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**Living With the End in Mind**  
**Part 2 – Chasing After the Wind**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are in a series right now called *Living With the End in Mind*. We started it last week in this great book of Ecclesiastes. If you have your bibles, turn to Ecclesiastes 2; that's where we are going to be today. Last week, we introduced this book, talking about everything is meaningless under the sun and chasing after the wind. We saw that everything is meaningless. What Solomon is referring to there is this idea that everything is utterly meaningless apart from God. And the things we like to chase, the pursuits in life that we make the end in mind. We get to the end of that pursuit whether it be a job, a promotion, a retirement, a house, a car, whatever. We get there and we're like, *This isn't quite what I thought it would be*. It's because it's not supposed to be your end in mind.

When we get to Ecclesiastes 12, we see fear God and keep his commandments. So, we are living with the end in mind.

Today in Chapter 2, it picks up from Chapter 1 because in Chapter 1, you see that energy and wisdom applied to the irregularities of life, trying to figure out what's going on under the sun and to find meaning if I do this or do that. If I study it more, if I think about it more, if I find wisdom, then maybe it will make sense.

Today, Solomon is going to put to the test pleasure, trying to fill our lives with pleasure, saying yes to everything that is presented to us to see if that will give us a full life. We already know the answer. The answer is no. That's not the end in mind either.

Amy and I were on the couch this week. Amy was buying Christmas presents. Who is already done with Christmas shopping? I'm really proud of you. Did you buy anything? How many people do you have to buy for? Thirteen grandkids. You bought all of them gifts already? No, no, we don't buy for grandkids anymore.

Amy looked at me and all she said was, "You're in charge of your brother." I was ready because my brother and I went to a Philly's game in June. I've never been to a game where they sell the memorabilia from that game. I grew up going to the Cub's games in Chicago. You know, a ball hits the dirt and it's scuffed, they sell it for \$50.00 up in the concourse. I bought my brother one that was thrown to Schwarber. I thought it was awesome. Amy said this to me, and I go, "I know exactly what I'm going to get him. I'm going to buy him a real base that was used in a Cub's game and this is going to be the best gift I've ever given him. He's going to keep it forever and treasure it."

I Googled Chicago Cub's first base authentic for sale. The first one that pops up, and my heart started racing, was Game 7 of the 2016 world series first base, so Rizzo. I'm like this is exactly what I need to get him. I hit it and it was \$102,000.00. My brother has a December birthday so you can combine birthday and Christmas. Everybody with a birthday in December knows that. You like your birthday and Christmas combined. I thought well I can combine his Christmas and birthday and if he lives to 642, I can get it. my brother has a lot of Cub's memorabilia.

I started thinking about all the stuff we go after. What happens after that initial adrenaline rush wears off? You've bought something before that you thought was awesome. Two weeks later, you're not so enthusiastic. It didn't do what I thought it was going to do. And I thought I could buy that base for my brother... Just so you know, I'm not buying that base. I love my brother, but you know what they say... it's the thought that counts. So, I asked him to give me credit for the thought. I already told him about it. I go, "Guess what I was going to get you for Christmas." He's like, "Thanks, Bro." I'm like, "Yeah, but you're getting baseball cards." We all get that.

The chasing after the wind is the idea that I put so much energy into something, save up for it, finally get it, and when that wears off... Today, Solomon is going to test this. There are some seniors in this room that have tested a lot of what he's going to talk about today. And there are some young people going, "I still want to test it. I still want to see if this is really the end in mind and if this is going to bring me ultimate meaning and fulfillment in life."

I'm looking around at what Solomon refers to in Chapter 12 of this great book, blossoming almond trees. That's the image he gives us for gray hair. There are a lot of blossoming almond trees in this room right now who are going to read through this list and go, "You know what? I did that. I bought the house of my dreams and then it wasn't a year or two later that I realized every square foot I own owns me. Some of you are at that place you can't wait to downsize; you can't wait for less.

