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“On the Hunt for Happiness and Satisfaction”

Ecclesiastes 2

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Have you ever tried to find happiness and satisfaction in things, places, or people, only to end up feeling empty and/or disappointed. Solomon experienced these same feelings, which are described throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon’s later years were marked by his hunt for happiness, satisfaction, purpose, and meaning. He looked everywhere but to the Lord. He came to realize that life without God was nothing but a never-ending “wild goose chase.” Pastor Gary’s message today focuses on the common ways many people mimic Solomon by engaging in the pleasure hunt, the measure hunt, and the treasure hunt.

Message Introduction

1. Pastor Gary said: “As I mentioned last week, Solomon [made] a lot of sinful choices, and he [came] to the end of his life and he [realized] that all of the many experiences and adventures and achievements and accomplishments [were] completely empty without God in the equation. [At that] point in his life, God [was], at the very best, on the fringes of his life. I do believe that - when you [consider how] the book ends - Solomon [came] around full circle to surrendering his life to the Lord again. But, for the time being, he [was] writing out of the experience of emptiness. ... Basic human needs and pursuits have not changed since the beginning of time and we share that [in] common. ... [We should learn] from Solomon’s experience, and then [look] forward in our own lives [to determine and pursue] what really matters. And that really is [what the questions are]: ‘What really matters in your life? and [How do you] find happiness?’ This is something that every human being faces, because [we’re] all on a quest for purpose and meaning and satisfaction. ... What brings us lasting purpose and meaning and happiness?”

2. Speaking of Solomon's example, consider what Mark Twain said: "Everybody can serve as an example; if nothing else, a bad example."
3. Pastor Gary said: "Solomon discovered what so many people fail to conclude; [we] try to achieve satisfaction and happiness and purpose... by reorganizing the external. ... [Real] purpose and meaning and happiness comes from reorganizing our internal lives, much more than reorganizing our external lives."
4. [Ecclesiastes 2:24-26](#) - *"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."*

The Pleasure Hunt

5. [Ecclesiastes 2:1-](#) - *"I thought in my heart, 'Come now, I will test [life] with pleasure to find out what is good.' But that also proved to be meaningless."*
6. The pleasure hunt can be described as the attempt to find happiness and satisfaction in physical or sensual gratification.
7. Laughter
 - a. [Ecclesiastes 2:2](#) - *" 'Laughter,' I said, 'is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?' "*
 - b. [Proverbs 17:22](#) - *"A cheerful heart is good medicine..."*
 - c. Pastor Gary said: "What Solomon [was] saying here, however, [was] that he thought laughter would cure everything. He basically thought [to himself], '[If] I just laugh at life, I can make my unhappy life, happy.' ... [Everything] in life is not a laughing matter. And, laughter can sometimes mask the pain, can't it?"
8. Alcohol
 - a. [Ecclesiastes 2:3](#) - *"I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly - my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives."*
 - b. Pastor Gary said: "[There's] a connection between the idea of alcohol cheering us up [and] bringing some measure of pleasure and enjoyment. [Look], I'm not going to use this verse as commentary on the merits and demerits of alcohol, [because] I've spoken on the subject before. ... [That's] not really the context here, because he's not talking about the merits or

demerits of alcohol itself. Solomon is simply talking about how he thought that wine could cheer him up and lift him out of depressing emptiness. ... [He thought] he could be happier if [he] could just drown out [his] sorrows, or at least take the edge off [his] problems. ... A lot of people have learned... the hard way... as soon as you [become] sober, [your] sorrows [and your] problems are still there. ... [Alcohol] doesn't fix anything. ... If you're using alcohol as some kind of a medicinal treatment of your sorrow or your emptiness or your [unfulfilled life]; all of that will still be there when you're sober! Alcohol is not an answer to [these things]."

