



Are you getting the most out of life? Is there a difference between existing and living, do you think? Is the life you're living now worth living? Are you fulfilled in your life right now? Maybe these questions seem morbid, even depressing, but maybe they are the wellspring to finding real life... real relationship.

I. ECCLESIASTES AND THE GREAT QUESTIONS

- A. This week I was reading Ecclesiastes. Come to find out this book is read during the Festival of Sukkot, or Feast of Tabernacles. Now if you have ever read the book of Ecclesiastes, one would hardly consider it a book of joy.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

[1] The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

*[2] Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*

*[3] What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?*

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

*[5] The sun rises, and the sun goes down,
and hastens to the place where it rises.*

*[6] The wind blows to the south
and goes around to the north;
around and around goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.*

*[7] All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they flow again.*

*[8] All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.*

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

*[10] Is there a thing of which it is said,
"See, this is new"?*

*It has been already
in the ages before us.*

*[11] There is no remembrance of former things,
nor will there be any remembrance
of later things yet to be
among those who come after.*



- B. A better translation for the original Hebrew word for vanities would be something like pointless or meaningless. Pointless, pointless... or meaningless, meaningless. The author begins by telling us that all of life is pointless! Hardly a book of celebration! Hardly a book of joy. And yet this is the scheduled reading for Sukkot.
- C. I read that originally rabbis fought against having this book included in the Talmud because it's contradictory to passages in the Torah and even self-contradictory. So why is it in here? What does it teach us? It ends with the charge to submit yourself to heaven and fear the Lord. This is the point!
- D. I mentioned in conversation that I had been reading it and found out that several other people had read this book during the past week! And Abel told me this was his favorite book and that many people miss the beauty in it. As I searched it out I found that many people find this book even the most profound in all of scripture. So I decided to look at it again.
- E. I've passed over this book because I know about the author. King Solomon wrote this book, and we know that he was taken off course throughout his life. Though he had wisdom, and though he was the wealthiest man who ever lived... he was taken off course. And for me, that colors the book. I think what could I learn from someone who is off course? But I'm realizing we can learn a lot!

II. TIME FOR EVERYTHING....EVEN DANCING!

Ecclesiastes 3

[3:1] For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

[2] a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

[3] a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

[4] a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

[5] a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

[6] a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

[7] a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

[8] a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

[9] What gain has the worker from his toil? [10] I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. [11] He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. [12] I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; [13] also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.



[14] I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. [15] That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

- A. This is the most known and quoted portion of Ecclesiastes. It's the title of songs and novels. It's truly profound. Life is complicated. Life is multi-faceted and all of the facets are necessary. Can you imagine if you only had happiness. If you only had one emotion then you'd really have no emotions. It's the variance that makes life sweet, don't you think?
- B. I've been thinking more and more about the Jewish calendar. God calls for days of awe and supplication and mourning, and then days of joy and feasting. It's all necessary! It's the variance that makes life life.

III. THE CALL FOR JOY

[2:24] There is nothing better for a person than that he should EAT AND DRINK and find ENJOYMENT in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, [3:13] also that everyone should EAT AND DRINK and take PLEASURE in all his toil--this is God's gift to man.

[5:18] Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to EAT AND DRINK and find ENJOYMENT in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.

[8:15] And I commend JOY, for man has no good thing under the sun but to EAT AND DRINK and be JOYFUL, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.,

[9:7] Go, EAT your bread with JOY, and DRINK your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

[11:8] So if a person lives many years, LET HIM REJOICE IN THEM ALL; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

- A. Last week we talked about finding joy in the midst of transition. The Feast of Tabernacles is about just that... remembering the desert wandering and rejoicing in God. Everything in me wants to resist this teaching. I wish it weren't so, because it certainly doesn't look very good to be resisting the scriptural call to rejoice in transition. But I have a difficult time with it. And I know many of you do too.
- B. We are missing out! God knows best. And the call to find joy, even contentment in the journey is right. Why? Because the journey is good. The process is good.

IV. THE CALL FOR SOBRIETY



One of the best lines of seen in a long time is placed in the last chapters of this book. It's altogether perfect. It's godlike in it's tension. You'll see what I mean...

Ecclesiastes 11

[9] Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

- A. Now remember, Solomon was an old man by the time he wrote this book. And the wisdom he displays here in these 3 sentences is altogether lovely! It perfectly embraces the tension of God, the energy of God. Instead of laying out a list of do's and don'ts he advises a pursuit of pleasure... with the reminder that God will judge us all in all. Wonderful!!! Perfectly wise!
- B. Do you understand what I mean by tension? I've had people respond to things I've written as if this notion were somehow a heresy....saying there can be no tension in God. Let's look at hydrogen and oxygen atoms, AKA water.

Within the water, at least a few molecules away from the surface, every molecule is engaged in a tug of war with its neighbors on every side. For every "up" pull there is a "down" pull, and for every "left" pull there is a "right" pull, and so on, so that any given molecule feels no net force at all. At the surface things are different. There is no up pull for every down pull, since of course there is no liquid above the surface; thus the surface molecules tend to be pulled back into the liquid. It takes work to pull a molecule up to the surface. (http://www.exploratorium.edu/ronh/bubbles/sticky_water.html)

Colossians 1

[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

- C. I know sometimes we consider these things as concepts, words only... but consider Jesus the greatest force, the greatest attraction in all of science... No, in all the universe(s). He is the pull and the push. All things hold together in Him. What in the world? Do we know this man? Do we credit Him at all, let alone do we credit Him enough? Who is this Jesus? Can't you just almost see! Aren't there moments where everything becomes so clear, so resolutely clear! And it's there in that place, with Christ, that all of life here comes into focus. And the search for meaning is over.... Because it's been found in Him.

Ecclesiastes 12

[13] The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. [14] For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

- D. The meaning of this life can only be found above the sun. It's in Christ that we find our meaning. It's in Christ that we can celebrate not only this season but any season. Nothing is meaningless if we see Him. Nothing is pointless if we find Him.