

**DON'T CHASE EMPTY PROMISES**  
**Tragic Hope Series - Part 2**  
**Dan Burrell**

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*“I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.”*

*“I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”*

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

*“I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. 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.”*

*“I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 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. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”*

*“So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yes I perceived that the same event happens to all of them.”*

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*“Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.”*

*“I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill much leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. The also is vanity and a great evil.”*

*“What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his works is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from Him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner He has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.”*

Good morning Life Fellowship. Have you ever had someone come up to you and say, “I need to tell you some things. What do you want me to tell you first? The bad news or the good news?” Have you ever had anybody do that to you? Well, this morning first of all I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is I am back. (*Laughter.*) The good news is Ben is feeling a little better, but if you know anyone who had Covid, it just wipes you out for several weeks afterwards. And he is really wiped out, and it is still not within his strength capacity to be able to stand up here and preach for two hours in a row.

Some scientist years ago said that speaking to a large group for 45 minutes is the equivalent of eight hours of regular labor. I don't know if that is true or not, but if you think that is close to being true then please pray for me. It is more strenuous obviously than many things, so even though Ben wants to be here, we don't want him to relapse, so we agreed I was going to be here one more time.

I do want to mention this, two weeks from today Ben and I are going to be here together, Lord willing, and we are going to be talking about 2020 a little bit, and some of

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the things we have experienced, some of the things we are looking ahead to, kind of to give you an update on our Covid precautions as we are getting ready to go into the flu and cold seasons so we can make sure safety steps are taken. So two weeks from today if I have to have Ben up here with an IV and a hospital bed, he is going to be back, okay? Hopefully he will be back next Sunday, but we are playing it week by week for now.

So that is the bad news, but the good news is we are here, and we are studying Ecclesiastes, it is fall, we are almost done with 2020, God is still on His throne and we have a lot to learn. You know as I was studying Ecclesiastes again this week and looking at this passage I was struck that when we get done with the entire book, it really is the situation where Solomon was declaring some bad news. But in the end, in the conclusion he reaches some good news. There is a good conclusion to this, but as the case often is with bad news, it precedes good news. And with bad news sometimes we have to digest it a little bit to get to the good news.

I have always been the kind of guy that preferred to hear the bad news before the good news. I am the kind of guy that wants to do the hard tasks at first, so I have the easier tasks to anticipate, and it kind of acts as its own reward by getting through the bad stuff first. I think that is one of the reasons why our mothers made us eat our vegetables before the dessert. And I am at a stage in life where if I want to eat the dessert first, I can, but I don't because I want to save that and savor that for the very end.

So when we look at the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes we are really looking at some bad news before the good news. We are looking at some of the hard conclusions before we get to some of the hopeful truths at the end. And as we know when we started out with this passage, we have this kind of downer message that is coming from Solomon, and he is saying, *'Life is nothing but a bunch of smoke and mirrors. It is a tragic hope that we have. It is this idea that so much of what we expend our energy on, so much of what we anticipate, so much of what we invest in, in the end it doesn't seem worth it. It doesn't seem fulfilling. The accomplishment fades, the joy goes away and in the end what are we left with? Vanity. Smoke. Illusions. A lack of reality.'*

So last week we began by looking at some bitter truths, and we closed with some joyful hope. Today we take a similar track as we go into Chapter 2, and we are going to look at some empty promises. And you know empty promises are always disillusioning. They are a disappointment. We have to get through the bad things, so we need to talk about those so that we can get to the hopeful truths that come later in the book. There is a lot of life that is very much like that.

I don't know about you, but I cannot wait until the election season is over. I am hoping it is November 3rd, but there are some indications it may stretch on like 2000 did, and it

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could be weeks before it is final. I will be extremely pleased if after November 3<sup>rd</sup> the ads will at least stop. So much of the advertising just means we are really experiencing empty promises. *'If you put me in Washington, I will do this.'* Well when you go to Washington you will only be one of four hundred and thirty-five, or you will only be one of a hundred. And even if you are president you have the Supreme Court and Congress to check on you.

