

Rising Above the Tide

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 7

Ecclesiastes 2:12-17

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

At times life can seem disgusting, distasteful, and disheartening, even for those who trust in Jesus Christ. These are some of the same conclusions that have been drawn through the life and contemplations of King Solomon in his *Book of Ecclesiastes*. Solomon discovered that a life lived under the sun is a life that will be forgotten after death deals its fatal blow.

Discussion Points:

Solomon conveys that life has become disgusting.

- In what situations do you become disgusted and angry with life?
- Why does it seem unfair that all of the successes we feel like we have accomplished in life will be forgotten?
- What does the Bible outside of *Ecclesiastes* say about success and accomplishments in this life?

Solomon also expresses how life has become distasteful.

- How is the sentiment in the following verse reflected in the attitudes of current culture? *So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me* (Ecclesiastes 2:17b).
- What other Bible characters have exhibited signs that they believed their lives were disgusting or distasteful?
- Where in scripture can you find solutions and hope for a distasteful life?

Finally, Solomon considers how life has become disheartening.

- How does the knowledge that all will die become disheartening?
- What are the world's solutions for a disheartening life?
- What are God's solutions for a disheartening life?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Gospel Connection: (Taken directly from the sermon, “Rising Above the Tide”.)

If you don’t belong by faith to the Creator who reigns above the sun, then you are stuck down here building nothing more permanent than a sandcastle. You are chasing after the wind without rescue, without a redeemer, without hope beyond the grave.

The tide is coming in. You can’t avoid the tide. You can’t cheat the tide. You can’t outlast the tide, but you can, because of Jesus Christ, one day rise above the tide.

Jesus Christ said:

“I am the resurrection and the life - whoever believes in me, even though he dies, yet shall he live (John 11:25).

How?

For God so loved the world – the world of humanity, stuck down here under the sun – that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Do you know Him?

Practical Implications:

Think: Am I living a life for God or living myself in the moments before death comes?

Pray: Praise God for the hope and salvation He offers through Jesus Christ. We do not need to live with a disgusted, distasteful, and disheartened attitude. Ask Him to keep you focused on Him, not on life under the sun.

Do: Run through reasons you have to be thankful when life becomes disheartening.

Rising Above the Tide

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 7

Ecclesiastes 2:12-17

When I was a kid, growing up in Norfolk, Virginia, I lived just four miles away from the sandy beaches of Ocean View, which is a part of the Chesapeake Bay area. I can remember hitchhiking to Ocean View for an afternoon of skim boarding in the summer.

Most of my brothers and I had our own skim boards we had made from scraps of plywood. You'd skim that board across the surf that washed up on the beach, then run after it and jump on it – and take off like a rocket.

We'd cut the front ends of our skim boards into a curve and sand the edges and surface as smooth as we could. Then we would choose colors and paint them. I painted my skim board baby blue with a dark green border around the edges. I evidently wasn't very good with colors.

One thing I never got into was building sand castles; that was for little kids who had a plastic pail and little plastic shovels and forks. Skim boarding was the thing to do.

Well, things have definitely changed over the years. For one thing, it's not a good idea to hitchhike anymore – even if it's legal in certain areas. And skim boarding is no longer allowed at most beaches, including Ocean View, except early in the morning and later at night.

Hitchhiking and skim boarding are becoming things of the past, but building sandcastles has become the rage. Many coastline states and other countries around the world now hold elaborate sandcastle contests every year in the summer months along their sandy beaches.

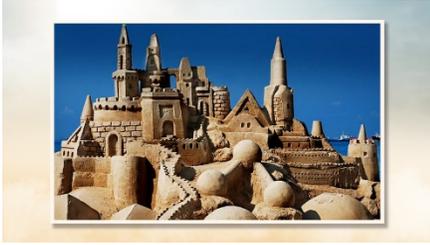
There are sandcastle building tournaments that offer cash prizes of \$10,000 dollars and more. Some of this year's competition winners from around the country featured exquisite, beautiful artistry.



