

A Practical Study of ECCLESIASTES

“Where Your Heart and Treasure Meet”

Study Number Two – The Success Syndrome: Work – Wine – Women – Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

As you know, those birthdays that have big zeroes attached to it with the four, the five and the six, are the ones that usually create the greatest amount of anxiety and frustration.

I mean, the 20 and the 30 are steps to maturity.

But 40, 50 and 60 have got to be mid-life crisis all entailed in one.

Seventy, 80 and 90 are steps to old age.

And so we don't have as much problem with those.

Dr. James Dobson in his book:
Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives
records a letter that I believe describes today's study beautifully.

It is a letter from a woman who is married to a workaholic.

And this is the letter:

John and I were deeply in love when we got married. We

struggled during the first two or three years, especially with financial problems. But I knew he loved me and he knew I loved him. But then something began to change. I'm not sure how to describe it.

He received a promotion about five years ago and that required him to work longer hours. We needed the money so we didn't mind the extra time he was putting in. But it never stopped.

Now he comes home late every night. He is so tired I can actually hear his feet dragging as he approaches the porch. I look forward to his coming home all day because I have so much to tell him. But he doesn't feel much like talking so I fix his dinner and he eats it alone. I usually eat with the kids early in the evening.

After dinner John makes a few phone calls and works at his desk. Frankly I like for him to talk on the telephone just so I can hear his voice. Then he watches television for a couple of hours and goes to bed. Except on Tuesday nights, he plays basketball and sometimes he has a meeting at the office. Every Saturday morning he plays golf with three of his friends. Then on Sunday we are in church most of the day. Believe me there are times when we go for a month or two without having a real in-depth conversation. You know what I mean?

And I get so lonely in the house with three kids climbing all over me. There aren't even any women in our neighborhood I can talk to because most of them have gone back to work.

But there are other irritations about John. He rarely takes me out to dinner. He forgot our anniversary last month. And I honestly don't believe he's ever had a romantic thought.

He wouldn't know a rose from a carnation and his Christmas cards are signed just "John."

There is no closeness, no warmth between us yet he wants to have sex with me at the end of the day. There we are, lying in bed having had no communication between us in weeks. He hasn't tried to be sweet or understanding or tender, yet he expects me to become some passionate and responsive flower to him. I'll tell you, I can't do it.

Sure I'll go along with my duties as a wife but I sure don't get anything out of it. And after the two-minute trip is over and John is asleep, I lie there resenting him and feeling like a cheap prostitute.

Can you believe that? I feel used for having sex with my own husband. Boy does that depress me. In fact, I've been awfully depressed lately. My self-esteem is rock bottom right now. I feel like nobody loves me, I'm a lousy mother and a terrible wife.

Sometimes I think that God probably doesn't love me either. Well now I better tell you what's been going on between John and me more recently. We've been arguing a lot. I mean really fighting. The only way I can get his attention, I guess. We had an incredible battle in front of the kids last week. It was awful—tears, screaming, insults, everything. I spent two nights at my mother's house. Now all I can think about is getting a divorce so I can escape.

John doesn't love me anyway so what difference would it make. I guess that's why I came to see you. I want to know if I will be doing the right thing to call it quits.

Now that's the story of an awful lot of people isn't it?

We're shocked by people we hear who go through that kind of traumatic set of circumstances and then all of a sudden they just call it quits.

John Denver wrote a song when his wife Annie and he were getting a divorce.

A lot of times in a man's music you can tell what he's going through.

The song is called "*Seasons of the Heart*". And in it the words are very interesting.

