

“Trivial Pursuits” (Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26)

What would it take to make you happy? What if you had the wealth of Bill Gates or Donald Trump? Would this make you happy? What if you had the success of Oprah or Martha Stewart? Do you think you could be happy? What if you had the brains of Carl Sagan or Stephen Hawking? Do you think you could be happy? Let me guess. Your answer is, “I don’t know, but I’d sure like to give it a try.”

A few people have been able to possess wealth, success, and intelligence just as I described. Solomon, the third king of Israel, was one of them. In some ways he had everything. He had a thousand wives and concubines, enormous wealth, international respect, and unparalleled wisdom. What he didn’t always have, however, was a reason for living. He didn’t always have happiness. He fits the pattern of the highly gifted, extremely ambitious person who climbs the ladder of success—only to contemplate jumping off once he’s reached the top.¹

In the first eleven verses of Ecclesiastes chapter one, Solomon examined three broad categories in his search for the key to life: human history, physical nature, and human nature. Now in 1:12-2:26, he narrows his search to his own personal experience.² In a sense he takes us on his own spiritual sojourn as he searches for satisfaction in life. In the memoirs that follow Solomon informs us that he sought satisfaction in four broad categories, but wound up empty-handed.

1. Satisfaction cannot be found in education (1:12-18). In this first section, Solomon states that even the best education is powerless against life’s enigmas. In 1:12-15, he begins seeking wisdom externally: **“I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my mind³ to seek and explore⁴ by wisdom⁵ concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God⁶ has given to the sons of men⁷ to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works [intellectual] which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.⁸ What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.”** Solomon begins by giving his credentials once again (1:12; cf. 1:1). Why does he reiterate his position as king? To remind us that he is a man who had everything this world could offer. If anyone could have found satisfaction in life, it was Solomon. After citing his credentials, Solomon states that he purposely set out to find the ultimate principles behind everything in the universe (1:13). I assume he studied literature and art, psychology and sociology, astronomy and physics, and theology and philosophy.⁹ But he found his search to be a “grievous task,” for there are so many things that yield no answers, even when assaulted by the highest of human intelligence. Everywhere Solomon turned with his knowledge and wisdom he found *hebel* (1:14).¹⁰ Things that were crooked to his mind he couldn’t straighten out; and there were many gaps he couldn’t fill in (1:15).¹¹

In 1:16-18, Solomon transitions to seeking wisdom internally.¹² He writes, **“I said to myself, ‘Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.’ And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized¹³ that this also is striving after wind. Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.”** If Solomon were alive today, he would say, “You’ve heard of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle? Morons!”¹⁴ Solomon’s point in 1:16 is that he is the wisest man that has ever lived, yet he still couldn’t find satisfaction in education and learning. At first glance, it is natural to assume that Solomon’s quest led him to observe insanity. However, in Scripture both “madness” and “folly” imply moral perversity rather than mental oddity.¹⁵ Having felt that he had mastered intellectual pursuits, Solomon decides he will seek to understand the pursuit of pleasure. These verses anticipate 2:1-11, where the actual pursuit of physical pleasure is described, but here he means that he examined the life of pleasure from a philosophical standpoint. Yet, in the end, he finds that much wisdom leads to “much grief” and “increasing pain.” Every pursuit for wisdom and knowledge under the sun is like “striving after wind.”

Have you ever tried to catch the wind in your hands? It is impossible. In fact, it is a ridiculously futile waste of time. It can't be done! This is exactly Solomon's point. Wisdom "under the sun" fails to satisfy the soul. This observation actually demonstrates Solomon's wisdom, for the more knowledge we acquire the more we realize just how ignorant we are. As Socrates himself said, "I am the wisest of all Greeks, because I of all men know that I know nothing." The more we are educated in current events, the more serious the world's problems appear. The better we understand the vastness of our universe, the more insignificant we become. In other words, increasing knowledge often compounds our sense of futility.¹⁶ T.S. Eliot once remarked, "All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance."¹⁷

[So the pursuit of education is not the answer to life's dilemmas. Now we will see that...]

