

Turning Down the Noise
Week 1: When Life Gets Loud
Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Not really the most uplifting passage in the Bible, right? You may have come to church this morning looking for encouragement, and instead, you got, “Everything is meaningless.”

But, what if these words are actually the most honest, and helpful, words we could hear?

We did some work on our staff values and behaviors last year, and one of the statements that came out of it is, “We share to the last 5%.” Meaning, we don’t pull punches. We say the hard things that need to be said to each other because it makes us better. And a lot of times, the last 5% is hard to share and it’s hard to hear, which is why we usually keep it to ourselves, but we’ve found that’s where the gold is. Sometimes the most helpful words we can share are the most difficult words to say and to hear.

The book of Ecclesiastes is the author sharing his last 5%. He’s sharing words that are hard to say and hard to hear, but are exactly what we need. And even though they were written 1,000’s of years ago, they’re just as relevant today as they were then. The things people were chasing then are the same things we chase today, and, if we’re willing to listen to them, the honest words of Ecclesiastes will help put those things in their proper places. They will help turn down the noise in our lives.

And doesn’t it feel like that’s something we need? It sometimes feels like the volume of our world has been turned up to 11. We are bombarded by the noise of notifications, endless news cycles and entertainment, pressure to achieve, the expectations of others. It seems like everywhere we turn, someone is shouting at us, “This is what you need to be happy!” “This is what will finally make you feel better about yourself, about your future.”

And all this noise can be so loud that it tricks us into believing it’s true.

So, we turn up the volume on those things that were never meant to give us life and meaning and satisfaction. We think, “If I can just be a little more successful...” “If I can just make a little more money...” “If I can just stay busy enough, distracted enough...” “If I just keep scrolling...then I’ll find what I’m looking for!”

But the louder those things get, the harder it is to find what we truly need. The more noise that’s in our life, the harder it is to hear what we actually need to hear. To hear the voice of wisdom. To hear the words of the Lord.

And the book of Ecclesiastes is like someone walking up to the soundboard of our lives, turning it all down, and saying, “Let’s talk about what’s really going on here.” This can be hard, which is why we don’t always want to do it. Poet Carl Sandburg once wrote, “Life is like an onion. You peel it off one layer at a time, and sometimes you weep.”

There might be a reason we've filled our life with so much noise. It's providing layers of protection to keep us from having to deal with the hard stuff. Ecclesiastes is like someone peeling off those layers, saying, "No, let's talk about the hard stuff that nobody really wants to talk about, or hear, because it might be exactly what we need to put things into perspective."

And so, that's what we're going to be doing over these next 7 weeks. We're going to be going through this ancient book that has a lot of wisdom for us today. So, if you haven't already, go ahead and turn there with me. Ecclesiastes 1.

In these opening verses, we learn a little about the author and he says some things that are going to become themes throughout the book. And we see the biggest theme take shape within the first two verses. Look at it again...(Eccl. 1:1-2)

A quick word about the author...he refers to himself as the "Teacher," a son of David and king in Jerusalem. And because it's a book of wisdom, a lot of people assume it was written by Solomon, who wrote the Proverbs and some other wisdom literature. But, we don't know that for sure. There are some things that indicate it could have been written much later than Solomon.

Whoever it is, the "teacher," is writing from a place of tested wisdom and experience. He's likely a man who had great wealth and power and pleasure. If anyone could find meaning in the noise of life, it would have been him. But instead, he gets right to his point and says, "Meaningless, meaningless. It's all meaningless!"

The word he uses here is the Hebrew word, "Hevel." It means vanity...it's all for show...meaningless, vapor, breath, mist.

He uses the Hebrew word 5x in verse 2 alone ("Utterly" is a form of Hevel). He'll go on to use it 38x in the entire book! And when he says that everything is meaningless, he's not saying that nothing matters. He's saying that everything we chase in this life has a way of slipping through our fingers. Life is fleeting. It's elusive and hard to grasp. All the noise we fill it with is temporary and unpredictable. There's no real substance to it.

And so, he asks in verse 3...(READ)

All the striving. All the noise. All the effort. At the end of it all, what do we actually have to show for it? What's left of our lives and our pursuits when it all comes to an end?

