

HATING LIFE

ECCLESIASTES 2



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Hating Life: Ecclesiastes 2
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Ecclesiastes 2: Introduction

In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon – who for good reasons prefers to remain semi-anonymous – is trying to reason with his wayward-leaning son, Rehoboam. He knows that Rehoboam will soon become king, and the way things are looking, he'll undo everything Solomon sought to accomplish.

But Solomon knows he shares responsibility for his son's bad choices. So in this book of testimony, aphorisms, parables, and straightforward lecturing, Solomon hopes to rescue his son from the fate that derailed him for so many years.

Chapter 2 of *Ecclesiastes* is the most autobiographical section of the book. In it Solomon, doubtless with great shame and regret, shows how he allowed his heart to go astray until all he desired was whatever would satisfy his great lusts. The occurrence, over and over, of some form of the first person pronoun reminds us of the George Harrison song, "I, Me, Mine," sung by the Beatles on the *White Album*. By his shameful rehearsing of his "I" problem, Solomon seems to have been hoping to reveal the same problem within his son, and to rescue him from the disaster of life "under the sun."

Solomon's words of warning about the inadequacy of a materialistic and sensual way of life is a message our "culture of narcissism" (Christopher Lasch) needs desperately to hear.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes 1 a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Oil and Water

Pray Psalm 38.15, 22.

For in You, O LORD, I hope;
You will hear, O Lord my God.

Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

Read Ecclesiastes 2.1-3.

Prepare.

1. How would you summarize what Solomon began to undertake here?
2. What was he hoping to learn by doing this?

Meditate.

Solomon gives us a glimpse into his season of crisis. He was continuing to seek the wisdom of God, to know how he ought to live before Him (“under heaven”, v. 3); at the same time, he was beginning to look for answers in the folly and pleasures of life under the sun.

But these are like oil and water. Perhaps because he found the pursuit of wisdom so difficult (1.13) and filled with grief and sorrow (temptation, 1.18), he decided to give in to the pleasures of the flesh – only as a “test”, mind you (v. 1) – in order to see if there might not be some wisdom here.

But the presence of divine wisdom in his soul led him quickly to conclude that laughter, folly, and diversion for their own sakes cannot yield meaning or purpose; instead, they only bring vanity and disappointment. The course Solomon describes in chapter 2 must have begun later in his life, after he had finished most of his great building projects and garnered the esteem and obedience of the surrounding nations (1 Kings 10). As we read in 1 Kings 11.1ff, the influence of pagan women, doubtless wed in the name of political “wisdom”, must have had a role in bringing Solomon to this point of crisis. Solomon seems to have believed that one can only learn the value – or danger – of something by experiencing it; he also clearly rues having taken that approach to pleasure and folly. A “word to the wise” was not sufficient for Solomon; it would not be sufficient for his son, either.

What about us?

Chapter 2 begins the most biographical section of Ecclesiastes. Solomon reflects on his experiences, achievements, and greatness. The things mentioned here would have been familiar to Rehoboam, who would have known his father best in the years after he had begun to attain to greatness. Did Solomon hope to establish a point of contact with his son by beginning his admonition at this place they could both share in common, building out from there to a fuller understanding of life as God intends it?

The dramatic and rather embarrassing use of the first person pronoun (in various forms) throughout this chapter was perhaps intended to arrest Rehoboam’s own self-serving tendencies, as Solomon may have observed or supposed them to exist. Solomon is allowing all his folly, vanity, and disappointment to show through at the beginning of his book because he wanted to lead Rehoboam to see himself in his father’s folly, so that he might turn away before he was consumed.

Solomon's advice to his son fell on deaf ears, yet this does not negate either the value of the advice or the approach to communicating it.

Reflect.

1. Why can't we have it both ways – a little of God's wisdom and righteousness and a little fooling around?
2. Solomon indicates he had a divided heart – divided desires. How can we keep our heart – the seat of our affections – pure from fleshly desires? Why must we?
3. Solomon was seeking to know the good life (v. 3) as the Lord intends it ("under heaven"). But he let his own ideas about how to do this take the place of God's Word (1.16, 17). Where did that leave him? What's the lesson for us?

In my opinion this is the true good which Solomon seeks and which men do under the sun while they are alive. For me it is nothing more than the work of faith common to all men who wish to have it abide throughout their entire lives. This is the good work done in us in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever. Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), Homilies on Ecclesiastes 2

Today, Lord, I will be tempted to follow my own best ideas and the lusts of the flesh. Help me to resist this temptation by...

