

## Turning Down the Noise of Achievement

April 19, 2026

A few years ago, we were on vacation at the beach with our family and our close friends. We had enjoyed a beautiful sunny day out by the water, and we were resting inside before dinner. I was sitting on the floor working on a puzzle with my friend, and my daughter was watching a movie, sitting near us as we worked. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie *Sing 2*, but it's a great movie and has a scene in which one of the characters is singing this popular pop song from a few years ago. The song was "*This girl is on fire.*" Now, if you know that song, I'm sure you're singing it in your head, so I apologize for that. But I'll never forget Elliot, who was about 7 at the time, she was watching that movie and that scene with that song came on, and she was in it. She was singing that song with all of her effort, she was committed. Hitting the high notes, really nailing it. The song was over and she said, pretty much to herself, "Man, I'm SO good at that". We just laughed and laughed, and she couldn't figure out why because she was serious. She was so proud of her performance, and she was very confident in her skills.

I tell you that story, not only because it makes me laugh, but because today we're talking about the noise of achievement. Accomplishments, confidence, pride, humility, rest, sabbath – all of these topics are on the table today. And while, like Elliot, we want to be confident and have pride in what we do, we have to be thoughtful to not allow the things we do or achieve define who we are.

We're in week 2 of talking about the noise of the world that seems to be turned up to 11 and getting louder every day. We are constantly bombarded by the noise of notifications, news, endless entertainment, pressure to achieve, and the expectations of others. This noise fills every corner of our lives and makes it harder to hear what matters most: the voice and wisdom of God. What would it look like for us to turn down the noise of meaningless pursuits so we can hear the voice of God and rediscover a life of purpose, peace, and wisdom?

Today we'll be in Ecclesiastes chapter 2. Ecclesiastes is this book of wisdom written from the teacher's life experience. He's sharing what he's learned, he's pulling back the curtain a bit and giving us a bit of the hard truth.

There are a few books of wisdom in the Bible. The book of Job teaches us about suffering in our faith, divine justice, that the Lord will always be with us. Proverbs is another book of wisdom, and it is full of these short practical truths about moral behavior and the fear of the Lord.

And then we have Ecclesiastes. My Bible is a study Bible and it has these great pages that set up each book, and it talks about the author, the setting, when it was written, things like that. It also gives an overview of the themes of each book in the Bible. To share just a bit about Ecclesiastes, my Bible says that this book examines the meaning of life, the limitations of human wisdom, and the inevitability of death. It kind of feels like a downer, right? But really, let's get into it and we'll find that there is so much goodness and so much to learn from this ancient book of wisdom.

Before we get into the Scripture today, I want to review what Shawn shared about last week and the definition of this word meaningless that we'll come across. The teacher didn't really mean to say that these things have no meaning, but it's that Hebrew word Hevel, and it translates as vanity, vapor, mist, something that you can see but not grasp or understand. During my study I read that some people like the word absurd or enigma instead of meaningless. So just keep that in mind as we get going here.

Ecclesiastes chapter 2. This is verse 1-3.

*"I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with 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, and embracing folly – my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.*

Here, the teacher shares that he has this intent to explore pleasure as a means to find what is ‘good’ or worthwhile in life. He says he’s testing himself, and he describes his attempt to find happiness and meaning through wine, wisdom, and wealth.

However, he quickly concludes that pleasure itself is ultimately meaningless. Pleasure is a vapor, it’s an enigma, unable to be grasped. This results in his revelation that superficial enjoyment is fleeting, and cannot provide lasting fulfillment.

#### Verses 4-10

*I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. <sup>5</sup> I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. <sup>6</sup> I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. <sup>7</sup> I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. <sup>8</sup> I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem<sup>[a]</sup> as well—the delights of a man’s heart. <sup>9</sup> I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. <sup>10</sup> I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.*

In these verses, he undertakes extensive building projects, creates these beautiful gardens, and amasses significant wealth and resources. By all accounts, the teacher was doing pretty well for that time. He had wealth and possessions, status and success. I mean, if there were a checklist for success in 935 BC, this guy was checking all the boxes.

