

Why Losing Your Focus With God, Means Losing Purpose And Joy?

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

What is the meaning of life?

Why am I so unhappy?

Does God care?

Why is there so much suffering and injustice in the world?

Is life worth living?

Who wrote Ecclesiastes?

**The author never gives his name. The author identified
himself as:**

a “son of David” (1:1)

a “king in Jerusalem” (1:1)

“king over Israel in Jerusalem” (1:12)

wiser “than anyone who [had] ruled over Jerusalem before”

him (1:16)

a builder of great projects (2:4–6)

owner of numerous enslaved people (2:7)

having herds of sheep and cattle (2:7)

having great wealth (2:8)

having a considerable size harem (2:8)

being more significant than anyone who lived in Jerusalem

before him (2:9)

Most of the book is written in the first person. However, in the end, the book is written in the third person. Therefore, it is possible that Ecclesiastes had an editor.

What Does The Bible Say?

Why did Solomon write Ecclesiastes? His thesis is one central point.

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

The word meaningless occurs thirty-eight times and is found in every chapter except chapter 10.

Solomon says that chasing the following: wealth, security, happiness, and blessings is useless.

However, they are wrong for two reasons:

We cannot predict God’s ways because the way God accomplishes His purposes is a mystery to us.

Eventually, death cuts short our plans and leave our wealth to others.

Living for oneself will never make us happy.

He still believes in God, so he is neither an atheist nor an agnostic.

3 What do people get for all their hard work under the sun?

(Ecclesiastes 1:3 NLT)

The Preacher hints at his evangelistic purpose by using a critical phrase almost thirty times throughout his argument: “under the sun.”

This phrase leads us to understand that when we view life from a merely human perspective and limit our gaze to this solar system without ever lifting our eyes to see the beauty and glory of God in Heaven, life will leave us empty and unhappy.

What makes Ecclesiastes so tragic is that Solomon writes it.

Solomon son of David took firm control of his kingdom, for the Lord his God was with him and made him very powerful. 7 That night God appeared to Solomon and said, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!”

8 Solomon replied to God, “You showed great and faithful love to David, my father, and now you have made me king in his place. 9 O Lord God, please continue to keep your promise to David my father, for you have made me king over a people as

numerous as the dust of the earth! 10 Give me the wisdom and knowledge to lead them properly, for who could possibly govern this great people of yours?”

11 God said to Solomon, “Because your greatest desire is to help your people, and you did not ask for wealth, riches, fame, or even the death of your enemies or a long life, but rather you asked for wisdom and knowledge to properly govern my people —12 I will certainly give you the wisdom and knowledge you requested. But I will also give you wealth, riches, and fame such as no other king has had before you or will ever have in the future!”

13 Then Solomon returned to Jerusalem from the Tabernacle at the place of worship in Gibeon, and he reigned over Israel.

14 Solomon built up a huge force of chariots and horses. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. He stationed some of them in the chariot cities and some near him in Jerusalem. 15 The king

made silver and gold as plentiful in Jerusalem as stone. And valuable cedar timber was as common as the sycamore-fig trees that grow in the foothills of Judah. 16 Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Cilicia; the king's traders acquired them from Cilicia at the standard price. (2 Chronicles 1:1;1:7–16 NLT)

Solomon started his career with God as his focus.

4 In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the Lord his God, as his father, David, had been. 5 Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. 6 In this way, Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's sight; he refused to follow the Lord completely, as his father, David, had done. (1 Kings 11:4–6 NLT)

Ecclesiastes is the result of someone who stopped walking with God.

Solomon's wives led him away from God. What is there in your life that may be leading you away from God?

How Can You Obey?

19 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. (Hebrews 10:19–23 NLT)

Never let anything interfere with your time with God.

24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24–25 NLT)

Never let anything interfere with your time with your Christian community.

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 Tough Questions is from Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 48 - 50.

Explore:

Key Truths

Apart From God, Human Activity Is Meaningless, Fleeting, and Monotonous.

