

ecclesiastes

Life in a meaningless world?



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1. Everything is Meaningless - 1v1-11

Is it possible to find life absurd and still hold on to the reality of God?

- 1) When was the last time you ever really stopped and thought about the meaning of life?
- 2) Does your life have meaning? Does your world have meaning?
- 3) Is Qoheleth's assertion that everything is meaningless contradictory to the Gospel?
- 4) "The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing"v8 - Is this your experience of life?
- 5) How would you describe Qoheleth's mental state, is this a reasonable reflection on the world or not?

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2. The Search for Satisfaction - 1v12-2v26

They come to rest at any kerb: All streets in time are visited.
- Philip Larkin, "Ambulances"

- 1) Is there anything on Earth that has lasting value?
- 2) Is the paradox true; That the more you hunt for pleasure, the less you find? 1v16-2v11
- 3) Qoheleth made a mini garden of Eden for himself, full of all delights, a little world of his own making. Is it possible we are in danger of doing the same with our houses and possessions? What was Qoheleth's conclusion?
- 4) Qoheleth's realisation of death (2v17-16) is a sudden road block in his thinking, how does your understanding of death effect your life? What does our inability to talk about death say about the world we live in?

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3. Tyranny of Time - 3v1-15



It suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth, I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small.

Neil Armstrong

- 1) If you could have frozen time at one point in your life, when would it have been?
- 2) How important is the rhythm of life to you, the seasons, years, and cycle of life?
- 3) How often have you thrown yourself into some absorbing activity which offers immediate fulfilment, but how freely did you choose it? How soon will you be doing the exact opposite? Do you really make free choices?
- 4) God is the only one with the eternal perspective; the ability to stand back far enough to see the masterpiece he has created, how does it make you feel to know you are a small part in this masterpiece?
- 5) Can you comprehend eternity?

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4. Harshness of Life - 3v16-4v3

"If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin."

— Charles Darwin, Voyage of the Beagle

- 1) How do you deal with the injustice in this world?
- 2) Why is there so much injustice in our world?
- 3) If God could intervene at any time, why do we have to wait for the promises of the next life?
- 4) Is there any difference between man and beasts? v18-22. How might Psalm 49 help answer this question?
- 5) Should we have a gloomy outlook on life, 2v2-3, or should we have a cheerful one? Do we allow ourselves to see the realities of life?

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5. The Rat-Race - 4v4-8

“Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies and cuts through to the essence of the evolutionary spirit.”

Gordon Gecko, Wall Street 1987

1. Are you a failure? Share some experiences of failures in your life?
2. Do you have a competitive need be better than other people?
3. V4 paints the picture of the fool, he is a picture of complacency and unwitting self-destruction - have you ever let idleness erode your capacity to love, to care for yourself and others?
4. Do you want a “handful of quietness’ - what does this phrase mean?
5. Do you toil, either out of envy or habit and fixation, let money making lead your thoughts and actions?
6. Are you engaged in lonely, pointless busyness?

6. Bitterness of Disappointment 5v13-6v12

“Dreaming about being an actress, is more exciting than being one.”

— Marilyn Monroe

- 1) Do you look back on your life and think you missed a chance to get wealth, or maybe you have lost your wealth through some misfortune? If you are able to, share some of your story or someone else's as a modern day equivalent.
- 2) In v15-17 we see a stark and sober description of reality, how does it make you feel?
- 3) Reading v18-20 seems to highlight a simple, moderate life, how important is the word God in those verses?
- 4) Chapter 6v1-6 could be seen as an atheist's charter. If this life is all there is and we are just waiting around to be deleted, life has little meaning. Can an understanding of the afterlife help us enjoy life more?
- 5) There are many unanswered questions in the closing verses, is this defeatism or realism?
- 6) How have you coped with disappointment in your life?

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7. Frustration 8v1-17

At every turn this chapter will face us with our inability to call the time and master our affairs. On one level after another we find ourselves pinned down, hunted down and disorientated. - Derek Kidner

- 1) What gets you most frustrated in life?
- 2) Are you able to recognise the “time and way” v5,6?
The moments that can be missed or seized in this ever changing world?
- 3) How do we deal with the perversity of wicked people succeeding? How much more obnoxious is it when religion seems to bless it? (v10)
- 4) The Judgment of God seems to release some of the frustration for Qoheleth, does it really help knowing that in the end all will face God? (10-13)
- 5) Where does our busyness really get us in life? Is it really possible to find meaning in the things we do?
- 6) Is it comforting that we are baffled by God, not some idiots human philosophies?

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8. Jeopardy 9v1-18



The British artist Banksy has made a sculpture of a TV that has, written on its screen, "In the future, everyone will be anonymous for 15 minutes."

- 1) What does our world's obsession with looking younger and prolonging life "what ever the cost" say about our understanding of life and death?
- 2) We are all going to die, Qoheleth is very clear about that. Whether we are rich or poor the same fate awaits us, how do you deal with your own mortality?
- 3) V11 talks of chance and change in life, can you think of small chances that have impacted your life? How might your life have been different if they hadn't?
- 4) How might the little parable in v13-17 be applied to our world? Who would you be in the story?
- 5) How valued is wisdom to your life and the decisions you make?

9. Be Sensible 10v1-20

- Life is what happens while we're busy making other plans. (J. Lennon)
- If you want to fly with eagles, you can't hang with turkeys.
- You get what you need, not what you want.

1. Is it really easier to ruin something than to create it? Share some experiences of this in your life?
2. V3 is a comedy sideline, how easy are fools to spot in our society?
3. V4 talks of our response to those in authority over us. Have you ever resigned or walked away from something you shouldn't have, and just how submissive should we be to those in authority over us?
4. In this chapter of wisdom and proverbs, which ones stick out to you?
5. How much of our walk with God is about practical wisdom in the everyday? What bits of wisdom do you live by?

10. Towards Home and a Conclusion 11-12v14

If the previous chapter was all about being sensible, here we have a call to: Be bold! Be joyful! Be Godly!

1. V1-6 are a buoyant call to be bold in life. As we do not really know what will happen, what would that call look like in your life?
2. V7-10 speaks of being joyful, what relation does joy have to what is right?
3. Chapter 12 starts with the phrase “remember your creator”, how can we live a life that responds to God being Creator?
4. If someone today was going to do a precis of life, what conclusion do you think they would come to?
5. Do v13-14 conclude the challenge of life for you?
6. How much does the knowledge of God judging what we do impact your everyday life
