

Chasing the Wind  
Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-26  
August 18, 2013

*“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless. A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”*

As a child, did you ever try to catch the wind? You ran, you grabbed, you might even have tried to sneak up on it, but you never succeeded. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us that if we approach life without God, our efforts to find joy and meaning in life are nothing more than chasing after the wind.

Solomon tried to achieve joy, happiness, and meaning through every avenue available to him, but in the end he concluded that, without God in his life, he would never find what he was after. Worn to a frazzle and thoroughly frustrated, Solomon concludes: *“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless”* (Ec 1:2 NIV).

People chase many different winds in their search for fulfillment in this life. However, in the end, life without God is meaningless. Some people learn this and find, in God, everything they’ve been looking for. Others go to their graves with the answer to life still beyond their grasp.

There are those people who believe satisfaction lies in one’s occupation, but Solomon warns: *“What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless”* (Ec 2:22-23 NIV).

Do you understand what Solomon is saying? Work, work, work. Compete, strategize, plan, sacrifice, travel, worry, lose sleep, skip vacations, add hours, increase responsibility, scratch the right backs, invest, save, risk, work, work, work!

After all of that, your life will have meaning and fulfillment, right? Don't count on it. Scripture tells us it doesn't work. Solomon says that all the money he had, all the hours, all the plans, all the years of study, and all the investments of time and energy made no difference in the end. Without God at the center of his life, his life was empty and meaningless.

Dennis Barnhart was the president of an aggressive company called Eagle Computers, Inc. The company grew incredibly fast from its meager beginning. Barnhart became a multi-millionaire on the day of his company's public stock offering. While driving his red Ferrari home that day, he lost control of the car, drove through 20 feet of guardrail into a ravine and died.

The newspaper account of the accident read: Until about 4:30 Wednesday afternoon, it had been the best of days for Barnhart and his thriving young company. Barnhart's ownership of 592,000 shares in his little company made him worth nine million dollars. That same afternoon he died in an auto accident.

Wealth, ambition, hard work, fame, and status are all just shadows in this life. Like a vapor they are all blown away. The only thing you can take from this life is your relationship with God.

Some folks pursue the wind of pleasure. Solomon writes: *"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction ... this too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind"* (Ec 2:24, 26 NIV).

How could Solomon be so sure about this? He speaks from personal experience. Earlier in chapter two, Solomon writes: *"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 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"* (Ec 2:10-11 NIV).

Many people would agree that if hard work isn't the key to a meaningful life, then why not sit back, relax, and enjoy the pleasures of life. The Epicureans of ancient Greece lived by the motto "Eat, drink, and be merry." The Greeks called it "eros" from which we get our word "erotic."

The hedonistic, Hugh Hefner philosophy of personal pleasure above all else is very attractive to many people. But, in the end, does it work? That lifestyle is contrary to what God wants from us, therefore, it can't succeed. It, too, is just a chasing after the wind.

This brings us to the wind of wealth. What about all the things that money can buy to make our lives meaningful and enjoyable? Solomon tried that, too. *"I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. 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. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well – the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me”* (Ec

2:4-9 NIV).

Sadly, all of this left Solomon empty. It was all meaningless. His boredom was beyond description. He was like the man in the Gospel lesson. In the end, these things added nothing to his soul.

To the lie that says, “If only I can earn enough, buy this or have that, I will be happy,” Solomon says, “Don’t bother, it doesn’t work.” Have you ever known anyone who earns enough, is beautiful enough, has clothes enough, has a house that is furnished enough, has food that is fancy enough, has relationships that are satisfying enough, or a life that is always full enough? Solomon says: “*Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless*” (Ec 5:10 NIV).

E. Stanley Jones, in his book *Growing Spiritually*, talks about a fictional character who lived a fantasy life. All he had to do was think of it and – poof! – it happened! So the man leans back and imagines a mansion and – Poof! – he has a 15 bedroom mansion with servants to wait on his every need. But the place needed several fine cars, so again he closes his eyes and – poof! – there they were.

He continues the same lifestyle with travel and fine foods and women and entertainment. And yet, there was something missing. He wasn’t happy. Finally, he grows so terribly bored and unchallenged that he whispers to one of his attendants, “I really want to get out of this. I want to get my old life back again. I’d rather be in hell than be here.” To which one of the servants replies quietly, “Sir, where do you think you are?”

Living the life of this world, chasing the winds of self-fulfillment, is useless. There is nothing on this earth that can fill the need in an empty soul. But God offers us a better way. In spite of our selfish and sinful attempts to be our own answer, God graciously gives us a new way of life. God goes beyond our horizontal direction of life and gives us a vertical direction that points to our Savior.

In the final chapter of Ecclesiastes, Solomon points us to that vertical direction: *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”* (Ec 12:1 NIV). This is an ultimate truth: You cannot go through life without the Lord, because it simply doesn’t work.

Left to our own resources, life will be meaningless. It can be nothing else. True meaning and direction can only be found in God. The only source for a meaningful life is Jesus Christ.

When the human race decided to turn away from God and seek meaning on its own, God didn’t turn away from us. When God had every right to let us suffer the

consequences of our own choices, he chose to come to us in the person of Jesus. He came to take the punishment of our sins upon himself so we might see the path to real life.

Jesus came to take away our horizontal direction; our lives of frustration and despair and chasing after the wind. He came to save us from false hopes and false dreams; from the lies of Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

When Jesus died and rose, he restored our vertical orientation; he restored our relationship with our heavenly Father. Jesus opened the door to real life both in the here and now and in the hereafter.

Neither you nor I will ever be able to catch the wind. We will never find true meaning living the life of this world, and that's okay, because God has given his Son so that we might find our meaning in him.