

# The Search for Satisfaction

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[ 0 : 00 ] You know, if you will look around at people, just how they go about their daily life. And I'm talking about people you know, people you see up close. And then people you just know about.

You sort of observe them. Isn't it true that most people are just focused on the here and now? What they can see, what they can hear, what they can touch in the world around them.

Now that does not mean that most people are consciously trying to block God out of their life. It certainly doesn't mean that most people intentionally live as if he does not exist.

A Gallup poll taken in 2016 asked a simple yes or no question, do you believe in God? 89% of Americans said yes.

Now, in one way, in 2016, I would think it would be lower. But at the same time, it was one question, yes or no. And a lot of people who said, yes, I believe in God.

[ 1 : 12 ] It might not be the God of the Bible who's revealed himself in Jesus. In fact, I'm sure their idea of God, the ideas of God would be varied.

But it is something that as late as 2016, 89% of Americans said they believed in God. But there's a lot more than 11%, the 11% that didn't.

There's a lot more who go about their daily lives as if what happens in this world is everything. And let's be honest. Aren't there some days and some situations where we live like God is not real or God is not involved?

We're just doing the best we can, trying to figure it out as if we don't have a relationship with him.

Well, this is not how God created human beings to live.

The early church father, Augustine, profoundly stated why God made us and how that affects us in this prayer.

[ 2 : 29 ] He said, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you. Augustine's statement is a good summary of the book of Ecclesiastes.

But Solomon, the writer, goes further in describing the heart of a person who lives without God as more than just restless.

Solomon reveals, we've seen a little bit of it, we're going to see a lot more as we go through the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon reveals that when we leave God out of our lives, we're going to have more questions than answers.

We're going to find that there's just not a lot of satisfaction to be found in life. We're going to find a lot of frustration. Solomon repeatedly says that life lived under the sun as if God doesn't exist, has no lasting value or meaning.

I want you to understand, Solomon is not denying reality. There's meaning in a lot of things we do. He's talking about ultimate meaning. He's talking about that which really satisfies you. That which really makes sense of your life, not just now, but for always.

[ 3 : 51 ] Chuck Swindoll explains why such a life with God left out has no value or meaning. Look at it. Solomon had everything he wanted and investigated everything that was visible under the sun.

But he found nothing that provided real meaning or satisfaction. It seemed logical that the source of ultimate meaning and satisfaction must be invisible.

But how many people do you know who can see the invisible? How many people can hear the inaudible? An American Indian was walking down the street of New York City with a good friend who was from that city, lived their whole life there.

Well, as they were walking down the busy street, the Indian put his hand out to his friend and said, wait, stop. Did you hear that? His friend said, hear what?

He said, a cricket. And his friend just laughed and said, what are you talking about? You didn't hear a cricket in the middle of Manhattan?

[ 4 : 58 ] All this noise? There's no way that you heard a cricket. Well, the friend just sort of grinned and said, watch.

And the friend was still in the midst of, you know, cars going everywhere, people yelling, horns honking. He stopped. He listened.

He slowly made his way across the street and there was this concrete planter with a tree growing in it. And he got to it and he felt around on the mulch and he pulled out a cricket.

His friend could not believe it. How in the world could you hear a cricket in this, all this that's going on?

And the Indian replied, it's just a matter of what you're listening for. Let me show you. Then he reached in his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins, quarters, nickels, dimes, pennies.

[ 5 : 58 ] He held it up about shoulder high and just dropped them. As soon as they all hit the concrete and that ping sounded, every head within a block turned and looked at that spot where they heard the money hit the ground.

The Indian looked at his friend with a grin and said, it's all about what you're listening for. If we rarely see the invisible or hear the inaudible, it's because we're not looking for it.

We're not listening for it. If we live life only under the sun, if we live life like it's just all up to us, like God doesn't even exist, we're going to find a lot of things in our life won't make sense.

And they certainly will not satisfy us. And that is the message of Ecclesiastes. I'm calling this series Discovering What Matters Most because that's what Solomon is trying to help us do throughout this book.

He's pointing out what matters most. You have to excuse me. He's pointing out what matters most by pointing out two things. Number one, the many things that do not ultimately matter.

[ 7 : 26 ] And that's the majority of the book. Most of this book, Solomon is writing from the perspective of somebody who has no relationship with God. He is writing because he probably experienced some of this himself toward the end of his life as king when he just blew it all.

Solomon wants us to learn from his mistakes. Or at least from what he's telling us. Solomon wants us to understand where we won't find that which we really want, really need to make our lives more purposeful.

And then he tells us the few things, but the important things that really do matter. Let's look now at some of the things that matter to most people.

