

Is life really worth living?

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- [0 : 0 0] Right, Ecclesiastes, chapter 1, interesting book, one of my favorite books of the Bible, because it echoes with my melancholic nature.
- Now, that hymn I quoted right at the beginning was by a man called Henry Twelves, and that was the only hymn he wrote.
- But he wrote a poem, and I'm looking for it. I had it with me, but I'll find it.
- You might remember it. When I was a child and wept, time crept.
- Got it. When I was a child, I laughed and wept. Time crept. Henry Twelves, apart from at even air, the sun was set.
- [1 : 1 5] The only other poem he ever wrote that we knew of was this one. When, as a youth, I waxed more bold, time strolled. When I became a full-grown man, time ran.
- When older still, I dearly grew. Time flew. Soon I shall find, in passing on, time gone.
- O Christ, wilt thou have saved me by then? Amen. Henry Twelves. Just interesting that he wrote that even air the sun was set, and this, and that seemed to be the complete record of all that he did.
- Well, I really read that because it speaks of the brevity of life, how life passes by so quickly. And, of course, that was one of Solomon's great themes in the book of Ecclesiastes.
- So, let's read the first 11 verses together. The words of the teacher, Koheleth, son of David, king of Jerusalem.
- [2 : 3 1] Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?
- Generations come, generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises.
- The wind blows to the south and turns to the north, round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.
- To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say.
- The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear is full of hearing. What has been will be again, and what has been done will be done again, and there is nothing new under the sun.
- [3 : 3 9] Is there anything of which one can say, look, this is something new? It was already there. It was here already long ago. It was here before our time.
- There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.
- Pretty depressing stuff, but we'll try and cheer you up in a little while. But we are now going to sing again. Sort of given a bit of a title to what I wanted to say tonight.
- Is life worth living? Suppose God doesn't exist.

That occurs to a lot of people. What then? The Bible says that's a foolish belief. It's only fools who say there is no God.

[4 : 38] But not believing in God for three notable philosophers of the 20th century. I don't want to blind you with philosophy, but you might recognize the name of Bertrand Russell, who was an atheist.

Jean-Paul Sartre, who was an atheist. And Albert Camus, very, very famous philosophers, all united. It was their starting point.

Indeed, many people assume there is no God. And their philosophical ideas overlap with certain key words that you'll find in their writings.

Albert Camus, I remember his name, it's Camus. It's French, you see, two French philosophers, Sartre and Camus. See, I've just moved from Camus Avenue.

I'm sure he had nothing to do with it, but I never forget his name, because I lived there for seven years. Albert Camus. But he established a philosophy called absurdity.

[5 : 50] That life is absurd. And he said this, Albert Camus. Deciding whether life is worth living is the fundamental question of philosophy.

All other questions follow on from that. And he said you will never live life if you are looking, you will never enjoy life if you are looking for the meaning of life.

That's the sort of depressing counsel we get from philosophers. But these three made their personal fortune out of their pessimism. But the heart of man can never be truly rested, rest content with a meaningless existence.

There is within us an irresistible urge to find some rhyme or rhythm for our being here.

Ecclesia asks really the question, is life worth living? I hope you've read it through sometime, because it's really searching stuff. Most people ask that question maybe many times through their lives.

[7 : 06] Is it worth living? Maybe you've asked it. And things haven't changed really in the last 3,000 years since these words were penned.

We just wear different clothes, but our thinking is pretty much the same. And Ecclesiastes has something to say to our unhappy and frustrated generation.

Listen, how and why was such a pessimistic book like the book of Ecclesiastes ever included in the Bible?

It seems to contradict so much else that's said in Scripture. And we can easily get the wrong impression without certain key things to remember.

All 66 books of the Bible make a contribution to the whole counsel of God. And Ecclesiastes is no exception.

[8 : 04] To the total revelation of God, this book has something to say. In a sentence, to summarize its message, would be this.

When you come to chapter 12, you can look back and say, Ecclesiastes has said, A life not centered in God is purposeless, it's empty, it is chaotic, it's absurd, and it's meaningless.

