



1867



1899



1905



1950



1974



2009

"The Evolution of Our Church Buildings"

First Baptist church

Established 1826

TOWNSEND-SMITH SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

A CARING CLASS

JANUARY STUDY THEME: Wrestling With Life's Mysteries

January 3, 2010 Lesson: "Wrestling With The Meaning of Life"

Scripture Passage: Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 12:13-14

According to the Bible, King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived.

In Eccl. 12:13 he has given to us his conclusion of the real meaning of life.

"When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this [is for] all humanity."

In spite of these words from King Solomon, many people live their entire lives without any meaning or purpose. Others, however, do set goals for their lives without any regard for considering God's will for their lives. Others of us have found that in the earlier years of our lives we did not do a very good job of goal setting and sort of drifted along with the tides of life. Now that we are more mature, we have seen a great need for following the advice of King Solomon and have determined to live a life of complete obedience to God and leave the consequences of what follows to Him.

IS LIFE MEANINGLESS? [Eccl. 1:1-7]

Everything is Futile

¹ The words of the Teacher, son of David, King in Jerusalem. ² "Absolute futility," says the Teacher. "Absolute futility. Everything is futile." ³ What does a man gain for all his efforts he labors at under the sun? ⁴ A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets; panting, [it returns] to its place where it rises. ⁶ Gusting to the south, turning to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles. ⁷ All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full. The streams are flowing to the place, and they flow there again.

King Solomon was not saying that fulfillment can never be experienced here in this life. God can fill all of our endeavors with meaning and purpose. Solomon was simply acknowledging the sobering truth that life may begin with big dreams, but we always come back to square one in the end. Life's meaning is not found in materialism, wealth, fame, vocational success, or the pleasures of the world.

IS LIFE WEARING YOU DOWN [Eccl. 1:8-11]

⁸ All things are wearisome; man is unable to speak. The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing. ⁹ What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰ Can one say about anything, "Look, this is new"? It has already existed in the ages before us. ¹¹ There is no memory of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no memory among those who follow [them].

Solomon had the world, and he discovered that {same as in a James Bond movie} "The World Is Not Enough." The eyes of a man are never satisfied and the ear cannot hear and figure out why life is so empty.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER? [Eccl. 12:13-14]

¹³ When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this [is for] all humanity.

¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

King Solomon said that at some point in our lives we will see how futile life is without God you will look beyond the world for life's real meaning.

Chapter 1

1. Solomon's personal experience

Everything is futile

Notes for 1:1

The author, Solomon (the "king over Israel in Jerusalem," see [Eccl 1:12](#)), referred to himself as the Teacher, or leader of the assembly. He was both assembling people to hear a message and gathering wise sayings (proverbs). Solomon, one person in the Bible who had everything (wisdom, power, riches, honor, reputation, God's favor), is the one who discussed the ultimate emptiness of all that this world has to offer. He tried to destroy people's confidence in their own efforts, abilities, and righteousness and direct them to commitment to God as the only reason for living.

[1:1-11](#) Solomon had a purpose for writing skeptically and pessimistically. Near the end of his life, he looked back over everything he had done, and most of it seemed meaningless. A common belief was that only good people prospered and that only the wicked suffered, but that hadn't proven true in his experience. Solomon wrote this book after he had tried everything and achieved much, only to find that nothing apart from God made him happy. He wanted his readers to avoid these same senseless pursuits. If we try to find meaning in our accomplishments rather than in God, we will never be satisfied, and everything we pursue will become wearisome.

Notes for 1:2

Solomon's kingdom, Israel, was in its golden age, but Solomon wanted the people to understand that success and prosperity don't last long ([Psalm 103:14-16](#); [Isaiah 40:6-8](#); [James 4:14](#)). All human accomplishments will one day disappear, and we must keep this in mind in order to live wisely. If we don't, we will become either proud and self-sufficient when we succeed or sorely disappointed when we fail. Solomon's goal was to show that earthly possessions and accomplishments are ultimately meaningless. Only the pursuit of God brings real satisfaction. We should honor God in all we say, think, and do.

Notes for 1:8-11

Many people feel restless and dissatisfied. They wonder: (1) If I am in God's will, why am I so tired and unfulfilled? (2) What is the meaning of life? (3) When I look back on it all, will I be happy with my accomplishments? (4) Why do I feel burned out, disillusioned, dry? (5) What is to become of me? Solomon tests our faith, challenging us to find true and lasting meaning in God alone. As you take a hard look at your life, as Solomon did his, you will see how important serving God is over all other options. Perhaps God is asking you to rethink your purpose and direction in life, just as Solomon did in Ecclesiastes.

The king finds wisdom meaningless

Notes for 1:12-15

"What is twisted cannot be straightened" refers to the ultimate perplexity and confusion that come to us because of all the unanswered questions in life. Solomon, writing about his own life, discovered that neither his accomplishments nor his wisdom could make him truly happy. True wisdom is found in God, and true happiness comes from pleasing him.

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Notes for 12:13,14

In his conclusion, Solomon presents his antidotes for the two main ailments presented in this book. Those who lack purpose and direction in life should fear God and keep his commandments. Those who think life is unfair should remember that God will review every person's life to determine how he or she has responded to him, and he will bring every deed into judgment. Have you committed your life to God, both present and future? Does your life measure up to his standards?

[12:13,14](#) The book of Ecclesiastes cannot be interpreted correctly without reading these final verses. No matter what the mysteries and apparent contradictions of life are, we must work toward the single purpose of knowing

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon shows us that we should enjoy life, but this does not exempt us from obeying God's commandments. We should search for purpose and meaning in life, but they cannot be found in human endeavors. We should acknowledge the evil, foolishness, and injustice in life, yet maintain a positive attitude and strong faith in God.

All people will have to stand before God and be judged for what they did in this life. We will not be able to use life's inconsistencies as an excuse for failing to live properly. To live properly, we need to (1) recognize that human effort apart from God is futile; (2) put God first — now; (3) receive everything good as a gift from God; (4) realize that God will judge both evil and good; (5) know that God will judge the quality of every person's life. How strange that people spend their lives striving for the very enjoyment that God gives freely, as a gift.

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