

Where Do You Find Fulfillment In Life?

Ecclesiastes 11:9—12:14

Do you know people that are unsatisfied with life?

Always searching for meaning and purpose through different pleasures and experiences?

Solomon is looking at life in the rearview mirror and has a lot of regrets.

He has lived life to the fullest, but he feels empty. He is cynical, jaded, and frustrated with the way life has turned out.

Hevel is translated as meaningless or vanity. (38 times)

Hevel: a Hebrew word that refers to breath, smoke, mist, or vapor: It is impossible to grasp, and before you know it, life is gone; it vanishes into thin air.

He tries to find fulfillment in the four W's: Wine, women, work, wealth

Solomon is the most powerful and wealthiest man alive and yet feels empty.

Most theologians feel that Solomon wrote the Book of Proverbs early in his life. And he wrote Ecclesiastes near the end of his life. And he wrote the Song of Solomon in the middle of his life.

What Does The Bible Say?

9 Young people, it's wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want to do; take it all in. But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do.

10 So refuse to worry, and keep your body healthy. But remember that youth, with a whole life before you, is meaningless. (Ecclesiastes 11:9–10 NLT)

Enjoy your youth, because you will get old and die!

But Solomon also says that we will eventually stand before God and answer for our behavior.

How Can You Obey?

Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, "Life is not pleasant anymore." (Ecclesiastes 12:1 NLT)

Remember your Creator. Be a Christ-follower.

8 "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless." (Ecclesiastes 12:8 NLT)

2 "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!" (Ecclesiastes 1:2 NLT)

9 Keep this in mind: The Teacher was considered wise, and he taught the people everything he knew. He listened carefully to many proverbs, studying and classifying them. 10 The Teacher sought to find just the right words to express truths clearly.

11 The words of the wise are like cattle prods—painful but helpful. Their collected sayings are like a nail-studded stick with which a shepherd drives the sheep.

12 But, my child, let me give you some further advice: Be careful, for writing books is endless, and much study wears you out. (Ecclesiastes 12:9–12 NLT)

My slant, this is an editor who summarizes Solomon that his proverbs encourage us to seek God.

13 That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God... (Ecclesiastes 13:13 NLT)

Fear God, which means to respect God.

13 ... and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty.

(Ecclesiastes 13:13 NLT)

Obey God. If you say you are a Christian and do not obey Christ, you are ignorant or disobedient.

15 “If you love me, obey my commandments. (John 14:15 NLT)

14 God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad. (Ecclesiastes 13:14 NLT)

If there is no God and no judgment, life is meaningless.

However, since there is a God and judgment, everything has meaning.

How will you seek fulfillment in life, on your own or through your Creator?

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Additional Notes:

This week's Bible and Science is from Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge's book, *New Answers Book 1* (Green Forrest, AR: Master Books, 2006), 47 - 63.

Explore:

Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Lord of all. Judgment should be left to Him in matters not clearly spelled out in Scripture.

Encourage parents and grandparents to discuss this key truth at home.

Explore:

Solomon asked God for wisdom when he became king in place of his father David (2 Chronicles 1:7-12) and later became famous for that wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34). In spite of his wisdom, however, he ended up acting foolishly. Influenced by his many foreign idolatrous wives, he even brought idolatry into Israel (1 Kings 11:1-11). As an elderly king, he surely had much to look back on, both good and bad. He wrote about life apart from God in Ecclesiastes.

Explore:

Believers Live With Judgment and Accountability in Mind

(Ecclesiastes 11:9—12:8)

Two extremes lie in wait for those who contemplate life. One extreme is to focus on its darkness. It is all coming to an end and will mean absolutely nothing, and no one will remember me! We see this outlook in many of the earlier passages of Ecclesiastes.

The other danger is to not take life seriously at all: eat, drink,

and be merry, and pay no attention to consequences for oneself or others. Solomon will help us avoid both errors if we will pay attention.

