

Let the Good Times Roll

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 6

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

In the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, Solomon basically asks one question which he will try to answer a number of different ways – How can I be happy? How can I keep the good times rolling? King Solomon describes his personal journey in *chapter 2* chronicling his particular decisions, his lifelong obsessions, his royal possessions, and his selfish rationalizations which leads to the ultimate realization that ***“all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun”*** (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

Discussion Points:

As Solomon pursued a life of self-gratification and success, he eventually recognized that none of it brought meaningful purpose to life. He concluded that without God the destination is not freedom, but bondage.

- Entertainment and comedy are not inherently bad; however, in what ways might this type of self-gratification bring more meaninglessness into life?
- Solomon also sought the pleasure alcohol in his search of satisfaction. How can turning to substances to cope with or numb the pain of life’s problems be like striving after the wind?
- Why would designing an architectural marvel or planting a breath-taking garden not bring freedom but bondage into a life seeking meaningful purpose?

Though Solomon controlled everything from industry to commerce, he determined that without God the destination is not happiness, but bitterness.

- Are there instances in your own life which illustrate that control over things in your life does not bring happiness, rather bitterness? What are they?
- In what ways does the world attempt to find happiness in the pursuit of riches and the delights of the flesh outside of finding satisfaction in God?
- What other Bible characters have pursued their heart’s pleasure, only to find unhappiness and bitterness?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Finally Solomon had the world at his beck and call, yet he found that without God the destination is not contentment, but boredom.

- Have you yet faced up to the facts that toiling under the sun is vanity if it is not done under the Son? Why or why not?
- What are some areas in life that when all of the effort and success is totaled up still equals zero?
- What does the Bible say is the way to turn all of this around?

Gospel Connection: (Taken directly from the sermon, “Let the Good Times Roll”.)

Paul wrote to the Philippians that Jesus in the glory of Heaven didn’t hang on to His equality with the Father but emptied his hands of all of His glory and all His privileges and came to earth by that miraculous conception and grew up *to humble Himself and die on a cross to pay for our sins* (Philippians 2).

And as many as receive Him, receive the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

The problem with the human heart – like Solomon – is that we chase after things we can see, but our deepest need is not visible, it is invisible. In 430 AD, Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

When you come to Him by faith, when you place your life in His hands, in the moment you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior your heart finds what it has been missing; and your destination changes – forever.

Practical Implications:

Think: Am I chasing after life’s pursuits that will end in vanity or am I spending time pursuing true meaning in life?

Pray: Thank the Lord for allowing a man named Solomon to share the knowledge of a foolish life lived in folly and the answer of living a life of meaning.

Do: Practice living under the ‘Son’ rather than under the ‘sun’.

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Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 6

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

If there is a song for the ages that seems to guide the lifestyles of the rich and famous – successful business and world leaders – best-selling authors, award winning musicians and super-stars, or if there is a set of lyrics for the average guy on the street who’s trying to make a living and is looking for a break – or at least the weekend – where he can take a break, it would be the same song for them all. In fact, this song seems to describe the pursuit of the human race.

It was made famous by B.B. King who belted out the lyrics that go like this:

Hey everybody, let’s have some fun
You only live but once
And when you’re dead, you’re done.
So let the good times roll.

I don’t care if you’re young or old,
Get together, let the good times roll.

Don’t sit there mumblin’ and talkin’ trash,
If you wanna have a ball,
You gotta go out and spend some cash.

And let the good times roll
Let the good times roll.ⁱ

I can’t think of anybody better suited for those lyrics than the person we are discovering together in our study of the autobiography of King Solomon.

He was living the lyrics one party after another with plenty of cash to finance it all. Truth is, he didn’t earn a paycheck – he had a debit card directly linked to Fort Knox because he owned it all. “Let the Good Times Roll” would have been his theme song for life.

In his private autobiography known as the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, Solomon introduces us to his star-studded life. But he has been dropping hints along the way that, as exciting as it seems to be, nothing seems to last.

Today we arrive in chapter two, and you could write over this chapter the lyrics to that song “Let the Good Times Roll.” In this chapter, Solomon basically asks one question which he will try to answer a number of different ways – How can I be happy?

In other words, what can I do that will make me happy and keep me happy in life?ⁱⁱ

Opening Decisions

Notice some of Solomon’s opening decisions:

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself. But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, “It is mad.” And of pleasure, “What use it?” (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2).

