

Five conference championships, the first in only their sixth season. Two Super Bowl championships playing in five total. Career record for wins in team history. Coach of the year. Stadium ring of honor. Hall of Fame. A man of class and a winning record. A man of tradition but also innovation. Loyal to players, assistants, and owners. 29 years with the same team as head coach, the first coach in team history. So when news broke in February 1989 that legendary coach Tom Landry had been fired by the Dallas Cowboys the public couldn't believe it. This was one of the greatest ever. He led their team to glory. They expected better, but Landry was out and someone else was in.

With all his accomplishments, all the hard work, all the preparation and wins for Landry to be fired we might have expected him to say, **"Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless."** What did he get for all of it? Fired by some new owner named Jerry Jones who wanted to bring in his own coach. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, could relate. Solomon was the son of King David, a real legend in his own time. David was considered by many to be the greatest king Israel had ever seen. Yet King Solomon had a lot going for him too. He had great earthly success. Wealth greater than all the kingdoms of the world, wisdom beyond anyone else on earth, and property and animals beyond counting. He had it all.

But there was a problem. Solomon said, **"I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me."** Solomon was bitter, like a fired head coach, because he knew there would come a day when he would be forced to give it all up. Death would take his huge fortune and just give it to someone else. And Solomon worried, **"Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?"**

I think the numbers are misleading. The numbers seem to indicate government programs are pushing more and more people not to work. Food stamps continue to climb in usage. Medical care is set to become more of a government controlled process in which people won't need a job to get medical care. It seems the statistics indicate people either don't want to work or are seeing they don't have to work in order to receive the most basic services.

I argue that deep down people want to work. They have a desire to contribute to providing for their own needs. They realize that if they put forth their talents, gifts, and abilities to use in some sort of meaningful way they can make money. Unfortunately people have also figured out that they won't live forever. Thoughts of death have at least a few people wondering and questioning what will happen to all the hard work they do today to make money? Suddenly all the hard work and money is going to someone else. The truth Solomon spoke hits hard. **"For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless."** It's not always laziness or government programs that push people to not work, but a realization that I can work as hard as I want but it's all eventually going to go to someone else after I die. Death and loss really contribute to people not having a huge drive to work.

If you've received an inheritance think about where that money actually came from. You didn't work for it. In fact if you receive a large enough inheritance you don't have to work hard at all. But someone did. Follow the inheritance back through the generations and you'll see a long list of people in your family tree who worked hard and all died leaving it to the next generation. They may not have seen the fruit of their labor. They may have lived in poverty compared to the way we live today. So does every generation appreciate wealth? If you've seen the TV show Pawn Stars on the History Channel, many people bring in precious family heirlooms and antiques they no longer care about. They're willing to sell what someone worked hard for all for quick cash. Wealth not earned with hard work becomes wealth easier to spend. Solomon spoke the truth. **"Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun."** The next generation might be wise or foolish. It really doesn't matter because one day they'll have control over everything you've worked for.

And what about that generation? For that matter what about your generation? Think about you. What is the focus of so many people, even your focus too often? We tend to focus on the here and now. Do you work so many hours you can't remember what eating a meal at home with your family feels like? Are you so consumed with getting a better car to show the coworkers you've arrived? Do you push so hard with schoolwork during the year because good grades, school and extracurricular activities are the only things that matter? You do realize that no matter how hard you work, no matter what you gain, or earn when you die you take the same amount out that you brought in, nothing.

Days of worry and stress, nights of sleeplessness and concern, these are what you might be experiencing working under the sun. **"What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless."** You can be the greatest coach, the hardest worker, the best student, and in one moment it can all be gone and given to someone who could care less. That person could in one moment destroy everything you worked to build up, earn, and put into the bank.

Wisdom offers no relief. Money, no relief. Hard work, no relief. It's almost like we must throw up our hands and give up. We could, **"Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry"**. Some despair and say, why work then? Laziness sets in and an attitude of kicking back and enjoying what little time we have on this earth with our money and material things. Others work hard trying to put out of their minds that despair of losing everything and having no control over it. Despair encourages trying to find a little satisfaction out of life, a little enjoyment wherever we can. **"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God."** And there is the first crack of something better. Despair isn't all there is. Everything in the world leaves us wanting. Human beings can never find any pleasure alone. We only continue to live because God offers an escape.

God grants escape to **"the man who pleases him"**. Solomon puts such a person opposite the sinner. If all people are sinners the difference is somewhere else. Sinners are always opposed to God. The one pleasing God is not opposed to him. The only way to not be opposed to God is to have faith. Paul reminded the Colossians in the second lesson how they were brought to faith. **"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."** Paul spoke about us too. Our sins died with Christ. All those times we despaired, all the times we thought wealth or knowledge or wisdom would help us find earthly enjoyment, for all our sins Jesus died. And we died with him there on the cross. But Jesus lives and so do we. Our life is hidden in his life. Our true life, our escape is hidden in Christ. The only way to have this life hidden in Christ is through faith granted by the Holy Spirit. So the one who pleases God has Spirit worked faith and an escape from a life of despair.

Christ gives us escape not just to a more enjoyable existence here. Think beyond that. We're escaping out of this world completely. It looks to others like we're bound here though. It appears we suffer the same troubles, same trials, same experience as everyone else. Work hard, die, leave everything to someone else. **"Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless."** If that's you, if you feel bound by this world, if the trouble and trials seem to leave you saying that everything is like chasing the wind, if you're trying to find happiness in this world and it's possessions listen. You have been rescued from that. You're real life is hidden in Christ who lived his perfect life for us so we would have true enjoyment. Believers like us can live happy lives here and concentrate on eternity. God offers escape. There's life beyond the sun, with God, in heaven, forever.

King Solomon highlights in the book of Ecclesiastes how life can be harsh, cruel, and we hate seeing people lose everything they worked hard for. It just doesn't seem fair that a Hall of Fame coach should be railroaded out and fired like he was. It doesn't seem right that people work all their lives to build up a business or a fortune only to have to pass it on to someone else who doesn't care or hasn't earned it. It doesn't seem fair that we work hard, we save, and we pass on an inheritance and yet have no control over how that generation will use it. But just when we think things are unfair and the worst we're called on by King Solomon to remember that without God life under the sun means nothing. But with God and from God...

There's life beyond the sun