2. Satisfaction cannot be found in pleasure (2:1-11). In this section, Solomon describes his grand experiment into pleasure and its total failure. He followed the philosophy of the advertising slogan, "You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can get." He grabbed for all the pleasures of life. But after some time he realized that the "gusto" was less fulfilling and did not taste so great.¹⁸ In the first eight verses, he speaks of at least six kinds of pleasure he tried in his effort to find satisfaction.

- **Humor (2:2).** Solomon writes, "**I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.' And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, 'It is madness,' and of pleasure, 'What does it accomplish?'"**¹⁹ Solomon mocks "laughter" as "madness." I don't know if the comics he listened to were as bad as the ones we see on TV today, but if so, I'm not surprised he labeled it "madness." Do you really think the leading comedians of our day are sincerely satisfied with life? Has humor given them an inside track on human happiness? Hardly.²⁰ It is easy to seek to lose ourselves in comedy and entertainment whether it is in a theater, in front of our TV, or on-line. Although it can seem like a great escape, it leaves us empty in the end.
- **Wine (2:3).** Solomon writes, "**I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.**" Many people assume Solomon was a "party animal" who got drunk like a skunk. Not so! He was too smart for that. Getting drunk for pleasure is about as dumb as jumping off a ten-story building to enjoy the breeze. Rather, Solomon was a connoisseur of fine wine, but he clearly states that he didn't drink so much that it would prevent his mind from guiding him wisely. Rather, wine became a socially acceptable way to loosen up and enjoy people and conversations. Yet, he states that it is futility.
- **Projects (2:4-6).** Solomon writes, "**I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.**" Solomon tried to create his own Garden of Eden. His buildings, vineyards, gardens,²¹ and irrigation canals are legendary. Solomon's temple is known to be one of the most magnificent buildings of all time. It took 153,000 workers seven years to build.²² However, it took them thirteen years to build Solomon's own house! Imagine what you could build with unlimited resources and 100,000 plus workers. Imagine what it looked like! But did all this beauty satisfy? No, it didn't. The projects described here don't seem to resemble an ongoing job or trade as much as leisure projects. The house-building, tree-planting, and reservoir-constructing in Ecclesiastes might correspond to a new shed, some tomatoes, and a sprinkler system in your backyard—on a grander scale than we're used to, certainly, but the intended result of personal enjoyment is the same. Yet, this will never satisfy.

- **Possessions (2:7-8).** Solomon writes, **“I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.”** He bought more and more slaves and even bred them. He amassed larger herds than anyone before him—the real measure of wealth to the average man. He collected gold and silver and all manner of luxurious gifts from other kings and countries. So great was Solomon’s fortune that silver and gold were soon regarded in Jerusalem as stones (1 Kgs 10:27; 2 Chron 1:15). Not one of all the above good things brought satisfaction or joy. For centuries, the old saying that “money can’t buy happiness” has been espoused by many, but few ever live their lives as if there is any truth to this statement—in fact, quite the contrary. As one wise pundit with deep insight put it, “All I want is the chance to prove that money can’t buy happiness.”²³

The classic movie *Citizen Kane* illustrates this point. In the film, you watch the character Charles Foster accrue an incredible amount of wealth, until it ultimately destroys him. As Foster is progressively tainted by his desire for wealth, power, and pleasure, there is a recurring shot of a fireplace in his home. As the wealth grows and becomes more destructive, the fireplace gets bigger and bigger until in the last few frames, it is the largest thing in the movie. The fireplace is always burning and consuming. By the end of the movie, the fireplace takes up almost an entire wall of his house. Foster’s life is nothing but this raging inferno that never, ever is consumed until he dies. And when he dies, all his possessions are burned. The viewer watches his entire life go up in smoke. The only difference between Foster and most of us is that his stuff produced a lot of smoke. He had a big trash bag. We will have little-bitty trash bags. But in the end, it all goes up in smoke.²⁴

