

The Vanity of Pleasure

Guy Mason – October 8, 2017

Matt Chandler: Well, good morning. How are you? Are you doing well? Okay, two of you are! I love that. You're in the right place then, right? I want to introduce to you a friend of mine. This is Guy Mason. You should almost immediately feel your coolness shrink.

Guy Mason: Come on. Come on!

Matt: I just couldn't pull that off, brother. I mean, it's just stunning. All right. Now Guy is pastor of City on a Hill Church in Melbourne, Australia. If you have no context...

Guy: There you go! Come on!

Matt: Oh! Okay! If you have no context for Melbourne, Australia, think San Francisco, California. They're very similar to one another in culture, very similar to one another in weather. In fact, we were having a talk earlier today, and he was like, "Dallas weather is incredible." I was like, "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Do you remember when I was in Melbourne, and it was sunny and beautiful for those three or four days, and you were like, 'No, no, no. This is not our weather'? This is not our weather."

We're getting a cool front right now. If you were here a month ago, you would have combusted into flames. So it's God's grace on the cold front. You're welcome for that. We prayed that in for you. Guy planted a church called City on a Hill in Melbourne, Australia, and God has just blessed it. Then on top of what God is doing there as they gather thousands of people every week in a movie theater, he has been used by God to plant churches.

His church did something called the 10 Cities initiative. They have planted churches in the 10 larger cities of Australia. So Guy has not been just used powerfully by God in Melbourne but also across the major cities in Australia. You have partnered with them without even knowing it. We've been very much involved with City on a Hill. Guy is in the Acts 29 Network with us. Man, it is by God's

grace that he is here today. He is just such a gifted preacher of the gospel. He is going to open up the Word of God and then feed us today from there.

I want to do one more thing before we pray for Guy and we dive in. Pastor Geoffrey, I know you're here. Where did you go? Ah, there you are! Pastor Geoffrey. I was in the foyer this morning. I watched Pastor Geoffrey... I was like, "Oh my gosh! That's Pastor Geoffrey!"

Pastor Geoffrey pastors a church or actually runs an orphanage (he does all sorts of things; the list is too long for our service) in the slums of Kijabe and others in Kenya. This brother makes \$1,500 a year and has faithfully served among the least of these. I mean, among drug-addicted kids, orphaned kids. The work he does is in one of the more dangerous places in the world. I said this in the nine o'clock service. You humble me. The Spirit of God in you humbles me.

Here's what we're going to do. We're going to pray a prayer over Geoffrey, and then I'm going to pray a prayer over Guy. Then we're just going to dive in and see what the Lord has for us today. I said this at the nine o'clock service. I'm going to say it again. If you have some cash in your pocket and you want to just slip that to Geoffrey, you should do that.

Here's my word. I said it in the nine o'clock service. I'll say it again. You cannot take any of the money they give you and give that away. You need to receive this as a blessing on you, on your wife, and on your family for your faithfulness to our King. All right? If you make \$1,500 a year, how much is \$10? Right? We can bless this brother. I mean, do you know how rich...? It's stupidly rich here in this place.

If you have it... You don't need to feel guilty if you don't. Man, if you have \$10, you can just walk up and give him that \$10 handshake. You're not rewiring the orphanage with this, all right? You're going to love your bride. You're going to get a little... Yes! Amen! Right? Fix up that car so you can make it back and forth between where your wife is three hours from you and where you're working. You just receive the blessing of Jesus on your life, Pastor. Do you hear me? All right.

Here's what we're going to do. We're going to stretch our hand out to Geoffrey. It's not witchcraft. You're not a Jedi. You're not putting anything on him. This is us just saying, "We are with this brother." Then I'm going to finish praying. We're going to pray for Guy. We're just going to swing our hands over.

Again, you're not Jedis. You're not magical. This is just us saying, agreeing with one another, "Yes, Lord. Amen, Lord! Bless this man, Lord." All right? Let's do that. I know some of you are like, "I thought we were Baptist." No, we're *Christians*. Right? This is what we do. All right. Let's do this.

Father, we bless Geoffrey in the name of Jesus Christ. We thank you for what he has sacrificed, his physical pain, the way he has slept on cots, he has slept on concrete floors. He has fought for and wrung out his life for hundreds of orphans and drug-addicted teenagers, the have-nots and want-nots of that culture there in the slums of Kijabe and other parts of Kenya.