He even says that “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired.” He indulged in every desire he had. By the worlds standards, this is the peak of self-fulfillment and personal freedom.

And yet.

We read here in verse 11, he says *“Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”*

We get to the end of this passage, and the teacher summarized all his attempts at finding life’s meaning as “chasing after the wind.” And if you remember last week, Shawn shared that when the author says, “under the sun”, he is saying here on earth.

Think about what it means when he says a chasing after the wind. We feel the wind as it passes, but we can’t catch hold of it or keep it. This paints a picture of effort without arrival.

He says that nothing was gained here on earth.

So, the conclusion here is a bit alarming. What he’s saying is that in all his accomplishments, even the big accomplishments, his good feelings were only temporary. What he discovered is that security, happiness and self-worth are not found in these accomplishments.

Let’s remember here that the author here is not someone who failed. This is the voice of someone who *succeeded*—and still found something missing. He came to the realization that you can fill your life and still feel unfulfilled. You can reach your goals... and still wonder “what now?” You can have everything you wanted, or everything that you THINK you wanted... and still feel like something is lacking.

You know, as we were planning this sermon series, Shawn said “take a look at the topics, and let me know which one stands out to you.” And it made me laugh in way that only God can do. Because if there is anyone in this space that needs to hear a sermon on turning down the noise of achievement in their life, it’s me. And I told Shawn that it’s a lot easier to write a sermon when it’s

something that you really connect to. I've had years of preaching this message to myself to prepare me for today.

I am, by nature, an achiever. I love to set goals and meet them. I love to exceed other people's expectations. Learning that about myself and turning down that noise has been a constant part of my faith and my life.

I want to be sure that you hear this – there is nothing wrong with working hard and being successful, making and meeting goals. There is nothing wrong with being someone who works hard for achievements, to grow in their career or academic or athletic accomplishments. We should be hard workers, we should be confident in our gifts and talents and have pride in our output. Work ethic is important, it is a reflection of good character. God wants us to work hard and enjoy success and the fruit of our accomplishments. But we must do these things from a place of humility, a place of giving God the glory for these things in our life. We have to be thoughtful of the line – the line of finding our worth and identity in who the world says we are or resting in our identity of who God says we are. We have to be careful.

Because **there is a quiet exhaustion that settles into your soul when achievement becomes the measure of your worth.**

Not physical exhaustion—though that often comes too—but something deeper. It's the kind of exhaustion that whispers, *"You've done so much... why doesn't it feel like enough?"*

Our world tells us that achievement gives us status and worth. Our world says that achievement, money, success, that those things define us as someone who has "made it." Our world says that the more we strive, the harder we work, the more we conquer – then we will be fulfilled. But truly, that kind of striving leads to exhaustion, not fulfillment. The Bible has a lot to say about turning down the noise of what the world says.

There are several stories throughout Scripture that turn this worldly view of achievement or striving upside down.

In the gospel book of Luke, we read about Mary and Martha. Jesus comes to their home, and while Martha is busy serving and achieving something “good”, Mary simply sits at Jesus’ feet. Martha represents striving, responsibility, and doing more. Mary represents surrender, attention, and being with Jesus. And Jesus affirms Mary – not because serving and being busy is bad, but because being with Him matters more than proving ourselves. Jesus’ values presence over productivity.

In the Old Testament book of Judges we read about Gideon. He has an army of 32,000 men – that feels like a strong army that can be used to conquer others and check off those accomplishments of winning battles, right? But we see God reduce the size of Gideon’s army from 32,000 men to just 300 men. What happens here is God intentionally strips away Gideon’s strength in numbers, so that when Gideon’s army wins the battle, the victory is unmistakably God’s victory, not Gideon’s achievement. Gideon could not have won that battle without the Lord. The Lord values trust over strength.

