

**Eternity in Their Hearts**  
**From the Series “King Solomon Teaches Us About the Meaning of Life”**  
**By Phil Brainerd**

**Introduction**

The English language is full of great words. Here’s one of my favorites: “**Forever**”. It appears to be on the list of favorites for a lot of people. That’s demonstrated by how often it shows up in our culture. It certainly shows up all over in our songs. There appears to be an unending list of songs that have the word forever somewhere in the lyrics. For example:

Oh my darling, oh my darling,  
Oh my darling, Clementine!  
You art lost and gone **forever**  
Dreadful sorry, Clementine

That was written in 1884. People like this word so much, it often in the title of the song: In the 60s we had “Strawberry fields forever” by the Beatles (1966). In the 70s Bob Dylan sang “Forever Young” (1973). In the 80s Rod Stewart recorded a song with the same title, “Forever Young”, but different lyrics (1988). The country and western singers are never far away. In that same decade Randy Travis gave us “Forever and Ever, Amen” (1987).

Lots of the songs with forever in the title talk about love, but in the 90s, the Dixie Chicks taught us that “The Cowboy Lives Forever” (1990). (Apparently, the Dixie Chicks have matured greatly over the years, so they’ve changed their name to just “The Chicks”.)

Moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Taylor Swift wrote “Forever and always” (2008). Just singing “Forever Young” wasn’t quite accurate enough for Tim McGraw, so in 2009 he sang “Forever 17”. Incidentally, one of the biggest stores in the local mall is “Forever 21”.

Some people don’t quite need forever. I still remember being seated in a theater in 1977 to see the first installment of “Star Wars”. Across a gigantic panoramic screen rolled the words, “A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...”. “Long time ago” and “far, far away” were sufficient to launch the Star Wars franchise.

For others, forever isn’t enough. Maybe you’ve heard the phrase “Forever and a Day”. That phrase shows up all over in our culture. It gets traced all the way back to Shakespeare.

What is it about the word “forever” that captures the hearts of so many people? The answer to that question is given to us in the Bible. It was given through a man named Solomon.

In this series, we’re studying some ideas from his book, Ecclesiastes. In the first session, we learned that you find meaning in life when believe in God. More than that, you find meaning

when you fear God - That is to say that you have an awesome respect for God that leads you to do what he says.

In our last session, we learned that you find meaning when you understand that God is sovereign - He is in total control of his universe. And he has a plan. We were told, "He makes all things beautiful in its time." God doesn't just have a plan - It's a beautiful plan, a perfect plan, the best plan.

For this article, let's start by letting King Solomon answer the question we asked: Why does the word "forever" capture so many hearts? Let's read:

...He has also set eternity in the human heart... (Ecclesiastes 3:11(b))

We are captivated by forever because God created us to be that way. We're going to learn that you find meaning in life when you understand your place in eternity. That's why our message is entitled, "Eternity in Their Hearts".

### **Why does eternity matter?**

Let's ask a question: Why does eternity matter? To understand this, think about what eternity is. It's tied into the word "forever". Eternity means that the universe goes on forever. It doesn't stop.

Many people look at the universe as just a gigantic pile of matter - of stuff. There's no plan or order or purpose to it. Now, the universe contains many things. Those things are constantly changing - They come and go. So, the universe is eternal, but nothing contained in the universe is eternal.

That includes us. This creates a problem. If nothing in the universe is eternal, if nothing in the universe has a purpose or plan, then **we** do not have a purpose or plan. Do you know what that makes us? It makes us cigarettes.

Somewhere in the world, a farmer grows tobacco. Somewhere else in the world, someone else makes some paper. Others load the tobacco and paper onto trucks, and they're taken to a factory. The tobacco and paper become a cigarette. It winds up in a box, which winds up in a carton, which winds up in a crate, which winds up in a warehouse. Imagine walking through a gigantic warehouse where you're surrounded by mountains of cigarettes. Eventually, one cigarette winds up in someone's hand. It gets lit. It burns up in a few minutes. After that, it's thrown into an ashtray and eventually winds up in the trash.

That's it. The cigarette exists for only a short while and disappears. The process is repeated countless times. If we are not eternal, if we do not have a purpose or plan, then we are nothing

more than cigarettes. Why does eternity matter? That's why. God created us to be eternal. He placed eternity in our hearts. That allows us to perceive eternity when nothing else can.

No animal understands eternity. Only humans can. Your dog Fido and your cat do not understand eternity. Neither do they understand beauty. If you see a beautiful sunset, you can choose to stop and watch until every last ray of sunlight is done painting the horizon. If your pets happen to be with you, they can sit there, but they won't get it.

No – only humans have eternity in their hearts. That's why we captivated by ideas like “long, long ago”, “far, far away”, and “forever and a day.”