We just bless him in the name of Jesus. Build him up, Father. I pray just his pockets will be filled with your blessing as he leaves this place. You've already blessed him with your nearness. You've blessed him with spiritual power. I just ask now that in your kindness, he would receive your kindness this morning as that. I thank you for this servant. He humbles me. I want to be more like him. Thank you for your grace.

We pray for Guy. I think this has just turned into International Sunday at The Village Church. I thank you for that. I thank you for what you have done in Australia and to connect us as friends and to see already this weekend what you've done in the hearts and lives of the people of The Village Church. I thank you that the Word of God is living and active. It continues to go forth. It is going forth all over the world right now.

In Australia, they're in the future, but they heard the Word last night, which was their Sunday morning. It shaped them. Here we are today sitting under the Word again. Bless your servant as he preaches a fourth time to us. I just ask you would build him up in strength and energy and, Spirit of God, you would burn brightly through him and you would stir all of our affection for Jesus Christ. We need you today. Help us not just do church like we do church. Rescue us from that. Invade this space. We need you. It's for your beautiful name, amen.

Will you guys welcome Guy? I love you, brother.

Guy: Amen! Amen! Thank you, Matt. I love you too! Good day, Village Church! How are you all doing? It's so good to be with you. I love Texas, and I love, love, love this church. I'm so thankful for your love for Jesus. You are an evidence of his grace, and I just really rejoice in God for you and give a lot of thanks for Pastor Matt. You know, they say it takes a village to raise a child. I think it takes a

pretty amazing pastor to raise a village. I'm thankful for him, thankful for his love for Jesus, his integrity, his friendship, and his faithfulness.

As Matt mentioned, I am from Australia. I planted a church called City on a Hill. By God's grace, we've seen hundreds of people come to know Jesus. We've seen some new churches planted. In fact, this month in just a few weeks, we will celebrate our tenth anniversary together as a church. I want to thank you guys for your support, your investment in the gospel Down Under, and your ongoing prayers for that.

I caught up with a mate just yesterday. I was talking about the last time I visited Texas. I got to stay with a host family from The Village Church in this amazing home in Highland Village. Amazing! They were great people, and they treated me to some wonderful Southern hospitality. I loved that. He even loaned me the keys to his huge, black SUV truck thing. It was massive, right?

In Australia, our cars are half the size of this. I think you could probably fit the Great Barrier Reef, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and Russell Crowe in the back of one of these. It was huge! The other thing is in Australia, I drive on the left-hand side of the road. I was going down the interstate, flying along, and discovered you call that the *wrong* side of the road. I learned in that moment that Texans not only have bigger cars than Australians but bigger cuss words as well. So thank you for that.

I did have one slight disaster, and it's embarrassing, but we're family, right? Good. Good. So the host family was out, and I was visiting the bathroom, as you do. I hit the flush button and discovered something about America. The water moves in a clockwise direction in the Northern Hemisphere. If it's blocked, it doesn't go down. It comes up. On this particular occasion, it went right to the top and was teetering on the edge, like a car on a cliff face kind of moment.

I'm freaking out, because this mansion of a place and this bathroom is amazing, pristine white, white Persian rug, ornate statues. It's the Genesis 1 of bathrooms. Being the expert plumber I am, I said, "I know what will fix this. I'll hit the flush button again!" Yeah. Do you know what happens when you flush an already blocked toilet? It explodes! The water was like a fountain, not like a kind of a fountain you might see in a garden. It was more like a fountain in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. You're welcome.

At this point, you think a humble, Christian man should call the house owner and say, "I made this mess. Can you come and help me out?" No, no, no. I'm far too proud for that. I'm racing through the

house trying to find something to clean this up before they get home. I can't find any mops, can't find any towels. All I could find is a small fry pan.

Picture me like this in this amazing bathroom like ladling it into the shower, trying to clean this up as fast as I can, because the last thing I want is the family to come home and find me like this in the bathroom. Terrible! Terrible! I eventually conceded, called him up, told him what I'd done. He was more than gracious, more than thankful. That was awesome. Looking back, I did forget to tell him about the fry pan, so...whatever.