Pray Psalm 38.1-4.

Let the Spirit search you as you pray these words. Confess and repent of any sins He brings to mind.

Sing Psalm 38.1-4.

Psalm 38.1-4 (*Leoni: The God of Abraham Praise*)

O Lord, rebuke me not, nor chasten me in wrath!

Your arrows pierce my sinful heart and fill my path.

Your heavy hand weighs down; my flesh and bones grow weak.

My sins oppress, confuse, confound – I cannot speak!

2 See What I Have Done

Pray Psalm 38.3-5.

*There is no soundness in my flesh
Because of Your anger,
Nor any health in my bones
Because of my sin.
For my iniquities have gone over my head;
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.
My wounds are foul and festering
Because of my foolishness.*

Read Ecclesiastes 2.4-8.

Prepare.

1. Solomon seems to have acquired an “I” problem. Explain.
2. Why is Solomon telling us all this? What’s his purpose? Is he wanting to encourage us to indulge in material things and experiences?

Meditate.

We might say, on the one hand, that Solomon is simply reporting the facts. All he tells us is true.

But it’s the way he tells us that is most troubling, and this way of reporting seems deliberate.

Solomon let his wisdom and success go to his head. He actually began to believe that he had been responsible for all his greatness, rather than God, Who had promised to make him great. But Solomon has a point, toward which he is working, and he wants to make sure that when he arrives there – the vanity of mere material success – we’ll be ready to agree with him.

Most of what Solomon reports here is corroborated in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Solomon became the quintessential secular man – focused on himself, indulging his passions to the full extent of his ability, and seeking lasting happiness in things and experiences – but not so that he was eternally lost.

Material success didn’t satisfy Solomon, and it won’t satisfy anyone else.

Solomon became so full of himself at this point in his life that he appears to have had no room for God. Here he lays the groundwork for a theme that will recur throughout Ecclesiastes: The “stuff” of life must not be regarded as an end in itself; nor is it intended merely for our pleasure. Everything has its place in the divine economy, and we find real happiness and lasting fulfillment only when we live our lives from that perspective.

The intemperate desires Solomon reports having indulged here – and that he doubtless sensed was growing in Rehoboam – will be tempered with gratitude and contentment as the king unfolds his “under the heavens” convictions in due course.

Reflect.

1. Solomon began well, seeking the wisdom of God for all his work. Here, he seems to have become distracted. How do you suppose that happened? What’s the warning to us?

2. Solomon has already pronounced all his success and wealth as “vanity of vanities”. Why is this so?

3. Solomon had asked God to help him rule the people well, that they might be blessed by God in all things. Whom does Solomon seem to be serving in these verses? How can we keep from falling into this trap?

Such is “vanity of vanities,” your splendid buildings, your vast and overflowing riches, the herds of slaves that bustle along the public square, your pomp and vainglory, your high thoughts and your ostentation. For all these are vain; they came not from the hand of God but are of our own creating. But why then are they vain? Because they have no useful end. Riches are vain when they are spent upon luxury; but they cease to be vain when they are “dispersed and given to the needy.” John Chrysostom (344-407), *Homilies on Ephesians* 12

Thank You, Lord, for Your many good and excellent gifts. Help me to use them all today to...

Pray Psalm 38.1-8.

Thank the Lord Jesus for bearing the heavy burden of your sins. Intercede for friends or co-workers you know who are still lost in sin and unbelief, and ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to speak with someone about Jesus today.

Sing Psalm 38.1-8.

Psalm 38.1-8 (*Leoni: The God of Abraham Praise*)

O Lord, rebuke me not, nor chasten me in wrath!
Your arrows pierce my sinful heart and fill my path.
Your heavy hand weighs down; my flesh and bones grow weak.
My sins oppress, confuse, confound – I cannot speak!

My sinful wounds grow foul, and fester painfully;
I bend and groan within my soul most mournfully!
Sin fills my every part; conviction stings my breast.
Lord, ease my numbed and burning heart and grant me rest!

3 With All Diligence

Pray Psalm 38.6-8.

I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly;
I go mourning all the day long.
For my loins are full of inflammation,
And *there is* no soundness in my flesh.
I am feeble and severely broken;
I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.

Read Ecclesiastes 2.9-11.

Prepare.

1. What was happening to Solomon? From what had he begun to derive his happiness?
2. How did this happen to Solomon? What was his conclusion about all this?

Meditate.

