

## **An Empty Life: The Emptiness of Significance**

**Ecclesiastes 1:1-11**

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

*June 1, 2003*

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to the book of Ecclesiastes. Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, in your Old Testament. We're beginning a summer Sunday morning series on the book of Ecclesiastes, a book that at first reading is filled with despair, frank hopelessness, stiff philosophy, is in fact full of gospel truth. And we look forward to unveiling that to you as we work through the book this summer.

A few comments about the first verses are in order. The Greek rendering of the Hebrew name that you have here in the first verse, "Preacher," is the name from which we get the modern word, Ecclesiastes. The Preacher is what the person calls himself, who is speaking to us in this book, and his message you will see summarized in verse 2. His message is basically that all man's efforts to find happiness apart from God are useless. This life, apart from God, is meaningless, it is hopeless, and it is only filled with despair.

Now, that's an important message, because from the very beginning chapters of the book of Genesis, the Old Testament asserts this fundamental truth: that there is a Creator, He is distinct from His creation, we are His creatures, and we are not Him; and the essence of life consists in glorifying and enjoying that Creator and honoring Him as the One who is the Lord and Sovereign.

And so it is perfectly appropriate that there would be a book in the Old Testament that sets forth what happens when you attempt to live life against that truth or without that truth. If you attempt to live life under the sun, if you attempt to live life apart from the reality of a Creator that has brought all things into being and made us for Himself, then this will happen. That's basically the story of the book of Ecclesiastes. It is an exploration of the different ways that people try to find meaning in this life apart from God, and it is an explanation of how futile that is. It is a big argument to argue you into a corner in the denial of the Creator. So, when the author says, "All is vanity," he really means it. Everything under the sun is vanity apart from God. Everything in this world, everything in this earthly sphere is incapable of satisfying the deepest part of our soul apart from God.

So, this book is a believing philosopher's inspired reasoning about the truth end

of life, and it is his way of pressing those who refuse the first principle of life, to the logical conclusion of their faulty presupposition. He is saying, if you choose to live life apart from God, this is what life will be like, and he explores the various options. This first section, verses 1-11, is really the introduction to the whole book. He gives as thesis statement in verse 2, and then spends the rest of the introduction, from verse 3 to 11, elaborating that thesis statement, and driving it home, showing it to you in various ways, and from different angles. But his thesis statement is basic: apart from God, this life is meaningless. Let's hear then God's holy and inspired word, beginning in Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 1:

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.  
"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,  
"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."  
What advantage does man have in all his work  
Which he does under the sun?  
A generation goes and a generation comes,  
But the earth remains forever.  
Also, the sun rises and the sun sets;  
And hastening to its place it rises there again.  
Blowing toward the south,  
Then turning toward the north,  
The wind continues swirling along;  
And on its circular courses the wind returns.  
All the rivers flow into the sea,  
Yet the sea is not full.  
To the place where the rivers flow,  
There they flow again.  
All things are wearisome;  
Man is not able to tell it.  
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
Nor is the ear filled with hearing.  
That which has been is that which will be,  
And that which has been done is that which will be done.  
So there is nothing new under the sun.  
Is there anything of which one might say,  
"See this, it is new"?  
Already it has existed for ages  
Which were before us.  
There is no remembrance of earlier things;  
And also of the later things which will occur,  
There will be for them no remembrance  
Among those who will come later still.

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy word. May He add His blessing to it.  
Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, enable us to ask the hard questions, enable us to hear Your answer, show us the despair of life apart from You, not lived for You, with You, in fellowship with You, and show us where to run when we see that despair in our own experience. This we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.*

What's life all about? What's the meaning of life? What's the purpose of life? Encapsulate it. Say it in a sentence. "What's it all about, Alfie?"<sup>1</sup> As the song said back in the 60s. Paul Simon put it slightly more cleverly in the 80s, "A man walks down the street, He says, Why am I soft in the middle now? Why am I soft in the middle? The rest of my life is so hard! I need a photo-opportunity; I want a shot at redemption! Don't want to end up a cartoon, In a cartoon graveyard ..." <sup>2</sup>

And the answer of this book is, "Under the sun, you want to know the answer? Life is empty. There is no meaning. There is no significance." If you want to live life under the sun, if you want to live life apart from God, if you want to search for meaning in this life anywhere and everywhere but in saving relationship with God, the answer is: this life is empty.

