



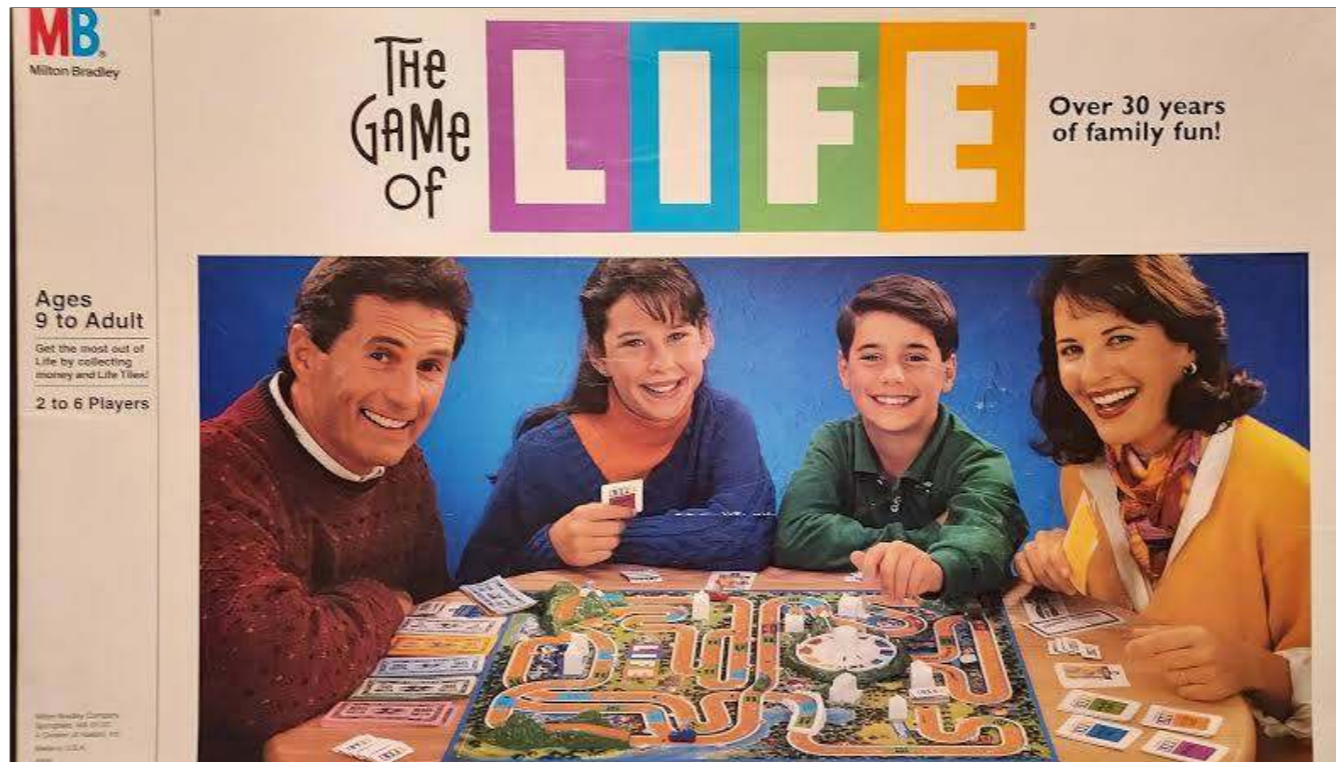
**The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes:
Choose Eternity over Futility**

Eccl. 1:12-2:26 (CSB)

**The Futility of the American
Dream**

With the days becoming shorter and cooler, families will soon play less outside and find entertainment inside. Back in the day, the only screen in the house was the tv, and it only could get a few channels with broadcasting only for certain hours.

So families would participate in an activity known as board games.



In particular today, I want to point out this old school game: The GAME of LIFE

(pic of game of life)

In the Game of Life, your goal is to achieve the success of the American Dream. “Players travel through their lives looking for success. Players transition from college to working life and then to family life and then retirement. Throughout the process you will earn money, make investments, get married, have children, and retire.” You are also able to change your career, decide if you want a family or stay single, and even get to ask the bank for loans.



So, basically, players are in a race to retire with the most stuff, the most wealth. And depending on how you do in your career and investments, you can retire at Millionaire Mansion or Countryside Acres.

I think parents in the 80s and 90s who played the game with their kids were hoping they could help launch their children toward the American Dream. But reconsidering the game now, especially in light of Ecclesiastes, the game is rather depressing. You are just a peg on a board trying to race to the end of your life, just so you can compare your assets to the others, like a scrooge who races to one's own grave. For what? So you could say you had more money in the game of life? That is futile and depressing. You can't take it with you and your life is short, with the Game of Life flashing it all by in about an hour.

