

## What's In the Box

January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016

About a month ago, I received a **post card in the mail from a local supermarket** letting me know about their new home delivery service.

- At first, my only question was **how much something like that would cost**. But, surprisingly, it wasn't all that expensive.
- I then **wondered who would actually use it**. But then I notice how they addressed the postcard. In fact, how they addressed it explains why someone might use it.

You see, the postcard didn't have my name on it... instead; it was simply addressed, ***"Dear Time Pressed Family"***.

- I looked at that and thought, ***"Man, did they get that right!"*** As a society, we are **revved-up, stressed-out, and overscheduled**.
- In so many ways, we've **exceeded our maximum capacity** for what we can handle and we ready to collapse.

It seems at times that **every moment of the day** is spent trying to meet the demands of **work, school, relationships, finances**, or just the **daily responsibilities** that we have at home.

- Maybe this will catch on... no more driving to the supermarket, no more **long shopping lines**, no **looking for a parking space!**
- There are too many **things** we already have to do; too many **responsibilities** to be met;
- too many **obligations** to be carried out, too many **things we want to do**, and there just isn't enough time.

We kid around saying, ***"Man, I wish the Game of Life came with instructions."*** But, do you know what? It does!

- In fact, I've got the directions right here (from the game of LIFE) and what it says is that the **object of the game** is to...
- ***"collect money & LIFE tiles & have the highest dollar amount at the end of game."***
- The problem is that while money can **buy a house**, it can't buy a **home**. Money can **buy a bed**, but it can't buy you any **sleep**.
- Money can **buy a clock**, but it can't buy you more **time**. Money can **buy just about anything**, but it can't always buy you **joy**.

You see, as we think about this for our own lives, **we need to consider that LIFE really has to be more than just “collecting money and LIFE tiles”.**

- But, if money isn't the bottom-line, then as we continue each day through this “game of life,” how do we even know if we're getting ahead?
- How will we even know, at the end of our lives, if we've even won? What will we measure our lives by in order to determine whether it's been a “win, loss, or draw”?

It's got to be more than just **buying more time** or **earning more money** or having a **big bank account**.

- It has to be more than just **doing well** or **having good relationships** or **staying healthy** or **being well-entertained**.
- You see, for everything else to make sense, there **needs to be something underneath all of that...** a single underlying purpose to LIFE.

Back in October, I talked about a scene from City Slickers that captures what I'm getting at here.

- Well, rather than mention it again, I'll just show it. **[show clip of Curly & Mitch: “One Thing.”]**
- **“Do you know what the secret of life is? One Thing... just one thing!”**
- That doesn't mean that there aren't many important things we should embrace or invest our time in.
- It just means that underneath all of *those* things needs to be a **single underlying purpose** that brings **perspective and meaning and direction** to everything else.

If you look in the seat pocket in front of you, **you'll notice a mysterious “sticky note”... and that sticky note represents a box... and that box represents your life.**

- And there's something I'd like you to write in the center of that box → It's the answer to a question... **“What is the ultimate purpose of your life?”**

- That is, how we will define what that **single, ultimate purpose of life... what that “One Thing”** really is.
- I know... it’s pretty heavy question for a Sunday morning! But, my hope is that **as we leave today**, we’ll each have a clearer sense of how we might fill in that box...

You know, it’s always a beautiful and miraculous thing whenever a new life is born into this world.

- And yet, as you hold that new baby in your arms, **how do you know what it’s here for?**
- 19 years ago, Joyce and I found out that we were going to bring a new life into the world.
- And as much as that might have terrified others, it was such an exciting time for us!

One of the things that we did to prepare for that moment was to go through childbirth classes together... where I learned about being a “Coach” for my wife.

- Our instructor, a mother of sixteen or so kids, gave us a lot of advice.
- For instance, one of the things she told me was that I **should never use the word “pain”**.

So, instead of asking Joyce if she was experiencing **multiple waves of earth shattering pain**, I should simply ask, “Are you experiencing any discomfort?”

- But, then the day came when Joyce went into labor with Rebecca. It lasted fourteen hours.
- I remember looking at the monitor... knowing that every time the chart spiked, she was getting hit by a wave of pain.

