

Live Life with Joy
Ecclesiastes 9:1-18
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A common question often used in an icebreaker is this, “*What advice would you give to your younger self?*” Here’s how some people answered that question.

1. You are perfect just the way you are.
2. Stop being lazy! Get up!
3. Take yourself seriously (but not too seriously).
4. Fake it till you make it. That’s the key to the rest of your life.
5. Don’t be a “cool” person. Be a likeable person. You want the cool people to like you. You also want the uncool people to like you.
6. Don’t try cantaloupe again when you get older. It’s still the same vegetable tasting fruit you don’t enjoy now.
7. Chips and salsa are more important than pumpkin spice, and I’m willing to lose friends over this.
8. Candy corn is gross because it tastes like stale icing and dried wood glue. Even when you’re older, it will still leave a waxy and oily feeling in your mouth.

The famous philosopher Ferris Bueller gave this timeless advice: “*Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.*”

As we come to the ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes, we’ll see how Solomon stops and looks around so he can do a deep dive. In the process, he discovered five more life lessons he could have written to his younger self. Here’s the main point he’s making: *You are not prepared to live until you are prepared to die.*

To fully embrace and appreciate life, we must confront our mortality and understand that life is finite, which can lead to a more meaningful and purposeful existence.

1. Life is inscrutable. In Solomon’s search for significance, he did a lot of observing and interpreting of events. We see this in Ecclesiastes 9:1: “***But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.***” The phrase “*laid to heart*” is an emphatic statement, meaning Solomon poured his time and energy into “*examining it all.*” The word

“examine” means, *“to dig through and explore.”* He concludes that nothing befalls the children of God that doesn’t first pass through the hands of God. We teach our children the song, *“He’s got the whole world in His hands.”* We need this reminder as we approach election day, which was our topic last weekend.

At the same time, he concludes there are things that **“man does not know.”** This is fleshed out some more in verse 2: ***“It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.”*** Whether someone is a sinner or a saint, morally righteous or unrighteous, a churchgoer or not, bad stuff happens. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:45: ***“For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”***

Good things happen to the good and to the bad. After some citizens from Galilee were murdered, Jesus asked this question in Luke 13:2-3: ***“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”***

When Hurricane Helene hit, it took the lives of believers and unbelievers. It destroyed property of avid churchgoers and church avoiders. But God continues to work His ways and His will for His glory for the sake of the gospel. Last week, I received a letter from the Billy Graham Training Center at the Cove in Asheville, North Carolina. Not surprisingly, they have mobilized relief operations on their property by serving more than 1,000 Samaritan’s Purse volunteers daily, as well as housing and feeding North Carolina State Troopers. While the majority of their staff have been adversely affected by the storm, many are on site to welcome and assist these heroes. Speaking of heroes, six Edgewood servants had the privilege of partnering with Samaritan’s Purse when our team of 20 was providing relief. We’re sending another team of 10 people from Edgewood this week!

It’s good for us to admit that life is often inscrutable. As we’ve been learning, God’s ways are often mysterious. Chuck Smith writes, *“There are things I cannot understand and because there are things I cannot understand, I’ve chosen to just trust in the things that I do. God is good and He loves me. That is enough.”*

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2. Death is inevitable. Recently, I came across this bumper sticker: *“Eat well, stay fit, and die anyway.”* That leads us to verse 3: ***“This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”*** Notice the word *“evil”* is used twice.

- **Death is evil.** Evil is described as the *“same event”* which happens to all. Death is called the last great enemy and always arrives like an unwelcome intruder. 1 Corinthians 15:26 says, ***“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”*** 1 Corinthians 15:55 proclaims Jesus as the destroyer of death, ***“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*** We can enjoy life because we know Jesus Christ has defeated death.
- **Depravity is evil.** Solomon says our hearts are *“full of evil”* and full of *“madness.”* My mind goes to Genesis 6:5: ***“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”***

One commentator writes, *“We all share inescapable distribution of adversity and prosperity during life, and all share the same ultimate fate after life – we join the dead!”* Woody Allen is known for saying, *“I’m not afraid of death. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”* That’s not going to work out so well for him.

