

LIVING A LIFE THAT MATTERS

by Glenn Newton



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Introduction

The writer of Philippians tells us to be “anxious for nothing.” This may be one of the most difficult passages in all of Scripture. We live in a day and age when everyone seems to be “on edge.” Even in many churches, we just seem on edge, afraid to do anything, and afraid the things that are being done might not be the right things. It’s a tough time to attempt to be “anxious for nothing.” As a result, many people are turning to things of the world to try to ease the angst. The problem with these things is that, according to Ecclesiastes 1:1, they are meaningless. And the stark truth is that if we invest our time in meaningless things, our lives will not have true meaning.

Through a study of select passages from Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, we will discover how to live a life of significance. Lives that matter will make a difference in the lives of others and in the growth of God’s kingdom.

About the Author

Glenn Newton has been serving the preaching minister for the Lakeview church of Christ in Tacoma, Washington since 2007. He has served in ministry since 1993 and has previously worked with churches in Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Tennessee. A 1997 graduate of Heritage Christian University, Glenn actively speaks at lectureships, workshops, and meetings throughout our country and has co-authored two other books, “The Great Commission Part 2” with Steve Cummings, and “Elder/Preacher Relationships That Last” with his father Gene, and his brother Mark). He has also authored “Our Rock and Our Fortress” in the **Flex** series. He and his wife Regina have been married since 1991 and have three sons.



Lesson 1

Living a Life that Matters

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 12:9-14

Key Verse:

***The conclusion, when all has been heard is:
fear God and keep His commandments,
because this applies to every person (Ecclesiastes 12:13).***

WARM UP



What would happen if you moved out of your neighborhood tomorrow? Would people notice? Would they say, "Aw man, why are you moving? We are going to miss you"? Or would they say, "Yippee!!!" or "What was their name again?" Would they even notice? What if you left your place of employment? Would the atmosphere of your workplace change? What if you left the church you attended?

One of the things that frequently happens, is that people will leave a church, and no one will be aware for a few months. This happens in most churches and often we look at that as an indictment on ourselves or those in leadership. We feel bad because we didn't notice. And we should notice! But it is also an indictment on those who can leave without being missed. Don't you want to live the kind of life that if you left, people would immediately know you've gone? Don't you

want to matter in that way?

How can we do that? How can we live a life that matters? This will be the focus of this study, but what is the foundation for a life that matters? Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon shares several “foundations” that will never give meaning: wisdom, education, pleasures, stuff, work, friends, personal advancement, riches, happiness, and recreation just to name a few. After sharing his list of meaningless things, Solomon tells us that the foundation for a meaningful life is to “fear God and keep his commandments.”

WORK OUT



Lives that matter fear God.

Most of have read the account of creation from Genesis several times. It is important to notice that our name is mentioned nowhere in the text. In the beginning, you weren't there, and God did just fine. Of course this is said with a hint of sarcasm, but Solomon echoes the thought when he says, “God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5:2). It seems that maybe our self image is out of whack. We think we can add something to God's creation to make us better, but we were created in His image and according to His likeness! After we were created He paid us His highest compliment – “very good!”

But of course, the first man and woman weren't satisfied with “very good;” they sought to improve on it. Satan tempted them to do the one thing God told them not to do, with the assurance that it would make them better. It didn't. It separated them from God. The rest of the Bible is a call for us to come back to Him. James 4:8 is a summary

of the message of the whole Bible in one sentence: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

Throughout the pages of Scripture, we find this statement to be true. Abraham drew near to God and he went from childless to the father of a nation. Moses drew near to God and he went from reluctant prophet to mighty leader. David drew near to God and he went from shepherd to giant killer. Peter drew near to God and he went from fearful denier to powerful preacher. And Paul drew near to God and went from murderer to missionary. When we draw near to God, He makes our lives significant! Lives that matter are built on the foundation of a healthy respect of God.

