

Christian Vocation: James Fullton, architect

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Preacher: James Fullton

[0:00] Good morning. I have some good news and I have some bad news. I'll start with the bad news. If you love your work and enjoy your work days, if you find your work satisfying and rewarding, if in the words of Frederick Buechner you feel that in your work you found the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger have met, well then what I'm about to say may feel like a bit like a wet blanket. However, if your work's hard and you find it frustrating, if you lack confidence at work and question whether you even have the skills to perform, if you are frustrated by bureaucracy and you have a hard time getting out of bed because your work just doesn't seem to matter, well then the same message may feel like a cool wet cloth on your tired sweaty brow. Before we get there though, let me back up and tell you a bit about myself and my work. My name is James Fulton and I live in New Haven with my wife Kim and our five children, four of whom we adopted from Brazil in 2009 and one who was born in 2012. We've been at Trinity since 2005. After some initial interest in being either a marine biologist or a commercial airline pilot,

I started homing in on architecture during my middle school years. At the time, a friend of mine had a few architecture related books, a National Geographic book about large engineered structures such as bridges and dams, and a few Frank Lloyd Wright books. I would often peruse these books on my visits to his house and by high school I was fairly certain I would go on to study architecture and I took some drafting and residential design electives to test the waters. After high school, I studied architecture at Georgia Tech where I received a Bachelor of Science in 2002, married my high school sweetheart the next weekend, and moved with her that summer to New Haven to pursue a master's degree from the Yale School of Architecture. Two years into my three-year program, I interned at Picard Chilton, a mid-sized architecture firm on Chapel Street across from the Green, and when during my last year of grad school they offered me full-time employment upon graduation, Kim and I decided to settle in New Haven. I accepted the job offer and we bought our first house. I worked at Picard Chilton for about eight years before moving to Yale

University where I have been working in the facilities planning and construction department for about six and a half years. Whereas before I was the architect, now I hire the architect and am responsible for representing the university's various interests including financial and programmatic while balancing a complex web of competing desires from various constituencies across the university. My job is to synthesize these wants and needs into a clear direction for the architects and their design teams during the design process and to make sure their designs fit our requirements. There are others in my same or similar position and together with our colleagues on the construction side of things, we touch hundreds of millions of dollars of capital projects each year. When Pastor Greg reached out to me about speaking to this class, I was initially hesitant, but I told him I'd meet him for lunch before saying no out of hand.

At lunch, I elaborated on my hesitancy. I've been feeling unmotivated at work lately and I don't feel I'd have anything to offer the group. Work has been so frustrating lately and some menial tasks have been sucking up the time I'm generally able to spend on the larger projects in my portfolio about which I feel more confident.

The bureaucracy of my position is feeling oppressive lately and I feel like I'm stuck doing things of little consequence. Well, James, he said matter-of-factly, it sounds like you could speak to us about Ecclesiastes.

[3 : 49] That's right. I'm not sure whether Pastor Greg knew this before we met, but having just led my small group through Ecclesiastes within the last year, I found myself suddenly fresh out of convincing reasons to say no.

And so here I am in front of you speaking to myself as much as I am to you this morning. Any questions before we move on? All right.

Ecclesiastes 2, 13 and 14 says, Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.

The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness, and yet I perceive that the same event happens to all of them. I have put around some papers that have all the references, so I hope you've found those.

As I'm slowly discovering along my Christian walk, we often have lots of unfair preconceptions about books of the Bible until we read them, study them, and meditate on them firsthand.

[4 : 57] The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes was certainly a book that had a particular reputation in my mind. Perhaps, as I did, you imagine Ecclesiastes to be pessimistic, even hopeless at worst, or at least melancholy at best.

At first blush, Ecclesiastes is certainly a bit of a downer, what with all that meaninglessness that's announced here, there, and everywhere. However, in a short time of reading and reflection, the hints of unmatched beauty in its poetic prose shine through as it pursues its almost singular point, and one notices a richness they might otherwise miss by simply pulling tweet-length verses out of context.

And if your only experience with Ecclesiastes is the Byrd's 1965 folk hit and anti-war ballad, Turn, Turn, Turn, well, then you're missing a huge opportunity to wrap yourself in the sober comforts of this book.

Ecclesiastes shows us a lifetime of wisdom from an individual known in Hebrew as Kohelet. Often translated as preacher or teacher in English, Kohelet refers to an individual who speaks at a gathered assembly or congregation.

