

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ find their meaning and purpose in Christ (1 Peter 2:9).

SCRIPTURE

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11; 12:13-14



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

King Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes but refers to himself as the "Preacher" and "son of David" (v. 1:1). In some regards, Solomon spends his time through this book examining the meaning of life. Considering Solomon was the wisest person ever to live (1 Kings 3:12; 4:29-30), his thoughts on such an epic topic would be highly valuable. But his words in Ecclesiastes aren't merely theoretical. He was a king of great wealth and, therefore, experienced much of what he discusses. It would be hard to find a better teacher on the subject of the meaning of life.

Check out the Teacher Prep Video for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/1064810501>

OPENING

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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MEDIA AS STUDENTS ARRIVE

1. Play background music (optional)
2. Display **SERIES TITLE** Slide and announcement slides in a loop or customize the provided **PowerPoint**.
3. Play a 5-minute Countdown Timer 5:00 minutes before you start.

GAME or ICE BREAKER

Based on your group's size, choose a **Game** from **Deep Discipleship Games** OR use the **Ice Breaker** prompt.

- **Game**—We recommend **Aw Sweet!** or choose another screen game from **Deep Discipleship Games**
- **Ice Breaker**—As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? Why?

DEEP DISCIPLESHIP GAMES

Find free games in **Deep Discipleship Games**. It's already included with your Deep Discipleship subscription. View the game in advance in case you need supplies or slides.

WORSHIP

Craft a time of worship with a live band or sing along to a playlist.

- Check out our curated Spotify list. We understand that every church has a different theological view of worship. These songs are suggestions, please pick what works best for your church.
- <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2xmeIKGUjkEE7bJYSCbRwe?si=d254ec715a4749e5>

SLIDES (optional)

Use **SERIES Background & Blank Slides** or **PowerPoint** to create lyric slides.



TRANSITION TO MESSAGE

Include a brief element that transitions students from worship to teaching time, like a prayer or video. This will keep students focused and prepared for the message while the band leaves the stage.

VIDEO (optional)

Show **SERIES Promo Video** or **LESSON Intro Video** after the last worship song.

MESSAGE

Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.

POINT 1: Everything is vanity

Read or have someone in your group read Ecclesiastes 2:1-2

Have you ever sat down to think about the pleasures in your life? Often, people find pleasure in cool things or experiences, but you can also find pleasure in your work, school, or anything. King Solomon in Ecclesiastes does just this: he takes a moment to examine all the pleasures of his heart, and instead of finding joy or happiness, he finds vanity.

ILLUSTRATION: Share a story or experience where you realized something you were doing was worthless, or your work was in vain and made no difference.

King Solomon looks at his life and says, *look at all this stuff I have and what I'm doing with my life, and it's all worthless, like chasing after the wind. That's got to be disappointing.*

POINT 2: A pleasure-shaped hole

Read or have someone in your group read Ecclesiastes 2:3-11

King Solomon lists all he has accomplished and added to his life. It's a long list, and in many ways, much of this list is good. They are things that would usually bring a person pleasure and joy, but at no point does King Solomon seem satisfied. Yet his whole life and meaning seem wrapped up in the pursuit of pleasure.

For the most part, those of us living in North America live in the top 1 percent of the world. We have so many opportunities for pleasure and entertainment in our lives, but they seem only to feed our demand or need for more. We can't seem to fill the pleasure-shaped hole in our hearts.

ILLUSTRATION: Share a story from your own life where you have tried to find your identity by putting things in the pleasure-shaped hole in your heart.

At the end of the day, nothing in this world can permanently fill our desire for more.

SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint** OR the **Background & Blank Slides** to create these slides to support your message:

- Ecclesiastes 2:1-2
- Point 1

SLIDES (optional)

- Ecclesiastes 2:3-11
- Point 2



POINT 3: What matters most

Read or have someone in your group read Ecclesiastes 12:12-14

Ultimately, this is the very thing King Solomon is wrestling with in this book. He concludes that only God can fill the pleasure-shaped hole in his heart. When we fear God and keep his commandments, we place God at the center of our lives. Our pursuit of him becomes the focus of our lives and work. God wants us to enjoy what we do, but that only comes with him as the source.