If you adopt the positions of the three philosophers I've quoted, then life is absurd if what they said was true. Faith in God is the only means of satisfying the human heart.

And because death is universal, and Solomon keeps referring to that, it's universal and inevitable, no one without God can ever make sense of earthly experience.

Try as he may. The writer has hit a nerve in human thinking. And this book is one man's quest for meaning, which God wanted him to pass on.

- [9 : 19] He wanted us to know about it. He deserves a hearing for that reason. This book is included in the Bible. His purpose, Solomon is the author, is to close off and shut down all false options that the human heart might go for.
- He's a lighthouse saying, Avoid certain things, or you will end up marooned and dashed to pieces on the rocks.
- As a child, I was brought up during the war years. Saw my father once in the first seven years of my life because he was away as a soldier fighting the war.
- Food was scarce during the war. Not many of you are old enough to remember, but I remember it well. Food was scarce, and we were extremely poor.
- Don't cry, but we were poor. Really very, very poor. I grew up forever hungry. My appetite came between me and my wits.
- [10 : 32] At mealtimes, I had a favorite saying that my mother regretted hearing. She would put down what we were to eat, and I'd say, Is that all there is?
- Is that all there is? Forever hungry. There was never enough to eat. I was given all that my mother could afford, but like Oliver Twist, I wanted some more.
- Some of you can remember the singer Peggy Lee, if you're interested in jazz at all. Peggy Lee was a very popular singer, and she took up my words in one of her songs.
- She didn't know that, but I'll just sing it for you. No, I won't. She relates a series of experiences from her life, being in a fire, going to a circus, being in love.
- She sings about all these things, and then asks, Is that all there is? Is that all there is? Have you heard it some of you? Is that all there is? By Peggy Lee.
- [11 : 42] Let me quote from her song. I know what you must be saying to yourselves, if that's the way she feels about it, why doesn't she end it all?
- Oh no, not me. I'm in no hurry for that final disappointment, for I know just as well as I'm standing here, talking to you, when the final moment comes, and I'm breathing my last breath, I'll be saying to myself, is that all there is?
- If that's all there is, my friend, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball, if that's all there is. Well, of life, many people are saying just that.
- Is that all there is? What was important to 8,000 American students who were asked the question, what's life all about?
- 16% said life is about making a lot of money. That's a high percentage, but no surprise, 16%. The goal of many people in this world is to make money.
- [13 : 00] I don't know whether it's yours. A more telling statistic, however, 75% of the students said that their first goal was to find a meaning and a purpose in life.
- It's a subject that's been debated for centuries by great minds, the rank and file in local pubs, and in the banal, crass inanities of pop music lyrics.
- John Lennon and co. The lyrics are often statements of despair. I can't get no satisfaction. That's terrible grammar, you know, but we know what Mick Jagger was saying.
- I can't get no satisfaction. Courtney Love. It's the emptiness that follows you down. It's the ache inside when it all burns out.
- Well, in the authorized version, meaningless, meaningless is translated vanity of vanities. All is vanity. It's a Hebraic repetition, vanity, vanity.
- [14 : 16] Really, what it's saying is, this is real serious vanity. It's nothing. It's absurd. It's meaningless. We use the word vanity in a different way, of course.

One lady saw vanity as her besetting sin and sought help from her pastor. She said to the pastor, I look in the mirror every morning and admire myself for half an hour and think how beautiful I am.

For her encouragement, the pastor said, that's not your besetting sin. It's your vivid imagination. Just to help her along, to get that one out of the way.

The writer of Ecclesiastes possesses the greatest intellect the world has ever known.

Einstein is an also-ran alongside Solomon. He was the richest man that ever lived, was Solomon. He could feel sorry for Bill Gates and Warren Buffett in their poverty.

[15 : 23] Also, he was the biggest womanizer in the world. I mean, how many men have a thousand wives?

He took adultery to a new level. He had the time. He had the money. He had the power. He had all the opportunity in the world to do and obtain exactly what he wanted.

He denied himself nothing. You'll see that as you read the book. Yet he found no satisfaction. I can get no satisfaction. Cecil Rhodes was at one time probably the richest man in the world at that particular time.