Solomon dives further into the reality of death in verses 4-6: ***“But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.”***

Ray Pritchard often says, *“If you’re not dead, you’re not done.”* I think of the Latin phrase *memento mori*, which means, *“remember, you must die.”* We need to be reminded of our mortality and the transitory nature of earthly pleasures. The value of knowing you are going to die is so you can learn to live.

The illustration Solomon uses is vivid: ***“a living dog is better than a dead lion.”*** In that day, dogs were not precious pets but rather diseased and despised scavengers. They were the most loathed and mangiest of animals, while lions were the most lauded and majestic. A dead lion was gone and without hope, while a dog

who was alive, no matter how much it struggled, still had hope. It's better to be alive than to be dead. If you're alive, you know you're going to eventually die, and therefore, you can adjust your life accordingly. Once you die, your destiny is settled because there will be no more chances to repent. There is no purgatory where your sins can be purged.

This has two applications.

- **No matter how lost you are, if you're alive, there is still hope for you to be saved from your sins.** Knowing that you will die one day, should cause you to repent today. Verse 6 reminds us once death comes, it's too late to be saved as your fate will be sealed. Hebrews 9:27 says you have an appointment with death, so make sure you're ready to face judgment: ***"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."***
- **No matter how low you are feeling, if you're alive, there is still hope for you to find a reason to live.** If you've been contemplating suicide, and feel like there's no way out, please reach out. If you are breathing, there is hope for things to get better. If you need to talk to someone, reach out to a pastor or call 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Hold on to Isaiah 41:10: ***"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."***

3. Joy is irresistible. The proper response to death is to treat life as precious and to live it with joy. Join me in verses 7-8: ***"Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head."*** The three great blessings for God's people were grain, oil, and wine. Bread and wine were the staples of the region, so it was no coincidence Jesus chose bread and the fruit of the vine for the Lord's Supper. BTW, we'll be celebrating communion next weekend.

The word **"go"** implies motion and has this idea: *in light of the life you've been given, get up and go enjoy it!* The word **"joy"** means, *"cheerful, pleasure, celebration, gladness."* The word **"merry"** refers to being *"well-pleasing."*

The last part of verse 7 reminds us that the saved have God's approval to take pleasure in the simple things of life. We don't have to work to earn God's favor because we already have it. Because life is so uncertain, and evil is powerful and

pervasive, God's gifts give us comfort and remind us of His purpose for our lives. In that sense, Solomon is saying to believers, *"Have a blast while you last."*

White garments represented joy and purity as we see in Revelation 7:14: ***"They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*** Oil was a fragrant ointment which served like perfume or cologne and makes us think of Psalms 23:5: ***"You anoint my head with oil."***

Solomon held up the joy of monogamous marriage between one man and one woman in verse 9: ***"Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun."*** In short, he's saying something like this: *if you're married, since life is brief, enjoy it with your bride.* Proverbs 5:18 says, ***"Rejoice in the wife of your youth"*** and Proverbs 18:22 says, ***"He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord."***

I've been thinking a lot about joy during our study of Ecclesiastes. This is the sixth time Solomon has called us to enjoy life. As Psalms 85:6 instructs us, we've been asking God to revive us again that we might rejoice in Him. Gladness and generosity were key elements of the early church as we read in Acts 2:46: ***"And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts."***

Here are some things I'm rejoicing in this week.

- I find great gladness in your generosity for Hurricane Relief as God has moved you to give more than \$78,000 to help the hurting!
- I'm filled with joy for First Church of the Nazarene, located right across the street from our facility. This weekend, they are celebrating 100 years of faithful gospel witness in our community and on the continents. Their Upward Sports Ministry has really taken off and they hosted the Light the Night event this past Friday in partnership with Edgewood, Bethel, and Word of Life. Over 400 were in attendance. On Wednesday, I had the joy of delivering a card signed by the staff team to convey our support to Pastor Scott.
- I celebrate what God is doing in our children's ministry as we are now faced with some significant space challenges and the need for expanded restrooms. This past Wednesday, our Awana kids brought in hundreds of pounds of

food for the Youth Hope Food pantry. The boys and girls had a competition, and the girls won, but I like how Marcy said it on Facebook: *“The true winner is Youth Hope Food Pantry!”*

- I celebrate how the Edge Student ministry continues to go deep in God’s Word as they tackle tough topics and immerse themselves in the glory of the gospel each week. They had a blast at a bonfire last Saturday.
- This week, I reached out to Andrew Hofer, who is the area director for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. God is on the move through FCA in our local schools. Just this past week, FCA had a Fields of Faith worship night at Black Hawk College. 21 students heard the gospel, and testimonies were shared by two local students from BHC.