But Solomon learned firsthand they don't really, when all is said and done, they don't really matter. Number one, the things in life that do not satisfy. That's going to be from chapter 1, verse 12, through chapter 2, verse 23.

I put 22 as 23. Think of what you'll read there. We're not going to read all of these verses. We're going to read some of them, but not all of them. If you just sort of walk through those verses, that's sort of like a diary of Solomon's search for true satisfaction and meaning in life.

[ 8 : 50 ] Let's look at it. Number one, wisdom will not ultimately satisfy. And he points that out in verse 12 and verse 16. I want you to look at it.

I, the preacher, have been king over Israel and Jerusalem, and I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. Look at verse 16. I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me.

And my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. Solomon really did grow in wisdom and knowledge and understanding.

I'm going to guess most people in this room, you know that God gave Solomon a special gift of wisdom. It's described in 1 Kings chapter 3. At the beginning of his kingdom, as beginning of his reign as king, Solomon's heart was right with God.

[ 9 : 59 ] God even asked him, what do you want? I'll give you anything you want as king over my people. And Solomon's reply was, I want to be wise. I want you to give me wisdom so that I can serve your purpose, help your people.

And God gave it to him. God gave him such wisdom that no one ever lived was wise like Solomon. But that's not the only kind of wisdom he had. Solomon studied life. I mean, he was real, he was real like a scientist and a philosopher. He tried things.

He thought through things. He did research. And as he did this, his worldly wisdom grew. And that's not a slap at the kind of wisdom I'm talking about. It's not contrary to God's wisdom. You see, all truth is God's truth. If something's true, it's just truth. It's just the way God made things. All truth is God's truth. And so as Solomon studied and learned, he grew wise about all kinds of things in this world.

[11:07] But as time went on, Solomon stopped thinking about how God was involved in his life and his kingdom.

Solomon started looking too much at just this world, life under the sun. And his relationship with the Lord deteriorated. He failed to use his wisdom in God-honoring ways.

Truth is, he started chasing women. And women, many wives, 1 Kings 11 tells us, they took him away from the Lord.

And they not only took him away from the Lord, Solomon put his focus on false gods of these pagan women that he wasn't supposed to have. And it resulted in Solomon and his family and the whole kingdom suffering disaster.

All because wise Solomon acted like a pure fool as he got older in life. Solomon even studied, he goes on in verse 17, the opposites of sanity and wisdom, madness and folly.

[12:22] Look at that, verse 17. And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceive that it is also but a striving after wind.

Solomon wanted to know everything, what's wise, what's not. How wise people live, how fools live. He wanted to learn from people's, what they knew and what they didn't know.

He wanted to learn from people's mistakes even. But when all was said and done, when you combined all this great learning, he says it was like a striving after the wind or it's like chasing the wind. That's an impossibility.

You understand that. You can't chase the wind. You can't catch the wind. Even if you could, what would you have? That's his point. It's futile.

It's futile. But even more, let's look at verse 18. For in much wisdom is much vexation or grief or pain or sorrow. And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

[13:31] Solomon learned much and grew in wisdom, but it didn't satisfy him. In fact, he said all it did gave him pain and sorrow. Now, this is not an excuse for you who are especially in high school to go home and say all this studying, you know, it just causes pain and sorrow in my life.

I'm going to quit studying. That's not the point here now. There's a right way to go about it. Don't give up on it. But this reminds us something here.

There's a lot of truth in that old saying, ignorance is bliss. Sometimes the more you know, the more you stress.

Now, that doesn't mean we should go through life and be willfully ignorant, put our heads in the sand and not try to know what's going on.

But let's face the fact, acquiring wisdom and knowledge, it doesn't always solve our problems.

[14:36] It sometimes adds to them. And we can become very, very wise and knowledgeable about life, but still not find true satisfaction.

That's what Solomon is talking about. He discovered wisdom's not the answer. So he moves on and tried something else. We'll call this next section the pursuit of pleasure.

We see here, pleasure will not ultimately satisfy. Solomon decided he's on a quest for what matters in life. How can I make life meaningful?

Make life such that I want to get up every day and just seize the day. He said, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to entertain myself to death. And so he, look at it, verses 1, 2, and 3.

We're in chapter 2 now, verse 1. I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself. But behold, this also was vanity, futility, pointless.

[15:38] I said of laughter, it is mad, and of pleasure, what use is it? I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine, my heart still guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

Solomon, think about it this way. He's going to entertain himself. So he goes to downtown Greenville. He walks into a club to hear a comedian.

I love comedy. Let's just go and, you know, maybe just sort of taking a time out, hearing someone who's truly funny, being able to laugh.

