

FROM DUST TO DIAMONDS – IN 40 DAYS
“WHAT ON EARTH AM I HERE FOR”
ECCLESIASTES 1:12-15 / 12:9-14

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. IT IS ONLY THROUGH A VIBRANT AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST THAT WE FIND SATISFACTION FOR THE DEEPEST LONGINGS IN OUR LIVES.

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This morning, we are starting week #1 in our “Purpose Driven Life” campaign. On Wednesday, during the Ash Wednesday service, we said that our theme during this Lenten campaign will be “From dust to diamonds – in 40 days.” That without Christ, we are no different than the rest of creation, we are but dust of the earth. However, we were created unique from the rest of creation in that we were created for a particular purpose we were created to be containers that would hold the living God. As we come to realize God’s purpose for our lives, and start to live the purpose out, we will be changed from mere dust, to diamond containers.

So let us start from the beginning: God’s plan for each one of us is that we are to be the location of God’s presence and ministry on earth. Since, we are containers that are supposed to leak it is our contents that make us valuable, and we are to spill out the love, ministry, and presence of God onto all we come into contact with. God’s plan for each one of us is that He wants to live in us and minister through us and we also said that all we have to do to have God come into our lives and live inside of us, is to ask Him. For the next 6 weeks we want to ask, “What does God hope to accomplish in me and through me,” but this week we want to ask, “What on earth am I here for?”

This morning, we want to find the right starting place, where can we gain a foothold to start to find meaning in life? The Bible says that we must start from God, if God created the universe and all that is in it then we must start with Him. The problem is that most of us are rather successful, we have gone to school, worked hard, and have come to think that we deserve what we have. This morning, I would like to ask us to put those thoughts aside. We need to approach this with open and humble minds, and I know, it is hard to be humble when we have worked so hard all our lives to get where we are. Let me give you an example.

This didn't happen here; I know it never would but remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough that even when they were honoring me for my achievements, there was always someone there to remind me that earthly achievements aren't worth much.

One Sunday evening, the church had a potluck dinner, honoring my 5th anniversary as their pastor. A lot of people got up and said nice things about me. Wanting to be humble, I said, "All that I am, I owe to my parents." One of the deacons shouted out, "Then why don't you give them the 25 cents you owe them and pay off your debts?"

I know that would never happen here. Right? But let us see if we can answer the question, "What on earth am I here for?"

It doesn't matter how successful we are, how much money we have, or how comfortable we are able to live, there is a hunger deep inside our souls that always seems to be missing. What is it that will satisfy the deepest longings of our soul? What will it take to fill that emptiness that no amount of money or achievement can satisfy? Well that will be the main idea of our study this morning. If you're visiting with us for the first time this morning, I would invite you to follow along on the outlines you have in your bulletins. **IT IS ONLY THROUGH A VIBRANT AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST THAT WE FIND SATISFACTION FOR THE DEEPEST LONGINGS IN OUR LIVES**, the first step to finding purpose in our lives, is to find Jesus, and enter a personal relationship with Him.

I. WHAT ARE WE SEARCHING FOR? (Vs. 1:12-13a)

OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS IN LIFE HAVE TO DO WITH LOVE, SECURITY, AND FINDING MEANING IN LIFE.

In chapter 1, verse 12 and the first half of verse 13 will give us some insight into what we are searching for. We will see that **OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS IN LIFE HAVE**

TO DO WITH LOVE, SECURITY AND FINDING MEANING IN LIFE. We all have this need to give and receive love we have a need to feel safe and secure and we have a need to know that our lives have counted for something. Neil Anderson has explained these three areas in depth in his books.

