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Rejoice and Remember
Chasing the Wind: Searching for Meaning Series
Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7
Pastor Matt Meyer

Well, if you were here last week, Bryan mentioned that perhaps this journey through the book of Ecclesiastes this summer has seemed like a long, dark night. But then he said these next couple of weeks—this week and next week—if you were to look at the horizon, you might just see the faintest glimmer of light, that would tell us that the sun is going to rise again. So either Bryan is prophetic or he read ahead. So, I'd invite you to turn to Chapter 11 of Ecclesiastes and look at verse 7 with me:

The light is pleasant, and *it is* good for the eyes to see the sun. (*NASB, Ecclesiastes 11:7)

The Preacher is saying, “The sun is coming up; things are about to change.” It has been a long journey of a lot of depressing and discouraging news, but this signals to us that we're about to turn a corner. And before we go too far around that bend, I think it's smart for us to remind ourselves where the Preacher has taken us on this journey.

Ecclesiastes could be viewed as a wise man's attempt to answer the many questions that life poses us or that we pose about life, like, “What is the meaning of life? What do we gain from all of our work and toil and strife?” See, the Preacher spent his life conducting experiment after experiment, seeking an answer to these questions. It was his search for meaning and purpose and significance. But, interestingly, he had one restriction on all of his experiments. He would only look for answers under the sun, meaning he would limit his experiences to what could be experienced on earth. He basically took God out of the equation completely.

So the Preacher looked at gaining knowledge. He sought to experience success and did. He sought to experience pleasure. He looked at the ideas of time and justice and work and wealth and wisdom, and all of his experiments kept coming up with the same answer: that those things were meaningless, or at very best, confusing. They were ultimately unsatisfying, because they didn't last. They were fleeting. Obtaining or indulging in these things didn't solve the great enigmas of this world, like the problem of evil or the brokenness that we see around us, or the absurdities of life, like, “Why do good things happen to bad people? And why do bad things happen to good people?” There was no correlation surrounding that. He could find no pattern. In fact, the only thing that the Preacher said wasn't fleeting was death...still bad news. The same fate, he says, awaits everyone. It is a sure thing, and it is permanent, especially without God in the picture.

So over and over again, the Preacher has sought to reconcile a Genesis chapters 1 and 2 vision of life with the reality of a Genesis 3 world, a world marred by brokenness and sin. And the same answer kept coming up again and again. You could probably say it with me, “*Meaningless*,

meaningless. Everything is meaningless.” We say that for you a different way. The book of Ecclesiastes is trying to work out how a Genesis, chapter 1-2 world—a good and beautiful world created by God for humans to dwell in—could be good and true, when our experience is a world full of the results of Genesis 3: sin, distrust, brokenness, blaming, and disorder. And pretty much up to this point, the answer has been, “It can't be true. It's all meaningless.”

Well, that's the journey that the Preacher has been on, and we've been on it with him. There's been a few others from our congregation who have also been on this journey. They've allowed us to listen in on their conversations from time to time as they've thought about how these concepts from Ecclesiastes have intersected with their lives. We've gotten to see Clint and Cheryl and Sydney chat about the meaning of success and finding meaning in success and accomplishment, and being noticed and wanting to be recognized, but then recognizing that that all just fades away. Yes, eventually you're forgotten. They've discussed together the struggles of finding their identity in work, or in working hard, or in making money. They've talked about how they wanted to do something important. They want their lives to matter. But then Clint asked this question, “How does what you do not become who you are?” And then he closed that conversation by saying, “Well, maybe we never figure that out in this life,” because he's still wrestling with that.

Well, the three of them have had one more conversation in recent days, and we're going to get to listen in on that together here for the next few moments. Take a look at this.

