

Vanity & Striving for the Wind

by Steve Odom

Steve Odom's sermon explores the futility of seeking happiness in earthly achievements, urging a focus on spiritual fulfillment through God.

Duration: 58:37

Topics: "Idolatry", "True Fulfillment"

Description

In this sermon, Steve Odom shares his personal journey of searching for significance and meaning in life. He initially turned to athletics and sports, finding joy and purpose in football and collecting cards. However, he eventually realizes that these pursuits are not fulfilling and leave him feeling anchorless and directionless. Odom's story serves as a reminder that worldly pursuits and achievements cannot provide true happiness and purpose, and that we need to seek something greater to find fulfillment in life.

Transcript

This message is entitled Vanity and Striving After Wind and is given by Steve Odom, formerly of the Green Bay Packers. Thank you, Larry. Oh, boy.

I haven't felt this anxiety since I was playing football. In fact, I was thinking just the other day, just a few seconds ago, about the last time I spoke and when that was and where it was. It was during the time I was playing football.

And while I was playing football with Green Bay, I was the chapel leader. Every team in the NFL has a chapel leader, a guy who, when we go on the roads or when we're at home, who introduces the chapel speakers. And his responsibility is to see to it that the chapel speaker on the road gets a ticket to the game and that, you know, things are taken care of in regards to the chapel speaker.

Well, in the middle of the season, this was the 79th season, right in the middle of it, we were playing in Miami against Miami Dolphins and our chapel speaker didn't show. And that's one of the things that makes a chapel leader very nervous. Because at 8.30 in the morning, before we play a game on Sunday, that's the time we have our chapel service.

And usually the head coach is in the front row with his wife and then you have half the team there and visitors and everyone's expecting to hear a word from the Lord. Well, our speaker didn't show up. And so that left me with the responsibility of doing something with this group.

And so I whipped out my Bible and opened it up to Ecclesiastes and I began to speak with him about some of the things I'm going to speak with you about today. But I went a little further than I normally do. I substituted various things for fellowship with God.

And this morning, during the chapel service, I decided to go a little further and I said to the group, including the head coach of the Green Bay Packers, who at that time was Bart Stark, I said that as far as I'm concerned, there are many things that men substitute for fellowship with God. And one of those things, for many guys that play in the NFL, is football. And that as far as I was concerned, if I broke my leg or got a serious injury in that game that day, to such an extent that it prevented me from further playing football, that it would mean very little to me because I do not substitute football for fellowship with God.

Well, that was part of my message and that day we lost the game. I fumbled about three times, misjudged the punt, and Monday morning I found myself a free agent and on my way to New York on Tuesday. And so the Lord really tested me very quickly in that incident.

And so in some respects I'm very nervous about this morning because I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. But I'd like to thank Larry and his wife and Roy Freeman and Beverly and Jackie for this opportunity. They all kind of had a little bit to do with my being up here.

And I tell you, Roy Freeman had a lot to do with the anxiety I'm feeling right now, too. He knows what I'm talking about, don't you? Well, you know, when I was going to school, college, I attended the University of Utah. One of the things I would always do is I'd run to the papers, especially on Sunday mornings, and I'd look at the comic strips.

I'd check out the sports section, too, but I was more into comic strips, I think, at that time. And one particular strip that I always looked at was the Peanuts comic strip. And I can recall on New Year's Day of 1974 that Charles M. Schultz, the creator of the Peanuts comic strip, was featured as the grand marshal of the Tournament of Roses parade in Pasadena, California.

And on that day in his strip, Linus finds Lucy watching the parade on television and asks, has the grand marshal gone by yet? And Lucy replies, yeah, you missed him, but he wasn't anyone you ever heard of. The obvious point is that Schultz's own created characters were unaware of their creator. And then there's another strip where Schultz has Snoopy on his doghouse in his characteristic sighing posture, and he's sighing and he's looking up in the sky and he's saying, I searched the sky and I can find no meaning, no meaning.