All of which to say, if you're looking for a decent plumber this weekend, I am not your guy, but I am very thankful to be in Texas and love the opportunity to open up God's Word with you. I reckon it's a good time for us to pray. Clearly, I need all the help I can get. So would you join me in that?

Heavenly Father, wow. We marvel at your goodness, your kindness, and your grace to us. We thank you that we woke up this morning. We woke up in your mercy, which was new every day. I thank you every single person here you know by name. They are fearfully, wonderfully made. It's no accident we've gathered together in your kindness, in your providence, in your purpose. You've brought us together to be one.

I pray, Lord, that as your Word goes out, you would achieve your purpose in this hour. Thank you, Lord, that your Word never returns empty. I pray you would take my dead words and make them come alive. I pray you'd take our dead hearts and make them come alive. May we come alive to your wonder and to your glory and your goodness. I pray this for our good. We pray this for your glory. We pray this in the precious name of Jesus. All of God's people said with one super loud voice, "Amen!" Amen.

I want to talk this morning about *The Vanity of Pleasure*. If you have a Bible handy, I want you to come with me to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 2. As you're going there, I want to share with you some lyrics to a song made famous by a jazz artist named Peggy Lee. Peggy Lee grew up in North Dakota before moving to the bright lights of Hollywood in search of fame and success.

After a few setbacks, she enjoyed an illustrious career in music, film, and television. In 1969, just before her fiftieth birthday, she recorded a song called "Is That All There Is?" This song found great resonance with her generation, and she won a Grammy in the following year. Let me share with you the lyrics to this song. Listen on in. She says...

I remember when I was a very little girl, our house caught on fire.
I'll never forget the look on my father's face as he gathered me up
In his arms and raced through the burning building out to the pavement.
I stood there shivering in my pajamas and watched the whole world go up in flames.
And when it was all over, I said to myself, "Is that all there is to a fire?"

Is that all there is? Is that all there is?
If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing.
Let's break out the booze and have a ball
If that's all there is.

And when I was twelve years old, my father took me to a circus, the greatest show on earth.
There were clowns and elephants and dancing bears,
And a beautiful lady in pink tights flew high above our heads.

And so I sat there watching the marvelous spectacle.
I had the feeling that something was missing.
I don't know what, but when it was over,
I said to myself, "Is that all there is to a circus?"

Is that all there is? Is that all there is?
If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing.
Let's break out the booze and have a ball
If that's all there is.

Then I fell in love, head over heels in love, with the most wonderful boy in the world.
We would take long walks by the river or just sit for hours gazing into each other's eyes.

We were so very much in love.
Then one day he went away, and I thought I'd die, but I didn't.
And when I didn't, I said to myself, "Is that all there is to love?"

Is that all there is? Is that all there is?
If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing.
Let's break out the booze and have a ball

If that's all there is.

What do you make of Peggy Lee's outlook on life? "If this is all there is, why not break out the booze and have a ball?" If this is all there is, why not make the most of this life and pursue and get your hands on as much pleasure as you possibly can? You might be surprised to hear this, but that pursuit of pleasure is exactly what the writer of Ecclesiastes set out to do. He was a man of fame, success, fortune, yet he became deeply suspicious with life.

Instead of purpose, he found futility. Instead of meaning, he found vanity. Instead of something, he looked at everything and said it was nothing more than a chasing after the wind. It was out of this deep angst with life that he, like Peggy Lee, sought a path of pleasure. He thought, "Well, if this is all there is, why not break out the booze and have a ball?"

What did he learn from the pursuit of pleasure? What observations did he make, and how might you and I here today learn from his experience? As we navigate this text together, I have three headings. First, let's begin with...

1. *When a king goes on spring break.* In Ecclesiastes 1, verse 1, it says, "**The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.**" Now a lot have speculated about who actually wrote Ecclesiastes, but it's clear the life and lessons of King Solomon are to be looming large on the stage of our minds. He was a man of great fame and fortune and had a great thirst and a great hunger for meaning, purpose, and life. Look with me to chapter 2, verse 1. It begins, "**I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with...'**" What? "**...pleasure; enjoy yourself.**"

The word *test* signifies what follows is somewhat of a scientific experiment where he wants to discover through personal experience. The word *pleasure* highlights what he wants to find. Did you note, however, where this conversation is taking place? "**I said in my heart...**" Now in the ancient world, the heart was kind of code for the inner being, the depth of mind, spirit, soul, the seat of your affections and will.

