

The True Value Of Life Under The Sun

THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

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INTRODUCTION

In **James 3:13-18**, a wisdom that is self-seeking is described as human, earthly, arrogant and demonic. Such wisdom is always meaningless, not willing to yield to God's directives. It brings frustration, confusion and emptiness.

We are no strangers to the incessant building collapses in Nigeria. The Building Collapse Prevention Guild recorded at least 62 catastrophes in 2022, causing 84 deaths and injuring 113 persons.



Various reasons have been given for these building collapses. One of the main reasons was based on the rising cost of building materials. Most builders, developers have resorted to usage of low-quality materials to avoid spending more than their projected expenses on buildings. Money that would have been spent to build a bungalow that won't collapse would be used to build a two-storey building that will collapse at mid-stage or at completion.

This wisdom is a total lack of purpose or usefulness. This brings more harm than good – only on record (temporary) that he started a building but money spent *lost*, lives lost, time wasted and damage made to one's reputation (identified as a murderer and probably called a ritualist) - *what a futility of wisdom!*

What about the *Prodigal son* – **Luke 15**. The young man (*identified by some as an alcoholic because of his behavior*) decided the source of his unhappiness was his father's house so he decided to leave. He demanded his share of the estate which he promptly converted to cash, probably at considerable loss because of the hasty sale. He took his journey to a far country. Notice his desire to get as far away as possible.

At first there was still no hint of tragedy. The boy gained temporary joy and friendship by squandering his property in loose living. But his resources ran out at the very time that a drought devastated the far country and a series of bad events happened.

Those friends who were attracted by his wealth and were willing to spend it, probably vanished at the same time his money got exhausted. No one was giving anything to him. He had no choice than to work for a Gentile. To make matters worse, he had the job of taking care of pigs. Under the law of Moses, a pig was an unclean animal (**Leviticus 11:7**). Jews did not eat pigs, did not raise pigs, had nothing to do with pigs. Even after thus debasing himself, he still did not have enough to eat, so he had to get in the trough with the pigs.

What fulfilling purpose, benefits did he enjoy from the exercise of his wisdom? He lost status of an heir of great wealth, freedom and honor. The person he went to work for would have been far beneath him at his community and father's house. He lost moral standing. He was feeding pigs which was a violation of a long-standing value back home. He faced starvation. At first he wanted to be far away from home as much as possible, but now he long desperately to be at home – back to the starting point – *what a futility of wisdom!*

Solomon in ***Ecclesiastes 2:1-11***, continued emphasizing his message to the Israelites (*same message applies to us today*), that so much is frustrating, futile and meaningless, without God's wisdom. All human wisdom must yield to God's wisdom if we are to find the fulfilment God intended for us while on earth.

SOLOMON – THE ALL-OUT EXPERIMENTER *Ecclesiastes 2:1,10*

We have to give Solomon credit: in his all-out search for meaning in life, once he found out that one thing did not satisfy him, he turned to something else.

First, he tried wisdom, the human variety, not the divine, and pronounced it all "*futility or vanity*" (***Ecclesiastes 1:12-18***). This was the focus of last week's lesson.

Next, he tried pleasure as he said to himself, *¹ I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore, enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity.*

He became a total hedonist (*a person who believes that the pursuit of pleasure is the most important thing in life; a pleasure-seeker*) who denied himself nothing.

¹⁰ Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor.

To Solomon if it felt good, he did it; if it looked good, he bought it; if it sounded good, he went for it. He went unrestrained using his wisdom not God's.

Why did God allow him to go unrestricted? Why would God allow any human who has self-seeking wisdom to go unrestrained in his futile wisdom?

Romans 1:21-28, gives a little insight. Paul stated that such a man or woman does not want to think about God. To think about God would be to reprove his evil deeds. He wants to put God out of his thoughts so he can reject God. He does not want God to control his life. He wants to do his own thing, go his own way. As a result of the his futile or meaningless wisdom, he is bound to suffer the following:

²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things [1 Kings 11:4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David]

²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. ^{26a} For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. ²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.

[1 Kings 11:1-2 ¹ But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites— ² from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love].

There is so much evil (*sexual immorality [rape, paedophilia, LGBTQ (An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer"), masturbation, pornography] wickedness, betrayals, covetousness, robbery, maliciousness; envy, murder, strife, cultism, kidnapping, lies, deceit, gambling, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, unforgiveness, alcoholism, indecent dressing, etc.*) that our world today offers us. These offers are based on the futility of the wisdom which humans have created for themselves to try to make sin respectable and permissible.

If we trust this wisdom and yield to it, God will allow us to go on in our futility. He will allow us to be consumed in our own wisdom.

