

Journey Into Meaningful Living

LESSON 1 . . . Why Does Life Seem Meaningless? (Ecclesiastes 1:1-15)

Ecclesiastes, which means “one who calls an assembly,” was written to answer this question: “Why does life seem meaningless?” It contains *the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem* (1:1). Solomon wrote *Ecclesiastes* late in life, around 935 B.C. His purpose for the book was to spare future generations the emptiness of trying to live without God. As the son of King David, Solomon had privileges of immense power and wealth. Shortly after coming to the throne of Israel, Solomon had a dream in which God told him to ask Him for anything he wanted (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon asked God for wisdom to judge his people. As a result, what does 1 Kings 4:29 tell us?

Solomon was a brilliant man and considered to be the wisest man to ever live. In addition to *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon wrote most of the book of Proverbs. People came from all over the world to hear his wisdom. Jesus talks about the queen of Sheba traveling from *the ends of the earth* (southern Arabia) to hear Solomon’s wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-10; Mt 12:42). Then, what does Jesus say in the last phrase of Matthew 12:42?

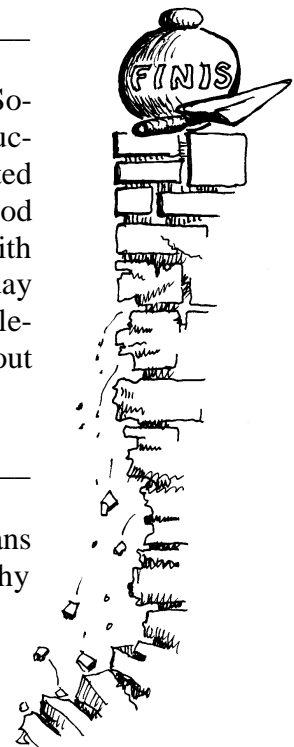
The only person wiser than Solomon to ever live is Jesus Christ. As Solomon followed in his father’s footsteps, he experienced success after success and became the richest, wisest man in the world. However, he drifted away from God and discovered how foolish a person can be without God in his life. Solomon wrote *Ecclesiastes* about 3,000 years ago to deal with life’s most difficult questions. Yet, we find this book is still relevant today because the questions, as well as the answers, are the same. In Ecclesiastes 1:2, what word does Solomon repeatedly use to sum up life without God?

This word, which occurs more than thirty-five times in this book, means meaningless or empty. In this passage, Solomon gives us **six** reasons why life without God is meaningless.

1. Work is useless. Solomon first asks what people gain from all their hard work *under the sun* (1:3). The phrase *under the sun* is found



NOTES



about thirty times in this book. It refers to life on earth. So, Solomon is asking what a person profits from a life of work. He knows what truth found in 1 Timothy 6:7?

When I die I will leave everything behind to the next generations. My children will probably rent out my house, sell my prized possessions, and waste their inheritance. Without God, life is meaningless because **work is useless** and . . .



2. Life is pointless. Solomon writes that generations come and go, but *the earth remains*, or never changes (1:4). After we die, the world will go on just fine without you and me. One day, soon after I die, I will just be a nice memory at Thanksgiving and Christmas. I hope one of my grandkids will say, “Oh, I kinda miss Poppa,” and that’s all that will be left of me. The reason is **life is pointless** without God.

In verse 7, Solomon describes hydrology, the science dealing with the cycle followed by the water of the earth. This cycle puzzled scientists until the seventeenth century. Before that time, people believed subterranean reservoirs deep in the earth furnished all the water. If only they would have read what Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 1:7! Write it below:

Solomon explains the water cycle, which includes evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and transportation. Water from the ocean evaporates into the atmosphere and collects in clouds. It is then deposited on the earth as rain or snow. Some of the rain and snow seeps into the ground to sustain plant life, but much of the water from precipitation runs into streams and rivers and eventually winds up in the ocean again. It is an endless cycle. This verse is just more proof the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

Without God, **work is useless, life is pointless**, and . . .