Well, at one point, the thing was spiking off the charts. so, I leaned over her a bit and,

- with nothing but a sincere and caring heart, I asked her... **“Joyce, are you experiencing some discomfort?”**
- And with that, she opened her eyes and **gave me a look that could have melted Alaska!**

- Bit, in spite of all that “discomfort,” this **beautiful, tiny, purple, cone-headed baby girl**... was born!
- Seeing Joyce hold Rebecca for the first time... after all she had just gone through... is one of my favorite memories.

You see, **what makes the pain of childbirth bearable**— what allows people to go through the pain— **is the purpose that lies on the other side**.

- While we might never know what that purpose is this side of heaven, there is purpose to it.
- And if we’re going to **not just “survive” but “thrive” at the Game of Life**... we need to understand what that purpose is.

Listen... if someone asks you, ***“When were you born?”*** of course you’ll have an answer to that question.

- But a much deeper... and a much more important question is, ***“Why were you born?”***
- Why don’t they print that on your birth certificate?

**An alarm clock** will tell you when to get up every morning; but why is it that an alarm clock **can’t tell you why? Why should you get up?**

- You see, the real tragedy in this life is ***not when somebody suffers***... Truth is, we’re all going to suffer to one degree or another.
- The real tragedy is when somebody goes through **life without ever really understanding what the purpose of his or her life** is really about.

A Texas businessman named **Bob Buford** had reached all of the goals that he had set for himself by the time he was in his early forties.

- He was the **President** and **CEO** of a tremendously **successful cable TV company**; he had a **happy marriage**;
- he had a **beautiful home**; he had a **lot of toys**;
- He was; he was ***independently wealthy*** and very much ***financially secure***.

And yet, in spite of all of that... in spite of how successful he was in the eyes of others, he simply wasn’t satisfied.

- **He just didn't have a real sense of purpose in his life..**
- **So, he hired a consultant**—a very bright business consultant—to meet with him and his wife Linda.
- **This consultant, named Mike**, took a sheet of paper and sketched a box on it. Then he asked Bob & Linda a question, **“What’s in the box for you?”**

They weren't sure what he meant... so Mike told them about a time that he had worked with Coca Cola, who had decided that the main thing their company was about was *Great Taste*.

- That led them to develop a product called “New Coke.” Does anyone remember “New Coke?” The problem was that “New Coke” was not catching on.
- Mike said to the Coke guys, *“One of the reasons New Coke was a disaster was that you put the wrong words in the box.”*
- So he asked them again... ***“What’s the driving force for which you exist?”***

They went back to the drawing board, and the new phrase that they came up with was *American tradition*. We're about ***“American tradition.”***

- That led them to go back to “Classic Coke,” which led to their recovery.
- Mike told this story to Bob and Linda and said to them, *“You have to be real clear on the central purpose of your life. I’ve talked with you long enough and have gotten to know you well enough to know that it’s one of two things: It’s **either money** (he drew a dollar sign), or it’s **Jesus Christ** (he drew a cross).”* And then he asked them: *“What’s in the box?”*

Bob writes, ***“No one had ever put such a significant question to me so directly. I sat there stunned by the implications of this decision.”***

- Would we have to give away all our money? Would we be required to dress like a missionary in Africa?
- As a result of all of this, Bob wrote a best-selling book called *Halftime*. **It’s about wrestling with this question...**
- Because every human being born into this world has to answer the question, *“What are you going to put in the box?”*

You look at people in **history** or **those making news today** and just by looking at their life you can pretty much figure out what's in their box. For example...

- **Hugh Hefner** – a lot of you know Hugh Hefner, the longtime publisher of Playboy Magazine. What do you think Hugh Hefner would say goes in the box? Probably he would say **Sex**.
- **Lebron James** – I'm no basketball fan... but when a player wins **NBA MVP 4 out of 5 years**, you kind of know what he would put in the box? Winning!
- **Donald Trump**: What do you think Donald Trump would say goes in the box? Money. Lots of Money.
- Do you remember **Imelda Marcos**? She was the First Lady of the Philippines for 20 years. What do you think Imelda Marcos would put in the box? Shoes! It's a Shoe Box!