Clint: *Cheryl, does life have meaning?*

Cheryl: *Does life have meaning? I used to think so, but then I really changed my focus because, when I first became a believer, I was 24, and my family, we knew a lot about the wicked side. I didn't grow up in church, and that list is so depressing. And so I flipped, and I thought, “Okay, I've got the good list. Now I can be on the wise side.” Well, when you try to do it on your own, it's a little bit depressing, until you really put the real focus in, to take my eyes off the world and look at Jesus, the One who was the overcomer. He is the example of it all, and when I'm in His presence, that's the meaning.*

Clint: *See, I think I'm probably a little bit behind you at this, in that part of the story you just told, because the first two thirds of my life, I was not a Christian. It was defined by chasing one thing after another, to find my satisfaction or joy, and that other stuff satisfies. But I think in this next chapter that I'm in, which is now, I have a better perspective, and at least I understand what should satisfy. I think I still am chasing that in a weird way, like I think I'm still looking for it to fully satisfy. I certainly still want life to have meaning, and I want this to matter, and this thing that I'm doing at work to matter, and this relationship to matter, or this accomplishment to matter...whatever it is. I know enough now to know, to go, “Big picture? It's all pointless...probably.” You know, I just really want it to matter. And I think I'm torn by that...honestly.*

Cheryl: *I think instead of wanting it to matter, can God use it to show Himself to others, right?*

Sydney: *Yeah, I think it just takes so much perspective. Because, when I'm in the day to day, when I'm working, working doing stuff, I'm like, "Okay, this is what matters. I'm doing stuff that matters." Like, "This is all important, and I have to give up sleep. I have to give up my good habits, so that I can do something that matters." But being gone for two weeks and realizing that life went on without me, I was like, "Oh, I don't necessarily matter, and what I'm doing isn't ultimate." I think the more successful I've gotten, the more restless I've gotten.*

Clint: *What do you mean?*

Sydney: *The more I've gotten positions, and the more I've done well in school, the more I've wanted, and the less I feel satisfied. I remember in middle school, I was so satisfied with my friendships. I was so satisfied where I was at in life, almost in a way I didn't know any more. I didn't know any better. I was just content with where I was at. And now that I'm in a spot where everybody is like, "Go for the promotion. Go for the better job," I'm like, "Go for filling up your time more." I'm just very restless.*

Clint: *I think you gave me a better perspective on this. There is meaning in life. God wants it to be meaningful. But the meaning, what's the source of that? And if the source is me, okay, my satisfaction, which is oftentimes the case, then that is pretty meaningless. But I can be doing the same thing with a different heart—you know, the heart of God—that now that becomes part of this ripple effect that you can have. I think you offered a new perspective. I hadn't really thought about it like that, and that's pretty challenging for me.*

Cheryl: *Yeah, I think about how, like, I'm old, and I think about all the things He's used in my life to mature me. If I was that person...Hmm, I like this person better now, because I've gone through that. And then I'm better at certain things and thinking about it differently, especially when it comes to how it firstly affects me. Is it about me? No, not so much. I think that's so cool when you say, "I don't know how I'm going to do it," because that's when I've learned to say, "Okay, God, how are You going to do this?" And because I don't know, I really do not know. I'm walking away challenged. Like, if I look at the world and what all the mixed messages are, it is more confusing than ever. But if I look and sit with the One who created the world, He says, "Okay, I've got it. I've got you."*

Clint: *Yeah, I like that. I think life is full of meaning. God created life, so it has meaning, and I think our journey through it is to find that meaning and where that ends up.*

So does life really matter? Does life have meaning? And they expressed, "I want it to matter." Sydney talked about, "I really want what I'm doing to matter, but then I can be gone for two weeks, and life just goes on without me. So, maybe I don't matter. Maybe I don't matter as much as I thought I did."

See, these are the big questions that Ecclesiastes is seeking to deal with. But what I want you to notice is where their conversation ended. It ended with this idea that life is full of meaning because

God created it. God wants there to be meaning in life, but the source of that meaning is important. If the source is my satisfaction, if it's all about me, well, then, that can be pretty meaningless for you, for anybody else, right? But if we could do the same things: live our lives, go to work, do the things that we're doing with God as the source of meaning, well then that can be part of what Clint called this ripple effect—that my life does have an effect on yours or on someone else's. It does matter how I live my life.