In the nineteenth century, a philosophy grew up which originally came from those who were being oppressed in absolutist courts of Czarist Russia. These revolutionaries rejected the authority of the state, church, and family.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, had formalized this philosophy of nothingness called *nihilism*.

*Nihilism* comes from the Latin root, *nihil*, for the word *nothing*. It says that there is no meaning in this life. *Nihilism* is the belief that all values are baseless.

There is no objective basis for values. You create your own values. There is nothing that can be absolutely known or communicated. Every belief, every considering something-true, is necessarily false because there is simply no *true world*. Nihilism is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. So, a true nihilist believes in nothing, has no loyalties and no purpose other than the impulse to destroy.

Nietzsche, in arguing for nihilism, said that "its corrosive effect would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions, and lead to the greatest crisis in human history." And looking at it from the dawn of the twenty-first century, he looks close to being right. The thinking of this philosophy has undermined, for instance, virtually all the systems in our society. Since the mid-twentieth century, nihilist themes such as value destruction and the purposeless of the universe, have preoccupied artists, songwriters, poets, social critics and philosophers.

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<sup>1</sup> *What's It All About Alfie?* Hal David - Burt Bacharach

<sup>2</sup> *You Can Call Me Al*. Paul Simon

But long before Nietzsche, a philosopher far wiser than the German thinker, had looked this issue square in the face. He called himself the Preacher, and in the second verse of this book he says, "Everything is meaningless."

I want to look at that issue, and introduce the theme to the whole book by examining verses 1 through 11, and as we do, relentlessly return to the main proposition, that all man's efforts to find happiness, satisfaction, significance and meaning in this life, apart from God, are utterly vain. There are empty, they are vanity, they are hopeless. They're despairing. They will not result in anything constructive.

### **I. Attestation of competence.**

The author begins in verse 1, by attesting to his competence. He's basically saying, "Look, I have had a range of experience which uniquely enables me to explore the question of the meaning of life with you." The author is speaking from a position of knowledge and experience that qualifies him to ask and answer hard questions. The words of the Preacher, he says, the son of David, King of Jerusalem. He calls himself "The Preacher." And you see that illusion to Solomon there, Son of David, King in Jerusalem, and this constitutes an assertion that "I know what I'm talking about." I've experienced some things, and I've achieved some things that few men have experienced and achieved. I'm in a position to have enough life experience and a special kind of life experience so that I can state, with confidence, the things that I'm going to state in just a few moments. In other words, verse 1 is there to say that the author knows what he's talking about. "I know what I'm talking about; I've been there; I've got the T-shirt."

### **II. Assertion of the human situation, without God.**

Verse 2 is his thesis statement and it's a brutally realistic evaluation of life under the sun. And, by the way, that's a phrase you're going to see over and over in this book. Life under the sun is the preacher's way of talking about a life that is lived only along the horizons of this world. It doesn't look above the skies; it doesn't look to the ultimate realities that are beyond this earthly reality. It's life lived apart from God. And he gives us this realistic evaluation of life under the sun: Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. This is the author's assertion of the human situation without God. He's saying that if you view life without reference to God, the world in which we find ourselves is a chaos without meaning or progress. He is laying down the foundation, the groundwork, for commending to you a God-centered life by saying, "You go ahead and try to live a non God-centered life and I'll tell you what your life is going to be. Your life is going to be empty." He's saying that this is a result that flows from any and every approach to life that leaves God out of the center—emptiness and pessimism. Emptiness and pessimism are the only alternatives to Bible faith.

You see, his point is to undermine confidence in a pagan and an unbelieving view of life by pointing to the futility of life apart from God. You can see it in his words, in the two parts of his statement – *all* and *vanity*. When he says *all*, he really means *all*, everything. He doesn't mean that most things are empty in this life; he means all things apart from God are empty in this life in the sense that they cannot supply ultimate meaning. There's nothing under the sun, apart from God, that can supply ultimate meaning. And he calls them vanity; he calls them emptiness. That reminds us of the brevity of life and of the insubstantiality of life and the unreliability of life and the frailty and futility and even the deceptiveness of life because there are so many things in this life that seem to promise more than they are able to deliver. And he says, if you're looking for meaning in this life under the sun, apart from God, here's what you'll end up with—a handful of wind. He saying, the search for significance apart from God is utterly fruitless and empty. He's saying, if you sit down and think hard about life, if you try to live life apart from God, it is utterly meaningless.

