

Thank you, Tim. Today's reading is from Ecclesiastes 12. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them. Before the sun and the light and the moon, and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain, when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few. Remember him before the silver cord is severed and the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the Spirit returns to God who gave it.

Meaningless, meaningless, says the Teacher. Everything is meaningless. Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

Now all has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter. 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. Thank you, Jim.

Let's pray and we'll get started. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the wisdom that you give us. And I thank you for Ecclesiastes, this reminder to look at life correctly, to turn down the noise and live life, hearing closely your commands, your direction, so that we may have a good life. Thank you for that wisdom. In Jesus name, Amen.

Well, today we're wrapping up. This is the last week we're going to be in Ecclesiastes I. I hope you've spent some time with Solomon, you've wrestled with the stuff because Ecclesiastes is one of the more challenging books in the Bible in my opinion. It's a truth telling book and truth is often uncomfortable. If you've had to tell the truth to someone, you know how that feels. And Ecclesiastes had has at times been unsettling to me.

It demands that I look at my life from every angle and realize that if God is removed from the second center point of it, then it all starts to unravel and cave in, to fall apart. So we've looked at it from different angles. We looked at it from the angle of pleasure and success, money, achievement. And we've listened to Solomon as he has told us what he has learned. That all of that comes up short in the end.

It's been a wake up call, perhaps for some of us, forcing us to ask questions that we would mostly like to avoid. Questions about what we're living for and what lasts, what remains when the years move on. For some of us, we deal with those questions by just staying busy. We stay stimulated, we stay preoccupied. And still, beneath all that activity, there's going to be an emptiness.

And Solomon talks about this. He says, vanity, vanity, meaningless, meaningless. Here today and then gone tomorrow. Lives filled with activity and yet lacking, meeting, meaning, surrounded by sound and yet starving for wisdom. So throughout this series, we've said that all this effort, all this activity is just noise, staticky noise that keeps us from hearing God clearly and keeps us from living the life God has given us abundantly.

The noise of accomplishment, this pressure to prove that we matter by what we achieve. And that noise just leaves us exhausted and unable to hear Jesus say, you matter because you belong to me. That's it. We've. We've looked at the noise of comparison where we try to.

To measure up, we try to catch up, we try to keep ahead, but we just end up robbed of a. Of a life that. That matters. The noise of wealth, where we talked about the promise that wealth seems to offer, the promise of security and control and happiness, even, only to discover, like Solomon did, that the more we get, the more we want and the more we have, the more we stress about trying to keep hold of it. On Mother's Day, we looked at the noise of unrealistic expectations that leave us feeling like failures because our life didn't end up like we thought or imagined that it would.

And instead of teaching us to trust in God, we just leave feeling like we've ruined it all.

Then there's the noise of uncertainty. Last week, Alan spoke on this, where instead of trusting Jesus with the unpredictability of life and life is unpredictable, we get swept up in anxiety and fear and this mental chaos, and it's all noise, noise, noise. And now in chapter 12, at the end of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher gathers it all into one final word of wisdom. And he says, turn down the noise and remember your Creator in the days of your youth. And no matter where you're at in the spectrum of youth and death, you're all as young as you're ever going to be right now.

You're all as young as you're ever going to be. And so today the wisdom of Solomon says, remember your Creator today. Life is short. Life is fragile. Life is moving faster than we think it is.

And your body does not stay strong forever. I've got gel insoles in my shoes right now because my feet are not 18 year old feet anymore. Anyone know what I'm talking about? I'm telling you. Hands that once were steady begin to tremble.

Solomon uses this very poetic language to talk about the body and how it doesn't act and feel and work the way it used to. Legs and backs that once carried kids on their back and ran through the yard. Now, now shuffle. And so stoop. Eyes that once saw clearly begin to hate

driving after 6:30 at night.

Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Ears that once caught every sound now demand that you repeat something three or four times and eventually Solomon says the dust returns to the ground and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Life under the sun, as Solomon describes it, is temporary.

Now that may be very depressing to you. We played Taps, I tell you, Roger was playing Taps up there and I didn't know whether to feel cold chills or whether to cry. And then I walked back there and BJ said the same thing. I'm like, I know it was, that was a moving moment, wasn't it? But it reminds us that life is temporary and we can be depressed about that or we can say, listen, I'm going to apply my heart to wisdom because it doesn't last that long.

And the wisdom is this. Remember God. Now what does that mean? Because remembering God is not just thinking periodically about God and going, oh yeah, oh, I remember God. Remembering God.

