

Torrey 1987 Living in an Unending Cycle: Session 1

By Ron Allen

[Speaker 1]

Dear God, thank you for all the speakers that are coming here and all the effort they put into this and how this can be a real time for my own spiritual renewal. Pray that could be the goal of everyone here. Pray that the words would really hit us at home and that we would be able to apply them and learn. Thank you for this opportunity of rest from classes and just a good time. Amen. Dr. Ron Allen will be talking about "Living in an Unending Cycle: Part 1."

[Ron Allen]

Let me say, and I'll say it again in the larger meeting, how appreciative I am to have been invited to be here with you and to share with you from the word of God. Now I must say, I did not expect there to be this many people here in this room this morning. I thought if I would put down the word Kohelet that would probably impel some of you to desire to get married one of the conferences. So you need to be married or to find out about motivation and reward or puritanism.

And I'm just very pleased that all of you are here and maybe you're already married and you don't think you like the Puritans and you've decided what rewards you're going to get or something. But this is really in the imagination of most people, the backwater of the Bible, this little book of Ecclesiastes. And yet I believe the Book of Ecclesiastes or, Kohelet as we'll call it, may be one of the most important single books for the believer today, especially the young believer, a person who's college trained and is looking forward to life with thought and reflection.

And I'd like for you to open your Bibles to this little book. You may have to look for it a bit, but it's in the poetic portion of the Bible, and it's the little book called Ecclesiastes. And we're going to be looking at that on three different occasions. And while you are certainly free to sample each of the seminars during the next three days, those of you who stay with the one will sense a sense of continuity and direction. So if you've opened your Bible to the book of Ecclesiastes, first I want to deal with a little bit of nomenclature.

When you hear the word Ecclesiastes, you think "church" because you think "ecclesiastical," or Ecclesia. And in fact, one of the most misleading of names for Bible books would be to call this book Ecclesiastes. But this is not a book designed for the church at worship, and it is not a book that even focuses on that concept of church at all. But it is a word that describes the gathering together of wise people for discussion and reflection and interaction on the meaning of life. For that reason, the tendency today is not to translate the word that is the title for the book, but in fact, to transliterate it and make the Hebrew word, a word of currency in English, and the Hebrew word is "Kohelet," and that's why you'll hear me refer to it that way.

The book Kohelet is a part of Israel's wisdom tradition and is an exceedingly important book to understand living. Now this year at Western Seminary, I'm teaching a course in the exegesis of sapiential literature. That's the Book of Proverbs, we talk that way so we can charge high tuition, which has to do with a very positive and affirming approach to life. For the Book of Proverbs, which is central in Israel's wisdom, presents the idea that God has created the universe with something of himself or something that points to himself, something that is the marker of His presence in all that He's made.

You have to be very careful how we say this, because we are not pantheist, not at all. But we do believe that creation bears witness to the presence of God, that there are the distinctive walls of his fingerprints and all that He's made, and that a person who looks at nature and life rightly is going to sense. Oh yes, this too, is a place where God has been, or this too, is something that speaks of him, or this too, is a pointer to his reality and his presence.

And I want to respond rightly to that. In the Book of Proverbs, there's pretty much a saying of yes to life. For if this is God's world and he's built it with certain patterns, certain flaws, certain ebbs, certain waves, then if I can just adjust my life to the patterns of the world that God has made, then my life ought go on an expected course, and it not be a life blessed by Him. Now, if we take that too far, we go into the heresy of the "health and wealth gospel," which has been the devastation of many lives and not a few television evangelists in the last few days.

The health and wealth approach is that if you live your life according to God's promise you will be very healthy and become very wealthy and everyone will mark that out. Here is a person blessed by God. That isn't really what Proverbs is saying. The Proverbs does say yes to life, and it does say that if an individual just understands how God's world works, that there are certain expectations that regularly will come as the seasons follow one another as night follows, day as the seasons of rain come, and the seasons of dryness come.

So your life will follow such a pattern. Now, not everyone's life follows those patterns. In fact, it seems today that many people feel those patterns hardly even work anymore. Well, they do work. But Israel's tradition of wisdom said there is another expectation as well, and that's what's

found in Kohelet, and that is that there is a dark side to hope. And that's what our book is about. Book with me now, at the opening words as I read then the words of Kohelet, the son of David King in Jerusalem.

