

# Enjoy Your Ice Cream Cone

Ecclesiastes Part 1

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3, 2:24-25

11-17-2013

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Summary: Ecclesiastes should be interpreted at face value (the Preacher's words are all true). "Everything is futile" is not intended in an absolute sense, but refers specifically to the effort to control and understand wildcard providence. The solution is to simply trust God with providence and enjoy what He has given us. The ability to do that is not in our control and comes only as a gift from God.

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**Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Preacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Absolute futility," says the Preacher. "Absolute futility. Everything is futile." 3 What does a man gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?**

**2:24 There is nothing better for man than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God's hand, 25 because who can eat and who can enjoy life apart from Him? 26 For to the man who is pleasing in His sight, He gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy, but to the sinner He gives the task of gathering and accumulating in order to give to the one who is pleasing in God's sight. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.**

## Introduction

### Getting Ahead

How can you get ahead in life? How can you gain an advantage, and get an edge so you are ahead of the game? I typed that question into Google, and a Wikihow.com page came up with seven steps to getting ahead.

- 1) Read
- 2) Figure out your goals
- 3) Make friends
- 4) Let go of your limiting conditions
- 5) Develop a positive outlook
- 6) Get control of stress
- 7) Make a to-do list

If I do those seven things, Wikihow.com promises that I will have an advantage over everyone else. The problem with that is this – that page was at the top of my results in my search, which means millions of other people saw that same list. So now my question is this – how do I get ahead of them? They are all reading books and making to do lists and controlling stress – I now have to do those seven things just to

stay even with all those other people. It does not give me any advantage. I am still dead even with the people who have read that same list. And I am a few steps behind the people who found an even better list.

Is it possible to get *really* ahead in life and gain a true advantage? Well, you can gain an advantage over fools by being wise. And there is a better list than the Wikihow webpage. It is called the book of Proverbs. Follow the wisdom principles in that book, and you will be ten steps ahead of all the fools.

But what if I am not content with that? What if I am not satisfied with just having an advantage over the fools? Because let's face it, you can live according to wisdom, and make all the right decisions, and still run into trouble. There are people who make their to do list, and read books, and they work hard, save for a rainy day, control their tongue, plan for the future, avoid bad friends, trust in the Lord and lean not on their own understanding – they live out all those wisdom principles, and still, they get leukemia. Or they get fired from their job at age 50 and can't find any other work. Or their house burns to the ground and they lose everything. Or their children go astray.

If you live according to wisdom, then generally speaking things will go better for you – many things will go better, but many other things won't. Job was wise and lived well and made good decisions and he had more trouble than anyone. In the big, overall picture, whether you are wise or foolish – things happen that are totally outside of your control and they affect you right along with everyone else. And everybody wants to know – how can I get ahead of that? How do I get a handle on the wildcard of divine providence? The world calls it luck or fortune or chance or fate; we understand that it is divine providence, but one thing we can all agree on – whatever we call it, it is a wildcard. It is like an unpredictable wild animal – you can never know what it will do. It might run away, it might bite you – there is just no predicting it, no controlling it. Isn't that how life is? These seemingly random things just happen to you all the time, and you can't control them or even see them coming.

A few weeks ago I was about to leave for the conference on biblical counseling, and right before I leave my computer dies. I didn't see that coming. But I had the hard drive backed up as a disk image so that if that happened I could restore all the programs and all the settings and files and everything else with one click of a button. I use so many programs, restoring everything on my computer takes a huge amount of time. And so in my effort to use wisdom, I even backed it up with two different disk image programs, just to be sure, in case one got corrupted or something. So I get back from the conference, I have my new hard drive, I hooked it up to my backup hard drive to restore it, I hit the button, and at that moment the dog walked by, caught the wire, pulled it off the shelf and broke the backup drive and I lost everything. Since then I have spent over 100 hours getting my computer all set up. That was 100 hours I didn't have to spare, and I cannot even begin to tell you how far behind I am on everything now. I didn't see that coming. I tried everything I knew to avoid that, and it happened to me anyway. And I don't know why. It doesn't seem like it's good for the church, or good for me, or good for anyone.

