

**Sermon Transcript from June 19th, 2016
How to Find Meaning & Purpose
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Today, I would like to attempt to teach the whole book of Ecclesiastes this morning. Now, the thing with wisdom literature is that it's supposed to be treated like a concert. It's supposed to be taken all together like surround sound. You won't really be wise unless you take all of it together because each book has a different aspect of wisdom. If you take one book alone, you're not getting the full picture. For example: Proverbs. Proverbs is more of a straight-laced, straight forward, more fundamental view of wisdom. We learned about this last week. And it is true. The book of Proverbs is true only when you apply it rightly and in the right situations. It gives wisdom to us straight, with almost no nuance at all. The book of Job takes a way more nuanced approach to wisdom and tries on the premise of Proverbs.

So, Proverbs says things like, "The righteous flourish and the wicked suffer," and Job tries this premise on and proves it to be wrong. But, what we learn from that book – we started a few weeks ago – is that there's more going on than what we know and we have to trust Yahweh in this very complex world. Ecclesiastes is just crazy. This book is crazy. It's all about this complex, insanely complex, crazy world. And it's super fun because it's like a nihilist got hold of a book in the Bible and just scribbled all over it in the middle of the Bible. It just asks all these questions. It questions everything. This is like one of my favorite books of the entire Bible. It's just such a fun book to read.

Now, a little disclaimer: today I'll be teaching you my interpretive take on and reading of Ecclesiastes. Wisdom literature is very tricky to interpret. So, you might agree with me or you might not agree with me. Either way, I think this book will resonate with every single person in this room. The way the teacher sees the world is the experience of everyone. Herman Melville, in his book "Moby Dick," said, "The truest of all books is Ecclesiastes."

So, it's my hope today to show you how a book about meaninglessness can be so meaningful and how this book can help us define meaning and purpose in our own lives. So, Ecclesiastes. Let me just read the first three verses. He sums up the entire book here.

Ecclesiastes 1:1: "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!"

"says the Teacher.

"Utterly meaningless!

"Everything is meaningless!"

"What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?"

And everyone said "amen." Okay, so – this book's so fun.

Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that we would sit this morning in this book, in its purpose, in its reasoning, in its view of life, that we would not jump ahead too quickly, that we'd stay here even though it's uncomfortable at times, even though it might test and push against things that we might think we believe about progress and technology and just how fun San Francisco is, that it would push against all those things and we'd be uncomfortable for a while and be okay with that.

And I pray, ultimately, that You'd lead us through the valley of the shadow of death, through this book, and that we would see light at the end. So, Jesus, I pray that You would be that light and I pray that You would illuminate our hearts and our minds. I submit all of my capacities to You and I pray that, today, You would use me. Anoint me, Lord, I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

So, there are two characters in the book of Ecclesiastes. The first character is the author and the second character is the teacher. Basically, you hear the author in the opening words and then the conclusion where he weighs in on the whole matter. So, the author compiled the book and then gives an introduction in verse Ecclesiastes 1:1 and then, at the end, has the closing argument or the closing conclusion of the book. The second character is the teacher. He is the very middle of the book who has the bulk of the book and its

message comes from the teacher.

So, if you look up here on the screen, this is how the book is broken up. So, you have the author in Ecclesiastes 1:1 and then you have the teacher from Ecclesiastes 1:2 all the way to Ecclesiastes 12:8, and then the author concludes in Ecclesiastes 12:9-14. This is how the book is broken up. So, what we're going to hear for the most part of this book is the "teacher." The author allows the teacher to give us a hard lesson in reality. And we would be wise – this is what wisdom literature is for – to listen to his teaching.

So, what is the teacher's teaching? What is his teaching? This is how teaching: Hevel, hevel, hevel. The word "hevel" there is translated in NIV as "meaningless." If you have ESV or some other translation, it might be translated "vanity." His conclusion, his teaching, is that the whole world is hevel. This is used 38 times in this small book. The teacher is saying that everything, every pursuit, every pleasure, every accomplishment, every season in life, everything you work for, everything that happens to you in this life is utterly meaningless. He wants to show you and me that life in this world is absolutely meaningless.