And this particular translation says Vanity of Vanities, says the preacher vanity of Vanities. All is vanity. That's the new King James Bible, which I ordinarily championed. But I'd like you to think about that expression for a moment. Vanity of vanities seems to be a categorical no to life, and it puts the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and very strong opposition to each other. The one is saying yes, and this one seems to be saying no. But if we look more closely at the meaning of the word translated vanity, maybe we'll see that it's not really a no that is saying, but more of a maybe the Hebrew word that has translated vanity in the King James tradition is the word Hevel.

Hevel is H-E-V-E-L. And it's a word you should know. Many of you know, a number of Greek words, certainly, you know, agape and words like that. Well, it's time to learn a few Hebrew words, and here is one of them. It's heavy. Would you say that heavy? H-E-B. But there's a line under the B as it's like a V. H-E-V-E-L, say it again, heavy. The word heavy can be translated vanity and certainly has been. But vanity, as I understand that word is a word meaning nothing. And the Book of Kohelet is not saying that life is nothing.

In fact, as you look at the way this is worded, vanity of vanities, that's what we call the superlative genetic in Hebrew, it's like the expression Holy of Holies, or song of songs, where you have a word followed by its own plural and the of in between. It's a means of developing a

superlative in Hebrew so that Holy of Holies means the most Holy place and Song of Songs, the loveliest melody, and vanity of vanities would be absolute negation of all meaning in life at all.

And yet the Bible doesn't really say that the basic meaning of the word heavy is not so much vanity as it is vapor. That is, this is a pictorial word. It's a word that evokes an image in your mind based on an experience that you've had watching a pot boil, wraps a kettle, a tea kettle, and seeing the vapor arise from the water that has now been affected by heat and has now gone through a dramatic change. And you watch the steam from the kettle. And in a prescientific age, when we didn't have a modern means of capturing that vapor and perhaps analyzing it and thinking about it, all you would do is watch that vapor dissipate and disappear.

And the writer of this book, whom I take to be Solomon, in his last year, says that's the way life is vanity of Vanities. Well, better vapor of vapors and vapor of vapors, then could be rendered thinnest of vapors. Most passing of vapors, a vapor that you know is real for life is real. But a vapor is so very hard to hold onto, to capture, to put in a beaker and try to analyze it's just that it's passing now. It's very difficult for a young person to think this way because when you're in your late teens and 20s and I know some of you are older than that.

But nonetheless, when you're in those periods of your life, it's very hard to think about life passing quickly, for in fact, you're wondering right now, perhaps how long is it going to take for this hour to be over and three days of lectureship? And can I really bear that? Where are we going to go Friday at noon and, boy, I'm sure glad it's over at noon. And we're just in October. How long does it take for this semester to get over? I want to get back home.

I want to go back to see the family. And I'm only in my third year of college, and I have a whole year to go. And that's the way you tend to think. I remember I have a good memory. I remember those feelings. But now I'm 46 and I cannot believe where time has gone. I have a daughter who is 25. I can't believe that. A daughter, who's 25. I was at a restaurant the other day. Very lovely waitress serving me and my wife. And I thought I have a daughter that's older than that waitress. Where's life gone?

How could it have passed so quickly now we've tried to cheat time in our family because we have two sets of children. We have our older daughter, we have a son, 21, and then we decided to have two more children. We have a daughter who is now ten and a boy who's twelve. And so I am with younger parents and going to the soccer games again and going to the basketball games and doing all the things like that. And I said one day I'm so glad I have these younger children because they're going to keep me young longer.

And my boy who's twelve and is the pistol of pistols. That means superlative generative, said to me, no, dad, I'm going to make you old so fast, it's going to cause your head to spin. But this concept of the fleeting nature of life is something you only discover when it's too late in that sense. And that's why I think the book was written late in the life of Solomon, much past 46, by the way, but very late in his life. And as he looked back, he thought how quickly it all went.