One woman recently said, “Courageous, that's how you see me. Successful, that's why you believe in me. Happy, that's what you expect from me. But, emptiness, that's what's inside of me.” Four hundred years ago, one poet put it this way, “Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more: it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.”<sup>3</sup> Are you looking for significance? Are you looking for significance in something in this life, under the sun, apart from God? You'll never find it. No endeavor, no quest obtained, no possession possessed under the sun, can give you meaning, significance, and purpose in life. That's what the author of Ecclesiastes is telling us. That's what the Preacher is saying to you today.

### **III. Assessment of the yield of our endeavors: emptiness.**

In verse 3 he gives us an assessment of the yield of all human endeavor. “What advantage does a man have in all his work, which he does under the sun?” He's telling you that significance, meaning, purpose cannot come from any earthly endeavor. Look at the commercial language he uses in verse 3, “What advantage does a man have?” That's literally the idea of gain. What gain does a man get? What's his yield? For all that he puts into life, what's his yield? And what is the Preacher's answer? The answer is: this life doesn't pay dividends. You won't find a yield of meaning and significance under the sun. There's nothing in this life that can provide that for you. And notice the words he uses, “What advantage does a man have in all his work, his physical labor, his toil, the mental and emotional anguish that goes along with the various aspects of human endeavor, misery, and trouble and hardship?” And he says, “Under the sun,

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<sup>3</sup> *Macbeth*, act 5, scene 5, William Shakespeare

everything that we do, everything has an undertone of misery and futility.

None of our endeavors, apart from God, can supply life with significance and meaning.” That’s why you find so many songs about working hard, and getting nothing for it. That’s why you find so many songs about the quest for meaning and the frustration of that quest for meaning. “Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind.”<sup>4</sup> Now, that’s a cheerful song for a Top 40 hit, isn’t it! Why do we buy that? Because there are people out there that are asking that question, and their experiencing that futility. None of our endeavors, apart from God, can supply life with significance and meaning, and no little, trite sayings can supply that significance and meaning. Have you ever heard someone say, “The reason I live life, what gives meaning to my life, is I’m trying to make the world a better place.” Well, we understand there’s a certain nobility in that kind of selflessness and desire to give back to the world and community, but that can’t supply ultimate meaning in life.

A number of years ago, before I was married, and you’ll understand why I’m saying that when I tell you the story, I was in an airport lobby in the late 1980s, on the way back to Scotland to continue my doctoral work. I’d been home for the Christmas holidays, I was traveling alone, and as I sat there in the airport, I saw a gorgeous, blond-haired European girl. And I thought to myself, “Boy, wouldn’t it be nice to sit next to her on the plane on the way over.” And, as I got on the plane, guess what? I was sitting right next to her, and as God’s punishment to me for ogling, though when I saw her at first I thought, “She’s got to be late 20s,” but she turned out to be 17 and she talked for seven hours, nonstop, on the flight over. She was also the hardest, most skeptical seventeen year old I’d ever met. About three hours into the conversation, she was sharing with me the contrast between her philosophy of life and her granddads. Her granddad had said to her, whatever he called her, “You know, I try and live so that when I die I leave this world a little better place.” She said to me, “That’s stupid. I’m in life for me.” Two thoughts came into my mind. One was, “Honey, I’m sure sorry for whoever ends up with you.” But the other was, “You know, if there is no God, if we think about life apart from God, you’ve got a point. And however noble your grandfather’s thought is, and I wish you would follow it more, your thought makes more sense, if there is no life with God under the sun.” Meaning in life cannot be found in human endeavors, however noble they may be.