And yet, reaching further back into human history, **there was one man who devoted his life** to an experiment—

- to figure out **what he would need to write in that box** in order for a life to be lived well.
- And thousands of years later, people still read the book that this man wrote.
- It's called **The Book of Ecclesiastes**, and it is found between **Proverbs** and the **Song of Solomon** in the Old Testament.

Ecclesiastes begins by saying that **“These are the words of the teacher.”**

- Eugene Peterson, in his translation of the Bible called The Message, calls this man **“The Questor.”**
- He calls the book **The Words of the Questor** because this man, named Solomon, is **on a quest to find out what belongs in the box...** to discover for himself what life is ultimately about.

Now, Solomon was in a unique position to carry out this kind of an experiment, because he had **wealth** and **power** and **ability** that exceeded those of anyone else on the planet.

- And keep in mind... this quest for Solomon **wasn't a joke**. In fact, throughout Ecclesiastes, he continues to **emphasize just how devoted he was to this task**.

- You see, once he put something in the box, he didn't play games. **He walked as far down that road as any person could go.**
- In fact, Ecclesiastes is essentially an account of these various quests.

He begins by putting **human wisdom in the box.**

He says in Ecclesiastes 1:13, ***"I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is under heaven."***

- He became really smart. We are told in 1 Kings 4:29 that Solomon's wisdom was ***"greater than the wisdom of all the peoples of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt,"*** which was renowned for being a place of wisdom.
- His reputation for intelligence was so great that the Queen of Sheba (present day Yemin) travels to Israel to see for herself.
- In fact, she comes to ask him all these hard questions in order to test him.

She is so amazed by his wisdom that we're told in 1 Kings 10:5 that ***"It took her breath away, and there was no spirit left in her."***

- And she says to him, ***"How happy your people must be! How happy your officials must be, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!"*** (v. 8)
- When was the last time somebody said to you, ***"How happy your people must be! How thrilled your spouse must be... your friends... your family... just to get to hang around to pick up the bits of wisdom that drop from your mouth every day."***

The Questor said, ***"I walked down this road as far as it can be walked... but it didn't satisfy this ache inside me, and it didn't tell me why I ought to get up in the morning."***

I've shared with you before about Dr. Hugh Moorhead who heads a university Philosophy Department.

- In one of his books, "The Meaning of Life, he explains how he sent 250 letters to 250 of the brightest people in our society—

philosophers and scientists—and he asked them, “*What is the purpose of life?*”

- Can anyone guess what the number one answer was? It was, “***I don’t know.***”

In fact, a number of people wrote back to him and said, “*I don’t know. If you find out while you are doing this, please write back and tell me what the answer is.*” These were real bright people.

- Just to give you an example of some of their comments... **Isaac Asimov**, a famous writer, says, “*As far as I can see, there is no purpose.*”
- **Albert Ellis**, one of the preeminent psychologists of the 20th century, said, “*Life has no intrinsic meaning.*”

Here is one that really struck me. This one really lays it out. Poet & Philosopher, **Michael Anania**, wrote this:

- “*I don’t want to retreat into the justly despised positivism,*” he says, “*but to question the meaning of life proposes its own answer. Life, if you think of it as an assertion of meaning and process, always exceeds assigned meaning. To offer a parody of technical language, the set of all meanings is included in life, which is an additional meaning, so expands the set by a hypo-set, and so forth. So, any statement, any such question expands the frame exponentially. What I’m saying in nutshell is the meaning of life is meaning.*”
- Well, I hope that clears things up for you... because, to be honest, **I have no idea** what the guy just said!

The **Questor** said that **education is a good thing**, but it doesn’t belong in the box. It’s not the bottom-line.

- So, he tried another option. He writes in Ecclesiastes 2:1, “***I thought in my heart, ‘come now. I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.’***”
- Solomon was a man of fierce appetites. So he said to himself, “*All right. I’ll indulge every desire that I have and see how that works.*” **[He puts “pleasure” in the box]**
- Any **food** he wanted, he ate. Any **object** he desired, **he bought it or took it for himself.**

He surrounded himself with **parks** and **gardens** and **vineyards**. He wanted a nice house, so he constructed a palace so magnificent it defied description.

- In fact, Scripture says it was so ornate that *“silver was used like stone.”*
- He liked music. But in the absence of a good playlist on iTunes, he went ahead and brought in the best musicians and singers of his day.
- Their job was just to hang around his house... to play for him whenever he wanted.

