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## Daily Devotional - Monday, September 9, 2024 - Dust to Dust

SEPTEMBER 09TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

### Daily Devotional - Monday, September 9, 2024 - Dust to Dust

Death, they say, is the great equalizer. The author of Ecclesiastes would agree. Once again, the Teacher calls us back to the book of Genesis. He has already shined a spotlight on the Garden of Eden, before sin entered the world. He presented the Garden of Eden as the model for how we receive God's gifts of eating, drinking, working, and marriage. Now he reminds us of God's curse of death in Genesis 3:19: "[F]or dust you are and to dust you will return."

Today's passage is difficult to read. The Teacher laments that humans and animals will suffer the same fate: death. You may be surprised at his question in verse 21: "Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

At first glance he seems without hope. What about the hope we have in the resurrection and our life with God in the new heavens and the new earth? Like any good teacher, he leaves us with this question for quite a long time. But in 12:7 he again alludes to Genesis 3:19 and answers the question, perhaps afraid we would miss his meaning: "The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

All of us are going to die; we are all like Abel: "Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless" (v. 19). But for those in Christ, those who have believed in the death and resurrection of God's only Son, there is

*All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.*

**ECCLESIASTES 3:20**

hope! Will you trust Him today?

Go Deeper

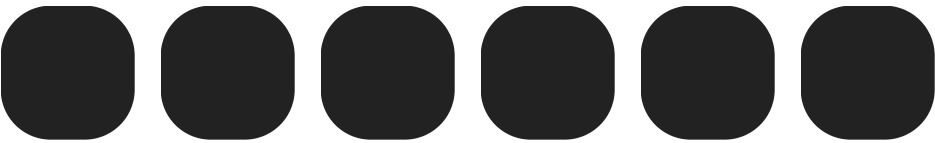
If you are in Christ, how can you share the hope of the resurrection with those you love? If you do not know Christ, believe in Him today!

**Pray with Us:** So often we can relate to the hopelessness and weariness of Ecclesiastes. But in our own despair and discouragement, we remember You, Lord, and Your Word, that “those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31).

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Daily Devotional - Sunday, September 8, 2024 - No Worries

SEPTEMBER 08TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Sunday, September 8, 2024 - No Worries

When the film *The Lion King* was released in 1994, children all over the world sang along with Timon and Pumbaa (a meerkat and a warthog) and their “problem-free philosophy.” The pair taught us that “Hakuna Matata” meant “no worries.” It was their way of encouraging young Simba, who has just lost his father. The *Lion King* is not a Christian film, but the Teacher would agree at least in part with their basic philosophy.

We should enjoy the life God has given us! In Ecclesiastes 3, the Teacher laments (again) that there is no gain, or ultimate reward, from “toil,” or work (v. 9). Why? Because work doesn’t

*He has made everything beautiful in its time.*

**ECCLESIASTES 3:11**

ultimately produce anything that lasts—all that it accomplishes is “meaningless” or gone too soon. But we should not descend into pessimistic nihilism or withdraw from work. Rather, we are to “be happy and to do good while [we] live,” and further to “eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all [our] toil” (v. 13). These things are “the gift of God.”

So, Hakuna Matata! Yes, but even more, the Teacher is telling us to realign our priorities and expectations. These daily activities God has given us (working, eating, and drinking) are gifts *for our enjoyment*. They were never meant to give us what only God can give us purpose, meaning, fulfillment, security, and hope. Rather, they are ephemeral experiences, temporal gifts from our good Father. God actually does want us to be happy—and that requires us to return, in a sense, to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve enjoyed intimacy with God and an appropriate relationship with the gifts He gives: working, eating, and drinking.

## Go Deeper

How do you view working, eating, and drinking? Are they idols you ask to fulfill you or take away your sorrows? Or do you see these activities as gifts from God to be enjoyed in the moment?

**Pray with Us:** Almighty God, You alone can bring peace into this world full of turmoil! Grant us grace to have our hearts fixed on You—where true joy and enjoyment of life can be found. We rest in Your faithfulness!

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## Daily Devotional - Monday, September 2, 2024 - IS EVERYTHING MEANINGLESS?

SEPTEMBER 02ND 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

### Daily Devotional - Monday, September 2, 2024 - IS EVERYTHING MEANINGLESS?

At first glance, the book of Ecclesiastes may seem to have a pessimistic outlook on life. Why would a whole book in the Bible say that everything is meaningless? But certainly, many of us can identify with the feeling. When life is hard, we may ask ourselves: “What is the point?” or “What am I here for?” But the message of Ecclesiastes is this: Life with God is *not* meaningless.

The word translated “meaningless” is *hebel* in Hebrew; it appears nearly 40 times in Ecclesiastes. It’s been translated negatively since Jerome used *vanitas* (“vanity”) in his Latin Vulgate. But in Hebrew it means “breath” or “vapor” and is used metaphorically to refer to

*“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.*

*“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!”*

**ECCLESIASTES 1:2**

things that do not produce their intended results. Interestingly, the name “Abel” is also derived from the word *hebel*. In Genesis 4, we see an early example of the “upside-down world” in which we now live. Righteous Abel received the curse of wickedness—a short life, no family, no land, no wealth. While his brother Cain, acting with wickedness, received the blessing of righteousness—a long life, a large family, land, and wealth.

