

Intro: Garrison. Pastor. Good to be back. **Pray.**

Where do we look for the good life?

Last week I was headed to a meeting and had to stop for gas. I reluctantly start pumping \$4 gas into my car and a video comes on the little screen. I usually mute it(which you can do btw) but since I was getting \$4 gas I knew I wouldn't be pumping for long. And the message caught me. "At _____ we help people find the good life. What is the good life? Well that's for you to find out." I chuckled cynically, thinking 'what a dumb line.' All the while militantly trying to keep the number I'm paying for gas at \$15 even. Once I get to 14.85 I start tapping the handle with surgical precision until I get to 15 even. Why do I care so much you may ask? Because I have my own internalized belief about where the good life is found. And it comes out every time I pump gas. I don't want to spend money on gas. And yes, I know I'll have to fill up again way sooner than I should. But I can't accept paying over \$15 for gas. That's because I want more money in my bank account for as long as possible, that's the good life for me. Judge me. But I think you're probably not that different from me.

If we were honest, we, along with millions of Americans, live as if the good life were found in 'More'. More money, more gas maybe? more stuff, more joy, more ease, more fun, more success. How much more? I'm not sure. But definitely more than I have now.

Yet if you look at the people who have the 'most' - the ultra wealthy, successful, influential, intelligent— you see an interesting trend:

Madonna –(beyonce in the 80s for gen z) her career has spanned over 3 decades. Very rare amongst musicians. 9 #1 hit singles. 39 Billboard Music Awards. 7 Grammys. She holds the record for the highest grossing tour of all time for a solo artist. Has sold more than 300 million records worldwide and is recognized as the best-selling female recording artist of all time by *Guinness World Records*. *Time* named her one of the 25 most powerful women of the past century.

She was quoted by Vogue Magazine - "My drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I feel I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will."

Jim Carrey- An incredibly successful actor. Won awards. Has made millions. Made the best Grinch movie in existence. He sums it up well - 'I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.'

—->But you don't find this trend solely in American celebrities.

Leo Tolstoy. You can go back to Leo Tolstoy. A Russian author, one of the best novelists ever. Wrote War and Peace, Anna Karenina. Incredibly wise and intelligent. Late in his life writes this: "My question - that which at the age of fifty brought me to the verge of suicide - was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man ... Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?"

→ So we've got an incredibly successful solo pop artist(for the Gen z-ers think Beyonce but in the 80s) who never feels like she's done enough to prove herself. One of the most successful actors of all time saying that we've been tricked into thinking the life of success and wealth is everything. And one of the most brilliant writers of all time saying, "What's the point?"

That pattern would seem to show that maybe the good life isn't found in having it all.

Now there's an abundance of stories about successful people flaming out and becoming discontent and unsatisfied. And I think those stories tend to be really intriguing to us. We hear them and if we're honest, I think we're a little bit like "What?" Mr. Carrey, I'd be happy to be rich and famous to show you how incorrect you are!" We get annoyed by these successful, rich, intelligent, famous people talking about how their life at the top of the mountain isn't what it's cracked up to be.

I think there's something in us that wants to challenge them. We doubt them. We're cynical about it. We think if we had what they had—the most—we'd be happy. More would solve most of our problems, we think.

The question then becomes, does having more actually lead to the good life? Or is what's going on with those unhappy celebrities actually real?

According to the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, the pattern with the celebrities is absolutely real. That if we took our desire for more to its natural end—have the most, have everything—we'd be unsatisfied. He's going to tell us that even if you got all you ever wanted, it wouldn't be enough. This week the Preacher is going to nail down

More is Meaningless.

In chapter 1, the Preacher begins by saying 'all is vanity', and now he's going to prove it to us by telling us about a great experiment where he first hand puts this to the test. He's going to test a hypothesis.

Can anything in this world satisfy me? Make me happy? Is 'more' actually fulfilling? And what's shocking -- even as an ancient, near eastern king -- he's actually going to chase after a lot of the same things we do today.

Ecclesiastes 2. *I¹ said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity.¹ 2 I^v said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?" 3 I² searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on³ folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.*

First thing the preacher tests to see if it'll satisfy

1. More Fun.

The Preacher says I'm going to test the boundaries of all life has to offer. And he starts with fun. He says I'll test myself with pleasure. I'm going to enjoy myself. I'm going to laugh. I'm going to 'cheer my body with wine.' He's trying some cabs, maybe a nice blend ya know?

Now we don't know exactly what that looks like. But we do know the descriptors of the Preacher. He's a king. So the resources at his disposal are a lot more than you or I have. Don't think about a wine tasting with the gals. Think a feast; parties, thousands of people in a palace with roaring laughter, amazing food and an endless list of the best wine available.

