

The grass weathers, the flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever. If you've been around this year, you've probably noticed that at the end of public reading of Scripture before the sermon, we have recited these words from Isaiah, chapter 40. And there's a few things that happened last fall that kind of brought this conviction upon me that, that we should do this. Number one, I, I noticed really, I guess, last year, leading into the summer and definitely in the fall, that there's just a. An increased hunger for the Word of God.

There's an increased hunger for the Word of God, not just to, like, know it, but to really, like, live by it. And I think that we're realizing that, man, everything else in this world, it. It fades. But the Word of God, like, this is what we desire. This is what we are hungry for.

This is what we need. Number two, if you're around in the fall, we preached through Romans Chapter eight. We spent nine weeks on Romans Chapter eight. And that last week, just read Scripture. That was the entire sermon, was just reading the story of scripture from Genesis through Revelation.

And I put the last period on that sermon and walked away from it, closed the document, thought that it was done, and the Lord just impressed on me. No, include as the Last verse, Isaiah 40, verse 8. The flowers fade. The grass withers of the Word of the Lord endures forever. And so I opened it back up and put that on there.

And I can't tell you how many people said how much they appreciated that last line as kind of the exclamation point to the reading of God's Word during that sermon. And then the third thing came from talking to some young adults and college students that have been a part of Sherwood Oaks. And as I talk to this generation, Gen Z down to Gen Alpha, and we hear from them and we see studies that are being done across the nation. There is like a spiritual hunger and some even say maybe even a revival that is happening in that generation. And they don't want the experience.

What they want is the truth. What they want is what is found in God's Word. Because they have grown up in a society where everything is changing around them. Everything feels like it is in flux. And they are looking for something that roots them and grounds them.

And something that is. Is here, was here long before us and will be here long after we are gone. The. The flowers fall, the grass withers. The Word of our Lord endures forever.

What we are hungry for. This, this desire that is inside of us is for the Word of God. And I don't think that it's just young adults that are feeling this. I think if we're honest, we're probably all feeling this in one way or another. We've said throughout this series that we

live in a very noisy world, like a very noisy world that is shouting at us where true meaning and purpose and value is found.

It is shouting at us to follow and to buy into its worldview and ways of living. And a lot of what we hear from our society, from our culture, like, when we first hear it, we're like, oh, that. That sounds good. It's like a hint of truth that's in it. But if we live by that worldview, it's not long until we start feeling it breaking down around us.

And it leads us to a place that it promised to deliver. And once we get there, we're like, is this leaves us wanting something more or maybe sometimes even more deceptively, it leads us into a place that. That's filled with pain, it's filled with hurt. We buy into our cultural cultures, sexual ethic, and it leads us to a place that leaves our hearts broken, wondering if we're loved. We buy into our culture's view of money and holding that up, and we fill our bank account, and we experience all this success, and we're like, okay, but what now?

I'm about ready to retire, and I don't know what's next for me. And we start to buy into our culture's worldview, and we realize just how limited it is. And then you add to that that culture changes, opinions change, algorithms change, experts agree, and then they disagree on something. And people who have barely lived for a blip on the eternal radar are talking about things being on the right side of history. And oftentimes they'll criticize this book as being on the wrong side of history.

And it's like, how can you make those judgments? You've barely even been here, barely even know what's going on. And we disregard something.

We disregard something that has been here long before us and will be here long after us. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God endures forever. And we can look elsewhere. We can try to find happiness and meaning and satisfaction elsewhere. Man, we might find it for a moment, but it's not going to last.

It's fleeting. And I think that's where Ecclesiastes lands. Been in this book for seven weeks. We've seen that the teacher has pursued all of these different things. And I think just as the one who is entrusted to shepherd Sherwood Oaks during this season of our lives, of our cultural moment.

I just want to break through all of the noise that is shouting at us, of this is where you find life. This is where you find meeting. And I just want to remind us that, no, it is in the word of our Lord. So that maybe, maybe if we have found ourselves buying into something and we've walked down this path and it's led us to the end, and we look up

and we're like, this is not where I want to be. Maybe there'll be something in the recesses of our brain that just recites that verse again.

The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our Lord endures forever. And it brings us back to Scripture. It brings us back to what is true and lasting. And that's what the Teacher is trying to do. In this entire book.

He's pointing out the fallacy that anything in this world can bring us satisfaction. He's saying, no, it all comes down to this. It all comes down to the wisdom of God. And he tried finding pleasure in achievement and wealth and work. He tried finding meaning in the pursuit of power.

