



## **“The Emptiness of Self Indulgence”**

**Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**

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21:19

So if you haven't been here with us for the last few weeks, you picked a good week to start because we're just kind of really getting rolling with this new series that we're talking about, the book of Ecclesiastes, but we're talking about this search for meaning,

21:36

right? It's the question that everybody in the world is asking, why are we here? What's all this for? Why, why, why, why, right? So last week in chapter one, we talked about this idea that the last couple of weeks in chapter one, we've seen this, the preacher is kind of the person he's just identified as the preacher, right?

21:59

So in the book of Ecclesiastes, the preacher is searching for meaning and searching in all these different places. And so last week we talked about how he searched with knowledge. He tried to go and find the answer.

22:11

And so he searched books, he searched all the knowledge, all the wisdom that he could find. And in the midst of all of it, it left him empty. It actually left him frustrated that he described it as vexation and sorrow, that he was disappointed that as much as he searched and searched and searched for answers, he couldn't find the answers that he was looking for.

22:31

So it seems like as we pick up in Ecclesiastes chapter two this week, I'm gonna invite you guys to make your way to Ecclesiastes two. If you've got your copy of God's word, or if you don't, there should be one hiding underneath of your chair that you can grab and follow along as well if you want to.

22:45

But as we jump into chapter two, he has this choice to make, right? See, as he's searched all of the knowledge, all of the wisdom that he could go find, it feels like he would be tempted at this point to give up, right?

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To just say, I guess I can't figure it out. But he continues on. And so he sets up another experiment to say, well, I'll go find meaning in some other place. And so this week, he's gonna look in pleasure.

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He's gonna look in this idea that he's going to find happiness, find meaning, find purpose, and just going and doing whatever it is that makes him happy, right? So we're gonna read from Ecclesiastes chapter two.

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We're gonna read verses one all the way down through 11. So I'm gonna invite you guys to follow along in your copy of God's words, or maybe on the screens if you want to just follow along on the screen as we read together Ecclesiastes chapter two.

23:38

It says starting in verse one, I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself. But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad and of pleasure. What use is it?

23:51

I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine, my heart still guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold of folly till I might see that what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the days of their life.

24:03

I made great works. I built houses and planted gardens for myself, planted vineyards for myself, excuse me. I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

24:19

I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.

24:35

I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me, and whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them.

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I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil that I had expended in doing it and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

25:09

These are the words of the Lord. Would you guys pray with me? God, we thank you for your word. God, we thank you that we can gather together, that we can worship together, that we can study together, that we can consider what you have to say to us and that we might hear from you this morning.

25:23

So God, as we have our next few moments that we get to study this passage and consider what you have for us, God, we pray that you would speak and that we would listen. God, that your spirit would come and would convict our hearts in areas wherever that may be this morning.

25:36

God, that you would work in us, not to just understand some things with our head, but God, more than many other weeks, this feels like one that we really need to understand with our hearts this week. So God, as we give this time to you, we pray that you would speak and that we would listen.

25:51

It's in your son's beautiful name we pray, amen. All right, well, as we just jump into the passage, we see the preacher kind of establishing his experiment in verse one, right? After the preacher determined that he would not find the meaning of life by wisdom, he says to himself in verse one, come now, I will test you with pleasure.

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So enjoy yourself. This word test indicates that he's making a very deliberate, intentional decision to set out, I'm gonna do this experiment. I'm gonna go learn something from this experience that I'm going to go and feel for myself.

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Koheleth, the preacher that's here talking, he becomes what is essentially an experimental hedonist. Hedonism is that word that comes from the ancient Greek language. It's simply ancient Greek for pleasure, right?

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It's defined by Merriam Webster as the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the soul or chief good in life. In other words, this guy, he chooses to make his own personal happiness, the primary focus of his existence.

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That sounds kind of familiar to us, doesn't it? There's a lot of people in our world today that kind of live in the same way, that live with this hedonistic, I'm gonna do whatever makes me happy. I'm gonna go chase after whatever it is that sounds good to me, looks good to me, is going to make me feel good.

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In fact, it seems like the modern meaning of that term, the American dream kind of refers to this idea, doesn't it? That we would live for ourselves rather than for another. We see it all over the place in several different places in today's culture.

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If we look at some common phrases that we hear stated, people will say, look out for number one, right? Look out for yourself, take care of yourself. Tony Robbins, the motivational speaker, will say, take what you deserve.

