual report is online and available for you to look through. What that basically is it's just a highlight reel of last year. So some facts, some figures, some numbers and things to celebrate that we've watched God do in and through our church. And I just want to thank you for your continued trust and generosity. We're looking forward to seeing how God is going to build on that and what he's going to do in 2018.

Well today at all of our campuses, if you're brand new, we are on the final week of a series of messages that we've been in since the beginning of the year called *Under Review*. We've been working our way through the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes.

And as we get started I just wonder how many of you would agree with this statement right here: Life doesn't always cooperate.

Anybody agree with that statement? Right? Anybody—oh, applause. We very much agree with that. How many of you had a week this last week that just didn't cooperate? Plans that didn't come together, conversations that didn't go the way that you thought that they would—I mean, life would be so much better if it would just get the memo and get on the same page as you are.

But life doesn't always play that way. It doesn't always cooperate. This has really kind of been one of the dominate themes that Solomon has been communicating to us all study long: life just doesn't always cooperate. So what are we supposed to do with that?

See, if you are coming into this brand new, Solomon is this guy who late in life sits down and he begins to put some thoughts down in a journal, so to speak. This journal is about 3,000 years old and he begins to just examine his life and some of the decisions that he has made and some of the mistakes that he has made. And the thing that God has revealed to him—he's really kind of giving us where true happiness and fulfillment can be found and where it most certainly won't be found.

And Solomon was not just some ordinary Joe. He was one of the most successful, wealthiest, powerful people to ever walk the face of the planet. He had it all. And yet he keeps coming up short.

And he comes to this season of his life where he just isn't as worried so much about what other people think of him. So he just kind of lays it all out there. He doesn't sugar coat it. He doesn't dance around the issue just kind of hoping that you'll catch what he is saying. No, Solomon just says it like it is, which is one of the reasons why some of the content we read in Ecclesiastes is so shocking and oftentimes complex.

Solomon, as a younger man, started off well. And he loved God and he met this great girl and they fell in love and they had this passionate relationship. You can read all about it in Song of Songs. But somewhere along the line, we don't exactly know when and we don't exactly know why but that marriage didn't last. It fell apart. So he jumps to another one and then another one and then another one.

He ends up walking down the aisle like 700 times. And he had all of these flings on the side. And you would think that he would find some kind of compatibility. Like out of 1,000 women you'd think that he'd be able to find someone who was compatible with him, somebody who would fulfill him, but no one ever did.

See Solomon sort of did his own thing in mid-life. He sort of traded all that in and he pursued all of this knowledge and these accomplishments and money and pleasure. And he thought that out all of these things one of them has got to bring purpose and fulfillment, but it just left him feeling emptier than ever.

So what Solomon is doing is he is taking us back and he's describing to us what life was like without God. And please don't misunderstand. Solomon is not in despair late in life, he's not questioning God then. He's not saying: Hey, I'm not quite sure that I believe or I'm not quite sure that I trust in God. No, he's describing what it was like during mid-life for him to live his life as he has walked away from God. And he's describing the questions that he was asking then and the feelings of despair that he was feeling then.

But see, I believe that late in life Solomon came back to God. As we conclude this study in Ecclesiastes I want you to know that he is not going to leave us hanging in despair. On the last page of his journal he is going to provide some extremely clear conclusions as well as an invitation to you and to me. He's not going to leave us any doubt about where he currently stands.

I love the fact that Solomon comes back to God late in life because it should say to you, whoever you are, that it doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter what your past looks like, it doesn't matter the kind of shame that you might be carrying around with you, that you have hope as well. You can come back to God as well. It doesn't matter—no matter what.

So as we come to chapters 11 and 12, Solomon's writing in these last two chapters of his journal really reminds me of his writing in the book of Proverbs, which is another book that he wrote. It's this wisdom literature because Proverbs is sort of like these short, insightful statements that are packed with all kinds of principles and life application. That's what the last two chapters of Ecclesiastes remind me of.

