

## Chasing After Bubbles & Chickens

### Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 4

*Ecclesiastes 1:12-15*

### Discussion Guide

#### Main Idea:

Life isn't about chasing after bubbles or trying to catch that elusive chicken. It isn't about living like some silly legendary frog hoping that maybe fate will deal you a better hand. No, life is about living down here under the sun surrounded by a broken world, where you can't solve every dilemma but you obey and trust and follow your Lord, one assignment at a time.

#### Discussion Points:

It seems that Solomon, in *Ecclesiastes*, makes the claim that our occupation is an unfulfilling assignment from God.

- How does statement frustrate or encourage you in your view of life and work? In what ways does this draw a parallel to Adam and Eve in Genesis?
- What are some ways that the world seems restless and unsatisfied with life and work?
- How does knowing that your potentially unfulfilling occupation is part of God's plan affect your attitudes and purpose regarding what you are currently working at or striving for in your daily life?

Solomon also asserts that satisfaction is an unreachable achievement for mankind.

- How could this knowledge impact your life 'under the sun', as well as your spiritual life?
- In what ways is this truth reflected in the world's decisions and direction?
- Where does scripture say satisfaction and contentment come from? List some verses.

## **Discussion Guide Cont.**

Two conclusions can be drawn in this passage. No matter how hard you try, there are dilemmas you can't straighten out, and no matter how much you have, there are deficiencies you cannot provide.

- What are some ways that the world seems to have enough of the wisdom of man, even without God, to identify the problem of sin?
- Though these conclusions seem depressing, how does a life with Christ help fashion a perspective that can change 'depressing' into 'encouraging'?
- How can these two conclusions encourage the world to seek after God and a hope for life on earth now?

**Gospel Connection** (Taken directly from the sermon, *Chasing after Bubbles & Chickens*):

We know from history what Solomon only knew through prophecy.

- The Redeemer will arrive on schedule and be born under the sun with us.
- Jesus will toil and sweat under the sun.
- Jesus will get hungry, thirsty, and tired and even pay his taxes under the sun.
- Jesus will be unappreciated and abused, maligned and accused under the sun.
- And Jesus will be crucified, and He will die under the sun. But in His suffering under the sun, He will save us from our sin.

Jesus not only died and rose again...

He now offers to supply what we can never come up with. We will always be deficient for the day; we will always be lacking and needy. *But My God, Paul write, will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19). He can meet every one of our deficiencies with His rich deposit of daily mercy and grace.

We don't have a remedy for our fallen nature and our broken sinfulness; that's true, but Jesus offers us not only salvation but daily cleansing with His life-blood which *continually cleanses us from all sin*. It is a fountain that never, ever stops cleansing us and cleansing us and cleansing us from sin (1 John 1:7).

And in the meantime, for those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him alone for salvation, Jesus does something else; He gives us our assignments – and remember, they are at times an unhappy business – but God makes the difference by giving them divine purpose.

### **Practical Implications:**

**Think:** How does knowing truth about Christ encourage you while laboring in life 'under the sun'? Does this hearten you to share this good news with others who may not know there is hope?

**Pray:** Praise God for both designing unfulfilling assignments 'under the sun' to show us our need for Him and granting us a path to salvation and purpose in these days on earth.

**Do:** Focus on Christ and the purpose that He has given as you continue to work in the assignments God has specified.

## Chasing After Bubbles & Chickens

### Finding Meaning . . . Under the Sun, Part 4

*Ecclesiastes 1:12-15*

A fictional story is told of the frog who went to a fortune teller to find out his future. He wanted to know what was ahead for him. He wasn't happy with the way things were going and wanted to know if things were going to get better.

The fortune teller looked into her little crystal ball and then said to the frog, "Well, there is a beautiful young lady in your future, and she can't wait to meet you."

The frog gasped, "Really?"

The fortune teller replied, "Absolutely, in fact, she's fascinated by you. She can't wait to see you and, when you meet her, she's going to want to know everything about you." The frog could hardly believe his good fortune. "And that's not all," the fortune teller promised, "this beautiful young lady is going to pay incredible attention to everything about you."

The frog was so excited he could hardly breathe! He couldn't believe his wonderful future. He said, "When will I meet this young lady?"

The fortune teller answered, "Next semester, in Biology class."

We all want to know if life is going to get better and what our future holds.