Kohelet is a wise, Solomon-like individual and has been traditionally identified as King Solomon. I mention Kohelet's wisdom here, and so it's important to place Ecclesiastes in the broader context of its genre, namely Hebrew wisdom literature, which also includes Proverbs and Job.

[6 : 25] In fact, these three books, in the order Proverbs, then Ecclesiastes, and finally Job, provide a bit of a narrative arc and work together to present us with a nuanced and well-rounded overview of biblical wisdom that we might miss by looking at one book alone.

Charles Spurgeon said, Knowledge may be dangerous if unaccompanied with wisdom, which is the art of rightly using what we know. Knowing the content of these three books, then, could be considered knowledge.

Knowing how to balance them is wisdom. As the pastors described so well in last year's sermon series, Proverbs provides a sort of practical template for what it might look like to live a God-pleasing life.

In the world of Proverbs, the wise seem to be rewarded for adherence to God's instruction, while the foolish, who carelessly ignore or blatantly reject wise living, tend to get their comeuppance.

But lest we forget that Proverbs is a book of Proverbs and not promises, Ecclesiastes comes along, shakes its head, and says, Yeah, about that, I hate to break it to you, but it doesn't always work that way.

[7 : 32] The verse I read just a few minutes ago is indicative of this overarching theme. In numerous places throughout Ecclesiastes, Kohelet notes the value of the wise individual over the fool, but he also matter-of-factly acknowledges the apparent disconnect that often the same thing happens to both, or even the opposite of what we might imagine should occur happens to each.

When Hugh Hefner died last year at age 91, I was amazed by all the celebrity endorsements and flattering obituaries. I just couldn't imagine, especially in the Me Too age, that men and women alike were fawning over man, who built an empire and an industry that diminishes the God-designed beauty of sexual relationships by treating women like sex toys and men like base consumers.

But then Ecclesiastes 7.15 came to mind and made some sense of the madness, at least observationally. In my vain life I have seen everything.

There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. It is Ecclesiastes, then, that starts to tease out what happens when the neat and tidy edges of proverbial wisdom blur and the ends of our lived experience under the sun begin to fray.

Rounding out this long arc of biblical wisdom, started by Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Job comes along and, well, all bets are off when we meet unimaginable suffering and lose sight of everything we thought we knew about ourselves, our relationship to God, and what it means to live a good life.

[9 : 04] But that's a whole other story. As with the other wisdom books, Ecclesiastes is heavily observation-based. Oftentimes, Kohelet is not saying whether particular situations are good or bad, but simply that they occur, and we have to come to grips with them as we live a life bracketed by extremes.

This is a fair reading, for instance, of Ecclesiastes 3, 1 through 8, the famous turn, turn, turn verses, where the world described has us inhabiting the broad spectrum between birth and death, planting and reaping, weeping and laughing, loving and hating.

Does anybody have any questions so far? Okay. There'll be time at the end, too. All right. Ecclesiastes 1, 2 and 3.

Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities. All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

English author Anthony Burgess said, Translation is not a matter of words only. It is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture.

[10 : 19] Any study of Ecclesiastes requires careful consideration of one word, which, if understood poorly from its translation, risks skewing our understanding of the text. Understood correctly and with nuance, however, this word, which is used 38 times in 12 short chapters, will help us notice the message of Ecclesiastes better than if we went by the face value of the word in the translation we happen to be reading at the time.

I'm going to ask you to open your Bibles to Ecclesiastes, chapter 1. So I'm wondering, in verse 2 of chapter 1, how many people have meaningless in their translation?

Okay. Anybody else have meaningless in their translation? Okay. A few. All right. So as an example, meaningless, this is how the New International Version and the New Living Translation translate the word we're going to be talking about.

How many people have vanity in their translation? Okay. Quite a few more have vanity. So this is how English Standard Version and the King James Version, among numerous others, translate the word we're looking for.

Does anyone have anything else other than meaningless or vanity? Okay. That covers it. Well, the International Standard Version says pointless.

[11:49] The New English Translation says futile. The Good News Translation says useless. And there are a lot of others as well. All of these words beat around the bush as the Hebrew word here lacks any concise English translation.

And that word is hevel. Hevel is a noun which personally makes my grammarian self want to issue meaningless, pointless, futile, and other adjectival translations.