9. Sex

- a. **Ecclesiastes 2:10a** - *"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure."*
- b. Solomon was the most powerful man in the world, which gave him access to many women.
 - i. **1 Kings 11:3** - *"He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines..."*
- c. Pastor Gary said: "Listen, God created the gift of sex to be enjoyed for pleasure and procreation, within the context of marriage between a man and a woman. ... The problem is that we've begun to believe a lie... that if we go the way of the world and [believe] what the culture thinks, [then we will experience] ultimate happiness and fulfillment. [If we believe the lie] we will always end up being disappointed. And, if instead we really understand the importance of God in our lives, and making him central to our lives, then we will experience a measure of pleasure and joy and fulfillment that the world doesn't offer, let alone deliver!"
- d. The woman Jesus spoke with at the well in Samaria would be a classic example of a person who looks for fulfillment in one relationship after another.¹

The Measure Hunt

10. **Ecclesiastes 2:4-7** - *"I undertook great projects: I **built** houses for myself **and planted** vineyards. I **made** gardens and parks **and planted** all kinds of fruit trees in them. I **made** reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I **bought** male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I **also owned** more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me."* (Emphasis added)

¹ John 4:1-26

11. The measure hunt can be described as the attempt to find happiness and satisfaction in terms of accomplishment or success.
12. Pastor Gary said: “Now, look, again, a word of caution, the Bible is not discouraging hard work or success. Far from it! The Bible champions hard work, and God makes people successful for his glory. ² ... Solomon was talking about doing what a lot of people do, and that is trying to find fulfillment and purpose and identity in what he did, rather than who God is. ... [A lot of people] get their identity and sense of satisfaction and meaning and purpose [from] the things they do and the things that they accomplish, rather than [finding satisfaction and meaning and purpose] in God.”
13. **Ecclesiastes 2:11** – *“Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”*

The Treasure Hunt

14. The treasure hunt can be described as the the attempt to find happiness and satisfaction in material possessions.
15. **Ecclesiastes 2:8–9** – *“I amassed silver and gold for myself and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well – the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.”*
16. **Ecclesiastes 5:10** – *“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.”*
17. Pastor Gary said: “[The problem] is when money has us; it’s not when we have money. Money makes a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. ... [Solomon] realized that all of the money in the world could not buy happiness.”
 - a. Solomon flooded the market with silver to the point that it was worthless!
 - i. **1 Kings 10:27** – *“[Solomon] made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones...”*
18. Pastor Gary referred to the sad and tragic stories of a number of lottery winners, including: Jack Whitaker, Abraham Shakespeare, and Donna Mikkin. ³

² **Deuteronomy 8:18** – *“But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...”*

³ <http://time.com/4176128/powerball-jackpot-lottery-winners/>

19. Pastor Gary shared a few statistics that reveal a lot about our culture.
- In the last 50 years, the average size house in America has tripled, and yet Americans have more of their possessions in storage units than any other country in the world.
 - There's enough square footage in storage buildings in America for every man, woman, and child to stand under roof.
 - There are more shopping malls in America than there are high schools.
 - American children make up 3.1% of the population of children in the world, but they own more than 40% of the toys in the world.
 - American's discard an average of 65 pounds of clothing annually.
 - American's spend more money every year on shoes, jewelry, and watches, than they do on college education expenses.

20. [Luke 12:15](#) - *"Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' "*

The Conclusion

21. [Ecclesiastes:20-21](#) - *"So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. for a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune."*

22. [Ecclesiastes 2:25](#) - *"... without [God], who can... find enjoyment?"*

23. Pastor Gary said: "... Solomon [was] not saying, and neither am I saying, that [Christians are the only] happy people in the world, and that those who don't know God and don't go to church and don't have a relationship with Christ, [that] they can't possibly be happy [or] they can't possibly be successful. That's nonsense. There's a lot of people in the world who don't know the Lord [who] are quite content and quite happy and quite successful. What I am saying, however, and what I believe that Solomon was communicating from his own life experience, is that [we] might find a measure of happiness and contentment and pleasure in this world, apart from God, but it will not be lasting. ... Every human being has a God-shaped hole in [his or her] heart, because, without [God there will be a] constant gnawing, nagging realization [that] something is missing. ... [If that's you, it's probably the case that] the Lord needs to be supreme in your life. [Knowing Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior will be the only thing that will bring ultimate satisfaction for your soul]."

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Ecclesiastes 2:24-26](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the search for meaning, purpose, and happiness, and [Ecclesiastes 2:24-26](#). (See #1 and #4 above)
3. Spend time talking about the points and the Scriptures Pastor Gary shared concerning the pleasure hunt. (See #5 through #9 above)
4. Spend time talking about the points and the Scriptures Pastor Gary shared concerning the measure hunt. (See #10 through #13 above)
5. Spend time talking about the points and the Scriptures Pastor Gary shared concerning the treasure hunt. (See #14 through 20 above)
6. Spend time talking about what brings satisfaction to our souls. (See #21 through #23 above)
7. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).