

How Do You Look At Life

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[0 : 00] How do you look at life? What's your perspective? Do you consider it positive or negative? Think about the way you just view life, think of life.

Does it motivate you to get up every morning and really seize the day? Or is your general attitude such that it makes you want to just stay in the bed and just sort of wish the day away?

Well, as we turn to the book of Ecclesiastes this morning, began last week, continuing today, we're going to look closely at how our outlook on life, the way we view life, our worldview, you might say, it not only affects the way that we think, the way that we feel, it affects the way that we actually live life and experience life.

We're going to look at verses 1 through 11, actually 2 through 11 of chapter 1. And I want to ask you, if you would, to go ahead and read the rest of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2, because that's really one unit, and I'd like for us to go through that next Sunday morning.

We won't look at every verse. Obviously, that's a lot. But if you would, read between now and next Sunday morning. Chapter 1, verse 12, through the end of chapter 2, because you'll see as you go through that.

[1 : 27] In fact, I want to encourage you to, if you haven't already, read through the book of Ecclesiastes. There's only 12 chapters. It would not take you long. Here at the beginning, as we read this, some of the things we're going to be focusing on, it's very depressing.

Life's bad and then you die. That kind of thing. But that's not all Ecclesiastes says. The preacher, as Solomon calls himself, he is intentionally trying to paint a depressing view of life under the sun as if God does not exist.

But throughout the book, he is going to sort of shine a light on how life is intended to be lived in this world and that God really does intend for us to enjoy life in this world when we look at things from his perspective.

Looking at life from the wrong perspective is what we're going to look at first this morning. Looking at life from the wrong perspective, which is under the sun. Look at the description of life under the sun in verses 2 and 3.

Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

[3 : 05] That's a description of life under the sun. Solomon is beginning this book by giving us two keys to understand the whole point. Two keys to understand what he is saying when he talks about all this vanity, meaninglessness, futility.

First is the phrase under the sun in verse 3 there. That's the first key to understanding the message he wants us to understand. It's found about 30 times throughout the book.

So in 12 chapters, 30 or so times, you know this phrase is important and so we need to understand what he's talking about. It's a description of life that is limited to this world only.

Life under the sun. Life in this world. It's a secular way of looking at life. A man-centered, as if God does not exist. A godless way of looking at life.

When Solomon is writing and he's talking and he's talking about life under the sun, he's trying to help us understand what life feels like and looks like when we leave God out.

[4 : 17] When he's not a part of our thought process. When we're not thinking in terms of this is God's world. He's the creator of it. He's got a plan and purpose for us to follow.

Under the sun. A life, a way of looking at life, living life, as if God does not exist. The next key is the word vanity in verse 2.

The Hebrew word means breath or breeze or vapor, puff of smoke even. He's describing something that we would call fleeting, something that is temporary, something that is passing away.

When Solomon says all is vanity, he's writing about life under the sun being futile being empty. A lot of life under the sun is pointless.

He's pointing out what he's saying. Now, the message of Ecclesiastes just in a nutshell is a warning against living a life as if God does not exist.

[5 : 25] But we need to understand and I tried to emphasize that at the beginning last week. This is not a book where atheists are the target audience. You know, some people may come to church and think, well, why in the world would you be talking about looking at life as if God does not exist and we're Christian people or professing Christians or most of us are.

We're in church. all of us can live our lives, live a day, live in certain places around certain people as practical atheists, as if God does not exist.

We need to understand Ecclesiastes is written to people like us. people who know God or at least know about God. This is being written to people who may have even experienced God's power, God's goodness in their lives, but in a day gone by.

Solomon is writing because he knows from first-hand experience how even though we start out well, even though we have a right belief system, Solomon knows that we can let people or things in this world get our attention, distract us, and take us away from living a life that is focused on knowing and loving and serving God and seeking to do His will.

Some believe that Ecclesiastes may be Solomon's personal warning to people anywhere, any walk of life to learn from His mistakes.

[7 : 21] Don't live life as I did toward the end of my life. But you read about in the book of 1 Kings, especially the 11th chapter. Now, the preacher starts out with a question in verse 3.