And in all of this searching, he arrived at this conclusion. Ecclesiastes, chapter 12, verse 8. He says, Meaningless. Meaningless, says the Teacher. Everything is meaningless.

This is one of the first things that we talked about in week one of this series. This is a phrase that he repeats 38 times throughout these 12 chapters. And if you've been with us, you know that the word meaningless doesn't mean that life has no meaning. It doesn't mean that there's no point to any of this. That word meaningless is heavil.

It means breath. It means vapor. We talked about that. Heavel is what is left after you pop a bubble. It's that residue that hangs in the air just for a moment, and then it's gone.

And the Teacher is saying that that is our life, that that is our pursuits apart from God. It is that residue that hangs in the air for a moment and then it is gone. Any of these things apart from the Lord is meaningless, Meaningless, utterless, utterly meaningless. And the Teacher of Ecclesiastes doesn't just stop there, doesn't just point out what is broken and then walk away and say, well, good luck figuring it out.

Instead, he shows us where what we are looking for can be found. Look again at verse 13. He says, now, all has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter. All has been heard.

Here is the conclusion of the matter. In our English Bibles, depending on your translation, this is about 12 words that the author says here. But in the original text, in the Hebrew, this is four words. Four words. And this is how they are written in this order.

Soft, devar, hakul, nismah, End word, all heard. That's how this verse starts. Four words, end word, all heard, heard. He spent 12 chapters to get to what he's about ready to say. This is like going on a transatlantic flight.

You've been in the plane for 12 hours. The pilot comes on and says, ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning our initial descent. And then 30 seconds later you're at the gate. Like, he lands this plane real quick. He gets right to his points again, 12 chapters talking about all of the ways he has searched for meaning and satisfaction where it can't be found, how pleasure failed him, how achievement failed, how wealth failed, how control and certainty has failed him.

220 verses to get to these final two verses. And he gives us the TLDR, the too long. Didn't read. So if you didn't read anything else in Ecclesiastes, this is what it's about. Everything written up to this point is summarized by what is next.

End word, all heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

All of that searching, all of the turning down the noise on these places that he and we look for satisfaction and meaning. And his conclusion of what leads to a meaningful life filled with joy and satisfaction and purpose comes down to fear God, keep his commandments and know that one day the righteous judge will judge all things. That's it. It's a little bit anticlimactic. After everything that he's talked about, I thought that maybe there would be a philosophy, five easy steps to living your best life.

But that's not his conclusion.

And let's be honest, like if we were to walk up to someone in the street and ask them, hey, do you want a life of meaning and purpose and satisfaction? They'd be like, yeah, tell me how to find it. And our answer is, okay, you ready for this? Be afraid of God, do what he says, and know that one day he's going to judge you to make sure that you did those things. Most people are like, eh, no thanks, I'm out.

And honestly, I think I would be out on that as well. I don't know many people who are willing to sign up for that. And then you add to it that we live in a culture where freedom is defined by no authority, no one telling you what to do or what not to do, no boundaries, no judgment. Certainly freedom is not found in surrender. And so this just doesn't make sense to us.

His conclusion here though, and in all of the ways that he has looked for what will fill him, his conclusion is, if you want to find it, and it starts at surrender, it starts at surrendering to the Creator who actually knows where life is found, who designed us to find it in that, who knows how life works. So surrendering our need to control outcomes and people and just walk by faith and trust in the one who actually controls all things.

And I think there's a few reasons why this is so easy for us to miss. Number one, it's easy for us to miss because our world is shouting a completely different message to us. The world is shouting at us, what we want to hear, where life is found, things that we want to do, indulgences that we want to give ourselves to. So we don't hear the wisdom of God. And I think the second reason we don't always hear it is because the wisdom of God whispers to us.

The wisdom of the world is shouting for attention. The wisdom of God is gentle and humble. And it whispers, it's an invitation. And there are people whose hearts are hardened that don't want to hear that invitation, that surround it with all of this noise to where they miss it. And then I think the third reason that we can miss this is because we just don't always like the wisdom of God.

It's not something that we want to hear.

I had skipped over this passage for time today, but verse 11, the teacher says that the words of the wise are like goads. Goad, that's not a word that, you know, we use very often. But this is a picture of an ancient goad. It was a long stick with a sharp point, so it'd be about 6 to 10ft long and have this sharp point. And farmers and herders would use it to direct their ox or their livestock.