That is the way our system works; nobody gets to be the dictator, and you really aren't all that. You are not going to get to have your way, but the promises are there. *"Send me there and I will lower your taxes. Send me there and I will do this and the economy will be great."* And they make the promises without any caveat; they make the promises without any shame. And it gets frustrating after a while and will turn you into a cynic if you watch it too long.

I was reading this week in the Raleigh News and Observer where they said that the amount of money being spent for the election for the senate race for one seat out of one hundred between Thom Tillis, who by the way is from here, and Cal Cunningham was going to be two hundred and fifty million dollars. Two hundred and fifty million dollars! I am an independent and I got all the mail from both the democrats and the republicans in my mailbox, and let me just tell you that this week on a daily basis I am getting stacks of cards that I never even look at, they don't even make it into my house, because I sort through them as I am walking up my driveway and I put them in the trash bin as I walk by. But those things have to cost anywhere from fifty to seventy cents apiece to print and that is before they even mail them. And I think about all that money that is being spent on paper going in the trash.

I have to tell you that this is a big month for me. We set it aside on our calendars because it is about church planting and church planting internationally, and I know I am getting three hundred bucks a week in political advertising that I just wish we could invest that money in a church plant. I used to give money politically. Every year I would pick two or three candidates and write them a check, but I quit doing that several years ago. I am taking my three hundred bucks that I might give to political candidates and I am putting it in one of those banks out in the lobby, because I want to invest in something that matters for eternity. And I encourage you to do that if you haven't already done that. Just pick up one of those little banks and be a part of what we are doing.

I got reports this week of churches being planted, even in the midst of Covid in Nepal and in India, and it is so exciting knowing that some of those churches began because we invested in something eternal. If we took that two hundred and fifty million dollars being spent on one senate race and divided it by three hundred to be invested in

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church planting, we would be able to plant eight hundred and thirty-three thousand churches. Doesn't that make you crazy? And yet we buy into the empty promises. And if our guy wins, we are hopeful, we are optimistic, but at some point during the next two, four or six years, however long their term is, if we are realistic we will look at them and think, '*How did I vote for that guy? Where are the promises he made?*' And it leaves us feeling disillusioned.

This is the theme of Ecclesiastes. And as Solomon said in another place: "***There is nothing new under the sun.***" This is as old as life in creation. So we are going to go in and take another swipe at Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Last week I kind of set up the entire book, this week this is going to be pretty intense, so buckle your seatbelts as we get into it a little bit deeper. You have already heard the Scripture this morning which took five minutes to be read, but understand that I am just able to do the hors d'oeuvre on all of that so you can get to the meal later on this week. And I hope you will, because there is so much to study here.

I am going to, in a very distinct way, try to get you through the first two chapters so that you understand not only those two chapters, but what is to come later on as it unfolds in this series. We see three things going on in the first two chapters. The first thing that Solomon is doing is he is saying, '*You know I have tested life. I tested life and I have a conclusion after testing life. I have done wisdom, I have done wine, I have done women, I have done work, and I have done wealth. I have done all of these things and my conclusion is - it is all smoke and mirrors. It is vanity.*'

By the way I need to make a little confession to you. How many of you were here last week? Or if you saw this last week online this is for you too. I am only human and sometimes I make mistakes in my studies and sometimes they are humdingers and sometimes I do two at once. And last week I did two at once. Let me explain what I did, okay? Ben and I use the same study material. Ben, by the way, has more theological education than I do. He is a language expert. He knows Greek and he knows Hebrew. I am a practical theologian, and the university that I teach at is a school of practical theology. So I am more of a process guy which is why Ben and I make a great team. We study the same books and we each make notes and then we share the notes with each other, and we talk about them.

So Ben and I read the same book and Ben is underlining, underlining, underlining different things. So as I go back and read it through his eyes I see that he has underlined the Hebrew word for vanity. And when he underlined it he did it with a black marker that connected the two bottom parts of a letter - the letter 'h.' So if you connect the two bottom parts of the letter 'h,' what does that look like to you? It looks like a 'b.' So last

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week I said the Hebrew word for vanity is 'bebel,' because I don't understand Hebrew. But it is not 'bebel;' it is 'hebel.' That was mistake number one.