In today's passage, Solomon confronts us in how we approach life. In particular, he addresses three basic areas of life considered necessary for success by the world. Each general matter allows for you to have more capability in life, and so is better than the alternative of not having capability. Still, if they are not placed under the glory of God and used only as tools in living for God's glory, then they are futile. Good things must not become God things. We are not to pursue these matters as ends in themselves but as avenues of appropriate worship and service unto God.

We're going to break up today's passage into 5 different parts for reading and exposing them. We'll start in 1:12.

**12 I, the Teacher, have been king
over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I
applied my mind to examine and
explore**

**through wisdom all that is done
under heaven. God has given
people this miserable task to
keep them occupied.**

**14 I have seen all the things that
are done under the sun and have
found everything to be futile, a
pursuit of the wind.**

**15 What is crooked cannot be
straightened;
what is lacking cannot be
counted.**

**16 I said to myself, “See, I have
amassed wisdom far beyond all
those who were over Jerusalem
before me,**

**and my mind has thoroughly
grasped wisdom and knowledge.”**

**17 I applied my mind to know
wisdom and knowledge, madness
and folly;**

**I learned that this too is a pursuit
of the wind. 18 For with much
wisdom is much sorrow; as
knowledge increases, grief
increases.**

Investigations into what can fulfill you in a fallen world apart from God are frustrating and futile.

Solomon began an investigation into what could fulfill him in a fallen world apart from God.

He determined that everything is futile. In a world wrecked by sin, man cannot have anything that is lasting and ultimate through his own efforts and capabilities. Even man's search for life's purpose is ultimately purposeless if it is not oriented to God in Christ.

He had plenty of means at his disposal to try life out. If we think we might be able to have nice things, live a good life, or accomplish great things, Solomon had more capability than all of us combined.

Here's the interesting juxtaposition of this book. The book itself is divine. The writing of the book, which was after Solomon pursued all these things, is inspired. But God did not prescribe for Solomon to pursue everything Solomon describes in the book.

He is going to begin his sociological/philosophical experiment to try to find what can fulfill him apart from God.

Solomon tells us a couple key things about his investigation.

First: It is man's responsibility to try to figure out what life is all about. None of us has the right to treat life as trivial. Life is not a game, and it is certainly a frustrating task for man to try to determine life's purpose without God revealing himself.

What was your life like prior to coming to know God by means of faith in Christ? At what point did you start questioning what it is all about? At what point did you start questioning the basic assumptions that have been passed on to you? Have you reached that point in which you question whether the American Dream can fulfill you?

Something inside of you recognizes that you are made for so much more, an eternity more.

There is enough evidence in nature of God's divine power, Paul tells us, that man is without excuse. We should know and recognize God as Creator and Lord over all.

But there is something crooked about this world. Qohaleth tells us that there is something crooked about this world that even he could not make straight.

Beyond it being man's responsibility to determine what life is all about, Qohaleth tells us that the task is a frustrating, miserable one. Because of sin's deceptive influence over mankind, we convince ourselves of all kinds of lies and contradictions. Sin entices us with partial truths. Many times all it really takes to help breakdown the walls of

someone's self-confident denials of truth are to let them just keep talking to the logical conclusion of their claims. So, you say that, do you know what that means?

In chap. 2 that we are about to discuss, we find that no matter how much you try to succeed at life, you will fall short and find it frustrating. Solomon refers to it as disastrous, calamitous. It is miserable. Even if you decided you will take a different approach than your parent or peers, if it is not based in repentance and faith in Christ, then you are setting yourself down a different avenue that arrives at the same end: meaningless frustration that ends in death. He even goes on to say that the more education and thought you put into discerning life, the more frustrated you will be mentally and emotionally by life.

So, again, let me warn you. We are going down a path that we are required to go, but it will only frustrate you more to go down the path if you do not have a right relationship with God.

As Jeremiah 9:23 teaches us, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man boast in his strength, nor the rich man boast in his riches. But let him who boasts, boast in this: That I am the Lord, who exercises in kindness, justice, and righteousness, for in these I delight.

2:1 I said to myself, “Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy what is good.” But it turned out to be futile.