He addressed the young with the advice to enjoy life (verses 9-10). Live with a full and happy heart, but remember that we will give an account for our lives. Profit from being young, not by being young and foolish, but by living in such a way that one can enjoy life even as one prepares to meet God.

Creative activity requires constraints. The artist or the artisan makes choices. It may be the wood to carve, the paint to use, or the cake to decorate. What will we create? What are we going to paint? What kind of cake will we bake? Only once we have made some very important initial choices can we get on with the business of the creative process.

How about building a happy life? That is one of the first choices to make. Do we want to shrink back from life's inevitable end

and not enjoy what it sends our way now? Do we want to live as though it will never end? Choosing to live joyfully and vigorously (especially when young) while remembering that we will answer to God—that is a recipe for a happy life. Let us live joyfully, and encourage our children and grandchildren to do the same. If they have particular interests, encourage them to follow them in such a way that they will be able to answer to God for how they have lived.

Verse 1 of chapter 12 extends the closing thought of the previous chapter. In 11:9-10, Solomon emphasized enjoying life. Here in chapter 12, he painted a more detailed picture of what is coming. Living only under the sun (apart from God) will mean that we will find no pleasure in the harder years of old age. We should draw near to God and live with Him in mind before those years come.

Most interpreters see verses 2-7 as an extended poetic description of old age. An older person hardly needs a reminder of what aging can be like. Solomon went through this lengthy description for the sake of the young. He wanted them to think about what was coming their way. He spoke of things that diminish with old age: joy, eyesight, movement, hearing, speaking, desire, and more. He spoke of increasing fear and frailty. He closed with the image of an abandoned well. The cord had snapped, the bowl or bucket was broken. The pitcher for pouring water into other vessels had shattered. The wheel or pulley to pull up the water was broken. Life was over.

Verse 8 gives us Solomon's final repetition of the refrain he repeated throughout the book: apart from God it is all meaningless! If one does not die tragically young, one dies pitifully old. That is life under the sun.

Solomon's advice is to give thought and attention to God while we are young, worshiping and serving Him. The time will come when our abilities and faculties will diminish, when we will not be able to do for God and for others what we once did. In fact, the day may come when our life becomes very difficult.

Remember God while we can still remember any- thing. Praise God while we can still raise a voice in praise. Listen to God and others while we can still hear anything at all. Do something for God and others while we still can.

We do not want to scare children or grandchildren when they encounter older people. Let us in- stead help them to be more understanding of those who have diminished capacities. Respect for the elderly is good, and not just for the elderly.

Explore:

Walk in the ways of your heart and in what your eyes see
(Ecclesiastes 11:9): Is this not the opposite of the deceitfulness

of the heart that Jeremiah 17:9 warns us about? Solomon, in Proverbs 3:5, warned us not to lean on our own understanding. In Ecclesiastes, he provided some understanding that we need to take into account. Jeremiah asked, Who can know or understand it (speaking of the heart)? We cannot trust it. Left on our own, it will surely lead us astray. Solomon, however, was telling us to follow it, but not to let it lead us astray. Follow it in the realization that God will call it all to account. Living life in such a way as to be ready to answer to God is not likely to lead us astray. There is no contradiction in the Bible's instructions. What we have instead is clarification and specific application to specific areas of life.

Explore:

Some translations speak of evil days in 12:1. This is not evil in the sense of moral evil, but rather in the sense of enduring the

curse from Genesis 3 that finally claims all of us. Verses 2-7 are worth examining in more detail:

Verse 2: Life in Israel followed well-defined weather patterns. Spring clouds would come and go, but autumn and especially winter clouds tended to set in and hang around. As we age, it seems that the aches, pains, and various ailments tend to stay for longer than they used to.

Verse 3: Knees, hips, and legs become frail-er, leading to precarious, shaky walking. Teeth cannot grind as well when they are missing! Eyesight dims. Even cataract surgery is no cure-all for failing eyes.

