

Your best life now?

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, as we come again to this portion of scripture, we pray again for your illumination.

We pray for the spirit to be at work. Please help me to proclaim these words of yours in a way that is faithful to you and in a way that helps us to understand your intentions, your purposes, how you want us to view our lives and our world.

So please be speaking to us today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now, one of my favorite shows growing up was The Lion King. I watched the animated movie multiple times as a kid and as an adult, I've been fortunate to catch the musical twice.

And one of my favorite things about it is simply listening to that rousing opening song, The Circle of Life. You know that part as the Zulu chants start?

You see the sun rising, the river flowing, the birds flying, and all the animals moving and gathering together against the backdrop of the majestic mountains and the misty skies as baby Simba is anointed and dedicated.

[1 : 18] And the basic idea behind the song is that there is a rhythm, a natural pattern to all of life that we all simply move along to even as we try to find our place here.

And implicitly, one big lesson that the entire movie wants to say is don't mess with this circle. But here's an interesting question to ponder on.

Is there a circle of life we move to, whether we realize it or not? Are there certain rhythms that we dance to unknowingly?

What circle are we on? And I wonder if for many people, we move on what I call a circle of gain.

That's what life is all about. Gain. Think about it. We go to school, try to gain the best possible marks we can, gain as many friends as we can, gain whatever other skills we can, musical or sporting or whatever.

[2 : 29] And then we go to uni, gain the best possible degree that we can, and then get a job, and then if possible, gain a better job, however you define better.

Maybe to gain more experience, or more flexibility, and probably to gain more money. Because like it or not, money gains you more freedom to do what you want.

To travel, to eat nicer food, and so on. And then somewhere along the way, you gain a house, hopefully, and gain a family, maybe.

And now you aim to do the best you can to make sure that your kids can gain as much as they can. And so you send them to a tuition, and you send them along to some ECAs, so that they can try to gain the best possible marks that they can, and gain as many friends as they can, and gain whatever other skills they can, so that they can eventually gain a good job.

And you can see where this is leading to, isn't it? Or so that you can also gain a happy retirement. And so it's a circle of gain.

[3 : 42] Now, of course, not everybody's circle is quite the same. Some will say it's not about jobs, and houses, and so on. No, it's simply about wanting to choose our own path, to become the best possible version of ourselves, or to gain new perspectives or opportunities for growth and development.

But whatever the case might be, the paradigm is still the same, even if the goals are different. Life, we believe, is about gain.

And even Christians are not exempt from this mindset. You know, if our non-Christian friends look at our aspirations, I wonder, in all honesty, how much different are we?

So why do we chase gain so much? I wonder if one reason is because we conceive of life as a game to win. Now, there's a quote that is attributed to Albert Einstein.

We're not sure if he really said it or not. But it captures a popular approach to life. You have to learn the rules of the game well. And then you have to play better than anyone else.

[5 : 08] And it is into this kind of ecosystem that the teacher of Ecclesiastes throws a bombshell. Verse 2.

Meaningless. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. He looks at our circle of life and seemingly declares it to be all rubbish.

Well, is the Bible even allowed to say that? Now, there's another movie from my childhood called City Slickers.

It used to show on TV2 or TV3. And there is a scene in that comedy where Billy Crystal's character, who is facing a kind of midlife crisis, is addressing a classroom full of 8-year-olds.

And this is what he tells them. Value this time in your life, kids. Because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices.

[6 : 13] And it goes by so quickly. When you're a teenager, you think you can do anything. And you do. Your 20s are a blur. Your 30s, you raise your family.

You make a little money and you think to yourself, what happened to my 20s? Your 40s, you grow a little pot belly. You grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud.

And one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother. Your 50s, you have a minor surgery. Now, you call it a procedure. But it's a surgery.

Your 60s, you have a major surgery. The music is still loud. But it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway. 70s, you and the wife retire.

You start eating dinner at 2, lunch around 10, breakfast the night before. And you spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate in soft yogurt and muttering, how come the kids don't call?

[7 : 19] By your 80s, you've had a major stroke. And you end up babbling to some Jamaican-ness. So instead of a circle of life, we get a circle of cynicism.

Now, is that what the teacher in Ecclesiastes is expressing? Is he like an ancient version of Billy Crystal? Who is this guy anyway?

