

sermon study guide

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Sermon Title: Is That All There Is?

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. What was the first large item you saved your pennies for? Where is that item today?
2. What would you like people to remember you for?

PURSUE GOD: Time that is devoted to the Word of God

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

1. The word 'hevel' translated as "meaningless" actually refers to a puff of air or smoke or vapour. What do you think caused King Solomon to come to this conclusion? When have you felt this way about life?

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1a, 13-14

2. What do these verses teach about finding true meaning in life?

PURSUE MISSION: Seek to be the community of God's people in your community

Read Romans 8:19-21

1. Here in the New Testament, the word translated "futility" (NRSV) is the same word as "meaningless" in Ecclesiastes. How can this sense of futility help turn people toward the Gospel?
2. In what ways does Jesus bring meaning into a seemingly purposeless world? How can we help others see the meaning he brings?

For Personal Reflection/Prayer:

1. How do you respond when you feel that everything around you seems to be futile?
2. When you think about what you want people to remember you for, what are you currently doing to make this happen?

This week's writers: Jared Harrison, Jemimah Ong, Edi Dygert and Deb Matiko

THE WORD (NIV)

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

¹ The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

² "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.

"Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless."

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.

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¹¹ No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Ecclesiastes 12:1a

Remember your Creator

in the days of your youth,

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

¹³ 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.

Romans 8:19-21

¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that[a] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Is That All There Is?

Pastor Ashwin Ramani

'Is that all there is?' 'What is the meaning of Life?' Solomon wrestles with these questions in the Book of Ecclesiastes. King Solomon was Israel's most successful king and had everything, in excess: wealth, food, knowledge, wisdom, and women. He explores and responds to these questions and comes to a conclusion as he reflects on his life experiences. Solomon's opening idea is bleak (Eccl 1:2): "Meaningless! Meaningless!... Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

The Hebrew word 'hevel' is used 40 times for 'meaningless'. 'Hevel' refers to a puff of wind or smoke or vapour. The emphasis is on the fleeting nature of life. Strike a match, see the smoke produced as it catches fire; and then as it is blown out, only more smoke, quickly dispersed. This is our life in the light of eternity, gone before we know it. 'Chasing after the wind' makes a similar point. We neither grasp the wind nor our life in our hands.

Is that all there is? (Eccl 1:3) The realization of utter meaninglessness can produce a sense of despair, restlessness and futility. The Teacher wants us to feel this, to see that this is only the logical outcome of life without God. "Under the sun" is an earthly, physical perspective where our activities have limited value and life no ultimate meaning. We will all be forgotten (Eccl 1:11). Secular and atheist philosophers come to the same conclusion. A scientific answer to "What is the meaning of life?" begins with a bleak reality: The harsh answer is, "It has none".

However, all of this is not Solomon's conclusion!

We have a Creator (Eccl 12:1a). We were made by God and for God. In remembering him we find meaning in life. God gives us the "above the sun" perspective. Our life ought to be lived for God from youth when many critical decisions are made. Life has one purpose – to know God, fear him, follow him as best we can, and leave everything else in his hands (Eccl 12:13-14). Fear is not 'afraid': it is reverence and awe before God.

We are destined to be unsatisfied apart from God (Romans 8:19-21 NRSV). In the original language, the word 'futility' in Romans is the same word as 'meaninglessness' in Ecclesiastes. The world has been subjected to meaninglessness as a result of our sin. We are not shielded from the effects of sin. We struggle and yearn for all things to be made right.

Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman says, "Reading the book of Ecclesiastes in light of the New Testament points us to Jesus, in whom our lives find true meaning." Our frustration is meant to drive us to Christ, who entered our world and lived 'under the sun'. By his death, Jesus removed the sting of death and gave us the hope of the resurrection. The gospel is not just a message of hope. The gospel is a Person, Jesus; he is the good news, the gateway to life's meaning.

Blaise Pascal, a 17th century French thinker with exceptional skills and acknowledged as a genius while still in his teens, had spiritual questions and found his answer in John 17:3. His response was, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by any created thing, but by God alone made known through Jesus Christ." This is Solomon's conclusion as well: everything is not meaningless.