

# Enjoyability

Ecclesiastes Part 2

Ecclesiastes 1:4-2:26

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Summary: The world is subject to futility because of the curse. Solomon came to hate life because he tried to gain control and the understanding of it through education, science, fun, drinking, work, accomplishment, wealth, music, and sex, and while pleasure offered some enjoyment, and wisdom gave some benefits, none of it gave him what he was looking for. Solution: enjoy the details of life by realizing that the ability to enjoy is a special gift granted in the moment.

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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? **4** A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. **5** The sun rises and the sun sets; panting, it returns to its place where it rises. **6** Gusting to the south, turning to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles. **7** All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full. The streams are flowing to the place, and they flow there again. **8** All things are wearisome; man is unable to speak. The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing. **9** What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. **10** Can one say about anything, "Look, this is new"? It has already existed in the ages before us. **11** There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them. **12** I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. **13** I applied my mind to seek and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied. **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. 16 I said to myself, "Look, I have amassed wisdom far beyond all those who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge." 17 I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind. 18 For with much wisdom is much sorrow; as knowledge increases, grief increases.

2:1 I said to myself, "Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy what is good." But it turned out to be futile. 2 I said about laughter, "It is madness," and about pleasure, "What does this accomplish?" 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. 4 I increased my achievements. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and planted every kind of fruit tree in them. 6 I constructed reservoirs of water for myself from which to irrigate a grove of flourishing trees. 7 I acquired male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned many herds of cattle and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I gathered male and female singers for myself, and many concubines, the delights of men. 9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. 10 All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles. 11 When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun. 12 Then I turned to consider wisdom, madness, and folly, for what will the man be like who comes after the king? He will do what has already been done. 13 And I realized that there is an advantage to wisdom over folly, like the advantage of light over darkness. 14 The wise man has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I also knew that one fate comes to them both. 15 So I said to myself, "What happens to the fool will also happen to me. Why then have I been overly wise?" And I said to myself that this is also futile. 16 For, just like the fool, there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man, since in the days to come both will be forgotten. How is it that the wise man dies just like the fool? 17 Therefore, I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me. For everything is futile and a pursuit of the wind. 18 I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile. 20 So I began to give myself over to despair concerning all my work that I had labored at under the sun. 21 When there is a man whose work was done with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and he must give his portion to a man who has not worked for it, this too is futile and a great wrong. 22 For what does a man get with all his work and all his efforts that he labors at under the sun? 23 For all his days are filled with grief, and his occupation is sorrowful; even at night, his mind does not rest. This too is futile. 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

### The Curse

Why do women have so much trouble giving birth? I would love to ask an evolutionist that question. In evolutionary theory, how do you explain the difficulty of human childbirth? If the way things are is the result of the survival of the fittest, that means all the women who had bodies that gave birth easily and

safely, like so many of the animals, those women all died out. And the women for whom childbirth was an excruciating, life-threatening ordeal are the ones who survived, and that is why female human beings today have such pain in childbearing. I would love to watch an evolutionist attempt to answer that question. That is just one of countless areas where the theory of evolution fails to explain the real world. The creation account in Genesis, however, explains it perfectly. The reason for the pain of childbirth is given in Genesis 3. God created this world as a perfect paradise, and nothing was wrong with it. But then mankind sinned. We refer to that as the Fall of mankind. And in response to that, God cursed this world. And the effects of the Fall and the curse of God were massive. It had an effect on the ground, on our bodies, on our relationships, and on the world as a whole.

**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, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay**

Someday Jesus is going to return and do a complete remodel on this place so there will be a new sky and a new earth, and all the problems will be eliminated. But until that time, we are living in a fallen, cursed, messed-up world, and the book of Ecclesiastes teaches us how to live in a world like that - how to deal with the problems of the curse.

## Review

Last week we began our study of the book of Ecclesiastes, and we saw that the author, who is referred to as the Preacher, was on a quest to try to get a step ahead of the curse. He wanted to control wildcard, unpredictable providence, and he wanted to know more than what God has revealed so he could have controllable happiness. He makes this massive effort to gain control over his own happiness, and here is where he ends up:

## Why Solomon Hated Life

**Ecclesiastes 2:17 Therefore, I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me. 18... I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun**

He came to hate life. Why did you hate life, Solomon? Let's scan through chapters 1-2 and see.