Then suddenly Charlie Brown appears with a dish of dog food and Snoopy leaps up and yells, ah, meaning. The universal experience of man, however, is that he is not so easily satisfied in his search for meaning and reality. He has an insatiable desire for something that goes beyond what satisfies his physical hunger.

And without this meaning, he feels estranged from himself. He feels anchorless, detached, directionless. He begins to think that his planet, his world is a cosmic orphanage and a crazy mixed up universe that offers no real pattern for living and no direction for meaningful destiny.

So he begins a searching process for something that will bring significance and meaning to his life. I'd like to share with you this morning a bit of my searching process, my search for happiness. And it began, it began with athletics, with sports.

As a kid growing up, football, baseball, sports in general was everything to me. I can recall collecting football cards and baseball cards and trading them and inventing games with these cards and doing all sorts of things with those cards. In fact, I can recall quite vividly the time once I became a professional football player when I was leaving the practice field in Green Bay and going up to the stadium and this kid comes up to me and he has a card in his hand.

He presents it to me and he says, Sir, sort of like the Joe Green commercial, you know, he says, Sir, would you please sign this card for me? And this was my second year in the season and I reached down to sign what this kid had for me and I looked at it and it was a football card and it was a picture of me. And I just flashed back that it seemed like it was only yesterday that I was collecting these things myself and playing games with them and here I was being asked to sign on my face. But when I was a kid I collected those things and football for me, before I got into sixth grade, was not an organized game.

I'm from Berkeley, California and they didn't have Pop Warner football over there. So the way we played football was in the streets. You know, we'd get a little side street where there wasn't very much traffic and occasionally there would be cars parked there, but we'd play our games on the streets and usually you'd have four guys and you'd have two on each team and it would amount to a lot of faking, a lot of lateral movement from side to side.

One play might last 15 minutes with a guy just trying to avoid a guy and it wasn't a realistic sort of game, but that was the best we could do. And thinking back on my athletic development, I can really, I'm really thankful that I had that opportunity because there were times on the football field, because of my stature, that I had to do more faking than running over. And so it got to the point where you were even inventing moves.

You'd run out of things to do and you'd look and you'd see a guy that did a certain move on TV and so you'd try it out on the streets. But that's the sort of thing I did. When I got into the sixth grade I had a teacher who was really encouraging to me.

He was a guy who took one look at me and decided that I wasn't going to be a big fella, so I ought to be fast. And so he would challenge me to races. During our recess I can recall going out on the playground and we'd run little 50-yard dashes and he'd always push me to try to catch him, kind of that coaxing.

He'd run just fast enough to win and keep me right in his hip pocket sort of thing. By the time I got out of sixth grade I was the fastest kid in the school. I couldn't beat him, I was the fastest kid in the school.

During those days you were either, if you wanted to be something, you were the best fighter or the fastest runner. Because of my size I chose to be the fastest runner. And that too paid off later in life.

But junior high school was the time when I, all during this time baseball was organized. I could play baseball and I was playing baseball in summer leagues. And junior high school was really when my baseball talents were beginning to develop.

And again I had a coach in junior high school who was encouraging to me. This guy thought that I was going to be in the 1972 Olympics. And so he would take me to track meets and all sorts of sporting events and really kind of became another father figure to me.

But my baseball talents were really beginning to develop and I was becoming more interested actually in baseball than I was in football. The eighth grade was also a time where I was going to begin to experience

a series of injuries that were going to prevent me from playing football. And the first injury occurred in the eighth grade in a baseball game.

This was the summer before the first organized football would be available for me. And I was in a baseball game and I had laid down a drag bunt and the second baseman was covering first base because the first baseman went to catch the ball to throw it to the second baseman. The second baseman was the only guy I think in the world who was smaller than I was at the time.

And he was on a collision course with me. And to avoid hitting him I crossed over my left leg and I hit the first base in such a way that it fractured my left ankle. I didn't know it at the time.

I stayed in and stole second and third base and came in on a single. And the coach, you know, he noticed that I was kind of hopping and he came over in the dugout and looked at the ankle and decided that it was fractured and took me to the doctor. And sure enough the x-rays showed a fractured left ankle.