Their conversation is the path that the Preacher starts us on today. He's going to build a bridge from this seemingly endless repetition of everything being meaningless, to a path where life does have meaning. Without ignoring the baffling, frightening, realities of the world, it is possible to live a life of meaning, even with unanswered questions, even in a broken world where tragedy happens every day, and death is a certainty for each of us. But not without expanding the search for meaning beyond just what can be experienced on earth. We've got to put God back into the equation. The only way is to trust God, because a life without a living and faithful relationship with God, is meaningless and hopeless. So, let's go back to the passage together and see how he builds that bridge. Ecclesiastes 11, starting in verse 7, again:

The light is pleasant, and *it is* good for the eyes to see the sun. Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. (There's going to be good days and bad days.)
Everything that is to come *will be* futility. (Vs. 7-8)

So, the Preacher starts with this strong life affirmation that it's good to see the sun, especially after a long, dark night. But then he gives two key instructions. **Rejoice**, or maybe your translation says, “*enjoy*,” and **Remember**. These two words are going to dominate the remaining sections of our passage. **Rejoice** will govern chapter 11, verses 9 and 10, and **Remember** is going to govern Chapter 12, verses 1 through 7, where we'll end for today. The Preacher is saying life is meant to be *enjoyed* and *rejoiced* in. But as we do so, there are important things to *remember*. Verses 9-10:

Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

Life is to be lived with joy, and by following whatever it is that your heart desires. Now this is not an excuse for overindulgence, but a recognition of individual giftings, of talents, of desires, of vocations, of preferences. The Preacher is saying, “Go find what you love, and do it to your heart's content. Enjoy it. **Rejoice** in it. Don't give in to the pessimism and grief and anger and anxiety that will come your way in life.” In fact, I think the Preacher is possibly preaching to himself here, because he's been pretty pessimistic up to this point.

While you're enjoying while you are young, enjoy all that life has to offer, **because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting**. They don't last forever. We all get old, as Cheryl admitted.

So, just like all the other times in Ecclesiastes 3. Do you remember that section? ***There's a time for everything under the sun, a time to live, a time to die, a time for rejoicing, a time for weeping.*** Just like all those other times, youth and the prime of life could be added to that list. It's a time for something valuable, even if it's not permanent, even if it's not an end in itself. In fact, don't make it an end in itself, because it doesn't last. This advice is given to young people. It's very similar.

It resonates with the traditional wisdom repeatedly given in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. If you were to go look at those nine chapters—the first nine chapters of Proverbs—you would see that almost every one of them begins with this refrain: ***Listen my son. Hear me, my son.*** And if it doesn't begin with that at the beginning, somewhere down in the passage, it's there. ***Listen to my words.*** The wisdom in those chapters, and in our passage today, is addressed to a youth, but we can all gain from following it.

But also in verse 9, we finally have the Preacher recognizing God as being part of what gives life meaning. He says rather soberly, in all this enjoyment of life, *“Know that you are accountable to God.”* You will give an answer for how you lived your life. God's judgment lies ahead, and we need to keep that in mind. This is a really important point in the book of Ecclesiastes. The Preacher is affirming, here, what he has called into question in previous passages.

For instance, in Ecclesiastes, chapter 9, he asked a bunch of questions like, “Does it really matter how we live?” “Does it make any difference whether, in the end, you lived wisely or religiously or morally or not at all?” “Doesn't the same fate await all of us?” “Will there ultimately be any distinction between the righteous and the wicked?” “Will justice ultimately prevail in the end or not?” But in chapter 9, he didn't answer those questions. It was as if he just walked off, kind of shrugged his shoulders and said, “Well, no one really knows.” He just kind of lets those questions hang out there.

But now he has stated there is a judgment awaiting each person, and God will be the final judge. All of our life and work and enjoyments are to be lived in light of that truth. Now, often, I think we hear this idea of judgment in a very negative way, like punishment. But this is not the idea of, “Go have your fun now, while you're young. Go sow your wild oats, but you'll pay for it later. God has an eye on you. He's keeping watch.”

I think the Preacher is simply calling for life to be lived to the full, with the maximum enjoyment of the present moment. Sometimes we struggle to understand how reverence for God, which is important, and reveling in life before God, are compatible. But they are. God is just as interested in what we do with our lives as He is in what we refrain from doing with our lives. In fact, this idea of judgment here, could just as easily be suggesting that God will hold us accountable if we do not make it our business to enjoy to the fullest the things that God has given us to enjoy. This idea of living life to the full, of rejoicing in life before God, is found all over the New Testament.

