

Ecclesiastes 2:1-2

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-2/ecclesiastes-21-2/>

Solomon evaluates pleasure as a means to satisfy man's compulsion for understanding, and finds that it is a dead end.

In Chapter 2, Solomon transitions to another avenue of exploration. The first chapter ends with Solomon considering the advantage of wisdom. The ability to find meaning through reason and effort. Now, he moves to consider *pleasure*. If work and wisdom are found to be hebel/vaporous/vanity, perhaps *pleasure* will produce an answer to life's meaning. Perhaps if he focuses on pleasurable experiences, he can discover the path to fulfillment in life. Since Solomon was incredibly wealthy, there would be no practical limitation to pursuing pleasure.

Solomon continues his investigation by means of various *test* cases. The nature of this testing is whether the pleasure from Solomon's experiences and accomplishments will allow him to understand the purposes of God.

Solomon writes that he reasoned internally, that he *said to myself*. *Myself* is a translation of the Hebrew word *leb*. 'Leb' occurs 593 times in the OT, and is translated "heart" 508 times (in the KJV). It could be translated as "said to his heart." This is Solomon giving us a deep look within himself, telling us his inner conversation. It is a biblical example that shows us that the wisest man who lived not only practiced self-talk, he had acute awareness of the various functions of his being. He was aware that his will was separate from his appetites and desires. But he was also aware that there were desires deep within his heart that needed to be satisfied. He reasoned, then chose. In this case, he is seeking satisfaction for his heart through pleasurable experiences.

Solomon says to himself: *Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself*. It appears that Solomon is addressing his heart with his mind. He is granting permission, making a choice to act. Solomon's self-awareness is such that he actually can hold his reason apart from his heart. In [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#), Solomon will tell us that God has placed eternity in the human heart (*leb*). So it would seem that Solomon is choosing to allow the heart to pursue pleasure in order to see if it will satisfy his desire for meaning. It doesn't. Solomon says of *pleasure*, "What does it accomplish?"

Solomon says of *laughter*, “*It is madness.*” Laughter is a symptom of gladness. But laughter, by itself, does not contain real meaning for life. It is a reaction to external factors. It is the end result of an experience or moment, but it has no substance on its own. A person laughing for no reason at all would look insane to any observer. *Laughter* standing alone is *madness*. Solomon is not opposed to laughter; in the following chapter he claims that “there is a time to laugh” ([Ecclesiastes 3:4](#)). In the same verse, he counters this by explaining that there is also “a time to mourn.”

There is no permanence to *laughter*. By testing his heart’s ability to enjoy life and live with a purely positive attitude, Solomon finds this is futile. Many things in life are painful and difficult. The meaning of existence is not to simply laugh through all circumstances. That disposition is *madness*. Eventually *laughter* can become a means of ignoring reality, not enjoying it. And even in a period of concentrated pleasure and enjoyment—there is something left to be desired in our soul. A life chasing *laughter* and fun leaves most people with an empty, wasteful feeling. It is false, out of touch, thoughtless, and vaporous.

And of *pleasure* (or joy), Solomon says “*What does it accomplish?*” More literally, what does it *do or make*? The rhetorical question is suggesting that pleasure, just like wisdom, has its limitations as a way to help humans reconcile meaning with practical experience. It is a vapor. It creates nothing and leaves nothing in its wake. It passes over a moment of time and then is gone.

Biblical Text:

¹ I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. ² I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?”