And those years when I was younger and I thought life and time stood still. Now I've awakened and it was a Tuesday morning, I think, and all of a sudden I realized I'm not gray and I'm

enfeebled and all the happy times are behind. And who knows what's ahead? Well, it's that kind of an attitude that pervasive so that the expression vanity of vanities that is life is nothing is not nearly so appropriate for this book as thinnest of vapors that is, life is transitory. It's passing.

And believe it or not, it's passing far too quickly. And as we think about it, we have to think, who are we and how are we to relate to it? The word is heavily Venice to vapors. That's what Kohelet says. Now he sets the stage by reminding you of cycles, cycles that we're all familiar with. But cycles that are a part of the way life works, he says in verse three, what Prophet has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun for one generation passes away and another generation comes.

But the Earth divides forever. The sun also rises and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes to the south and turns around to the north. The wind whirls about continually and comes again on its circuit. All the Rivers run into the sea. If the sea is not full to the place from which the Rivers come there, they return again. All things are full of labor. Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

Verses 3 to 8. Now, what the writer here is explaining are the cycles of life that we learn about sometimes in a life science class, but far too late apply to the way our life is going, because what he's saying is, there are cycles that have been going on from time and memorial. I can't even say it time in the past, and these cycles will continue long after you've gone. And you have to ask yourself, so what is the point of my life in the light of all of those cycles?

In fact, he says, what's the profit? And the next great word from this book is the word my "yithron." The word is "yithron." Profit. What's left over? In fact, when it's all done, here's a person who's born, he's lived a life coming now to the end. And he's asking, what is the bottom line? What profit has my life really been? Is there anything left over, or am I like that song that Tennessee Ernie Ford sang a long time ago? Am I like that kind of man who loaded 16 tons?

And what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt? Is there anything left over? Is there anything of value, anything of significance for all the work that you've done? Well, this makes it sound kind of down, doesn't it? But that's the way this book is supposed to sound, because for many people, that's the way life is. You see, there are the positive approaches to life that are expressed in the book of Proverbs what happens if your life doesn't measure up to that? What happens if your expectation doesn't mesh with reality then do you turn from God, or do you say Proverbs is a lie?

Or do you come to this book for the other side, which is the dark side of hope? But you have to ask these questions. A generation comes and a generation goes one after the other. But the Earth continues. We're in present dealing with very disappointing nomination for the Supreme Court from the point of view of our President, that is, he's greatly disappointed and is speaking about that even today and many people have taken sides on this and have expended great energies and a great deal of money and a great deal of concern on that.

But in the long view, someone might ask. There have been controversial nominees to the Supreme Court before, and there have been those who have not been accepted by the Senate in

its role in advice and consent to the president's nominations before. And yet the Supreme Court continues to work and the government goes on and life goes on. And those things that seem to be all consuming for the moment will we regard them as importantly, 100 years later, or if life should continue 1,000 years later? What difference will it make?

A generation comes. A generation goes. There will be other crises. And does that crisis really mean as much as we think it does in the moment? Well, it may. But the long view is maybe it won't. These tempests in teapot hardly change the way the full cycle runs, because that cycle is continuing. A generation comes and then it goes away and another generation comes and it'll go away. And the Earth seems to go on. And we have to ask of ourselves and of our lives. Does it really matter?

Does my life really count? And if it doesn't, well, then I have some real rethinking to do. Look at verse 5, the sun rises and the sun sets. Now we wouldn't have life if there was not the factor, the impact of the sun on this planet. We all know that. And yet we have to ask, in a new day: "So what?" Because there was a day yesterday. Now there's a day today. And I suspect there will be a day tomorrow. And the question comes to us, what change will a new day bring?

And is there anything really, yithron, left over from that new day? Or is that not just another example of Hevel, of this vapor, that's ascending and is real? But it's so hard to hold on to blowing of wind. We just come off of Columbus Day, passed unnoticed, I suppose, by much of America. But in Portland, Oregon, Columbus Day is remembered not because of Columbus, but because of a terrible windstorm. Took place years before I ever came to Portland. But there was

a tremendous windstorm, 1962 on Columbus Day, where the winds were blowing over 100 miles of an hour through the city of Portland, and roofs were destroyed. Buildings were destroyed. Lives were lost. It was a terrible thing.