This upside-down world is what the Teacher refers to when he calls something *hebel*. Life has been turned upside down by sin. We’ve all experienced this. Sometimes the fastest runner doesn’t win the race (Eccl. 9:11). Sometimes there is wickedness where there should be righteousness (Eccl. 3:16). And physical death is coming for all of us, sinner or not (Eccl. 9:2).

Every time you see the word “meaningless” in Ecclesiastes, try inserting the phrase “like Abel.” Ecclesiastes is an honest assessment of life “under the sun.” It is also a robust theological reflection on how to navigate this world—through living in right relationship with God and enjoying His gifts.

**Go Deeper**

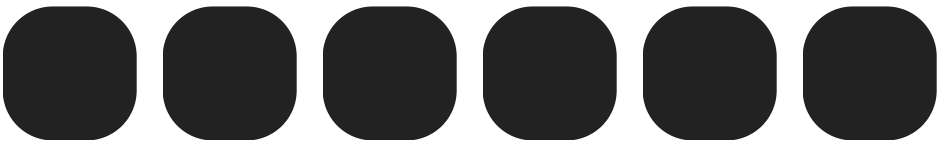
Read Abel’s story in Genesis 4. What has been “like Abel” in your own life?

**Pray with Us:** Is everything meaningless? In this world marred by sin, it may seem so. But Your Word, Lord God, gives us encouragement and great joy—that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us and gave us life, peace, and freedom. Hallelujah!

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# Daily Devotional - Tuesday, August 27, 2024 - ELIHU: HOW GREAT IS GOD

AUGUST 27TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

## Daily Devotional - Tuesday, August 27, 2024 - ELIHU: HOW GREAT IS GOD

How accurately can we predict the weather? Most researchers agree that forecasting accuracy has dramatically improved (now at around 97 percent), but it only applies to short-term calculations. “Research has repeatedly reached the same conclusions: We can predict the weather up to 14 days in advance at best,” said meteorologist Dr. Michael Riemer.

In the book of Job, Elihu continues to speak, now turning His focus to God. Elihu poses questions humans have puzzled over for centuries. Among them are: “Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion?” (36:29), “Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash?” (37:15).

*God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding.*

**JOB 37:5**

The Bible points us to the One who created and controls the wind and the rain, the lightning and thunder. The Almighty God knows the future and has complete power over all creation. Elihu is correct when he says that God is “beyond our understanding” (Job 36:26).

In chapters 35 to 37, Elihu celebrates God’s work as Creator: “God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him?” (36:22). “He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth,’ and to the rain shower, ‘Be a mighty downpour.’” (37:6). “The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them” (37:10).

Our natural curiosity about the created world directs us to the One who designed, created, and maintains the extremely complex systems of nature. “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16–17).

**Go Deeper**

What does Elihu get right about God? How does creation help us better understand the Creator?

**Pray with Us:** Dear God, thank You for Your creation! We can look at the world around us and praise You: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps. 19:1).

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# Daily Devotional - Monday, August 26, 2024 - ELIHU: RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

AUGUST 26TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

## Daily Devotional - Monday, August 26, 2024 - ELIHU: RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

When I was young, my dad and I watched the movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. In the story Jefferson Smith stood up against corruption by holding a 24-hour, one-man filibuster on the Senate floor. In his speech, he wasn't just speaking to the Senate chair, but to the entire Senate and any onlookers.

Elihu has been giving Job his opinion on the man's desperate situation. Now, he moves from talking to Job to addressing the crowd that had gathered. He begins, "Hear my words, you wise

men; listen to me, you men of learning" (v. 2). He speaks to them as if they were a jury in a court case that would give a verdict after his final argument. He ends with the appeal, "Men of understanding declare, wise men who hear me say to me, 'Job speaks without knowledge; his words lack insight'" (vv. 34–35).

*Be kind and compassionate to one another.*

**EPHESIANS 4:32**

What is Elihu's verdict? He not only views Job as a person covering up sin, but he also said Job was in a state of rebellion. "To his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God" (v. 37). The clapping of the hands is an expression of contempt. Lamentations 2 states, "All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at the Daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15).

Elihu is anything but kind toward Job. He publicly scolded him and actively recruited others to join in his "righteous" indignation toward this dear man of God. Do we do the same? With the advent of social media, it can be easy to publicly attack a fellow Christian without knowing the whole story. In Job 34, Elihu shows us how it's done.

### Go Deeper

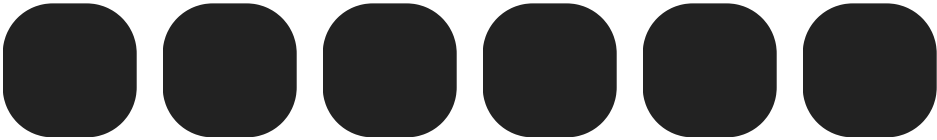
What can we learn from Elihu when we comment on social media? Do you think twice before criticizing a fellow Christian? Do you try to get others to side with you?

**Pray with Us:** We give You thanks, almighty God, for nourishing us in Christ. By Your Spirit, You assure us that we belong to Your family and are heirs to Your everlasting kingdom. Help us to be encouragers to others, and not critics.



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