

LIVE
LIGHTER
LOVE
BETTER

TWELVE BIBLICAL DECISIONS
FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Cary Schmidt

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DEDICATION

For my “grandtwins,” Chad and Charleigh Schmidt

Being your Papa makes me wonder how I will ever get anything done with the rest of my life. Your birth has brought new clarity to what is essential and what is trivial. I love you and hope I get to live a long time watching you grow up in God’s grace.

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READ THIS FIRST

You're probably reading this book knowing you don't have time to—which is also why you need to. I will strive to be a good steward of both your time and your heart.

For years I've wanted to write a book about life-management, but it seemed God kept saying “not yet.” I'm so glad He did. Between then and now He allowed me to follow Him down surprising roads of challenge and faith. The journey has shaped and deepened my perspective on “productivity” and life-management considerably—in what I pray are God-honoring ways.

The time between wanting to write on this subject and actually sitting down to write has been filled with personal crises and faith decisions that fundamentally transformed what would have been the content of this book. This is not a book about productivity—

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there are already many good books on that topic. This is a book about living lighter and loving better.

These chapters will probably not help you get *more* done, but they will help you get *better* done. This book may not make you more productive in life's tasks or projects, but it will make you more fruitful in your relationship with Jesus and with those He calls you to love. So while this is not so much about *productive* living, it is about *valuable* living.

This book is more about surrender to God's values *through* life than it is about wringing more *out of* your life—whether for Him or for yourself. It's less about managing your life *for* God and more about allowing *God* to manage your life. It's more about letting Jesus fulfill His abundant life *in* you than your over-extending yourself *for* Him.

Our case-study is Solomon—a man whose life decisions brought smashing success into an epic dance of destruction with staggering failure. It all resulted in unparalleled regret and crushing disappointment.

Solomon's life experiment revealed that he was his own worst enemy and a most cruel lord to himself and others. As we study together, it is my prayer that you truly discover that Jesus is a better Lord to you than you could ever be to yourself. Indeed He is the best Lord! His pleasure worked in and through you is much more delightful and meaningful than your life lived for personal pleasure.

Solomon chose to be his own lord, and what a terrible and tragic taskmaster he became—both to himself and to those he was called to love and lead. He lived heavily and loved poorly. He

lived big and loved small. By studying him, we will rediscover our counter-intuitive call to *live lighter and love better*.

Jesus, on the other hand, is the antithesis of Solomon. He is a loving, gracious Lord who, rather than demanding that you destroy yourself for Him, destroyed Himself for you! Yes, He wants your whole life and trust—even in persecution and death. This is the call of discipleship, costly but also rewarding and meaningful. But no, he would never crush you the way you would crush yourself. As your own lord, you will either suffer from insatiably pursuing your own pleasure, or conversely, you will overextend yourself in service “for Him,” pushing yourself harder, longer, and well beyond where He ever would. Neither extreme is honorable, and spiritual suicide is never the same as martyrdom.

Together, we will survey one of the greatest books in all the Bible when it comes to discovering the true meaning and purpose of life—Ecclesiastes. We will gain a high-end view of life done differently—wisely. It’s all drawn from Solomon’s personal regrets and his late-age view of a life gone horribly and tragically wrong.

Together, we will sit with Solomon when he was an old man, looking back on his train-wrecked life and its heaps of sorrow and of good memories gone epically bad. We will survey his smashing success and study his staggering regrets. We will hear him mourn his folly, bemoan his bad decisions, and grapple with self-incrimination.

We will see him anxiously awake at night, pacing and stewing—despising his abundant wins and oppressed by his deep losses at the end of a pointlessly extravagant life. We will see him empty and sick of soul—vexed with his idolatry and extreme

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excesses and powerless to undo his decisions. We will hear him wish he could do it all over again very differently.

We will hear his warnings and cautions. We will hear what he would do differently—what he wishes he had done better—now that he’s “done it all.”

By the time Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, it was too late to “get it right.” His life was one grand experiment of regret. But it’s not too late for you and me—yet. And fortunately for us, God used Solomon to pen painful words that will help us steward our one trip through life with wisdom and faith.

The words of Ecclesiastes have two perspectives—the first and most obvious is the “under the sun” context. This is the view you have as you read the words as Solomon’s and filter them through his earthly context. The second and less obvious is the “above the sun” context. This is the view you have as you realize these are God’s inspired words through Solomon’s life for your life today. To properly understand the book, you must keep both views in mind.

Twelve Critical Decisions Ahead

From Solomon’s life, we will examine twelve critical decisions for a well-lived life. My simple goal is to help you to rest in the loving Lordship of Jesus—to live lighter and love better—glorifying Him and enjoying Him every step of your short visit on planet Earth.

Jesus is a good Lord. Every other lord is destructive, and nobody proves that better than Solomon—through first-hand experience.

Most biographies are written about successful lives. Usually we focus on the good stuff—the high points. Often a good man’s regrets and mistakes are given less press—rightfully so. The successes are more fun to read and more intriguing to track. We wisely want to emulate the things someone did right.

God thinks differently, and He’s brutally honest. With God, there is no white-washing of the story. In Ecclesiastes we meet Solomon in all of his unvarnished humanity—quite undone and frail. We see him at his weakest moments, in private, away from the spotlight of monarchy—in a context that no palace subject or servant would have been privileged to witness.

We see beneath the crown, behind the royalty, under the weight. We see him despising what he sees in the mirror, resenting what has become of his once hopeful kingdom. We see him alone and undone—a vexed soul behind the golden veneer of a king’s life.

What if you could read the brutally honest advice of an extremely wealthy and successful man? What if that advice was, “Don’t do life the way I did”?

Solomon is about to tell us that we don’t need *more* in life. We need *less*. He’s about to show us that a *bigger* life tends toward a *smaller* god—which only makes that big life a big disappointment. He’s about to show us that *less* of life and *more* of God makes for more *true life!*

Let’s reverse engineer Solomon’s crushing success and discover how to *live lighter and love better*.