I'll give you just a couple of passages, a couple of references this morning. Philippians, chapter 4:4-8 sounds very similar to this text. I'm just going to quote a couple of those verses to you:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (Enjoy it.) Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. (Don't forget about God being present.) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)

Here's another one, Colossians 3:17:

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Now, many commentators think Colossians 3:17 is a very positive echo of Ecclesiastes 9:10. Here's what that verse says.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with *all* your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

It's kind of a negative ending to that, like, "Do whatever you're doing because eventually you're going to die, and you won't be able to do it anymore." But Colossians brings this positive, eternal impact, because God is back in the picture. "Do whatever you find to do with all of your might, as if working for the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

One more New Testament text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Perhaps you know this one. Maybe it's hanging on your wall.

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Now I don't think it's hard to know how to apply this. Just go out and enjoy your life. Enjoy the present moments that you have, whatever stage of life you're in. But I do think the stress of life, the culture that surrounds us, this desire for achievement...for productivity...for wanting to give the best to our children and give them the most opportunities, (that with all of that going on) it's still possible to lose sight of it. So what can we do to keep us from losing sight of it? I'll give you two things.

Number one: **Slow down the pace of your life.** We live in a culture that says the good life comes as a result of productivity and having more and bigger and better and the newest things. So do everything you can to get those things. But it's hard to be in the present moment and enjoy the things that you have if you're constantly working to get more, or if you have to work to do more so you can pay for the larger and the newer things that you've already taken on that you don't actually have the time to enjoy now.

Or if you're signing your kids up for a traveling team for every single sport, to make sure they have the most opportunity in high school athletics or a college scholarship. And please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that traveling teams, large houses, a new car, getting a promotion, that any of those things are inherently wrong. The Preacher has told us there is a time for everything under the sun. The issue is whether pursuing and having those things begins to take over our life. Is our pursuit of those things—or whatever it might be for you, that the Holy Spirit might be bringing to your mind right now—is our pursuit of that actually enhancing our ability to enjoy life before God, or is it detracting from it?

Slowing down the pace of our lives will allow us to do what the Preacher is encouraging us to do, “Enjoy life before God.”

The second thing is: **Practice gratitude.** Giving thanks will also help us enjoy the life God's given us. Now it's fascinating to me that those three New Testament passages: Philippians 4, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 5, weren't just ones that I picked at random. They were in commentaries that I looked at on this particular chapter of Ecclesiastes, about enjoying life before God. And then I went and looked at them again, and I thought, did you notice that every single one of them talks about giving thanks?

My wife is so much better at this than me. She does this regularly in her devotional time, writing down blessings, things she's thankful for. In fact, on her birthday, which was recently, she makes it a point to make a list that totals however old she is, of the things that she's thankful for. Now, as you get older, that list gets longer. You've got to come up with more. I'm not gonna tell you how old she is, (*laughter*) but you have more to be thankful for, because you've had more experiences; you have more of life.

In recent years, many studies have been done looking at how gratitude affects our brains and thus our lives. Researchers have actually been able to show that gratitude and giving thanks actually rewires our brain. It changes the brain chemistry, how our brains function, so how we think, and thus how we make decisions and how we live. But I would say that that research is just showing what God has known always to be true. There are over 170 references in the Old Testament and New Testament to the idea of thanksgiving or giving thanks. The Israelites were supposed to regularly offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to Yahweh. It was a regular, ordinary part of their everyday lives.

Now think with me for a minute about the book of Ecclesiastes. Since the Preacher has set out to figure out the meaning of life by experimenting with everything under the sun, but excluding God, where does it leave him? Everything being meaningless, because without God, there is no one to which to give thanks.

Giving thanks reestablishes our relationship with God on its proper terms. It causes us to be more aware of God's activity in our lives. It cleanses us from the subtle attitudes of self-sufficiency and entitlement and greed that kind of sneak in sometimes without us knowing it. When the blessings of life are seen as a result of God's grace, it makes us into gentler, more humble people.

Giving thanks helps us to recognize God's provision in our lives, which encourages us to trust Him for the future. And by the way, this isn't just true when things are going well. I have found that many people—some are sitting in this room today—are going through extremely challenging circumstances, debilitating diseases, grieving over losses. They are some of the people who practice gratitude the best, because they are aware of the present moment that's going on in their life, and they're thankful for it, and they take advantage of it, and they enjoy it before God.

