

# Ecclesiastes: The Ultimate Guide to a Meaningful Life

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[0:00] The Word of God, Ecclesiastes. As a young man, I remember watching a TV series called The Long Search. It was a man searching, finding truth, searching for meaning, for life, looking through all kinds of philosophies and religions of all kinds, but really never coming to a conclusion.

It was kind of frustrating because he never really came to a conclusion. Ecclesiastes comes to a conclusion about that question. Ecclesiastes, it tells of the meaning of life and the pursuit of wisdom.

Ecclesiastes, the word Ecclesiastes means the preacher. It has the idea of a teacher or a debater, you could put it. And most understand that it was King Solomon.

And perhaps speaking in a bit of a backslidden state or a backslidden kind of thinking from time to time here, but he was an earnest thinker, a philosopher, and he's telling of this search of his, for happiness and of the struggle with life's puzzles.

Thankfully, Solomon does come to a conclusion about life's meaning, making sense of it all. His conclusion is to remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

[1:16] Honour God with your lives. The fact is, soon youth will pass away. And old age and death will come. Only eternity will remain.

So prepare for death and judgment. All that is under the sun is vanity, in the sense that it will pass away. And all that will remain is God the judge and our eternal souls.

So let's take a look at the book on this man's search for meaning. Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verse 1. Ecclesiastes 1, verse 1. The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher. The vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Now the preacher lists some 30 kinds of things that are vanities.

He tells of emptiness, of frustration, of dissatisfaction. It's like the modern song, I can't get no satisfaction. It's like Solomon's feeling about it all.

[2:26] He's exploring all these things. He's exploring wisdom and pleasure and wealth and work and reveals their ultimate emptiness. The word vanity is used 37 times in the book.

And the preacher tells about really the hopelessness of life. As far as godless life, we see vanity. For example, the vanity of man's works.

Verse 3. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? So Ecclesiastes tells us Solomon's search for real meaning in life.

He was searching for something that would truly satisfy in this world. Notice, under the sun. Verse 3. He's talking about the context of the world under the sun.

So in his life on earth is the sense of it with really little regard for the existence of an eternal world beyond the sun. So the philosopher tries vainly to find satisfaction in earthly things.

[3:29] To try to find happiness under the sun. Here on the earth, under the sun, apart from God. It's almost like there's a lack of meaning, of purpose.

And one by one Solomon exhausted every source of earthly hope, as we'll touch on some of them. He tells us of life under the sun as meaningless and futile from that kind of perspective.

And it goes on, verse 4. It tells us, One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever.

Life is fragile and fleeting. One generation passes away, and another generation comes. It's all very fleeting, isn't it?

Life is like that, isn't it? Verse 5, it says, The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth towards the south, and turneth about unto the north. [4:30] It whirlleth about continually, and the wind returneth again, according to his circuits. So it's saying here that the sun goes up, the sun goes down, the wind blows around, and blows back where it came from.

And verse 7, it says, All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. Unto the place from whence the rivers come, there they return again.

Life is short. One generation goes, and another comes. The sun rises, and the sun sets. The winds blow round and around, the rivers run into the sea, but the water evaporates, and it rains again. There seems to be no purpose to anything.

The whole of life is like a puff of wind. It's futile and vain. Life is repetitive, says the philosopher.

Verse 8, All things are full of labour, man cannot utter it.

[5:29] The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done.

And there is no new thing under the sun. So it's like this continual cycle. Your eye sees things, your ear hears things, but it's like over and over again.

Groundhog day, yeah. That kind of thought that, you know, it's like groundhog day again, isn't it?

Yeah, I know. The sun comes up, the sun goes down, it's just another day, all the same. Get up, go to work, go home and go to sleep.

Get up and go to work again. It's that kind of thing, isn't it? There's nothing new under the sun, no new thing under the sun. And verse 10, it says, Is there anything whereof it may be said?

See, this is new. It hath been already of old time, which was before us. You know, we've seen it all before. It's another day. It's just the same again as it was before.

[6:26] Verse 11, There is no remembrance of former things, neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after. So, in other words, the philosopher is saying here, one generation is born only to die and be forgotten and then be replaced by another generation.

Now, if there is no God and there's no life after death, as the atheist claims, then life is merely a journey from nothing to nothing. We come with nothing and we leave with nothing.

And all earthly happiness has an end. The human heart longs for something more, something more enduring, something eternal, something eternal. Another vanity that he tells us of is verse 12, human wisdom and philosophy, they cannot satisfy.

So, he's saying here, chasing after human knowledge of itself is ultimately meaningless because even the wise and foolish both die in the end. So, it reads there, verse 12, I, the preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem, and I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done unto heaven.

