

# Oh, How Utterly Empty Life Is!

I want to start by asking a question. Have you ever stopped to think what life is all about? Have you ever wondered why God caused you to be born? Have you ever asked why you are even here? Maybe you asked yourself why you were born to your parents or why you were born in a particular country? I remember as a child realizing that I was born in the United States of America and not in another country. I wondered, “Why did that happen?” How about the year in which you were born? You could have been born a thousand years ago, or a thousand years in the future, assuming that God is going to leave our planet here for another thousand years. What is life all about? The truth is some have never stopped to think about why we are here.

In a “Peanuts” cartoon, Lucy made the statement, “Life is like a lounge chair on a deck. Some place it so they can see where they are going. Some place it so they can see where they have been, and some place it so they can see where they are at present.” Charlie Brown responded, “I cannot even get mine unfolded!”

There is a lot of truth to that statement. Some of us look back and we think that life was better way back then. Some think, “I would love to go back to the way life used to be.” Some of us are really glad that we are not living back in those days. We are glad we are where we are. Some of us look at the present and we think that life could not be any better than it is today. But some of us look at the present and we think, “Wow, is this really all there is to life?” So we look to the future and hope that

life will be better. We think and wish it could be better, and we are hoping that in the future things will be better. Lucy said that some of us look back at the past, some of us look at the present, and some of us are looking to the future. That is how we function in our lives. Unfortunately, there are some who do not even think about life or the future.

The author of Ecclesiastes said in Ecclesiastes 5:20,

**For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart. Ecclesiastes 5:20 (NASB)**

Now, consider this verse for a moment. At the end of the verse, we are told that God is keeping us happy with the gladness of our heart. The first part of the verse said that as

a result, we do not even think about life. We are so preoccupied with the events and responsibilities of our lives that we do not even stop long enough to think about life itself.

We do not ask why are we here, where we are going or if our lives count for anything. When was the last time you

asked, “Does my life count for something? Am I happy with my life? Would I like my life to count for something more than it does today?” This verse says that God has allowed us to be content with the busyness of life so that we do not stop to think about the purpose of life, where we are going or if life counts for anything.

**Theme of Ecclesiastes.** Our study is Ecclesiastes



1:1-11, and the theme of the book is, “What is life like under the sun?” Ecclesiastes has twelve chapters and the author of the book will show us what life is like under the sun or here on earth. It is an amazing book because it keeps challenging us. What we are going to discover is that Ecclesiastes is the best wisdom that man has to offer because it was written by the wisest man that has ever lived here on Earth—King Solomon.

**Background of Ecclesiastes.** Ecclesiastes is the Greek title of the book, and it means “assembly.” The Hebrew title is *Koheleth*, That word means “preacher” and occurs repeatedly throughout the book. It occurs three times in chapter one, one time in chapter twelve and verse nine, and then one time in the middle of the book at chapter seven, verse twenty-seven. Solomon is playing the role of a preacher. He is preaching to us about what life is like under the sun, or here on planet earth.

**Author of Ecclesiastes.** The author said in chapter one, verse one that he is the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Now that is the first hint that the author is King Solomon. The message is repeated again in verse 12. It says,

I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.  
Ecclesiastes 1:12 (NASB)

Now we know that the author is the son of King David, and we know that King David had a son, Solomon, who succeeded David as king. Therefore, we know the author is Solomon. When we look at verse 16, we find that the author was a very wise person,

I said to myself, “Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.” Ecclesiastes 1:16 (NASB)

The message is simple. The author is extremely wise, and who was extremely wise? Solomon! Ecclesiastes 12:9 states that the author, Solomon, wrote a lot of proverbs.

1 Kings 3:3-7a states,

Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what you wish Me to give you.” Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David . . . 1 Kings 3:3-7a (NASB)

We are told that God made Solomon king. He replaced his father, King David. Then we are told that Solomon said,

. . . yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. 1 Kings 3:7b-12 (NASB)

What did God do for Solomon? God gave Solomon wisdom because Solomon asked for wisdom. Of all of the things that Solomon could have asked for, he asked for wisdom. He did

not ask for money. He did not ask for friends. He did not ask for life and he did not ask for the lives of his enemies. He asked for wisdom.

In your prayers what do you request? When you are talking to God what do you request? Do you ask for money? Do you ask God to give you things? For what do you ask? Do you know what Solomon did? He was concerned about the people. When he asked for wisdom, it was to help his people. Solomon was focused on others at this point in his life.

