

I'd like to begin tonight with a serious question: **What is the Purpose of Life?** A question often associated with this is **What is the Key to Happiness?** There are so many ideas out there on how to find fulfillment in life and so many opinions on what our purpose is. Let's look at what the wise man says:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 – *“this is man’s all”* (NKJV) or *“this applies to every person”* (NASB)! There it is! Every human’s purpose is to *“fear God and keep his commandments”*! We understand that everything we do or think will be judged by God so the conclusion is to do what he commands and follow him.

I could end the sermon right there and say that’s it. The wisest man in the world said it and it’s in the Bible so it’s true. I could end there but there’s an important section that I have left out in **verse 13**:

*“The conclusion, **when all has been heard**, is: fear God...”* (NASB)

*“Let us hear the conclusion of the **whole** matter...”* (NKJV)

*“**Now all has been heard**; here is the conclusion of the matter...”* (NIV)

What is the *“all”* Solomon is talking about? What had he gone through to reach this conclusion? If I ended the sermon there we would know what the purpose of life is but we wouldn’t have an appreciation for how Solomon got to this conclusion.

The *“all”* Solomon was drawing a conclusion from, I believe, can be clearly seen in **Ecclesiastes chapter two**. We will be spending most of our time here but before we delve into the text it’s important to establish what we know about Solomon.

We can see in 1 Kings that Solomon succeeded his father David as the King of Israel. We see that Solomon asked God for wisdom in **1 Kings 3:5-14** and that he received it. Solomon built the Temple and it was glorious. We know that Solomon was well respected by other nations and we know that Solomon was arguably the richest man in history. In **1 Kings 10**, after running the numbers through generators, we see he would acquire something like \$1.1 billion a year! Solomon had access to anything he desired.

Sadly, in **1 Kings 11:1-8**, the last thing we read about him is he, because of his many foreign wives, got involved in idol worship and *“did what was evil in the sight of the Lord”* (**11:6**, NASB). So bringing it to **Ecclesiastes two** we find that this is most likely Solomon reflecting on this evil time of his life and we can learn what Solomon had heard and tried on his pursuit of purpose and happiness.

1. Wealth Matters (2:1-11)

- a. Solomon had a lot of stuff! He didn’t *“withhold [his] heart from any pleasure”*. You know what? I bet that was a lot of fun. Having stuff is great! We talked earlier about how much wealth he had! In **1 Kings 10** the Queen of Sheba brings him what some people appraise as up to \$325 million at one time! Think about how much fun you could have with all that money!
- b. Wealth isn’t inherently bad. It can give us many opportunities to help others. **1 Timothy 6:17-19** – We can use our wealth with love and kindness in a way that would glorify God!
- c. BUT, in a society that focuses so much on self and sin it is easy for us to fall into the same trap Solomon did. Our worldly desires often cause us to lust or greed for **stuff**. In verses 4-8 the phrase *“for myself”* appears seven times!
- d. But you know what his stuff couldn’t do? It couldn’t save his soul. It couldn’t bring him lasting happiness. Just look in **verse 11**: Solomon says, *“all was vanity and striving after the wind and there was **no profit** under the sun.”*
- e. Worthless. It means nothing. So what does God want us to do? He tells us in **Matthew 6:19-21**.
 - i. Jesus, in chapter 6, says a lot about doing good deeds in a prideful manner. He tells them to focus their attention on giving God the glory instead of receiving glory from men.
 - ii. **Vs. 19-20** – There are all these people who are focused on their possessions and what they have. Jesus says moth and rust will destroy it or someone may steal it. It’s all temporary. Jesus tells them to focus on the treasures in Heaven. The things which are eternal deserve our time and attention.
 - iii. **Vs. 21** – We have a choice to make. If we choose to focus on stuff our heart will be there. If we choose to focus on Heaven, our heart will be there.
- f. It’s so easy for me to focus on the physical because that’s what I see every day. God calls us to look beyond and to follow **him** and to seek after the treasures in Heaven that are **eternal**!

