Breathing Lessons

Wisdom from Ecclesiastes for this Fleeting Life

Life is Just a Breath

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 *Hevel havalim*, says the Preacher,

Hevel havalim! All is *hevel*.

3 What does man gain by all the toil

at which he toils under the sun?

4 A generation goes, and a generation comes,

but the earth remains forever.

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

5 The sun rises, and the sun goes down,

and hastens to the place where it rises.

6 The wind blows to the south

and goes around to the north;

around and around goes the wind,

and on its circuits the wind returns.

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

7 All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full;

to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

8 All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it;

the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

9 What has been is what will be,

and what has been done is what will be done,

and there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

10 Is there a thing of which it is said,

“See, this is new”?

It has been already in the ages before us.

11 There is no remembrance of former things,

nor will there be any remembrance

of later things yet to be

among those who come after.

1. The Brevity of Life

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2

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Hevel = breath, vapor, mist

(see Job 7:16; Ps. 144:4; James 4:14)

1. The Brevity of Life

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2

2. The Cycle of Life

Ecclesiastes 1:3-11

2. The Cycle of Life

The problem (v. 3)

Ecclesiastes 1:3

3 What does man gain by all the toil

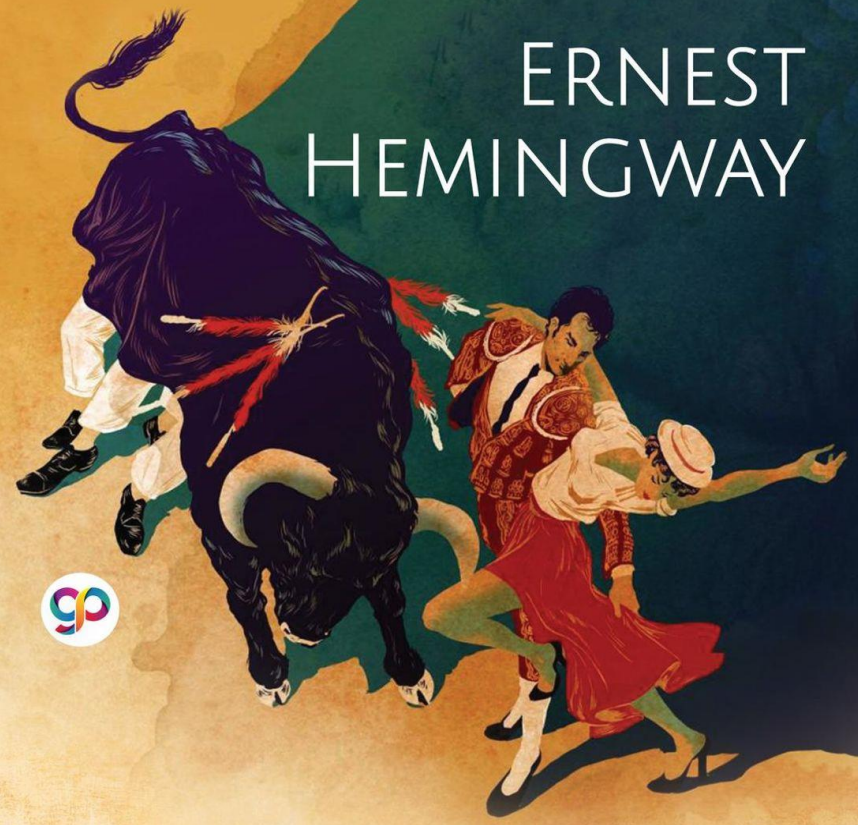
at which he toils under the sun?