### Life Is Short

The first thing about life that bothered him was the fact that it is so short. It is impossible for humanity to make any real progress because of our tiny, little lifespan.

**4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.**

Compared to man, the earth seems to be practically eternal. It is constantly being renewed and refreshed.

**5 The sun rises and the sun sets, panting. It returns to its place where it rises. 6 Gusting to the south, turning to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles. 7 All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full. The streams are flowing to the place, and they flow there again.**

The earth keeps replenishing itself. The rivers never run out of water. The sun wears itself out running all the way across the sky, then disappears into the sunset – but then the next day, it's back! The wind blows away then comes back. Everything around us is spent and then renewed, spent and then renewed. It disappears then reappears. Everything in the world is like that except ... us. We die, and we are gone. Our lives are so incredibly short. My generation in this world is like a river that has no headwaters to supply it. So as soon as the water runs down into the sea, the river is gone. And what am I

in this one generation of billions of people alive right now? The river itself is about to disappear, and I am just one drop of water in that river. And I think I am going to get a handle on the Universe and figure out time and eternity and gain control of providence? I can't even keep peas on my fork. I am going to figure out the mysteries of the universe? I can't even remember where I left my car keys. The point here is that we are so tiny, and so temporary, and we have so much human limitation, that we could never back up far enough to see the big picture.

**8 All things are wearisome; man is unable to speak. The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing.**

No matter how much you study and learn, there will be an infinite amount left to see and hear. You can't gather it all in. And for that reason, we can never make any real progress.

**9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.**

Why?

**11 There is no remembrance of those who came before**

When one generation dies and the next generation replaces it, some knowledge is passed along, but most of it is not. It is not like I pick up where my father left off. If by age 50 I can get to where my dad was when he was 50, I am doing great. And it is the same with generations. Only a tiny fraction of the things that happen ever get recorded in history, and it is still way more than anyone can ever read. They say those who don't know history are bound to repeat it. And usually the people who say that imagine that they know enough history to avoid repeating it. But that is a fantasy. None of us can ever know enough history to avoid repeating it, and so human history is just one long story of the same things happening over and over. Nothing of significance ever really changes. Just as the rivers and the wind and the sun are in constant motion and continual change and the result is perpetual sameness, so it is with humanity. Nothing is new.

“What about the electric tooth brush? What about cars and computers and cell phones and space travel?”

Those things are impressive, but what has all that really changed? Is the human race fundamentally different now? Do we have fewer problems now that we have computers? No – because of the amazing processor speed, my computer at home is capable of generating tens of thousands of new problems per second! Just think of how many of the problems in your life are related to your computer, or your car, or your cell phone, or your house. All these wonderful, life-changing marvels of modern invention are the source of most of our problems! Why? Because just like the rivers flowing and the wind blowing there is an appearance of great change, but in the big picture, it is all staying pretty much the same. I open up my Bible and read about the heartaches and anxieties and problems people had 3000 years ago, and guess what – they are all the same problems I have today. When I read the psalms, I don't hear them crying out in lament, “Oh God, I have to travel everywhere on foot. I can't fly overseas, I have no GPS – woe is me!” Those weren't their big problems. Their big problems were things like injustice, sickness, death, sin – and all those things exist today every bit as much as they did back then. We have gotten nowhere. There is nothing out there that is so different from what you already have that it would give you control of life. No one has a new angle. Solomon says, “No, life is like an exercise bike. Each generation is born, gets on the bike, and peddles like mad until they eventually die and fall off and then the next generation gets on. And they say, “You guys didn't get anywhere, but we'll peddle harder.”

**Knowledge Is Limited**

The Preacher thought that if he could just gain enough knowledge, he would be in fat city. He would eventually be able to figure life out, and get on top of the rat race.