Then in the ninth grade it was my opportunity to play football in an organized way. So with pads and everything I was all excited. And in the very first game I fractured my right ankle.

So I didn't get to play. But it healed in time for me to play baseball. So I played baseball.

The tenth grade, the first game of the football season, we had less than two minutes to go in the game and I was running a sweep around left side and I turned it inside toward the end zone and crunch, fractured my left ankle again. That was the first game. So I didn't play football again, but it healed in time for me to play baseball in the summer.

So I played baseball. So the eleventh grade came along and we were playing our first game in South San Francisco. And I was playing defensive back this time and I backpedaled to cover this guy who had to be 7'9".

He was an end on the other side. And I backpedaled and I noticed a running play inside so I came up to support on a run. And this big fella just got right in my chest.

And he lifted me up about a thousand feet. And I came down, I came down on my wrist like this behind me and I fractured my left wrist. That was the very first game so I didn't play football.

But it healed in time for me to play baseball. So I played baseball. So it's twelfth grade now in high school.

It's my last chance. And we're in the first game. And by this time I was really kind of cautious and scared and concerned.

And I had a girlfriend and she was kind of cautious and concerned and afraid. And she gave me a pair of socks. And she said, these are going to be called good luck socks.

And our colors were red and white. And she gave me a bright blue pair of socks for good luck. And they weren't really good luck, but I made it through that game, that very first game.

In fact, I made it through the whole season without an injury and was blessed with just a tremendous year. All kind of honors, a high school All-American and was selected to play in different high school bowl games. And just a tremendous year, all kind of honors.

Scholarships also. And scholarship offers to most major universities. But at the end of that season, there was still a fractured feeling in my life.

There was still a feeling. And it wasn't a physical feeling because I had healed and the physical injuries were gone. But I was feeling fractured psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

And I was searching. I was searching. I could recall looking at other guys on campus who had all the medals from track on their sweaters and they'd give their sweaters to the girls and the girls would wear their sweaters and walk down the halls and all these medals would be jingling and stuff.

And they had all these things and honors. And I was president of a social club, which was a big deal. Berkeley is kind of the place if you want to know anything about philosophy or any sort of lifestyle, that's sort of the place.

And I was searching. Fortunately, at the time, I was also in a Sunday school. I was in a church.

But I attended Sunday school. I didn't really go to church. And I had a teacher in the church who loved the Lord and shared that love with me.

And I began to understand that in her teaching from the scriptures that all had sinned and that I was a sinner. And that meant that I was separated from God. And the result, the penalty of that sin, was death.

And the sin was a barrier that was keeping me from God and that Christ had removed that barrier by dying on the cross for my sins. So the issue for me, as she explained it, was belief, belief on Christ. And I believed that he said who he was, that he rose, and that he's living.

And I became a believer. I put my faith in Christ. That happened in the 12th grade.

And I went on. I went to college. And I didn't concern myself with injuries.

And I didn't have any injuries. And it was sort of every year, the four years I was at the University of Utah, were like my senior year in terms of success. I had it all the way along.

And ended up graduating an All-American and being asked to play in several post-season games and then eventually being drafted by Green Bay. And I used that faith in everything I did, particularly in my sports, particularly in my football. And I could spend a long time talking about that with you, but that's not really what I want to share with you.

I realize in my counseling, in life in general, that everybody wants to be happy. Don't you try to be happy? Maybe you come to a golf course like this, thinking that it will bring you happiness. You go out on the green and you putter around and you drive.

Eventually you become upset. You get angry. You get mad.

So you try something else and something else and something else. Perhaps it's bowling or tennis or television or running or the theater, women, bars, alcohol. Seeking something.

Seeking happiness. But you don't find happiness. When you reach the end of a day off or a long vacation, there's no happiness.

When you go to bed at night, you're determined to find happiness. And when you wake up in the morning, you go out and you set out a new day trying to find happiness. But no happiness.

The story of Solomon is really what I want to share with you this morning. And it's quite a contemporary story. The book of Ecclesiastes itself is one of my favorite books because of it being contemporary.