Now notice 1 Kings 4:29. It says,

**Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men . . . 1 Kings 4:29-31 (NASB)**

Then in verse 32 we read,

**And he also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. 1 Kings 4:32 (NASB)**

That is Solomon. Solomon was extremely wise. He wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs, and we discover from 1 Kings, that he is also a very wealthy individual. God provided all of that to him as also. That is the author of Ecclesiastes, a wise and very wealthy individual. Incredible!

So we are told in Ecclesiastes that this is the son of David, king in Jerusalem, he is very wise and wrote many proverb. The author of Ecclesiastes is King Solomon! I believe that he wrote Ecclesiastes at the end of his life.

**Date of Ecclesiastes.** The date when Ecclesiastes was written is about 940-931 B.C. The advantage of writing Ecclesiastes at the end of his life is that he had experienced everything. You are going to see when we get to chapter 2, that he accomplished whatever he wanted. There wasn't anything that Solomon wanted to do that he did not do. He did whatever he wanted, and he did it all. That message means that he saw, experienced and learned. Ecclesiastes reveals King Solomon's findings.

Ecclesiastes tells us what he learned. Also we are going to see his recommendations for life. Ecclesiastes is a summary of his findings and recommendations for life. I call Ecclesiastes a gospel tract. In fact, I have recommended the book of Ecclesiastes to people who are not Christians and you will see why. Ecclesiastes challenges us to think about life and why we are here. I pray that you will think about why you are here. I pray you will think about your life and consider if it counts for anything. I pray you will think about that for which you want your life to count. Maybe you are content to do nothing? Maybe you are happy with your life. The book of Ecclesiastes will challenge us to think about why we are here, and if our lives count for anything.

**What Advantage Does Man Have?** Verse 2 gives us the theme of the book. Verse 2 says,

**"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,  
"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Ecclesiastes 1:2  
(NASB)**

Now the Hebrew word for "vanity" is very important. It is *habel*. *Habel* means "vapor," "breath," "meaningless," "worthless," "fleeting" or "empty." All of these words are discouraging: meaningless, worthless, fleeting and empty. They are all synonyms of this Hebrew word that is translated here as "vanity." For me it is like a soap bubble. I think about this word vanity. This word does not mean that you are looking in a mirror and you are vain because you are primping yourself, combing your hair, or using cologne or cosmetics. That is not the idea of this word. The idea of this word is like a vapor or a soap bubble. I remember as a child my dad bought me a toy, a little plastic wand that you first dipped into a bottle of liquid soap. Then you blew through the wand and bubbles came out. It was fun to see all these bubbles float around and then pop. The theme of Ecclesiastes is "vanity of vanities." Let me put it this way, "soap bubbles of soap bubbles." The idea is that life goes "pop!" Life is short, fleeting, and empty. Life is just a soap bubble that goes pop!

"Vanity of vanities" is actually a Hebrew superlative, that can be translated this way: "Oh, how utterly empty!" One writer reworded it this way: "Oh, how utterly absurd life is."

Solomon is telling us that life is vain, empty, and fleeting. So he says, “Empty of empties, oh how utterly empty life is.” Here is a man who did everything that he wanted to do. He had money, power, the position of a king and used them all to accomplish all that he wanted. You will discover that in chapter 2. His conclusion to life was that life is empty.

**What Is the Advantage In Work?** In verse 3, he demonstrates the emptiness of life, that life is nothing more than just a big soap bubble. He said,

*What advantage does man have in all his work  
Which he does under the sun? Ecclesiastes 1:3 (NASB)*

The word for “advantage” in the Hebrew has the idea of “profit.” He is asking the question, “What is the profit in all of your work?” The word for “work” has the idea of toil and labor. The idea is that you go to work in the morning, you work all day long, and you are really tired at the end of the day. Then you get up the next morning and you do it all over again. You work and you work and you work. Or perhaps you stay at home but you have the responsibility to make the meals for the day, to clean the house and to take care of your car. You do these things over and over. Solomon says, “What is the advantage in all that you do? What do you get for yourself? What is the profit?”

Just to make sure that we understand he is talking about life here on Planet Earth he says, “... which he does under the sun.” This is not heaven. He is speaking of life here on earth. What is the profit in all that you are doing here on planet earth? His answer is there is no lasting advantage in all of your labor. Think about it this way: the money comes and the money goes. You work really hard and you hope to get to the end of the month before the money runs out. What we are doing is working hard over and over again and for what? Shakespeare said in “Macbeth,” Act 5,

*Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
signifying nothing.*

That is Solomon’s message. Life is just a bunch of sound and fury. When you are done, you have accomplished nothing

because when you leave this life, you take nothing with you. So what did you get? Maybe you are poor, or maybe you are wealthy. Who cares? What do you get when you die? We die and we leave it all—it does not matter what you had. That is a wake-up call. What is life all about?

