

Dec 10, 2006 • "Ecclesiastes, Part 15; A Life Lived Well" Matt Chandler

On November 27th, which was just about two weeks ago, Nathan Taylor, a covenant member here at the Village Church and small group leader woke up and went fishing with a buddy of his in his hometown in Oregon. He was fishing on Devil's Lake, and somehow on the way in, the boat he was capsized into the really cold waters. They fought as well as they could to stay above the waters. Hypothermia finally got the best of Nathan. His friend Matt made it to shore with the help of somebody jumping in the water from shore. And Nathan gave into hypothermia and went home to be with the Lord, leaving behind a 20 year old wife and 3 month old son. On Saturday, I sat in his memorial service and listened to his friends talk about him, and I felt sorry for us. Like, he seemed to have this extraordinary, extraordinary personality. He had that kind of life story that made all other men want that life story. Like, he had these weird kind of jobs where he'd go be a forest fire fighter for three or four months. You know, the kind where they drop you behind the fire and tell you, "Good luck. See you when you put it out." And he climbed mountains and he traveled the world and he had this amazing eye for photography. He looked like he always had a photographer with him. And he took inner-city kids camping, and he brewed his own beer at home in his bathtub. That's my kind of people man. I loved the way he lived his life. I mean, isn't it just amazing just how he saw the world? And then you can tell he just lived it well, man. And not, he gets to be home. So, I don't want to talk anymore about Nate's life, I want to talk about yours. Because as I sat there in that memorial service, I couldn't help but thinking about what we've been talking about the last couple of weeks how Solomon shifted Ecclesiastes 9, 10 and 11, and now he wants to talk to you about how to live life and how significance and depth and meaning and beauty go beyond comfort and self seeking. And Nathan's life was evidence of that, but I want to know where you are in this. Because here's the deal, Nate doesn't need oxygen anymore. He's at the table. His race is run. He no longer needs oxygen. You and I, still breathing in our mouths, through our noses, into our lungs, we still have life.

And that's what Solomon said last week if you remember, "You've still got life." So, what are we doing with it? And he's going to begin to unpack for us, starting in chapter 10, what a life lived well looks like. And I'll tell you, it's a hard text. It's a hard text because he's going to say, "Wise people do this, and dumb people do this." And as I study this text, I realize I'm a lot more dumb than I am wise. And I think you'll find yourself on the dumb side of the fence several times as we read through this. So, let's look at it. Ecclesiastes 10:2, "*A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.*" I can't believe the Republican Party hasn't grabbed a hold of that one yet. I'm not a political guy, but I can't believe they haven't taken that text and owned it and put it on all their hand-outs and mailers just to try to further convince us that Jesus was a Republican. So he says here that there are all these different categories that we fall into here on Earth. You've got pretty people, you've got ugly people (you just do, it's the way things are), you've got rich people, you've got poor people, you've got smart people, you've got dumb people. And then you've got all the sub-categories between those. All of us aren't supermodels, but most of us don't frighten small children. Most of us are in the middle of the mix. We're not pretty, we're not ugly, we're not pretty ugly, we're somewhere else in the middle of that. And he's saying, "Listen, let's throw out all the categories because it doesn't matter how pretty you are, how ugly you are, how rich you are, how smart you are. You can throw all that out, because there's only two things that you need to look at in your life and evaluate. There's a way to walk, the right way to walk, which is for the wise. And then, there's the wrong way to walk, which is for the

