

So this question, is there any meaning in life, is a big question that many of us have felt and asked, can you relate to being in Disneyland, the happiest place on earth, and though you are there, feel like you are not enjoying life after winning 23 Olympic gold medals?

Swimmer Michael Phelps confessed in an interview that he struggled with depression and even suicidal thoughts.

I had everything, money, fame, medals, and I still felt lost.

Can you relate to the challenge of finding meaning?

Ecclesiastes is one of the wisdom books of the Bible.

Do you know the five books?

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes.

We don't know the author, we don't know who the author is, and we don't actually know who the teacher is that the author is talking about.

So there's an author of Ecclesiastes, and the way that he shares the truth is he talks about a teacher who is reflecting on life.

And the teacher is a son of the kings.

It's probably, a lot of us would believe it's Solomon, and we're really going to go with that, the thought that Solomon wrote the book.

But we don't know absolutely for sure.

The Greek word Ecclesiastes means one who addresses an assembly.

That's what Ecclesiastes means.

So it's about a teacher.

So there's an author speaking from a teacher's perspective.

And the overarching big idea of the Book of Ecclesiastes is that as human beings, we really don't have much control over our lives.

That's the essence of the book.

And without God, without knowing the God who created everything, life is meaningless.

Now, the word meaningless comes from this Hebrew word hevel, H-E-V-E-L.

And the word doesn't actually mean meaningless.

It means vapour or smoke.

And so the idea is the teacher is reflecting on life and saying it's all, it looks like something that you can grab hold of.

But when you try to grab it, it disappears in your hand.

So it's hevel, it's impossible to grab a hold of.

And it also is a word that means paradox, enigma.

It's a mystery because sometimes it feels like you can grab hold of life.

And so often other times we can't.

It's temporary and fleeting and enigma.

So for the teacher, all is hevel.

All is hevel.

And that's the teacher's motto, which is a bit of a downer.

Let's face it.

It's a bit of a downer to think that all is hevel.

The author thinks that basically people spend most of their life investing energy and emotion into things that ultimately have no lasting meaning or significance.

In fact, if you read the book, he has these two big ideas.

And again, they're a little bit depressing.

Time is fleeting and death is coming for you.

Time is fleeting and if you didn't realize that, you will meet death at some point and realize it all was over far too quickly.

Now, who's feeling encouraged?

Yeah, awesome, awesome.

We got some people encouraged already.

So what does the teacher advocate?

What does he say throughout the book?

We're doing like a skim through the whole book in this introduction.

Does he say we should become hedonists, pleasure seekers, or relativists where you basically make up all the rules yourself?

Now, he says, in essence, both of them are heathen as well.

They're going to bring you to meaninglessness.

The teacher acknowledges the core ideas from Proverbs.

He says, no, Proverbs is one of the wisdom books.

And a lot of what you find in Proverbs is helpful, but even Proverbs, he says, is heathen at the end because the good don't always get a problem-free life.

Good people 3,000 years ago were dying young.

They were having challenging times in life, and the horrible people were still living long and seeming to prosper.

So, he's basically saying the teaching of the Proverbs is helpful, it's good, but it still leaves you asking, what's the meaning of life?

So, what is the way forward?

Well, paradoxically, the teacher discovers that the key to truly enjoying life is accepting Hevel.

Accepting Hevel.

Acknowledging that everything in your life is totally out of your control.

About six times, at the bleakest moments in his dialogue, the teacher suddenly talks about the gift of God, which is the enjoyment of the simple.

The enjoyment of the simple things, the good things, friendship, family, a good meal, a sunny day.

You and I can't control the important things in our lives.

Nothing is guaranteed.

And strangely, Ecclesiastes teaches, that's the beauty of it.

When we adopt a posture of complete trust in God, it frees us to simply enjoy the life that he has given us, rather than chase the one we think we should be living, amen?

The author offers, and this is what Alex mentioned, the author offers at his conclusion what he thinks the answer is.

He says, fear God and keep his commandments.

This is the whole duty of humans, for God will bring every deed into judgment, every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

So ultimately, though there is not everlasting meaning under the sun, under what happens when the sun rises and sets, there is everlasting meaning when we get to know the God who is beyond the sun.

Amen?

That's where we find everlasting meaning.

So basically, in those couple of minutes, we've had a movie trailer where we've given away everything.

Haven't we?

You know those movie trailers?

Who hates them?

Like, oh, thank you.

Thank you, you've just told me everything.

Well, I felt like that was actually required because it's darn depressing working through all the meaningless stuff.

So we've got to know it gets to a place that's encouraging.

But this morning, I still think there is encouragement in these first 11 verses.

We're in chapter one, verses one to 11.

Is there any meaning in life?

Ecclesiastes suggests beware the voice that subverts.

The words of the teacher, a son of David King in Jerusalem, meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher.

