

Enjoy life with the one you love, as long as you live the useless life that God has given you in this world.

Ecclesiastes 9:1-10

November 5, 2017

Yes, the living know they are going to die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward; they are completely forgotten. Their loves, their hates, their passions, all died with them. They will never again take part in anything that happens in this world.

Oh, Ecclesiastes! We meet again and you are just so uplifting this week!

This passage starts off rather drab, doesn't it? Awfully blunt and directly to the point, with little to no beating around the bush. Those before us, you, me and those to come -- all sharing a common destiny. We all are going to die and we all are perfectly aware of it.

All of us are going vanish from this physical earth whether we are accountants or dental hygienists or middle school teachers or photographers.

We all will perish whether white or black or gay or rich or wise. Taking care of our bodies is a wonderful accomplishment, but even eating all the vegetables we possibly can will not prevent death.

A good person is no better off than a sinner.

What?! -- So we should all be cranky accountants and ornery middle school teachers because it is ultimately irrelevant how we behave one way or another? No, this is not to say that a good person and a sinner are the *same* person. We should not completely disregard our duties to be gentle and kind-hearted humans and go about our lives being sinfully rude. Rather, this means each and every human dies. A good person dies, a sinner dies.

Ecclesiastes has been the most wonderful, yes, wonderful slap in my face I think I have ever received. It has challenged me -- as it should you. Many of us have learned thus far, that we are dust, most things in life are useless, like chasing the wind, but with positive connotation. And if you are busy and stressed out at the same time then you are wasting this precious gift of life. I agree with Ben's statement of Ecclesiastes being such a reality check, making anxieties and worries seem hollow. Many of you are aware that I am a college student. A stressed out college student. I started this school year with three jobs. Thanks to the wake-up call from the philosopher, I now only have two. Baby steps :)

But really what is the intention here? What is God's intention? The answer is not completely about all dying with a common destiny. It is about God being in control of our common destinies. We do not control when our death day comes. And with God having the hold on our reins in life -- He gives us happiness. It's truly about the happiness we are so freely given in this journey, this life, this destiny. Read further...

Always look happy and cheerful. Enjoy life with the one you love, as long as you live the useless life that God has given you in this world.

Not too long ago, my Great Grandma Reichenbacker passed away at the age of eighty-four years young. She died -- the commonality she shares with you and me and your loved ones. She was and is my Grandma Vicki Ahrens mother. My Great Grandma and I were not that close, probably due to the reason she produced enough people to create a small village. To put into perspective on just how big her family is, her immediate family took up one whole side of the church at her funeral while guests took up the other half. She had eight children, my Grandma Vicki being one of them. She whole-heartedly loved all eight of her children for their unique perfections and flaws. My Grandma Vicki had four children, my mother being one of them. My mom had three children, myself being one of them. See what I mean on the size of the family? The strand I come from is only one small part.

Even though I was not close with my Great Grandma, I did know a few things. She did exactly as the philosopher proclaimed! She lived her life with the ones she loved, didn't work overly hard, always appeared cheerful and was deeply happy with the simplicity of her life. She had oddball jobs, but was mostly a home maker. As she got older, we as a family would reserve a decent chunk of area at her nursing home to have a Christmas celebration. She sat in her wheelchair, smiling at all of the faces she had created -- never complaining, never dissatisfied. She was so invested in having a uselessly happy life.

My Grandma Vicki resembles her mother almost identically. Lives so simply, loves her husband and children and grandchildren, and has a deep belly laugh if you get her going. She's one of my truest friends for a reason!

But *always* look happy and cheerful? Doing so seems rather unattainable. Nearly impossible. How must we be constantly merry when the rates of depression and anxiety and suicide are rapidly increasing? How must we be constantly over joyed and full of life when mental health facilities and social workers are suffering from large budget cuts? How must we be cheerful when mass murder and famine and hurricanes and floods break us down? How must we be happy when the extreme pressure to get a college degree, to make a good living, to do better than our parents, is ever so real... only to find out the resumes and jobs and money are all blatantly useless!

I have wondered, If I decided that I did not want to follow through with a college education, but instead, I wanted to be a stay at home mom because doing so would be moderately simple and make me happy, would that truly change the person I am? Yes, it would change the fact I would be perceived as less intelligent and sought out to have a lower work ethic by society -- but it would not change the person I am deep down. Yes, my parents would be saddened and maybe disappointed. But would they love me any less? The answer is probably not.

Go ahead—eat your food and be happy; drink your wine and be cheerful.

If you have looked at your bulletin cover you may have noticed a couple of giddy, gleaming girls who put a camera on self-timer a few feet in front of them in the Colorado Rockies. My dear friend Katherine Kaliban and I made a westward visit to our friend Kathleen Marsh this past summer. Here, we are doing exactly this -- eating our food and being cheerful. Sharing the simplest of meals, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Cracking useless jokes with one another, taking useless pictures, climbing useless heights and happier than ever. A time of stress-free, “Rocky Mountain High” bliss.

This is the good stuff -- right here! It says it!

It's all right with God.

Although we cannot avoid the occasional sadness, happiness is such a full and rich gift we can all learn to utilize more. So, here I may offer a few suggestions. And if you already do a lot of these things -- seriously, good for you!

Work hard at whatever you do, because there will be no action, no thought, no knowledge, no wisdom in the world of the dead—and that is where you are going.

Work hard, play hard! Sounds cliché, but this could bring you happiness. Do not spend your life working for the goal of saving and investing so much money for a future that never comes, a tomorrow you are unaware about. Work hard because there will be no work when you die and play hard and experience all of the fun and playing this world has to offer! Take that vacation with some of the extra money you have. Go explore God's beauty because it's not too late! It's never too late, for we don't know what tomorrow brings!

If you were asked what you would do if you *knew* today was your last day would your answer be similar to one of Tim McGraws' most popular songs, “Live Like You Were Dying?”

The lyrics read:

I went skydiving. I went Rocky Mountain climbing... I loved deeper, I spoke sweeter, and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying.

Eat the pizza! Eat the salads too, but there is no point in restricting yourself to such high extremes when we all share the same fate. Share a meal with a friend. Have a real, deep, healing, conversation with someone. Odds are, it will make their day and make yours too. Spend more time engaging in the hobbies you love. Celebrate the art of today!

If you are living as if enjoying life is a sin -- stop!

This is what God wants and intends for us -- happiness. Pure happiness. Happiness is a gift like no other. It is not to be thrown away. Loosen up, because the grip you have on the life you are trying to perfectly control is not your grip to have -- It is God's. Enjoy this life with your useless spouses, and useless coworkers, and useless friends, and useless pets.

When we stress less, share more, partake in activities we love and be plain and simple, we have happiness. And when we have happiness, we have God.