

Well, good morning ladies and gentlemen. We are glad you are here this morning. We're in a series called Ecclesiastes and it's called that because there's a book in the Bible called Ecclesiastes. If you've got your real bibles with you, not a digital one, those are fine by the way, but, but finding Ecclesiastes in your real Bible is this easy. Open it up to about midway.

Do do do do do. Flip a few pages to the right. You'll come to psalms first and then you'll come to Proverbs and then you'll come to Ecclesiastes and that's the book we are in. The passage that we're looking at today is this passage right here. And I was going to invite Connor Sash but I do not see Connor right now.

Here he is. Get up here Connor. Chip chop. What's going on bud? Rumba zimba.

What's the one you did? The limbo? Yeah, yeah. We don't have a limbo stick. So I'm going to invite Connor Sash to read this to us, please.

Is this on? There we go. And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless. A chasing after the wind.

The fool folds his hands and ruins himself. Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil. And chasing after the wind. Again I saw something meaningless under the sun. There was a man all alone.

He had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. For whom am I toiling, he asked. And why am I depriving myself of enjoyment? This too is meaningless, a miserable business.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. Also, if two lie down together they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

The one may be overpowered. Two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Thank you Connor. Friday night I was taking my 15 year old.

It's hard to keep track down to see a friend who lives down towards Evansville. We're driving through Lagodi and I've got a few others in the back seat. And I say boys, feeling very generous right now. Would we like to swing through McDonald's and get a little bite to eat off the value meal? They're like six and seven dollars and I've discovered them recently.

It's going to change life as we know it. When we go through

McDonald's. So we're driving through, the rain's coming down a little bit. It's a new system there where you've got the two, you know, the two intercoms, the two ordering systems. Then you've got multiple windows and I don't know what happened.

I got confused. I passed the window there and got to the next window and the boys are yelling, you pass the window. You pass the window. And the rain's coming down and they've got some music. I don't even know what it is.

I can't understand the words at all. Cranked on the radio and I'm trying to back up and I'm using my camera and I'm off the, off backing up and I can't get around. And then you get there and the guy was like, idiot. Did you not see me hanging out the window? No, I didn't.

There's a lot going on right now. So we get our food in and we got. They're all trying to sort it out and who's got the french fries? Who's got this? And they're yelling and the music's going, the rain's coming down and I'm trying to figure out which lane to get into to turn to go on down where I said, okay.

So I shut the music off. I said, hey, shh, I'm trying to see has anyone been there? Anyone know what I'm talking about? If it's just I can't see, I don't know what I'm doing, I can't figure out what I'm doing when there's too much noise. And I think this is what we mean when we talk about the noise in our lives.

Those distractions that just, they can keep us from seeing weirdly, they can keep us from hearing, they can keep us from making good life decisions that honor God and bless and bless ourselves and others. It's just noise. We all live with it in some degree or another. We don't always notice it, but it's always there. Corporate, quiet, persistent, always pulling at us.

It shows up when we're scrolling through social media. Anyone? It shows up when we look at our neighbor's house or our co workers career. And it's a very specific type of noise. It's the noise of envy and comparison.

It shows up in my life when I watch home improvement shows. Now several years ago I gave up on hgtv and almost within a week I noticed that my personal satisfaction with my habitat increased dramatically, skyrocketed. I loved my place. And then two months ago, I discovered a show on YouTube called Restoration and Restoration. They take these old homes 100 years old, about the age of mine, and they take these houses that time and.

And consist and consecutive owners have just. Just remodeled to the point of not even recognizing this house. And when they strip all that back and they get back to the original woodwork and they find the

original, like, light fixtures and they. And they. And they tear up the carpet and refinish these beautiful hardwood floors.

And I'm telling you what, I watched that show for 30 minutes, and the house that I was perfectly content with yesterday all of a sudden looks like a sty that I am living in. How can I live here and call myself a human being? And what's worse is I look at my own floors and go, well, why do they get beautifully finished original woodwork and hardwood floors? And I have to live with this.

Now here's the truth. Debbie McKilber says this. If the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, you can bet the water bill is higher. So I get it. I get it.