With these opening choices, Solomon puts some things to a test or an experiment to see if they can get the good times rolling.

He tried the wisdom of men in *chapter 1*, and that didn't last long; in fact, it only added sorrow to his mind and heart. So now in *chapter 2*, Solomon turns to entertainment, or literally to laughter. This can be understood as "comedy". He starts bringing in the best standups in the kingdom, court jesters and the like, because it is time to laugh about life, not be so serious and studious all the time.

But notice, he concludes that merriment and laughter are *madness* – which is a word that carries the nuance of moral perversity.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, most of the comedy in Solomon's day was just like the comedy in our day – it was morally risqué. It was off color. It was dirty comedy. And none of it, Solomon concludes, really helped him find any lasting meaning or purpose in life; it just made him feel a little dirtier.

Solomon wrote what he did next in *verse 3*:

*I searched with my heart how to cheer
my body with wine – my heart still
guiding me with wisdom (that's earthly
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
(Ecclesiastes 2:3).*

Allister Begg writes that Solomon leaves the comedy club and heads to the bar in his search of satisfaction. He turns, like many people, to substances to cope with and numb the pain of life's problems.^{iv}

We've only got a few days to live – the days of the children of Adam are only a few . . .

So we'd better have some fun,
You only live but once
And when you're dead,
You're done.

So let the good times roll.

A little buzz will help it roll along, even though it won't last.

There is nothing wrong with having fun or laughing, which is good medicine, Solomon wrote. Comedy can entertain us but it can't free us from who we are. Good times can entertain us, but they can't redeem us. In fact, even when the comedy is clean, the show eventually has to end and you are back to life again.

And life is no laughing matter.^v

Solomon is looking in the wrong place to find lasting joy. He concludes that these opening decisions haven't brought him lasting pleasure or peace or joy in life.

Lifelong Obsessions

Next Solomon catalogs, what we'll call, his lifelong obsessions. He condenses 40 years of his career into the following three verses:

*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. I made
myself pools from which to water the
forest of growing trees (Ecclesiastes 2:4-
6).*

Southwest of Jerusalem, in a place seldom visited by tourists, are huge depressions in the earth still referred to as the pools of Solomon which he used to water his private gardens.^{vi}

The scope of what Solomon did was incredible! You may notice that everything in this text occurs in the plural – *houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, trees and pools.*

Fred Olmsted, considered the father of landscape architecture, designed New York's Central Park and Boston's Emerald Necklace. He was approached by young George Vanderbilt in the 1880s and agreed to design the gardens at Biltmore Estate as his final project. Today you can stroll around acres of gardens with hundreds of ornamental shrubs and beautiful trees, ponds and pools stocked with fish, 75,000 tulips blooming in the spring and 2,000 roses planted exactly as they were for the Vanderbilts. (This is exactly what my lawn

would look like, if Fred Olmsted would return my calls. He's been gone for 120 years, and that's my excuse.)

I find it fascinating that Solomon chooses words directly from *Genesis 2*. The words Solomon uses for **make** and **plant** and **water** and **garden** are the same words from the Creation account of the Garden of Eden.^{vii}

This was the garden that Adam and Eve called home; it was a literal paradise, and they lost it because of sin. And don't ever think that just because Adam and Eve were forgiven that they ever forgot was the Garden of Eden was like.

And to this day, we all long to return to that Garden Paradise. What is it about us with our little flower pots and rose bushes and fruit trees and fish ponds? It is the faint echo in our hearts of Paradise lost; it is the longing in our hearts for creation to be restored? (*Romans 8*). Isn't it our little statement of anticipation and faith that this is where we are heading – as Jesus promised – in that glorious new heaven and new earth (*Revelation 21*)?

Keep in mind that none of what Solomon is doing here is for the benefit of anybody but himself. He is not sharing Paradise. You can't get tickets to see these gardens. These great works were not public works.^{viii}

I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees
(Ecclesiastes 2:4-6).

He writes, ***they were for myself. . . I made them for myself.***

By the way, in this passage, Solomon will use the word 'me' four times, 'myself' four times, 'my' thirteen times, and 'I' eighteen times. Thirty-nine times he tells us that this is all about 'I, me, mine, and myself'.

