



Ecclesiastes Study - Chapter 2:

- 1) I said to myself: “Go! Celebrate! Pedal to the metal! See where the limit to pleasure really is. Stare vanity in the eye and face it down.”
- 2) To Laughter I said: “Tell me your best joke. I want to know how far hilarity can take me.”
- 3) I dared my soul to brave excess. “Drink it all in,” I said. “See where a good bottle of wine gets you. Or two. Or three. Drink until you can drink no more. Can you still hang on to wisdom and silliness at the same time? You’ve only got so many days to experience both – why not together? All work and no play – I already know what **that** gets me!
- 4) I worked hard to supply all this experimentation – I built great pleasure palaces. I planted vineyards with the best vines. I did it all with expert craftsmanship to satisfy my exacting standards.
- 5) I cultivated the most beautiful gardens and parks. I filled them with the choicest fruit-bearing trees. I only wanted the most fragrant and sweet fruits.
- 6) I constructed stunning pools and reservoirs to water my gardens and trees. I filled my hills with wild and productive forests. I expected nothing less than the finest lumber.
- 7) I acquired fine servants, maids, and footmen to fill my house, and the finest flocks and herds to fill my pastures. Never had a king set eyes on so fine a collection of treasures adorning the hills of Jerusalem.
- 8) Beyond all this I collected an immense hoard of gold and silver, tribute from every prince and petty lord in all the lands under my command. I filled my concert halls with the finest musicians and choirs of men and women – all the while feasting on the finest delicacies my lands could produce while I basked in the rapturous music. Oh, the indulgence of the senses I’ve known!
- 9) And in all of this I came to the conclusion that I had climbed to the highest heights a king could go. I had it all. More than that, Wisdom herself never left my side.

- 10) Everywhere I looked, pleasures were mine for the taking, and I partook of plenty. My indulgences were without count and my joys unmeasurable. All my hard work had yielded more than I could have imagined. It was all *mine*...
- 11) I looked hard at all my creations, the fruit of my labors. I contemplated all it took to get where I was. I savored the accomplishment. And I was shocked. It wasn't *enough*. I was suddenly struck with the horror of the futility of it all. I was so convinced I had it all yet found my hand full of nothing but wind, and even that I couldn't grasp. I despaired in my futility. What did I *really* possess after all this toil and sweat under a hot sun? I'd gained nothing worth holding on to.
- 12) I turned on my heels to face Wisdom and ask her where it all went. All those wise words sounded like the rantings of a fool or the babblings of a drunk. Had I been *played* for a fool? Will there be more fools to come who will get drunk on my hard work and bear nothing but more fools hungry for folly?
- 13) Well, compared to that, wisdom was certainly preferable, like light is preferable to darkness, but that's about it.
- 14) The world's full of wise men and fools, and fools who think themselves wise. And they're all going to the same place. Shocking isn't it? All of them just stumbling in the darkness, really, all the way to the grave. What befalls one befalls the other.
- 15) I moaned to myself: "The fool falls in the pit, and I'm no better off. Oh, what a cruel fate! The demise of the fool I understand, but the wise? I've got all the wisdom a man could hope for and I'm still going down like the fool. The futility of it all is maddening."
- 16) Even worse: When the wise man crumbles to dust, the fools left behind won't even remember his name. There rest the bones of the wise man and the fool – side by side. And foolishness keeps on going oblivious to the wisdom that was lost. Then those fools will fill the graveyard too.
- 17) I'm sorry to admit that all this futility grew in me nothing but contempt. The very act of living, the striving for something better, just seemed like an evil joke. The wind howled its mockery all around me. I was working hard for *nothing*...
- 18) I resented the waste of time pursuing things that only haunted me now. This burden was even heavier than the load of work I had heaped on myself to get here. I couldn't enjoy it and someone after me would get to bask in it, instead.
- 19) Who knows what kind of person he'll be? Wiser than me? An utter imbecile? Either way he gets full command of everything I've worked for all my life and he'll get it all without lifting a finger. What a waste.
- 20) Grief overwhelmed me. I couldn't shake the frustration of what my toils under the sun had *not* produced.
- 21) Again, I thought: "There's someone who's going to get everything I've worked so hard for, and he probably won't deserve it. The finest things I could produce in this life will be his toys. Why did I put myself through all this?" It's a sick and cruel joke.

- 22) What comes of it all? To be human is to work hard and have it all whipped out of your hands by that mocking wind. And still the hard work continues, and the sunburn gets more painful.
- 23) It's really just endless pain and frustration that you cannot escape. And night is no solace, full of troubled dreams and anxiety about the struggles of tomorrow. Why even try?
- 24) There's no good way out of the fix we're in. If you've got to eat and drink just to live, you might as well throw a party and toast the hard work that vexes you. The soul senses the reality behind it all. You work hard so you can eat, because it's the thing that God Himself gave to man to bring some sense of purpose. Without it there would be nothing at all.
- 25) If someone knows how to eat or drink, it's certainly me. No one ever drank me under the table!
- 26) I've learned this: If you're given wisdom and you celebrate your fortune, or whether you're stuck in sin and tough living and lighten your burden with dissipation, either way we all face God in the end, and to deny that fact is as futile as anything else.

Explain the Context

From your own reading provide a short answer to the following:

What is the theme of this chapter?	What is the author communicating?
What did the author miss?	What is God trying to say?

Take a moment to consider these questions:

- 1) Pursuit of pleasure often leaves a void in our hearts. What can fill the hole?
- 2) What is the purpose of our work?
- 3) What does scripture tell us should be the goal of our work?
- 4) What does God tell us about rest from our work?
- 5) How does our attitude about our work reflect our relationship with God?, Others?
- 6) How does gratitude play a part in our work?
- 7) If you're in a different stage of life (retired, unemployed, disabled) what kind of meaningful work do **you** do, and why?

Apply the Scripture

Write the verse that stood out to you while reading [in this translation or your favorite].

How does this verse challenge you? Does it reveal an attribute of God's character?

For further study:

Based on these scriptures what do we learn about our work? Add any others you find.

- Proverbs 16:3
- Colossians 3:23
- Genesis 2:2
- Matthew 5:16

Lessons the *author* should have learned:

- Attitude is everything.
- Gratitude is an essential part of meaningful work.