And here, years later, 1962, 1987, years later, people ask me, now, were you here in Portland and the Columbus Day storm? I said, no, I wasn't. Well, everybody was here. They knew where they were when those winds hit, sort of like when President Kennedy died. Those who were of a certain age and older at that period of time. They'll tell you exactly where they were when they heard the news. I'll tell you where I was. I was on the campus of Cal State LA walking toward the library, and a person came running out of the library building saying, They've just shot the President.

And I was not a fan of that particular president. But I thought, what a stupid thing to say. And I thought, what nonsense? Why would someone say something like that? I found it was true. Well, the Columbus Day storm, apparently, was something like that. And yet it's just a memory. Everything that was destroyed has either been rebuilt or didn't need to be rebuilt. We had a whole line of trees on our campus that were destroyed by the Columbus Day storm. When I first arrived at Western Seminary, 1970, I looked at this line of stumps.

And I was thinking, who cut down those trees? And what kind of a statement about faith in God is that, to destroy that line of beautiful trees on a seminary campus? And I had my exegetical ecological hackles up at that point. And I was going to storm in and cause my own blowing. And then they said, oh, no, we didn't cut those down deliberately. That storm knocked them down,

and we just came along and tried to tidy up the mess. Well, now they've uprooted all those stumps, and they planted new trees.

And those trees are now taller than I am. And one day, I suspect, Lord [foreign language] his return. Those trees will be as grand as those trees ever were. And if the wind blows again, another time now, more trees can be planted. And you keep asking, what's the yithron? So what? If the wind blows, it'll blow again. And it's a hevel. It's like a vapor. It's real. We do not deny reality. But we still ask the question. So why all the rivers run to the sea?

There is some humor in this. You're supposed to read this. This is not a guffaw. It's not a great laugh. You're supposed to smile as you read this. All the Rivers run into the sea. But the oceans haven't been filled yet. And those Rivers have been running the sea as long as there have been Rivers. And the ocean still isn't filled up yet. Now you can come along and you can say, well, he's just describing a certain cycle that I learned about in 6th grade class in life science.

That's the way the hydrogen cycle works and the water that flows to the sea there's evaporation. It goes back up, it comes down again. That's the way nature works. But this is not a study in science. This is actually an observation on life that as you stand even beside a great river, the Columbia, which by the way, is much lower these days than normally it is here in Portland, we're suffering a water shortage. Unbelievable. I never thought living in Portland people be praying for rain, but they are this year.

Farmers have to plant their seed. We have grass seed farmers. They have to plant their seed in the dust, and they're hoping that the nights will not get too cold for germination before we finally get some rain that will cause those grass seeds to germinate. I never thought living in Portland, I'd hear people praying for rain. Kansas, maybe North Carolina, maybe Texas, surely, but not in Portland praying for rain. And yet, even though the rains are late and we've had unseasonably warm weather, I know you've been hot.

We've been hot too. Hot for us. 92 degrees in October. Unbelievable. But the rains are going to come again. And when the rains come again, the Rivers will be up to their normal level again. And when the Rivers are up to their normal level again, they'll still be delivering the same amount of water to the ocean that that river has done since we've known anything about Rivers. And yet you'll probably not be able to notice any appreciable difference in the level of the Pacific probably be about the same and all the energy of the flowing of the river.

You have to ask. So what? What's left over? What's the yithron? It's just another example of an ongoing cycle. That's why, he says in verse 8, all things are laborous. All things are work, and it's difficult to express the burden I'm under and the eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear ever filled with hearing. These are observations about life. They're true. By the way, there is an approach to Ecclesiastes, which I don't buy anymore. Maybe I should have mentioned this a moment ago earlier on in my time.

The general approach to Ecclesiastes among evangelical Bible teachers is that this is a book written as though a person were not a believer, and it's the standpoint of doubt. And it's the idea

that if there were no God and if I were not in relationship with Him, this is the way life would be. That's not my view of this book at all. My view of this book is that it is part of the word of God. It is a part of Holy Scripture, came from the same community that gave me Proverbs gave me the prophets, gave me Torah.

