

Being a Happy Realist

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Preacher: Steve Whitacre

[0 : 0 0] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Got in Friday night, got to check out Fifth Friday, hear some live music, eat some wings, got to spend some time with parents yesterday morning, ate lunch with some leaders yesterday afternoon, Brenner last night, and then here to worship with you all this morning is a great treat. Some of you I know already and have met from Advance and the Parenting Seminars, and others of you I've just met this morning, some of you haven't even met yet, and look forward, hoping to shake some more hands after our service today.

So three quick things I want to say just to kind of get started here. First, I want to address you as a church from a church. So I come as an ambassador, so to speak, from Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville, and I say greetings from Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville. You are our brothers and sisters, and you do here what we do there, and it brings me and us great joy to think that we are doing this together. I know that Jeff Perswell was down here a couple weeks ago, and I'm sure he greeted you from our church, but I'm going to join him in saying that as well.

Secondly, I want to say thank you for your hospitality. Athens feels like home already. I've only been here two days, and I love it. This is, I really enjoyed our time, really enjoyed getting to know you. You have been so warm. This is one of the things I love about being a part of Sovereign Grace Church, of a sovereign, of being part of this little denomination we've got. Sovereign Grace Church is, as we come, and it's like, I feel like I understand these people. I know where they're coming from. I know what they value. I know what they love, because they love Jesus Christ the way I love Jesus Christ.

And y'all love to serve him and to follow him the way I do and the way I want to. And then thirdly, I want to thank you for sending Taylor and Elizabeth Hollingsworth to the Pastors College. Man, what a great family. They have been a blessing to my family. They have been a blessing to so many families in our church. Elizabeth has been graciously giving my daughters and my nieces and their friends art lessons. I've had the privilege of teaching Taylor Greek in the Pastors College. I'll tell you stories later. It'll be great. Don't know if this is the time or place for that. But having had them with us for a little bit, I can't wait for them to get back to you. And I know that they're going to be a wonderful service to this church. And I know that you're very excited to have them back.

[2 : 5 2] Now, I'd like to ask you to open up your Bibles, if you would please, to Ecclesiastes chapter 9. Ecclesiastes. Skinny little book in the Old Testament. Open up to the middle. You might hit the book of Psalms. Turn to the right a little bit. If you run into Isaiah or something that rhymes with Isaiah, you probably went a little too far. Turn back left. Ecclesiastes chapter 9.

When somebody mentions the book of Ecclesiastes, maybe you think of the opening words of the book. It's almost like a cry of despair. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. That's how the book begins.

It doesn't seem like a real chipper book. For a lot of people, the mood and the tone of the book, it leaves them kind of scratching their head. And maybe, you know, you're sitting down to your morning devotions trying to read through the Bible in a year. And I'm just going to jump over to Psalms. Maybe, maybe to the Gospels, find me a story about Jesus. Something I can understand a little better. Maybe you've heard Solomon's famous poem from chapter 3, read aloud at a funeral. Right? A time to be born and a time to die. But beyond that, Ecclesiastes for a lot of people is one of those Old Testament books that we just, we just skip over or don't spend much time thinking about. But for some, for some folks, Ecclesiastes is a favorite in the Bible, including, well, me, my wife, Nicole, she's writing a book on it with her mother, a book for women should be out someday. It's a slow process being a wife and mother and writing a book. More famously, Ecclesiastes was also one of the favorite books of the Bible of the late theologian J.I. Packer. All right. And he wrote an article for Christianity Today explaining why he loves the book of Ecclesiastes. And here's what he says. He says, look, you got these five wisdom books of the Old Testament. Psalms teach us how to worship. Proverbs, how to behave. Job, how to suffer. Proverbs. Oops, I said Proverbs already. Song of Solomon, how to love.

And Ecclesiastes, how to live. How? How does Ecclesiastes teach us how to live? With realism and reverence, with humility and restraint, coolly and contentedly, in wisdom and in joy.

