

Sermon: “*Worship & Wealth: Reverence & Contentment*”

Series: “*Meaning: Exploring Faith & Doubt*” November 2, 2025

Texts: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 & 6:1-12 Dave Sattler NSAC

Sub-texts: Deuteronomy 6:4, Psalm 5:11, Psalm 46:1/10, Matthew 5:37

Sources: Bible Gateway, NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: John Goldingay, Sidney Greidanus, Derek Kidner, Douglas Miller, & Christopher Wright. Sermon: John Fortune (NSAC, 10/5&26/2025). Song: “Turn! Turn! Turn!” by The Byrds (1965). Play: “Macbeth” by William Shakespeare (1606). Stats: Alpha Canada 2025. Images: CAC & unsplash.com.

I. Introduction & Review:

- Welcome to church, everyone! Thanks for joining us ... [people online], long-timers, first-timers, new Canadians, those coming back to church. We’re excited you’re here today!!
- I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors at NSAC; it’s time now to dig into God’s Word. It’s our conviction that one of *the* main ways God *guides us* and *makes Himself known to us* is through His Word, the Bible.
- <Slide> We are on our sermon series called “***Meaning: Exploring Faith and Doubt***” through the Bible book of Ecclesiastes, the so-called ‘black sheep’ and often-neglected gem of the Scriptures.
- Packed with brutally-honest straight talk, like Pastor John Fortune said, ***the writer of Ecclesiastes seems to “question everything we assume about life.”*** (John F, NSAC, Oct 5 & 26, 2025)
- Time, work, pleasure, relationship, worship, wealth—everything “under the sun”—falls under the critical ‘microscope’ of Qohelet, the Teacher who writes in the tradition of Solomon.
- <Slide> In case you haven’t noticed, ***Ecclesiastes has influenced mainstream culture in lots of ways.***
- ILL—Pete Seeger wrote a song immortalized by the American folk band, The Byrds, who cut it in 1965: “To everything, turn, turn, turn, There is a season, turn, turn, turn, And a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, a time to die, A time to plant, a time to reap, A time to kill, a time to heal, A time to laugh, a time to weep.”
- Lyrics taken right out of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes.
- Other nuggets include: 3:11 - “He has made everything beautiful in its time.” Sounds really nice on a greeting card. 4:12 - “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Popular at weddings.
- And Ecclesiastes 8 birthed the motto, “Eat, drink, and be merry!”

- And, as we'll see, today's passage is even inspiration for the famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools, The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!"
- "Life's but a walking *shadow*, a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more. It is a tale, Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."
- [Grade 12 English is finally paying off!]
- <**Slide**> ILL—I grew up *Christian*, and, I like to *question* things. (Not always a great combination). Those who know me well know I have a dark side. I'm a glass half-*empty* guy. It's part of my makeup.
- Since the first time I read Ecclesiastes, as a skeptical teenager, often cynical about my life, and, life on the planet in general, God has ministered to me through this book.
- I have found the Teacher's dark musings soothing for my soul.
- Ecclesiastes has helped me process my **doubts** and losses. It's given voice to my frustrations with injustice, and, helped my **faith** to grow.
- But, most of all, through this book, **God has brought me square with His transcendence**: He is God and I am (surely) not!
- Painful truth, I know. And, comforting too. For deep down, I know that every attempt I ever make to 'play God' (consciously or sub-consciously) is *hevel* (a word that appears more than 30 times in this book) translated "meaningless"—"vanity"—a "chasing after the wind."

II. Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7: On Worship

<**Slide**> 1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. 2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. 3 A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool. 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. 5 It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. 6 Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and

destroy the work of your hands? 7 Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God.

<Pray> *“Lord, thank You for Your Word. Please move me out of the way. Come speak to us by Your Spirit. We’re hungry to hear from you.”*

III. Bible Teaching: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

1. <Slide> **‘Worship with reverence.’ (5:1a)**

- In chapter 5, the tone of the Teacher switches from dark reflection on “life under the sun” to positive instruction on worship in church.
- ***So, why did you come to church today?***
- Perhaps it’s habit—simply what you do every Sunday. Or, maybe you come because you want something from God, desire to be seen or connect with people, or wish to be entertained, or you’re trying to please someone—a friend or family member you know wants you to be here.
- “Guard your steps.” When we [come] to the house of God,” we are to worship with **reverence**. And, **reverence** for God involves more *listening* than talking.

2. <Slide> **“Let your words be few.” (5:1b-3)**

- It was the 13th Century Persian mystic poet and scholar, Rumi, who once said: “Sell your tongue and buy a thousand ears.” Hah.
- Ecclesiastes 5: “Do not be quick with your mouth.” (2a) “Let your **words** be few.” (2b) “Many words mark the speech of a fool.” (3b)
- Why, in Deuteronomy, when giving instructions on worship, the Lord says repeatedly: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)
- ***In coming to church, we ought to adopt a posture of being ready to hear from God.***
- One commentator writes: “What *God* says to you is rather more important than what *you* have to say to God.” (Wright, p65)
- We need to be better at listening. We don’t dictate. God does.
- May our hearts be open and expectant to hear from Him.