Now, first question: why in the world is this in the Bible? Why is this right in the middle of the Bible? Peter Kreeft, a professor of philosophy at Boston College, – I've quoted in the book of Job – I think that he's probably the best person I've ever read on the book of Ecclesiastes. He's a philosopher and Ecclesiastes is a philosophical book and he just breaks it down beautifully. He says that this is the first pre-modern book to answer the question of philosophy, "What is the meaning of life," by saying, "There is no meaning in life."

Peter Kreeft is saying, "This is the first pre-modern philosopher to do that." The author of the book of Ecclesiastes. Peter Kreeft says that Ecclesiastes is the book that we most need as modern people to listen to. He says this:

"Ecclesiastes is the one book in the Bible that modern man needs most to read, for it is lesson one and the rest of the Bible is lesson two. Modernity does not heed lesson two because it does not heed lesson one."

That is profound. Lesson one: life is meaningless. Lesson one: you cannot find ultimate meaning in any of the major pursuits in this life. You can try, but it's an exercise in futility. That's lesson one and, until you understand that, until you hear it from someone who's been there and who's tried it all on and lived to tell us about it – that would be called "listening to the wise person," by the way – or if you've experienced yourself, you cannot move on to the rest of the message of the Bible, which is the hope.

This is lesson one. Peter Kreeft actually says whenever he teaches the Bible in whole, he always starts with Ecclesiastes. I wish I would've read that in January. That would've been a lot better. He's like, "I always start here."

Because, for the modern person – I mean, in a world before the fall Genesis 1 is where you would want to start. But, in this world, this is where you start. This is where you start, because this is what everyone is looking for is meaning. So, what does the teacher mean when he says that life is meaningless or life is vanity? When he looks at life, when he tries life on, when he does everything in life, what does he mean that life is meaningless?

The word "meaningless" doesn't really capture the Hebrew word "hevel." The Hebrew word "hevel" is like the word "vapor" or "smoke" or "a mirage." I would think they would use the word "hologram" if they had such a thing then. It's like it looks like something. I want to go towards it. And, once I get this thing that looks like a thing, I go towards it and it's nothing. It means you go for something you thought was there or you thought had weight or had meaning, but it turned out to be of no real substance at all. It wasn't solid and it wasn't really real. That's what the word "hevel" means. It's like it looks like something and I go for it and I actually spend a lot of energy trying to get it and, once I get it, it's vaporous. It's like, "Oh, I went to go hug it and it's gone. It's not really there."

So, pleasure and money and wisdom and sex and traveling and you think subconsciously, when you go after these things, "If I get this thing, then I will get life and it will give meaning to my life." And then you get it. You get sex and pleasure and money and wisdom and you travel the world and you do the thing and at the end you come back to your creepy apartment and it's hevel. Like, hevel. I've been there. I 'gramed it and it's gone now. I thought it was the thing and it's not the thing and it's a mirage or it's a hologram; it's hevel.

And this is his conclusion:

Ecclesiastes 1:2: "Hevel! Hevel!"
"says the Teacher.
"Utterly hevel!
"Everything is hevel."

"I've gone after everything and it's meaningless."

Is anyone depressed yet? Is anyone depressed yet? Now, why does he say that? Why does he say this and how does he support his argument? Anyone could say that. "Oh, life is meaningless." Why does he say that and how does he actually support his argument? The book of Ecclesiastes seems to ramble. It kind of moves from one subject to the next. He goes in and out of things, he will just start saying, "Meaningless, meaningless," and then go into something that sounds meaningful and then he's like, "Oh, there's meaning here. But, it's all meaningless."

This book actually embodies its own message. What he's saying is that life rambles to nowhere. "Life rambles to nowhere and this book will do the same thing. Life does it and my book will do it."

Nevertheless, Ecclesiastes has a very logical argument. He's arguing something very philosophically, and here's the teacher's philosophy of life. And there's three words to understand to understand his philosophy. The first word is "meaningless." Hevel. That word means, "vapor, smoke, hologram." Something like that.