I want to focus on the first and last words of that little list. Realism and joy. Ecclesiastes teaches us how to live with realistic joy. First, realism. King Solomon. King, the great King Solomon, the son of the great King David. Solomon is the author of this book. He's very realistic about the challenges of living in a fallen world. Or to use his phrase, under the sun. It's one of his favorite words describing life. Under the sun. What is this world that we live in like? He knows that life is full of weariness and toil, of drudgery and disappointment. Sometimes heart-rending tragedy and loss. His opening cry, that word vanity, the word is repeated 38 times in the book. The book is not that long. It seems like we're on to something here. We've got a key word for this book. It communicates the fact that all of our experiences of our lives are outside of our ability to control.

[6 : 31] and that our circumstances are difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to understand. Life is uncontrollable and at times life is incomprehensible. So Solomon wants us to be realistic. Not because he's a pessimist, but because he wants us to be prepared. He wants us to be realistic, not because he is unkind, but because he wants us to be unshaken. He wants us to be ready to face with faith the setbacks and the sorrows that are a part of this fallen life under the sun. And yet, he also wants us to be realistic with joy. He doesn't merely want us to be jaded or cynical.

This is not a book that is just stuffed with irony. This is a book that is also joyful. It's a realistic joy in the midst of what might appear to be a gloomy or almost despairing view of life. There are moments in this book where the sun seems to burst through the clouds. And King Solomon brings us in on a kind of wonder and delight at how God has made the world to work. That's what we're going to look at today. He wants us to understand how to endure life's sorrows and also to enjoy life's pleasures.

Oftentimes, while doing that simultaneously, he wants us to be happy realists, to experience realistic joy. And so today we're going to look at one of the sunniest passages in Ecclesiastes. These verses are going to help us answer the question, how do we enjoy life in this vain, often vicious world?

How do we live life to the full when our lives are beset with loss and longing? These are tough questions. How does the gospel of Jesus Christ transform our heartache into happiness?

Ecclesiastes teaches us that the way to live life to the full in this fallen world is to cherish and enjoy the seemingly ordinary gifts and mundane gifts of God that he gives to us every day.

[8 : 57] We're going to learn to enjoy these gifts. We often look for happiness in relief from longstanding trial or success from a risky venture or some hard-earned reward. But Solomon wants us to see that joy is not in results but in receiving with glad and open hands the gifts of God.

So let's read Ecclesiastes 9, 7 through 10, and then I'm going to pray. Ecclesiastes 9, 7 through 10. Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already approved what you do.

Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going.

Happy realism. Let's pray and ask for God's help. Father in heaven, this is your word to us. Please help us to see with our eyes and to hear with our ears and to set our hearts upon all that you would show to us. We pray this in the name of your beloved son, Jesus Christ, whom we love with all our hearts. Amen. Amen. So if you are a note taker, I have three points that come from these verses, partly because preachers like to have three points and partly because I think there's three points to say here. And they are this, enjoy your wine, enjoy your wife, and enjoy your work. So first point, enjoy your wine, chapter 9, verses 7 through 8. Now look, I realize right off the bat, right? Some of you might be thinking, actually, I don't like wine. Or others of you are not old enough to drink wine.

And so you might be tripped up by this. But he says, enjoy your wine. That is not the only thing that Solomon wants us to enjoy. Solomon is saying that we are to enjoy our food and our drink. In fact, all of life, all of the tangible expressions of his goodness and his kindness that he's given to us.

[11 : 34] At first glance, these verses, they seem like kind of a random collection of suggestions, right? Some advice on how to live well. But did you notice that there is a very prominent theme of joy in these verses? Eat your bread with joy. Drink your wine with a merry heart. Enjoy life. And even the reference to white garments and having oil on your head. Some people think that maybe it's about purity, but really, it seems like in the context of Solomon's day, that is about dressing for feasting and festivals.

It's about having a party. That's what he's saying to do. Enjoy your party. Bread and wine, feasting and rejoicing. These are not frivolous events. These are not sideshows in our life, but they are full of meaning and full of pleasure. And God intends for us to find joy and happiness in everything that he has given us as a gift. So if it is spaghetti or steak, if it's Coca-Cola or Cabernet, enjoy it as a gift from God and with a merry heart. Now, anytime we talk about enjoying our wine, it's probably right and good that I say that God has given us these gifts for enjoyment and not for excess. It's not only a problem with wine or other alcohol. That can be a problem with food as well.