**2 I said about laughter, “It is
madness,” and about pleasure,
“What does this accomplish?”**

**3 I explored with my mind the
pull of wine on my body—my
mind still guiding me with
wisdom—and how to grasp
folly,**

**until I could see what is good
for people to do under heaven
during the few days of their
lives.**

**4 I increased my achievements.
I built houses and planted
vineyards for myself.**

5 I made gardens and parks for myself and planted every kind of fruit tree in them.

6 I constructed reservoirs for myself from which to irrigate a grove of flourishing trees.

**7 I acquired male and female
servants and had slaves who
were born in my house.**

I also owned livestock—large herds and flocks—more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.

**8 I also amassed silver and gold
for myself, and the treasure of
kings and provinces.**

**I gathered male and female
singers for myself, and many
concubines, the delights of
men.**

**9 So I became great and
surpassed all who were before
me in Jerusalem; my wisdom
also remained with me.**

10 All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles.

**11 When I considered all that I
had accomplished and what I
had labored to achieve,**

**I found everything to be futile
and a pursuit of the wind. There
was nothing to be gained under
the sun.**

**All the pleasures money can buy
are meaningless without Jesus.**

2) All the pleasures money can buy are meaningless without Jesus.

Solomon decided at some point that he would try out every kind of pleasure money could buy. And his wallet was not lacking. Solomon ruled not only Israel but received tribute from neighboring nations. He was looked to for wisdom from foreign dignitaries and honored with wealth for his wisdom.

Listen to the description of his wealth:

20 Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they were eating, drinking, and rejoicing. 21 Solomon ruled all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines and as far as the border of Egypt. They offered tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

22 Solomon's provisions for one day were 180 bushels of fine flour and 360 bushels of meal, 23 ten fattened cattle, twenty range cattle, and a hundred sheep and goats, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and pen-fed poultry, 24 for he had dominion over everything west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza and over all the kings west of the Euphrates. He had peace on all his surrounding borders.

Did you hear how much food he used daily just for the people of the palace?

When you go to a steak restaurant, how many steaks or burgers do you order? Just one right. Maybe you split a steak with another family member, because a full steak is too much, whether too much food or too much money.

Solomon was not worried about the cost of steak.

A skilled butcher is able to use an adult cow to make anywhere from 120–180 cuts of steak, and Solomon would have been receiving the best of the best for his house. And there were about 20 such cattle daily used to feed his people lavishly. That is just the cattle. There were also oxen, hundreds of sheep, deer, gazelles, farm-raised birds and plenty of breads, not to mention in other places all kinds of fruit are mentioned.

He had the money of nations and did not have to worry about any war expenses during his reign. As the king with the amount of money he had, he could give himself whatever experience of pleasure he decided to pursue.

So, Solomon tries out the experiences of the following areas:

He tried out laughter. That one did not last long before he excluded it from bringing ultimate meaning. Comedies tend to distract us from the difficulties of life. They can be like a reset button for us, for laughter is a good medicine. But comedians and comedies do not challenge us to look beyond ourselves. They just distract us for a while, and sometimes make life more difficult, depending on the nature of the jokes. Just ask Chris Rock and Will Smith. You can only seek after laughter so much before it becomes pointless. It is not ultimate and will cross the line of appropriate when you start asking for more and more. Laughter itself is not bad, but laughter is not the end that you are created for.

Solomon then tests out alcohol. He appears to be taking notes at different levels of consumption. Having a little allowed him to still operate normally. Then he wanted to see what kind of effect full folly from wine provided. Basically, Solomon let himself get really drunk for the sake of the personal experiment to see if such drunkenness is fulfilling. It was not fulfilling. Look, the Bible does not forbid the consumption of alcohol. It forbids the inappropriate consumption of alcohol. Any amount that disorients or clouds the thinking and functioning of a person is too much. Also, there are ages that should not consume alcohol. There are roles of people who should not consume any alcohol for the sake of their responsibilities. Also, alcohol and other drugs can have disastrous effects on how people relate. Beer commercials paint a picture of how great it is to drink with your friends, picturing you being transported to a beach, or giving you inspiration for running an extra mile. But they do not show the teenager on the road after wrapping his car around a tree or of the father who becomes abusive after consuming a whole case after watching football.

A buzz is not what you are made for. The consumption of depressants or hallucinogens do not bring fulfillment to your life and often bring much more trouble.

Solomon then moved onto even more expensive pleasures. Solomon basically built an entire country club just for himself and whoever he decided to let use it.

I remember taking lessons at the city pool and always being so excited for birthday parties there. What if there was no pool for you to swim in?

According to one history of swimming pools, the first public pool in the U.S. was built in 1887 in Brookline, Massachusetts. One of the first recorded residential pools was at Vanderbilt in Asheville, NC in 1895.

