

# The Last Word on Meaningful Living

**Preached by:** Matthew S. Black

**Text:** Ecclesiastes 12:9-14<sup>1</sup>

**Date:** September 22, 2010, 7pm

**Series:** Ecclesiastes (Finding the Meaning of Life)

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 12**. This evening we are finishing our study on “Finding the Meaning of Life”. We come tonight to “The Last Word on Meaningful Living”.

Beginning a week from Sunday we’ll move our Mark series to Wednesday nights. On Sunday mornings we will start an 8 message series through the Song of Solomon entitled “Passion, Purity, & Fidelity”. This is going to be a practical series about a Biblical view of Romance, Courtship, and Marital Faithfulness. This series is designed for both singles and married people. You are not going to want to miss it. It really is going to be one of those earth shattering, foundational series.

The wisdom of Solomon, recorded in his journal called Ecclesiastes, covers basically every area of life and death. Repeatedly, he has used words like "vanity," found 39 times, and phrases like "under the sun," found 29 times, to drive home the point that life without God ("under the sun") is meaningless. While life with God ("over the sun") matters!! Life matters!

Solomon gives us the final word on meaningful living in **Ecclesiastes 12:9-14**, “Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. 10 The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. 11 The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. 12 My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

13 ¶ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

[Prayer for Guidance]

I. A meaningful life is invested in **teaching** people to be like Christ (vs. 9-12).

This is very similar to the “Great Commission” that Jesus gave in **Matthew 28:18-20**, “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Like Solomon, we ought to have a passion for teaching and influencing others for Christ. Christians are not invested in money or things primarily but in people!! We get a fantastic insight into Solomon as a person in **verse 9**, “Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.”

A. **Who** we are to teach. Solomon “taught the people” (verse 9). Did you know that the aim of the Great Commission that the Lord gave us is to “make disciples”? Solomon was one of the most practical teachers of God’s Word ever to live. We all ought to aim for that as well. Solomon’s teaching was brought into the Scriptures, but we are all called to “teach the people”. We are to seek to teach every one. We are to make disciples of our children, friends, family—every creature.

B. **How** we are to teach. **Verse 9**, “Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.”

1. With great **preparation**. How did Solomon teach? Before he taught, he prepared “...weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care” –the word “weighing” means to “ponder, to sift, to search out”. We are to study and meditate and pray over God’s Word. We are to renew our minds each day through the Word.
2. With great **practicality**. **Verse 10a**, “The Preacher sought to find words of delight”. The word “delight” means “winsome, easy to grasp, readily applied”. It’s delightful, and easy to be received and applied to our lives.
3. With great **penetration**. **Verse 10b**, “and uprightly he wrote words of truth”. In fact Solomon goes on to say in **verse 11**, “The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.”
  - **Goads** – The Word of God gives us our **motivation**. **verse 11a**, “The words of the wise are like goads”. God’s Word is like the goads for cattle, or we might say spurs for a horse – God’s Word pushes us, spurs us on toward the goal of Christ-likeness.
  - **Nails** – The Word of God gives us our **foundation**. **Verse 11b**, “like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings”. You can hang your life on these nails. We need to fasten our lives upon God’s Word because it is “firmly fixed” (verse 11).

- **One Shepherd** – The Word of God gives us our **direction**. A shepherd leads his sheep. And though there were many wise and holy men who “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21), we can rest assured that “they are given by one Shepherd.”

The words of Scripture are inspired words of authority from “one Shepherd”, from the Lord Himself.

4. With great **power**. **Verse 12**, “My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”

It is a waste of time to look for something to change us outside of God’s Word. There are many books written, and many methods taught that people say are the answer. There is no other answer outside of God’s sufficient Word. We are called to teach God’s sufficient Word.

We read in **2 Peter 1:3**, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us”.

- II. A meaningful life is a **practical living out** of God’s Word (vs. 13-14). Now the Christian life is not theoretical. It is to be lived out. **James 1:22**, “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

It’s not enough to believe right and teach right. We are called to live right. Listen to the words of Solomon. He sums up the entire book in two verses.

**Verse 13-14**, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

To the Pharisees Jesus gave a harsh indictment. **Mark 7:6**, “he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ““This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me””. Before we condemn the Pharisees, let’s remember, the temptation toward hypocrisy is in us all. Let us all pray for the grace of God to empower us to practice what we preach!