In other words, he is after more than just a good time or a fun night out. He is after deep fulfillment, deep satisfaction, deep, lasting joy. Do you relate to that (that hunger, that thirst, that desire)? Of course you do! Blaise Pascal famously said, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end."

I have four kids, and I remember the first time I took my kids through the doors of Costco. It arrived in Australia. It's huge! The first thing we were greeted with (I don't know if it's the same here) was the biggest TV screen and sound system you'd ever seen. Then to the left of that was this huge Jacuzzi package. You know, a Jacuzzi with all the special cup holders and people with balls throwing them and having a great time.

My daughter (her name is Summer) was 7 years old at the time. She looked at the TV screen, she looked at the Jacuzzi package, she looked at me, and said, "This is the life!" She was 7 years old, and she found herself at Costco. Right? What did she mean, "This is the life"? She meant, "This is where true happiness is! This is where you get fulfillment and lasting pleasure."

Now of course we can all chuckle at the honesty of a young child, but isn't it true that same tape is played in our heads all day long? "Oh, if I could just have *that*, then I'd be somebody. Then I'd be alive. If I could just get *there*, then I'd truly be living." Well, what if you could have it all now, if there were no limitations? No limitations to money, time, resources, opportunity. You'd have it all. Where would you go? What would you find?

Well, let's look at King Solomon's journey and where he began. Have a look with me to verse 3.

"I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven..." It's as if the preacher heads to the wine cellar and pours himself a full glass of red. He tells us he tried to cheer his heart. Sometimes he did it with wisdom, and sometimes he did it with folly.

Those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament will know *folly* refers to foolishness or ungodliness. There's a sense in which sometimes he drank in moderation, enjoying every sip, smelling it, whatever you do when you do that. Other times, he was foolish. He pushed the limits. Right?

I didn't grow up going to church, wasn't raised in a Christian home. I first tested my heart with alcohol when I was 13 years of age. We went to the bottle shop. My mate, the same age as me, somehow managed to convince the owner we were 18 years of age, which is the legal drinking age in Australia. We thought we'd enter into the scene with just a few beers. It turns out it's cheaper if you buy a case. Who would have thought?

I don't know if you know this, but a 13-year-old testing their heart with a case of beer is not a good idea. We spent the night singing, shouting, spewing, and then sleeping. Then we woke up the next day, talked about it with our mates. Then come Friday night the next week, we did it all again. Then we did it all again. That was pretty much the cycle I went on all through middle school.

There's a sense in which King Solomon had that kind of cycle. He kept testing his heart with alcohol, seeing if this would satisfy him until he got bored of that and tried something else. Have a look with me to verse 4. **"I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees."**

Historians point out for us, friends, that Solomon not only had these huge parties that would cater for upwards of 10,000 people but also spent a decade building this huge mansion/palace kingdom. Massive! Massive! The palace included a treasury. It included a judgment hall for his ivory throne. It included a particular palace for the daughter of Pharaoh, multiple rooms for his multiple wives (which we'll come to), and all of these gardens spanning outside, forests and trees.

It was huge! In fact, such is the scope of the work that you'll notice in verse 4, every single thing he mentions is in the plural, not the singular. He didn't build a house; he had houses. All right? He didn't build a garden; he had gardens. He didn't install one TV; he went all the way to Best Buy and said, "I'll take the lot." He had everything!

I was talking with my wife, Vanessa, about, "What is your happy place?" For me, it's quite easy. It's the beach. There are a lot of great beaches in Australia. I love to get to the beach, cool drink in one hand, full rack of ribs in the other. Right? Something light. That's my happy place.

For my wife, her happy place is the garden. She loves to be in the garden. I should say I'm never in the garden, which may explain why it's her happy place. She loves to plant things and watch them grow. It's not about necessity, is it? We don't need the tomatoes. It's about the pleasure of seeing the work of your hands.

