

DECONSTRUCTING LIFE UNDER THE SUN

Part 4 - Deconstructing Experience

INTRO

- What was the craziest or strangest dish you've every tried in your life? Would you have it again?

READ

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 and 12:13-14

If you ask people what is a "good life", a very common answer will be something like a life full of good experiences. These experiences can be pleasures, adventures, romances, achievements, or simply an easy and fun life. And the more aware we are of the experiences we are *not* having, the greater the feeling that we're missing out on having a great life.

In Ecclesiastes, the Teacher wants to challenge this understanding of what makes life good and fulfilling. He wants to warn us that even if you could have all these experiences, you'd still feel that life was empty and meaningless. But he doesn't want us to simply trust his authority, he shows us throughout the book why experience is never enough.

REFLECT

1. Why experience is not enough

First, he shows us that for life to be meaningful and fulfilling, we need to make some sense of it, to be able to explain how we got here and where we go from here. But life experiences, as good as they may be, never answer these questions. They are only able to put them aside.

Second, the Teacher also reminds us that we need to make some difference in the world or people around us for life to matter. But when experiences are all about what we get out of life, we can end up concluding that nothing we did ever mattered.

Finally, we are creatures of time. We live *with* the past, *in* the present, and *for* the future. As long as

we are at odds with our past and anxious about the future, we can never fully enjoy the present, doesn't matter how good it is.

2. What can make life "good"

At the end of the book, the Teacher reminds us that we can only find meaning and satisfaction in life when we remember the true story of who we are and who God is.

Throughout the Bible, we are shown what the true story is. That God made the world good, that we rebelled against his good plans for us, that he has brought salvation through Jesus Christ, and that he is renewing all Creation, culminating in an eternal life with him. When we live according to the truth, in trust and obedience to his will, life makes sense, our lives matter, and all our experiences are redeemed and enriched.

In summary, we live well when we know what is God's will for our lives, live obediently to his call, and enjoy his many gifts in gratitude

Qu: If you could have everything in life, what kind of life would you want to have?

Qu: When famous and successful people warn us that they still feel miserable, how do you react?

Qu: Why is it important to live according to the true story that God has revealed to us?

Qu: In light of the discussion, what is a healthy relationship towards good life experiences?

RESPOND & PRAY

- What encouraged/challenged you the most from this discussion?
- Spend time praying for one another and those you know who need to hear the good news of salvation.

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SIX KEY IDEAS TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ECCLESIASTES

The book of Ecclesiastes can be difficult to interpret because it is so different from the other books in the Bible. Its unique style needs some explanation before we can begin making sense of it. We hope these six ideas will help you unlock many of the lessons we can learn from the book.

1 - Ecclesiastes is a speech by *Qohelet* (the Teacher) about the meaning of life.

The book has two “authors”. One is a speaker in an assembly (He is called *Qohelet* in the original Hebrew, usually translated as the Teacher or the Speaker). His purpose is to talk about how we can make sense of life’s meaning. The other author is an editor who wrote down the Teacher’s speech and also wrote a brief prologue (1:1) and an epilogue (12:9-14) to the book.

2 - The book is not an explanation, but an *exploration* of what gives life meaning.

Rather than just answering the question of life’s meaning, the Teacher goes on a journey to explore how we try to make sense of life. His journey is a winding road full of dead ends and it’s not before the book’s conclusion that we hear what he believes about the matter.

3 - The book is about understanding earthly life (under the sun) from an entirely earthly perspective.

The Teacher’s method is to analyze only what we can see happening on earth (under the sun), and he limits himself to what we can experience and reason for ourselves. This point is really important for making sense of why the Teacher can’t find any meaning in life in his exploration. In other words, the Teacher intends to show that we can’t make sense of life if we limit our scope and our methods to what is only “earthly”.

Part 4 - Deconstructing Experience

4 - Life under the sun is *hevel*: a mysterious, formless, short-lived, mist or vapour.

The way the Teacher makes this point is to call everything in life *hevel* – a Hebrew word that means vapour, mist, or breath. By that, he means that earthly life is fragile, short-lived, and hard to make sense of. Many translations of *hevel* have been *vanity*, *meaningless*, or even *mysterious*.

5 - The conclusion: there is more to life than what we see “under the sun”. We know that what we do matters because we’ll be judged for it. And it is possible to make sense of life because God created us on purpose and with a purpose.

By the end of the book, the Teacher concludes that his earthly method only resulted in vanity or meaninglessness. But then he reminds us that there is more to what we see under the sun. We were made by God and will be judged by Him. That changes everything. Since we were made by God, there is some sense we can make of things. And since our actions will be judged by God, it must mean that they are not meaningless. Our actions make a difference, so much so that God holds us accountable for them.

6 - Ecclesiastes is not all that God wants to tell us.

Finally, the Teacher only hints at the beginning of an answer to the question about life’s meaning. God has revealed a lot more about life’s meaning than what we find in Ecclesiastes. Most important of all, through Jesus Christ he made a way for us to be forgiven and for life under the sun to be forever transformed. Because Christ took upon himself the guilt for our sins, we can confidently face God’s judgment. And because of the resurrection, we know that life will be forever transformed and not be merely *hevel*. As we explore this amazing book, let us always allow our minds and hearts to drift back to Christ.