

Hi. I get to read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. They think Solomon might have been the author, but they're not for sure. The words of the teacher, son of David, King of 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? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north. Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To place the streams to the place the streams come from there they return again.

All things are worrisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear is filled of hearing. What has been will be again. What has been done will be done again. There's nothing new under the sun.

Is there anything of which one can say? Look, there's something new. It was already here long ago. It was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Thank you, Brenda. I appreciate that reading.

I got caught up in it and neglected to come up here when I was supposed to come up, up here. But I'm here now. We're glad to have you here. This morning we're starting a new series based out of Ecclesiastes. I'm so excited about it.

We're not even one sermon in yet, and I'm like, this is going to be a great series. I hope you are part of it for the entire length. I love a good documentary, which is a weird, weird segue, but let's just get it out there. I love a good documentary. One of my favorites, Ken Burns.

Anyone have a favorite Ken Burns documentary? Yeah. Which one? Baseball. Excellent.

What is it? Yeah. Okay. I love the Civil War. That was a great one for me.

I love Jefferson. His documentary on Jefferson was absolutely amazing. I love documentaries. The one he did on the national Parks. Anyone seen that one?

Okay, y' all have homework. You need to watch a Ken Burns documentary this week. That's what you got to do. I love a good documentary, but I

tell you, I love a good mockumentary. Does anyone.

Has anyone heard that phrase? Mockumentary? A mockumentary. I was explaining this to Carly this week. A mockumentary is like a documentary, but it's also a farce.

It's just a fake. Anyone familiar with the Office? The TV show the Office? That is a mockumentary where they bring cameras in and they present this as like, it's a real thing. One of my favorite favorite mockumentary directors is a guy named Christopher Guest.

Christopher Guest has directed a couple of great mockumentaries. One of them is Best in Show. And it. It's a mockumentary, a fake documentary about the. About the famous dog show.

And they. Anyway, watch that one, too. There's one called A Mighty Wind, which is a mockumentary about these bluegrass artists trying to make it big. But the best one that struck the culture at just the right time was something called Spinal Tap. This is.

Anyone familiar with this movie? Okay, we got a few. Thank you. If you know, you know, it's a great. It's a great one.

It's about. It's about a fictional rock band. And there's this one scene, and they're trying to make it big, and it sort of follows their trajectory. There's this one scene where they're looking at their band equipment, and one of the guitarists goes down to his amp and he says, look at this. Y' all know where I'm going with this?

He says, look at this. And he looks at the volume and the volume. He's especially proud of his amp because it goes all the way to 11. 11. Not 10.

11. You think 10, but then it's like 11. And the guy's looking, the other guy's looking, well, why not just. Why not just make 10 a little bit louder? And he goes, well, because it's 11.

But it's one more than 10. It's one louder than 10. And some of you are scratching your heads going, what's so funny about that? Trust me, it's funny. It's just funny.

It's funny. And that moment hit just right in the culture. And soon after, real bands and real musicians were asking for equipment where the volume knobs went up to 11, including Eddie Van Halen. And so Marshall, the company that provided the props for this movie, this is Spinal Tap, started making amps that went up to 11. Oh, my word.

You can still find it. Not just the Tesla S series. Its volume control goes to 11. The tachometer on the special editions of the Porsche 911 goes up to. And it goes even outside of technology.

In 2016, astronomer Christoph Stanek described a super bright object in the galaxy this way. He says, it's as if nature took everything we know about magnetars. How many of you know everything there is to know about magnetars? I've never heard the Word. But here's what he said.

It's like nature took everything we know about Magnetars and turned it up to 11. If you go to IMDb, which is the film rating site, if you go to IMDb and look up Spinal Tap, the normal 1 to 10 star rating has been turned to 1 to 11.

More and more, the volume of our world, the world around us seems to be turned up to 11. Every day we're bombarded by sounds and noises, the dings of notifications. If you looked at my phone right now, it would send some of you into a spiraling panic attack because of the number of notifications on my phone. If you know, you know, Carly knows. She didn't want to think about it.