I do not have the budget to do what they're doing with those homes. But comparison in my life is one of the loudest forms of noise that I deal with. Maybe you do too. Solomon, writing thousands of years before Facebook and HGTV and performance reviews, says, I see this too. I see it in my life as well.

He says In Ecclesiastes, chapter 4, verse 4, he says, I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. And this too is meaningless. It's a chasing after the wind. Has anyone ever chased after the wind? Did you catch it?

No, you don't. But did you catch what Solomon said? He says all toil and achievement can be driven by comparison. Now, sometimes I feel like Solomon was just in a really bad place when he wrote Ecclesiastes. Anyone else get that feeling?

But I also get what he's saying here, because even in ministry, even in the work that I feel like is a good work and a God work, sometimes we find ourselves doing things not because God called us to it, but because we want what another church has or we want to do what another church does. They have something we want. And Solomon says that when comparison becomes the fuel, even good work starts to feel meaningless. It feels empty. It's the chasing after the wind.

Now, Solomon is not anti work. I know some of you Got real excited right now. But he's not anti work because he says in verse five, remember this, fools fold their hands and bring ruin on themselves. Doing nothing isn't the answer. It's not the antidote to envy and comparison.

It's not the solution just to give up. If you do nothing to care for your house, it doesn't matter how nice the floors are underneath that carpet, the house is going to fall down. You got to take care of the things around you. You got to take care of the people around you. You got to take care of the responsibilities around you.

Indolence leads to ruin. Indolence is a great word by the way. Indolence is just laziness and doing nothing, vegging on the sofa while the house falls around you. The truth is, and Solomon recognizes this, we were created to work. That's part of our creation.

God set Adam to a good work almost immediately. In Genesis chapter 2, verse 15, the writer of Genesis says this, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to what work? And there's two Hebrew words here. The word work is a Hebrew word abed, which means to serve or steward like, like the parable of the good stewards who are entrusted with something to, to manage and take care of and make better and grow. So that's the word abed, that's the word that this writer uses for work, the translator says is work.

Then there's the take care of. And the take care of is a word called shamar and it means to guard or protect. So this idea that Adam has responsibilities is alluded to in a book by Jack Eswin and I've got a copy on my desk, it's all dog eared co called Recovering Eden. And, and he says this, he says that the responsibility that God gave to Adam was about expanding the sanctuary of God, the place where God dwells. This is what, this is what Adam's role was.

And he does this by, by, by building civilizations, by building culture, by building communities, and in so doing replicating God's God's sanctuary heaven into the rest of the world. And we do this whether we're in healthcare, whether we work at the limestone mill. Well, no matter what we do, we can build civilization, we can build an enhanced culture, we can build communities through what we do. This kind of work. The work that God gave Adam, the work that God gave us to build up God's plan and build others up as well is good and it's meaningful.

So to one extreme Solomon would say this doing nothing isn't the answer, you were created to work. But then he immediately pivots to the further extreme on the other side. In verse six he says, better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. There it is. This is to the person who, who has one handful but realizes or thinks that two handfuls are even better.

Anyone know you know anyone like that? Who's there? Two handful kind of people. Like, like if one is good, two is better. If we got one car, we need two cars.

If we got a two car garage, we need a three car garage. If we got five bedrooms, we need six bedrooms. If we've got the jacuzzi, we need the pool. Anyone know people? Maybe you're like that.

I can be a little bit like that. So there's no judgment on my part. But, but if one is good, if one handful is good, then two is better. And so, so these kind of people go after more money, more success,

more recognition, but in the process they don't experience much peace. Now again, this is an extreme that Solomon is pointing to.

And Solomon says the wisdom that God gives says this, that one handful with peace is better than anything else. Contentment and rest. Work is good. But work driven by fear, by insecurity, by comparison, by envy will never give us the peace that we think it is going to bring us. Some of us grew up believing that if we just did a little more, if we worked a little harder, if we outperformed the person working beside us or studying beside us, then we would feel secure.