A. THE METHOD

Let's take a look at the method the search takes. In verse 12, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes identifies himself as Solomon, the King of Israel. If you have been attending our regular Sunday morning services, you will recognize King Solomon as the primary author of the Proverbs. Listen how he describes his pursuit of wisdom where he says, "I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven." He devoted himself! He did not just read a few books, watch some PBS television special, or listen to talk radio he devoted himself to a life-long pursuit of knowledge. His wisdom was legendary and people from all over the world came to hear King Solomon's wisdom. He is credited with writing 3,000 proverbs and writing over 1,000 songs. He classified all biological plants and animals, and studied anthropology. This is the king who God blessed with the gift of wisdom, he was no amateur. This whole book of Ecclesiastes is Solomon's systematic approach to search out the meaning of life.

B. THE TOPIC

That brings us to the topic of Solomon's search we will see throughout the book that Solomon is focused on life under heaven, what are the things that give meaning and joy to life. Now keep this in mind King Solomon had unlimited resources, he had access to money, power, wealth and influence. He was Israel's most wealthy, educated, and influential king and if we were to read through the entire book, we too could see that his search focuses on these three categories.

* LOVE

People are hungry for love and it is what all of us desire. We want to be in a relationship where we can give and receive love freely, we want to be known intimately and we want to know others intimately and we want to know that there is someone who understands us and accepts us for who we are.

* SECURITY

Second, we have a deep need for security, we have a need to feel safe and secure, and we want to feel good about our future.

* MEANING

And third, we all want to believe that our lives count for something, we want to know that we have made a difference. This is the topic of the entire book of Ecclesiastes, and it will be our topic for this morning. So what we are saying about the nature of life is this; **OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS IN LIFE HAVE TO DO WITH LOVE, SECURITY AND FINDING MEANING IN LIFE.**

II. SEARCHING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES (Vs. 1:13b-15)

WHEN WE LOOK FOR LOVE, SECURITY, AND MEANING IN LIFE APART FROM GOD, WE WILL END UP FRUSTRATED, AND ALWAYS LOOKING FOR MORE.

The main problem most people face is that we find ourselves searching in all the wrong places, that's what the second half of verse 13 through 15 is about: **WHEN WE LOOK FOR LOVE, SECURITY, AND MEANING IN LIFE APART FROM GOD, WE WILL END UP FRUSTRATED, AND ALWAYS LOOKING FOR MORE.** If we were to go back to the very beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes, we would hear Solomon moan out in frustration, "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity." And in these verses he starts out, "What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind!" In other words, these needs are powerful, unless they are fulfilled, we will always feel restless, and life will never seem satisfying. Animals are content to eat, find shelter, and procreate but humans need more than this we need to find emotional and spiritual satisfaction as well. The

problem for us is that we don't know where to start looking we fall into the same trap that humans have fallen into since the beginning of time.

A. UNDER THE SUN

We start to look for these things -- look at verse 14 -- under the sun. Under the sun will be a phrase that Solomon uses throughout the book, here is what he means by under the sun; like our modern day approach to life, he is going to take a perspective that is limited to this world, the search will limit itself to earthly, observable data. It rules out God and makes us as humans the center of existence so we start with ourselves as the center. Our language betrays us, doesn't it? I talk about my job, my house, my car, my wife, my husband, my boyfriend, my girlfriend, my church, my ... my... my.... And who is it that we look for to help us find meaning, people who think like we do.

* SEX AND PLEASURE

Let us just look at the world we live in and see how we have tried to meet those fundamental needs that we have. Let's start with sex and pleasure. We have already described the love we are looking for, we have this need to give and receive love, we have this need to be known and accepted for who we are this takes place in the context of relationship. Learning to love and to be loved is hard work and it has nothing to do with sex, it has everything to do with things like empathy, forgiveness, acceptance, grace, service, and humility.