If he were talking like this in third grade you would make him go stand in the corner. He would be the kid you would never want to have

around the playground. Those are his toys, his playground, his neighborhood, his city, his country, his world – and you can't have any of it.

Solomon makes it clear that he is not sharing any of the credit or any of the glory or any of the perks and prizes. Why? Because people wrapped up in themselves don't share glory with anybody . . . not even God.

These are his decisions. These are his obsessions.

Royal Possessions

Continuing on Solomon lists his royal possessions in **verse 7**:

I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house
(Ecclesiastes 2:7a).

Other passages like *I Kings 5* indicate that Solomon had an additional 30,000 drafted Jewish men to work on his building projects.^{ix} Solomon had this huge work force build these projects, manage his daily operations, and wait on him hand and foot.^x

You might wonder how he fed all of his workers. Let's see what Ecclesiastes reveals as we continue reading the next phrase in **verse 7**:

I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 2:7b).

First Kings 4 informs us how much food Solomon prepared each day to feed his government workers, his household staff, farming staff, and leaders:

Solomon's provision for one day was 180 bushels of fine flour and 360 bushels of meal, ten fat oxen – not the skinny ones but the fat ones – and twenty pasture-fed cattle (I Kings 4:22).

Today you must shop at a fancy grocery store and pay extra for *pasture-fed* or grass-fed beef; these cows were never given any hormones or antibiotics – they lived in the pasture – these were extremely happy cows. Solomon fed his working force the best of the best. And that is not all of the meat that he prepared each day:

A hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks and fattened fowl. (I Kings 4:23).

One Old Testament scholar estimated that it would take 30-40,000 people to consume that much food every day.^{xi} It was a banquet feast every day in the court of Solomon.

Solomon controlled everything from industry to commerce to building to agriculture. If he were living today, he would be the majority stockholder in Starbucks, Costco and Cracker Barrel – the three pillars of human civilization.

And where did he attain all of his money? Look down at *verse 8*:

I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. (This was a reference to the tribute from surrounding kings and kingdoms. He had enough money to buy more than food.) ***I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man*** (Ecclesiastes 2:8).

According to Biblical accounts, in today's economy Solomon brought into his royal coffers around 1.8 billion dollars a year. And with this amount, Solomon can fund his party machine, his projects, his palace and his harem of 1,000 women.^{xii}

As people toured the palace they would have been breathless to see this golden age of Israel's history laid out in marble and gold, precious stone-studded doors from Africa, spices from Arabia, sandalwood and ivory sculptors from India, cedar ceilings from Lebanon, as well as the gorgeous costumes of his attendants and servants. Like the Queen of Sheba before them, it would have taken their breath away.^{xiii}

Solomon took in five million dollars a day; he had plenty of money to buy the band and the choir too. It all belonged to him. Every night in his sculptured gardens was another concert and another party under the stars, and the choir would be singing something like:

C'mon everybody, let's have some fun,
You only live but once,
And when you're dead, you're done.
So . . . let the good times roll.

Selfish Rationalization

In *Ecclesiastes 2*, Solomon conveys his personal decisions, his lifelong obsessions, his royal possessions, and then continues in his journal to reveal his selfish rationalization, in *verse 9*:

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me (I kept my wits about 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*** (Ecclesiastes 2:9-10).

In other words, "I worked hard and I deserved this stuff. I am an alpha male and this is what alpha males do; didn't you know that? And since I had money to burn, if something looked good, it couldn't be bad, so I bought it. If something tasted good, it couldn't be wrong, so I ordered it. If something felt good to do, it couldn't be harmful, so I did it, and, besides, I deserved it."

So let the good times roll.

But after all of this, Solomon still asks himself, 'Why am I still empty?'

Honest Confession

Solomon continues to answer this question in *verse 11*:

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun
(Ecclesiastes 2:11).

Where it reads ***then I considered all that my hands had done***, the Hebrew verb translated ***to consider*** literally means to face, to face up to, to face the facts, or even, to look someone in the eye.^{xiv}

In other words, Solomon says, “Here I am at the end of my life and now I am facing up to the facts. I am looking myself in the eye and facing up to reality.”