Maybe you are thinking:

- If I could just meet the right person
- If I just resolve that one dilemma in my life
- If I had more money, my future would be bearable

- If I had more education, I'd have more opportunities and life would matter more
- If my health was better
- Or, if I had the right connections or a different background or a different family I'd be set up to experience the kind of future I'd find more purposeful, exciting, and fulfilling

Or perhaps you feel like you need all of the above to guarantee a future of happiness.

I saw someone wearing a T-shirt with the message on it in bold letters that read, "I want it all!"

They are under the impression that if they had something more – something different – their future would take a turn for the better.

Well take it from someone who didn't want it all – he actually had it all - and he came to the discovery that everything wasn't nearly enough. Turn back to the message of the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, written by Preacher Solomon.

Solomon now takes us from observation, observing the world of nature and human nature that he has directed us on a field trip to see, and shifts gears in this summary statement to the world of experimentation.

He is going to give us the details of his experiments in the chapters that follow, but for now he gives us a summary of what he spent much of his life doing.

Solomon introduces himself as a diligent explorer, then later, in our next session together, he will introduce himself as a dedicated student.

But for today, Solomon is a diligent explorer.

***I, the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.*** You could translate that, “I have been and still am the king over Israel”. Now notice: ***And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven*** (Ecclesiastes 1:12-13a).

***I applied my heart*** is another way of saying, “I devoted my life”, but to doing what? ***To seek***, which is the Hebrew verb for questioning and inquiring; and ***to search out***, which is the verb for exploring.

That same verb was used of the 12 Hebrew spies in Numbers chapter 13 who went out to spy out the land of Canaan to take a good look at the land, the topography, the people, and the military strength of the people of Canaan. These spies weren’t just casually walking around; they were deep into the land watching the people in the cities and the enemy armies, and they’re taking notes.

Solomon says, “I dedicated my life to get there on the streets of life. I didn’t write a term paper on life stuck in my ivory palace. I explored every nook and cranny of the human experience.” And throughout the rest of his journal he’s going to give us the sordid details.

You’ll notice in ***verse 13*** that Solomon says he is ***searching everything out by wisdom***. The Hebrew word for wisdom (hochma) is a broad term that demands context for the right nuance.<sup>i</sup> And in this context here, Solomon uses his own wisdom; he tries to figure out life without the wisdom of God. He is basically using his own observational skill set and the intuitive wisdom of man. Remember, his perspective is stuck under the sun; his insights are earth-bound.

In fact, the phrase here ***under heaven***, in ***verse 13*** is a parallel phrase to ***verse 14*** where Solomon writes,

***I have seen everything that is done under the sun*** (Ecclesiastes 1:14a).

***Under heaven*** and ***under the sun*** are saying the same thing. Solomon is exploring life from the perspective of fallen humanity living out their lives under the sun, all the while ignoring the Creator of the sun, the true and living God.

Now what Solomon observes about life in his exploration will be true, but the problem is that he doesn’t go far enough. He stops under the sun and never looks above the sun, until later on.

So what did Solomon discover as a dedicated explorer? He makes two discoveries in this exploration.

**Your occupation is an unfulfilling assignment from God.**

***And I applied my heart to see and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man*** – literally, the children of Adam – ***to be busy with*** (Ecclesiastes 1:13).

What’s life to you, Solomon? It’s an ***unhappy business***. You could render it - ***It’s an evil burden***. It is an unfulfilling list of duties and chores, evidently assigned for us by God.

Solomon may be hinting here at the fall of Adam and Eve after they rebelled and sinned against God and lost the Garden of Eden. And because sin entered the world, ***Genesis chapter 3*** informs us that the world became a broken place, including the emergence of weeds, thorns, pain, sweat, toil, and ultimately death.

Sin has made life an unhappy business.

That is why you can be burdened today with the treadmill of life:

- You work 9 to 5 forever and feel, at times, like you’re getting nowhere.
- You get to the end of your chore list and realize you have to start all over again.
- You weed that garden but then have to weed it all over again.
- You respond to that email and your inbox just fills up again.

There's a reason we call life a rat race. Although that means we are the rats stuck in a maze. And there is some truth to the idea of being stuck in a maze. Solomon has already informed us in *chapter 1* that the world seems to be tied to a treadmill.

