

I was reading Forbes magazine a while back. And I ran across an article about college. Specifically, the article was entitled, “The 10 Worst College Majors.” Of course, being Forbes magazine, their idea of “worst” came from a particular bias. That was obvious by a quote in the second paragraph of the article: “Most young people in college take whatever interests them, without thinking what it can really do for them.”

Heaven forbid a college student take a course in something that actually interests them. No, no, no... what can this course do for me financially. That's what really matters.

Now, some of you who know my own personal history know why I have such a strong reaction to that statement. Because I went to college looking for a degree that would “do something for me.” And after two years of beating my head against a wall, I switched to a major that actually interested me. That major just happened to be English Literature. Which came in at #10 on the Forbes' list of worst majors. I then took that degree and went on to get my Masters of Divinity. Which came in at #4 on the Forbes' list of worst majors.

So apparently, I am a living, breathing example of what NOT to do. And I'm proud of that. Because despite breaking every rule they laid down, I do not consider myself a failure. And I do not consider my degrees in English and Theology to be poor choices or bad investments.

Though, I will grant, that they are not financially lucrative. Nobody in their right mind becomes a pastor for the money. Not unless they intend to become a con-artist, which, unfortunately, a few do. The best that a real pastor can ever hope to receive is enough meet the needs of his family. I'm not here to make money any more than this church is here to make money. Being a pastor is a non-profit profession. I know that and I accept it gladly.

But is being a Christian in general a non-profit profession? That's a trickier question. And I think it's one of the reasons why the church really, really doesn't like to talk about money. It's not that we're all greedy sinners, although that may be true. It's just that, the Bible talks about money a lot, but it isn't always real clear about what it's trying to say.

Take this passage in Mark from our Gospel lesson. *“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”* We've got a great principle here. Greed has no place in God's kingdom. God does not look at a man's wealth. The pursuit of possessions will only hinder your faith and witness. Good stuff.

But that still doesn't help us answer the tough questions. How much should I give to the church? Where is the line between prudent savings and greed? How generous do I need to be? The Bible seems pretty good at telling us what we shouldn't do, but it's not quite so clear on what we should do.

But that's why I love this passage from Ecclesiastes. That's why I love the book of Ecclesiastes in general. Because there's nothing like a grumpy old man to 'tell it like it is'.

That's what we've got here. Solomon is at the end of his life. He's been king for close to 40 years now. He's got 700 wives and 300 concubines (which is more than enough to make any man bitter). And so he finally sits down to write a very wise, very Godly, but very blunt assessment of life for his sons.

And what does he say? Money is not all its cracked up to be. And he should know. He's one of the richest men who ever lived. But that's what he tells us over and over again. *“As [a man] came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand... just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?”*

As the old saying goes, you can't take it with you. In fact, as he previously explained in the passage, you can't even pretend to take it with you by saying, for example, that you want to leave it for your children. Because chances are, you'll lose it anyway. The stock market will crash, or you'll end up in the hospital, or you'll be robbed, or your kids will just waste it anyway.

We try all these different ways of convincing ourselves that the actions of our life have some sort of eternal meaning. That we can somehow cheat death by accumulating wealth or prestige or the admiration of those around us. But the truth is, you are going to die and be nothing more than a pile of dust in the ground. And that is all the meaning your life will have.

It seems like a pretty hopeless way of looking at things. And yet, Solomon still finds a reason for hope by the end of our Old Testament lesson. He tells us that everyone should accept his lot and rejoice in his toil because this is the gift of God. In short, Solomon still has hope because there is still a God above giving good gifts to His children. And that alone is a reason for joy.

If that was enough to give Solomon hope, then our hope should be so much greater. Because we don't just believe in a God up above. We believe in a God who came down to earth and dwelt among us.

Our hope lies in Jesus Christ, and our meaning lies in what He is doing here among us right now. We live in the hope of something greater than a pile of dust in the earth. We live in the hope of a God who loves and forgives. The hope of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. The hope of a God who raises the dead and brings life back from dust. From dust you were created. To dust you will return. From dust you will be recreated.

And so we echo Solomon's words all the more joyfully. Don't spend your life working for something that will be nothing more than dust in a few years. And don't despair in that fact. Enjoy your life! God gave it to you as a gift. In fact, he's made that gift even greater than it once was. For we don't just find enjoyment in the few days of life that God has given us. We find enjoyment in the eternal life that God has given us.

You can't take any possession from this life with you. Not even this life itself. But you can take the new life given by Jesus Christ with you. It's the one thing you can hold onto through the despair of death and still find it in your hands on the other side. Which makes it more valuable than anything else you will ever possess.

And it is the one thing that brings true joy and meaning to your life. But only if you remember that this is not your life. This is the life that God has given you. And this is not your wealth, these are not your possessions. These are the wealth and possessions that God has given you.

If you were a worker in a factory, would you consider the machines you use, your own personal machines? Of course not! They're the company's machines. All you take from the factory is a small paycheck in return for the work that you agreed to do.

When you were a child doing chores in your family's home, did the fact that you did chores there mean that you owned the home? Of course not! You did the chores because you were told to. And because your parents were putting food on the table and clothes on your back.

We are workers in God's kingdom. We are children in God's family. The life and wealth and possessions he has given us are tools for the glory of His kingdom. They were not yours to begin with. And they are certainly not yours after you give them back to God.

So the question, "How much do you give to God?" kinda has no meaning. You give nothing to God. Because you have nothing to give. The question is really, "How much do you give **back** to God?" And to that, I give you the answer of a man much wiser man than I am.

Have enough to eat and drink. Have enough to find satisfaction in your labor. Enjoy what God has given you with gratitude in your heart. But also accept your lot in life, and be happy with your work. Let the Lord keep you occupied with gladness in your heart.

So that when your last die comes, you don't spend it reflecting on the days of your life and how meaningless they ultimately were. But instead you reflect on the days of your new life. The life awaiting you in paradise. Where suffering and death will end. And meaning will begin. Amen.