Yet, when we turn on our television sets, read our newspapers, and listen to our friends talk, whenever we hear the word love, it is either connected to people having sex, or someone intensely enjoying themselves. We see the description of people having casual sex, peppered with the words, "I love you." We see people saying, "I love this restaurant," or, "I love to go bungee jumping." When we say, "I love something or someone," what we really mean is that this thing or this person brings me a great deal of pleasure. That is why we have a more than 50% divorce rate and that is

why we have a society that consumes and spends more than it makes. We are always looking for something or someone new to give us pleasure but the sad thing is; we are never satisfied. King Solomon enjoyed this type of lifestyle he had 700 wives and 300 concubines from all over the world, these women were exotic and beautiful. He enjoyed gourmet food and drink from all over the world and yet, Solomon never found lasting satisfaction in all of this; so if you are looking for love through sexual encounters, or for satisfaction in things or even in using people, then you will never find lasting satisfaction, looking for love in sex or pleasure will continually leave you empty. Even in the best of husband and wife relationships, we know that our spouse cannot meet all of our emotional needs to be loved. That is why people get involved in extramarital affairs for the most part; people are not just looking for sex they are looking for love. The problem is they are looking in the wrong places.

* POWER AND DIPLOMACY

Second, King Solomon thought power and diplomacy would help him feel secure. There was peace throughout King Solomon's reign, there were no active enemies, and kings from all over the world were eager to make treaties with him, yet because Solomon learned to depend on his own strength, wisdom, and alliances, his kingdom found itself embroiled in civil war.

When we think about security, we think of putting money in 401k's, we think of locking our doors, putting alarms in our houses, and buying all kinds of insurance policies yet, we know those things do not guarantee anything. We have seen people lose their entire life savings in the stock market. Since 9-11, people live in fear, and now people are afraid to travel. When we get sick, we are afraid. It almost seems as if we are a people who are afraid to live and afraid to die. Fear has taken the joy out of life. So as we can see, there are no guarantees for our security in life.

* ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACQUISITIONS

As far as meaning in life goes, King Solomon was probably the ruler with the most accomplishments and acquisitions, he built the first temple in Israel and he built a palatial palace where people came from all over the world just to see his throne room. Solomon had power, horses, palaces, libraries, and buildings of all types but, these things did not satisfy him either. Somehow we have come to think a career will bring us satisfaction; if we just get the right job, if we get the right promotions, and if we make a certain salary, that will make us happy. Many of us spend our days climbing the corporate ladder, and when we reach the top, we find that it is not as satisfying as we thought. When we make a million dollars, we find that it is no longer satisfying we now need to make two million, then three million, then four. Think about how many of us are in credit card debt. Why is that? Because we think if we buy this thing or that thing, we will be satisfied but alas, we are not. The thing we thought would make us happy is now sitting on the floor of our closet or in the basement and we are still looking to buy something we think will satisfy us.

I would challenge all of us to go back and read the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon tried it all. He tried to find satisfaction in sex, in alcohol, fine foods, and pleasure but he did not find lasting love in any of these. He tried his hand at politics, power, and diplomacy; even though he was very successful, they did not bring him lasting peace and security. He built about everything you could build, acquired every material thing you could acquire, and received the highest education possible. He was arguably the wisest person in the world, yet he still felt it was all meaningless.

B. COMING UP DUST

If you look carefully at verses 14-15, you don't need to read between the lines Solomon's assessment is that if you start in this world your search for love, security, and meaning, all you will come up with is dust. If you're not a Christian, and you are visiting with us for the first time, I would like you to examine your level of satisfaction of life. Maybe you thought getting married

would bring you satisfaction. Maybe you thought getting divorced would bring you happiness. Maybe you thought achievements at work or school would fill you up. Or maybe you thought all your money and property and wealth would bring you peace.

None of these things mean anything when the doctor tells us that we have cancer and are going to die. Nothing consoles us when our children do not turn out the way we think they should. Never do we feel as alone as when a friend or a lover betrays us. Is there emptiness deep inside of you? Is there something in your heart that is telling you there is more to life? If so, then stick around for a couple more minutes; but for now, be aware of this: **WHEN WE LOOK FOR LOVE, SECURITY, AND MEANING IN LIFE APART FROM GOD, WE WILL END UP FRUSTRATED, ALWAYS LOOKING FOR MORE.**

However, there is an answer to all these problems; there is something that can satisfy the longings of our heart. In fact, it is not something, it is someone. At the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon gives us the answer, his conclusion is that most of us never find true peace and happiness in life because we have been looking for satisfaction in the things of this world.

