

Ecclesiastes 2 Devos

Life Above the Sun Devotional: Week 2

By Laurie Ness

Week 2 Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 2:1–3 *I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. 2 I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” 3 I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.*

Devotional. “A day without laughter is a day wasted.” –Charlie Chaplin

Solomon starts out chapter two calling laughter madness. Granted, he is likely saying this in order to make a different point entirely, but the subject of laughter is worthy of our time to ponder.

I don't know that I would go to the extreme of Mr. Chaplin's quote--certainly, one can have a productive day without laughter. But how many days will a person's productivity remain high--in the absence of laughter--and is productivity alone the mark of a successful day?

Laughter can calm nerves, heal hearts, and draw people together. It's an icebreaker, a diffuser of tense situations, and a stress-reliever. Some say laughter can even help our physical health.

Does God care about laughter? In Luke 6:21, He tells us those who weep now will eventually laugh. Proverbs 17:22 reminds us that a merry heart is like medicine. We can guess He has a sense of humor, even by looking at aspects of His creation (ever seen a warthog?). And laughter, with all its benefits, seems to be a gift from Him.

As long as it's appropriate humor, let's make it a point to lighten up sometimes and enjoy the gift of laughter.

Prayer. Father, we thank you for the healing gift of laughter. Please help us to recognize and appropriately enjoy the humor in our days. Guide us in cheering up others as well.

Week 2 Tuesday

Ecclesiastes 2:4–11: *4 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. 9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. 11 Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*

Devotional. Probably all of us have known kids who were “spoiled rotten” in our estimation. And many of those kids have grown up with an annoying (even dangerous at times) sense of entitlement.

There are also adults who may not have grown up with much, but are now intent on collecting as many expensive things as money can buy.

Do “things” bring happiness?

Solomon was on a deliberate journey to have and experience every single thing his eyes and heart desired. He didn't say no to himself about anything he wanted. This included people. He used people (slaves, singers, and concubines) in various ways whenever he felt like it. He gave in to every impulse, and no one had as much, materially, as he had.

We saw in yesterday's passage that Solomon wasn't impressed with having everything, calling it “vanity,” which can also be translated as “vapor,” or “mist.” He had everything, and found nothing meaningful in any of it.

It's okay to enjoy material things, but only a relationship with Jesus Christ brings true joy and meaning to our lives. Are we spending more time accumulating things, or nurturing our relationship with Him?

Prayer. Lord, please help us to keep our priorities straight. Let nothing be more important to us than You.

Week 2 Wednesday

Read Ecclesiastes 2:12–17: *12 So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. 13 Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. 14 The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. 15 Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. 16 For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! 17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

Devotional. Have you ever strolled through a cemetery, taking in the names and dates of the lives of strangers who have met their eternal destiny? Can you tell which of these people lived a wise life here on earth; or the ones who lived foolishly? Unless you knew them, you probably can't tell the difference by reading gravestones.

The point is, a cemetery holds the remains of both wise and foolish people. People's bodies die, whether they lived in wisdom or folly.

Solomon asks a good question. Why bother to live wisely, if I'm going to die anyway, just like the foolish people do?

This thinking, though, only addresses our physical being, which isn't the most important part of us. Our bodies are dwelling places for the time being, and this time on earth is short compared to eternity. The truly wise choose Jesus, and in doing so, they are preparing for a glorious eternity. The foolish choose to live for themselves, and, though they may gain an enjoyable earthly life, their eternity will be far from glorious.

Prayer. Lord, may we wisely choose to live for You and take joy in the knowledge that our lives have purpose because You are at work in us.

Week 2 Thursday

Read Ecclesiastes 2:18–23: *18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, 19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. 20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.*

Devotional. “You can't take it with you,” we often hear. Do we take it to heart? None of what we acquire—material things, clout, businesses, etc.—will mean anything once we die. Wherever we go for eternity, all will be left behind.

Solomon apparently wasn't happy about this. He went so far as to hate and despair all the work he had put in over the years, because he realized he would have to leave everything in the hands of whoever came after him—who didn't work for it, and could potentially be a fool!

This is a discouraging thought for us today, too, especially if all we're living for is what we can gain on this earth.

The great news is that there is more! While it's necessary to work for what we need, and feels rewarding to get what we want, these things pale in comparison to focusing our lives on Jesus Christ and reaching out to others with His love. Our relationship with Christ is the one thing we can take with us!

Prayer. Thank You, Father, for sending your Son, Jesus. Thank You for the deep meaning this relationship brings to our lives. Inspire us to seek Your kingdom first and foremost.

Week 2 Friday

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24–26 *24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? 26 For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who plunders God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.*

Devotional. “Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, and confusion into clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.” --Melody Beattie

After all his musings about the vanities of life, Solomon recognizes that everything we humans enjoy is provided by God's hand. This is important for all of us to confess. Even if we have worked really hard to afford something we've wanted, it's God who has given us the health, the energy, and the opportunity to do that work.

God blesses us with so much—more than we even realize on a typical day. He deserves us with thanks. Gratitude is something we owe Him, yet our thanksgiving benefits us as well. Gratitude leads to joy. Our outlook always improves when we focus on our blessings, and when we take time to acknowledge the One who provides them all.

One way to focus on thankfulness is to keep a gratitude journal. Writing down our blessings is a wonderful way to prepare for the future. When difficult times come, we can be encouraged by looking back on all the ways God has blessed us in the past. Whether or not we keep track of our gratitudes in writing, it's a good practice to try to think of at least three things per day to be grateful for. Even on the darkest days, there are always blessings to acknowledge.

Prayer. Lord, you are so very generous with us in a multitude of ways. Thank You for your blessings. Today I am especially grateful for