

FINDING MEANING

We are 'meaning machines'. We attribute meaning to everything in life, yet our search for true meaning seems to want to evade us and elude us at every corner.

- **Wealth:** Where we can think that 'things = meaning'
- **Pleasure:** We think that meaningless comes as a result of pain or suffering, so we try to pursue pleasure to find meaning.
- **Career:** Where we pursue meaning in what we do and what we accomplish.

Meaning and purpose comes from the inside out, rather than from the outside in.

Meaningless in Hebrew is **Hevel**
Hevel = Vapour or smoke

The 2 perspectives Ecclesiastes gives us:

Perspective 1: **TIME**

Ecclesiastes 1:3-5,9-11 (NLT) ³ What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? ⁴ Generations

come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. ⁹ What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. ¹¹ No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

Perspective 2: DEATH

Ecclesiastes 9:2-5 (NLT) ² The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don't. ³ It seems so wrong that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate. Already twisted by evil, people choose their own mad course, for they have no hope. There is nothing ahead but death anyway. ⁴ There is hope only for the living. As they say, “It's better to be a live dog than a dead lion!” ⁵ The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered.

Death encourages us to see life with eyes of humility

Lessons from Ecclesiastes

Lesson 1

Ecclesiastes 4:7-9 (NLT) ⁷ I observed yet another example of something meaningless under the sun. ⁸ This is the case of a

man who is all alone, without a child or a brother, yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, “Who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?” It is all so meaningless and depressing. ⁹ Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.

We find meaning in community.

Lesson 2

Ecclesiastes 3:12-14 (NLT) ¹² So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. ¹³ And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God.

¹⁴ And I know that whatever God does is final. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God’s purpose is that people should fear him.

Enjoy where you are now, rather than always looking forward to enjoying where you will be in the future.

Lesson 3

Ecclesiastes 3:22 (NLT) ²² So I saw that there is nothing better for people than to be happy in their work. That is our lot in life. And no one can bring us back to see what happens after we die.

Ecclesiastes 5:19-20 (NLT) ¹⁸ Even so, I have noticed one thing, at least, that is good. It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life. ¹⁹ And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to

enjoy it. To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life—this is indeed a gift from God. ²⁰ God keeps such people so busy enjoying life that they take no time to brood over the past.

Be content with what you have in this life.

Lesson 4

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) ¹¹ Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

When we do not have God as our reference point, we will never see the true beauty in life.

Until we find the fulfillment of our longings in the infinite God, we will never be satisfied.

Lesson Summary

- Meaning in Community
- Meaning in the Moment
- Meaning in Contentment
- Meaning in Beauty

THE WRITER'S CONCLUSION

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (NLT) Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Fear God and keep his commandments.

Psalm 119:96 (NLT) *To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless.*

Doing things God's way will give us unending satisfaction, meaning and purpose.