Then he writes, *“I tried cheering myself with wine and embraced foolishness.”* (Ecclesiastes 2:3)

- Maybe **sexual pleasure** would be the key to his satisfaction. So he devotes himself to that.
- The Bible says he had **one thousand wives and concubines**. He’s supposed to be the smartest guy in the world, and he had a thousand wives! Think about that one!

He sums up this whole journey this way. He said, *“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired. I refused my heart no pleasure (Ecclesiastes 2:10).”*

- I see it. I want it. I’ll have it. I’ll consume it.
- **He indulged every appetite; he experienced every thrill; he scratched every itch; he bought every toy.**
- He was not held back by the **lack of resources**, by the **worry of what anybody else might think about him**, or by any **moral parameters**.

He walked down that road— experiencing all the different things people use to mark their box.

- He walked down each road as far as it could be walked and, at the end, when he turns around and looks back, he says,
- *“All a man’s efforts are to feed his appetites, yet his appetite is never satisfied.”*

Maybe some of you are thinking that there's some **pleasure**, some **thrill**, some **experience**, some **relationship**, some **gratification** that— "*If I just hard that...*"

- Solomon says, "**Go ahead and try it, if you want. But that's not it.**"
- So he tried another option—one that a lot of people in our day try. He says, "**I undertook great projects. I devoted myself to my SUCESS.**" (Ecclesiastes 2: 4-8)
- This is the ladder of success. He **climbed this ladder higher** than anybody in this room will ever climb. He became the most prosperous king in the history of Israel.

Solomon **extended his country's economic borders** farther than they had ever been extended before;

- he single-handedly **made Israel into a shipping empire**; he seized the **two major trade routes** of his day.
- We are told that King Solomon was "*greater in riches and wisdom than all of the other kings of the earth.*" (1 Kings 10:23)

We're told, in **1 Kings 10:24**, that the whole world sought an audience with Solomon.

- Warren Buffet, Hillary Clinton, Bill O'Reilly, President Obama, Katie Couric, Oprah, Vladimir Putin...
- would all sit in amazement at his feet... because nobody ever climbed the ladder of success the way that this man did.

And when he climbed it to the top, and **when he took a look at all that he had done**, this is what he wrote: "*I turned my head and saw yet another wisp of smoke on its way to nothingness—a solitary person working obsessively late into the night compulsively greedy for more and more, never bothering to ask, "Why? It is so meaningless and depressing"* (Ecclesiastes 4: 7-8 MSG)

**The smartest guy who ever lived surveyed all that he had done, all the knowledge he had accumulated,**

- all the **appetites that he had gratified**, all the **scratches he had itched**, all the **ladders he had climbed**, all the **toys he had collected**...
- **And he said, “That’s not it. It can’t be what fills the box.”**  
**[show empty box]**

At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon reflects on this meaningless journey he’s taken.

- With all the things he tried to put in the box, he summarizes them all in Ecclesiastes **12:8**, saying, **“meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless.”**
- So, after it was all said and done... what did he write in the box?

He says this in **Ecclesiastes 12:13**, *“Here is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person...”*

- Having walked down each of the roads in search of fulfillment, he fills in the box one last time...
- **[GOD] “Honor and Worship God... trust Him... know that He loves you... listen to all he calls you to as His precious child.”**

That consultant who met with Bill & Linda Buford knew that ultimately, they could only put one thing in that box...

- It could be **any one of the roads Solomon** walked down... **OR it would be God...** *“to know God more, to worship Him, and to walk in intimacy with Him.”*
- So you have to answer the question: What are *you* going to put in the box?

Having won 11 PGA tournaments, Paul Azinger was at the height of his professional golf career when the doctor told him that he had life-threatening cancer.

- He was relatively young... one of the best golfers of the 80s & 90s. He certainly never thought about death and dying.
- Written in bold letters, in the center of his box, was the word “Success”. It’s **all he was after...** it’s **what he thought would bring ultimate meaning & satisfaction** to his life.

But with death in front of him, even the 1.4 million dollars he made on tour that year as a professional golfer meant nothing.