So, that's the first word, because he used that word over and over and over again. The second word that's important to understand to understand this book is "toil." Some of your translations use the word "work." What he means by "toil" is "our attempts to find meaning and purpose. Our work at finding meaning."

Some of you work at your jobs and you hope that your jobs help you find meaning. Some of you go after relationships and that's how you find meaning. Some of you look to a sexual identity and that's how you find meaning. Some of you look to – even in this room – a cold religion and that's how you find meaning. "Toil" is your work to try to find meaning. So, that's the word "toil." That's a word he uses over and over again.

The third word that you need to understand to understand Ecclesiastes is "under the sun." And what he means by "under the sun" is "our life on earth." Our life in this earth, on this earth, under the sun. Now, if you're thinking, "Well, there's a simple solution to that. Get off of this earth."

It's so funny. I mean, I think that movie "Gravity" a couple years ago explored this theme. Like, "All we have to do is get off of Earth." And I don't know if that is the answer. I guarantee you if they started making commercial space travel and you landed on the moon, the first thing that you would do is do an astronaut selfie with the Earth in the back. Every one of you would do this. You know it to be true. Like, "I got off of Earth and I just want my self with Earth in the back on my feet. That's all I want in life."

You can't get off this earth. You're from the dust. This is in us. We live life on the earth even if we get off this earth. Now, I think – this is my interpretation – the teacher does have an understanding of God. He references God in this book a lot. But, it's a distant God. I think – I believe – that the teacher's view of God is a naturalist's view of God. More like mother nature than Yahweh that we find in the rest of the Bible. Ecclesiastes' God is a naturalist's distant, cold God. I think you can prove that by reading the actual book in it's entirety. You will see that it's a naturalist's cold, distant God. "You are in heaven and I am on earth. Let my words be few."

There's a distance there. There is a gap I can't bridge. That sort of thing. So, this is his argument. Those are the words. Now, here is his argument. His whole book is like this. Follow this logical argument here that he puts forth. He says this:

"All toil is under the sun. All our attempts to find meaning and purpose happen on this earth."

Proposition two: "All under the sun is meaningless. Therefore, [conclusion] all toil is meaningless."

So, he says, "Everything that you do to find meaning, you do that on this earth. And everything on this earth is hevel. Therefore, all of your attempts to find meaning is meaningless."

That's his argument in the book. That's like an airtight argument in this book. It's like, "Everything that you tried to do under the sun on this earth to find meaning will, in the end, prove itself to be meaningless because you will die and you will leave your inheritance to someone stupid."

He says that literally. That's his argument. But, the way he proves it is by living through it, by going through and trying everything that there is under the sun to find meaning. He tests his own thesis. He actually tries it on.

Look at Ecclesiastes 1:12: **"I, the Teacher, was king over Israel and Jerusalem. I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens."**

This means that he had enough resources and time to do this. He says – and this is why I really believe he thinks God is this distant, cold God. He says, "What a heavy burden God has placed on mankind."

What he's saying there is that God would place us on this world, alone, groping to find meaning. What a heavy thing. That this distance, cold God would place us or mother nature would place us on this earth and say, "Hey, figure it out. Have fun with that."

What? That's a heavy burden. And he's right. "I've seen all the things that are done under the sun and all of them are meaningless; chasing after the wind."

The teacher does not merely argue, this teacher experiments. He tries it all on. For example, Ecclesiastes 2:1 he says, **"I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure...'"** – so, he's now testing his thesis. He's like, "Okay. This is meaningless. I'm going to try everything that people try to find meaning. I will try pleasure to find out what is good."

"But that also proved to be meaningless. 'Laughter,' I said, 'is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?' I tried cheering myself with wine," – who hasn't done that? – **"and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom."**

So, he's saying the whole time: "As I was drinking and as I was drinking in pleasure, the whole time I'm trying to find out the meaning of life. So, I didn't do it just to escape life, I actually did it to find life."

"I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom." – and this is the conclusion. Here's his purpose – **"I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens [under the sun] during the few days of their lives."**

"I tried it all because I wanted to see what was actually good for us to invest our time into. What should we be doing under the sun during the very few days of our lives?"