III. SEARCHING IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES (Vs. 12:9-14)

TRUE LOVE, CONFIDENCE TO FACE TOMORROW, AND A PURPOSEFUL LIFE CAN ONLY BE FOUND BY BEING IN A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

In chapter 12, verses 9-14, we will start searching in all the right places. You see, **TRUE LOVE, CONFIDENCE TO FACE TOMORROW AND A PURPOSEFUL LIFE CAN ONLY BE FOUND BY BEING IN A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** The Christian message is not all about religion or doing religious things, its message is that Jesus Christ died so that our sins could be forgiven, that we could be in a right relationship with God, and enjoy this life to the full.

A. A PROPER PERSPECTIVE (Vs. 9-12)

Solomon gives us a proper perspective in verses 9-12. Solomon's wisdom came from God and the Bible is inspired by God. Even though it is a human book in the sense it was written by many different people with different experiences, personalities, and languages over a 2,000-year period of time, the book is really supernatural in the sense that God inspired them. These thoughts are not human thoughts they are divine thoughts. Every thought, every word, and every stroke of the pen was inspired by God. If we want to find satisfaction for our deepest needs in life, then we should go to the source of life: God. If I want to enjoy my Honda Civic, then I should read the owner's manual to see how to care for it, how to work all the gadgets, and how to get the most enjoyment out of it. If the manual says to change the oil every 3,000 miles, and I ignore it and don't change the oil at all, the car will break down, and I will be frustrated.

God created us; he formed us from dust of the earth. But we were created for a purpose; God created us to hold His Spirit. After God fashioned Adam from dust of the earth, the Bible says that God breathed into him the breath of life; God breathed His Spirit into Adam. Unfortunately, Adam sinned. He rebelled against God. He went and did his own thing so God took His Spirit from Adam and Adam spiritually died. From that point on, all of us have been born physically alive, but spiritually dead. We feel empty because we were created to be spiritually alive; we were created to house God the Holy Spirit. We are valuable containers and if you're sitting around empty, don't do it any longer. Jesus said that He stands at the door of each one of our hearts knocking, but not only is He knocking, He is calling out, He is standing at the door of our hearts. He is knocking at the door and He is calling out to us, "Let me come in. I will bring satisfaction to you I will fill your life with meaning, with love, and with security. I created you and I know what it takes to fill your life."

In these couple of verses, King Solomon is saying that the words of his teaching are important, they are true. If we follow the principles, we will live a solid life. But look at verse 12

where he says that we can always read one more book and we can always listen to one more sermon but in the end, we must make a decision; we must decide what to do with Jesus Christ. If your looking for love, if you want to feel secure about your future, or if you want your life to count for something, then start the journey right now by giving your life to Jesus. All it takes is a humble decision, there doesn't have to be any big fanfare. If you want Jesus to come into your heart, if you hear Him knocking at the door of your heart, if you hear Him calling to you, don't wait another minute. Just do this. Quietly say to Him, "Jesus, forgive me for my sins. I want to give you my life. Come into my life, and live in my heart. I believe You are the Son of God. You died and rose from the dead. Amen." If you prayed and meant that, then God now lives in you. You have been changed from dust to diamonds.

B. COMING UP DIAMONDS (Vs. 13-14)

And now we are ready to find purpose in life because now everything is coming up diamonds. Listen to what Solomon's conclusion is in verses 13-14. He says, "Fear God and keep His Commandments, for that is the whole duty of each person." Life becomes simple. We are going to talk about each purpose in the next 5 weeks but for now, let me briefly tell you how they work.

First, our need to give and receive love is fulfilled in the purposes of worship and ministry. Jesus simplified the Christian life like this, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Worship is the way we love God. Worship is coming to God, listening for His guidance, and demonstrating our love for Him by committing ourselves to obeying Him. So worship is our love response to God.

