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Finding Meaning on Monday Morning

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 8

Ecclesiastes 2:18-26

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Man's pursuit of the dream job has not changed since the days of King Solomon. Today people continue to look for that perfect, fulfilling, life-affirming position, however most meet with frustration. No matter how desperately the world seeks meaning for living through a career, Monday morning comes without much significance, indeed it is often the most loathed day of the week. After running over several reasons jobs do not bring true meaning and deep satisfaction, Solomon encourages the reader to remember that life is a gift from God and whatever station you are in, life should produce gratitude for His grace. Life under the sun is always enriched with an improved view of God.

Discussion Points:

In *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon suffers great dissatisfaction with his life's accomplishments. He realizes he will leave behind everything he earned and accomplished to someone who will enjoy it all but did nothing to create it. And with no guarantee that it will be well-managed, he now grasps how much he worked to buy everything he could, leaving little time to enjoy all that he had.

- In what situations do you feel dissatisfied with life? Why do you think you feel that way?
- Where does all the effort that you put into your accomplishments seem to end up?
- Cite other scripture passages that deal with work and proper outlook on accomplishments, and what do they teach us about life and perspective?

Your station in life is a gift from the hand of God.

- How does the following verse encourage you as you 'toil' in your job? *There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from Him, who can eat or who can have enjoyment?* (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25).
- Why can you consider your station in life a gift from God?
- What are some of God's attributes that give you hope when life can feel dissatisfying?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Your station in life should produce gratitude for the grace of God.

- *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. This also is vanity and a striving after wind* (Ecclesiastes 2:26). How does this inspire you to continue to live and work in an effort to please God?
- What are the world's solutions regarding dissatisfaction with accomplishments?
- Why is God's plan superior?

Gospel Connection:

Jesus Christ brings us salvation as well as into a relationship with the living God. With His help we are able to change our perspective on life, work, and accomplishments in a way that allows satisfaction in this life.

Practical Implications:

Think: Am I living a life for God, even in respect to my work and accomplishments?

Pray: Praise God that we do not need to live a completely dissatisfied life. Ask Him to keep your life focused on Him.

Do: Remember that you are saved by grace and forgiven. This is a source of encouragement and hope in times of discouragement or dissatisfaction.

Finding Meaning on Monday Morning

Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 8

Ecclesiastes 2:18-26

I recently came across an article written by a career guidance service who analyzed 200 jobs in the country and ranked them best to worst. The best jobs they called dream jobs and the worst jobs were simply referred to as non-dream jobs. If you wanted to live the dream, you needed to follow their advice and choose from the top of the list.

According to their analysis, among the top dream jobs were software engineers, financial planners and occupational therapists. The non-dream jobs, according to them, were dishwashers, meter readers, and roofers. So, if you want to live the dream, work on a computer and not on a roof putting on shingles.

A few years ago, excavations in Egypt uncovered a school text dated around 1700 years before the birth of Christ. It was a text that school boys were copying down as they learned to write. It was nothing less than career counseling; it was promising them a good life if they would become teachers and writers or scribes.

The text also discouraged them away from other occupations, like “the small building contractor carries mud . . . he is dirtier than pigs from all that mud.” Another line discouraged them from becoming an embalmer “whose fingers are foul, for the odor thereof is that of corpses.” Another line warned them of becoming laundry men because they will be washing the laundry on the river, next to the crocodile” who could eat them.ⁱ

The dream job is not doing laundry, working at a funeral home or putting up a building. The dream job is becoming a scribe. Nothing much has changed in man’s pursuit of the dream job.

The bigger issue of course is that the world is desperately trying to find some kind of meaning for living, and they’re frustrated with the fact that they can’t find much significant meaning on Monday morning. Frankly, to this day, Monday morning isn’t the favorite time of the week.

And the frustration is only building.

Today, one journal article reported, work dominates American’s lives as never before, as workers pile on hours at a rate not seen since the Industrial Revolution. (But it’s not making a difference. The article reported that) employees are feeling more and more insecure and unfulfilled. The article concluded by saying, work just doesn’t satisfy life’s deepest needs and it never will.ⁱⁱ

Frankly, that’s not really news, and that summary isn’t really new. Solomon discovered work unfulfilling centuries before Egyptians were telling boys to avoid doing the laundry. If anybody had a dream job, Solomon had it. But what he says now about his amazing career might surprise you.

So, take your copy of Solomon’s private journal – we call it the *Book of Ecclesiastes* – and turn to **chapter 2:18**, we’ll pick up our study where we left off. And I’ll tell you ahead of time that Solomon is basically announcing, “I’ve had a lot of jobs, and all of them would have been considered dream jobs, but I hated

every one of them. None of them were fulfilling.”

Solomon blurts out,

I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:18a).

You could paraphrase this to read, “I hated every job I ever had.”

Solomon, tell us how you *really* feel.

Maybe you have arrived here today and that is exactly how you feel about your job. You dread the next shift; your heart sinks at the thought of punching in and getting on the treadmill.