### **God Is Eternal.**

Here's another good question: How can God make eternal beings who have eternity in their hearts? Answer: He can do so because he is eternal. We read in the psalms:

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.  
2 Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
(Psalm 90:1-2)

Look at that: “...from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” From as far back as humans can imagine to as far in the future, God is there. That's because he is eternal. Because God is eternal, he can share eternity with us.

### **God is Unchanging**

There is another quality of God that makes this practical for us: God is unchanging.

I the Lord do not change. (Malachi 3:6)

God never changes. God has always been what he is now. He always will be. He has always been all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, and all the other “alls” that describe him. He always will be.

That's important because we've been learning that we find meaning in God. Think about it: If God changes, then our meaning changes.

Our friends in the Hindu faith believe in a being called Brahman. Brahman, they believe, is God. However, he is not a creator. Brahman and the universe are one and the same. We are not created by Brahman - We are Brahman.

Brahman is often pictured as an ocean with waves. The waves are all made out of the water of the ocean. They mysteriously rise up and then disappear - Over and over forever. We, it is said, are like those waves. Specifically, we are the thoughts and dreams of Brahman. Brahman, it is believed, spends all his time thinking about how things could be. When something doesn't work out, he moves on to something else.

If you're looking for meaning here, you have a problem: If Brahman is changing all the time, then meaning changes all the time. After searching for a lifetime, You may think you found meaning. But then Brahman says, "Oops, sorry. That was yesterday's meaning. Today, we have a new one."

Compare this to the unchanging God of the Bible. He is infinite. That means he knows all the possibilities. He doesn't have to think them through one at a time. So, God's plan is the best of all possible plans. He will never change. Because of this, his plan will never change. And so, meaning doesn't change.

How can God make eternal beings who have eternity in their hearts? He can do it because he is eternal and unchanging.

### **The Practicality of all this**

Here's another question: Is all this practical?

On one level, we could say that it doesn't need to be practical. We're meeting God. We're learning important things about him. So, we could stop here and worship God. We could allow ourselves sit in awe and wonder as we ponder his eternal nature. However, God allows us to enjoy him on many levels. We could call some of those levels "practical".

### ***The Yardstick Principle***

To understand this, we need to learn what I call "The Yardstick Principle". Here's how it works: Imagine that I have a yardstick in my hands - A wooden one. Now, I take a razor blade and lightly touch it to the wood. This make a tiny nick on the yardstick - So small that if I look away, I'll forget where the nick is, and I won't be able to find it again.

The yardstick represents all the time in eternity. That little nick represents your life. The point: Your life is a teeny-tiny little slice of a much, much, much longer time. So, anything you go

through, anything you feel, is much more limited in duration than you think. Even if it's your whole life. If you understand that, it puts everything in perspective.

Solomon makes a few statements about the way this is applied:

### ***Other's Opinions***

Do not pay attention to every word people say... (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22)

Have you known people who spend all their time worrying about what people think about them? It's sad when people do that. When you worry what everyone thinks, you spend your life paralyzed. Life is too short for that.

Instead consider this solution. I once heard a wise man say that everyone should take a piece of paper. Divide it into two parts: People who like you and people who don't. Then, divide it in half one more time. Call that one right reasons and wrong reasons. In the first section, write the names of the people who like you for the right reasons. In the second, write the names of the people who like you for the wrong reasons. Third, there are people who dislike you – sadly, for the right reasons. Finally, there are people who dislike you for the wrong reasons.

You only care about the first and the third groups: People who have opinions about you for the right reasons. And as a practical matter, you can't always take care of those groups completely.

### ***Procrastinators***

Next Solomon has some thoughts for procrastinators:

Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! (Ecclesiastes 9:4)

This is a poetic way of saying, "Don't put things off." There are daily and weekly things we should be doing. But we don't. They have a way of piling up.

Then there are the big items. Sometimes those big things get put off longer and longer until one day, well, one day, you don't have any more days.

Maybe there's something you should do. You're thinking, "I can't do that – I'm not up to it. I'm not important – no one will listen to me." To that, Solomon says: "Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion." You might be surprised at what you can accomplish. Maybe you'll succeed. Maybe you'll fail. You'll never find out unless you start. And Solomon encourages us to start now.

## ***Living in the Past***

Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions. (Ecclesiastes 7:10)

Have you ever met people who live in the past? Solomon says, “Don’t do that.” It’s funny – Solomon isn’t saying that the old days **were**n’t better than today. Maybe they were. But, they’re past - Maybe long past. Solomon tells us to live in the present, planning reasonably for the future...

## ***Mourning vs. Pleasure***

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. (Ecclesiastes 7:4)

Many would say, “That’s depressing.” Are we supposed to park outside the funeral home and spend all our time there? I don’t think Solomon is suggesting anything so extreme. This keys into something we discussed in the last article. God has a plan. That plan involves some things that we would expect, and which we enjoy. Conversely, sometimes that plan involves things we would not expect, and which cause pain. We must account for both.

