



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Humans, We Have a Problem!

THE GOOD LIFE

Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:26

Tim Badal | September 25, 2022



Last week we opened this series from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. We learned that it was written by Solomon, the son of David, king over all Jerusalem. Solomon was given wisdom by God, having been the second-wisest man in history, second only to Jesus Christ.

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes at the end of his life, describing his regrets and remorse. He had lived life to the fullest, consuming everything the world had to offer, yet he found himself wanting more. This book was written as a cautionary tale about what you might call an experiment, a life lived in search of the answers to how one can find satisfaction and meaning in this world.

Today we'll begin in Ecclesiastes 1:12. We'll be finishing chapter one, then read all of chapter two. I promise we'll still get out on time, even with this great passage of Scripture before us. What we'll learn today is that we have a problem that we need to understand and accept if we want to find happiness in this world.

I'll begin with a story about Mr. H who was a good-looking man of his time. He was the guy everyone wanted to be. He was seen around town with the most beautiful and successful women. Mr. H was not only good looking and had wonderful women around him, he was also known for his work. He was known to take on audacious plans and goals, then he fulfilled them. He was an airplane pilot and his aviation prowess was known by all. In his day he was known to be the richest man in all the world. Everyone looked to him, and as TIME magazine said, "He is the man of the age." Mr. H had everything going for him. He had the world on a platter. He was the envy of the world.

However, the last decade of Mr. H's life was described as "mad and miserable." The life of Howard Hughes, from a little over a generation ago, is a cautionary tale about having the world and being miserable. Howard Hughes had it all. He had money to do whatever he wanted or needed. If he needed to buy you off, he could. There was nothing lacking in his life. The last decade of his life was a totally miserable existence. He put himself into a hotel room in Las Vegas, only allowing a few people into his room. But no one wanted to go there. This man did not take care of himself. For the final years of his life, he had no personal hygiene. They said his nails were nearly a foot long. The stench was so bad they had to close off the entire floor of the hotel, because no one could stand to be near it. He lived in abject poverty. After everything he had accomplished and experienced, Howard Hughes said of his life, "It was a miserable existence." Howard Hughes is a present-day picture of Solomon.

Three thousand years earlier, Solomon had everything. He had a thousand women at his beck and call. He had palaces, slaves, singers and possessions. Everything you could imagine—he had it all. At the end of his life, like Howard Hughes, he wrote, "I am miserable."

This brings us to the question that should rock us to our very core: how can you have everything in this world and still be miserable? How can you have everything and end up with nothing? This is what Solomon was asking when he wrote this book. "How can it be that I had riches and successes and pleasures beyond measure, yet still not be satisfied?"

Just as the astronauts on Apollo 13, after feeling a violent jarring and a loud bang, radioed back to earth, "Houston, we have a problem," Solomon's words in our text today are communicating through the gift of the Holy Spirit, "Humans, we have a problem!" If we don't realize the problem we have, we will go the way of Howard Hughes and Solomon. We will build our lives on the stuff of this world, only to come to the end of life with sadness and regrets.

We long for fulfillment in life.

Let's read what Solomon says about fulfillment in life, beginning in Ecclesiastes 1:12. *"I the Preacher have been king over Jerusalem."* Wait a minute. Isn't that what he said in verse one? Why is he reintroducing himself? It's because he knew that half of Village Bible Church wouldn't be here in week one of this series, so he's re-introducing himself. He wants us to know he's King Solomon in Jerusalem and he's the one preaching to us.

If you missed last Sunday, I encourage you to go online and listen or read the introductory information which will help you. There we explained that the premise for this book is singular in its focus: life is meaningless apart from God. Life apart from God will gain you nothing in this world. Each week in this series, Solomon will be hammering away at this thesis. He wants us to know that, looking through the eyes of wisdom God had given him, that his conclusion was that life is meaningless apart from God.

He says in verse 13, *"I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven."* He was on this all-out pursuit of knowledge. He looked at the landscape and people in his life, then decided to do this experiment. The controlled environment in his experiment was everything "under heaven" or "under the sun." He purposed to look at life on earth without God being part of it. He wanted to know, "Can a person experience everything this world has to offer? Can a person enjoy everything to be had in this world, then through that find happiness, contentment and fulfillment?"

His conclusion is found in verse 14. *"It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with."* Did you hear that? The wisest man on earth says life is an unhappy venture that God has given us to keep us busy. The reason some of you are tired is because you're busy., just going about life under the sun.

Continuing at verse 14:

¹⁴I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. ¹⁵What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. ¹⁶I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me...."