But he doesn't stop with fun.

Ecclesiastes 2:4-6 *"I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees."*

2. More Success.

He shifts to success. He starts to build an empire. As a king he wants to be great. Both to be remembered but also to be the greatest king on earth.

So as part of this he starts building his house. And then a city. And then an entire kingdom. He becomes an elite gardener. He plants entire vineyards, parks and trees. He's got such a massive amount of plant life to take care of that he needs entire pools of water to keep everything alive.

He makes these works himself. He's made something of himself. He wins Monopoly but this is real life.

And again, he doesn't stop there.

Ecclesiastes 2:7-8 *"I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women,*

He shifts to:

3. More Comfort.

I built my kingdom. Now it's time for me to enjoy it. He sits back to enjoy the massive amount of wealth he's accumulated. He wants for nothing. He doesn't have to exert himself at all. He has servants doing everything for him. He doesn't cook, he doesn't clean.

He's got constant entertainment from these singers. No spotify for him. With a snap of his fingers he's got John Mayer and Beyonce serenading him in his bubble bath. And still he keeps going:

and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man."

4. More sex.

He tries sexual pleasure. It was common at this time for royalty to have women they were married to, potentially more than one, as well as concubines, who essentially were secondary wives that existed for sexual pleasure and providing heirs if the king's wife was barren.

The Preacher is essentially saying, I had uninhibited sexual pleasure. I could have sex whenever I wanted, with just about anyone I wanted.

By all worldly standards, he's lived the good life right? See how he reflects on it:

9 *So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.*

I became the greatest. And I got anything I wanted. We'd expect that he'd draw some sort of conclusion right? He's gotta be gassed out after all that accomplishment and pleasure right?

Nope. He still keeps going:

12 ^aSo I turned to consider ^bwisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only ^awhat has already been done. 13 Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.

5. More wisdom.

The Preacher studies wisdom vs foolishness. If the good life isn't found in more pleasure, could it be found in the life of wisdom? Biblically this means living life correctly. Vs the life of the fool. Careless. Where you're living life without correct knowledge and go through life unaware of what life is really about.

So he pursues the life of wisdom. Maybe if chasing every desire and whim didn't cut it, the path towards the good life could be found in 7 steps to a better me. If he just live his life better than other people– maybe that's the good life.

Now let's just pause for a second. I don't know about you, but at this point, maybe the preacher isn't tired of the experiment, but I am. That's a lot of stuff he just ran through. It's a little ridiculous.

It's also really hard to relate to, right? Sure he pursues more and more, and maybe I do the same? But not really right? Because I'm not an ancient king that's absorbently wise, wealthy and successful. I'm not planting crazy vineyards or building lavish palaces. I'm not throwing parties for thousands of people with more wine that I can ever imagine. I'm not running around having as much sex as I want with whoever I want.

This experiment in a sense feels a bit unrelatable right? After all, we don't do this right?

But what if we just took Ecclesiastes 2 and rewrote it for us modern westerners. Ecclesiastes 2- the citizens church translation:

'I set out to test my heart, to see where the good life is found. I said to my heart, enjoy yourself. I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine. So I decided to go out to a couple breweries this Saturday and but not to get drunk or anything, but maybe just go get a little buzzed to cut the edge. I went to multiple wine tastings and tried all the best trendy spots in South End. I made great works, by working overtime to try to get promoted as many times as possible, crushing my goals while neglecting family, friends and God. I made good money and was very comfortable. I had great possessions. I bought a truck. And then traded it in for the family van. I bought a house. But it wasn't big enough. So I got another one.

I also gathered for myself a very comforting number in my savings account. I got singers, both men and women, on my spotify and instagram feed. Didn't you see the concert I was at?? I had lots of hobbies. I golfed, I gardened, I gymed, I knitted, I Netflixed, I chilled. I went on vacation, twice. I gathered for myself friends and downloaded hinge when I got lonely to message a couple people before deleting. I had many concubines in the form of pornography. I sought wisdom and became the best version of myself. I found the right schedule, the right diet, the right routine. I became the greatest enneagram 1 of all time. My family had the best Christmas card ever and my kids? Well they're going to get everything they want too.'

Does that sound like you at all? Does that make it a little more relatable? Maybe you still don't feel like this includes anything you do or how you live. But it did describe what you fantasize about when you have a dull moment or as your drift off to sleep.

See, we want the same things that the Preacher chased after. It just looks different. So yeah, I don't need to be a king. I don't need to be an international pop star, or actor or successful writer. I just need a little bit more than I have now. That's what I'm interested in. Just a little bit more.