Look at it again. What does man gain by all the toll in which he tolls under the sun? That word gain refers to something left over, a surplus, a profit.

He's asking the question here. He's sort of a philosopher. He's wanting us to think. So he's asking us the question, what will be left at the end of a life, your life, if it is a life lived exclusively under the sun?

He's going to answer that question throughout this book. He's going to be telling us, and is telling us, if we live our lives in this world as if God doesn't matter, then we can expect to really gain nothing.

Now, Solomon drives home his point by painting a bleak picture of specific things about how life will look, live, feel, if we just live it under the sun, in verses 4 through 11.

[8 : 49] We can think about this as examples of a life lived in this world as if this world is it, as if the things of the world pleasures the world.

That's just the essence of life. So let's look at some of the things he says. Look at verse 4. A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

Life is fleeting and life is elusive. Let's think about it that way from verse 4. Life is fleeting. Life is moving on. We can't do a thing to stop it.

Generations come and generations go. People die. People are born. There's nothing we can do. It is fleeting. Life is elusive.

You can't grab hold of it. You can't make life work the way you want to when you want it to work that way.

[9 : 56] I don't know what age this sinks in, but a lot of us have already figured out that we don't control much, if anything, about our lives.

We can't control our health. You know, we're here today, we're healthy, but we don't know what tomorrow is going to come. Some of us in this room, we could have a heart attack, we could die.

Some of us could come down with a flu and be very sick, even if you don't shake hands this morning. We can't control the economy. Stock market, up and down this week.

Interest rates, are they going to go up? House prices. We have no control over these things, but we think about them.

We need a good economy. economy. We want a good economy. We want things to hum. We cannot even control our own personal future.

[11 : 06] Will you have a job tomorrow? Will you have a job this time next year? Or will something happen that it just goes away? When will your family members die?

We have no control of that. We have no idea. We have no idea. Who will your children marry? You got children up here on this platform this morning?

Little kids, teenagers, college age, single. Who were they going to marry? You don't get to choose, but they may not even know yet.

And if you're young, single, people, you might think to yourself, who will I marry? When will I marry? Will I get married? You see, Solomon's trying to say, life is fleeting and life is elusive.

[12:06] Life is short. Life is unpredictable. But here's the thing. Life goes on. A generation goes and a generation comes.

I like the way Allen Jackson describes that in one line from his song, remember when. Old ones died and you were born. I could sing that and just make tears come to your eyes, but it would be the wrong kind of tears.

But I love that. Talking about life. Old ones died. New are born.

That's just life. Now, note the twist that Solomon adds to the statement about life and death. He says, but the earth remains forever.

I want you to think about that. We are human beings created in the image God. We are the highest form of creation in terms of God made us and only us in his image.

[13:10] If you read there in Genesis 1 and 2, he made us in his image, put us in this world, take care of the world, subdue the earth, he said.

But it's we who come and go. The earth remains forever. The sun that rises in the morning, it rose on your great-grandparents and grandparents who are no longer here.

The sun that rises and sets tomorrow, it's going to rise and set on my great-grandchildren, your great-grandchildren and all who come after them if the Lord doesn't come back.

life. What Solomon's trying to point out here, he's adding to the futility, to the meaninglessness of life lived only under the sun.

You live and you die. Generations come and go. Everything else stays the same. Life is not only fleeting and elusive, it's also repetitive. Look at verses 5 through 8.

[14:21] Let's read those together. The sun rises, the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north, around and around goes the wind, and on it circulates the wind, and on it circuits the wind returns.

All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full. To the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness.

A man cannot utter it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. A man by the name of David Gibson, he's got a book on the book of Ecclesiastes, it's very good.

He does an excellent job of explaining how these verses together show the repetitive nature of life. He says it very well, and I want to quote him, I want you to look at it with me.

He says, the preacher focuses on a three-fold pattern in the world that is matched by a three-fold pattern in human experience. The activities of sun, wind, and water, in verses five through seven, follow the same course as the activities of speaking, hearing, speaking, seeing, and hearing, in verse eight.

[15:46] The point is that the world itself doesn't seem to go or get anywhere, so why should humans get anywhere? The sun chases its tail.