2. The Cycle of Life

The problem (v. 3: toil . . . under the sun)

The pictures (vv. 4-7: generations, sun, wind, water)

ERNEST HEMINGWAY



THE SUN ALSO RISES

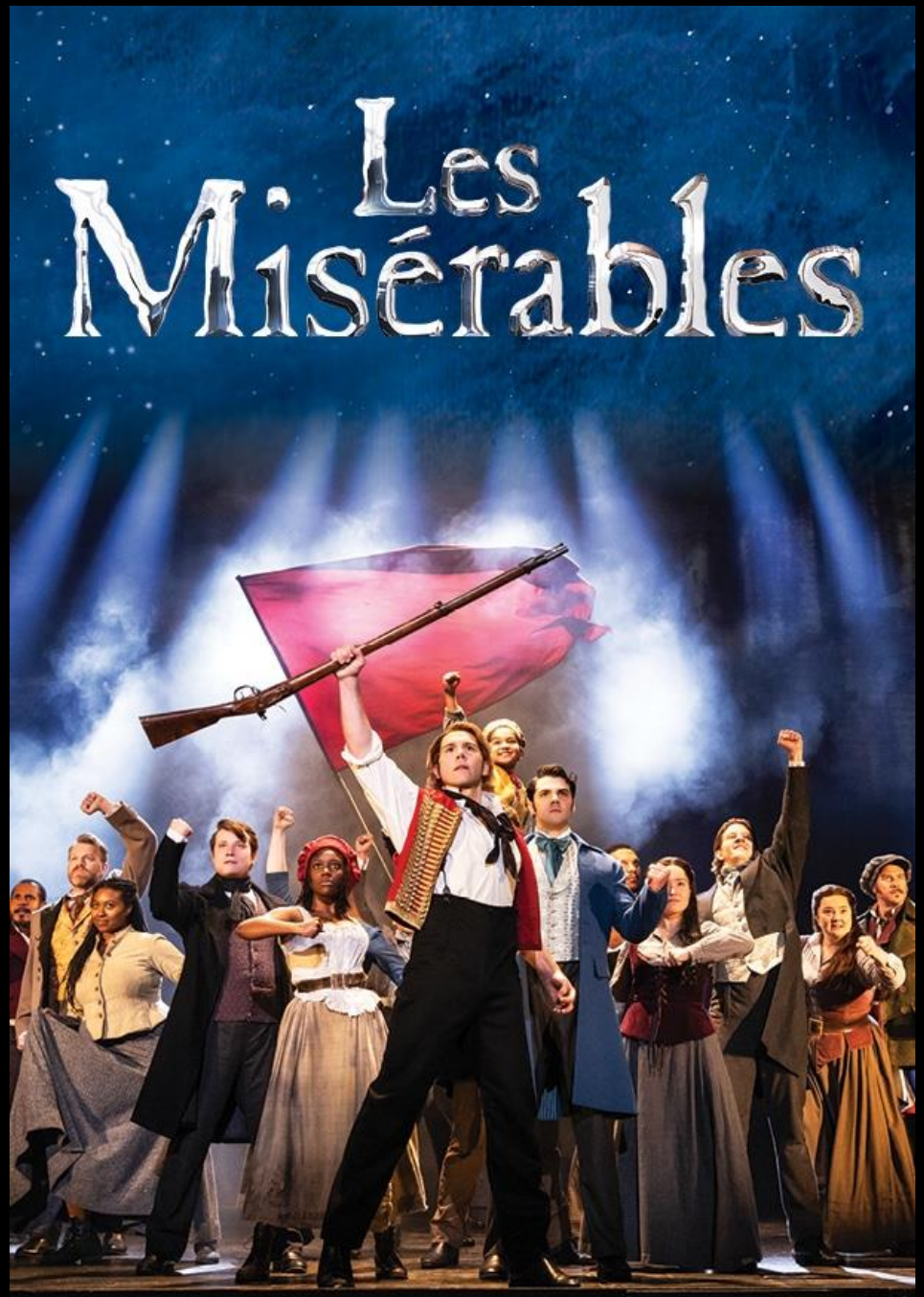
Some of the finest and most restrained writing that this generation has produced. **–New York World**

2. The Cycle of Life

The problem (v. 3: toil . . . under the sun)