This was probably crafted by that little kid I ignored at the beach while I skim boarded.



Some of the entries this year were huge in scope and size; they were palaces made of sand and water. Every year, thousands of people come to watch these contestants create their masterpieces.



What is really remarkable to me is that they can be built in such a short amount of time. Typically, the contest begins around 9:00 am and runs until late afternoon. The contestants choose their places on the beach and start from scratch.



But they have to finish their creative masterpieces around 3:00 o'clock so their entries can be judged. And that is because someone else is going to show up to take a close look at these castles.



He never fails to show up right on time, and when he does, everything stops. We call him, The Tide.

The Tide comes in. When he arrives all these sandcastles and creative masterpieces are washed away.

The English word for tide originally referred to a portion of time; in fact, time and tide are close cousins in meaning. Tide originally referred to a season of time. We use the words, “good tidings” to refer to a season of good

events. To this day, we say that Christmas is a time of glad or good tidings, which means it is a season that makes us glad.

The King James Version records the angels delivering to the shepherds, *good tidings of great joy*, regarding the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:10).

In Old English, the word tide originally carried the idea that not only was something going to happen, it was going to happen as predictably as the rising and falling of the ocean’s waters. This is how the word tide became the term to refer to that rising and falling of water. The tide was an expected event; the tide was always on time. And there wasn’t anything any sandcastle could do to avoid it; no matter how beautiful or how elaborate or how creative or how magnificent.

The tide was on his way.

This happens to be the issue keeping Solomon up at night. The fact that there is an event that is going to happen, and it is going to happen to everybody. It is an expected event, although the hour is unknown. The event is as predictable as the ocean’s tide. And it doesn’t matter if people spend their time making sandcastle masterpieces or just pour piles of sand out of a plastic pail – this event can not be rescheduled.

The tide is going to come in.

Solomon describes his frustration about it, right here in his journal. Now if you were with us in our last study in *Ecclesiastes chapter 2*, Solomon asked the question, “Is there anything I can experience or accomplish that allows me to hang on to happiness?”

And the answer was “No”. No matter what accomplishment or thrill we experience, it doesn’t last. An example from a tennis player is that after winning Wimbledon, one professional admitted later to a reporter that the euphoria she felt only lasted about two minutes. Hanging on to happiness, Solomon concludes, is like trying to catch the wind with a net.

Solomon asks another question, “Is there any advantage to living wisely rather than living wildly?”

So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king?
(Ecclesiastes 2:1a).

Now what Solomon does is turns his attention to a new train of thought. ***“So I turned my attention to compare the advantages of wisdom and madness.”***

By the way, the combination of the words, “madness and folly” refer to the same idea of living the wildest, craziest kind of life you possibly can.¹ Notice that Solomon suggests here that no man after him will be able to experiment with life like he has been able to experiment.

So here is the question in Solomon’s mind - is living a moderate, prudent, moral life any better than living the wild party life?

Which commercial is right?

- Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise
or
- You only go around once in life so grab all the gusto you can.

Which direction is going to be better?

Even though most of his journal has been jaded and negative, Solomon’s answer might surprise you; notice ***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
(Ecclesiastes 2:13).

In other words, using your head is smarter than running wild. Way to go, Solomon! I’m going to let my kids read this verse.

There is more gain in wisdom. The word **gain** is a commercial term you can translate as ‘profit’ or ‘advantage’. There is an advantage to avoiding the wild and crazy life. In fact, Solomon equates ***folly*** with ***darkness*** and ***wisdom*** with ***light***.

Now he goes on to write another proverb in ***verse 14:***

The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness
(Ecclesiastes 2:14).

The wise person has his eyes in his head, means he has both eyes open; he has 20/20 vision. But the fool walks through life as though he were in a fog. We would describe him today by saying he is in the dark. He is not thinking; the lightbulb is not on in the attic.