Let's look at the test today. And before we jump in Ecclesiastes 2, here's what we are going to learn from this chapter. If you are new to our church, we're going to go through a chapter at a time. We're going to spend 12 weeks with a little break for Christmas and take this through the winter. We're not going to be able to go through every verse. Today is a pretty text heavy message, but we're going to encourage you in your home group and in your family and quiet time to dive into each chapter during the week.

Today, we're going to learn more and wisdom... that's from Chapter 1. More pleasure, food, wine, laughter, accomplishments, square footage, and wealth will not bring more meaning to your life. We've heard this before. If you've been in church for years, you've heard us talk about this vacuum that we have. By the way, this is what our family calls the love jug. It refers to the heart. I used to use this with my kids to teach about co-dependency. We're going to use it in a different way today to talk about the stuff we pour into our lives to try to be full. But we know and we've heard this before. *"There is this God-shaped vacuum in every man that only Christ can fill."* – Augustine. And yet, you and I, if we are honest, we continue to pour other stuff in there to find meaning and purpose. Those were our two words last week – pursuit and purpose. There is a lot that we pursue in life that are good pursuits; they are just not the end in mind.

Christ is the end in mind, and when he is the end in mind, fearing God, keeping his commandments, honoring the Lord, worshipping him only, then we see all this other stuff has purpose that comes to it.

Today we are going to see this idea that **we worship the giver, not the gifts**. Whenever you turn a gift from the hand of God into your soul source of life, the thing that you want to bring meaning, this is when we turn gifts into idols. This is when we try to fill our lives with something that was never meant to bring the purpose and the meaning. That is a place only for God.

So let's look at Ecclesiastes 2. ***I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you (meaning of life/end in mind) with pleasure to find out what is good.*** So, he's going to set out on this test. ***"But that also proved to be meaningless. 2 "Laughter..."*** He starts off with laughter. I love laughter. Who in here loves laughter. We all love laughter. We're going to see in Ecclesiastes 7...

By the way, I'm not that guy you want to watch a movie with if I've already seen the movie. I am a terrible person wo watch with. I'm always going to "Oh, just wait. Or if you get distracted on your phone, I'm like, "Put that down; you've got to watch this right here!

So, we get to Ecclesiastes 7 and what does Solomon say? Sorrow is better than laughter. He doesn't say laughter is bad. A cheerful heart is good medicine. But the laughter is not meant to be a source of life.

***...I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?"*** I love how he starts off these chapters with questions that lead into this test. ***3 I tried cheering myself with wine...*** I grew up independent, fundamental, premillennial, King James Only Baptist. This is not an approved glass. I want to let everybody know that in the independent Baptist Church. I had to borrow this from Travis' house. I said, "Can you let me borrow a wine glass?" He said, "Make sure I get it back. I don't want to lose my set." I said, "No problem." But you know people that are trying to fill their lives right now cheering themselves with wine. And yet we are going to get to Ecclesiastes 9 in a little bit where it says ***Eat your food with gladness, drink your wine with a joyful heart for now God favors what you do.***

We are going to see today the difference between treating something as a source and treating something as a gift. He goes on. ***...and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom.*** Most scholars believe this is referring back to Chapter 1 where it's talking about "I'm still on this pursuit of wisdom. I'm still trying to figure out the irregularities of life and the challenges of this toilsome labor under the sun." ***I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.*** Keep this in mind because this comes back in just a moment, but it's a theme throughout all of scripture. The brevity of life – it's a mist, it's a vapor. We're here for a short time and then we are gone. "Seventy years we have upon this earth eighty if we're strong, if our strength endures, but those hears are filled with sorrow and anguish. Life is a mist, a vapor; it's hard it's difficult, it's challenging."

***4 I undertook great projects...*** I love when it transitions to this because there are people in here going crazy that people would try to cheer themselves and find meaning in one thing and yet you find meaning in another. You turned your job, which is your source of income, into your source of life. We do this. We take every meeting, every opportunity, every endeavor, every project that's given to us and we say

we have to do it, so we say yes to everything. Solomon says, ***I built houses for myself...*** We had a lady ring the doorbell a couple of weeks ago. It was late Monday afternoon. I went to the door and her minivan was parked out in our driveway and the door was open. I could tell she had a few kids in there. She goes, "Hey, I know this is out of nowhere but is there any chance you would be willing to sell me your house?"