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By the way, that's not an endorsement of Tony Robbins. Don't listen to anything he says, but especially this one, right? Take what you deserve. We'll hear it in advertising, slogans like Obey Your Thirst from Sprite, Have It Your Way from Burger King.

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Take care of whatever it is that's gonna give you satisfaction, gonna give you fulfillment. We even hear it in music, right? Queen made their famous song, or one of their, I guess, several famous songs.

28:08

They said, I want it all, I want it all, and I want it now, right? Frank Sinatra even lived this way, as he braggingly would sing that, you know, I did it my way, right? We see all these different places where in culture, in society, and the things that we hear from other people, we hear this attitude of take care of yourself.

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Look out for number one. And so this idea of the American dream, the original concept was actually coined by a man named James Truslow Adams in his book, The Epic of America. But he described this American dream as the dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each, according to ability or achievement.

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It seems like we could kind of distill that down and summarize that in a single word of what is kind of come to mean today for many people, right? We could simply distill it down to this idea of more.

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I need more stuff, I need more happiness, I need more, I deserve more, I need more, right? Sounds like the experiment that the preacher is setting up sounds very familiar to something that many people have kind of set up and established in their own lives today.

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I'm going to go pursue pleasure, I'm gonna go find something in life that'll make me happy, right? Seems like an interesting thing. Let's dig into it a little bit more. So as he's chasing happiness, we see in verses two through eight that he chases after this happiness in hedonism.

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He turns his attention to pleasure and so we read again in these verses, let's kind of look at this list of all the things that he tried in verses two through eight. He said of laughter, it is mad. Of pleasure, what use is it?

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I searched my heart with how to cheer my body with wine. My heart's still guiding me with wisdom and how to lay hold on folly that I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the days of their life.

30:05

I made great works. I built houses. I planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks. I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

30:17

I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold in the treasure of kings and provinces.

30:32

I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. We see this big, long list of all these worldly pleasures, all these things that he chased after and said, well, that'll make me happy.

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Well, that'll make me happy. Well, that'll make me happy. We see this list, right? He chases after laughter. He chases after wine. He chases after houses and vineyards and gardens and parks and slaves that would make his work easier, his life easier.

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He chases after all these great possessions. He has singers. He has concubines. He's kind of essentially checked every box, right? He goes through this list in rapid fire succession, saying, I tried that and I tried that and I tried that.

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All right, so let's go through and just briefly touch on a few of these things, just a couple of thoughts about each one before we kind of summarize what he found at the end of this experiment. The first thing that he mentions is laughter.

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The first experiment that he tries to give him purpose, to give him meaning and this feeling of fullness in life was comedy. It's an entertainment form that many people latch onto today, that many people use today to make it through life, right?

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When people get insecure, when they feel uncomfortable with things, a lot of the times we'll have, the funny guys always got a joke to tell, right? When things get serious, when things get a little difficult, there's always something funny to say or to think about.



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There's times when people are bored or people are uncomfortable or people don't know what to do. We have so much comedy at our fingertips, it's easy to just turn on a sitcom and laugh at the end of the day that's been a difficult day, right?

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It's easy to just go to YouTube and find a funny video of a dog doing something silly or something crazy that we just, millions of people have sat and watched these videos of just funny silliness that exists out there on the internet, right?

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When people get bored, when people get insecure, when people can't find meaning in the other things in life, a lot of the time, they'll quickly turn to entertainment. They'll quickly turn to laughter.

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And the preacher tried this as well. But he says in this passage that it failed to bring him any meaningful fulfillment. It failed to bring him any lasting purpose in life. And so, all right, we tried laughter, but that left him empty.

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The next thing he turns to is alcohol. Alistair Begg talking about this passage says that the preacher leaves the comedy club and heads to the bar now, because he turns from laughter to wine to find fulfillment and purpose.

33:00

There's many people that'll turn to substances to find pleasure, to perhaps help cope with life's problems. There's things that get difficult or things that get heavy in life. And so, it's an easy way to numb all of the stuff that's going on in life, right?

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It's a popular way to find enjoyment or to escape from the troubles of life. No doubt, in a room like this, alcohol is a controversial topic that if we took time to dig into that deeply, we would have all kinds of thoughts in a room this size.

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But I think it's good for us to be honest about all of the things that the Bible says about alcohol, right? According to the Bible as a whole, and Ecclesiastes in particular, wine can be a joyous thing.