But Strong's Concordance defines the word as vapor or breath, which are close in concept to the Hebrew but not so popular in translations. Vanity is a reasonable translation and seems to be one of the most popular.

It is at least a noun. And when defined not as inflated pride in oneself or one's appearance but rather something that is vain, empty, or valueless, it comes close. Vain being defined by Merriam-Webster as marked by futility or ineffectualness.

Keeping in mind the idea of futility or ineffectualness while we read Ecclesiastes yields a more faithful interpretation of the original text than we might get from meaningless or even vanity alone.

[12:58] As alluded to by the Strong's definition, Hevel may physically refer to smoke or a vapor, which is actually a pretty good image to consider as we try to get the gist of this complex word.

So if we imagine smoke for a second, we can see it. It seems to have a form, but if we try to touch it, we can't. The moment we try to grasp it, the quicker it changes or it dissipates or it moves.

Depending on context, then, this word extends to imply a seemingly pointless venture, a paradox, an enigma, something that cannot be grasped, something that seems to defy human understanding.

Other uses of Hevel in the Old Testament are variously translated in the ESV. Job 7.16 says, I loathe my life, I would not live forever, leave me alone, for my days are a breath.

Proverbs 31.30 says, Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. From Jeremiah, the instruction of idols is but wood, they are worthless, a work of delusion.

[14:06] And Zechariah says, for the household gods utter nonsense and the diviner see lies that tell false dreams and give empty consolation. So meaningless, vanity, a breath, worthless, empty, futility, smoke, all of these words have been used in an attempt to express Hevel in English, and each is reasonable and yet incomplete.

Ecclesiastes is for the most part defined by a particular mood and holding Hevel lightly and surrendering to the poetry of that mood allows for a richer reading of the book. All this to say, with regard to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes as it touches on our work, well, it's complicated and confusing and a bit hard to get a handle on.

But one thing is clear, it would be far too simplistic to sit back, glance at Ecclesiastes and call our work meaningless. Any questions there?

Pause for a second. Alright. So, our work may not be meaningless, but it sure is frustrating.

As we learned in Pastor Greg's introduction to this class, the origin of work is good. However, after the fall, our work was subjected to futility, and we now often experience our work as toil, a word which, by my count in the ESV, Kohelet uses 32 times.

[15:39] In chapter 2, we find Kohelet in the midst of a search for meaning. I searched till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life, he says.

He first tries pleasure and laughter. Enjoy yourself, he says. But alas, Hevel. Wine? Nope.

Also Hevel. I like this next one. He moves on to making great works, houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, trees, pools, forests, you name it, he built it.

All Hevel. He buys up slaves and builds up a massive household. He increases his flocks and herds. He amasses great treasures.

Nope. Hevel. He tries to find meaning in entertainment when he hires male and female singers. Perhaps Jerusalem scout talent, I don't know. He even avails himself of many concubines, yet even that is Hevel.

[16 : 45] At this point, Kohelet has quite literally pursued wine, women, and song to find some deeper meaning. He opines, So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem.

Also my wisdom remained with me and whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure for my heart found pleasure in all my toil and this was my reward for all my toil.

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Do you notice here what Kohelet is ultimately seeking through his work? He's expecting that fulfilling his every desire will give him pleasure and for a time it does but of course as we might suspect it doesn't last and something finally dawns on him.

In the end seeking cheap pleasure is all Hevel impossible to grasp fleeting a striving after wind. I wish this was a lesson we would take to heart by listening to Kohelet rather than trying to find meaning for ourselves and things that can never provide ultimate meaning.

[18 : 06] Instead we're often like the child who has to touch the hot stove even though we've been told it will burn us. I can relate to Kohelet a bit here in a lesson I learned quite by accident.

Come to think of it I suppose many valuable life lessons are learned by accident. The firm I worked for Picard Chilton has a well-deserved reputation for designing large commercial structures often high-rises and they're very good at it.

Since first sketching the distinctive spired crown of the Chrysler building from photos years before I'd ever been to New York City skyscrapers have long been an interest of mine. How exciting it was then to find myself just out of school immersed in the design of soaring structures that could change the skylines of their respective cities for years to come.

In a short time I found myself traveling frequently for work, often times internationally. The expense was my firms but the frequent flyer miles and hotel points were mine to keep and use for my family.

I presented a competition in Copenhagen. I traveled to Malaysia for a single face-to-face meeting where my time in the air getting there and back was way longer than my time on the ground. And I went to Italy twice to look at stone slabs at the same quarry where the block Michelangelo used for David had been cut in the 15th century.