Two African countries were named after him, southern and northern Rhodesia, having made his fortune with diamonds. But you know, he was a contemporary of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.

And one of the poorest men in comparison in the world. But they were good friends. And they were traveling together once on a train, I think it was, and William said, Cecil, are you happy?

[16 : 39] Me? Happy? Good heavens, no. What do you think of that? The richest man in the world. The other richest man I'm thinking of is Jean-Paul Getty.

You never see a photograph of him smiling. He's always scowling. Utterly, utterly miserable, which proves a point. The unnamed writer of Ecclesiastes could only be Solomon.

And he presents two alternatives, two alternate ways of looking at life. Oscillating first one way as he's writing and then another.

It's an account of someone who believed in two worlds, but takes a look at life from one world and then another world.

Different sections of the book. The first world, we can say, looked at life under the sun. Under the sun. The dwelling place of man.

[17 : 41] Under the sun. But secondly, he refers to things above the sun. The dwelling place of God. Ecclesiastes 5.2 God is in heaven and you are on earth so let your words be few.

He acknowledged. But sometimes he spoke as if this was the only world. Under the sun. Read for under the sun. Earthly existence. And we're familiar with breadth, length, and depth.

We're much less at ease with height. Especially above the sun. Heaven and its higher values are considered either non-existent or inaccessible to an awful lot of people.

Under the sun is where they live and where they think and they view life from the mind of someone without spiritual insight. Secular man.

Secular man. Suffering from heaven blindness. The majority of people view life horizontally as if blinkered with a big baseball cap.

[18 : 51] Their vision is exclusively human. The divine is ignored. Living without the benefit of the light of revelation from God.

Like the philosophers I mentioned, revelation is set aside as irrelevant because it's impossible. And it's the man who lives and reasons as if God has not communicated with the world unaware that God has spoken to the world or if he's aware in any way he rejects it.

Just life under the sun is all he's concerned about. He's bought into the horizontal but has no concern, no interest in the vertical. Pie in the sky, says Karl Marx.

Christian gospel is just that to many. Supernatural Christianity treated with scorn and his frame of reference is materialistic secularism.

And the term under the sun occurs 29 times in this book. So that's the way Solomon is looking at things at certain times. Living earthly life anchored with things under the sun.

[20 : 08] Gloomy, pessimistic conclusions result when life amounts to ignoring God as if there was nothing above the sun.

I've got two sons. I was allowed a few minutes, both born at home, not hospital. I was allowed a few minutes alone with my firstborn son.

He's a missionary now with Wakelet Bible Translators but just a few minutes after he was born. They placed him in my hands and I was on my own with him in the room and I prayed with him.

And without bias or prejudice, I held the most handsome baby ever. The image of his father. Big brown eyes, wide open.

I remember his eyes were wide open and he was bright and looking around. It was a very emotional experience, I can say. He was surveying the room, not crying.

[21 : 18] That came later. That came sooner. I will never forget the pensive, puzzled look on my son's face as if drinking in his new surroundings and asking, who put me down here?

Where did I come from? Who am I? What am I doing here? Who's this weirdo holding me? Where do I go from here?

How long will I be here? Is this all there is? Obviously a very bright child to have such profound thoughts at this early stage in life.

But three things had been thrust upon that child, unto my unsuspecting son, uninvited to him. The world, life, and time.

New experiences for this tiny being created in the image of God. It bothered the great C.S. Lewis, you know, who was once an atheist and became a Christian sometime before the war.

[22 : 33] the most reluctant Christian he described himself as because he was happy with his atheism but realized it was wrong.

He was very bothered the fact that God had not personally consulted him as the creator as to whether C.S. Lewis wanted to be born or not.

He was given no choice in the matter. He was delivered here without prior consultation and even annihilation was not an option because he was an eternal soul.

We're all eternal souls. Sadly, many come to wish they'd never been born. That's an awful reality. Even the Lord said for some or for someone it would have been better if that man had never been born.

Well, stop the world I want to get off someone cries. Have you ever felt like that? Oh world, oh life, oh time.

