

## The Heart of the Matter (The Meaning of Life)

### Ecclesiastes 12

[NIV]

Remember your Creator

    in the days of your youth,  
before the days of trouble come  
    and the years approach when you will say,  
        “*I find no pleasure in them*”—

<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light

    and the moon and the stars grow dark,  
        and the clouds return after the rain;

<sup>3</sup> when the keepers of the house tremble,

    and the strong men stoop,  
when the grinders cease because they are few,  
    and those looking through the windows grow dim;

<sup>4</sup> when the doors to the street are closed

    and the sound of grinding fades;  
when people rise up at the sound of birds,

    but all their songs grow faint;

<sup>5</sup> when people are afraid of heights

    and of dangers in the streets;  
when the almond tree blossoms  
    and the grasshopper drags itself along  
        and desire no longer is stirred.

Then people go to their eternal home

    and mourners go about the streets.

<sup>6</sup> Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,  
    and the golden bowl is broken;

before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,  
    and the wheel broken at the well,

<sup>7</sup> and the dust returns to the ground it came from,  
    and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

<sup>8</sup> “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.  
    “Everything is meaningless!”

<sup>9</sup> Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people.

He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs.

<sup>10</sup> The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

<sup>11</sup> The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—  
given by one shepherd. <sup>12</sup> Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
    including every hidden thing,  
        whether it is good or evil.

## The Heart of the Matter



## The Reality of Death



I am probably a pastor today because of Death.



I was a church kid - went to church every Sunday or more with my parents.

My father was an elder of the church.

But I was a brat.

I argued with my Sunday School teachers because I knew the Bible better than they did.

I had fights with other students at church.

I stole and swore like a sailor at school.

You see, I have a nose for BS Christians because I was one.



But when I was 12 a classmate of mine was killed in a car accident.

I made me begin to evaluate what life was all about.

It was an existential moment in which I asked, "What is the meaning of life?"

Some folks never ask that question because they never face those circumstances.

Others ask the question and don't get an answer.

Some get the wrong answer - yes, you can get this really wrong.

But the most important thing is that such questions start you on a journey.

The most important quest in your life - the quest for meaning.



A Show of Hands: Who has never asked what the meaning of Life is?



### **The Quest of Ecclesiastes**

Ecclesiastes is a story of such a quest.

It is a quest set out upon by a character who has absolutely everything.

This is Solomon, the most powerful, the wealthiest, best educated,

most influential king Israel ever had.

He represents the very pinnacle of a golden age.

Our world has many empires past and present who had golden ages.

But as we saw, Ecclesiastes is not about someone who get the answer right.

It is about a jaded, narcissistic, exploitative, intelligent, person.

I am tempted to call him godless but tragically he knows of God.



[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTBlFC-oAnw>]

[Accelerated Version of Anthony Cerniello's, *Danielle: Girl Grows Up Into An Old Woman Emulating The Aging Process*, published on Sep 12, 2013. Cerniello took a trip to his friend Danielle's family reunion with photographer Keith Sirchio and took portraits of the entire family. Cerniello then scanned each photo, selected family members that had the most similar bone structure and edited them into a stunning time-lapse entitled Danielle. The idea behind the project was to create the perception that 'something is happening but you can't see it but you can feel it, like aging itself.]

Chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes is a meditation on aging and the absolute inevitability of Death. Verses 1-8 is about the end of life.

Your Eyes Go.