Be the way, we have several members of our staff who have studied Greek and Hebrew, and they gave me no end to the harassment this week for doing that. Not only that but I apparently repeated it about nine thousand times during the course of the two sermons. I walked into my office the day after Amy Coney Barrett did the famous thing where she held up her blank notepad which many of you probably saw on TV. So on my door was a picture of Amy Coney Barrett holding up her blank notes and it said, 'babel, babel, babel.' (Laughter.) So we have several openings on our church staff right now, if you are interested. (Laughter.) And if you think that's bad - then my mom calls me. Even mom figured it out before I did. So I am telling you it has been bad.

But that was only one mistake. The other mistake is in Greek the letter 'b' is actually pronounced 'v.' So it should have been 'havel.' In fact if you do it correctly it is almost like you are clearing your throat, 'havel.' So that is the correct word that is translated as vanity. So now I have corrected myself, and humiliated myself in front of all the people that have watched this, or will watch it, as it will be on the internet forever, and I may become a meme myself. But I do want to make sure that I am accurate, and please forgive me for what I will call a scribing error.

And it is the word 'havel.' And 'havel' means 'emptiness, smoke, vanity.' It has the idea of something that appears for a little while and then disappears. Or something that you reach for to grasp and it is not there. It is literally the smoke in smoke and mirrors. So when Solomon got to the end of all of his pursuits he said it was like grabbing at something and it not being there. It is like a breath on a cold morning that is there for a second and then disappears. It is vanity, it is emptiness, it wasn't worth it. And he said, *'I tested life. I tried for all of the pursuits. I had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. (Let that sink in for a moment.) I had a thousand women at my beck and call.'*

If you read I Kings and II Chronicles you will see passages of what Solomon accumulated. Do you realize that he had so many people in his court that it took three hundred head of cattle per week just to feed them? They were slaughtering three hundred cows per week just to feed the people that were in his immediate court, the people that were helping him make decisions and to govern. And this guy was filthy rich. This guy was known for his excess. He had women, he had wealth, he had power, he had fame, he had wisdom, and in the end he said, *'I tested it and it left me feeling empty.'*

The second thing we see is it made him despise his life. As we progress there are many people who get to where they do not enjoy life anymore. There are people who get

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so disillusioned with this life that they take their own life. It doesn't indicate that Solomon was ever to that point, but he was basically saying, *'Look at all I have and I am still unhappy. Look at all I have and I still want more. Look at all I have and it still doesn't fulfil. Look at all I have and it is all an illusion, it is smoke and mirrors.'* And in the conclusion of that he said, *'I have despised my life.'*

And then as we wind down to Chapter 3 we will see that Solomon gets to the point where he says, *'But you know I can find some joy in it. There are some things that are okay.'* And we see him beginning to embrace his life and to find pleasure in things that are common to all of us. And that is a journey that many of us may end up taking over the course of our lives. I think there is a time in all of our lives where the ambition runs deep and thick in us. *'I want the house, I want the wife or husband, I want the kids, I want the nicer car, I want a cool vacation, I want a nest egg, I want friends, I want the corner office with the good view, I want, I want, I want, I want.'*

We are testing what will give us life, what will give us hope, what will give us significance, what will give us peace; we are looking, looking, looking, looking and at some point, which often happens in the mid-forties to a lot of guys I know, they will look at things and say, *'I have worked my fingers to the bone and I still don't feel good. I am still discontent. I am still empty.'* Now what often happens for some people when they kind of hit that midlife stage is they either get smart or they get really, really stupid. And sometimes they double down on the vanity, and they leave their family, or they make sudden big shifts in their lives. An average man commits suicide at 46 years of age. There is something that is going on about half way through life for many people where they look at it and they say: *'I have worked all this time. I have chased all these things. I have pursued all these trinkets, and now I feel so empty that I despise my life, and I want to start over. Or I want to end it now.'*

And then eventually if you live long enough there comes that point where you can sit back and you watch everybody else scurrying to and fro. And you watch everybody else chasing the smoke and mirrors. And you say, *'Just give me Jesus. Just let me have the peace I know because of what possesses me and not what I possess.'* And there is a godly contentment, a realization that life is short, then we die, and that for too many years we have chased the wrong things. And that is where Solomon ends up in Ecclesiastes.