So, what does the teacher try on in the course of his writing? He tries to fill his mind with philosophy, he tries on wisdom, he tries to fill his body with hedonism, he tries on pleasure, he tries to fill his pockets with materialism, he tries on wealth and power, he tries to fill his conscience with ethics, he tries on humanity and brotherly love and he tries to fill his spirit with religion. He tries to fit God into his understanding under the sun, and every single one of these things break down for him.

He says, "Wisdom, or philosophy. To know is better than to be ignorant."

That's true. He goes, "I test myself to know everything I can know."

And I will tell you this: being wise is better than being stupid. Granted, that's good. But, the more you know, the more you realize how much of a bummer this life is. Has anyone ever found that to be true? Anyone ever WebMD'd anything and was like, "I didn't want to know that. I have cancer."

Like, everything is that. "I have a headache. Oh, it's cancer."

And I'm a hypochondriac, so I WebMD everything and I go, "Ash, this is the end. This is the end now."

She's like, "Stop looking at those things."

I'm like, "I think this is it. I think I'm the fifth one down. That's me and my time is limited here, so."

Like, the more you know the worse it gets. And this is what he says. He's like, "The more you know about life, the more you read the news, the more you realize what a bum life is."

It's almost better to be ignorant than to know everything. And, even if you were smart enough to do something great in life, guess what? If you are super smart or super stupid, you will both end up in the same place. You will both die. "Hevel," he says. "Yeah, be wise. That's great. It's actually kind of better than being stupid. But, know this: the more you know, the more you wish you didn't know. And then, ultimately, you and the dumb person end up in the same place. The grave."

And who really knows? He goes on and he says, "Animals go down. Humans go up. I don't know. Maybe. Maybe animals and us are just the same thing and we just both go to the ground. Who really knows? No one has come back to tell us. Who really knows? Hevel."

So he goes, "You know what? I'm going to try pleasure; hedonism."

And pleasure is very numbing and very fun and very pleasurable. But, if you are looking for meaning, you will not find it in pleasure. You will find distraction in pleasure, you will find endorphins in pleasure, but you will not find real meaning in pleasure. He basically says, "The rich know this to be true, but the poor still believe in this lie. Hevel."

He says, "Okay. What about work, wealth and power? I'll do that."

He finds that one of the worst things that can happen is that you build wealth and that you work for it and you build a legacy and then you die and you leave your inheritance to a stupid person who wastes it. This is what he says. It's like building a hotel empire and then leaving it to someone who wastes it and it's like, "Vanity, vanity. Everything is vanity."

That's scary. That is so scary. We want things like, "I'm going to build this thing and then I'm going to leave it to someone just ridiculous. Hevel."

That's hevel. He's wise enough to know that if you do that you're going to leave it to someone who's going to waste it. So, he says the conclusion. Here's the conclusion after he attempts wisdom, pleasure and wealth.

Ecclesiastes 2:17, he says this, **"So I hated life."**

So I hated life.

Ecclesiastes 2:22: **"What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest."**

Does anyone know that to be true? Even at night your mind doesn't rest.

"This too is meaningless."

After two chapters of trying, after a lot of reading, observing, women, men, wine, meals, work, politics and probably war, this is his conclusion: hevel. And then he offers wisdom. Now, I think we should listen to this. I think this is great. This is actually good wisdom if you are living life under the sun. Meaning you believe that God – if there is a God, distant God or you might believe in mother nature or some spirit being in the universe that kind of wants to love everything or whatever, this might be good advice for you if you don't buy into the nearness of the risen Lord Jesus. If that's not you, then this might be actually really good advice for you.

This is his advice to us if you're living under the sun. He says in Ecclesiastes 2:24, **"A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?"**

Let me explain this to you because, at first, it's tricky because it uses the name "God," so it's tricky. Let me explain this to you. What he's basically saying is this: It's better to live

your life like Dory from Finding Nemo. The new one is so good, by the way. It's better to live your life like Dory, with short-term memory loss; to live in the moment; to just keep swimming and to not think too much about your future and not too much about your past. Live in the moment and enjoy your life. It's way better to do that. So, whatever you eat, enjoy it. Whatever it is that you eat, enjoy it. That's what you have in the moment. So, if you're vegan, enjoy that... you know, whatever.

