



Links Players

God, Golf, and The Good Life Vanity Fair

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. (Ecclesiastes 2:17, ESV)

My partner was having a bad day, and his partner wasn't faring any better. As we walked off the eighteenth green, he said to me, "It's only a game." In an effort to put things in perspective, he tried to comfort me. For thirty seconds, I felt better!

Who can understand this game? How can someone with a swing like Max Homa miss so many cuts over what must feel like an eternity, at least to him? You have to give him credit, though! Max has kept a consistently positive outlook.

Unlike Max, I've wanted to "helicopter" my mid-irons countless times. I've also wanted to tomahawk my gap wedge far too many times. But I always recall a story about a guy who wrapped his club around the cart, only to have it ricochet into his neck—he died on the spot!

I suppose that underneath all these pitiful attitudes lies the dark truth: "I am taking this game far too seriously." I mean, I don't "put food on the table" with my play, whether I shoot 68 or 82. I can hear my wife saying, "Thank you, Lord!"

Despite all my self-talk to stay encouraged, the truth is that I love this game, and even though it's "just a game," at times, I love it too much. The issue is with my heart, not the game.

Depending on the translation one reads, the author of Ecclesiastes seems to suggest, "Life is meaningless," or "Life is absurd," or "Life is hard to grasp," or "Life is fleeting," or "Life is filled with emptiness."

Interpreted this way, we might conclude he is saying, "Life is nothing more than a Vanity Fair." In other words, since there is nothing beyond this fleeting life—life between the bookends of birth and death—we should pursue wealth, pleasure, status, and appearance.

If that's the case, then all of life and life's constituent parts, including golf, are nothing more than a silly game. If we thought this way, we would be completely mistaken.

Scholars are divided on the best way to translate the Hebrew word "hevel," which is typically rendered as "vanity" or "meaningless."

After examining several commentators, it appears that our author is best understood as saying, "Apart from knowing and living for God, life is impossible to grasp and enjoy during our fleeting time on earth."

One thing is for sure: he is not saying life in its entirety or life in its various pursuits is meaningless or absurd. That would contradict the rest of Scripture.

"In the beginning," our Maker created the world and said, "It is good," and "It is very good." Unlike Platonists and Gnostics, we affirm with God: the physical, earthly, or natural world is "good."

However, we also affirm with Scripture that the world and humanity are "fallen." Biblically speaking, "fallen" means that the world and humanity remain good, but corrupted.

To state the obvious, golf is a game. However, it is not "just a game." It can and should be a meaningful part of every golfer's life, but only if it is subordinated to a life lived for the glory of our God and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, pursuing golf or anything else without first properly relating to King Jesus is a life wasted in a meaningless Vanity Fair.

Prayer: Father! Teach us again that "all things are from Him, through Him, and for Him!"

READING: Ecclesiastes 1-5 (yes, I am recommending re-reading. In 100 readings, we wouldn't have read it too much).

1. Assuming you have, how would you rate your club-throwing ability? Was it Olympic quality or merely a rookie's effort? Laugh or lament!

2. After wrestling with the text again, discuss why many people tend to categorize our earthly life and its many good gifts, including golf, as outside the Lordship of Christ—after all, we are told to do everything as unto the Lord and for his glory.