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It can be used in the way that God intended for it to, and it can be a positive thing. Ecclesiastes, a couple of different times, talks about wine in a positive way. In Ecclesiastes 9, it says, "Go, eat your bread with joy, "and drink your wine with a merry heart." Ecclesiastes 10:19 says that bread is made for laughter and wine gladdens life.

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Meanwhile, if we look on the other hand of things, the Bible is very clear. It is explicitly clear that wine can be bad, can be evil when it's used improperly, when it's abused against God's design, right?

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The Bible condemns drunkenness in Ephesians chapter five, verse 18. It condemns drunkenness as evil. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, "but instead be filled with the Spirit." What the Bible is telling us there, what Paul's telling us there is that when we take something that perhaps may be good, and we are now placed under the influence of it, that we're placed under its control,

34:39

well, anything that we place ourselves under the control of that's not God is gonna be a problem, right? Is gonna be an issue. And so, when we place ourselves under the control of something like strong drink, well, that can be a problem.

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That's sinful. It's very clearly defined as sinful in Scripture. And also, I think it's good for us to just have an honest evaluation of the issue as well, right? Just very pragmatically, if we look at life, I think many people in this room can look at a life of a friend or a family member, someone that we love that was destroyed by abusing something like alcohol.

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So, we also need to know that it's a very dangerous thing that we have to be very careful with. So, the preacher describes his search, and he says, well, I tried laughter, and it left me empty. I tried alcohol, and it didn't bring any more meaning or purpose to life than any of the other things.

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He comes away empty from that as well. And so, he turns to homes, and vineyards, and gardens, and all these other things. He turns to what essentially seems like he's living out this, like, lifestyles of the rich and famous, right?

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He's going through all these different things, and in verses four through six, he says, all these incredible things that he gathered for himself. He said, I made great works. I built houses, I planted vineyards, I made myself gardens and parks, I made pools, I did all these incredible things.

36:02

I gathered all this stuff for myself. I'm pretty sure, like, the home and garden magazines, and the home improvement TV shows, they weren't quite around back then, but if they were, this guy's on the cover, right?

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And he says, I built everything. I beautified everything. He exercises what essentially looks like almost godlike control as he's building here, and decorating here, and doing all these incredible things.

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He was this architect, this builder, this gardener. He designed these mansions that were strictly for his own pleasure, for his own enjoyment. And I think it's interesting, if we notice even the scope of what this guy is doing as he's building, did you notice?

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He said, I built houses, plural. I planted vineyards, plural. I planted gardens and parks, everything, it wasn't even just enough for him to have one of any of those things, right? One mansion's not enough, let me build a few.

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One garden is not enough, let me have several of them. This guy had everything that we could possibly dream of, possibly imagine, and he had the lake house, and he had the beach house, and he had the cabin, the villa up in the mountains, and he had all of it, right?

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And in the midst of all of it, he still comes walking away going, "eh."

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In addition to the homes and the gardens and the vineyards, he says that he bought male and female slaves, that he had all these riches that were available to him as well, right? In verse seven, he describes having male and female slaves, slaves that were born into his home, that he has possessions of herds and flocks and all these different things.

37:38

Now, we're not gonna get into the historical issues of slavery here, right? But what we can simply kind of identify, distill this down to is the fact that this guy had this incredible property. He had this vast amount of riches and what he's doing in going and hiring these people and having them come and live in his home as he's making life easier for himself, right?

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They didn't have Alexa back then, so maybe he named one of his slaves Alexa and said, Alexa, turn the lights on, right? He would go into these different situations and he said, well, I don't wanna do that.

38:09

I don't wanna cook, but he can't go to El Cholo and get tacos, so he's gonna hire somebody to come make tacos for him. I don't wanna clean up the mess, so instead of hiring a maid, he's gonna go get a slave to clean the house for him.

38:22

He does all these things to make life easier for himself. I don't wanna do that, so I'll have somebody else take care of it. I don't wanna do that, so I'll have someone else take care of it. The scope of this property, he needed this huge workforce that was gonna work for him, so he made his workload easier for himself.

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He said, I don't wanna do that, let somebody else take care of it. So he goes and hires all this help. He made life easy, right? And in the midst of that, it didn't bring meaning. It didn't bring fulfillment.