- **Music (2:8b).** Solomon says, **“I provided for myself male and female singers.”** He didn’t need an iPod; he had live musicians with him whenever he wanted. Can you imagine having your favorite musician or band travel with you wherever you go? All you have to do is snap your fingers and they are at your beck and call. This too is futile.
- **Sexual Pleasure (2:8b).** Solomon says, **“I provided the pleasures of men—many concubines.”** Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. One thousand women available to him any time of the day or night! Surely that ended his search for satisfaction, didn’t it? Well, it ended his close relationship with God, but it didn’t end his quest for meaning and significance. It only left him bored, empty, and frustrated. Several years ago, I read an article about Hugh Hefner in *Christianity Today*. The author explained that Hefner is completely desensitized to sexual activity due to excess. Even though he owns the Playboy mansion, for many years he has not had a sexual relationship with a woman. What a glaring example of the futility of immorality.

Solomon summarizes his pursuit of pleasure with his own analysis in 2:9-11: **“Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.”²⁵ Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.”** I cannot help but think here of Jesus’ question in Mark 8:36: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” Solomon would answer, “Nothing. It profits him nothing at all.” Solomon says, “It won’t work. You can earn more, spend more, collect more, drink more, eat more, sin more, you name it, but none of those things will put meaning into life.”

[So far we have seen that the pursuit of knowledge is futile and the pursuit of pleasure is futile. Now Solomon will tell us that...]

3. Satisfaction cannot be found in wisdom (2:12-17). It's been said that a good preacher makes points that are bluntly stated, clearly explained, and endlessly repeated. That's what Solomon is doing here. Solomon has already talked about wisdom and knowledge at the end of chapter one, so perhaps he is going back to the subject rather than pursuing a new topic, but I prefer to think that his previous discussion dealt primarily with the acquiring of knowledge or education, while now he is more concerned with the application of wisdom and knowledge. Solomon shares two important principles.

- ***The wise man and the fool die alike (2:12-14).*** Solomon writes, “**So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king [Adam, the ‘king’ of creation] except what has already been done? And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.**” Solomon concedes that wisdom has certain advantages over ignorance. However, despite its advantages, even the remarkable gift of wisdom falls under the general condemnation of *hebel*. The grim reaper stalks the wise and the fool, the righteous and the wicked, the believer and the unbeliever. Death is the great equalizer, and if it makes no distinctions, then why bother to be overly wise? Why not act the fool if we all end up in the same grave anyway?
- ***The wise man and the fool are both forgotten (2:15-17).*** Solomon writes, “**Then I said to myself, ‘As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?’ So I said to myself, ‘This too is vanity.’ For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.**” The intellectual’s real hope is that he will achieve lasting fame and be long remembered for his great contributions. Solomon pronounces all this to be an illusion. Future generations will no more remember the scholar than they will the beggar on the street. In fact, a good case could actually be made for the fact that fools are remembered longer than the wise. At least the crazy get more press. And what is Solomon’s response to all this? He says in 2:17, “So I hated life.” Notice carefully that he doesn’t say, “So I hate life,” but “I *hated* life.” This is not his final conclusion, not even his present outlook, but it was his attitude when his pursuit of wisdom turned up a dry hole—he despaired of even living.

Consider the sum total of all our knowledge, all our progress, all our technology. Has any of it really made the experience of life richer? Yes, we are thankful to God for medical advances and jet travel. Most of us have more information on the hard drives of our computers than entire nations once possessed in their ancient libraries. Yet, there have never been so many unhappy people, so many illiterate, so many hungry, diseased, and disowned. All our accumulated knowledge of history cannot keep us from terrorism and war and discord on every continent.²⁶ We spend millions on AIDS awareness, yet people who “know better” regularly engage in promiscuous sex. We have more consultants and experts in business than ever before, yet bankruptcies continually occur. We have learned about fat grams and exercise routines, yet we are the most obese nation in the world. Books on parenting and marriage appear regularly, yet families seem to struggle as never before.²⁷

[Solomon has pursued education, pleasure, and wisdom. His personal experience takes him on one more excursion, but the result is the same.]