There is a sense, friends, that when Solomon is building, growing, building, growing, he is doing that in pursuit of pleasure. He is testing his heart. Look at verse 7. **"I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem."**

Now when he says he bought many slaves, he is being a little modest. In fact, in 2 Chronicles, for example, we read there is a point in which Solomon did a census of all the foreigners living in Israel, which tallied up to 153,600 people. Do you know how many of the 153,600 were forced into labor? There were 153,600.

Why? You say, "Guy, well it's very obvious. He needed to build all this stuff, and he needed people to run the empire." True, but think with me on a little bit deeper level. Solomon has shared with us this is all part and parcel in his pursuit for pleasure. What is the pleasure in having all of these employees, in having all of these servants, in having all of this stuff? Might I suggest to you that it is the pleasure of power, the pleasure of being in control?

Søren Kierkegaard has a brilliant quote. Listen to what he says. "If I had a humble spirit in my service who, when I asked for a glass of water, brought me instead the world's costliest wines blended in a chalice, I should dismiss him, in order to teach him that my pleasure consists, not in what I enjoy, but in having my own way."

Do you hear what he is saying? Pleasure comes from being in control. Pleasure comes from having power. There were none who had as much control, as much power, as King Solomon. Look then to verse 8. **"I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man."** All right. So picture it. Huge festivals, parties. He books out Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake, Michael Bleecker. Right? The best!

Then he starts scrolling Tinder. Do you guys have Tinder? No one is putting up their hand. I understand. You guys have Tinder. I know. He is swiping right, and he gets tired of swiping right that he just gives the phone to his chief of staff and says, "Do you know what? Just bring all the women in. I'll have them all."

Historians point out he acquired for himself 300 concubines, 300 chosen women whose purpose was to satisfy whatever sexual fantasy or whatever need he had. There were 300 concubines alongside 700 wives. I know what you're thinking. "That's a lot of anniversaries to remember! How did he keep up?" I don't know, but he did make Hugh Hefner look like a nun. (Too soon, right?)

Verse 9. Note the humility. **"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep**

from them." Note those words. **"And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them."**

Think about that.

This is a man with more money than Bill Gates, more intelligence than Stephen Hawking, more creativity than Steve Jobs, more power than Donald Trump, more parties than Charlie Sheen, more followers than Justin Bieber, and more women than Ryan Gosling and One Direction combined. He had it all! He had everything. What did he learn? What did he discover from his adventures in spring break? This leads to our second insight, which I've called...

2. *The morning after*. Verse 11: **"Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold..."** Which means, "Take note!" **"...all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun."** I picture Solomon at this point waking up after a huge night out. There are women sprawled out in his room, to his left an empty bottle of Scotch, to his right a new tattoo.

He kind of gets out of bed, lights a cigarette, walks out to the balcony, opens the doors, and looks out on his kingdom below. As he is met with the coolness of the morning breeze he begins to consider his life. He begins to consider all he has done and all he has built. He begins to consider the man he has become.

That word *consider* in the Old Testament literally means to look something in the eye, to confront it, to face it, to ask the big, deep question. It's in that moment that he says, "Vanity! Vanity! All is vanity!" The word *vanity* speaks of meaninglessness.

It's not to say he didn't have a good time. It's not to say he didn't enjoy his success, his great parties, or women. It's saying, when he looked at it all, it was empty. It didn't satisfy the deep longings of his heart. It was there, and then it went. It was fleeting, like chasing after the wind. It was outside of his grasp. It came, and then it went.

As I was thinking on this I was reminded of this work of art by Damien Hirst. I think we have a picture of it. It's a sculpture. This is an eighteenth-century skull encrusted with 8,000 diamonds. It's worth something like \$100 million. I know what you're thinking: "This would make the ideal Valentine's gift...for your ex." Right? It's not the kind of thing you want to wake up to in the morning.

But there's something about this piece of art I like because, on one hand, it speaks of opulence, prosperity, and wealth. At the same time, it confronts you with your own mortality, because while diamonds are forever, we are not. The good things of this world are good, but they're fleeting. They don't satisfy the eternal longings. There's an emptiness, a futility. Have you ever considered that? Have you stopped and wondered, "Why is it the good things of this world don't ultimately satisfy?"

