

< **LIVING LIFE**

BACKWARD >

First Congregational Church
505 W. Mulberry St. Kokomo, IN 46901

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I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
I applied my mind to study and to explore by
wisdom all that is done under the heavens.
What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind!
I have seen all the things that are done under
the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing
after the wind.

What is crooked cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted.

I said to myself, "Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge."

For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge, the more grief.

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I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. "Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.

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 male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.

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.

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So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is 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.

ECCLESIASTES 2:17-18

And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil 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 person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

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A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the person 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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. THE TEACHER TESTS WISDOM, PLEASURE, ACHIEVEMENT, WEALTH, ENTERTAINMENT, AND SUCCESS. WHICH OF THOSE ARE YOU MOST TEMPTED TO CHASE?**
- 2. FOLLY WAS DESCRIBED AS “LIFE LIVED OUT OF ORDER” WITH GOD PUSHED TO THE MARGINS. WHAT DOES THAT KIND OF FOLLY LOOK LIKE IN NORMAL LIFE?**
- 3. “SOMETIMES LIFE FEELS HEAVY ENOUGH THAT WE DON’T WANT TO THINK MORE DEEPLY. WE JUST WANT TO FEEL LESS DEEPLY.” WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU TRY TO NUMB, AVOID, OR DISTRACT YOURSELF FROM THE HEAVINESS OF LIFE?**
- 4. WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE THIS WEEK TO RECEIVE THE GIFTS WITHOUT GIVING THEM YOUR HEART?**