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He essentially retires, right? I don't have to work there. I don't have to work there. I don't have to do that if I don't want to. I don't have to do that if I don't want to. He got to do what he wanted to do every morning.

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I look forward to those days, right? I look around the room, there's some people that are living those days right now. You get to wake up and just go, what do I feel like doing today? Man, one day I'll get to do that.

39:12

Maybe. He tried all those things, didn't make him happy. Didn't bring fulfillment, didn't bring meaning to life. So next it says that he tried singers. He tried entertainment. He goes and he hired male and female singers.

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He has all this silver and gold and the treasures that are available, he goes and collects for himself concubines and all of these things he hires and he gathers and he tries everything, whether it was homes, whether it was food, whether it was wine, whether it was workers to make his life easier, whether it was women, whether it was whatever it was, all these things.

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He tried to find pleasure in every single angle that he could possibly think of, whether it was sex, whether it was substances, whether it was anything else. He tried it all. He was the definition of this hedonist.

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I'm going to go, I'm gonna go test pleasure to see if maybe pleasure, if I can go find something that'll make me happy, well that, that's the reason why we're here. That's the thing that's gonna make me feel full.

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That's the thing. And so he tries this experiment and he checks all the boxes, right? He checks all the boxes and now in verses nine through 11 we see him as he kinda steps away from the experiment and now we get to reflect on the results that he found in verses nine through 11.

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He says in those verses, so I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

40:56

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil that I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. You know, these verses that kind of present the summary of what he experienced, of what he learned during this experiment, they kind of give us this like mixed bag of conclusions, right?

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We look at these verses and first in verse 10, it tells us that he found delight in many of these things that he went and did. And he says that my heart took delight in my work. Anybody that's ever started a project that you went out and took care of it yourself.

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Have you ever tried to, you know, repaint the room before and you get to the end and you go, you know, this turned out pretty good. You redo the gardening up in the front of the house and you rip out the old ugly stuff and you put in new pretty stuff and you get to the end of it and you have that feeling of fulfillment, that feeling of, look what I did, look what I accomplished.

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And it makes us feel good inside, right? And he describes that his heart took delight in all of his work and all these things that he had gathered for himself. But anybody that's ever painted a room before realizes that eventually that room needs to be repainted again, doesn't it?

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All of a sudden the scuffs start to show up and things start to get a little bit messed up. Anybody that's ever redone the gardening on the front of the house, you've redone the flower beds, what happens?

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Those flowers die and you need to put new ones in. The weeds start to pop up. I don't know how the flowers always die and the weeds always grow, but it seems like that's just kind of the way it is, right?

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We look at these things and he says that in all of his work and all of these things that he tried, he found delight, but he says that happiness was his reward, that that feeling of, oh, that made me feel good, was in itself the reward that he received, but that there was nothing lasting, that there was nothing kind of eternally significant there that actually gave him purpose and fulfillment in those things.



42:52

Immediately after acknowledging that those things made him happy in verse 10, the king kind of proceeds to this final conclusion of the experiment in verse 11. He says that he surveyed as he looked back on this whole thing, as he kind of got out of the weeds a little bit and kind of took a step back and evaluated everything that had been done.

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He evaluated all these things that he had tried. As he steps back, his assessment was that all of it was pointless, that all of it was described as hevel, this word that we've translated as smoke or vanity or meaningless, it's this thing that when we chase after whatever that thing is, pick a pleasure from the list.

43:33

Whatever it is that kind of appeals to you, pick a pleasure from that list and we need to acknowledge that all of those things are described as hevel, are described as this thing that kind of means smoke, that we look at it and we think that it's one thing and so we look at relationships and we go, oh, well, relationships will fulfill me.

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So we take that relationship and we say, this relationship is the most important thing in my life and we think it's gonna make us happy, make us happy, make us happy and then when we get our arms around it, anybody that's ever been in a relationship before, you realize that eventually that person's gonna come up short, that person's gonna fail you at some point.

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Maybe extravagantly, maybe in the little moments where they leave the wet towel on the floor and it drives you crazy or the dish in the sink or whatever it is, but anybody that's ever been in a relationship before, we have conflict in relationships, right?

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We have conflict and it's because relationships are good things, but they're never meant to be the thing. All these other things, homes, they can be wonderful things for us to enjoy, but when we make them the thing, I just need a bigger house, I just need the house on the hill, if I could just get that, then I'll be happy.

