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# **“Chasing After The Wind”**

## **Seeking Fulfillment In Pleasure and Productivity**

### **ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11; 18-26**

#### **Introduction**

1. Last week, we followed Solomon’s quest for the meaning of life as he examined wisdom.
2. His conclusion: “All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:17, NIV84).
3. Tonight, we are going to look at verses 1-11 and 18-26 of Ecclesiastes two, where we find Solomon taking another path in his search for meaning in life:
  - a. Verses 1-11 are an examination of a life of pleasure.
  - b. Verses 18-26 focus on the fruits of our labor.
4. In both sections we find Solomon’s conclusions to be much the same as they were in his examination of wisdom.
5. Of pleasure, Solomon began by saying to himself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself,” **but then concluding** , “And behold, it too was futility” (v. 1).
6. Of the fruit of his labors, He states, “I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun” (v. 18).
7. As he explains his reasons for this hatred, he keeps saying, “This too is vanity” (vv. 19, 21, 23, 26).
8. Tonight, let’s look at what Solomon learned as he continued his search for that which brings meaning and fulfillment to life, and why he made these comments.

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## I. The Futility of Pleasure

### A. WINE AND LAUGHTER

“I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.” (Ecclesiastes 2:2–3, NASB95)

1. You and I can only imagine the entertainment and the pleasures which Solomon provided for himself:
  - a. “I provided for myself male and female singers” (v. 8b).
  - b. “I provided for myself . . . the pleasures of men — many concubines” (v. 8b).
2. First Kings 4:22-23, we read of the choice food which Solomon enjoyed every day, while 1 Kings 10:21 indicates all his drinking vessels were of gold.
3. He no doubt enjoyed the best wines with which “to stimulate [his] body” (v. 2).
4. Don’t you know that laughter could be heard throughout his banquet hall during the different festivities, but when the party was over, and he examined his heart, Solomon still found himself dissatisfied and empty.
5. In Proverbs 14:13, it was Solomon who said, “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief” (ESV).
6. Many years after Solomon, a Greek philosopher named Epicurus taught that we could attain happiness through the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure.

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7. Solomon could have told him that the person who builds his or her life only

on seeking pleasure is bound to be disappointed in the end. Why?

- a. The search for pleasure usually results from selfishness, and selfishness destroys true joy.
  - 1) People who live for pleasure often use others to get what they want.
  - 2) The end result — broken relationships and empty hearts.
  - 3) We must realize and pass on to the generations behind us — “people are more important than things or thrills”<sup>1</sup>
  - 4) God intended for us to share His pleasures with others. Only as we do this, do we find true joy.

**3a**

- b. When we live for pleasure alone, we must constantly increase the intensity of the pleasure, or our enjoyment of it will decrease.
  - 1) Eventually, you reach the point of diminishing returns when the amount of enjoyment becomes less and less until there is none.
  - 2) This is true of alcohol, drugs, gambling, sexual sin or any other pursuit whose sole purpose is to provide pleasure.
  - 3) When pleasure alone becomes the central focus of our lives, we ultimately find ourselves empty and alone.

**3b**

- c. Pleasure appeals only to a part of who we are as a person and not to our total being.
  - 1) There is a difference between entertainment and enjoyment.
  - 2) While entertainment has its place, it only helps us escape life momentarily.
  - 3) God designed us for enjoyment and enrichment, which not only brings delight to our hearts, but builds character as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, (Victor Books: Colorado Springs, CO, 1990) p. 34.

## **B. ACQUISITION & PRESTIGE**

1. In verses 4-8, Solomon described the various things in which he engaged himself:

“I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;

“I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;

“I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.

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“I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.

“Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.” (Ecclesiastes 2:4–8, NASB95)

2. In each of these, Solomon tried to find something that would give his life ultimate meaning and purpose:
  - a. Great works (vv. 4-6)
    - 1) “houses (1 Kings 7:1-12), vineyards” (v. 4)
    - 2) “gardens and parks, all kinds of fruit trees” (v. 5)
    - 3) “ponds of water . . . from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees” (v. 6)
  - b. Workers (v. 7a)
    - 1) Two kinds of slaves.
    - 2) Those he purchased and those born in his household
  - c. Wealth (vv. 7b-8)
    - 1) “flocks and herds larger than all who preceded [him] in Jerusalem” (v.

7b).

2) “silver and gold” (v. 8a)

“The king made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem” (1 Kings 10:27).