We are told that in the Hebrew there is a “stylistic crudeness” in the way Solomon says, “The end of the matter”. It’s abrupt. He’s saying, let me get to the point.

- A. A meaningful life is a life of **seeing** God. This is truly the essence of the fear of the Lord. After saying all he had to say, Solomon his one sentence summary statement of the book. It’s powerful. **Verse 13**, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

1. **A definition of fearing God.** What does it mean to fear God? Essentially, it means to live as if He is with you. It is to live in constant AWE, dedicating our lives as a living sacrifice.
  - **Fearing God** and faith are very similar ideas. A God-fearer of the Old Testament is the same as a disciple of the New Testament. Everything else is vanity. Without a God-focused life, all other paths lead to nothing.

God is AWE INSPIRING because of His majesty, His power, His works, His transcendence, and His holiness. A good example of the fear of God is Isaiah 6.

## 2. **Isaiah, an example of fearing God.**

- Isaiah begins by seeing the Lord “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (verse 1).
- He hears the angels crying out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”(verse 3).
- He sees himself and his lostness and helpless sinfulness is unveiled before the holy God and he says, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (**verse 5**).
- He receives the cleansing touch of the sacrifice, pointing to our Atonement, the Lamb of God, and Isaiah hears, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (verse 7).
- And what is the inevitable outcome of a life that lives in the presence of God? When Isaiah heard God’s voice saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (verse 8), what did he say? “Then I said, Here am I! Send me.” (verse 8).

This is what makes life meaningful! Living a humble life being awe inspired by God’s majesty. Isn’t God amazing? He fills our cup! He’s all we need! He’s everything we could every hope for. Live in His presence each day!

- **Oswald Chambers** put it this way, "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."
- **William Gurnell** said, "We fear man so much because we fear God so little."

B. A meaningful life is a **submitted** life. **Verse 13, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”** If we fear God, our lives will be characterized by submission and joyful obedience to God.

Someone said, “The only part of the Bible you truly believe is the part you obey.”

If we fear God, we will keep His commandments.

This is very similar to the “Great Commission” that Jesus gave in **Matthew 28:18-20**, “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.””

The Christian life is one of constant submission of our way to God’s way.

Illustration: Jack Lipton and R. Scott Bulione, graduate students at Columbia University, presented their findings on how members of the various sections of 11 major symphony orchestra perceived each other.

- The **percussionists** were viewed as insensitive, unintelligent, and hard-of-hearing, yet fun-loving.
- **String players** were seen as arrogant, stuffy, and un-athletic.
- The orchestra members overwhelmingly chose "loud" as the primary adjective to describe the **brass players**.
- **Woodwind players** seemed to be held in the highest esteem, described as quiet and meticulous, though a bit egotistical.
  
- With such widely divergent personalities and perceptions, how could an orchestra ever come together to make such wonderful music?
  
- The answer is simple: regardless of how those musicians view each other, they chose to subordinate their feelings and biases to the leadership of the conductor. Under his guidance, they play beautiful music.

Solomon is saying that when we follow our Master Conductor, our life will resonate with beautiful music—this is meaningful living! We may not understand, but we can say with Solomon in another place that we will, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths”( **Proverbs 3:5-6**).

- C. A meaningful life is a **satisfying** life. **Verse 13**, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” The word “duty” is supplied—the idea here is – to fear God and keep His commandments is “the whole of man”. It is man’s highest calling and destiny. Why are people miserable chasing after temporary dreams? Why is one Super Bowl not enough? Why do people go from marriage after marriage and relationship to relationship? Because we were made for something bigger!

D. A meaningful life is a **far-sighted** life. What is man's ultimate concern? **Verse 14**, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." Ecclesiastes ends with a very powerful admonition. It's not that nothing matters. In fact everything matters! **Hebrews 9:27**, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment". We as believers ought to be earnest and careful about our lives. Everything matters!!!

**Conclusion:** Is life worth living? Yes, *if you are truly alive through faith in Jesus Christ*. Then you can be satisfied, no matter what God may permit to come to your life. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (**1 John 5:12**).

Life in Christ is the only life that matters. Christ is the meaning of life. He is the way the truth and the life. He is our all in all. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The joys of the present depend on the security of the future. If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, then your sins have already been judged on the cross; and "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus".

You may be in a jail cell that is grey and dark for years, but if you have Christ, you have joy.