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Pleasure is Pointless
Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11

Pleasure is pointless DIG: What key phrases tell you about the perspective of his passage. What great projects did Solomon undertake? What desires were such projects meant to satisfy? Why is the Teacher so unhappy with what so many would call success? What could be the reason Ecclesiastes is in the Bible? Why isn't the world enough to satisfy your needs?

REFLECT: What is the most important project you have undertaken in the last year? How do you measure your success in that? What pleasures are you tempted to take for yourself instead of seeking the pleasure of God? Do you see yourself as more led by your heart, or by your head? In what areas do you find yourself controlled more by your desires or wisdom?

If we were able to find lasting satisfaction in earthly pleasure,
then we would never see our need for God.



There are those in the world today who experience more **pleasure** than most people in the history of the world. Yet in spite of their prosperity – or maybe because of it – they still suffer from poverty of the soul. The taste of **pleasure** has grown their appetite for this world beyond satisfaction. Meanwhile, they are still desperately searching for meaning in life.

The pleasure test: **Solomon** first tried to think his way to the answer, using his mind to figure out the point of existence. But **his** quest for knowledge through human intellect ended in frustration and sorrow (**to see link click Ce – Wisdom is**

Pointless). So, **the Teacher** decided to take another approach. **He** started talking to **himself** again – not about life changing like the grace and beauty of **God**, but about getting more out of life. **I said to myself, "Come now, I** (**he** used the word **I** almost 40 times in these verses) **will test myself with pleasure and enjoy good things" (2:1a).** Clearly, **he** was self-indulgent in the pursuit of self-centered **pleasure**.

But almost immediately **the Teacher** tells us that this new quest failed as spectacularly as the first one did. **Pleasure** did not satisfy **his** soul any more than **wisdom**. **But this too was pointless (2:1b).** Although it seemed to hold out the promise of purpose, **pleasure** vanished like **the wind**, leaving **the Teacher** empty handed. The pursuit of **pleasure** turned out to be nothing more than **pointless** self-gratification.

Lest we think that **Solomon** failed to give self-gratification a fair chance, **he** lists all **the pleasures he** sought after. First, **he** experimented with comedy. Some people deal with their insecurities by joking about something. When they get down on themselves, they make fun of other people. When they are bored, they look for something to give them a giggle, such as a funny clip on YouTube – anything to get **a laugh**. **The Teacher** tried this sort of thing too, yet it failed to bring **him** lasting fulfillment. **Of laughter I said, "This is stupid," and of pleasure, "What's the use of it" (2:1a-2)? Solomon** discovered that when it comes to the meaning of our existence, **laughter** is **a** useless **pleasure**.

The next **pleasure Solomon** tried was **alcohol**, another popular way to seek enjoyment in life – or else to escape your troubles. Knowing this, **the Teacher-King** said: **I searched my mind for how to gratify my body with wine and, with my mind still guiding me with wisdom, how to pursue foolishness; my object was to find out what was the best thing for people to do.** But what do we make of **his** comment that **his mind was still guiding him with wisdom while drinking**? In one of **his** famous proverbs, **the Teacher** declared: **Wine is a mocker, strong liquor a rowdy; anyone led astray by it is unwise (Proverbs 20:1).** But maybe **Solomon's wine**-tasting was a controlled experiment. Maybe **he** was **drinking** in moderation and then soberly assessing **his** experience. Maybe **he** was not an alcoholic after all, but merely a connoisseur. But either way – whether **his wine drinking** was marked by sophistication or inebriation – the man was looking for **pleasure** while **he** still had time. So, **Solomon** introduced a prominent theme that **he** would use in the rest of the book: namely the brevity of life, **during the short time we have to live under heaven (2:3).**

The **Solomon** of **Ecclesiastes** grabbed for all the gusto **he** could, but still came up empty. There were many other **pleasures** in **his** life and **Solomon** was rich enough to try almost all of **them**. The scope of **his** achievement is indicated by the fact that **the Teacher** mentions everything in the plural: **I worked on a grand scale – I built myself palaces, planted myself vineyards, and made myself gardens and parks; in them I planted all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the trees springing up in the forest (2:4-6).** The best of all, it was all for **him**. **His palace** was paradise regained, a man-made Garden of Eden.