Well, let's explore that. I've been calling him the teacher because that's what verse 1 tells us. And there's no doubt that's what he's doing.

Now, turn with me to the end of the book, to 12 verse 9 for a moment. And notice what this person does. He imparts knowledge to the people.

He's teaching. So, yes, he is a teacher. Now, in some other translations, he's also called a preacher.

- [8 : 25] That works too. You see, the Hebrew word translated here as teacher in the NIV is called *heleth*. Now, that means one who gathers or assembles.
- That's what the Hebrew root word means. So, this is a preacher addressing a crowd. And what is he saying?
- Well, Ecclesiastes 12 verse 9 and 11 tells us that he is giving us nothing less than wisdom. These are the words of the wise.
- Indeed, verse 10, he is searching for words that are right or perhaps better translated delightful because it's right in the sense of hitting the sweet spot.
- And so, that tells us that we are not simply to hear Ecclesiastes as the words of a hardened cynic. It's too simplistic to call him just another Billy Crystal.
- [9 : 29] Oh, his words will certainly poke us hard at times. In verse 11 we are told that these words are like sharp sticks and nails.
- They're going to be painful sometimes. And yet, they are also meant to be heard as upright and true. Indeed, they are royal wisdom.
- For notice how else the preacher is described back in chapter 1 verse 1. He is son of David, king in Jerusalem. So, he's a king.
- In fact, he could be King Solomon himself. Certainly, the early chapters of Ecclesiastes fit well with his life. And the only big reason commentators are hesitant to identify the teacher as Solomon is because they say that the style of the Hebrew language that is used here does not fit Solomon's time.
- And so, we can't be 100% sure. But whatever the case, it is clear that we are to see this guy as someone who is at the very least Solomon-like.
- [10 : 40] He's a king, from the line of David, no less. A preacher bringing a message from the shepherd as 12 verse 11 points out.
- It's just that the message of his sermon is somewhat unexpected. And so, Ecclesiastes is royal wisdom. It's not pure cynicism.
- Now, the evidence of the book itself suggests this as well because throughout this book, yes, we will find pain, but we will also find recommendations of joy.
- We will hear statements about how one action is better than the other. And that's hardly cynical. Indeed, this book was actually read during the Feast of Tabernacles, which is basically Israel's Gawai.
- So, it's read during a time of rejoicing. So, I don't feel guilty about preaching Ecclesiastes during this season. Nor is it pure evangelism.
- [11 : 53] Now, occasionally, we hear that Ecclesiastes is simply all about what a life without God looks like. It's purely for the unbeliever. Now, there is certainly plenty in this book which will speak to that, without a doubt.
- But throughout the book, the writer does make reference to God quite regularly, even insisting multiple times that God is in control. I've put some references on your outline.
- And so, this is clearly a book by a believer for believers as well. And that's how we should approach this book.
- So, what exactly is he saying? Well, that's what we're going to try to find out over the next three months. Indeed, the only way, I think, to get at what he's saying is to journey with the preacher himself.
- You must enter into his mind and experience his highs and his lows. You can't just rely on second-hand information.

[13 : 05] And so, this morning, I'm going to unpack the opening passage of Ecclesiastes. But I'm hoping that as I do so, it will at the same time also give you a wider sense of what this book as a whole is going to say that you get a sense of where it's heading.

So let's get into the mind of the preacher in today's passage, and to do so, I'm going to ask four questions. So here's the first question. What is life like?

What is life like? Well, let's look at verse two again in the NIV. Meaningless. Meaningless, says the teacher. Utterly meaningless.

Everything is meaningless. That's how he begins, and that's how he ends later in 12 verse 8. In fact, this word translated meaningless in the NIV comes 38 times in total in the book.

So this is his key conviction. It's the theme tune, the main melody, the core message. So what does he mean? Well, to understand this, I'm going to have to teach you a Hebrew word today.

[14 : 25] And it's Hebel. Now, can you say this with me? Say it aloud together. Hebel. Okay, one more time. Hebel.

Now, that's the word that is translated meaningless in the NIV. But it's actually a tricky word to translate. So if you look at some other English translations, it will also say vanity or futility, you know, something like that.

So, which is it? Well, let's explore. Now, the word Hebel is literally vapor, breath, mist.