Also because of, here's a man who had everything. Absolutely everything. In fact, the story is a story of entertainment.

It's a story of living it up. It's a story of a person who had everything he ever wanted within his grasp. Everything he dreamed of within his grasp.

Yet having these things, he didn't find happiness. He tried everything. Everything.

And the story is recorded in the Word in order to save you the time, the trouble, and if you have it, the money. Like I said, because Solomon tried everything. Everything, that is, except the grace solution.

If you have your Bibles, I'd like you to turn to 2 Chronicles, beginning with the 13th chapter. I'll read it. I just want to point out some of the magnificence of Solomon, his wealth.

2 Chronicles 9, verse 13. It's kind of interesting to write practically in the middle of the Bible is there's an income tax return. It's not very long, but it's rather impressive.

Sources of income are shown, and then some entertainment items here apparently to be deducted. But in verse 13 it says, Now the weight of gold which came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold. 666 talents of gold.

In our monetary standards, that's \$20,479,500. That's a lot of money. Besides that which the traders and merchants brought, he also had people working for him in addition to that income.

And the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon. And King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten gold using 600 shekels of beaten gold on each large shield. Now there was a custom during that time of converting gold, if you had enough of it, into various paraphernalia.

So in keeping with this custom, Solomon made 300 shields of beaten gold using 300 shekels of gold on each shield. And the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. The house of the forest of Lebanon was like Solomon's summer retreat, his little cabin up at Big Bear.

Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure gold. And there were six steps to the throne and a footstool in gold attached to the throne, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arm. And 12 lions were standing there on the six steps on one side and on the other.

Nothing like it was made for any other kingdom. And all of King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. Silver was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon.

For the king had ships which went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram. Once every three years, the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks. Now, apes and peacocks, that's kind of amusing.

You can just kind of picture a ship undocking, and you can see the unloading of all these precious ornaments made of silver and ivory and gold and turquoise and just everything you could. All the riches you can just imagine coming off this ship, and then all of a sudden at the end of this line you see apes and peacocks. It seems a little out of context, but that's where Solomon had gotten.

He had gotten to the point where he had gone beyond riches to the point where he was finding and seeking pleasure in unusual ways. So King Solomon, verse 22, became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth were seeking the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart.

I'm going to read that verse again. And all the kings of the earth were seeking the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. I'm not going to read the rest, but it goes through 28 and it's talking about his wealth.

And from that reading you not only get the idea that he was a rich man, which he was, the richest in his time, but that he was getting richer every minute. Now, if you could turn to Ecclesiastes, this is where I want to go, beginning with the first verse. The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.

What advantage does a man have in all his work which he does under the sun? The reason that Solomon makes, in verse 2, vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, it's the Hebrew superlative of the word vanity, really emphasizing how vain things are. And the reason Solomon makes such an issue of the vanity of all things becomes clear if you understand the day, the time in which the book was written. It was a season when the fortunes of Israel stood at a low ebb.

Men in Israel were discouraged and disappointed. Faith burned with a dim light. And one reason for this disappointment was that men had expected too much from purely earthly values.

And if a man properly assesses the worth of earthly things rightly, he won't expect too much from them. Consequently, when they do fail him, he won't be unduly disappointed. And the people during this time were really investing a lot of themselves in the earthly values.

There are two things in understanding the rest of the book that we need to concentrate on. And the first is vanity. What does the word vanity mean? The word itself is used 31 times in the book of Ecclesiastes.

And the word vanity in Hebrew really means vapor or breath. Something like the breath that condenses when you breathe, when you exhale into cold winter air. It condenses and then it disappears all at once.

So it's translated transitory or vanity. This is kind of confession time here now in terms of relating to this word vanity. I love to take baths.

And I don't take them as much as I used to. I take showers though, don't worry about that. But I don't take baths as much as I used to because of jacuzzis now.

But I do like baths. And when I take a bath, whenever I do take a bath, I use Mr. Bubble. If you've ever taken a bath, and I hope some of you have, you use Mr. Bubble or any kind of bubble bath that kicks up the bubbles.