And so it have a grip down on this side. And you kind of see this farmer using it as they're plowing the fields just to make sure that everything is staying in the right direction, moving where it's supposed to. And what I love about this picture, somebody in the 8 o'clock service pointed out, what I love about this picture is that the farmer isn't using it to poke, he's using it to guide, using it to help stay in the right direction, move in the right way. And that's what the wisdom of God is for our lives. And sometimes wisdom confronts us.

Sometimes wisdom pokes and prods us, sometimes it comforts us, but it is always for our good. And the wisdom of God endures forever. And it comes down to this. Fear God and keep his commands. What does that mean?

I think it's easy when we hear that phrase, fear God, to think, be afraid of God, like, cower before him. I. I think that's especially true whenever this phrase fear God is. Is in the context of. Of judgment. And.

And so what we hear is, is that the wisdom of God comes down to, you better do what he says or he is going to smite you. And, like, nobody wants to be smitten. And so we're like, well, I better do what God says or else he's going to punish me.

I don't think that's what it means to fear God. There are a few Hebrew words for fear. If we kind of go back to the root of these words, one of them is rooted in feeling. And so if we kind of map it out. And so if fear is rooted, you know, as a feeling, then we kind of come over here in contempt.

And, you know, we feel hope and affection. But this emotion, the emotions that we feel, anger, gladness, hate, love, sadness, fear. And if we think of fear as being rooted in this feeling and we hear fear God, then it would be really easy for us to interpret that and say, well, fear God means dread him, be horrified by him, feel terrified at what he might do if you don't do everything he says.

But this actually isn't at all. Whenever Scripture talks about fearing God, it never uses this word that comes down to this root. Instead, what it uses is a word that's. That's rooted in something else. It's rooted in our minds.

The second word is yahre. And it's to consider something.

It's to respect, something to admire. To fear God means to revere properly, to worship, to be in awe of who he is, to recognize that he is the author and the creator of life and all things, and to bow reverently and humbly before Him. It's not the kind of fear that makes you run away. It's the kind of fear that makes you fall on your knees and say, wow.

A couple years ago, we took our family to visit the Grand Canyon. And I look at that picture and I'm like, oh, that they look so young. They grow up so fast. Addie's going to Be a freshman next year. Whoa.

But we went, and I had never been before. And so I remember when we got to the place where we could finally kind of, there was a breaking, and we could see the Grand Canyon in front of us. I remember looking at it and just going, whoa, this is amazing. I was in awe of what I was taking in. And that was my first thought.

My second thought was, man, there's not a fence around this thing. Like, where are the girls? We need to make sure that we keep them away. And I don't know why that surprised me so much. I mean, the thing is, like, probably the circumference, like, thousands of miles long.

Who's going to put a fence on it? But I was like, we need to pay attention here. We need to make sure that we stay back from the edge. And honestly, I was more worried about myself falling in than I was the girls falling in. And I imagine Amber probably felt the same way, to be honest.

And that fear didn't make me say, come on, Amber, girls, we got to get

out of here. We can't be here. This is terrifying. We've got to get away. No.

That fear that I was feeling in that moment said, man, we need to respect the boundaries that are around this thing. We need to respect those little signs that say, watch out for the cliff. Mind the gap. It's a really big gap. Like, I don't want to be one of the 12 people every year that fall into that and die.

I'm like, please, Lord, I do not want to be a statistic on that list. And so we didn't run away in fear, but we certainly knew where the edge was.

We played it safe, we avoided it. We were respectful of it.

And I did a few hikes down into the canyon. Not all the way hope to do that one day, but went down into it, staying on the trail. One morning, I got up early before the sunrise, did a run out to a little part that jettisons out, and watched the sunrise. And so, like, I enjoyed it, but I was mindful at all times of where that edge was. I think that's kind of what it means to fear God, to be respectful of who he is and the boundaries that he's put in place for us.

And not because he's trying to just arbitrarily keep us from having fun. It's because this God who designed and created us, knows where true life can be found, and he wants us to experience it. There is wisdom in living a life that is aligned to God's word. Where everything else in this world is fading and falling, it endures forever. His eternal words point us how we can find life and make our life better.

They point us to the way that God designed us to live. And so the word of the Lord basically is just rightly recognizing who he is and who we are not and then responding accordingly to that.