Utterly meaningless.

Everything is meaningless.

The voice that subverts, it's a voice in our head that says, you know what, this is meaningless.

It's the voice that Alex had in Disneyland.

This is meaningless.

It's subverting the hope that life is worth living.

Well, God is good and his works are good, and he has created humanity to co-manage the world with him by his grace through his spirit.

And he has prepared, as we looked at last week, good works in advance for us to do.

So clearly, is there an amen at the end of this?

Life is not meaningless.

Because there's a good God and he has good stuff for us to do.

But so many of us have heard the voice of the cynic, the voice that says it's not.

The teacher is a son of David.

Maybe it is Solomon, who, of course, was the wisest person to live pre-Jesus.

And this teacher has seen a lot and really seems quite the cynic.

If you look up history, cynic and cynical come from the philosophical school founded by Antisthenes, a student of Socrates in the 4th century BC.

The cynics believed that true happiness comes from living in accordance with nature and reason, not possessions, status or pleasure.

Cynics rejected wealth, comfort, fame and social norms as artificial and corrupting.

Cynics often used shock tactics.

They were the original shock jocks.

Mocking or acting out taboo behaviors to expose societal hypocrisy and false values.

The cynics were subversive, ironic and often provocative.

Cynicism often ended in a kind of stoic detachment or mockery.

The cynics were the original glass half empty people.

Some of us warm to Ecclesiastes, because that describes you.

Don't you reckon?

Some of us love to be deconstructionists.

We love to pull things apart, and we are a bit glass half empty oriented.

We are slow to be convinced of the novel and the good.

Is there any meaning?

Well, it's a timeless question, and the teacher is suggesting that it's the case.

I think it's something to be aware of as a warning.

Beware the cynic.

And also, secondly, beware the cycle that grinds us down.

Verse 3, what do people gain from all their labours, says the teacher, at which they toil under the sun.

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises.

The wind blows to the south and turns to the north.

Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

I'll tell you what, this guy is just negative.

No matter who you are, he says, you're going to experience the repetition.

That is life.

Everything we do under the sun, think about it, it's a watertight little ball, isn't it?

And the water's going places and then it goes back to it and the sun rises and sets and then does it again and the wind blows from the north to south and east to west and all over and then it stops and then it does it again.

Then we went camping for two weeks when we were away and we had the best weather, praise the Lord, compared to what it could have been because we were in a camper trailer with a canvas roof.

And we had fantastic weather for about 12 of the 14 days.

For two of those days, we had really strong driving rain, but the other 12 we had barely any even wind.

But it reminded me you can have a fantastic 12 days, but the cycle is going to get you in the end.

There's rain coming, there's wind coming because it's cyclical, isn't it?

It's just, it's going to rain at some point and it's going to flood, especially driving through the north of New South Wales, you're going to get a flood.

Sometimes we know in Australia, you're going to get a bush fire and other times you won't.

But it's constantly up and down a cycle.

It happens, the flood comes and then it recedes, but it all happens again.

And of course, life is like this.

You could say it's monotonous.

We pay our dues in the workplace and we come to the weekend and then it's back to Monday.

And sometimes you can feel stuck in relationships, can't you?

And you can feel stuck in life, in your direction.

As the movie said, it's Groundhog Day again and again.

And this is the experience of the teacher three millennia ago, three thousand years ago about.

It says this cycle of the sun rising and setting, it's never ending whenever you live in history and it's meaningless, meaningless.

The voice continues to subvert, to undermine the hope that we can find, meaning the cycle continues to grind us down.



And then he says, there's an ache that remains.

There is this ache that remains, verse eight.

All things are wearisome, more than one can say.

The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

What has been will be again.

What has been done will be done again.

There is nothing new under the sun.

Is there anything of which one can say, look, this is something new.

It was here already long ago.

It was here before our time.

The teacher says, our senses are hungry, but never filled.

Life offers experiences, but they're not enough.

The teacher, we find in other places, has not refused his eyes anything, but it's not enough.

His eyes need more.

And he's listened to whatever he wanted to, but hasn't found anything ultimately new.

Have you noticed that no matter how many emails you answer, they keep coming.

The social media, it doesn't seem to ever end.

There's always another post or real, another video.

You do the dishes today and, has anyone found that they turn up again?

Work weeks.

Weekends are great.

Mondays, they just keep coming around.

News consumption, the 24-7 news cycle, it's just always there and always filled with a level of anxiety, isn't it?

What was once old, wide-leg jeans and mullets, becomes trendy again.

Every generation sort of thinks they're unique, but envy, greed, love, betrayal, longing, creates the same deep ache.

We ache for meaning, don't we?

So we can connect, don't we?

We connect with the teacher.

And we're like, please, there's got to be more.

But we do, we connect.

The voice that subverts.