This sort travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. So, he's saying here, and this is Solomon speaking, we understand it to be, and he was called in scripture, the wisest man alive.

[7:53] That's 1 Kings 4, 31. So, he knew about wisdom. This was what he knew back to front. He was well studied, and he had a lot of knowledge. And he says he gave his heart to seek it, to search it out.

And yet, he goes on to say, I've seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

So, he's saying really, human wisdom doesn't have the answer. It doesn't have the answer for life's ultimate questions. He's saying it's vexation of spirit. It's frustrating. It's vanity.

It's vain. And it reads on, I communed with my own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem.

Yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. This is a learned man. And Solomon tried learning. He was searching and constantly seeking it out.

[8:55] And he got more wisdom than many others. And it can be true for us that someone's mind can be filled with knowledge, yet they have no peace

in the heart.

That's true, isn't it? You know, some people, they've got PhDs and lots of letters after their name, and they might be very studious and intellectual, yet they have no peace in the heart because they don't know the Saviour.

In the search for happiness, we can find really that learning is not the answer. It's not the answer.

Verse 17, he goes on, and I gave my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.

I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. It's vexing, it's frustrating, any spirit, he's saying. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

So he's found here that learning without knowledge of God falls short. It's really deficient. Solomon found that worldly wisdom was vain.

[10:01] And then he found also that worldly pleasure was a vanity.

Worldly pleasure. Chapter 2, verse 1, I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth.

Therefore, enjoy pleasure. And behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad. And of mirth, what doeth it? So he thought, Well, I'll find some pleasure here.

Some fun and excitement. He looked for meaning in pleasure. He indulged in wine and parties and entertainment. But it was vain.

It was vain. It tells us here of the vanity of drink. He says, I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom and to lay hold on folly.

So he's basically saying here that he found that drinking was not the way to solve life's problems.

Friends, the glug, glug, glug, the bottle does not satisfy. It does not satisfy.

[10:59] It's another vanity. Another vanity is materialism. Solomon thought that riches and glory and material possessions could satisfy, but no, they could not satisfy the hunger in his heart.

He tells us here, chapter 2, verse 4, I made me great works, I builded me houses, I planted me vineyards. I made me gardens and orchards and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits.

I made me pools of water to water their wind, the word that bringeth forth trees. Notice here he says, me, me, me, quite a lot. Me, myself and I. It's very much a repeated theme that he was searching within himself for that which could satisfy, but he found it not.

And materialism was another letdown. The preacher gave himself, it says, to wine and laughter. It says he built luxurious houses and surrounded himself by gardens and orchards.

He chased after fame and success, recognition, but it was all in vain, all in vain. All human achievements will be forgotten in time. Someone might be famous one time, one generation, but give it a few years, a few generations and their name is forgotten.

[12:22] I made me. I planted me. I made me. I made me. I got me. He says, verse 7. I got me servants. I got this and I got that.

I got me servants and maidens and had servants born in my house. Also, I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me, silver and gold and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces.

I got me singers and women singers and the delights of the sons of men as musical instruments and that of all sorts. So, I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me. So, he's saying here, I had it all. It was all laid on. He'd gotten so many things, many things and great wealth.

He sought pleasure in material things yet he found he was not really satisfied. He wasn't really satisfied. Such a life can be empty and meaningless.

[13:30] We see and you can hear of great well-known people of today, people who are famous and have got all the success that the world would reckon but deep, deep down they're not satisfied.

They're not satisfied. Did all the material wealth that Solomon had make him happy? No. He had everything. He was the king.

Riches cannot satisfy. The love of money is vanity. It reads on in chapter 5 verse 10 it tells us, He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver nor he that loveth abundance with increase.

This is also vanity. You know, they get something and they want more. They've got some silver, they want more silver. They've got something of this, they want more of it. They're not satisfied.

He that loves abundance with increase. It's vanity. It's just a pointless rat race, isn't it? The hamster wheel. Verse 11, When goods increase, they are increased that eat them.

[14:36] And what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? They've got, but they want more. They want to keep accumulating, greedy grasping. In contrast, it says, verse 12 of 5, The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

You hear these film stars and rock stars and they've got to take tranquilizers to get to sleep. They're worried about this or that. The abundance of the riches that they have, it won't suffer them to sleep. They're worried that someone's going to steal or whatever it is. They just can't get that peace deep down. And chapter 6, verse 7, it says, All the labor of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not filled.

Now, I know you're all getting some appetite for lunch today, but there's that sense where some people eat, but they've just got to keep on eating. They're never satisfied. Their stomach's never full.