In Proverbs 4.23 Solomon advised his son to watch over his heart “with all diligence.” The heart is the seat of affections – our desires, passions, aspirations, and hopes. Blinded by lust, Solomon let his covetous heart become the dictator of his soul’s wellbeing. Whatever he wanted, whatever he thought he might find pleasure in, he took for himself.

Perhaps he had a lingering sense that this was not the way he should have been living. The reference again (v. 9, cf. v. 3) to his wisdom remaining with him suggests as much. His pangs of conviction notwithstanding, Solomon had reached a point where mere pleasure and abundance were the driving forces of his life; yet, when he achieved the acme of such success, there was nothing there to give his soul the satisfaction he desired all along. His conclusion, “*There was no profit under the sun*”, is the primary lesson, although not the primary theme, of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes, as we have said, does not unfold according to a tight, logical order or sequence. Instead, Solomon intrudes his lesson and theme in various places, varying the manner of his repeating them to make sure his reader doesn’t miss them along the way.

Here is the second great statement of the primary lesson Solomon wants his son to take away. Just as you can’t find satisfaction in mere observation and experience (chapter 1), you won’t find it in pleasure and prosperity.

In our increasingly secular age, this is a lesson believers need to proclaim with confidence. We should note also Solomon’s statement about his wisdom persisting with him through all this foolishness. Even though unbelievers deny the existence of God and act like they have no need or regard for Him (cf. Pss. 10, 14), still, Paul tells us they all know Him, deep in their souls, and have the works of His Law written on their hearts (Rom. 1.18ff; 2.14, 15).

Our unbelieving friends know the same pangs of guilt and doubt that Solomon did, and they may be open to hearing a word from the Lord concerning their real need.

Reflect.

1. Solomon’s drift from the Lord began with small deviations and compromises of faith. How do you

see this in 1 Kings 11.1-8?

2. If you had been there at the time – as Asaph, the author of Psalms 50, 73-83 was – what might you have said to Solomon? How can we know when we are beginning to drift into vanity?

3. How can we keep our desires from running roughshod over our souls and leading us off the path from following God? What does it mean to guard our heart with all diligence?

They nourish their hearts in self-indulgence who, according to the word of Ecclesiastes, do not prevent their heart from enjoying every wish and from delighting itself in the things which they have prepared. The Venerable Bede (672-735), *Commentary on James 5.5*

Help me, Lord, to be alert to little deviations and compromises in my life, and to...

Pray Psalm 38.1-8.

As you think about the day ahead, pray for the people you will meet, the work you will do, and the opportunities you will have to serve others. Try to anticipate temptations you will face, and prepare your heart to deal with them as you are in prayer with the Lord.

Sing Psalm 38.1-8.

Psalm 38.1-8 (*Leoni: The God of Abraham Praise*)

O Lord, rebuke me not, nor chasten me in wrath!
Your arrows pierce my sinful heart and fill my path.
Your heavy hand weighs down; my flesh and bones grow weak.
My sins oppress, confuse, confound – I cannot speak!

My sinful wounds grow foul, and fester painfully;
I bend and groan within my soul most mournfully!
Sin fills my every part; conviction stings my breast.
Lord, ease my numbed and burning heart and grant me rest!

4 Glimmer of Hope...

Pray Psalm 38.15, 16.

For in You, O LORD, I hope;
You will hear, O Lord my God.
For I said, “*Hear me*, lest they rejoice over me,
Lest, when my foot slips, they exalt *themselves* against me.”

Read Ecclesiastes 2.12-14.

Prepare.

1. What is Solomon thinking about in these verses? To what do his thoughts lead?
2. Where does he want us to set our eyes? What does that mean?

Meditate.

Because his wisdom had “remained” with him (v. 9), Solomon was able to see, at the end of all his folly, that wisdom is the superior way. His indirect word of advice to Rehoboam is that he will not be able to achieve anything more than Solomon did, or know anything more or different. So (by implication) he should be content to know wisdom and spare himself the vexation and disappointment of a life in pursuit of folly and madness.

“Use your head, lad,” he seems to be saying in verse 14, “and don’t let your heart jerk you here and there into the darkness of sin.”

But then another sobering thought arrested him: We’re all going to die. So what difference does it make whether we live in wisdom or in folly? Solomon doubtless had this thought, but he worked through it to his satisfaction (as we shall see). Here he seems to be anticipating Rehoboam’s thinking this too, and so, in the light of death’s certainty, heading off to eat, drink, and be merry while he could.