#### **IV. Appraisal of the perpetuity of the problem.**

He goes on to say, in verse 4, “generation goes, generation comes, but the earth remains forever.” In other words, he’s giving us here, he’s apprising us of the perpetuity of this problem, and the problem of meaninglessness under the sun doesn’t go away. A new generation comes along and doesn’t come up with a

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<sup>4</sup> *Dust in the Wind*. Kansas

secret formula. The problem doesn't go away, it doesn't get better over time. When the next generation comes along, and starts thinking about things, the same old situation is here on planet earth. "There's no solution to this problem through progress," that's what the Preacher is saying. This problem, he's saying, will outlast every generation of men. How does the hymn put it, "Frail as summer's flower we flourish, blows the wind, and it is gone."<sup>5</sup>

## V. The lack of the solution to the problem in nature.

He goes on to say in verses 5-7 that the lack of a solution to this problem is displayed even in the cycles of nature. In the Old Testament, when a believer looked at the world and saw the regularity of the sunrise and of the seasons and of the ebb and flow of the tide, you know what the Old Testament believer did? He rejoiced. It was a sign of God's sovereign control, of His working out His purposes. But the author of Ecclesiastes says, "You want to know something interesting? When an unbeliever looks at this world and he considers the cycles of nature, the sun, the seasons, the rivers, it feels monotonous and hopeless to him." Sun and wind and rivers, the incessant hubbub of creational activities, they don't seem to get us anywhere. And you can see it here. The point of the illustrations in verse 5-7, "the sun rises, the sun sets," and by the way, did you hear the title of a modern novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, in that verse.<sup>6</sup> It's amazing how much modern literature draws on allusions to this book. It's as fresh as today. The sun rises, the sun sets, and it starts all over again. The wind blows, it circles around here and there, but then it starts right back where it came from again. Water flows from the rivers into the sea, the sea never fills up and keeps flowing right there.

The point is, the unbeliever looks at the world, and creation, though it is active to the point of an inexpressible exhaustion, can't provide man with lasting satisfaction. All that activity, even in nature, seems to be pointless in terms of providing ultimate significance. Isaac Watts paraphrased Psalm 90 and Moses' plaintive cry when he said, "The busy tribes of flesh and blood, with all their lives and cares, are carried downward by the flood, and lost in following years."<sup>7</sup> Modern secular poets sing about that too. That great contemporary theologian and philosopher, Sting, does it in his song, *All This Time*. Catchy tune, isn't it. Dark words. I think he wrote this song right after his father died, and the song reflects the circumstance of the pries coming to his home to read his father the last rites.

I looked out across The river today  
I saw a city in the fog  
And an old church tower

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<sup>5</sup> *Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*. Henry Lyte

<sup>6</sup> *The Sun Also Rises*. Ernest Hemingway

<sup>7</sup> *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. Isaac Watts

Where the seagulls play  
Saw the sad shire horses  
Walking home in the sodium light  
Saw two priests on the ferry  
October geese on a cold winter's night  
And all this time The river flowed  
Endlessly, To the sea.

Two priests came round Our house tonight  
One young, one old,  
To offer prayers for the dying,  
To serve the final rite  
One to learn, one to teach  
Which way the cold wind blows  
Fussing and flapping in priestly black  
Like a murder of crows

If I had my way I'd take a boat from the river  
And I'd bury the old man I'd bury him at sea  
And all this time The river flowed  
Endlessly, To the sea.  
Blessed are the poor  
For they shall inherit the earth  
One is better to be poor  
Than a fat man in the eye of a needle  
As these words were spoken  
I swear I hear the old man laughing  
What good is a used up world,  
And how could it be worth having?

And all this time The river flowed  
Endlessly, To the sea.  
All this time The river flowed  
Father, if Jesus exists, Then how come he never lived here?  
Yeah, yeah  
Yeah, yeah  
Yeah, yeah<sup>8</sup>

The flow of the rivers in nature, for the one who looks simply at this life under the sun, doesn't bring hope, but despair. And even when we consider the seasons of life, there's something plaintive, something pensive about it. Some of you love the movie and Broadway show, *Fiddler on the Roof*. And there's a song that's not meant to be sad and nihilistic, but it certainly evokes deep, deep longings and questions about meaning and reality. It goes like this:

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<sup>8</sup> *All This Time*. Sting



Is this the little girl I carried?  
Is this the little boy at play?  
I don't remember growing older  
When did they?  
When did she get to be a beauty?  
When did he grow to be so tall?  
Wasn't it yesterday when they were small?  
Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise, sunset  
Quickly fly the days  
seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers  
blossoming even as we gaze  
What words of wisdom can I give them?  
How can I help to ease their way?  
Now they must learn from one another day by day  
They look so natural together  
Just like two newlyweds should be  
Is there a canopy in store for me?  
Sunrise, sunset Sunrise, sunset  
quickly fly the years one season following another  
laden with happiness and tears<sup>9</sup>

The song is not supposed to be hopeless, but it evokes some deep questions about the meaning of this life, and it reminds us that this meaning cannot be supplied by this life, apart from God.