The pictures (vv. 4-7: generations, sun, wind, water)

The poignancy (vv. 8-11): experience, history, mortality



LES MISÉRABLES: "One Day More" from Les Misérables, photo by Matthew Murphy

2. The Cycle of Life

Ecclesiastes 1:3-11

3. The Gift of Life

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

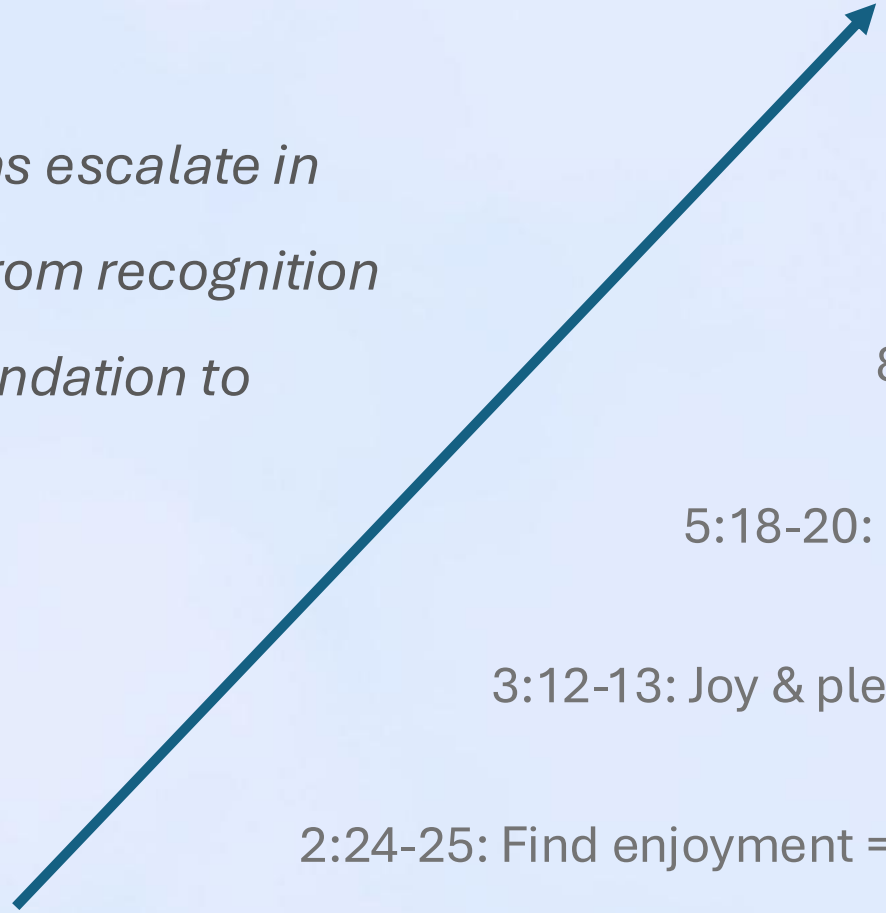
There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God,
25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