2. Wisdom Excels (2:12-17)

- a. Given the context and the message of Ecclesiastes, it is evident that he is speaking of earthly wisdom and knowledge.
- b. Here in **verse 13** Solomon illustrates the value in earthly knowledge. He says wisdom is better than foolishness as *"light excels darkness"*. Just as he shows in **1 Kings 3:16-28**. Think about doctors. Their practice is physical by nature but we get great advantages from their care and treatments. Or education in general there are many advantages to being educated on things of this world. Think about technology!
- c. BUT, in **chapter 12:12**, Solomon asserts that to pursue earthly knowledge can be wearisome. In **2:15-16** Solomon is very clear that *"one fate befalls"* both foolish or ignorant people and those who are wise and knowledgeable. That *"one fate"* is death. All will die and furthermore in the grand scheme of things, all of the great authors of the world have very limited knowledge in comparison to our God and our purpose.
- d. You know what Solomon's earthly wisdom couldn't do? It couldn't save his soul. It couldn't bring him lasting happiness. In **verse 17**: Solomon says, *"...everything is futility and striving after the wind."*
- e. Worthless. It means nothing. What does God want us to do? Look over at **Acts 17:11**.
 - i. They were commended for being *"noble-minded"* or *"fair-minded"*! These Bereans didn't have much, if any, knowledge of Jesus, when Paul and Silas preached Jesus to them they immediately *"searched the scriptures daily to see if these things were so."* What a powerful example!
- f. God wants us to focus on spiritual wisdom! The only way to acquire it is to spend time in his word! They were in the word daily and they were eager to learn more! That's preparing for eternity! **2 Timothy 2:15**. To be approved of God we must work hard to soak in his word! Being diligent and being hungry for it! I won't need algebra to get to Heaven. But I need the Word to get to Heaven.

3. Work Provides (2:4-26)

- a. Solomon did a lot of great things. He had worked hard to make house, vineyards, gardens, and ponds for himself. In **verse 9** Solomon asserts that his *"...heart was pleased because of all of [his] labor and this was [his] reward for all of [his] labor"*. Likewise, in **verse 24** he says that enjoying the fruits of one's labor is *"...from the hand of God."* Man has to realize that the fruits of our labor truly are a gift and God should be praised for them!
- b. BUT, in **verses 19 and 21** Solomon says someone who didn't put in the work that we have is going to get all of the things we work for when we die. We don't know whether it will be *"a wise man or a fool"*. **Verse 22** makes it clear that there isn't a lasting reward from the labor of our hands.
- c. You know what Solomon's hard work couldn't do? It couldn't save his soul. It couldn't bring him lasting happiness. In **verse 21**: Solomon says, *"This too is vanity and a great evil."*
- d. Worthless. It means nothing. So what do we do? In **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** we have our answer.
 - i. **Vs. 24** – The Corinthians understood this reference to races as their city held the Isthmian Games. In a race only one wins. Paul tells us to run in a way that we will be victorious!
 - ii. **Vs. 25** – The candidates of these races had to be "pure, sober, and enduring; to follow orders and to eat sparingly for ten months before the contest (Horace, 'Ars. Poet.,' 412). We are called to do the same! But Paul assures us what we train for is for eternity.
 - iii. **Vs. 26-27** – Paul uses running and shadow boxing to illustrate his confidence and forthright blows. Everything is fixed at his goal as he disciplines himself so he won't be deterred.
- e. God wants us to focus our hard work into the spiritual race; to discipline ourselves and become champions for God! **John 6:27**. Solomon learned this lesson and Jesus taught it. Why do we still seek after the temporary?

Conclusion: Look at **Ecclesiastes 2:24-26**. God wants us to be thankful for what we have on this earth and to praise him for all of the blessings he puts on us. Wealth, Wisdom, and Work are not sinful. We're not condemning these things and putting a big red X on them. But let's not forget our purpose. Let's not forget eternity.

I'll offer the invitation like this.

What is the Purpose of Life? What is the Key to Happiness?

Have you heard wealth matters? Have you heard wisdom excels? Have you heard work provides? What's the conclusion?

"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep his commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgement, everything which is hidden, whether good or evil."