

Finding Meaning in Life

Ecclesiastes can be a strange and confusing book. Some people read it and wonder why it is in the Bible. It seems so pessimistic. Others connect to it because it captures what they have experienced in life. Frustration. Emptiness. Confusion. Things not working out the way they were supposed to. However you have experienced this book, it is God's word for us. And it is incredibly relevant to our day when we are tempted to look for meaning in life in all the wrong places. Let's consider what Ecclesiastes has to say about finding meaning in life.

Opening Discussion: What has been your experience with Ecclesiastes up to this point in your life?

Read Ecclesiastes 1 and 2

1. Though these two chapters don't cover everything, they do give a good overview regarding the kinds of things in which the Preacher seeks to find meaning. What things does he address? And what does he conclude about all of the things in which he sought meaning?
2. The Hebrew word for "vanity" (or "meaningless," "futility") is *hevel*. What is your understanding of the nuances of this word that occurs many times in Ecclesiastes?
3. How many times do you find the phrase "under the sun" in the first two chapters? What does this communicate about the Preacher's perspective?
4. In a world that is full of what the Preacher calls *vanity*, he encourages one, God-focused response. What is it (see 2:24-26; 3:12-13; 3:18-22; 5:18-19; 8:14-15; 9:7-10)?

5. How would you summarize what the Preacher taught?

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-2; 12:9-14

6. There are two voices in Ecclesiastes. The bulk of Ecclesiastes contains the words of the Preacher, however, at the beginning (1:1-2) and the end (12:9-14) is a second voice who frames the discussion. This second voice, the Frame Narrator, communicates the message of the book. What does he communicate about where meaning in life is found?

Brian said:

The Frame Narrator essentially lays before his son two options. Now the son has a choice. He can ignore the father's wisdom and try for himself to find meaning in all the things that the Preacher explored. He can believe that he will have a different result and yet the truth is he will not. He too will find all those things meaningless. His second option is to heed the wisdom of his father, and from early on orient his life around seeking and obeying God. We are to hear the message of this book from the perspective of this son. And like him, you have two options. What will you do? Will you disregard what the Preacher discovered that all pursuits in this life apart from God will not ultimately satisfy; that all of them are a kind of grasping at the wind? Will you hear the message that this world is broken and that the results of our efforts will often be frustrated and different than what you expect? Or will you press on thinking that for you it will be different? That once you get that job, or make enough money, or find that right relationship that then you will be good; then you will be satisfied? Or will you choose to listen to the Frame Narrator understanding that it is only in a relationship with God that your life will have meaning? What will you choose?

7. What would it look like in your life to truly respond to the wisdom offered by the father to his son in Ecclesiastes?

8. As you reflect on what we learn from Ecclesiastes in what ways it is an important message for our day?