*before the sun and the light  
and the moon and the stars grow dark,  
and the clouds return after the rain;*

Your Strength Goes (Arms, legs, back)

*when the keepers of the house tremble,  
and the strong men stoop,*

Your Teeth, Ears, Eyes Go

*when the grinders cease because they are few,  
and those looking through the windows grow dim;  
when the doors to the street are closed  
and the sound of grinding fades;*

Your Confidence Goes

*when people rise up at the sound of birds,  
but all their songs grow faint;  
when people are afraid of heights  
and of dangers in the streets;*

Your Libido Fades

*when the almond tree blossoms  
and the grasshopper drags itself along  
and desire no longer is stirred.*

Your Friends Die

*Then people go to their eternal home  
and mourners go about the streets.*



You Die

*Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,  
and the golden bowl is broken;  
before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,  
and the wheel broken at the well,  
and the dust returns to the ground it came from,  
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*



### **Meaning of Life**

The Conclusion:

*"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.*

*"Everything is meaningless!"*

There is only one great certainty.

Everything that lives will die.

You will die.

So what?

So what is the meaning of life?

How you answer that question will determine everything about how you live.

If you have never asked that question,

If you have avoided that question,

it still remains.



### Shout Outs: How do Some People Answer this Question?

#### **Kohelet's Answer**

- <sup>9</sup> Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people.  
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here is the conclusion of the matter:  
Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the duty of all mankind.  
<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
including every hidden thing,  
whether it is good or evil.

He is not godless.  
But he is heartless.  
His life is meaningless.  
With a thousand women at his beck and call he is loveless.  
God to him is not a friend, is not a saviour, is not a lover.



God is a judge, and existential prop to be feared and respected and obeyed.  
There are plenty of Christians in our day like this.  
In fact, we may come from such traditions.  
No wonder non-believers find such religion odious.  
I would too.  
Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, got the answer to the meaning of life Wrong.  
How? Why?



## **What We Were Created For**

It is one thing to be religious, to go through the motions.

    This is what it means to have a tradition, a history, a culture.

It is also another thing to have a faith,

    a belief system, a theology, a cosmology, a philosophy.

But these are empty things.

    A purely traditional life has foundations but no conviction.

    A purely rational life makes sense, but has no passion.

Solomon has both of these things but it was not enough to save his soul.

You see, he had not heart.

He had no love.

He had money, power, influence, lovers, hobbies, education, intelligence.

But meaning? Purpose?

He did not have.

What motivates you?

Guilt? Fear? Duty? Success?

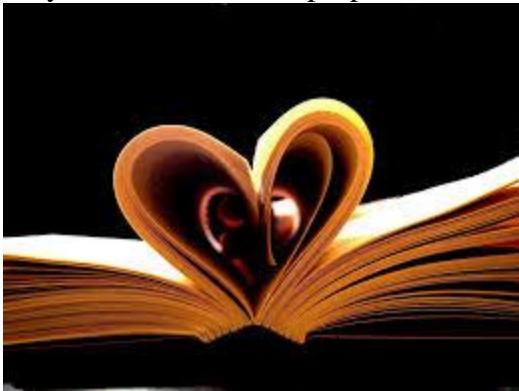
These things are powerful but they can be meaningless.

We were created with a purpose.

We were created with intention.

That purpose gives us our meaning.

Do you know what that purpose is?



Jesus Loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.

To love and be loved.



First with God our creator, saviour and friend.  
Then with others.  
But what does this love look like?

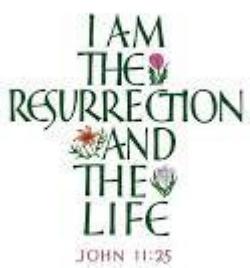
### **Discussion**



How do you get to know someone?  
How do you come to truly appreciate and love someone? (Not romantically.)  
How do you get to know God personally?

This is not a private matter.  
It is a part of our lives together to tell the stories of his reality in our lives.  
How do you know the love of God?

This is the very heart of our existence.  
It is what it means to be Christian.  
Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart  
and with all your soul  
and with all your mind  
and with all your strength.  
It means to love him with everything you are.



One need not fear death when one is a friend of the resurrected and ascended Christ.  
We were created to live.  
We were created to love.  
He came that we might have life, life to the full.

"Glory be to the Father  
and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning,  
is now and ever shall be,  
world without end."