*Of course we have our differences
You shouldn't be surprised
It's as nature as changes
In the seasons and the skies
Sometimes we grow together
Sometimes we drift apart
A wiser man than I might know
The seasons of the heart
And I'm walking here beside you
In the early evening chill
A thing we've always loved to do
I know I always will
We have so much in common
As many things we share
That I can't believe my heart
When it implies that you're not there*

*Love is why I came here in the first place
Love is now the reason I must go
Love is all I ever hoped to find here
Love is still the only dream I'll ever know.*

*So I don't know how to tell you
It's difficult to say
I never in my wildest dreams
Imagined it this way
Sometimes I just don't know
There's a stranger in our home
When I'm lying right beside you
Is when I'm most alone
And I think my heart is broken
There's an emptiness inside
So many things I've longed for
So often have been denied
Still I wouldn't try to change you
There's no one that's to blame
It's just some things that mean so much
That we just don't feel the same*

*Love is why I came here in the first place
Love is now the reason I must go
Love is all I ever hoped to find here
Love is still the only dream I'll ever know.....*

What do you mean love is why you came here in the first place?

And why is it that if love is commitment to care forever, that now because you haven't found it, you're selfish and egotistical enough to say that it's time to go and to call it quits?

You'll never find love in looking for it anyway.

You'll only find it as you give it and the happiness and fulfillment that comes in that.

As we look at the mid-life crisis, I believe the key to it is selfishness.

I think it's somebody who is flat tired of giving.

And as a result of that, he no longer wants to continue the hassles and the responsibilities.

And so he's saying in answering the question, what about me?

The foundation for the mid-life crisis was in Chapter 1.

I hope you saw it last week.

There were three things that Solomon gave us in Chapter 1, as the foundation.

1. There is no gain in what I'm doing.
2. There is nothing new under the sun.

And we said you'll never see anything new when you're running around in circles.

And that's the big merry-go-round that Solomon's talking about.

3. The frustration to Solomon was, there is no remembrance after you live.

I mean a 5-minute eulogy and a 1-minute of silence and then its business as usual.

And that's what it all boils down to when you get to the end of this thing.

So what do you do when you begin to test your limits?

Well, you come to the Success Syndrome.

If you've made a mess in your life, at least you're going to try to make a success in your profession.

And so a lot of guys, when they realize their life is getting messed up, their emotions are getting messed up, their

marriage is getting messed up—

When these things start to fall apart, then we pour our things into those things which are temporary.

Paul said in:

2 Timothy 4:10

For Demas has forsaken me because of his love for this present evil world.

We turn to those things which are here and now.

Those things which we feel we can enjoy.

Those things which we hope will bring meaning and purpose in life.

And so we have called it the **SUCCESS SYNDROME**.

And in the **SUCCESS SYNDROME**, it involves the **THREE W's**:

1. **WORK**,
2. **WINE**, and
3. **WOMEN**.

God really wants you to be a success.
Please don't think I'm knocking success today.

Matthew 6:33

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

God really wants to bless and prosper you.

You find some of the biblical characters who walk with God are some of the prosperous and successful individuals.

Joseph for one said, “everything he did, the Lord blessed him.”

Daniel was the same way.

Abraham was the same way.

Jacob was the same way.

God blessed them and prospered them.

We're living in a day when we're flooded with books on success, positive attitudes, motivation, money management, goals and more.

Someone has said “Man is the only creature who doubles his activity when he fails

or he's lost his way.”

You'll find oftentimes that workaholics are that way because of guilt,
because of the fear of failure,
because of trying to escape,
settling for material goals
rather than
for spiritual goals.

If I were to take one verse today and write it over the Second Chapter, to make this chapter come alive, it would be Psalm 16:11.

Psalm 16:11

You will make known to me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

As we read this 2 Chapter of Ecclesiastes you will not believe the accuracy of this 2 Chapter and how relevant it is today.

It is so practical. Let's go for it!

v. 1 I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless.

Why is he starting with pleasure?

Because that's the first thing the guy in the mid-life crisis says: "Hey! I've done all this, what about me having some fun?"

Listen to Jim Conway in his book *Men in Mid-Life Crisis*. He says that very same thing.

