



Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION

If you made a graph of American life since the end of World War II, every line concerning money and the things that money can buy would soar upward, a statistical monument to materialism. Inflation-adjusted income per American has almost tripled. The size of the typical new house has more than doubled. A two-car garage was once a goal; now we're nearly a three-car nation. Designer everything, personal electronics and other items that didn't even exist a half-century ago are now affordable. No matter how you chart the trends in earning and spending, everything is up, up, up. But if you made a chart of American happiness since the end of World War II, the lines would be as flat as a marble tabletop... And if you charted the incidence of depression since 1950, the lines suggest a growing epidemic. Depending on what assumptions are used, clinical depression is 3 to 10 times as common today than two generations ago. Money jangles in our wallets and purses as never before, but we are basically no happier for it, and for many, more money leads to depression. How can that be?

—Gregg Easterbrook, *The Real Truth about Money*

In **Ecclesiastes**, Solomon, the son of David, the king of Israel, speaks to us as “the Teacher” (1:1). Nearing the end of his life, and having seen the emptiness of pursuing satisfaction apart from God, the Teacher gives us a good dose of Reality 101.

THE PREMISE: Life, under the sun, is vanity (Hebrew, *hebel*)!

LIFE UNDER THE SUN DESCRIBED (1:4-11)

- This naturalistic world is not concerned about you.
- This naturalistic world is not controlled by you.
- This naturalistic world will not satisfy you.

LIFE UNDER THE SUN ANALYZED (1:12-18)

- There is something fundamentally wrong with this world and it cannot be fixed by you or by me.
- The more you see and know of this world, the more it will disappoint, anger, and grieve you.

LIFE UNDER THE SUN TESTED (2:1-10)

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure...” (2:1)

Solomon decides to put his thesis to an experimental test. Can lasting purpose and satisfaction be found in this world?

Vanity. Hebrew, *hebel*, literally, “vapor, breath.” Used 38x in Ecclesiastes. It signifies that which is fleeting, futile, and frustrating, like chasing the wind.

Eccl 2 is a sobering account of the relentless anxiety of the materialist who lives under the shadow of unavoidable death.

—Iain Provan

The basic fact about human existence is not that it is a tragedy, but that it is a bore. It is not so much a war as an endless standing in line. The objection to it is not that it is predominantly painful, but that it is lacking in sense.

—H. L. Mencken (1880-1956)

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. —Blaise Pascal (1623-62)

- Hedonistic Parties (2:1-2)
- Wine/Alcohol (2:3)
- Building Projects (2:4-6)
- Materialism (2:7-8a)
- Music & Entertainment (2:8b)
- Sexual Pleasure (2:8c)
- Human Greatness (2:9)

Personal Reflection: “If I only had _____, I would be happy and satisfied in life.”

LIFE UNDER THE SUN SUMMARIZED (2:11-23)

Solomon pushed pleasure to the limits, trying everything and pursuing enjoyment in all that this world offers (1 Jn. 2:15-17). But in the end he concluded...

- It does not _____ (2:11).
- It does not _____ (2:12-16).
- Instead, it only leads to _____ (2:17-23).

LIFE UNDER THE SUN REDEEMED (2:24-26)

- R_____ life as a gift from God.
- S_____ trying to clutch onto or hoard the things of this world. See them as gifts not as gods, as blessings not as idols.
- T_____ God for the simple things in life and enjoy them!

For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from Him? (2:25)

The paradox of hedonism is that the more you hunt for pleasure, the less of it you find.

—Derek Kidner

I drink not from mere joy in wine nor to scoff at faith—no, only to forget myself for a moment, that only do I want of intoxication, that alone.

—Omar Khayyam

One of the striking features of the vast projects undertaken in 2:4-9 is how the language evokes the Garden of Eden, as if the Preacher were trying to recreate God’s good and perfect world. But it cannot be done.

—David Gibson

I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.

—Jim Carrey

I think the saddest people always try their hardest to make people happy because they know what it's like to feel absolutely worthless and they don't want anyone else to feel like that.

—Robin Williams

The basic things of life are sweet and good... What spoils them is our hunger to get out of them more than they can give.

—Derek Kidner

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

—Jim Elliot

The ability to enjoy and use the good things of life is itself a gift of God. Those who belong to God should above all others have a capacity to enjoy life.

—Duane Garrett