

# How to Live a Meaningful Life

**Series: Finding the Meaning of Life**

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**Text: Ecclesiastes 9:1-10**

**Date: Wednesday, August 4, 2010, 7pm**

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 9**. We are going to talk tonight about “How to Live a Meaningful Life”. Some of us are going to live to be 95. Some of us are going to die at 35. But with the limited amount of time that we've been given, Solomon is pleading with us not pursue comfort, but to pursue meaning, significance, beauty, and depth. How can we pursue a meaningful life that will count when we see Jesus Christ? Solomon lets us in on it in Ecclesiastes 9.

## I. First we must debunk common myths about the good life.

A. **Myth #1:** If I live a godly life, God will always **prosper** me on this earth.

This is false. Actually, a meaningful life will include both **good and bad**, but all is **guided** by God. **Verse 1a:** “But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God”.

For the righteous and the wise and those who submit to God, their deeds, their lives, the things that befall their lives, it's in the hands of God. Nothing befalls the children of God that doesn't first pass through God's hands.

**Proverbs 37:23-24,** “The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way; 24 though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand.”

Look at **verse 1b**, “Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.”

One of the things I love about the three thousand year old book of Ecclesiastes is that it does not pretend that life is always nice or fair. But God is sovereign in all of life. He does not do anything to please man. He does what He Himself pleases. One of the things He pleases to do is to guide the steps of His own people. But “whether it is love or hate, man does not know.”

There is a lot of religious silliness out there right now on TV and radio that contradicts this verse. We are all going to experience both love and hate in this world. Just because we follow Christ does not mean all will go well with us. There is an emphasis that if you follow Jesus, good things happen to you. Now, I have a lot of problems with that, namely the Bible. Because if I read the story right, John the Baptist got his head cut off for doing what God asked of him.

The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not that if you're good, He blesses you in this world. The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that He is enough, no matter what the circumstance, and your blessing is that your Name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

You may obey and God may or may not bless you on this earth. Think about the saints of God.

- Jeremiah gets beat up, stripped naked, and thrown into a ditch.
- Isaiah is sawn in two and dies.
- Consider what God says about the greatest saints of the OT era in **Hebrews 11:35-40**, “Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, though commended through their faith, **did not receive what was promised,** 40 since God had provided something better for us”. The great saints did not get the promises while on this earth, but instead got the opposite. They died, and some were tortured waiting for it.
  
- Joseph suffered much in the pit and the prison and in Potiphar's house in slavery. Yet, we read in **Genesis 50:20**, Joseph's words to his brothers, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good”. Joseph's brothers did whatever was in their deceitful hearts, but God worked it all for Joseph's good.
  
- And think about our Lord – He was crucified—and this was God's will.

Don't be surprised that a very fulfilling, meaningful life includes both fantastic times and fantastically awful times. Both love and hate are before you—you will experience both as a child of God. What matters is that our heart is submitted to God, that we have an unwavering confidence that all we do is “in the hand of God” (**verse 1**). So a meaningful life will include both good and bad, but all is guided by the sovereign hand of God.

**B. Myth #2: The godly die in a better than the wicked.** Actually, what is true is that a godly, meaningful life will often end in the same way as those who live a meaningless life.

**Verses 2-3**, “It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man

are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

**Verse 1** tells us that God watches over His children. He guides them through thick and thin. He leads them through the valley of the shadow of death. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. But we do know this. There is coming a day when we die. The only thing we can all be sure of is that we are closer to death right now than we were when we first walked in.

And do not be surprised if you die in the same way as the wicked. The righteous and the wicked both die of cancer, both are crushed in hurricanes and tsunamis. Both die alone at times, and both die at times with family surrounding them. Both may die in prison or in freedom.

Death is the evidence that something has gone cataclysmically wrong in the universe. **Verse 3b**, “the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.” The problem is in the heart of man. We are born utterly depraved, unable to do that which is truly good, we are unable to live selflessly for God, but instead are selfish beings from our mother's womb. This is why death comes to all.

**Application:** Yet for the believer, “all things work together for good” (**Romans 8:28**). Even death is good for us, because it is the entrance into the eternal Kingdom!

There is hope for all before death. **Verse 4**, “But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.” Both rich and poor have hope, but once death comes any hope for meaning is cut off for any who is not in Christ. While there's life there is hope!

If all you have is this life, it will all perish when you die. That's what Solomon says in **verses 5-6**, “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun”. Again, if all you have is this life, it will all perish when you die.

Now if you are a believer in Christ in here, you're saying, “Wait a minute. These verses don't apply to us, because our love does go on. We live eternally with Christ, the wedding supper of the Lamb, banqueting table of the King.” That's right, Solomon's making a very clear distinction between those two. He's saying, “Under the sun, you're done. You have no more influence under the sun. Your love dies, your hate dies, your envy dies with you. You leave everything here when you die.” So, you've got this chance and this hope because you're alive. Jesus asked this question in **Mark 8:36**, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

## II. Now let's look at the **Discipline** of a Meaningful, Christ-centered Life.

### A. A meaningful life engages with **friends**.

1. **By eating dinner**. What? That's right. Look at **verse 7**, "Go, eat your bread in joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do." Eating in Scripture is almost never alone. It is a picture of friendship and communion. So Solomon says, eat dinner! He's not saying that we should be hedonists. He's already explained in the first half of the book that food and pleasure will never satisfy. But if God has first place in your life, you ought to use the blessings of God and form relationships with people.

