



"He Shall Direct Thy Paths"
Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

followHIM: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Wednesday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions

Part 1:

What if wisdom isn't about loss but learning how to meet it? Dr. Adam Miller explores Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and examines how correction, sacrifice, and seeing reality clearly lead us beyond conventional wisdom to the unconventional wisdom of Jesus Christ.

Part 2:

Dr. Adam Miller examines how Ecclesiastes dismantles our illusions about success, happiness, and desire and points us toward the surprising freedom found in sacrifice and the life of Jesus Christ

Timecodes:

Part 1 -

- 0:00 - Part 1 - Dr. Adam Miller
- 3:35 The Art of Losing
- 5:36 Where Wisdom Arises
- 7:54 The Foolishness of God
- 11:05 A Philosopher Reads Scripture
- 13:44 Scripture is Ongoing Conversation
- 16:49 Trust Beyond Knowledge
- 18:10 The Bible's Wisdom Books
- 21:22 Why Ecclesiastes Belongs
- 23:57 Job Doesn't Get Answers
- 25:28 Hungry and Wondering
- 27:42 Everything is Futile
- 30:39 Seeing What We Avoid
- 32:51 Jesus Faces Loss
- 35:29 Wisdom in the Book of Mormon
- 36:48 Wisdom is Better Than Rubies
- 40:05 Wisdom Personified as a Woman
- 42:24 Are We Willing to Be Corrected
- 45:01 When the Truth Feels Hard
- 47:15 Loving Being Duped
- 50:32 Paying to Be Deceived
- 51:57 The Price of Real Wisdom
- 53:34 Trust in the Lord
- 55:52 With All Thy Getting
- 57:50 The Path of the Just
- 59:33 Wisdom Comes Through Doing
- 1:01:17 Lose Your Soul to Save It
- 1:05:07 Turn Left to Go Right
- 1:08:54 End of Part 1 - Dr. Adam Miller

Part 2 -

- 0:00 - Part 2 - Dr. Adam Miller
- 0:24 Happiness Depends on Wisdom
- 2:10 Loving the Idea of Love
- 4:09 Jesus and the Wisdom Tradition
- 8:03 The Despair of Winning
- 11:07 The Ghost of Special Adam
- 13:12 Ecclesiastes is Hard Medicine
- 16:12 Vanity of Vanities
- 18:29 Hopeless About Everything Else
- 20:43 Nothing New Under the Sun
- 23:19 Chasing the Wind

- 25:16 What If You Got Everything
- 27:41 Success Still Doesn't Satisfy
- 30:21 Hope in Jesus Alone
- 31:41 To Everything a Season
- 34:37 Human, Animal, and Divine
- 37:32 Why We Need Jesus Christ
- 39:12 Sacrifice Everything
- 40:46 The Rich Young Ruler
- 43:40 Charity is the Difference
- 45:17 Breaking up the Transactional Gospel
- 47:22 Take Up Christ's Life
- 49:17 Remember Your Creator
- 51:01 Divine Melancholy
- 53:44 End of Part 2 - Dr. Adam Miller
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Biographical Information:



Adam S. Miller is a professor of philosophy at Collin College in McKinney, Texas.

He earned a BA in Comparative Literature from Brigham Young University and an MA and PhD in Philosophy from Villanova University.

He is the author of more than a dozen books (see links on the home page) and serves as the current director of the Latter-day Saint Theology Seminar.

He and his wife, Gwen, have three children.

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Hank Smith:	00:00:00	Coming up in this episode on followHIM.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:00:03	What's maybe most surprising about Ecclesiastes at the end of the day is how skeptical and irreverent and oldly pessimistic it is as a book to the point that many people have not only wondered why it's in the Bible, how did it even get there, to the point that, well, no one's ever had the courage to cut it from the Bible.
Hank Smith:	00:00:33	Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my co-host, John Bytheway, who does not have dry bones. John, you've probably never seen that compliment before, but listen to Proverbs 17:22, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones."
John Bytheway:	00:00:59	Yeah, I don't want that kind of, would that be spiritual osteoporosis or something?
Hank Smith:	00:01:06	John, you have a merry heart.
John Bytheway:	00:01:08	Oh, so do you, Hank. Thank you.
Hank Smith:	00:01:10	That's what makes you an excellent cohost. John, we are privileged to have returning to the show Dr. Adam Miller. Adam, welcome back. We've missed you.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:01:19	I am happy to be with you again as your resident Latter-day Saint philosopher. Am I the only philosopher that you guys have on the show?
Hank Smith:	00:01:31	We do have Joe Spencer join us every once in a while, and I know he's a close friend of yours.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:01:37	Indeed he is.

Hank Smith:	00:01:38	Both compliment each other and complement each other really well. John, when you think of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, does anything come to mind?
John Bytheway:	00:01:48	Yeah, the Proverbs are little sound bites, little refrigerator magnets type of things. I was watching the Bible Project on YouTube. I liked something they said. The Proverbs are not promises. They're kind of like good ideas and great guidelines. They work a lot of the time. And then I loved how it said, "So we balance those with Ecclesiastes and Job." And I went, oh, that's perfect. Proverbs will give you some great ideas. Train up a child in the way he should go. He will never depart from it. Well, that's a good idea. Then we'll read Job and Ecclesiastes. There's some exceptions. So I appreciate that big picture.
Hank Smith:	00:02:27	That's fantastic. I was telling you both before we hit record, my first introduction to scripture really was the book of Proverbs has a special place in my heart. Adam, Dr. Miller, what are we going to do today? We've been talking about this for a few months. You were excited to take these on.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:02:44	John Bytheway doesn't look like he's aged a day in decades. But you and I, Hank, I think we're looking a little rough -
Hank Smith:	00:02:52	Yeah.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:02:52	Around the edges. Time is taking its toll.
Hank Smith:	00:02:55	It is.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:02:56	Our lives are slipping away here. How long do we have left? Maybe days, maybe decades.
Hank Smith:	00:03:03	Right. Just this morning, I was looking at my phone going, "Man, I got to move this further away from me. I can't see it." Right. I was talking to a friend once, Natalie Norton. You have these moments in conversation where people say something and you never forget it. She said she had learned that happiness in life is how you manage loss, how you deal with loss. And that's something I hadn't heard, but rang true.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:03:35	As Elizabeth Bishop puts it, "Life is in some respects the art of losing." It's the art of losing. Are your children grown? Have your parents passed? Have your dreams and ambitions been realized? The world's a moving target. The one thing that's guaranteed is that everything that arises passes away. That's one part of the picture. Imagine that world and then couple that

world in your imagination with a certain kind of religion. Imagine, for instance, a religion that required you to lose your life in order to save it. Imagine a religion that could at any time ask you, like Jesus did, to leave your family or to willingly suffer persecution or to plain go sell all that you have right now and give it to the poor. Imagine a [religion](#) that is explicitly premised on the necessity of sacrificing all things, because as the [Lectures On Faith](#) put it, any religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.

00:04:50 Imagine a religion here that required you to willingly return to God everything you'd ever been given to consecrate all of your time, all of your talents, all of your possessions, turning over the whole of your life to God's care and attention. Can you imagine that kind of religion coupled with this kind of world? Can you imagine joining this kind of religion on purpose and then showing up every Sunday for decades then perhaps even attempting in all earnestness to actually and honestly sacrifice all things, consecrating them all back to God?

00:05:36 So imagine on the one hand then that we have a world where disappointment and loss and death are guaranteed. And on the other hand, a religion where sacrifice and consecration, not just of some things, but of all things, is quite intentionally the explicit order of the day. The place where these two lines meet, the place where inevitable loss crosses with willing sacrifice, that's the place where wisdom arises. This is what the book of Proverbs and the book of Ecclesiastes are about, wisdom. Both are wisdom books. Both books are integral to an ongoing and open-ended biblical conversation, a conversation that is unfinished, that you and I are invited to participate in about the nature of this divine wisdom. Both books then I think press the same set of questions. What kind of world is this? What kind of life is vain and foolish given that world?

00:06:45 And then what kind of life would be redemptive and wise given that world? With the time we have today, I want to try to accomplish three things. First, I want to look at how the book of Proverbs describes wisdom in terms of a willingness to fear God, welcome correction, and break free from the kind of self-deception that keeps us from seeing the truth about ourselves and the world. Second, I want to look at how the book of Ecclesiastes can function as a harsh, perhaps very harsh, but necessary medicine that forces us to see with clear eyes the nature of the problem we keep avoiding, a problem that perhaps the whole of our contemporary world is built to distract us from seeing. Third, I want to then look at how this kind of

wisdom can, by way of faith, open onto the kind of surprising, redemptive, and unconventional wisdom that Jesus describes as loving your enemy or what the apostle Paul calls the foolishness of God.

00:07:54 And as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians, the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, such that at the end of the day, as conventional as the kind of wisdom we find in Proverbs seems to be, the kind of wisdom at stake in the gospel of Jesus Christ is pretty unconventional. If Proverbs depends on the expectation of a sort of symmetry between action and consequence, the gospel hinges instead on an asymmetrical and unconditional expression of perfect love. So that true wisdom, divine wisdom looks for all the world to the world like foolishness. So the question is why? Why would real wisdom look foolish and why would that foolishness be redemptive?

Hank Smith: 00:08:55 Fantastic. Before we go any further, John, for those who haven't been here before, or maybe this is their first introduction to Adam, what do we know about him?

John Bytheway: 00:09:05 [Adam](#) is a professor of philosophy at Collin College in McKinney, Texas. He has a bachelor's in comparative literature from Brigham Young University and a master's and a PhD in philosophy from Villanova University. He's the author of probably more than a dozen books. I'm looking at Original Grace right here. And I know that one that's currently in production that he wrote with Rosalynde Welch, whom we've had on the podcast, called [Seven Songs](#): Signs of Christ in the Old Testament. Everybody that loves the Old Testament should be interested in that, especially as we've talked about songs in the Old Testament, which we have this year. That's going to be a great contribution. Thank you for joining us again.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:09:52 My pleasure.

Hank Smith: 00:09:54 Let's read from the [Come, Follow Me](#) manual. And then Adam, we're excited, John and I both, to listen and learn. It starts this way. "You might think of the book of Proverbs as a collection of wise counsel from loving parents. Its main message is that if you seek wisdom, especially God's wisdom, life will go well. But Proverbs is followed by the book of Ecclesiastes, which seems to say it's not that simple. The preacher quoted in Ecclesiastes observed that he gave his heart to no wisdom, but still found vexation of spirit and much grief. In various ways, the book asks,

can there be real meaning in a world where everything seems vain, temporary and uncertain? Yet while the two books look at life from different perspectives, they teach similar truths. Ecclesiastes declares, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man." This is the same principle found throughout Proverbs, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." Life is always better, if not always perfect, when we trust and follow the Lord Jesus Christ." Beautiful. So well written. Adam, with that, where do you want to start? How do you want to go about this?

Dr. Adam Miller:

00:11:05

Yeah, that is well said. Let's start with your standard issue disclaimer here for listeners. I'm not a historian, let alone of the Hebrew Bible or a scholar of ancient Semitic languages. I'm a philosopher sometimes, wear also the hat of a theologian. That's a different kind of job and it brings a different perspective to these passages. The historian might ask a question like, "Did this event really happen or why did this event really happen?" Where a philosopher would instead ask a question like, "What does it even mean for a thing to be real anyway?" Which is a very weird, very hard sort of question. Weird, hard questions about obvious things that we normally take for granted. That's the philosopher's job. We'll try to do some of that today. Let's just start with a little bit of really big picture biblical context, as has probably been emphasized by many of your guests here this year, the Bible and the Old Testament in particular is not a single book.

00:12:23

The Bible is a collection of books. The word Bible literally means books, plural, not book singular. That's good, I think. These books, they need each other. They are in open conversation with each other. To understand these books is not just to understand what's being said on any given page, but to see how that page is in active conversation with a number of other very different pages that may address the same topic from very different perspectives. Though they share the same God and are inspired by the same spirit, these books come from many different times and places and perspectives, and most of those are very different from ours, very different from the world in which you and I live, very different from the sort of assumptions that you and I might bring to bear about the world or about religion. I think a good general interpretive rule for the Bible in general and the Old Testament in particular, and for scripture even more broadly, is to keep the parts in circulation with each other, to keep them all in conversation with each other, and especially to keep all of the parts of the Bible and all of the parts of our scriptures in conversation with Jesus Christ.