- Seeing how distraught he was, the chaplain of the tour said something to him that struck a nerve.
- He said, *“We think that we’re in the land of the living going to the land of the dying, when, in reality, we are in the land of the dying headed for the land of the living.”*

This crisis of cancer led **Paul Azinger** to reconsider what he had written in the box. In fact, it led him into a deep and rich relationship with Jesus.

- What seemed like his imminent death made him realize that there was **more than just *this* life on earth...**
- that life on earth is a temporary assignment... that we were made for eternity.

The words of Solomon, written in **Ecclesiastes 3:11**, must have rung so true in his heart...

- that ***“God has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.”***
- I’ve been thinking about that verse a fair bit this week. I knew that it was something that was a much for me as it was for this message...
- *especially after seeing Francis Chan on FB illustrating the heart of what Solomon was talking about here.*

Imagine this rope is the timeline of your life... both your life here on earth and your eternal life.

- Now, this red part represents your life on earth... just a few short years relative to a life that runs into eternity.
- And yet, as Solomon wrote so long ago, many of us live our lives thinking only about this little red part of... it’s all we think about.

Just look at these four inches of rope. We invest every bit of our effort getting from “here to there”.

- “I’m going to work hard, save hard all through *here* so I can really enjoy life *over there*... so I can retire in comfort *over there*.”
- But, **what about all of this** (exposing the rest of the rope)?  
**What about eternity?**

How is it that we live this life (these few inches of rope) with so much disregard for the rest of our eternity?

- Why would I work so hard **through “this little red season”** of my eternal life trying to make myself as **comfortable and well-entertained** as possible?
- Why would we put things like **“pleasure”** and **“success”** and **“comfort”** in our box **when, at the end of these 4 inches of rope**, there stands an eternity.

So, while **most people seem to be living for just this tiny piece** of our lives... as we consider what to put in the box...

- perhaps **we should consider the rest of our lives**... our eternal lives.
- I think this is what **King David** (Solomon’s father) was **coming to grips with** when he wrote this in Psalm 29:4 ,
- **“Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered, and that my life is fleeing away.”**

You see, Paul Azinger realized that life is most disappointing and most despairing when it’s lived as though this world is all we have...

- measuring success only through the acquisition of power and position as well as the accumulation of stuff.
- But guys, you will not be in heaven two seconds before you cry out, *“Why did I place so much importance on things that were so temporary?”*
- “Why did I waste so much time, energy, and concern on what was never going to last?”

You can try to put *getting richer, smarter, happier, stronger, more secure, more successful*...

- **you can try and walk down any of those roads as far as you want to.**
- Just know that perhaps the smartest man who ever lived, who went on to also write Proverbs and the Song of Solomon,
- went farther down that road than you ever will, and he found out it's a dead end.

So, what will you write in your box? One of the **dangers of asking that question here** is that everybody knows what answer you're supposed to give, because this is church.

- You know what you should put in that box... And yet, because of the place you may be in right now, inside,
- you may be thinking, *"If I were really free to pursue these things all the way, I think I could be ok. I think that would satisfy my life."*

You see, because we struggle to really trust God in our lives, so many Christians end up living lives

- trapped between **longings that they are afraid to fully pursue and obedience to God** that they don't really want to give.
- They think they can leave the box empty.

Solomon says, *"You know what? If that's what you really think—if you really think that satisfaction belongs down one of these roads—then go down that road!*

- *Stop living your life in this twilight zone where you're trapped between two competing purposes in life."*
- If you want to go down that road, go all the way down that road.

Just know that perhaps the smartest human who ever lived walked a lot farther down that road than you or I ever could,

- and what he found that without living in intimate friendship with God, everything else is emptied of its meaning.
- If you try to take God out of the picture... you're left with nothing... nothing that you'll be able to keep.

Folks... God has made you to be the ultimate object of His affection & love... He made you **know Him** and **enjoy Him** and **serve Him** and to **love others** and to **live with Him for eternity**.

- You see, as we navigate the twists and turns of everything from relationships and work to finance, family, and stress...
- The **one thing** that will allow us to **truly win the Game of LIFE** is to **live out the purposes for which we were created**... to walk in intimacy & friendship with our Heavenly Father.
- So we need to make a choice. What will we write in the box? What will you write in your box?