That phrase, "under the sun," is another important one. He'll use it 29x and whenever he uses it, he's talking about life from a purely earthly perspective. His main point is that the things we chase "under the sun"...the things we pursue apart from God, or for our own

gain...they're ultimately meaningless. And when we die, they die with us. There's nothing eternal or lasting about them.

And then he gives us some examples of this from the world around us...(READ vs. 4-7)

Generations come and go. The sun rises and sets. The wind blows. Streams flow endlessly. His point is that everything in life keeps moving, but nothing feels like it's moving forward. You're busy. Life is noisy. But are you fulfilled? Verse 8...(READ vs. 8-9)

The reality of a life that is spent chasing after meaningless pursuits is that it's never fully satisfied. The eye never gets enough of seeing. Ears never get enough of hearing. We have access to more content than ever before, and rates of flourishing and fulfillment are lower than they've ever been. Consumption does not equal satisfaction.

Or, as Josiah Queen sings, "We've got dust on our Bibles, brand new iPhones. No wonder why we feel this way."

We have infinite content and little fulfillment. And to put a cherry on top of this mud pie, he closes this section with these words...(READ vs. 11)

Not only is life repetitive, it's easily forgotten. Generations come and go. At best, people 2-3 generations from now will remember us, but even that's unlikely. Think about that for too long and you'll also be saying, "Meaningless, meaningless. It's all meaningless!"

So, what do we do with this? Well, I think Ecclesiastes was written to create a little discomfort inside of us. It makes us come face to face with some things we typically just want to ignore.

Life can feel repetitive sometimes. Effort can feel pointless. We can get caught up in content overload and constant motion without meaning. Satisfaction can always seem like it's just out of reach. Legacy feels temporary, at best.

Ecclesiastes leaves us with a problem...life under the sun is meaningless. It's "hevel."

In studying for this series, I read that the word "hevel," where we get "meaningless," someone described it as "what's left when a bubble is popped." I like that image.

It's there...and then it's gone.

You can see it...but you can't hold it.

You can reach for it...but can never grab it.

And I started thinking about the bubbles in my own life...

- Achievement
- Productivity
- Approval
- Success in ministry
- Preaching a *great* sermon

What are your bubbles?

I've spent more time and energy in my life than I'd like to admit chasing after things that looked like they would satisfy...and every time, they popped. Meaningless, meaningless. It's all meaningless.

That's what the Teacher is trying to show us in this book. Life...and it's pursuits...apart from God feels like this...

But then, our world comes along and turns up all that noise! And instead of slowing down and asking why these things aren't satisfying us, it just fills our lives with more noise. More meaningless pursuits. More things that promise to fulfill us, but only leave us more empty than before.

And we just keep chasing after the wrong things. And I think what the book of Ecclesiastes wants us to see is that **all the noise in our life is keeping us from hearing God.** It's keeping us from pursuing the things that truly matter, or finding the real value in the good things we've been given.

The problem isn't that life is busy, it's that when it gets loud, we don't always know how to turn down the noise to anchor ourselves in the Lord. And I think that's the life that Jesus is inviting us into when he says, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest."

Jesus is inviting us to be still and rest in Him. He wants to show us the things that are creating noise in our life so he can turn down the volume on what is keeping us from finding the abundant life in Him. And so, here's what I'm challenging you to do...**create intentional moments of silence this week.**

Carve out 5 minutes, each day this week, where you leave your phone in another room. No music. No distractions. Just sit, breathe, and be with the Lord. Maybe just start with a prayer, "God, I'm here. My life is loud. Help me to hear your voice." And then, just listen.

If you're not used to this kind of silence, it will feel awkward. Your mind will wander and you'll want to quit, but don't be discouraged. That might be the first sign that the noise in your life is finally being turned down.

What it, over the next 7 weeks, we actually learned how to live differently. How to find true meaning in our lives, in our work, in our relationships. To experience less noise and more clarity. Less striving and more peace. That's the life Ecclesiastes is pointing us to, and is the life that Jesus is inviting us into.

The world is loud, but God still speaks. The question is, are we quiet enough to hear Him?

Invitation and Communion

In our noisy world, God didn't shout louder, He came closer. Jesus stepped into the noise so we could hear God's voice and see what God is like.

The Apostle John says that God is love. And Jesus showed us that love on the cross. He made a way for us to come to the Father. If you are tired of running. Tired of searching. Tired of the noise in your life, Jesus invitation is for you to come to Him.