And I'm not this morning going to spend much time addressing issues here related to our temptations to lack self-control. The Bible has plenty to say about the sins and dangers of drunkenness or gluttony. And let's be aware that those are sins. But seeing that and saying that, then the Bible is clear on the one hand about the importance of self-control. But on the other hand, the Bible is also clear that we are to revel in and rejoice in God's gifts to us. We are to receive and enjoy them for his glory. And so he gives us gifts of food and wine, ordinary pleasures of social events together, parties, festivals, festivities. All of this is a gift from God. And they're meant to strengthen our hearts in the midst of our many cares and sorrows so that we might remember and know deep in our bones that God is good. Psalm 119.68, God is good and does good. One of my favorite verses. James 117 reminds us, every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. So God has given us gifts. Enjoy your wine. God has given us these gifts as an expression of his kindness, his pleasure in the material world. God is a creator.

And so this extends beyond even just food and drink. On a beautiful spring day, as we walk out, these grounds ought to be a reminder. Every Sunday, every time you gather here, look at the beauty just out the windows, the trees. Think about this. God could have made one kind of tree and every tree with one kind of leaf that always stayed the same color all the time. And there's such variety, shapes and sizes of leaves, shades of green. Some trees are short and fat and some are tall and skinny and they're beautiful to look at and they bud and bloom and then they're green and then leaves fall off and it's all a part of God's gifts to us. And maybe you noticed as we were reading through this that we are commanded, we are commanded to enjoy. Did you notice how many commands are in just these couple of verses? He says, go. He starts there. As you're going through life, he says, eat and drink. He says, let your garments be white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love and do whatever your hands find to do. He is commanding us to obey with our emotions. God wants us to learn to align our feelings with his good gifts and his pleasure in the world that he's created.

Joy is commanded. One of the themes throughout the book of Ecclesiastes is that joy is something that we have been commanded to experience. C.S. Lewis, famous author, novelist, he one time said, God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy. God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy. Have you thought about that? Well, the reason for that is because God wants our happiness to be in him and in the gifts that he has given us. And in the same way that any parent would be saddened by a child who didn't find pleasure in Christmas gifts around the tree, doesn't God, doesn't it grieve his heart if we don't see and receive and rejoice in the gifts that he's given to us? So we are called to obey God with our emotions and we're empowered to obey God with our emotions.

[16 : 44] He has given us his spirit to fill us and help us with that. How does he do it? How does he empower us to obey? Well, because joy is a command and it is also a gift from God to those he loves and has called.

Only Christians can truly enjoy life in this fallen world. Only Christians can be both realists who understand the depths and the measure of sorrow that there is in this world, but also happy realists who see that there are gifts from God and the pleasures around us and are for us and are from God.

And so these verses point us to a thoughtful and deliberate way of living that is careful to savor and to cherish the gifts of God. These verses begin with food and drink and celebration, but I hope it's obvious that this can start to filter down into all sorts of just mundane areas of life.

If you start thinking about it, there are pleasures to be had all the time. You don't have to wait for the next birthday party. You don't have to pop a cork to find pleasure and joy. There is joy to be had all around us. Of course, parties, birthdays, vacations, big milestones, those are happy moments, but these verses encourage us to find joy in very daily and mundane things. Sunrises, crossword puzzles, a little bit of jazz, a little bit of jazz, or whatever kind of music it is you like, laughter around the dinner table, and food on the table. I tell you, you'll have a lot of opportunities to find pleasure in food on the table around here. Just this last couple of days, Mexi wings, Mayfield ice cream, Navarro's barbecue. Whoa! Coming back, y'all, that was amazing.

Anyway, the vision of life that Solomon is putting forward here is one where God's people are realistic about how difficult the world is and yet choose to act on their faith and find joy in everyday life.