There's a part of Scripture, and it speaks truly, and it's not the standpoint of doubt or the standpoint of Fame and belief at all. It's really the way things are. It's not all the way things are because there are other things to be said about life. But it is true, and it is scripture and it is of God. The eye is not satisfied with seeing. I don't know what your own personal movie code is or your own personal television code is. But can you imagine someone coming out of a movie theater or finishing a television program and saying, well, now I've seen the movie.

I don't need to do that again. Or now I've watched a television program. I don't need to do that again. That's not the way it is, is it? Go to a movie. First 5, 10, 20 minutes are all promos of the next movies that are going to be there. And the idea is, if you don't like this one, come back again, maybe we'll have one you'll like and the same thing when you watch television, they never say, now you've seen this, aren't you glad? But it's always on our next show because the eye is never satisfied with seeing and the ear with hearing.

Can you imagine now you've just turned off your radio and you say, well, now I've listened to music. There's something else in my life. Never do that. Imagine borrowing a record and saying, I'm borrowing a record because I don't want to buy it because one hearing is enough. The whole record industry is based upon the fact that one hearing isn't enough and that hearing one record

isn't enough that you're going to buy more, that there is this ongoing insatiable desire to see more and to hear more and only rarely along the road where you ask, what does it all mean?

What's the yithron? What's left over? What is really a value here in this very real, but so quickly passing life that is God's gift to me? And in verse 9, our writer gets even more dark in his view, as he says, that which has been is what will be and that which is done is what will be done. And there's nothing new under the sun. I'm a news junkie. I confess that just as Dr. Radmacher confessed his enjoyment of chocolate declares, I have not yet confessed.

My news junkie-ism as a besetting sin, but I do enjoy. And I pursue the news. In fact, I do a radio commentary for United Press International once a week, and that gives me license and justification to follow the news. And like most people in the church, I have been following, nearly insatiably, the story of Baker PTL Fallwell and Bofiglio. Have you noticed that USA Today page 3, in the first section has become the PTL page? You may not have time to read a newspaper, but it's true since March.

Imagine it's since March, nearly every day, five days a week. USA Today has had one article minimally on that scandal. And there are people I suspect who are thinking never in the history of the Church has there been such a scandal. Jerry Falwell said that as he resigned from PTL just the other day. He said, in the history of the Church, this is the worst cancer and scab on Christianity. Well, a preacher uses rhetorical language like that. And sometimes in the midst of something you tend to overstate.

But people who have the long view they know the Church has always been beset by scandal and by corruption and by misstatement and misdeed. It's not new. We publicize it more. We have a better means of sharing with other people, the nastiness in the world about us. But it's not new. Long before I was ever born, there was a scandal in Los Angeles that caused my grandparents and my parents to be as titillated by that one as we have been by this one. You see what these words are.

That which is will be and that which is done already has been. And there's really nothing new. We have better ways of spreading the news, and we're more informed, but we're more informed about the same things. Basically, Dr. Radmacher mentioned this man who's fallen in sin, who is one of our graduates. He did not go on to say the worst thing about that. The worst thing about that is, he's not only a graduate of our seminary, but he was teaching at our seminary. He's one of our faculty members, albeit part time.

He was a regular member of our faculty. And I'll tell you, I almost hate to go to faculty meetings anymore when there's a special guest there, because it seems every time we've had a special guest, there's been a tragedy that's about to be announced. And I remember going to this faculty meeting it's just two weeks ago and seeing a guest there a pastor, pastor from a local Church, another one of our graduates. And he was there on behalf of the church co-pastor with this other man who'd fallen in this terrible sin.

And he was there to tell the faculty what he understood and to plead with the faculty not to say anything to anyone until the church, in their own process, began to deal with this problem. But I

sat there and I heard about my friend and colleague, my partner in ministry. And I have this numbing sensation. How can that be? I have this tremendously piercing question. What about yourself? Could you have done such a thing? Surely I could. And then what about our whole enterprise? Are we going to bring it down on our own heads by our own evil actions?

And then you start to think, has anyone ever done anything like this before then the moment you say that because we've been through this time and time again until it's almost a stock caricature about the church, isn't it? The pastor who runs off with. It's almost something that you say, there's nothing new. It's always been that way. I suspect when the prophets were still in Iran. There were prophets doing this kind of thing which is being done by pastors today. The phrase at the end of verse nine is the third major phrase that we look at in this book.