## **VI. The things that we want the most in this life, eventually weary us upon reflection, apart from God.**

In verse 8, he goes on to say that things we want most in this life, apart from God, will eventually weary us upon reflection. "All things are wearisome," he says. Man is unable to tell it. The eye is not satisfied, nor is the ear filled with hearing. In other words, what we desire can't fulfill us. What we get delights us less and less. We're impacted by two universal laws: the law of unfulfilled expectations and the law of diminishing returns. When you finally get what you've always wanted, you find out what? It didn't give you what you thought it was going to give you. That's why athletes who've accomplished the goal for which they've been training and practicing for years, are sometimes, if they're reflective and thoughtful, the most miserable human beings on earth if their satisfaction is found in the accomplishment of their goals. Because they get there and they ask themselves, "Is this all there is? I won the trophy. I got first prize. I got the gold medal. Is this all there is? Where's the satisfaction I thought was going to be coming with this?" The law of unfulfilled expectation gets us and we become weary with what we desired.

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<sup>9</sup> *Sunrise, Sunset*. Fiddler on the Roof

Or, the law of diminishing return hits us. We may enjoy something and delight in something, but over time the return lessens and sometimes we even get sick of that which we once delighted in. It bores us. It exhausts us. It drains us. It wears on us. It saps us. It cannot satisfy us. Everything in life becomes a weariness apart from God. "I can't get no satisfaction," said the Rolling Stones.

And there's a reason. Augustine reminded us of it years ago when he said, "Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee." Why is that so? He answers it in the sentence before: "You have made us for Yourself, and therefore our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee." You look for rest anywhere else, you won't find it. You look for satisfaction anywhere else, you won't find it. That's why I love that line from one of the stanzas of "Beneath the Cross of Jesus." Remember where he describes the Lord Jesus and His cross as "the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land." We do live in a weary land and the rest that we find here is in the shadow of that mighty rock.

### **VII. Ultimate meaning is not found in progress, invention, or new accomplishments.**

Look at verses 9 and 10, he goes on to say that ultimate meaning is not found in progress; it's not found in invention; it's not found in new accomplishment. In other words, meaning is not found in the next thing because the next thing never turns out to be so new after all. He's not tiradeing against progress or technology, but he is tirading against your trying to find ultimate meaning in change and progress and technology. You know, near eastern kings were always trying to seek to accomplish something new so that they could leave a legacy, build a new building, bridge a new river, or capture a new territory. They wanted to leave a legacy. They wanted something new, something special, something unique, something extraordinary about their reign which would establish their reputation and imbue their reign with significance. Ecclesiastes is saying here that that won't work. Ultimate meaning is not found in something new. "New and improved"—the ultimate hope of the modern consumer will not realize your fondest dreams.

### **VIII. Face the emptiness of life full square.**

Finally, in verse 11 he says, "Look, face the emptiness of life full square." Meaning and significance cannot be found here under the sun. It can't even be found in being remembered. There's no remembrance of earlier things. And also of the later things that will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still. He's saying, "Are you living to leave a legacy here? Well, I've got some news for you. They'll forget you. They'll forget it; they won't remember you no matter how important you are." Apart from God, the preacher says, our approach to life will either be bitter and cynical and pessimistic, *or* it will be trite, unrealistic, narve, and impractical. We're going to

explore those two alternatives over and over again in the weeks to come. Apart from God, our approach to life is either bitter and cynical and pessimistic, *or* it's trite and unrealistic and naive and impractical.

But by way of contrast, the Christian view of life is realistic and hopeful and practical and durable all at the same time. You see, the preacher is saying, if you really consider this life apart from God, you'll see there's no hope. But that very hopelessness, the futility of any other approach to life, should lead us to the only hope--God our Savior.