So the Teacher is searched high and low, and this was his conclusion. And then he closes with words of judgment, which are always hard to read. These words of judgment, I think, are meant to humble us and confront us at the same time. Over the course of this book, the Teacher has wrestled with things like injustice and, and oppression and evil and hidden corruption. He's.

He's talked about how the pursuits of the things in this world have led others to succeed and others to be trampled on. And in verse 14 he says that none of this will escape God. None of this is going to fly underneath his radar, and none of it is going to stay hidden forever. God sees it all. He sees what is done in secret.

He sees the wounds that you carry that somebody else inflicted upon you because of their sin. He sees the quiet faithfulness that nobody

applauds, the prayers that we whisper through tear filled eyes. He sees the integrity that no one else knows. He sees when we follow him and are faithful. And he sees when we go our own way and we do our own thing.

Nothing is hidden from his sight. And one day God will make all of these things right. We hear judgment and we think fear again. But there is a hope. And that the sin that has been done against us, the brokenness in this world, we don't ultimately have to fix it.

We can live faithfully to the Lord and follow him and trust that one day he will turn Eden back into the state that it was. One day he will restore and redeem and renew all things. And until then we just live faithfully with Him. And so after all the noise, all the striving, all the searching, the Teacher arrives at this conclusion up on the screen. I'm not the center of the universe, he is.

Would you say that with me? I'm not the center of the universe, he is. Now turn to the person next to you and say that. And maybe it's like a confession that you need to say, hey, listen, I know I'm not the center of the universe, he is. Maybe it's an accusation that you need to say, hey, you're not the center of the universe, he is.

Whatever it needs to be. Just go ahead and say that to the person Next to you, I'm not the center of the universe. I know I act like it sometimes. He is.

If anybody needs to see a counselor after this, we have some that are available. And we can get you connected. And we can try to. We can try to make God bend his will to ours, or we can bend our will to God's. We can try to say God, it's, I want to live my way.

I want to do my own thing. I want to go searching for meaning and purpose and joy and all of these other things. Or we can say, man, that's not where it's going to be found, because it's not how we've been designed to find. Find it. So I surrender to the One whose words are eternal.

I surrender to the One who knows Me better than I even know myself. I surrender to the Lord.

Ecclesiastes ends with a gentle nudge towards surrender, a nudge towards the life that we were actually made to find. Everything else is just noise. And more than anything, I think that this book calls us to trust in the Lord. Everything under the sun is ultimately going to disappoint us. And so let's fix our eyes above the sun.

Let's fix our eyes on what is eternal. Let's fix our eyes on Jesus.

And I think that's why Ecclesiastes maybe ends in judgment.

Centuries later, Jesus comes along and all of the brokenness in our world and all of the sin in our lives and everything that has been done against us and all of the pain, all of the ways that we have disobeyed God and we've gone our own way. Jesus took the punishment for us so that we have to our hidden sin, our rebellion, our pride. Jesus took it upon himself. He was judged for those things. So that if we are in Christ, we don't have to be.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So we do not have to fear God. We revere him. We trust him. We surrender to him.

And we do not have to fear judgment because Jesus has already taken it upon himself for us. If you're here this morning and you've never surrendered your life to him, you've never trusted Jesus as your Savior. Yes, to save you from your sin, or as your Lord, the one that you surrender your life to. And today, let today be that day that you take that step. We'll have some people around the room with lanyards that would love to pray with you.

If you have anything that's going on, help you take that step of surrender. We've got a couple of baptisms later on this morning. We'd love for you to take that step as well. You can go and see them during this response time. We've got some communion stations in the front and in the back.

And so here in a moment you can get up, go grab a cup that has some bread in it that helps us remember Jesus body that was given and some blood that helps us juice that helps us remember his blood that was shed. Whenever you are ready, just take and eat. And thank God that the judgment that we deserve was cast out on Jesus and the resurrected life that Jesus experienced after the tomb can now be ours. And so God, thank you for that. In you is life, abundant life.

And Jesus, your invitation to us is not come and follow a bunch of rules, but come all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest. And out of that relationship with you, oh man, we just want to live for you. We want to lay our lives down. We want to surrender to you so God may you find us faithful. May we fear you, God, not in terror, but in awe of who you are and what you have done for us.

And so meet us in this moment. Lord, if there's anything you want to reveal in our life, Holy Spirit, we give you permission to do it.

Help our lives to align with you in all ways. In Jesus name, amen.