

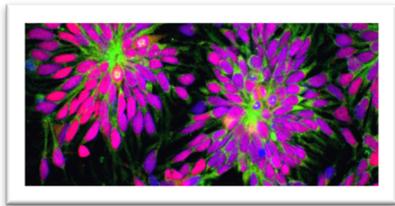
Searching for Meaning in Life

“Vanity of vanities all is vanity”

Ecclesiastes

(Based on a message given at Providence Baptist Chapel, Bedford on 2 May 2021)

“*Vanity of Vanities*” is the famous phrase and timeless truth that was written by King Solomon some 3,000 years ago. What a bold statement to make. Without God, life has and can have no meaning. The big questions of life simply will not be answered. Questions like: Why am I here? What is life all about? Where am I going in life? Is there any purpose and meaning to life? Without God, our search for meaning will fail.



Human Cells Under a Microscope

Many Scientists today tell us, in their opinion, we are just made up of billions of cells. Cells that are responding to predetermined rules, or algorithms. A predictable code, which has appeared by chance. Atoms and molecules that apparently behave predictably, because of chemical programming. Surely that cannot be!

What about human consciousness, our emotions, and feelings? What about our vast potential for creativity, our inner thoughts, and unique personalities? There must be more to life.

King Solomon

Solomon lived in 848BC and became king over ancient Israel at the age of just 12. History tells us that he was the wisest and richest person of his time. He knew three thousand proverbs and could recite them all. When visited by the Queen of Sheba (from Ethiopia), she was recorded as saying the “*half had not been told her*” about his wealth and glory. His conclusion about life is worthy of consideration. He concluded that life is empty and not merely one part of life, but all of it is ultimately vanity. The totality and completeness of life is all just a vapour.

Before coming to this wide-reaching conclusion, Solomon conducted a series of ultimately failed experiments. He used his extraordinary wealth, riches, and wisdom, to test his thesis thoroughly. He created, as it were, a chemistry laboratory of life and tried out various life experiments:

1. **Comedy and laughter.** If only I can laugh, he thought. If only somebody would make me laugh and laugh and laugh. That would give me satisfaction and joy. Sadly, experience shows that often the clown is the most unhappy person.
2. He turned to **wine and to alcohol.** This will relax me. A bit more, just a bit more, but a habit was formed and there was no lasting pleasure.

3. He tried **property, real estate, and DIY**. Perhaps one more project, a bigger palace, an extension, that will do it.
4. He turned to all kinds of **entertainments**, music, and drama. But they gave no ultimate pleasure, just a few hours of superficial fun.
5. He developed many **relationships**, with hundreds of wives. Many try this still today, in our promiscuous Western society.
6. He sought to build a **reputation** for himself to make a legacy. If only people will look at me and consider all that I have done and achieved.
7. Finally, he got hold of everything his eyes lusted for. All the **possessions** he wanted to buy, and he did not hold back.

All of these experiments failed for Solomon, just like they do still today.

The Fairground of Life

There is a poem written by Rosemary Clooney, which analogizes the essence of Solomon's experiment. It tells of a teenage girl who went to a fair, what John Bunyan called 'Vanity Fair'. She stayed too long and found out the reality of life.



*"I wanted the music to play on forever,
 Have I stayed too long at the fair?
 I wanted the clown to be constantly clever
 Have I stayed too long at the fair?

 I bought me blue ribbons to tie up my hair
 But I couldn't find anybody to care.
 The merry-go-round is beginning to slow now.
 Have I stayed to long at the fair?

 I wanted to live in a carnival city,
 With laughter and love everywhere.
 I wanted my friends to be thrilling and witty,
 I wanted somebody to care.

 I found my blue ribbons all shiny and blue,*

*But now I've discovered them no longer blue.
The merry-go-round is beginning to taunt me,
Have I stayed too long at the fair?*

*There is nothing to win and no one to want me.
Have I stayed too long at the fair?"*

Vanity in Word Pictures

Life is vanity, Solomon says. The same Hebrew word for vanity is translated with many other contrasting English words. All of them are helpful descriptions of what Solomon had in mind. Life is like a **breath**. I can't get hold of it. I know on a cold day you can see your breath, but there is no substance to it. It is also a **delusion**. We delude ourselves with one more possession, one more night out, one more friendship, one more relationship, one more bottle. We are mistaken.

Vanity is called **emptiness**. Like a vessel that we thought would have something in it, but it turns out to be empty. It is also a **fraud**. We are deceived. It turns out to be just a failed promise. Like buying something on the internet, but it never arrived. The word is translated as **futile** or pointless and like **idols**. There was something there, I think I can see it. But it can't hear, smell, or speak. It can't move. It was nothing. It was useless. It is like a **vapour**. The kettle boils and we see what comes out, but we can't touch it. Finally, vanity is translated as **worthless**. Life has no value without God.

God Has Given Life

Imagine you open a present. The present arrives and you decide for some reason you later regret to throw the envelope away that was attached to it. Your present gets mixed up with some other presents. It was wrapped up beautifully, but you have no idea who sent it to you. The envelope is gone. It contained both a letter from the one who gave you the present and the instructions for the gift. But you threw the envelope away. You don't know who and why the special present was given. It could be from anybody.