The FCA at Rocky has started meeting on Sunday nights this fall. The number of students has doubled and there is true discipleship going on. I also hear great reports about what God is doing at Moline High School under the leadership of Edgewood member Joel Delp. Here’s part of an email Joel sent me a couple weeks ago: *“Our group has been booming which is amazing! We switched to Monday mornings and are having to possibly switch to meeting in the cafeteria because my room only has 30 seats, and we have been having 35-40 people each week.”* Joel mentioned the students needed Bibles, so we purchased a case for them. Andrew Hofer writes, *“It’s been such a radical transformation, and lives are being changed on that campus!”*

The Spirit is also moving at Quad Cities Christian, Sherrard, Orion, and Rockridge. Check out what Edgewood member Tyler Kargl posted this week about what God is doing at Rockridge Junior High: *“FCA at the Junior High level started three weeks ago...the word has spread and this morning, the group was standing-room only. It went from 15 kids in week one to over 40 kids in week three! They had to be moved from the classroom to the library. It’s been fun to watch this group grow in a short amount of time! He is moving and He is good!!”*

In addition to student ministry, FCA values the coaches and the influence they have on their athletes, schools, and communities. Edgewood member Thom Sigel has been helping to lead a Bible study for coaches. Up to 15 coaches meet each week to study God’s Word.

- Intersarsity at Augie and Blackhawk continues to see God at work and several students from Augie are now attending Edgewood.
- Our Go Team partner Youth Hope conducted some evangelism training this past Saturday morning and had one of their biggest outreaches ever in the afternoon as over 250 kids heard the gospel clearly. Youth Hope is also partnering with two elementary schools in East Moline to provide mentoring for third grade boys. I have the privilege of being part of this, along with six other Edgewood guys.
- While the Satan Club is meeting again at a Moline Elementary School, our Go Team partner Child Evangelism Fellowship continues to share the gospel through the Good News Clubs on campus. In addition, groups like Young Life and Quest for Christ are providing a strong gospel witness in our area schools.

Friends, there's a lot to celebrate, isn't there? To rejoice is a choice and there's always a reason to be joyful if you know Jesus and are involved in His mission. The joy of the Lord is irresistible. If you're searching for your meaning and purpose, I commend this personal mission statement from the Westminster Shorter Catechism: *"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."*

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4. Eternity is inescapable. Verse 10 tells us the time to work, witness, and worship is now because when we die, it will be too late: ***"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going."*** We're to expend our energy and work with our ***"might,"*** which means, *"intensity, strength, and power."*

I think of Caleb declaring in Numbers 13:30: ***"Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it."*** Later, when he was 85-years-old, Caleb declared in Joshua 14:12: ***"So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said."***

2 Chronicles 31:21 says this about Hezekiah: ***"And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered."*** The

New Testament equivalent of this value is found in Colossians 3:23: ***“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”*** Let’s make sure we are not being spiritual slackers as Jeremiah 48:10 warns: ***“Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness.”***

This past Saturday, the deacon and pastoral teams met again to seek the Lord regarding His mission and vision for Edgewood. At one point, Pastor Daniel spoke up and passed along an observation. After being our Administrative Pastor for just six weeks, this is what he said: *“I have consistently observed a high commitment and strong work ethic among the staff, Deacon Board, and Trustee Board.”* And then he added, *“In 30 years of ministry, Edgewood is by far the most gospel-focused church I have been a part of.”* Same.

While it’s important to work hard, Solomon also observed that sometimes circumstances beyond our control bring misfortune and disappointment. We see this in verse 11: ***“Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.”*** God brought this verse to mind when I recently went out for a run.