4. Satisfaction cannot be found in work (2:18-26). Now a significant number of people will agree with me on this point, for all of us at one time or another lose interest in our work and wonder if it's even worth it. But let's see the reasons behind Solomon's analysis. Again, Solomon shares two critical principles.

- *You can't take it with you (2:18-20)*. Solomon writes, **“Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.”** It's a pretty sure bet that Solomon was a Type-A personality. He's like many Americans today. It's easy for some of us to work, work, work, strategize, plan, skip vacations, miss out on family time and leisure, and work, work, work some more. Then, when everything is in place, when all the ducks are in a row, wham! We die and have to leave it all to others. That is a fact that applies to every one of us. King Tut tried to take it with him, and we smile at the futility of his effort. But millions after him have acted as though they could take it, amassing great fortunes while fearful of spending them lest they die penniless.
- *You can't control it when you're gone (2:21-23)*. Solomon writes, **“When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.”** Some people amass great fortunes, not for their own benefit but for their children's benefit. But there's no guarantee that the child will show the same wisdom that the parent showed. Typically, large fortunes are squandered by those who inherit. More often than not it also ends up destroying relationships. Leaving our loved ones too much might be worse than leaving them too little.

The disappointing reality is that significance cannot be found in work. Some time ago, an aspiring television star was given a shot at a network series. He went to the NBC studios, saw his name on a parking space, found the crew treating him like royalty, and admired the star on his dressing room door. The series pilot was shot in five days, but television executives rejected it. When the young actor left, no one said goodbye, the name was gone from his parking space, and his dressing room was locked. “All the success was like smoke,” he said. “I couldn't get a handle on it; like cotton candy, once it was in my mouth it was gone.” Our culture is a cotton-candy world—sugary and seductive—a pink swirl of empty calories. Today you might be the “flavor of the month,” with Hollywood or Wall Street at your command. Tomorrow your pockets may be as empty as your soul.²⁸ If you don't believe me, ask Britney Spears.

Solomon, the Preacher, has taken us on his search for satisfaction through the pursuit of education, pleasure, wisdom, and work. Each effort he has judged to be futile. None of these areas, when pursued for their own sake, are able to provide meaning and satisfaction in life. So he concludes this entire section in 2:24-26 with these words: **“There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give²⁹ to one who is good in God's sight.³⁰ This too is vanity and striving after wind.”³¹** At first glance, 2:24 almost appears that the Preacher has flipped and is telling us that since life is *hebel*, the best thing you can do is to gorge yourself, get drunk, and tell yourself that your labor is worthwhile, even though you know it isn't. But that is a serious misunderstanding of his point. Solomon is saying that eating and drinking and laboring, while devoid of ultimate meaning in and of themselves, are infused with meaning and purpose and happiness and satisfaction, when done in accord with God's regulations and with His blessing. What spoils these activities is our greediness to get out of them more than they can give or our tendency to do them to excess. Nevertheless, God longs for us to enjoy these activities. He wants us to enjoy a good meal with friends. He encourages us to drink in moderation. He expects us to have a positive attitude toward work, for “The highest reward for man's toil is not what he gets for it, but what he becomes by it.”³²

God also wants us to realize that He will grant three gifts to those who please him: wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But to the sinner who persists in trying to remake God's world, there is also an outcome: "a chasing after the wind." This reference to the chasing of wind is to the frustrating activity in which the sinner works night and day to heap things up only to find in the end that he must, and as a matter of fact does, turn them over to the one who pleases God.³³ This again demonstrates the utter futility and transient nature of life.

