

The Search That Never Ends: Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

Scriptures for Today:

***Ecclesiastes 1:12-18** I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. 16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. 17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. 18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*

Introduction

Imagine being one of the richest people on the planet.

You have unlimited resources. Everything in your life is taken care of. You don't have to worry about food, shelter, clothing, bills, or basic needs. You lack absolutely nothing materially. You don't have to spend your time working just to survive.

So what do you do with your time?

A lot of wealthy people spend their time enjoying the pleasures this world has to offer. They travel. They buy houses. They buy cars. They build companies. They chase more money, more influence, more power, more recognition.

But some search for something deeper.

Take Elon Musk, for example. He is one of the richest and most influential men in the world. He has access to almost anything this world can offer. Money can buy just about anything on earth, and he has more than he could ever spend in a lifetime.

He has explored electric cars, rockets, satellites, artificial intelligence, brain technology, and space travel. He is searching the earth. He is searching the heavens. He is searching technology. He is searching the future.

But the question is this: Why is he still searching?

How can a man have that much money, that much intelligence, that much influence, that many resources — and still be searching for meaning?

And before we point the finger at someone else, we need to ask ourselves the same thing.

Have you ever worked hard for something, saved for something, dreamed about something, and finally got it — only to feel empty shortly after?

You finally get the new phone. You finally get the new car. You finally get the new house. You finally reach the goal. You get what you thought would make you happy.

And then the excitement fades. The anticipation is gone. The novelty wears off. The new thing becomes normal. And before long, your heart starts searching again.

That is the cycle of life under the sun. Man searches for happiness. Man searches for purpose. Man searches for satisfaction. Man searches for meaning. But the search never ends because the world never satisfies.

What most people fail to realize is that the wealthiest and wisest man who ever lived already made that search.

Imagine if someone came from the future and said, “I have already searched everything you are chasing. I have already reached the end of the road. I have already discovered where it leads.”

For those of you who are looking for happiness in your life. What if someone came to you from the future and said, “I’ve already tried everything that you are going to try to bring you happiness. I’ve figured out the secret.” Would you listen to them?

For those of you who are chasing money in your life. What if someone came to you from the future and said, “I already obtained all the riches in this world. I have more money than you can ever imagine. I want to tell you where it leads” Would you listen?

That is what Solomon is doing in Ecclesiastes.

He is not speaking as a man who missed out on life. He is speaking as a man who had everything this life could offer and found out it still was not enough.

So why do we keep searching the same places Solomon already searched? Why do we keep chasing what he already told us was empty? Why do we keep looking under the sun for something that can only be found above the sun?

This morning, we are going to look at **The Search That Never Ends**.

And in Ecclesiastes 1:12–18, Solomon is going to show us what happens when man gives his heart to search for meaning, wisdom, and satisfaction in a world that cannot give him rest.

Let’s begin reading in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verse 12.

1. The Search Begins (vv. 12 – 13)

Ecclesiastes 1:12-13 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

We are reminded again who is talking. The Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. King Solomon. This is not your average everyday guy. It's hard to grasp how much Solomon had. If we were to compare Solomon's wealth to our modern day understanding he would have most likely been a multi-trillionaire.

He had all money, all resources, all wisdom, all time and freedom. He could have done anything that his heart desired. But notice what he set his heart toward.

13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven...

That means he devoted himself to this search. He poured himself into it. His mind, his energy, his desire, his attention, his emotions, his time — all of it was given to this pursuit.

Everyone gives their heart to something in this life...

Some people give their heart to their home...
Some people give their heart to entertainment...
Some people give their heart to making money...
Some people give their heart to earning recognition...

It may look different for each person, but the heart is doing the same thing. It is searching. Searching for peace, meaning, satisfaction, control, security, rest.

Solomon investigated life as a whole. **(All things that are done under the sun)** He turned it over. He examined it. He studied what men do and why they do it. He looked at labor, success, pleasure, wisdom, foolishness, wealth, power, and knowledge.

He asked the questions men are still asking today:

Why am I here? What is the point of all this work? Why do people suffer? Why does nothing fully satisfy? Why do I get what I wanted and still want more?

He also points out that the search is sore travail, which means it's heavy, painful, wearisome. It's a burden. And we know that's true because people are exhausted out there trying to make themselves happy. Trying to get ahead. Trying to figure out why they still feel empty.

The search is sore travail. The world says, “Keep searching. You are almost there.” But you’re not. God says, “Look at Solomon. He already searched it.”

Solomon searched with more wisdom than you have. More money, more opportunity, more freedom, more resources. He put more than all of us combined could ever put into searching. And he’s going to tell us what was the result of that search...

2. The Search Is Empty (vv. 14)

Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

Solomon says “I have seen”. He observed it for himself. He watched life. He studied people. He looked at their labor, their goals, their dreams, their achievements, their pleasures, their projects, their kingdoms, their houses, their wealth, and their wisdom.

And he says: “...behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.”

That phrase “**under the sun**” is a key phrase in Ecclesiastes. It is talking about life from an earthly perspective. Life viewed only from this world. Life without eternity in view. Life without God being the center.