We would get the ribbon at, at the end of the school year, we would get the trophy at the end of the game. And we would feel, because we had the trophy and we had the blue ribbon, because we had the straight A report card, that we would feel secure and we would feel loved and we would feel valued. And if that is your life and if that's how you feel, I just want to say I am so sorry that that is the world that you live, that you grew up in, because this is not the world that Jesus wants us to live in. Solomon says that all that hustle is really just a chasing after the wind. And then Solomon introduces to, to a particular kind of person.

I don't know, maybe you identify with this guy in verse 7 and 8. So there was a man all alone. He had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. Can you picture this guy?

He's a go getter. He is not just a nine to fiver. He isn't. He's a seven to eight kind of guy. He works all day long.

He's driven. He goes after it. He wants, he wants, he wants it all. He wants the corner office, he wants the high position. He want.

He's. This is his goal. He's going after it. He works all the time. And yet every new accomplishment, every new achievement, every new advancement isn't quite enough.

He's not lazy, he's not irresponsible, he's very productive. He's extremely successful. And you and I may go, ooh, I wish I had that guy's life, except for this. And Solomon alludes to this. He goes, he's got all this, but he's alone, no relationships, no shared joy, and no one to come home to at night.

And so he works later and later. And in verse 8 he says, for whom am I toiling? Why am I doing this?

Who is all this work for? And why am I depriving myself of life and enjoyment? It's just meaningless.

This kind of guy needs to know this. When work becomes our identity,

when work becomes like security, when work becomes the source of worth that we ascribe to ourselves, then it ceases to be a blessing. It ceases to be that serve and protect kind of work that God gave Adam and God gives us. And it becomes a burden. If that is you today, Jesus wants to remind you of something very, very important.

I love how the New Living translation talks about this. Jesus says, consider the lilies of the field, the birds of the air. They are not tied to a job description. They have no retirement account, they don't have performance reviews, and yet God takes care of them. And here's the passage I want to draw your attention to.

If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers, most of which will never be seen by the human eye, don't you think that he will attend to you? Don't you think he'll take pride in you? Don't you think he'll do his best for you? And Jesus says it this way, what I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax. Take a deep breath, don't be so preoccupied with getting that you can't respond to God's giving.

People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things. But you know both God and how he works. So steep your lives. That word steep has this idea of like a teabag in that hot water, just, just letting, just letting aromatics release and changing the environment around it says, let your life steep in God reality, God initiative, God provisions. Don't worry about missing out because you'll find that your everyday human concerns will be met by the God who cares for you.

You are not valuable because of what you produce. You are not valuable because of how many hours you work. As Alan reminded us last week, you are valuable because you belong to him. You are his child, not a resume. You need to hear that again.

You are his beloved child. You are not an impressive resume to Him. Work matters. Work is good for you, but it is not the end of life itself. So if you're in this place where competition is isolating you from other people, where comparison is just wearing you down, what's the next step?

Well, Solomon would say the next step is this connection, community. Two are better than one. If you're out there doing it all on your own, like the man who comes to his senses and looks around says, wait, wait, who am I doing this for? Take a look. Because God may have put someone that you can do that for.

He gives us three pictures of this. Two are better than one reality. He says, first, two are better than one because when one falls, the other helps them up. Secondly, two are better than one because when it's cold and life can get cold sometimes, can't it? Two stay warm.

Better than one. And third, when opposition comes in life and anyone

there right now, where opposition seems to be all around you, here's what you need to know. Two are better than one. Two can stand together when opposition surrounds you. And then Solomon concludes with this, this line right here.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. And this is, I believe, a beautiful way of inviting Jesus into whatever situation you find yourself in.

If two is good, then three is better. Envy and comparison. And trying to do life all on our own is just a recipe for fragility. Where we are easily broken, we're easily shattered. Little things become outsized.

Big. And they. They can mess with our peace of mind. They can mess with our sense of who we are when we're living in this comparison place of envy, isolation.

Comparison, envy, isolation looks like this. You don't share with others, not just your stuff, but your life. You don't admit weakness because if someone finds a weak spot, well, they're sure to take advantage of it and get one over you. You don't let anyone get ahead because if they get ahead, that means you're falling behind.

