

## PM 02-01 Vanity vs. Endurance

tags: ["sermon","faith-in-action","2026"]

cssclass: ["primary","enclosed","sermon","sermon-layout"]

show\_exv\_footer: true

---

### Springboard Scripture

James 4:14 says life is like a mist—you see it for a moment, then it's gone. This matches the “vanity” idea in Ecclesiastes. It reminds us to care more about forever than about things that disappear fast.

### Hook

People chase degrees, money, promotions, and success, hoping it will make life feel worthwhile. But it often leaves us feeling empty. It's like trying to grab fog—the harder you try, the quicker it slips away. We're like people running on a treadmill: working hard, getting tired, but not really moving forward. Late at night we ask ourselves: if life can end in one breath, what was the point of it all? We can spend our best years chasing things that won't last.

### Introduction

- Ecclesiastes shows the struggle between working hard and finding real meaning.
- The writer (the Preacher) had power, wisdom, and riches, but he says life “under the sun” (just living for this world) feels empty.
- Without God, our work just repeats in circles with no true gain.
- Generations come and go, but the world keeps spinning like we were never here.

- James brings hope: hard times aren't random. God uses them to shape us.
- The world sees trouble as something that hurts us; James sees it as something that proves and strengthens real faith.
- The fix for an empty life is to fear God and obey Him. That turns short-term work into something that lasts forever.

## Thesis

Without God, life feels empty and pointless. But when Christians stay faithful through hard times, those difficulties get eternal value and help us grow stronger in faith.

## Lesson Alignment (Bloom's Taxonomy)

---

Vanity vs. Endurance

- **Everyone Agrees: Life Without God Feels Empty**
  - **What “vapor” really means**
    - **Our work has no lasting value**

### ***Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NASB 1995)***

*“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, ‘Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.’”*

The Preacher uses the strongest words to show life without God is empty. The Hebrew word *hebel* means vapor, breath, or mist—something you see briefly then it vanishes. So work done without God has no real,

lasting foundation. Even our greatest efforts are as temporary as morning fog.

We fool ourselves thinking job titles, bank accounts, or popularity really matter. Without God they're just different kinds of smoke. If your whole identity is your career, you're building on something that disappears fast.

- **Life is very short**

Because people are like mist, everything we create on our own is temporary too. Nothing here lasts forever. That's why life without God leads to hopelessness. If the person doesn't last, how can their work last?

- **Limited to this world only**

- **Living just “under the sun”**

***Ecclesiastes 1:3 (NASB 1995)***

*“What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?”*

“Under the sun” means looking at life only from an earthly view—no God included. It's only what we can see and touch. It ignores spiritual reality. Living this way acts like the physical world is everything.

- **Leaving God out**

When we ignore God, life becomes a closed loop with no real purpose. There's no answer for why we hurt or

work so hard. Everything just repeats in cycles that never fill the heart. Without God the world feels like a repeating trap.

That's why some people who "have it all" still feel empty and can't get out of bed. Leaving God out doesn't make us free—it makes us hollow.

- **The endless repeating cycle**

- **Generations come and go**

People live, work, die; new people take their place—but the world stays mostly the same. This shows how small each life is in the big picture of time. One generation builds, the next does the same. It feels exhausting because there's no real progress—just endless coming and going.

- **Nature lasts, people don't**

Sun rises and sets, wind blows in circles, rivers flow but the sea never overflows. Nature keeps going strong while people fade quickly. This shows human pride is foolish—the world outlasts us. Without connection to the eternal God, we're the weakest part of a world that doesn't notice when we're gone.

- **No real lasting gain**

- **Work with no profit**

***Ecclesiastes 2:11 (NASB 1995)***

*"Thus I considered all my activities which my*

*hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.”*

The Preacher reviewed everything he built, learned, and earned. He looked for “profit”—something real left over. He found none. All his effort used his life but gave nothing that lasts past death. It was like chasing wind—complete waste.

- **Gains don’t last**

Anything gained “under the sun” ends at death. Money, fame, knowledge—none travel with you. Earthly success is an illusion that vanishes when life ends. This leaves the heart empty because we all want something permanent.

**Truth:** Living only for this world is chasing shadows that give no lasting value to the soul.

- **God Uses Hard Times for a Good Purpose**

- **Hard times really happen**

- **Troubles come in all kinds**

***James 1:2 (NASB 1995)***

*“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,”*

James is honest: Christians face problems too. “Encounter” means falling into tough situations, often suddenly. They can be small annoyances or huge losses. James doesn’t say the pain itself is joyful, but we can view it with joy because of a bigger purpose.

- **Outside pressures test us**

These aren’t troubles we choose. They come from outside and test what’s inside—our faith. They shake up comfortable “under the sun” living and force us to look to God. Hard times are where empty earthly life meets God’s real plan. They end our trying to do everything alone.

Stop asking “Why me?” like life is random. Ask “What is God building in me?” That question turns pain into training.