The wind goes to the south and comes back around again to the north. Streams flow into the sea, and the water evaporates, and then streams flow into the sea again, and it is never full.

So is the world, and so it will always be. So is humankind, and so we will always be. People are like the insatiable sea.

Just as water pours into the ocean again and again without ever feeling it, so the things of the world pour into human beings via their eyes and ears and back out through their mouths, yet they never reach a point of complete satisfaction.

Humans never finally think, this is it, I'm full. I have seen it all, said it all, and heard it all. I have given out and taken in all that I can.

[16:54] We never get to the point where we've heard enough. I just want to tune everything else out. We never get to the point that we don't want to look, fill our eyes with images and pictures, people and places.

We never get to the place that we just want to close our mouths and never say another word. We don't.

That's what makes us always on the lookout for something new, something different under the sun.

Look at verses 9 and 10. He says, what has been is what will be. And what has been done is what will be done.

And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, see, this is new? It has been already in the ages before us.

[18:01] Solomon's telling us, it's a well-known statement, there's nothing new under the sun. Now before you object and say, well, there's a lot of things new, I want you to think about what he's actually saying, what he means here.

Solomon is no idiot. Solomon's the wisest man who ever lived. Solomon saw a lot of things change in his lifetime. He saw new inventions. He learned new things.

He's not trying to deny that kind of reality. He's talking about the basic events of life in this world never change like the things we've already read that he has just mentioned.

The ways of the sun, the wind, and the rivers, they remain the same. The cycle of life with generations coming and going, people living and dying, that hasn't changed.

People are born, people live, they do certain things, and they die. It always works that way. That never changes. But even those things that we think are new, I want you to think with me.

[19:15] Are they really? Your latest smartphone that you spent more money than you'd want to tell anybody you spent. It's just an advanced form of communication or information gathering.

When I was a little boy, my grandparents lived about 150, 175 yards away from me. When I was a little boy, I'd see them outside, and I'd yell, Pop and Nan!

And I'd ask them questions. We lived out in the country. It wasn't like living in town here. But even then, they didn't really see that was the best form of communication. I'd yell at the top of my lungs.

And they'd wave, and they'd say maybe something. They wouldn't carry on a conversation yelling back and forth. So I learned, especially as I got a little bit older, I could go over there and talk with them, or I could pick up the phone, the landline that was in the hall, one in the house.

I could call them. If they were alive today, I could text them. I could email them on that more than you want to admit, costly phone.

[20:27] That phone, it's a form of communication, and communication has been around since Solomon's day, since the beginning of times. It's Adam and Eve. You think, well, mine's really a computer.

Computers are wonderful. They give us the ability to learn and acquire more information than anyone just a few years ago could have ever imagined.

More information is available to us today than we could read about in multiple lifetimes. But before the internet, we did research and we acquired new knowledge.

A lot of people in this room have spent a lot of hours in a library looking up information. And most everybody in this room, no matter what your age, you've spent a lot of time not online, not with a computer of any form, but you've spent a lot of time in your life with a book or a magazine or a newspaper in your hand acquiring information.

And so a lot of the things that we think today is new, that car, that rocket ship even, it's just a form of transportation.

[21:54] And so what Solomon's trying to point out here really and truly, when you boil it all down, there's nothing new under the sun.

There's nothing new that we can discover that will break the repetitive cycle of life and satisfy us to the point that we never want anything new again.

This last statement in verse 11, it reminds us of something we know and the older you get, the more you know it. Look at verse 11. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to come among those who come after.

We can think about this under the heading, life is not remembered. We don't remember our history. And today, most people don't even care to know about their history.

Some translations here will say that there is no remembrance of former generations or of even former people. You think about this, the overwhelming majority of people who've lived on this earth lived and died in obscurity.

[23:10] Do you remember the names of your great, great grandparents? Do you know where they lived? Do you know what they did? Do you know what contributions they made to their community?

If you know where their community was. Here's a real encouraging thought. Especially if you think, I really am an important person.

I break the mold. Truth is, there's probably not a single one of us in this room that in a hundred years, anybody will ever know we existed.

Nobody will know our name. Nobody will care that we occupied a space in Pickens County at this point in time. Now, if you're thinking to yourself, this is the most depressing sermon I have ever heard.

