

IS *Life* MEANINGFUL OR MEANINGLESS?

THE SKEPTIC'S GUIDE TO LIFE WITH GOD: ECCLESIASTES · ECCLESIASTES 1 · JANUARY 7, 2024 · PASTOR MATT ERICKSON

"I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind." (Ecclesiastes 1:14)

Background on Ecclesiastes

- The type of literature Ecclesiastes is
- The author of Ecclesiastes
- The framing of Ecclesiastes
- The searching of Ecclesiastes

Is Life Meaningless? (Ecclesiastes 1:2-11)

The meaning of *hebel*:

- literally: "vapor" or "breath"
- figuratively: "meaningless," "empty," "fleeting," or "vanity"

A series of considerations of what can seem meaningless or fleeting:

- Toil and the weariness that comes from it
- The rise and fall of generations
- Longing for more (greed)
- Things come and go
- Being forgotten after death
- Examples of life's brevity even in nature

Creating or Discovering Meaning (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18)

Searching for knowledge and wisdom can feel meaningless

The difference between creating meaning and discovering meaning

Discovering the One who holds meaning (John 1:1-5)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. First, what things give you a sense of meaning in your life? Next, are there ever things that make you feel like life is meaningless?
2. This week we begin a new preaching series entitled "The Skeptic's Guide to Life with God" based in the book of Ecclesiastes. Whether you are on your own or with others, begin your study in prayer, asking God to speak to you, and then read Ecclesiastes chapter 1 aloud.

3. *Background: Of the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible—Torah (Law or Teaching), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings), Ecclesiastes falls into that last grouping. Ecclesiastes is biblical wisdom literature, which also includes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Songs. The book is one of the most unique in the Bible, offering a sort of skeptical counterpoint to straight-ahead guidance offered in books like Proverbs. Chapter 1, verse 1, lists the work's author as "Qohelet," which could be a name or a title. As a title, it likely means teacher (as in the NIV) or assembler (as in assembling people). While there is a tradition associating King Solomon, son of David, with Qohelet, this has come into question for various reasons, including that Solomon is nowhere referenced in the text.*
4. Verse 2 introduces a theme of this chapter that continues into other parts of the book. Why do you think the writer might begin the book in this way?
5. As you read through verses 3-11, we encounter a wide variety of situations and things that move the author toward feeling that everything is meaningless. Which of these stand out to you? Do you agree with the author or not?
6. This theme might make Ecclesiastes seem like a strange book for the Bible or to study. Why might it be helpful or good for us to have these words in Scripture?
7. As you read verses 12-18, one phrase recurs: "a chasing after the wind." What do you think that means?
8. Read John 1:1-5. How might Jesus as "the word" (logos in Greek could refer also to truth and ordering structure of all reality) bring meaning into the world?
9. What has God been speaking to you about through this study? If you are with a small group, discuss that with one another and then pray about what you shared. If you are on your own, write it down, pray about it, and share this with someone during the next few days.

DIG DEEPER This week dig deeper in one or more of the following ways:

- Consider reading through the book of Ecclesiastes in one sitting to get a sense of what the entire flow of the book is about.
- As we approach this series, what are some of your biggest questions about life, God, and life with God? Maybe you could write them down and discuss them with others.
- Explore some of the following resources:
 - Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*
 - The Bible Project Guide to the Book of Ecclesiastes:
bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-ecclesiastes/