**A Generation Goes And Comes.** In verse 4, he says,

*A generation goes and a generation comes,  
But the earth remains forever. Ecclesiastes 1:4 (NASB)*

I cannot help but think about a generation comes, represented by a little baby. The generation passes, represented by a casket. The earth remains. Did you know the earth just continues. My mother was born in the early 1900s. The earth was here when she was born. My mother died this year. She came and she went, but the earth is still here. It was here before she came, and it is still here after she left. That will prove to be true for you also. The earth was here before you were born and after you die, the earth will still be here unless the Lord Jesus comes first. The message of Solomon is that a generation comes and a generation goes, but the earth remains.

**The Sun Endlessly Rises and Sets.** Now verse 5.

*Also, the sun rises and the sun sets;  
And hastening to its place it rises there again.  
Ecclesiastes 1:5 (NASB)*

The idea is that the sun comes up in the morning, and then it sets at night. Then Solomon makes this incredible statement. He says, “then hastening to its place, it rises there again.” The idea for hastening in the Hebrew means to gasp, to pant or to pursue. He personifies the sun as if it is in a race. So the sun sets and then hurry, hurry, hurry, it gets back just in time to rise the next morning. Solomon is not being literal. He is being figurative at this point. When we are told the sun “rises and sets, and is hastening”—the picture is of the sun actively hurrying. “Hastening” is a participle in the Hebrew. The sun rises and sets, and hurries to rise and set again. The message is that the sun keeps doing it again and again and again. You come and you go, and that is it. The sun comes and goes and it

just keeps doing it again and again and again—but you don't. You come and you go! Therefore, the question is, "What is the advantage for you being here on planet earth?" You are not going to hang around. You labor. You work really hard. You get tired. You go home, sleep, get up in the morning and you do it all over again. Then someday you will die. What is the advantage to you for all that you have done?

**The Wind Endlessly Cycles.** Next verse 6.

**Blowing toward the south,  
Then turning toward the north,  
The wind continues swirling along;  
And on its circular courses the wind returns.**  
Ecclesiastes 1:6  
(NASB)

In this verse scripture reveals the knowledge about the patterns of the wind that was not known until modern times. Now we understood that the wind travels in circles. The message here is that the wind goes toward the south and then

goes toward the north. When we are told the wind continues swirling along, the Hebrew has the idea the wind is moving in circles, "And on its circular courses, the wind returns." This is the knowledge of the movement of the wind over our planet, which we did not really discover until modern times, but here it is in scripture, Ecclesiastes 1:6. But what is the message? The message is the wind continues, and continues, and continues—but you don't. You come and you go and do not return!

**The Water Endlessly Cycles.** In verse 7 we are told,

**All the rivers flow into the sea,  
Yet the sea is not full.**

**To the place where the rivers flow,  
There they flow again. Ecclesiastes 1:7 (NASB)**

Again, here is the knowledge of what we call the hydrological cycle or the water cycle. This was not known until modern times, but here it is in Ecclesiastes 1:7. What is the message? The water is just like the sun which rises and sets. The water is just like the wind which blows around. The water flows into the sea, then evaporates, falls to the ground as rain, flows into the rivers and in the seas and evaporates once again. It cycles and cycles. But you don't. We come and we go!

**All Things Are Wearisome.** In verse 8 Solomon says,

**All things are  
wearisome;  
Man is not able to  
tell it. Ecclesiastes  
1:8a (NASB)**



The message is you do not stop to think about the weariness of life. You are so busy getting up, getting to work, then doing the work, going back home,

getting your meal, getting back to bed, watching some TV or listening to the radio, or reading a book that you do not stop long enough to think about what is life all about.

The second part of the verse says,

**The eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
Nor is the ear filled with hearing. Ecclesiastes 1:8b  
(NASB)**

The message is that you see something new and you want more. You look and you want more. You are never satisfied. You keep wanting to see something new—or the same things again and again.

When is the last time that you listened to a piece of music and thought, “Oh, I do not need to listen to any more music for the rest of my life.” This verse says, no, that is not true. You are going to want to hear music again, and again and again. The message is life is on a wearisome cycle.

