

TNT BIBLE STUDY
WHERE TO TURN WHEN LIFE LETS YOU DOWN
A STUDY IN ECCLESIASTES

SESSION 2: “LOOKING FOR MEANING IN THE WRONG PLACES”
Focus Scriptures: Ecclesiastes Chapters 1-2

SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

WELCOME/PRAAYER

Last week you were introduced to the Book Of Ecclesiastes (*Note: If you missed last week’s lesson, I recommend that you review it from our Face Book or You Tube streaming page*), which is named after its central character, Qoheleth (translated “the Preacher” in the ESV translation). I gave you fair warning that on the surface, this is not a “happy” book. *(1) It has a spirit of hopeless despair; (2) It has no praise or peace; and (3) It seems to promote questionable conduct.*

However, as we go deeper into this study, we will find that Ecclesiastes is full of surprises regarding wisdom that will help us to sustain our spiritual growth as we navigate our lives thru an upside-down world. *We discovered three principles to apply to our personal lives on last week:*

1. **Everything will be beautiful in its own time.** If you want your life to be beautiful then chase God and not His blessings.

2. **The world cannot bring us total satisfaction.** The Preacher [King Solomon] authored this book at the end of his life. He realized that, in the end, the world could not satisfy him. All the wisdom, wealth, and power he accumulated was vanity [meaningless]. Man is born into the world – lives – and then he dies.

3. **The only source of human satisfaction is God alone.** The things of God are always a blessing if we live in Him. Why? Because when we live in God, He is our sole source of satisfaction. No matter how wise or rich or successful we may be, we cannot find meaning in life apart from God.

I hope that you found some time to read chapters 1 and 2 this week as we continue to explore the question: *Where To Turn When Life Lets You Down*.

ECCLESTIASTES – CHAPTER 1

Sometimes we can get so caught up in daily repetitive tasks that we begin to lose sight on what really matters. We worked hard, but to what end? Have you ever asked yourself, "WHAT'S THE POINT"? [Give students a few moments to share their viewpoint; live streamers can write in the chat box online].

After listening to your comments, we will view a *five-minute, Part 1 video* [chapter 1] *produced by 3-Nails Studio and narrated by David Navins*. Before I show the video, let's read the first three verses in chapter 1 [NIV version].

Ephesians 1:1-4 [NIV]

The words of the Teacher, [a] son of David, king in Jerusalem:

2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!"

says the Teacher.

"Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless."

3 What do people gain from all their labors

at which they toil under the sun?

4 Generations come and generations go,

but the earth remains forever.

Vanity of vanities [*meaningless ESV*]: The Preacher begins his sermon with his first conclusion (*though not his ultimate conclusion*). Looking at life all around, he judges it to be vanity – nothing, useless, meaningless. To strengthen his point, the Preacher judged life to be the ultimate vanity, the vanity of vanities. This Hebrew phrasing is used to express intensity or the ultimate of something, as in the phrase holy of holies. This phrase (*or something quite like it*) will be used about 30 times

in this short book. It is one of the major themes of Ecclesiastes. Let's take a look at

Part 1 (chapter 1) video clip: [Ecclesiastes - Chapter 1 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

The Preacher's Summary: "Life is vanity, without meaning." We see from the first two verses that Solomon wrote this from a certain perspective, a perspective that through the book he will expose as inadequate and wrong. *Most all of Ecclesiastes is written from this perspective, through the eyes of a man who thinks and lives as if God doesn't matter.* Solomon wastes no time getting to the heart of how he feels about life. His opening in Ecclesiastes is startling: "Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Everything is meaningless," he writes.

In **verse 3**, Solomon asks: *What is the point of all our hard work?* His question feels a lot like a lament many of us feel deep inside but might be afraid to articulate, especially to God. In **verses 4–11**, Solomon uses a series of metaphors to illustrate his point that life is meaningless. **[Question to Students]:** *“What emotion(s) would you say are at the root of this question and do you think we are free to ask God?” Why or why not?*

In **Verse 9** we see a phrase we have all heard before: *“There is nothing new under the sun.”* Solomon explains that every “new” thing we experience isn't new at all. We don't always see it that way though. We tend to assume that what's new to us is new to history. But that's not exactly true, when we revisit examples from history and at the present time, such as pandemics and the national divide.

As if his reflections weren't disconcerting enough, Solomon ends his opening poem in **verse 11** with a stark observation: people come and people go, and *“there is no remembrance of”* them (CSB). Everything is meaningless. Nothing satisfies. Nothing is new. In **verse 12**, Solomon switches from poetry to a narrative telling us about his experience searching for meaning in the wrong places.