And happiness cannot be found in all of these luxuries, all of this wealth, all of these material things. It's emptiness, really, isn't it? There's no satisfaction there. Truly, there's no satisfaction in material things.

[15:52] Another vanity that Solomon talks about is the vanity of lusts, of worldly lusts. Solomon gave himself to the pursuit of pleasure. He had pretty much everything, everything that a man could want.

He had it all laid out for him. He had pretty much had everything that he wanted in life, as far as human passions. Yet he found that they did not ultimately satisfy.

It says, verse 10, And whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy. For my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all my labor.

Now, Solomon, he had 700 wives. 700 of them. Mother-in-laws. Plus 300 concubines. Imagine that. 700 wives, 300 concubines.

Yeah, how many mothers-in-law would that be? And you wonder, you know, some people might think, well, he had pretty much everything you could desire. Yet his lust towards many strange women did not satisfy the emptiness of Solomon's heart.

[17:01] And he had to feel sorry for him. One wife's enough to look after. But yeah, he was, he was, pretty much he had everything that he could lust after. But it was all vanity.

All was vanity. Verse 11, All was vanity. Pleasures and riches cannot satisfy. Solomon was empty. The pleasures and riches did not bring him satisfaction.

Wealth, material possessions, even hard work. He'd work for it. Maybe he deserved it, what he got, what he accumulated. But honestly, such accumulating cannot bring contentment.

And we see really the vanity of materialism. It's what our world's obsessed with, isn't it? They feed that too through the advertising, don't they?

You've got to have the latest model, the latest version, the highest, latest, newest, biggest, brightest, shiniest.

[18:05] There's always something better than what you've got. And it's feeding that, oh, my neighbour's got such and such. And it feeds that, doesn't it? That craving, that lusting, that keeping up with others.

Yeah. But really, it's vanity. It's the point that Solomon came to here, this vanity, that just living for the now, living for the now.

I looked on all the works that my hands had brought and on the labour that I had laboured to do, and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

We're going to skip a few verses here. As I say, we can't capture the whole book, or I've been here for a few hours, I think. But even for all of his work and the fruits of his labour, the preacher saw that all of his efforts would eventually, they'd be passed on to others, which leads to a sense of emptiness too.

Even if you've got your bank account loaded when you die, I mean, someone else is going to enjoy that. It's almost, what's the point of doing that? It cannot provide lasting fulfilment, accumulating wealth.

[19:19] It cannot guarantee happiness. Ecclesiastes shows, it really shows us here that life here upon earth under the sun, without God, it leads to emptiness.

Truly, we have to know the one who governs time to make a sense of life. And so, we hear further about there is a time for everything.

There is a time for everything. And this is one that you sometimes hear quoted as a kind of popularised kind of poem. Sometimes they read it at funerals, for example.

The preacher relates how life unfolds in the series of different seasons. And God makes sense of time. That's what life is. It's time, isn't it? Of our lives.

And we can find meaning and purpose in every stage of our life. And so, we'll just read that through. It tells us here in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, to everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and 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, 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.

[21:09] he hath made everything beautiful in his time also he has set the world in their heart so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end the point here in chapter three says Ecclesiastes is that there is a time for everything there's different seasons of our life and what matters is that God is in control of time of every phase of every moment of our lives of all the goings-on of that which we live and it goes on he hath made everything beautiful everything beautiful in his time so in other words God has timing and purpose and that's for you and me our lives have got God's purpose God's timing and it's perfect even when we struggle with some of those things we could go back on that list in chapter three and say wow some of those things aren't too nice they're a bit painful there's struggles there there's loss and we can sometimes grapple trying to understand his plans we just have to wait sometimes because it's all going to be beautiful in his time because he's the governor of time he's the one who sees the end from the beginning we just have to wait on God's timing we can find meaning for life in God ultimately it says that our times are in his hand the psalmist says Psalm 31 but I trust in in thee oh Lord I said thou art my God my times are in thy hand in other words having that sense that he governs my life he gives me life and he chooses how long I'm going to live my life how long we have to live he has the say so over your life every season of it every phase and he'll see you through not just your life but your future and he'll see you through your life journey simply trust his hand he will right the wrongs of time in eternity we might think of our lives of what's happened to us when some things were not pleasant he's going to right those wrongs because he sees the end from the beginning and it says chapter 3 17 I said in my heart God shall judge the righteous and the wicked for there is a time for every purpose and for every work there's a sense where God's over and above time and space he governs eternity he sees everything we can only touch on a few further verses here today but one thing that Solomon does through the other verses that I'm not touching on today is he reflects on the certainty of death death he also tells of the need of every man friends we've got a problem says Ecclesiastes we've got a problem says the preacher as we hurtle towards life beyond the sun as we hurtle towards eternity beyond this earthly time we are all sinners we're all sinners it says and we stand in need of his saving we're all in need of God's grace and forgiveness we read that in chapter 7 verse 20 Solomon says for there is



but getting ready for life beyond This life this earthly life because fact is there is hope beyond the grave It tells verse 14 for god shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing whether it be good or whether it be evil there's a time coming where The last verse says that he's going to bring everything into judgment After death all men are going to stand before god There is life beyond the grave Look at solomon's journey worldly pursuits temporary rather let us seek the lasting fulfillment of relationship with god Pursue wisdom yes with humility yes