The author of Ecclesiastes doesn't sell out that hope for us here in chapter 1, verses 1-11, nor in the rest of chapter 1, nor in chapter 2, nor in chapter 3. He's not ready to give you quick and easy answers, but he will give you an answer and I'll tell you ahead of time that that answer is in the knowledge, the saving knowledge of the one and true living God. Try to live this life apart from Him, and you won't live. Let's pray.

*Our heavenly Father, unless You are our vision, unless You are our desire, our hope, our delight; we will not find significance in this life. By the grace of Your Holy Spirit, draw us to seek You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## **A Guide to the Morning Service**

### The Twin Lakes Summer Staff Commissioning

Each year we publicly pray for our Twin Lakes Summer Staff as they prepare for three months of significant responsibility and ministry. We look to God for safety (for both staff and campers), for opportunities to share the Gospel and to be spiritual encouragements in the lives of the campers, for conversions, for impact upon families, for impeccability in the testimony and walk of our summer staff, for harmony between them, for delight in their work, and for the glory of God in all of it.

## **The Sermon**

We begin a new series of summer Sunday morning services today in the Book of Ecclesiastes. *An Empty Life? — Asking the Hard Questions* is the series title and theme. Take a hard look at your life. Do you know what you are here for? Does it mean anything? Is there significance in what you are doing? Do you have a real sense of purpose? What's it all about? Does it matter? The author of Ecclesiastes is a man who wrestled with these hard questions, and came to know the answer. Join him. Tapes of all sermons are available for check-out or

purchase in the Church Library/Bookstore. See also <[www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org)>.

## **The Psalms and Hymns**

### **Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (Psalms 103 and 150)**

Julian, the great hymnologist says “A magnificent hymn of praise to God, perhaps the finest production of its author (the German hymn-writer, Neander), and of the first rank in its class.” “Praise to the Lord” is the opening phrase of each stanza of this song that draws on Psalms 103 and 150. It was translated by the remarkable Catherine Winkworth who “lived most of her life in Manchester, England. The notable exception was the year she spent in Dresden, Germany. Around 1854, she published *Lyra Germanica*, containing numerous German hymns translated into English. She went on to publish another series of German hymns in 1858. In 1863, she came out with *The Chorale Book for England*, and in 1869, *Christian Singers of Germany*. More than any other single person, she helped bring the German chorale tradition to the English speaking world.” (*Cyberhymnal.org*) It is a favorite of our congregation.

### **From All That Dwell below the Skies (Psalm 117)**

In 1719, Isaac Watts produced his *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. This setting of Psalm 117 was part of that collection. We sing it to the familiar tune “Duke Street.” The hymn has a wonderful “missiological bent” to it, calling on everyone, in every land and every tongue to praise the one true God (which fits nicely with our morning Scripture reading in Acts 10).

### **Have Thine Own Way, Lord! (VBS Hymn)**

This is this year's VBS theme hymn. The words were penned by Adelaide Addison Pollard. She was convinced the Lord wanted her in Africa as a missionary. She tried to raise funds to go, but was unsuccessful. It was in this uncertain state of mind that she attended a prayer meeting. There, she heard an elderly woman pray, “It's all right, Lord. It doesn't matter what You bring into our lives, just have Your own way with us.” At home that night, much encouraged, she wrote this hymn. George Coles Stebbins composed the hymn's tune. He studied music in Buffalo and Rochester, New York, then became a singing teacher. Around 1869, he moved to Chicago, Illinois, to join the Lyon and Healy Music Company. He also became the music director at the First Baptist Church in Chicago. It was in Chicago that he met the leaders in the Gospel music field, such as George Root, Philip Bliss, and Ira Sankey. He later became involved in evangelism campaigns with Moody and others. Around 1900, Stebbins spent a year as an evangelist in India, Egypt, Italy, Palestine, France, and England..

### **Be Thou My Vision**

This ancient Celtic hymn text expresses the desire of a Christian to live a God-centered existence: for the Lord to be what we see, our constant mental preoccupation, our ever-present companion, our wisdom, our true Father, our protector, our delight, our only inheritance, first in our heart. Very appropriate for today's message.

This guide to worship is written by the minister and provided to the congregation and our visitors in order (1) to assist them in their worship by explaining why we do what we do in worship and (2) to provide them background on the various elements of the service.

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