

The Whole Duty of Man

The older I get, the more I look back and take an assessment of my life to this point. Experiences, successes, failures, mistakes, regrets—all are a part of self-examination. The writer of Ecclesiastes, whether it be Solomon or not, does a lot of self-assessment as he is nearing the end of his life. What he discovers is that he has wasted a great deal of it doing things of no consequence—things that haven't really done him any lasting good.

In the first chapter, the writer concludes that day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, life is spent doing the same meaningless things. Wisdom as an application of his increased knowledge only caused him more sorrow and grief. In chapter two, he realizes that pleasures like laughter, and wine, and successes are all, what he calls **“trying to catch the wind.”** He looked for something **“worthwhile”** to do during his **“few days”** on the earth.

Work, and the satisfaction that comes from it is meaningless because it's temporary. All the things done in this life, in their time, don't last forever. Judgement will come for all of us based on what we have spent our lives doing. The world and all of the things in it, oppression, work, advancement and the riches that come with it are meaningless in comparison to a full rich relationship with God. We are to, as the writer says in **5:7**, **“stand in awe of God”** and realize our small stature in this great big universe. We shouldn't live our lives in folly—doing foolish, meaningless things. Rather we should live our lives in reverent obedience to God.

Chapter 11 is so full of good advice on how to live one's life. Take risks, but be careful. Realize everything goes the way God intends. You are not in control. Work hard. Do what you will, but know you'll answer to God for the kind of life that you've lived.

But it's **chapter 12** that most people dwell on when thinking of Ecclesiastes. The writer speaks, using metaphors to describe the aging process that all of us will go through. We came from the earth, and we will eventually return to it. God will receive our spirit and judge us according to the life we've lived. So much of our time is wasted on meaningless things, so that when we are about to die, we realize what's really important. For so many, it's too late to redeem the time.

So, what's most important? What should we consider our purpose in life?

Ecclesiastes 12:13:

**“Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the duty of all mankind.” (NIV)**

“When all has been heard, the end of the matter is: fear God [worship Him with awe-filled reverence, knowing that He is almighty God] and keep His commandments, for this applies to every person.” (AMP)

The conclusion the writer of Ecclesiastes has come to offers us the advice that all of us should follow. It's not about the things one can accumulate or the experiences one can have, it is the quality of the life lived. That life is one that is to be lived in complete awe of God, realizing his supremacy over all—including each of us. Our respect for God will cause us to live obedient lives, doing His will.