I go, "Ma'am, we're flattered. Thank you." She was from Park City Utah. They had just moved here. I said, "Ma'am, you're never going to believe this but in May, our daughter got married in the back yard and I'm here until the Lord returns." Because you can't put a price on memories. You know what I'm talking about. You can't put a price on memories. I go in the house, shut the door, and Amy goes, "Who was that?" I said, "A lady wants to buy our house but don't worry I told her you can't put a price on memories." Amy was like, "Yes you can. You most certainly can. Our memories are for sale." She gave me some crazy number. "You go chase her down." I can't even tell you the number I'm so embarrassed. It's like a 5x multiplier on the value of our house but we're going to give her the contents too. I thought to myself, do you know why I don't want to sell my house? I don't want to build another one. I know some of you love it. It's hard to build a house in the Ozarks as a pastor. You start getting bids from people and you're like, "Well I'm going to go with this bid over here." "I thought you were a pastor. I go to your church. You should hire me." So, no, I'm keeping this house and we're keeping our memories.

***...and planted vineyards. 5 I made gardens and parks...*** So, that's what's going to fill me. That will fill me right up. I'm going to have all this to look at and all this to survey. It's going to be great. ***...and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.*** Sometimes people are just looking for a project to fill up. ***7 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.*** We are going to see later on in this book that the sleep of a laborer is sweet. Someone who works and goes home and finds rest. But someone who has a lot can sometimes have a hard time sleeping because you're thinking about all you need to do to manage what you've got. And in this day could you imagine? You've got a herd over here, a herd over there, a herd over there. You try to fall asleep at night and you're like, "Okay, where are they. Okay, tomorrow, I've got to move that herd over there and that herd over there... The more you have, the more you have to lose sleep over, the more you have to think about.

***8 I amassed silver and gold for myself...*** Last night, did you see the \$1.6 billion lottery did not have a winner and now it's a record \$1.9 billion. That's insane. But I did study don't get excited because if you take it in a lump sum, it's only like \$850 million. And then after taxes, you're going to be down to like, \$400 - \$500 million, so it's not what it's cracked up to be; that's all I'm trying to say. Can I make you this? In the first service, when I shared this, I just saw we were all on the same page. If somebody wins that \$1.9 billion here's something I can guarantee you. Next year at this time, they will not have more joy in their life than I do. Because they are going to get that money, they have to hire lawyers and accountants and they have to get people to help manage it. Then they have to go on HGTV Lottery Dream Home show and all that. They have to find a new house. They have to find new friends. It's just going to change their life. I'm telling you it will not bring more joy. We've heard the stories of people who were making a few bucks and they come into all that money. They are not prepared. They don't know how to manage that kind of money.

There are some of you in here right now going, “But Ted, that’s one thing I want to test. I hear what you’re saying but let me try the Lotto. Let me prove you wrong.”

There was a study done years ago. It’s a well-documented study that put the optimal income for happiness. Anybody want to guess what it is. Just throw a number out at me. Did somebody say \$100,000? It was \$75,000. We’re going to see this in a moment in Philippians, but here’s what they discovered. The basics are covered in the first parts of your income, like what Dave Ramsey calls your four walls – food, shelter, clothing, water... All of that is in that, but up to \$75,000, there is a range of happiness that people find. But after \$75,000, this study discovered there was not a big difference between the person making \$75,000 and the person making a million. Again, right now... this is what I love about this book. there are people in here going, “I want to test that theory. I make this, give me this and I’ll show you what I’ll be able to do.”