3. The Gift of Life

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

The Refrains of Joy in Ecclesiastes

The refrains escalate in intensity from recognition to commendation to command



11:8-10: Rejoice in all your days

9:7-10: Joy is commanded

8:15: Joy is commended

5:18-20: God gives power to enjoy his gifts

3:12-13: Joy & pleasure = God's gift

2:24-25: Find enjoyment = from the hand of God

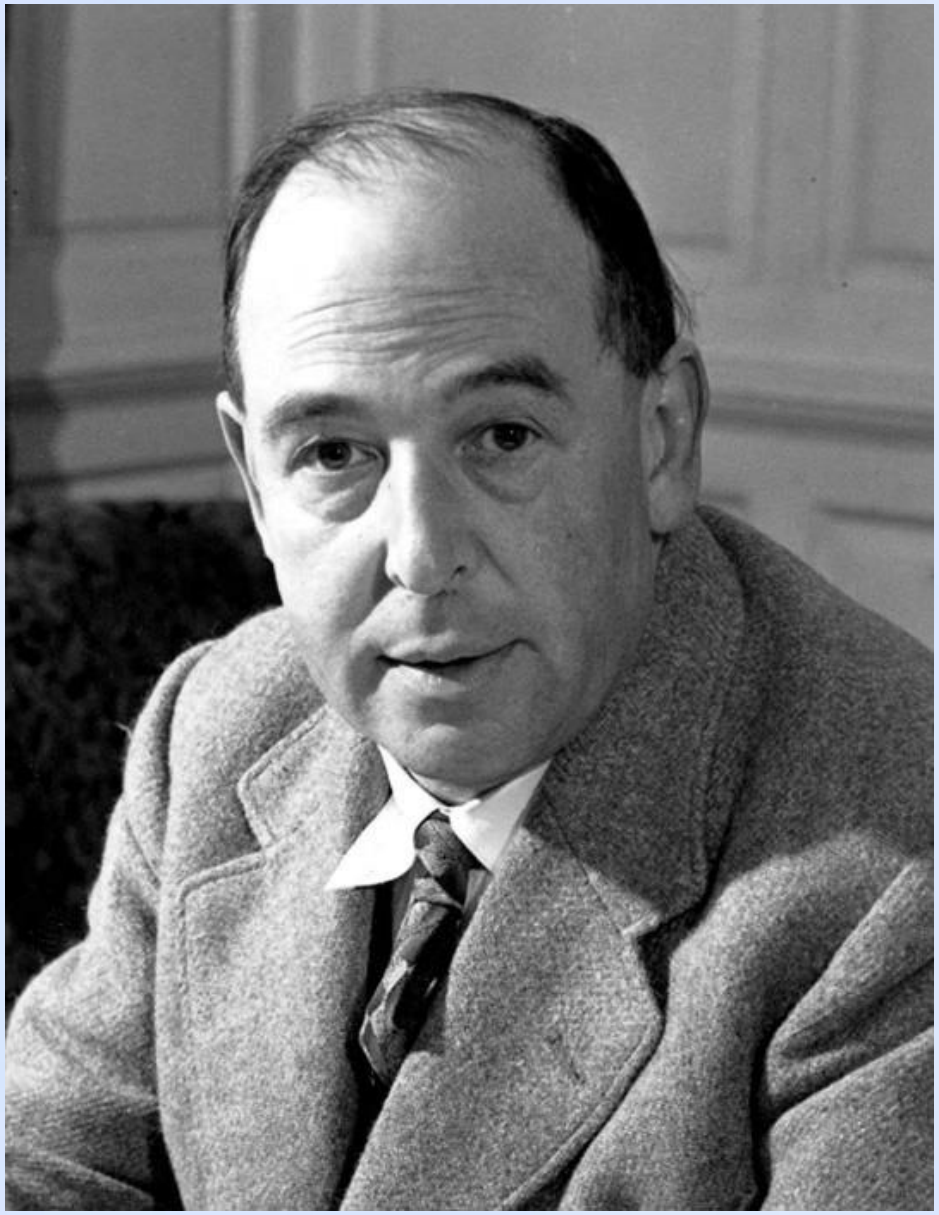
Author of THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