3. Entertainment is endless. Concerning entertainment, what does Solomon write in 1:8c-d?

No matter how much we see or hear as we entertain ourselves, we are never satisfied. Listening to music CD's and radio, or watching DVD's and TV can never satisfy. There is no end to what we want to hear or watch. When I grew up in the country west of Caddo, Oklahoma, we had only two TV channels—ten and twelve. We thought it was great when we could get reception for both channels. Now, we have a satellite dish that can receive more than 200 channels, and they keep adding more because we never seem to get enough.

Without God in our lives, **work is useless, life is pointless, entertainment is endless**, and . . .

4. Repetition is relentless. Solomon correctly writes that what has been will be again, and what has been done will be done again. He also writes that what is said has been said before. This is because *there is nothing new under the sun* (1:9-10). There is an old proverb that reads, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." It amazes me to see teenagers wearing socks with sandals; in my day, only old men did that. The new shorter haircuts are like what men wore in the fifties and early sixties. Yes, the more things change, the more they stay the same. However, what truth in Psalm 14:1a-b remains the same?

When Solomon writes *there is nothing new under the sun*, he does not mean people never invent anything new. Rather, he is saying no matter how much we think things change, life is still the same. In our generation of wealth, computers, games, medical advances, and endless entertainment, people are just as unhappy and depressed as they were 3,000 years ago. Solomon is saying *there is nothing new under the sun* to give purpose and meaning to life. But God can give you something *new*. What does God say in Ezekiel 36:26a-b?

Only God can give life *new* meaning and purpose. This is because without God, **work is useless, life is pointless, entertainment is endless, repetition is relentless**, and . . .

5. Being remembered is fruitless. Solomon writes: *There is no remembrance of former things*, or former people, and those who are yet to come will not be remembered by *those who come after* them (1:11). We are destined for obscurity; we will all soon be forgotten.

People sometimes try to be remembered by having buildings names after them. When I was in college, new dorms were named after distinguished

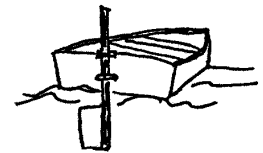
professors. One year a very well-liked professor, whose last name was Pool, retired. They were building a new dorm at the time, and I wondered if they would name it “Pool Hall.”

Obscurity is certain for all non-believers. However, what does Psalm 112:6b promise?

In heaven, everyone will know your name (1 Cor. 13:12). Yet, without God, **work is useless, life is pointless, entertainment is endless, repetition is relentless, being remembered is fruitless, and . . .**

6. Forgiveness is hopeless. In verses 12-13, Solomon writes that he tried to make sense out of his life apart from God. He writes that he devoted himself to seeking *wisdom*. He decided to learn everything he could to become an intellectual who knew how to deal with life. But he writes it is all *vanity*, or meaningless, and a chasing *after wind* (1:14). Then, what does Solomon write in verse 15?

The word translated *crooked* can refer to a problem that cannot be solved and *lacking*, or “wanting,” means insufficient information. Therefore, some problems can’t be solved. But *crooked* can also refer to a wrong that cannot be righted and *lacking* to what has been lost that cannot be recovered, such as virginity. However, our God has the power to straighten out a *crooked*, or perverted, life. Charles Spurgeon said, “Sin is a knot only God can untie.” God will not change the past—that would be unfair, but He changes the way the past affects us. Without God in our lives, our past sins are like an anchor that drags us down with guilt. But with God’s forgiveness, our past sins are like a rudder that guides us in the right direction and adds appreciation for what Christ did for us on the cross. How does Ephesians 1:7 express how God can straighten a *crooked* life?



God never intended life to be meaningless. But without God, **work is useless, life is pointless, entertainment is endless, repetition is relentless, being remembered is fruitless, and forgiveness is hopeless.**