## *Science*

**12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my mind to seek and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven.**

He tried to gain control of life through science. He observed how things go; he applied sound reasoning to it, and attempted to figure it all out. That is the culture we live in for sure. Education is the solution to everything. That is their way of dealing with any problem. The way to solve teen pregnancy – sex education. Where did that get us? They know exactly what they are doing now, but they are still getting pregnant. We have education coming out of our ears, and yet our problems are not going away. But this culture still thinks that is the solution – more education. More awareness. How can we get rid of breast cancer? Awareness. Just have football players wear pink shoes so more people will be aware that breast cancer exists. And we have ribbons and ad campaigns and billboards and public service announcements, and awareness is at an all time high, but, strangely, people are still getting cancer.

Is there value in science? Absolutely – tremendous value. I love science! It shows me the glory of God. I cannot get enough of it – it absolutely fascinates me. But does it give me control over the big issues in life? No. Will it exempt me from wildcard providence? No. The most brilliant scientists in the world still get flat tires in the rain, and their kids still leave things out in the yard where they get ruined, and they get the flu and lose their car keys. The Preacher tried to get above all that through science and education and **14 ... and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.** Why didn't it work?

**15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.**

There are some things that just do not go the way they should go. They are crooked and bent. And science can observe and measure how bent they are, but it can never straighten them out, because the curse is God's doing.

## *God's Doing*

**13 ...God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied (or better, by which they are occupied).**

The point is, God has made it this way. It was God who subjected this world to frustration. All my plans to be the captain of my own destiny run aground on the eternal, sovereign decree of Almighty God. The only way I could gain control of life is if I stormed the gates of heaven and took over.

And not only did God cause the futility, but God also prompts the heart of man to seek meaning and understanding. We have a divinely implanted desire to have meaning in our lives. The animals are not like that. No cow is out there in the pasture filled with anxiety, looking down at the grass and thinking, *What does it all mean?* They can just stand there all day every day staring at the grass and never get bored. The animals are perfectly content to have no meaning in life because God did not plant inside them a craving for meaning. He has not planted eternity in their hearts like He has with us. He made us in His image, and as a result we can never be satisfied with lives that are filled with nothing but momentary sensations. We cannot stand emptiness and meaninglessness. We have this voracious appetite for meaning, but when we try to find it by figuring it all out, it only increases both problems and our questions.

## *Knowledge Only Compounds the Trouble*

**17 I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind. 18 For with much wisdom is much sorrow; as knowledge increases, grief increases.**

The more you gain wisdom, and see how things are supposed to go, the more you see them not go that way, and it is maddening. You study history and learn all about Hitler and Stalin, and you study

science and learn about entropy – everything moving toward disorder, and you study physiology and learn about viruses and incurable diseases – you learn about all these terrible things and the more you study the more you realize we cannot do anything about them. With all our “advancements,” we still have maniacal murderers running countries, viruses are only getting worse, and the second law of thermodynamics still has not been repealed.

A friend of mine is a brilliant scientist. And he told me the reason he pursued science was to pursue truth about life. And when he finally got through his PhD program he said he was absolutely appalled to discover how little we really know. He said, “*That’s all we know? We’ve come up with a few names to describe a few processes, but our knowledge doesn’t go any further than that?*” That brought him to despair and he ended up becoming a Christian.

The more knowledge you gain and the more skillful you become in your work and the more money you make, the more often you find yourself awake at night weighed down with anxiety. When you flip burgers at MacDonalD’s you can clock out, go home, forget about work and sleep like a baby. But when you work your way up to a prestigious, important, high paying job, it is inevitably also a stressful job filled with really hard problems that keep you up at night. So are you really that much better off than the guy flipping burgers?

## **Partying Accomplishes Nothing**

So the Preacher went down the road of science and education, and that did not get him happiness and meaning, so in chapter 2 he tries another approach. If not education, how about fun?

### **2:1 I said to myself, "Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy what is good."**

The word translated **pleasure** most often refers to celebration – singing and dancing and eating and drinking and all the elements of a party.

The second half of verse 1 can be taken a couple different ways, but I think the NIV translation is best.