	00:13:44	If we fall into the trap of expecting any one verse or any one chapter or any one book to be telling us exactly what we need to know and that's it and that's all there is, then I think we'll miss the point. The point is the way that God has initiated a conversation with us as human beings, that this conversation has been recorded in part for us in our scriptures, that the conversation is open, ongoing, and invites us to participate in an active way in that conversation with all of it always circling back to Jesus Christ. If we follow that as a kind of general rule, then most of the concerns that we tend to have about any given passage of scripture can find their proper place and we can find a way to see what is being offered in that scripture even if it's not what we expected or even needed at that moment.
Hank Smith:	00:14:43	It's not univocal. It's almost like a choir. All these different authors offer something different each. Sometimes they come in direct conflict with each other and that's okay.
John Bytheway:	00:14:56	I like an open and ongoing conversation. I love that we're going through a book of scripture every year. Hank, haven't you been pleasantly delighted with how a different guest will see the same segment we did four years ago differently, give us new thoughts and insights. I used to think I knew stuff, but I know nothing. And as we start doing this, it's been really fun to see how much there is to learn every time.
Hank Smith:	00:15:26	Talking about dealing with loss, the loss of confidence in your own knowledge over the years.
John Bytheway:	00:15:31	Exactly.
Hank Smith:	00:15:33	When you're young, you think you know everything and by the end you think, I know nothing.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:15:37	As the book of Proverbs emphasizes, that's a big part of what divine wisdom looks like, knowing how little you know, not trusting what you thought you knew, and it's then putting all of your trust in God.
John Bytheway:	00:15:52	What's the Book of Mormon verse that says we have to consider ourselves fools before God? Yeah, we are.
Hank Smith:	00:16:02	A little bit about the foolishness of God.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:16:05	Yeah, the foolishness of God to become fools with Christ and for Christ.

John Bytheway:	00:16:10	Do you ever wonder when the Lord sees us all in these conversations if he's up there going like this, how far we're missing the point or whatever? We think we're really getting into it and the Lord's going, oh, boy.
Hank Smith:	00:16:27	It seems to me when I am sitting with someone like Adam and entering scripture, I'm less sure of everything I know. There's a healthy feeling to it. I know it doesn't sound like it's a good thing to be less sure of everything you know.
John Bytheway:	00:16:44	I think it means you're more open to learning, which has got to be a good thing.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:16:49	Yeah, I think it's crucial to the learning experience. It's crucial to finding yourself at that moment where at the limit of what you know, you put your trust in something that's not you. You put your trust in God and let him carry the weight.
Hank Smith:	00:17:08	I love it.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:17:09	Two other general points I think about reading scripture, interpretive points. I think it's also very helpful to keep in mind that genre, understanding genre can be especially important to knowing and following what's going on in any of these particular books in the Old Testament. And genre can be especially important for understanding books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which are doing a different kind of thing than most of what the rest of the Bible is doing, right? Different genres have different kinds of rules and different kinds of goals and use different sorts of rhetoric, than other genres do. And this respect, as we already mentioned, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are examples of wisdom books rather than being narrative or history or law or prophecy, like most of the rest of what we have gotten or will get here in our course of Old Testament study this year.
	00:18:10	There's something more like an inspired set of parallel reflections on the meaning of life and law and prophecy. It's as if in the middle of the Old Testament, someone called timeout from the steady stream of story and prophecy to say, "Let's sit for a moment with this." Depending on how we count, there are four wisdom books in the Bible. Sometimes the Psalms are included in that list, but I think really the Psalms are a whole separate thing to themselves. The four wisdom books, as I would count them, include Proverbs here, Ecclesiastes, Job, and the Song of Solomon, sometimes called The Song of Songs. Proverbs, as John has already noted, is not a surprising inclusion in the Bible. Primarily consists of pretty conventional wisdom

about what you would need to do in order to negotiate your way through the world in a more or less successful way.

00:19:20 Fingers crossed. It's a pretty straightforwardly pious and optimistic book, so I don't think it's any surprise that we have Proverbs in there. And as you noted, Hank, it's a powerful book and can be a great entry point to our experience of a Hebrew way of thinking about the world. But the other three here in our list, Ecclesiastes, Job, and the Song of Songs, are all quite surprising, all very surprising in terms of the kinds of things that they have to say, and maybe even just in terms of the fact that they're in the Bible at all. As we take a close look at the details of Ecclesiastes today, one of the first questions we might end up asking ourselves is how and why is this in the Bible? Ecclesiastes.

Hank Smith: 00:20:12 One of these things is not like the others.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:20:14 Yes, exactly.

Hank Smith: 00:20:15 Where did this come from?

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:20:18 Exactly. As long as we keep them in conversation with the rest of the Bible, and especially keep them in conversation with Jesus Christ, these are also some of the most rewarding and valuable books in the Bible precisely because of how surprising and unusual they are, and because of the ways that they, as a result, can challenge us to think harder, to think more deeply, to connect more truly with the gospel message itself. And Job, as you recall, you get kind of an extended argument about the nature of divine justice and the relationship between justice and human suffering. And spoiler alert, it turns out that the relationship between justice and suffering is not at all what we thought, and that recognizing this can open onto a direct experience of God, which in some ways is pretty surprising conclusion to reach, though perhaps not in relationship to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

00:21:22 It's a surprising inclusion though in the canon of the Old Testament. The Song of Solomon is a surprising inclusion because as short as it is, it's a powerful 2,000 year old love poem that not only treats human intimacy as a divine gift, but that has long been understood as an allegory for developing a deep and intimate connection with God. The third of those is Ecclesiastes, the third of the surprising inclusions here in the wisdom books. Ecclesiastes may be the most surprising of all of these three wisdom books and may be the most challenging of all three of those surprising wisdom books, and may be one of

my favorite books of scripture, period. I even, at one point, once published a small little bespoke paraphrase of the whole book in contemporary English to try to capture for people what's so valuable about it and why they might care about the experience of reading [Ecclesiastes](#).

00:22:31 It's a weird, hard book that refuses to take for granted many of the conventional ideas that we typically assume are obvious, that the book of Proverbs itself may take for granted as obvious. You can see then why, as a result, it might appeal, especially to a philosopher. If our business as philosophers is to not take for granted as obvious the things that seem obvious to everybody else, well, Ecclesiastes does a great job of doing just that.

Hank Smith: 00:23:04 The Lord wanted to put in something for philosophers, right? Like, we can't have them missing out here.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:23:11 He throws us the occasional bone, yeah, that's nice.

Hank Smith: 00:23:16 I will say this before we go any further, to everyone listening, you're already loving what Adam has to say. Go back four years ago, walk through the book of Job with us. Go find that episode. I remember being so unsatisfied with the ending because Adam showed us Job never gets his questions answered.

John Bytheway: 00:23:37 Right.

Hank Smith: 00:23:37 The Lord comes with something but not answers to questions, and then the book ends and you feel like, no, where's the wrap up? Where's the part where all of the questions get answered? And it didn't happen. And that left me kind of uncomfortable, but also, again, I think it's a healthy uncomfortable.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:23:57 Yeah, Job spends 40 chapters, he and his friends, asking these questions about suffering and justice, and Job just begging God to show up and answer his questions. And to everyone's surprise, at the end of the book of Job, God does show up, but instead of answering any of Job's questions, he spends four chapters of his own asking Job question after question. And then he wraps the whole thing up, God does by saying, And Job was right to ask his questions. You friends who told him to sit down and be quiet, you were wrong. Job was right to ask them, even though God only responds with questions of his own and never answers. It's a truly remarkable thing, the book of Job.

Hank Smith:	00:24:43	You can easily find that on our YouTube channel, go back and find Adam. John, you know how I feel about Adam. You feel the same way. It's always a profound experience.
John Bytheway:	00:24:53	Yeah. If it's mind expanding, it's soul expanding, and I just think it puts us in a position, hopefully for some inspiration, to be hungry and to be wondering. You'll love it.
Hank Smith:	00:25:05	Be open to analyzing why you are certain, or maybe should you be so certain about things. I appreciate that. Adam and his friend, Joe Spencer, who we've had on the show, have helped me appreciate philosophy in ways I never thought possible or even had the, opened me up to a world of thinking that I didn't even know existed.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:25:28	As John noted, to be hungry and to be wondering is a good place to be spiritually. Let me note one last thing here in terms of setting up our reading of the pair of them. What's maybe most surprising about Ecclesiastes at the end of the day is how skeptical and irreverent and oldly pessimistic it is as a book to the point that many people have not only wondered why it's in the Bible, how did it even get there, to the point that, well, no one's ever had the courage to cut it from the Bible. A later ending to the book was added to help soften the blow of its claims by editors who were concerned for unsuspecting readers simply stumbling upon it. Here's the kind of unsurprising and relatively conventional thing that you would find in the book of Proverbs. This is, for example, Proverbs chapter three, verse 33, "The Lord's curse is on the household of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous." No surprises here. Exactly what you might expect to have been said. The wicked will be cursed and the righteous will be blessed or something like this.
	00:26:49	In Proverbs 15:17. This is a great one. "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened ox where there is hatred." That's also just good sound I think conventional wisdom. You're better off just with a salad where everyone's happy than a meal, a rich feast where everybody's angry and upset. Good plain, unsurprising, proverbial advice. Here on the other hand are the alarming lines that you find in Ecclesiastes. Here, for example, is the opening line of Ecclesiastes. Verse two. I'll use a variety of translations here as we skip around back and forth, depending on what's most useful. This is from the New English translation. Futile, futile, laments the teacher. Absolutely futile. Everything is futile. That's the opening line. The opening line of Ecclesiastes.
John Bytheway:	00:27:59	Use that in a talk. Put that on your missionary plaque.

Dr. Adam Miller:	00:28:05	Yes. This is getting used all the time, I'm sure, by missionaries and different sorts of Facebook memes etc. to promote interest. Or here is the original closing verse of Ecclesiastes, 12 chapters later. This is verse eight of chapter 12. This is the NIV version. Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher. Everything is meaningless. That's the closing line of the book. The opening line of the book, futile, futile, everything is futile. The closing line of the book, meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless. An unusual position for a biblical book to take. The million dollar question then again though is why? Why does Ecclesiastes say this? What does it have to do with Proverbs and what happens when we put this cry of despair from Ecclesiastes in conversation with the teachings of Jesus Christ? The original ending of Ecclesiastes is pretty clearly chapter 12, verse eight. Even in contemporary translations, the scene is obvious because the discourse switches from first person to third person, all the way through the book, the preacher, quote unquote, the speaker has been speaking in the first person directly to us.
	00:29:31	Then it switches to the third person here in verses nine through 12, and you get a little commentary on what people have just read that also gives it a kind of a slight more pious, less skeptical and irreverent spin. And it wraps up by saying, "Since every deed will God bring to judgment for every hidden act, be it good or evil, at the end of the day, fear God and do good. Which is a pretty pious ending to a resolutely impious at least from a conventional perspective and skeptical book.
Hank Smith:	00:30:10	It reminds me of the book of Mark, which ends with you never see the resurrected Lord. It's the women saw the angels and ran away and someone did not like that ending. They added quite a bit. And it's after verse eight, actually. I think it's Mark 16:8. It says they went out from the sepulchre. They were afraid. They didn't say anything to anyone. And that's the original ending. That's the ending. Someone was uncomfortable with that.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:30:39	The tomb is empty, yeah. We can be sympathetic, I think, with people being uncomfortable ending just with an empty tomb. But it's also a kind of extraordinary move on the part of the earliest manuscripts that we have, at least for the Gospel of Mark, that it has the courage and audacity to leave their gospel ending with a kind of question for us to answer then as believers or not in response to the fact that the tomb was empty. The basic problem has to do here with the way that there's something really obvious about the world that in general you and I can't see or don't see or don't want to see or even refuse to see. And that this is what prevents us from being wise,

such that the first step toward redemption is to open our eyes and willingly see what it is that we have not wanted to see.