Really, Solomon is going to communicate this to us. We don't oftentimes want to hear this, but it's true none-the-less. No matter how hard you and I try we can't control life. No matter how hard we try. In fact, if you were to sit down maybe later today and if you were to create two lists—one list is everything that you can control in life and the other list is everything you can't control—the list of the things that you can't control would far outweigh the list of things that you can.

I mean, just think about all of the things that we simply cannot control in life. Now that doesn't mean that we don't have some responsibility, it doesn't mean that we don't work hard, it doesn't mean that we don't set goals, but it just means that we come to this place of humility that goes, "Man, there is just so much that I simply don't have any control over."

I can't control what is going on in North Korea right now. I can't control what is going on in the stock market. I can't control what's going on in Washington. I can't control what's happening with terrorism around the world. I just can't control it.

There are so many things about my own body that I can't control. There are all kinds of things going on inside me that I just can't control. My heart is just beating away. I'm not telling it to. My lungs are breathing. I'm not commanding them to. There are things going on in my body right now that I'm not aware of nor do I understand. There is way more in life that I can't control.

The sooner that we come to understand that the sooner we'll come to this place of wisdom in our lives, that's what Solomon is communicating here in these last couple of chapters. What are we supposed to do with this? What are we supposed to do when life doesn't play nice? Just because life doesn't always go as we had planned, it doesn't mean that there isn't one.

So let's look at this starting off in verse 1 of chapter 11. Solomon is going to say something kind of unusual here. He says, "Send your grain across the seas, **and in time**, profits will flow back to you."

Now, some of you might have read this in a translation, perhaps growing up, that said it this way, "Cast your bread upon the waters..." How many of you have ever heard that phrase before? A handful of us have.

I remember when I was growing up in church, at the youth group that I went to I was talking to one of the volunteers, youth sponsors, and I was struggling with something. I don't remember what it was, but I was talking to him and he offered me some counsel. He looked at me and he said, "You know, Aaron, sometimes you just need to cast your bread upon the waters."

And I had no idea what he was talking about, alright? But here's the thing. I didn't want him to know that so I just pretended like I did. Have you ever done that? Has somebody ever given you some counsel and you had no clue what they were talking about, but you were like, "Wow, that is good. That is good. Let me write that down with my imaginary pin in my imaginary journal."

I had no clue what he was talking about, "You want me to feed the ducks?" Like, "What do you want me to do," alright? This is an odd phrase and we don't often use it now-a-days. In Solomon's day it was very, very common because they lived in an agrarian culture.

And so he's basically saying this: If you are a farmer there are only two things you can do with your grain. You can keep it and make a sandwich, which will feed you one time, or you can put it on a merchant ship and send it off and invest it somewhere and it will actually yield a much greater return. But if you put it on the ship, then it's outside of your control, it's outside of your supervision and any number of things could happen to it. It's a risk you have to take.

So Solomon is basically saying to you and to me—it has nothing to do with grain and ships for us today, but there is application for you in this. He's basically saying: Hey man, sometimes you've got to live your life boldly under circumstances that you simply cannot control. You've got to move beyond your comfort zone and you've got to take some risks from time to time. In fact, that's actually the prerequisite for growth of any kind.

I would simply say this. Man, just take a few seconds right now and just ask yourself this question: What's **one thing**, like one thing... I did this this last week. I came up with like 20 things. But what's the one thing I know I need to do—because it's been on my to-do list for a really, really long time. It's been rattling around the back of my head for a really long time, but I haven't done anything about it yet— (or say).

Uh-oh, I've been putting it off.

And then this is the application of this verse. Why have you been putting it off? Not because you're excited about it, not because you can't even see the benefit of it—you're putting it off

because there is some risk behind it. What if you do that thing and you actually lose what you currently have? What if you do that thing and it doesn't go as you had planned? What if you say that thing and it actually doesn't get received like you wanted to and it actually makes the situation worse. It requires boldness.

