

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

All is Vanity without God

3 principles to keep in mind when meditating on Ecclesiastes:

- It is a philosophical exploration of life without God.
- It is meant to demonstrate the vanity of such a life and to promote the fear of God.
- It is filled with tensions that can only be fully resolved in Jesus Christ.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11, jotting down observations that interest you and questions that puzzle you as you go.

Observations

Questions

An important word to understand: *Vanity* (v.2)

Your Bible translation might say *Meaningless* or *Futility*. Depending on the context, the Hebrew root word (that's the original language that was translated into our English versions of the Bible) can mean:

- Breath
- Delusion
- Emptiness
- Fleetingness
- Fraudulent
- Futility
- Nothingness
- Uselessness
- Vanity
- Vapor
- Worthlessness

The idea comes up a lot in Ecclesiastes. One of my seminary professors described it as trying to collect soap bubbles. It's the idea of something being frustratingly elusive. Something that seems like it should be obtainable, but when you close your hand around it, it disappears.

Verse two says "All is vanity." Why? Read verses 3-11 again and write down all the reasons you can find that The Preacher says this. (Don't flip the page until you've done it, because I share my findings over there and I don't want to ruin your fun.)

Okay, nice work. Here's what I'm seeing in the text. His basic argument is something like:

What does man really gain from all his hard work? (v.3)

- Generations keep passing by (v.4)
- The sun, wind, and water all cycle around back to where they started (v.5-7)
- Everything is sort of exhausting (v.8a)
- Your eyes and ears are always hungry and never satisfied (v.8b)
- There's nothing really new in this world (v.10)
- And nothing we do in our lives will really be remembered (v.11)

When you think about it, we toil and stress every day, and most, if not all of it won't last, satisfy, or be remembered beyond our generation. This is why he says, "All is vanity."

If you were talking to The Preacher, how would you respond to this argument?

Remember, Ecclesiastes is about demonstrating the vanity of life *without God*. Without God, The Preacher's argument rings true. But we don't have to live without God.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. How does this answer The Preacher's argument?

If death is the end, what we do in this life is meaningless. But, in Christ, we are promised resurrection and eternal life. This means the labor we do for the Lord is not in vain. It is of eternal significance. And I don't just mean acts of Christian ministry...

Read Colossians 3:18-25. How does this answer The Preacher's argument?

As Christians, *all* our toil can be "as for the Lord," including our efforts in relationships and in our workplaces.

List some of the work you have ahead of you today:

How can you approach this toil "as for the Lord"?

Don't let today be a day of vanity. Make it count!