00:31:42 As the book of Proverbs says, we end up living as fools or dupes, or as Robert Alter puts it, dolts is his translation. Because of this ignorance, then we do end up doing foolish and destructive things. We end up pursuing happiness in impossible ways that fail to match up with how the world really is and with what God really wants for us. We have to see with clear eyes the world as it actually is. That sort of sober wisdom I think is what Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are both meant to help equip us. I have to be disabused of the idea that my happiness depends on getting something and response to my own desires so that I can discover instead that my happiness depends really on knowing something, or even better, someone, that someone is God. What I have to know is what Jesus sees and knows, that the world is full of loss and suffering as everyone dies and all things pass away.

00:32:51 This is what Jesus sees more clearly than anyone else. Jesus never hides. He never turns his face from fear or loss or pain or suffering. He always looks it square in the eye. He sees it as clearly as it can possibly be seen. But then I also have to do what then Jesus does. I have to greet all this inevitable loss of all things with my own willing sacrifice and consecration of all things. And this as Jesus shows is ironically the only way to save and redeem all things is by greeting their loss with willing sacrifice. And that sacrifice is a kind of transformative alchemy that gives us back everything that we would lose as we love and care for it, even as it passes away. Jesus is the model there at the end of the day, though I think Mormon gives us a look at it in miniature. But that's what's at stake, I think, in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

John Bytheway: 00:33:54 I'm still thinking about that I myself am a dolt and uh.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:34:00 We all are.

John Bytheway: 00:34:02 There's a really hopeful phrase for me in, King Benjamin says, I'm in Mosiah 3:11, that his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them or who have ignorantly sinned. I just think there's hope for dolts because a lot of us have ignorantly sinned. That gives me some hope that yeah, we're a lot of dolts and I've had my moments of great doltage myself.

Hank Smith:	00:34:37	Adam, I have two items I would love for you to comment on. One, you brought up Mormon in the Book of Mormon. To me, one facet of many of my testimony of the Book of Mormon is it's wisdom. And it seems that you have to live a while to get that kind of wisdom. You just have to be on the earth observing for quite a while. And here you have this young 20s farmer. Lehi has wisdom of an older person. Mormon has the wisdom of, you even watch Mormon change throughout the book. You can watch him soften.
John Bytheway:	00:35:19	From 10 years old to...
Hank Smith:	00:35:21	Yeah, as he writes. I would love to ask you about the wisdom you've seen in the Book of Mormon.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:35:29	Yeah, I think the Book of Mormon is full of wisdom and the Book of Mormon, like the Bible, is a good example of what it looks like to see an unfolding, ongoing, growing conversation about what it looks like to experience the kind of wisdom that allows for redemption. You can see the way that that conversation unfolds in individual people's lives. As you noted in the Book of Mormon, you can see the way that Nephi undergoes a whole series of transformations that deepen and expand what he understands about God and about God's work. You can see the way that it unfolds over the span of the whole Book of Mormon, the way that the Book of Mormon embodies a whole series of perspectives on wisdom that are irreducible to one point of view, but that in conversation with one another all help point toward and deepen our understanding of Jesus Christ.
Hank Smith:	00:36:27	Adam, I'm going to save my second question for a little bit later. It's a little bit of a teaser. It'll keep you here. Because what we've been talking about is kind of spelled out in the book of Proverbs. Here's Proverbs 8:11, "For wisdom is better than rubies." There's a bit of an Adam Miller feel to that, to that verse.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:36:48	Yeah, wisdom is better than rubies. That I think is a version of something that I floated a few minutes ago that at the end of the day, happiness does not depend on getting something, but it depends instead on knowing something. It depends on acquiring a certain sort of wisdom that understands the nature of the world, your place in it, and what all that has to do then with your relationship to God. The comparison to rubies is helpful here. It's the kind of comparison that the book of Proverbs frequently makes because it wants to emphasize how then valuable wisdom is and how much more valuable wisdom

is than the kinds of things that we normally spend our time trying to acquire. Let's take a closer look now at the book of Proverbs and then at some of the details of the book of Ecclesiastes, both of which I think are well worth our time.

00:37:40 The book of Proverbs is itself a collection of sayings compiled over several centuries from a variety of different sources. The book of Proverbs doesn't hide this. The seams are visible and it indicates to you when it's transitioning from one set of sayings to another set of sayings. Some of the sayings compiled in Proverbs are attributed directly to King Solomon himself and may go back even that far to the 10th century. Some of them we are told were compiled in the time of King Hezekiah in the 8th century, but other sections are also clearly borrowed from even non-Hebrew sources and repurposed. Some are explicitly ascribed to sources other than Solomon. Eight basic sections to the book, you get a little introduction in the first couple verses of chapter one. Then from the remainder of chapter one through chapter nine, you get an extended discourse on wisdom, on the nature of wisdom that's primarily framed as the conversation between a father and a son.

00:38:58 Like most conversations between fathers and sons is a monologue. By the father to the son. It's very different than the rest of the book of Proverbs because it's one long, sustained, more or less continuous conversation. Most of the rest of the book of Proverbs consists of little teeny, tiny, two-line couplets, very pithy sayings that you could essentially read in any order and are more or less self-contained in their own right. Most of the rest of the book of Proverbs, you could cut up with a pair of scissors verse by verse, put them into a lottery ball hopper, spin them around and pull them out in any order and you'd be just fine. Nothing would be lost in the process. But those first nine chapters are not like that. It's that opening section on the nature of divine wisdom you will be surprised to learn is what interests me most.

John Bytheway: 00:40:02 We are shocked.

Hank Smith: 00:40:04 Shocked.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:40:05 The practical advice that you get in the middle, people are welcome to spend time with that, but that's not what I'm going to focus on. One of the most striking features of those opening nine chapters especially is the way that at various points, wisdom is personified as a woman. Wisdom as a woman speaks directly to the son, to the father's son, petitioning herself for the son to care about the nature of wisdom. That's a pretty

unusual thing in the context of Hebrew literature for an abstraction like wisdom to be personified in this way. Not unusual maybe for wisdom to be associated with the feminine qualities, but unusual for abstractions in general to be personified in Hebrew thinking. But this carries through in general across the biblical canon, the idea that divine wisdom is almost a kind of quasi personage who has been involved with God's work from the very beginning and has expressed God's will throughout the course of time.

	00:41:13	It's passages like this that also supply a template for what John does at the beginning of his gospel. When John says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." That kind of personification of the Word, of logos, of reason, of wisdom, they're associated with Jesus Christ. We find a early template for that way of talking here in the book of Proverbs.
John Bytheway:	00:41:41	In the Book of Mormon, this is Mosiah 8:20, "O how marvelous are the works of the Lord. How long doth he suffer with his people? Yea and how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men for they will not seek wisdom. Neither do they desire that she should rule over them." Book of Mormon too has wisdom as a she. You can see my wife nodding at this part.
Hank Smith:	00:42:04	Adam, you're right. She speaks first person. Right in chapter one, "She crieth in the chief place of concourse in the openings of her gates in the city. She uttereth her words saying, How long ye simple ones will you love simplicity?"
John Bytheway:	00:42:21	Ye simple ones?
Hank Smith:	00:42:22	Ye simple ones.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:42:24	How long will you dolts hang on to your ignorance? Our appetite for wisdom will depend on our appetite for correction. Are we willing to be corrected?
John Bytheway:	00:42:38	Corrected.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:42:39	We will only be as wise as we are willing to be corrected. We will only acquire as much wisdom as we are willing to bear what seems to outsiders to be what is fearful, the fear of the Lord. I'm especially going to use for this section some of Robert Alter's translations, which I think are some of the cleanest, clearest, most contemporary translations. Here's Proverbs chapter one,

verses one through seven. "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel, to know wisdom and reproof, to understand discerning maxims, to accept the reproof of insight, righteousness, justice, and uprightness. To give shrewdness to the simple, to allow knowledge and cunning. Let the wise man hear and gain learning and the discerning acquire designs. To understand proverbs and adages, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Wisdom and reproof dolts despise.

00:43:53 That's the official prologue here essentially to the rest of the book of Proverbs. And what's less clear in the King James version that is really emphasized here in Alter's version is the role of reproof and correction. For instance, in King James, verse two gets translated as, "To know wisdom and instruction to perceive the words of understanding." Instruction is fine as a translation, but it's a pretty weak translation of instruction in the sense of you're going to now be instructed about what you need to change, about how you need to be corrected. Reproof is straightforwardly how Alter translates that. To know wisdom and reproof. Those two things go together. To accept the reproof of insight, that's what's at stake here in knowledge. Will I accept the reproof or will I reject it? To borrow another famous line from the Book of Mormon, with respect to the nature of wisdom, the wicked take the truth to be hard.

00:45:00 This is a good sign of the fact that something might be true, that I take it to be hard, that I don't want to hear it, but I would prefer it not to be the case, that I reject it and refuse it. That's a good sign that I might pause and reconsider. And something quite important, in fact, might be at stake here instead. Wisdom and reproof dolts despise. Alter has it. Part of what's always going to be at stake here in what wisdom is trying to show us is that wisdom is trying to show us that our desires are not a good measure for truth. It's going to hurt to discover that I'm probably not going to get what I thought I wanted. I'm not going to want to hear it. Seeing the truth is always going to involve my willingness to lay down my will and accept reality and endorse the Lord's will instead.

00:45:54 And that always pinches. It always hurts that sort of correction. The fear of the Lord then is the beginning of wisdom as Proverbs puts it here. These verses later in chapter one that you already pointed us toward, Hank, verses 20 through 25, and then 29, read like this. This is wisdom personified. Wisdom cries out in the streets in the squares. She lifts her voice at the bustling crossroads, she calls at the entrance to the gate, says her sayings. How long dupes will you love being duped? That's

great. I really like Alter's translation here. How long dupes will you love being duped? In scoffers, lust, scoffing, in fools, hate knowledge. Turn back to my rebuke. Look, I would pour out my spirit to you. I would make my words known with you. Because I called and you resisted, I reached out my hand and none paid heed and you flung aside on my counsel and you did not want my rebuke because they hated knowledge and the Lord's fear they did not choose.

00:47:15 How long dupes will you love being duped? There's a certain sort of innocence to our ignorance given the way that as a human being, you're born as a baby, you don't know things, everybody needs time and space to learn and grow. When you arrive, you're a blank slate. There's no shame in that. But over time here, especially as we grow attached to trying to understand reality in terms of our own desires, an element of self-deception becomes involved here where we become culpable in a way for our attachment to this distorted way of seeing reality that refuses to recognize the really obvious truth about how the world is passing away, about how it won't line up with our desires, and about how we're called as a result to sacrifice instead of cling to all the things that we've been given, such that as dupes, we end up loving being duped.

00:48:15 The more successful we can be in our self-deception that no, we really are great and we really do deserve it and we really are going to get what we want. The better we can preserve that fantasy, the more we like it and the more resistant we become to the truth that wisdom is in fact offering instead the hard truth that we need to hear.

Hank Smith: 00:48:35 That's why Ecclesiastes is going to hit me so hard.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:48:39 Indeed.

Hank Smith: 00:48:39 Everything you're chasing is meaningless and futile. I don't want to hear that.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:48:45 Yeah, zero punches pulled once we get to Ecclesiastes. Proverbs does a nice job of setting up the pins for us here in many respects. A lot of the contemporary world is quite intentionally built to reinforce and coddle our tendency toward distraction and self-deception and avoidance to not see the real problems, to actually respond to them with care and love that they require.