**...and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers...** Now we are into entertainment. And do we live in a day where we are entertained all day long? I grew up in a day where you had a favorite show and you watched it and they left you with a cliffhanger. You had to wait until next week to find out what happened. Now, if you decide today that you want to get into a new show, you can binge watch the whole thing by midnight. It’s just at the tip of our fingers. We can be entertained. We’re not hiring bands to live with us, but he did. We have our phones, but he had them

**...and a harem as well...** Not to get into too many details with this, but there are those saying just fill your life with sex. Fill your life with relationships that are just for your pleasure only. **...the delights of a man’s heart. 9 I became greater by far...** In joy? In purpose? In meaning? No and what other people would look at and go, “You got it going on. You’ve got a great life. You’ve got all that. You can do whatever you want, nobody telling you what to do.” **...than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.** I am still trying to figure out. I’m still pursuing this as a test. Now here’s the key.

An American – United States of America citizens, Verse 10 is us. **10 I denied myself nothing...** We live in a country where we don’t ever have to say no. We can say yes to everything – food placed before us, opportunities for entertainment, going places. He says **10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.** “I said yes to everything to test and see if that would fill me up.” **My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve...** Grueling labor, the difficult challenges that go into building all of this and providing all of this. Here we get all three themes we looked at last week in one verse. **...everything was meaningless,** (utterly empty apart from God) **a chasing after the wind...** Putting a lot of energy into something that didn’t get the reward that I was looking for. **...nothing was gained under the sun.**

Here is our lesson up to this point with denying ourselves nothing. If you deny yourself nothing, you will live an empty life. You will live the meaningless life. If you deny yourself nothing... we looked at this term last week. If I deny myself nothing and say yes to everything, I’m wasting my life. Yes to every morsel, drink, gathering, meeting, project, and opportunity leads to an empty life. This isn’t how Christians are called to live. We’re called to sacrifice and deny so that Christ can fill us.

I was thinking about it this week. We're only a couple of weeks away from Thanksgiving. I absolutely love Thanksgiving. I'm already telling myself to be good. *You don't need to go crazy. Just take small portions.* But this will be me at about 2:00 to 3:00. You know your sitting there, "I've made a terrible mistake. Then around 4:00, Amy is like, "Do you want a turkey sandwich?" "Yes, I want a turkey sandwich. Of course I do; it's thanksgiving. We're supposed to eat all day long." Let me just add that as much fun as it is to be gathered around with family and friends and eat, eat, eat, how are you feeling at the end of that big meal where you're just stuffing and stuffing? And at the end of it you're miserable.

You will never enjoy God and life if you deny yourself nothing. This is what we know as followers of Jesus. As followers of Jesus, we're told, ***Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*** - ***Matthew 16: 24***

This is a mark of our faith and as Christians and as followers, not to say yes to everything. What am I denying myself so I can be full? I kept thinking about it this week. Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the spirit. It's all throughout your Bible. All the stuff we want to be filled with but ultimately leaves us empty.

As Solomon moves through this test, he says, "Here's what I've tried: denied myself nothing." And look at how strong we get with words like hated and despair as we move to verse 17

***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.*** There are some seniors in here wrestling with that right now. You're getting ready to leave this earth and you've heard it in church I don't know how many times. Every one of our teaching pastors has shared this. You will never see a Hearse pulling a U-Haul. No matter what you try to accumulate, you're not taking it with you. The reality is all that you gather you are going to leave for someone else.

Tommy Nelson at Denton Bible Church, I love when he teaches this. He said, "Just make sure the last check you write to your children in life bounces."

***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.*** Here's what he's really doing in this text. He's again processing the brevity of life. He's now wrestling with death. It's like, "I did all of this." And now he's talking about the end in mind and he's going, "Is this it? To build all this up and try to fill my life with this and then I'm gone."

***...This too is meaningless. 20 So my heart began to despair...*** Now, at this point, it almost reads to me like a lament psalm. I don't know if you are getting that feeling as we read this text, but a lament psalm is I'm hurting, the enemy is winning, God, you don't seem to be listening. That's what I'm reading in Ecclesiastes 2. It's this I'm trying, I'm trying, I'm trying. It didn't work. This is counterintuitive to the wisdom of God. But our mind goes to just more then. If this didn't do it, I just need more glasses and I need the glasses to be more full. Then I get to then end and realize I had the wrong end in mind. So, I 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?** Lots of questions in Ecclesiastes. But he doesn't leave us there. This is what I love. So, that lament psalm always ends with a lot of pain, "God, where are you in all of this?" But then it always ends with this confession of trust. "But great is your faithfulness. God, you are good. You are one I can rest in and trust no matter what I'm going through." **23 All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.** Because all the stuff you've got, you're thinking about it all and all you need to do. But he doesn't leave us here and here's where it turns.