Picture your hands out in front of you, cupped together, palms up. In your open hands are all the things He has entrusted to you—money, cars, a home, furniture, everything. All of these are His gifts (Jas 1:17). We are the stewards, and faithfulness is our charge. That means our hands must never close over the gifts, but remain open so that He may use them as required—and refill our hands.³⁴

The main conclusion of Solomon's search is: *Get satisfaction from God's gifts*. Satisfaction is a gift from God, just like salvation. When we can take our education, our pleasure, our wisdom, and our work as gifts from God, then our search has found its goal. And all the good things that God has in store for us are ours. Death will take none of that satisfaction.³⁵

Copyright © 2008 Keith R. Krell. All rights reserved. All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any articles written by Keith Krell, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Keith Krell, Timeless Word Ministries, 2508 State Ave NE Olympia, WA 98506, 360-352-9044, www.timelessword.com

Scripture References

Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Isaiah 55:8-9

Job 11:7-8

Philippians 3:7-14

Jeremiah 9:23-24

John 17:1-3

Study Questions

1. What role does education play in my life? How important is learning to me? Can I balance knowledge and humility? How have I seen wisdom to be a “grievous” task (1:13, 18)? Will I be a lifelong learner that is willing to recognize the limitations of wisdom and education?
2. Do I love God more than I love the pleasures of life (2:1-11)? Are the pleasures God gives me reminders to me of my gracious and loving heavenly Father? Are my pleasures the catalysts by which I serve Him more effectively and enjoy Him more fully?
3. What is my perspective on the death of people (2:14-16)? Have I fully acknowledged the transient nature of *my* own life? How has this mindset affected my pursuit of pleasure and management of time?
4. What is my philosophy of work (2:18-23)? Have I looked to work to satisfy my desires for significance? If so, how can I begin to recognize that this is not the purpose of work? Read Colossians 3:22-25.
5. Have I learned to enjoy life (2:24-26)? Have I stopped to “smell the roses” along the way? How can I slow down my pace of life and enjoy God’s good gifts? Who can I enjoy a good meal with? How can we celebrate the goodness of God in our lives?

Notes

¹ M.R. De Haan II, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: RBC, 1983), 9-10.

² The careful reader will notice that Solomon begins speaking in the first person in Eccl 1:12. The emphasis is upon his personal experience.

³ The phrase “I set my mind” (1:13, 17) is what is known as an inclusion (i.e., the bracketing off of a passage by beginning and ending a section with the same or similar word or phrase). The use of this particular inclusion again emphasizes Solomon’s personal experience.

⁴ The word translated “seek” (*darash*) means to penetrate to the very core of a matter, while the word translated “explore” (*tur*) means to investigate a subject on all sides. In his quest for satisfaction, Solomon did his homework—he did a thorough job.

⁵ “Wisdom” (*chokmah*) in this context does not refer to living life with God in view. It means using human intelligence (“under the sun”) as an instrument to ferret out truth and significance.

⁶ Ecclesiastes does not use the divine title *Yahweh*, God’s covenantal name (Exod 3:14-15). Instead, the book uses the word *Elohim* for God twenty-eight times, a word that stresses His sovereignty over all creation. The wisdom writers often use *Elohim* when they wish to speak of universal truth instead of truths that are peculiar to God’s covenantal relationship to Israel. Ronald B. Allen, “Ecclesiastes,” in *Nelsons New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 782.

⁷ Most of our Bibles have translated the Hebrew word *adam* (“man”) as “men.” The phrase then reads: “It is a grievous task which God has given the sons of men to be afflicted with.” Yet, Solomon seems to be alluding to Adam and the effects of the Fall. Therefore, the idea is: On account of Adam’s fall, the sons of Adam seek and explore in pursuit of the meaning of life, but to no avail.

⁸ “Striving after wind” is only used in the book of Ecclesiastes. Seven of its nine occurrences follow *hebel* (“vanity,” “futile,” etc.) statements (1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9). Constable suggests, “This phrase ‘striving after wind’ occurs frequently in Eccl 1:12-6:9 and is a structural marker that indicates the end of a subsection of Solomon’s thought (cf. 1:17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9).” Dr. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Ecclesiastes”; 2007 edition: <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/ecclesiastes.pdf>, 10.

⁹ A universal theme in wisdom and philosophic writings is that the life of wisdom is the highest of all callings. In Plato the task of the philosopher is the purest of all. Here, however, it is a grievous task (we could translate the phrase as a “lousy job”). Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1993).

¹⁰ In Rom 1:21-32, Paul says that man’s thoughts are foolish, futile, dark, immoral, and perverted.