No matter how you live, and no matter how many precautions you take, you are going to get routinely blindsided by seemingly random hardship that just happens to you out of the blue and causes all kinds of problems. And so we all naturally have the question: Is there a way to beat that? Is there any way to gain control of life so we are not subject to the bad things that just happen to people – like a typhoon that just comes and kills everyone in the area – young, old, strong, weak, educated, uneducated, insured, uninsured – everybody gets hit. Is there a way around that? Is there a way I can gain control of life? Maybe some religious thing I can do, or build up some karma, or pray or read my Bible or put money in the offering plate, or acquire some kind of knowledge that will enable me to get up on a rock while the floods of life sweep everyone else away?

We all naturally seek that. We are all constantly trying to get an edge on life – in big things and in small things. I am driving on I-25 in rush hour, it's all jammed up, and what do I do? My lane is stopped, I see another lane is moving along, "I've got to get over there in that lane." And when I do that I keep an eye on the car that was ahead of me in the last lane I was in, so I can see if I end up ahead of that car or farther behind it. Every lane change is a gamble, and sometimes it pays off and other times that new lane stops moving as soon as I get in it. My goal in changing lanes is to get ahead. If I can stay in the best lane all the time, then I move along faster so that I am not really subject to the traffic jam. But so often I do

that and find that my efforts to get an advantage come up futile. Instead of catching up to the cars out ahead of me, every lane I get in stops moving and I just work my way toward the back of the line. And the guy who just sat back and relaxed and stayed in his lane the whole time ends up way ahead of me.

We all want to gain control of what happens to us so that life isn't such a wildcard. Or if we can't gain control over it, we want to at least understand it. Is that possible? I know that calamities happen because this is a fallen, cursed world. I know that God sends suffering for various reasons (to test and build my faith, to show me His attributes, to increase my desire for Him, to enable me to comfort others, etc.). I understand those general reasons, but what about the specifics? I know why cystic fibrosis exists in general, but is there a way I can know why a particular child gets it at a particular time? Why my son or my daughter and not my neighbor's? Why did the guy run the red light and hit me and not the guy in front of me? Why is this particular trial happening to me at this particular time? If I can't gain control, can I at least get some answers?

About 3000 years ago there was a man who got something that most people at some point fantasize about. God came to him and said, "I'll give you one wish." And this man, instead of asking for money or power or fame, asked for wisdom. And God was so pleased with that choice that He granted his request and made him the wisest man in the world. And on top of that also gave him the things he did not ask for – riches and fame and power. And this man ended up using all those things - the wisdom and the money and all the rest, to try to figure out a way to gain control of life and to get the key to understanding it all. He spent many, many years on the quest – trying one thing after another. And when it was all said and done, probably at the end of his life, he wrote down his findings. And we have a copy of those notes. It is called the book of Ecclesiastes. Today I would like to begin a study of the book of that book. So let's start with verse 1.

## **Author**

### **Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Preacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.**

That is Solomon – a wisdom book written by a guy who had enormous wealth, lots of women, was consumed with wisdom, and who was the son of David and reigned over Israel as king in Jerusalem. The only person who fits that description is Solomon.<sup>1</sup> However most modern scholars don't believe it was him. They say the language in the book does not fit that era. There are Hebrew words that were not in use back in Solomon's time. Plus, at the end of the book the writer refers to the Preacher in the third person.

### **12:9 Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge**

That sounds like someone else talking. So which is it? Is the Preacher Solomon, or was this book written much later? My question is, why not both? I am convinced the Preacher was Solomon. What I think most likely happened was Solomon wrote some things, and those writings survived through the years and later on some prophet of God, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, took those writings and compiled this book. So what we have here is not just the observations of the wisest man in the world, but we have the very Word of God about those observations.

## **Difficulties**

Ecclesiastes is a notoriously difficult book to interpret for a couple reasons. For one thing, it sounds so pessimistic. It sounds like it was written by the prophet Eeyore (from Winnie the Pooh). It is not just that he sees the glass as half empty instead of half full – he is saying there is no glass. Everything is meaningless and futile, none of your efforts do any good, and no matter what you do in life we all just end up six feet under. At first glance it might seem like the kind of book where we need to put antidepressants

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<sup>1</sup> After the division of the kingdom, kings over the south reigned in Jerusalem, but they only reigned over Judah, not Israel. And the kings over Israel were not in Jerusalem. Solomon was the only son of David who reigned from Jerusalem over the whole nation.

in the bulletin each week while I am preaching through the book just to keep everyone from wanting to slit their wrists.

The other difficulty is some of the statements the writer makes.

