



SONGS: “Glorious Day”, “Run to the Father”, “Good Good Father”

TITLE: Living Life Backwards - Avoiding Dead Ends

ICE BREAKER: Describe a time you got really lost when you were walking or driving somewhere. What happened? How did it happen?

BIG IDEA: Following the WAY, is the only way to avoid dead-ends in life. (John 14:6)

MAIN SCRIPTURE: Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

Wisdom Is Meaningless

¹²I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³I 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! ¹⁴I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

¹⁵What is crooked cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted.

¹⁶I 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.” ¹⁷Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

¹⁸For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge, the more grief.

Pleasures Are Meaningless

²I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. ²“Laughter,” I said, “is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?” ³I 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.

⁴I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. ⁵I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁶I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. ⁷I 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. ⁸I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem^[a] as well—the delights of a man's heart. ⁹I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

¹⁰I 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.
¹¹Yet 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.

Wisdom and Folly Are Meaningless

¹²Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom,
and also madness and folly.
What more can the king's successor do
than what has already been done?
¹³I saw that wisdom is better than folly,
just as light is better than darkness.
¹⁴The wise have eyes in their heads,
while the fool walks in the darkness;
but I came to realize
that the same fate overtakes them both.
¹⁵Then I said to myself,

"The fate of the fool will overtake me also.
What then do I gain by being wise?"
I said to myself,
"This too is meaningless."
¹⁶For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered;
the days have already come when both have been forgotten.
Like the fool, the wise too must die!

Toil Is Meaningless

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ 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. ²² What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ²³ All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

²⁴ 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,²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶ 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.

OPENING THOUGHTS:

As humans we all have a desire to be happy and to have a life of meaning. That is a God-given desire but we get to choose the road we will take to get there. As humans we try many roads to happiness but even the best ones end up in dead-ends. We travel those roads under the "shadow of death" because, though we try to ignore it we know it's ahead. This is why Jesus came to show us the way to really live and become the way to Heaven. Jesus is "THE WAY"...the only way to LIFE, abundant life now and eternal life forever. Everything else is temporary and meaningless...a chasing of the wind.

MAIN POINTS:

1. The destination we all want is real happiness and meaning What road in life do you take in life to get there?
2. The detours the world offers are appealing. 1:12-18 Knowledge 2:1-3 Pleasure - laughter, wine, parties 2:4-7 Projects - houses, gardens, staff, herds 2:8 Wealth 2:8 Music 2:8 Women, Sex 2:9 Power and Fame 2:10 Possessions
3. The disappointment we all face is that our detours are dead-ends. 2:11 It's all ultimately meaningless, a chasing of the wind. 2:12-16 We all die 2:17-23 It's all temporary and quickly left behind. Death reveals who we

really are: Dependent creatures created for a relationship with our Creator now and forever!

4. The direction to our true desire is God's Way. 2:24-25 "With God" life is good. Enjoy its simplicity and beauty. 2:26 Pleasing God is the greatest pleasure 2:26 God-pleasers end up eternally blessed

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (questions taken from "Living Life Backwards")

1. What is your motivation for getting up each morning?
2. What do the lives of people you know reveal about what they think will make them happy?
3. How would you describe "true joy" to a friend who knows nothing of this?
4. What strategies do you think people you know, including yourself, use to avoid facing the reality of death?
5. What do you make of the idea that death can give us the perspective we need to begin to enjoy life?

FURTHER STUDY (IF APPLICABLE)

CHALLENGE: Live your life "WITH GOD" and make him your greatest joy so that you don't demand more from the things in life than they can give. Stay on the WAY of JESUS because every other road is a dead-end.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, please open my eyes to see the end of the various roads in life. Help me understand the way I am traveling through life. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Deliver me from all other paths. Help me to enjoy the good gifts of life because they are from you but help me not to expect them to satisfy me. You alone are my true joy and meaning and friend and destiny. You are MY WAY through life. In your presence is fullness of JOY...so I thank you that I am traveling with you and headed to an eternity in your presence.