If the main lesson of Ecclesiastes is that life “under the sun” can only disappoint; the main theme is that wisdom – life “under the heavens” – is the divinely-appointed way to live. The way of wisdom is never beyond the reach of any who will get their “eyes in their heads” and see things the way they really are, so that they turn away from folly and embrace the way of the Lord in every area of life.

In the structure of Ecclesiastes Solomon is never very far away from this theme, even as he drives at the lesson of his meditations by one means or another. His message to his son is thus not simply, “No, no, no!” It is a message of hope and wise counsel to help a young man find the meaning of his life before he squanders it in self-indulgent folly.

Reflect.

1. The fear of death haunts every person who does not know the Lord (Heb. 2.15). How should the Christian prepare for death?
2. Why is Solomon’s story so appropriate for our secular, materialistic, and narcissistic age?
3. What does it mean to “walk in darkness”? How can we know when we’re beginning to stray onto

that path? What should we do then?

Let us make note of the fact that the body of a person is constructed like the world itself. As the sky is preeminent over air, earth and sea, which serve as members of the world, so we observe that the head has a position above the other members of our body... "The eyes of a wise man are in his head." That is to say, this position is better protected than the others and from it strength and prevision are brought to bear on all the rest. Ambrose of Milan (333-397), Six Days of Creation 6.9.55

Lord, let the vision of Jesus be the commanding vision of my life (Col. 3.1-3), so that I...

Pray Psalm 38.9-16.

As you pray let the Spirit search out the true desires of your heart. Are they what they should be? Do you need to refocus on loving God above all things? Wait on the Lord; listen as the Spirit searches the desires of your soul; and redirect your desires as the Lord leads.

Sing Psalm 38.9-16.

Psalm 38.9-16 (*Leoni: The God of Abraham Praise*)

You know all my desire, my sighs You know full well.
My strength fails and light's holy fire my eyes dispel.
My friends and loved ones fail; the wicked do me wrong.
My life they seek, my soul assail the whole day long.

Their threats I will not heed, nor speak to their reproof.
To hear or speak I have no need – I claim Your truth!
Lord, hear my fervent prayer! Let not my foes rejoice.
Redeem me from their traps and snares – Lord, hear my voice!

5 ...And Then You Die

Pray Psalm 38.17, 18.

For I *am* ready to fall,
And my sorrow is continually before me.
For I will declare my iniquity;
I will be in anguish over my sin.

Read Ecclesiastes 2.15-17.

Prepare.

1. What was distressing Solomon at this point?
2. What “happens” alike to the wise man and the fool? To whom is that “vanity”?

Meditate.

The fear of death is a lurking presence in the human soul (Heb. 2.15). When we are living “under the sun”, death seems so final. So it really doesn’t make any *lasting* difference whether we pursue a course of wisdom or one of folly; we’re all going to die, and no one is going to remember whether we lived one way or the other.

This is, of course, only half the truth. As Solomon will later explain, people are made for eternity, and the way of eternity leads along the path of wisdom. But when you’re considering wisdom over folly from an “under the sun” perspective – as Rehoboam was doubtless doing – it will never make sense to go that way. The vanity of things and fun will always win out.

This is why, in sharing the Good News of the Kingdom with unbelievers, way we must help them see the folly of their short-sighted, this-worldly perspective, so that they can hear the Gospel on *its* terms, according to *its* perspective. But they will only be ready to do so when they have first come to see that their own worldview has nothing substantial to commend it. We must show them that their chosen way of living is vanity and striving after the wind. Then they may be in a better position to consider life “under the heavens”.

Solomon’s argument proceeds in fits and starts. Ecclesiastes is a study in how to make the divine way clear to headstrong unbelievers. That doesn’t guarantee they’ll accept it – Rehoboam didn’t; but our job is only to help people understand the Good News. Only God can change the heart.

Seek agreement and common ground as a starting-point. Investigate the claims and hopes of the one who is living “under the sun”. Point out the inconsistencies of his view and try to help him see that his way is, in the end, only hopelessness and death. Explain that his soul, crying out for more, will never be satisfied with such a way of life. As Solomon will insist, only life “under the heavens” can fulfill our deepest human needs.

Reflect.

1. Many people find it difficult to think or talk about death. Why?
2. Given that we all must die, does it make any difference whether we live wisely or like fools? Explain.

3. Why did Solomon come to hate his life? Do people today hate their lives? Why? How can we help them see that life is really worth living?