If I just had a little more _____ . Do you feel that? What's that for you? What do you fill in that blank with?

If you could snap your fingers and everything would be fixed-- what would change? What would you have or not have?

Because that's where you believe the good life is.

If you snap your fingers and your problems are fixed. What's different? What do you have more of?

- An extra 0 or two on the end of your bank account balance.
- A job that's just a little bit more exciting or fulfilling or engaging.
- A little bit more house. Give me that extra bed room and half bath.
- Maybe just a little bit better version of the things you have now. A newer, nicer car. A newer nicer couch. A newer nicer TV. A newer nicer computer. A newer nicer stroller. A newer nicer bed. Newer nicer furniture.
- Less stress more fun. As many vacations as possible. As many trips as possible. As many concerts as possible. Living for the weekend.
- A little bit more sex with your spouse. Or a different spouse all together.
- A better version of yourself. Where you've really got life figured out. The more in shape, the more intelligent, the more disciplined. The version of you that has it together.

Just a little bit more. A little bit better.

So sure, we don't need it all. But we'll experiment all the same with some sort of cocktail of 'more' that if I just had that, our lives would be more fulfilling and satisfying.

And the sad reality is we will come to the same result as the Preacher, with his outlandish experiment. Look at his verdict:

17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

It's all vanity. He says in v 11- Pleasure evaporates. Comfort and success evaporate. He says in 14- wise dies like the fool. It's all meaningless!

The Preachers life is stuffed full of everything you and I dream of... and he hates his life. What!

Because it was like chasing the wind. The Preacher says it's all vanity. You get it and it's gone. It doesn't satisfy. It doesn't last.

We can doubt it all we want but the point the Preacher is trying to make is that because he had the most, we can know that our desire for just a little bit more won't work either.

Which he's very clear on why:

20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

If last week you were hoping to get some better news. Sorry. He lands exactly where he left off in chapter 1.

He says our desires are elusive. You chase them and come up empty handed. Or you do get what you want and you realize, I don't get this forever. Which is the key point the Preacher is trying to make.

Death reveals how foolish our pursuit for more actually is. Our impending death is a wake up call. Which we'll talk about thoroughly in a couple weeks. But for now, the Preacher says, when you fantasize about having more and better, give your life to the chase, at some point you have to wake up and say gosh, I've got what? 40 years left? That's it.

And I'm spending all of my time unhappy with my current circumstances and my current life status? Everything I own now will pass on to my relatives or a landfill. All personal progress I make is cool but by itself what's the point? The best version of you and the worst person on the planet all end up in the same place. In the ground.

The best life 'under the sun', as the Preacher puts it, is a hollow life.

Death makes you ask, "Is this really all there is?"

Which may all seem really morbid and depressing. And it is. Yet we have to stare this down as the people of God because it's in the book. So what do we do with this? Well just like last week, we have 3 invitations.

1. Sacred Mundanity.

18 I hated ^aall my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must ^rleave it to the man who will come after me,^{m24} ^tThere is nothing better for a person than that he should ^eeat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is ^bfrom the hand of God,

In one chapter he goes from -- "Wine + food are vanity and I hated my toil" to "there's nothing better than eating and drinking and finding enjoyment in your toil."

Ironic is it not? The whole chapter he says- eating, drinking, toil on earth is vanity. What's the prescription? How about eating, drinking and toil?

The catch 22 of ecclesiastes 2. Chasing sex, work, possessions isn't the good life! But also, if there is a good life to be found, sex, work, possessions and the rest—they're all part of the good life. What? Why?

Because what you have now is from the hand of God. See the problem isn't the stuff. So many of the things the Preacher tries are from God. Given to be enjoyed. But it's when we look for the good life in **more** of them that it becomes a problem. Ecclesiastes shows us that when our desires become king we suffer.

Which isn't a unique idea to Ecclesiastes. Chasing our desires, however big or small, and trying to find the good life in that pursuit doesn't work. It always leads to disappointment. And God is constantly inviting us back into reality. See how Isaiah puts it:

Isaiah 55 ^d“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 ^eWhy do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Trying to find the good life in ‘more’ is like spending your last dollar on a netflix subscription when you’re starving. Why aren’t you buying the food? Come and eat. This stuff can’t satisfy you. You were designed for something more. To be satisfied by life with God.

So yes the stuff is good, just like Preacher said, but it can’t fill you up. CS Lewis says it this way:

If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”

I love that quote. And what’s so good about it is that it’s not that we kill the desires. And say ‘stuff is bad!’ No. It’s that we ground our desires in Christ. Which frees you up in the now to enjoy what you have.