God of course is the giver of life and your soul is the special gift. God's gift to you only has a real meaning and purpose if you know who the giver is, if you know why He gave it to you. When things go wrong with the gift, you need the instructions to put things right. Life without God is like a present with no giver to explain about it. It is abstract, meaningless, pointless and void of anything worthwhile.

Find the envelope (the Bible) with the Maker's instructions and open it. Learn what He is like and why He gave you a soul. Know what He has said to you. Inside He has written a love-letter.

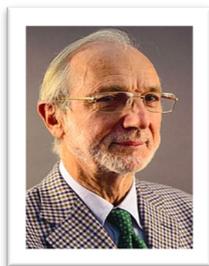


The problem is that as soon as we open the present things have already gone wrong. We fail, we sin, we fall short of the glory of God. We develop twisted characters and veer from the best pathway for life. We need to go back to our Creator, who alone gives us the instructions, in His Word, open it and read it.

Remember your Creator while you are young

Life does not have to be like this. When Solomon's experiments were over, he said "remember". Remember *that* you have a Creator. Come before your Creator, ideally while you are young, or as soon as you hear the Creator calling you. "Remember, now, your Creator." It doesn't have to be meaningless and pointless.

Solomon also gave a warning. Be careful, because "*the evil days will come*". The end years of life will draw near. Life's experiments will fail. You will say "*I have no pleasure in my life as it is, without God, without my Creator. While the sun, nor the light, nor the moon or the stars, be not darkened nor the clouds return*". You will see the dark clouds do come down in life. Illness comes suddenly. The sunlight goes away. What seemed to be pleasure is gone. The music at the fair stops. The merry-go-round doesn't go round anymore. Isn't this an accurate picture of life without God?



Renzo Piano

If I gave you a book and you opened it, you would probably ask who is the author? If I showed you a wonderful painting, you would say, who is the artist? If you look at the tallest building in Europe, the Shard, you might ask who designed it. It did not just get there. It was designed by an Italian man called Renzo Piano. There is an architect, an artist, an author, somebody that wrote the software, and knows the JavaScript to code it. Of course, there is a Creator. Do you know your Creator? Have you remembered Him? Or have you been trying to forget Him?

We often see on the News, some actor or actress, or a popular musician, who has fame in their world. A rap artist with fifteen million social media followers but sadly dies suddenly. There does not seem to be an explanation for why the individual life has ended. No illness is mentioned. Then the inquest into the death comes out some weeks later. It becomes clear, yet again, that they tragically took their own lives. The fame and millions of followers were empty of meaning. Life was lived without God.

We also hear of people who grow up not knowing their mother or their father. They were brought up in a different home and family. At the age of 3 months or 3 years they were fostered or adopted. We feel for them. But sooner or later, when they get to 16 or so, their heart inevitably cannot wait any longer. They have a longing desire to

re-connect with Mum or Dad. They cannot live not knowing who their father or mother is. So, they reach out, desiring to re-connect. "Who are my parents what are they like?" They cannot live without knowing. Wouldn't you rather know your Creator? His purpose, reason, and explanation for life and the soul.

Abundant Life

In John chapter 10, The Lord Jesus is speaking about life, its meaning and purpose. He says, "*the thief comes to steal*". He wants to steal your life; this is referring to Satan. He wants to ruin your life so that it has no potential meaning and purpose. He wants to destroy your life. But Christ says, I am come from Heaven to this earth of sin, this earth of emptiness. "*I am come that they might have life*". There is no life in our souls without God, as Lord and Saviour. It will be empty, futile, meaningless. But Christ says "*I am come*" to fill up your empty vessel. Fill it until it with abundant life.

Christ says, I am come to give you the reason I made you. You are living your life completely differently to the way I want you to live. You have gone this way and you have gone that way. I am come so that you can be reconciled with me. When the merry-go-round stops in life, then you will see it has just been a Vanity Fair. It won't give you pleasure, meaning, purpose, you were looking for.

The testimony and experience of true Christians is this: it is not that we found life. It is not that we worked it out. It is not that we were intelligent. Christ found us, He calls us to Himself as The Good Shepherd. He comes to find the lost sheep. He says, this is the way you come to Me. "*I am the door*". I am not a thief. I never came to make your life poorer. I never came to make your life more restricted or be a kill joy. I am come that you may have abundant life.

Solomon tried to have without God, but he found it was impossible. His conclusion was this: fear God and respect your Maker. Open God's Word, read the Maker's instructions, read His love-letter to your soul.

What a contrast this is to Satan's way. He wants to rob you of lasting joy. He wants you to have no confidence in God. But Christ has come to give real life. Do not travel through life scratching around on the surface, looking for meaning. "*Remember your Creator*." He designed you and gave you a soul. Your soul cannot be satisfied with all these other things, only by Him.

"*Fear God and obey Him*" were Solomon's final words. God's command is for us to go and seek Him and to ask for this new and abundant life. He will give it to you. He will fill up your life and it will over-flow, with joy and peace. You will know forgiveness of sin and all your guilt taken away. Do not wait till the music stops. Don't wait for the

carnival of life to end. Come to Jesus Christ. There can be meaning, and purpose in our lives. But only if you will seek the Lord by coming in repentance and faith.