**2:24 A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work.**

That is repeated seven times in the book. Is that a Christian idea? Isn't that the pagan philosophy of the Epicureans that Paul condemned in 1 Corinthians 15?

**1 Corinthians 15:32 ...If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."**

That is the way to live if there is no resurrection. But there is a resurrection, so how can Ecclesiastes say that is the best thing you can do?

Because of those difficulties, there have been a wide variety of interpretations of this book. Some have assumed that the Preacher, who says all those things in the book, is like Job's friends. It is a record of someone giving bad advice. So the purpose of the book is to show you the folly of that bad advice. Others have suggested that there are two players in the book – the Preacher, who is saying wrong things, and the narrator, who corrects him at the very end. But either way, the advice of the preacher is wrong.

Is that a possibility? Let's think it through. How do we know for sure that Job's friends were wrong? We know because at the end of the book God speaks to them and says, "You are wrong!" So if we peek ahead to the end of this book, what do we find? Is there a statement telling us that the Preacher is wrong? No – the exact opposite. Take a look at the closing paragraph of the book.

**12:9 Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. 10 The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.**

The words of the Preacher in this book are not wrong. They are right and true, and they are the very Word of God.

Another approach for interpreting Ecclesiastes has been to say that all the negative statements are what life is like "under the sun" – life without God. If you live with a naturalistic perspective, without God, and you try to find your joy from earthly things, then you will find your life is empty. And the solution is to look beyond the sun to God. That is the interpretation of Ecclesiastes that I have held for most of my life. But now that I am taking a closer look at it, I am realizing there is a big problem with that view. The book doesn't actually say that. It does not say, "Stop looking under the sun – look beyond the sun to God." Instead, the solution he ends up giving is an "under the sun" solution:

**5:18 Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun**

So "under the sun" does not mean "apart from God." It just means in this life – the observable life on this side of Judgment Day.

So what are we to make of this book? How about if we just take it at face value? Instead of coming up with some way to say it cannot really mean what it says, let's just accept what it says in the context of the opening chapters. I am finding that if you do that, the difficulties actually are not as difficult as they first seem. It is true, the words are very negative – all of life is futility. But is that really such a sub-Christian idea? Doesn't the New Testament teach the same thing?

**Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it**

That word **futility** is the same word used in the Greek translation of Ecclesiastes. This is a fallen, cursed world, and futility is a reality. And the book of Ecclesiastes is a detailed explanation of what Romans 8:20 is talking about. It is a book about how to live in the middle of that futility.

## Futility

### 2 "Futility of futilities," says the Preacher. "Futility of futilities. Everything is futility."

Your Bible might say *meaningless* or *vanity* instead of *futility*. I decided to preach this book out of the Holman Christian Standard version mainly because I believe **futility** is the best translation of that word, and it is such a crucial word for understanding the book. That word appears 48 times in this book, so we will never get the message of this book unless we understand what it means. The most literal translation of the word is *air*, or *vapor*. And it can be used to describe the idea of emptiness, or of temporariness – that which is fleeting or momentary. Or it can mean futile. If an effort is futile that means it cannot succeed. No matter how hard you try, it won't work and therefore it is a frustrating waste of time. Trying to reason with someone who won't listen is futile, for example. So which way is the word used in Ecclesiastes – does it mean vain, or meaningless, or futile? The writer gives us a clue by the fact that nine times in the book that word is followed by the phrase **a chasing after the wind**.

### 1:14 ...I have found everything to be futile, a chasing after of the wind.

I think that is good evidence that *futile* is a good translation. If you try to chase down the wind and catch it, you will find that to be a frustrating waste of time that never succeeds. If a *thing* is futile, that means you cannot control it. If an *idea* is futile, it means you cannot understand it.

### *Toil*

And it is a lot of effort. Do you see that word translated **efforts** in verse 3 (your Bible might say **labor** or **toil**)? That refers to more than just work. It means struggle. It is that kicking and scratching and striving to understand or control life.

## Problem: Controlling Providence is Futile

So the book begins with the statement that everything is futile. Now, does Solomon mean that in an absolute sense? Of course not. If he believed that in an absolute way – every single thing in life is futile, then he wouldn't bother writing this book, because that would also be futile. He is not saying that every aspect of life is futile. Later in the book he talks about plenty of things that are not futile. When he starts out the book saying **everything is futility** he expects the reader to say, "OK, what is it, exactly, that is so totally futile? I'd better read carefully what he says next so I can understand what he's talking about." And if you read the first two chapters you find out.