I would simply say that you've got to begin to ask God for wisdom and say, "God, what is that one thing that you've been telling me to do, your Spirit has been telling me to do it or to say it—to have that conversation—but I just keep kicking the can down the road on it and I need to have the boldness to do it?" Now, some personality types—I get it. The way that some of us are wired that is extremely difficult to do.

Other personality types—you do this too much, alright? You're taking too many risks and Solomon gets to you in verse 2. He says, "But divide your investments among **many places**, for you do not know what risks might lie ahead."

So he's telling us what any good financial advisor would: Hey, don't put all of your eggs in one basket. You need to diversify your portfolio. Build some margin into your life to absorb the unexpected.

And then he says in verse 3, "When clouds are heavy, the rains come down." In other words, when you see the clouds getting dark, you know what is coming. However, "Whether a tree falls north or south, it stays where it falls."

Now this isn't one of those riddles. You know the ones. Like, if a tree falls in the woods and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a noise? That's not what he's talking about. He's simply saying this: Sometimes life will give you a clue of what is getting ready to happen next and sometimes life doesn't ask your opinion.

Sometimes you see the storm clouds coming and you can take cover and sometimes a tree falls and you don't know why it fell in the direction that it did, but there it lies. In other words, there is no use crying over spilled milk. It happens. What are you going to do next?

Here's basically what he is saying: Life is unpredictable.

Life is unpredictable and there are good things that come into our lives that are unpredictable and maybe we didn't even deserve them but we were actually the recipients of them and there are bad things that come into our lives. That's just part of life. And it's not because you've sinned or because somebody else sinned and it's not because God is mad at you. It just sort of happens.

Several years ago there was this big tree that had fallen not far from our house—behind our house—and it fell over a creek, almost perfectly, to where it created this natural bridge. And I loved that tree. I didn't go out there to cut it down. It just like fell into place where it was this

beautiful, natural bridge over this creek. In fact our family took family pictures on it a couple of years ago. You can see this massive tree over this creek—beautiful imagery behind it.

I loved that tree. I'd go back there early mornings or late at night with my Bible, maybe my journal and just sit on the tree as the creek was flowing underneath and I was like, "Thank you, God, for giving me this tree. This is just amazing. And I had all of these great plans for it. Like one day Lindsay and I were going to take family pictures with our grandkids on it. I thought, "This is incredible."

Then late one Indiana spring all of the rains came and flood waters rose and when it all receded I went back there with my Bible and journal and somebody stole my tree. I felt really angry about it. Like, "What happened to it?" Literally I thought somebody had stolen it. I thought somebody had come through, cut it up, and taken it away. But, no, the floodwaters came and flushed it away like a toothpick and I was just like, "Why did you do that, God? I thought you gave me the tree."

Listen, the blessing of it didn't have anything to do with me and the taking away didn't have anything to do with me. I just enjoyed it while I had it. And you know, sometimes we just have to come to that place in our lives where there are blessings that flow in and sometimes there are difficulties that come into our lives.

So when bad things happen, we need to face them with humility. Don't let them send you into a tailspin. But when good things happen, man let them make you grateful and be generous with them. That's what Solomon is saying.

He goes on in verse 4. He says, "Farmers who wait for **perfect** weather **never** plant." There is no such thing as perfect weather. "If they watch every cloud, they never harvest."

What's he talking about here? He's talking about worry. And worry is that thing that robs you and me of potential opportunities and blessings in our lives. I'd even take it a step further. Worry is the thing that robs you of spiritual growth and emotional health. Worry is constantly knocking at the front door of your life every single day. There is always something to be worried about. When you crack the door open to worry—the front door—it will come in and trust in God will always sneak out the back door.

If you are waiting for the perfect set of circumstances to act on anything, then you'll be waiting for a really long time because there is no such thing.

He goes on in verse 5 and he says, "Just as you cannot understand the path of the wind or the mystery of a tiny baby growing in its mother's womb, so you **cannot understand** the activity of God," he doesn't say it's difficult to understand, or hard to understand—you'll get there eventually. He says you cannot understand the activity of God, "who does all things."

