

Chasing after the Wind

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ecclesiastes 2.1-11 | March 12, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our Lenten series entitled Chasing After the Wind, a refrain found throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. Today we consider the topic of “pleasure”, and how we often chase after the pleasures of life seeking ultimate fulfillment.

II. Connecting with One Another

Name something in life that brings you great pleasure, whether physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. Do you pursue that pleasure? How?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Ecclesiastes 2.1-11, aloud and slowly. What words or phrases stand out to you on this initial reading? What questions do you have?

b. The author of Ecclesiastes attempts to find meaning in life. In chapter one, he tries wisdom. Perhaps learning and knowledge will help him attain what he desires. But it is not to be. Even great wisdom, Solomon concludes, is a “chasing after the wind.”

Read Ecclesiastes 2.1. In chapter two, the King experiments (“tests” himself) with “pleasure.” He is like “The Wanderer” in the song U2 wrote for Johnny Cash:

*I went out there/In search of experience
To taste and to touch and to feel as much/As a man can before he repents*

Have you known anyone who lived like this? What was the result? Have you ever had a season like this in our life? What is Solomon’s immediate conclusion in verse 1?

c. Look through 2.1-11 and count how many times Solomon refers to himself. (“I”, “my”, etc.) What does this tell us about where his focus is? Who is Solomon concerned with?

d. Lest we think Solomon didn’t give hedonism a fair chance, verses 2-8 lists all of the pleasures he tried. Make a list of those pleasures.

e. First he tried “laughter” and concluded that it is “madness”. What kind of laughter do you think Solomon was referring to? When is the pleasure of laughter good and life-giving? When can it be life-destroying?

f. Next he tried “cheering [himself] with wine”. Partaking of alcohol seems to polarize many Christians. Why do you think that is? Can drinking alcohol be a healthy pleasure, a gift from God? How?

g. The end of verse 3 introduces a prominent theme in the rest of the book: the brevity of life. The thinking is this: because life is so short, we must pursue pleasure while we still can. Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Why or why not?

- h. In verses 4-6 Solomon recounts his skills as an architect, a builder, and a developer. In addition to demonstrating power on the battle field, kings of the ancient near east displayed their dominance by subduing and cultivating the land.

What pleasures result from designing, landscaping, or decorating our homes? When can that pleasure become an unhealthy pursuit?

- i. Verses 7-8 speak of the vast goods that belonged to the King's estate: countless slaves, the largest herds and flocks, overflowing silver and gold, entertainment in the form of singers, and a concubine reported in 1 Kings 11:3 as numbering a thousand.

How do we seek "pleasure" through the accumulation of goods and "stuff" today? How can we own our stuff without our stuff owning us?

- j. Verses 9-11 are Solomon's personal reflections on his experiment with pursuing pleasure. Summarize his conclusion.

What do you think of his conclusion? Too bleak? Just right? Why?

IV. Reflect

- a. In the second half of verse 10 Solomon states that he "took delight" in his labor. He considered pleasure to be a "reward" for his toil. When have you experienced "delight" in a job well done?
- b. Read Philippians 3.4b-9. The apostle Paul describes his pedigree and accomplishments, which he—on the surface—has every reason to take pleasure in. Instead he calls them "rubbish" in comparison to knowing Christ as Lord. Is it a challenge for you to keep your accomplishments and pedigree in their proper place? What does a "heathy pride" look like for Christians?
- c. What "pleasures" might churches be pursuing today that are ultimately a "chasing after the wind"?
- d. As 21st century Americans almost everything is offered to us. We have as many opportunities as Solomon to indulge sinful and selfish desires. But we are not satisfied. Our unsatisfied longings are a spiritual clue that we were made to enjoy the pleasures of God. How have you experienced the "pleasures of God" in your life? How do unsatisfied longings point you to a greater fulfillment to come?

V. Pray

- a. Take a few moments in silence to quiet your mind and turn your heart toward God...
- b. ...thank God for the good gifts He has brought into your life...experiences...work ...people ...blessings that enrich your life and bring you pleasure and meaning...
- c. ...confess to God those pleasures in your life that are *not* healthy and life-giving... that perhaps you even feel bound by...ask God for help and grace...
- d. ...pray for others who appear to be chasing after the wind of pleasure...that their longings would lead them to God...
- e. ...pray for our church to be a community that finds joy and delight in the gifts God gives...