[19 : 27] For my last five years at the firm I was involved with my longest term assignment which had me traveling bi-weekly to Calgary for meetings and site visits for the design and construction of a 50-story office tower.

It was fun, it was exciting, it was glamorous, especially when I started getting upgraded to first class almost every time. In many ways I was living the dream but of course it wasn't always a dream.

I mean this in the most humble way possible but once a bit of a young star in the office things started to change when Kim and I adopted our children and I started showing hesitancy to put in the hours that other mostly unmarried employees did without balking.

My teammates started questioning my commitment to our projects and the politics of the office started to become tedious. I began to receive low marks on my peer reviews for my work ethic and when I tried to address this with my supervisor by telling him I was often in the office several hours before the rest of my team and so when I left by 6pm I had already been there 10 or 11 hours instead of their 7 or 8.

His answer was, well, perception is reality and their perception is you're not here enough. When I found out that some younger employees who had been at the firm less than I had and who were not yet even licensed architects were making more money than me, I really started to question the smiles and nods and pats on the back from my bosses and eventually I started to consider alternative employment.

[20:54] I hadn't gone into my first job looking for my life's meaning per se. I wasn't on a mission like Kohelet is in chapter two. Rather, it just kind of happened that I was doing pretty much exactly what I had wanted to do for so long.

When I left, I was sad not so much that I was leaving the firm, but because I felt I was leaving the firm, disillusioned by the way I had been treated, whether consciously or unconsciously, by my colleagues. But I like to say now that I am thankful that God gave me my dream job right out of school, because then I could do my dream job for a while, set it aside, and move on to something else.

Had I not had the opportunities I did at the time, I might still be searching and striving for a dream that could never provide any ultimate fulfillment. I might still not have learned Kohelet's lesson.

My current job is hard to compare to my old job. They are in the same industry and I am dealing daily with architecture and buildings, but they are like apples and oranges. There are some things I miss about my old job and some things I could do without in my new job, but the move overall has been a good step for me and my family.

Practically speaking, it has allowed me to support a family of seven on one income. The benefits are above average, the hours are fewer and more predictable, but it's also a job and it feels like a job most days too.

[22:16] Who of us then can relate to Kohelet a little bit farther into chapter 2? Verses 18 through 21. I hated all my toil in which I toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool.

Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it.

This also is vanity and a great evil. This has got to be one of the biggest frustrations I have in my current job, and one of the biggest motivations sucks that I battle every day.

That is, feeling like the work I do today will be inconsequential in a few years. Each day it feels like I'm fighting to make wise decisions for the future, at the same time I'm fighting against unwise decisions from the past.

The most poetic way I can think to describe my current job is that I'm one of the stewards of Yale's built environment. One of the reasons I wanted to work at Yale was because of the legacy of great buildings that make up its campus.

[23:37] From Sterling Memorial Library to the Yale Art Gallery to the Yale Whale and everywhere in between, Yale is littered with amazing architecture and has shown itself at times to be an institution with great architectural vision.

But all that glitters is not gold. For every well-maintained building on campus, there are at least two or three that need serious work. Each of which got to that point over time by many people making many decisions, both big and small.

Generations that have come before me and generations that will come after me will attempt to be wise in the spending of large sums of money on buildings at Yale. But we will also always miss the mark.

Things we think are wise expenditures today will be moot when a new faculty member or a new dean or a new provost or a new president decide that priorities have changed. I never know whether one of my projects will be neglected and relegated to second-rate care or re-renovated in a couple years at great expense because someone has changed their mind on its utility.

Oftentimes, in the interest of financial decisions today, we're asked to defer work, which only exacerbates other issues in the future. I'm actually on the receiving end of one of these issues right now.

[24:51] A few years ago, what we call the NAVE, that is the main hall of the church-like Sterling Memorial Library, underwent a \$20 million restoration. The project is stunning, really. Though I wasn't involved in the project at the time, the library is one of my responsibilities now.

At the time, a decision was made to defer replacement of some rain leaders, pipes, that bring water down from the roof through the stone walls to the stormwater management system below. Instead, the lines were scoped with a camera to look for damage and then protected on the inside by synthetic lining rather than replaced.