SELF-SEEKING HUMAN WISDOM IN THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE *Ecclesiastes 2:1-11*

All that Solomon tried or tested in his human wisdom revealed the extent human may go to test his pleasure, to achieve his self-seeking desires.

To get the full effect of Solomon's "pleasure test," take a careful look at all that he tried.

First was laughter. ¹*I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore, enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity. ²I said of laughter—"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"*

Evidently, Solomon sought to lose himself in whatever would give him a laugh, whether *entertainment or games*.

Today, we are exposed to the highest levels of sexual, deceitful and meaningless content in music, magazines, television, and movies – all for entertainment.

Last week Friday, July 28, 2023, I was having my haircut in a saloon, and I heard the "vocal" lyrics of a song *if you play yahoo you go die, if you noh play yahoo you go die, make we play yahoo and die; if you noh do dreadlock you go die, if you do dreadlock you go die, make we do dreadlock and die...*

Second was wine. ³*I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.*

Solomon tried strong drink, all the while seeking to acquire more wisdom (*human wisdom – as he was not contented with God's wisdom*).

Solomon looked for contentment at the bottom of a bottle. Even though he indulged in drinking, he claimed his mind was still "guiding him wisely," apparently meaning that he sought to remain in control, perhaps to gauge whether or not

wine was giving him what he looked for. It did not.

(Beyond all human analysis, who knows if his indulgence in wine drinking was a factor in leading him to lust after 300 concubines and 699 wives - 1 Kings 11:3 - And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart – emphasis mine).

For those who engage in drinking alcohol (whether in bits or large quantities) - what is your motive: discovery, inspiration, wisdom, pleasure, fulfilment, joy, healing, contentment etc.

Are you really in control of yourself when you indulge in drinking? Has the wine given you what you are looking for? If yes, are you now contented? Or do you need periodical or regular contentment?

Third was real estate. Solomon mentions houses, vineyards, parks, gardens, and pools. ⁴*I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. ⁵I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁶I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.*

There are some pretty amazing buildings being constructed around the world; some of them absolutely defy conventional human civil engineering wisdom and others challenge the laws of gravity. Every year seems to take the bar higher; pioneers of material sciences, civil engineering, landscaping, interior designing are taking design and architecture to a whole new level with unbelievably futuristic spaces for work, living and play.

We have the Jeddah Tower (*Kingdom tower*), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.



A skyscraper construction project in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It is planned to be the first 1 km (3,281 ft) tall building and would be the world's tallest building or structure upon completion. It will have more than 200 floors with the world's highest observation deck on the 157 th floor (26 floors have already been built up). It will house office space, luxury condos, a Four Seasons hotel and an observatory. It has 12 escalators and 59 elevators with 5 of the elevators being double-decker.

A tower that would finally overtake the Burj Khalifa and help position Jeddah as a global city on par with Dubai. Then things took a turn. Today the building stands unfinished and abandoned 300 metres in the air – and after years of political crackdowns and a global pandemic, it's unclear if Jeddah Tower can ever rise to its full height. Even if construction works do start up again, it'll take a massive feat of engineering to complete. The development is currently on hold.

We have the *Dubai Pearl, Dubai, Agora Garden Tower, Taipei, Dawang*

Mountain Resort, Changsha, China, Istanbul New Airport, Dubai One Tower, Forest City, Johor, Malaysia, Eko Atlantic City, Lagos, Nigeria, etc.

Will man ever find satisfaction in building and land designs?

Solomon said with all his acquisitions, he will definitely leave it to the man who will come after him. Yet, he does not know whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all his labor in which he toiled and in which he has shown himself *humanly* wise under the sun.

This also is futility or vanity (***Ecclesiastes 2:18,19***).

How many rooms can the richest man occupy in the most expensive and biggest mansion in the world? How will the buildings or estate be used after his death?

Fourth was money and possessions. Solomon specifies that he owned many slaves, livestock, silver, gold, and other treasures— "larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem."

⁷ ...Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. ⁸ I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces...and musical instruments of all kinds. ⁹ So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. ¹¹ Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

According to **1 Kings 3:13**, because Solomon asked for God's wisdom to rule the Lord's people in a godly way, God also gave him riches and honor beyond comparison with any other king on earth.

1 Kings 10:14-29 provides us with a summary of Solomon's great wealth: gold, silver, ivory, exotic animals, horses, chariots, spices, and expensive clothing. What an impressive list!

So fabulous was Solomon's wealth (and the use of his God-given wisdom) that the Queen of Sheba exclaimed, ⁶...*"It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your*

wisdom.⁷ *However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard (1 Kings 10:6,7).*

One wonders why would Solomon searched for more money and possessions in addition to what God has given to him.

The belief that wealth brings happiness is an age-old one. Solomon gave it all he had in order to find out. What did he find out – emptiness!