Paul would write something very similar in Romans, chapter 11. He would kind of throw out this rhetorical question to us. He would ask, “Who can understand the mind of God?” And he was not expecting anybody to raise his hand. He wasn’t expecting anybody to go, “Oh, I think I have the answer to that.” It’s a rhetorical question. The answer is: nobody does because God is infinite in his nature, which means that he doesn’t have a beginning date and he doesn’t have an ending date.

And I can’t understand that because I do. I have a beginning date and one day I’ll have an expiration date. If I’m lucky it will be about after 90 years on this planet. Who am I to think that I can come anywhere close to the knowledge and the perspective that God has.

He just simply says: Man, there are just some things in life that you’ll never fully grasp or understand because we just don’t have the perspective and the mindset of God.

And I don’t know about you but the younger I was the more answers I thought that I had, and then the older that I get the more I grow in wisdom but the fewer answers I have. Go figure.

So answers—like if you get an answer to everything that probably means that you have a deficiency in wisdom, because wisdom is really slow to speak. Wisdom asks more questions than offers answers. Wisdom doesn’t make accusations. So what Solomon is trying to get us to do is that he is trying to get us to settle down and grow in wisdom.

He says: Listen, man. You can’t understand the mind of God but here’s what you can do. You can lean in and you can invite the wisdom of God into your life over a period of time.

See, life should be a blessing. The years and the decades that go by—hey, man, don’t resent growing older. See it as an opportunity to grow in wisdom.

In the past 20 years of being a pastor I’ve noticed three things, generally, about myself and about others. These three things right here that we’re all kind of wanting to know about. The first one:

We want to know what God wants us to do.

Anybody want to know what God wants you to do today? We call that God’s will, right? We say, “Hey, what does God want me to do? Does he want me to take this job or that job? Does he want me to move over here or stay over here? Does he want me to continue to rent or does he want me to buy? Does he want me to start that relationship or not? What does God want me to do?”

This next thing that we all want to know is: We want to know why God doesn’t intervene.

Why doesn’t God intervene in my life? Why didn’t he answer my prayer immediately when I asked him?

Here's the third thing: We want to grow spiritually, I've never met anybody who doesn't want to grow, but we aren't sure how. We're not exactly sure what it means to grow in our lives as followers of Jesus.

Let me say this. All three of those things cannot be answered quickly. They come with, as one author puts it, "A long obedience in the same direction." It is going to require lots of experiences. It is going to require lots of valleys. It's going to require us to experience failure, which many of us are terrified over.

And as we learn to trust God... Listen to me. It's not just been the good times when I've grown. If I'm being honest, it's been through the really difficult seasons of life where I've grown the most. And it scares me to say that out loud because I don't want to go through a bad experience.

But man it's true because in those moments what ends up happening is you stop leaning so much on yourself. In those instances you are so humbled you're like, "Man, I don't have any answers anymore," and you begin to lean into the wisdom of God.

See, here's the thing. God wants to give you the answers to all three of those issues. He's not withholding those. He's not hiding from you. He wants you to know his will for your life.

He wants you to know that he's just as upset and ticked off at what's going on in the world as you are. In fact, he's way more upset about it than you are. And he says: this is what I'm going to do about it and this is what I've done about it and here's how I'm going to make things right.

And God wants you to grow spiritually. God wants you to grow in wisdom and to be surefooted—to be the kind of person that other people would look at you and say, "Man, I don't know that I believe what you believe, but my goodness you're a person of deep waters. What is your secret? How do you live life so resiliently when life keeps punching you in the face? How do you do that?"

God says: I want you to grow.

See, you and I, we cannot know the mind of God but he is so gracious that he gave us a book and he said: this is what I want you to know about me and about the world in which you live. The question is: are you reading it? And are you reading it and asking him, "God, what do you want to say to me through it?" That's the issue.