[18 : 49] I've got a quotation here for you from a theologian named David Gibson. Listen to what he says. It is vital to see that eating, drinking, dressing, and loving in these verses do not form an exhaustive list of God's gifts. Rather, it's a representative list of what it looks like to love life and live it to the full. These things are a way of saying when God made the world, he made it good. And no amount of being a Christian, of being spiritual, ever changes the fact that God put you in a physical world with hands and food and drink and culture and relationships and beauty. Sin fractures everything, distorts everything. But sin does not uncreate everything. So if we were to tap into the preacher's worldview and train of thought, I think an expanded list would go like this. So enjoy your wine, enjoy your bread, and ride a bike. See the Grand Canyon. Go to the theater. Learn to make music. Visit the sick. Care for the dying. Cook a meal. Feed the hungry. Watch a film. Read a book. Laugh with some friends until it makes you cry. Play football. Run a marathon. Snorkel in the ocean. Listen to Mozart.

Ring your parents. Write a letter. Play with your kids. Spend your money. Learn a language. Plant a church. Love it. Start a school. Speak about Christ. Travel to somewhere you've never been. Adopt a child. Many of you? Foster a child. Give away your fortune and then some.

Shape someone else's life by laying down your own. You may be able to add to the list above in a hundred ways. I hope you can add at least a few more. That'd be a great lunchtime conversation today, wouldn't it? What would you add to this list? What are some of the mundane daily pleasures the Lord has given to you? Think about this past week. What brought you joy? Where did you find happiness?

Think about this coming week. Let's be on the lookout for God's gifts to rejoice in. Let's marvel at the food and drink that we get to enjoy three times a day. It is a gift from God.

My brothers-in-law, I got these two brothers-in-law and the three of us, we like to eat and we like to eat together. As we have a little saying, every meal a memory. Because we enjoy it and we thank God for it. And so I pray that as we go out from here together, church, we will say every meal a memory.

[21 : 32] What a gift from God. Our culture leads only to dissatisfaction, to disappointment, and to disenchantment. Ecclesiastes, though, teaches us to enjoy what God has given us. So enjoy your wine and all that goes in it, with it, with it. But that's not the only point here. Enjoy your wine.

Second, enjoy your wife. Look at verse nine. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you unto the sun. He says, enjoy life with the wife whom you love.

It's no stretch then to say that this also means that wives are to enjoy life with the husband whom you love. I have been married to my bride, Nicole, for a little over 20 years. And I think this is one of the best commands in the Bible. Some commands are harder to follow, but this one is a delight.

The fact that this verse, though, the fact that this command is in the Bible means that some people need to be commanded to do this. Some people need to be reminded to do this. Some people need to be helped to do this. 20 years of marriage, I know, and from 18 years of pastoring, I know that marriage is not always a delight, that there is conflict, there can be friction, there's disagreements, there's disappointments, there's times when it is hard. All right, we are realists.

This verse pushes us to be happy realists, even in our marriages. The fact that this command is here, single people, can also protect you from an idealistic view. You might be tempted to think, well, if I could just get married, if I could just make it, if I could find that one, well, then I'd be happy, and then my problems would be over. This verse is here for a reason, folks. And so, yes, you should be looking forward towards marriage and working and preparing for marriage, but prepare yourself that we are happy realists about what that could be like. So, Solomon says that loving your wife or your husband, if you have one, is your portion in this life. What that means is whether you are married or whether you are single, that position is your portion. Okay? That means that planning and forethought and design God has gone into placing you there, has gone into placing you with that woman or with that man or in that single season. God thought about this. God, well, I don't know how long God had to think about this. I think he just knows these things instantly, but he knew what would be just right.

[24 : 19] He knew what would be perfect. He knew how to fit him for her and her for him. God is wise and good powerful to do this. The good giver, once again, giving good gifts to his children. Remember in Genesis 1 and 2, as God is forming the world, and you have that phrase that's repeated over and over again, and it was good, and it was good. Second day, third day, and it was good. Fourth day, and it was good. And then finally at the end, God looks back over all he had made, and it was very good. You turn the page into chapter 2. Adam was alone. It is not good. It's jarring. That's meant to like slap us into face. Whoa, this is God's creation. Doesn't God get what he wants? He made the world, and he made it in a way that it would be obvious to Adam. It was not good for him to be alone. And so he made Eve.