Apart from God, Seeking Wisdom and Understanding Is Meaningless.

Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the Bible

This lesson introduces us to the book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon around 934 BC. It joins the other Wisdom books that apply to all people of all time.

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:

Apart From God, Human Activity Is Meaningless, Fleeting, and Monotonous (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)

The king to whom the first verse introduces us was undoubtedly Solomon. No other king of Israel ever fit the description better than he.

Translations vary for verse 2. The King James Version used the word vanity. In the time of that translation, vanity did not mean excessive pride in one's appearance or reputation, as we commonly understand it today. It referred instead to the emptiness or ineffectual outcome of something, as in, they labor in vain who build without the Lord. Other translations use synonyms such as worthless, meaningless, or fleeting. Others mention frustration or emptiness. The word comes from a root that literally denotes breath or vapor. It means that everything (at least everything under the sun) is passing away, and rapidly so. Picture trying to hold onto the vapor rising from a cup of coffee or your exhaled breath on a winter day. No sooner do you see it than it is gone.

With verse 3 Solomon challenged us to consider what life is really like apart from God. A lifetime of toil and labor—what do we really get from it after all? Solomon asked many penetrating questions, questions that seem dark, even discouraging. To understand what is going on, we must focus on the sphere of activity that Solomon is describing: under the sun. This is not life in Heaven or in the kingdom of God. This is life down in the dirt and the mud—life under the sun apart from God.

If secular scientists are right and billions of years into the future all the stars, including ours, will die out, then everything living will die. In light of that, how could anything really matter, if that is all there is? We are not designed for meaninglessness, however. Nor are we designed to find or create our own meaning, either. We are built to live in the meaning and purpose for which God has created us.

The earth and its cycles continue, even as generations (under the sun) come and go (verse 4). Solomon turned his attention to natural phenomena that illustrate this idea of ceaseless coming and going:

Verse 5: The daily rising and setting of the sun.

Verse 6: Whereas the sun travels east to west, Solomon described wind patterns going north and south, but also round and round. Interestingly, we know today that most weather patterns travel in curves or circular patterns.

Verse 7: The water cycle: streams go to the sea, so why does it not fill up? Because the waters return (via evaporation and condensation) to the land that fed the streams in the first place.

Solomon saw this continual cycle as a burden to understand (verse 8) and more than he could express. He also understood how the products of human senses, especially sight and sound, were never enough to bring satisfaction to people. Facebook and

other online businesses know that with the right picture, they can generate millions of clicks from users whose insatiability or appetite will lure them into sites designed to sell or swindle, not inform. There is even a word for it: clickbait. People never get enough, it seems.

The people of Solomon's day let their eyes and ears wander through the temptations to sin or empty frivolity. They needed no computerized clickbait. Technology has changed, but human nature has not (verses 9-10). Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun. Customs, languages, nations, and tools change, but the people involved are very much like those who went before or will come after.

Speaking of before and after, verse 11 observes how the repeating cycles of human remembrance are empty as well. How many people of the past can most of us recall? Even the most avid historian among us knows only a few out of all the millions

of human beings who preceded us. How many of us will make a name that will be remembered for more than a generation or two of our descendants? Given enough time, all is forgotten—under the sun.

The natural cycles that Solomon used put our time here on earth in a different light, one that is not always comfortable for us.

We should help the generations following us to understand that all generations pass, even ours and theirs. They are all pretty much the same from one to the next, especially if God is out of the picture. Solomon's observation holds true in spite of our much-hyped references to different generations (Boomers, Xers, Millennials, etc.). If we want something lasting and eternal, we will need to find it outside of this world of cycles and demise.

We want our children and grandchildren to understand that what they do and how they live are important because of God, not

because of what they may find here under the sun. Naturally, we will need to model this behavior for them.

Explore:

Ecclesiastes 1:5 describes the daily rising and setting of the sun.