For me, that also kind of rubs against everything I've been told about this world, everything I've been told about life. I remember listening to an interview with Russell Brand, an English guy. He said something like, "I thought it would be good to be rich and famous. It would be good to have stuff. It would be good to have money and be invited to the party."

Well, I've been invited, and I've been in, and we're having this chat in this swish private men's club in east London. It's super cool. There are bare brick walls, and everyone is double good-looking. I've been inside now. I've seen the other side of the looking glass, and it ain't flippin' worth it! It ain't flippin' worth it! It doesn't feed your soul. I still feel empty inside."

His words were a little more colorful than that. I gave you the light version, right? Do you hear the point? We all grow up believing that if we could just have (blank), we'd be satisfied, don't we? One of the ways you and I deal with the dissatisfaction of (blank) is telling ourselves, "Well, maybe I just need more of (blank). I have success. Hmm. Maybe I need *more* success. I have *some* beauty. I guess I need *more* beauty. I'm having *decent* sex. I guess I need *better* sex and *more* sex. I have *her* approval. I guess I need *her* approval."

We run, and we strive. Some of us pray, and we work. We go in and out. We try day after day striving and running for that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but what if King Solomon is right? What if Russell Brand is right? What if that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is nothing more than an illusion, a myth?

It brings to mind the words of a great philosopher of our day, and my vote for the next president, Jim Carrey. He said, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer." Why aren't these things the answer? Why *aren't* these things the answer?

First, did you notice the most dominant word in our text today? It's actually the word *I*. "*I* searched. *I* made. *I* bought. *I* had. *I* became. *I* surpassed." King Solomon uses the word *I* 40 times. Forty times!

Now admittedly it's an autobiographical work, but it does hint at just how self-seeking and self-orientated he became.

You say, "What's the problem with that?" The problem is almost all studies in the field of happiness, in the church or out of the church, reveal lasting joy is never found in what you can get *from* the world but the meaningful, living relationships you share with others *in* the world. Right? So nobody comforted themselves on their deathbed by counting the number of Mercedes-Benz vehicles they owned. No one comforted themselves by counting off the number of women with whom they slept.

No, we find comfort in our deathbed recognizing and being surrounded by people we love and know and people who know and love us. But here's the deal. You will never have lasting, loving relationships with others if life is all about you. Meaningful, deep relationships require...what? Sacrifice. They require us taking our own pleasures and sacrificing them for the sake of the other.

Here's an example (just a small one) in my life. I have a good mate. His name is Luke. He is actually a pastor in one of our churches. He was being ordained by the denomination we are in. It's a big deal in a minister's life. They go to like this gothic cathedral building. They dress up in big gowns from the sixteenth century. They recite liturgy. There is, you know, all of this kind of stuff. Family and friends are invited in to kind of mark that special occasion.

Here's the problem. The service goes for longer than two hours, and it's dead boring. By "dead boring," I mean if you try and sit through the whole thing, you could in fact die. So I had agreed to go months in advance. "Of course I'll be there, brother. Of course I'll be there! You're my mate, right? We're good friends."

I wake up in the morning. The sun is out, and the beach is calling my name. Where is my happy place? The beach! I'm thinking of excuses. "Car busted. The car doesn't work. Oh, my wife is a bit unwell. Oh, one of my kids had an accident." That could be arranged, right? Now you'll be happy to know I did go, but the battle was real. I just share that because I know what life is like, and you would know what it's like. Why? Because I, like so many in our generation, worship one god made up of three persons: *me, myself, and I*.

The idol of self is, I would say, the greatest tempting idol of our culture and generation. The idol of self will call you to sacrifice the needs and wants of others for your own glory, your own joy, your own self-seeking pleasure. I mean, just think about it in really simple and practical ways. Do you

ever click "maybe" on Facebook because you just want to keep your options open? Do you struggle to commit to your girlfriend or your boyfriend because you always just want to keep your eye over the shoulder and see who else is coming through?

Do you always move from one job to the next job, one friendship to the next friendship, one church to the next church because you're constantly evaluating things based on what you get out of it? Here's the deal, friends. If you make your life all about your needs, your wants, your pleasure, your desires, you will in the end die a lonely and unsatisfied individual. It's true! It's sad, but it's true.