That's what life is like. It's a common biblical idea. So, for example, look at Psalm 144 verses 3 to 4. Lord, what are human beings that you care for them, mere mortals that you think of them?

They are like a breath. Hebel, exactly the same word. Your days are like a fleeting shadow.

[15 : 36] And so when the teacher proclaims life is Hebel, he is basically getting at two things which the rest of the book will make clear.

First of all, he is saying life is ephemeral. It's transient, temporary, brief.

You are merely one mouthful of air. Imagine it's a very cold day, and you breathe in, and you breathe out. And you can see the vapour materialise in front of you, but only for a second or two.

And then it's gone. Or imagine a birthday cake candle. You light it, and then you blow it out. And maybe you see a puff of smoke. But not for long.

Before you know it, it's gone. That's what life is like for all of us. We're here today, gone tomorrow. According to scientists, the sun will probably be around for at least another 5 billion years.

[16 : 45] Now, how many weeks do you think that is? That's 260,714,285,714 weeks in total.

Now, imagine a human being that lives to about 80 years old. You know, that's not too bad, right? 80. But how many weeks do you think that is? Okay, I can see the things working in your mind.

I know how many digits you come up with. And the answer is that it's roughly 4,000 weeks. Not much. But that's our life. It's ephemeral.

Hebel. ephemeral. Now, Ecclesiastes is not the first time in the Bible we encounter this word. The first time we hear of this word is all the way back in Genesis chapter 4.

In fact, you already know it. You just didn't realize it. Do you remember the story of Cain and Abel? Well, the name Abel is literally this word, Hebel.

[18 : 01] How is that significant? Well, in the Old Testament, names matter. It captures something of the essence of their existence. Abraham, for example, means the father of a multitude.

But why is Abel named as such? Why is he Hebel? Well, he's righteous, he does nothing wrong in Genesis 4, but his life is tragically cut short before its time.

His life is the very embodiment of transience here today, gone tomorrow, hence Hebel. And that is what marks out every son and daughter of Adam.

We are all Abels, our lives are all Hebel. Here today, gone tomorrow. Second of all, the teacher is saying life is enigmatic.

You see, this breath, this vapour isn't just short-lived. It's also something you cannot get whole off. Have you ever tried to catch the wind?

[19 : 16] Good luck with that. life, the teacher says, is like chasing after wind. That's a phrase he'll use later. It's virtually impossible to grasp.

And that's what life is sometimes like. Incomprehensible. Why did that person die young when he was so full of potential? Why is that corrupt and cruel dictator still alive at 100 years old?

And once again, Abel's story illuminates the meaning of Hebel. Now, this is a guy who honoured the Lord, who offered the appropriate sacrifice.

And what happened to him? He got murdered by his brother. But hey, what happens to Cain? He gets a mark of protection, he has children, he even builds a city, he has a long life.

And so what we get is a situation where it seems the script has been turned upside down. Abel does good, he gets no reward.

[20 : 28] Cain does evil, he enjoys good stuff. It's incomprehensible, it's enigmatic. We just don't get it if we look from the perspective of just this life.

And what Ecclesiastes is going to do is to point at different situations and say, hey, isn't this like able? Sometimes your labours get you nowhere.

Sometimes wise people don't get listened to. Sometimes injustice comes instead of righteousness. And isn't life very much able-like?

Don't things often fail to work out the way they're supposed to? life is happy where cause and effect, labour and reward, action and result, don't always work the way they're supposed to.

And so this, the teacher contents, is what life today is like. Not so much meaningless, but ephemeral and enigmatic.

[21 : 39] and so from now on, every time you see the word meaningless in the NIV, think those two phrases instead. That's heb-el. And so he's not being cynical, but trying to get us to face reality, square in the face.

And he's right, isn't he? It's indisputable that we will all die one day. It is true that we can't make sense or take control of everything here and now.

But it's not the most uplifting message to hear. And this is probably why most of us, by default, would naturally resist the teacher's conclusions fiercely.

Maybe it's why this book is not often preached in churches today. All of us want to make the most of life. All of us want to make a difference. All of us don't want this life to be empty.

And so we've convinced ourselves that life has to be this circle of gain. What other alternative is there?

