



[Ecclesiastes 1:2-3](#)

(2) Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. (3) What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

King James Version

To a Christian, the [book of Ecclesiastes](#) may appear to have a forbidding beginning. It is part of God's Word, but is it true that life is nothing but meaningless trouble and without purpose and value? Does our Creator intend life to be an unremitting stream of frustrations broken only by the blessed relief of death? One may wonder why such a message is even in the Bible. Such thoughts, however, are far from the truth.

The book indicates in a number of places that it was written by Solomon, a man especially gifted by [God](#) with understanding and [wisdom](#). In its first verse, the author identifies himself as the son of [David](#) and king in Jerusalem. Most commentators believe Solomon wrote it late in his life, following an eventful forty-year reign.

Upon reading Ecclesiastes, many believe that Solomon's outlook on life was decidedly pessimistic despite living in regal glory and with every amenity to make life appealing. Such readers have misjudged him. Once a person understands the reason for his palpable pessimism, then he also understands that it is clearly justified by the record of history.

Ecclesiastes presents the Christian with a unique perspective on life. Though the term "God" is used 41 times, [Jesus Christ](#) as Messiah and Savior never appears within its twelve chapters. Nor does it focus on the wondrous miraculous works of God, such as [healing](#), raising the dead to life, or dividing the sea for His people.

Every reference to God within it uses the Hebrew word *elohim*. The Bible uses this term most frequently in a rather distant sense of "powerful Creator" rather than "One with whom a close, personal relationship exists." Yet, Ecclesiastes reveals Him as deeply involved in the constant operations of His purpose, not only in terms of the oversight of

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His creation, but in the reality of His unseen hand personally involved in the daily life of His children.

Some commentators have described Ecclesiastes as "gritty," probably because it deals with life's realities and pulls no punches. Life is difficult. The book deals, not with minor issues, but with major goals and events that come up as an individual works out the purposes and challenges of life. Such events, which can be either blessings or curses, fill and change the course of a person's life. They are the kind of happenings that may make one wonder, "Where is God in what I am going through?"

Life can be thought of as being similar to a person trying to navigate toward the exit of a labyrinth. A labyrinth has many possible paths to follow, and thus a person is forced to make many choices that either open or close the way toward his goal. Will his choices yield growth and profit in living, or will they block him, causing mystification and frustration?

For a Christian, this means that a reality of life is that everything matters. Not every event and choice matters to the same extent, but whether serious or passing, it does matter to some degree. The record of Solomon's experiences reminds us that our calling is too precious to waste on meaningless vanity. Though some choices are more consequential than others are, none of our choices is totally inconsequential. God gives us the wisdom in Ecclesiastes to help us grasp what the major paths and choices must be so that life is not meaningless.

The major teaching of the book is that, despite the wide diversity of choices available to us in life, in reality only two ways of life exist: God's and man's. Solomon shows us that, if life is to be filled with profitable purpose, then God and His way must not be merely considered occasionally but deliberately chosen with foresight in every matter. Otherwise, life may be filled with a great deal of activity yet prove to be a futile pursuit of time-wasting and profitless vanity.

Thus, Ecclesiastes is not truly about the meaninglessness of life. Rather, it is about the meaninglessness of living life without God, or as Solomon wrote, living life entirely "under the sun."

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:
[**Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part One\)**](#)

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