#### **1 ...I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.**

This is all part of his scientific research. He is going to use partying and celebration and laughter to see if through those things he can discover what is good to do. What is the best way to live? What is the secret to lasting, deep happiness? What is the most profitable way to spend your time? Which kind of lifestyle will yield the greatest benefits in your effort to bypass the troubles of the curse? Maybe it is just to not take life so seriously, and have some fun. You only go around once, so you might as well just have a good time.

You have heard the saying, “If life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” What does that mean? It means if life turns sour, just add sugar. That is what Solomon tried to do with life. Life in this cursed, futile world is like a sour grapefruit, and he figures if he sprinkles the sugar of pleasure on top of it, life will be worth living. Maybe this is the key to a happy, meaningful life.

#### **1 ...But it turned out to be futile. 2 I said about laughter, "It is madness," and about pleasure, "What does this accomplish?"**

Laughter feels great while you are doing it, but you can surround yourself with comedians and all kinds of fun and games and parties and recreation and everything that makes you laugh, and your life can still go in the tank. And it is basically nothing more than temporary insanity. Forget about most of reality, and just focus on one, funny little thing for a moment while you block everything else out. Then you laugh for a few moments, and then return to reality and the sorrows of life and the laughter stops.

He is going to tell us in chapter 3 that there is a place for laughter. But it is not the key to a happy life, and it is not going to solve your biggest problems.

## Drinking

How about alcohol?

**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.**

This is another technique people use for getting a handle on life. If you can't control the problems, just escape from them. Get some marijuana or Prozac or just have a few beers, so the problems of life don't hurt so much. The Preacher made a very intentional, scientific study of that approach and he found that does not get you anywhere either.

## Work

So then he turned to work and achievement.

**4 I increased my achievements. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and planted every kind of fruit tree in them. 6 I constructed reservoirs of water for myself from which to irrigate a grove of flourishing trees.**

These are all the things we are tempted to think, "I'll be happy when \_\_\_\_." We think, "My life is a mess now, but once I get organized, and I get focused, and I accomplish my dreams, then..." And Solomon says, "Been there, done that - it's a dead end."

## Wealth

Something else he tried was wealth. The other day they had a contest at a basketball game and this fan had a chance to win \$20,000 if he could make one shot from half court. He took a running start, heaved it up, and it banked right in. We see that and we think, "Man, if I could just get an infusion of \$20,000 right now, my life would be so much better."

**7 I acquired male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned many herds of cattle and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.**

He was #1 on Forbes' richest people in the world list. We daydream about winning the lottery. Solomon says, "Ha - the lottery? I burn through that much money in a weekend." He had wealth beyond imagination, but it didn't make him happy.

## Music

**8 ...I gathered male and female singers for myself**

Many, many people seek meaning in life through music or the arts. They get depressed, they run to their music. Solomon tried that - he had all his favorite music groups on staff in his house.

## Sex

**8... and many concubines, the delights of men.**

He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. There was a playboy mansion way before Hugh Hefner. There are men who think, "Man, if I had my pick of 1000 playmates - the most beautiful women in the country all living in my mansion - I would be happy!" Solomon tried that.

## The Limited Value of Pleasure

**9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. 10 All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them.**

He never drove past a house he couldn't afford to buy. And he tried living a life of hedonism – just say yes to every impulse you have. Most people who try to find meaning or joy in life through these kinds of things never learn what Solomon learned because they don't have the resources to take it to the extreme like he did. They run after wealth, and it does not satisfy, but they think, "It's because I don't have enough. If I just had a little more..." And the same goes for all those other pursuits. So Solomon wants us to know, "Look, I took it to the extreme."

**1 Kings 4:22 Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, 23 ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl.**

That was the *daily* provision - each day that is how much food the caterers set out at his party. It would take thousands of people to consume that much food in a day. He spent 13 years building his house - the entire royal building crew working 13 years. He built dams and reservoirs - anybody here ever built a reservoir? He had 1000 women. He was a scientist with a world-famous reputation, to where the queen of Sheba travelled all the way to Israel just to witness his legendary intelligence in person.