The Scripture just said that good food is to be enjoyed with good friends who have good senses of humor because this is how you practice for heaven. Encourage people all around you by eating with them!

Remember how Jesus was accused of wrongdoing because He lived by this. Jesus said in **Luke 7:34**, "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"

We are commanded to enjoy the gifts God gives us. We have this same sentiment in **Psalms 104:14-15**, "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth 15 and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart."

**Application:** Do you want to live deep? Do you want to find significance? McDonald's in your car is not dinner. Hot pockets in the office are not dinner. Go home. Spend time with your family. We say life is so busy today. Life was busy then as well. Use meal times to build relationships—and be encouraging to people. Be "merry". It's a command.

#### **A Clarification**

Notice Solomon says, "for God has already approved what you do" (**verse 7b**). The idea is very clear that Solomon is not speaking of hedonism, but of a godly enjoyment of the gifts of God for the glory of Christ. You are accepted by God. You are approved—you are walking in faith—your motive is not pleasure but pleasing God. So go ahead and enjoy it for the Lord.

2. **By being a blessing to people**. **Verse 8a**, "Let your garments be always white". In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, white garment are

symbolic of joy and are worn on joyous, festive occasions.<sup>1</sup> Be an encouragement to people.

So, he's saying, "Do dinner, laugh, enjoy friends, let conversation be deep and rich, smile and enjoy, and then do not stand at the center of your universe. You have been blessed to be a blessing. So, do dinner, be a blessing to others.

3. **By being encouraged by God.** Verse 8b, "Let not oil be lacking on your head." Oil, in both the Old Testament and New Testament, is a reference to the anointing presence of God in the Holy Spirit (**1 Samuel 16:13**). It is a symbol of gladness in the Holy Spirit (**Psalm 45:7**).

#### B. A meaningful life engages with **family**.

Every political campaign it seems the theme is "family values". It always sounds good on the surface, but they end up being dirty rats to their families and really have no family values.

**Verse 9**, "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun."

Solomon says, "Enjoy your wife, but remember, it's going to be some work." You need to enjoy dinner. Talk with your family. Talk with friends. But don't forget the dishes. There are dishes to wash. There's going to be some serious work if you want to enjoy your wife.

Let's talk about this. I have found through my own marriage, intimacy, spiritual emotional intimacy must be worked at and it does not come easily.

If you really want to want to get really deep down to the core of who your wife is, married men, you are going to need to spend some time with her. You need to learn to communicate. **1 Peter 3:7**, "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered".

- It matters **THAT** you TALK with her.
- It matters **HOW** you talk with her! "showing honor to the woman as a weaker vessel."

Let's be honest. You cannot enjoy the husband or wife He's given to you if you are wishing you were married to someone else. Solomon says this, "The grass is not greener on the other side". And if it is, it's because YOU have stopped watering the grass.

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<sup>1</sup> Jay Adams. *Life Under the Son. Counsel from the Book of Ecclesiastes*, 95.

You say, “But you don’t understand my husband” or “You don’t understand my wife”. Listen, if your spouse was at one time lush, green pasture—what happened to the grass? YOU did!

If you want to enjoy life with your spouse, you cannot seek to change THEM, you need to change YOU! What is your goal. You will enjoy your spouse once you “toil” and work hard on your own attitudes and reactions.

If you are not right with your spouse, it is very likely that you are not right with God. You are not doing what He’s called you to do. In fact, Peter says in the verse we just read, that if you’re not right with your spouse, then your prayers are hindered. So enjoy and engage in married life if you are married.

### C. A meaningful life engages in **work**.

**Verse 10**, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going”.

The Scriptures here are pleading with you to be a good worker. God blessed us with work before the Fall. There is a joy and satisfaction in working hard. Previous generations called this the work ethic. There is something that happens when we’ve done a good job and get to step back and look at it. There is a feeling that we did a good job, that we accomplished something. You know vacation is going to be difficult for me if there is nothing to do. I can’t just go and sit—so we have various activities planned. You know it’s true. You come home from vacation sometimes exhausted because it takes more energy than work!!

**Application:** Let me say something to the younger people. Turn off mine sweep or pac man or wii, or Atari, or whatever it is. Turn off the computer or the video games and do something productive. Parents, I want you to know it drives me crazy to see our young people glued to a portable video game or computer. I allowed it once recently, and it convinced me that it’s not a good idea. Parents you need to limit screen time. If your kids are in front of videos, video games, computer, TV for more than a short amount of time a day—you are teaching them to waste time.

**Conclusion:** So let me paraphrase what Solomon is saying: “Go to dinner and invest in relationships with people. Don’t hoard everything you’ve been given. Follow the still small voice of God. Pour into deep relationships, specifically your spouse. Work hard. And in the end, find what God has asked and be obedient to it.”