From the teacher's point of view, it is. It's not just a thought, it's a way of life. And one of my favorite verses that seems to sum up this way of life, of remembering our creator, is Micah 6. 8. I've, I've preached on it so many times, many of you could recite this from memory.

But it goes like this and let's read it together. He has shown you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Those three things, to act justly. Hebrews 13:8 says, do not neglect to do good and to share what you have. That's justly.

To act justly means we pay attention to the vulnerable instead of just stepping over them. That's acting justly. We're to love mercy. Titus says, we are saved. He has saved us, not because we've done a lot of righteous stuff and we deserve it, but because of his mercy.

And so to love mercy is. It means that we care for others the way God has loved and cared for us. And then to walk Humbly with God. Philippians says, do nothing out of a selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourself, not looking only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others.

And so to walk humbly is. Is to. Is to live with gratitude for God's goodness to you, to remain teachable by God and others, and just to serve the way God calls us to serve. Serve. This is what it's like for me to turn down the noise in my life and remember my Creator.

What are the things that are most important to Jesus? To walk humbly, to love mercy, and to act justly.

So secondly, we remember. We turn down the noise and remember our Creator, but we turn down the noise and anchor our life in what truly, truly matters. And verse 13 of chapter 12, he says, fear God and keep his commands. That's the. That's that attitude of living life with what matters and what's true and what is lasting.

Now, the commands of the Lord, many of you go, oh, my word, there's a lot of them. But Jesus gave us two. Can anyone tell me what those are? Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. That.

That's the first commandment. And the second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus says, these are the two commandments that everything else is built on. Everything else hangs on these two things.

Love the Lord and love your neighbor. Now, how does this tie in? It means that we do not allow ourselves to get distracted by the noise that is out there, so that we focus more on that than we focus on what really matters. Loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength, that's our primary focus. But the second one is this, that we don't let all the busyness, all the noise distract us from.

The second rule is that we love people around us. We take care of the people around us. We don't let the temporary distract us from what eternally matters. We love our neighbor. Now, I don't know about you, but my life has more stuff going on than just focusing on God and worrying about my neighbor.

I've got other things that need to happen in my life. You. You guys as well. Eisenhower. General Eisenhower has this little matrix he uses or he used.

He's gone now. He's no longer with us, so we can talk about him in the past tense. He had this matrix that he used, and it was four questions. He says, well, four. Four thoughts.

One. Some things are urgent and important. Anyone ever heard this matrix before? They need immediate attention. They're urgent and they're important.

We'll take care of those things right away. Some things are important, but not urgent. These are things that we. We pay attention to, we take care of, but we don't stress over. And this, honestly, is the place where I think Jesus wants us to live, mostly where we remember the important things.

But we are not living in this place of anxiety and stress over them. We're trusting Jesus with the things that are important that he's going to take care of in his time. Some things feel urgent, but

they're not important. Anyone know stuff like that in their life? Like, oh, my word, I got to take care of that.

And you just take a moment ago. Hold on just a second. In one week, will this matter? Tomorrow, will this matter? This afternoon, will this matter?

Those are the things that. That feel urgent, but they're not important. And wisdom teaches us to delegate those to someone else who can take care of it, or to put them off until we got the time, the space, or the money to deal with it. Or just simply say, you know what? I'm not going to worry about it.

It's not my circus, not my monkeys. I know it feels urgent to you, but it's completely unimportant to me. Deal with it yourself. Anyone say, amen? That's great advice right there.

Yeah. And the fourth thing are things that are neither urgent nor important. And this is the place, place where noise often lives. The things that are not important and not urgent. And yet we fill our lives with the stuff that's meaningless, meaningless, meaningless.

And that's why Solomon says, the teacher says, remember your creator and anchor your life in what truly matters. And do it now when you're young, because the day of trouble is going to come, and you need to make sure that the noise in your life is not normal. Because what happens is oftentimes when we let the noise just settle there, it becomes our normal and we don't know any better. This is just how life is. And Solomon says, it doesn't have to be that way.

In fact, it's dangerous to live in that space. In 1941, C.S. Lewis wrote a little book. It was called the Screwtape Letters. Has anyone ever read the Screwtape Letters?

So if you know the story, if you know the book, it's a book of letters. Letters that a senior demon. I said that right? A senior demon has written to a junior demon. And the letters are about how to manage the person they've been assigned to, the human they've been assigned to.

And the job that they've been assigned is to pull this human from. Away from the God they love. A person who is spiritual, who loves Jesus, but has a demon assigned to them to pull them away from their creator. And if you read this book, what you find striking is this. That Screwtape, that's the name of the senior demon, doesn't recommend to his junior demon, Wormwood.