This new god is called indulgence. It is the god of pleasure, luxury, gusto, comfort, ease, and sensuality. The reasoning goes something like this: I've worked hard all my life. I obeyed my parents when I was a little kid. I did what I was supposed to do in school. I went to church like a good little boy. I went to college, got a good job, got married, settled down as society expected. Started a family, bought a house in the suburbs, even managed to get a second car. I took out life insurance and started retirement funds. I became respectable in the community. I was a member of the PTA, the Chamber and the local church board. I've worked hard at my job. I'm now vice-president in charge of sales in a four-state area. I've paid for braces, piano lessons, four different stages of bicycles and membership at the Y. I've footed the bills for all kinds of trips and vacations and I'm carrying a big load to make sure that my kids get a good college education. I'm tired of doing all this. It's time that I get some pleasure out of life. It's time for me to indulge myself. I'm going to follow a new lifestyle that does not include God and sacrifice. I am going to start using my money for my own pleasure, my own leisure, to get me the kind of freedom that I want. I'm going to use my life and time and money and energy to get me the kind of intimacy and sex and pleasure I want. God has talked to me all my life about serving other people, giving to other people, supporting other

people. Now it's time I get some of that.

That's the beginning!

Here it is in Chapter 2.

He says I'm going to start by trying pleasure.

What happens when you start messing around with pleasure?
Well it never satisfies.

One person put it this way:

The higher a person builds the wall of self-gratification, the deeper becomes the reservoir of his need.

You'll never find satisfaction.

v. 2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

There's the QUESTION. And he's answering it.
Is that all there is?

The problem is, a quart of pleasure today takes a gallon tomorrow to get the same effect.

Pleasure's kind of like eating peanuts.

You never can take just one.

It's far easier to take another peanut
than it is to sit and reflect
on the delicious quality of the first one you took.

It is said of Moses: He chose rather to suffer affliction with the
people of God
than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

- Pleasure is enjoyable.
- It's one drink.
- It's one sexual fling.
- It's one contest won.
- It's one project accomplished.
- One wild party but you have to go on to more and to more
to find satisfaction.

**v. 3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing
folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I
wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do
under heaven during the few days of their lives.**

“I tried cheering myself with wine,”

What happens when you go on your pleasure kick?

Well you have to try a little White Zinfandel.

I mean, you have to see why that stuff
is really all that great!

And so you become a connoisseur of fine wines and you start

reading Wine & Spirits Magazine
so you can be sure to try them all!

Drinking is all part of the pursuit of joy
in the bottle.

The only problem is, we have a ton of alcoholics that end up in
AA.

At least Solomon said:

*“I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my
mind still guiding me with wisdom.”*

He still held his mind together in disciplined restraint as he
partook of intoxicating beverages.

*“I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under
heaven during the few days of their lives.”*

Isn't that sad? And yet his analysis is correct.

James 4:14

“Our life is like a vapor that appears for a
little time and then poof, it's gone.”

He says the few days we're here, I wanted to see if I could find
what really was going to
have meaning and purpose to my life.

Let's go through verses 4-9.

v. 4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.

v. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

v. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

v. 7 I 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.

v. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.

v. 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

When you're unhappy and pleasure doesn't satisfy and you start doing a little drinking and that doesn't cut it, what do you start doing?

You start pouring yourself into significant constructive projects to use up your time.

Let's look at these things that people do.

1. He got involved in BUILDING A HOUSE.

Now I want to tell you that can be a killer, especially when you have to satisfy a thousand women.

Some of you guys are climbing the walls and you're just trying to satisfy one.

You aren't halfway through and the architect is nearly crazy in trying to put the thing together.

Remember Solomon was responsible for the building of the temple.

And you know this house is going to be something.

2. He *PLANTED VINEYARDS*.

He took up a little farming. And got him a little farming project on the side.

3. *He made "GARDENS and PARKS and PLANTED ALL KINDS OF FRUIT TREES."*

He began the Keep America Beautiful Campaign.

We plant trees and shrubs wherever we can find a place to plant one!