There are two specific things that he runs after that he finds absolutely futile. Everything he says about futility is referring specifically to those two things – not to everything. And if you understand that, the book will make sense. But if you miss that, the book becomes a hopeless maze of contradictions. For example:

### 1:17 I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; I learned that this too is a chasing after the wind. 18 For with much wisdom is much sorrow

Wisdom is utterly futile and useless. But then...

### 7:11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance and an advantage to those who see the sun, 12 because wisdom is protection

Which is it Solomon? Is wisdom an absolute futile, meaningless waste of time that gives you no advantage? Or is it a valuable treasure that brings great advantage? The answer is, wisdom in general is supremely valuable, but if you try to use it to go after the two things he is going to mention, that will be futile. It is the same with pleasure and enjoyment. Sometimes he says pleasure and enjoyment are futile, and later he says there is nothing better. Is that a contradiction? No, because when he says it is useless or

futile, he is talking specifically about when you use pleasure or enjoyment to obtain these two things. That is when it is futile and useless.

## 1) Controlling Life

So what are the two things that are completely futile to pursue?

### *Gain*

#### **1:3 What does a man gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?**

That word translated **gain** (your Bible might say **advantage**) means to gain an advantage – to get ahead, to get on top of the pile and have an edge on life. And it is a major theme in this book. That word is used ten times in Ecclesiastes, and zero times in the rest of the Bible. The whole book is about the Preacher toiling and laboring to gain some kind of advantage in life, so he would not be subject to the same kind of trouble as everyone else. He is trying to find a way to beat the system of wildcard providence. To bypass the traffic jam of life. To insulate himself from the seemingly random craziness that happens to people. In other words, to gain control over life. To be in charge of your own providence. Every effort to do that is totally futile.

## 2) Understanding Providence

The second thing that the Preacher found to be futile had to do with understanding.

#### **1:13 I applied my mind to seek and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven.**

He wanted to find a way to understand all the things that take place in life. If I can't control it, let me at least understand it. The strange, twisted things that happen and seem to make no sense – let me understand why those things happen. Let me see the integrative key that will enable me to see how it all fits together. I don't want to just see the jumble of gears – I want to get outside the watch and see the whole thing and how it all works. Give me a bird's eye view of the traffic jam of life so I can get my answers. That is what he was trying to do, and that pursuit was futile.

#### **14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.**

There is no way to understand it, and trying to understand it is an absolute waste of time. You can understand pieces of it, but you cannot ever discover the final, ultimate, integrating key that ties it all together.

Physicists have been struggling for years to discover what they call a “theory of everything.” Here is the definition I found: *A theory of everything is any theory that fully explains and links together all known physical phenomena, and predicts the outcome of any experiment that could be carried out in principle.* Nobody has been able to come up with anything yet because when you get down to the level of quantum physics, things just don't behave the same as in the big world. Gravity does not work, the laws of physics don't work – things just do not work the same, and the effort to come up with a “theory of everything” is the quest to come up with some set of rules or laws that would apply both in the big world and the microscopic, quantum world. So really the phrase “theory of everything” should be written with a small “e” – and the word *everything* should be in quotes, because it is not really a theory of everything. It is just a theory of two things – how do you reconcile the world of general relativity with the world of quantum physics? It is not an actual theory of Everything. It does not even try to touch on morality or the human soul or spiritual growth or ethics or meaning or duty or any of the most important things in life. What Solomon is trying to do is come up with a real theory of Everything with a capital E. He wants to understand life and death and why everything happens and what will happen next.

**2:3 I explored with my mind how to let my body enjoy life with wine and how to grasp folly-- my mind still guiding me with wisdom-- until I could see what is good for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.**

He was trying to discover, through observation, what is good for people to do – how to live. Is that a bad thing to do – to try to discover what is the best way to live life? Yes, if you try to do it through observation. Solomon’s plan was he would try one way of living, see how it worked, then try another way and see how that worked, then another way, etc. and see which way has the best outcomes. And he found that to be absolute futility. There are some things we can discover through scientific observation, but this is not one of them. What if Abraham tried that method? He goes to Egypt, lies about his wife, and everything goes well for him. Comfort, safety, wealth – everything is great. Then when he tells the truth what happens? He is rebuked, humiliated, and deported. If you are figuring out how to live life through observation, then times like that would say, “Lying is the best policy. Honesty is a mistake.” What would Paul have learned? Preaching Christ is a huge mistake – it just stirs up trouble and lands me in prison. You can never figure out how to live through observation or scientific testing. There are just way too many unknowable variables.