He's saying, "I'm smarter than anyone has ever been." I want you to think about that. There have been some really heavy hitters that led him, including his father David, a man after God's own heart. But he says, "I'm smarter than all of them." He's boasting, but it was true.

He goes on, *"My heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly."* He's saying, "I've looked at the whole spectrum of life and have perceived all of it as striving after the wind." Verse 18, *"For in much wisdom is vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."*

So this guy goes on a journey to learn how to find satisfaction in this life apart from God, but he's not the only one. We all do that. From birth, we enter into this experiment, trying to find satisfaction in this world.

I came across an article from the Harvard Business School called "Blissful Thinking: When It Comes to Finding Happiness, Your Dreams Are Liars." The article begins as a conversation between a professor, Arthur Brooks, and his mentor Len Schlesinger. Len Schlesinger asked Arthur Brooks, "You want to be a teacher at Harvard. What can you teach that only you can teach, and what is it that your students need that they don't have?" Arthur responded, "I have good news and bad news. Looking at our graduates, they have everything they want. That's the good news. They have a good education, good jobs, good income. They have it all." Then he said, "But there's bad news. What they wanted is the wrong thing, and as a result, they're not happy." Wait? Harvard graduates aren't finding happiness? Arthur told his mentor, "What we need at Harvard is a class on happiness."

Church, we also need a class on happiness. Ecclesiastes is going to be that class for us. What does it take to be happy in this world? Solomon gives us a punch list of all the things in this world we think would surely bring happiness.

Let's look at chapter two. The first thing on Solomon's list is pleasure. *"Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.' But behold, this also was vanity."* He's saying, "Whatever my eyes and heart desired, I did not keep from it." He looked at the world and said to himself, "This is all about me. Enjoy yourself." Friends, this is the motto we live under. This is the overarching theme in 2022 America, "Enjoy yourself." But at the very heart of this motto is selfishness. In our text today, the words I, me or my are used 57 times. It's all about Solomon. "Look what I have. Look what I've built. Look at what I've experienced."

That is the overarching purpose of every marketing strategy you come in contact with. When you turn on your TV or other technology, advertisements will come at you with this overarching theme. “You need what we’re selling in order to be happy.” They say, “If you buy this shirt, you will look like Brad Pitt. If you eat this burger, you will never be hungry again. If you drive this car, people will think you’ve arrived. If you get that home in that subdivision, people will see you as successful. If you get that promotion in that job, things will be better.”

This motto of self-enjoyment is screaming at us, and sadly far too many of us have bought it hook, line and sinker. The problem is that’s the world’s motto, because they have no regard for Christ. But church, you have taken His name and put yourself under the banner of Christianity. You’re a Christ-follower, which means He is preeminent in your life. But at the same time you’re living a lie, allowing yourself to be king, creator and god of your world.

How do you know if you’re enjoying yourself more than you’re enjoying Christ? Let me give you three easy tests.

Look at your conversation.

What are you talking about? Is it about you or about Christ? Is it about what you’re doing, about what you have, about what you desire, about where you’re going, about your dreams—or is it about Christ and His glory and greatness in the world?

Look at your calendar.

Is your calendar filled with things that bring you and others closer to Christ and His goodness and grace? Is it about your hobbies, desires, day off, dreams, pursuits, wants? Or is it about Christ?

Look at your checkbook.

What about your checkbook? If you log your spending over the last month—and the banks keep track of all you’ve spent money on—was it about you? Was it about enjoying yourself? Or was it about Christ and the advancement of His Kingdom? At times it’s good to spend money on ourselves? But overall, do we see evidence of a pursuit to know Christ better and to make Him known in the world?

Solomon pursued pleasure, and man, he had it. A thousand women were around him. He had all the pleasure he could ever wish for. He was king, so nobody could tell him no. He had everything. Some of us are seeking to live life like Solomon. But now he’s saying to us, “Time out. You won’t like where this ends up.”

Solomon goes on to talk about parties and punch lines. Look at verses two and three: *“I said of laughter, ‘It is mad,’ and of pleasure, ‘What use is it?’ I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine.”* He concludes again that this is vanity. Living life for a party is vain. In our day, we tend to endure the week to get to the weekend. Some of you white-knuckle it from Wednesday on, “I’ve got to get to the weekend.” When you get to the weekend, you think everything will be great. You’re planning to laugh, party and focus on yourself. You just want to get rid of the workload and start living on the weekend.