Hank Smith:	00:49:11	I noticed that wisdom said, she asks, "How long ye dupes will you love being duped?" Not how long dupes will you be duped, but you actually -
John Bytheway:	00:49:20	You will enjoy it.
Hank Smith:	00:49:21	You love this part.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:49:24	Yeah, we love it. I often joke with my students that it used to be the case that when I was in school and I found myself in a classroom where I didn't want to be, that I would have to myself do all the hard work of fantasizing that I was someplace else doing something else with someone else. I would pony up and do the hard work of being duped in a way that I loved to be duped by my own fantasies and daydreams. For them, that's a pretty rare experience actually for my students today that if they're in a classroom wishing that they were somewhere else doing something else, that they don't have to do that work themselves. They can offload all that work of fantasizing and being distracted and running away from how things actually are and where they're actually at by flicking open their phones and letting the world bear the burden of helping them to love being dupes who love being duped.
Hank Smith:	00:50:22	It's so easy. It's not even. I don't have to daydream anymore. My daydreams are right on my screen. It'll take me somewhere else mentally.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:50:32	Yeah, we'll pay good money to have someone else dupe us more effectively than we could dupe ourselves because we love being duped so much.
John Bytheway:	00:50:40	I think it's been referred to as the dupification of the new generation, right?
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:50:45	I've heard that before, yes.
Hank Smith:	00:50:48	Yeah, not how long will you be duped? How long will you love being duped?
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:50:53	Scoffers lust scoffing, he says. Fools hate knowledge. I called and you resisted.
Hank Smith:	00:50:59	Maybe that's why it's difficult to compete with media and phones as a teacher, as a parent sometimes, even as myself.

John Bytheway:	00:51:08	I'd rather be doing something else somewhere else with someone else. I'm going to rescue that king who's in a tunnel full of boulders.
Hank Smith:	00:51:18	Better go jump these trains.
John Bytheway:	00:51:22	How interesting. I like that. I didn't ever thought of it that way, but yeah, I want to be somewhere else doing something else.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:51:30	We see this again and again with, in the social media, the truth loses to desire every time. What we wish for the case, what we wanted to be true, what rings our bells and colludes with our fantasies, that will win out every time over what we don't want to hear and don't want to see and what is actually the case.
Hank Smith:	00:51:51	The algorithm wants it to be that way, because you'll come back.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:51:57	Well, this is the price then of real wisdom. You have to hear and see and feel what you didn't want to hear and see and feel. You have to be like Mormon of sober mind and quick to observe the way things actually are and how it departs from what you thought you wanted things to be.
Hank Smith:	00:52:19	John, where is it in the Book of Mormon? The spirit will showeth you things as they really are. There might be an addition there and it will be really uncomfortable. Right?
John Bytheway:	00:52:31	Jacob 4:13, I think. And you won't like it.
Hank Smith:	00:52:36	Yeah, and you probably won't love it.
John Bytheway:	00:52:38	I love what you've taught me here. When I see the word instruction in King James, I've always thought I'm just learning something, but this kind of instruction is this is what you're doing wrong. This is reproof. This is what you thought you knew but isn't right. That's humbling and helpful though. Am I willing to receive instruction or reproof from my dupification?
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:53:04	Yep, that's the price of wisdom. That's the door through which we must be willing to enter. Once you pass through that door and see the truth that the world is passing away and you will lose everything, then you will be called to actually sacrifice willingly everything in order to save it and care for it and redeem it, which is also a hard thing that we are keen to avoid.
Hank Smith:	00:53:32	Keen to avoid.

Dr. Adam Miller:	00:53:34	Here in chapter three, we get very famous and rightly so, set of verses and five through 12, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your discernment. Through all your ways, know him and he will make your path straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and swerve from evil. Let it be healing for your flesh and a balm to your bones." Or as we get it in the King James, even better here. "It shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones. Honor the Lord more than your wealth than the first fruits of your crop and your barns will be filled with abundance. Your vats will burst with new wine. The Lord's reproof my son do not spurn and do not despise his rebuke."
Hank Smith:	00:54:26	Adam, in chapter three verse eight, "It shall be health to thy navel." Is, that's a pronoun there, it. Is it wisdom?
John Bytheway:	00:54:36	The trust of...
Hank Smith:	00:54:37	Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord. Depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel. That
John Bytheway:	00:54:43	This behavior will be? That's a good question.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:54:47	Yeah, it's a good question. My inclination is to see the whole of verses five through seven as the it, this whole complex of trusting in the Lord, not leaning to your own understanding, being not wise in your own eyes and fearing the Lord. Those things collectively are what constitute wisdom. That wisdom then will be health to your navel and marrow to your bones. Yeah, it's a powerful phrase, health to your navel. Your navel is your belly button. It's the place where in the womb, strength and nourishment, it's the place where it comes from, where it flows into you, health here to the navel, strength and power and growth coming to you from God and marrow to your bones, a powerful image. Let it be healing for your flesh and a balm to your bones is how Alter has it. One of my favorite verses here in all of Proverbs in chapter four, verse seven.
John Bytheway:	00:55:49	Oh, I love it.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:55:52	Here I really prefer the King James translation, but I'll give you Alter's first. Alter's translation of chapter four, verse seven goes like this. The beginning of wisdom is get wisdom. That's great. The beginning of wisdom is get wisdom and in all that you get, get discernment. I suspect the Hebrew here might even be pithier and more entertaining than the English rendition. The King James goes like this. Wisdom is the principle thing,

therefore get wisdom. And then this, my favorite bit. And with all thy getting, get understanding. With all thy getting, get understanding. So there are two ways to understand this. I think you might see it as urging us to always and only get wisdom. With all of your getting, the thing that you should be getting is wisdom. But also I think you could read it in the sense that, as Alter seems to suggest, that in all that you get, also get discernment such that whatever you're doing, whatever you're trying to get, whatever work is at hand, you should also simultaneously be acquiring wisdom.

00:57:11 You should be getting discernment. Your understanding should be increasing regardless of whatever the particular task is that you are engaged in at the moment. Wisdom should simultaneously be accruing. With all of your getting, get understanding. Keep your eyes wide open the whole time. Always be quick to observe. Always be sober. Never be duped by your love for being duped. It's nice. The beginning of wisdom, get wisdom. That seems so simple when you put it like that.

Hank Smith: 00:57:47 Right.

Dr. Adam Miller: 00:57:50 Just a handful more here in this same spirit. Verses 18 and 19 in chapter four, "But the path of the righteous is like lights, radiance, ever brighter till day has come. The way of the wicked is like darkness. They know not on what they stumble." Whereas the King James has it, "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness. They know not at what they stumble." That's a good example too of like the real value of also always simultaneously keeping an eye on the King James translation. The way that it might have been cleaner and clearer what the Hebrew was saying in the contemporary translation, but if you skip the King James altogether, then you miss the way that we're getting biblical language that is picked up and repurposed elsewhere all the time in other passages of scripture, in songs, et cetera.

00:58:53 This notion of the path of the just being a shine our light that shines more and more brightly unto the perfect day, that's language that has resonance across the whole of scripture and into our contemporary way of speaking as Latter-day Saints. You'll miss that if you skip out on the King James altogether, even if it's also really valuable to read contemporary translations.

Hank Smith:	00:59:16	The path of the just, is that the commandments? Is that living with integrity? The path of the just is maybe the beginning of wisdom. That's why maybe the Lord has given us commandments is to get you started down that road and give you a gleam of light.
Dr. Adam Miller:	00:59:33	Yeah, and I think it has to do here with the way that this sort of wisdom is not a theoretical endeavor. It's something that accrues as you engage practically in obedience, in service, in sacrifice. And as you serve and obey and sacrifice more, the wisdom will increase in parallel, right? It's the kind of wisdom that you can only have at the end of the day by having done what you were asked to do. You can't have it in the abstract. You can only get it from the inside out by experiencing it for yourself. That unfolds in this very gradual, very careful way over time.
Hank Smith:	01:00:13	A cruise with engagement. I really like that.
Dr. Adam Miller:	01:00:16	But the way of the wicked is darkness instead. One characteristic feature of wickedness is the way that you will constantly stumble because the world will not be what you want it to be, but also you won't understand why you're stumbling because you don't actually grasp the true nature of reality. You've refused to see it, so you keep stubbing your toes and you keep getting frustrated and disappointed by how things turn out when you try to force them to be what you want. You're not willing to accept the sort of correction that would allow wisdom to actually arise so that you could see the sacrifices that need to be made in order for love and justice and mercy to prevail.
	01:01:00	It would seem, and this is of course how you would think about it automatically as a kid. It would seem like the way to care for your own soul would be to privilege your own desires, to try to get those desires satisfied. But that's not actually the case. What you have to do instead, it turns out as Jesus puts it right, if you want to save your soul, you can't save your soul. You can't save your soul by saving your soul, you have to lose it to save it and you have to be willing to accept here the sort of instruction that brings your heart and mind back around to reality in order to avoid despising your own soul here.
John Bytheway:	01:01:40	I love the idea of, in a human way, to have mentors who are willing to give you correction. Some of my last advice I got from my mission president was to go home and find mentors and to be willing to say, "Do I have any blind spots? Am I doing

anything wrong that you see that's hurting me?" To be willing to invite reprove that way, which was terrific advice.

- Dr. Adam Miller: 01:02:08 Yeah, mentors are really important in that respect. This is not the kind of thing you can outsource to an app or a chatbot whose entire orientation is to flatter you and agree with you and aid and abet all of your fantasies and your desire to be duped because that's good business. It drives engagement, as they say, captures our attention. When what you really need are people who, because they love you, will tell you what you need to hear, even, or especially if you don't want to hear it. The gospel is a kind of apprenticeship model where we have to sign up to work with people who are far enough along that they know what they're doing so that they can show us how to do what they've been doing so that we then can discover it for ourselves and show it to others in turn. But you have to do it.
- John Bytheway: 01:03:05 I've heard Hank quote verse 13 dozens of times,
- Hank Smith: 01:03:09 "A merry heart, maketh a cheerful countenance." It's very similar to what I quoted. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Maybe I like it because it's one thing that comes natural to me. Is a merry heart.
- John Bytheway: 01:03:22 Well, who else did it come natural to? We all need some, what do we call it? Vitamin NCT. Joseph Smith said he had a native cheery temperament.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 01:03:35 That's a super valuable thing and it points out the way that our happiness here does not depend on getting something. It depends on a certain state of mind. It depends on understanding something, seeing something. It depends on the native cheery temperament, the disposition of our hearts. That's where the truth of our happiness lies. And that's a very powerful, liberating thing to discover that I don't have to depend on the world to give me what I want in order to find joy, but that I can bring to the world by sacrificing for it, caring for it, appreciating it, being grateful for it. That's the source of joy is what I bring to it rather than what I had hoped to get from it.
- Hank Smith: 01:04:16 I'm trying to put this in a way I might understand it better. Almost like he that refuses to eat healthy and exercise doesn't really like his own body. Even though that's not what the body wants, seemingly. When I get up early to exercise, my body doesn't seem to want it, yet I'm doing it because I want to care for my body.

John Bytheway:	01:04:41	The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
Hank Smith:	01:04:44	So it does seem like the opposite. If I love my own body, just give it what it wants, not something it doesn't want.
John Bytheway:	01:04:50	Twinkies, Ding Dongs. Yeah.
Dr. Adam Miller:	01:04:53	Yeah, but there's a place for Ding Dongs especially, I think, but -
Hank Smith:	01:05:01	It almost seems like the last thing my body wants, but it's supposedly the one thing it needs.
Dr. Adam Miller:	01:05:07	Yeah, exercise is a good example of how the body acquires wisdom where you haul it out of bed and you force your body to engage with reality in an intensive way that doesn't match up neatly or obviously with your own desires, but that in the process you then discover things about the nature of reality and about your own nature, about who and what you are that you couldn't have discovered otherwise. You start to understand what your body is. You start to discover what your body can or cannot do. You start to discover what strengths you do or don't have.
	01:05:42	But if you don't leave desire to the side to engage with reality in this intensive way that exercise requires, then you don't get to see the sunrise, you don't get to feel the blood pumping in your own veins, and you don't discover who and what you are either. The thing about reality, as I think Proverbs emphasizes, is that if you get a taste for it, you will love it and sacrifice everything caring to take care of it, to redeem it, to save it. That's Jesus. Jesus sees the whole of it and it just makes him love it and care for it all the more.
Hank Smith:	01:06:18	Feels like a paradox at first.
Dr. Adam Miller:	01:06:20	Yeah, it certainly does.
Hank Smith:	01:06:23	There's a Disney film. Do you guys remember when the Disney film Cars came out and the older car is trying to teach the younger car, you got to turn left to go right. Are you crazy?
John Bytheway:	01:06:36	That makes no sense. Well, and you might look at like Alma's advice to Shiblón. You have to bridle your passions and then you'll be filled with love. It's like, wait, what?
Hank Smith:	01:06:49	Shouldn't I let it go?