- When you realize work can’t satisfy you, then work becomes a gift to be enjoyed.
- When you realize sex can’t satisfy you, then sex within God’s design becomes a gift to be enjoyed.
- When you realize more possessions can’t satisfy you, you can actually start to enjoy the things you have now.
- When you realize money can’t satisfy you, you can start to use to enjoy it and even more, bless others with it.

Everything you have is a gift. The Good Life isn’t found in escaping the mundanity of your present life. It’s found in experiencing God in the day to day of your life now.

And I cannot say it more bluntly, you will not be happy until you truly come to grips with this. Please stop chasing the wind. We’re all going to die. Don’t miss the good God has given you. Which leads to our second invitation:

2. Sacred Honesty

We are invited to agree with the Preacher. We all know what he’s saying is true. Deep down you do. And if you don’t, I’d invite you to see that maybe you’re too caught up in the pursuit for more to actually see. And today is the day you can take your blindfold off.

Like Tim said last week, we’ve gotta stop playing pretend. We know this doesn’t work. Just think about it:

- How many of you wanted a house? Yay equity! And then you bought one and then you were like, okay cool, let me do some projects. And then they went okay. And then something broke. And then you wanted to make the yard better. And then something else broke. And then weeds sprouted up. And then the neighbor did an addition that you can’t afford. And then your friend bought a bigger better house. You can apply to a car, a job, anything. Aren’t you tired of that?

- How many of you are so excited to get to the weekend, every week, all you think about, recoup and rest. Saturday comes and goes and before you know it it's Sunday night and you're laying in bed anxious about the coming week. Just need more comfort and ease. Can't you see that it's vanity?

Think about your past self. You a year, 5 years, 10 years ago. Many of us thought we were a marriage ceremony away from the Good Life. Is that working out? Many of us thought we were one kid away from the Good Life. One move away. One job away. Some of us are stressed about money right now, what would the version of you 10 years ago think about the amount of money you make now. They'd think you're a big shot if I had to guess.

I'll say this for myself. 10 years ago. Before I'd even met just about any of you in the room. The Good Life to me was getting to be a part of a church plant in Charlotte. Being a pastor that gets to preach on Sundays. To be married and to have a kid. To have a house that I own. I chased them hard. I often was depressed that I didn't have them. I have all of those things now. **And if I can be honest, I barely ever remember that those are the things I wanted.** I have a completely different set of things that I fantasize and chase now.

Might that be an invitation? Chasing the next thing. Chasing more. It's all vanity. We're going to die. We have limited time. Be honest in the face of that reality. Is this all there is? Surely there's more.

Spend your time doing what actually matters.

And lastly:

3. Sacred Joy

25 for apart from him⁴ who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Apart from him who can have enjoyment? It begins and ends with God. How gracious is our God that He gives us His word that actually shows us where not to find the Good Life?

Can we just quickly think about the picture that the Preacher is painting. He says this pursuit is like chasing the wind. Really think about that. Close your eyes if you have to. Imagine you're at a park, reading a book on a bench maybe. Pretty day, slight breeze. And out of the corner of your eye you catch a glimpse of someone. And they're sort of running around in circles, reaching out in all directions, clamping down their hands—at nothing. They get closer to you. And now you make out that every time they reach out and grab, they let out a little yelp. Dang it! And they keep going. You finally ask, what are you doing?? 'Well isn't it obvious? I'm chasing the wind. I'm getting closer every time to catching it'. You would be second hand embarrassed. Maybe slightly afraid of this person. What they're doing is so ridiculous you don't even realize what they're doing at first. You'd say, hey, please stop. Or sir or madam, you need help. Can I help you? This is ridiculous. You can't catch the wind. It's vanity.

That is us. In the park. Scaring the children. Spending all our energy on what's destined to fail. And God, through the Preacher is graciously saying, stop making a fool of yourself. This doesn't work. What a gift! But not only does He tell us where not to find the Good Life. He shows us where to find the good life.

As we said last week and will keep referring to - The Good life we're invited into as the people of God is... It's having a place to belong. A place to call home. It's having work to do. And a people to belong to in the place with the presence of God.

In His presence. Knowing His voice. Seeing the gifts that He has already given to you.

Only when you find your satisfaction in a life with Him will you ever have any true and lasting joy. And when you do, the gifts are actually enjoyable. You'll see them as blessings, not stepping stones to the next thing. Your mind won't be consumed with how and when you can get the new thing, it won't need to be. You won't need to be constantly thinking about the next step to the Good Life.

Because in Christ, you've been invited into the Good Life now.

Pray.

Time of Response

- Communion
- Prayer Team
- Worship