It's a wonderful story. It's a wonderful picture of how God designs each for the other. God made you. Couples, husbands, wives, God made you for one another's joy. God made you to serve one another.

God made you to delight in one another. And God made your marriage, he designed it to preach the gospel. That two sinners who have been brought together could live in harmony, could grow in patience, could learn to forgive and set aside wrongs and disappointments, who would lay down their lives for one another and model something of what Jesus Christ is like in his love for the church. And the church is like in her submission to Jesus. That is a miracle. As long as we're talking about what the Bible says to men and women, it's worth taking a brief moment to remember what the Bible says about men and women.

God created men and women together in the image of God. Men and women are created equal in value and dignity and personhood. Need them both. God loves them both. Men and women. Men and women.

But God has made men and women different in the roles that he has assigned to them. God has given us different jobs to do in the home and in the church. And we're not just in that. We're not just like ticking some theological box. Like, yeah, that's what we believe. We'll go with that. That's what the theologians say.

[26 : 45] Sure, that sounds good. This is God's design for men and women. It's one of the ways he shows his goodness to us. God made us for this as an expression of his goodness. And there is great joy in walking in that design and experiencing that. And all around us, our culture is bailing on this design. Our culture is jettisoning God's design in the desire to pursue self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-satisfaction.

There's a lot of self in the middle of that. What they're really doing is dethroning God and putting themselves on the throne in his place. But whenever people abandon God's design, they lose out on the opportunity to experience joy and peace, satisfaction, hope. It comes from walking in the good of God's design. So brothers and sisters, if you believe this, if you believe that this is God's design for us, men and women in marriage or as single Christians, let's not grow weary in doing good. Let's not lose sight of this goodness. Let's celebrate it. Let's not be ashamed to talk about it in front of our neighbors. This is a gift from God for our joy. And how does this work? How do these mundane moments in marriage become joy? Well, I have three suggestions for you. Remember first that God made you one for another. A simple place to begin is just to remember God, husbands and wives, God made you for each other.

And it's good to think about that. Whether you are just back from your honeymoon or you've got five plus decades together, God made you for one another. And think about how he's fitted you together. Think about how the strengths and the weaknesses of the one and the other serve to make up for each other, to offset, to complement each other. That's a gift from God. Second, find your joy in the other's joy.

How can you lay down your life today? How can you sacrifice for your spouse today? A year or two ago, I read Charles Dickens' book, *Great Expectations*. And I came across something that the main character, Pip, says to the love of his life, Estella, when he asked her to marry him. He says, if you can tell me that you will go through the world with me, you will surely make it a better world for me and me a better man for it. And I will try hard to make it a better world for you.

Isn't that a beautiful description of what it means to lay down our lives, to see the value of the other, to see, look, you better me and you better me for the world. And I'm going to try to make it a better world for you. I love that picture. Third, speak, speak often and speak specifically of your love and appreciation for one another. You are married to a person whom God is at work in. Even if you are, listen, if you are married to an unbeliever, and there may be some of you here, your husband or wife does not know the Lord. Either way, God is at work. God can be at work through your faith to testify to the truth and power of the gospel. If your husband or wife is a believer, then your spouse has the Holy Spirit in them. God's at work. And there's ups and downs. There's challenges. There's thin spots and joyful spots. And you got to work through all of that. But God is at work.

[30 : 31] God is at work in us. I think Martin Luther summed this up really well. He said, let the wife make her husband glad to come home and let him make her sorry to see him leave.

That's such a great way to think about it. So how can you remember this week how God fitted you together? How can you sacrifice and lay down your life for the other? And how can you speak often and specifically of your love and appreciation for each other? So God has given us all things to enjoy.

Enjoy your wine. Enjoy your wife. And third, enjoy your work. Verse 10. Look at verse 10. It says, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. For there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom and shall to which you are going. So the last ingredient for happiness is this.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. Enjoy your work. I imagine that many of you have read through Ecclesiastes enough times to know that actually Ecclesiastes has kind of a split view on work, kind of a schizophrenic view. Because at first, on the one hand, Ecclesiastes 2.23 says, all his days are full of sorrow and his work is vexation.