4. He made “*RESERVOIRS to water groves of flourishing trees.*”

5. He “*bought male and female SLAVES.*”

You need to have lots of hired help when you have all this going on.

6. He got in the *CATTLE and SHEEP business.*

7. He got into the *SILVER and GOLD market.*

8. He got a *bunch of MUSICIANS and a harem* so he could *delight his heart.*

You know you look at that and that’s exactly what so many people do.

A lot of people today are building bigger houses.

The house they have they’re not satisfied with.

The car they drive, they have to have a better one.

The boat they have is not big enough to go in the Gulf so we have to get a bigger one.

The ranch I have, got to have a few more acres.
And so we add the land next to it.

And all some people live for is a brand new toy—something to keep them entertained and to cover their empty guilt-ridden lives.

Verse 9: “I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.”

v. 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

Two members of the Body: the EYE and the HEART. And he’s satisfied every one of those needs.

v. 11 Yet 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.

“Yet”—verse 11. Here’s the result of it.

“[Yet] when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was”—and there are your **THREE KEY PHRASES** again that just weld this book together—*“everything was”*:

1. *“meaningless,”*
2. *“a chasing after the wind;”*

3. *“nothing was gained under the sun.”*

I read a statement the other day that at this point really jumped out at me.

“Let nothing on earth be your rest. God never intended so poor a portion for His redeemed ones.”

Don't let anything on earth be so important to you that you're satisfied with that because God never intended for you to have such a poor portion as far as life is concerned.

1 Corinthians 2:9

“What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—

It'd blow your mind if you realized what God has in store for you.

So Solomon says in verse 11, I looked at all this, I tried all these things, and I'm just telling you it's meaningless.

It's nothing under the sun.

It's like chasing after the wind.

Verse 12.

What's he going to do?

v. 12 Then 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?

v. 13 I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.

v. 14 The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.

Now what he's coming to is an awareness of the fact that a wise guy and a fool both are going to die. And both of them are going to leave everything they acquired to somebody that isn't going to appreciate it. That's kind of the thesis that he's coming to.

I tried all this, I amassed all this, I acquired it, and it's a venture in frustration. I've put it all together and now I've got to leave it to somebody that ain't going to appreciate it.

Boy, you talk about a guy who's really got his head together. He's pulling it in there.

Hebrews 9:27 says:

Hebrews 9:27

It is appointed unto man once to die but after this the judgment.

And in essence that's what Christ teaches in the New Testament and we're going to see it in just a minute.

Verse 15.

v. 15 Then I thought in my heart, “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said in my heart, “This too is meaningless.”

“Then I thought in my heart, ‘The fate of the fool will overtake me also.’”—doesn’t make any difference how many degrees I have after my name—“‘What then do I gain by being wise?’ I said in my heart, ‘This too is meaningless.’”

v. 16 For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

“For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered;”—remember we had that last week.

He said a guy lives and he dies and everybody forgets him.

“[in days to come] both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!”

v. 17 So 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.

“So I hated life, because of the work that is done”—and there are your **THREE PHRASES**—“under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

“I hated life.” I didn’t like it! I couldn’t find anything that was really meaningful.

Charlie Jones wrote a book called *Life is Tremendous*. If you want to read a great little book that’s got a lot of humor in it and a lot of class by a guy who’s very highly motivated, Charlie Jones does a great job in *Life is Tremendous*. This is what he says:

Do you know what I like? I like to relax. I like to talk about work. I like vacations, conventions, commissions, salary increases, long luncheons. What do I get? Headaches, heart breaks, turndowns. But do you know what I have been learning? If I don’t get excited about what I don’t like to do, I don’t get much that I do like to be excited about. I’ve been learning that life is not something which you like to do. Real life is doing what you ought to do. I’ve been learning that people who do what they like to do, eventually discover that what they thought they like to do they don’t like to do. But people who are learning to do what they don’t like to do but ought to do eventually discover what they thought they didn’t like to do they really do like to do.