Solomon's got his own residential large bath or pool nearly 3 millennia earlier than the Vanderbilt. Donald Trump owned 17 golf courses worldwide in 2016, all of which were expensive member-only clubs replete with top notch amenities. Those clubs did not fulfill him. Sports, music, and movie stars buy elaborate mansions and then struggle to sell them after they are no longer amazed with them. Michael Jordan has been trying to sell his Chicago mansion for 10 years now.

I've known several people throughout my life who work hard so that they can have a good retirement once they reach that point but either never reach that point or grow bored with it.

Solomon had more money and wealth than anyone during his time. There are some credit cards available to the extremely rich with no spending limit. There is the American Express Black Card. There is no item that can be purchased that American Express will turn down for its clients with this card. Then there is the Bank of Dubai First Royale Mastercard. Each person with this card is given one's own "royal lifestyle manager." The card is trimmed in real gold and has a .235-carat diamond embedded in the middle of it.

Basically, Solomon would not only own such cards if they had been available to him. He would have owned the bank or credit company that supplied them. He tells us that such wealth is meaningless in and of itself. The pursuit of money and more wealth will never bring you contentment.

Solomon also began gathering for himself concubines. Remember, Solomon has let us know that he has disregarded what God prescribed for him as a king. Solomon gathered many women to himself for sexual pleasure. That is what a concubine in a harem was for. They were not wives. They were merely for exploits at the king's whim. Those experiences were fleeting he says. And the next time did not satisfy him as much as the prior time. Every time someone crosses the line sexually, so that they are committing sexual immorality, a new line is formed. The high that you experienced during your last romantic encounter is not enough, and so you are tempted to sin even further the next time. There is no amount of Rom-coms on Hallmark and no amount of pornography that can ever sustain or fulfill the human soul. Rather, the pursuit romantic venture at all costs will cost you the very life and joy you were hoping to find.

We live in a society that tells people they should seek out whatever pleases them. It has gone so far that if you feel you want something to be true, it is considered hate for you to be refused that thing. Our government has even bought into the nonsense that you are more likely to harm yourself if you do not get satisfied in whatever way

your heart desires for yourself. But Solomon informs us that such pursuits do not satisfy. Instead, pursuing pleasure as your reason for existence is empty and depressing. Marilyn Monroe, Robin Williams, and a host more of wealthy people who took their own lives through drugs or violence speak to the depression that such pleasure pursuits can bring.

12 Then I turned to consider wisdom, madness, and folly, for what will the king's successor be like? He will do what has already been done.

**13 And I realized that there is an
advantage to wisdom over folly,
like the advantage of light over
darkness.**

14 The wise person has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I also knew that one fate comes to them both.

15 So I said to myself, “What happens to the fool will also happen to me. Why then have I been overly wise?” And I said to myself that this is also futile.

**16 For, just like the fool, there is
no lasting remembrance of the
wise, since in the days to come**

**both will be forgotten. How is it
that the wise person dies just
like the fool?**

**17 Therefore, I hated life
because the work that was
done under the sun was
distressing to me. For
everything is futile and a pursuit
of the wind.**

Trying to live well, healthy, and wise is futile if you are not known by God.

3) Trying to live well and wise is futile without Jesus.

After Solomon finished with his experiment at the bar and strip club, then he went over to the library and fitness center. If giving himself over to whatever pleasures he felt at the time were not fulfilling, maybe the disciplined life is what brings fulfillment. I've been using gyms and weight rooms since middle school. By now it is easy to spot the people who dedicate themselves to the trimmest physique in the hope that it brings them lasting joy, or at least joy for longer. And, yes, it is good to be healthy. We are body and soul and should exercise. But when growing a half-inch in your waist size disrupts your life and controls your thoughts, you should begin to realize something is off. And when you go to the gym, you may notice like I do that even the most fit people still long for something more than fitness, many times displaying insecurity in relationships and a longing for acceptance.

And what about applying yourself at school so that your identity and purpose in life is to be the person who is always right or at least appears to be in the right direction? Isn't it better to be wise than foolish. Well, yes, but even this pursuit without Jesus is pointless.

At some point, you will come to the end of your knowledge and you will also come to the end of your life. Then what good did all your diet and study get you?

Mark Dever was preparing to speak at a conference once in which a catholic bishop would also be speaking. The two of them were discussing a question that was posed to them. The question went like this: If Christianity proved to be false and there is no God, would you still want to practice it? The Catholic bishop said yes, because it promotes all kinds of virtues. Dever whole-heartedly disagreed. As 1 Cor. 15:17-19 teach us: 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Those, then, who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. 19 If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.