[23 : 41] Shakespeare's words observation of life appears in Macbeth. Macbeth's a big film that's doing the rounds at the moment. Macbeth's famous soliloquy tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time.

Life is but a walking shadow. A poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

Verse 13, it's an unhappy business that God has given to the children of men to be busy with human existence seen as a divinely imposed burden. The first time God is brought into the equation is verse 13 here.

Solomon wondered, will I find anything of lasting value in this world where I must live out my life for a finite period? Did the world have anything to offer him?

And the search in a person's life is often twofold for meaning and for moral victory.

[25 : 00] That eludes our modern world. My search was for what it's worth chasing and grasping the wind.

It came to nothing, he says. philosophers who take the non-existence of God for granted echo Solomon's conclusions as he describes life under the sun without God.

One lottery winner won 10 million pounds. Previously, he'd earned 150 pounds a week and he had all this money.

He quickly and enthusiastically blew 5 million of it, buying all the things he ever wanted. He just went out and bought them until he ran out of ideas of things to buy, as you do.

5 million pounds blown. Each item he bought, which previously he couldn't afford, gave him a buzz lasting 15 seconds. He confessed after his win, after a little while after his win, I'm no happier now than I was when I was earning 150 pounds a week.

[26 : 26] What does man gain under the sun? Jesus said, if you were to gain everything, what's it worth? Mark 8, 36, what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?

And what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses. The world could have been a paradise for man, but sin spoiled everything in the Garden of Eden.

as John Milton knew, because of sin, paradise was lost. According to the psychologist Carl Jung, a third of his, very famous psychologist, a third of his patients had no clinically definable neurosis at all.

They were suffering from the senselessness, the futility, and the frustration and emptiness of their lives, not to mention their guilt.

This awful burden of guilt. And Ecclesiastes then records the thoughts of the richest, most powerful, influential, intelligent, gifted, famous, most educated man that ever lived, possessing a knowledge of astronomy, meteorology, botany, zoology, and many other disciplines.

[28 : 04] And he was enormously talented as a man. He had everything. He was the king. He was an architect. He was a builder. He was a poet. He was a philosopher.

He was a lover. He was a writer. He was a judge. And the wisest man on the face of the earth. Couldn't have much more than that, couldn't you?

And yet it is he who speaks of what human life amounts to when you're disconnected from God, the monotony of life without God.

There's never been more entertainment in Britain and we've never been so bored. The entertainment industry is huge and worth billions.

We have the TV. We have theater. We have cinema. We have nightclubs and discos and sport and yet we're bored. They tell me we never hear enough.

[29 : 03] We never see enough. We never do enough to bring satisfaction. Past generations, well, some wanted to be saved and others wanted life improved and others wanted to be emancipated from slavery and others wanted to be educated because they're ignorant.

Today, they want to be entertained. The great fear in their life is boredom. You'll have heard of the book by Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, yeah?

Bestseller. Sold in amazing quantities. You could buy, I went into Costco one day and he had a pile of The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren.

Morrison's and everywhere. The title has much to do with the popularity because people long for a purpose driven life.

Many young people today have no sense of purpose. In honest moments, they'll admit that their lives are not purpose driven but nihilistic.

[30 : 14] There's nothing purposeful about binge drinking, about drug abuse, about gun and knife crime, terrorizing gang warfare, violence, promiscuity or casual sex.

They are destructive things, all of them. Suicide is at an all-time high among the young people. I've got an actual suicide note here that reflects my own thinking from my pre-Christian days.

This is a suicide note to someone, to anyone in the world who cares. Who am I? Why am I living?

Life has become stupid and purposeless. Nothing makes sense to me anymore. The questions I had when I came to college are still unanswered and now I'm convinced there are no answers.

There can only be pain and guilt and despair in this world. My fear of death and the unknown is far less terrifying to me than the prospect of the unbearable frustration, futility and hopelessness of continuing to live.

[31 : 27] death. So this young student decided that an early death is better than life.

Solomon, successful, fabulously wealthy, served by great men, admired and envied by millions, with a harem of concubines, yet he had an aching heart in search for an elusive thing called meaning.