I'm confident this was done to save money, keep a schedule, and avoid the hassle of invasive stone work. However, considering the age of the building and otherwise comprehensive renovation that touched everything else surrounding it, it would have been the perfect time to replace the leaders with the least amount of impact on operations in the long run.

Instead, only a few short years later, the lining is suspected to have failed at what was likely a weak joint to begin with, and rainwater has been entering the cavity between the inner and outer stone walls and their brick core for months, telegraphing moisture through to the interior stone.

The flash flood level rain we had a few weeks ago didn't help, and the failure has now been catastrophic and the issue has become critical. An easily ignored problem that was deferred then now has water leaking through and staining the stone in one of the most prominent public locations on campus.

[26:14] And what I'm sure will be hundreds of thousands of dollars of work that will impact the public space of the library with construction noise and hassle could have been prevented for far less expense and impact when the space was renovated in the first place.

The decision that led to this problem wasn't mine, but it's my problem now nonetheless. Unless I get too full of myself, I'm sure I am making decisions I feel are wise now that will become someone else's problem in the future.

So when faced with these frustrations, when we realize that we can't place ultimate meaning in our work, when we can't count on future stewards of our work to care as much as we did, and when even our wisest decisions today will be thought foolish in the future, what are we to do?

So the quicker we remove ultimate meaning from our work, the quicker we are free to see it for what it actually is. But what is it? Fortunately, Kohelet presents both the problem and the solution in almost one breath.

He says, What gain has the worker from his toil? I've seen the business that God has given the children of man to be busy with.

[27:32] He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live.

Also, that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. This is God's gift to man. That's Ecclesiastes 3, 9 through 13.

And then Ecclesiastes 2, 24 and 25 says, There is nothing better for a person than he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also I saw is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment.

So did you catch what it is? Our work is a gift. And not only is our work itself a gift, but the ability to enjoy its fruits is also a gift.

Often times, I do not experience my work day, nor reflect on it afterwards as a gift from God. So know that I'm talking to myself here as much as I'm talking to you. But when confronted with the issues raised by Kohelet, I can see that it is a gift.

[28:47] It is a gift that allows me to provide for my family. It is the gift that allows my wife the space to take educating and mothering our children seriously. It is the gift that allows us the time and resources to open our home to a small group.

It is a gift that provides, as I say to my children, all of the things we need and many, many of the things that we want. In light of the frustrations of our work, and perhaps despite of it, we are wise to see our work, whatever it is, as a gift from God and be grateful.

I have a feeling that embracing our spirit of gratitude may even begin to soften some of the frustrations surrounding our work. But I want to go a bit further than Kohelet does and try to bring together some larger biblical themes here.

Ecclesiastes ends by summarizing Kohelet's arguments and exhorting the reader. Ecclesiastes 12, 13. The end of the matter, all has been heard.

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. This got me thinking about God's commandments, and as it relates to our work, one particular imperative came to mind from the New Testament.

[30:04] In Colossians, Paul writes, Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. But what is this inheritance? What do we know that Kohelet didn't? As we saw from chapter 2, Kohelet illustrates that one of the main frustrations for us in our work is that what we work so hard to create often gets left to someone else.

Kohelet is not the only biblical figure to notice this. The prophet Zephaniah says, Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them.

Though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them. Another prophet, Amos, says, You have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them.

You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. Similarly, Deuteronomy says, You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it.

[31:10] You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit. There are other instances as well, but the general theme seems to be thus. Disobedience of the Lord results in the inability to enjoy the fruit of our labor.

This certainly gels with our understanding of work as toil, as the corruption of a good thing after the fall. It is this world we live in post-fall that we have seen Kohelet trying to grapple with as he observes a frustratingly unfair world.

Deuteronomy describes the consequences of disobedience. Zephaniah and Amos describe judgment. However, there's another prophet who uses the houses and vineyard to describe restoration and promise.

In his description of the new heaven and the new earth, Isaiah says, They shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat. And my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. Finally, at last, there will be a restoration.

[32 : 20] Not one that takes away work, but one in which our relationship with it will be made right. When we shall again enjoy the fruits of our labor as God intended.

No more as Kohelet will we be subject to an unfair world. As the Jesus Storybook Bible says, every story whispers his name.

And so we know that scriptures like Isaiah point to Christ. And we know that this promised restoration is offered in the person of Christ. It seems to me that the promise of this future restoration of the right relationship of labor and fruit is what gives a dignity to our still frustrating work today.