[30:28] While seeking knowledge and understanding Accept the limitations of human wisdom And remain open to Divine revelation Divine revelation this is true wisdom the word of god And fear god Fear god Let his wisdom guide your decisions and actions your relationships Are you investing in things that are of eternal value?

Meaning in life It's not found in money Or pleasure or work or knowledge even or popularity The preacher tells of his own personal experience and he was an experienced man he was He was quite aware of life and quite a knowledgeable man and he had such a wide experience of earthly ambitions and learning But he found that pursued as ends in themselves it would just wind up in emptiness and dissatisfaction Life making sense of it all The book of ecclesiastes really shows us the absurdity of trying to find happiness without god It's the most essential Solomon found that nothing nothing nothing apart from god made him truly happy There's an emptiness in all that this world has to offer faith in god is the only worthwhile reason for living look at his journey the things of this world material things possessions sensual pleasures power prestige

He was the king he had it all But it did not bring real happiness in his soul of itself life as we know it for those who know christ is not futile and empty it's very purposeful it's very full and real and a blessing a blessing true purpose true life is christ and true satisfaction and fulfillment is found in knowing him and living for him and friends we can navigate all of those complexities of life the mysteries of life and no true joy we might have those ups and downs we might have those seasons that are not so pleasant but we've got a wonderful relationship that is eternal with our heavenly father with our creator god solomon embarked on this quest this quest this search this long search this search for meaning navigating through life's twists and turns life's seasons he wanted desperately wanted to find meaning and purpose in a world of vanity he walked through at times these complexities searching for answers for life's ultimate questions and friends these truths in ecclesiastes are timeless these are timeless truths his search has application in our modern world especially in our materialistic world it's driven just by pleasure and hedonism and just feeding feeding without ever being full it has application to our lives our own lives we can know a meaningful life we can seek after the eternal there is life beyond the sun ecclesiastes says it's all vanity vanity of vanities all is vanity what prophet have a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun as in just that earthly context is vain isn't it but he saw actually as he came to the conclusion that there is something beyond beyond the life under the sun what do we see the vanity of man's works you can work and work earn and earn and it's all just going to evaporate isn't it man's wisdom and learning you might be the brightest and best and most academic and intellectual but if you don't have the peace in your heart then all that learning up here is not going to help worldly pleasures you might have everything money can buy but you'll still want more you'll still want more there'll still be something else you'll want worldly pleasures can't satisfy worldly wealth materialism worldly lusts the word says there's a time for everything it's a time to be born there's a time to die friends i'll be ready for that time another thing the bible says is there's a time to be saved a time to know him 2 corinthians 6 2 behold now now today now is the accepted time behold open your eyes and see this now is now is the day of salvation there's a time and a purpose for everything are you saved are you saved today do you know him whom to know his life eternal life under the sun is empty and vain it's vanity of vanities but there is one who governs the sun who governs time and eternity who governs your very life from its beginning to its end and he wants you to trust him and he says behold now is the accepted time now is the day of salvation

let us pray lord we thank you that there is hope beyond the grave there's hope in the present there's a life that doesn't say it's vanity of vanities it's actually very meaningful that we've got breath to breathe and a life to live lord you've given it all to us we only can thank you for what little measure of life we've yet to live that lies ahead it's all in your hands our times are in your hands lord we pray that each one might know that that day that that accepted time to say yes lord i believe i trust you i receive your salvation gift lord we pray each one might know that heart that is transformed by the

spirit of god made alive again made new brand new born again lord we pray we may know that truly and know that purposeful life that is a life that is in your hands lord that we can say yes this is the conclusion of the whole matter that we should fear you lord we should honor you we should know you we should follow you we should heed your word and obey it and act upon it and trust you for time and for eternity we pray lord help us to find that meaningful life that is truly only found in you and know that truly lord that you are truly the one who leads and guides our every step and every season every phase every moment until the day of our death and beyond it need a purpose the sun there is life beyond this earthly life that is under the sun but we thank you for that that is in christ our savior in jesus name we pray