(source unknown)

“I hated life” he says.

Mark Twain writes so many sage pieces of advice. But when it comes down to life he says:

Life is just one darn thing after another.”

(source unknown)

That’s just all I can say for it.

Solomon says it’s:

“meaningless,”

“chasing after the wind,” and

“all under the sun.”

Now you notice he not only hated life, but he hated the things he acquired. Look at verse 18.

v. 18 I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.

“I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun,”—
WHY?—“because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.”

Luke 12:19 and 20 is the teaching of Jesus on this. Here's a guy, he's really gotten it together. He's been successful:

Luke 12:19, 20

I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come. Take your ease; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you. And who will own what you have prepared?" So is the man who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Probably one of the neatest little books that I've read of recent days is the book by Jerry White called *Honesty, Morality & Conscience*. In the book he talks about the frustration of acquiring things and this is the mold from which it comes:

(Honesty, Morality & Conscience by Jerry White)

In college he grew a beard, he wore overalls and dirty T-shirts and did drugs. Then he graduated, shaved his beard, bought a new blue suit, and joined the corporate treadmill. He married, had two children, joined the right clubs and bought a home in the suburbs. He sold his soul to the company. Then his wife left him. He divorced her, became a playboy and then remarried. He was promoted by his company. He cheated on taxes, his travel reports and his wife. He did none of these things because he deeply wanted to or thought he should. Rather, they were the right things to do. They were acceptable. Everybody was doing them. Yes, he was very, very

successful and very, very unhappy. Life had become a masquerade but now he hardly knew who he was. Come to think of it, he was a little bit of everybody. Although fiercely claiming independence, he actually would do nothing that might endanger his standing with his peers. He might well describe himself as an American newspaper editor Emile Henry Gauvreau did: “as being a part of that strange race of people aptly described as spending their lives doing things they detest, to make money they don’t want, to buy things they don’t need, to impress people they dislike.”
(source unknown)

That is phenomenal, isn’t it?

(Honesty, Morality & Conscience by Jerry White)

...part of that strange race of people aptly described as spending their lives doing things they detest, to make money they don’t want, to buy things they don’t need, to impress people they dislike.
(source unknown)

That is Solomon.

(Honesty, Morality & Conscience by Jerry White)

The influence of people on people is a powerful force, affecting everyone. Only the power of God and the innate drive for physical survival outrank it. A reasoning mind can become powerless in the face of this pressure. Even the most committed individualist conforms in some ways to the lifestyle

of others.
(source unknown)

He says “I hated life and then on top of that, I hated everything that I acquired in this mad search for pleasure in the midst of all of it.”

Verse 19.

v. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.

“And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?”

Now he’s talking about the guy that’s going to get everything he acquired. And he says my frustration is, now when this passes on to this guy, that maybe I don’t even know, is he going to be a wise man or a fool?

“Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured all my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.”

v. 20 So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.

“So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.”

Why?

You know, I really searched myself at this particular point. Why the frustration? Why the meaninglessness to it?

And then I read a little book called *Man's Problem and God's Answers* by Dr. Pentecost, one of my seminary professors.

And in it he gave an illustration that settled the thing for me. His illustration was as follows:

God created in the animal kingdom the cow and the lion. The cow feeds on the grass. The lion is nourished by the meat. You can feed a cow meat all day and it'll starve to death. And you can feed the lion grass and he'll die. [And he said] God created man initially as a spiritual being to be satisfied only and fully, completely, edified and built up by spiritual things, not material things. And the material things are like the grass to the lion and like the meat to the cow. You'll never be satisfied if you try to substitute and violate God's laws with regard to the heart of the individual.

(source unknown)

Verse 21.

v. 21 For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.

What's the use of leaving a lot of things to people who aren't going to appreciate it? I mean, some parents feel like, you know, they've done their thing if they can leave a trust fund and all kinds of things for their kids. Maybe that's the greatest disservice you can do for your kids is to leave them everything that they don't have to work for because they're not going to appreciate it anyway.