Looks like resenting anyone with nice original wood floors that you don't have but connection and community remind us this, that life is not meant to be lived alone. What did God tell Adam? It's not. It's not good for you to try to do this work that I've given to you by yourself. I'm going to provide people, in Adam's case, a person to help you do it.

You're not alone. And your worth isn't threatened by someone else's success. You matter to God no matter how well someone else is doing. You are beloved child of God. And it means that we can work together and succeed together.

We can go the places God wants us to go together.

And at the end of the day, community says, hey, floors are meant to be walked on, not looked at. So gather all your friends together and have a party right here on these old scuffed up floors. Here's the simple invitation for this week. If you notice, comparison started to creep in on you. And again, I'm pretty sure we all wrestle with this noise in our lives instead of indulging it, instead of sort of coddling that.

Do this. Celebrate someone else. Send them a text. Hey, man, I was at your house. Your floors are beautiful.

I love what. I love what you've done. You've done a great job with those floors. I don't know why I'm fixated on floors right now.

Because we had the carpets cleaned a week ago and already it's like, oh, if you are thinking about putting carpeting in your house anywhere and you're leaning towards white, can I just.

Have you read Solomon a lot? Because that is vanity of vanities. It's all meaningless. It is a chasing after dirt and grime the rest of your life. Don't do it.

When you see comparison, when you see MV coming into your lives, send a text, say, hey, I'm thinking about you. You're doing great. I'm so proud of you. Make a phone call. Hey, I just wanted to hear your voice, remind myself what a blessing you are in my life.

This is what. This is how we make old in the olden days. This is what phones look like right here. Hey, I was just thinking about you and I want to talk to you.

I know no one does this. I have a hard time doing it. Write a note. There is nothing like getting an encouraging note in the mail. I love it.

I love it. Andrea does this with volunteers, people that she sees just doing a great job that she's so thankful for. And she sends them a little note, says, thank you for the way you serve. I saw what you did and it was amazing. That encourages other people and it.

And it keeps us from being so focused on our own stuff. And every time we do this, every time we celebrate someone else some good stuff that's going on in their lives, it turns down the noise of envy and comparison in our own lives. We're getting ready to have a time of communion, and I was reminded of this. Someone shared this this week, and I thought, that's really good. I want to use that.

It. Is this such a good reminder about this time of communion at. At the communion table, there's no place for comparison. It's not like growing up at your family table and said, well, why can't you be more like Billy Bob? You need to be more like Sister Jane.

No, there's no comparison at the table of the Lord. We all come. There's no. There's no rankings. No one gets first chair, second chair, third chair, like an orchestra.

We all just get to pull up a chair and join in at the table. No achievements earn you a place here. The only thing that earns you a place here is the one who earned it for you. Jesus. So no one's ahead and no one's behind.

And the bread that we're going to receive reminds us that Jesus gave himself for us. Not because we measured up, not because we worked harder than anyone else, not because we did certain things to get

there, but because Jesus loves us and considers us his beloved brothers and sisters, beloved children of his Father. The cup reminds us that our value was settled at the cross, not by again, how productive we were in life, but by the grace of Jesus.

Comparison isolates. But this moment here, this moment of communion connects us. And so as we receive the juice and the bread, we lay down our striving, we lay down our envy. And at the feet of Jesus, we fall and we cry, holy, holy, holy. You are holy.

And we remember that we belong to Jesus and we belong to each other. And that's how God turns noisy, exhausting work into meaningful work and connected lives. And that's what we want to be about. Amen. Heavenly Father, we come to the table today.

We may look different, we may dress different. The challenges and responsibilities that we have outside this moment are different than each other.

We have different struggles, and in some sense, we wrestle with different types of noise. But when you say whosoever can come, you mean that whosoever. And so that. That involves all of us. This morning, Jesus, you invite us to the table, and so we come ready to receive from you.

A warm smile, pat on the shoulder. I'm so glad you're here. The invitation to be part of your family. Lord, you love us so. In this moment, may we know it in the deepest core of our being how much we are loved by you.

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