Solomon observed it all. He saw everything that man did or could do in this life and it was empty. It was like chasing smoke. Nothing has changed since then.

Billionaires who are trying to leave this earth and go to mars and other planets are chasing smoke.
Power hungry leaders who start wars and fight over resources are chasing smoke.
Entrepreneurs who spend their entire lives creating products that end up in landfills are chasing smoke.
The people walking these streets searching for their next fix are chasing smoke.

It’s all vanity and vexation of spirit. It’s frustrating trying to catch something that you can’t hold. It’s like chasing the wind. When you do things in this life and leave God out of the equation, it leads to emptiness. It’s like you’re stuck in an endless loop. A broken cycle that keeps repeating itself. You never achieve what you’re looking for. And there is a reason for that...

3. The Search Finds Brokenness (vv. 15)

Ecclesiastes 1:15 *That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.*

So when Solomon examined everything under heaven, everything in this life apart from God. He found emptiness and vexation of spirit. And why is that? He goes on to explain...

“That which is crooked cannot be made straight...”

Solomon is saying there are things in this world that man cannot fix. For example, I don’t know how to fix all the violence and abuse around here. I don’t know how to get people to dedicate the short life that they have to serving God, I don’t know how to get people to stop making the same mistakes over and over again. I don’t know how to fix these things. But God does.

There are crooked things that cannot be made straight by human strength, human wisdom, human government, human money, human education, or human effort. Why?

Because the world is crooked because of sin. When God made the world, it was not crooked. It was very good. There was no death, no sorrow, no sickness, no corruption, no violence, no betrayal, no broken homes, no ruined minds, no wicked desires, no graveyards.

But when sin entered into the world, everything was bent out of shape.

Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

That is why life under the sun is so frustrating. Man is trying to straighten a world that sin has made crooked. And you see it everywhere.

You see crookedness in homes.

A husband and wife stand at an altar and make vows before God. They promise to love each other, stay faithful to each other, and remain together until death. Then pride creeps in. Selfishness creeps in. Bitterness creeps in. Sin creeps in. Trust is broken. The home that should have been a place of peace becomes a place of tension and brokenness. That is crooked.

You see crookedness in society.

People cry out for justice, but they don’t even know what righteousness is. Governments make laws, but laws cannot change the heart. Politicians promise to fix the world, but they cannot fix themselves. The world keeps looking for the right leader, the right policy, the right system, the right movement, but the same sins keep showing up in every generation. That is crooked.

You see crookedness in the body.

You can exercise. You can eat healthy. You can take vitamins. You can go to doctors. You can try to preserve your strength. And those things may help for a time. But your body is still wearing down. The eyes get weaker. The back starts hurting. The hands lose strength. Sickness comes.

There is a man who I mentioned before in a sermon, his name is Bryan Johnson. His main goal in life is to not die. He spends millions of dollars attempting to slow aging and optimize his health. He thinks he will achieve immortality by 2039. But he just found out that he has a chronic autoimmune disease where his stomach is eating itself.

No matter how much money you spend, no matter how hard you try, you can't escape death. Your body is getting closer to dying every second. That is crooked.

Man can try to manage problems. Man can try to treat symptoms. But man cannot fully straighten what sin has made crooked.

That's Solomon's point. People think, "If I just had more money, if I had more education, if I married someone else, if I had another job, if I had a bigger home, then everything would finally be straight."

But the problem is deeper than your circumstances. The problem is sin. That is the crookedness that cannot be straightened (by the things of the world).

He also says **"that which is wanting cannot be numbered."**

The word "wanting" means lacking or missing. Solomon is saying there are so many things lacking in this world that you cannot even count them all. There are so many people who add things to their life, but it just isn't enough.

You might add money, but then you'll lack peace.
You might add pleasure, but then you'll lack satisfaction.
You might add comfort, but then you'll lack contentment.

It's an endless cycle of being in a state of needing more.

So Solomon has shown us that the search is empty because the world is broken. There are crooked things man cannot straighten, and there are missing things man cannot even number.

But maybe someone would say, "Solomon just didn't search far enough. Maybe he did not know enough. Maybe if he had more wisdom, more experience, more knowledge, he would have found the answer."

4. The Search Climbs Higher (vv. 16)

Ecclesiastes 1:16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

Solomon now takes us deeper into his personal testimony. He is reflecting. He is looking inward and considering everything he had become, everything he had gained, everything he had learned, and experienced.

That's something that we need to do as well. Sometimes we need to commune with our own heart and look at where we've come from, what direction we're going. What have we obtained in this life? What is it all adding up to?

Solomon looked within and he said, "Lo I am come to a great estate." In other words he had reached a great position. He was not at the beginning of the road. He had climbed high. He had arrived at a place of greatness, success, power, and abundance...

1 Kings 10:23 So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.

That is an incredible statement. Not only did he exceed above the kings of his day. But his riches and wisdom exceeded above anyone who would ever live.