This is why the author of Hebrews wrote that we are to fix our eyes on Jesus as we run the race with endurance (Heb. 12:1-2). He is the source of our pleasure (Ps. 16:11). To lose sight of that is to step into vanity.

SLIDES (optional)

- Ecclesiastes 12:12-14
- Point 3

CLOSING

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ find their meaning and purpose in Christ (1 Peter 2:9).

SLIDES (optional)

- Mark of a Disciple

FACILITATOR NOTE: DO YOU HAVE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION RIGHT AWAY?

- If YES, then **STOP HERE**, divide into groups, and provide Small Group Leaders with the **Small Group Breakout Questions** on the next page.
- If NO, then end your gathering with the **Reflect & Respond** questions and **Prayer** prompt below.

REFLECT & RESPOND

Give the students time to silently think through what they have heard and contemplate these questions:

- If you were 100% honest today, would you say you're satisfied with your life? Why or why not?
- How can you fix your eyes on Jesus and avoid vanity this week?

SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint** OR the **Background & Blank Slides** to display the **Reflect & Respond** questions.

FACILITATOR NOTE: Don't rush this part. Give the students a few minutes to consider how having Jesus at the center of their lives can fill the pleasure-shaped hole in their hearts.

PRAYER

Take time to pray that the students will fix their eyes on Jesus and make him the center of their lives.



SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT (OPTIONAL)

Pick a few questions from each section to discuss. Close with prayer.

BREAKOUT QUESTIONS

Build Meaningful Relationships

- **What are some things that bring you the most joy or pleasure in your life?**

Answers will vary. God created us for joy and pleasure; what we do is often rooted in a God-given gift, talent, or ability. But when we seek pleasure outside of God, it gets warped by sin.

- **What is one thing you wish you never had to do again?**

We all have things we have to do that we don't want to do. Help your students understand that being entertained 100% of the time is not a realistic goal.

Share Personal Stories & Ask Intentional Questions

- **What does the word "vanity" mean to you?**

The definition of vanity is either the pride of one's value and worth or something being worthless or of no value. Help your students connect their definitions to this passage.

- **When have you realized your work was in vain or not worth the effort you put into it?**

Answers will vary, but may include: a project you couldn't finish, busy work a boss made you do, practices that never ended, etc. Help your students connect their feelings with how King Solomon feels in Ecclesiastes 2:1–2.

- **Why do you think we are never fully satisfied by entertainment or our pleasures?**

Regardless of your student's social or economic means, the joy from their "stuff" or hobbies eventually fades, and a desire for more creeps in. Nothing we have can make us happy forever except Jesus.

- **What do you think King Solomon meant by "a striving after wind" in Ecclesiastes 2:11?**

Pursuing pleasure will never satisfy us because we can never truly catch it, just like you cannot catch the wind.

- **What does it mean to "fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13)?**

We are called, like Israel, to make God the center of our lives, understand his power and authority, and trust him to lead and guide us. And then obey what he says!

- **What does King Solomon ultimately think of the pursuit of pleasures?**

The pursuit of pleasures is meaningless unless they are first rooted in God. Anything less, and we will be forever unfulfilled.

Make Life Application & Hold Students Accountable

- **What are some of the things you try to fill the pleasure-shaped hole in your heart with?**

Help your students think through the things in their lives that they turn to for pleasure or worth versus God. It could be sports, awards, grades, reputation, dating relationships, or darker pleasures like drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc.

- **How can you practically focus on finding fulfillment and joy in Jesus?**

Answers will vary, but the more we spend time with God and recognize him as the giver of all good things (James 1:17), the more we will find joy in who he is.

PRAYER

Take time to pray that the students will fix their eyes on Jesus and make him the center of their lives.
Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.

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