In fact, it's even more than that, because the pursuit of self-seeking pleasure not only dehumanizes others in the process; it actually destroys your own soul. I read a brilliant book about 12 months ago called *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It's by the great Oscar Wilde. This is your spoiler alert warning. The book has been out for about a hundred years, so no excuses for you guys.

It's an amazing book. It's about a young guy called Dorian. He is a wealthy and good-looking man who has a portrait painted of him. It captures his beauty. It captures him. He looks at it, and he marvels at it. Then he is struck by a terrible thought. This portrait will capture his beauty for all eternity. It will never age. It will look wonderful forever, unlike him. He will age. He will lose his beauty. He laments this, and he bargains with heaven.

He says, "Let this painting take on the stain of age. Let this painting take on my weariness, my despair, my shame, and my brokenness. Let it take it so I may walk with eternal beauty and eternal life." Under that bargain, he then enters into the world and pursues all the kind of self-seeking pleasure he wants. He becomes a disciple of hedonism. He gets into a relationship with a young actress. They're falling in love, and yet after one failed performance which embarrasses him in front of his mates, he dumps her cold.

That night, he goes home, looks at the painting, and notices it's changed. It now sneers. He is frustrated by this. He goes to seek out the young girl only to discover, in response to the breakup, she kills herself. He doesn't know what to do. His friend says, "Don't worry about it. See it as a triumph, an artistic triumph to your romance and to your love."

He accepts this advice and goes deeper and deeper into his path of hedonism, pursuing all manner of sin, all manner of self-indulgence, all manner of debauchery. All the while, the painting contorts

and distorts, gets uglier, more grotesque, and so vile that in the end, Dorian spends more time trying to hide the portrait from anyone seeing it than he does pursuing his own pleasure.

Why did Oscar Wilde write *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? I believe because he knew something of the futility and vanity of self-seeking pleasure. He knew it not only dehumanizes others but also will in the end stain your soul for good. Friends, this is the sad irony of Ecclesiastes. King Solomon had all the wealth, all the wisdom, and yet he lived the life of a fool. Instead of sharing all he had with others, instead of extending himself and building healthy, loving relationships with others, he was a lonely man. He lost the pleasure. He lost the beauty. He lost what was good.

There's a third and fundamental reason, though, why these things of the world are not the answer. This leads me to the final point, which I've called...

3. *The mansion too big to fill.* In Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, he pens some of the most beautiful words in the entire book. Verse 11. He says, "[God] **has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart...**" Think about that. On one hand, he is saying, "There is beauty in this world. God has made a beautiful world. God has made us to enjoy the beautiful things of this world. There's beauty in food. There's beauty in wine. There's beauty in work. There's beauty in sex. There's beauty in friendship. There's beauty in family."

There are beautiful things God has made for us to know and enjoy. Yet at the same time, he recognizes God has also placed eternity in our hearts. In other words, we were created with eternal desires. We were created for eternal beauty. We were created for eternal pleasure. We were created for eternal joy, and ultimately we were created for eternal love.

Do you know that? You were made for eternal love. The great author Victor Hugo came to the exact same conclusion about life. He said, "The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; love for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves." Brothers and sisters, you have to ask the question where you can know a love like that, where you can rest in a love like that, where you can know and be secure in a love that transcends all the other loves of this world.

Of course, the answer in the Bible is God and God alone. You were made for him. You were made for God! Listen to the passion of the psalmist. Psalm 63. "**Because your steadfast...**" What? "**...love is better than life...**" Psalm 73. "**Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth**

that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but..." Who? "...God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Psalm 16. **"In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."** Psalm 84. I love this. **"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere."** "I've been in all of those rooms. I tried all of this, but better is one day with you." Psalm 136. **"Give thanks to..."** Whom? **"...the LORD, for he is..."** What? **"...good, for his steadfast love endures forever."** His steadfast love endures forever.

Don't you love the passion? Don't you love what is gripping their hearts? Unlike Solomon who looked at everything under the sun, found vanity, and saw nothing, they look at everything above the sun and found everything. It's not to say they had life easy. It's not to say they didn't struggle in life. It's not to say they didn't face suffering, brokenness, despair, distraction, or doubt. It is to say that in the midst of all of that, they had their anchor in God.