Think of all the jobs you’ve had. Some you hated, some you liked.

I remember as a 13-year-old thinking I might like to have a paper route. My friend always had money in his pocket. So I joined him one morning and tagged along on my bicycle. It was hard enough getting up at 4:30 in the morning to fold newspapers in his garage, but by 6:30 that morning I knew God was calling me into the ministry.

Solomon looks back on all his career accomplishments, every job he ever had, and he’s filled with disgust.

The Hebrew word here for *hate* is a word that refers to *intense disgust* or *dislike*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Solomon says, “There’s not a job on the planet that gave me meaningful fulfillment in life.”

Why was that? Well, Solomon gives us several reasons why he hated Monday morning – so to speak – and every day after!

As Solomon looks back on his life, one reason everything he had ever done was so unfulfilling can be found in the following statement:

1. He is going to leave behind everything he has earned and accomplished.

Notice *verse 18* again:

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 (Ecclesiastes 2:18).

Everything he had rattled off earlier in his journal about all of the parks and gardens and fruit trees and vineyards he planted and houses he built doesn’t seem to matter. . . it is hitting him now that somebody else is going to vacation in *his* parks and stroll around in *his* gardens and live in *his* houses.

He is old enough now to come face to face with the reality that everything his career had produced – and it was amazing – all of it would be left behind. And he did not want to share it with anybody. He had wanted it all for himself. You may remember how he emphasized in his journal earlier in the chapter– ***I built houses and planted vineyards for myself*** (v. 4); ***I gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings*** (v. 8).

“It was mine. It was all for me.”

What was driving Solomon to insane distraction was the fact that he was going to leave behind everything he had earned and accomplished. It was going to somebody else.

Another reason Solomon feels entirely unfulfilled with his amazing career was:

2. He can’t guarantee that what he leaves behind will be managed well.

He writes, in *verse 19*,

And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:19).

This is vanity, this is frustration, this is futility!

Oh, the futility of the thought. Solomon writes that somebody will inherit all that he had accomplished and may not have the street

smarts or business savvy or even the desire to keep it going.

Solomon is concerned that an unworthy heir might inherit everything he built.^{iv}

He knew he couldn't guarantee his legacy would last one generation. (Which it won't by the way.) His worst fears would be realized when his foolish son Rehoboam essentially throws it all away.

To this day, the newspapers are filled with the stories of wealthy heirs who squander their parent's fortune – fortunes earned over years of time and through years of difficulty – only to be parted away.

But what about someone who doesn't want to carry on the legacy? What if they have other interests? What if they don't want to manage parks and orchards and vineyards and buildings?

One of authors I'm reading in my study of *Ecclesiastes*, wrote about his childhood, remembering how a neighborhood store carried everything from groceries to hardware. He writes that it never seemed to be closed – it was open early in the morning and as late as possible in the evening – seven days a week. The only time he ever saw the owner outside his store was at the crack of dawn when he took his dog for a walk. On rare occasions, the man's wife worked at the counter. He writes that this store was there throughout his childhood and into his early twenties. Then one day, this man collapsed and died while serving a customer. Immediately after the funeral, his wife put the shop up for sale and showed all her neighbors the brochure of the world-cruise she was going to be taking. Thousands of dollars would be spent touring the world. You could hear her husband rolling over in his grave.^v

Solomon isn't even dead yet and the thought is making him roll over in his bed. He hates Monday morning, so to speak, and every day after that, because even though he is working and working and working, he isn't finding fulfillment in his work. In fact, he is driven to distraction.

Another reason for Solomon's dissatisfaction is:

- 3. He can't enjoy his accomplishments because they will be enjoyed by somebody who didn't work for them.**

Notice *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 also is vanity and a great evil (Ecclesiastes 2:20-21).

I mean, this just isn't right!

Somebody is going to enjoy apples from that orchard they didn't plant. They are going to stroll through that park, but they didn't build it. They didn't spend hours with the architect to design those palaces, yet when I'm dead they are going to move their furniture into the living room.

You see, what is happening is that Solomon is now old enough to finally come to terms with the fact that everything he built will be left for somebody else to actually enjoy.

But why would that bother him so much? So what if somebody eats apples from a tree you planted? So what if somebody moves into the house you built? Why is this such a big problem?

We are given a clue in his fourth complaint:

- 4. He worked around the clock to buy everything he could, which left him little time to enjoy anything he had.**

Look at *verse 22*:

What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation (maddening frustration). ***Even in the***

night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23).

The truth is Solomon never enjoyed those apples. He never enjoyed a stroll through that beautiful park. He didn't enjoy his palaces either. He is like one of the kings of Great Britain, I learned recently, who built a palace he never once visited.

The problem is not with palaces or possessions; the problem is with priorities in life.

The real issue is not with our things . . . the issue is with our thinking.^{vi}

Let me put it this way:

It is not wrong to have things money can buy, unless you have no interest in things money cannot buy.