When people use this method to decide how they are going to live life, it is just another effort to control wildcard providence. They are trying to use the law of sowing and reaping to control all outcomes. So really both of these goals were the same goal. Trying to control life and trying to understand life were not really two separate things. His reason for wanting to understand life was so that he could control it. In both cases what he was after was what he calls **gain**, or **advantage**.

And what he finally discovered was that the law of sowing and reaping is not an absolute law. So no matter how you live, you will never be able to gain control over life. It is absolute, 100% futility.

## **Wisdom and Pleasure**

So then in the rest of chapter 1 and chapter 2, he takes us along on his futile journey of trying to get control of life. First he tried wisdom, and he found that life is not long enough to gather enough data. There is just way too much that you can’t discover, and so doing it through scientific inquiring and education is a dead end.

Then he tried pleasure and found that was another dead end. He tried alcohol, he tried achievement and work, he tried riches and wealth, he tried sex – none of it got him anywhere. In each case he found that the effort he put into his search was greater than what he got out of it. He about killed himself in the search and it yielded nothing. If you are running a business and you pour a bunch of money into something and you find that it is yielding less profit than what it is costing you, then you drop it. If you find that you are pouring 100% of your resources into it and it is yielding zero profit, then you have the very definition of futility. That is what Solomon ran into no matter what method he tried.

## **Solution: Enjoy Providence**

So what should we do? If we none of our efforts to get ahead will work, we can’t gain control over wildcard providence – we just have to sit here in the traffic jam with no way out and no way to even discover why things are happening, what are we supposed to do? Solomon gives us the answer to that question seven times in this book. In my study I have divided this book into seven sections, and each one ends with the same conclusion. The first one is at the end of chapter 2. I don’t have the heart to make you wait two weeks for it, so we’ll just skip right to the end of chapter 2.

**2:24 There is nothing better for man than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God's hand, 25 because who can eat and who can enjoy life apart from Him?**

The solution to the futility of life is to simply enjoy what God gives you and trust Him with the big picture. And that conclusion is repeated seven times in this book. If anyone thinks this is a depressing

book, they are missing the main point! This is a happy book. The message of Ecclesiastes is: Enjoy Life! It is a book about how to enjoy life even through unpredictable, painful, hard wildcard providence. The problem in life is that trying to control providence is futile. The solution to that problem is to stop trying to control it, and sit back and enjoy it. And if you do, you will have joy. That is a happy message! This is the picture I chose for the album cover for this series:



I picked that because I want people to understand, the book of Ecclesiastes is all about how to enjoy life. Or more accurately, enjoy providence. And step 1 to enjoying it is giving up your quest to control it.

## **Eat Your Ice Cream**

Instead of trying to discover and obtain what will make us happy, trust God and enjoy whatever it is He has given you right now. Imagine a little child who goes out with his dad for some ice cream. And as he is talking with his father he gets to thinking, “What will next year be like? What if I don’t enjoy third grade as much as second grade? And what about high school? And will I ever get married and have kids? And how will I ever make a living – I don’t even have any skills! And why do we live in Colorado? What if I would be happier in California, or Florida? Of all the states and countries and cities, which one would be the best place for me to live? Would I be better off if I were growing up on a farm?”

And he gets all worked up and he starts demanding answers to all those questions from his dad. And he can’t settle down until he gets them all answered, and his dad says, “Son, just enjoy your ice cream cone. Let me worry about where you live and what will become of your future and which school is best for you – your task right now is to just enjoy your ice cream cone before it melts all over the floor.” For that kid to try to find answers to all those questions would be absolute futility. And it would rob him of the very thing he is seeking – happiness and a good life. He would miss out on the enjoyment of the ice cream and get nothing in return. If he tried to travel to all the states and countries and towns and communities and tried each one of them to see if it would be best for him – before he got a fraction of it done he would be dead. And so his dad says, “Right now we live in Colorado; just learn to enjoy Colorado. Don’t worry about what another place would be like. This is where you are – enjoy it. Right now you are not in high school, you are not in third grade – you’re in second grade – just enjoy second grade for now.” That is the message of Ecclesiastes – stop flailing around trying to control life, and just enjoy your ice cream cone.

