



How to Enjoy the Good Life

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

The spirit of what the Preacher says about the pleasures of wine, women, and work is captured well by Eugene Peterson's loose paraphrase in *The Message*:

Seize life! Eat bread with gusto, Drink wine with a robust heart.
 Oh yes – God takes pleasure in your pleasure!
 Dress festively every morning.
 Don't skimp on colors and scarves.
 Relish life with the spouse you love
 Each and every day of your precarious life.
 Each day is God's gift. It's all you get in exchange
 For the hard work of staying alive.
 Make the most of each one!
 Whatever turns up, grab it and do it! And heartily! (Ecclesiastes 9:7–10)

There are millions of ways to apply this passage, with its call to Christian hedonism. This is a beautiful, bountiful world, and we were designed to enjoy its pleasures. So make the most of every day. This week I have tasted some of the little joys of life (most of them free): a warm piece of cornbread, fresh from the oven; the sight of two hawks soaring high over the city on their daily hunt; an evening with friends; shooting baskets and playing catch with my sons; a good strong hug from each of my three daughters. To have these joys is to know my Father's grace.

But there is also a deadly spiritual danger in the pursuit of pleasure. We may get so distracted by earthly pleasures that we lose our passion for God. How tempting it is to worship the gift and forget the Giver!¹

Open It

1. If time stopped for 12 hours for a guilt-free day of recreation, how would you enjoy those hours?

¹ Ryken, Philip Graham. *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters (Preaching the Word)*. Article: *The Good Life (Ecclesiastes 9:7–10)*. Crossway, 2010.

Read It

Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

Explore It

2. **Where do the righteous and the wise and their deeds reside? (v. 1)**
3. **What can be found in the hearts of people before they die? (v. 3)**
4. **Which emotions should accompany our eating and drinking? Why? (v. 7)**
5. **What two factors make the outcome of life unpredictable? (v. 11)**
6. **Wisdom is better than what three things? (vv. 16-18)**

Apply It

What Death Teaches Us about Life

The British preacher and evangelist David Watson tells about a medical student who came to see him after dissecting his first cadaver. The student was deeply shaken by the experience, because as he cut through muscle and other tissue to expose the body's internal organs, he said to himself, "If this is all that we become at death, what is the point of anything?"

To answer this question, we need to look beyond this chapter to the end of the book, where the Scripture says that this life is not the only life there is. Ecclesiastes 9 tells us about life "under the sun," which raises the possibility of some other kind of life, in some other place. When we get to chapter 12, we discover that there is also a life above, where "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (v. 7), and a life to come, when "God will bring every deed into judgment" (v. 14).²

7. **Have you ever had your perspective change after the death of a loved one? Write down what occurred to you in that season.**

² Ryken, Philip Graham. *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters (Preaching the Word)*. Article: The Living and the Dead (Ecclesiastes 8:16–9:6). Crossway, 2010.

8. **What eternal perspective about death can we gain from John 14:1-6?**

9. **Life is about more than just what happens “under the sun.” How have you stored up treasures in heaven? Are there any changes you’d like to make in the future?**

What Enjoyment Teaches Us about Life

In Ecclesiastes 9:7–10, immediately after another reminder that everything done under the sun will come to an end for each of us, the Teacher gives us a command: “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do” (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

Death does not just destroy. It urges us to sketch life and light on the canvas of our lives while we can. “Let your garments be always white. . . . Enjoy life with the wife whom you love” (Ecclesiastes 9:8–9).³

10. **What are some of the biggest and best ways you like to have a good time on vacations, weekends, or evenings?**

³ Gibson, David. Let Death Teach You How to Live. Desiring God. 2018. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/let-death-teach-you-how-to-live>

11. How can the people of our church properly treat the fun parts of life like God's good gifts to us?

12. What do the following verses show us about God's gift of enjoyment and pleasure?

Proverbs 17:22

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Luke 7:33-34

The logic here is that death loosens my grip on God's gifts, as if they were ever mine by right, and instead frees me to see his world for what it is: the lavish endowment to wayward creatures of abundant good things we do not deserve. Death frees me to enjoy things for what they are, rather than what I want them to be. Creation is there to be enjoyed and lingered over, not plundered for my gain or manipulated for my fame.

Food and drink, love and sex, work and beauty — these things become even more enjoyable when we paint them into our lives, knowing one day they will pass. Try and hold on to them, or worship them, and we will find we are chasing the wind with only fistfuls of mist to show for all our effort.⁴

13. What would you say to someone who is convinced God wants Christians to experience misery and struggle all the time?

14. What would you say to someone who is convinced God wants Christians to experience comfort and pleasure all the time?

⁴ Ibid.

What Wisdom Teaches Us about Life

Ecclesiastes mainly looks at things from the perspective of human wisdom, which is valuable as far as it goes. But there is also a divine wisdom, which alone can save us. The Bible says that the foolishness of God, so to speak, is wiser than the wisdom of men (1 Corinthians 1:25). The point is not that God is foolish, of course, but that if he were, even his foolishness would be wiser than all our wisdom. If we want to be wise, therefore, we need the wisdom of God. The way to get that wisdom is simply to ask God for it. "If any of you lacks wisdom," the Scripture says, "let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). The primary way that God answers our prayer for wisdom is by giving us his Son, Jesus Christ, whom the Bible identifies as the very wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:30)...

All of this helps us to know how to handle life's setbacks and live with life's uncertainties. A practical, down-to-earth example comes from a missionary partner serving in the Muslim Middle East. Her family had been going through hard times, but she knew how to handle them wisely. In a letter to her supporters back home, she listed some of those hardships. But she also listed, right next to them, a better and wiser way of looking at each circumstance:

Deep spiritual oppression and harassment //
Privileged to shine as stars in this inky black night

Mail, packages, and a wallet stolen, phone tapped //
Great reminders that our lives are not our own

No longer do we have the convenience of a car //
No longer do we have the expense of a car

Very dangerous driving conditions and traffic //
A good public transportation system to use

Tight and challenging times facing us now //
Many opportunities to prayerfully trust Him

Mud-colored tap water flows from our faucets //
Sparkling, life-giving water flows from our lives

Many aggressive viruses and lingering illnesses //
Truly thankful spirits for His healing touch

A cold apartment when you have the flu //
Hot drinks, blankets, massages and prayers that
warm us up ⁵

15. Wisdom from God is powerful because it allows us to see with God's eyes. Write down a personal hardship and a "better and wiser way of looking at each circumstance" like the examples above.

16. Choose one area of your life where you need wisdom and write a prayer asking God to give you divine wisdom so you can make a difference, just like the poor, wise man from Ecclesiastes 9:15.

⁵ Ryken, Philip Graham. Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters (Preaching the Word). Article: Man Knows Not His Time (Ecclesiastes 9:11-18). Crossway, 2010.

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