Richard Pryor said it real well. You remember here a while back he had this tragedy where he was running down the street as a burning flame and he says: "As I was burning I found I called on God not Bank AmeriCard." I mean, he really knew where it was.

There are just a lot of things that MasterCharge, Bank AmeriCard or American Express can't get for you. And yet some of us live as though that's where it all is.

Psalm 73:25 and 26 says:

Psalm 73:25, 26

Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and besides Thee I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

And so he asks himself the question in verse 22 when he's trying to put all this together and wrap it up. He says:

**v. 22 What does a man get for all the toil and anxious
striving with which he labors under the sun?**

What does a man get from all of it?

I thought of Burt Bacharach's words "I'll never fall in love again" from the Broadway musical *Promises, Promises*. You've heard that song a jillion times.

What do you get when you fall in love?
A guy with a pin to burst your bubble.
That's what you get for all your trouble.
I'll never fall in love again.
I'll never fall in love again.

What do you get when you kiss a guy?
You get enough germs to catch pneumonia.
After you do, he'll never phone you.
I'll never fall in love again.

Don't tell me what it's all about,
'Cause I've been there and I'm glad I'm out,
Out of those chains, those chains that bind you,
That is why I'm here to remind you:

What do you get when you fall in love?
You only get lies and pain and sorrow.
So for at least until tomorrow
I'll never fall in love again.

(source unknown)

He's saying there's just a lot of pain and sorrow as a lot of meaninglessness to this. It's a "chasing after the wind."

Verse 23 he has degenerated into a workaholic and I couldn't believe this was in the text.

v. 23 All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

He's just poured himself into these projects. He brings it home with him at night. He's just like John in the first of the study tonight. He brings his work home. He talks on the phone. He goes to bed thinking about it. He gets up starting it and everything else around him, meaningful relationships, he is totally oblivious to it.

[Paraphrased from article in the August 1974 issue of *Scientific America* entitled "The Origins of Alienation" by Urie Bronfenbrenner]

One team of researchers tried to find out how much time the American father spends with their little children. And it is significant that each of these men were asked "how much time do you spend interacting with your little children in the home?" And most of the guys said "Usually 15-20 minutes a day." The researchers put a little microphone on the children to record the verbalizations. Do you know what the results were of the average American father spends with his children? It is the average of 37 seconds per day—2.7 encounters, lasting no more than 10-15 seconds each. That's the

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contribution of many of American fathers with their little children—37 seconds a day.

Workaholics—we're designed in that society to climb the corporate ladder, even if we find it leaning against the wrong wall, in order to achieve something so there can be more comfort and more material blessings as we call them.

Solomon, when it's all said and done—and I know some of you guys can't believe this—but what he's telling you in these last verses is what you really need to listen to today.

v. 24 A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God,

v. 25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

“for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?”

What a question!

v. 26 To the man 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.

You look at a guy like Joseph, you look at a guy like Daniel, you look at a guy like Abraham—these men, blessed by God,

but only blessed because of Joshua 1:8 and Matthew 6:33.

In Joshua 1:8 we read:

Joshua 1:8

This Book of the Law shall not depart of your mouth but you shall meditate therein day and night, and be careful to observe all that is written therein. Then you will make your way prosperous. Then you will have good success.

And Matthew 6:33:

Matthew 6:33

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; then all these things shall be added unto you.

It's a man who humbly and in a broken and a contrite spirit comes before God and realizes that God is the true author of success and happiness and fulfillment. And under the restraints of that, bound by His unfailing cords of love, that man learns to find real meaning and purpose in life when God is the one who is the orbit in which he operates.