There are simple ways to apply this. And, again, I don't think you need me to tell you this but humor me. Practice giving thanks with your kids at the dinner table. Just go around and everybody, each time before you pray, ask, “What are you thankful for from today?” Everybody names one thing. Or do this with your spouse, with your friends, with your roommates at a meal. Practice it with your kids at bedtime. Model it for your kids. Practice it on your own for the next month. As you sit down to be with God, just write down five things you're thankful for, and then slow down your life enough to talk to Him about those things and express your thanks to God. This leads us to our second instruction from the Preacher, because giving thanks reminds us of the God that we have. And the second instruction was to **Remember**. The first one was **Rejoice**. The second one was **Remember**. Look at chapter 12, verse 1:

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them”; before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly. Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. *Remember Him* before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7)

Now there's a lot of poetic language there, **caperberries** and **daughters of song, sing softly**, and there's a good amount of debate by scholars as to what is this passage talking about. And some scholars think that it's talking about the judgment of God coming upon all evil, because some of the pictures that are there reveal things that would happen with a military invasion. Often, if God would bring a nation in to conquer Israel, to bring them back to Himself. Or also there are pictures painted there by the prophets when they talk about the coming day of the Lord. So some scholars think it's that.

Other scholars think it's a picture of getting old. I tend to be in that camp. It makes the most sense to me in terms of, he's been talking about being young and remembering God. But then, as he

progresses in this description of what it means to get old, he's saying, "Remember Him before it's too late, before you can't anymore, before you die." Now, in the New American Standard that I just read to you, the word **remember** is actually only in verse one. You heard me read it in verse 6, but it's in italics in my Bible, which means that it's not in the original language. But it was supplied by the translators because it makes sense, and it helps with readability. But actually, this concept of remembering could be included in almost every verse, almost every description. In the New Living Translation, it will help us see how the Preacher wants us to *remember* God over the course of how we age. So I'm going to read these verses to you again from that translation, and I want you to listen for how often does this idea of *remembering* Him come up?

Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, "Life is not pleasant anymore." Remember him before the light of the sun, moon, and stars is dim to your old eyes, and rain clouds continually darken your sky. (because you're just grumpy). Remember him before your legs—the guards of your house—start to tremble; and before your shoulders—the strong men—stoop. Remember him before your teeth—your few remaining servants—stop grinding; and before your eyes—the women looking through the windows—see dimly.

Remember him before the door to life's opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades. Now you rise at the first chirping of the birds, but then all their sounds will grow faint (because you're lose your hearing).

Remember him before you become fearful of falling and worry about danger in the streets; before your hair turns white like an almond tree in bloom, and you drag along without energy like a dying grasshopper, and the caperberry no longer inspires sexual desire. (That's what it was known for.) Remember him before you near the grave, your everlasting home, when the mourners will weep at your funeral.

Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken. Don't wait until the water jar is smashed at the spring and the pulley is broken at the well. For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

(*New Living Translation Ecclesiastes 12:1-7)

Again I think it's as if the Preacher is preaching to himself, because all through these experiments, he has forgotten God, has not included Him in the equation of finding meaning. And now he realizes his mistake, and he doesn't want us or others to make the same mistake. So he says, "Remember Him before you get old, before your eyes don't work so well. Remember Him before your legs are weak, and you begin to be afraid of falling. Remember Him before your opportunity to work fades and you have no energy anymore. Remember Him before you can no longer hear the birds chirping. Remember Him before you near the grave, and everything seems to be breaking down, especially your body. Remember Him before it's too late. That is before you die, and the dust that we are made of, will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God.

Now that verse—chapter 12:7—the idea of dust returning to the earth, the spirit returning to God, is another echo of Genesis 2:7, with the idea of dust. Before I read this to you, I want you to understand that in Hebrew, the word for *breath* and the word for *spirit* is the same Hebrew word, but the translators translate it differently depending on the context. So you're going to hear this idea of *dust* and *breath* or *spirit* in Genesis 2:7:

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (*NASB Genesis 2:7)

And in Ecclesiastes 12:7, when he says, **The dust will return to the earth from which it came, and the spirit will return to God**, that is a different place than the Preacher has been. In Ecclesiastes 3, he spoke of the fate of humans and animals as being the same. They all die. They all go to the same place, into the ground. But, again, now he has remembered God specifically. He has remembered his Creator who breathed life into him.

So, what does it mean to **remember** God? Well, for an Israelite, it was far more than just mental recollection. It was an act of covenantal allegiance. It called for obedience. It was a very strong word in their culture in Hebrew, and it was commanded over and over and over again in the book of Deuteronomy.