He was their security. He was their answer. He was their hope. He was their love and their joy. I want you to ask yourself today, is that true of your life? Is that true of your life? Do you know this God? I'm not asking if you come to church regularly. I'm asking, have you tasted and seen that he is good, so good that you know with great joy and confidence that this God of goodness, this God of glory, this God of cosmic wonder came close to you in Christ, that he pursued you, that he sought you out with great love at great cost to himself that you would know the wonder of God?

You know, I mentioned before about the portrait of Dorian Gray and how the portrait took on all his sin, age, and shame. Man, isn't it incredible to know, when Jesus came to this world, he came to take on our sin and shame? He took on my drunkenness, my lust, my greed, my pride, my "self-seekingness." He took it all on himself. He took on your drunkenness. He took on your greed. He took on your lust. He took on your pride. He who knew no sin became sin.

Jesus became the portrait. Do you know what happened to the portrait of Dorian Gray? It became so vile to Dorian that in the end, he took a blade to it to try and destroy it forever. It is staggering to me to know Jesus knew the cost of him entering the stage of human history that there came a time where we found his face so vile, so grotesque, that we put a blade to him.

The Bible says Jesus embraced the horrors of the cross. Jesus endured the wrath of God, and he did all of that willingly and joyfully out of the love and security he had with his Father and out of his

love for you. Through his life, through his death, through his resurrection, he knew you could be forgiven for all your sin. He knew you could be set free from all your self-indulgent, self-seeking pleasure. He knew above all else, you could be brought home to the loving arms of God.

John says, "**In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**" This is the only love. This is a love that's better than life. I know you long for love. You were made for love. You're not going to find it in the world. You're not going to find it in yourself. You find it in God and him alone.

I spent so many of my years trying to find something: meaning, purpose, satisfaction in the world. It was empty. At 14-15 years of age, someone gifted me (very courageously) with a Bible. They said, "I think you might want to read this." It was a Good News Bible. It came with pictures, which I needed. I began to read about this Jesus, began to hear of his truth, not just historical truth but truth of the heart. I began to see his compassion, his power, and his love.

You know, I've had a lot of doubts, distractions, highs, and lows ever since giving my life to Jesus, but I tell you today it was the best decision I ever made. Do you remember what Jesus said? "**I came that they may have life and have it...**" What? "**...abundantly.**" We don't need to speculate what that life is because he goes on to say in John 17, "**And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**" You were made for him. Do you know him? Is he your everything?

The awesome thing about Jesus, friends, is he not only satisfies our heart, but I have come to see he helps redeem all the pleasures of this world. In Jesus, I can redeem the pleasure of relationships because people are no longer objects to be used but image bearers to be loved. In Jesus, we can redeem the gift of work. Instead of running to your work to try and earn your approval and earn your status and identity, you can live out of your identity in Jesus as a son and daughter of the living God.

Instead of worshiping sex as your god, you can redeem it as a gift to be enjoyed like all other gifts that are found in the purpose and pleasure of God himself. Jesus is like the sun that has to sit at the center of the solar system holding all the other planets in orbit. That's what he does with our pleasures, but he must be central in your life. He must be your greatest love, your highest joy, your most passionate pursuit.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who could just be the fourth member of the Trinity, once said this: "If Christ is not all to you, he is nothing to you. He will never go into partnership as a part Savior of man. If he be something, he must be everything..." If he be something to you, he must be everything. Village Church, please know this. Solomon was not an atheist. He believed in God, but to him, God was like the moon, which is *there* but not *here*.

It was controlling the tides of life but never occupying the affections of his heart or governing the direction of his will. Do not make the same mistake. Do not give your life to lesser, futile pleasures. Find your rest in Jesus. Find your security, joy, and love in him. Would you stand with me as we pray and commit ourselves to our good God?

Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your wonder, your majesty, and your beauty. We thank you that by your Spirit, you are ministering to us right now, though we confess how easy it is, Lord, to give ourselves to other pleasures, to give our desires to lesser loves. Lord, we thank you that you know us. You care for us, and your mercy is anew every day.

I thank you even right now you are calling us home. Even right now, you are calling us into a deeper, living, loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Lord, may we be content in him and hungry for more. May we be satisfied in him and thirsty for more. We thank you, Lord. We love you, Lord. We pray this for our good and your glory. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.