44:45

How big is big enough? I think we could walk outside and look around in most of the neighborhoods around us where most of us live. Probably all of us live if we fix our sites correctly on what many people in the world exist in, what many people in the world experience as their home life, right?

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I think all of us would have ginormous houses compared to what many people have lived in throughout history. We look at these things and we have to ask the question, how big of a house is big enough?

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How nice of a car is nice enough? How much money is enough money? How little work is enough relaxation for us to be able to finally have the meaning, the purpose, the value that we think we're chasing after in life?

45:29

When is it ever gonna be enough? He sets up this whole experiment. In the midst of all of it, he says, I did it all. I had the biggest homes, I had the nicest gardens, I had all of the things. And it says that, he describes it as pointless, as just smoke.

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I thought this was gonna make me happy and I couldn't ever grab onto it. It was just smoke. As he engaged in this experiment, he found some pleasure in some of the things that he tried, but considering it objectively after the whole experiment had come and

gone, he pronounced it was all like chasing after the wind, trying to go and to catch the wind.

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His determined effort at finding enjoyment, at finding pleasure, at finding meaning in life had not brought a sufficient return on the investment of all that he had given and given and given. See, the reality is that just like last week, we talked about how wisdom is limited and bringing us fulfillment in life, of giving us meaning in life, of helping us find all the answers that we're looking for.

46:29

Well, pleasure is just as limited as wisdom and what it can provide. This week, he tries all those things. So what happens to people who pursue pleasure as their main passion in life? The answer that Ecclesiastes gives us is not an encouraging one for those people, right?

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It's one that I think we already know based on what we have seen in our own lives. We chase after these things and maybe it's the big thing and maybe it's just the little thing that you've looked forward to.

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Anybody ever looked forward to getting the new cell phone that was coming out in a few months and you get it? This one's gonna be great. This one's gonna, this one's gonna, and like a few months later, it's just a phone.

47:08

It doesn't really, but the screen's like this much bigger than the last one that I...okay. And by the time the next one comes, we just want the next one, right? It's never enough. It's never going to actually satisfy us.

47:21

It's never actually going to give meaning to those places where we think we want or need things. Pleasure may seem like it's gonna make us happy, but ultimately it doesn't. So maybe we hear all of this and we think, well, okay, so the preacher in Ecclesiastes, well, he tried all these things, but that guy was living like thousands of years ago.

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So if he's living thousands of years ago, maybe he had all the luxuries that were available back then, but if he was living today, then we can do that. You know, that guy never had a Lamborghini available to him.

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If he could just go get that, then, then, okay. Well, there's things that exist today. Maybe you need the nicer car. Maybe you need the best option of something. If I could just go get that really nice, fancy fill in the blank, then, then I'll be happy.

48:07

We hear the story of the preacher, but this whole conversation, this whole thing, as I was thinking and studying this week, it brought to mind an interview that I remember hearing about back in 2005 that happened.

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Tom Brady was interviewed in 2005 by 60 Minutes. Tom Brady at that point in 2005 had just quarterbacked the New England Patriots to their third Super Bowl title, and they're asking him this question.

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He's talking about when's enough? When is enough enough? You've got all this success. What does it feel like? His response was, why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me?

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I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, hey, man, this is what is. I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me? I think there's gotta be more than this. I mean, this isn't. This can't be what it's all cracked up to be.

48:59

He's had all the things. He's checked all the boxes. When the interview asked him, so what's the answer? So what's the solution? All Brady could say was, I wish I knew. I wish I knew. He was actually asked, 2005, that was a long time ago, right?

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He's won several more Super Bowls since then. He's earned millions of dollars more since then. 10 years later, Brady was asked kind of a follow-up question and he admitted again, he still didn't have the answers that he was looking for.

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He still hasn't found what he was looking for, right? Tom Brady, immeasurably wealthy, earned hundreds of millions of dollars just playing football, plus you had advertisement, plus you had the fact that his wife is probably making more than he is in her career, right?

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We've got all this money. If there was anything in the world that a person could possibly want, that guy could probably go buy it and probably do it with cash, right? Immeasurably wealthy, immeasurably successful.

49:56

I hate to acknowledge it or to admit it. Five, 10 years ago, people were arguing about who's the greatest quarterback that's ever played football. People are kind of done with

that argument at this point, and that hurts me to my core as a Colts fan who was rooting for Peyton Manning in all those games to watch Tom Brady win and win and win, but we're kind of done arguing about it.