## **Trust God**

But what if what I have right now is not exactly ice cream? What if it is hardship? The key to learning how to enjoy the un-enjoyable is by realizing that it is not the big picture. It is part of the big picture, and you do not need to know what that bigger picture is because you can trust God with that. Imagine one day the family is just grinding through their daily routine, and suddenly dad comes home with a huge smile on his face. And he says, “Everyone, pack a bag – we’re going on a surprise vacation to (your favorite vacation destination). I’ve already worked out all the details with your teachers at school,



obligations at church – everything is all prepared. All you have to do is grab some clothes and whatever you want to bring along, and off we go.” Everyone is excited, and the house is buzzing with joy and anticipation as each person scrambles to pack a suitcase. How can they be happy packing a suitcase? What is fun about packing a suitcase? Nothing. There is nothing fun about it, nothing interesting about it, nothing new about it. So how is it possible to enjoy it? You can enjoy it only when you realize it is a piece of a much larger picture. If your dad just came home and said, “I want everyone to get some practice at packing, so pack a suitcase, then unpack it, then get back to what you were doing” – no one would enjoy that. It would be impossible to enjoy. And that is exactly the reason why so often we find life impossible to enjoy. It is because we see the task at hand, divorced from any bigger picture and without the bigger picture that task, in itself, has nothing to offer. It is not fun, it is not exciting, it is not fulfilling, and so we find it impossible to enjoy.

So what is the bigger picture? This particular thing in my life right now – why is that happening, and how does it fit in to the bigger picture? I am having to do the work of packing, but for what? Instead of bursting in the door and telling us what it is for, God has burst in the door and said, “Pack your bags, I’ve got something planned.” And we say, “What is it?” And He says, “Just trust Me.”

If at that point you try to discover what it is He has planned, that effort will be absolute futility. The message of Ecclesiastes is simply this: enjoy the packing. And when you are on the way to the airport, enjoy the drive. Enjoy whichever piece happens to be in front of you right now, and trust God with the rest. Don’t waste your life wishing you were at some other stage in the unfolding of the big picture.

If wisdom calls you to make a change, then make a change. But do not make a change just because you are seeking happiness in life and you think you will find it in something different. That will just be a futile lane change – you will still be in the traffic jam. If you set your sites on bypassing wildcard providence, you will be miserable. But if you just accept it as it comes, and you enjoy whatever God gives you, then you will be happy.

## Enjoyment is From God

“But how do I do that? Is it just a matter of simply deciding, *OK, I’m going to enjoy this?*”

No. We will find later in the book that enjoying something is not within our power. There are people who get all the most delightful things this world has to offer, and they have no ability to enjoy them. You are not in charge of your own ability to enjoy things.

**2:24 There is nothing better for man than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God’s hand, 25 because who can eat and who can enjoy life apart from Him?**

**3:13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God.**

The fact that the ability to enjoy comes from God is what sets this apart from hedonism or Epicureanism. Some people have rejected the teachings of the Ecclesiastes and have said it does not even belong in the Bible because this is just Epicurean philosophy. But anyone who says that is not reading very carefully. The Epicureans said, “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.” The Preacher says, “Eat, drink, and enjoy your work because this is from God’s hand and who can enjoy life apart from Him?” Those are very different. The philosophy of the Epicureans is the very thing that Solomon calls absolute futility. And it is futile because it is an effort to generate your own enjoyment by gaining control instead of receiving it from God and trusting His control.

But if the ability to enjoy life is a gift of God, and it is not something that is in my control, how am I supposed to do it? I am commanded to enjoy life, and yet the ability to do so only comes from God, so how do I go about seeking that from God? What can I do to receive that gift from God? That is what Solomon wants to teach us in this book. And we will plan on exploring that next time. But for now it is enough to say this – step 1 is trust. Stop striving and struggling and squirming against the hard providence in your life. Stop scrambling to gain control of the uncontrollable. The most important key to being able to enjoy the ride is to trust your Father to be driving somewhere good.

**Benediction: Ecclesiastes 12:3 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.**

## **James 1:25 Questions**

- 1) Are there any areas in your life where you tend to scramble to gain control of the uncontrollable, or you have fretted because you cannot know the unknowable?
- 2) What are the areas where you find it hardest to just trust God?
- 3) What is your current “ice cream” that God wants you to learn how to enjoy right now?