**24 A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see...** The tone changes here. Not just meaningless. **...is from the hand of God...** So, it's from the giver, which makes it a gift, it completely and totally changes my perspective on all of this. Not meant to be a source, but it is meant to be seen as I received it from the Lord. For I see this from the hand of God. **25 ...for without him...** That's tied back to everything is meaningless. **...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.**

We are to see food, drink, and work as gifts, not the source.

We read the same thing in Ecclesiastes 5 – **This is what I have observed to be good; that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink, to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun. During the few days of life that God has given them.** Here it is again ...from the hand of God, God has given us all of this **...for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil...**

Christians, we have a real negative tone with the word *happy*. *Happy* is a great word. Sometimes you hear Christians split the word joy and happiness. The Bible doesn't do that, so I don't know where that fell into Christian theology and teaching. John Piper says the Bible says delight, contentment, joy, and happiness interchangeably. We like to hair-split it and say joy is the inner peace we get from God. Happiness hinges on our circumstances and what's going on around us. The Bible doesn't say that. We can be happy in our toil when we understand it's a gift from God. So, that's why when we gather around the table, we thank the Lord, and we say in our home often as we're praying – "We receive this with thanksgiving because God is the giver". So, I'll never get cocky thinking it was my strength that provided this on the table. That ultimately, he gave me the wind, the breath in my lungs, and the strength to be able to provide this.

And then Verse 20 – **They seldom reflect on the days of their life...** And we are going to see too don't ask why were the good ole days better than these. Often times, people will say "I miss the good ole days." Do you know what you miss about the good ole days? The highlights. When we say the good ole days, we tend to not want to talk about the injustices that took place in that time period that you're talking about.

Guess what? Every generation has highlights and every generation has injustices. But we seldom reflect on those days when we know who our source is. Why? **...because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.**

This just said he went after laughter. Listen, laughter reveals joy. Laughter is an overflow of joy. Find your joy in Christ. And enjoy the days you have upon this earth.

We read in Philippians 4: 12-13... It's another misunderstood passage because sometimes we read Philippians 4: 13 as I can do anything I want through Christ who gives me strength and that is not what it says. You have to understand Verse 12 before you get to Verse 13. It says, **12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.** Again, whether I'm making \$20,000 a year or \$100,000 a year. Whether I'm making \$25,000 or \$200,000 a year. I've learned the secret to being content in every situation. Meaning this is something we can learn and discipline ourselves to understand the source and to walk with Jesus. **...whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.** Do you know what it's talking about there? The extremes of life. I can go through the good times, the highlights. I can go through the bad times. I can go through darkness. I can walk through it all because I can do it all because it is Christ who is my ultimate source. That's where this illustration ends.

The magic trick did not work in the first service, incase you were wondering. And we don't have it recorded. It was bad. This pitcher represents being filled by God and it is a limited illustration I know that. But you need to understand that all of these glasses are a limited supply, not meant to fill and bring meaning to your life. He is unlimited free refills. Stay connected to the source because he fills and leaves us full. We can just keep pouring and pouring. Stay connected to the true and only source of life.

Father, you are our end in mind. Why would we look to anything else to be the end in mind or to be the source of life? Whatever they are turning to in this room right now to bring their meaning to life, let them see today and end today confess to you and repent of that today turning that gift into an idol and look to you as their true meaning and true source that whatever circumstance we go through, whether hungry or well fed, we turn to Christ, the true and only source of life.

For the one who had never placed faith in Jesus, that today they would stop trying to fill themselves with food and drink and work and possessions and wealth to find meaning but that they would turn to you, the true and only source of life.

We pray this in the authority of the name of Jesus... and everyone agreed and said Amen.