So I'm really, really excited about our daily Bible reading. I hope that you are on this. If you are not just go to:

*[www.tpcc.org/dailybiblereading](http://www.tpcc.org/dailybiblereading)*



We are trying to make this as easy as we can. We do not want to just grow wider as a church. We want to grow deeper as we grow wider. And if you're just waiting... I mean the average, committed church goer, statistically, comes to church 1.4 times per month. So less than half the time people who consider themselves committed goers are here, less than half the time.

And so if you're just coming and you're just listening to a message and this is the only Bible you're getting all week—you're not going to grow, you're likely not going to discover what God's will is for your life, and you're going to continue to live really cynical and bitter about what's going on in the world, because God says some stuff about it and he wants you to know it.

So we've tried to make this super, super easy. A Scripture passage will come to your email box early every morning. You read it and then there are just a couple of thoughts of application to kind of help you think about it. It will take you all of about five minutes to do it.

And I'm really excited because, as of Tuesday night, over 4,300 of you are subscribing to this and IT told me that about 60 percent of you are opening it, which I thought was bad at first but they go, "No, that's really, really good. If you know anything about internet stuff, 60 percent is amazing." And I was like, "Well, 100 percent is amazing," but anyway they tell me that's good, alright?

So if you haven't gotten on that I want to encourage you—do it right now. Do it today and begin to get into God's word. But listen to me, it's not just about reading a few verses and then going on with your day. It's simply asking these questions right here:

What's God saying to me?

This is a question I want you to ask every single time we gather together every weekend. You might have read the passage that we're talking about a jillion times, God can still say something to you that's fresh because the Bible says that it is living and it's active. So when you read a passage of Scripture or when you hear a sermon, you step back and you go, "God, what do you want me to hear from that? What are you saying to me right now in my life as it relates to my marriage, as it relates to my career—what do you want me to hear?"

The next question is: Is it consistent with the entirety of God's word?

God will never subjectively say something to you by his Spirit or in a sermon that is not consistent with the rest of his word. And how will you know if you don't read it?

Here's the third question. This is maybe the most important. It's the one we neglect: What am I going to do with it (that's application)...**and when?**

That's what trips me up because I come up with applications all of the time, but when am I going to do it? And that's why being involved in a group is so important because, not legalistically or in a mean spirit but lovingly, you can have people come around you and say,

“Hey, when are you going to do that? Not because we’re grading you, not because we’re judging you but because we want you to grow. We want God’s best in your life.”

Listen. That is how you grow in an unpredictable world filled with circumstances that you can’t control.

And as the book comes to a conclusion, Solomon is going to pull all of these themes and threads together about how to live a meaningful life. Get this: It’s by making the most of the season of life that you are in regardless of your age.

Have you noticed that for most of our lives we are not content with the age that we are? We want to be a different age. Have you noticed this? Like as a really little boy I couldn’t wait to grow up. I couldn’t wait for my next birthday.

I’ve got a six-year-old daughter at home. She can’t wait to turn seven. I don’t know why. There’s nothing significant about seven.

My fifteen-year-old son, I get that, he’s really looking forward to turning 16. I just took him to the BMV a couple of weeks ago to get his driver’s permit—please pray for your pastor, alright? I’m losing sleep. This is crazy. I can’t believe I’m in this season of life, right?

But I don’t know when it happened. I’m guessing somewhere around the age of 25—between 25 and 30 we start wishing we were younger. It goes in reverse. Amen?

It’s like, “When’s your birthday?”

“I don’t know. I don’t even celebrate it anymore,” alright? “I’m just wishing it away. I just want to go in reverse.”

Here’s what Solomon is going to do. Solomon is going to go: Hey, man. Don’t do that.

I get it. As we get older looks change, bodies change, all of that kind of stuff. But he says: As you grow older there are some significant opportunities. Don’t miss them. That’s what he’s going to say in these next few verses.