Dr. Adam Miller:	01:06:52	Let's give you one more passage here just for fun from Proverbs and then we'll turn left to go right by looking at Ecclesiastes. That's a good way to describe Ecclesiastes. It feels like you're taking a hard left when you hope to go right, but then you end up in the right place at the end of the day. Chapter 16 verse 31. Gray hair is a crown of splendor through righteousness obtained. Or, as the new English translation has it. Gray hair is like a crown of glory and is attained in the path of righteousness.
Hank Smith:	01:07:33	When you started this, Adam, you said, "If we're lucky, we can grow old and gray."
John Bytheway:	01:07:38	If we're lucky, we'll have gray hair.
Dr. Adam Miller:	01:07:41	Exactly. You have to cross your fingers and hope that you will stick around long enough to get that crown of glory.
Hank Smith:	01:07:49	We complain about getting old, not realizing what a blessing it is.
Dr. Adam Miller:	01:07:53	This is what desire does when we try to read the world in light of our own desires and the world refuses to be what we wanted, then complaining is the order of the day. It's the telltale sign of the fact that we are dupes, loving being duped.
Hank Smith:	01:08:12	Coming up in part two.
Dr. Adam Miller:	01:08:15	As useful as the book of Proverbs can be, it also can be a trap because it can build into your way of thinking about the world the expectation that if I do X, Y will for sure happen. The point of the book of Ecclesiastes is to disabuse you. Profoundly, deeply, repeatedly without mercy. To disabuse you of the idea that any such symmetry exists.



- John Bytheway: 00:01 Welcome to part two with Dr. Adam Miller in the book of Psalms and Ecclesiastes.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 00:07 Let me offer you a little summary of what I see going on here in Proverbs, and then we'll turn left into Ecclesiastes. We don't want to make people wait too long for that. They've been on pins and needles, I suspect. Right?
- John Bytheway: 00:20 They're just dying. Yeah.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 00:24 We've seen, as I've emphasized, that according to Proverbs, happiness doesn't depend on getting something. It's allure, it's a false path, but it depends instead on knowing something. It depends on wisdom, it depends on seeing the truth, on not falling from the self-deception that follows when we quite naturally but wrongly try to interpret reality in light of our desires, expecting reality to match up with and satisfy our desires. That's how a child thinks, but it's ignorant and it's unserious and it's not sober and it's not fearful. Where faith is fear of the Lord, because faith requires us to steer into what we are afraid to see. It requires us to steer into what we don't want to see and then do what Jesus does, which is to sacrifice what we are afraid to sacrifice. Turns out that in some sense, the Lord is terrifying because the Lord is on the side of reality.
- 01:29 The Lord is on the side of sacrifice. But seeing what's real, accepting reality, then sacrificing what must be sacrificed is in fact the only place to find joy because of the way that is the only way to express love. Fear of the Lord, get to steer into that fear, all the things that we're afraid to see and feel and recognize and sacrifice, that left turn will get you to where you actually wanted to go.
- Hank Smith: 02:03 Yeah, so it seems ironic that someone who loves being duped never really experiences love.

Dr. Adam Miller:	02:10	Yeah, it's a way of avoiding what's actually at stake in love. To love being duped is to love the idea of being loved, but not to love loving, which is always the kind of trap we fall into as human beings. As you reminded us, Hank, that's what it means to think that love is a reward rather than a law, to think that it's something that you could get rather than something that you need to do and join and participate in.
John Bytheway:	02:39	When I tried studying Jesus' parable of the sower years ago and I thought, "Wow, there's so much you can learn from the four types of soil." And I saw this in Proverbs and I thought, "I wonder if this was in the Savior's mind." But look at Proverbs 24, start of verse 30, "I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding," a little couplet there. "Lo, it was all grown over with thorns and nettles had covered the face thereof and the stonewall thereof was broken down." And then you get, "Then I saw and considered it well. I looked upon it and received instruction" or maybe even reproof.
	03:22	Because Jesus is like, Are you overgrown in your soil? Are you rocky? Are you deep? I looked and I went, Huh. So I thought that sounds like somebody learned from looking at a garden and it was useful for maybe interpreting where the parable of the four types of soil came from. What you said earlier, Adam, is that look at these scriptures feeding into other places in the standard works. Here, Old Testament, New Testament maybe. Do you guys see that in there maybe?
Hank Smith:	03:55	Yeah, I like that. It's almost as if Jesus read that and said, I'll try that.
John Bytheway:	03:59	Yeah, I can do that.
Hank Smith:	04:01	I'm going to go look at a garden and see what I can learn.
John Bytheway:	04:04	I received instruction by looking at this messed up garden and I thought, huh.
Dr. Adam Miller:	04:09	I think that's very much the case. Jesus' parables come in all different shapes and sizes, some of which are very short, like two-liners as if they were proverbs themselves. Some of them are much longer sprawling narratives. But the basic building blocks for all those parables are already here in the Old Testament. To be able to see and feel the way that Jesus is picking up and repurposing and transforming the tradition that he's inherited, the tradition of scripture that he's inherited and

		has internalized, that adds a lot of depth and power to the parables when you can make those connections.
John Bytheway:	04:50	Yeah. And when Jesus read the scriptures, what was he reading? Reading this stuff maybe.
Dr. Adam Miller:	04:56	Yeah, it was his native language, essentially, right? When Jesus thought about God, these were his raw materials for thinking about God. All right. Ecclesiastes?
Hank Smith:	05:06	Okay. I am ready.
Dr. Adam Miller:	05:09	Ready or not?
Hank Smith:	05:10	I'm ready to turn left to go right.
Dr. Adam Miller:	05:13	All right, so Ecclesiastes, one of our four wisdom books, also interested in the nature of wisdom. In some ways, the book of Proverbs, if going back all the way to the 10th century is probably some of our oldest material, literarily speaking in the Old Testament. Where Ecclesiastes almost certainly comes on the opposite end. It's probably composed as one of the latest of the books that makes it into our Bible. Third or fourth century is a common estimation, third or fourth century before Jesus is born. So probably some of the latest material that had a chance to see and internalize and respond to a lot of the tradition that had already begun to accrete and gather. So I think it's especially helpful then to see Ecclesiastes , not as a kind of outlier, but as in active conversation with the rest of the biblical cannon. It's ascribed to a solomonic-like figure, but the speaker goes only by the name of the preacher or the teacher or something like that and is never explicitly identified as Solomon himself.
	06:30	Though certainly a solomonic type figure the preacher is meant to be. That'll figure into the story that the preacher tells us about his own experience. It's pretty short, just 12 chapters. Those chapters are themselves pretty brief, breaks it down into four basic sections. You get the very famous prologue in chapter one, you get the kind of epilogue in chapter 12. The remainder of chapter one through chapter six, you get the preacher's account of his search for meaning and satisfaction with negative results reported on either front. Then you get some practical advice in chapters seven through 11 in light of what he thinks he's discovered about the nature of the world. So if I were to offer a kind of a general description of what I think the preacher is offering to us in Ecclesiastes is we might contrast Ecclesiastes

here with something like the book of Lamentations, where what you get in the Book of Lamentations is after the Kingdom of Judah has been thrust into exile by the Babylonians and they've lost everything, you get in Lamentations a series of poems that just capture the utter despair experienced by these people having lost everything that they ever thought was worth keeping.

08:03 Lamentations is heart-rending in that respect to read, to feel with them the despair that comes with having lost everything. Ecclesiastes is also a cry of despair, but it's a cry of despair that comes not from having lost everything, but a cry of despair that follows from having won everything. It's a kind of cry of despair that follows the preacher having succeeded in every possible way, won every possible prize, gotten everything he ever thought he wanted, and then still not finding what he was looking for. It's a kind of cry of despair from the opposite end of the spectrum of human experience, not from having lost everything, but from having gotten everything. And it still didn't work according to the preacher.

Hank Smith: 08:57 I remember one [celebrity](#) saying, "I wish everyone could be rich and famous to find out how meaningless it is."

Dr. Adam Miller: 09:05 Yeah, that's exactly the book of Ecclesiastes. You and I tend to suffer from the fact that unsuccessful as we are, we are able to maintain the fantasy that if we had gotten what we wanted, we would be happy. But the preacher is here to report that even if you got everything you wanted, you would still be sad. Because that's no road to happiness. Happiness doesn't work like that. It comes through sacrifice, comes through love and selfless service, and you can't get there through wealth and success and power no matter how much of it you have. In fact, you'll even be stripped of the one thing, the one consolation that we have from not having succeeded and being able to pretend that we would have been happy had we got it. They don't even have that, the people who are rich and famous. They can't even pretend.

Hank Smith: 09:56 I've read some of the social [research](#) on money and when you take someone out of poverty, that does have an impact when they can get medicine and they can have somewhere to live. But there does reach a point and no one really wants to accept it where more money does not equal any more happiness, any more satisfaction.

John Bytheway: 10:18 And what you obtain, you have to maintain and suddenly you've got a lot more. Hank, I've told you about this book I heard about

called [Money for Nothing](#), about people who won the lottery. It was like, "This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me." Somebody said, I spend my days with lawyers and lawsuits because he made some bad investments and I thought, wow, isn't that interesting? Fiddler on the Roof when his future son-in-law said riches are God's curse and he said, "May God smite me with it and may I never recover." Remember?

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| Hank Smith: | 10:52 | I think I quoted some of those studies. I was speaking once and a woman raised her hand and said, "Those people just don't know where to shop." Right. If I had that, I would be happy. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 11:07 | Ecclesiastes, I find it spiritually valuable because I think of it as a sort of exorcism. It performs exorcism for us. I've often felt like all my life that I've been haunted by the ghost of a special Adam who follows me everywhere and shadows me with the promise that if I could only work hard enough or be smart enough or be handsome enough or be spiritual enough or whatever, special Adam is perfect Adam who would get what he wanted and deserved getting it. If I could only be special Adam, then I would be happy. |
| John Bytheway: | 11:53 | I'm sorry I'm laughing. It just sounds familiar. It's, I think I have a special John. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 11:58 | Have you met special John? |
| John Bytheway: | 12:00 | He's a dupe, but I follow him sometimes. Yeah. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 12:04 | Exactly. The special Adam is what the dupe loves being duped by. The idea that there's some version of me out there that could or should get what they wanted and deserve getting it, that they would be happy as a result. |
| Hank Smith: | 12:18 | It's a siren. It's a, "Come over here. You will be happy." |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 12:23 | Yeah, and that's, special Adam is not the thing that the gospel promises me to live up to. Special Adam is the thing that the gospel is trying to free me from. The whole idea that I should be special in that way, get what I wanted and be loved and be more important than other people or whatever. And Ecclesiastes performs a kind of exorcism performed here by the preacher as he says, "No, look, here's the ghost of special Adam. He's a sham and he's a lie. It can't work and it won't work. And you can't get there that way. Here's why." I've always found it very powerful and very liberating, very salutary in that respect. I've always been grateful for Ecclesiastes. |

Hank Smith:	13:10	It just seems very liberating.
Dr. Adam Miller:	13:12	To put special John to bed and to just go about the business of living your life and caring for other people. That's the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the kind of freedom and joy that it promises. You have to cut that guy loose. You can't cling to that duping fantasy. You have to let him go.
John Bytheway:	13:32	Those first 11 verses of Ecclesiastes 2, I built this, I built this, and all was vanity. It was nothing. No point. No profit under the sun, I mean.
Dr. Adam Miller:	13:47	You might also think about Ecclesiastes as something like medicine. It's hard medicine that I might need to take in order to feel much better.
John Bytheway:	13:56	To get it.
Dr. Adam Miller:	13:57	Ecclesiastes is not food. You can't live on Ecclesiastes. But especially if you're a certain kind of person who is attached to the idea of your being someone special, which afflicts some of us more than others, then Ecclesiastes could be just the kind of medicine that you need in order to be well enough to eat the real food that the gospel offers. You might need Ecclesiastes, but you'll want to keep it in conversation with Jesus Christ and his teachings. I've often thought, for instance, that the book of Ecclesiastes is an essential pairing with the book of Romans, that if you want to understand what Paul means by grace and the grace of God and how that results in our salvation by way of Jesus Christ, you read Romans against the backdrop of Ecclesiastes and you see the absolute vanity of attempting to save yourself and be someone special, then you pair that with the corresponding offer of adjoining Christ in the work of sacrificing all things to find love and grace. They're two sides of the same coin, Ecclesiastes and Romans, but you need both sides of the coin, or at least most of us need the Ecclesiastes side in addition to the Romans side.
Hank Smith:	15:18	I've read your Grace is Not God's Backup Plan . That was a paraphrase of Romans, was it not?
Dr. Adam Miller:	15:24	I've got a couple of these little paraphrases. One is that paraphrase of Romans, that grace is not God's backup plan. One is my paraphrase of Ecclesiastes, which is called nothing new under the sun. Or I have a third little paraphrase like that, that's a paraphrase of the Song of Songs, of the Song of Solomon. If

people want kind of a way into the song of Solomon, they might try that too.