We got 24, seven news cycles, which are. It's constantly throwing information at us, information that we can do nothing about. Information that rarely even applies to our lives, but yet it's in front of our face all the time. Endless entertainment pressures to achieve the expectations that comes from other people and ourselves. And this is noise.

This noise just fills up every corner of our lives. Anyone saying, yeah, I understand what you're talking about here. I get. Fills up every part of our lives and makes it harder to hear what really matters. The voice, the wisdom of God.

And we may blame it on technology, but the problem has been around for years and years and years and years and years. And a guy, Solomon, we, he mentioned him, wrote a book a thousand years ago and longer called Ecclesiastes. And he was hearing the same noise in his head too. But in his writings, he does more than just complain about it. He actually points us forward to a better path.

And so as we go through this book, Ecclesiastes, this timeless book, I pray that we will also rediscover some of these ancient paths and learn how to dial back the noise to discover purpose and peace and wisdom as we hear the voice of God over just the cacophony, the din, the static of the noise around us. I hope you're in it with me because it's been good so far. Just this week, as I've been processing through it now, Brenda mentioned this Ecclesiastes was written by the Teacher. We commonly assume him to be Solomon. And I'm going to ask you to do this.

If you've got your phones on you, if you've got your real Bibles. Sorry, that's my generation speaking. Your real Bibles in front of you. I'm going to have you turn to Ecclesiastes Chapter one, or open

it up in your Bible app. Now, Ecclesiastes.

If this is your Bible, open it up halfway to the very halfway point. And you're probably going to open it up to the book of Psalms. Psalms is really close. You're almost there. If you're just Psalms, you're going to turn to the right, flip to the right, you're going to come up to Proverbs, and then the next book you're going to find is Ecclesiastes.

And I'm going to have you just go there, and we're going to land on chapter one. That's basically where we're going to be this morning.

Solomon starts this out. The teacher will say this. He starts this, this chapter out by making a claim that some of us might want to argue with. And he says this. Meaningless.

Meaningless, says the teacher. Utter meaningless. Everything is meaningless. Have you ever felt that way?

I don't know. I. I'm a contrarian. Maybe as I get older, I'm like, well, hold on. Not. Not everything is meaningless.

Life and love and, and. And our walk with the Lord. That's not meaningless. That has. That has meaning.

And I think it's helpful to understand where that word and what it's translated from, what it means and where it's translated. It's translated from an ancient Hebrew word, Hever. Actually, it's. If you, if you see it spelled, it's H, E, B E, R, but it's pronounced that. B is pronounced like a V. So Hevar.

And Hevar has with it this I idea or this picture of breath. Like on a cold morning, you see it and then it's gone, or vapor. Something that's elusive, something that's ephemeral. That's a good word if you want to take a word home with you. Ephemeral is a good word.

And so when he says meaningless. Meaningless. A better way, Not a better way, but another way, perhaps a clearer way of saying this might be temporary. Temporary, says the teacher. Utterly temporary.

Everything is temporary. And as I get older, I understand that more and more. The teacher goes on to explain what he means by this. And he talks about human labor. If you can look at.

You can look in your. Your chapter one there of Ecclesiastes and see that he says what is truly gained from. From hard work, all of our labor doesn't lead to lasting satisfaction.

He says life, all this activity under the sun, in quotes, is temporary, especially when it's contrasted with the nature's constant

and repetitive cycles. He says, the sun comes up, the sun goes down, the wind blows the wind dies down. The wind blows again, then dies down again. Rivers rise and fall. The oceans rise and fall, Fall waters flow into the sea and just loop back again and again and again.

And he says in verse nine, there's nothing new under the sun. Now the contrarian in me pushes back against the teacher here, too and says, what do you mean there's nothing new? We just saw some four. Four astronauts go the furthest into outer space that anyone has ever gone before. Surely they.

That is a new thing. And then I think back. Well, we've always sent explorers out to explore the furthest reaches. Now, this time they went a little further. But what did they do?

They looped back and came home again. There's nothing new. Well, what about AI? That's new. That's frighteningly new.