Very quickly let's look at some of the empty promises that Solomon believed, and if we are going to be honest, often that we believe. We go back to Ecclesiastes Chapter 1 and we looked first at that poem last week and we kind of used that to be our launch for understanding what is being taught in the whole book. But if we go back and look at it

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more carefully one of the themes of that poem, in verses 4 through 11 in Chapter 1, is this: Solomon believed he was it. He believed he was 'the man.' And you know many of us grow up with this mentality that we are a big deal. And if we aren't yet a big deal we want to become a big deal. And if we think we are a big deal, we want a bigger deal. If we have a hundred Twitter followers we want a thousand. If we have a thousand we want a hundred thousand. If we have a hundred thousand we want a million. It becomes an insatiable appetite for influence.

If you get your first apartment you love it, and then you decide you want to own your own place so you get a condo. The condo has two bedrooms but you decide you want a garage so you want a single family home. Then you buy the single family home and then you realize you wanted a bigger yard. So you get a bigger yard and a three car garage and then you think it would be nice if you had a vacation home. You get the vacation home, and the next thing you know you have to work to keep it up as well as your place back home. Everything comes about accumulating stuff and more and more. And we want it, but then we find that we have a house over here as well as a vacation house, and we have this car and this many degrees all in our pursuit to make people think we are all that.

And it is a lie. It is a lie that Satan gives us because in the end whether we are famous, whether we are rich, whether we have one house or twenty houses, or we live in a van down by the river - we all are going to die. Everybody dies. That is what Solomon was saying, '*For all my pursuits, I am still going to die.*' He was a big deal; he was perhaps one of the most famous men on the planet at that time. You know one of the things that I find is this, even in my prayer life. My wife and I were talking about this last week. It doesn't matter how little you have or how much you have, it seems like we think the world revolves around us. It is this idea of entitlement. It is this idea of almost thinking that God answers our beck and call. Our prayers become about us, '*Lord, give me this. Lord, help me do this. Lord, I want this.*' The prayers all become about us rather than Him. And that begins expanding in our lives until it begins controlling us.

It is interesting that almost every time we pick up a newspaper we see politicians shooting for the headlines, right? And just pick a name like Nancy Pelosi. I saw this article about her house and how long she has served and how much money she has made. But do you know if you were to leave the United States and go to just about any other country and you were to ask who is the speaker of the house of representatives in the United States - they wouldn't know. And even more than that - they wouldn't care.

There are six billion plus people on the planet, with roughly three hundred and thirty million living here, and probably two thirds of them don't know who Nancy Pelosi

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is. I mean it just keeps getting smaller and smaller and smaller, but because we see her name on the headlines from time to time, we think she is all that. And quite frankly I believe she thinks she is all that.

But I would ask you this - who was the speaker of the house before Nancy. I only see one or two hands, but unless we are like a sicko news junky like me and Terry there, most people probably don't remember who that was. Certainly I can't remember who it was a hundred years ago. And as soon as Nancy goes away the new one will be there and we will begin talking about him or her; we won't be talking about Nancy because she will disappear like smoke and mirrors.

And that is important for all of us to remember. I would guarantee you that there is going to be a new pastor at Life Fellowship Church in the next thirty years, because I am not going to be up here when I am thirty years older than I am now. And you wouldn't want me up here in thirty years, quite frankly. Just give me another cup of pudding and I will be fine. (*Laughter.*) Someone else is going to be in your office, someone else is going to live in your house, and someone else is going to spend your inheritance. And so we believe that lie that it is all about us.

The second thing that Solomon learned, when we continue on in Chapter 1, is we are lying when we think we have life all figured out. Solomon said, *'You know, I was wise, perhaps I was the wisest man of all time. And I still can't figure out what is going on here. I can't figure out how to be happy, and I can't figure out how to be fulfilled. Everything that I have, and have done, and I still don't have life figured out.'*

When I was in my twenties and my kids were all little stair steps I traveled the country talking about childrearing. I did. I had sets of tapes that I would sell so that I could pay for the adoption fee of the next one I was going to adopt. That's what I did. I would leave on a Friday to go speak someplace that night and all day Saturday at conferences. I had a speech that caught fire called, 'Raising Beaver Cleaver Kids in a Bart Simpson World.' Now you would need to be a baby boomer to understand that. But that was my famous sermon that I preached.