When you run the bath water, you pour in the Mr. Bubble or whatever you use, and it kicks up all those nice bubbles and stuff. And then you get into the water and you kind of kick back and do whatever you do in the bathtub. But if you sit there long enough, you begin to realize and you're looking around, about that time when the fingers start to wrinkle, you notice also that the bubbles are going away.

And if you sit there long enough, you're sitting there in a tub of dirty water. And the word vanity is like soap bubbles. It kind of kicks up and it's really exciting and you can really get into it at first, but after a while it goes away.

It evaporates. It's just gone. And so that gives you an indication of what he's meaning by vanity.

And also keep that in mind because it's used 31 times and it's used after he tries and substitutes for fellowship with God. The other phrase that we need to understand is in verse 3. What advantage does a man have in all his work which he does under the sun? Under the sun is the phrase. The correct appreciation of this phrase is important.

It's an important safeguard because of the message of the entire book. It's used 25 times in the book of Ecclesiastes. It must always be borne in mind that the use of this phrase, Solomon is saying that he's going to rule out higher values and spiritual realities and employ solely earthly values and gifts.

The use of the phrase is the equivalent of drawing a horizontal line between earthly and heavenly realities and leaving out of consideration the higher realities or the higher values, the spiritual realities. It's been my experience that there's very little objection to that because it seems to me that people who are in and out of trouble behave as if the heavenly realities were entirely inaccessible to them. So it's like when Solomon uses the phrase under the sun it's as if he's saying let us for the sake of argument momentarily rule out the higher values.

So the presence of the little phrase under the sun means what I claim is true if one deals purely with earthly values. So he begins in verse 4 by saying and by showing verse 4 through 7 by showing how concentration on the things under the sun are like cycles in life. A generation goes and a generation comes, verse 4. But the earth remains forever.

It's like one generation is dying off and another one is coming on and it just keeps going around and around. The only thing that's stable is the earth for which this drama takes place. The sun rises and the sun sets.

And hastening to its place it rises there again. And the word for hastening means panting. It's as if we see the sun rise and we see the sun set and the activity that occurs between the setting and the rising is a panting, a hastening activity.

And it's another cycle. Blowing toward the south then turning toward the north The wind continues swirling along on its circular courses. The wind returns.

Pointing out that the only thing that's constant about wind is that it's going to change. The rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they will flow again.

The picture is one of the sun beats on the water, evaporates it, forms a cloud, moves over the land, precipitates, the water runs down into the river or the ocean again and that whole process starts over again. Just a continual cycle, round and around and around. So Solomon, who had everything, was

looking for something different, something new, something unusual, some fountain of youth, something that would be a constant source of stimulation, something whereby he could be happy without God.

So he tried substitutes for fellowship with God. The things he tried, which I'm going to touch on briefly, are these. He tried education, pleasure, possessions, heritage, philosophy, money, reputation and sex.

The first education is found in the 13th verse, first chapter. He says, and I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given the sons of men to be afflicted with.

The first thing he tried was education. He had access and Alexandria of his time, of all the works that were ever done in the libraries. And he studied them.

If you were to study the rest of that passage, you'd see that he studied several things that are common today, agnosticism, empiricism, most of the philosophy. But if you look at that verse again, you'd see, he says, I set my mind to seek and explore. But then, that same verse a little later, he says, it is a grievous task which God has given the sons of men to be afflicted with.

So it's kind of a, you know, if he decided to do it, why is God afflicting those who decided to do it? Well, what he's saying here is that, and he's using it in this way because he's trying to say that even men who do not know God have a desire to discover truth because God has put that in their heart. So he tried education. And his conclusion, well, this is verse 14.

I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. His conclusion was, and maybe you have concluded some of the same things about education, is that it is futile. In fact, if you flip over to the 12th chapter, verse 12, he says, But beyond this, my son, be warned, the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.

I know that. I spent over four years in graduate school in addition to the four years of undergraduate work at Utah studying. And the conclusion, my conclusion, concurs with his conclusion in that it is vanity and striving after wind.