John Newton put it a poetic piece and I'm afraid it describes many men, many women who are right here in the second chapter of Ecclesiastes and it goes like this:

My waking dreams are best concealed,
Much folly, little good, they yield;

But now and then, I gain, when sleeping,
A friendly hint that's worth the keeping.
Lately I dreamt of one who cried,
"Beware of self, beware of pride;
When you are prone to build a Babel,
Recall to mind this little fable.

Once upon a time a paper kite
Was mounted to a wondrous height,
Where, giddy with its elevation,
It thus expressed self-admiration:
"See how yon crowds of gazing people
Admire my flight above the steeple:
How would they wonder if they knew
All that a kite like me can do!
Were I but free, I'd take a flight,
And pierce the clouds beyond their sight;
But, ah! like a poor pris'ner bound,
My string confines me near the ground:
I'd brave the eagle's towering wing,
Might I but fly without a string.

It tugged and pulled, while thus it spoke,
To break the string—at last it broke!
Deprived at once of all its stay,
In vain it tried to soar away;
Unable its own weight to bear,
It fluttered downward through the air;
Unable its own course to guide,
The winds soon plunged it in the tide.
Ah! foolish kite, thou hadst no wing,

How couldst thou fly without a string?

My heart replied, O Lord, I see
How much this kite resembles me!
Forgetful that by Thee I stand,
Impatient of Thy ruling hand;
How oft I've wished to break the lines
Thy wisdom for my lot assigns?
How oft indulged a vain desire,
For something more or something higher!
And but for grace and love divine,
A fall thus dreadful had been mine.
(source unknown)

Paul Harvey said:

A thousand times reading the biographies of the world's most successful, I have been reminded of this: success is determined by how much you can dish out, and more by how much you can take. How much crow you can eat, how often you can turn the other cheek and somehow keep on keeping on.
(source unknown)

I was talking to one of my buddies the other day and he says "I'm so busy acquiring it I don't have time to enjoy it."

You know where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

What are the lessons that I got out of this study? I got seven of them that I'll share in conclusion tonight.

Seven thoughts that come to the surface out of this chapter:

Lesson #1: The pursuit of pleasure will only leave you thirsty.

The pursuit of pleasure will only leave you thirsty.

Lesson #2: Cheering oneself with wine and folly will end in futility.

Cheering oneself with wine and folly will only end in futility.

Lesson #3: There is no real purpose in becoming a workaholic.

There is just no real purpose in becoming a workaholic.

And if you've got one, tell me. You know, I mean I'm searching for it. There is no real purpose in becoming a workaholic.

Lesson #4: There is no satisfaction in possessions and pleasures.

There is no satisfaction in possessions and pleasures.

Lesson #5: There is a frustration of leaving everything you have acquired to others who won't appreciate it.

There is a frustration of leaving everything you have acquired to others who won't appreciate it.

I think the answer to tonight's study is in lesson #6.

Lesson #6: A man will only find satisfaction in his work when he is doing it for the glory of God.

A man will only find satisfaction in his work when he's doing it for the glory of God.

You notice he says “under the sun,” “chasing after the wind.” It doesn't have to be that. God designed life for you to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, right?

And #7 has some tricky words in it. So as you copy this last lesson, I'll repeat it a couple of times so you can get it.

Lesson #7: A man shows what he is by what he does with what he has.

A man shows what he is by what he does with what he has.

A man shows what he is by what he does with what he has.

And I put Colossians 3:23 and 24 there:

Colossians 3:23, 24

Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord, rather than for men. Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Lutzer wrote a book called *Failure: The Backdoor to Success*.

And in it he says:

It is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail.

What a tragedy to climb the ladder of success to find it leaning against the wrong wall.

And then he quotes these two verses from Psalm 113: 7 and 8. These are great verses:

“He raises the poor from the dust and He lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.” (Psalm 113:7, 8)
(source unknown)

God is the one who is the **AUTHOR OF SUCCESS**.

He lifts the poor and the needy up and allows them to sit with the princes.