3. <Slide> **“Fulfill your vows.” (5:4-7a)**

- “Do not let your mouth lead you into sin,” instructs the Teacher. (6a)
- Come to think of it, most of our sins (my sins) are mouth-related.

- Words matter. Stupid things we say come back to haunt us—and it's impossible to take them back. Broken promises damage relationships.
- 'Make a **vow** and keep it' is a bit of a foreign concept in our day when 'commitment' is a bad word.
- We love to look for an 'out'—a perfect excuse, an alibi, a better offer, to justify not doing what we've said we'd do but no longer feel like doing.
- **Vows** were a serious matter in the ancient world. They were both voluntary and unbreakable. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus weighs in: "All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." (Matthew 5:37)
- And, in matters of faith, it's best to be honest about where one is at, rather than pretend. ***Rash vows are meaningless and unwise.***
- APP—I want to address long-timers who attend church regularly but have yet to make a commitment to Jesus.
- Some of you are 'on the fence'—just not there yet—still not convinced about Jesus or feeling it. You've been honest. You're thinking twice before making a big promise—and, I respect that.
- While I wish you were further along in your faith journey, I want to acknowledge your integrity in not faking it—or, pretending.

4. <Slide> "***Fear God.***" (5:2b/7)

- The Teacher ends this section with the call to "fear God" or "stand in awe of God"—a statement that relates back to v2b: "God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." Powerful reminder.
- Yes, there are some 'technical issues' with this declaration.
- The God of the Christian Story is not strictly bound to heaven. We know God the Son Jesus came to earth and, still now, God makes His presence real on earth through His Holy Spirit.
- This is not a spatial reference, however. It is a reminder to *respect the distance* between humanity and God. God is *imminent*—and close, He is accessible to us (like a friend), and, God is also *transcendent*—holy, to be approached with respect, awe, and, some fear—mouth shut, heart open.
- When it comes to worship, sober self-examination is in order.
- ***God is supreme. We(e) humans are limited.***
- And, we must not/cannot manipulate God with our words, or, attempt to impress God (or, others) with our 'super-spirituality. It doesn't work.

IV. Scripture: Ecclesiastes 6:1-12, On Wealth

<**Slide**> 1 I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: 2 God gives some people wealth, possessions and honour, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil. 3 A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. 4 It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. 5 Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man— 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

<**Slide**> 7 Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied. 8 What advantage have the wise over fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? 9 Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. 10 Whatever exists has already been named, and what humanity is has been known; no one can contend with someone who is stronger. 11 The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? 12 For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?

V. Bible Teaching: Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

1. <**Slide**> **Wealth is never secure. (6:1-6)**

- The Teacher is back to his dark musing again. Did you catch it?
- He observes another “evil under the sun” (1a): “God gives *some* people” great wealth, possessions, many heirs, recognition—they have *all* the things *anyone* could *ever* want—“but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead.” (2)
- Doubling down, the Teacher suggests a stillborn child is “better off” (3) than a person who prospers and lives long; for **wealth is never secure**.
- It's difficult to picture what the writer has in mind here. Perhaps he's thinking of Job, who lost everything; or, Solomon himself, one of the richest and wisest to walk the earth, whose legacy got away from him.

- I believe ***the Teacher is challenging us to embrace a heavenly worldview—urging his audience to consider a greater truth to live by.*** While wealth, possessions, and notoriety are not *bad*, they are also not *eternal*—they do not last. And, in and of themselves, they cannot deliver the sense of meaning we’re all looking for.

2. <Slide> Pursuit of wealth cannot **satisfy**. (6:7-12)

- 6:7: “Everyone’s toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.” A life driven by wealth does not **satisfy** because one can never have ‘enough.’ We spend much time accumulating stuff (in our recent move, I think we took 8 pickup truckloads to landfill and recycling).
- We drive ourselves to try and be successful, grow our reputation, improve our financial position. Yet, all of this is terribly short-sighted.
- V12: “Who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? [Shakespeare] Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?”
- And, if we are fortunate enough to *have* wealth, there’s no guarantee we will enjoy it, or, secure what will happen to it after we are gone.
- As one scholar puts it: “Instead we ought to focus our lives on the kingdom of God and *his* righteousness. Then we can enjoy God’s gifts to us every day: food and drink, work and health, family and friends, forgiveness and salvation.” (Greidanus, p156)
- <Slide> APP—Begg some serious life-questions: ***When we examine our daily activities, what is “meaningless” and what carries eternal value?*** What things in our week have a lasting impact? What life activities hold significance beyond the grave?
- Sadly, attending to our spiritual health often finds itself way down the list in our daily agendas. [Now, *you’re* all here this morning so your spiritual life is on your radar. That’s good.]
- <Slide> This is why ***serving in the mission of Jesus is so meaningful.*** If you have not found a place to serve in His mission, you need to. Teaching His Kids or SummerJAM, caring for people through outreach ministries (ELL, GriefShare, Coffee Time, Christmas Dinner, FLO, Mission Trips), leading a small group, investing in our Mission & Care Funds, praying for God to move in our offices or neighbourhoods,

sharing our faith with family and friends—*these* activities have **lasting impact** ... and carry eternal significance **beyond the grave**.