¹¹ Solomon observes that it is God who has “afflicted” us with this task. This is significant because the “affliction” that we experience should be the very thing that drives us to God, the ultimate goal of living.

¹² The external and internal divisions come from Barry C. Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class notes.

¹³ The phrase “I realized” and its synonyms occur frequently in Ecclesiastes (cf. 1:13; 2:1, 3, 14, 15; 3:17, 18, 22; 7:25; 8:9, 16; 9:1).

¹⁴ This is a great line from Vicini in the classic movie *Princess Bride*.

¹⁵ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*.

¹⁶ Michael P. Andrus, “The Search for Satisfaction” (Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26): unpublished sermon notes.

¹⁷ Quoted in David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 23.

¹⁸ Kurt De Haan, “Why in the World am I Here?” (Grand Rapids: RBC, 1987), 8.

¹⁹ Identifying Eccl 1:3; 2:2; and 6:8a as verses that present questions that “are among the most [*sic*] important questions in the book,” Miller observes: “Toil, pleasure, wisdom. In one sense, each of these is a rhetorical question: by implication they make a statement that there is *no* surplus for toil, that pleasure accomplishes *nothing*, and that the wise have *no* advantage over the fool. Yet, their form as questions raises the possibility of an answer and Qoheleth finally does supply one in each case: he eventually allows for value in toil (2:24; 3:13; 4:9; 5:17 [Engl. v. 18]; 11:6); he urges that to seek pleasure accomplishes little (2:1), although life without it is worthless (2:24; 3:12-13; 4:8; 5:17 [Engl. v. 18]), and it is particularly to be found in companionship (4:8-9; 9:9); he says finally that though wisdom has limitations, it preserves life (7:11-12; 9:16-18; 10:10). By delaying his answers, Qoheleth raises tension and uncertainty for the reader.” Douglas B. Miller, “What the Preacher Forgot: The Rhetoric of Ecclesiastes,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62 (2000): 229.

²⁰ Prov 14:13 states, “Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief.”

²¹ One of the reasons we love gardens is because man was first made in one. It was the only place on earth that was completed, then Adam and mankind was given the task of cultivating the rest. Gardens are an echo of home.

²² See 1 Kgs 6:38 and 7:1.

²³ Tim A. Krell, "Chasing the Wind: Philosophical Reflections on Life": unpublished paper (3/1/1996).

²⁴ Tommy Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 31-32.

²⁵ Davis writes, "In 1:3, the author directs his readers' attention to what is arguably the key question of the book: 'What advantage does man have in all his **work** which **he does** [**works**] under the sun?' (NASB; emphasis, mine). In our current section of the book, the author begins to address the *amal* (noun -- labor, toil, trouble; verb -- to work, to labor, to toil) concern of that question. Throughout the book (though significantly more frequently in the first half of the book [30x] than in the second half [5x]), the author utilizes the various grammatical forms of *amal* (labor) 35 times, 15 (i.e., nearly 43%) of which he uses to drive the thought of the latter portion of chapter 2 (vv. 10[2x], 11[2x], 18[2x], 19[2x], 20[2x], 21[2x], 22[2x], 24). Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*.

²⁶ David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 23-24.

²⁷ Wayne Schmidt, *Soul Management* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 35-36.

²⁸ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 39.

²⁹ The word "give" (*nathan*) appears in Ecclesiastes with God as its subject eleven times.

³⁰ Solomon is not speaking of believers and unbelievers. It is speaking of those who please God or are displeasing to Him. Roland Murphy, *Ecclesiastes* (WBC Vol. 23a; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 26-27.

³¹ This is the first of seven passages in which the writer recommended the wholehearted pursuit of enjoyment (2:24a; 3:12; 3:22a; 5:17; 8:15a; 9:7-9a; and 11:7-12:1a).

³² Preaching Today citation: John Ruskin, *Leadership*, Vol. 7, no. 4.

³³ Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997, c1996), 293.

³⁴ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 41.

³⁵ Robert S. Ricker with Ron Pitkin, *Soul Search: Hope for 21st Century Living from Ecclesiastes* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 37.