Given the vast scope of **his** building projects and the huge size of **his** property, **Solomon** needed a massive workforce. To that end **he bought male and female slaves, and had many home-born slaves as well.** And to feed them all **he also had many herds of cattle and flocks of sheep** across **his** royal ranch. **More than anyone before him in Jerusalem (2:7).** We see all of this in the life of **King Solomon**, who had countless servants waiting on **him** hand and foot **(First Kings 10:4-8)**, and so many animals that every day the chefs in **his** royal kitchen prepared **ten fattened oxen, twenty pasture-fed oxen and one hundred sheep, in addition to deer, gazelles, roebucks and fattened poultry (First Kings 4:23).**

Needless to say, **the Teacher-King** also had a lot of money – some from taxing **his** own people and some from foreign tribute: **I amassed silver and gold, the wealth of kings and provinces. He** used some of **his** money to make beautiful music, both literally and figuratively: **I acquired male and female singers, things that provide sensual delight.** Music was a rare **pleasure** in those days, but **Solomon** could afford to bring it into **his** own home. Sex was more common, but few people have ever experienced it on the scale of **King Solomon** who had **a thousand 700 wives and 500 concubines** in **his** royal harem **(Ecclesiastes 2:8; First Kings 11:3).**[252]

Personal reflection: This is how **the Teacher** summarized **his** experiment with **pleasure**. **So, I grew great, surpassing all who preceded me in Jerusalem . . . I denied my eyes nothing they wanted. I withheld no pleasure from myself; for I took pleasure in all my work, and this was my reward for all my work (2:9-10).** Rather than waiting for **God** to make **him** great, as **He** had promised **(1 Kgs 1:37)**, **the Solomon** of **Ecclesiastes** made **himself** great. Whenever **he** saw something **he** wanted, **he** took it. Whenever **he** was tempted to indulge in a fleshly **pleasure**, **he** gave in. **He** denied **himself** nothing. Not really

what **God** had in mind.

Foolish pleasure: On "the morning after," while still suffering the after-effects of **his pleasure** trip, **Solomon** said: **Then I looked at all that my hands had accomplished and at the work I had toiled at; and I saw that it was all pointless, like chasing the wind, and that there was nothing to be gained under the sun (2:11). The king** was facing up to reality, looking at life the way it really is **under the sun,** cutting **God** out of the picture, and **he** wants us to know it isn't pretty. Squeeze all the **pleasure** out of life that you can, and still there is nothing to be gained. **Pleasure**, pursued for **its** own sake, cannot satisfy our souls. We can learn this lesson from **Ecclesiastes**, or we can learn it from our own melancholy experience.

Longing for God: When we finally discover that all **the pleasures** we pursue **under the sun** cannot satisfy our souls, then maybe we will look beyond this world. Our unsatisfied longings are a spiritual clue that we were made to enjoy **the pleasures** of **ADONAI**. If we were able to find lasting satisfaction in earthly **pleasure** then we would never see our need for **God**. Our dissatisfaction should point us back to **YHVH**, not away from **Him**. Maybe this is why **Ecclesiastes** is in the Bible. It is here to convince us that satisfaction only comes from **God Himself**. The world is not enough. We were made for another world **(Philppians 3:20a)**. There is a **God** in heaven who sent **His Son** to save us and then to satisfy us. In order to accomplish this saving purpose, **Ha'Shem's** unselfish **Son** could not live to **please Himself**, but **He** had to live for **His Father's pleasure**. Think of it this way, everything that **Solomon** pursued, **Yeshua** was tempted by, yet resisted. This makes **Him the Savior** of every dissatisfied **sinner**.