One author commented that this Hebrew proverb is translated into the contemporary German culture to read, “He who wants to play chess had better not keep his eyes in his pocket.”ⁱⁱ This is a silly way of saying, “In life, like in the game of chess, you’d better keep both eyes open and alert.”

My grandmother taught me this when she taught me how to play chess. She taught me that I had better stay alert. She might have been an older lady and might have been my grandmother, but when it came to playing her in a game of chess:

she was vicious . . .

she was diabolical . . .

she was unmerciful . . .

she was . . . well, you get the point.

My grandmother would look over her little glasses at me and say, “Check”. I’d start racing all over that board with my king and two pawns – which was all I had left – trying to stay alive, but I invariably got cornered. She would start cackling like the wicked witch of the west and I’d hear her say that dreaded word, through her long fangs, “Checkmate”.

It’s taken years of counseling, but I think I’m over it.

That was a pretty good life-lesson my beloved grandmother taught me – you have to keep both eyes open.

The fool, on the other hand, is in constant trouble. The term ***fool***, used by Solomon 18 times in this private journal we call *Ecclesiastes*, refers to a person who lives an evil, self-centered, God-dishonoring life. The fool doesn’t have his moral headlights turned on; he

is driving in the dark and constantly totaling his life, one accident after another. The only thing he seems to be looking for is the next opportunity to sin.

So back to the question – is there an advantage to living wisely or foolishly? And Solomon says, “Yes, there is.”

But before you go up to Solomon and say, “I’m so glad to see you’re taking a turn in your journal and starting to say some positive things about life.” Solomon says, “Not so fast.”

Solomon records:

The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness . . . and yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them (Ecclesiastes 2:14).

The same event – the same *miqreh* – is the Hebrew term for fate or destiny, the same thing is going to happen to us all.

Notice *verse 15*:

Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so wise?” (Ecclesiastes 2:15).

And what is that event that will happen to both the wise and the fool? Skip down to the last part of *verse 16*:

. . . the wise dies just like the fool!
(Ecclesiastes 2:16b).

Solomon effectively says, “So this eliminates any advantage! So do whatever you want to do.” Build an elaborate sandcastle or spend your life skim boarding, it doesn’t matter. The tide is coming in for us all!

Solomon adds two observations that affect us all. Again, he is telling us the brutal truth whether we want to hear it or not.

1. No matter what you do, your accomplishments are forgettable.

Here are the brutal facts of life laid out in *verse 16*:

For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten (Ecclesiastes 2:16).

Solomon has made this statement already in *chapter 1:11 – generation come and go and later generations don’t remember earlier generations*. He is not trying to be mean. He is not trying to rub your nose in it. He is actually trying to be painfully honest and remind us that our lives will be forgotten.

I recently read an article by someone who studied in the area of modern genealogy, and he commented that the average person doesn’t know the members of his own family beyond four generations. You know your parents’ names, your grandparents’ names, maybe your great-grandparents’ names, but what about your great-great-grandparents’ names? How are you doing?

C’mon, they are the reason you are even alive four generations later. You probably don’t know who they are much less what they accomplished in life.

They have been forgotten.

Solomon knew about Egyptian pharaohs living nearby who had the habit of chiseling out the names of their predecessors on monuments and replacing them with their own. They wanted to forget their predecessors as soon as they bit the dust.

Egyptian texts which have been excavated from around the same time that Solomon lived read, “Those who built pyramids are soon forgotten – those who were once gods lie forgotten in their tombs.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Here is the brutal truth – one day no one on the planet is going to remember you or the sandcastle you built, even if you won first place. The tide is coming in and it will render an irreversible judgment. No matter what you do, your accomplishments are forgettable.

2. No matter who you are, your death is unavoidable.

Solomon adds an exclamation point at the end of *verse 16*:

How the wise dies just like the fool!
(Ecclesiastes 2:16b).

No matter how smart you are, no matter how much you have, how big your sand castle is, how high your I.Q., how large your income, or how many toys you have in the garage, everyone dies.