In the book of Exodus, we see God provide manna, daily in the wilderness. Manna was this bread like substance that tasted like honey wafers, and each day God provided the Israelites exactly enough for them to eat for just that day. The Israelites couldn’t store it up, because if they did, it would spoil. It’s easy for us, in our humanness and our striving, to want to be in control. But this daily dependence on God for their food forced them to trust God *every single day*, not rely on their own control or self-sufficiency. God values surrender over control.

There is even a story in the book of Mark about a rich young ruler who has everything – all the wealth and worldly possessions that he could acquire. And Jesus asks him to sell everything – let it all go and give it to the poor. Jesus says get rid of all of your wealth and follow me.

Presence over productivity.

Trust over strength.

Surrender over control.

This is a powerful theme that shows up all throughout Scripture. The Bible affirms what the teacher in Ecclesiastes says – it consistently redirects us from striving, proving, controlling, and achieving... and instead guides us toward trusting, surrendering, and depending on God.

This theme shows us that the world and the noise of achievement says one thing, but the word of the Lord tells us something different.

Achievement says ‘I have to prove myself to others.’ But God says that He is enough.

Achievement says ‘I can do this on my own.’ God says to trust Him even when we don’t understand.

Achievement says ‘My value comes from what I do.’ But God tells us that our value comes from being His.

So what do we do? How do we live differently in light of this? Again, as someone who needs to be reminded of this message often, it’s important to shift this into something that we can apply in our lives, something that we live out.

Here’s three things we can do as we learn to stop striving and instead learn to rest in the Lord.

**Be grateful, but not expectant.** Be grateful, but not expectant. Receive joy, success, and accomplishments in your life. It is okay to be proud of those things. But we must be careful that you don’t ask these accomplishments to be what they were never meant to be. Don’t expect anything in your life to fill a void or “complete” you. Only God can do that.

**Anchor your life in God, not outcomes.** When your identity and purpose come from Him, everything else finds its proper place.

Colossians 3:23-24 says “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

This passage encourages us to view our work as a form of worship. True achievement comes not in seeking earthly praise or outcomes but in dedicating our efforts to God. When we work for Him and anchor our life in Him, that is when we will find true rest.

**Prioritize sabbath.** Sabbath is the English form of the word shabbat, which is the original Hebrew word. Both of these words come from the verb “shavat” which means to stop. So, at the root, both words literally mean to stop working, to cease striving, to rest.

We see this in Genesis when God created the world in 6 days and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day he rested. He didn’t rest from exhaustion, but from completion. So this rhythm of sabbath, of shabbat, becomes a rhythm where we stop producing, stop achieving, stop controlling. We turn it all off so that we can simply BE with God.

This root word “Shabbat” carries a deeper, richer meaning than just “rest.” It implies not just slowing down, but ceasing, or stopping. It implies delighting in the Lord. So when I say prioritize sabbath, I’m really encouraging you to practice the deep Hebrew idea of Shabbat – not just to rest from work, but to rest from the need to prove, earn, or accomplish, and to delight in the Lord.

I want to share just a few quick, practical things that I’ve learned about rest that could be helpful. If you work with your hands, rest with your brain. Read a book, do a crossword puzzle, listen to a podcast. If you work with your brain, rest with your hands. There is science behind this.

My favorite thing on Sunday afternoon is to bake. I love nothing more than going home, kicking off my shoes, and baking or cooking. I follow a recipe, so it’s not hard brain work. But I use my hands – which is very soothing and

restful for me. Often, I'll have music on, sometimes I just enjoy the quiet. So, think outside the box with rest. Rest or sabbath doesn't mean you have to sit. It can mean that, if that's what you need. But sabbath is less about telling you what you must do and more about telling you what **not to do**. Don't strive. Don't produce. Give yourself time off from expectations from others or from those expectations that you put on yourself. Those expectations are not from the Lord.

