


TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- *"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."* Look up the word "vanity" (at Dictionary.com, look at definition #4; if you go to WebstersDictionary1828.com, look at definition #1). What does it mean? Now, rephrase Ecclesiastes 1:1 in your own words.

Who has ever felt like life (or, some aspect of it) is empty, futile? Would you tell us about it? How long did you feel that way? Did your view change—and, if it did, **when, how** and **why?**

- Solomon experimented with pleasure-seeking—and concluded that it could not satisfy the human soul. What would you say to someone who retorts, *"Well, he just didn't try hard enough!"*

Have you ever gotten caught up in the quest for ever-greater pleasure? Would you tell us about it?

- Solomon also explored finding soul-satisfaction through philosophy, trying to "make his own meaning". The world-wide suicide rate is 0.01% of all deaths, but a survey of the wikipedia article "Deaths of Philosophers" resulted in a rate of 25%—which means that philosophers take their own lives **2,500 times more often** than the average population! What does that tell you about the prospects of "happiness through philosophy"?

- Finally, Solomon explored finding soul-satisfaction through work—"climbing the corporate ladder". His conclusion: "Like pleasure and philosophy, the 'American Dream' is just more 'chasing after the wind!'" Which of those three dead-ends—pleasure, philosophy, or work—is most beguiling to you personally?

- The solution is to "seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness". How are you doing with that?

- Pastor Doug claims that a person who says, *"I tried God and Christianity. It just didn't work for me,"* is actually living for himself and just using God as an add-on. Do you agree or disagree—and why?

Application-Challenge

If your friend said that, how might you respond?

Seek to love, serve and obey God just to give him pleasure, just because he is worthy.

Sermon Summary (Key Text: Ecclesiastes 2:9-26)

Ecclesiastes depicts a man who is conflicted and disillusioned; everything, it seems, is meaningless and grievous (1:1; 2:17). Solomon, the “teacher or the professor” (Hebrew *qohelah*, 1:1), conducted a big “**thought experiment**”. We call it the Book of Ecclesiastes. This thought experiment concerns how to look at life “under the sun” (a life lived without regard to eternity or God). Thirty times he repeats the phrase “under the sun”. Solomon said, “Let’s make-believe that this life is all there is. There is no God, no final judgment, no eternity.” He concluded that life lived without acknowledging God is meaningless (2:11). This is what we call having a “secular mindset.” This is how many people process life today. The secular person says, “Because we can’t know whether or not there is a God, we must find our comfort, our happiness, our meaning in the here and now (“life under the sun”).” Solomon conducted this experiment in three ways: **[1] Trying to find meaning through seeking pleasure** (2:1–11). Solomon had all the sensual pleasures—a harem, elaborate projects built by slaves, parks filled with every kind of fruit tree, limitless silver and gold. “All that my eyes desired, I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure...” (v. 10). What was the outcome of this pleasure experiment? “Behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun” (v. 11). When you live for pleasure, Solomon said it’s like chasing the wind—you can’t hold onto it. The happiness that pleasure produces is temporary, elusive and ultimately unfulfilling. We’re always craving the next high, which leads to disillusionment or despair. **[2] Trying to find meaning through wisdom**—through secular philosophy—by asking “What is the right way to live?” (2:12–17). Solomon despaired when he concluded that the same fate—death—befalls both the wise and foolish. It makes no difference which route you choose. This is the same conclusion to which Sartre, Kierkegaard and Camus came: if this life is all that there is, then when you die, you just rot in the grave, and that is the end. Ultimately it doesn’t matter if you were wise or foolish, nice or nasty, a philanthropist or a serial killer. Nothing you do makes any difference; nothing has final significance. **[3] Trying to find meaning in your work** (2:17-23). Is work a meaningful pursuit? “Nope. Been there, done that too!” says Solomon (v. 17). Think of all the people who worked so hard, gave large sums of money, to establish universities like Harvard, Yale and Princeton. They would be absolutely appalled to see what they’ve become today; they’d want their money back! We’re no better; one hundred years from now we’ll be thought of as just as unenlightened and naïve we perceive past generations to be. Without regard to God and eternity, work is meaningless: “All his days, his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity” (v. 23).

The Lesson? Look at the repeated phrases, “under the sun” (ie, without regard to God and eternity) and “vanity” (ie, meaninglessness). Solomon concluded that if this life is all we can know, if we base our meaning in life on just those things that are here, a satisfying life will elude us. Harvard Professor Stephen Gould once was asked, “Why are we here? What’s our purpose?” He replied: “We’re here because one group of fish had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures. We may yearn for a ‘higher’ answer—but none exists.” He thought that this explanation, though troubling—if not terrifying—was ultimately liberating because we get to construct our own meaning and purpose. That sounds nice, but it just doesn’t work! Viktor Frankl, Jewish psychologist and Nazi death camp survivor, found out why: others can rob you of the things in which you find meaning, and then you have nothing to live for. The only prisoners who stayed strong were the ones who lived by the God-given conviction that this life isn’t all there is, that there will be ultimate justice. You can’t just create meaning for yourself. You have to discover meaning in some reality that is higher and greater than you are. As Sartre said: “If your origin is meaningless and your destiny is meaningless, have the guts to admit that your life is also meaningless.” If you look for meaning under the sun it is going to disappoint you. It’s like striving after the wind.

So then Solomon conducted a **small thought experiment**: he put God into the equation (2:24-26). With God at the center, all those same pursuits which were “vanity...chasing after the wind” became God’s gifts to us! With God at the center, work becomes a gift. With God at the center, a simple meal becomes a pleasure. One’s wife satisfies where a harem did not. When we try to use God for our own selfish ends, life is vanity. But when we seek to please God rather than ourselves, burdens become gifts! This small thought experiment also points like **an arrow** to something else: selfish sinners receive a gift too—the gift of gathering and collecting up wealth in order to hand it over to those who please God (v. 26b)! God gives those who reject him the gift of futility and meaninglessness! You ask, “How is **that** a gift?!” Despair points people toward God! God subjected this world to futility **in the hope of** redemption (Romans 8:20). Jesus experienced the ultimate futility on the cross so that we wouldn’t have to (Mark 15:34). When we see God doing that for us, it should make us want to live to please him. And when we live to please God, everything in life becomes a gift!

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

"Five Question Bible Study" (see page below) *is a simple way to study any passage.*
We can use it learn about the God-centered life...

Monday—Read Proverbs 3:1-10. Describe the glad contentment God gives to the God-centered person.

Tuesday— Read Proverbs 3:11-20. Describe the patient quest of the God-centered person.

Wednesday— Read Proverbs 3:21-35. Describe the quiet integrity of the God-centered person.

Thursday— Read Proverbs 2:1-9. Describe how wisdom is both "hard-won" and "God-given".

Friday— Read Proverbs 2:10-22. Describe the "moral safety and stability" wisdom gives.

Saturday—*In preparation for worshipping the risen Lord together with your church family,*
read **Psalm 73.**

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would *this text* answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]

Just around the corner!

**COMING
SOON**

PointMan Breakfast at the fire pit!

- Saturday, December 4
- 9⁰⁰-10³⁰am
- Just \$10
- Bring a camp chair
- Chick-fil-a breakfast (gluten free option available)
- To register: tcc.org



Keyword: **firepit**