[22 : 48] But the teacher refuses to let us get away with this. And so this brings us to our second question. What happens when we try to make life purely about gain?

Well, the teacher pulls no punches, verse 3. What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? What is there to show for a lifetime of working for gain?

And his implied answer is nothing. That road leads to a complete dead end. Really, we ask? Well, the teacher says, let me show you.

Let's consider the dead end of our strivings. All throughout our lives, we are told to work hard and you will surely achieve your dreams. Nothing is impossible if you are willing to work for it.

And so what happens if we think that life is all about gain is that we live lives constantly on the move. We are always on the go, going on to the next job, going on to the next city, going on to the next experience, going on to the next big thing of significance, whatever that is.

[24 : 03] We keep ourselves busy. As long as we can keep moving, we can make something out of nothing. That's what we tell ourselves. But the teacher says, look at the sun, verse 5.

It rises and it sets, it rises and it sets, it rises and it sets. It's constantly on the move. In fact, verse 5 literally says the sun is panting, it's out of breath as it keeps moving.

So it's actually more poetic in the Hebrew. But what does the sun have to show for all its efforts? Just more of the same old, same old.

The next day is like the last. Nothing changes. It's all repetition. And that's how a life-pursuing gain feels like.

As someone once memorably put it, the red race turns out to be a hamster wheel. There's no real profit in it. Or consider verse 6.

[25 : 12] the wind. It blows to the south and turns to the north. Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. So it goes about in circuits.

But where does it start? Where does it end? Where is it going? No one knows. There's lots of movement, but there is no reaching its destination.

And why should life be any different? The teacher asks. It's like doing the laundry. The clothing needs to be washed and yet we never seem to get to the bottom of it all.

Every new day there's another pile. It's like the streams. Verse 7. The streams flow. They keep flowing. They never stop flowing.

They put all their energy into flowing. There is plenty of power behind the flowing. But the sea never gets filled. There is no end except a dead end.

[26 : 13] Or think of your email inbox. You reply to emails, you subscribe to the inbox zero philosophy, which is an approach advocated by productivity experts to keep your email inbox as empty as possible.

But before long, you hear the ping of another notification and another round begins. And what's worse is that if you actually reply to emails, that means people are more likely to email you back.

So instead of getting things done, you get more new things to do. The sea is never full. The inbox is never empty. And that's where our strivings end up.

Or consider the teacher says to dead end of progress. Consider what our eyes can see today. All thanks to the marvel of technology. We can get on a plane to see all sorts of things.

Cherry blossoms in Japan, the Dutch Mahal in India, the Niagara Force in Canada. We have YouTube, we have Netflix, we have TikTok. And we can listen to an endless stream of experts on every topic that you can think of.

[27 : 31] How to make your own crafts, how to start your own business, how to manage your time. And yet, verse 8, we never seem to get enough of it. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear is filled of hearing.

There is always one extra bit of knowledge to absorb, one more piece of commentary that we cannot do without one more thing to take in to see. And to what end?

Same thing with human history. Is there any progress there? Well, of course there is, we say. We've put planes in the sky, we've put men on the moon, we've put smartphones in our hands.

But that's not what the teacher is getting at. He's saying, look at your latest iPhone, I think it's iPhone 13 now, and how different is it from, say, the iPhone 8?

Maybe it has a slightly better camera, maybe it's got better batteries. But in the big scheme of things, how much difference does it make? Has having the iPhone 13 improved your relationships?

[28 : 44] Has putting a man on the moon put an end to selfishness? Has a plane in the sky put an end to world poverty? No.

For, verse 9, what has been will be again, what has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun.

For the human condition has not changed. And then there is the dead end of legacy, verse 11. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Is it possible for people to make such an impact that they will gain recognition forever? The teacher asks. Well, let's think about some big names.

What about some of the biggest names in world history? Julius Caesar? Alexander the Great? Now, you have probably heard their names. people to ask you now to tell me something meaningful about them, you would probably struggle.

[29 : 57] Or perhaps something more personal. Tell me something about your great-great grandmother. My guess is it's the same struggle, isn't it?

Most of us probably don't even know their names. just over a decade ago, one of the most well-known preachers was a guy called Mark Griscoll.