If you like meat, then enjoy it. That's what you have. Enjoy it. Just take it in. Enjoy it. Whatever you drink, enjoy it. And this is the thing. He says, "Whatever way you are toiling..." – remember, the word "toil" means trying to find meaning in this life.

"Whatever way you are toiling, just enjoy the pursuit. Find satisfaction in the hunt, because you'll never catch anything."

There is no meaning in life, so just enjoy trying to find the meaning. You will never find it, just enjoy trying to find it. The point is this: you can't find meaning in this life because there is no real meaning in this life. You must make your own meaning. That will preach. Like, I could take that on the road. That will preach, right? Like, "Hey, there is no meaning. Find your own meaning."

And you're like, "Yeah!"

Gosh, if I took that anywhere in this country, it would preach. It is actually preaching now. Sadly, it is preaching from many pulpits as well. "Find your own meaning."

I think this preaches to our modern sensibilities because we all believe, deep down, that there is no real meaning in this universe, and the only meaning is the meaning that we create. But, the problem here is that this breeds serious anxiety. He says in chapter 2, he calls it "anxious striving." Because, if you don't know why you are here and live with no real meaning, then the moment becomes the meaning. The moment that you're living in is all the meaning that you get.

But then, if that is true, then your greatest fear is the fear of missing the moment. This is called "FOMO." The Fear of Missing Out. Most of you have really bad FOMO, and it's rooted – even if you're a Christian you do – in this idea that life has no real meaning other than what you make of it. So, if you're not making meaning out of every minute by doing the absolute best thing at that moment, you are missing out and, therefore, your life doesn't have meaning. Or, at least, it doesn't seem to have meaning in that moment.

So, if you're not having the absolute best time right now, you don't have any meaning. So, you bounce between your life having a lot of meaning if you are having the best moment of your life. Like, "Oh my gosh. My life is so meaningful. I'm having so much fun." Or, you have absolutely zero meaning because you're bored. You're bored and you're like, "My life is horrible. I am not living in the moment."

And then you get on social media and you're like, "They're living in the moment. I'm not living in the moment."

Have you – no, never mind. I won't get into that. This breeds serious anxiety. Some of you right now, your hearts beating really fast and you don't even know why. Because that's you. Like, if I'm not having the best time of my life right now, I can't be silent. I can't turn it off. I can't turn my phone off. Like, hey, try to turn your phone off for a day.

"What are you talking about? There's no way. I might miss it. Or, if I'm there, it might not count because I didn't take a picture of it."

And we live this way. I mean, this is so funny because it's true. Right? We live this way. What's great about Ecclesiastes is at least it's honest. I wish that you would be more honest. I wish you'd go, "I can't turn my phone off because I'm so addicted to it and I find my life in it. This is my life. I can't turn it off. I can't turn off my email. I can't, because this is my life. I live for this thing."

I wish you would just be honest. Ecclesiastes, at least, is honest. It's deeply despairing, but it's also deeply honest. With this view of life, living under the sun, Ecclesiastes 10:19 is the mantra of your life. It's also deeply – this is also the end goal of life. If you live under the sun, this is the end goal of life. If anyone read through this book up to Ecclesiastes 10:19, did you highlight it? Don't lie. You probably did. If San Francisco had a Bible verse, this would be

the Bible verse. Here it is:

"A feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry, and money is the answer for everything."

Did anyone read that and go, "Uhh... life verse! This is it! I've found it in the Bible. This is my life verse."

I hope someone, at least, didn't know what the book was about and tweeted it like, "Oh, #lifeverse. This is it, guys. I've found it."

I hope that happened. I'd love to find it if it did happen. This, in all seriousness, is actually pretty wise to cover up the truth about life under the sun with a million diversions and distractions like feasts and wine and money. Because, the truth of our meaninglessness is the most terrible truth there is. It is despairing, it is depressing. If this sermon had a soundtrack – and, oddly enough, most of my sermons do, in my head at least – it would probably be that song off The 1975's album that came out earlier this year, "If I Believe You."