It is like cleaning the house or doing the laundry. Just imagine if you vacuumed the house ten years ago, and you have not done it since because you did not need to do so. Wow! That would be fantastic! Or, imagine if you could wash the dishes and not need to wash them again. The truth is you have to vacuum the house again and again. You have to do the dishes again and again. But the message is you follow this routine day after day, repeating it again and again. When you finally die and disappear, what was the advantage in doing all those things again, and again? Solomon says life is wearisome and we do not stop long enough to think about it.

Verse 9 continues with the repetitiveness of life,

**That which has been is that which will be,  
And that which has been done is that which will be done.  
So there is nothing new under the sun. Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NASB)**

Solomon is just reviewing that life is repetitive. We keep doing the same things over again. The psychologist William Marston said this, “Ninety-four percent of people are simply enduring the present while waiting for the future.” They are waiting for something to happen: waiting for children to grow up and leave home, waiting for next year, waiting to take a long dreamed-about trip, or waiting for tomorrow. Psychologists have taken surveys, performed studies, and determined that most people make it through life by hoping for something better in the future. They have their focus on the future.

In the pages of scripture, God tells us that there is a millennial kingdom when Jesus returns. When you die you will go to heaven, if you are a Christian. God keeps giving us hope because life in this world is miserable at times and always wearisome. When you die you leave what you accomplished

behind. What is the purpose in life? Why are you here? What are you accomplishing?

**Is There anything new?** Verse 10 adds this,

**Is there anything of which one might say,  
“See this, it is new”?  
Already it has existed for ages  
Which were before us. Ecclesiastes 1:10 (NASB)**

The word for “new” in the Hebrew does not mean “new” in the way we think about something being new. The word has the idea of something fresh, that has not existed before. We need to understand this when he says “new.” He is talking about the fact there is nothing brand new, because everything that we think is new today is actually built on something that has already existed. Everything is built on something else. There is nothing that we can say is really new, that has not already existed.

The message is: if you are going to take pride in being creative and thinking you accomplished something new, it is not true. Solomon’s message is that is not true. You cannot say that you have invented anything that is really new. Everything is built on something else that someone has done in the past.

**There Is No Memory of You.** Verse 11 is maybe the most discouraging of all,

**There is no remembrance of earlier things;  
And also of the later things which will occur,  
There will be for them no remembrance  
Among those who will come later still. Ecclesiastes 1:11 (NASB)**

The meaning of the Hebrew word that is translated as “remembrance” is not remember. A better translation of the Hebrew word is “memorial.” What he is really saying is that there will not be any memorials to individuals for very long. There is a memorial when you die, but soon others stop remembering you. Eventually any fixed memorial will be destroyed and disappear.

What do you think about? You labor, you toil and you try

to accomplish something new and hope people will remember you. Verse 11 says that is fleeting. Perhaps your legacy will linger for awhile, but later you will not be remembered. André Marius writes this:

The universe is indifferent. Why are we here upon this puny heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I'm quite convinced that no one else has the slightest idea"—and we could add the word "either." Nobody else does either.

He is been talking about life under the sun.

**Conclusion.** Do you think Solomon proved his point? He said "empty of empties, life is nothing but a soap bubble." Life is empty. You go through life, toil and do many things over and over again. When you get done, what have you accomplished? Nothing!

Now watch this: He was the richest man. He was a king. He could spend, buy and obtain whatever he wanted. This was his conclusion. So, if you think having power and money will bring joy to your life and let you accomplish something, Solomon says that will not happen. He has been there and he has done that.

We will conclude with 1 Corinthians 15:58. I want to show you what is true. Solomon has been talking about what is true under the sun here on planet earth for us in all of our toil. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, we are reminded of what is permanent and what does count. It says,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NASB)

This does not sound like Ecclesiastes. The reason is that Ecclesiastes is for the man who is living on planet earth trying to get whatever he can. The man under the sun here on planet earth is not focused on God. He is focused on himself. But 1 Corinthians 15:58 has a spiritual focus. It says, "Always abounding in the work of the Lord"! That is what is not vain or empty. Everything else is vain and empty and

counts for nothing!

When I discovered this truth, I told God, "I want my life to count for something." I told the Lord, "I'm giving my life to you. What I do is for you." In Philippians 1:21-22, Paul writes these words,

For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh . . . Philippians 1:21-22 (NASB)

I want to change the words and say, "If I am to live life under the sun this will be fruitful labor for me . . ." Why is ministry labor fruitful for us? Because we are living for Christ. So, Solomon says that life is nothing but a big fat zero unless you are committed to the cause of Christ, unless your labor is for God, unless you are serving the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. Amen!