Sometimes life brings tough moments - The funeral being one. If we pretend those moments will never come, they just get tougher.

Today, there is all kinds of escapes from troubling thoughts - All kinds of entertainment. Comedies, Music, Sports, to name a few. There’s nothing wrong with an occasional moment of entertainment. However, if we live there, we will never fully be prepared for the harder times. And that’s sad, because one of the hardest times is death.

## ***Righteousness and the Lack Thereof***

Here’s something that make death especially hard.

20 Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins. (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

Ah, this is a problem - A big problem: We’ve said that an eternal God created us and put eternity in our hearts. Most people hear that hear that, and they assume everyone will spend eternity enjoying themselves. Sadly, that’s not true. Why not?

But your iniquities have separated you from your God... (Isaiah 59:2)

Solomon teaches us that we all have a problem of sin. Isaiah teaches us that our sins separate us from God. What does this do to us when we reach eternity? This is vitally important: It means we either reach eternity with God, or we reach eternity *separated from God*. You don't want to be separated from God for eternity. Remember that yardstick principle? Eternity is a very, very long time.

How do we become reunited with God so that we can enter eternity with him? We must have our sins taken away.

24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24-25)

So, God provided his Son Jesus to take away our sins so that we can return to God. However, we must choose to accept that gift.

Solomon taught us that we should not worry concerning the way people think about us. However, clearly, we should be very concerned about how God thinks about us.

Solomon taught us that we should not procrastinate - Especially about the big decisions. Accepting the gift of Jesus Christ is a big decision that should not be put off. You might put it off day after day. Then, one day, you run out of days. Do it now.

Solomon teaches us not to live in the past. Indeed, now is the time to think about the future. - and where you will spend it.

Solomon teaches us that the house of mourning can be a wise place. That's especially true if we understand that one day, we will be the subject of mourning. You must choose Jesus before that day comes, or there is no hope. Many times, I've seen funerals where the deceased was clearly someone who called upon the name of the Lord for salvation. Though we miss those people, we take comfort that they are with God for eternity. There is no sadder funeral than the ones where friends and family don't know the eternal state of the person who has left them.

And it is Solomon who teaches us that there is no one on earth who is righteous. Everyone needs the sacrifice of Jesus to take away their sin. Let us tell you how you can know for certain that you will be with God for all eternity through the gift of Jesus Christ. There will be important info at the end of this article.

Let's pull this all together.

## Conclusion

Now we know why the word “Forever” is so important to most people. The eternal God has created us as eternal beings. And he has placed eternity in our hearts. If you understand your place in eternity, life has meaning.

In our last article, we mentioned a woman named Joni Ericksen Tata. She suffered from a tragic accident that left her paralyzed from the neck down. Understandably, she spent considerable time in a state of confusion, anger, and depression. Then, she met Jesus Christ. When she understood that God had a plan for her life, a beautiful plan, she began to find meaning and hope. Now, she’s an inspiration to others.

On the other hand, there’s Carl Sagan. He was a renowned astrophysicist. At one point, he wrote a novel called “Contact”. Some of the story involved experiences that he went through in life, but which he explained through various characters. Early in the story, we meet a young girl who lost her father to tragedy: He had a heart attack. Her mother had also passed away, leaving her an orphan. Apparently, the father had been prescribed special pills that he was to take whenever he felt chest pain. He kept them in the medicine cabinet on the second floor of their two-story house. One day, the chest pains came while he was on the first floor. As he went up the steps to get his pills, the exertion made things worse. He never made it to the cabinet.

In one scene after the funeral, this young lady is shown talking with the minister who presided over the ceremony. He said to her, “I know this is very hard for you now, but I hope you will come to understand that this is part of a plan.” She responded, “If my father had kept a spare bottle of pills on the first floor, he would be alive.” She gave this response with a voice that, although calm, reflected bitterness. To Carl Sagan, as expressed through this character, there is no God, and life has no plan or meaning.

That’s the choice we have before us today. If you understand your place in eternity, even the most tragic of lives become an inspiration. If you don’t, you get lives filled with bitterness. And, if you understand your place in eternity, you will know to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sin. And you will spend eternity in his kingdom. If you don’t understand your place in eternity, you will spend it separated from God. And believe me, you don’t want that. So, don’t put it off. Make the decision to listen to the voice of God. Let him teach you that forever can be a very, very good thing.

God has placed eternity in their hearts. Let him help you to celebrate eternity in yours.

---

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church: [TrinityTeaneck.org](https://TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site: [PhilBrainerd.com](https://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site: [PeaceWithGod.net](https://PeaceWithGod.net)

---