I don't know. Maybe. Maybe it is new, but maybe it's like the segue. Remember how excited we were for the segue? It was going to transform transportation, wasn't it?

How many of you drove a segue to church this morning?

I don't know. There's all these promises. New patterns are going to emerge, new technology that's going to replace all the old technology and then newer technology will follow that culture shifts will replace old culture shifts and that's what they do. But then they in turn are replaced by new culture shifts. And in the end, is there anything new under the sun?

It feels new. Maybe it feels scary, maybe you get a little anxious about it. But the teacher reminds us that's probably because you've forgotten what has come before. That's what he says in verse 11. No one remembers the former generations and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

All the noise, all the hype, all the busyness, all that feels new and exciting says in the end all of it will pass through and into history and much of it will be forgotten, especially all the things that we thought were so important. Anyone remember being in their 20s and the things that you stressed about in your 20s? Nehemiah remembers that. It wasn't that long ago for you, buddy. You're still in it.

How old are you? 24. Remember 24? Remember all the things you stressed about at 24? And now at 54?

It's hard for me to even remember that far back of the things that I worried about that felt life shattering and life moving to me. And I go, I want to impart the wisdom of the ages into young Nehemiah. But

unfortunately, it will only be learned by going through it. Yeah, it's a pretty depressing way to start a book about finding meaning and purpose within God's wisdom, to talk about everything being meaningless, meaningless and meaningless. But you can't prescribe a remedy until you know the illness.

Any doctors in the room, any nurses, medical people. You can't fix it until you know what's wrong. And here's the problem. We are surrounded by noise, digital distractions, constant busyness, inner anxiety dialed up to 11. That drowns out the voice and wisdom of God.

And I believe, and I think the teacher would tell us the same thing, that it's intentional, that noise is intentional. There's a reason it exists, and here's why it exists, to provide distraction. It's a distraction by the enemy to keep us engaged in the meaningless so that we don't experience the meaningful. Did you get that? So I don't want that in my life, do you?

I don't want my life to be consumed by meaninglessness. I want to have a life that's meaningful. And so how do we do that? Knowing that I was preaching on this this morning, I put into practice the challenges I'm going to give to you at the end of the service. And I'm telling you right now, let me just be perfectly honest, I found it hard to do.

It wasn't easy. This challenge.

I set aside 20 minutes, 20 minutes. How hard is that going to be? And I took my cup of coffee, which I love, a cup of coffee. I went out on my front porch yesterday morning, morning, early morning, no traffic, quiet, sat there. I'm saying, I'm going to enjoy 20 minutes of silence before the Lord.

And in that moment, the birds were annoyingly loud and my phone was right over here. And I'm telling you, how many times did I go, no, no, no, I'm going to be just quiet. I'm just going to be still. I'm just going to listen. I'm just going to enjoy this moment.

And if God speaks to me, I want to be ready for it. Then I'm like, well, hold on, let me check that.

Get up. Look off down the road a little bit, see if anything's happening downtown. Sit back down.

Don't touch the phone. It's hard. It's hard. Quieting our lives is harder than it sounds. Let's just put it out there.

It is not easy. It's not easy. I have started this personal journey more times than I like to admit. Yesterday morning was not the first time I attempted this only to get sucked back in to the meaningless. Of our contemporary lives.

But in the process of trying and even failing, here's what I've learned, at least is true. A quieter life has to embrace intentional silence. It has to. Our life is filled with muchness and manyness. An old Quaker wrote that, and I love that.

Our life is filled with muchness and manyness. And if you're sitting beside someone whose life is filled with muchness and manyness, nudge them and say, I think he's talking about you right now. This is just it. We try to know too much. We try to know everything.

Knowledge is power, we say. And so we try to know all the knowledge so that we have some control. We feel like we have some control over the world around us. If we know more, then we can manage more. And that's not true, but we try nonetheless.

We engage with endless social media. We engage with the 24. 7 news cycle. We go to bed with it on, and it's the first thing we turn on when we get up. We do not give ourselves space from it.

We don't give ourselves relief from it. We try to know too much.