fool.” And we've already defined what it looks like to be wise. We've already decided that what it looks like to be wise according to Solomon in this sacred literature of ours is that people understand that there is something bigger than them, they have been pursued by God, they have submitted to God and now walk in obedience to God. And that's the wise man. Now, look how it defines the fool, and I think you'll have a hard time arguing that that guy's not a fool. Look with me in verse 3, *“Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.”* Tonight, when you and I get in our car and head out of there and we get on I-35 or F.M. 2499 or we get on some major thoroughfare and there's a man walking down the middle of the road, we know something's wrong with him. If somebody's skipping down the middle of I-35E northbound, something's gone wrong up there. So, you're calling the cops or you're calling the ambulance, but something's gone wrong. But, let's roll it down to a deeper level. He says, “You want to know who the fool is? The fool is the man who pretends he's indestructible and that he stands as center of the universe. That's the fool.” The fool is the one feels big despite the fact that the universe screams out to him that he is small. God has wired the universe to communicate to you how fragile, small and insignificant you are. And if you don't believe me, let's get in an airplane and let's go to the ocean. And if you just pictured Corpus Christi or South Padre, you do not know what I'm talking about. That is a gulf, alright. That is not the ocean. Don't get in that water. Nobody is going to sit on the sand in front of the roar of the Pacific Ocean and feel mighty, no one, except maybe the fool. Who's wrestled the ocean and won? There's a lot of boats on the bottom of the ocean. Who's wrestled the ocean and won? No one sits at the base of the mountain...and once again, if you're thinking of San Antonio, that's called the “hill” country, alright. No one's stood at the base of Ranier, no one's stood at the base of Everest, no one's stood at the base of the Rockies and said, “I'm powerful.” The universe screams out that you are finite and that death is coming for you, that you are small and no matter what you do, there is an appointment that is inescapable. Still don't believe me? Let me ask you a question. Do people who do pilates and eat spinach still get cancer? How about they guy who runs marathons? Does he finish his 3 mile run, walk into his garage and die of a heart attack? Do you need me to keep on going? The fool pretends these things are not reality. The fool does no thinking about the fact that maybe even tonight, life is required and then judgment.

And then look at this next line, because I love this next line. *“If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.”* I think this is so great. He says there's something about a fallen world where people who think they're the center of the universe and they're indestructible and they rise and they rise to levels of power and we end up working for them. And then all of a sudden, we want to try to run away from people like that. And Solomon goes, “Here's the deal. They're everywhere. Everywhere you go, there they are. You can't get away from fools who think they stand at the center of the universe.” So he says, “Calm down. Breathe. Don't run, don't move from this place to this place to this place trying to run away from a broken world. No matter where you go, there they are.”

Verse 5-7, *“There is an evil that I have seen under the sun,...”* And listen, my wife and I, we laid in bed and talked about this verse over and over again, and she was challenging me on how I saw it and how I thought of it. And so, I went back and did some studying, trying to find historically what he could have been addressing, what he could have been talking about. And I really wrestled with it, and I think I land a little bit more on where she lands on this text. And I'll tell you that I couldn't find anything in his time period that could have matched up with this, but it screams where we are. Alright, look at verses 5-7,

“There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.” Here's what he says. He goes, “We live in a maddening world where stupidity, folly, debauchery and wickedness is exalted and put up like a crown achievement to be pursued when what is good and right and real and makes a difference walks on the side of the road. You know, 100 years ago, the famous people were doctors and scientists. And now, you can't turn on the TV without finding out that Brittany Spears isn't watching here babies while she's clubbing. Paris Hilton? Seriously? How does she keep getting on television? It baffles my mind. I feel like I'm a creative, imaginative human being, and I cannot fathom what in the world's going on there. I can't imagine why we exalt and our culture and puts on high, people like that. It's baffling. And listen, I'm not a hater. I'm just saying I don't quite understand. Did you know that even at a church our size, we have a pro tool set on a Mac here that can take an “alright,” I don't say “um,” I say “alright.” They can take “alright,” they can change the inflection of the word before it, they can change the inflection of the word behind it and they can remove the “alright” as if it were never there. There's a thing called autotuner that can make us all sound good. Put on a snazzy beat, dress sexy and sell records...get exalted. Madness. I'm sorry. If you like Paris, I'm sorry. I don't have anything personal against her. I don't know her. I don't know.

Here we go. So what to do, verses 8-10. How do we then live life? He'll give a warning about life and then start to help us. *“He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.”* So, the alarm clock goes off and the guy reaches over and turns it off and he gets up and puts on his work clothes just like he has for 20 years. And he drinks his cup of coffee and he kisses his wife and children goodbye. And he gets in his truck and he heads out and he begins to dig a ditch. He digs ditches for a living; it's what he does. He's dug ditches every day for 20 years. But this day, for whatever reason, in the middle of digging a ditch, he stumbles on a stone and falls into the ditch and dies. A man wakes up just like he has every day for 30 years and breaks down walls for a living. And he breaks down this wall, except this wall has a snake in it and it bites him. Solomon says life is hard and it's unpredictable and no one controls it, but there's a wise way to do things. And then he uses this great illustration about the guy and the logs. He says he takes his ax and he doesn't just start going out flailing on trees, he sees that his blade is dull and so he begins to sharpen it. He sharpens it and sharpens it and sharpens it and then he heads outside and begins to knock down trees. And he's saying in this text that maybe sometimes it's better to work smart instead of harder. I think he's saying this. I think he's saying that wise men and women know where they're going and they're working a plan to get there. I want to be three things, that's it, no more no less, three things. I want to pastor and preach and teach th gospel as well as I possibly can with the gifts that Christ has given me. I want to do that. I want to be an amazing husband. And I want my kids, 20 years from now, to not doubt the sincerity of my love for Jesus to love me and my wife and to love the church. That's all I want. But here's what I've realized as I've pursued those things. Those things just don't happen. Like, nobody stumbles into godliness. Have you ever noticed that? Like, nobody ever walked in one morning, turned on ESPN and all of a sudden was in the middle of Shekinah glory. Here's something else I'm noticing. My four year old, she's starting to give me one word answers. “How was school?” “Good.” “What did you learn?” “I don't know.” “What do you mean I don't know? I just picked you up.” “I don't know.” Or the