*To speak now of the troubles of this life, the person has taken his soul in vain who is constructing the things of the world and building the things of the body. We arise each day to eat and drink; yet no one is filled so that he does not hunger and thirst after a short time. Daily we seek profit, and to greed there is set no limit. "The eye will not be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing." He that loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. There is no limit to toil, and there is no profit in abundance. Ambrose of Milan (333-397), *Death as a Good* 7.28*

My life is worth living, Lord! Help me to live for Your glory today as I...

Pray Psalm 38.5-16.

What do you fear? What doubts assail you? What lingering sins are keeping you from a richer, fuller relationship with the Lord? Where do you need to be more faithful and obedient in your walk with and work for the Lord? Let the Lord search you concerning all these matters.

Sing Psalm 38.5-16.

Psalm 38.5-16 (*Leoni: The God of Abraham Praise*)

My sinful wounds grow foul, and fester painfully;
I bend and groan within my soul most mournfully!
Sin fills my every part; conviction stings my breast.
Lord, ease my numbed and burning heart and grant me rest!

You know all my desire, my sighs You know full well.
My strength fails and light's holy fire my eyes dispel.
My friends and loved ones fail; the wicked do me wrong.
My life they seek, my soul assail the whole day long.

Their threats I will not heed, nor speak to their reproof.
To hear or speak I have no need – I claim Your truth!
Lord, hear my fervent prayer! Let not my foes rejoice.
Redeem me from their traps and snares – Lord, hear my voice!

6 From One Fool to Another

Pray Psalm 38:17, 18, 21, 22.

For I *am* ready to fall,
And my sorrow *is* continually before me.
For I will declare my iniquity;
I will be in anguish over my sin.

Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, be not far from me!
Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

Read Ecclesiastes 2:18-23.

Prepare.

1. Why is Solomon so suddenly bitter in these verses?
2. What legacy is Solomon focusing on in these verses?

Meditate.

Perhaps thinking that he had managed to bring Rehoboam along thus far, Solomon makes his first direct jab at achieving something like conviction.

Who does Rehoboam think he is to receive all the work of his father and just squander it in self-indulgence? The very thought of it led Solomon to hate all that he had done and to despair of his life amounting to anything.

Is this just a ploy on Solomon's part, an attempt to get Rehoboam to "wake up and smell the coffee", if only for his father's sake? Doubtless Solomon actually had these feelings, but expressing them this way at this point in his biographical sketch seems deliberately provocative. It's not the last time Solomon will employ this tactic. Clearly Solomon loves his son and wants to spare him the vexation, anger, and despair into which he himself had slipped – if only temporarily – in his old age.

Solomon's admission, in passing, of his having used his wisdom "under the sun" (v. 19) is a testimony to his sense of a failure of stewardship. He took what the Lord had graciously granted him and used it to foster a self-indulgent way of life. Where did that lead? Hatred of life, despair, vexation, suspicion of his successor – in general, disappointment and misery.

The difference between Solomon and Rehoboam was that Solomon had come to see the folly of his way. He was speaking to Rehoboam from the way of the fool in order to discourage him from embracing that way (Prov. 26:4, 5). He wanted to spare his son the sleepless nights he himself had known (v. 23), and to help him know the way of true wisdom, contentment, joy, and hope, which is the inheritance of the redeemed as they labor in the Kingdom of the Lord.

Reflect.

1. What's the difference between happiness and joy? Which should we seek, and where should we expect to find it?

2. Should we be concerned about leaving a legacy to those who will survive us? What kind of legacy?

3. Solomon emphasizes that the reflections here are on his experience of living “under the sun”. Why are days “sorrowful” and work “burdensome” for those whose only horizon is on this material age?

*If the whole earth is not worth the kingdom of heaven, surely he who has left a few fields leaves nothing, as it were; even if he has given up a house or much gold, he ought not to boast nor grow weary. Moreover, we should consider that if we do not relinquish these things for virtue's sake, we leave them behind later when we die and often, as Ecclesiastes reminds us, to those to whom we do not wish to leave them. Why, then, do we not relinquish them for the sake of virtue, so that we may inherit a kingdom? Athanasius (295-373), *Life of St. Anthony* 17*

Lord, the most important legacy is to love and serve You with joy. Help me to build on that legacy today as I...

Pray Psalm 38.17-22.

We can always grow in our salvation, and we must strive to do so. Part of growing in grace is confessing our sins as the Lord leads. Take your time; listen as the Spirit searches your soul. Confess and repent as He leads.

Sing Psalm 38.17-22.

Psalm 38.17-22 (*Leoni: The God of Abraham Praise*)

My sins I now confess; my anxious soul relieve!