The first is the word vanity, which I've translated vapor the word hevel. The second is the word yithron. Prophet in verse three, and the third is the phrase "tachat hashamesh." "Under the sun." Now it's the phrase "under the sun," "tachat hashemesh," that has led many Bible teachers to say, this book doesn't deal with us. It deals with a worldling. For Bible teachers have come at Ecclesiastes from a distinctly New Testament point of view and writing on the great crest of the Book of Ephesians, they've said, "Our dwelling is in the heavenlies."

And hence when the Book of Ecclesiastes talks about living under the sun, it's not talking about us. Well, not so fast. Our position may be in the heavenly, but our living is very much under the sun. All under the sun means is right here on planet Earth. And it's possible that someday if we have a space colony and we actually send a ship to some distant galaxy, and that is a long time

away. It's possible then that someone might say, well, the Book of Ecclesiastes isn't for me because I'm no longer run to the sun.

But that's an awful long way off. For most of us. We're under the sun. And by the way, in whatever animated state suspended animated state that those people might go to another solar system, they take the same thing with them because it means our life and it's where we live. I live under the sun and under the sun. I have to ask the question, what's the form? Is there anything that I can say? No, this is brand new. Look at verse ten. Is there anything in which it may be said, look, this is new?

At the moment we say that, it turns out it was already ancient times before us. Now what we have that's new today is technology. I'm as appreciative of technology as any of the rest of you. Writing, for example. I write on a computer, and I must tell you, I'm a champion of a computer. For a writer, I know that computers can be used for many other things, but for a writer, a computer is incredible, really is. My first book, I wrote long-hand on legal pads on a kitchen table in Manila.

No air conditioning, very hot, very humid. And I kept one of those yellow pads. I didn't need to keep them all, but I kept one just to remind myself of the still curled pages from the perspiration on my arm. As I was writing that book, I couldn't get a typewriter in the Mellow. I couldn't go buy one because we were just there a short time and to to purchase one, there's an import duty, very expensive. Couldn't do that. And I couldn't rent one. There's no place to rent a typewriter in

Manila and I finally sweet-talked very lovely missionary lady into letting me use the seminary library's typewriter at night, three nights a week from 9 to 11.

It was the only fine typewriter in the seminary, and she had to go through board action to give me permission to use it. And I typed them three nights a week from nine to eleven. Retype what I'd written longhand and then mailed in that manuscript. Today, every place I go, I take my computer with me, like a computer [inaudible]. I have a desk model at home and I have a portable I carry with me. It's in my motel room right now. And with a computer, I can do things that I could not possibly do handwritten or typing.

I'll tell you a little about that tomorrow in the plenary session and I'm appreciative of that technology. I really am. But writing is still the same. You can't put the computer on autopilot and type the thesis and then say, let the computer write the book. You still have to do the writing. What has been speeded up is the facility of producing a good copy. Because when I edit and revise and rewrite, I no longer have to calculate how much time it's going to take me to re-type it.

And that used to be the terrible thing of having to re-type, perfect copy, or at least nearly that, or paying someone else to do it. Now, literally, the day before I hand in a manuscript, I can still be doing fine tuning and then press the print command and go to bed while that final copy is being printed. And if there's not a jam-up, for a power failure or a paper short, there are things that go wrong. I have it ready to mail, and I have overnight delivery today too, so it sounds like it's all new.

It isn't new at all. What having that capacity has done for me has allowed me to say yes to more things than I ever should say yes to. And I'm more behind than ever. I remember when I writing my first book. I was fighting a deadline and I mailed it on the day that it had to be mailed. They told me it had to be mailed. October 31, 1978. October 31, 1978. I mailed that first manuscript on the very day it was due to be mailed. I'm doing the same thing.

It's just I'm doing it with better technology and on the day it's due to be mailed. I'm doing that the same day. I haven't changed anything. I'm still living on the ragged edge. I'm still a power failure away from disaster. That typewriter I borrowed in Manila, the electronic typewriter. We had a typhoon. Typhoon Cotting came. Typhoon Cotting dumped 24 inches of rain in 22 hours. Can you imagine that? I went outside and stood in the rain just for a moment to see how hard. It was coming down, literally gave me a headache.