You're listening well. That's the point that Solomon wants us to get as we read his introduction to Ecclesiastes.

[24 : 20] This is how the preacher wants us to feel, wants us to think about life in this world if our whole focus in life is about us and other people and things to the exclusion of God.

God is our creator. God is the sovereign one. God is our heavenly father as Christians. He wants us to see. He's trying to make clear, and he's going to do it over and over and over again in various ways, that life, live and no relationship with God is basically pointless.

It is depressing. There's just not much to it. Now, later on in this book, he's going to point out how God intends for us to live a meaningful life in this world, but not thinking this world is everything. We're going to come to that when we come to that. But I don't want us to leave this morning on such a negative note. I want us to lean in on a more positive note by looking at life from the right perspective beyond the sun.

The preacher shows us that when God is left out of the picture, the natural world can be meaningless. Unless it can be boring to us, us in this room.

[25 : 49] But that's not true when we put God at the center of everything. Now, I want you to look at a passage, Psalm chapter 19, verse 1 on the screen.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. God intends for us living in this world, when we think about nature, when we look at what He's created, when we think about even the rivers and the sun and the wind and all this kind of stuff, He wants us to be in awe because He created this.

He created this from nothing. He created this for His glory and our good. He wants us to just be in awe of what we see and to praise Him as the one who created it.

The repetition that we see in nature is not intended by God to be boring and meaningless. Look at how Philip Ryken points out.

He says the repetition that we see in nature is intended to be a testimony to the goodness and the orderliness of God. The regularity of the created world shows the constancy of its creator.

[27 : 10] This may not be a good day for you for a lot of different reasons. You know, you may have gotten up this morning. It was cold. It may have been heat in your house, but you looked outside.

It was raining. You know what the forecast was. You're looking for, you know, is there ice out there? It just makes you cold to the bone. And I'm sure a lot of people in this room, you thought about, I just may not go today.

It's cold. It's dreary. I mean, I'll be honest with you. I thought that. It was a bad day. There may be some things that have happened in your life this morning that has nothing to do with the weather. This is just not a good day for you. But because of the way God's made things, you know the sun's going to come up in the morning.

If you live, tomorrow's going to be a different day, a new day. The weatherman says tomorrow's going to be clear. Tomorrow the high's going to be up in the 50s.

[28 : 20] Tomorrow is going to be a better day in a lot of ways, and we can count on that because that's the way God has made things. New days come about every day.

We can start all over again the next day. Don't you get to the end of some days? No matter what, you're just tired, and you're worn out. And you get home, you get settled in, you just want to go to bed.

You just want this day to end. You just want to rest. You just want to do whatever. And you think to yourself, I'm going to go to bed, and tomorrow's going to be a new day. You can count on it.

That's the way God made it. That's the pattern He has set in motion in life, and it's good. Under the sun, the seasons come and go without change.

To some people, it may just be old and boring. Winter, spring, summer, fall. But it doesn't have to be.

[29 : 23] I've already heard somebody say it this morning. I certainly am thinking it. I'm looking forward to springtime. To 70 degrees. To warmth.

To green grass. I'm looking forward to summer. I'm looking forward to warm ocean water at Myrtle Beach. And you know, by the time August rolls around, we've had a lot of days where it's 90 degrees.

We've cut more grass than we wanted to. We've sweated more than we want to. We're going to be excited about fall coming. And the cooler temperatures.

And the change that we'll see in the colors. And the change we'll feel in the air. What I'm describing here is the way God has created an orderly, predictable, seasonal change.

The way God has created an orderly and predictable and enjoyable and a sense of newness in the world He has created for us to find little joys like this.

[30 : 39] To look forward to spring. To enjoy His, the variety that He's really put in this world for people who will look at it and be thankful and appreciative and praise Him and worship Him for it.

Life with God at the center is actually filled with new things. Through faith in Jesus Christ, a person's actual life can be made totally new.

Look at what Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. He says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

A person's life can literally be changed from the inside out. The way they look at life, the way they experience life, the way they relate to people. Through faith in Jesus Christ, through this supernatural regeneration, new birth that God brings about when He puts His Spirit in us, we can literally be changed from the inside out.