The writer of this song and the singer of this song, Matty, is an outspoken humanist. Even in the song he references himself as an atheist. And this is how the song starts. He says, "I've got a God-shaped hole that's infected."

That is insane. Like, any open wound that's ignored gets infected and more painful. He's like, "I've ignored it for so long it's infected."

"I've got a God-shaped hole that's infected, and I'm petrified of being alone. It's pathetic, I know."

And then he goes into the chorus.

"And if I believe you, would that make it stop?
"If I told you I need you, is that what you want?
"I'm broken and bleeding, I'm begging for help,
"And I'm asking you Jesus, show yourself."

I love honest songwriting. Then, in the end of the song, he sings this refrain over and over and over again, and it kind of just fades out as if it goes on forever. And he says:

"If I'm lost, then how can I find myself?
"If I'm lost, then how can I find myself?
"If I'm lost now, then how can I find myself?"

Over and over and over again, and this is the refrain of the book of Ecclesiastes. It's a fixed reference point; a point of reference that's stuck. It's life under the sun. It's life in the self. If I'm lost now, if I'm lost. We're all told, "If you're lost, then look within yourself to find yourself," and he just calls "BS" on that. If you're lost, how can you find yourself? If I'm trying to find a meaning under the sun that's only found above the sun, how will I ever find it? If I'm trying to find myself but I'm lost, then how great is my lostness? I'm stuck.

The reference point keeps going over and over. It's buffering because it never ever moves forward. And he says, "I'm asking you Jesus, show yourself."

What he is asking for, he says, "I need revelation. I need something from beyond me to save me. I can't save myself. I can only think I've saved myself if I convince myself that I'm not lost anymore, but we all know that's a lie"

See, the book of Ecclesiastes is a book where God reveals to us exactly what life is like when there is no revelation. God lets us, for 12 chapters, be steeped into a world without revelation. This is why this book's in the canon. This is why this book is a revelation, because it reveals to us what life is like without a revelation. And what is it like? Meaningless. Hevel. Hevel. Everything is hevel.

What happened with that 1975 song is what philosopher James K.A. Smith calls, "Cracks in the secular?"

It's when humanists, naturalists or atheists doubt. But, an atheist's doubt is faith. Think about that. Their doubt is faith in the transcendent, in the divine, in a person God. Cracks

in their secular worldview let the light in and they're tempted by the light. This is what happens to the teacher too. It's expected because this is what life under the sun is. There's a crack in his worldview. There's a crack in his thinking, and it happens to everyone, if we're honest, and he says it in Ecclesiastes 3:11.

He says, **"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."**

This is the crack in his secular mindset. This verse comes right after the very famous verses about how there's a time for everything; a time to be born and a time to die; a time for war and a time for peace; a time for hate and a time for love. Like, he does this time time time time time thing. And then he says, "And he has made everything beautiful in its time. But, he also set eternity in the human heart."

This is the teacher's crack in the observable world. He says this: "We experience only time, yet we desire eternity. We experience time, but we want timelessness."

Who taught us this strange thing called eternity? We hunger and there's food, we thirst and there is water, we desire and there is love and there is even sex. We long for eternity and sometimes we say, "Well, there isn't one."

Or is there one? St. Augustine, in his confessions, said, "My heart was restless until it found rest in you."

It's that thing. The teacher shows us what and where the meaning of life is by showing us where it's not. That is why this book is in our Bibles. It's showing us that meaning is not found under the sun; meaning is only found beyond the sun. See, it's not meaninglessness to eat. It keeps you alive. It's not meaninglessness to have sex. It keeps the human race alive and it brings pleasure. It's not meaninglessness to scratch a mosquito bite because it relieves the itching for a moment. But, only for a moment.

And then this is the rub: short-term purpose is no compensation for long-term purposelessness. We just kind of do these small things like eat and have sex and scratch an itch. And that's all it does. It relieves it for a moment.

