

# MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING Text: Ecclesiastes 1

## *The Search We All Share for Meaning, Fulfillment, Happiness*

Introduction:

–Bill Turner

1. Often we're searching for Meaning, Fulfillment and Happiness in the wrong place, in the wrong way, only to find the wrong thing...
    - a. **The Perfectionist Trap:** If I'm Perfect then I'm Acceptable, My Life Will Be Perfect  
–My Self-Worth is Based on Being Perfect
    - b. **The Performance Trap:** If I Meet Certain High Standards I Will Find Happiness  
–My Self Worth is Based on my Performance on Job/ or in Life
    - c. **The Approval Trap:** If People Like Me, I Will Have Fulfillment and Happiness  
–My Self-Worth is Based on What Others Think
    - d. **The Attention Trap:** My Self-Worth is based on others meeting my needs
  2. We Take These False Assumptions—w/ Many Others—& Mix them in a Toxic Brew
    - a. **My Performance + Other's Opinions of Me = True Meaning, Fulfillment and Happiness**
  3. Solomon conducted the search for meaning, fulfillment and happiness
    - a. A Search that we all share—because we all seek to find it...
    - b. God has given us a book showing where his search began and how he found the answer...
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## **I. THE PROBLEM: There is no true meaning, fulfillment or happiness without God**

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### **A. SEARCHING IN THE WRONG WAYS... [without God]**

1. I'm going to figure this out myself... I will accomplish this by myself...  
I will find happiness and fulfillment by myself... without God!
  - a) But When I Try to Do It All On My Own and I Fail...  
then I Face Depression, Discouragement, Defeat, Despair.
  - b) God did not create us to manufacture meaning, fulfillment and happiness ALONE  
He created us for something greater!
  - c) But We all Try to Things OUR Way as Solomon did
2. **Solomon searched on his own and it became a burden (Ecc. 1:8)**

### **B. SEARCHING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES [under the sun without God]**

1. **Solomon searched in all the wrong places 'under the sun' (1:12-18)**
  - a) The Things of This World which are Temporary not Eternal
  - b) Everything under the sun is temporary & was never the true source of joy
2. **Everything Apart From God—Fails to Fully Satisfy the Human Heart**

(1) • All Worldly Things (1:2-11)	• Great Accomplishments Fail (2:4-11)
(2) • Human Achievements Fail (1:12-15)	• Brevity & Inequality of Life (2:12-17)
(3) • Wisdom of the World Fail (1:16-18)	• Work Fails (2:18-23)
(4) • Pursuit of Pleasure Fail (2:1-3)	• Wealth and Riches Fail (2:18-23)

## **C. SEARCHING IN THE WRONG WAYS AND ALL THE WRONG PLACES COMPLETELY ENDS IN FRUSTRATION AND DESPAIR!**

1. The Things of this World are Temporary and Fleeting So Nothing On Earth Really Endures or Fully Satisfies the Human Heart

2. Vanity is the **Hebrew word: Hebel** > used 35x in 29 verses...

Translated several ways...

a) **[breath, or vapor, fleeting]** It is used of Life as transitory. (Psalms 39:5; 144:4)

The Bible compares our mortal existence to a breath or vapor. (James 4:14).

b) **[idols, nothing, useless]** It is used of idols, which are powerless, of no value.

Something people put their hopes and dreams in but is powerless to save.

c) **[meaningless, emptiness, futility]** In a Broader sense, hebel comes to express the absurdity and futility of life in a fallen world. The NIV: "Meaningless" (1:2)

d) **[vanity]** NKJ, ESV use "vanity" to say our brief lives are marked by empty futility.

3. (Ecclesiastes 2:11) Helps us understand the broader scope of the word...

a) Searching for Meaning and Happiness Apart From God is Chasing the Wind:

It is Futile, Frustrating, Empty, and Defeating

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## **II. THE SOLUTION: True Meaning, Fulfillment and Happiness can only be found in God**

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### **A. SOLOMON SPENT YEARS IMMERSSED IN HIS WORK, TRYING TO FIND MEANING AND HAPPINESS THROUGH THE THINGS OF THE WORLD**

1. Trying to Find Significance as a Political Leader

a) Trying to Accomplish Something Great,

b) Trying to Make a Name For Himself, Trying to Impress Important People

c) So w/ Vast Wealth, Wisdom & Possessions He Had You'd Think It Was Enough...

2. But the Search Became a Burden Because Even Too Much is Never Enough

a) It took Solomon a Lifetime of Searching, Carrying a Burden, to Realize...

### **B. ALL THINGS FAIL TO FULLY SATISFY THE HUMAN HEART (1:8)**

1. (Proverbs 27:20; Ecclesiastes 5:10) — **[paraphrase 5:10-11 NLT]**

2. In 1923, a meeting of America's most powerful men took place at the  
Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago.

a) At the meeting were the following nine financiers and power brokers:

1) the president of America's largest steel company,

2) the president of America's largest utility company,

3) the president of America's largest gas company,

4) the president of the New York Stock Exchange,

5) the president of the Bank of International Settlements,

6) the nation's greatest wheat speculator,

7) the nation's greatest speculator on Wall Street,

8) the head of the world's greatest monopoly

9) a member of President Harding's cabinet.

b) These were some of the most successful businessmen of the era.