Verse 4: Hearing weakens, gradually shut-ting us up in a house of silence. The sound of grinding may refer to speaking faintly over gums—with teeth gone, our speech suffers. Most

interpreters believe the rising up at the sound of birds indicates how the old can be easily startled, in spite of bad hearing. Some see a waking up at first light, when the birds begin to sing.

Verse 5: With aging, people tend to be more risk-averse. It often shows in their driving or in their hesitation to do much climbing.

The almond tree in full bloom appears as a bright white fluffy ball, surely a reference to gray or white hair. The grass-hopper dragging itself along in cold weather calls to mind the painful moving about we may experience because of stiff joints. Desire (caper berry in some translations) refers to sexual desire. The caper berry enjoyed popularity as a sexual stimulant. Even stimulants eventually fail. The eternal home in this case may be no more than the grave, considering the rest of the passage, but we cannot rule out a truly eternal home with or without God.

Mourners refers to a funeral procession.

Verse 6: This is the final breakdown of the living human organism. Some see the silver cord as the spinal cord, connecting the brain to the body. They will usually think of the gold bowl as the skull containing the brain. Others see a silver cord holding a golden bowl at a well. In either case, the end result is the same: complete destruction.

Verse 7: Our body begins its descent back to the dust, and our spirit meets its Creator.

Explore:

Believers Demonstrate Proper Reverence for God and Obey His Word (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

These last few verses of Ecclesiastes tie up some important loose ends. First, we find out more about Solomon (often called the

Teacher or Preacher). He did not hoard his wisdom for himself. He shared his knowledge with his subjects. He worked at discovering and organizing proverbs. He was not content just to collect them. He put effort into finding the best way to express wisdom. As a result, what he wrote was trustworthy (verses 9-10).

Verse 11 and the first part of verse 12 tell us something important about the words of the wise, or the Wisdom literature of the Bible. These words work primarily in two ways. First, they are like goads, the sharply pointed sticks used to get the plowing oxen moving, or moving in the right direction. Words of wisdom spur us into action, to do the right thing or to move in the right direction. Second, they are like embedded nails. Goads produce movement. Nails produce stability. Some things do not need to move. They need to be fastened down. Words of wisdom help to nail things down, keeping us from wandering off on our own away from God.

To summarize, words of wisdom serve to move what needs to get moving and to settle down what needs to stay settled.

God is not against books or literature. The Bible, after all, is a collection of books. Yet it seems clear that we have multiplied words—published words—in ways that bring about great weariness. Now, the thoughtful person must wade not merely through millions and millions of hard cover and paperback books, newspapers, and magazines, but must now navigate the confusing pages of the online world (verse 12b).

There may be much to be written still, but nothing else to be heard (verse 13). We await no discovery in art, science, economics, or politics that will invalidate the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep His commandments. Everything else arranges itself around that one central duty. God will have the last word. His judgment or evaluation will prevail. He will easily ignore our pitiful attempts to excuse what is wrong or to

condemn what is right (verse 14). We can do no better than to live the life He has set before us, to fear Him, keep His commandments, and await His final word.

Explore:

The Whole Duty of Man—Solomon is speaking here of a universal obligation. Language, culture, historical era, political system—these do not matter. In every time and in every place, to fear God and keep His commandments is the all-encompassing duty of every person. Note carefully, however that Solomon's reference to God's judgment over every deed does not mean salvation by works. We cannot earn salvation by doing good works. It is faith in Christ's work that saves us. We will, however, give an account for the way we live.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way

others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ- followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 5

Why are some of the reasons we should not read anything between the first two verses of Genesis?

Question 2 of 5

Why is it essential to maintain an awareness of coming judgment?

Question 3 of 5

What choices and actions demonstrate people have accountability to God in mind? What options show they do not?

Question 4 of 5

Why is it better for people to come to Christ and live for Him earlier in life than later?

Question 5 of 5

What are some attitudes and actions that demonstrate reverence for God?