C. S. LEWIS

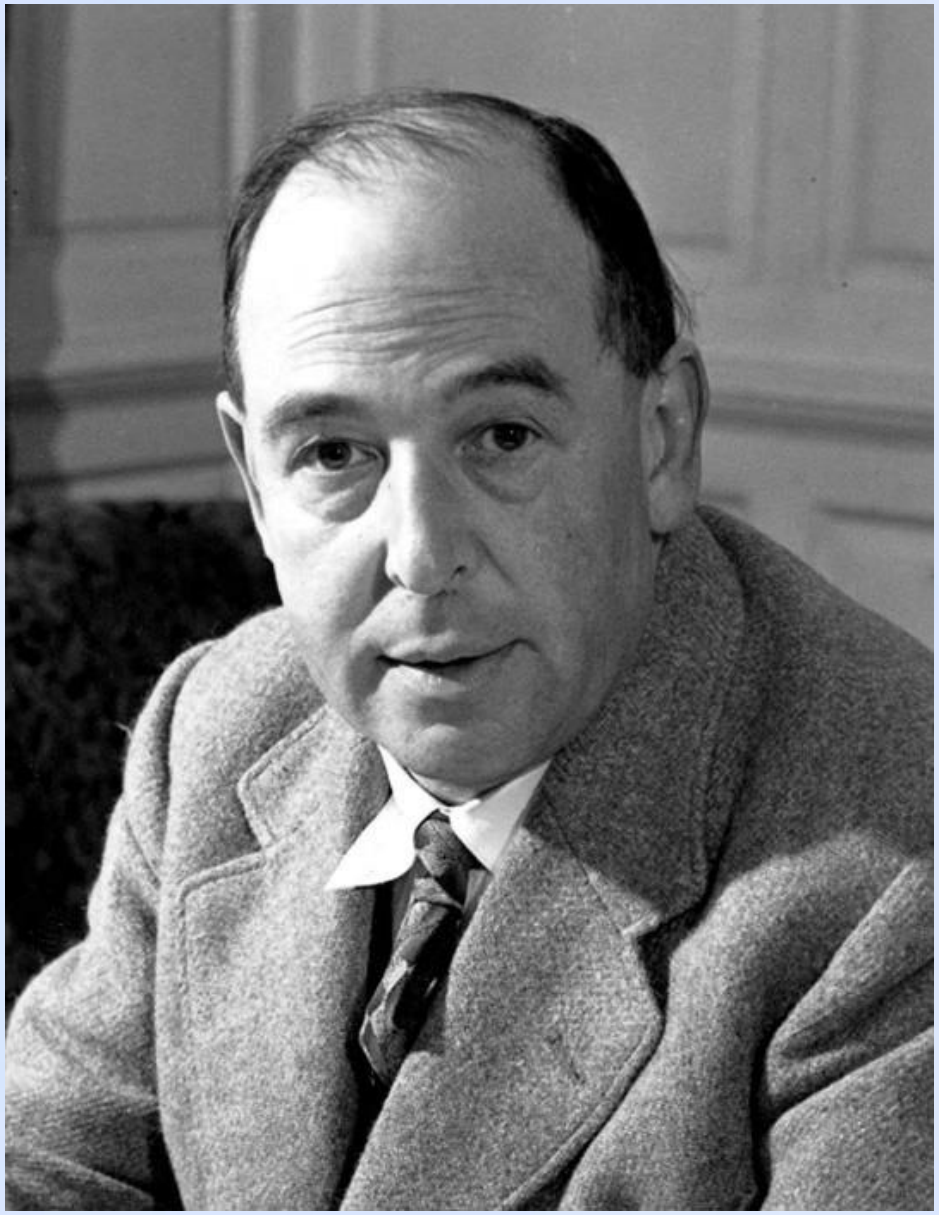
Second in the celebrated Space Trilogy that begins with
OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET and ends with THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH

PERELANDRA

"Mr. Lewis has a genius for making his fantasies livable." —*THE NEW YORK TIMES*



The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world: but joy, pleasure, and merriment, He has scattered broadcast. We are never safe, but we have plenty of fun, and some ecstasy. It is not hard to see why. The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose an obstacle to our return to God. . .



Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.

—C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

3. The Gift of Life

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

Application

Here is our first “breathing lesson”:

receive life as God’s gift.

The Gospel Perspective

When the New Testament writers reflect on the power

of the Risen Christ and the hope of new creation,

they reframe the futility of this world and the

weariness of our toil.

Romans 8:18-21

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.