He says a lot about that, but I'm going to go on to the next thing he tried, which was pleasure. Now, probably what happened at this point is that Solomon said to himself, You know, you're too serious of a guy. You need to go out and kind of live it up.

You've been studying for all these years, and now you need a break. So go out and have a good time. So in verse 1 of chapter 2 he says, I said to myself, Come now, I will test you with pleasure.

So enjoy yourself. And behold, it, too, was futility. So he got into just having a good time, partying.

Going to this party, going to that party, going to this club, going to that club, laughing, having a good time. And the conclusion to that is in verse 2. Part of it is in verse 2. He concluded in verse 1 by saying that it, too, was vanity. But he said, I said of laughter, it is madness.

And of pleasure, what does it accomplish? In verse 3, he went to a second type of pleasure, and that was alcohol. He says, I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely. He conducted an experiment is what he did.

He conducted it in such a way that he wasn't overly intoxicated. Intoxicated but not overly intoxicated because he wanted to be able to discern whether or not this would bring happiness to his life. But he wasn't alcoholic for a time because he was seeking that.

Perhaps he got into his chariot and went out and ran over a couple of kids or something. Or maybe he was the kind of alcoholic that went to the local pub and beat up a few guys. Or maybe he was the domesticated kind of alcoholic who goes home and beats up his wife.

But an alcoholic he was, and an alcoholic he tried as a substitute for fellowship with God. So then, verse 4, he goes on. I enlarged my works, I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself, I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. Then he moves from what he did outside to what he does inside. He bought, verse 7, I bought male and female slaves, and I had home-born slaves, and I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me.

I collected for myself silver and gold and treasures of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men, many concubines. The male and female singers, he goes into how he decorated the inside of his house, and the male and female singers were his equivalent of a stereo system.

He'd just have 500 bass over here, and he had the tenors over there, and the altos, the sopranos, and he'd say, sing, and they'd sing in stereo for him. That's the kind of person he was. He tried, okay, from, we've already talked about the education, the pleasure, and the possessions.

He tried those next. He went to heritage. He said, okay, now I'll try to find happiness by having a family.

Verse 18 of the second chapter. Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to a man who will come after me. He was afraid that his son would be a fool, and he was right.

His son was Rehoboam, and he was a fool. He was so foolish that he split the kingdom, and that split still exists. Solomon went on to say, and who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool, yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun.

This, too, is vanity. He next went on to philosophy. And chapter three is Solomon's philosophy.

There is an appointed time for everything, and there is a time for every event under heaven. This is that chapter I'm sure all of you are familiar with. A time to give birth, a time to die, a time to plant, a time to uproot what is planted.

And he goes on to the contrast, listing the contrast in life. I hope as I'm going through what Solomon has gone through, that you're going through what, that you're evaluating your own lives in terms of these same things, because I did. I can recall quite vividly the time when I had to discover the meaning to life for myself, and I went, before I came to know Christ, I went via the route of philosophy.

And I can recall being at a party in high school one night, I think my junior year in high school, just really discouraged and not getting into the party thing, and so I went outside. And it was a really beautiful night with all the stars in the sky, and it was very clear, and I went to this place where I could be alone and really

think about life. And I decided that I needed to come up with some sort of philosophy, some sort of philosophy of life that would make myself significant, bring meaning to my life.

So I devised this philosophy, it went kind of like this. It was, well, I'm going to just suppose that the earth is a cell, and that people are parasites or something like that on this cell, and the cells within a body like mine are yours. And earthquakes are the result of the body belching or something like that.

And I went on and on and on. I don't know if anyone's heard anything like that before, but I went on and on and on. And the whole idea was I was trying to make myself feel significant in a world that just seemed too big for me, and I was lost.

And Solomon also came to this kind of place, and so he came up with a philosophy that recognized contrast in life but didn't quite know how to integrate the contrast, didn't know how to put it all together. Solomon studied every philosophy that was available at that time, and like I said, that's in that chapter. He studied evolution, and he studied empiricism, agnosticism, and all major religions, because he wanted to find meaning and purpose to his life.

