



Trial and Error

Open it

1. If you only had 24 hours to live what would you do?

Daily Devotions

Day 1 — Today's Theme: Explore It

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12–26.

2. What was “the Preacher’s” quest or goal to accomplish?
3. What kinds of things did he pursue to accomplish his goal?
4. What were some of the shortcomings of his pursuit of wisdom and living a life of wisdom?
5. What were some of the shortcomings of his pursuit of self-accomplishment and achievements?

Day 2 — Today's Theme: The View From 30,000 Feet

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12–18.

Solomon sets out on a noble quest. Well, that's not exactly the term he used for it. He called it "unhappy business." His goal was to search out, in essence, the meaning of life. What is it that humanity can do or accomplish that will satisfy the longings of the human heart in this life?

His quest takes him on an adventure to explore all the avenues that humanity uses to try to achieve happiness and fulfillment in life—and each of the things he explores he concludes is a sort of "bubble" that humanity uses to hide from one glaring and painful reality: death.

Last year I was flying out West from Chicago and after we took off and started heading out, I looked out the plane window and was able to identify places that I knew. It was pretty neat seeing all the places where I normally live my life from the air. It was pretty wild how close some things seemed from 30,000 feet instead of on ground level. It was a totally different perspective!

Solomon had the same idea. If we are going to examine this life and find out what is truly important and what truly holds value, we have to step back and look at life from the 30,000-foot view by considering our own mortality. Now, I know that for us young people, thinking about the fact that one day we are going to die seems far off. It's hard to think of that. But death is the needle that Solomon uses to pop the bubbles where we tend to hide and pretend like we don't have to deal with death.

But one pastor once said, "The only person who is prepared to live is the person who is prepared to die."

6. Take a second to think about your own mortality. What are some of your first thoughts?

7. Look up Psalm 39:4–6. How should the perspective of death influence how you live your life "today"?

8. How do you want people to remember you someday when you're gone? What are you doing today to build that legacy?

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Work Hard, Fall Hard

Read Ecclesiastes 2:1–11, 18–23.

As Solomon sets out on his journey to discover “the meaning of life” he starts by indulging himself in all kinds of pleasures. Surely, if anything is going to bring happiness in life, it’s going to be the things we enjoy, right? As it turns out, wrong.

Solomon was a man of immense resources (he was a king... so yeah), so he could basically get whatever he wanted. He wanted a new Xbox? Done. Wanted a car? Got all the bells and whistles. Go on a trip? Traveled first class and stayed at the nicest hotels. He did it all.

Solomon “kept his heart from no pleasure.” If he saw it and wanted it, he got it.

At the end of the day, all those achievements and all that stuff didn’t deliver. See, the problem with pleasure is it leaves you wanting more. Pleasure promises happiness and contentment, “If I only had ___ then I’d be totally good,” but then you get there and you just want more. So his conclusion is “there was nothing to be gained.” Trial and error!

So is life really all just about having fun and getting a bunch of cool stuff? Or is there something more?



9. Solomon longed to find lasting value and happiness but couldn't find it. What things seem to promise happiness in your life right now?

10. How would you define success?

Day 4 — Today's Theme: Wise as an Owl

Read Ecclesiastes 2:12–17.

If pleasure doesn't cut it then how can you go wrong with wisdom, right? So Solomon gave being wise and being straight up foolish a shot. And what did he learn? Well, yeah, it is better to be wise. Seems like it generally saves you from a bunch of unnecessary trouble in life.

BUT!!! What does wisdom gain you in the end? Six feet deep and pushing up daisies. As Solomon looks from that 30,000-foot view, he says, "Wait a second. What's the bother with working so hard to be wise if at the end of the day both the wise man and the fool are both gonna die? In the end it doesn't really gain you anything at all!"

Just something to chew on...

- 11. What good is it to be wise if at the end of the day everyone is going to die anyway? What does this mean about wisdom?**

Day 5 — Today's Theme: Who Cares? God Cares. Should I Care?

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24–26.

So what then? If success, pleasure, accumulating wealth and possessions, and wisdom all fail to deliver, what then? What's the conclusion?

Throughout the rest of this book, we're going to unpack all of these things much more as Solomon wrestles with all of this with pen to paper. But for now, he leaves us with this...

Not everything is all morbid and sad about this. Just because none of these things deliver lasting meaning and value and will all leave us coming back for more, he does include this tidbit of good news in here, like a glimmer of shining light in the darkness: *"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, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?"*

"Solomon is not advocating 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!' That is the philosophy of fatalism, not faith. Rather, he is saying, 'Thank God for what you do have, and enjoy it to the glory of God.' Paul gave his approval to this attitude when he exhorted us to trust *"in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Tim. 6:17 NKJV)... It is not enough to possess "things"; we must also possess the kind of character that enables us to use "things" wisely and enjoy them properly."¹

12. How might living in a culture that promotes all these fleeting things create challenges for you to "keep the main thing the main thing"? What are some ways that your small group members could support each other in this?

13. What kind of character do you think "enables us to use 'things' wisely and enjoy them properly"?

¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Satisfied (Ecclesiastes): Looking for the Answer to the Meaning of Life (p. 46). Kindle Edition. Note: This study was written by Pastor Jeremy Anderson. www.villagebible.church/students.