We get used from the fairy tales of three wishes. You can have three wishes. But for Solomon, it was a sort of a reality because the Lord appeared to Solomon, 1 Kings 3, 5, and said during the night in a dream, Solomon, ask what you want me to give you.

There's a blank check from God. What would you have said? Ask what you want me to give you. To win the lottery, play for man united, marry Miss Great Britain, live until you're a thousand, be healed, own a Bentley continental, come first in the elusive.

No. Solomon asked for understanding and wise discernment, and this pleased God and wisdom was granted, plus God graciously gave him all the wealth he didn't ask for.

[32 : 59] The queen of Sheba was amazed at Solomon's wisdom, his possessions. He answered all her questions. Nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. And when the queen saw all of his wisdom, the palace he built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending of their servants in their robes, his cup bearers, the burnt offerings at the temple of the Lord, she was amazed.

She says, the half wasn't told me. Really impressed with Solomon. And Solomon was, of course, was the builder chosen to construct the most expensive, famous, and glorious building that the world has ever known, Solomon's temple.

Well, I could go on, but you get the picture. was it C.S. Lewis who said, there's a God-filled blank in every man's heart which only Christ can fill.

And so I really must come to a conclusion. Solomon had ample things to do, plenty of places to go, projects to complete, forever in popular demand.

It was a busy life. But it all left him empty. But he did refer to life above the sun, and there was a spiritual dimension to him, earlier in his life more than later in his life, because he backslid, and he started to worship other gods, would you believe?

[34 : 33] And it became a moral failure. As for us, the New Testament comes in and says, now you think about life above the sun. This is the way Paul puts it.

encouraging believers, set your affections on things above, where Christ is, and where your life is hid with Christ in God.

Meaning is found not in things, not experiences, not in possessions, not in business, not in wild living, not in work, not in wine, not in women.

It's found in Christ, in God. God. Psalm 107, verse 9, he satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry with good things.

The Lord will guide you always, says Isaiah. He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land, and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

[35 : 37] Psalm 63, satisfaction can only be found in God. He alone satisfies the longing heart. Without God, who can eat or find enjoyment?

Solomon says in chapter 2, in verse 25. Many things God has created gives us pleasure.

You know, don't forget, pleasure was God's idea. And at God's right hand, there are pleasures, how long? Forevermore.

fullness of joy in my right hand, and pleasures forevermore. And in the book of wisdom, we find God saying, he who finds me finds life.

He who misses me misses life and harms himself, to as many as receive him, they receive the most meaningful life possible.

[36 : 43] Jesus Christ said to people to believe, I have come, that you might have life, and that you might have life in all of its fullness.

Now, I've described my thinking before I became a Christian, because I was near to suicide. God knew that I didn't want to go on living.

And the 17-year-old cripple girl that I'd known, she had TB of the hip, and I hadn't seen her for a number of years, but she'd become a Christian.

And in my utter state of despair, she led me to the Lord Jesus Christ. And my sister, my older sister, then my two younger sisters, all my sisters are in Christ, due to this one person who just told me that there was an emptiness in my heart which only Christ could deal with.

And I'm so grateful to Nancy Coulson. She's in heaven now, but what a great soul winner. So the book of Ecclesiastes has a particular message that echoes in many thinking human hearts.

[38 : 13] And let's pray. Father, we thank you that there is meaning and purpose in life. You created life to be good.

You didn't create life in order for it to be a disappointment. moment. But Lord, we've messed up so often as human beings. How gracious of you to come back and give us another chance.

We thank you, Father, for the gospel, for its transforming power, and for the way we can be renewed and given a new purpose for living, and you put a spring in our step and a joy in our hearts that we cannot receive anywhere else.

So thank you, Father, for the book of Ecclesiastes and for reminding us of the great glories and wonders that are above the sun. And there's coming a day when we shall be ushered through those pearly gates and be with the Lord forevermore to experience those pleasures at your right hand.

So thank you, Father, for such kindness and such love. In Jesus' name, Amen. Now we're going to go into communion. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.