Is this an error in Scripture, since we now know that it is the earth's spinning on its axis that gives the appearance of sunrise and sunset? Not at all! Even today, when school children learn about the earth's orbit around the sun and its rotation upon its axis, we still commonly use the very same terminology.

Solomon was merely engaging with language in the same way we all do. On the contrary, we find that Solomon recognized the need for rotation somewhere in the process. The prevailing wind and water patterns over the globe today tend to flow in circular or oval patterns, not in straight lines. The North Atlantic current sweeps up out of the Caribbean, along the eastern coast of North America, and carries still-warm water and air over to the western

side of Europe. Then the winds drop down toward the south before beginning a push back across the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean. This is just one example of many around the world. Solomon did not use the words evaporation and condensation, but he described them in verse 7 (to the place the streams come from, there they return again). Solomon's proverbs reveal careful attention to the natural world, and these verses reveal it even further. Did Solomon make these observations directly? Or was he wise enough to learn from those whose experience permitted observations not available to him in Jerusalem? Perhaps a bit of both.

Explore:

Apart from God, Seeking Wisdom and Understanding Is Meaningless (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18)

Solomon certainly achieved much. He had the time and resources to learn whatever human knowledge or wisdom was

available in his day. Did such wisdom free him or make him glad? On the contrary, it was a heavy burden (verses 12-13).

Solomon testified that all of the human activity he had seen or learned about was without lasting meaning. It was no more fruitful than chasing after a breeze (verse 14).

Crooked in verse 15 does not denote perverse or wicked, but rather deep, impenetrable, or hard to get to the bottom of. There are things we cannot figure out. Even worse, we do not even know what we do not know! If Solomon's quest to understand it all came up empty, it was not for want of trying. He drank deeply from the cup of wisdom and knowledge. He looked at it from all sides, including insanity and folly. Apart from God, his pursuit of the wind of wisdom was fruitless (verses 16-17).

Indeed, Solomon warned that wisdom and knowledge carried the heavy baggage of sorrow and grief (verse 18). This is the perspective of a man whose heart had drifted away from God. It

astonishes us that this testimony comes from one who repeatedly advised us to seek wisdom!

As we come to the end of this first chapter, we must recognize how serious what Solomon described really is. He did not mention God until describing the burden He has placed on mankind. It is indeed a heavy burden to understand that an entire life's activity, if done apart from God, will amount to nothing. What good are riches, wisdom, and knowledge if all we can do is disappear into the nameless ranks of those who went before us?

Christian believers long to say at this point, "But wait! We're not merely under the sun!" But we must hold off. Solomon was not writing to those who had seen the mountaintop and looked on the other side. He spoke seriously to those who looked no further than their limited under the sun horizons. And their prospects were not good.

As we age, we may find ourselves agreeing more easily with some of Solomon's more discouraging observations. We must not give in to the temptation to keep our view "under the sun." We must live life looking upward, to the Son, for our own good and that of those who follow us.

Explore:

Solomon received special wisdom from God, but this does not mean he just woke up "really, really smart" one day, as though God had downloaded data into his brain. Solomon's own testimony is that he devoted himself to study, and he explored all that is done under heaven. He applied himself to the understanding of wisdom. Likewise, God distributes gifts or abilities to us today, but we need not expect magic. We too will need to apply ourselves.

Explore:

The emptiness of life apart from God demonstrates that we are special creations of God, with an eternal soul. We were created to be in relationship with God. Encourage parents and grandparents to discuss this truth at home.

Leading Others To Christ:

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

What is the purpose of biblical genealogies?

Question 2 of 5

Give some examples of today's worldly wisdom that differs from wisdom revealed in God's Word.

Question 3 of 5

Why do you think worldly wisdom leaves people unsatisfied and unfulfilled?

Question 4 of 5

How is seeking wisdom apart from God like chasing the wind?

Question 5 of 5

Apart from God, where do people in our culture look for purpose and meaning?