Hank Smith:	15:49	And those were written by Adam, not special Adam, right?
Dr. Adam Miller:	15:53	Well, special Adam is always lurking. He'd like to get special credit for doing these things.
John Bytheway:	15:58	Brought to you by special Adam. Special Adam.
Dr. Adam Miller:	16:02	I didn't even actually write those books. They're just paraphrases. Yeah. Let's take a look at chapter one verse two, Ecclesiastes.
John Bytheway:	16:10	There it is again.
Dr. Adam Miller:	16:12	You just get the superscription in verse one, the words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, hints at a kind of Solomon-like figure here without coming right out and claiming that it's Solomon himself. But the persona is Solomon-like, and the persona refers to himself here as the preacher. He's going to preach a sermon here to us whether we want to hear it or not about the nature of reality. And the nature of it, as the King James has it, is vanity of vanities saith the preacher, vanity of vanities. All is vanity. Or as the New English translation has it, futile, futile laments the teacher. Absolutely futile. Everything is futile. Or as the NIV has it, meaningless, meaningless. Everything is meaningless. Absolutely meaningless. Or as Alter has it, merest breath. All is mere breath. The word here in Hebrew that gets translated in this whole variety of ways is the word hevel, which the root meaning is something like breath, as Alter gives it here.
	17:29	It's a word used to describe a kind of insubstantial mist. It's a word that's used to describe not breath when you inhale, but breath when you exhale, the kind of waste carbon dioxide that comes out when you exhale, that's hevel. That's what we're talking about here. This is what life is according to the preacher. Everything that's involved in the world, as you and I know it, is in some sense this insubstantial vapor that's a waste product of life that you expel when you exhale your breath. You can't keep it, you can't hold it. It's never going to satisfy you. It's never going to be what you want. It will always slip through your fingers. That's the nature of life, the preacher says.
Hank Smith:	18:27	Such a fun way to start.

Dr. Adam Miller:	18:29	Can you imagine someone up bearing, someone standing up on the fast Sunday and just bearing their testimony? "I know that life is meaningless and futile and everything that we do is vain and mere breath." But in some ways that should be a really important part of our testimonies. It's hard or maybe even impossible to have real hope in Christ, as Paul puts it, unless we've first become hopeless about everything else. We have to put the whole of our heart and mind into our trust that we place in God and stop reserving parts of it or some of it or even the bulk of it for things other than God, hoping that they might be able to make us happy with or without God's intervention, hoping that they might be able to rescue us and satisfy our desires. But at the end of the day, nothing can. The only possible route to happiness is to surrender those desires and love and serve the world as it is the way that God does. Those are the opening lines. Memorable. All timers.
Hank Smith:	19:40	That'll get your attention at least, right?
Dr. Adam Miller:	19:42	Vanity's not a bad translation. You do get the sense, as John noted earlier, of vanity in the sense of a mirror, in the sense that the whole thing is just a hall of mirrors. It's just a game of reflections without any real substance in the sense of a mirror, but also vanity in the sense of things just being futile, like you did that in vain or you took God's name in vain, that sense of vanity as well, where you did it without real, it didn't have any real meaning or substance or intention behind it. All those things combining here in that one same little word, which is the kind of key word at the heart of the whole of Ecclesiastes. Here's what we get in verses 3 through 11 then in this opening section after that initial cry of despair. The preacher says, What benefit do people get from all the effort which they expend on earth?
	20:43	A generation comes and a generation goes, but the earth remains the same through the ages. The sun rises and the sun sets. It hurries away to the place from which it rises again. The wind goes to the south and circles around to the north. Round and round, the wind goes. And on its rounds it returns. All the streams flow into the sea, but the sea is never full and to the place where the streams flow, there they will flow again. All this monotony is tiresome. No one can bear to describe it. The eye is never satisfied with seeing nor is the ear ever content with hearing what exists now is what will be, what has been done is what will be done. There is nothing truly new on the earth. Is there anything about which someone can say, look at this, it's new. It's already been done long ago before our time.

	21:34	No one remembers the former events, nor will anyone remember the events that are yet to happen. They will not be remembered by the future generations. That in cosmological terms is the initial argument where the preacher says, look just at how the world in general works. The sun just goes round and round and it never gets anywhere. The wind just blows in circles and then it leaves and then it comes back again and nothing ever changes. The rivers endlessly empty into the sea, but the sea never gets any more full than it was before that water went in. That's just how life is in general, he says. Nothing new is going to happen here. Whatever it is you do is not going to make any difference with respect to the overall structure of the world. It may feel sometimes like you did something new, but that's just because we have such bad memories that we don't remember what anybody did before, which is really fine because nobody's going to remember what you did anyway.
Hank Smith:	22:37	You're right. This preacher. Not normal for the Bible.
Dr. Adam Miller:	22:44	But it is good medicine for special Adam. You can see how it's meant to perform a kind of exorcism here. If something good happens, as Jesus will say, it's because God did it, not because I did it. If there's something worth remembering here, it's remembering how God delivered us, not that I did something to deserve being delivered because I'm different or special or better than other people. That's not how it works. That's not what memory's for. That's not how satisfaction or joy or happiness is found.
John Bytheway:	23:18	It's great because it's so different.
Dr. Adam Miller:	23:19	You guys are a closet iconoclast. Let me give you one other verse here from chapter one. Then we'll look at what I think is his most wrenching and personal set of confessions in chapter two, then we'll do chapter three. In chapter one, well, it's going to be 14 and 15. The preacher says, I reflected on everything that's accomplished by man on earth, and I concluded, everything he has accomplished is futile. It's all like chasing the wind, or as Alter has it. It's all like herding the wind. What is bent cannot be made straight and what is missing cannot be supplied. It's all like herding the wind as if the whole of life were like herding cats, but the cats weren't even cats. They were just wind.
John Bytheway:	24:16	You don't even get the cats in the end of it, right?
Dr. Adam Miller:	24:19	It's all just everywhere all the time and it's constantly slipping through your fingers and never goes where you want it. If you

think that your happiness depends on getting it to go where you want it to go, good luck, the preacher says. It's not going to happen. Then we get in chapter two, almost what we could describe in philosophical terms as a kind of reductio ad absurdum. Are you familiar with this term? A reductio ad absurdum is the argument in which you prove that something cannot be the case by showing how absurd it would be, were it to be the case. You prove the contrary by the absurdity of the proposed example. So he's going to give us an example of that here now. He's going to offer us a little case study that will put all of our fantasies to rest by showing us what would happen even if all of our fantasies came true.

25:17 You think you're sad because you're not getting what you wanted, but let's say you did get what you wanted, the preacher proposes. What would happen then? And then he runs us through what happened to him when he did get everything he wanted. That's chapter two. I'm just going to give this to you more or less straight here. I think it's worth the investment. Verse one, chapter two. "I thought to myself, come now, I will try self-indulgent pleasure to see if it's worthwhile." And he did, but I found that it is also futile. I said of partying, it's folly and of self-indulgent pleasure, it accomplishes nothing. I thought deeply about the effects of indulging myself with wine. All the while my mind was guiding me with wisdom and the effects of behaving foolishly so that I might discover what is profitable for people to do during the days of their lives.

26:14 I increased my possessions. I built houses for myself. I planted vineyards for myself. I designed royal gardens and parks for myself. I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I constructed pools of water for myself to irrigate my grove of flourishing trees. I purchased male and female slaves. I owned slaves who were born in my own house. I possessed more livestock, both herds and flocks than any of my predecessors in Jerusalem. I also amassed silver and gold for myself, as well as valuable treasures taken from kingdoms and provinces. I acquired male singers and female singers for myself. What gives a man sensual delight, a harem of beautiful concubines.

26:57 So I was far wealthier than all my predecessors in Jerusalem, yet I maintained my objectivity. I did not restrain myself, he says, from getting whatever I wanted. I didn't deny myself anything that would bring me pleasure, so all my accomplishments gave me joy. This was my reward for all my effort, yet when I reflected on everything I had accomplished and on all the effort that I had expended to accomplish it, I concluded all these achievements and possessions are ultimately profitless, like

		chasing the wind. There is nothing gained from them on the earth.
John Bytheway:	27:35	Well, clearly he just didn't try hard enough, right?
Dr. Adam Miller:	27:41	The 10 verse long litany of all of the pleasures and toys and satisfactions and successes that you could possibly earn or achieve or acquire or amass as a human being, he lays it all out for us and he says, look, I had it all, doesn't work. It's as futile and vain as any of the rest of it, and it all slips through your fingers just as surely as just a small portion of it would. And if there's any happiness to be found, you're not going to find it here. Of course, we don't believe him.
Hank Smith:	28:17	Yeah, I was going to say, "Well, then let me try this experiment. Give me all the money in the world and let me...
Dr. Adam Miller:	28:23	We would all be happy to rerun the experiment back. See for ourselves, but his testimony is, no, it's all vain. It's all futile. It's all meaningless.
John Bytheway:	28:35	What's the old saying ? The tragedy isn't that you failed. The tragedy is that you succeeded at something that doesn't matter.
Dr. Adam Miller:	28:45	Yeah, that's a lot of our lives. Number one, we don't succeed. Most of us just fail most of the time, in large respect. But even when we do succeed, the things that we tend to succeed at don't actually matter at the end of the day and didn't deserve what we invested in them.
Hank Smith:	29:02	You climbed the ladder of success only to find it was leaning against the wrong wall.
Dr. Adam Miller:	29:10	Yeah, that's the message here. Wrong wall. Doesn't matter how good you are or how fast you climb or how much you get. It's the wrong wall.
John Bytheway:	29:17	On that happy note.
Hank Smith:	29:21	What did C.S. Lewis say that it's not even getting stuff that we love, it's having more of it than other people?
Dr. Adam Miller:	29:28	The more stuff you have, the more obviously true that becomes to you. Really, all you care about is the fact that you have something that other people don't, not the fact that you have it. It's a real indictment, but this is meant to be good news. If you pair it with what Jesus Christ has to say as an alternative, the

preacher does not lay out the alternative here, which is why we tend to find him so hard to bear and so distasteful. He doesn't say, look, there's a whole separate thing you can do. It's called gospel of Jesus Christ, in which instead of losing everything inevitably, you sacrifice everything on purpose willingly. That's the gospel of Jesus Christ, but he doesn't lay that out. All he points out is the fact that you're going to lose it all inevitably, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ in part. But you have to pair that kind of world with then a certain sort of religion that Jesus is advocating in response. But you can't get there without realizing that the preacher is also right. Then you need that medicine. You have to take that medicine first. You have to be hopeless about everything but Jesus in order to put all of your hope in Jesus.