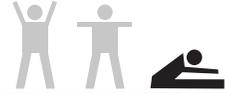
Lives that matter keep His commandments.

As humans, we tend to look for the easy way out, don't we? The Pharisees in Jesus' day were no different. They knew the importance of command keeping. But there were so many commandments that they couldn't help but wonder if there was one that had more significance than the others. So they asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest, and He told them to love God and love each other (Matthew 22:35-40). If fearing God is the foundation for a life that matters, then we lay that foundation by loving God and loving our neighbor. This is the beginning of a life that matters.

It sounds simple, but for many of us this has taken a back seat. As was stated in the introduction, we live in an anxious time. In regards to our lives, the economy, even the church; our stomachs seem to be tied in knots. As a result, we try to make ourselves feel better with things that, in the grand scheme of things, don't matter. They only make the knot of anxiety even bigger. Yet when we love God and love each other, we see the knot loosening and we see the difference God is making through us. In other words, we need to take the spotlight

off of ourselves and place it back on God where it belongs. When the spotlight is on us, it only highlights our needs. When it is on God, it highlights the One who can fill our needs and make us significant.

COOL DOWN



So, how do we live a life that matters? How do we loosen the knot of anxiety pent up inside us and truly learn to fear God and keep His commandments? Let me offer two practical suggestions.

Take personal responsibility for your own life.

The old comic strip, "Calvin and Hobbes," shows this so clearly. Calvin says, "Nothing I do is my fault. My family is dysfunctional and my parents won't empower me! Consequently I'm not self-actualized. My behavior is addictive, functioning in a disease process of toxic codependency! I need holistic healing and wellness before I'll accept any responsibility for my actions!" Hobbes replies: "One of us needs to stick his head in a bucket of ice water." Calvin says, "I love the culture of victimhood."

Many people love this culture, but not those who live lives of meaning! Those who choose to live lives that matter take responsibility for everything in their lives, both good and bad. They choose not to be a victim to anyone else. Lives that matter see setbacks and problems as part of what makes them stronger. They do not waste time and energy whining about how people are unfair. They do not curse life for not placing them at the head of the line. They simply, but firmly, accept responsibility for their own responses to life.

We cannot choose everything that happens to us, but we can choose how we react. When we live lives that matter, we find that

setbacks are temporary and every problem holds potential. Life is what happens in us, not just around us. No one can fear God and keep His commandments for you. Your life does not have significance based on what other people do, but only what God does through you.

Invest your time in things that have real meaning.

In our text, Solomon tells us that God will bring “every deed into judgment” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). That statement should make us want to invest our time in things that please God! The litmus test for the things we invest our lives in should simply be, Does this matter to God? Is this going to make a difference in the grand scheme of things? The litmus test is not “Does this matter to me?” Many of us have financial budgets. Do you have a “time budget”? If you do, what does it look like?

J. Michael Shannon stated it accurately when he said: “We eat foods that do not nourish us. We drink beverages that do not quench our thirst. We wear clothing that does not protect us. They all symbolize the fact that we live without purpose. Life has no more meaning for many than it has for the hamster in his cage, turning his little wheel. God wants to give high purpose to life. He wants to challenge us to give our lives to the same noble purposes to which Jesus gave His life.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What impact would it have on the people around you if you moved to a different community? What impact would it have on your neighborhood? Your workplace? Your church family?
2. Do any of the meaningless pursuits that Solomon mentioned dominate your life right now? Which ones? Why?
3. What does it mean to fear God? Why is this the foundation for a life that matters?
4. Why do you think loving God and loving each other are at the top of Jesus' list when it comes to the commandments?
5. What does it mean that we "live in a culture of victimhood"? How can this negatively affect living lives of purpose?
6. There are 168 hours in a week. Not including church assembly times, how much of your time each week do you invest in the things that matter to God? (Study, service, prayer, etc.) What does your "time budget" look like?