

Fact Sheet for “Purpose in Life” Ecclesiastes 1:1-3:15

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In Douglas Adams The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy a supercomputer named Deep Thought was asked to calculate the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything. After 7.5 million years it produced the answer, “42.” The secular world has no real answer to this question. God on the other hand has one.

The book of Ecclesiastes, in my estimation, is one of the most difficult books in the Bible to get a handle on. King Solomon was its human author. God blessed him when he first became king (1 Kings 3:12-14). But wisdom once gained can be lost. After this book was written, Solomon acted foolishly. He did not follow his own advice in this book and the kingdom was split.

Read 1:1-11

Verse 1 identifies Solomon as the author. Verses 2-3 set the background theme for this whole book.

ESV Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. ³ What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

“vanity” – or “transitory” like steam from a tea kettle, but it also has a sense of “without lasting substance.”
“toil” – all the things we put effort into
“What does man gain?” – What does he gain that is lasting and not transitory from his work?

In verses 4-11 Solomon considers all the energy that is continuously expended in nature, with no permanent gain. And there is the strong hint here that since this is the way God designed the world, then what we toil for in this world will largely follow the same pattern... no permanent gain.

Read 1:12-18

Solomon was gifted with wisdom by God, and he sought to be very wise. He sought wisdom in the sense of this being for him an ultimate goal in life, or his purpose in life. Then he paused, looked back on the wisdom he gained, and pronounced it as “striving after wind.” In other words his efforts had no lasting gain because he couldn’t correct the ills of the world.

Read 2:1-11

Solomon now turned his efforts from acquiring wisdom to pursuing pleasure.

Wine (having a good time) – verse 3

Stuff, stuff, and more stuff – verses 4-8

Then he looked back on his pursuits...

ESV Ecclesiastes 2:11 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.

But... don’t overlook the closing words of the previous verse...

ESV Ecclesiastes 2:10 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.

This thought will come up again and again in Ecclesiastes.

Read 2:12-17

Now Solomon considers the outcome of being wise versus being foolish. There are advantages of wisdom in life, but both the wise and the foolish die. Being wise cannot change this. Solomon remarks...

ESV Ecclesiastes 2:17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

Read 2:18-26

Solomon sees that what is inherited by wisdom and hard work may be inherited by a fool, so what is to gain from wisdom and hard work? Again, don't miss verses 24-26.

ESV Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 ¶ There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? ²⁶ For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

Read 3:1-8

These are God appointed times in life. They are God's design for life.

Read 3:9-15

ESV Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. Death, loss, hate, war... beautiful??? The New American Standard translates this word as "appropriate." Later on in Ecclesiastes this same word is translated "fitting" (5:18).

Look again at verses 12 and 13. These verses contain great wisdom.

ESV Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil-- this is God's gift to man.

From this point through chapter 11 Solomon will write about various observations from wisdom, and in chapter 12 he will bring all to a conclusion.

If you don't know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior... if you are living life without God... if you don't believe what it says in the Bible, then what do you have?

Evolution... No hope of eternal life, you are just gone... No real purpose in life except "me, me, me"

Solomon's closing words to this book are...

ESV Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¶ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

For those who have no Savior the Bible the Bible gives their end Revelation 20:12-15). It's up to you to choose.