Then my kids became teenagers, and all my wonderful childrearing parenting advice went right out the window. Someone called me recently and said, *'Hey, would you be willing to come and talk about parenting and childrearing at my church?'* And I said, *'Absolutely not, I don't have the foggiest clue what to tell them.'* But you know when I was young I thought I had it all figured out. Have you ever heard someone said this: *'Well, when I have kids I am not going to let my kids do that.'* Yeah, your kids are probably going to do a lot worse than that. God hears you.

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No, we don't have life all figured out. We just don't. Whether it is leading a church, or raising kids, or having a successful marriage, or growing a business, or whatever it is, there are a thousand more things to learn than we ever even thought of. And Solomon in all of his wisdom, all of his glory, all of his success, all of his money, and all of his women knew he didn't really have life figured out.

Then in Chapter 2 Solomon starts talking about a lot of the pleasures that he had enjoyed. He said, "*I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.*" But his conclusion right away was that was all vanity too. It was just all smoke and mirrors. It was just a bunch of empty promises. And when we get to the point where we are pursuing pleasure, the next experience, the next hit of adrenaline, the next rush of excitement, the next new thing, and you hard core chase that, hard core pursue that, eventually you find that like every other addiction it takes more the next time to satisfy as opposed to what it took initially. There is no fulfillment; it is all emptiness.

Then in verses 4 through 6 of Chapter 2 we see Solomon talking about how hard he was working. It was pretty impressive. I think it is in I Kings Chapter 3 or 4 that it talks about this. Solomon had all kinds of slaves, and there were two types of them. He had slaves from lands that he had conquered, and he had slaves that had been born of the slaves that he had conquered. So he was a ruthless leader because slavery is horrific, and yet he exploited people for his own personal gain thinking it would give him status.

And that wasn't enough, so he made a conscription in Israel and called up 30,000 men, able bodied men, and told them they would work for him building his temple and building his palaces. 30,000 men were at his beck and call, beyond his slaves and everyone else in his household. And he kept them working. They built gardens, they built palaces, and houses for spring and for fall. They built walls of protection, buildings to hold his largesse. And in the end he found no satisfaction in all of that.

He measured himself by his enjoyment, and then he measured it by his employment. And that is a common mistake we make, isn't it? We have to have the boat, have to have the corner office, have to have the promotion, have to have the bigger house. We look for enjoyment, and particularly men pursue employment, hoping to find satisfaction. And when we look at the list of Solomon's treasures we see at the end his conclusion was smoke and mirrors.

The old abolitionist's preacher, Henry Ward Beecher, said this: "*Success is full of promise until men get it, then it is last year's nest from which the birds have already flown.*" There is something sad about seeing last year's nest in that naked tree when the leaves have fallen off, and while once that nest had been the source of life now it decays in the winter winds.

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Then in Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 and verses 7 through 8 Solomon said he thought he could find satisfaction in power and success. He talks about how he was able to control and influence. In verses 9 through 11 he talks about his fame and his accomplishments. In verses 12 through 17 he talks about his wisdom, his experience, his education and how much he had learned over life. And whether it was power and success, or the fame and the accomplishments, or the education and experience, in Chapter 2 from verses 7 to 17 there is a list of things that Solomon thought if he could just gain, he would have it all. But it wasn't there.

In the end Solomon reaches his unhappy conclusion that he had believed empty promises. And in the end whether it was the industrious and the lazy, the wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, the same conclusion was reached and that was we die and then we are forgotten. So he had made four arguments here: life was monotonous and meaningless, wisdom is empty and pointless, wealth is futile and fickle, and death is certain and uniform. That is the bad news, all right?

Now in verse 24 we are starting to see a shift that occurs in Solomon's attitude. And if you study the whole book, and depending on how you measure it, in all there were between six and eight positive conclusions that Solomon eventually reaches in the book of Ecclesiastes. And that is where we are going to focus as we conclude this morning. Solomon's conclusion was that we can see what we have as a gift from God and enjoy it whether it is great or small, and then enjoy it for His glory and for our good.