He was popular across denominational and geographical lines. Whether you are theologically charismatic or non-charismatic, whether you're in America, Australia, or even Malaysia, many people love his bombastic style.

He was really popular. But he eventually fell from grace. And a podcast was recently made about his rise and fall. And I just asked our brother Paul-Link about him recently.

And now Paul is just a little over 10 years younger than me. And of course he's a fellow full-time worker, so he knows a lot of the big name preachers. But when I asked him about Mark Griscoll, he was like, Mark who?

[31 : 01] Never heard of him. Well, that's how it is. What was popular even less than 20 years ago is not remembered. There was a great pandemic 100 years ago.

But before our current pandemic, did anyone in this hall remember that? You see, our memories are short.

And so a life spent pursuing the gain of legacy is a chasing after wind, the preacher insists. You can have a building name after you.

But in time, that building can be renamed or even demolished. It's a dead end. So how are you feeling at the moment?

Probably not very positive. But we must understand what the preacher is doing. He wants us to stop being in denial. He wants us to stop trying to pursue what cannot be gained because when we do so, we end up frustrating, possibly even hurting ourselves.

[32 : 15] But that probably raises our third question. Why is life this way? Why is it hebel? And now we come back to verse 3 again and especially that phrase under the sun.

What we've just talked about that teacher insists is life as it is under the sun. That's important to acknowledge. But what is this life under the sun?

Well, to understand this, what we need to realise is that as the teacher meditates on life throughout this book, he does so with Genesis 1 to 3 open in front of him.

For one of the things you would notice if you read this book closely is how often the language and vocabulary of Genesis 1 to 3 pops up in this book.

Now, we won't look at it today, but next week, when Dr. Ng Hong Park takes us through Ecclesiastes chapter 2, well, take some time to notice how in his passage, the language there evokes God's creative activity, especially the creating of Eden.

[33 : 25] But here's the point that the preacher wants to make. Once upon a time, wherever you were under the sun, it was all Edenic.

It was all paradise. God made the sun and everything else, and everything under the sun was very good.

Genesis chapter 1. But that's no longer the case. Ecclesiastes 1 verse 3 tells us what life under the sun is now like. It's full of toil.

Another word that is specifically used in Genesis 3. And by using that word, he's recalling to our minds that sin has entered into this world, curse has fallen upon it, and Eden has been lost.

That's why we toil. Our world has been hebelled lies, if I can put it that way. The tree of life has gone, and all that is left, is death.

[34 : 31] That's our reality. Ecclesiastes picks up on this explicitly. So if you look at 3 verse 20 and 12 verse 7 on the screen, let me just read them out.

He says, all go to the same place, all come from dust, and to dust all return. Or 12 verse 7, the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

And that is basically picking up on the language of Genesis 2 verse 7 and 3 verse 19 on the screen. I'm not going to read it all out, but you can see that the phrasing is remarkably similar.

And so death, the teacher says, is the great equalizer. Death ensures that whatever you do in this life, there will be no gain for you to take away in the end.

If you chase this or that the return on your investment is going to be unprofitable because death is going to rob you of your gain.

[35 : 37] And this is something I won't dwell on now because this will be something that will be expanded on throughout Ecclesiastes. This is a theme that we'll return to regularly. But for now, here's what the teacher wants us to recognize.

Our lives are limited. There are limits to our work, our wisdom, our ability to bring about justice, and ultimately limits to our actual lives.

That's life under the sun. And to resist these limitations, to try to push back against them and to transcend them, is to in effect try to be God when we are not God.

And that will only end in tears. Now that brings us to our fourth and final question for today. Is there a better way then?

Are we doomed simply to dwell in this hebal world for all eternity? And at this point, you will expect me to say, yes, of course, there is a better way. As a good Christian preacher, this is where I point you to Jesus.

[36 : 50] And yes, that is what I am going to do because it is true. After all, that is what the good news of Christianity is all about, isn't it? According to 2 Timothy 1 verse 10, here is the good news.

Christ Jesus has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Christ has relativized death.

We die, but it is not the end. And so yes, we do need to place Ecclesiastes within the larger storyline of the Bible. And thankfully, that's where the storyline reaches its climax in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So yes, I do want to say that. One better way is to look beyond life under the sun today to the son of God who has given us eternal life and hence eternal significance and we can certainly rejoice in that.