Realist. Then I saw Ecclesiastes 4.4. Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is a vanity and a striving after wind. Realist. On the other hand, Solomon wants workers to enjoy their work. Ecclesiastes 3.22. So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work. For that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what after him? Joyful realist. And our verse today, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. So what is your work? Most of you know, I think, pretty intuitively what your work is. For some of us, our work is what we get paid to do every day. You know that you are at work because you punch a clock. You get a W-2 at tax time every year. You have a business card or an email address.

[32 : 50] Then you know what your work is, right? That's pretty straightforward. If you are a student, there's a lot of young people, college students here. If you are a student, school, learning, that is your work. That is what God has appointed you to. And he calls you to the same kind of joy and satisfaction in your learning that he calls your parents or others around you to in their actual work. If you are a mom, I don't need to tell you what your work is.

You know far better than I do. But you have work. If you are a mother of small children, man, you have the hardest job in the room. But thinking about it as work may serve you and give you access to some of the categories that Solomon wants to think about.

Some of you might be past this phase. If you're retired, maybe you are done with a job, but maybe the Lord has still given you work to do. There is a great deal of discipleship left to be done. You have learned a lot about God's ways in the world. You have a lot to offer to a younger generation about parenting, about work, about joy, about faithfulness in Christian living, about how to stay a Christian for decades. We need that. I need that. Younger Christians in this church need that. There's evangelistic opportunities for you. There's many ways that the Lord may have work for you. And Ecclesiastes protects us. It protects us against the two great temptations with work.

There are two equal and opposite dangers related to work. It's idolatry and idleness. Idolatry and idleness. I'm borrowing these categories from a really good book on work called *The Gospel at Work* by Sebastian Trager and Greg Gilbert. And they explain in that book that these two sins are opposites.

Chances are most of us, we don't experience just one or the other. So we might be tempted to idolatry in our work when we overvalue our work. This can be a temptation for men and for women to overvalue our work, to find our identity in it, and to think that, well, the job that I do, the way that others see me as a worker is the most important thing about me. This might be you if your work is your primary source of satisfaction. You think, what can I get out of this? This might be you if your work is about being the best so that you can make a name for yourself and earn a reputation among your colleagues or your community. This might be you if your work has become primarily about making a difference in the world. The value of your work is that the value you put on it is determined by the impact you make in the world. That elevates fruitfulness over faithfulness. The opposite error, though, is idleness. If idolatry and work comes from overvaluing work, idleness comes from undervaluing work.

[35 : 58] There are some people who just flat out refuse to work. I've known one or two in my years as a pastor. The Bible's pretty clear. If a man will not work, let him not eat. He'll feel it. He'll eventually get back to it. But there are many ways that many more of us refuse to work in more subtle and perhaps dangerous ways. Maybe you've heard of procrastination.

I used to be an amateur procrastinator, and then I went pro. My son recently explained to me that procrastination is working tomorrow for a better today. So let that sink in for a minute.

This is easy to spot in other people, but sometimes harder to recognize in ourselves. Because in this day and age, it is easy to be very busy doing lots of not the right thing, lots of the less important things, lots of things, but not the things that God has called us to do in our work. And so we need to identify and recognize idleness in our work. You might be idle in your work if your work is merely a means to an end. It's punching a clock. I got to get through the day.

Thank God it's Friday. Can't wait for the weekend. All I want to do is whatever it is you do. Maybe if work is just nothing but an endless frustration to you, or maybe if work has been divorced from discipleship, and you don't think about how work can help you to grow as a faithful Christian and the fruits of the Spirit, maybe if you don't connect love and joy and peace and patience and all the rest to your work, well, then maybe there's a kind of idleness there. There's a Scottish preacher named Alexander McLaren. He had this to say about procrastination before it was even a thing. I don't think that word had been invented yet. But he said this, no unwelcome tasks become any less unwelcome by putting them off till tomorrow. It's only when they are behind us and done that we begin to find that there is a sweetness to be tasted afterwards, and that the remembrance of the unwelcome duties unhesitatingly done is welcome and pleasant.

