

You Are What You Love: Week 2

Week: 2 A Methodical Look at Pleasure

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, *You are What you Love* by James Smith, Chapter 1

Bad dad joke:

Calvinist VBS next week. No need to invite your friends.

Opening Illustration:

There are three main voices in the Wisdom literature sections of scripture. Think of them as **three voices**. Proverbs is a wise young counselor; Ecclesiastes is a middle-aged brilliant cynic and Job is an older experienced man.

They are all working to answer two questions.

What is a good life?

How do I get it?

Each “voice” gets a chance to answer this.

We are spending this series looking at the slightly cynical voice of Ecclesiastes. He will work to show what is really in the heart and what it will really do.

Let’s go to these questions in our imagination again.

Close your eyes and imagine the good life. Notice who you are with, what you are doing, how you are viewed by others and where you are. Sights, smells, activities. Soak it all in for a moment.

What if you actually got all the pleasures you wanted?

Scripture:

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

2 I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. 2 I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” 3 I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. 4 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. 11 Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it,

and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

- Many of the verses are similar to Genesis. He wants to build a kingdom like God did, but one where he is king. He wanted a kingdom without the King.
- Verse 2: Notice that pleasure was an intentional test.
 - After years of pastoral counseling I can honestly say: Pleasure is a more dangerous prison than pain.
 - For many of us what is keeping us from moving forward spiritually isn't pain we want free from, it's a pleasure we are afraid of letting go.
- Verse 3: This is a methodical and intentional look at pleasure. This isn't a foolish young reckless man giving into his indulgences without thought. This is a strategic test to pursue pleasure in its fullest expressions. He is an ethnographer. He goes into these spheres and examines them. He is the person who actually tried all the promises the world offers.
- He literally "kept his heart from no pleasure..."
What are the pleasures that he strategically pursued to their fullest expression?
 - **Substance indulgence:**
(V.3) I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine.
 - **Comfort and Security:**
(V.4-6;7b) I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.
 - **Power over others:**
(V. 7a) I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house.
 - **Sexual pleasures:**
(V.8) and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.
 - **Entertainment:**
(V.8) I got singers, both men and women
 - **Wealth:**
(V.8) I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.
 - **Fame: A name that lasts.**
(V. 9) So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem.

- The truest definition of failure is to succeed at that which does not matter. After he attains all this, he realizes that he isn't really any different and his heart isn't full.
- This brings us to a really important question. How do hearts become shaped to want what can't fulfill them?

Final Thoughts:

When I was a younger pastor, I was counseling an inner-city student who was in trouble with the law for smoking weed. After some conversation he told me, "Pastor Mike, I am going after the life I want. I want to smoke weed and hang out with my friends."

Let's pause and be aware of how this version of good was shaped in him.

Let's pause and be aware of how this version of good was shaped in you.

Ecclesiastes is not only pointing out how these things can't fulfill, he is pointing out the fact that our hearts are shaped to want what can't fulfill them.

Let's drive the question deeper.

In other words, how did your heart get to the point where it wants what can't fulfill it?

James Smith says it like this;

"We need to read the practices that surround us. We have to learn to exegete the rituals we're immersed in." -James Smith (Pg. 40, You are What you Love)

Everyone is trying to answer the questions for you.

What is the good life?

How do you get it?

Let's practice being ethnographers. Let's see if you can see how the shaping happens.

1. Picture of Starbucks Coffee promo. What do you see? What is this telling you?
2. Picture of a Craft Beer promo. What do you see? What is this telling you?
3. Picture of a Shampoo promo. What do you see? What is this telling you?

Remember: For most people what you hear repeated in a positive way will eventually be your preference.

Attention leads to actions, actions develop habits, habits become life rhythms. When we become intentional about our auto pilot we move from spiritually destructive to productive! - Cathy Howie

Next Steps:

As you fill out the next steps card I want you to pause and reflect on these questions:
What life rhythms do you need to prioritize in your life to shape your heart spiritually?
What life rhythms do you need to break to help shape your heart spiritually?

References:

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Body Types through the years: <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/ideal-body-types-throughout-history/>

Understanding the Wisdom Literature: <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/wisdom-series/>

Understanding the literature types and postures of Wisdom Literature: Bartholomew, C. G. (2012, 2016). Wisdom Literature. In Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The word used here, hebel, means “vapor” or “breath” and is used in Isa 57:13 parallel with “wind” and in Prov 21:6 for “a fleeting vapor.”

Garrett, D. A. (1993). Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs (Vol. 14, p. 282). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom sayings that examines the meaning of life’s endeavors, the value of common wisdom, and the problem of injustice. The opening verse presents the speaker as a member of David’s royal family, but his name is not mentioned.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (Ec 1:1). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

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