

DUST IN THE WIND, ECCL.1

Something Worth Living For #1

◆ **Intro:** Michael Phelps is the most decorated Olympian of all time, but what's left to accomplish after you've proved you're the best in the world? In the 2020 documentary "The Weight of Gold," Phelps takes a long look at life after the Olympics and how he was not alone in experiencing depression after winning it all.

◆ "The Weight of Gold" features interviews with Olympians who discuss going their entire lives without normal childhoods, without outside skills or interests beyond their sport, without any plans after the Olympics, and whose entire lives have been defined by a rapid, 40-second race. Phelps says, "We're just so lost. A good 80 percent, maybe more, develop a post-Olympic depression. I thought of myself as just a swimmer, and not a human being, and that's where I thought, why don't I just end it all?"

◆ Many Olympians after reaching the top, also reach the existential questions of life; Why am I here? What's the point? What does it mean? Many of us ask the same questions day after day. We are all by nature seeking meaning, and humans have come up with many varied answers!

◆ If you've ever saved up for a purchase, and then felt mildly empty after the buy; if you've ever won an award, and observed it wasn't all you thought it would be; if you've ever fed an addiction only to discover it wasn't enough; you're in good company with the writer of Ecclesiastes. "The Teacher" (assumed by many to be Solomon but we really don't know that) in this somewhat ponderous book, sets out to explore everything he can

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in hopes of finding real meaning to life. Over the next 10 weeks we'll join him and look at a host of topics like money, sex, fame, accomplishment, limitless wealth, politics, education, power, individualism -to name a few.

◆ **1. I have an emptiness nothing on Earth can fill.** This is a central teaching of Ecclesiastes. Over and over as we read through it you will see that he tried this or that "under the sun" and found it wanting. We are going to see this again and again. The Teachers term for this thesis is "wind".

◆ A. In English we translate "meaningless". The term means literally "vapor", like the condensation you breathe out on a cold Fall morning. Like the trail of smoke that disappears into the air above a candle. Ever heard of Kansas? I mean the band. And they had a famous song called "Dust in the ____". Wind. That's the term "The Teacher" uses throughout Ecclesiastes. There are a lot of things in life that are just dust in the wind!

◆ When I was a freshman in High School I was 4'11". The thought crossed my mind that if I were taller and more muscular, I'd be a happier individual. I really looked forward to that. I must tell you now that it simply isn't fulfilling. I also used to wish I could date an Indianette, my High School's version of a high-kicking cheerleader: long white go-go boots, short red corduroy skirts with tassels on every seam edge. I finally did date one. It wasn't so great. She

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didn't really like me. I think my muscular bulk intimidated her. It kinda felt like chasing the wind.

◆**B.** We try all kinds of things, as the Teacher will explore.

Baseball wins, our name in lights, bigger houses, alcohol made from a *different* plant, a different husband. Some folks will tell you, "Who cares. Live it up, soak up everything you can. But often it seems there's a certain monotony to everything, a routine that feels like it's going nowhere. What used to thrill doesn't anymore, so we desperately look for another thing of beauty. Maybe if Jesse's girlfriend was my girlfriend, then I'd be happy.

The Teacher points out that this futility is in the very cosmos itself

◆1) The cyclical nature of generations points to futility. (v4, 11). Nobody you know ever mentions your great, great grandma! Guess what, 50 years from now nobody is ever gonna mention you! Ouch. Not to mention that the Apostle Paul told the Christians in Ephesus in the 1st Century not to get drunk or tell dirty jokes. It's in the Bible you know. Two-thousand years, and many generations later people are still trying it. Talk about futility!

◆2) The cyclical nature of life points to monotony. (v5-7) The sun runs the same circuit every day. No variations. It's been happening every 24 hours for millions of years! I thought variety was the spice of life? What if it did a loop-the-loop once? All the rain drains into the Missouri or the Mississippi but the Gulf of Mexico is never any more full

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(v7)! The jet stream is always blowing back and forth. (v6 is unusually monotonous in the Hebrew: “going to the south and turning around to the north, turning around, and turning around goes the wind, and on it’s turn-around trips returns the wind.)