**10 ...I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles.**

Literally, **that was my portion for all my struggles.** Your **portion** is your lot in life – the share that you end up with. And his lot, his reward for all that struggle, was whatever enjoyment he experienced along the way and nothing else. That was his reward *in full*. It did not lead to meaning, it did not show him the best way to live, it did not answer the big questions, it did not give him control of life, it did not exempt him from the futility of the curse – it just gave him some fleeting sensations of pleasure.

**11 When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun.**

## The Limited Advantage of Wisdom

Does that mean it does not matter how you live? No, that is not what he is saying. He tried the life of wisdom and the life of hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, and neither one of them gave him what he was looking for, however he wants us to know that even though it cannot give you control of wildcard providence, and even though it cannot give you deep, lasting happiness and meaning in life - still, wisdom is better than folly.

**12 Then I turned to consider wisdom, madness, and folly, for what will the man be like who comes after the king? He will do what has already been done. 13 And I realized that there is an advantage to wisdom over folly, like the advantage of light over darkness. 14 The wise man has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I also knew that one fate comes to them both.**

There is value in wisdom. It is better to have eyes in your head than to stumble blindly through life. Solomon is not overturning the rest of the Bible. He is going to keep reminding us - everything else in the Bible still applies. Wisdom is still good, but its value is limited. Even wisdom cannot get you out of the traffic jam of life, it is not going to exempt you from the troubles of life that we all face, it is not going to release you from the curse, and it does nothing about the problem of death.

**15 So I said to myself, "What happens to the fool will also happen to me. Why then have I been overly wise?" And I said to myself that this is also futile. 16 For, just like the fool, there is no lasting**



**remembrance of the wise man, since in the days to come both will be forgotten. How is it that the wise man dies just like the fool?**

## **Despair**

So what was the outcome of all this? What was it like for him after running to the extremes of education, drinking, achievement, riches, and sex?

### **17 Therefore, I hated life**

Despair. He attained the pinnacle of education, a partying lifestyle, drinking, work, accomplishments, money, music, marriage, relationships, and sex, and it brought him right into the pit of despair.

## **Misery in Pleasure**

But how can that be? Didn't he just say that he derived some enjoyment from his pleasures? And didn't he gain some advantage with all his wisdom? Yes, but those things he gained were not enough. The little pleasures of life and the little benefits of living wisely are not even close to enough to satisfy the cravings of the soul. And so if that is all you have in life, you will end up hating life.

### **17 Therefore, I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me. For everything is futile and a pursuit of the wind.**

He discovered that it is possible to be miserable even while experiencing pleasure. He sprinkled the sugar on his grapefruit, but instead of the sugar making the grapefruit sweet, the grapefruit somehow made the sugar turn sour. You picture the drunk or the man enslaved by gambling or porn, and his wife has taken the kids and walked out, he got an eviction notice and has nowhere to go, they repossessed his car, and he grabs that bottle or hits the casino or goes to a strip club, and experiences shallow pleasure even while he is in deep misery. He tries to deaden some of the pain with pleasure, but even in the midst of that little pleasure he hates life, loathes himself, and wishes he were dead.

That is the extreme, but we all experience that in some measure. Haven't you had times when you are indulging in one of your favorite pleasures, and it has ending up being more work than it was worth? You are struggling and striving to make a vacation work, or you are putting forth all kinds of effort to engage in some form of recreation, and it is turning into such a headache that at some point you are thinking, "Man, how much fun do we have to have? Can we just end this and go home?"

## **Death**

And the thing that really spoils the party is death.

### **18 I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?**

Whatever gains you might begin to make, death just takes them all away.

### **20 So I began to give myself over to despair**

Depression is a strange thing. You want more than anything to find relief, and yet something inside you insists on remaining miserable. The soul refuses comfort. That is where Solomon ended up when he saw death coming. You break your back scrambling around your whole life chasing after that stuff, and then when you finally get it, death is right there around the corner, and you just go in the ground and someone else gets it all. You never see a hearse pulling a U-haul. A really wealthy man died and someone asked, "How much did he leave?" And the answer came, "All of it."