But that is not what I want to major on. And the reason is because that is not what the preacher of Ecclesiastes majors on.

[38 : 01] And if we jump too quickly to the New Testament and we leave Ecclesiastes behind, I think we'll miss out on what he wants us to actually hear. We'll miss out on the slightly different angle that he wants to give us.

And the major lesson I think the preacher wants to give us today is to see that life is ultimately more about gift than gain.

Life is ultimately more about gift than gain. Instead of taking us forward to the resurrection, the preacher takes us back to creation.

Come back with me to verse 4. Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. Now look again at nature, the preacher says, and try to look at it from the perspective, not of gain, but of gift.

And what do you see? Yes, the sun rises and then it sets, the streams keep flowing, and none of them go anywhere, so to speak.

[39 : 15] They don't progress in terms of gaining anything. But what if you stop seeing creation from a transactional viewpoint, from what it gains or loses, and start seeing creation as it really is, as an eternal theater that praises God and gives glory to him?

Then we won't see the world as a meaningless go-around. We'll simply see the creation bringing glory to God simply by their existence.

You see, as the sun rises and it sets, it is simply doing what God has given it to do. Even though the wind has not found new places to go to, as it blows, it is still doing what God wants it to do.

And that, the preacher says, is how we should conceive of our lives. It has been given to us by God as a gift, and we receive it as such.

You see, yes, like it or not, inbuilt into our lives is a kind of repetition. We wake up, we drink coffee, we do some work, we eat lunch, we go to the toilet, we go home, we have dinner, we sleep, and the next day, we do it all over again.

[40 : 46] And if life is about a circle of gain, well, that brings us angst, because we're not gaining. But if we receive life as simply a gift from the Lord, in which we live in relation to Him, well, that makes the difference.

So here is an illustration that I think works really well. I heard this from someone. Imagine that you have kids, and you're spending a day at the beach with them, and you build this amazing looking sand castle.

It will probably win sand castle of the year, you know, if there was such a competition. And both you and your kids are proud of it. But the next day when you go to the spot where you build that sand castle, it's all gone.

The tide has washed it all away. And there's not even a trace there that there was once a sand castle of the year winner standing at that very spot. And of course that was inevitable, isn't it?

You know, the tide was going to come. And if life is all about gain, then you would be upset. It's Hebel. But what if you took a different perspective?

[42 : 03] What if you recognised that even though the sand castle was wiped out, what really mattered was that the kids got to spend time with their dad?

What if what really counted was that they got to build it together with you, even though it didn't last? What if you simply took that time together you had as gift?

And then that gift in a sense has become gain. And that is how we should approach life. Life is a gift received from God, live in relationship with Him, giving glory to Him in everything, even in the things that don't necessarily last.

Life is not about being in control or asserting your ambitions, it is about knowing the one who made you because at the end nobody can go with you into the end but Him.

And that is true even as Christians today. You see, we really do have a resurrection hope and I don't mean to downplay that at all. We really are new creations heading for new creation.

[43 : 26] But Romans 8, which we heard in our call to worship this morning, reminds us where we are still presently located, even as Christians. We are in the creation that still grows.

And that is the New Testament equivalent of living under the sun. We are still waiting in a Hebel world for the world that isn't Hebel. And so this is how we are to live in the meantime.

We are to give up thinking that we can gain our best life now. If we aim for that, we will end up setting ourselves for disappointment. But if we live recognizing our limits and understanding that everything we have is a gift, we will live differently.

And that is where Ecclesiastes is going to take us to for the next couple of months. that is a lot I know to take in. Why don't we pray to God now to receive life as a gift to give up on worldly gain and to be ready to hear His upright, true, delightful, though painful and wise words as we keep reading through Ecclesiastes.

Let's pray. Father, indeed, you said that this book is never going to be an easy one.

[44 : 55] It's no wonder that the teachers searched to find just the right words. But under your inspiration, we trust He has found the right words. And so Father, we pray that you will ready ourselves to hear what you have to say.

Help us not to make life simply about worldly gain, about chasing after things that are futile or don't matter in the end.

Instead, help us to look to Jesus, our creator, our sustainer, the one who has risen again, and help us to live gratefully knowing that knowing Him is what matters most, and that let us receive everything we have from Him as a gift.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.