Although *Ecclesiastes 1* only highlights the things in life that can't deliver meaning, we have to go to the *“logos,”* a Greek word used in *John 1:1 [NIV]*; *“In*

the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

God,” referring to Jesus. He made us, He is the reason we exist and the one we look to for meaning.

ECCLESTIASTES – CHAPTER 2

As *chapter 2* opens, Solomon records a conversation he had with himself. *“Go ahead,”* he writes. *“I will test you with pleasure; enjoy what is good”* (v. 1, CSB).

Let me end our session tonight with a brief exploration by Solomon in his search for meaning in:

- Pleasure
- Projects
- Possessions
- Power
- Profession.

Do any of these boxes reflect where you are in your pursuit for the meaning of life [Give a few minutes for student sharing]?

I want to turn your attention now to the screens as we visualize Solomon’s conversation in **Part 2 video** [*chapter 2*]: [Ecclesiastes - Chapter 2 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

We sometimes think all pleasure is bad -- but Solomon saw pleasure as the enjoyment of something good. Nevertheless, the pursuit of pleasure has many pitfalls. It evidently didn’t take long before Solomon learned that it is futile to look for ultimate meaning in pleasure.

Embedded in these first few verses is a remarkable phrase that’s easy to overlook. In *verse 3*, as Solomon describes his experience with pleasure, laughter, and wine, he writes that his mind was *“still guiding [him] with wisdom.”* In a sense, he was evaluating whether pleasure, laughter, and wine could deliver the meaning they promised.

In chapter 2 Solomon realized that:

1. **Wisdom is better than folly**—Solomon even compared wisdom to light and foolishness to darkness (v 14). He wrote, *“I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them [the wise and the foolish] both.”* Then he summarized his thoughts in *verse 17* on wisdom by saying he *“hated life”* because *“all of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”* *If pursuing wisdom leads us to the same destination as foolishness, what is the point of being wise? While his words may seem overly dark, they’re worth exploring because we, too, can find ourselves in a similar place. When we choose wisdom and still can’t get ahead, what then? When we make all the right decisions but still experience negative results, what are we to think?*

2. **It’s common today to feel that life is meaningless**—Solomon even laments that he hates working because everything he earns will go to someone who comes after him, and that person may be foolish. In other words – *“I’m going to amass great trinkets and treasures, and then I’m going to die, and I’m going to take all of that and just hand it to somebody else.”* Feeling that life is meaningless is much more common than we care to think. It is a feeling that is often difficult to address. *Who wants to talk about such a heavy topic?* As hard as it is, if we are having an experience like Solomon’s, it is important that we address it head-on with people we trust.

3. **We can enjoy the good gifts of eating, drinking, and even work** – Because it’s all from the hand of God. *Verse 24* is the first sign of positivity and the first hint of an answer to the overwhelming meaninglessness that Solomon sees in all his pursuits.

REFLECT ON THESE THINGS

Here are a few principles to take away from session 2:

A. Identify at what point you may have turned away from God – At the end

of this heavy session, you may just want to tune out for a bit. But we need to also ask ourselves these difficult questions. If we don't, we run the risk of continuing to operate in the same vain pursuits that Solomon warns us against in chapter 2.

B. Look to Jesus for Hope

If we are honest with ourselves, we can sense what Solomon describes. Life is hard. It can feel meaningless. But when we look to Jesus, we find hope. With God, our lives have real and lasting purpose.

C. Rely on the Holy Spirit

As we follow God, He assures us that our lives are not meaningless. And for that, we should be grateful. Finding the purpose of life is a universal longing, no matter when or where a person lives.

PASTORAL CONCLUSION

Nothing in this world can satisfy us on its own. Not pleasure. Not projects. Not possessions, power, wisdom, or even our profession. On their own, all these pursuits are meaningless and futile. But when we recognize that all these things come directly from God's hand, we can put them in their right perspective—we can receive pleasure as a gift, we can pursue wisdom and learn from our mistakes when we get it wrong, and we can value our work without being defined by it. With gratitude, we can enjoy life for what it is: a gift from God.

Sadly, a lot of people look for purpose in the wrong places. The book of Ecclesiastes is clear that nothing on earth will satisfy us—everything is meaningless apart from a life lived in submission to God, who we know as the divine logos. Spend some time meditating on what it means for you to live out your purpose by submitting your life fully to God.

Ecclesiastes

Session 2 – Chapters 1-2

September 24, 2024

MEMORY SCRIPTURE:

“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

SELF- REFLECTION:

Reflect on what the meaning of life means to you. Did you arrive at the same conclusion as Solomon or in what way do, they differ?

NEXT WEEK 10/1/2024

Read Chapters 3-4

Session 3: “A Season For Everything”