Our hope is that each Sunday we leave this space with an intention of helping us turn down the noise. What can you do to practice Sabbath in a simple way this week? How can you set aside a block of time to stop striving? No work, no productivity, just rest, worship, and enjoy God. Maybe you need to actually put it in your calendar instead of hoping it will happen. Move things around to give yourself this time. I feel confident that you'll be glad you did.

When we read Ecclesiastes 2:11 you can hear the longing in the authors voice. *"Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun."*

He was longing for something in his life that all of his worldly achievements had not given him.

This longing for "something more" is not accidental. It's our heart longing for the Lord. Jesus speaks directly to this when He says: "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst."

The world offers temporary satisfaction, but Christ offers lasting fullness. Where life feels like striving, He offers rest. Where everything on earth feels like vapor or a mist, He gives eternal purpose.

Timothy 4:7 is a verse you often hear at the end of someone's life. It says "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

These words remind us that achievement in our life is about remaining faithful to God's calling until the end. True success is measured by perseverance and faithfulness, not by earthly recognition. Finishing the race well and keeping the faith are the ultimate achievements.

What a relief! I hope this is a relief to you the way that it is to me. It is truly such a gift that our future in heaven is not measured by our earthly accomplishments. It is measured only by our willingness to keep the faith.

This book of Ecclesiastes was written so that we would learn from the author's mistakes, he was sharing from his experience. He's telling us that the everything we think is important here on earth, everything under the sun, isn't worth it. You can't catch it, you can't grasp it, it won't fill the longing in your soul, so you might as well stop trying to make those things, those achievements and accomplishments, more important than what they are. Don't settle into that exhaustion, that cycle, of achievement being a measurement of your worth. Because while the world says those things matter, they don't matter when you get to heaven. Jesus and a relationship with him is the only thing worth chasing after, the only thing under the sun that will provide you true fulfillment.

I want to end our time today with a prayer. This is A Liturgy for Resting in God, by Thomas À Kempis. He was a medieval German priest, and this prayer is an excerpt from *Every Moment Holy*.

Grant me, O most loving Lord,  
to rest in you above all else—

above all creatures,  
above all health and beauty,  
above all glory and honor,  
above all power and dignity,  
above all knowledge and cleverness,

above all riches and art,  
above all fame and praise,  
above all sweetness and comfort,  
above all hope and promise,  
above all gifts and favors that you can give,  
above all happiness my mind can feel;  
above all that is not you, O God.

Anything you bestow on me  
or reveal to me or promise to me  
is too small and unsatisfying  
if I do not see or meet you in it.

For surely my heart cannot truly rest,  
or ever be fully contented,  
unless it rest in you.  
Amen.

Each week we provide space for individual response to the Lord. During this time there will be opportunity to through song. You can pray with people around the room, they'll have lanyards on and they are available for you to pray with about anything, big or small, a praise or a need.

This is also the time that we'll take communion. In just a moment you'll be able to get up and get communion if you need to, from one of the tables at the front or the back of the room. You can take communion around the room or back at your seat, with others, or on your own.

On one side of the cup is a small piece of bread that represents the body of Jesus that was given for us, and the other side is the juice to represent His blood that was shed for us. When we take communion, we remember that He took on the weight of our sin and died on the cross for us.

Jesus says that you're worth His love, and that is the greatest accomplishment we can ever have, and yet we had to do nothing for it. We don't have to earn it. We don't have to earn it through success or wealth, or achievements. We simply have to accept what he offers us and be faithful in pursuing a relationship with Him.

If you haven't yet made that decision, maybe today is the day. The day that you stop trying to chase after the wind, knowing that nothing under the sun will fill the longing in your heart. The only thing that will fill that longing is Jesus. We are celebrating baptisms today, the water is ready. A life of peace, joy, and rest in the Lord is waiting.

PRAY