

Weekly Devotional



July 18-22, 2011

Prayers

Monday: This week be sure to pray for both the West Virginia Youth Mission Team and the mission team in Chinle.

Tuesday: Continue to pray for all those who went to VBS last week that they would desire to return to Glenkirk and learn more about God.

Wednesday: Pray for those who serve God overseas, especially those working in areas of extreme poverty and those working in Muslim countries.

Thursday: Pray for those who serve in our government that they have the courage to make hard decisions.

Friday: Pray for the weekend services and the safe return of our mission teams.



Monday

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; 1-2; 1 Kings 3:7-14



In preparation for Sunday's sermon, we will be reading through the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. The author, Solomon, was David's son, the last king of the united Kingdom of Israel, reigning during Israel's golden era. As a young boy he became king and asked God for one thing: wisdom. God granted his prayer and gave him riches and honor too. Solomon started well, but ended poorly, preferring worldly wisdom over fearing God for much of his life. After his death the Kingdom of Israel was divided, never to be the same again. As you read Ecclesiastes, allow it to challenge your priorities and outlook on life.

Philosophers often ask, "What is real? What is of ultimate importance?" We believe that what we see or what scientists discover is real. Solomon would beg to differ. Basing our understanding of life on worldly wisdom and observation will lead to Solomon's conclusion: It is all "meaningless." But if we view life from the perspective of life after death, from God's perspective, and from His revelation as to what is important, we will discover real wisdom and happiness no matter what happens.

Remember those hollow chocolate Easter bunnies. From the outside they carried such promise, but once you bit into them, you discovered nothing but air. So much of life ends up being hollow. The problem is that we do not take time to really notice. Instead, we get caught on the treadmill of work, chores, taxi driving, supporting family, vacations, and periods of extravagance and pleasure. And we discover too late, like Solomon, what we are missing.

If everything you value today suddenly disappeared (loved ones, job accomplishments, homes, toys), would your life still have meaning, or would it be hollow? Let Solomon show you where some of your priorities may be misplaced. In the end Solomon does not give us answers as much as he gives us a road map to happiness: "Fear God and keep His commandments." See life from God's eternal perspective. What changes might you need to make, not so much in your doing as in your prioritizing, trusting and finding contentment in your present state?

Tuesday

Ecclesiastes 3 and 4



“A three-strand cord is not easily broken.” I am amazed at how often we forget this truth even in the church. Paul will pick up this same theme with a slightly different twist in 1 Corinthians 12 when he talks about our being a part of the body of Christ and in 2 Corinthians 6 when he calls us not to be unequally yoked.

Often today we evaluate situations by what is good for ourselves. When we are in love, we think of the other person. When that love is in trouble, we go back to thinking about ourselves. Today we place a high value on independence, but we are designed to live in community and in inter-dependence.

But inter-dependence is hard work. Conflicts of interest are bound to arise, especially when we are looking after our individual interests. But if we are looking towards a common goal, the goal trumps individual needs. If two people vote on some decision to be made, there can be an impasse (a tie). But if three people vote, there is always a decision. Seeking God’s direction, God’s will, God’s vote in the midst of decisions will often result in putting “self” aside for a higher good (a good we often understand only by looking back on the situation).

In Luke 12 a man once asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide equally an inheritance. Jesus responds with a parable on greed, followed by a teaching on trusting God to provide. Basically Jesus was saying the relationship is more important than the money, so forget the fairness of the issue.

Devaluing an important issue is impossible unless there is a higher power that we can trust. When we realize that there is a goal higher than our happiness, this allows us to put our personal needs and desires aside for the good of the goal. And when we allow others to help us achieve that higher goal, we are freed from the exhaustion of having to do it all alone.

Our society, though, tells us that everything depends on our individual hard work—if I don’t watch out for myself, who will. Worldly wisdom leads to isolation and divorce. Godly wisdom often means dying to one’s self, but it leads to community and happiness. Are you or your family trying to “go it alone”? Today ask for help, help someone else, take time for drinking coffee with a friend, or make a phone call. And remember, lasting community is only possible if the third strand of the cord is God.



Wednesday

Ecclesiastes 5, 6

One of the reasons why people fall away from faith in God is unmet expectations. All too often we believe that if we keep God's commands, go to church, offer Him our tithe, and say our prayers, everything will go well. When that does not happen, we begin to question the reality of God. Or we get so mad at Him—after the death of a loved one, after we hear another report of someone we know having cancer, or when we see the continuation of some injustice—that we no longer want to have anything to do with God.

Solomon reminds us that if we view life from the perspective of our few short years here on earth, we will come to the conclusion that following God is worthless. After all, it rains on the just as well as on the unjust. Those without God seem to do just as well as those with God. The problem is that true happiness is not in our power to attain, for we are never satisfied and circumstances are beyond our control. True happiness will never be found in the things of this life alone, for they will all pass away, even relationships.

