

Devotion 24:

Our Father Is Our Life, Meaning, And Purpose

Ecclesiastes 1--12

As a high school teacher for thirty years, I believe I can say with some confidence that the average person desires to know what his or her purpose is in this world. Ask the average teen what his or her goal is in life and the response will usually be this or some variation of it: "To live life to the fullest." Talk about begging the question! And teens aren't the only ones struggling with meaning and purpose. What do you think the ubiquitous mid-life crisis is all about for many men? Or why do many mothers struggle so much when the nest becomes empty? We humans want the dash on our tombstones to mean something. We want it to have mattered that we lived. So we attach ourselves deeply, personally to something, anything, in hopes that it counts.

Don't read Ecclesiastes if you want your attachment(s) to be validated. After trying pleasure, wisdom, and work, Solomon concludes in chapter 12:8: "*Meaningless! Meaningless!*" says the Teacher. *'Everything is meaningless!'*" On the other hand, he comes to see "*that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.*" (3:14) Solomon, in his God-given wisdom, discovers that life, meaning, and purpose are found above the sun, in and with our Father.

There are other Scriptures that agree:

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Col. 3:2-3

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.'" Jn. 14:6

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Jn. 17:3

But this truth is not easily learned. We naturally doubt in the flesh if our Father is really what life is all about. Fearing that we will miss our brief chance at "living life to the fullest," we pursue secondary things like wealth, happiness, family, friends, and success. Little surprise then that sometimes our Father removes our attachments from us, sometimes slowly and sometimes rather abruptly. Or, we acquire them but still feel an emptiness that won't go away. Either way, it is very painful because we feel as if we are dying or we feel as if we are living without meaning or purpose.

Thus Solomon writes in Ecc. 3:11: "*He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.*" In other words, the impulse of man shows that his innermost wants cannot be satisfied by that which is temporal. It is part of our human nature not to be contented with the temporal things of this world. Hear the words of Jesus:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Mt. 10:37-39

So Solomon urges us in Ecclesiastes 12:1: *“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.”* The verb *remember* here does not connote trivia or historical facts; rather it means “to keep constantly in mind and heart, to trust Him and live each day with and for Him.” In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Luther wrote: *“The godly find this life vile and death sweet; they go on living only for the sake of God, who wants them to live.”* Have you come to the point of seeing this life as vile? Are you living only for the sake of our Father?

Solomon began his search for meaning by asking, “What is worth doing?” He concludes with this:

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” 12:13

The apostle John put it this way in John 5:26: *“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.”* Jesus says later in John 10:10: *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

So by the power and grace of God, let’s live to the fullest—in, with, and for our Father, who is our life, meaning, and purpose.