If all you have is the wisdom of man and if all you can see is this brief life under the sun, then like Solomon, you are going to discover over and over again that your occupation in life is **an unrewarding assignment**.

Your job, your employment, your vocation, even your chore list doesn't seem to be all that rewarding, no matter how significant some of it might seem.

This was the conclusion of Leonard Woolf, the British publisher and political thinker, who wrote more than twenty books on literature, politics and economics. Born in 1880 and educated at Cambridge, his writings influenced the creation of the League of Nations and later the United Nations. He was awarded, quoted, acclaimed and applauded. But here's what he said at the end of his life:

I see clearly that I have achieved practically nothing. The world today and the history of the human anthill would be exactly the same as it is if I had played Ping-Pong instead of sitting on committees and writing books. I have therefore to make a confession that I must have, in a long life, ground through between 150,000 and 200,000 hours of perfectly useless work (Leonard Woolf—1880-1969).<sup>ii</sup>

Solomon would say, "Man, that's exactly what I'm talking about!" Your occupation is an unrewarding assignment, and it really doesn't seem to make any difference in the end.

Solomon the rather depressing explorer discovers the second raw truth that:

**Satisfaction is an unreachable achievement for mankind.**

*I have seen everything under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind* (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Now we have already discussed Solomon's use of the word, *vanity*, which means futility, brevity, emptiness, depending on the context. But Solomon now adds this new phrase – *striving after wind* – everything is, literally, "grasping after the wind".

You think you've caught something that's lasting? You just got a handful of air. You think you're getting somewhere in life? It'll vanish into thin air.

Like a little child chasing bubbles – you reach out to grab satisfaction and right when you think you have it, it disappears.<sup>iii</sup>

Solomon:

- was rich, powerful, creative, and famous.
- ate and drank only from plates and cups made of solid gold (*1 Kings 10:21*).
- made silver as common as gravel, (*1 Kings 10:27*).
- attracted world leaders who came to hear him lecture on everything from geology to anthropology.

Surely he has arrived with a lasting sense of satisfaction?

No. We are reading from his private journal he has now made public where he effectively says, "I was chasing after bubbles."

Striving after the wind.

Imagine after church returning to your car in the parking lot and finding a busload of people unloading out there and running around with nets.

You stop one of them and ask, "What in the world are you doing?"

He replies, "We're out here catching the wind."

What would you do? You would *not* invite him to church would you? No, you would probably run.

Would you ever think of saying, “Hey, you got a spare net? I want to join you; I’ve always wanted to catch the wind!”

Who would ever want to join the human race who have their nets out, trying to catch lasting satisfaction out of life under the sun without God?

One author wrote about a time when he and his family were eating lunch at one of those themed kid’s restaurants where TV’s were all over the walls playing cartoons without any sound. He said their youngest son was four years old and had never seen the Road Runner before. Wile E. Coyote – remember him? – did everything to catch that extremely fast Road Runner. Well, his son was just mesmerized as he watched this continuous loop of Road Runner cartoons as Wile E. Coyote strapped on rocket-propelled roller skates, shot himself out of a cannon, or got launched from a giant slingshot. After watching intently for quite a while – without even taking his eyes off the screen – he quietly said to us, “No matter what he does, he’s never going to catch that chicken.”<sup>iv</sup>

What Solomon does next is provide a proverb to summarize what he’s been observing.

***What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted***  
(Ecclesiastes 1:15).

Let me break this proverb down into two principles.

**1. No matter how hard you try, there are dilemmas you can’t straighten out.**

Now notice the first half of the proverb where Solomon writes, ***what is crooked cannot be made straight*** (Ecclesiastes 1:15a).

The Hebrew word for crooked is a metaphor for sin and moral brokenness.<sup>v</sup>

Solomon is observing a broken world, a broken human race, a broken bent toward sin, graft and greed and abuse and selfishness and

pride and murder and lying and immorality and on and on and on.

Solomon is observing that in a fallen world the children of Adam create, by means of sinful behavior, one dilemma after another that you can’t completely resolve. There’s something about the human race that is bent in the wrong direction. The Bible calls it Adam’s fallen nature. It’s bent; it’s fallen over.

And did you notice that the wisdom of man under the sun, even without God, can identify the problem of sin? We have courtrooms to prove that we can identify something crooked in our world.

We can put our finger on the problem of sin, but we cannot straighten out the sinner.<sup>vi</sup> And because of that, we happen to live in a world that we are unable to completely fix.