## Enjoy Gifts from God

So what is the solution to all this futility? We know that we have the hope of the resurrection in the next life, but what about in this life - life in a fallen, cursed world? The solution is in that refrain that repeats seven times in the book: enjoy life.

**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?**

So the solution is enjoyment.

### Two Out of Three Ain't Nothin'

Last week after the sermon someone posted verse 24 on his Facebook page. Eat, drink, and enjoy life. Someone commented on that post and said, "Two out of three ain't bad." Evidently he has got the eating and drinking down – just not the enjoying part. And I am sure that person meant it as a joke, and it is a clever comment. But it is worth thinking about that comment in a literal way. I think the whole point Solomon is making in this book is that when you think two out of three ain't bad, and you are doing pretty well if you do the eating and drinking even if you miss out on the enjoying – that makes for an empty life. In this case, two out of three is really bad. It's nothing. Two out of three is zero.

What good are the "good" things in life if you lack the ability to enjoy them? What good would dessert be if you didn't have any taste buds? Everything you are running after in this life - none of it can supply happiness unless God grants the ability to enjoy it. It is like two- part glue. You have the one part, but it does not work at all until you add in the catalyst that activates the properties of the glue. And the gifts of God in this world are like that. They don't work until God adds a few drops of the catalyst, which is the ability to enjoy. If you go skiing and don't enjoy it, that is normal. But if you go and you are able to enjoy it, it is because you have received a special gift from God. So now the question comes, "How do I get that gift from God? Is it totally random? Or is there something I can do that will make it more likely that God will give me that gift?" The answer is, there is something you can do. God gives this gift to a certain kind of person, and that kind is described in verse 26.

### Only For God Pleasers

**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.**

Two kinds of people - the one who is pleasing to God and the sinner. And the ones who get the catalyst - the ability to enjoy, are the God pleasers. So when you read verse 24 and see that the goal is to eat and drink and enjoy life, don't misunderstand that. Some people start there and then adjust the rest of the Bible to fit that one idea. So they say, "I know God wants me to be happy. And I'm not happy in this marriage, therefore God wants me to get a divorce." Getting out of this hard marriage, or being with that other person you are so infatuated with - that seems like it would make you happy, but without the catalyst - without the gift of enjoyment, you can get that divorce, get that other relationship, get whatever you are running after, and you will end up right down in the pit with Solomon - hating life. The Preacher wants us to understand that the rest of the Bible still applies. Yes, God wants you to be happy and to enjoy life, and yes, it is a good thing to seek that, but the only path that will take you there is the path of pleasing God. So right there that rules out all sin, all disobedience to God's Word as a means of enjoying life. Enjoy life! Enjoy providence! But do not cut yourself off at the knees by trying to enjoy life by disobeying God, because that will put you into the category of people to whom God does not grant the gift of enjoyment. You must please Him in order to get this gift.

### 1) *Faith*

And if you want to know what pleases Him, study the whole rest of the Bible. And especially Hebrews 11:6, which says **without faith it is impossible to please God**. The way to please God is to live a life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what pleases God, and the more you live that way, the more God will tend to give you this gift of enjoyment. That is where we left off last time. The first step to happiness in life is stop trying to control providence, and just trust God to run the universe.

### 2) *Obedience*

And that will lead to the second principle: obedience. You cannot please God by disobeying His commands. So if you want happiness, do what Paul did in **2 Corinthians 5:9 we make it our goal to please him**. Instead of grieving God by disobeying Him, make it your goal to please Him through obedience. The Preacher wants us to remember that. Numerous times in this book he is going to remind us about Judgment Day, and the conclusion of the book is all about fearing God because of Judgment Day. So all of that is true, but that is not his main point here. He just reminds us of that, but the point he wants to make goes beyond that.