One fellow in Calcutta was a very, very wealthy business magnate. He owned quite a number of vessels. He was visiting as a Christian with a missionary who had a real need. And at the end of their conversation he took out his checkbook and he wrote a check for \$150 and handed it to the missionary and he says “Oh, I’m so grateful for the fact that you’re so generous to help us on this particular occasion.”

Before he left the missionary’s house he received a cablegram from overseas that said he had a major business reverse and

one of his ships had sunk and all the cargo was lost.

The guy turned to the missionary and he says “I have just received very bad news. I’m going to have to take back that check and write another.”

And the missionary said “Sure, I understand that. That happens all the time.” And so he took the check and he tore it up. And he wrote another one. And this check instead of being for \$150 was for \$600. And he handed it to the missionary and the missionary looked at it and he said “Are you sure know what you’re doing?” And the guy said with tears in his eyes, “That cablegram was from my Father who is telling me to not lay up treasure on earth where moth and rust will corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. And I want to be a quick learner of His ways.”

(Paraphrase from *Our Daily Bread*, October 7, year unknown)

May I say to you, it’s so easy to get caught up in this, to get your priorities botched up, to be involved in a mad pursuit of all the things we’ve described. Can you believe this chapter is here? Can you believe that what is described is something he’s actually going through? And maybe you are sitting here and you’re in exactly the same place.

How to have a happy and meaningful life is the tract on the table. That tells you how it starts. It starts with a new birth. It starts with a relationship to Jesus Christ and bringing God into your life.

You’re then looking at life above the sun instead of under it.

Instead of it being meaningless, it becomes meaningful.

Instead of chasing after wind, you're chasing after the reality.

And Paul says "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ."

That's what waits for you when God is the author of all of those things, and when you are able to come with a broken and contrite spirit and submit to God's way of doing things.

Lord we thank You that life is involving many surrenders on our part. As we have seen Solomon make this made pursuit, we pray that we if we're caught up in this squirrel cage of activity—this treadmill of caring on things for the sake of trying to acquire more materially, that You would teach us how to put You first. And watch You then with rearranged priorities, begin to bring real blessing into our lives. Pray that Your Holy Spirit might now bring us to conviction. Lord help us to see that relationships are the most important thing. If we've strained our marriage, if we've neglected our kids, if we've been involved in things we shouldn't have been involved in, You'd convict us. And that we would learn to walk before You in humbleness and brokenness and in truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Study Number Two – The Success Syndrome: Work – Wine – Women – Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

NOTES

v. 1 I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless.

v. 2 “Laughter,” I said, “is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?”

v. 3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

v. 4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.

v. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

v. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

v. 7 I 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.

v. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.

v. 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

v.10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

v.11 Yet 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.

v.12 Then 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?

v.13 I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.

v.14 The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.

v.15 Then I thought in my heart, “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said in my heart, “This too is meaningless.”

NOTES

v.16 For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

v.17 So 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.

v.18 I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.

v.19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.

v.20 So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.

v.21 For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.

v.22 What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?v.23 All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

v.24 A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God,

v.25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

v.26 To the man 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.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-26 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. How is Solomon proceeding to test his heart, according to verse 1?

3. Outline the great projects of Solomon in verses 4-8.

4. What are the results of all of his effort, according to verse 11?

5. What are his verdicts about wisdom and folly, as stated in verse 15?

6. Why does he hate life and all things, according to verses 17-19?

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7. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving, according to verse 23?

8. How does God fit into the picture, according to verses 24-26?

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

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LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: The pursuit of pleasure will only leave you thirsty.

LESSON #2: Cheering oneself with wine and folly will end in futility.

LESSON #3: There is no real purpose in becoming a workaholic.

LESSON #4: There is no satisfaction in possessions and pleasures.

LESSON #5: There is a frustration of leaving everything you have acquired to others who will not appreciate it.

LESSON #6: A man can only find satisfaction in his work when he is doing it for the glory of God.

LESSON #7: A man shows what he is by what he does with what he has.