Ecclesiastes is the first and necessary step towards salvation for the modern world. The world will not go to the great physician until it admits that it's desperately sick. And Ecclesiastes – if you're here and you wandered in and you don't believe in God and you find yourself flirting with the idea of God and that's why you came to church this morning, it starts with us taking this book seriously and admitting that we're desperately sick; that our God-shaped hole is infected and we have to admit that. So, Peter Kreeft concludes in saying this:

"The point of Ecclesiastes is simply this: without God – no, not just without God, for the author of Ecclesiastes speaks frequently of God. Without faith in God – no, not even that, for the author has faith in God. In fact, the unquestioning faith. Never does he doubt God's existence. Rather, without the kind of faith in God that is larger than life and, therefore, worth dying for and, therefore, worth living for, and without a faith that means trust and hope and love, without a lived love affair with God, life is vanity of vanities, the shadow of a shadow, a dream within a dream."

Unless there is a deep, abiding, love affair connection with the Living God, a relationship with God, not a distant God, not a God of a naturalist, not a God of maybe He's there, but an intimate relationship with the Living God, nothing comes close to that. Maybe you've been told, "You then must draw near to God," but, actually, God continually draws near to us.

The first mention of human brokenness that we find in the Bible in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, man and woman, hide themselves from each other and then they hide from God. And what we see God doing is going after them to try to find them. God is looking for them. And we've been told the whole time, "You have to look for God." No. What if God's looking for us? We're a Christian church. Sorry if that's a surprise to you. But, we're a Christian church. Every week we gather to remember that in Christ, God came close to us. God came near to us. He came vulnerable as a baby and was made more vulnerable as He grew where He ultimately went to a cross to die for us. And this death, by love, is the wisdom of God, we're told. It's the beauty of God; it's majesty of God.

One New Testament writer, his name was Paul the Apostle, he had it all at one time. A life full of worldly successes, education, wealth, power, prestige, privilege, religion. He had it all. He says it was all crap. He actually uses a very vulgar word that I just won't use. But, you know. He's like, "It's all crap," until he met Christ. With Christ, poverty is riches and weakness is power and suffering is joy and to be despised is glorious. But, without Christ, riches are poverty and power is impotence and happiness misery and glory is despised. Christ is the wisdom of God that we take in when God has come near to us where we go, "This is a very depressing reality that we live under."

And it was a burden that God has placed under man if we think that. But, when we see God, when we know that God has broken into our world, that God has come after us, that God has make His glory shine in the face of Christ, and when we see Him, and when we begin a love relationship, a love affair with the Living God, then I see everything because I see Christ. I see everything because I see Christ. That's the despair, but that's also the hope, of this book.

Let's pray.

Lord, now as we turn to You, God, I want to pray now for this room to be filled with people with open hands, open hearts. I want to even ask you now, if you are willing or able, in an act of physical prayer, would you open your hands to God? Just if they're on your lap or just there. Just open your hands to God. This might be the biggest movement that you've made toward God in your life.

I want to pray right now for those in here, God, that there's a crack in their worldview that lets light in, that lets the transcendent God in right now, and that their hands would be open to it, that their hearts would be open to it, taking in the light of the Son. I pray that You would make Yourself near today, known today. By the power of Your Spirit, make Yourself known today as we respond and sing and receive communion and pray and stand and repent and ask You to forgive and heal and set right and save us. All these things, I pray that You would be very near. Even our experience, God, I'm just asking that You would do that on behalf of this church. That You would just be near us and we would know, "I met with God today. God met with me today."

You are near and You are present, Lord, and we believe that. Draw near to us as we respond to You, God, now. I pray for anyone who has not placed their trust or faith in You, Jesus. I pray they would open their lives to You, their hearts to You, their minds to You and let You in and receive You as their Lord, their Savior, their God. Receive You as the one who has come to set things right and they would join in with that great kingdom initiative, that kingdom program. They are just so exhausted, anxious, worried about status and living in the moment and the pressure of this world. It doesn't even feel like life sometimes couldn't get better than it does, but we live with constant anxiety.

Save us from that, Lord, and be real to us right now. Show us that all those pursuits without meaning from Heaven, it's hard to find the meaning. It's hard to have meaning, it's really depressing, Lord. Help us, God. Draw near to us now as we respond to You, in Christ name we pray, amen.