But now Sunday is here and Monday is looming. It’s back to work, back to toiling, back to looking forward to the next weekend, thinking that in the party and the punch line you’re going to find happiness. But if you’re honest, you know you’re just on a treadmill, going through the cycle over and over again. Solomon says to you, “This is vanity.”

You can do everything you can to make life a punch line. You can make people laugh. It’s ironic that some of the funniest comedians are some of the most miserable people in the world. Life is serious. Quoting Princess Leia, “Life is a brutal joke and you’re the punch line.” You can’t be satisfied with parties and the punch lines of jokes.

What about projects and possessions? Look at verses 4-11:

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.

All of life, no matter what you do, no matter what you build, no matter what you create, is all meaningless because you're going to hand it over to someone else in the end.

Now if that isn't raw enough, look at what he says next:

¹² So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. ¹³ Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly.

He's saying, "Just live your life wisely; that's better than being a fool. Maybe the answer is in wisdom." He continues, "*There is more gain in light than in darkness.*" Some of you are thinking like this right now. "As I look at the world around me, they live in darkness and foolishness. So I'll do the opposite. I'll live in light and wisdom." Okay, but let's see if Solomon agrees.

¹⁴ The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them.

The wise, the fool, the rich, the poor, the successful and those who are down on their luck—all of them experience one singular event: death. They all die.

¹⁵ Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.

It doesn't matter how you live your life, what you build, whether you're wise or not.

¹⁶ For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! 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.

God bless you. Let's close in prayer.

Seriously, Solomon goes on to say, "I hate life. Life is miserable." But here we are in life. We have pleasure, we have parties, we have punch lines, we have projects, we have possessions—we have all of this, but it gets us nowhere.

Last week I beat up on the millennials, and the old people loved it. I got more amens. So let's talk to the old people. In a book called [Balsamic Dreams](#), which is referred to as "the short and self-important history of the Baby Boomer generation," author Joe Queenan speaks of the time he started to experience some acute symptoms in his lungs.

So after taking his symptoms to WebMD, he presumed he was dying of lung cancer. Scared to death, knowing he needed to do something different, he then went on a mission to experience all he could in the months he had left. After all, WebMD told him he only had a certain amount of time to live when you have lung cancer.

But as his wife was watching this, she said to him, "You know what? You're making a big deal about this; surely it would be smart to get a second opinion." So he did and learned that his symptoms were the result of an allergic reaction that was making him cough. He wasn't dying. This is what he wrote:

But that night my sleep was deeply troubled. My brush with death, however fleeting, however absurd, had brought me face to face with my own jealously guarded values. Look at how I reacted to the thought that I might be dying. Did I say to myself, "Now might be a good time to help eradicate poverty in rural America?" No. Did I ask myself, "Wouldn't this be a good opportunity to spend time in a leper colony, serving those who are in need?" No. Did I ask myself, "Why not use the few remaining months to make this planet a better place than the way I found it?" Of course not.

Instead I embarked on a mad binge of self-aggrandizement. Rather than capitalizing on my remaining days and weeks to reconcile myself to my enemies, spend more time with my loved ones, consult wise men regarding the meaning of life, I succumbed to the siren song of self-actualization.

By the way, he wasn't a believer. This is not a person following after Christ. He continues,

Yet in my defense, I wasn't the only member of my age group who would have reacted this way. For choosing this pointless, self-involved course of action, I was, if nothing else, being true to the ethos of my generation. When faced with the unsettling developments like death, Baby Boomers always react in the same way: we sign up for self-improvement classes. A Baby Boomer *par excellence*, a prototypical product of the Me Decade, I only knew how to respond to the world insofar as it responded to me. Everything I had learned as a Baby Boomer had oriented me in a single direction: further into myself.

Wow. Did you hear that? When facing death, as absurd as it was, all he could do is think, "How do I experience and get more out of life?"

Point number one: we're all longing for fulfillment in this world and trying to find it by filling our life with things. The philosopher Blaise Pascal put it this way:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to his object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.

In other words, we live and breathe, eat and sleep pursuing happiness. Every one of us.

We lack the ability to fix what ails us.

We long to be fulfilled, but we can't get there, so we're unsatisfied. Why? The answer is in verse 15 of chapter one: *"What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted."* Solomon gives us two illustrations to explain why you and I will never find what we're looking for in this world.

We live in a straight world where all of us are crooked.

It wasn't always that way. In the beginning, God created the world and put Adam and Eve in the garden and it was a straight world. Adam and Eve enjoyed life in that perfect Paradise. But Satan tempted them by saying what the world is telling us today: you can find happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment apart from God, so go ahead and get selfish. So Adam and Eve got selfish, going after their desires apart from God, then sin was brought into the world. Crookedness became the name of the game.