Solomon had everything that money could buy, but he could not enjoy it because he had no interest in what money could not buy. He squandered years of his life by shutting God out of the equation.

And with that Solomon takes this surprising turn in his journal – he'll do it 6 times, by the way. For just a few verses, Solomon essentially straightens everything out for us, before taking us back into the testimony of his foolish years of wandering.

Let me shape into two principles what Solomon is about to weigh in these final verses in **chapter 2**.

First - Your station in life is a gift from the hand of God.

Look at **verse 24**:

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from Him, who can eat or who can have enjoyment? (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25).

This is the first time Solomon talks about really, truly enjoying anything. He has had

pleasure, but he hasn't experienced joy. But suddenly, he is talking here about enjoying your food and your job.

One author wrote that this is like a beam of light breaking through this gloomy journal. Solomon hates his job, but now he enjoys his job – what made the difference? God. The perspective that this is all from God is what made the difference.

This reminds us of the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy that *God gives us all things to enjoy* (1 Timothy 6:17).

Historically, the *Book of Ecclesiastes* was read by the Jewish people at the Feast of Tabernacles, their season of thanksgiving in God's provision of their needs.^{vii} Whatever they enjoyed came from the hand of God.

So your job isn't just a job, nor are your food and drink just groceries, they are gifts from the hand of God. Which means, that a satisfied life can be found after you stop looking for a better one.^{viii} Life that truly satisfies can only be found and enjoyed after we stop looking for a better one or demanding a better one from God.

Williams translates Paul's encouragement to the Corinthian believers – Everybody must continue to live in the station which the Lord assigned to him, in that in which God called him (*1 Corinthians 7:17*).

That does not mean you can't change jobs or move into another house. It means you are not going to pursue it thinking that it will satisfy you apart from a relationship with God, who is ultimately shepherding your life.

Second - Your station in life should produce gratitude for the grace of God.

Now look at **verse 26**:

For to the one who pleases Him (Hebrews 11:6 tells us that *without faith it is impossible to please God* – so this is a reference to believers), ***God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner*** (the unredeemed) ***He has given the business of gathering and collecting,***

only to give to one who pleases God (this is a veiled reference to the redeemed one day inheriting the earth in the coming kingdom (*Matthew 5*) – but for the unredeemed all they will ever do is work from 9-5, gathering and collecting only to lose it all in the end – Solomon writes); ***this also is vanity and a striving after wind*** (*Ecclesiastes 2:26*).

Here are some contrasting perspectives and realities of life to think over:

- Without God, Monday morning is another meaningless arrival.
- With God, Monday morning is a meaningful assignment.
- Without God, Monday morning is senseless.
- With God, Monday morning is sacred.
- Without God, Monday morning is an act of drudgery;
- With God, Monday morning can be an act of devotion.

Monday morning work can be just as meaningful as Sunday morning worship. God is just as involved in your life on Monday morning as He is on Sunday morning.

Martin Luther the reformer wrote that worship through service to God takes place not only in the church, but also the home, the kitchen, the cellar, the workshop and the field.^{ix}

So if you are writing computer code or doing laundry for a living, or you are a roofer or a dishwasher or a financial planner, that is your assignment from God. And in that assignment

bring Him glory by the way you work and the joy with which you live, and other people will notice the difference.

Every once in a while you run into a believer who gets what Solomon has declared.

This past week I was at the post office standing in line alongside just a couple people – it wasn't crowded. There was only one guy working behind the counter . . . I'd guess he was in his late 20's, early 30's. I could hear music playing in the background and, every once in a while, he'd sing along. Not loudly, in fact, somewhat absentmindedly but loudly enough to be heard. When it was my turn at the counter I joked with him that the Post Office should pay him more since he is also providing a concert. He laughed, weighed my package, and even sang another line or two. It was then that I realized it was a Christian artist and Christian lyrics. Without me saying anything He handed me my receipt and said, "I just know God is in control."

I said, "Amen to that brother . . . amen."

That guy had taken God to work with him that morning and, instead of a sigh, it had given him a song.

And he was delivering to his world the message that Solomon writes here – the only life that satisfies is the life that finds its satisfaction in God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/27/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from Milton P. Horne, Proverbs-Ecclesiastes (Smyth & Helwys, 2003), p. 415
- ii U.S. News and World Report, adapted from David Jeremiah in Searching for Heaven on Earth (Integrity Publishers, 2004), p. 35
- iii Walter Kaiser Jr. Coping With Change: Ecclesiastes (Christian Focus, 2013), p.
- iv Adapted from Donald A. Hubbard, The Preacher's Commentary: Volume 16 (Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 91
- v Adapted from Jim Winter, Opening up Ecclesiastes (Day One Publications, 2005), p. 44
- vi Adapted from Winter, p. 46
- vii Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Satisfied: Ecclesiastes (Victor Books, 1990), p. 40
- viii Adapted from Wayne C. Kellis, Life Under the Sun (WestBow Press, 2017), p. 21
- ix Adapted from Philip Graham Ryken, Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters (Crossway, 2010), p.