Look at what he says. He uses a lot of humor in this. Verse 8: “When people live to be very **old**, let them,” what’s the word there? Rejoice. Oh, come on. Say it like you mean it—we don’t mean it. Let them rejoice? What, are you kidding me Solomon? Rejoice? Man, as I get older I want to resent it.

No, “rejoice in every day of life. But let them also remember there will be many dark days. Everything still to come is meaningless.” So he’s getting real. Then he goes, “Young people, it’s wonderful to be **young**! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want to do; take it all in. But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do. So refuse to worry, and

keep your body healthy. But remember that youth, with a whole life before you, is meaningless.”

In other words, it’s going to go faster than you think. He said: Hey, man. If you’re young live it up. Enjoy it. There are some incredible opportunities and advantages to youth. The sad thing is that you probably don’t even recognize it. That’s why they say that youth is wasted on the young, right? You take advantage of the energy. You take advantage of how good your body feels. You take advantage that you can eat anything that you want—it doesn’t seem to affect you.

How many of you... I love Kings Hawaiian rolls. How many of you are with me in that? Man I love those things. Those are like little droplets from heaven and I believe that that’s what we’re going to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner in heaven. No calories. No bloating. No nothing. You don’t have to worry about gluten free—none of that stuff. You just eat them.

Kings Hawaiian rolls. I look at them now and my love handles blow out for a week. It’s just like so unfair. My son though, he eats them like PEZ candy and it doesn’t seem to affect him at all. And I resent him for it. I’m just like, “Hey, man.” Every time I see him doing that I’m like... He eats Lucky Charms at two in the morning and I’m like, “Hey, man. Live it up bro because those days are coming to an end very, very quickly,” alright?

Here’s all that he is saying to us. He’s saying: Hey, listen. As you grow older there are some advantages to that too. And the advantage should be wisdom. The advantage should simply be this: You begin to live your life with greater and greater intentionality—or at least you should because the older you get the faster life goes.

Here’s the thing. I can honestly stand before you and say that life is not perfect for me and I still have a lot of areas to grow in and a lot of things to learn, but I am living my life with greater intentionality today than I ever have. And I want to continue to do so into the future. And I’m telling you, it’s because of wisdom. That’s what I’m chasing after right now, “God, just give me understanding. God, just give me wisdom.”

And as you get older, that’s what you should be looking for so that when you get older, even though your body hurts you still have a sweet spirit and it’s contagious to those around you.

Solomon goes on. He says, “Don’t let the **excitement of youth** cause you to **forget your Creator**. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, “Life is not pleasant anymore.”

Why would life not be pleasant anymore? Well, it’s just like a high mileage car. The older you get the more your body begins to break down. Man, I can’t go to get a haircut anymore without falling asleep in the chair. It’s embarrassing, “Sir, you’re done.”

That’s what he’s saying. And then he uses a lot of humor here. Check this out, the physical advantages of growing old.

Verse 2: “Remember him before the light of the sun, moon, and stars is dim to your old eyes, and rain clouds continually darken your sky. Remember him before your legs—the guards of your house—start to tremble; and before your shoulders—the strong men—stoop. Remember him before your teeth—your few remaining servants,” that’s a great image, isn’t it? “—stop grinding; and before your eyes—the women looking through the windows—see dimly.

“Remember him before the door to life’s opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades. Now you rise at the first chirping of the birds, but then all their sounds will grow faint. Remember him before you become fearful of falling and worry about danger in the streets...

“...before your hair turns white like an almond tree in bloom, and you drag along without energy like a dying grasshopper,” I can’t wait for that, “and the caperberry no longer inspires sexual desire.” What? What are you talking about? I looked up the caperberry. As it turns out, you’re going to learn something today; a caperberry was, in ancient Israel, an aphrodisiac, alright? So I don’t know what to do with that, alright? Valentine’s Day is coming up this week. Go to [caperberry.com](http://caperberry.com). I don’t know what to do that.

So, “Remember him before you near the grave, your everlasting home, when the mourners will weep at your funeral. Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps,” that’s your spinal cord, “and the golden bowl is broken,” that’s your noggin.