Though foes are strong, Lord, heal and bless all who believe!

Forsake me not, O Lord! Repay my foes with wrath.

Stand by me with Your saving Word and guard my path!

7 The Hand of God

Pray Psalm 38.15, 16.

For in You, O LORD, I hope;
You will hear, O Lord my God.
For I said, “*Hear me*, lest they rejoice over me,
Lest, when my foot slips, they exalt *themselves* against me.”

Read Ecclesiastes 2.24-26

Review Ecclesiastes 2.

Prepare.

1. How does Solomon view God in these verses (2.24-26)?
2. What should be our response to this God?

Meditate.

Solomon declares his main theme as the conclusion of all his searching and straying: Life is a gift from God; if we receive it as such and engage it with a view to being pleasing to Him, we will know true contentment and joy, and will find real happiness and purpose in life.

There is no real happiness apart from God, Who gives to those who please Him everything they need for full and abundant lives. But to those who scorn the Lord and His ways, all that He gives them will be taken away and given to those who find favor in His sight. It’s vanity and striving after the wind to live this way, Solomon urged his son to recognize. How much better and more satisfying is it to see our lives as gifts from God, and as opportunities to do good and know peace and joy before Him? This, as we shall see, is where Solomon finally returned after his years of wandering under the sun.

As clear as he has been in pushing this lesson on Rehoboam, Solomon is just as clear in setting forth his theme. These words have a gentle and pastoral tone to them, following the harsh and despairing mood of the preceding paragraphs. We feel Solomon’s contentment, but also his compassion for the son he has misled for so long.

In a fallen world mankind’s only hope is to seek the Lord, to draw close to Him through Jesus Christ, to receive and use His many good gifts in service to His pleasure, and to grow in knowledge and wisdom so that we might enjoy and glorify God yet more and more.

All people are completely dependent in every way on the goodness and sovereign power of God (v. 24); gratitude requires that we cease thinking only of ourselves and begin serving the good pleasure of God. Wisdom teaches that, in so doing, we will discover the true meaning and purpose of our lives.

Reflect.

1. Every good and perfect gift – to every person, saved or not – comes from God. He is good to all, even to those who despise Him (vv. 24, 26). How can knowing this help us in talking with friends who do not know the Lord?

2. What does God intend for people in giving them such good things? How should we respond to Him?

3. What does God especially promise to those who are “good in His sight”? Why is this such a precious gift?

Since you therefore enjoy such a providential care from him and are partakers of the good things that are derived from him, you ought to return praise to him that receives the orphan and the widow, to Almighty God, through his beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord; through whom glory be to God in spirit and truth forever. Nilus of Ancyra (d. 430), Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 4.1.5

Thank You, Lord, for Your many wonderful gifts. Help me to use them all today to...

Pray Psalm 38.1-22.

We can always grow in our salvation, and we must strive to do so. Part of growing in grace is confessing our sins as the Lord leads. Take your time; listen as the Spirit searches your soul. Confess and repent.

Sing Psalm 38.1-22.

Psalm 38.1-22 (*Leoni: The God of Abraham Praise*)

O Lord, rebuke me not, nor chasten me in wrath!
Your arrows pierce my sinful heart and fill my path.
Your heavy hand weighs down; my flesh and bones grow weak.
My sins oppress, confuse, confound – I cannot speak!

My sinful wounds grow foul, and fester painfully;
I bend and groan within my soul most mournfully!
Sin fills my every part; conviction stings my breast.
Lord, ease my numbed and burning heart and grant me rest!

You know all my desire, my sighs You know full well.
My strength fails and light's holy fire my eyes dispel.
My friends and loved ones fail; the wicked do me wrong.
My life they seek, my soul assail the whole day long.

Their threats I will not heed, nor speak to their reproof.
To hear or speak I have no need – I claim Your truth!
Lord, hear my fervent prayer! Let not my foes rejoice.
Redeem me from their traps and snares – Lord, hear my voice!

My sins I now confess; my anxious soul relieve!
Though foes are strong, Lord, heal and bless all who believe!
Forsake me not, O Lord! Repay my foes with wrath.
Stand by me with Your saving Word and guard my path!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Solomon began to use God's wisdom for self-serving ends. Why was this wrong? How does this happen?
2. Should such matters as death and judgment be part of our proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ? Explain.
3. What kind of legacy should we be working to leave for the generations that follow us?
4. Solomon suggests some reasons why people may be so unhappy, dissatisfied, angry, and anxious. Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Ecclesiastes 2? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.