2 Chronicles 1:12 Wisdom and knowledge *is* granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that *have been* before thee, **neither shall there any after thee have the like.**

1 Kings 3:12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

God allowed Solomon to reach the pinnacle of human existence. Imagine all the people that are chasing money, fame, power, possessions their entire life. God allowed one man to have it all. More than anyone will ever have. He did that as an example. He recorded it for all humans to learn from it.

If someone already had everything and concluded that it was all meaningless and empty, why would you keep chasing it?

Imagine two ladders standing in the middle of a field, stretching miles into the sky. One ladder is for going up, and the other ladder is for coming down. You cannot see the top because it disappears above the clouds. But you have heard that whatever is up there is amazing. You have heard that if you can just make it high enough, you will finally find what you are looking for.

So you start climbing. It is exhausting. Your hands hurt. Your legs are tired. You are sweating. You want to stop, but you keep telling yourself, "It will be worth it when I get to the top."

Then, hours into your climb, you see a man coming down the other ladder. He is worn out. He looks disappointed. He finally reaches your level, and you ask him, “What is up there?”

And he says, “I made it to the top. There is nothing there. It was empty. It was a lie.”
Then he keeps climbing down. Now what would you do? Would you keep climbing?

Would you say, “Well, maybe it will be different for me”?
That is what people do with this world.

Solomon reached great estate. He already climbed the ladder. He already reached the top. He already had what people are still trying to get. And he came back down and told us, “All is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

Someone might say, “Well maybe wisdom isn’t the path to fulfillment. Maybe living life recklessly is the answer. Maybe being foolish and taking risks and living for pleasure is where it’s at.”

Solomon answers that next...

5. The Search Tries Everything (vv. 17)

Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

Solomon now shows us how far this search went. He says: **“And I gave my heart to know wisdom...”**
But he didn’t stop there. He says, **“and to know madness and folly”**. And what was the conclusion?
“I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.”

Solomon looked at both sides of life. He left no stone unturned.

He looked at wisdom, and he looked at madness.
He looked at discipline, and he looked at indulgence.
He looked at knowledge, and he looked at foolishness.
He looked at the serious life, and he looked at the reckless life.

Solomon is saying, “I searched every direction man tries to go.”

Some people search for meaning through wisdom. They try to think their way into peace. They study, read, learn, analyze, listen to podcasts, watch videos, collect information, and try to understand everything. They think, “If I can just figure everything out, then I will finally have rest.” Sort of like Elon Musk who thinks he will discover the meaning of life through technology and exploration.

Other people search for meaning through madness and folly. They say, “I don’t want to think about life. I just want to enjoy myself. I just want to have fun. I just want to feel good. I just want to escape.” So they run to pleasure. They run to entertainment, partying, alcohol, drugs, sexual sin, foolish spending. They run to anything that will numb the emptiness for a little while.

But both people are searching...

One man is searching in a library. Another man is searching in a nightclub.
One man is searching in education. Another man is searching in entertainment.
One man is searching through self-discipline. Another man is searching through self-indulgence.

But if both are searching under the sun (apart from God), neither will find rest for the soul. They will be on a search that never ends.

Solomon tried the path of pleasure. He tried the path of a fool. He tried the path of wisdom. None of it brought fulfillment.

6. The Search Never Satisfies (vv. 18)

Ecclesiastes 1:18 For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Solomon now brings this section to a sobering conclusion. He has searched by wisdom. He has seen the works done under the sun. He has found vanity and vexation of spirit. He has seen the crookedness man cannot straighten. He has climbed to the height of human wisdom. He has searched wisdom, madness, and folly.

And now he says: **“For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”**

Knowledge opens your eyes to brokenness. The more you know about life under the sun, the more sorrow you see. You start to understand how short life is. You start to understand how easily people are deceived. How deeply sin damages lives. How quickly health can fail. How fragile families can be. You start to understand that death is coming for everyone.

That is why increased knowledge can increase sorrow.

People have more information than ever before. They can pull out a phone and search almost anything in seconds. News from around the world is constantly in front of them. Wars, disasters, corruption, scandals, disease, crime, arguments, opinions, and fear are poured into their minds every day.

Does knowing more bring more peace? No.

They know more, but they are more anxious. They see more, but they are more overwhelmed.
They hear more, but they are more confused. They scroll more, but they are more empty.

That's why knowledge alone is not the answer. You need to have the right type of knowledge...

Philippians 3:7-9 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. **8** Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, **9** And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

That is the knowledge that satisfies. Knowing Jesus Christ and being given the righteousness of God through faith in Him.

So Solomon's testimony is clear.

The search begins. The search is empty. The search finds brokenness. The search climbs higher.
The search tries everything. But the search never satisfies.

Not because Solomon failed to search hard enough, but because he searched everything under the sun and discovered that nothing under the sun can give man what only God can give. God is the only one who gives peace, comfort, happiness, joy, and rest for your soul.

So the question this morning is simple:

Are you still searching where Solomon already searched?

When you try everything on earth and everything still isn't enough. It's time to look somewhere different. It's time to look above the heavens. It's time to look above the sun.

Man can never make the crooked straight. Man can never fill the empty void.
That's why Jesus Christ is the only answer.

Luke 3:5-6 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth; **6** And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Let's Pray