Knowledge is power, but wisdom is knowing when to shut it all off and be silent. And that's the key to hearing God speak. This dialing back requires us to embrace intentional silence, but it also requires us to embrace intentional pacing. Pacing? What do I mean by pacing?

I mean what we try to do, what we try to accomplish. I just read this morning AI is taking over jobs. But what we find is it is creating a lot more work. Coders are finding this new codes are coming through all the time, and these have to be reviewed by people with actual brains. And so it's.

People are inundated. There's a backlog, new codes that need to be reviewed. They don't. They can't keep up. It's creating problems because there's too much.

What should make our lives easier and instead just makes our life busier. We try to do too much. We mistake a full schedule with a full life that will preach. Parents, Parents, don't mistake a full schedule for a full life. When you're planning your children's weeks.

Can I get it? Amen. Those of us who are old, we know this. We know that full lives don't come from full schedules. Knowing when to push pause on our activity is key to experiencing God's presence.

And those of us who are entrusted with discipling our children, please remember a full schedule does not equal a full life. I'm done stomping on toes. I want to move on to something else. A quieter life embraces intentional space. Space is an interesting word, but it felt right in

the moment to use that word.

But what do I mean by space? I mean the boundaries that we put around ourselves. Reach out and touch the person next to you. Do it in an unoffensive way, please, but just reach and touch them. You have already, in touching this other person, probably overextended the boundaries of your personal responsibility.

We try to manage too much. We try to inhabit too much. We try to play God in other people's lives. When we can't even manage our own life. We try to control too much.

And what does it lead to? It leads to worry. It leads to complaining. It leads to fear and anxiety and bitterness and unforgiveness. When we try to manage other people, we have these endless and unrealistic expectations for ourselves and for others.

And knowing how to set boundaries, knowing how to establish proper space, intentional space in our lives is important to understanding the power of God. Because we only begin to understand the power of God when we understand where we are powerless. And those places of powerlessness are where we will first begin to experience the power of God. Knowing how to set boundaries around our expectations for ourselves and others and leave space for God to work in us and through us and around us is key. Key to experiencing the voice and the power of God.

Now, if we don't embrace spiritual, if we don't embrace intentional silence and intentional pacing and intentional space, we simply get led by the nose. That's a picture, isn't it? Get led by the nose to anxious and spiritually empty lives. That's. That's absent God's voice and his wisdom and his.

And his power and his presence and his guidance. And maybe that's why the teacher starts off by saying, it's all meaningless. It's all temporary. It's all ephemeral. The volume is turned up to 11, but it's all static.

I want meaningful. I don't want meaningless. I think you do too. So what do we need to do? Do we simply divorce ourselves from the world around us?

We retreat to a mountain cave, and there we live our lives just humming and waiting on God to do something. I don't think that's what the teacher intended us to do. I don't think that's what God intends us to do. He wants us engaged with the world, not controlled by it, but engaged with it. And so I think the start of intentionally experiencing God's presence is to intentionally dial the noise back from 11 to.

I don't know. Let's try 10. Let's try to dial it back to 10. Specifically Psalm 46:10. And here's what Psalm 46:10 says.

Practice intentional silence.

Turn to someone near you and say, go ahead. Go ahead and do it. I'm not going to go until you do it.

No one, not everyone, did it. I know they didn't. But that's all right. That's all right. We've got seven weeks of this series.

By the end of it, you'll be shushing somebody. Intentional silence. Here's what the author writes in Psalm 46:10. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth.

Intentional silence. And then intentional pacing. Look at this. There's a great verse for this. It says, stop, Stop.

Do that with me. Stop in the name of love. Stop. Just stop. And there's a great verse for this.

It's Psalm 46:10. What's it say? Read it with me. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth. Intentional silence. Intentional pacing. Sh. Stop.

And finally, intentional space. We're going to observe the boundaries that God has established for us. And there's a great verse that supports intentional space. Psalm 46:10. You almost know it by now, don't you?

Read it with me. He says, be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, and I will be exalted in the earth. Be still. Shh.

Be still. Stop. Be still. Remember, God is God. God is in charge.