Maybe that'll sort of laugh my troubles away. He tried that. He went to expensive wine bars and sampled their offerings.

Now, I want you to understand, Solomon didn't go wild, become a drunk. Look at what it says in the middle of verse 3. I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine, my heart still guiding me with wisdom.

[16:56] He didn't lose perspective. He did exercise self-control. He's just wanting to see what this experiment, drinking more than usual, laughing more than usual, what kind of effect that will have.

Now, again, this is not something that's knocking, just the way we live life in this world. But he found that wine and laughter didn't really change anything about the way he understood life and was experiencing life, which wasn't satisfying to him.

Next, he became self-absorbed and started all kinds of building programs. He had the money. He had the resources. He could command people to do whatever he wanted. So look at what he did, beginning in verse 4.

I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. Now, I want you to notice. Notice all the personal pronouns. I, myself, my, me.

Look at it. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

[18:09] I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. He's doing good things. He's doing things that will benefit other people.

We're not talking about evil things here. Good things. But it didn't satisfy him. He wasn't content. And so, he decided to forget restraint. He started accumulating more of everything. Slaves, musicians, and women.

Look at what it says in verses 7 and 8. I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks more than anyone who had been before me in Jerusalem.

I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines.

[19:19] The delight of the sons of man. Solomon became a poster child of a man obsessed with money, wealth, power, sex.

Money, sex, and power. Someone wrote a book about Solomon's downfall, and that was the title of it. A Man of Money, Sex, and Power. That's what he was experimenting with.

But it didn't satisfy him. He had everything that a human being could ever want. He had the money. He had the power. He had the resources. But look at verse 9 through 11.

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me, and whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them.

I kept my heart from no pleasure. For my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done, and the toil I had expended in doing it.

[20:29] And behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind. And there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Solomon is showing us that at the end of the day, if all we are concerned about and all we are putting our energies into, our personal projects and possessions and pleasures, once they run their course, we won't be content.

We will not find satisfaction. We'll still be looking for that something else. You know, sooner or later, based on what Solomon's telling us, sooner or later, we've got to come to the discovery that everything in this world that we own, that we build, it's like a sandcastle on the beach.

It may be impressive. It may be elaborate. But it's not permanent. Even if we have what our hearts desire.

And you have that. You think about it. There's always something that we really want at a point in time. Maybe right now, there's just one thing.

[21:54] Maybe it's a car. Maybe it's a different house. Maybe it's you fill in the blank. And you think, you say, if I could just get it, I'd be satisfied. I wouldn't ask for anything else.

But then when you get it, after a while, the new wears off. Fizz dies down. And it's no longer satisfying.

Solomon, he's searching. But he just can't find that which really satisfies him. And so he goes back to wisdom again.

But I don't need to be disappointed. Look at it. Verses 12 through 17. Wisdom never satisfies. Now, he knows that it's better to be a wise person than a fool.

Look at verse 13. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. It really is better to be a wise person than to be a fool.

[ 23 : 01 ] It's just a fact. He is not in any way saying, it doesn't matter whether or not I seek to be wise and knowledgeable and understanding and use that in good ways in life.

But ultimately, the wisest person you know and the most foolish person you know are going to wind up the same way.

Dead. He keeps coming back to this. No one in this world lives forever. No one lives forever under the sun.

Think about the wisest, smartest, most impressive person you know. One day they're going to die and they will not be remembered.

And you think about the dumbest person you know. Just the biggest fool that you've ever met in your life. They're going to die the same way and nobody's going to remember them either.

[ 24 : 05 ] That's what he's wanting us to understand here. The wisest person who ever lived. Lord, this pursuit is not going to satisfy us.

There's always going to be something missing. We're always going to be restless until we find our true rest in a relationship with God. There's one more thing listed in Solomon's diary about what didn't satisfy him.

That was his work. Look at verses 18 through 23. Work does not satisfy. The point he makes in this section is that all he has acquired is going to be left to somebody else one day.

Look at verse 18. I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool.

You think about that. Think about that, let's just say, if you're middle-aged or older. You've worked.

[ 25 : 11 ] You've hopefully saved. You may not be wealthy. There may not be a whole lot that you're going to leave, but you're going to leave something. And let's just be honest now.

You're probably going to leave it to a child or a grandchild or a niece or a nephew. You're going to leave it to somebody you know. Does the thought ever run through your mind? Are they going to blow it?

Are they going to act foolishly and lose in a matter of months what I have worked and acquired for years?

Look at what he says in verse 19. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool, yet he will be master of all for which I toil and use my wisdom under the sun.