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| Hank Smith: | 30:42 | Adam, as we move into Ecclesiastes chapter three, I figured out sometime in high school, maybe it was in college, that if I didn't have time to read my scriptures, at least I could turn on the song by The Byrds, right? Turn, turn, turn. And I thought, that whole song is scripture. I read some scripture today as I listened to Ecclesiastes chapter three. It actually got me interested when I first heard that song. I was interested in, what is this? I found out it was in the Bible. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 31:16 | Did you know that as a teenager, that The Byrds song Turn, Turn, Turn was from Ecclesiastes? |
| Hank Smith: | 31:21 | When I figured that out, I figured it would be scripture study. It took me a second before I thought. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 31:26 | You were way ahead of the curve as a teenager. |
| Hank Smith: | 31:28 | Yeah. I was like, "Oh, I'm going to go find out where this came from." And that was without the internet. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 31:33 | You had to do actual research? |
| Hank Smith: | 31:35 | I had to do some work, yeah. Because I just thought the lyrics were so odd to this song. Found out it was scripture. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 31:41 | There are two poems embedded here in Ecclesiastes. One we get here at the beginning of chapter three, which is then becomes the lyrics for that famous song by the Byrds. And then the other we'll come to in a minute here, we get in the final chapter of Ecclesiastes. But yeah, those famous lines from the opening verses of chapter three, "To everything, there is a season, a time to every purpose under heaven, a time to be |

born, a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to kill, a time to heal, a time to break down, a time to build up, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together. A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.

32:31 A time to get and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to rend and a time to sow. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time of war and a time of peace. That's the song. Especially out of context, it seems like the preacher's going a little soft on us here as he reminisces nostalgically about how everything has a time and a season and it all has its place and it all has its moment in the sun. But that's not actually what he's after here at all.

Hank Smith: 33:08 I was going to say there's something coming.

Dr. Adam Miller: 33:11 Yeah. His point in running us through all these continual transformations of one thing into its opposite, love into hate, getting into losing, keeping into casting away, being born into dying. His point in running us through that whole circular litany is to draw the conclusion that he does in verse nine. What profit then hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth? Because everything, as he outlined in the opening verses, everything comes back to the place where it started. Nothing changed and nothing mattered and it didn't make any difference. It's such a happy, cheery song, The Byrds song, especially when you hear the music in the back of your head as you run through the lyrics. But that's not what the preacher had in mind with those verses.

Hank Smith: 34:08 He wouldn't love the song. He'd be like, "Wait, wait, wait. Tell the end."

Dr. Adam Miller: 34:11 Yeah. I don't think verse nine is in the song, is it?

Hank Smith: 34:14 Yeah, it's not. Everything just goes back to the way it was. I love it. Those stones that you threw, they all gathered together again at some point.

John Bytheway: 34:24 And maybe the newspaper, The Times and Seasons in Church History was drawn from this phrase at the beginning.

Dr. Adam Miller: 34:32 Oh, that's a good question.

Hank Smith:	34:34	Yeah. Times and Seasons.
Dr. Adam Miller:	34:37	Yeah, I don't know. I don't know where that phrase came from for the newspaper. The end of chapter three, verses 18 to 22, the preacher goes out of his way here to point out something that is obviously true, like so many of these things that we really tend not to like to hear, but is perhaps quite important to hear. He says in verse 18, "I also thought to myself, it's for the sake of people so God can clearly show them that they are like animals. For the fate of humans and the fate of animals are the same. As one dies, so dies the other. Both have the same breath. There is no advantage for humans over animals, for both are fleeting. Both go to the same place, both come from the dust and to dust both return. Who really knows if the human spirit ascends upward and the animal's spirit descends into the earth?"
	35:39	So I perceive there's nothing better than for people to enjoy their work because that's their reward for who can show them what the future holds." This too, I think, harsh but perhaps helpful medicine to reckon with the fact that in some weird, strange way, what it means to be a son or daughter of God, at least in part, means being a mammal. That what I am is an animal. I'm a kind of animal. It's true that I have a divine nature, but this divine nature is of a peace somehow with the fact that I, like an animal, am made of dust, am born and will die, get hungry, get thirsty, have instincts, suffer all manner of biological processes and indignities and hormonal pushes and pulls that I didn't ask for and can't control.
	36:47	Part of what it would mean to reconcile with the reality of what I am as a human being, instead of just being duped by the fantasy of what I think I ought to be instead would be to reckon with the truth of how my being an animal is not incompatible with my being a son of God, that I have to understand the truth and reality of both of those things in order to understand the truth and reality of either of them. That's something I think we're often quite reluctant to do because we're so attached to our fantasies of a special Adam who would not be an animal and suffer all the indignities that go along with being an animal when the reality is get rid of it or be ashamed about it.
Hank Smith:	37:32	It seems that in a way, the preacher is describing the fall of Adam, that we now experience this world and it's very fleeting. And President Benson , he said , "Just as man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ." Maybe Ecclesiastes is doing that for me, helping me understand why I need Christ. No one adequately and properly knows why they

need Christ until they understand and accept the doctrine of the fall and its effect upon all mankind. Maybe that's part of what Ecclesiastes does is it shows me what the fall really is, what reality really is.

- John Bytheway: 38:19 What is vanity and what is lasting and eternal and permanent? What is lasting? If all this is vanity, well, what isn't vanity then?
- Hank Smith: 38:29 Yeah, Adam said he doesn't give us the alternative.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 38:33 Yeah, he doesn't sketch that out for us here. But it's easy, of course, as fallen people who suffer from our own ignorance and our own love of our own ignorance, it's easy to fall in love with a false idea of what salvation would look like. It's easy to fall in love with a false idea of what salvation itself would involve. It's easy to think that, well, if the problem here is that I suffer from my unsatisfied desires, then the solution must be that God will satisfy my desires.
- Hank Smith: 39:08 It's why we talk about mansions, right? And streets paved with gold.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 39:12 Exactly. When it turns out as Jesus describes it, the only adequate response to our losing everything is to just go ahead and sacrifice everything. That's tough medicine piled on top of tough truth, but it turns out works and is salvific and is redemptive and is profoundly liberating and deeply joyful and avoids all of the problems that come from trying to solve things in a backwards way that defies the truth about God and that defies the truth about the world.
- Hank Smith: 39:45 Adam, that actually brings me to my second question I had quite a ways back.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 39:51 Foreshadowed.
- Hank Smith: 39:52 Yes, yes. When you started to tell us about, you know, Ecclesiastes and how fleeting and vain and meaningless, what we're chasing, what, you know, what we think will make us happy, then you said the antidote or the answer is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It makes me think of the Savior's calling, seeing it in a different way. So when the Savior, you gave the example of He says to the man, "Will you sell all that you have, give to the poor and come follow me?" By the end of Ecclesiastes, wouldn't the preacher say, "Sure," because all of that is meaningless anyway. Almost the Savior is saying, "Do you see those things

for what they really are? Because if you do, this is not a difficult question. I'm actually offering you substance."

- Dr. Adam Miller: 40:46 I think that's exactly right. It's the kind of test to see if the young man can look beyond his desires to see the truth of the world and the truth of himself as part of it. And he can't, at least not yet. But who's going to pass that test? I'm doubtful. I don't think I am passing that test as we speak. It is being given to me. I'm not passing it, but that is the test, yeah.
- Hank Smith: 41:14 There does seem to be a wisdom at the end of life, which is kind of sad, but President Oaks, Good, Better, Best. He talked about breadwinning. He said, "Many breadwinners worry that their occupations leave too little time for their families. There's no easy formula for this contest of priorities. However, I have never known a man who looked back on his life and said, I just didn't spend enough time with my job." It does seem at the end of life, there's at least a wisdom of where I wished I would have spent my time.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 41:47 With all of your getting, get understanding, you may have to get other things along the way, but at least with that getting, still get understanding. You may have to go to work, but you can still perform even that professional work as an act of love and sacrifice and consecration, not as an act of acquisition in the hope of satisfying your desires. All of that's hopeless. Even if you succeed, it'll be more hopeless than you thought it ever was.
- Hank Smith: 42:16 The despair of getting everything you ever wanted. I wrote that down.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 42:21 Yeah, please. That's Ecclesiastics.
- John Bytheway: 42:24 I'm thinking of Job again who said, "Naked came I into this world and naked I'll go out." And then what do you have at that point? I like that there's been kind of more of an emphasis, at least I perceive it, on becoming, not just what we know, but what we have become. It's the thing that beats me up. My, what did you call it?
- Hank Smith: 42:45 Special John.
- Dr. Adam Miller: 42:46 The ghost.
- John Bytheway: 42:48 My special John beats me up. My special John reads the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13 and says, Okay, you've read

more books. You've served in more callings, but are you more charitable? And I'm not sure if I am. So that idea of what have I become, that's all you got when you leave because all the rest Ecclesiastes is teaching me is vanity. So Job says, Okay, now I leave, now what have I actually. Where was my ladder leaning and all that stuff? That's a good place to be, but it's a little frightening to me. Yeah. If I could move mount- what does Paul say if he had, could move mountains and had all knowledge and faith that you could move mountains and you gave your body to be burned but you didn't have charity, that's the one that pushes me against the wall.

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| Dr. Adam Miller: | 43:40 | It's hevel. It's vanity. It's futility. It's meaningless. Yeah, 1 Corinthians 13 is an excellent companion here for the book of Ecclesiastes. Paul is making the exact same point that the preacher is making, but in a deeper, fuller context. |
| Hank Smith: | 43:54 | Adam, you said earlier that wisdom is loving your enemies. Can you talk about that a little more? How does Ecclesiastes get me there? Well, with its compliment or with its answer, the gospel. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 44:09 | John noted early on in our discussion today that as useful as the book of Proverbs can be, it also can be a trap because it can build into your way of thinking about the world the expectation that if I do X, Y will for sure happen, that there is a mechanical quality to the world and perhaps even especially a mechanical quality of quid pro quo to the gospel, such that if I obey X or Y or Z, I will get the thing that I wanted, A, B, or C, money into the vending machine, object of desire out of the vending machine. Exactly. It's easy to fall into that trap when we're thinking not just about worldly things, but thinking about religious things. The expectation that there's a kind of symmetry between my actions and the possibility of satisfaction. The point of the book of Ecclesiastes is to disabuse you profoundly, deeply, repeatedly. |
| Hank Smith: | 45:17 | It's the exorcism. |
| Dr. Adam Miller: | 45:18 | Without mercy. To disabuse you of the idea that any such symmetry exists between how the world is and what you want the world to be, which can be profoundly liberating and useful. It breaks that set of expectations that I could treat the laws or commandments of the world or of the gospel as a way of getting the reward that I wanted, to bring it back to that way of framing. I can't treat obeying the law of love as a way of getting the reward I wanted, even if the reward I thought I wanted was love because God's law does not have that structure of quid pro quo. God's own law has the same asymmetrical structure that |

the preacher is showing us is at work in the world. That asymmetrical structure is captured by Jesus's commandment to love our enemy. If you do good, good may happen in response to your doing good, but it might not.

46:20 Even if it doesn't, you are still commanded to do good. And if someone hasn't done good to you, if someone has actively done evil to you, you are still commanded to respond with good. You are still commanded to love in response to that. There's a kind of asymmetry at the heart of this kind of unconditional gesture of love and sacrifice and forgiveness and surrender that can easily be obscured by the fantasy of there being some kind of controllable symmetrical balancing of the scales when really what's called for here is sacrifice, not just of some things, of everything, not just in the hope of getting what we'll want, but for the sake of loving everyone else. That's the gospel.

Hank Smith: 47:10 Correct my thinking here, both of you. When the Lord says, give your life, give up your life and you'll find it, it's not even the same life that you think you want when you get it back. It's like give up your desires and you'll have them and you find out your desires have changed.