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This is the greatest football player that has ever played the quarterback position in the history of the game. He is immeasurably successful. What he's pointed his life towards, he has achieved better than anyone else in the history of humanity.

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Immeasurably wealthy, immeasurably successful, not to mention the guy's married to a supermodel, right? This guy has it all. This guy has checked every box. This guy has chased down everything in the same way that the preacher has in Ecclesiastes chapter two.

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But at the end of all of it, he openly admits, there's gotta be more. This, everybody looks at it and goes, man, that'd be, it's not all it's cracked up to be. I wish I knew what would actually bring fulfillment.

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I wish I knew how to actually get that feeling that I keep chasing after and chasing after and chasing after. Satisfaction does not come in the pleasures themselves. It comes separately. There is such a thing as meaningful pleasure in life, but we don't find satisfaction in those things.

51:14

Satisfaction only comes from God himself, right? Satisfaction only comes from God so that our dissatisfaction that we experience in life, the reason why this book of Ecclesiastes is in the Bible is because our dissatisfaction is supposed to point us back towards the place where we find ultimate satisfaction.

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It's the reason why it's all in here. It's here to convince us that this world that we live in, that all this stuff that we see and experience and are told by all the commercials, right? Well, you need that, and you need that, and you need that, and you need that.

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All these things that we look at, that we point our lives in the direction of, well, the relationship will make me happy. The house will make me happy. The car will make me happy. The second home will make me happy.

51:58

The perfect family and marriage will make me happy. All these things that people chase after, it doesn't make them happy like they think it should. All these things, this dissatisfaction that we experience is there, is designed because it's meant to point us back towards the one who created us.

52:19

So I'd like to present to you guys an alternative. We've talked about this hedonism that the preacher has chased after and chased after and chased after and how it's left him empty. I'd like us to consider the alternative, which I've kind of termed, I've stolen the term.

52:34

We're gonna call Christian hedonism. Christian hedonism is a term that John Piper has been using for decades. John Piper's a preacher that's been kind of famous for several years. But the shortest description of Christian hedonism, simply put, is that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

52:54

I've been working on something with my kids just for the last couple of weeks. We've been starting to work our way through the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It's a catechism as a way of teaching things to children in kind of a question and answer format.

53:09

So you ask the question and then we've got the answer, right? So we ask the question and then answer the question. And so this Westminster Catechism, the very beginning of it, the first question in the catechism that I was just going through with my kids recently, it gets to this core issue so pointedly.

53:25

I think it's beautiful for us to hear. The first question of that catechism is the question, what is the chief end of man? Why are we here? What's the point, right? And the answer that it gives is that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

53:41

We exist for God, but in that existence, we don't just exist for God with this like gray cloud following us around all the time with this. We exist to enjoy God, that God has given good gifts. When God is our primary pursuit, when God is our ultimate joy, the results are indescribable joy.

54:06

We simply cannot wrap our minds around how incredible the reward of chasing after God can be in life. And that can be seen in sometimes the most horrifying circumstances. It has nothing to do with having the bigger house, with having the easy life, with having all the things that we want.



54:25

Thinking about this idea makes me think of a friend that Kari has had, my wife, for decades. She's been connected with this friend. This friend was a missionary who was serving in another part of the world, and she was forced to return to the United States when she contracted a very serious disease.

54:44

She was married, she had three young children at the time, so as she and her husband and their kids all come back to the United States, within a very short period of time, after moving back for her to try to get well and survive this thing, really, her husband decided that he didn't feel like being married to her anymore, and he didn't feel like being dad anymore.

55:03

He wanted to go do his own thing, and so he just decides, I'm out. So he packs up and he's out. Her health problems have continued for over 10 years at this point, that thing after thing after thing, it just seems like it never lets up for her.

55:19

I believe all three of their children that were young children when they came back off the mission field, all three of their kids have had very serious medical conditions as well that have actually stumped doctors at times.

55:31

It's never good when the doctors go, hey, check this out, what do we do with this, right? They were those patients that people were confused by, what's going on here? How is this young man dealing with this?

55:43

How, why, what? In the midst of all of that, you know what? Every single time I have seen this woman in my life, she has had the biggest smile on her face. She is the happiest person I think I probably have ever met.