- **How testing works**

- **It proves if faith is real**

***James 1:3 (NASB 1995)***

*“knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”*

“Testing” is like putting gold in fire to burn away impurities. Trials show whether faith is real and make it stronger. They don’t check *if* you have faith—they

improve and prove it. Trials turn weak belief into strong, tested faith.

- **Separates real from fake**

Shallow faith disappears in trouble like mist. True faith lasts through the fire. Trials remove the fake and temporary stuff from our hearts, leaving only what lasts forever. In that way, trials are actually a kindness—they show us what really matters.

- **Building endurance**

- **Staying strong under pressure**

The result is “endurance”—not passive waiting, but active, courageous standing firm. It’s holding up under heavy weight without quitting. While the world chases wind, the Christian stands steady. This endurance is the opposite of vanity—it builds real spiritual strength through troubles that would break others.

- **Growing tougher spiritually**

Sticking through trials makes the soul strong and able to handle more. This strength helps now and in eternity. God uses it to prepare us for bigger service and deeper trust. This is the real “gain” the Preacher couldn’t find on earth—character that lasts beyond this life.

- **Reaching full maturity**

- **Let endurance finish its job**

***James 1:4 (NASB 1995)***

*“And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

James says let the process finish its work. The goal isn't sinless perfection now, but full spiritual maturity and wholeness. God uses trials to bring us to complete growth. Suffering has a positive purpose—it builds us up.

- **Whole character with nothing missing**

The world leaves us broken and always wanting more. Trials can make us content and complete in Christ. What looked like loss becomes the way God makes us whole. This is the true profit for Christians.

**Truth:** God turns the pain of life into the power for growing strong in spirit. The Christian life is never wasted.

- **The Final Answer: Obey God**
  - **Put fearing God first**
    - **Real respect for God**

***Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NASB 1995)***

*“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is:*

*fear God and keep His commandments,  
because this applies to every person.”*

After trying everything, the Preacher gives the final answer: fear God. This isn't terror—it's deep, holy respect for God's power and rule. It means we know we answer to Him. This respect keeps us from empty self-focus. It's the start of true wisdom and real meaning.

- **The root of true wisdom**

Fearing God puts everything in right view—the world is temporary, God is forever. It changes how we see work and troubles. Our efforts become service to God, not chasing wind. It gives purpose that money or pleasure can't give.

- **Obey His commands**

- **Act on what God says**

Respect isn't just a feeling—it shows in obeying God's commands. Obedience proves we really fear God. In a world of things that fade, God's Word lasts forever. Obeying it builds life on rock. It changes us from “chasing” to “holding on.”

- **The guide for living faithfully**

God's commands give direction and purpose. Without them we wander in our own empty desires. Obedience isn't how we earn salvation—it's how living faith acts.

It's the full result of endurance James described. Obeying gives life weight, direction, and eternal value because it's tied to God.

Parents: don't just leave money to your kids. Teach them that what matters most—when the sun sets—is whether they walked in God's ways.

- **This is everyone's duty**

- **The whole purpose of being human**

The Preacher says this is “the whole of man”—our main reason for existing. All work and trials point here. If we gain everything else but miss fearing God and obeying, life was completely empty. But living for God fulfills our purpose, no matter our circumstances.

- **Applies to everyone**

This isn't just for super-religious people—it's for all humans. Death makes everyone equal in worldly success, but duty to God stays the same for king or beggar. Knowing this frees us from competing and chasing wind. We focus on what brings eternal reward.

- **Judgment is coming**

- **Everything will be judged**

Every action will face God's judgment. Life isn't random—it's a time we're responsible for. This gives meaning to every choice and trial. Nothing is meaningless to God—even secret things will be seen. Judgment weighs our short “vapor” life by God's eternal standard.

- **Ends all earthly emptiness**

Judgment makes sure justice happens and faithfulness is rewarded. It's the final gain for those who endure and obey. The unfairness of life here gets fixed by the Judge. For Christians, it proves their work for God wasn't wasted. The sun sets, but eternal day begins for those who lived by faith and obedience.

**Truth:** Fearing God rightly and obeying His Word are the only things that turn into something eternal.

## **Conclusion**

We don't have to live crushed under "everything is vanity." Jesus gives our suffering a name, a purpose, and a sure reward. The world offers a treadmill that ends in the grave. God's Word offers a path of endurance that leads to real maturity. Don't chase things that fade. Live under God's rule with joy and strength.

What empty thing are you holding onto right now? Let it go. Look at your hardest struggle this week and thank God for the endurance it's building in you.

## **Invitation**

If your life feels empty and pointless, you're stuck in a cycle of hard work for nothing. But you can break free by giving your life to Jesus—where every trial has a promise and every choice matters forever.

To begin:

- **Hear** God's Word (faith comes by hearing).
- **Believe** Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

- **Repent**—turn away from sin and empty living.
- **Confess** Jesus as Lord before others.
- **Be baptized** for forgiveness of sins and to start new life.

If you've done this before but returned to empty pursuits, repent and pray for forgiveness. Come forward while we stand and sing.

## **Greek/Hebrew Word Study**

---

## **Scripture Index**

---

## **Historical / Cultural Context**

---

## **Further Study Recommendations**

---