It was raining so hard. I didn't believe it was possible for that much water to fall that quickly. And thousands of people lost their homes. Who knows how many acres flooded? It was a terrible thing for me. Very little thing. It was a power failure. And the manuscript I was going to have done early. Well, I got it done just on the right time. And I seem to be always a power failure away from disaster. Nothing is new, really. We just have new ways to get ourselves into trouble.

See, this is new. Our computer is really new. They just speed up my capacity for causing myself more trouble. Look at verse 11. There's no remembrance of former things. Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who come after you. That is, people don't learn from mistakes of the past. We don't do that individually, nor do we seem to do it collectively. We

try to build in safeguards, but we find ourselves in the same old runs and we find ourselves in the same problem.

Now, if this sounds dark, it's supposed to. If it's depressing, it's supposed to be that way. It is also supposed to be regarded as true, because believe it or not, this is a factor of life. It's not the only factor. It is a truth about life. It's not the only truth. But it is true. And when I come to the end of my days, if God grants me life, that is, my expectation is to live a long time. I know it can be cut short, but my expectation is to live a long and full life.

And if God so grants me that, and I come to the end of my days as Solomon did his, I have to ask this question, be able to reflect on it. Or maybe I won't live another day. Last Thursday, I was in a car accident. I'm glad to be here, but I was in a car accident. It wasn't a life threatening one. But who knew? It was an exasperating one. It was a young driver. This is not relevant, but it is a fact that it was a young woman.

Well, see, I don't like jokes about women drivers. And so that's why I said it's not really well, but obviously she was not a Biola student. I do know that, because she didn't hit me once from behind. She hit me three times. I think what happened is she panicked and she had her foot on the accelerator and we were moving in heavy traffic and she slammed into me once as I was slowing down for a car ahead of me, and we're still moving. And with her foot on the accelerator, I could see through the rear view mirrors. She had her eyes closed and she was like this.

And she hit me again. And I turned around to say, twice is enough, and wham! She hit me the third time, rammed me into the car that was ahead of me. Finally, we all come to a halt. Three cars all scrunched together, and I got it back. And then front. And I learned not only is life a fragile thing, but so are Honda motor cars. Back end of my car. Terrible. My beautiful car. And, well, it wasn't life threatening, but it might have been.

And I cannot count on saying, well, when I'm 80, I'll ask these questions that Kohelet asks when he was in his maturity. But I have to be asking them along the way, too. I have to be ready on a Thursday, coming home from work with my young boy in the car, finishing his trumpet lesson. What if this were the last day of my life? What if it had not just been a rear-ender that caused me a minor whiplash that causes some difficulty sleep at night?

What if it were, in fact, the end? Finito? Gone? Ron Hayford, where is he? Gonzo. Zappo. You've heard him. He says those things. I heard him this summer. What if that were it? And if it were it in the moment when they say your life flashes before your eyes, what would the flashing picture be? Would it be this thin vapor there don't make no difference at all. What would the yithron be? What would there be that which is left over? And the evaluation is going to be done in view of the life I've lived here under the sun, because that's the only life I'm living.

Well, my intent today is to provoke curiosity and maybe to meddle a little bit in your comfort zone. My intention tomorrow and Friday, Lord willing, is to bring some resolution to the problems that Kohelet it raises in this opening chapter, I believe profoundly believe that Kohelet may be one of the most important books for the young Christian person in our day, because more

and more not only Christians are raising the question, but so are non-Christians all around us.

What really does it mean after all? And that's what Kohelet wants us to ask and face and then be able to answer.

So that's our plan for the next two days. Let's pray. Our Father, where the words of this strange book still in our mind, words dealing with vapor, vanity, words dealing with profit and meaning and words dealing with the transitory nature of life that has lived here under the sun. We ask that you would give us your perspective on these and all things and that we would find value and meaning and significance in our relationship with you and not in the yuppie things that seem to Mark all those about us.

For we know it to be wrong, that viewpoint that says he who wins has the most toys. But we have to ask, who will play with the toys then? Help us to be a people who takes life as a gift from your hand in Jesus name. Amen. Thank you very much.