default answer is “Jesus” or some other biblical character, “Moses, Noah, somebody. I don't know.” But she's so precocious/mouthy...I don't know where she got that...You can tell there's always something going on in there, and I want to know what it is. And so, you know what I've learned? And maybe you'll think this is absurd, and I'm okay with that. Like, I know if I'm going to be in the car with her tomorrow for 20 minutes, I need to spend time tonight thinking through how I'm going to talk with her. Because even at 4 years old and as steadfast as I am to love her, it's already starting to be easier to just listen to music. And so, I don't say anymore, “How was your day?” I say, “What was your favorite part of your day?” And then, she'll answer that. So, okay that's a good question, I can ask that. “What's the least favorite part of your day?” “Oh, this kid pushed me down.” “Who pushed you down? Huh? What? How old is he? Six? Okay, I'll dress up Patterson like an elementary school kid and send him in there.” I'm kidding, I'm kidding. They would know. Bleecker, I'll send in Bleecker. So, that's working right now. Hey listen, I want to love my wife, and I want to love her well. I don't ever want her to doubt my love for her. And that's all three of those love bits if you've been with us for a while. You know, with the pace of life here and with how busy things are and will always be...you know, I think for the first couple of years, I was, “Oh hey, yeah. That will settle down. It'll even out.” And then all of sudden, you wake up and go, “No, this is the lot, this is it.” I have to think through, “Okay, how do I do that? How do I work? There has to be a plan that I'm working on that. How am I going to do that? How am I going to accomplish that?” And I know some of you guys, you can disregard that, you can wake up every morning and roses just start falling out of your pockets, poetry on the wall. I mean, you're that guy, and that's an awesome deal. I'm not that guy. I have to work at it, I have to think at it, I have to talk with other people.

Where are you headed? So those are the three things I want to be, and so I'm headed that way. And here's the thing about a plan. It is not enough to want to. If you don't hear anything else I say tonight, I want you to hear this next sentence. If you're not careful your “want to's” are going to give way to “I wish I would have's.” And then what? The bit about the snake charmer is he says, “Who cares if there's a snake charmer and he forgets to blow his horn and everybody gets killed? Then you've got a guy with a flute, dead on the ground.” What good is the snake charmer if he's not charming the snake? What good is it if you want to be a godly man, if you want to be a godly woman, if you want to be a godly husband, if you want to be a godly wife, if you want to raise godly kids, if you want to do this thing, if you want an active faith, if you want to know Jesus? What good is it if you want that but do nothing to head that way? And listen, I don't believe in the power of the human self. I believe in grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, but sanctification is a process of God and you. Nobody gets holy by sitting on the couch. Nobody loves their wife fully by not working at it. It's not enough to want to. “Want to” will give way to “I wish I would have.”

Let's keep reading. *“The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?”* The wise man knows where he's going, knows what he wants to be and he's working a plan to get there. He also surrounds himself with men and women who are beyond him and exemplify who he wants to be later. The fool surrounds himself with people who are stuck in the same rut he is and is completely content walking with people who are okay where they are, have no plan, no desire to go anywhere else. I'm looking for older men whose children love Jesus, love the church and love them, and I want to hang out with them. Not because they did it right, because a lot of that is the grace of God, but because they

might be able to give me some insight. I want to hang out with people who spend their money well, because I know the dangers of trinkets, but I still like them. So, I'm like, "Don't waste your money...where did you get that?" That still happens to me. Things that sparkle, I like them. So I want to be around people who spend their money well like Claude Drury. Claude is one of the guys who runs the premarital program and the Compassion program. Every cent of his money is leveraged to help the poor. I want to be around him, and I want him to be able to speak in my life. And I want to walk with a bunch of people who are content where they are and have no hope of ever being something else. That's what the Scriptures say the wise man does.

