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Can You Find Meaning Without God?

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I once spoke at a large church in Houston ... by large I mean one that drew over ten thousand people every week. Afterward, I met with part of the leadership team.

How Big Is Your Church?

At the time I served as the lead pastor of a church in Oregon and it didn't take long for someone to ask, "How big is your church, Bill?"

I looked up at the ceiling as I calculated the number. "I'm pretty sure we run between nineteen and twenty thousand a week," I said.

The entire staff sat at attention and their eyes opened as wide as saucers. "Twenty thousand a week--why that's ... that's ... that's bigger than our church."

I nodded my head and smiled. "Twenty thousand would be. But I said my church ran between nineteen and twenty thousand."

A Bee Sting

Once they caught the drift of my statement everyone laughed. And I laughed too. But I felt as if a bee had stung me. And I recoiled on the inside because I knew that two decades of ministry had not resulted in what I had once dreamed would take place.

I Want My Life to Matter

I hate it when I compare myself with a man whose achievements eclipse my own. Such comparisons make me feel small, like a deflated balloon. Yet, as much as I hate feeling inadequate something good comes from the pain. Namely, I'm reminded that I want my life to matter. I want my time here on earth to mean something. If I didn't want my life to matter then I wouldn't care what I had accomplished.

In that way we're alike. Regardless of your age, education, income, or influence, you want your life to matter. And in some ways you question whether or not it does or ever will. You may go for weeks, months, or even years without giving it much thought.

And then you run into an old high school or college buddy whose lofty achievements make you wonder how he could have done so much more than you in the same amount of time. You slap him on the back, but inside you're not celebrating his success. You're grieving the comparative smallness of your own ... which a few moments ago you viewed with pride.

At times you wonder if life is no more than making a living, raising a family and dying.

Solomon Drew the Same Conclusion

Of course, you're not alone in your thinking. It may impress you to learn that Solomon drew the same conclusion. He noted that all of life "under the sun" is meaningless (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2). Like sand castles on the beach, which are swept away by the high tide, so everything we do is washed away. It amounts to nothing.

To prove his point, Solomon gave some illustrations (Ecc. 2). The fruit of a man's labor won't remain. And after a few generations even the man is forgotten. Or, consider nature. The sun circles overhead every day only to make the same journey the next day. Water follows an endless cycle from a river to the sea, from the sea to the sky, and from the sky back to the ground where it runs into a river.

Life Under the Sun

It would be easy throw up your hands in despair after reading Solomon's words. But remember, he was talking about life "under the sun." Life without God. And his words make sense, don't they? Just ask yourself, "What have I done that has eternal value if I take God out of the equation?"

The answer should reveal two things. First, life without God is, as Solomon said, "meaningless." Second, the opposite is equally true: The presence of God adds meaning to everything you do. Regardless of the comparative "size" of what you or I may accomplish, it's God's presence that gives it all meaning (Ecc. 12:13-14).