◆3) Oh and don’t forget blessed “education”! v16-18. The god of many a modern. In the news last week, the Nebraska Dept. of Education is setting new sex-ed standards: Kindergartners would be taught about a range of different family structures, such as same-sex families, while first-graders would hear about gender identity and gender stereotypes. Sixth graders would learn about sexual identities such as heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, queer, two-spirit, asexual and pansexual. The differences between cisgender, transgender, gender nonbinary, gender expansive and gender identity would also be included in the instruction for the pre-teens. And what kind of outcome do we really expect? Fewer diseases? More responsible children?

◆“More education is the answer!” No it’s not. Sure we can make devices that locate our cell phone in a haystack anywhere on the planet. We can also pinpoint someone with missiles and invent ingenious ways of blowing one another up. So no, education is not the answer. It too goes around in circles negating it’s own progress.

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◆**2. My emptiness can be filled with something above the sun, something eternal.** So here's the writers point.

Everything on earth goes round and round, like the wheels on the buss! So dig out those mom-jeans, fat ties, and platform shoes cuz it's all comin' back around. The fashion world is evidence of that fact that nothing can satisfy the human being. And if you have started to realize it, the good news is, the answer must be above the sun! St Augustine is quoted as saying, "Inside every human is a God-shaped vacuum." And Pascal is quoted as saying "Our hearts are restless until we rest in you, God."

◆**A. Ecclesiastes investigates the earthly level.** Some 33 times you will read the phrase "under the sun". Horizontal happiness is not lasting happiness. You need to meet a higher power. All the rest of the Bible speaks of "heaven and earth". Heaven is conspicuously absent, though we will see it in his conclusions. (ex: v13 *heaven, God*). When God is in the picture the cycles of nature become meaningful! Just listen to the Psalmist!

◆*In the heavens [God] has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them;*
Ps.19:4-5

◆Compare that to Eccl.1:5! ("hurries" is literally "pants", puffs. Gotta do it again.) And check out the hymn about creation in Ps.104!

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- ◆ Psalms 104:19-25 The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening. How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small.
- ◆ The Teacher would watch Planet Earth with David Attenborough and despair. It's all just temporary forms of dust. The Psalmist watches it and marvels and rejoices because he knows these creatures were planned, designed, purposed, even as he was planned, designed and purposed too! The cosmos is wearisome without it's Creator! But with it's Creator, the cosmos has meaning, it's going somewhere. It's fascinating and awe-filled. We see it's purposes. In the same way, your world can be so much more when you include your Creator.
- ◆ B. If you are disillusioned, or disappointed in your life on earth, I beseech you to look above the earth! If you long to escape, or are anxious about existence, look to heaven. Pay attention of God in your daily life. We are not masters of our destinies. But when you live like you are, you will find life dull because there is nothing new under the sun. On the other hand, when you

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recognize daily that there is a God behind all this marvel, newness does exist for you!

◆ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17*

◆ Isaiah 42:9 See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you. Isaiah 42:9

◆ Do you realize what this is telling us? So you got a scholarship in volleyball. Great. Play your best. Enjoy it. But if you make it your life, plan on feeling empty eventually. So you're good at engineering. Super. Design and figure and build for all you're worth. But if you want to know fulfillment when you go home at the end of the day, -consider it all secondary to the reasons God put you on the earth. So your business is really booming and you've got more money that you can spend. You've been blessed. But if you don't look at it from "above the sun", from heavens perspective, you will never get over that funny feeling that you don't have enough yet.

◆ **Conclusion:** Consider for a moment someone like Elvis. Anyone know who that is? Of course you do. Elvis had it all. Good looking. Talented singing voice. Money. Popularity. People still worship him and pilgrimage to his home. Countless fans wear his face on their clothes. You can buy Elvis dolls, and records and movies that still bring into his estate tens of millions of dollars annually! But it wasn't enough for the "King" of rock

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and roll. He died by drug overdose, like hosts of other singers, and actors and famous people.

◆And here's the most earth-shattering truth you'll ever consider! There is someone who came down under the sun, but lives above it! He died like everyone else on this earth will and must. But he rose from the grave and lives eternally. And by placing your faith and hope in him, your sin will be forgiven and your existence extended for all time. Paul wrote that if this isn't true, the Christian faith is futile, meaningless, dust in the wind. (1Cor.15:17). Let's bow our hearts to him! Let's ask him to enter our futile, dust-in-the-wind lives and recreate us! Let's ask him to give us meaning. Everything we do and say that aligns with his kingdom has eternal value and meaning!