Beware the cycle that grinds us down.

Beware the ache that remains.

And, and fourthly, the legacy that fades.

Verse 11, no one remembers the former generations and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Ouch.

I think that one hurts because the teacher is saying, the grandkids you haven't had yet, they're already forgotten.

Isn't that just depressing?

The grandkids or the great grandkids you haven't even seen, don't worry, they're already forgotten

because the passage of time will eat them up and death is coming and there's no such thing as a legacy that lasts.

Generations come and go, I wonder, I'm sure there'd be a few hands.

Well, we'll ask, how many people could give the full names of their great great grandparents?

A few family tree aficionados?

Yeah, but not many.

Whatever happened to our great great grandparents?

The legacy, the legacy that is lost, the teacher's take on life is hevel.

Hevel.

It's an illusory vapor that sometimes makes sense, but normally it doesn't.

The voice that subverts, the cycle that grinds, the ache that remains, and the legacy that fades.

Well, we could leave it there, but I'm thinking we need more for Monday morning.

That's basically what the text gives us today.

Chapter 1, verses 1 to 11, to a level.

I want to ask this question.

What impact has it made that the God that was outside the sun, going, looking like it's going around, but the earth's turning and sun's rising and sun's setting.

What happened when the God who's outside of that came in and was born of a virgin like we talked and sang about.

What happened to meaning when God walked among us and lived a perfect life to die in our place to pay for our sin and then rose again from the dead and ascended to heaven and sent his spirit back into his church who were living inside the blue ball.

What happened?

And the answer is a whole lot happened.

A whole lot happened.

Everything is Heavile.

It's transient, this side of heaven.

That's okay.

That's okay.

In fact, it makes us humble.

Amen.

If you get a hold truly of Heavile, it's a wonderful thing.

It's wonderful.

We recognize that we don't control tomorrow.

That's what Jesus told us.

You can worry about today, but don't worry, worry about tomorrow.

God's in control of tomorrow.

The voice that subverts should be our voice subverting the false hopes of society and humanity outside of complete dependence on God's provision.

Amen.

That's the voice that should be subverting, saying, you know what, you can't find meaning.

Let me give you a subversive, challenging idea.

Only God can give you meaning.

Everything is heave, I vapour until you realise the one who is anything but vapour loves you.

The God who created it all.

When our lives are in the everlasting hands of a good God, every second can count when we believe and we belong and we become the church that Jesus has called us to be and we honour God in everything.

There can be so much meaning.

What about the second aspect?

The cycle that grinds us down.

The cycle that grinds us down.

Does that routine, does that routine, does it have to be bad?

Does the same have to be boring?

No way.

You know that's the essence of sin, isn't it?

Think about it.

Getting bored with obedience is the essence of sin.

It's where sin comes from.

It's like, I'm going to be bored, Lord, eating every tree, every tree's fruit except for that one.

That's going to take away my boredom.

I need to do this disobedience thing.

No, God himself is able to say to the son every day, do it again, do it again.

I love this.

Do it again.

Isn't he?

Isn't God the one who says to the flower every day, he designed it to do this?

Bloom again.

Bloom again.

Every season.

Bloom again.

To the mother, give birth again.

The animal that's giving birth.

God is watching like a child, isn't he?

Does that remind you of children?

Children?

I've got grandkids now.

And when we look after them, it reminds me of what my kids did.

Do it again.

Do it again.

Do it again.

Do it again.

Do it again.

And so these days I go, I'm going to wear you out.

There.

There.

There.

There.

And then they walk away and go, yes.

Took me 50 goes, but you walked away from me.

But don't you reckon that there's something so profound about that?

That God says, do it again.

And the child says, do it again.

But as we get old, we get bored with wonderful things.

Don't we?

There's something so important about finding meaning in routine, in the normal.

When we were at Maroochydore on holidays, day after day, we saw this.

So no joke, that's Leanne, I think, down there in the top.

We basically saw a sunrise like that, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky for 10 days.

And there was a pilgrimage from the caravan park down to this spot where you would see, because it was the winter sun, it was quite low, the sunset would go down like that.

And I can promise you, we did not get bored of that.

We didn't get bored of it.

It was wonderful.

We need to see the glory in the everyday, amen.

In that which keeps happening over and over again, can I encourage you if you are new in your married life, get used to the face you wake up with and say thank you Lord for this beautiful woman or man that is next to me, because that face is a gift from God.

But if you are someone who is expecting to get bored with that face, you've got to work on that.

Because a wonderful, godly marriage till death do you part involves being grateful for that face again and again and again.

Amen?

It's this idea of embracing the routine.

Find true satisfaction in the routine, in the normal.

Find joy in the simple, and you've cracked the code of life by God's grace in Jesus.

The third idea, yes, there can be an ache that never satisfies in the eyes and ears, or there can be a gut level appreciation and gratitude to God when you look at things you've seen before.