Ministry is the way we demonstrate our love for others. God has created each one of us uniquely. He has given us natural talents and abilities. He has also given us supernatural gifts, we

call these Spiritual gifts. All we have, our money, possessions, and our achievements are gifts from God. We are to use all that God has given us to minister to one another. We are family. When we are filled up with the love of God, that love will flow onto others around us. Worship and ministry are purposes that satisfy our need to love and be loved.

How do we find the security we are looking for? First, Jesus said that once He comes into our lives, He will never leave us or forsake us. The Bible says that no person or event in this world or the next will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. All of us will face setbacks in life, we will get sick, we will suffer, and we will die but our security is in Jesus. We are created to live in eternity and our eternal destinies are secure in Jesus. We will live for eternity in heaven with Jesus where we no longer need to fear illness, setbacks of any kind, and even death. Our futures are secure.

But God has given us another way to be secure; He has given us a family. When we gave our lives to Christ, we became part of God's family. Everybody who has given their life to Christ is our brothers and sisters. Fellowship is the way we are to interact with one another. Fellowship is defined as meeting one another's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. You can lean on me when you are weak, and I can lean on you when I am weak. We are family. Fellowship is a purpose in which we can help meet one another's need for security.

And purpose, we all desire to live meaningful lives. Our purpose in life is to help others find Jesus as their Savior. Our purpose is to tell others about how much Jesus loves them and desires to be in a relationship with them. This purpose is evangelism. But, there is more we want to grow personally, and we want to help others mature in their walk with Jesus. This process is called discipleship. When we are actively engaged in evangelism and discipleship, we will feel as if we are making a difference and that our lives have meaning.

We were created to be containers of the living God. It is through us that God makes His presence known and it is through us that He ministers to the world. We find meaning and purpose in life as we involve ourselves in worship, ministry, fellowship, and discipleship: **TRUE LOVE, CONFIDENCE TO FACE TOMORROW, AND A PURPOSEFUL LIFE CAN ONLY BE FOUND BY BEING IN A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

I want to emphasize this one last time, that where we start to look for purpose and meaning makes all the difference. When I studied existentialism in university, a German professor would always give us this warning, “Carl Jaspers used to warn his students not to commit suicide during the quarter. I am giving you this warning as well.” I used to wonder why he would say that. Well, classic existentialism rules out the existence of God, they come to the conclusion that only the existence of God could give meaning to this life, but since there is no God, life is absurd. We are left to give meaning to life ourselves. And as King Solomon has told us, “That is simply chasing after the wind.” No wonder people who do not believe in God are often scared, confused, or empty.

On the other hand, it often discourages me to see people who call themselves Christians struggling with the same things. This can only be because we forget our glorious calling and purpose. Here is the truth: **IT IS ONLY THROUGH A VIBRANT AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST THAT WE FIND SATISFACTION FOR THE DEEPEST LONGINGS IN OUR LIVES.**

Let us take this next 40-day journey together to see how God can transform us from dust to diamonds. Forty seems to be a favorite number of God. He trained Moses 40 years in the Egyptian court and then He gave Moses post-graduate training of another 40 years in the wilderness to prepare him to lead the people out of Egypt and before Jesus went into His public ministry, He spent 40 days in the wilderness.

I want us to commit to allowing Jesus to change us in these 40 days. Just hearing it and learning about it isn't enough, King Solomon knew all of this. He was the wisest king of his time, but his life ended tragically. Why? Because even though he knew the right answers, he was still drawn to the glitter of this world -- under the sun.

Listen to how tragically his life ended:

¹Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. ²The LORD had clearly instructed his people not to intermarry with those nations, because the women they married would lead them to worship their gods. Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines and sure enough, they led his heart away from the LORD. In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship their gods instead of trusting only in the LORD his God, as his father, David, had done. ⁹The LORD was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ¹⁰He warned Solomon specifically about worshiping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the LORD'S command. ¹¹So now the LORD said to him, "Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my laws, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants.

(I KINGS 11:1-11 / NLT)

Let us commit ourselves this morning to finding love, security, and meaning in life in Jesus alone. Let us find the meaning and balance of life through worship, ministry, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship.