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WHY IN THE WORLD AM I HERE?

Why do some of us feel so empty? What's the point of going on day after day in the same meaningless way? How can we find satisfaction and significance in the repetitive routines and uncertainties of life?

In the following pages, *Our Daily Bread* Managing Editor Kurt De Haan explores the ancient but timeless writings of Ecclesiastes to look for answers to our deepest and most troubling questions. We'll see that we don't need the wealth or intelligence of Solomon to find the answers we are all here to discover.

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THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

You don't have to be suicidal to wonder if your life is worth living.

You don't have to be deep in debt to feel bankrupt.

You don't have to be locked behind bars to be imprisoned by your own desires.

You don't have to be walking the street to sell your life to others.

You don't have to be promiscuous to be preoccupied with sex.

You don't have to be addicted to drugs to exist on an artificial "high."

You don't have to be a millionaire to be bought by the love of money.

You don't have to be paranoid to run from the deeper issues of life.

You don't have to be a

corporate leader to live for your job.

You don't have to live near a landfill to think that life stinks.

You don't have to be driving a luxury car to believe joy comes from possessions.

You don't have to be homeless to feel lost and out of place in the world.

***“Most men
lead lives
of quiet
desperation.”***

—Henry David Thoreau

You don't have to be ignorant to misunderstand what life is all about.

And you don't have to be a genius to discover the real meaning of life.

So what's the secret? If the meaning of life is not the private possession of the brilliant scientist or

the devoted theologian, who can know and how can the rest of us find out? Why are so many people living with frustration, emptiness, despair, hopelessness, disgust, apathy, or anger?

When they think about the issues, some searchers find that the answers that seem to satisfy others are not adequate for them. Another group of seekers isn't really all that interested in finding answers—at least as long as they are finding some pleasure in life. Still others have given up hope of finding relief for their inner ache. They've escaped into an unreal world of drug- or alcohol-induced numbness to the harsh realities of life. Some, tragically, have even taken their own lives.

Who has the answers and why are so many people still searching if

they can be found? This booklet will review the search of a man who lived almost 3,000 years ago. It may be hard to believe, but the issues that he

If the meaning of life is not the private possession of the brilliant scientist or the devoted theologian, who can know and how can the rest of us find out?

wrote about are the same basic issues that are bothering people today. His observations sound like someone living in the early 21st century. The search has not changed, nor have man's desperate attempts to find answers.

GRASPING FOR THE WIND

It's an exercise in futility—reaching out and trying to catch a piece of a breeze. You may as well be attempting to tame a tornado or harness a hurricane. Chasing fulfillment in life can seem just as impossible, especially if you're looking in all the wrong places. Listen to someone who learned the hard way.

I . . . was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity

and grasping for the wind (Eccl. 1:12-14).

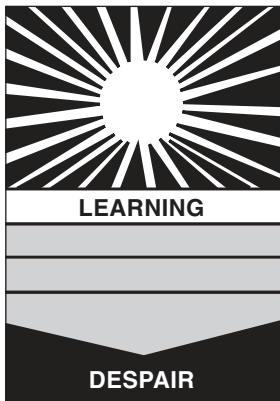
To this author, life “under the sun” appeared to be nothing but vanity, futility, meaninglessness. He struggled to find significance in the pleasures and pains of everyday existence.

Chasing fulfillment in life can seem just as impossible as taming a tornado.

In trying to understand the book of Ecclesiastes, it helps to know who the author is and why he wrote his journal. He never identified himself by name. But his self-description as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem,” as well as his comments about wealth, power,

wisdom, great achievements, and many wives, point to King Solomon (see 1:1,12,16; 2:4-9; 7:26-29; 12:9). If we accept Solomon as the author, then we see in Ecclesiastes glimpses of the dramatic story of a king who began his reign well but then lost sight of what's most important in life (1 Ki. 11:1-13). In his latter years he reviewed how he had spent his days. The conclusions he came to are both troubling and hopeful.

Our study in this booklet will follow Solomon's pattern of discussing the dead-end answers before revealing the route to true fulfillment. The futile and unsatisfying reasons for living that Solomon talked about include learning, escaping, working, and loving.



LEARNING

I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind (Eccl. 1:16-17).

What did Solomon learn about learning?

In his day, the name *Solomon* was synonymous with wisdom. In 1 Kings we read that no one before him or after him possessed such wisdom (3:7-12; 10:1-8). He was wiser than all the men of the East and Egypt (4:30). He spoke 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs (4:32). He knew enough to lecture about trees, animals, birds, creeping things, and fish (4:33). People came from all

***All Solomon's
knowledge
could not fill
the emptiness
he felt.***

over the world to listen to “Professor” Solomon (10:24).

How did Solomon “wise up”?

Solomon found out that even though he was able to accumulate vast amounts of knowledge, he still had a huge void in his life. As he grew older, he tried to fill that ache for something more by seeking answers from the gods of the nations around him (1 Ki. 11:1-13). All his knowledge, though, could not fill the emptiness he felt. Solomon eventually recognized that he had gotten off track.

So I said in my heart, “As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?” Then I said in my heart, “This also is vanity.” For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come.

And how does a wise man die? As the fool! (Eccl. 2:15-16).

Why bother with an education?

Solomon also knew the emptiness of an empty head. Ignorance is not a virtue. Solomon never

The more we learn, the more we will realize how little we actually know.

promoted foolishness or stupidity. In fact, he said:

I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness (2:13-14).

It is good to gain knowledge. The more “Solomons” we have in

the world the better. But Solomon realized that the pursuit of knowledge just for the sake of knowledge will leave us empty. The more we learn, the more we will realize how little we actually know. You will end up in despair if your hope of fulfillment is to learn enough facts (1:18).

What is the proper place of knowledge?

A billboard advertisement for a large research hospital proclaimed, “Knowledge Heals.” There’s some truth to that. It’s true when research results in a cure or the prevention of a disease. But knowledge about genetics, germs, or gastric juices cannot heal a broken heart. Knowledge about thermodynamics, astronomy, geology, neurology, or meteorology cannot provide a purpose for life. Knowledge about

our world can describe life, but it cannot explain the why of life. It cannot provide values or morality.

This has become very apparent in our present-day attempts to alleviate teenage pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Knowledge alone is not the answer. What we need are values! Knowledge without values is like a ship without a rudder.

*Knowledge
without values
is like a ship
without a rudder.*

Solomon advocated balance. It's good to try to be smart, but we need to remember that filling our heads with facts won't satisfy our heart's deepest desires. Knowledge of

life—the physical here-and-now world that we walk and talk in—doesn't give us all the knowledge we need. We can't afford to neglect knowledge of the crucially important spiritual dimension of our lives.



ESCAPING

*I said in my heart,
“Come now, I will
test you with mirth;
therefore enjoy
pleasure”; but surely,
this also was vanity.
I said of laughter—
“Madness!”; and of*

mirth, "What does it accomplish?" I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives (Eccl. 2:1-3).

Solomon had the means to pursue just about any pleasure imaginable. He followed the philosophy of the advertising slogan, "You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can get." Solomon tried it. He grabbed for all the pleasures of life. But he never was able to grasp what he wanted most. He said in 2:1-11 that his efforts to find purpose through the enjoyment of food, sex, music, and beautiful surroundings were like grasping for the wind.

How can you feel empty with a full stomach?

Solomon was a connoisseur of fine wines (2:3), and the best foods were available to him (1 Ki. 4:22-23; 10:4-5). But even though he sat at tables loaded with culinary delights, his soul was starving. He said:

All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied (Eccl. 6:7).

Why did sex lose its appeal?

Solomon's quest for pleasure surely wasn't hindered by a lack of sexual partners. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Ki. 11:3). Linguistic studies have suggested that the phrase "musical instruments of all kinds" in Ecclesiastes 2:8 would be better understood as referring

to a harem, a group of concubines. Such a translation would certainly fit Solomon's situation.

Things haven't changed much since Solomon's day. We are living in a sex-obsessed society. But Solomon learned that sexual relationships promise much more than they can fulfill.

Solomon learned that sexual relationships promise much more than they can fulfill.

Why did music sound flat?

Solomon enjoyed the melodies of great singers (2:8). He didn't need a CD player with earphones to have music wherever he went. He could afford to

have a traveling band to follow him all over the palace and all over the countryside. But beautiful music didn't solve the ugly issues of injustice, suffering, or cruelty. Music didn't offer answers of purpose; it only offered a diversion, a tranquilizer to get through another day.

Why did the beauty of the gardens begin to wilt?

The king surrounded himself with beautiful sights. He tried to please his eyes with rows upon rows of flowers, trees, and shrubs.

I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove (2:5-6).

But while the gardeners were tending the plants,

Solomon realized that his inner being was overrun with the weeds of confusion and self-serving pleasures. Something was wrong (2:11). Just as short-sighted self-interests led to ruin in the first garden (Gen. 1–3), Solomon learned that a rejection of spiritual wisdom could destroy the beauty of life.

How do people today try to find pleasure?

We haven't changed very much since Solomon's time. We're still grasping for good times and ending up with a fistful of emptiness. Our society is obsessed with sexual gratification. Some of us are preoccupied with music. Many seek fulfillment through food and drink. Others put all their energies into making their home a beautiful place. Still others pursue

pleasure through drugs, which blind them from seeing how their lives are being destroyed.

We're still grasping for good times and ending up with a fistful of emptiness.

Whatever the pleasurable pursuit, the end result is the same—it doesn't give lasting fulfillment. The thrill, the high, the excitement, and the laughter lack staying power.



WORKING

I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me (Eccl. 2:17-18).

Solomon's feeling of exasperation with the endless cycle of work is something we all can identify with. A mother of

small children may spend half her day washing clothes, only to see the children spill and smear food on themselves or "accidentally" fall into the only mudhole within 300 miles. A businessman may work all day or all week on a new proposal, only to have it "shot down" by his superiors. Or a man may spend all day washing and waxing his car, only to have a "fender bender" later that same day.

What if you went through your entire life with the attitude that all you ever accomplished was worthless, meaningless, empty, and futile? That's how it can seem if you're trying to make something of your life "under the sun" without God. As Solomon looked back on his life, he realized that he had emphasized his own achievements too much.

What had Solomon achieved?

First Kings 1 through 11 reveals Solomon's many accomplishments. He was incredibly rich (4:22-28; 10:14-29). The borders of his kingdom extended from the Euphrates River to the edge of Egypt (4:21). He had gained an international reputation as an author and a scholar (4:32-33). He built a magnificent temple for the Lord (6:1-38), and his own palace was a masterpiece of beauty (7:1-12). Even foreign kings paid taxes to him (4:21; 10:14-15). Yet when he reflected on his own work and the work of others, he said:

What has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?

For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the

night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity (Eccl. 2:22-23).

When do our possessions own us?

Many people today would love to have just a fraction of the wealth that Solomon had. Lotteries and sweepstakes attract

“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver.”

—Solomon

people who are hoping for the one-in-a-million chance at the big money. Men and women on television game shows will do almost anything to win money or big prizes. But as Solomon reminded us:

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase.

*This also is vanity
(5:10; see also vv.15-16).*

What is the right attitude toward possessions?

Solomon said:

*As for every man to whom
God has given riches and
wealth, and given him
power to eat of it, to
receive his heritage and
rejoice in his labor—this
is the gift of God (5:19).*

Contentment will
escape the person who is
always desiring more than
what he has in his hands.

***Contentment will
escape the person
who is always
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than what he has
in his hands.***

Solomon also knew that
contentment would escape
the person who looks only

at what he has in
his hands if his heart
is empty.

The key to
contentment is an
underlying recognition of
the true source of all that
we possess, as well as a
sense of gratitude to the
One who gives us strength
to work and the skills to
succeed.

Why is it futile to work your way to the top?

Many individuals spend
all their energies climbing
the ladder of success. But
Solomon pointed out that
the man who rises to the
top doesn't stay there
forever; he is forgotten
when someone else takes
his place (Eccl. 4:13-16).
Fame, prestige and power
are short-lived and fail to
fulfill the heart's desires.
Besides, Solomon knew
something that we should
realize too: Power and
fame don't necessarily

come to the most deserving (10:5-7).

What, then, is the worth of work?

Solomon let us know that work can be a good thing—if you don't give it too much importance. Solomon reminded us of God's view of work and the true purpose of life in 2:24-25. Verse 24 states:

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

Then, there is substantial evidence to suggest that verse 25 should read, "For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment *without Him?*" As such, it is a clear reference early in the book of Ecclesiastes to our need of God if we are to find fulfillment in life.

If we get our priorities

"out of whack," then we are working against ourselves. To try to find

To try to find fulfillment without the Lord is like trying to play tennis without a racket, or like trying to play golf without any clubs.

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LOVING

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun (Eccl. 9:9).

Although Solomon promoted marriage, he knew that life's meaning and purpose were not wrapped up in a human relationship. He used the

words *vain* and *vanity* in 9:9 to emphasize that his advice to find joy with one's spouse is advice that may make life more endurable even though it doesn't explain life's meaning. He knew from his own experience that the companionship of marriage wasn't the answer to his heart's greatest need. Solomon tried marriage—700 times!

Solomon knew from his own experience that the companionship of marriage wasn't the answer to his heart's greatest need.

And he even had an additional 300 unofficial wives (1 Ki. 11:3). But

Solomon knew that he could never fill his palace with enough wives to replace his need of God.

Solomon also saw the value of companionship in general. He noted in 4:8-12 that the person who has a friend to go through life with is better off than the loner who lives only for himself. The person who has a friend has someone who enables him to be more productive (v.9), helps in troubled times (v.10), makes the harsh times more bearable (v.11), and adds strength against enemy attack (v.12).

Is companionship enough to live for?

Being shipwrecked on a desert island may be more bearable if another person is stuck there with you. But the friendship won't get you off the island or answer your questions about life back home.

Even though Solomon extolled the virtues of loving and helping others (see also 11:2), he did so with the realization that simply showing love for others does not give purpose to an otherwise purposeless life. That is why throughout his discourse he pointed to the need for a recognition of God's part in this life and the life to come (2:24-25; 3:13-14,17; 5:1-7; 7:13-18; 8:12-17; 11:7-10; 12:1-14).

Many people, though, don't recognize God's role in life. They talk as if they have no worry of a coming judgment. They're not concerned about showing love to God. They believe that their purpose for living is to love people and make this world a better place to live. They reason that if all of us are stuck on this planet together, we may as well try to get along

and help each other. For example, one student described his reason for living by saying, “I try to live for a general positive influence. I try to be a good person. I’m not living for God; I’m trying to live for others.”

Jesus encouraged love for one’s neighbor as an evidence of one’s love for and devotion to God.

What is more important than loving people?

Humanitarian efforts are noble and commendable. In fact, you can find many Scripture verses that encourage loving human relationships. Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as

yourself.” He emphasized the need to love others when he told the great story about the humanitarian Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37).

But we have to remember that Jesus encouraged love for one’s neighbor as an evidence of one’s love for and devotion to God (Jn. 13:34; 15:9-12). Prior to the story about the Good Samaritan, He said:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind (Lk. 10:27).

In another situation, Jesus said that love for God was the first and greatest commandment (Mt. 22:37). Love for our neighbor is noble, but may amount to “grasping after the wind” unless we first love the one true God.

When can our love have lasting significance?

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon spoke of the folly and destructiveness of not loving others (4:8; 7:9; 9:18). Even though he encouraged his readers to find enjoyment in human relationships, he pointed to the need to give our primary attention to our relationship with God (12:13). And in order to strike home his point, Solomon spoke of the despair of living only for this life on a human level.

Without a knowledge of God, we would have to conclude that human life is no better than animal life (3:18-21; 9:2-4). We wouldn't know that the human soul lives on and faces God in a life to come. Humanitarian efforts would have no eternal value.

The great love chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, proclaims the greatness of love. But

Without a knowledge of God, we would have to conclude that human life is no better than animal life.

this love is possible only among those who know what it means to be loved by God and to love Him.

Loving others, as good as it is, falls short of giving the foundation on which to build our lives. We need a reason to love that goes beyond this life, a love that is rooted in the love of God (1 Jn. 4:7-5:3).

FINDING LIFE'S PURPOSE

Solomon learned the hard way that he could not live as if there were no God. Although he hints at the final answer at earlier points in Ecclesiastes (2:24-25; 3:11-14,17; 5:1-7,18-20; 7:16-18; 8:12; 11:8-9; 12:1), his strongest statement of the purpose of life comes in the concluding two verses of the very last chapter.

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
for this is man's all.
For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing,
whether good or evil (12:13-14).*

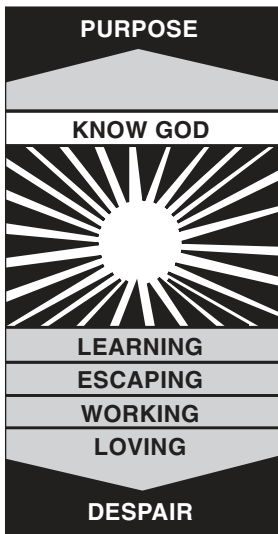
That's it. Our ultimate purpose is wrapped up in

our relationship to the God who made us. If we have thoughts about trying to get away with being self-serving, Solomon's words remind us that each of us is headed for a day of accountability before God.

What does it mean to "fear God," and what does it mean to "keep His commandments"?

KNOW WHO'S IN CHARGE

Many people react negatively to the idea that they should fear God. They believe that God is loving, kind, and gentle (which He is). They emphasize that for the person who has accepted Jesus' gracious offer of forgiveness, God's wrath against his sin has already been taken by Christ on his behalf. So is Solomon's advice good only for the



unbeliever or for people in Old Testament times? No, because Solomon is speaking of the need for all men to fear God, and because the call to fear God is emphasized in the New Testament as well.

What does it mean to fear God?

People who have irrational phobias (fear of heights, small places, crowds, elevators,

telephones, water, darkness, or bugs) often seek out psychological help to overcome their unnatural and debilitating fears. The fear of God, though, is not an irrational emotion. It makes logical sense when you understand the facts about who God is and what He is like.

The biblical concept of the fear of the Lord involves a recognition of the power, greatness,

The right kind of fear of the Lord will drive us to Him—not away from Him!

authority, and holiness of God. It is a healthy fear. It means we respect Him,

shudder at the thought of His judgment against our sin, hold Him in awe, reverence Him, recognize Him as absolute Lord, and honor Him. The right kind of fear of the Lord, will drive us *to* Him—not *away from* Him!

What are some biblical examples?

Many men and women in Scripture are described as those who feared the Lord. Others were specifically challenged to fear Him.

For example:

- Abraham demonstrated his fear of the Lord when he offered Isaac to Him (Gen. 22:12).
- The Egyptian midwives who refused to kill the male Hebrew babies feared God (Ex. 1:21).
- Job was recognized as an outstanding example of a person who feared God (Job 1–2).
- King David encouraged

all believers to fear the Lord and enjoy His favor (Ps. 34:7,9-10).

- The virtuous wife of Proverbs 31 was praised as a woman who feared the Lord (v.30).
- Some people listening to Jesus were challenged to fear God’s ability to cast them into hell (Lk. 12:5).
- Cornelius was a man who feared God and received the gospel gladly (Acts 10:22-48).
- Paul told the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).
- Peter encouraged believers to live in the fear of the Lord (1 Pet. 1:17) .
- Those who will inhabit heaven will be those who fear the Lord (Rev. 19:5).

Why does God want us to fear Him?

As Solomon said, fearing and obeying God is the whole purpose of life. When we fear, reverence, and honor the Lord, we show that we recognize Him for all that He is. We therefore stand in the proper relationship to Him as a creature before the Creator. To fear the Lord

To fear the Lord means that we take Him seriously and we desire to please Him with all that we do and say.

means that we take Him seriously and we desire to please Him with all that we do and say. It demonstrates that we realize we are accountable

to Him for how we use every minute of every day.

A fear of God will cause nonbelievers to seek forgiveness of sin through Christ. And fear of the Lord will cause believers to produce the fruits of faith and to be commended on the day they stand before Christ (2 Cor. 5:9-10; 7:1,11).

How is fear related to worship?

Fear of the Lord and worship are closely related. In Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, Solomon discussed going to the house of God. Verse 2 states:

Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few.

Then in verse 7 Solomon added:

For in the multitude of

dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.

A proper attitude toward the Lord, therefore, is essential to meaningful worship of Him.

Does anyone fear God today?

In a letter we received at RBC Ministries, one woman wrote, “What do people do who do not trust in God? I have never understood that. I need Him every hour of every day. They do too, but why can’t they know?” She understands what it means to stand in awe and humility before the Lord. She recognizes her dependence on Him. She is concerned about living for Him.

Many of us today, however, don’t have the same attitude. Some people are outright atheists. Others are outwardly religious—

at least they go to church every week. A vast number of men and women profess to believe in God but give Him little if any recognition throughout the day. Though claiming to believe, they live as unbelievers. That is one reason the Bible is full of reminders to fear the Lord.

It is easy to forget our need of God. It is easy to get wrapped up in our own ideas of the purpose for living and forget the real reason God has given us breath. He wants our loyalty, our affection, our companionship, our worship. He wants us to make the most of our lives so that when we stand before Him He will be able to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:21).

Thinking It Over.

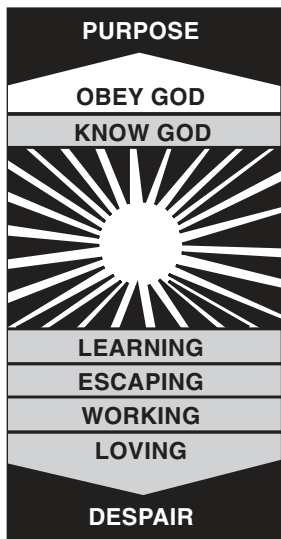
What are you afraid of? If you have the proper fear

of God, what will you not have to fear? (1 Jn. 4:17-21). Why is the fear of the Lord the foundation of all wisdom? (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:3).

FOLLOW HIS DIRECTIONS

Whether you're going to bake a cake or build a skyscraper, your success will depend on your ability to follow instructions. You wouldn't expect a cake to be delicious if you used the wrong ingredients. And you should not attempt to construct a tall building without an adequate foundation and sturdy materials. So why do we think we can throw away God's directions for life and still find fulfillment? Too often we think we know better than God what we should do.

Solomon got carried away with feelings of his



own importance and the greatness of his own wisdom. He forgot that God was far smarter than he was or ever could be. He deluded himself into thinking that the pleasures of earthly life were much better than the joys of living for God. He fell into the trap of making short-term investments and ignoring the eternal.

But Solomon learned

from his mistakes. He said at the conclusion of Ecclesiastes that the key to finding meaning in life is to “fear God and *keep His commandments*” (12:13).

What does it mean to keep His commandments?

This means that we obey whatever God asks us to do. For Old Testament believers like Solomon, that included the Ten Commandments as well as the hundreds of other laws concerning private, social, and religious life. For us today, to keep God’s commandments means that we obey the timeless principles of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament principles for life under the new covenant of grace (Heb. 8).

Jesus told His disciples, “If you love Me, keep My commandments”

(Jn. 14:15). Also, in 1 John we are told, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (5:3). In John 15:9-11, Jesus said that those believers who obey His commands will experience great joy.

What are the most important commands?

Every word of instruction from God is something we should do, but some commands are more basic and all-encompassing than others. For example, to begin to please God, a person must become one of His children. All who turn to God, acknowledge their own disobedience before Him (Rom. 3:23), recognize that Christ died for them (Jn. 3:16), and personally accept God’s free gift (Rom. 6:23) will be taking the first essential

step of obedience to God. When some people asked Jesus what they should do to please God, Christ said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (Jn. 6:29).

Two other commands are cited by Jesus as being the most important. Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets by saying that we are to love God and we are to love people (Mt. 22:36-40).

What happens if we don't obey?

To try to find fulfillment while disobeying God is like trying to start a fire with water. It just won't work. You can't swallow a deadly dose of cyanide and expect to survive. You can't plunge your bare hand into boiling water without getting scalded. And you can't disobey God without serious consequences.

In the last verse of

Ecclesiastes, Solomon pointed out our accountability to the Lord. He said, “God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:14). No one will ever get away with any disobedience (3:17; 8:12-13; 11:9).

To try to find fulfillment while disobeying God is like trying to start a fire with water. It just won't work.

The person who never takes the initial step of obedience and puts his trust in Christ will face God unforgiven and condemned (Rev. 20:7-15). The believer in Christ will stand before God and give account for his

life and be rewarded accordingly (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

How can our obedience help a searching world find purpose in life?

In the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians are several clues as to how we can show the world that true fulfillment comes through knowing and obeying God. When we are able to say, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21), we will be showing the world what is worth living and dying for. When we are united with other believers, we will show God's enemies that their purposes will not prevail (1:28). When we look out for the interests of others (2:4), we will demonstrate what it means to live a selfless, Christlike life. When we live blamelessly, we will shine like stars in

the middle of a dark world (2:15). When we live for heavenly purposes, we will contrast those who are controlled by their fleshly desires (3:17-21). When we are content whether rich or poor (4:11-13), we will show that we are not looking for significance in material possessions but in our spiritual relationship with God.

Thinking It Over.

Why do children disobey their parents? Why do adults break the law? Why did the men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 choose to obey God? When do you struggle with obedience to God? When does it seem irrational to obey Him? Ask God to show you areas in your life that need to be placed under His lordship.

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

The purpose of your life and mine, according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism of Faith, is to “glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” That statement is founded on many verses in the Bible that encourage us to live so as to bring attention to the greatness of our Lord. To glorify the Lord means to honor Him, to worship Him, to give Him the praise He deserves. Here are a few of the many verses that speak of giving glory to the Lord.

- “Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, give to the Lord glory and strength. Give to the Lord the glory due His name” (1 Chr. 16:28-29).
- “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear

much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (Jn. 15:8).

- “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5-6).
- “You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).
- “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).
- “To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:21).

HELPING YOU HELP OTHERS

The following questions are listed here for you to use in teaching or discipling others. We suggest that these questions be discussed prior to studying the specific point—as preview questions.

GRASPING FOR THE WIND

Learning

1. Why was Solomon in a good position to talk about education? (1 Ki. 3:7-12; 10:1-13).
2. What did Solomon say about the limitations of knowledge? (Eccl. 1:16-17; 2:15-16).
3. What did Solomon say about the advantages of knowledge? (Eccl. 2:13-14).

4. What is the most important knowledge? (Jer. 9:23-24).

Escaping

1. What seven pleasures did Solomon explore? (Eccl. 2:1-11)
2. What did Solomon learn about each one of these pleasures?
3. What was Moses' attitude toward such pleasures? (Heb. 11:24-26).

Working

1. What were Solomon's accomplishments? (1 Ki. 4:20-34; 6:1-7:12).
2. What was Solomon's conclusion about all that he had done? (Eccl. 2:17-18).
3. What gives work lasting significance? (Eccl. 5:19; 12:13-14; Phil. 4:11-13).

Loving

1. What are the benefits of human companionship? (Eccl. 4:9-12).
2. Why can't a loving spouse take the vanity out of life? (Eccl. 9:9).
3. What is more important than showing love to people? (Lk. 10:27).

FINDING LIFE'S PURPOSE

Know Who's In Charge

1. How should our accountability to God affect our lives? (Eccl. 11:9; 12:13-14).
2. What does it mean to fear the Lord? (12:13-14).
3. Does the fear of the Lord drive us to Him or away from Him? (Prov. 8:13).
4. What wrong fears will the right fear get rid of? (1 Jn. 4:17-21).

Follow His Directions

1. What did Solomon find to be the key to a meaningful life? (Eccl. 12:13-14).
2. What does it mean today to keep God's commandments? (Jn. 14:15).
3. What commands are the most important? (Mt. 22:36-40).
4. How can your obedience to God help others? (Phil. 1:10-11,21; 2:15).

YOUR REASON FOR LIVING

Excuse me, but your purpose is showing. That's right. The way you live reveals your real reason for living. Actions do speak louder than words.

Test yourself. Look at the following list of goals for life that we have discussed in this booklet. Take a look at your life and evaluate where your energies are being spent. Are you trying to:

- Get smart?
- Have fun?
- Work hard?
- Love people?
- Please God?

Do your responses to the following questions support your answer above?

- How do you spend time?
- Do you know God's Word so you know how to obey?
- Can you honestly say that you are living in full obedience to the Lord?

- If not, why not?
- Do you enjoy life?
- What are your greatest frustrations in life?
- To what are you looking for satisfaction?
- What are you doing that has eternal benefits?

If these questions make you uncomfortable, maybe you need to see, as Solomon did, the waste of living for anything less than God's intended purpose.

If you've never taken the first crucial step of trusting Christ to rescue you from God's judgment against disobedience, accept His offer of forgiveness right now. He will forgive, and He will give you new purpose and power for living (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5-8). Ask Him to help you to make the most of the new life He's given to you. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

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