### 3) *Receive It as a Gift*

The principle he really wants us to understand here is that there are two kinds of pleasure. The pleasure sinners have while they are in the midst of sin are real sensations of pleasure, but they eventually bring you to despair and hating life. That kind of enjoyment is short lived, shallow, and is far less powerful than the sorrows and disappointments of life. Everything that is messed up in this world will eclipse that tiny, little, weak, fragile happiness. But the enjoyment that comes from God is different. It results in loving life, and it is durable and ongoing and powerful and it eclipses the pain and sorrow and disappointments in life. Why? Because it comes as a gift from God.

So here is where we can begin to answer the question that was asked last week about enjoying a football game. Suppose you are a football fan, and one week you sit down with a bag of chips and a soda and a bunch of friends and take in a game. But for whatever reason, you don't really enjoy it all that much. You have been kind of down lately, and you thought this would cheer you up, and it did momentarily, but not really very much. Or you go to your favorite restaurant, or shopping or boating or whatever you do for fun, and for whatever reason it is just not that enjoyable this time. You go on a seven-day vacation and after a couple days you are ready to come home. You can't put your finger on why, exactly - you just don't seem to have the ability to enjoy it this time. You are getting some pleasure from it, but what you are getting from it is not even enough to match the amount of effort it took to have the experience. The headache of packing and going to the airport was bigger than the enjoyment of the vacation.

Please understand this - *that is the norm*. That is not a mental illness, it is not a disorder, it is just normal life in a cursed, fallen world. It is the natural state of affairs. If you do something for fun, and it isn't fun - you cannot seem to enjoy it - that is like going to MacDonal'd's and you order a burger, and you find that there is no \$100 bill tucked inside your bag. Is that a big shock? No, that is the norm. If you find a \$100 bill in there, that means someone gave you a special gift that was not part of the deal when you ordered the burger. If the enjoyment you get out of life is smaller than the heartbreaks and sorrows of life, that is the norm in a cursed, fallen world. And there is not anything you can do to change that. All the wisdom and money of Solomon and a lifetime of effort won't change that - no matter what method you choose. It is not in your power to reverse the problem of non-enjoyability.

On the other hand, when you can enjoy something good, that is a special gift from God. And one of the most life changing- realizations I have had in a long time was when I realized that truth. Because most of my life, all I ever did was thank God for the thing I was enjoying, rather than the ability to enjoy it. I would see a beautiful sunset and say, "Thank You God, for Your spectacular beauty." I appreciated the display of beauty. But I failed to realize that at that moment I was receiving two gifts, not one. I thought I was receiving one gift - the sunset. I didn't realize the sunset and the ability to enjoy the sunset were two

totally separate gifts. I just figured that on those days when I couldn't appreciate a good sunset it just meant there was something wrong with my mood. I did not realize that not being able to appreciate the beauty and receive joy from it is the normal state of things, and being able to enjoy it is a surprise \$100 bill in my bag.

What the Preacher wants us to do is not just to enjoy God's gifts. He wants us to enjoy the fact that God has granted us the gift of enjoyment. That will change the way you think about God. When you start to notice how many times a day God not only gives you some gift, but also grants the gift of enjoyability, that will teach your heart how much God really loves you, and it will begin to fuel the fires of your love for God. There is so much more to be said about this, but we are out of time. So let me just leave you with this: How about if you made it your goal this week to never enjoy anything in a way that does not increase your love for God? To use the analogy from last week - as you try to just enjoy your ice cream, do not do it in a way that leaves your heart unchanged. With every sensation of enjoyment - a funny joke, a pleasant evening, a tasty bite of food, a soft pillow - with every sensation of enjoyment realize what is happening. God is purposely, intentionally, right then and there pouring in the catalyst, slipping that \$100 bill in your bag, and granting you that gift that no one in the world can ever obtain on their own - the gift of enjoyment.

**Benediction: 2 Corinthians 5:9 So we make it our goal to please him ... 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**

## **James 1:25 Questions**

- 1) How are you most prone to fill in the blank: "I'll be happy when \_\_\_\_\_"? Imagine yourself getting that thing without the gift of enjoyment, and hating life.
- 2) For which of God's gifts in life has God most often granted you the gift of enjoyment? Try to think of a memory cue for those moments to call your attention to BOTH gifts (the thing itself, and the ability to enjoy it at that moment).