**"Looking for the Good Life"**

**Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26**

 ***Overview***

All of us have some conception of what the “good life” looks like. Who of us has not imagined us in another set of circumstances we would describe as our “happy place” – a place where life is truly enjoyable and lived to the fullest?



Imagining a beautiful life is a compelling thought – and it is not one reserved for Christians. What lies at the heart of the “rat race” is the hope that someday we will have run hard and fast enough to truly enjoy the good things life has to offer.

But few of us, it seems, ever get to that mystical place. Perhaps the reason for that lies in our flawed method. Maybe the path to the good life is less about working hard and more about the way we define it (or Who defines it for us).

 ***Getting Started*** *The Good Life*



1. What does your “happy place” look like? Describe it to the others in your group.

2. “People often refer to “the good life”. What does that phrase mean to you? How would you describe “the good life”?

3. What kind of work or pursuit do you find satisfying? If you could apply yourself to any kind of activity for the rest of your life, what would that activity be?

 ***The Text***

12I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! 14I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.



 15What is crooked cannot be straightened;

 what is lacking cannot be counted.

16I said to myself, “Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” 17Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

18For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;

the more knowledge, the more grief.

**2** I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. 2“Laughter,” I said, “is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?” 3I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.

4I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. 5I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. 7I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. 8I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man’s heart. 9I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

10I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;

I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my labor,

and this was the reward for all my toil.

11Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done

and what I had toiled to achieve,

everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;

nothing was gained under the sun.

12Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom,

and also madness and folly.

What more can the king’s successor do

than what has already been done?

13I saw that wisdom is better than folly,

just as light is better than darkness.

14The wise have eyes in their heads,

while the fool walks in the darkness;

but I came to realize

that the same fate overtakes them both.

15Then I said to myself,

“The fate of the fool will overtake me also.

What then do I gain by being wise?”

I said to myself,

“This too is meaningless.”

16For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered;

the days have already come when both have been forgotten.

Like the fool, the wise too must die!

17So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. 18I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. 19And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. 20So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. 21For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. 22What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? 23All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

24A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, 25for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? 26To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

 Ecclesiastes 1:1-12 – 2:26 (NIV)

 ***The Video (optional)*** “Looking for the Good Life” – Eccl. 1:12-2:26 - by Kyle Corbin, April 26/20

 (view at www.immanuelonline.ca)



 NOTES:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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 ***Understanding***

 1. What is the author of Ecclesiastes trying to figure out according to 1:13 and 2:1? What is his general conclusion (vs. 1:14)? What does he mean by “chasing after wind”?



 2. In what area of life is the author focused on in verses 1:16-18? Why do you suppose he considers both wisdom AND madness and folly (verse 1:17)? How do the quotations in verse 15 and 18 support his conclusion (i.e. can you give examples from your own experience that would support what is said there)?

 3. Which area of life does the author investigate next in his search for answers (according to 2:1-3)? What is the difference between “laughter” and “pleasure” (vs. 2:2)?

 4. List all the various “works” that the author participates in to find the answer to his questions (vs. 2:4-11). Note how many times the author uses the words “I”, “My”, and “Myself”. What does this suggest about his motives? How does this help us understand his comment about wisdom in 2:9 (consider Ex. 1:10, Prov. 21:30)?

 5. How would you describe the author’s attitude toward “wisdom” after reading verses 2:12-17? Does the author think wisdom is a good thing (vs. 2:13), or a bad thing (vs. 2:15)?

 6. How does the reality of death affect the author’s assessment of the value of wisdom and life’s activities (vs. 2:18-23)?

 7. In verses 2:24-26, the author seems to switch gears and have something of the good life in mind. How does he describe “the good life’ in this section?

 ***Applying***

 1. “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they use, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both – to be happy. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.” (Blaise Pascal).



 Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.

 2. How do you see people pursuing “wisdom”, “pleasure”, and “work” as the key to happiness or the answer to life’s challenges? In society? How about in the church?

3. The author does not seem constrained at all in his search for answers. Can you see how you, with your more limited resources and/or opportunities, have tried to find fulfillment in the areas the author explores?

4. How old do you suppose the author of Ecclesiastes is (defend your answer from details in the passage)? Do you think perspective on these issues changes with age? If so, how and why?

5. How does the inevitability of death impact your view of life? Does it affect your day-to-day actions in any way? How about your lifelong goals and aspirations? How about your celebration of life (cf. Col. 3:16-17)?

6. “Coming face-to-face with the reality of death is what gives us the perspective we need to truly enjoy this life.” Agree or disagree? Explain.

7. Does this passage comfort, convict or challenge you? Why?

***Memory Verse(s)***

24A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, 25for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?



 Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 (NIV)

***Extra Resources***



* *“Looking for the Good Life – Eccl. 1:12-2:26”* – by Pastor Kyle Corbin (“Immanuel Church” website, April 26, 2020). Pastor Kyle walks us through the meaninglessness of life that can help show us where the good life is found.
* *"Living Life Backward”* – by David Gibson (Crossway, 2017, pg. 33-47). Gibson provides a very readable commentary on the logic and implications of the teaching found in Ecclesiastes.
* *"Ecclesiastes” –* by Michael A. Eaton (Inter-Varsity Press, 1983, pp. 61-76). This offering from the “Tyndale OT Commentaries” series provides more technical and helpful detail on the meaning of the text.