And the result was that it, too, was vanity and striving after win. He next tried money. Money is found in the 5th chapter, verse 10 of Ecclesiastes.

He says, He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This, too, is vanity. One night, I suppose what Solomon did was he had, you've heard some of what he had, but one night, I suppose, he went out, and he was at one of his construction sites, and he hired at least 50,000 men to work on some of the projects he had going.

He'd walk out by the barracks where these men were staying, and he'd hear them just snoring away, just sleeping peacefully, heartily, with a lot of gusto, sleeping very, very well. And he'd walk down there, and he'd notice this, and these were men that had very little. They had just enough clothing for what, they just had the only clothing they had was that which they had on their back, and maybe an extra pair of shoes, but they were very, very poor, yet they slept very well.

And this inspired the verses 12 through 15, where he says, The sleep of the working man is pleasure, is pleasant, rather, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep. What happened to Solomon is that in acquiring all these riches, he developed insomnia, concern about income taxes, concern about what he had to do in terms of his investments, and all the plans that he had to make around all the money he had robbed him of life, just the simple thing of being able to sleep. 13.

There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun, riches being hoarded by their owner to his heart. When those riches were lost through bad investment, and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came.

He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. Next, he tried reputation. The seventh chapter, the first verse, A good name is better than a good ointment.

Now, the reputation thing in my own life came when, like I mentioned in high school, one of the main motivating forces prior to knowing Christ personally was to get that letter sweater, to get those medals, to get those awards that were there for me. And the thing you wanted to do, of course, is when you got it, to impress some girl by giving her what you won, that sort of thing. And there was a whole status sort of thing

that was associated with that.

And Solomon got into that, that reputation. And he had a very good reputation, but again, the conclusion was that it, too, was vanity and striving after win. And the last thing he tried was sex.

And that's found in the seventh chapter of the 26th verse, where he says, And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her. In Proverbs 5.4, Solomon, speaking there, says that he compares relationship, his sexual relationship as being like wormwood.

And wormwood was a sort of a stimulant. It was poison, actually. But when you put it in your mouth and you were tasting it and eating it, it was very, very pleasant.

It was very, very pleasant. It tasted really good. But the result was death because it was a poison.

And it sort of highlights the transitoriness of all the other things that Solomon tried. The 12th chapter is a description of Solomon in old age. He's gotten to the point where he's tried all these things for substitutes for fellowship with God.

We have the conclusion, actually, in the 13th verse. But before he gives the conclusion, he describes himself as an old man, as an old person. And he does it in such a way, I'd like to share that with you, that the metaphors used there are just quite vivid.

And I find that they cause people to think because when you get to be old is a time when you begin to reevaluate your life. And Solomon is saying here, evaluate your life right now before you get old. The first verse he says, Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near, when you will say, I have no delight in them, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain.

In the day that the watchmen of the house tremble. The watchmen of the house are the hands. You know you're old.

And you can be 70 or you can be 25, but you know you're old when you hold out your hand and it shakes. That's when you know you're hand, when you know you're old. You know your hand too, you get to see it.

And the mighty men stoop. The legs, mighty men is a metaphor for legs. They get weak.

No longer can carry the weight, no longer can walk as long and as hard as they once did. The digestive system beginning to give way. And one will arise at the sound of a bird, insomnia.

And all the daughters of song will sing softly. The hearing begins to decrease. Furthermore, men are afraid of high places and the terrors on the road.

The high places, of course, begin to feel afraid of height. No longer can fly on airplanes, no longer can climb high mountains, those sort of things. Become fearful.

And then just the natural fears begin to annoy you or bother you more. Furthermore, the almond tree blossoms, you begin to get gray hair. And the grasshopper drags himself along.

No longer has a physical strength. Grasshopper dragging himself along is an idiom for the way you carry yourself, your gait becomes less. And the caperberry is ineffective.