Dr. Adam Miller: 47:28 The trade on offer is give up your desires and you can have mine instead. That's also the trade on offer with respect to our lives. Give up your life, Jesus says, not that you'll get your life back, but that if I give up my life, he says you can have mine. Then I take up his life. I take up his name. I live my life as if I were him. Then he takes care of whatever was me, quote unquote. He's not offering here the opportunity for me to save my life. He's offering me the opportunity to live his life. That offer always stands and is always available and it's unconditional. Join him at any moment. He's ready and able and willing.

Hank Smith: 48:12 When I get to heaven, I think, oh, finally I get all my desires fulfilled. He says, oh no, that wasn't.

John Bytheway: 48:18 Not so fast, my friend.

Hank Smith: 48:19 That was not part of it.

Dr. Adam Miller: 48:22 No, that's not what he was offering at all. What will you do in heaven? You'll spend eternity ministering to other people, which is what God does. You won, you were saved, you became just like God. Congratulations. It will forever and always never

		be about you. Dislike it forever and always is never for God about God.
John Bytheway:	48:43	You'll bring to past the immortality eternal life of others.
Dr. Adam Miller:	48:47	Yeah, that will be your whole souled work forever without a thought to yourself.
Hank Smith:	48:55	Being a philosopher has to be so unsatisfying.
Dr. Adam Miller:	49:00	Yes. Right? Yeah. But the thing is that I tried not being a philosopher and it's also unsatisfying.
Hank Smith:	49:05	Yeah.
Dr. Adam Miller:	49:09	You have to give up, you have to give up on the idea of satisfaction.
John Bytheway:	49:13	The reducto absurdum, whatever that was.
Dr. Adam Miller:	49:17	Yeah, exactly. Reductio ad absurdum. Would you like this closing poem from Ecclesiastes? This is originally the closing words here of the book, chapter 12 verses one through eight. They go like this. "Remember you're a creator in the days of your youth before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain, when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred, then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him before the silver cord is severed and the golden bowl is broken, before the picture is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Meaningless. Meaningless, says the teacher. Everything is meaningless.
Hank Smith:	50:35	I can hear the silence in the room after he gives this. And I can see someone being uncomfortable enough to stand up and say. And moreover, because the preacher was lies, right?
Dr. Adam Miller:	50:49	The member of the bishopric adds a little grace note.
Hank Smith:	50:54	A member of the bishopric gives his concluding thoughts. Oh, that's funny.
John Bytheway:	50:58	Did you have anything, President? Yeah, just a minute.

Dr. Adam Miller:	51:01	But there is something to be said for what Mormon calls sobriety, for a capacity for a certain sort of soberness, for being able to look all of this loss and suffering and death in the eye rather than avoid it and pretend it's not the case. Or there's something to be said for what in that same spirit we might call a kind of divine melancholy that doesn't succumb to hopelessness because it retains hope in Christ, but still with clear eyes sees the hopelessness in all the things that we normally place our hope in. That is an important divine attribute that I think God himself embodies, this capacity for divine melancholy that tinges and colors everything that he sees and understands about the world because he has absorbed and experienced the whole of all of the suffering and all of the universe from beginning to end without avoiding it or running from it or imagining that it wasn't the case, but took it on and changed it, transformed it, redeemed it by sacrificing in response to it. That kind of divine life is hard work, but it's also at the end of the day, as the preacher says, the only kind of life that would be possible that was worth living.
Hank Smith:	52:30	Adam, Dr. Miller, thanks for your time today.
Dr. Adam Miller:	52:33	My pleasure.
Hank Smith:	52:33	Thank you. It's always. John, what'd you call it? Mind expanding, soul expanding?
John Bytheway:	52:38	Yeah. I want to talk again.
Dr. Adam Miller:	52:40	Patience testing.
John Bytheway:	52:41	It's been great. Yeah. No, I'm going to have a talk with special John, but yeah, this has been great.
Hank Smith:	52:48	Yeah. You've got to go away for a while. With that, we want to thank Dr. Adam Miller for joining us today. It has been beautifully difficult, good, harsh medicine. We want to thank our executive producer, Shannon Sorensen, our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen. And every episode, we remember our founder, Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. The timeout is over and we head back in to the Old Testament on followHIM. As a thank you to our wonderful listeners, we'd love to gift you the digital version of our book, Finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. It offers short, meaningful insights drawn from our past Old Testament episodes. Visit followhim.co , that's followhim.co , to download your free copy today, and you'll also find the link to purchase the print edition. Thank you for being

part of our followHIM family. Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, Heather Barlow, Amelia Kabwika, Sydney Smith, and Annabelle Sorensen.

followHIM Favorites



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| Hank Smith: | 00:03 | <p>Welcome to followHIM Favorites. This is where John and I share a single story to go with each week's Come, Follow Me lesson. John, we are in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and I have a story for you. A couple of stories, actually. It says in Ecclesiastes chapter three that there is a time to laugh.</p> |
| John Bytheway: | 00:19 | <p>I'm so glad.</p> |
| Hank Smith: | 00:20 | <p>I love this phrase. We should just do a full segment every week, John, called A Time to Laugh. You and I both, we love to laugh. I'm going to tell you a story from Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, then I'm going to tell you a time to laugh story about one of my friends. So here's the Joseph B. Wirthlin story. It's in Come What May and Love It. He talks about you have to learn to laugh, right, in life. He said, "I remember when one of our daughters went on a blind date. She was all dressed up waiting for her date to arrive when the doorbell rang. In walked a man who seemed a little old, but she tried to be polite. She introduced him to me and my wife and to the other children, then she put on her coat and went out to the door. We watched, she got into the car, but the car didn't move. Eventually, she got out of the car and red-faced, ran back into the house.</p> |
| | 01:08 | <p>The man that she thought was her blind date had actually come to pick up another of our daughters who had agreed to be a babysitter for him and his wife. He said we had a good laugh over that. In fact, we couldn't stop laughing. Later when our daughter's real blind date showed up, I couldn't come out to meet him because I was still in the kitchen laughing." Now, this is the part I love. "Our daughter could have been upset and embarrassed and humiliated, but she laughed with us." Well, I have a story just like that about one of my friends. Her name is Holland. And she told me a story and instead of being embarrassed or frustrated, she laughed and I laughed. And so I'm hoping, John, that this one might make you laugh.</p> |

	01:51	My friend Holland, when she was a brand new temple goer, so she had gone through the temple for the first time in December. Well, a week later, her aunt and uncle were getting sealed in the temple and so she wanted to go. Her parents couldn't make it there, so she was going to go on her own. And she was not very versed in temple lingo. She showed up late and on the way over, she was on the bus, she was searching her purse for her temple recommend. It was all going wrong. You have to think that she's kind of new at the temple to understand how this story is so funny to me. She gets there late. The sealing is at 12:30 and she arrives right at 12:30. Now, most people know you've got to be there early and right, she was running late and she runs into the temple, goes to the entry desk there and says, "I..." She says, she says, "My sealing is right now and I don't have my temple recommend. You're going to need to look me up."
	02:53	The person at the desk was kind of startled and he said - Your sealing? He said, "Your sealing is right now and just..." She said, "Yes, like in the next two minutes. And I don't have my temple recommend, you're going to need to look me up." To which the man at the recommend desk said, "Is your fiance here?" Now, my friend Holland does not connect what she said to what he said, right? Again, she's brand new at this. And she said, uh, I don't know. Because she doesn't have a fiance, so he could be there.
John Bytheway:	03:28	Maybe.
Hank Smith:	03:29	So she said, "I don't, I don't know." And he said to her, "Okay, you don't know if your fiance is here. Okay." and he said, now, you'll understand this a little bit later, John, so go with me on this. He said, "Are you sure that you've been, gone through the endowment? Are you sure you're endowed?" And she said, "Yes, what? Of course." Now, luckily, there was a friend of hers there who said, "Yeah, she's endowed. I was at her session, you know, last week." They finally got it worked out that, "Oh, it's not your sealing." Now, to be fair, we talk about, like, my session, right, our session. Right, right. So she just figured my sealing, our sealing. He said, "Well, you are in sealing room two. You know, you got to go around the corner." She went around the corner, the sealing doors are shut, which usually means, "Hey, don't come in." But she doesn't know that, right?
	04:28	She doesn't know that. So she opens the door, and there's the sealer, and he's speaking. And he looks at her like, "Oh, okay, hi." She said, "I'm sorry I'm late," you know, and she came in and there's no chairs, John, there's no chairs. So he says, "Oh,

no problem, no problem. Let's just have you sit here." And he had the bride and groom with their parents, you know, on the little couch there, had them move over. So he just said, "We'll have you sit right here." So they all, you know, kind of moved down and she sat there on the little loveseat, which again, she doesn't know would be an odd thing. Well, as she's sitting there, the sealer resumes his, what he's doing. As she's sitting there, she looks around the room going, "I don't know these people." And she looks down at the bride and groom thinking she'd see her aunt and uncle, and the bride and groom are looking at her and she says -

John Bytheway:	05:23	Who are you?
Hank Smith:	05:23	Don't know them either. Okay, now she doesn't know what to do. Again, she's brand new at this. So she stands up again and the sealer stops again and looks at her. She did not know what to say, John. She's just, she's the most wonderful girl. She was embarrassed. She did not know what to say. So she looked at the bride and groom and the sealer and said, "Congratulations." And turned around and left. John, she found the correct sealing room and it was open still. She went to the wrong one.
John Bytheway:	05:56	Oh, good. Right.
Hank Smith:	05:57	Yes. And her aunt and uncle are there and all of her family saying, "Where have you been?" She said, "I'm, you know, I'm so sorry." And she sat down. Now, John, at that point, I thought the story was over.
John Bytheway:	06:09	You mean it isn't?
Hank Smith:	06:09	The story's not over. The story's not over. On her way out of the sealing, her uncle Shane grabs her, pulls her aside and says, "Hey, why is your mouth bright blue?"
John Bytheway:	06:21	Oh, no.
Hank Smith:	06:23	And she said, "What?" He said, "Your mouth, it, your teeth, your tongue, your lips, they're all blue. Why are they all blue?" And she said, "No, they're not." And she found a mirror and sure enough, her lips and teeth and tongue were very, very bright blue because as she was searching for her temple recommend, she had found like a, like a blue candy, you know, a, a blue raspberry fruit roll up, something that in her purse that as she just, you know, she was so hungry she put it in her mouth and it turned her mouth bright blue. Now, John, let's review the entire

story knowing what we now know. She ran into the temple with a bright blue mouth and said to the man at the temple at the desk, "My sealing is in, is right now, but I don't have my temple recommend, so you're going to have to look me up." Then I can see why he said, Are you sure that you're supposed to be right?

07:20 Are you sure you're endowed? Then she went to the wrong sealing room with a bright blue mouth. Bright blue teeth, sat on the couch with the family.

John Bytheway: 07:31 With the couple. Oh, man.

Hank Smith: 07:34 Did not know who they were, stood up. Everyone looked at her and she said, "Congratulations." And turned around and laughed. I am crying as she's telling me this story. I am laughing so hard and she is laughing with me. Like it, she is having fun too. She's like, "Isn't that just the most wild thing?" Oh, John, we laughed and laughed about it. And, I still laugh. I think about it, you know when I go to a temple sealing, I think, what would it be like for a girl to walk in with bright blue lips and say, "Congratulations." And then turn around and leave. But the reason I love it is because the, as Ecclesiastes says here, there is a time to laugh. You know, President Hinckley was really good at this. He said "In all of living, have much fun and laughter." Do you remember him saying that? "Life is to be enjoyed," he would say.

John Bytheway: 08:27 One time after a conference talk, he said, "And after my remarks, we will sing Where Can I Turn for Peace." And then he went, "It makes you wonder who came up with this program to think I was going to stir up trouble."

Hank Smith: 08:40 He was so good. He was so good at that. So we hope this week you take a time to laugh. Now, come join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. We are with Dr. Adam Miller this week. He is a philosopher. A world-class philosopher. And what he does with these chapters is not only fun, but just mind expanding. You'll see things you, you've never seen before. You'll think of life, honestly, in a way you never have before. And then come back here next week. We'll do another followHIM Favorites.