The bumper sticker was wrong that claimed, “The man with the most toys wins”. It ought to have read, “The man with the most toys still dies.”

He still dies. The tide is on his way.

And with the shadows of death reflecting back on life, Solomon reaches these conclusions about life.

First, he essentially says that:

Life has become disgusting.

Notice the first phrase in *verse 17*:

So I hated life (Ecclesiastes 2:17a).

You could paraphrase this to read, “Therefore I was disgusted with life!”^{iv} Solomon is angry about it. I mean, look at the castles he has built! He has come to the realization that no matter how long he lives, he is still going to die just like everybody else. As an older man, it makes him mad to see the tide approaching.

One article records the effort of a man as rich as Solomon to fund what he is calling, “lifespan development processes.” He has already poured \$40 million dollars into this medical foundation to understand how to lengthen life. His net worth has exceeded \$50 billion dollars – yet Larry Ellison said this in an interview, “Death makes me angry . . . it doesn’t make any sense to me. Death has never made any sense to me.

How can a person be there and then just vanish and not be there?”^v

There are more sandcastles to build. There is still more to see and do and taste and experience. So, why does there have to be this predictable, unrelenting tide?

Secondly, Solomon adds:

Life has become distasteful.

Look at *verse 17* again:

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me
(Ecclesiastes 2:17b).

The Hebrew term for *grievous* can be rendered unpleasant or distasteful. In fact, it is a word used of poisonous herbs. Solomon says, “Life down here under the sun is like one meal of poisonous herbs after another.”

Life has become distasteful.

Thirdly, he goes on to add:

Life has become disheartening.

. . . under the sun . . . all is vanity and a striving after wind (Ecclesiastes 2:17c).

If there are no pockets in shrouds, as the Jewish proverbs says, if you have never seen a hearse with a luggage rack, as George Strait used to sing it, or, as Billy Graham used to say, “You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul to the cemetery”, then yes, life is disheartening.^{vi}

No matter what you can stuff in your pockets, all that you have done is chase after the wind. In the end you’ve caught nothing.

For the believer, the follower of Christ, life at times can be disgusting, distasteful, and disheartening, too. Solomon is telling the truth here, but he isn’t telling the whole truth. Remember, he is stuck down here with his perspective that never goes any higher than the sun.

Keep in mind that *Ecclesiastes* is best understood read backwards – you have to

repeatedly pull Solomon’s grand conclusion in **chapter 12** back into these observations about life. **Remember your Creator! Remember your Creator!**

If you don’t belong by faith to the Creator who reigns above the sun, then you are stuck down here building nothing more permanent than a sandcastle. You are chasing after the wind without rescue, without a redeemer, without hope beyond the grave.

The tide is coming in. You can’t avoid the tide. You can’t cheat the tide. You can’t outlast the tide. But you can, because of Jesus Christ, one day rise above the tide.

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Do you know Him?

Another preacher by the name of John Wesley, as a 66 year old man, entered into his private journal, on January 2, 1777: “I have begun expounding on the Book of Ecclesiastes. I never before had so clear a sight of the meaning or the beauty of it. Neither did I imagine that its parts were so connected together; all ending to prove that grand truth, that there is no happiness outside of God.”^{vii}

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/13/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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i David A. Hubbard, *The Preacher’s Commentary: Volume 16* (Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 84

ii Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *Ecclesiastes* (P & R Publishing, 2014), p. 57

iii Adapted from *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 5* (Zondervan, 2009), p. 507

iv Warren W. Wiersbe, *Ecclesiastes: Be Satisfied* (Victor Books, 1990), p. 38

v “Billionaires Disrupt Death...” Valley Wag (8-22-13); <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2015/march/3032315.html>

vi John D. Currid, *Ecclesiastes: A Quest for Meaning?* (EP Books, 2016), p. 40

vii Quoted in O’Donnell, p. 53