I enjoy having a watch that automatically records my exercises, but was discouraged when it buzzed and displayed this message, *“It looks like you’re working out...Record Elliptical Workout.”*

Apparently, my running pace was so slow that my watch thought I was just shuffling back and forth as I glided down the street. So much for the gazelle-like speed of my youth. I was bummed about all this until the Lord brought this verse to mind, ***“Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift...”***

I guess that means it’s OK to be slow as long as I continue to grow in my faith. Several years ago, Eugene Peterson wrote these words in his book called: “A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society”: *“There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.”*

If you’re a follower of Christ, you have signed up for a long apprenticeship in holiness. We’re to exercise self-control and stay headed in the right direction, no matter how slow we go.

The Bible often refers to the Christian life as a race that is more like a marathon than a sprint. The key is to keep running, and to stay the course so you remain faithful to the end. Paul used this same imagery near the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4:7: ***“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*** I may not be swift, but I’m going to keep running, no matter how slow I go. After all, Romans 9:16 says, ***“So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”***

We must focus on finishing our race as we keep our eyes on the inescapable reality of eternity. We see this in verse 12: ***“For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.”*** The word ***“suddenly”*** has the idea of ***“unexpectedly, surprising, all at once.”*** Death is certain and comes suddenly. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 21:34-35: ***“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.”***

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5. Wisdom is indispensable. The words ***“wise”*** or ***“wisdom”*** are used seven times in verses 13-18 to show us wisdom is better than might or weapons of war: ***“I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man’s wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”***

The wisest thing you can do is to tell your younger self to get saved now and choose to follow Christ every day because you’re going to die sooner than you think. Ecclesiastes 12:1: ***“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’”***

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Let’s summarize what we’ve learned.

- 1. Life is inscrutable.**
- 2. Death is inevitable.**
- 3. Joy is irresistible.**
- 4. Eternity is inescapable.**
- 5. Wisdom is indispensable.**

I reminded of what happened with one of our neighbors when we lived in Pontiac. Bob had been fighting some serious health problems and knew he was at the end of his life, so he asked me to come and visit him in the hospital. I sensed he didn't really care for pastors, so I was nervous to meet with him.

As I sat next to him, I shared the story of the two thieves on the cross. As I focused on this sweet shout from the Savior, I told Bob that it didn't matter how he had been living. It didn't matter how many times he had been to church (he hadn't been going). What mattered was whether he was going to turn to Jesus before it was too late.

I explained how I became a Christian and then walked him through what he needed to do if he wanted to be with Jesus in paradise for eternity. I urged Him to revere God, to repent of his sins, and to request salvation.

With tears in his eyes, he said he was ready to repent and receive Christ. He prayed out loud and asked Jesus to save him from his sins as he put his faith and trust in Him for salvation. By the time he was done, we were both crying. His wife Rita was crying as well (she got saved a few weeks later).

I'll never forget what happened next. After I shared some Scripture with him to let him know that he was now ready to die, I went out into the hallway to share the good news of Bob's last second salvation with his daughter Brenda.

While we were talking, a beautiful lullaby started playing over the hospital sound system. Apparently, the hospital plays this soothing song whenever a baby is born to let everyone know a new life has come into the world. With tears flowing down my cheeks, I turned to Brenda and said, *"They're playing that song for your dad because he's a new baby in Christ! Today is his spiritual birthday!"*

There's more to the story. Last December, Beth and I were in a shop in Geneseo, and I was being loud and kind of goofy, acting like I was in agony to go shopping. Just then, a young woman came up to me and asked, *"Are you Brian Bill?"*

Feeling a bit sassy, I replied, “*It depends on who’s asking.*” This made her a bit uncomfortable (I’m good at that) and then she introduced herself: “*I’m Savanna Yoder. You would have known me as Savanna Ifft.*” Once I recognized her, Beth and I hugged her and spent some time catching up. We invited her and her husband Camden to Edgewood. They were baptized recently and have been serving on our landscape team.

So, here’s the rest of the story. Our neighbor named Bob, who got saved right before he died, was Savanna’s grandpa!

Do you want to be with Jesus in paradise when you die? If so, Jesus says you need a spiritual birthday: “***Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.***” (John 3:3)

Have you been born again? If not, why not? Why not now?

Don’t wait until it’s too late.

I close with a challenge from J.C. Ryle.

- Life is short and uncertain.
- Sin is exceedingly sinful.
- Death is sure.
- Judgement is inevitable.
- Hell is a dreadful reality.
- Christ alone can save you.

Gospel Invitation