Accomplished, they're full of blessing. And there's a smile on their faces as they leave us. But undone, they stand threatening and disturbing our tranquility and hindering our communion with God.

[38 : 28] If there be lying before you any bit of work from which you shrink, go straight up to it and do it at once. The only way to get rid of it is to do it. Well, that helps me. That helps me with procrastination. I have a little set of index cards on a magnet on my desk lamp right there with different quotes on it. And I'll cycle them through. They're all about work. They're all about God's smile on work. And this is one of them. And I'll look at this quote from time to time. And it helps me to be a worker, to be a happy realist, and to see work as a gift from God, something to be enjoyed and experienced as an expression of God's favor. So Solomon wants us to see our work in the proper proportion and learn to enjoy it. So we recognize it's a gift from God. We remember that we have the Holy Spirit in us that transforms our thinking and feeling about our work. And we look for specific ways to be grateful. Give thanks for your work. When was the last time you thanked God for your job?

Not just that it brings in a buck so you can eat and pay the rent, but thank God for the good, honest labor that it is. The contribution it makes, the ways you can serve others, the ways that you have opportunities to spread the gospel, or at least model the gospel through faithful, hard work.

1 Thessalonians 5.18 says, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. So we're commanded, enjoy your wife, excuse me, enjoy your wine. We started there.

Enjoy your wine, enjoy your wife, and enjoy your work. I said that Solomon wants us to be joyful realists. Is this realistic? Is this a kind of life that you feel like you can go out and really have?

Is this one of those things that sounds nice and it's easy to nod along with in the comfort of a Sunday morning meeting, but then Tuesday afternoon hits, and you're not thinking about what a gift food is because you had to eat on the run, grab lunch in the car. You wolfed it down. It was just fuel for the machine. You had a conflict with your wife this morning and you're not thinking about what a joy this marriage is because you're grumbling about something she said and your pants weren't ironed or whatever it was. And then man, work is just another day, another problem. All I do is solve problems. How is this realistic? How can we do this? Yes, you enjoy a great meal, but you end up with a sink full of dirty dishes. Marriage is the most delightful of all human relationships, but there are calendars to maintain and carpools to split up and conflicts to work out. And work is work. It is tedious, sometimes taxing, and always toil.

[41 : 20] How do we become joyful realists in this? It's probably not going to surprise you when I say, we need Jesus. We need Jesus to help us with this. And Jesus, in fact, said he came to do exactly this, to transform our thinking and our living, to make us into joyful realists so that we could enjoy your wine and your wife and your work. In John 10, verse 10, he says, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. If you thought about that, Jesus came so that we, well, he came for many reasons. He came to forgive our sins, but that's not all. He came to transform us so that we might enjoy life that he has given us, that we might have life and have it abundantly. Solomon gives us a vision for enjoying your wife and your wine and your work. Jesus gives us power to enjoy your wife and your wine and your work. All of the ways that Solomon wants us to find joy are possible only through Jesus Christ. Because through him, we see our biggest problem has been solved. Our sins have been forgiven. We've been made right with God and adopted into his family. And that changes everything. We realize we are sinners that deserve the wrath of God. And instead, we have received grace. We've been forgiven and it transforms the way we look at the world. Every moment of life is a gift. We deserve eternal death and punishment. And we have been given sunsets and orange juice.

And think of all the pleasures there are in a conversation, holding hands, walking through the neighborhood with your kids, riding their bikes off in front of you. That's what Jesus has done for us. It's a pastor named Doug Wilson. I'm going to finish with this. He says, so the message here is twofold. God is the one who gives things and God is the one who gives the power to enjoy things.

These are distinct gifts. Just as a can of peaches and a can opener are distinct gifts. Only the first is given to the unbeliever.

Right? Unbelievers have peaches, but they're in the can. They can't get at them. The believer is given both, the can of peaches and the can opener, which is simply another way of saying that he has given the capacity for enjoyment. Friends, God has given us gifts to enjoy and the capacity to enjoy. So let's go forth and delight.

You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.