55:58

In the midst of just thing after thing after thing of life that we look at it from the outside and go, how are you still smiling? And she's just got this indescribable joy about her. She's been dealt, I think we're all honest, a pretty terrible hand in life, right?

56:18

But she has this indescribable joy about her because her joy is in her relationship with Jesus, not in her circumstances. Her joy is in the fact that she knows that God is good. And so if God is good and God is her father and God is in control, then who cares what the circumstances are doing?

56:36

I'm gonna focus on the things that I know about God. I know God is good, so I'm gonna live this way. And she just, it's just revolutionary. It has absolutely set her free from these circumstances that most of us, I don't think we'd be able to walk through with a smile on our face.

56:55

But this woman has walked through thing after thing after thing and in the midst of all of it, she's had this joy, just doesn't make sense to any of the rest of us. How can this person be happy in the midst of such terrible stuff?

57:12

Now we read this and we read how pleasure and all these things have kind of left the preacher with this emptiness, with this dissatisfaction and all these things. I think we'd be

tempted to walk away from here this morning going, well, I guess all pleasure is bad then, right?

57:25

We just need to live grumpy, sad lives, and we'll be serious all the time. That's not what it's saying. That's not what it's saying. You guys got that wrong. Don't say that. This isn't to say that the pleasures mentioned in this week's passage are bad on their own.

57:44

When we keep these things in their proper place, many of these things can be joyful things. All these things, I think I could argue, can be joyful things. It's just that they're not meant to give us ultimate fulfillment.

57:56

It's that they can be good things that can live in their proper place, but when we take them out of their proper place and we make them the sole driving force of our life, I just need the house. I just need the family.

58:08

I just need to go find enough laughter or a big enough high or whatever it is that that'll just make me happy in life. That's where we get off track. We can take good things and enjoy good things in life, but when we take the good things and make them the only thing, we can get really off track really quickly.

58:28

But there is such a thing as legitimate, holy, God -ordained pleasure, right? It's not always true of every pleasure. There's foolish, sinful pleasures that people chase after that Romans 13 talks really explicitly.

58:43

Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that. But for the people of God that are chasing after God, this Christian hedonism that we're talking about, I'm going to make God my goal. I'm going to make God my reason for existence, that when I fix my eyes on him and I enjoy the good gifts that he's given to his children, well, that means I can enjoy all kinds of beautiful things when I keep them in their proper place.

59:06

We can enjoy laughter when it's kept in its proper place. The Bible talks in several places, Psalm 104, it says that wine gladdens the heart of man. Enjoy those things. Enjoy delicious food. Enjoy beautiful gardens.

59:20

Enjoy beautiful homes. Enjoy the music that God has created, this beautiful art that people have been practicing for centuries. There's things that can bring joy in life. All those things can be good things when they're kept in their proper place.

59:38

Even, I'll whisper this one, I don't see any young faces in the room, so I think I'm safe to say it, but even sex, right? Even sex is a good thing that God created that God, we know that this isn't something that people came up with, right?

59:53

That God created man and woman, that God looked at man and said it's not good for man to be alone. I'm going to create a helper for him. God's the one that designed all of that, and he made it really fun and enjoyable for people to enjoy when it's kept in its proper context.

01:00:08

When it's practiced between a husband and a wife in the joy of marriage, that's a beautiful thing. We should enjoy those things. We're thankful that God created those

things and has given good gifts to people, but when we take God's good gifts and we twist them up and we use them over here in a way that he didn't intend for them to be used, well, that's where we get really off track and we get really just thrown off in the midst of all of this.

01:00:34

I want you guys to hear this. You guys know God's not a grumpy old man that's sitting in heaven just trying to take away our fun, right? God's not this grumpy old get off my lawn kind of guy that's just telling us, no more fun for you.

01:00:49

He's not trying to take pleasure away from us. He's trying to give us pleasure. As the one who created life, as the one who created all these things that we chase after and enjoy, God's the one that put it all together.

01:01:01

God knows how it works, and when we do it his way, it works better. Now ladies, please don't sell your husbands out here in just a second, but I think any of us, guys, if we're going to be honest, we've probably all done this before, right?

01:01:16

We've gone to the store, we've bought some new tool or some new toy or whatever it is and we bring it home and we're like, I can figure it out and we take it out of the box and we start using it and we grumble hours into this project.

01:01:28

This thing's a piece of junk. It doesn't work. It doesn't do what it's supposed to do. And then maybe it's just me, but my wife will come over and go, did you read the instruction manual? Oh, I have to push the red button, and all of a sudden it works, right?

