

How to Live East of Eden, Part 4: The Solution

The Preacher reveals his most shocking and inspiring insight right at the end. He will tell us how the whole of our lives can be lived to the glory of God. That nothing is wasted and everything we do and say 'under the sun' is of eternal significance. He gives us a clear call to be fully human, to seize the day and enjoy pleasures that ultimately point us to God.

Richard Cunningham is a member of the European Leadership Forum Steering Committee. He has been Director of UCCF: the Christian Unions since 2004. He has also worked in pastoral ministry at churches in London and Oxford. A graduate of London University and trained for ordained ministry in Oxford, he has been the primary speaker at over 40 University Missions. He founded 'Christian Persuaders,' a training programme that aims to identify, train, and place a new generation of apologetic evangelists in British universities. He is also a member of the College of Evangelists, an outreach arm of the Anglican church.

1. Summary so far

A. The Quest

The quest the teacher set himself:

'What does man gain from all his labour?' 1:3

'I will test with pleasure to find what is good?' 2:1

'I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives' 2:3

Life under the sun seemed meaningless- empty in terms of measurable gain or legacy.

B. The Frustration

1. Toil

2:10-11- nothing gained

2. Death

No difference between fool and wise man both will die 2:14-16

No better than the beasts (3:18-22)

So what does it matter how much wealth or achievement is yours – the more you have the more you have to lose at death. What does it profit a man (what is the net gain?) – If he gains the whole world and loses his life?

3. Evil

Where Justice should be (3:16)

Righteous perish and the wicked prosper (7:15)

God has put eternity in our hearts (3:10-11)

Being bound by time and wearied by toil and defeated by death

Compounds our sense of longing for permanence for tangible results for gain

‘Let him who cannot do the thing he would
Will to do that he can. To will is foolish
Where there’s no power to do. That man is wise
Who, if he cannot, does not wish he could.’ (Leonardo da Vinci)

C. Avoiding the false moves

1. Protestant work ethic- Work hard and God will prosper you

Problem – many godly people don’t seem to prosper while many wicked do

2. Treading water until we reach the shores of heaven

Since this life is transitory and essentially meaningless (with no legacy or residue)

2. The Conclusion provides the solution

“Remember your creator in the days of your youth” (12:1)

For there will come a day when you will lack the desire and the attributes to enjoy God’s world here under the sun. Our ability to see things as ‘beautiful in their time’ will diminish

A. Process of diminishing desire (12: 1-7)

Loss of sight (2)

Weak limbs, stooping back, loss of teeth; Unable to sleep, woken by slightest sound, but hearing nothing clearly; Many fears and little desire- then death.

Remember your creator before it's too late! (6 & 7)

B. Desire is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.
-Remember your creator in the days of your youth

3.The Judgement--the key to meaning and significance

The call to remember our creator is sandwiched between two reminders of Judgement (11: 9 and 12:14).

Fear God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole duty of man
For God will bring every deed into judgement- including every hidden thing
Whether good or evil (12:13-14)

A. Judgement reveals the difference between the wise man and the fool, the wicked and the righteous, the man and the beast.

Our actions are significant- there is a yield and a legacy.

4. Fear God and keep his commandments = Wisdom.

A. Creaturely independence is foolish
Adam and Eve wanted wisdom- Rather than fearing God, they replaced him.

Death, Toil, evil and frustration was the sentence they brought upon us all for not fearing God or keeping his commandments.

We now live East of Eden ("Life under the sun") – But we are invited to learn true wisdom

B. Creaturely dependence on God is wise.

We show true fear of God when we realise we are frail and confused creatures who can no more fathom what God has done than we can change what God has done.

-The power of negative thinking

-Fear of God and thus true wisdom, comes with humility.
We depend on God for our life, breath and everything else
Ignorant Athenians needed a lesson in wisdom (Acts 17:23-28)

Nebuchadnezzar's ignorance (Daniel 4:28-35) was cured by learning true wisdom.

5. Living wisely east of Eden

A. Modernism tried to build a new Eden through technique- A chasing after the wind –The result was dehumanising- meaningless emptiness.

B. Romanticism tried to get back to Eden- Thwarted by toil, death and evil

C. Learning from the Post Moderns- Take pleasure in the details
A hot meal after a hard day's work, Enjoyment of friendship and the tasks we are given.

D. Rest is at the centre of Eden- Rest is the destiny of God's people.

Hebrews 4: ¹ Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. ³ Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "On the seventh day God rested from all his works." ⁵ And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." ⁶ Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience,

⁷ God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

-Rest was at the centre of paradise- The Lord rested from creation so we would be able to realise that our rest and meaning was not primarily in creation (even in paradise) but in the Lord himself.

E. Jesus is at the centre of Rest

² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”
(Revelation 21)

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time”

(TS Eliot’s Little Gidding from Four Quartets)

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