Jesus Christ emphasized the golden truth that one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses and whoever believes otherwise is covetous and discontented (**Luke 12:15**).

Fifth was sex. ⁷*I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house...⁸...I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men.*

Verses 7 and 8 gave an indication of his acquisition of concubines. Seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines. Every conceivable erotic pleasure was at his disposal, and he apparently tried them all.

What was the result of this self-indulgence? It is unquestionable that he did experience some pleasure.

His wives turned away his heart. and his wives turned away his heart after other gods and his heart was not loyal to the Lord, his God. He built idolatrous centres for all his foreign wives (**1 Kings 11:3-8**).

This was a man who claimed he was in control of himself - pleasuring himself while guiding his heart with his human wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly (**Ecclesiastes 2:3**).

Many have enslaved themselves to many forms of sinful sexual pleasures – pornography, masturbation, rape, polygamy, polyandry, paedophilia, LGBTQ (*An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer"*), bestiality, which is (*also known as zoophilia, typically involves recurrent intense sexual fantasies, urges, and sexual activities with non-human animals*).

The problem with the pleasure that Solomon found was that it did not last!

Sooner or later, we have to face up to the kind of lifestyle we choose. When Solomon had tried it all, he "faced" all that he had done. He had to come to grips with the unreality and vanity of his chosen lifestyle.

We like to pretend that we will never have to "pay the piper" for how we have lived.

In recent years some heavy cigarette smokers and their families have attempted to sue tobacco companies because smoking produced cancer. *One has to wonder what they expected to happen?*

Some indulge in sinful sexual pleasure and contracted sexual disease, gets pregnant, or even die in the process. *One has to wonder what they expected to happen?*

Some indulge in drinking alcohol whether in small or large quantities, occasionally or regularly and find themselves going through the same cycle to get the same pleasure they received at first, needing more alcohol to get the same effect, and with over time, developed chronic diseases, "blackouts," or gaps in your memory, etc. *One has to wonder what they expected to happen?*

Do we really believe that we can consistently abuse our bodies and not pay the price for that abuse?

Can we reject God and not pay the price? Can we neglect our families and not pay the price? Can we indulge in sin and not pay the price? Paying the price is what the whole idea of judgment is all about. You can ignore God for now, but eventually you must face Him.

LESSONS FROM SOLOMON'S PLEASURE TEST

Solomon's sensual pleasures were unfulfilling! They did not give him the satisfaction, the meaning that he needed. That which promised him a full life left him empty inside.

Those who live only for pleasure actually find only a series of "funfixes" that quickly go away and have to be sought all over again.

Others who are caught up in this blind pursuit of pleasure may tell us, "You don't know what you are missing!" (or pleasure will open our eyes).

In reality the endless pursuit of pleasure only blinds us as to what is important about life.

Even today, in our Nigerian society, we are not unaware of the craze to achieve feats of endurance (for fame and recognition) after a chef, Hilda Baci, in May 2023 officially broke the record for the longest cooking marathon (individual), with a time of 93 hours 11 minutes.

Guinness World Records has seen a surge in record-breaking attempts from Nigeria, unable to contain the crazed surge, Guinness World Records recently warned saying, *"Please enough of the record-a-thons,"*

Damilola Adeparusi, (Chef Dammy) claimed that she cooked for 120 hours but this could not be verified as there were times she switched off live video during the contest.

A Nigerian masseur, Joyce Ijeoma, collapsed during a 72-hour longest massage on different individuals in Lekki, Lagos State.

Comedian Woli Arole had shared his plan to initiate 5000-hour marathon prayers, in a bid to break the record for the longest praying time.

Adebiyi Israel, a native of Ekiti State, who shared a screenshot of the acceptance email from the GWR, revealed plans to break the world record for the longest hours spent watching movies.

Another plan by some persons in Ekiti to start Kiss-a-thon, where participants planned to break the record for the longest continuous kiss.

Tembu Ebere, forced himself to cry for seven days for the record but along the line, he went temporarily blind.

Eventually, the pursuit of pleasure leads us to neglect God, or to allow pleasure to actually become our God. Sensual pleasures disillusion us and make cover-up artists of us.

We are "pleasure addicts"; we cannot get enough thrills; we need bigger and more exotic "fixes" to keep us going.

Do you think it was easy for Solomon to admit that he was not having fun? That is when we pretend, and those around us join in the game because no one wants to admit that they are really dying inside. It is all a tragic game.

Solomon learned to his dismay that he could not "make himself happy."

CONCLUSION

Therefore, if you want happiness, pursue God! God did not plan for us to find fulfilment just by living, but by living in Him.

Invest your time, energy, talent in God's service. Pursue better relationships with your family. Invest in people. Pursue service to others. Pursue meaningful work.

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