

Align With God's Priorities for Your Life by Asking These 4 Questions

How great was King Solomon? So great that Jesus spoke of his glory and wisdom nearly a thousand years after his death (Matt. 6:29; 12:42). Solomon, by his own admission, had it all, saw it all and did it all—but it all left him empty (Eccl. 1:12-18; 2:1-11). This proves that earthly possessions and pursuits do not produce true happiness. Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, which means “teacher or preacher,” as an aged man reflecting on his life experiences. The tone is rather pessimistic and depressing because he realized and regretted the folly of pursuing selfish goals. He was like the man who spent his whole life climbing the corporate ladder only to find out it was leaning against the wrong wall.

His parents, David and Bathsheba, named him Solomon, meaning “peaceful,” but the prophet Nathan nicknamed him Jedidiah meaning “beloved of the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:24-25). Unlike his father, who was a warrior, he enjoyed national peace during his 40-year reign. However, he struggled to find personal peace because He strayed from its source—Jehovah Shalom. The key word in Ecclesiastes is “vanity,” used over 30 times in the King James Version in only 12 short chapters.

Solomon called himself the “preacher” and repeated this lament, “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). The word “vanity” means “futile, empty or meaningless” and comes from a root word that means to exhale or a vapor, as if chasing the wind. Life apart from God is meaningless and leads to emptiness. A phrase Solomon used numerous times is “under the sun.” Nothing under the sun can totally satisfy us, so we must look to the Maker of the sun. There is a hole in our soul that only God can

fill.

Solomon wrestled with and answered four key questions on the meaning of life:

1. Origin: Where did we come from? He recognized that God is our Creator, the giver of life whom we should serve passionately in our youth before the aging process makes it difficult (Eccl. 12:1-5).
2. Purpose: Why are we here? We are here to do God's will and enjoy the life He's given us, realizing we are accountable to Him (Eccl. 11:9). The purpose of life is to live a life of purpose for God's glory and our fellow man's good.
3. Morality: How should we live? We should live according to God's will as it is expressed in His Word (Eccl. 12:13).
4. Destiny: Where are we going? While our body will return to the dust, our spirit will return to God who gave it to us (Eccl. 12:7).

Solomon discovered that none of these questions can be answered satisfactorily without God. For decades, he poured his life into building projects and accumulating wealth, and it did not satisfy. He chronicled his pursuits in Ecclesiastes 2. He had position, power and prestige. He pursued pleasure, recreation and architecture (spending seven years building the Temple and 13 years building his own palace—1 Kings 6:38; 7:1). He planted vineyards, orchards and gardens. He bought cattle and livestock, hired servants, singers, musicians and entertainers. He stockpiled gold, silver and other treasures. He became the greatest and richest king in world history (1 Kings 10:23).

The Bible catalogs Solomon's greatness and excess:

- He was a king, judge, builder, author, poet, singer, teacher, lover, husband and father.

- He had 40,000 stalls of horses, 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen (1 Kings 4:26, 10:26).
- His ivory throne was covered with gold and featured 12 lion statues on six steps leading up to it (1 Kings 10:18-20).
- Solomon's temple was an architectural wonder of the ancient world.
- He sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep at the temple dedication—1 Kings 8:63.
- He spoke 3,000 proverbs, wrote 1,005 songs and three books of the Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon (1 Kings 4:32).
- The Queen of Sheba, no stranger to luxury, was overwhelmed by his wealth and wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-7).
- He married 700 wives and had 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3).
- He made silver as plentiful as stones in Jerusalem (1 Kings 10:27).
- All the vessels of his palace were made of gold (1 Kings 10:21).

There is a big difference between having wisdom and being wise. Wisdom is knowing the right things; being wise is doing the right things. Having wisdom is thinking like God; being wise is acting like Him. For all his God-given wisdom, Solomon was extremely foolish in some areas. He violated all three of God's instructions for kings: "You must set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose ... shall not accumulate horses for himself ... shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he acquire for himself excess silver or gold" (Deut. 7:15-17). Ultimately, this led to Solomon's spiritual downfall—"For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been" (1 Kings 11:4).

Solomon began his reign with right priorities. He visited the

tabernacle in Gibeon, where he encountered God and requested and received unrivaled wisdom (1 Kings 3). Then he built a majestic temple in Jerusalem to facilitate the worship of Yahweh which became the headquarters of God on earth. Sadly, he ended his reign building shrines to the pagan gods of his foreign wives. Finally, his spiritual decline and disappointment with life led him to despair: "And I began to hate life for the labor that was done under the sun was contemptible to me, for all of this was vanity and chasing the wind" (Eccl. 2:17). Solomon summarized his search for significance, "Here is my final conclusion: fear God and obey his commandments, for this is the entire duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13, TLB).

We can only experience a fulfilled life as we pursue a meaningful relationship with the giver of life. Physical things cannot replace our need for spiritual communion with our Creator. If you think earthly things will bring you lasting fulfillment, take it from the greatest king in ancient history, they will only leave you empty. Only God can satisfy the longings of your soul! {eo}

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