A point I should very much remember when I'm most disenchanted in my job. Thankfully, ungrateful sinner that I am in my daily work through Christ, I don't have to obey perfectly to gain the eternal reward.

Christ has already done the work on my behalf. In Joshua, God reminds the Israelites of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built and you dwell in them.

[33 : 28] You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant. Is that not the promise for the Christian also? Is that not the inheritance that Paul mentions in Colossians?

In our case, Christ has labored to build the house for us and has planted the vineyards and cultivated the vine so that we might not labor in vain. Who knows?

Maybe I like all these scriptures because they talk about houses and the architect in me just can't help it. But the psalmist reminds us, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Because we know that the Lord himself is building our houses, we have the freedom to receive even our toil, as Kohelet suggests, as a gift from God with gratitude.

Because what awaits us is something that Kohelet couldn't even dream of. When Christ brings forth the restoration of creation, it will have us looking back on even our worst work days under the sun and saying with full-throated joy to hevel with it.

[34 : 38] Oh, I've got to groan. That's good. Questions? Bleep! You have to bleep Hebrew words?

Thank you. Happy to take a few questions if you have any.

Yeah. Thank you for sharing your experience. It's actually really encouraging. I think one of the questions I have is how do you, you know, having been trained in an ethic that strives for perfection and also having internalized the faith that sort of demands that out of you, right?

And that's very much, I think, who you are. How do you, in your work, when you are frustrated by decisions that you view as incorrect, how do you put back?

How do you raise that in a way that is, you know, is godly? Because I understand that, you know, in some careers, you know, we're talking about money and time and aesthetics.

[36 : 10] And in other careers, we're talking about people's lives and the success or failure of products that could impact disease and death. So, there's a certain indignation sometimes that occurs, you know, within, I think, within me when I see the same problems.

And when I raise these objections and stuff, I can do it in a very harsh way. And it can be very alienating to those around me.

But at the same time, you know, there's a time and place for that. So, I don't know if you have some thoughts on it. Yeah. So, the question is how to sort of push back in a godly way on things that we think are unwise, perhaps.

So, yeah, money. A lot of decisions at Yale are made based on money. And related to that, an unrealistic expectation of what money can buy sometimes.

And so, you know, between my colleagues and I, sometimes as we're brainstorming what's going on and, like, there's a component of this project we really think is important to do, we'll be talking about it.

[37 : 28] And I keep always coming back to, you know, it's either worth doing or it's not worth doing. Right? Like, if the provost really wants this, it's either worth doing here at the quality that we expect at Yale or it's worth not doing at this time because the money's not there.

So, sometimes there are those frustrations. But more to your point, perhaps, is, you know, there are definitely occasions where something has been excluded from a project.

And not constantly but periodically over the course of design and even into construction because we carry contingency monies to cover certain changes and that sort of thing. I will, one element in particular of a recent project, I never got it covered, but periodically I was saying, listen, I think that the right thing to do, ultimately, it's a practical, practically doing this now will keep us from having to come back in five years and do it in the same space that we're already in.

So, there's a practical, but also aesthetically for the quality of the university, like, this is something. And, you know, I did that three or four times to try to get a certain element brought back in for a small incremental cost relative to the whole.

And at a certain point, I did all I could do, you know, I guess I had to say hevel. Like, I couldn't, there was, there was no more to push back on because it wasn't, you know, working, working under, working to make a finite set of decisions under a larger decision-making body can be difficult.

[39 : 02] But, you know, when I feel it's appropriate, I do push, but it doesn't always, it doesn't always work. I don't know if that answers your question.

Kirsten and then John. I'd like to commend you and your wife, first of all, on making the difficult decision to put your family first and make a job change, which was not popular among your peers, especially now.

So, it's something that people just don't understand. And it's not a, it's not even a basis of whether you're a Christian or not. It's just in a career-driven society, everyone just assumes both of you are going to have full-time jobs with extra hours.

And it's a, it's a sacrifice that you can do. And, come to me, being a little bit older than you, we are on the other tail end of married children. And, um, I thought I was going to go back to teaching full-time, you know, and my kids went into school full-time.

The Lord had other plans for me. Being on this other end now, I wouldn't trade it for anything. Because that all is hebel doesn't factor in into the big picture of things, you know, for us personally.

[40 : 15] Um, so, that difficult decision to switch to Yale and not be in the high-intensity work, or whether it's just as simple as saying yes to one job and not another.