As Qohaleth tells us, if there is no hope beyond this life, then neither foolish nor wise living have purpose. And you can't keep yourself alive. You can't even keep your memory alive beyond the lives of those who knew you well.

Even the "great" people who we enter into our history books start to not matter to the public over time. Here are some quick speed questions: 1) Who was the 23rd president of the U.S.? (Benjamin Harrison) 2) Who won the 1930 World Series? (Philadelphia Athletics) 3) Who was the first Indian Ambassador to the United States?

(Asaf Ali) 4) What was the name of one of your great, great grandfathers?

Even if you live a wise, disciplined life that accomplishes good things for yourself or others, if there is no eternal life, and especially if you do not have eternal life, what's the point? So what?

**18 I hated all my work that I
labored at under the sun
because I must leave it to the
one who comes after me.**

19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile.

**20 So I began to give myself
over to despair concerning all
my work that I had labored at
under the sun.**

**21 When there is a person
whose work was done with
wisdom, knowledge, and skill,**

**and he must give his portion to
a person who has not worked
for it, this too is futile and a
great wrong.**

**22 For what does a person get
with all his work and all his
efforts that he labors at under
the sun?**

**23 For all his days are filled with
grief, and his occupation is
sorrowful; even at night, his
mind does not rest. This too is
futile.**

The power to build and influence is meaningless if it is not for eternity.

The power to build and influence is meaningless without Jesus.

Qohaleth now speaks explicitly to our careers. Despite modernity and postmodernity's shift toward the individual and one's own determination for oneself, parents still care about what legacy they leave for their children. If you have a successful business, you may want your children to run it after you are gone. Or you may have a trusted associate who works well with you that you think can see it into the future after you leave.

But many businesses falter or close down after the first generation owner dies away. Sometimes it is because the first owner did not set up the proper structures in place. Sometimes it is because the one inheriting the business does not have the same experience, skill, or passion. Sometimes the associate who worked well in one role does not realize the importance of gathering someone to complement his weaknesses.

God told Adam that all man's labor would come at the sweat of his brow and that he would be constantly dealing with thorns and difficulties. So there is no guarantee that any work you start will carry on beyond your time investing in it.

(Ex told to Dr. Quarles)

(I've known way too many people who say they are Christians or say they are at peace with God but worship at the altar of career success; replacing foundational family relationships with the absence and the meaningless pursuit of money.)

Jesus warned about such pursuits of a farmer who finally had enough money and crops to build new barns. He was satisfied with his efforts and boasted in himself. He died that night. And so was unable to enjoy the result of his labors. So what was the point? We're not made for our careers or our possessions.

And so what happens to all your strivings, to all your attempts to build, to your efforts to be an influencer, when your time comes to an end?

Even if you have set up the perfect trust or business situation that is super easy for the next generation to take over, how are you to know that it will actually be handled well?

So what's the point? If that is what life is all about but it is not guaranteed and is likely to change or fail after you're gone, why are you spending all your time doing it? You are made in the image of God and can only be satisfied in relationship with God. Your life, your enjoyment of life, your disciplines in life, your influences in life only have eternal significance if they are oriented to God in Christ.

24 There is nothing better for a person than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God's hand,

**25 because who can eat and
who can enjoy life apart from
him? 26 For to the person who
is pleasing in his sight, he gives
wisdom, knowledge, and joy;**

**but to the sinner he gives the
task of gathering and
accumulating in order to give to
the one who is pleasing in God's
sight.**

**This too is futile and a pursuit of
the wind.**

Bookend your days and ventures with devoted enjoyment of God.

Qohaleth introduces the idea of eating and drinking as being a gift from God. Note: he's not saying that eating and drinking are somehow fulfilling apart from God. He is saying that the simple enjoyments of food and drink is a gift from God for those who want to accept them as gifts to be enjoyed from God.

This is not simply about praying when you eat a meal, though that is taught in Scripture. It is about setting markers in your life so that you do not become a mere functional robot set to accomplish tasks. We have a robot vacuum that is supposed to work, but it has issues. Even when it was working perfectly, it never celebrated a job well done. It never worshipped God as the giver of its electricity.

You are not a functional robot. You make your days meaningful when you orient them to the Lord of all things. You orient your days to the Lord through how you begin and end. The dinner meal that Qohaleth speaks of is at the end of weary day of toil in this life. But instead of simply consuming or going to bed to get ready for the next day's grind, we should mark each day as momentous and special through our ritual of a simple gathered meal in which the focus is set upon God and His gifts to us, especially His gift to us of His Son by whom we can have relationship with Him.