“Don’t wait until the water jar is smashed at the spring and the pulley is broken at the well. For then the dust will return to the earth, and **the spirit will return to God who gave it.** ‘Everything is meaningless,’ says the Teacher, ‘completely meaningless.’”

In other words, it is fleeting. It’s going to go faster than you think. And here’s what he is saying: In a world that almost exclusively focuses upon the body—does it not? What do you look like? How in shape are you? What’s the shape of your body? What do you feel like? We make snap judgments just by the appearances of people.

Solomon reminds us that this body is not you. It has been temporarily leased to your soul. You are eternal.

I love what Kenny said last week. He said. “Man, you are not an accident. You are an answer. There is a reason that you have been born during this particular period of time. And the Spirit of God wants to reclaim and redeem your heart so that you might play a unique role in what God is doing in this world. To leave an imprint that only you can.”

That is absolutely incredible. That you have a purpose and that with God there is no accident. And God has done this with great intentionality and your body will give out eventually and perish but your soul will go on. So don’t let your body tell your soul what to do. Don’t let the pressure and the worries and the temptations that afflict your body rob your soul. That’s what

he is saying. Your body might be aging but your soul should be growing in wisdom as you age. And do it gracefully.

Before the grand finale, Solomon reminds us who he is once again. He says in verse 9, “Keep this in mind: The Teacher was considered wise, and he taught the people everything he knew. He listened carefully to many proverbs, studying and classifying them. The Teacher sought to find just the right words to **express truths clearly.**”

So I know we’ve been talking about it all series long, that Ecclesiastes has this reputation for being complicated and for posing all of these questions, and being hard to understand—and it is—but here in the last few verses Solomon wants us to know this.

Solomon is saying: Hey, listen. If you walk away from Ecclesiastes going, “Woe, that book was so confusing,” then he hasn’t done his job. That’s what he is saying because he says: Listen, I want to be really, really clear. I want to express truth clearly to you.

If we could sum it all up, he would say: Sometimes you just need to obey what you know to be true. It’s not that we need more information. It’s not that we need more knowledge. We need more application. We need to begin boldly putting into action the things that we know to be true.

See knowledge is what we **know**. But wisdom is what we **do** with what we know and that’s what Solomon is inviting us into.

And here’s his very last journal entry. I love this. He’s going to come to this conclusion and invitation. He goes: Well, “That’s the whole story. Here now is my **final conclusion:**” here it is, “Fear God and obey his commands.”

The most successful, accomplished man who has ever walked this earth, the guy who had it all says: You know what? Take it from me, late in life none of those things ever brought me the happiness and the fulfillment that I was wanting and the conclusion of the matter is: Man, if you can live your life fearing God and obeying his commands, that’s it. You will unlock the true meaning of fulfillment and joy in your life.

Now what in the world do those two things mean? Because I’ve got to tell you the fear of God doesn’t sound very exciting, does it? God wants me to fear him? Why would a loving God want me to fear him? Well fear just simply means: awe. Fear does not mean tremble fear like God is going to punish you or eliminate you. It is this idea that you are trusting God’s wisdom over your own logic. That’s what that means.

I like how this author named Ed Welch puts it. He says, “Fear in the biblical sense includes being afraid of someone, but it extends to holding someone in awe, being controlled or mastered by people, worshipping other people, putting your trust in people, or needing people. The fear of man can be summarized this way: We replace God with people. Instead of a

biblically guided fear of the Lord, we fear others. When we are in our teens, it is called 'peer pressure'. When we are older, it is called 'people-pleasing'. Recently, it has been called 'codependency'."

Here's what the fear of God means. The fear of God means that you're considering his wisdom that he provides above everything else in your life. You're saying, "God, I'm going to pursue you. I'm going to live my life with you in mind. I'm going to realize that my life isn't all about me, it is about what you want to do through me that will make a lasting difference in the lives of others."