Um, you know, are we listening to the Lord and what he has promised for us in the future? Or are we listening to what our peers are saying and what society is saying? And in the job world right now, with it being as competitive as it is for those new, really good jobs that are out there, it's really a difficult decision to make and not one to be taken lightly.

So, I just, you know, I, I hope that you feel that the, the sacrifice and the switch was worth it, even if you don't feel it every day.

Yes. Yes and yes. It's okay to wake up. Yes and yes. I see your posts about, you know, who you're next to on the bus or what you're listening to. And sometimes you sit there saying, man, I don't know if this is worth it.

So I understand that completely. Yeah. John, did you have? Yeah. Thanks so much, James. That was so pointy and beautiful. And I love the way of, um, gesture too, just kind of streaks of light and hope that we have.

[41 : 27] Because you think of, ah, Moses' cry. And you know, God, oh God, give permanence to the world. That long, right?

Not just a slip through your fingers. I think of, ah, how that gnawing kind of eats at us all. And, ah, when I think of vanity, vanity, I mean, when those, those words do, well, kallos, the Greek, which might have a semantic range, it's a pretty close.

I think of, ah, I think of 1 Corinthians 15, 58. Therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always about in the word of the Lord. That in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

And the therefore is, you know, 1 Corinthians 15 is just talking about the whole direction. God will take everything, and there is a permanent quality, and it will persevere.

So, the kingdom actually seems to be the answer to our longing, that there would be something permanent in our labors. Though it seems like the possibility that we might not invest them well.

[42 : 36] If, ah, in Philipians 2, ah, I don't know, somewhere around, ah, what it says, ah, would you, it's always, that I might not have labored in vain.

And he would say, but he'd know that he would not, if he held fast for the work of the Lord, that he would know that in the day of Christ he had not run, nor labored in vain.

So, we have, we feel this gnawing, but the kingdom allows us to bless in such a way that it will be permanent. He seems like he doesn't abandon the late work of his hands, and that he doesn't even abandon the work of the hands of his people.

So, thank you for that. Thanks. Thanks, John. Any last words? All right.

Thank you very much. All right. Let's pray for, um, let's pray for James, and, uh, pray for others who are working in architecture, and also others who are frustrated in their work.

[43 : 48] All right. All right. Lord, we thank you for, thank you for James, and thank you for the way that you have, um, brought these truths home in his own heart over the years.

Thank you, Lord, for, uh, showing him, um, that our, our dream job is not, it's not, it's not all that you've called us to live for.

And, uh, thank you for, um, uh, showing him that lesson and yet bringing him through that and, um, helping him, pray that you would help him to find contentment in you day by day to, um, to live in, in the, in the gratitude, uh, for what you have given to him to, even to enjoy, uh, the work that you've given him.

Um, uh, and to persevere through the frustrations of it. Lord, we pray for others who are working in architecture and others who may be, uh, struggling with some of these, um, uh, tensions and, and, and difficulties that, uh, that he's spoken about today.

Uh, Lord, that you would give them wisdom, that you would help them to, to work, to, to work heartily as for you and not, uh, for, uh, not for other people. Uh, Lord, that, uh, you would help them to, uh, to, to, to know that you are, uh, to, to find hope and joy in those promises of, of restoration that you are building.

[45 : 18] You are building a house, uh, for us, uh, Lord, that one day we will enjoy, uh, the, the fruit of, uh, of your work on our behalf. Uh, and Lord, we pray for, uh, pray for, especially for those who are, uh, just facing frustrations or feeling like their work is toilsome and, and even, and empty Lord, that's all of us at one level.

Um, but I pray especially for those who just feel that, um, in an oppressive way or on a daily basis, uh, or an hourly minute by minute basis.

Um, uh, Lord, that you would draw near to them in, in their frustrations, that you would help them to bring those frustrations to you. Um, that you would help them to, um, uh, to, to, to look, to find some of the wisdom, to find some of the wisdom in Ecclesiastes.

Uh, as well as Proverbs and, and Job, uh, to be helpful to them. Um, uh, Lord, that they would, that, that you would, um, yeah, just give them wisdom about how to, how to live in a very, in, in very frustrating work environments.

Um, uh, and Lord, we, uh, yeah, we thank you for this, uh, for all that you've given us this morning. Um, pray that you would help us to, uh, take it to heart, uh, and encourage one another with these words.

[46 : 35] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah. Thank you. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.