Look at this next part. Verse 15, "*The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.*" Listen to what this says because I find this to be really true. A person who doesn't know where he's going, what he's trying to be, what he's trying to accomplish, they tend to get exhausted by life because they're walking but they're not going anywhere. They exemplify the treadmill that we've been talking about through Ecclesiastes, running their guts out but not going anywhere. So keep this in mind. There are times in marriage where the going is uphill at an unbelievable angle. I mean, there are times in a marriage, days, weeks, months, sometimes even years, where it's hard and the going is difficult. But with the end in mind, being obedient unto Christ and sipping coffee as old men and women, rejoicing in all that Jesus did, with the end in mind, difficult days don't overwhelm because we know the end. And he's saying a person who has no idea where he's going, no idea who he's trying to become, no idea what life holds for him, no goals, not going anywhere, they have a tendency to get overwhelmed by nothing.

And then look at what else he has a tendency to do. Verse 16, "*Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!*" He's saying that people who have no idea where they're going have a tendency to start the party before anyone else gets there. They have a tendency to start drinking before the sun goes down. Look at this next piece. "*Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility,...*" He's saying when the son of nobility knows he's going to be nobility. So, he knows where he's going. "*...and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!*" That's such a great line because it once again says, "Hey listen, there is a time to party. There's a time to party that strengthens the soul. There's a way to party that strengthens the soul." Now, look at this next line. This is what happens usually to the person who has no clue where they're going, who they are, what they're supposed to be. "*Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.*" And everyone gets excited and goes, "That's what I'm talking about. Jesus wants us rich. Tell me how!" You have to read this verse backwards or you don't get it. It's not a sin to be poor, not at all. It's a sin to be lazy. So money affords us opportunity. Money enables us to rent an apartment or buy a house. Money enables us to buy a dining room table. And then, let me ask you a question. Is bread really made for laughter? I mean, do you ever just by yourself pull out a dinner roll and start chuckling? Bread's not made for laughter, that's not what he's referencing. What's Solomon referencing again? Dinner. I mean, have you been here since we started this thing? This guy's got a dinner thing going, doesn't he? It's like every nine verses he's going, "...and dinner. Eat together. Wine is good." It's like every nine or ten verses, he's saying "Eat dinner together," and he just did it again. He says, "Work hard and then spend your money wisely. Buy a big dining room table so your friends can come over, eat your bread, responsibly drink your wine and laugh at your bad jokes. Have them over. Money will afford you this." So the wise man knows where he's going, knows what he wants to be, knows what he's been called to do and be, he surrounds himself with people who are there, working his plan, gaining

wisdom, he parties to bring strength and drunkenness, he never numbs the realities of life, never, and he has a great dining room table.

Let's keep going. *“Even in your thought, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.”* Have you ever been busted? Have you ever run your mouth and get busted? No? Nobody? Me neither. But I've heard that this has happened to people. I mean, have you ever walked into a room and there's like nine other people dogging somebody and you say one line but it's that one line that gets back to the person? And then you're completely busted in the matter. He says the wise man understands that he lives in a sinful broken world, of which he is a part. And here's the part that got me. I think I do a decent job of not bad-mouthing people out loud with my mouth, but he even says that the wise man, he won't even do it as he lays in bed at night. And so, that's where I was like, “Dang it.” Because I lay in bed, and I'm like, “Kill him for me. Kill him for me and all who know him, please.” So, I have that problem where I lay in bed at night going, “Oh, why didn't I say that to him? That's so good.” He's saying that guy, he doesn't do that. He lays in bed at night, and he goes, “You know what, I don't battle flesh and blood, spirits and principalities. I pray for him. I pray for his heart. I pray for my heart. Maybe I'm seeing wrong.” That's the wise man.