But their Lives Changed Drastically after Stock Market Crash of 1929  
and the Great Depression that followed —> Only 25 years later...

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|---|------------------------------|
| 1) Four of the men died completely broke. | 3) Two were in prison.       |
| 2) One went insane.                       | 4) Two had committed suicide |

### **3. SOLOMON IDENTIFIES 18 THINGS THAT ARE VAIN (chasing the wind)**

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| 1. All the works of men (1:14).                                | 11. Money (5:10-12).  |
| 2. Pleasure (2:1).   | 12. Having wealth but failing to properly use it (6:1-6).             |
| 3. The profit from one's labor (2:11).                         | 13. Being able to use words masterfully (6:11).                       |
| 4. The quest for wisdom (2:15).                                | 14. Associating with those who do not think soberly about life (7:6). |
| 5. Focus on earthly accomplishments (2:21).                    | 15. Man's attitude toward evil (8:10).                                |
| 6. An over-emphasis or mis-emphasis on life and living (3:19). | 16. The system of justice and retribution (8:14).                     |
| 7. Competition (4:4).  | 17. The desire to retrieve the past (11:8).                           |
| 8. Stockpiling riches (4:7,8).                                 | 18. Death itself (12:1-8).  |
| 9. Trying to please everyone (4:16).                           |   |
| 10. Foolish use of words & promises (5:4-7)                    |   |

### **C. TRUE MEANING AND HAPPINESS CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN GOD! BECAUSE GOD PLACED ETERNITY IN YOUR HEART**

1. No Amount of Worldly Things Can Fully Satisfy the Human Heart because  
God Placed Eternity in your Heart (3:11)

*“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” — Blaise Pascal*

2. This God-shaped void in your heart is infinitely deep because it can only  
be filled by an infinite God! (3:9–15)
3. True Meaning, Fulfillment and Happiness Can Only Be Found in God!
4. This Helps Us Understand the Word of Jesus (Matthew 5:6; John 4:13–14)

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## **III. THE REALIZATION: Living by faith with wisdom from God, empowers us to face the storms of life and Find True Meaning, Fulfillment & Happiness in Him**

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### **A. ONLY GOD IS THE ONLY SOURCE OF TRUE HAPPINESS AND JOY**

1. To Search for it without God—is to search in the WRONG WAY...
2. To search for it in the World—is to search in the WRONG PLACE...
3. To search over and over in the Wrong WAY and Wrong PLACE...  
only brings you to the point of Disappointment and Despair!
4. The Very Opposite of What You are Looking For! (James 1:16–18)

## **B. THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD WERE NEVER THE SOURCE OF TRUE HAPPINESS AND JOY**

1. That's not to say there's not good things & happy things still in this world
  - a) [Little kids baseball game after lockdown] Look there's still some good in the world!
  - b) K: "Oh like parents yelling at their kids and yelling at the umpires?!"
2. There is some happiness, some meaning and joy, in this broken world...  
But it is fleeting, and it Fails and Leave Us Empty.
3. **HEADLINE: Facebook documents show how toxic Instagram is for teens, Wall Street Journal reports**
  - a) "One internal Facebook presentation said that among teens who reported suicidal thoughts, 13% of British users and 6% of American users traced the issue to Instagram. — "Thirty-two percent of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse," the researchers reportedly wrote. Facebook also reportedly found that 14% of boys in the U.S. said Instagram made them feel worse about themselves." (CNBC 9/14/21)
4. **WHY? Because We Compare Ourselves to Something Unobtainable!**
  - a) Even those considered Perfect by Others—Don't Feel Perfect Themselves  
They See Flaws, Imperfection that Cannot Be Changed.
  - b) Now Put a Young Teenager in an awkward stage of life in this Social Media Toxic Cult of Beauty...
  - c) They Compare Themselves to what they think is Unobtainable! Now They're Judged, by the world and by themselves, within themselves, and feel unworthy

## **C. WHEN WE LIVE BY FAITH—WE CAN HAVE WISDOM FOR THE STORMS OF LIFE & EXPERIENCE TRUE HAPPINESS & CONTENTMENT IN HIM**

1. This world is Temporary & Broken— We were created for something better!

**CS Lewis: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."**

2. God wants us to have the Wisdom from Above!

- a) To Find Him—and Find True Meaning, Fulfillment and Happiness in Him!
- b) So We Can Face the Storms of Life
- c) and Enjoy a Life Well Lived — a Life Pleasing to God (**Ecc 2:24–26**)

"Power, popularity, prestige, pleasure—nothing can fill the God-shaped void in man's life but God Himself! But seen from God's perspective, life takes on meaning and purpose, causing Solomon to exclaim, "Rejoice...do good...live joyfully...fear God...keep His commandments!" Skepticism and despair melt away when life is viewed as a daily gift from God." (NKJ Introduction to Ecclesiastes)

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. Jesus said, come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (**Matthew 11:28–30**)
- II. Jesus is setting us free from carrying the heavy burden of guilt, shame, of wearing ourselves out seeking significance in the eyes of the world.
- III. You are loved by your Father in Heaven and He gave the best of heaven for you! His Son to die for your sins and give you rest with Him in Heaven