01:01:44

When you use things the way that they're intended to be used, they work better. When we look at these things in life that we chase after and we go, no, no, no, God, I got it. I'll figure out how this works for myself.

01:01:57

We can really quickly get off the rails and we can really quickly take good things that God created for us and we can twist them up and we can destroy them. When we take these pleasures and make them the sole driving force of our life, They never are going to fulfill.

01:02:13

They are never gonna come through in the way that we think that they're going to. But when we keep those things in God's place, in God's proper place that He designed them for, that He created them for, that He gave us the instructions because He wants us to know how it works and how it works best, do it His way and it works.

01:02:31

Don't do it my way, do it His way, right? In the midst of all of this, the preacher has searched and searched and searched and He never found satisfaction in all the stuff and all the pleasure. But when we learn to find our satisfaction in God, then all His other gifts that He gives to us become their fullest version, become their truest pleasure that we get to experience, we get to enjoy.

01:02:54

We don't have to be as rich as Solomon. I think it's good news. We don't have to be as rich as Solomon, as rich as this guy that's here speaking in this passage saying, I had homes, I had gardens, I had all these things, I had checked all the boxes and I still wasn't happy.

01:03:09

We don't have to be as rich as He was in order to find happiness, to find joy, to find meaningful experiences in life. We were made with the capacity to be one of the happiest, most joyful creations in all of creation, right?

01:03:23

But we'll never find it when we're trying to figure it out for ourselves and do it ourselves and shoving God into the corner and saying, God, I got this one for myself. We only experience those things to their proper fullest joy when we learn to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

01:03:40

Like question one of the catechism encourages us. If you have that experience, if that's your moment, if that's the way that you came in here this morning, good. Leave here with a big smile on your face like my friend always has on her face.

01:03:58

And if you didn't, please don't leave here today until you can because our prayer team is gonna be down here after the service. I'm gonna be mowing around back there somewhere in the hallway talking to people.

01:04:07

Come find me, come ask the question. So how? What's different? How do I get to smile in the face of all the junk that's going on out there in the world? How do I deal with the news that just seems like day after day after day, there's more and more and more terrible out there in the world?

01:04:24

All these things that leave us empty, that leave us, there's not happiness at the bottom of that bottle. There's not happiness in the fourth wife. There's not happiness in whatever it is that people chase after.

01:04:36

It will not, it will not come through on its own. But you know what? When we do it God's way, it works, right? So don't leave here today until you have that answer and you've got that figured out for yourself, all right?

01:04:50

I love you guys, would love to talk with you. Would you guys pray with me? God, we thank you for, God, for this beautiful reminder that I think many of us need daily, that as we get so fascinated or drawn away, chasing after whatever random things in life it is that we wanna chase after, the commercials tell me I need that and I need that and I need this.

01:05:16

God, we chase after so many things trying to find a pleasure that will bring fulfillment in life. And as the preacher's talking about in Ecclesiastes 2, God, there is no pleasure that will fill us enough to fill the void that only you can fill.

01:05:32

God, I pray that as we experience these things for ourselves, as many of us are honest about our experience in life, I think many of us have seen that in small ways, but for whatever reason we struggle to take the little things that we've experienced of, yeah, that was disappointing and yeah, that was disappointing and we fail to take the bigger truth that everything in life will be disappointing if we try to make it the most important thing.

01:05:57

God, you are the most important thing. God, help us to live our lives with you at the center and keeping all the other stuff in its proper place, in its proper perspective. God, we thank you for your love for us.



01:06:10

We thank you for the way that you made a way for us to know you. God, that you sent Jesus to come and to live among humanity, to live perfectly and to die to pay a sacrifice that he didn't deserve so that we could be forgiven and so that we could be set free.

01:06:25

God, we thank you for adopting us as your sons and your daughters if we will simply receive by faith the gift of salvation. And so as we talk this morning, as we have time to gather together and to remember and to think about all these important things this morning, God, we pray that you would help us to keep the main thing the main thing.

01:06:46

God, help us to keep you at the center and all the rest of it in its proper place. God, we love you. We thank you for loving us and we thank you for the swift kick in the backside sometimes that we need that Ecclesiastes two gave us this morning.

01:07:02

God, we worship you and we thank you. It's in Jesus's name we pray, amen.