See one day you and I—it's going quicker than we think—we're going to be Solomon's age at the time that he wrote this. And we will probably put our lives under review. We'll examine some things. Here's the question: how many regrets will you have? And I hope that you will have zero.

The only way that you will get there is by living intentionally today. To begin to say, "Man, I don't want to live with any regrets. I don't want to get to the end of my life and go, 'I wish I would have said this. I wish I wouldn't have said that.'"

Begin to live with great intentionality to think about the end in mind first. Begin to live your life under review today.

I want to give you an opportunity to put your trust in Jesus if you never have. I know that at all of our campuses since the beginning of the year we've had a lot of people who have begun to visit our church. Maybe it was during this series, maybe a New Year's resolution kind of a thing.

And maybe you're here and it's the first church that you've ever attended regularly, maybe this is the first time you've been back to church in a long time. But you would not definitively say that you're a follower of Jesus. You might vaguely believe in God but you wouldn't say that you've invited Jesus into your heart and that you've begun to trust him.

I want to give you the opportunity to do that. And some of you may say, "Well, how do I know that I'm ready?"

Here's how you know you're ready. If you believe that there is a God and you are not him, if you believe that Jesus was God's Son and he came to live the life that you could never live and died the death that you deserved to die and he walked again and he's in heaven to reconcile you to your Heavenly Father, if you believe that this world is really, really messed up and part of that is because of the things that you've done to mess it up and part of that is because of what others have done to mess it up—God simply calls that sin and he says: I want to reconcile our relationship, man, if you know those things, you're ready.

How about this? If you're really uncomfortable right now, you're ready. If you're looking for the exit going, "I wonder if anybody will notice if I walk out?" you are ready. If you're feeling like

there's an internal wrestling match, we call that—the Biblical word for that is conviction—it's like this heaviness where you just feel like the Spirit of God is kind of using you as a punching bag right now, you are ready.

And I simply want to ask you to make a decision with boldness today. Do not let your inner attorney talk you out of it. It's been doing that too often. And I can actually probably argue you out of it more effectively than you can.

Some of you say, "Well, I don't know enough yet. I've got so many questions I don't have answers to. I don't know that I believe in God yet. Aaron, I have too many things that are out of order in my life. Let me get them in order and then I'll do this."

That's not the way it works. Man, if you could do that then you wouldn't need God. You come to God just as you are—filthy rags and all. And he says: Okay, I'll take it from here.

You don't need to have all of your questions answered. You don't even need to have all of your beliefs lined up. You just simply need to trust in the wisdom that God provides. And I want to encourage you to step out where you are, put your trust in Jesus, and go public by being baptized.

We've been doing it all weekend long and I don't know, maybe we've seen 25 or 30 people so far at this campus who have done it. I want to give you an opportunity at all of our campuses to do this today. And I'm going to invite our campus pastors to come down front and I want to pray. And I want to pray just a prayer over you and I want to ask you if you're ready to do this or if you're wrestling with this just to make this your prayer.

If we could just dim the lights a little bit. Everybody just bow your heads and close your eyes. Let me just pray for us and over us today.

Father, we come to you at the conclusion of a series of messages that has been so good but so challenging. And right now we want to invite your Spirit into this room and into the rooms of each one of our campuses that you would begin to work on our hearts and minds.

Father, I pray that if there is anybody right now who needs to make a decision with boldness and step out and say, "You know what? I am tired of putting this off. I am tired of chasing after all of these things in life that I thought would bring me happiness and fulfillment but they never have."

God, I pray that there would be some courageous people here who would be willing to put their trust in you, who would be willing to follow after you, who would be willing to say, "You know what? I know that there is a God who has a will for my life, there is a God who wants to give me answers to me questions but it's going to require, first of all, for me to have the trust of a child."

So, God, I pray that you would move right now in this room and in this place and in the minds of people—that if there are some who need to give their life to you, they would do it. We thank you for your goodness and your grace and your mercy. And we ask this right now in Jesus' name. Amen.