We can be made new, the Scripture says. Even as Christians, being made new, a lot of times, we don't live like the new person that we are. A lot of times as Christians, we do things that we know do not please God.

[31 : 57] We do selfish things. We do sinful things. But the good news that the New Testament tells us is, even when we sin and fail God as Christians, we can be forgiven, we can be given new starts, fresh starts in our relationship with God.

Look at what He says in 1 John 1.9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness.

You know, it may be that you're a Christian here this morning and you're anything but in good, close fellowship with your Lord. It could be that as we were going through this worship service this morning, the last thing in the world you could feel like doing was worshiping God because you know there's some things in your life He's not pleased with.

You feel separate from Him, alienated from Him. I want you to understand this Scripture says if you'll confess your sins, I mean, get serious with God, agree with Him about whatever it is, turn from it, change whatever it is He's calling you to do.

He'll forgive you. He'll cleanse you. He'll give you a fresh start this morning. Now, if you will do that. One day, God's going to make everything new. He's going to make this world new.

[33 : 14] Look at what it says in the book of Revelation. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. A little bit further on in that chapter.

And He who was seated on the throne and said, Behold, I am making all things new. Life in this world is broken. We live in a fallen world. We know that.

It's winding down. It will eventually come to an end. And God's going to create a new heaven and a new earth. It'll be paradise restored.

It will be that paradise, heaven, perfection for God's people, God's children, all who have come to Him through faith in Jesus. We have that to look forward to.

I want to ask you this morning, what's your perspective on life? Are you looking at life from the wrong perspective under the sun as if there is no God?

[34 : 15] Or are you looking at life from the right perspective beyond the sun with God as the focus, truly the center of your life? If we only live life under the sun, no relationship with God, no seeking His way and will, we will, sooner or later, find that our life is not what we want it to be.

It will not be fulfilling. It will not be satisfying. Sooner or later, we'll find, like I said last week, we're building our lives if God's not a part of, if God's not at the center of our lives.

If He's not directing our lives, we'll find that we're like children building sandcastles on the beach.

We can build some wonderful sandcastles, but sooner or later, they get washed into the sea when

the tide comes in.

That's life under the sun. There's a better way to live. And Ecclesiastes as well as the whole of Scripture is calling us to find this better way through faith in Jesus Christ, find this better way to be able to know God, to know His will, to do His will, to bring glory to Him as we do it, and to make a good difference, a positive difference in the lives of people around about us.

You know, when we, this world is over and done with, we're going to leave it all behind. We're not going to gain, as He talks about at the very beginning, we're not going to have anything gained as far as this world goes.

[36 : 02] But when life is over and done with, as Christians, people who believe in Jesus Christ, our commitment is to Him, God is our Father, we're living life His way, for us, death will be gain, death will be heaven, death will be perfection, death will be more, far more than we could ever have attained or even dreamed about in this life.

So what is your perspective? What is your perspective on life? Is it one you are satisfied with now? And even more importantly, is it one, your perspective one, that you will be satisfied with for all eternity?

Let's pray together. Dear God, help us this morning to see how we're living life, the way that we're looking at it. And dear God, help us just, just boil it all down to, is Jesus Christ, Lord.

It's our ultimate goal in life to know and do Your will, to serve Your purpose, to experience life as You intend.

Father, show us where we are. Help us to be honest. And dear God, help us to respond the way that we as individuals need to now.

[37 : 42] Father, if there are people in this room whose life is just basically meaningless because they do not know You, they have no relationship with Christ, make that clear. Help them to know that if they will admit that, turn from that mindset, that way of life, and truly trust Jesus and call upon Him to save them.

Help them to see that You will change them from the inside out now. Lord, if there are Christians in this room and they know what it's like to truly live life with You as the focus, You in the center, that they've drifted away or even rebelled, Lord, help them to confess their sin and come back to You. Help them this morning, dear God, to know that they can be forgiven, cleansed, given a fresh start. Show us how we should respond. Help us to do that now.

And let's just have an attitude of prayer and listen to the Lord and obey Him. I'd be happy to pray with you during this time. If you want to come forward, I'll be here at the front. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.