Solomon says, no matter how hard you try, there are dilemmas you cannot straighten out.

**2. No matter how much you have, there are deficiencies you cannot provide.**

Notice the last part of Ecclesiastes 1:15: ***And what is lacking cannot be counted.***

The words ‘lacking’ and ‘counted’ are financial terms. Egyptian texts from centuries ago have been discovered utilizing these terms in economic contexts.<sup>vii</sup>

No matter how much you have you will never come to the point where you believe you have enough for what might happen next. There is just not enough in your bank account. You can’t count on having enough.

And if you broaden this context, which I believe Solomon is doing, you will always find in *yourself* deficiencies to meet the need of the day. Which is why in the heart of every honest human being is the sense of insecurity, inadequacy, insufficiency, frailty, and inability. We’re always lacking something.

So Solomon finishes his exploration of the human race and life in general and by saying, “It isn’t a pretty picture”.

But just keep in mind, chapter 1 in *Ecclesiastes* isn't the rest of the story. God didn't leave us alone under the sun.

We know from history what Solomon only knew through prophecy.

- The Redeemer will arrive on schedule and be born under the sun with us.
- Jesus will toil and sweat under the sun.
- Jesus will get hungry, thirsty, and tired and even pay his taxes under the sun.
- Jesus will be unappreciated and abused, maligned and accused under the sun.
- And Jesus will be crucified, and He will die under the sun. But in His suffering under the sun, He will save us from our sin.

Jesus not only died and rose again...

He now offers to supply what we can never come up with. We will always be deficient for the day; we will always be lacking and needy. *But My God, Paul write, will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19). He can meet every one of our deficiencies with His rich deposit of daily mercy and grace.

You don't have the resources to handle the pressures and dilemmas of life; that's true, but that is not the end of the story. *You can stand strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might* (Ephesians 6:10).

We don't have a remedy for our fallen nature and our broken sinfulness; that's true, but Jesus offers us not only salvation but daily cleansing with His life-blood which *continually cleanses us from all sin*. It is a fountain that never, ever stops cleansing us and cleansing us and cleansing us from sin (1 John 1:7).

And in the meantime, for those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him alone for salvation, Jesus does something else; He gives us our assignments – and remember, they are at times an unhappy business – but God makes the difference by giving them divine purpose.

Whatever you do as a believer, even if it is pulling weeds or writing a term paper, suffering an illness, running a business, or changing a diaper, you are fulfilling your assignments from

God. Do them with trust, thanksgiving, integrity, and excellence so that you can testify that life under the sun is according to His sovereign purpose, and what you are doing under the sun is for the praise and glory of your great God who rules and reigns beyond the sun, and your labor down here under the sun *is not in vain* (I Corinthians 15:58).

And even down here under the sun we see glimpses of His power and grace.

What is crooked can't be straightened out – oh? Let me tell you about my life. What about yours? Our lives were bent and pointed in the wrong direction until we turned them over to Jesus Christ. And you can testify with me today that Jesus Christ can take a crooked person and make him honest; He can take a crooked path and make it straight and true, marked by gratitude and meaning.

Life isn't about chasing after bubbles or trying to catch that elusive chicken. It isn't about living like some silly legendary frog hoping that maybe fate will deal you a better hand. No, life is about living down here under the sun surrounded by a broken world, where you can't solve every dilemma but you're obeying and trusting and following your Lord, one assignment at a time.

And you have discovered in your exploration of life –

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth;  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide  
Strength for today, and bright hope for that  
tomorrow  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

Yes, we are in a broken world and some things are not going to be fixed until that eternal day, but, here and now, stand with this assurance that -

Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy Faithfulness Lord unto me.

I love you Lord.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 09/22/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from Philip Graham Ryken, Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters (Crossway, 2010), p. 38  
ii Ryken, p. 39  
iii Adapted from Daniel L. Akin & Jonathan Akin, Christ-Centered Exposition: Ecclesiastes (Holman, 2016), p. 13  
iv Bryan Wilkerson, "What's Your Story?" from: <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2013/march/3031813.html>  
v Akin, p. 14  
vi Adapted from David A. Hubbard, The Preacher's Commentary: Volume 16 (Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 63  
vii Stephen J. Bennett, Ecclesiastes & Lamentations (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 64