And this conclusion is what Solomon raised. Enjoy the life that you have. Let me just pause here and say this. We live in America, the most economically powerful nation that has ever existed in the history of the world. It is also the freest nation that has ever existed in the history of the world. We didn't choose that; God gave that to us. And we didn't ask for it, we didn't deserve it; it was just God's goodness that allows us to have it. If God has given us these opportunities, there is nothing wrong with enjoying them, if you enjoy them in perspective.

If you have three homes, and there are people in this church who have three homes, so if you have three homes enjoy them. If God has given you great business acumen and you are a successful person with the office penthouse suite and you can look across the lake or look uptown and so forth, praise the Lord for it. If you get to drive a hundred thousand dollar automobile, praise the Lord. Congratulations.

But the warning is this - do not think what you have will give you satisfaction. Do not think what you have makes you more important. Do not think what you have makes you entitled. And do not think what you have is forever, because it is not. And this is what Solomon is saying. We need to embrace it, enjoy it while it exists, but don't

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let it be our identity. Don't let it be what possesses us and consumes us. Don't let it be the end all to everything. Enjoy what you have if you have a lot or if you have a little. If you live in a van down by the river be thankful that you at least have a van, because there are a lot of people who don't. And if you live in a house on the lake, praise the Lord, because a lot of people would like to live there. But the fact that you get to live there does not make you more special to God than the guy who lives in a van down by the river. And in a thousand years neither one of us is going to care where we lived here. It is not what we possess that matters; it is what possesses us that matters. And this is what Solomon would conclude.

So here are the happy realities. Number one - you don't have to believe the lies. You don't have to believe that this is all there is. You don't have to believe that you are a better person because you are rich, or because you are educated, or you have the right last name, or you wear a certain kind of jeans. You don't have to believe the lies. If you believe that makes you special, if you believe that makes you fulfilled, then you are believing a lie, and you are worse off than the person who lives in poverty, or lives illiterate, or lives in the ghetto, who understands that God loves them where they are, and He is going to take them to a place far more wonderful. And in that they can find contentment. What does the Scripture say? ***“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”***

The second thing is this - it is not too late to change. Here is Solomon when he is an old man by then. His ship has sailed, he was looking over his empire, and he was feeling low and empty. But he was getting an attitude adjustment so significant that he decided to write it down. And today we can learn from his foolishness and from his acquired wisdom. As long as we have breath in our lungs, as long as we have one more day on our calendar, it is not too late to change.

Here is the third thing - there is much that can be enjoyed now. Don't you hate it when the old people in your life, people like me, say to you, *‘When I was your age I didn't appreciate .....’* And then they fill in the blank. *‘I didn't appreciate kids leaving fingerprints all over my windows, doors, tables, and my clean pants. I didn't appreciate it. But I do now, and I miss it.’ ‘I didn't appreciate sitting on a folding chair on a garage sale table eating pasta and burgers, as my wife and I survived on a Christian school teacher's salaries that were less than \$20,000 a year. I did not appreciate it.’*

*‘And now I can order the lobster tail if I want to. We can go out and enjoy a nice steak at the Epic Steakhouse on our anniversary. But I will tell you that my memories of sitting on a folding chair in a tiny apartment eating warmed up hamburger and pasta, across the table from the love of my life, are some of the best memories that I treasure more today than I ever treasured before.’* There is so much that can be enjoyed right

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now in this moment. Don't lose these moments of joy in pursuit of things that will not fulfil. The old man Solomon was speaking truth to us.

Number four - we can make this life matter right now. We can make our lives matter whether it is through generosity, whether it is through availability, through your presence, whether it is just through a hug or a gift card, or whether it is through sharing your testimony, or serving the little kids in Kid Life, through opening a door on Sunday morning for someone who is coming for the first time to our church, to leading a Small Group, to picking up the little bank in the lobby and putting three hundred bucks in it to plant a church in India. You can make a difference right now in this moment in this life and it can matter for eternity.

Number five - we can be the exception. We live in a materialistic generation, we live in a materialistic culture, and let's be honest - we live in Lake Norman. It is nice here. Someone wrote me last night, *'I passed through Lake Norman yesterday.'* I haven't seen this person for like fifteen years, but they wrote me and said: *'It is so beautiful. You are so blessed to be able to live here.'* This guy lives in South Florida and I thought everyone wanted to live in South Florida, but it is always more beautiful where you are visiting.