Who has found it is helpful to say thank you God that I can see and I have eyes.

Thank you God that I can hear and that sound, maybe it's a shrill sound, but I can hear it.

Thank you Lord God that I can taste this food that's the same meal I've had over and over again, but at least I've got the capacity for taste.

We need to reframe, don't we?

We need to recognize that routine can lead to liturgy.

Liturgy is the order of a worship service.

You go to churches all over Sydney today and there will be a different order of service.

And we call it liturgy.

Some will be doing a more high church setting, some will be doing a more low church setting.

Our liturgy is often singing songs of worship, some sort of announcements, maybe some creative part of expression of our community.

There's a Bible reading and prayer and there's a sermon from the Word of God.

And sometimes we have communion and then we have more singing and we have fel...



It's a liturgy.

It's an order of service.

We need to see our days, the routine of our days as liturgy.

I do this when I wake up.

I give honor to God.

I come under His word.

I pray.

I say hi to my wife or my husband or I don't.

I say hi to the person in the train.

You get what I mean?

Create a liturgy that takes the routines of life and turns them into an avenue of worship.

God thank you for all that I will experience today.

And as far as a legacy that fades, I don't have to be remembered, but I know I happen to be blessed with children and grandchildren.

And I know my DNA from me as a legacy will continue on at least for a little while, it would seem.

And if that's you, praise God.

But we can have a legacy that doesn't fade by just investing in people by the grace of Jesus for the glory of God in the kingdom of God.

Amen.

Just invest doing the good that we've been talking about the last month and do good, the good that God has prepared in advance for us to do and see that create a legacy.

Yes.

Do good and believe, Lord, it's not me that will make this last, but I'm praying that if I sow into the kingdom of God, into people, into relationship, you're going to do something worthy of your name.

Do you think that the woman in Mark 14 ever knew that we'd still be talking about that perfume jar that was poured out a couple of thousand years later?

Remember when Jesus said, don't make it make fun or criticise what she has done.

A year's wage is poured out on him to prepare him for the cross.

He says, wherever the gospel is preached, this story will be told.

But it's not always told, but the essence of waste is always in the gospel, isn't it?

The essence that a god on a cross dying under Roman rule, that's a waste of a life.

No, it isn't.

No, it isn't.

When he's paying for the sin of the world and he rises again.

And when we lay our lives down, we invest in the kingdom, in pointing people to Jesus, in loving people in Jesus' name, in doing the good works he's prepared in advance for us to do.

That's not a waste.

It's not a waste.

We can actually expect there to be a legacy that lasts.

It doesn't fade.

Life under the sun.

Is but a vapour in that it is here today and gone tomorrow.

It is out of our control.

It is out of our control, our life.

But that doesn't make our lives meaningless.

Amen?

Just because it's Heavile doesn't make it meaningless at all.

It just points us to the one who is not Heavile.

That's where we find our meaning, in the God who came from outside the blue ball and walked among us and told us about the hope of glory beyond this earth to the new earth that will last forever, where every tear will be wiped away and God will be glorified and there will be no capacity for sin.

And life will be the way it's always been designed to be, full to the brim of meaning.

Is there any meaning in life?

We should say to each other, yes, there is.

Yes, there is meaning in life.

As Ben said a few weeks ago, because this life is a journey from grace to glory, and in the process of getting from grace through to glory, it's a journey of working out how to do good.

The good that's been prepared for us to do.

We are now coming to do something that is a wonderful remembrance that we normally do once a month.

You could get bored of doing communion, or you could not get bored of doing communion.

Can we do the latter?

Can we stop, maybe close our eyes, and imagine the bread and the cup on that last night that Jesus was with his disciples.

And imagine him taking the bread and breaking it, and saying, do this in remembrance of me.

This bread represents my body.

And now for 2000 years, Christians have been doing it regularly.

Breaking the bread and saying, thank you Jesus that you gave your perfect life for us.

And Christians, like we're about to do, have eaten the bread.

And as the bread has gone into our stomachs, we are reminded, we are one body by faith in Christ.

We have solidarity.

We are one in the Spirit.

And so, Lord Jesus, we thank you for your life.

And it's our privilege again to take of the bread.

And can you imagine him taking the cup?

And saying, this cup represents the blood of the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

And as the years went by and the creeds were written, the church understood more and more what this meant.

That the blood of Christ is enough.

The blood of the lamb, the Passover lamb, that protects, identifies, and cleanses all who would believe.

Lord Jesus, we give you the praise that is due your name because you are the worthy lamb, the lamb of revelation, who is victorious, who defeats the enemies of God as a victorious, bloodied king.

Your death on the cross was enough to save us and to forgive us, and your mighty resurrection from the grave has made a way through death for all of us.

And we give you all the glory now.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.