He doesn't recommend that you. You drag this so by some big dramatic sin to the point where they're distant from God. He says that's not necessary at all. Here's what he says is the most recommended. You

simply keep him distracted, keep him occupied with trivial stuff, keep him shallow, keep him spiritually numb, keep him engaged in vanity, vanity and meaningless.

Meaningless. To some of us, that strategy sounds really familiar because we've been there, where we find ourselves drifting not because of some big dramatic sin, but because our lives just get busy with the not urgent and not important. And before we know it, we're very far from God just by living distracted. The enemy's goal is not always your dramatic ruin. His goal is really just a gentle drift so that you never become who God intended you to be because you were too busy with something else.

You were comfortable enough with the noise in your life so that you never asked the deeper questions about what that life was supposed to be about. In one of his letters, Screwtape tells his nephew, our goal is to make the whole universe noise. In the end, do you feel like we're close to that? Just noise? Because if the noise never stops, then people never slow down to ask what is good?

What is true? What does my life mean? How should I live that life? You keep the noise going. And those questions never get asked when we are surrounded by noise.

I've got noise in my pocket right now. I bet you do too. Noise. Just noise. Constant stream of outrage.

Advertising, entertainment, distraction engineered to keep me focused on meaninglessness as long as possible. Now, CS Lewis didn't predict the phone in my pocket. He didn't predict this technology. But he. He did talk about the principle that behind it.

And then he wrote a line that gets highlighted more than almost any other passage in that book. And here's what it says. It says the safest road to hell is the gradual one. The gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signpost. Maybe you're living that life right now.

And here's what the teacher would tell us. What Solomon, tell us ending up where you didn't want to be because you were distracted and you weren't paying attention. At the end of your life you go, meaningless, meaningless. Vanity, vanity. And this is all choices.

Choices to choose another hour on the phone instead of having a real conversation with the person in front of you. Choices to do one more scroll through your feed instead of prayer. One more click instead of opening up your Bible and reading it before the day is done. Another evening absorbed in just scrolling through your feed instead of fully present with the people that God has put right there in the room with you. Is anyone feeling as much conviction as I am right now about

this?

Yeah. The danger of distraction is not that it feels evil, it is that it feels harmless. And distraction is not harmless. When we let noise distract us, we're quietly surrendering our attention that could have been offered to God and the people around us and to the work that he has put in front of us. And so here is the question that Ecclesiastes leaves us with.

What does the enemy want you distracted from? Is it a conversation of the co worker or a family member that could change their life if you would just slow down and focus long enough to have that conversation? Is it a relationship that might be healed or strengthened or restored if you gave it the attention that it deserves? Is it meaningful work that would help build the kingdom of God around you if you stopped exhausting yourself on the unimportant and the non urgent and the meaningless?

And here's the real question. What version of you is on the other side of this? Once you turn down the noise, who could you be? Jesus said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And we might add, today, where your attention is, your heart is usually close behind.

Here's the truth. You can turn down the noise. You can step away from the endless churn of meaninglessness and choose even today, the day of your youth, you may not feel it, but this is it. This is it, the day of your youth to give your attention back to God, to focus on what really matters. And when you do, that little whisper that's saying I need to do this could become the voice and the whisper of wisdom, the still small voice of the good shepherd who calls you back to what lasts.

We're going to take communion here. Just a moment. I was sharing with the team beforehand, had a conversation this week with someone who was, who was expressing a concern that he had heard about communion being offered so much that it becomes. It just becomes a habit. And, and they have a point.

I will give them the point. We should never come to this table mindlessly. God intended this moment to be holy, not just a habit. But here's what we need to learn in our lives. And Ecclesiastes teaches this, that good habits are holy habits.

Good habits are. Good habits can be very good. And this moment where we intentionally say, I'm gonna. I'm gonna turn down the noise and dial back the distractions and just for this moment, remember something good, true and holy. Every week we take this moment and we remember God.

We remember our Creator. He did not leave us in our vanity. He did not leave us in our meaninglessness. He didn't leave us in our hopelessness. But he came near.

He said, I'm going to rescue, and I'm going to pull you out of that. I'm going to create something new and good in your life, something that matters, something that will be eternal. And so when we come to the table, we turn down the noise. We remember the cross of Christ. We remember the grace that he gave and extended to us.

We remember the Savior who gave himself for us. And we ask him to steady our thoughts, refocus our attention, quiet our hearts, and teach us to live wisely in the days we have been given. Heavenly Father, meet us in this moment, speak to us, remind us what is good and lasting and eternal. In Jesus name, Amen. Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church.

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