3. In all of this activity, there are two things which stand out:
- The person accomplishing these things: “I enlarged, I planted, I made, I bought, I possessed, I collected, I provided”
  - The person who benefitted from them: “for myself”

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4. In verses 9-10, Solomon provides us with a brief summary of the process he has just described in verses 2-8:

“Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.” (Ecclesiastes 2:9–10, NASB95)

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5. But what is his conclusion?

“Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:11, NASB95).

“Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:11, NIV84)

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## **II. The Futility Of Wealth**

## **A. WE CAN'T KEEP IT**

“Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.” (Ecclesiastes 2:18, NASB95)

1. Solomon knew the day would come when he would die and leave all he had acquired to his successor.
2. Solomon’s father, David, penned these words which we find in Psalm 39:6, “Certainly, man walks about like a mere shadow. Indeed, they frantically rush around in vain, gathering possessions without knowing who will get them.” (Psalm 39:6, HCSB)
3. In his parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus told of a farmer who had such a bumper crop one year that he decided to tear down his barns and build larger ones in which to store it.
  - a. He said to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry” (Luke 12:19, NASB95).
  - b. No sooner had he spoken these words than God spoke to him and said, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?” (Luke 12:20, NASB95).
4. In 1 Timothy 6:7-10, the apostle Paul had this to say to Timothy,

“For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Timothy 6:7–10, NASB95)

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**B. WE CAN'T PROTECT IT**

“And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:19–20, NASB95)

1. Solomon also knew that he had no control over how his wealth would be utilized after his death.
2. His successor could waste everything for which he had so diligently worked.
3. For this reason, Solomon said that he “completely despaired of all the fruit of [his] labor for which he had labored under the sun” (v. 20).
4. That is exactly what happened. Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, inherited the kingdom over which his father had labored for 40 years.
4. In a short while his abuse of his power resulted in a division within the kingdom which was never healed (1 Kings 11:41-12:24).
5. Cornelius Vanderbilt built a fortune on railroads and shipping in the mid-1800s.
6. In today’s dollars, his net worth would have been worth over \$200 billion.
7. However, his children — and especially, his grandchildren — lived lavish lives, building large mansions in New York City, Newport, R.I., Asheville, N.C. and elsewhere.
8. Of the 120 family members attending a family reunion in the 1970s, there wasn’t a single millionaire among them.

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**C. WE CAN'T ENJOY IT AS WE SHOULD**

“When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. For what does a man get in all his labor and in his

striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.”  
(Ecclesiastes 2:21–23, NASB95)

1. Solomon saw himself as someone who had labored “with wisdom, knowledge and skill” building “a legacy,” but that he would have to leave all of his wealth to someone who had not worked for it.
2. He asks, what is the reward for someone who has put in such long and difficult days, not to mention sleepless nights in the process.
3. The one to whom the inheritance is left did not have to do work for it and so, does not appreciate it.
4. This too, he says, “is vanity” (meaningless, futile, v. 23).

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#### **D. SO WHAT ARE WE TO DO?**

“There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God’s sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.”  
(Ecclesiastes 2:24–26, NASB95)

1. What is it that Solomon is telling us to do? It is this. You and I should thank God for all that we have, and enjoy it to His glory.
2. In 1 Timothy 6:17, the apostle Paul instructs us to fix our hope “on God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”
3. Solomon asked a question, “For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him [God]?” (Ecclesiastes 2:25, NASB95).
4. He knew that it is God who gives us “wisdom and knowledge and joy” so that we might not only appreciate the blessings which God gives, but that

we might also enjoy them properly.

5. There is one last detail which Solomon includes for us here.
6. It is that God allows “the sinner” to amass all kinds of wealth, but never truly enjoy it because he has left God out of his life.
7. Ultimately, his riches go “to the one who is good in God’s sight” (v. 26).
8. Though this is not always the case, Solomon did write in Proverbs 13:22 that “the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.”
9. When the Israelites left Egypt, God told them to ask their Egyptian neighbors for “articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing” (Exodus 3:22), which they did.

## **Conclusion**

1. Are you enjoying the life which God has given you, or are you chasing the wind?
2. Are you laying up treasure in heaven, or here on earth?
3. Is your hope fixed on God who richly supplies you with all things to enjoy?
4. Tonight, I want to encourage each of you to seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness first in your life (Matthew 6:33).
5. Keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1).
6. If you are chasing the wind, stop.
7. Turn to God in obedient faith, confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior, let Him wash away your sins.
8. Begin tonight building wealth that is eternal.