

Dear members and friends of St. John,

What is the meaning of life? Secular scholars and philosophers have been asking this question for thousands of years. Maybe you've wondered about it yourself? The book of Ecclesiastes is a view of life *without* God in it. It sums up the experience of millions of people over the years that have rejected God, and therefore drift through this life, wondering what life's all about. We read, "*I thought in my heart, '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 foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?'*³ *I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.*⁴ *I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.*⁵ *I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.*⁶ *I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees... I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.*¹¹ *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... For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!*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"*(Ecclesiastes 2).

Remember, I said that this is **the view of life without God**. We have a loving God that doesn't want you to despair over life's value. God created you for a reason – He gives you breath and life – He has a **purpose** for your life. So, how do we know what that purpose is?

Like everything else of importance in our life, **the Word of God has the answer**. So where should we look in the Bible? Surprisingly, in God's Law. God's commandments weren't given to man so that man could be miserable - a yoke that must be carried. No, they were intended for good. They were given so that life could have real meaning. And what sums up all the commandments? Jesus asked an expert in the Law what the Law of God is all about. He replied, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus answered him, "*You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live*" (Luke 10:27,28, NIV). Of course this is Law, and it shows us **our failure** to keep it. But it also points to God desire for us. "You will live" is more than just eternal life, but it's *life today* – and *each day* that He lives in us! **God gives life real meaning – through His Spirit working in us - that allows us to love our Lord, and to love one another!**

Let's begin with **loving our Lord**. We understand that love is a fruit of the Spirit. And the measure of how much we are able to love God is tied to the strength of our faith. Since faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), our ability to *love our Lord* is tied to the closeness of our relationship with Him (see the related article in this newsletter, "When You Want a Stronger Faith"). The more we are in His Word and the more frequently we receive Holy Communion - the stronger our faith will be, and the deeper our love for Him will be. We must strive to reconnect ourselves daily, since our sinful nature, the world, and Satan want nothing more than to separate us from our Lord – and to diminish our love for Him. Why is this first commandment the most important? Because our

ability to carry out the second table of the Law – to “love your neighbor as yourself” – **must** begin with love of God. The closer our relationship with our Lord is, the greater our ability is to understand His will for our lives. And that means we can begin to see God’s purpose for each day! **Real meaning in this life starts with a loving relationship with our Lord!**

Strengthened by God, we now **go out into the world** to carry out the **vocations** that God has given us. This is the ‘loving your neighbor as yourself’ part of God’s Word. God has given us unique talents and abilities that allow us to serve our neighbor in love. People always think of their employment as their vocation, but God sees vocation differently. ANY and ALL relationships that He places you in, as a friend, neighbor, parent, student, sibling, teacher, office worker, volunteer, grandparent, factory worker – all are vocations, and each day lived out in these relationships is an opportunity to help your neighbor in need. It may be producing a product or completing a service that helps society function. It may be a word of encouragement. It may be a helping hand. It may mean going out of your way to assist someone. It may mean sacrificing your time and personal resources to be Jesus to someone else. In each of your vocations, and we all have many, the love that our Lord has showered on you, bubbles up from within, and **God’s love is extended to others**. Contrary to what the world teaches, we don’t do it for a warm fuzzy feeling inside. We do it because we genuinely love our neighbor. That love is a gift from God. As we carry out our vocations, with love from above, **we accomplish the will of our Father in heaven! Life has meaning! Real meaning!**

Now, some of you may be thinking “I’ve been attending church for years, and I don’t see this in my life. I don’t sense this kind of meaning in my life.” A word of caution is necessary. ‘Church attendance’ does not guarantee that your relationship with God will grow and flourish. You need to put in more than just ‘time in the pew.’ Are you listening to the worship readings, trying to understand them – or is it just another part of worship. Do you sing hymns without thinking about the words, or do you sing them and study the words for meaning? Do you truly listen to the sermon, or do you wait for a good illustration to come along, that might peak your interest? **Going through the motions of worship will not grow your relationship with God.** How about daily devotions and weekly Bible study time? Without God’s Word as a priority in your life, your faith will suffer. Your love for God will wane. Your ability to share God’s love with others will decrease. And life will begin to look meaningless.

Look at the words from Ecclesiastes one more time. What’s missing? - any mention of God or neighbor! **What is described is a life that focuses on ‘me’, instead of God and His will for my life.** God wants your life to have real meaning. He created you for good works that He has prepared before hand for you to accomplish. But to do this, you must grow close to Him. Worship participation, daily devotions, weekly Bible study time is how God prepares you for this life and the life to come. **Strengthened by God, we move out into the world each day with a sense of purpose – God has work for you to do.** May He help you to carry it to completion, in the Day of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Pastor Travis