Romans 3:23 Tells us, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* If we were to translate Ecclesiastes into Romans 3:23, it would sound like this: "All are crooked and can't straighten themselves out enough to be straight like God."

So here you are, trying to make your way, but it isn't working. You need a straight edge, but you've got a crooked stick. No amount of pushing or prodding, no amount of trying to straighten it out, will work. No amount of elections in America, no amount of education, no amount of money will straighten you and me out. We are as crooked as we can be and will continue being crooked. That is why your life and my life, apart from God, is an utter mess.

That which is lacking cannot be counted.

Solomon looks out over the class and sees Badal, who is thinking, "This doesn't make any sense. Give me something else." So Solomon goes on to say, "That which is lacking cannot be counted. You don't have it in you to find what you're looking for."

Have you ever bought something from Ikea to put together, but there are missing parts? You know the frustration of trying to find that bolt or screw so you can make whatever you bought work.

Let me restate this for you. Solomon is saying life is a puzzle. God intended the puzzle to look like what the Garden of Eden looked like prior to the fall. It was beautiful. It was to be enjoyed. God designed life with Him to be perfect. But our life is very different. Our lives are like a thousand-piece puzzle, but there are only 632 pieces in the box. No amount of hard work, no amount of knowledge, no amount of pleasure or experience will bring that puzzle together. Some of us are trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together, but no picture is appearing. We're thinking, "Life doesn't make sense." But it's because we're not the thousand pieces God intended us to be. We're 632. So everything is a mess And we try to fill those missing pieces with the things of this world. God, however, says, "Things of this world were never intended to fill those holes like I was."

So listen, church. We want fulfillment, but Solomon says we lack the ability to fix it. So here's our life—a mess, chaos, with nothing in place. But there is good news. God sent His Son Jesus Christ to a broken, unfinished puzzle of a world, and He says if we will bow the knee to Jesus Christ, if we will trust Him, if we will make Him our priority, then our life will turn back to what we're looking for. Some of us are looking for this apart from Christ, but that will never happen.

We must look to God to find the answer.

So our final point today is that we must look to God for the answer. Let's pick up in Ecclesiastes 2:24: *"There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil."* That's it. Happiness is that we will eat, drink and find enjoyment in life.

"This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? ⁶ For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy." If you will give your life to God, He will give you the wisdom and knowledge to gain the good life He wants you to have.

However Solomon adds, *"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."* Here is what he is saying: Death is going to come to all of us, but what's more important is what comes after death.

Hebrews 9:27 tells us we all will die, then comes judgment. On the day of judgment, every one of us, great and small—Tim, Solomon, Howard Hughes—is going to stand before God. We're going to present our life to God, saying, "Here is the totality of my life. These are my experiences. God, this is how I lived my life."

If your life does not have Jesus Christ as part of it, all that God intended to be experienced by people will be snatched away from those who built their lives on the things of this world instead of on Christ. The good life will be given to the saints who will enjoy it in a place called heaven for all of eternity.

God is telling us that the good life is not just found here; it's only previewed here. The good life will be found in eternity to come. Jesus tells His disciples a story in Matthew 7 about two men who built two houses. The first house was built on sand; the second house was built on rock. The houses seemed to be very similar. Both had great exteriors, both had wonderful interiors. Good things happened inside and outside both houses. Everything was great. It would seem that the guy who built on the sand, who took shortcuts, won the day. But then storm comes. What is that? It's not cancer, it's not unemployment, it's not a lack of money or a lack of opportunity. The storm Jesus talks about is judgment day. That's when the house that was built on the sand will collapse. It won't stand up to God's judgment. But the house that was built on the rock of Jesus Christ stood strong.

So, church, what are you building your life on? What are you filling your life with? From a life perspective here on this side of heaven, it may look like you've done it right. But every man, woman and child will stand before Jesus Christ. And on that day, will the house of your life stand the scrutiny of the all-wise Judge, Jesus Christ? Or will you be greatly saddened that you built your life on the sand of the things of this world, only to watch them collapse, causing you to spend an eternity in hell?

We've got a problem and we can't fix it on our own. But the good news is Jesus came so we could build our lives on Him. Will we say that Christ is enough for us? If we believe that, then let's start practicing that. Let's start living that, so every decision we make isn't about us, but it's about Christ. It's about His plans and His glory, for us in this world and in the world to come. Folks, that's the good life. Amen?