VI. Life Applications

- Well, time to land the plane now with two life-applications ...

A. <Slide> **Contentment: It is God Who brings joy.**

- There's a powerful life-nugget in Ecclesiastes 6:9: "Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." This is where the modern proverb "a bird in hand is better than two in the bush" comes from.
- Because no human can know or govern her or his own future, each day, each breath must be lived for its own value. God invites us to be content with the life we *have* ("the bird in hand") rather than pine for the life ("the two in the bush") we *wish* we had, or, are convinced we *deserve*.
- ILL—It was literally half my life ago when I received the call to come to North Shore Alliance Church; and, I was young and had little idea where we were going.
- Wow! There have been countless highlights along the way: we've had front-row seats to many miracles of God—been on His mission, together, right here in our city, and, literally around the world.
- Over the years, one of *the* biggest struggles has been housing. Securing a safe, sustainable, affordable house on the North Shore eluded us for much of the past three decades.
- Sure, we had *wants* and hopes and dreams—and, there were lots of prayers. Still, many times, it appeared as if God wasn't listening.
- <Slide> Until a few months ago. When, as a result of God's unexpected and incredible provision, we were able to buy a townhouse near CapU!
- It's amazing to have our own place now—thank You, God!
- Yet, looking back, we are grateful (and surprised), at how God brought us joy despite the difficult circumstances we found ourselves living in.
- [Truthfully, there was *some* kicking and screaming from *me*, in the process, but God brought us His **joy** nonetheless.]
- Rather than fixate on what we *don't* have and allow our amped-up desires to control us, **it's best we find contentment in God's daily gifts** and acknowledge it's God Who brings us **joy** not our wealth, accomplishments, or successes.

- **<Slide> APP—So, *what do you rely on to bring you joy?***
- Your work, your health, your wealth, your fame, your next adventure?
- On what do we pin our hopes, and depend on, especially when life gets difficult?
- Psalm 5:11 declares: “But let all who take refuge in You [Lord] be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You.”
- God is entirely dependable and loves it when we “take refuge” in Him. Here’s the point: ***Life lived relying upon the strength and power of God is truly eternal life.*** And, when we come to depend on the Lord, nothing—not even death—can overpower us.
- When things in our world are not as we wish, when challenging circumstances come our way, when we experience loss or disappointment, we can always look to God to help us find a way through—and even bring us **joy** in the midst of it. Our refuge, our strength, our home, and true eternal **joy** comes from the Lord—and Him alone.

B. <Slide> Reverence: Worship under God’s sovereignty.

- Reality is: ***We don’t control our own destiny.*** Even with our own strong will, powerful thoughts, or good vibes, it’s impossible for any of us to ‘manifest’ what *we* desire. If that’s what you’ve been taught, that’s actually superstition, *not* Christianity.
- ILL/APP—And I have to say, in our world, ***this prevalent “life under the sun” secular worldview—where I am the centre of my own universe and I can do, or, be whatever I want—is not working.***
- Not only does it *not* satisfy the deep human desire for meaning outside oneself, its side effects are rough: We are more anxious, depressed, and isolated than ever before.
- Recent surveys suggest many Canadians, under 40, who have been pumped with this life-without-God secular worldview growing up, are now confessing a sense of deep spiritually emptiness. Exciting, many are turning to church to explore the Christian Story for the first time.
- Alpha Canada reports that 2025 has seen its largest participation ever!

- One of the harsh-but-sweet reminders of Ecclesiastes is this: **God is God and we are not!** The Teacher argues against the notion human beings can take charge of their own destiny.
- Instead, in all our plans, we should look to God, not just to the future which we might mistakingly believe is in *our* own hands.
(NIV Life App, p1142)
- I invite the worship team to come now.
- **<Slide>** We're going to take some time right now to **listen** to God.
- Take a posture of prayer. Bow your heads. Close your eyes. Listen.
- Come before the Lord with **reverence**. God is right here in the room *with* us. Open your heart. Invite God to speak to you this morning.
- Hear Psalm 46 (1/10): "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. He says, '*Be still, and know that I am God*'; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.'"
- Maybe today you fight feelings of **spiritual emptiness**: Your life lacks meaning beyond yourself and your daily activities.
- Confess your emptiness to God. Ask Jesus to shape your activities.
- Perhaps you have a ton of **doubts**. Process them with God. **Listen** ...
- Not having much much **joy** in your life?
- Ask God to bring you His joy—**contentment** with what you have (His daily gifts) rather than fixating on what you don't have or wish you had or think you deserve.
- People of NSAC, receive the joy of the Lord today!
- We humans are limited. *God* is sovereign—supreme. We do *not* command our own destiny. *God* does. And this is *good*. Because God is *good*. Amen. Thanks for listening.
- **<Prayer Slide>** Prayer is available, during worship now, and after the service. If there is something on your heart today, please don't leave without coming for prayer.
- 9am: Gary & Janice // 11am: George & Ali
- Let's stand now to respond to God in worship ...