Holy pleasure: When we turn to **ADONAI**, something surprising happens: the very **pleasures** that failed to satisfy us do not help us to find even greater joy in the goodness of **God**. This is not true of foolish **pleasures**, of course – what the Bible calls **the passing pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25).** However, this is such a thing as holy **pleasure** . . . **pleasure** that comes when we are in the presence of **Yeshua Messiah**.

Late in the fantasy *Prince Caspian*, from the Narnia Chronicles, C. S. Lewis portrays the sisters Lucy and Susan having "a romp" with Aslan. The great lion-king has returned to the Land of Narnia and awakened the forest. There is raucous dancing, with laughter and shouting, and a feast of luscious grapes that taste like wine. A wild boy is dancing there, dressed only in a faun-skin, with vine-leaves wreathed in

his curly hair. Lucy and Susan's brother Edmund looked a the boy and remarked, "Now, there's a chap who might do anything – absolutely anything." Later, the children figure out that the wild youth was Bacchus, also known as Dionysius – the god of wine. This prompted Susan to make a wise observation, "I wouldn't have felt very safe with Bacchus and all his wild girls if we'd met them without Aslan. "I should think not," replied Lucy.

This principle applies well to the life of a believer: **pleasure** is only safe for us when **the LORD** is there. This never happens when we take **pleasure** for ourselves, or make it our main passion in life. It only happens when we receive **pleasure** as a gift from **ADONAI**, the way **David** did when **he** said: **In Your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).**

We taste **God's pleasure** when we receive laughter as a gift from **Him** – not mocking other people or joking in a vulgar way, but laughing at ourselves and our limitations, knowing that one day we will enter our **Master's joy (Matthew 25:21)**.

We taste true pleasure when we receive **wine** as a gift from **God**, drinking it **with a happy heart (Ecclesiastes 9:7)** – not abusing it by making a mockery of ourselves by getting drunk.

We taste **God's pleasure** when we design good homes or other beautiful **buildings**, providing that we build them for the glory of **God** and not our own grandeur.

We taste **God's pleasure** when we stroll through a beautiful **garden**, feast our eyes on the colors of creation and see the beauty of **the LORD**.

There is beauty in everything that **Solomon** mentions: in rewarding work that is done for **the glory of God (Colossians 3:23)**, in feasting at a banquet table with thanksgiving **(First Timothy 4:3-4)**, in silver and gold that is invested in the Kingdom of **God**, with the guarantee of an eternal return **(Matthew 6:19-21)**. There is **pleasure** in **music** that delights the ear and moves our emotions to the worship of **ADONAI**.

There is **pleasure** in sexual relations when they are shared as **the Desiger** intended. When sexual intimacy is given to someone else rather than taken for

ourselves, and when it is shared exclusively between one man and one woman who are bound by a love covenant for life, then intercourse finds its greatest **pleasure**.

God is not a killjoy. **He** is not trying to take any **pleasure** from us . . . but to give us more. Once we learn how to find our satisfaction in **God Himself**, then all **His** gifts become the best and truest **pleasures**. The divine gifts of creation are meant to be enjoyed as matters of stewardship rather than possession. Happily, we don't have to be as rich as **Solomon** to experience meaningful **pleasures**. We simply need to receive what is in the world around us as a gift from a loving **God**, and then give thanks to **Him** in the name of **Yeshua Messiah**.[253]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Thank **You** that the future joy of life in heaven, will be far greater than any time of **pleasure** on earth. There **You** will live among **Your** children in your perfect home in heaven where there will be no pain, no shame, no crying no dying! **"Behold, the dwelling of God is among men, and He shall tabernacle among them. They shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them and be their God. He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Nor shall there be mourning or crying or pain any longer, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4).***

*When we set off to find happiness or joy on earth, we seldom find it. Instead, when we offer to serve others and give ourselves wholeheartedly to **You,** dear **Lord,** and **Your** work, it is then that we find what we most need. O **Giver** of **every good and perfect gift (James 1:17)**, I ask today that **You** give me a chance to serve **You** and others in a way which brings glory to **You** and to **Your** Kingdom. My heart rejoices in blessing **You**, for **You** are so wonderful, awesome and loving! In Your holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*