We don't have to buy into the entitlement. We don't have to buy into the wealth or the pursuit. We don't have to buy into the special feeling that we may get because we do live in a very credible area. What we can do is say, *'Thank you, Lord, for the joy I have in living right where I am, and may I be a blessing to others.'* We can be the exceptions.

So what do we do? Number one - do some introspection on what you are personally pursuing for fulfilment and happiness. I want to challenge you to take a moment and stop and ask yourself where you are investing your energies right now. And by the way, don't do this just once. I did this yesterday afternoon sitting on my back porch for forty-five minutes watching the sunset. And I said, *'What is it that I am spending my energy on that is a pursuit of emptiness?'* And I will tell you that by the time I got done I needed both sides of a piece of paper, because God gave me quite the list.

It is easy. It is like dust bunnies under the bed. You don't know how they get there, but if you don't pay attention they are going to take over the place. And poor investments of time and resources and attention and energy will accumulate and every once in a while you have to have a garage sale, or you have to get the Swifter out to get rid of it all.

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Number two - ask the Holy Spirit to remind you when you are chasing the wrong things. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you. You know we shouldn't need the pastor to do it, we shouldn't need a financial coach to do it, we shouldn't need our Life Group leader to do it, because the person who will do it best already lives within us, and that is the Holy Spirit. And He is there, but so often as we taught last year, the Holy Spirit lives within us and we ignore Him as if He does not exist at all. And He is not going to scream at us, but He is there, and He is available. All we have to do is pray over the decisions we are getting ready to make and ask Him if they are wise, what our motivation is in this, and if this is the best choice for us, and then let the Holy Spirit direct us. And through God's Word and the Holy Spirit He will speak to us.

Number three - intentionally delete a vain pursuit and replace it with something eternal. So we are to take action on what the Holy Spirit has done. This is milestones, very simple and very basic. I am not a theologian, but I teach practical theology, and if the Word of God is going to make a difference in our lives we are going to have to do some repenting, some changing, and some obeying.

So if the Holy Spirit says: *'Dan, you are spending money stupidly on twelve subscriptions that you don't even participate in, that equal an amount to plant two churches a year.'* Now I have a choice - do I start cancelling subscriptions and putting investments where they can be eternal, or do I continue on my merry way to smoke and mirrors? Do I chase the empty promise, or do I take an action that is hard core? And if I am going to make progress I have to listen to the Holy Spirit, and then I have to act on it. It is one thing to listen and it is another thing to move.

Which brings me to the fourth thing - invite someone to speak truth to you about how you are living your life. You are to be journeying with someone. One of the problems with being King Solomon was he didn't have to listen to anyone. And because it was such a weird position, and everybody was always wanting his attention, wanting his approval, wanting his favor - they told him what he wanted to hear and not what he needed to hear.

Every king needs somebody in their life that can be brutally honest. Now in the day of the kings in Israel they did. It was the prophet. The king was not allowed to go into the temple and the priest did not go into the palace. There was separation of church and state on a mammoth scale in those days. And part of the reason was this - the prophet could say whatever he wanted to the king and he was exempt.

That is why the Prophet Nathan went up to David, and David was pontificating about this horrible person who had taken someone's pet lamb and slaughtered it and ate it. And Nathan just let King David prattle on and then whenever he said he was going to

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punish that man and make him give fourfold lambs back, Nathan took his finger, pointed it up in King David's face and said, '*You are the guy. You are the man.*' Then David realizes the lamb was not a lamb, but it was a woman, and the woman was someone else's wife and her name was Bathsheba. And the judgment that he had pronounced on others became his judgment, because someone got to say, '*You are the man.*'

We all need that. We need someone in our lives who we give permission to who will look at us and say, '*You may have everyone else fooled, Dan, but I know you.*' Now I'm blessed because I crawl in to bed every night next to the person who can do that to me absolutely best, and she does, trust me. But we all need someone in our lives who will speak the truth to us. Solomon didn't have that person, and in the end of his life he was a spent, dried out, successful, wise, rich, powerful, but empty man who said, '*Let me give you advice. Don't chase empty promises.*'

*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*