He will be exalted in the heavens, and he will be exalted in the earth. Shh. Stop. Remember.

As we close up this morning, the teacher uses an interesting phrase, and it'll show up again and again in Ecclesiastes, so get ready for it. He uses this phrase under the sun 29 times. At least you will see it appear in his writings. And this is a beautiful and poetic way that he speaks to life on this side of eternity. For the Teacher, and maybe for you.

This morning, life under the sun oftentimes feels like this endless cycle of business. This, this. This looping and looping again and again. Just repetition that ultimately leads to nowhere. And our lives are dialed clear up to 11 with nothing to show for it other than busyness.

And Jesus doesn't want that life for us. That's not what he invited us into. He wants a different life for us. In John 10, verse 10, Jesus says this. The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

In other words, the thief, the enemy, Satan wants to push that volume, crank it all the way up to 11 in your life, which is only going to lead to a life that is meaningless and distracted away from the things that matter. Jesus offers you something different. I want to offer you a life that is. That is full and meaningful. Full and meaningful.

It matters. And that's the life I want. I think you do, too. But to experience that, I've got to first trust Jesus with my life. And if you've never done that, if you've never surrendered your life to him, the life he promises on the back end of this is always going to remain elusive.

It's going to remain a pipe dream for you. But if you trust him with your soul and then listen to me, follow him in obedience with your schedule, then you're going to experience a full and meaningful life. You're going to claim the inheritance that Jesus promised to those of us who say yes to Him. But it starts by intentionally reclaiming what is yours by right. And what is yours by right is this.

Is this relationship and an intentional time with Jesus. And so here's the challenge that I had trouble with yesterday morning, but I'm going to put it out for you as well. Here's what I want you to do this week. I want you to reclaim some time. Reclaim this inheritance that you have to be with Jesus by turning down the noise and inhabiting some silence.

So you're going to find a place. You're going to find a space. You're going to turn it down. So you're going to turn some stuff off. Don't take your phone with you onto the front porch.

That was a rookie mistake. I'm not going to make that again. You leave your phone someplace where it's away. You can't hear the dings. You don't even see it.

You're going to find a space, get a cup of coffee, get a glass of water, I don't know, a cookie, whatever. Whatever is like a sweet time for you. Find that. Find a place. And then sit in quietness.

And I'm going to put it out there. 20 minutes. If you fail, you're not

a failure. If you make it five minutes, that's five minutes you didn't spend last week. That's great.

Set a goal for 20, see what happens. Set a goal every day. But if you only make it three days. That's three days you didn't do last week. We're on a journey.

We're on an ancient path that's been trod many, many, many times before. You're not a pioneer in this, so you don't have to trailblaze for everybody. You just have to get on the path. Just start the path. 20 minutes.

Turn off the distractions, step away from them, and find a place to simply sit in quietness before the Lord. And if the birds are screeching, just say, lord, thank you for creation. I'm going to focus on bird screeching right now. And that'll be all right. That'll be all right.

And then pray this, Lord, help me. Be still and know that you are God. And if you do nothing more than pray this prayer at the beginning and into that time of silence, you will have arrested in some small way or in some big way, meaninglessness and have embraced meaningfulness. Let's share in a time of communion, Jesus, as we come to this moment, this may be the first time many of us have actually sat in silence. Our phones are not in front of us.

Our minds are in the moment. And so if there's other stuff, other noise, other static, we just ask that you quiet that noise in our minds. Quiet the noise in our hearts. Those voices that scream out our to do list, those voices that scream out the expectations others have on us. Those.

Those voices that cry out our failures and point out all the ways that we've disappointed you and others this week. We just pray that you would quiet those voices, those voices that are attempting to drown out your voice. I pray that your voice, the voice that says, I love you and I want to spend time with you. I want to bring meaning and purpose into your life. I want your life at the end to be full.

That's the voice we want to hear. Jesus, you love us, and that love compelled you to the cross. So that's what we want, to hear, your voice as we take these emblems that speak so beautifully of the way you love us. We want to hear you, Jesus.

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