What did all of his choices amount to? We have studied all these phrases in ***chapter 1***:

- ***vanity*** – futility, brevity, meaninglessness
- ***striving after wind*** – the idea of trying to catch satisfaction in life is like chasing the wind with a net
- ***nothing gained under the sun*** – you gain nothing if your perspective gets stuck down here under the sun, instead of looking up to Creator of the sun, the true and living God who reigns beyond the sun

This is the difference between walking through life down here under the sun (s-u-n), rather than walking through life alongside the Son (S-o-n).

If you recall, Solomon started out this chapter determined to enjoy life, but, after fast forwarding the tape some 40 years, he admits that even with all he accomplished and with all he possessed enjoyment never lasted much after the choir stopped singing, the band left, the harem went to sleep, and all the movers and shakers in the kingdom went home. Solomon, once again confesses, “Here I am with empty hands and an even emptier heart.” He was the proverbial man who spent his life climbing the ladder only to get to the top and find out it was leaning against the wrong wall.

What we can learn from the autobiography of one of the most powerful, wealthy, influential world leaders of his time is that the pursuit of our own desires, without God, lead us to the wrong destination.

Without God, the destination is not freedom, but bondage.

You got what you wanted, but discovered it turned around and mastered you. You don’t own your possessions, your habits, your lifestyle – it owns you. You are not the master of your desires, you are a slave to your desires.

Without God, the destination is not happiness, but bitterness.

Benjamin Disraeli, a British statesman a century ago who led Great Britain to great expansion, moved kingdoms and led an incredibly powerful and influential life. At the end of his days, he wrote, “Youth is a mistake; middle age is a struggle, old age is regret.”

That sounds like Solomon.

Without God, the destination is not contentment, but boredom.

I got what I wanted, but I can’t understand why I so quickly get over it. I thought that purchase would do it or that house, that job, that car, that relationship, that child, that promotion, that money, that publication, that title, that degree. I thought it would give me some sense of satisfaction, but it just seemed to vanish into thin air.

Everything I had I finally, honestly totaled all up and it equaled one big zero.

Without God the pursuit of your desires will not lead you to the destination you really desire. Solomon is effectively saying, “Listen up! A wise person will determine the destination before buying a ticket.”^{xv}

The truth is, according to the Bible, we all have the wrong ticket; we were born heading in the wrong direction. But fortunately we have

the biography of another king, King Jesus, and He had it all. But this King gave it all away in order to save you and me.

The Bible says:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Paul wrote to the Philippians that Jesus in the glory of Heaven didn't hang on to His equality with the Father but emptied his hands of all of His glory and all His privileges and came to earth by that miraculous conception and grew up *to humble Himself and die on a cross to pay for our sins* (Philippians 2).

And as many as receive Him, receive the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

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When you come to Him by faith, when you place your life in His hands, in the moment you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior your heart finds what it has been missing; and your destination changes – forever.

Here are some things about that new destination:

- there's an angelic choir that will never stop singing
- there are palace grounds with streets of gold and walls of gemstones
- there are gardens that will bloom with breathtaking beauty
- the celebrations will never end
- and in our perfected and glorified bodies, life will never be boring or tedious or painful or troublesome again

Let the good times roll? You better believe it! One day they will begin rolling, and they will keep on rolling and rolling and rolling and it will never end.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/06/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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i “Let the Good Times Roll”, by B.B. King

ii Adapted from Ray C. Steadman, *Is This All There is to Life?* (Discovery House, 1999), p. 24

iii Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes* (Crossway, 2010), p. 47

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- iv Quoted by Danny L. Akin and Jonathan Akin, Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes (Holman, 2016), p. 24
- v Ryken, p. 47
- vi Steadman, p. 27
- vii Douglas Sean O'Donnell, Ecclesiastes (P & R Publishing, 2014), p. 46
- viii Ryken, p. 49
- ix Warren W. Wiersbe, Ecclesiastes: Be Satisfied (Victor Books, 1990), p. 35
- x Adapted from Ryken, p. 49
- xi Walter Kaiser Jr., Coping With Change: Ecclesiastes (Christian Focus, 2013), p. 81
- xii Adapted from Ed Young, Been There. Done That. Now What? (Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 42
- xiii Adapted from David Jeremiah, Searching For Heaven on Earth (Integrity Publishers, 2004), p. 31
- xiv Adapted from Michael A. Eaton, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ecclesiastes (IVP Academic, 1983), p. 80
- xv Warren Wiersbe, Be Skillful: Proverbs (Victor, 1995), p. 49