This is also vanity. Solomon, even though he was wise, he worked hard, both by hook and crook.

[ 26 : 20 ] He gained a lot. But the person who's going to inherit what he has, he may be a fool who just goes through it too quickly.

And that really bothers him. Somebody who just squanders it foolishly. Look at verse 20 and 21. He's also concerned that a lazy person would get it. Verse 20.

So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it.

This is vanity and a great evil. Solomon is thinking, all this stuff that cost me something, it may fall into the hands of someone who doesn't understand the value of work.

He'll get what he does not deserve. Think about it. Think about what he's saying here about what we have, what we take pride in, what we build up.

[ 27 : 39 ] We have no control over what's going to happen when we're gone. Here's an encouraging way to think of all you have and work for and achieved in life.

Look at what he says, David Gibson. It is the people who follow us who will have control over all our toil and effort. Perhaps they will develop it, perhaps they will destroy it.

But either way, we will be dead and gone and soon forgotten. So what does that mean for all we have achieved? Not a lot. That's the honest answer.

Solomon is intentionally painting a very depressing picture of life that is lived with no concern for God, for his way, for his will. Did you notice from chapter 1, verse 15, through here, verse 23 of chapter 2, God's name has not been mentioned by design.

Solomon wants us to understand. Life was never intended to be lived this way. God didn't create us and just turn us loose in this world and live as if he does not exist.

[ 28 : 45 ] You know, we can try to make sense out of life doing a lot of things. We can pursue, as he's been talking about, education, hard work, pleasure, but it will not satisfy.

It will not. It will not. Solomon was wiser, wealthier, and more powerful than any of us, and he tried it.

And he failed miserably. Now, that's not the final word this morning. We've looked at what doesn't work, what doesn't matter.

Let's look quickly now. The thing that does satisfy, verses 24 through 26. Let's read verse 24 first.

There's nothing better for a person than he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.

This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For apart from him, who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him, God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God.

[ 29 : 59 ] This also is vanity and a striving after wind. It may be surprising, but look at verses 24 and 25. It may be surprising how God satisfies our desires for joy and meaning with some of life's simplest blessings.

Solomon's telling us here that God's good gifts, things that you can really enjoy and really get some satisfaction out of, God, he's telling us that they're right here in front of us every day.

The key is being able to see them. The key is being able to enjoy that they are actually gifts from God that he has given us to enjoy today.

Take food for an example. He talks about eating here. We usually think of eating and drinking as necessities. We think of it as, we enjoy eating, but we think of it in terms of, you know, I gotta have strength and energy to do this or do that after I eat.

Sometimes we even say blessings before we have a meal. And we might ask God, we thank him for this and ask him to strengthen us if we could better serve him or strengthen us for this or that.

[ 31 : 18 ] There's nothing wrong with that, by the way. But Solomon is telling us, see your food and drink as a good gift that God has given you today.

And he wants you to enjoy it just for the pleasure of it as you eat it. And as you sit there, you look at it, you eat it, you enjoy it, think, this is a good gift from God.

Thank him. Have a smile on your face. Don't be a glutton, but enjoy what he gives you for the pleasure it brings you at the moment, not just the energy that it'll provide for you to do something else later on.

God gives us the ability to develop wisdom, to work and provide for ourselves and others, and experience many pleasures in life.

some things we just need to do and enjoy the moment. And I'll always be thinking about what's down the road or what this is going to lead to.

[ 32 : 36 ] Solomon tells us, he's telling us in the past, he's telling us today, telling us in the future, we're going to leave it all behind one day. So right now, we need to enjoy what we have.

Every day. Learn to see it and accept it as a gift from God to be used in this world.

You can't use it after this world. But as you use it, use it for his glory. Use it for other people's good.

And use it as his child who just loves using gifts from your heavenly father.

One of my favorite philosophers says this well, Alan Jackson. He describes this point well in the opening line of his song, The Older I Get.

He says, The older I get, the more I think. You only get a minute. Better live while you're in it because it's gone in a blink. That's the message of Solomon. That's the message of Ecclesiastes.

[ 33 : 39 ] And you don't have to get old to understand that. Solomon wants us to understand. Life in this world is just a minute.

And as Jackson says, we need to learn to live while we're in it. Enjoy your wisdom, your understanding. Enjoy your food and drink. Enjoy the simple gifts, all the gifts that God gives you because it will be gone in a blink.

And that's how God made the world. These things that we have in the world to be used in the world, it's not, these things are not eternal. Augustine was right.

He said this to God, You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you. I want to ask you, have you found true rest, peace, contentment in a right relationship