Instead, Solomon tells us that enjoyment of life is really a gift from God. In her book, *So Long, Insecurity*, Beth Moore talks about “false positives.” These are things that we think would make us feel more secure. When we see these things existing in the lives of others, we say, “If only I had that, I would be happy. If only I was thinner, had a different job, looked different, didn't have all these bills, etc., I would be happy.” The reality is that having these things will not make us happy. True happiness comes from trusting God, doing all that He puts before us to do, and taking time to enjoy the moment.

We try to “find our life” (enjoy life and its rewards) by “holding on to our life” (holding on to what we have). Jesus said that when we give our lives over to God and to serving others, we actually find life and happiness. I have never liked to prune; it seems counter intuitive. Likewise, “dying to one's self” (cutting out our sinful desires, giving up our selfish desires for the sake of another, and giving our lives completely to God) isn't easy, and yet it produces life. What are you holding onto to find life that you might really need to die to? Today take a few minutes to just sit and enjoy the moment.

Thursday

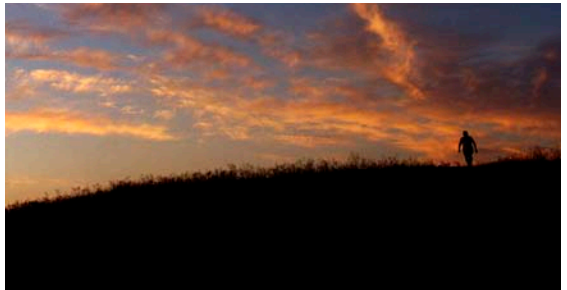
Ecclesiastes 7, 8, 9

Solomon also wrote the book of Proverbs. Like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes is filled with one-liners that teach great truths. "It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than listen to the song of fools." "Do not be over righteous, or over wise; avoid all extremes." "Do not pay attention to every word people say . . . for how many times have you cursed others." "Wisdom is better than war, but one sinner destroys much good." "Calmness can lay great errors to rest." "Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones." "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?'"

"Nothing is new under the sun." It really isn't. How often do we waste emotional energy trying to make everything right? How often do we believe we are the first generation to experience such corruption or ineptness amongst political leaders? How often do we long for the good old days? How often do we question actions that were taken amidst corruption? Solomon saw all these things long ago and his response was: We cannot always comprehend, but we can trust God and enjoy the moment.

Today take note of how you use your emotional energy. Is it really worth the toll it takes on your life? In some cases the answer will be "yes," in others it will be a loud "no." A word of rebuke and a word overheard can often destroy our days, but should they? It is not within my power (at least momentary power) to change corruption in our courts of law or amongst government leaders or by business leaders. I cannot turn around an unfair act, so why waste my time musing over it. Are there not better things to talk about? We often bring each other down by reflecting on things beyond our control.

Solomon, on the contrary, would say that a wise man keeps life in perspective, leaving the outcome to God and realizing that he will never understand the "wherefore of it all" on this side of heaven. So today, watch your emotional energy level and take note of what you talk about, remembering that the "the more the words, the less the meaning." And finally, remember that a "good name is better than fine perfume." What is your name worth?



Friday

Ecclesiastes 10, 11, 12



Have you ever asked, “Why?” or “Why Not?” When our children ask that question, we generally say, “Because I told you so!” as if that settles the question. For our children it doesn’t, and neither does it settle the matter when God says the same thing to us as adults. We tell our children not to run into the street, or wander off by themselves because we know of the dangers that might befall them. We teach them to say “no” to certain activities because we understand the long-term consequences.

God has given us commands. Like children we argue with Him. We ask “why” and do not get satisfactory answers. As adults God gives us the freedom to rebel. Solomon rebelled and at the end of his life he wished he never had. Many of God’s commands we understand only by looking back. Some we will never understand until we get to heaven. The trick is being obedient in the midst of not understanding so that at the end of our lives we have no regrets. The trick is being content to be a child and trusting God to be a loving parent.

For example, God calls us to keep the Sabbath—to take one day for worshipping Him, for friends, for family, and for the rest. We have a list of things we want to accomplish on Sunday, and we argue that taking a whole day off is archaic. After all, there are certain activities that require our presence on the Sabbath (or at least our children’s presence). As a result, we no longer play together as families, we no longer take time to re-evaluate our priorities, and we lead a treadmill existence. And our children grow up viewing a relationship with God as an add-on rather than the foundation upon which one builds a life.

Fearing God is not a popular concept; we like to talk about love and forgiveness. But accountability is a good thing, and fearing God reminds us that some day we will give an accounting for every minute of our lives. What will you say on judgment day about how you spent your money and about how you used your time? Life from this world’s perspective might seem meaningless as Solomon concludes, but from the perspective of eternity it will not be meaningless. How are you at being a child? Are you rebelling? Are you seeking to evade accountability?



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