The caperberry, that was a berry that was used as a stimulant for appetite. What this is saying is that you begin to lose desire, all desire. It goes on and down to verse 13, he ends his description of old age there, but down in verse 13 is the conclusion.

When all has been heard, fear God and keep his commandments, because this applies to every person. I'd like to go back to verse 1 of chapter 12. Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.

Remember also your Creator. How do you remember your Creator? Well, if you're a believer, you remember your Creator, you remember Christ. By daily being in fellowship with him, using 1 John 1.9 as often as possible to keep yourself in fellowship.

If you are an unbeliever, it means to trust in Christ for salvation. If you have your Bibles, turn to Acts, the book of Acts, chapter 4, verse 12. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.

Christ loves you. He died on the cross, as I said, he died on the cross for your sins. By dying on the cross for your sins, he removed that barrier, that obstacle, which separates you from God.

By believing on him, you can have eternal life. Like I said, the issue is not what you do or what you don't do. It's not sin, because Christ has taken care of that.

The issue is belief in him. He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life. I'm going to close now, in prayer, and I'm going to pray a prayer of invitation.

If it's your desire today to put your faith in Christ, I'm going to have a suggested prayer. You can pray that prayer right here today in your seat. God knows your heart and he's not so concerned with what you say, your words, as he is with your attitude.

This is just a suggested prayer. You can use your own words. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord.

Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life, Lord, and make me the kind of person you want me to be. Amen.

Also, in closing, I'd like to read a poem to you. Two cripples entered a church one day, crippled, but each in a different way. One had a body strong and whole, but it sheltered a warped and twisted soul.

The other walked with a halting gait, but his soul was tall and fair and straight. They shared a pew, they shared a book, but on each face was a different look. One was a light with hope and joy and faith that nothing could destroy.

The other joined not in prayer or hymn. No smile relaxed his features grim. His neighbor had wronged him, his heart was sore.

He thought of himself and nothing more. The words that were read from the holy book struck deafened ears and forlorn look. To one came comfort, his soul was fed.

The other gained nothing from what was said. Two cripples left the church that day, crippled, but each in a different way. A twisted boot did one body mar, but a twisted soul was sadder far.

One other thing, if you did pray that prayer at the end, I would appreciate it if you would let Larry or Roy or Beverly or myself know. Because growth in our spiritual life is important and being put in touch with those that can help you is part of that growth process. The help comes by the word of God, knowing where to look, how to get it, how to fellowship.

So if you did pray that prayer, I would appreciate it if you would let one of us know. Thank you. While listening to this tape, perhaps God's spirit has been talking to your heart.

If you felt the need to draw closer to your creator, why not start today? God has provided a way for man to enter into relationship with him forever through his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.

The Bible says that as many as receive him, to them give he power to become the children of God. You too can receive him right now by asking him to forgive you of your sins and asking him to come into your life and to be Lord and Savior of your life. If you'd like to receive Jesus Christ into your life today, you can do so through a simple little prayer.

Just open up your heart and repeat this prayer with me. Lord Jesus, I admit to you that I am a sinner. I believe that you died on a cross for my sins.

Please forgive me of all of my sins. I put them into my heart and into my life. Please make my life acceptable unto you.

Thank you, Lord, for your gift of eternal life. And I receive you this day. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Now if you prayed that prayer with me right now, you are a new person. All your past sins and faults have been forgiven by God. And in his eyes, you are a brand new creature.

The Bible says that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away and behold, all things become new. Now as a newborn spiritual infant, you should seek the sincere milk of God's word so that you may grow by it.

So read your Bible and pray to the Lord often and seek out other Christians and enter into fellowship with them. We'd love to hear of your decision for Christ. We'd love to give you a free study of the book of John on cassette by Pastor Chuck Smith.

Jesus never turned a spiritual or hungry or thirsty soul away, but filled everyone who asked. So we'd like to do the same for you in his name. So please write to us at the address on this tape.

Tell us of your needs and what the Lord has done for you today. May the Lord bless you now and keep you in everything you do and everything you say. Welcome to the family.

Open up. We want to. Reach out.

We love. We want to. Reach in.

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