Scholar Christopher Wright states this. “Remembering for Israel in light of the Torah, (the first five books the Old Testament) remembering for Israel included at least the following five great scriptural truths:

First: Creation, the scale of God's work being beyond our comprehension, but it's there, and it is good. *Secondly, The Fall*, our own perversity has spoiled what God created so good. *Thirdly, Abraham*, God's choosing of him and His promise to make a great nation, the origin of Israel, the hope for the nations, *Fourthly: The Exodus*, God's redeeming love and His power to bring His people out of slavery in Egypt and establish them in the land. And finally, *Fifthly: Sinai*, the covenant that was made there, the Law given, and God's presence in their midst of the tabernacle.

Now, interestingly, the Preacher only talks about the first two. He doesn't mention the last three, possibly because he's talking about this without thinking about God. He only talks about **Creation** and **The Fall**, but as a son of David and as king over Jerusalem, which is how He identifies Himself in the very first chapter of the book, he could not have been ignorant of them. So the God, he says we must remember as our Creator, can only be Yahweh, the Mighty One of Israel. So that's what it would mean for an Israelite to remember God.

What could it look like for us? Well, I have this simple prayer of invocation that we're going to put up on the screens. This is a prayer that I use to start my day and my daily devotions, and it goes like this:

*Father God, Creator of heaven and earth,
God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God of Israel,
God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
True and living God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Have mercy and hear my prayer.*

I'm going to walk you through each line. This prayer was given to me a couple of years ago. I've been using it for a couple of years. I don't know where it originated, but I find it fascinating that it's very similar to what Christopher Wright just told us about an Israelite.

First line, but it has some changes, because we know about Jesus, right? So:

Father God, Creator of heaven and earth.

Now *Father God* is a New Testament concept. Jesus was the one who told us that God was His Father. We could call Him Our Father, but then it does go back to where it would start for an Israelite: *Creator of heaven and earth*. You move to the next line:

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God of Israel.

This is not just a God that I'm making up. This is the God of the patriarchs, who trusted Him, who walked with Him, who God made promises to. *God of Israel*, not just a God of individuals, but a God who created a nation and established that nation as His representatives on the earth.

God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

Well, we've moved into the New Testament now. Now this is the God and the Father that Jesus came and revealed to us, what He is truly like, and then lived His life and died to bring us back into relationship with Him.

True and living God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is the God who lives in continual relationship...unending relationship...and invites us into that relationship through the death of Jesus on the cross and through the giving of the Holy Spirit who is present with us right now.

Have mercy and hear my prayer.

Now that could mean the prayer that I'm praying if I'm in my devotional time, that I'm praying right then. Or it could mean, if I start my day with this, the prayer that I'm going to live as my life before God today.

I have found it helpful to start my day and my devotional time with this. It reminds me who the God is that I'm addressing, that I'm sitting with, that I'm before in my life.

A few weeks ago, I was pretty sick. I was down for about a week, but three days of that, I was laying in bed. I could hardly open my eyes because there was such a sinus headache. Bright light hurt, and about the only thing I could do was pray this prayer. But I was able to remember it, and

it reminded me that God was with me in the midst of that. Maybe it will be helpful to you as you seek to remember God.

To conclude today, we can say, finally, the Preacher has recognized that the whole of life on Earth, including his own frustrating quest for meaning, the whole of life on Earth is lived within the story that is framed at both ends by God. We live in that same story. We are in the world that began with God's creation, and we are also in the world that will end with God's judgment. And within that framework, we are called to remember God, to enjoy the life He has given us, and to trust Him for the future, because He is the only One who can give life meaning. Let's pray.

Father God, Creator of heaven and earth; God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob God of Israel, God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, true and living God, who is Father Son and Holy Spirit. Have mercy and hear our prayer today. Lord, we wrestle, we struggle. I struggle to remember You in the midst of my day, in the midst of busyness, in the midst of work, in the midst of accomplishing things, in the midst of family time, in the midst of schedules. And so, God, I'm praying that You would, through Your Spirit, who is present with us now, and as we go out, that Your Spirit goes with us, that Your Spirit would gently nudge us and remind us, "Hey, I'm here. Enjoy what you're doing right now with Me." Lord, help us to be grateful people, to remember to thank You for the things that we have, that we're experiencing, even the hard things. We pray these things in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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