Alright, let's finish this up. Very quickly, the wise man is generous. He's generous with his money, he's generous with his bread, he's generous with his wine, he's generous with his car, he's generous with his clothes, he's generous. Now, this last part is our conclusion. *“If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth, and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.”* This is Solomon's hardest word in this whole thing. “Quit making lame excuses for your laziness and sinfulness and be obedient to what God has commanded you.” He says, “God comes to this man and asks him to walk through the forest. And the man looks up and sees the wind, and he's like, 'It's blowing those trees. Maybe one of those trees will fall down on me and kill me. I think I'll stay here.' God comes to a man and says, 'Plant seeds.' 'Okay, I'll plant seeds, but here's the deal. There's some thunderheads up there, and it's kind of a waste of time to plant seeds if it's going to rain.' And so, he does nothing. He's heard from the Lord, been spoken to and does nothing and makes excuses for not moving.” And Solomon says, “Give me a break. You're breathing. Why are you wasting your breath? Go.” “What about the tree?” “The tree could fall on you. I mean, nobody knows the ways of God. Sometimes the guy who digs pits everyday, maybe today he falls in. Maybe the tree does fall on you, but go.” All a man can do is accept the limitation of not being God and be obedient to what God reveals to him. So if He says, “Go through the forest”, go through the forest no matter how hard the wind's blowing. And if He says, “Plant seeds”, plant seeds even if it is already raining. I was thinking, maybe it happened before I was born, when did business become the badge of honor it is? Tell me everyone doesn't answer the question “How are you doing?” with “Oh, busy, man.” It's like if you don't answer that way, you're not... When did that become the badge of honor? When did we get to that place where we're like, “I'm busy, and business shows how cool and powerful I am. Business shows how much this world needs me, so as we talk, I'm going to answer some e-mails because that's how busy I am.” When did that become the mark of success?

Okay, so I'm working my plan. Will it work? That's out of my hands. Will my children love Jesus, love the church, love mom, love me? With all my heart, I hope. Do I have any guarantees? No. But I'm not expecting it to accidentally happen either. I want to be the best possible pastor, preacher, teacher I can be. Is that going to accidentally happen? No, I'm going to have to read, I'm going to have to study, I'm going to have to wrestle, I'm going to have to have conversations. What about you? Do you know who you are? Do you know what you're trying to become? Are you a "want to" kind of guy, kind of girl? Do you already have some "I wish I would have's?" "I wish I would have's," they just keep building until you put feet to them. So, I've got three goals tonight. I'll pray, you'll be dismissed, I'm going to get in my car, head home and I'm going to kiss my babies. We're finally clean. All week long, somebody has had strep throat at my house. We like had a black X on the door all week. So, I'm kissing babies tonight. I'm kissing babies and we're going to eat dirty food. I don't know what we're having. It's probably fast food, something horrible, something that's going to end our life before it should have been ended. And we're going to get on the floor and we're going to play and we're going to say prayers and we're going to read a book we've read a billion times. And my wife and I are going to sit on the couch and we're going to talk through this weekend. She'll grade out my sermon, "Be on presentation. Tuck your shirt in next time." We'll do that, and we've got some friends in from out of town and we'll talk life. And around 11:00 or so, we'll climb in bed. And the alarm will go off tomorrow morning about 6:30, and I'll think about going to the gym and hit snooze. And then, I'm going to head to the office, where I'll open the Scriptures once again and pray through and wrestle through the rest of chapter 11, so that next week, I can be the best possible pastor I can be. What are you doing tonight? What are you doing tomorrow? Because sometimes you just wake up and go fishing, sometimes you just wake up and go to school, sometimes you just get in your car and go to work, sometimes you do what you do everyday, and all of your "want to's" become "I wish I would have's."

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for tonight. I thank You for these men and women. And I pray that You would help us. That's what I pray for. I pray that this might not be just another one of those where we just kind of hear but we don't walk out and go, "What am I doing? What am I trying to become? Where am I going?" I just want us to wrestle with this one, Father. And I want to make clear that I don't like doing sermons on how to live life better, because I think in the end that you can do all of these things, but if we don't know You, we're still a fool because we're acting like we're indestructible when we're not. And so, I know a man or a woman in this thing, they can read down this list and they can have a plan and they can be working the plan and they can gather wise people around them and they can be generous with their money and they can party at the right time, but in the end, if we haven't submitted to You, if we haven't submitted to the cross then we're...And so I pray that you'd help us tonight. I know that there are young men out here who are coming from homes where dad was not a godly man, godly father, godly husband, and they want to be that so badly. I pray already as single men, they be gathering around themselves men who walk that way. I pray for my sweet sisters in this room who want to know You deeply, who want to know how to be a godly wife, who want to know how to be a godly mother, who want to know how to do relationships right. I pray that they would submit their lives and their walks to women who know how to walk. Father, I confess out loud that I don't want any "I wish I would have's." I know I'll have them, but I don't want them. Help me. Help us. We love You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."