

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-2/ecclesiastes-224-26/>

Solomon turns from the frustration of failing to find meaning through reason and experience. He discovers meaning and purpose through a life of faith and thanksgiving to God.

In the concluding sentences of Chapter 2, Solomon takes a redemptive turn. After he reaches the conclusion that meaning and purpose can't be discovered through reason and experience, he now says *there is nothing better than for a man to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good*. Solomon once again instructs on the importance of constructive self-talk. When he was fretting about discovering meaning and purpose, he *hated* his life. His *mind* had no *rest*. The solution requires a person to *tell himself* something. To *tell* ourselves *that our labor is good*.

Solomon instructs us to choose to enjoy life. That enjoyment requires a choice. It begins with choosing a perspective *that our labor is good*. We choose that perspective through self-talk.

What brought on the redemptive turn? Solomon has shifted the basis of his explanation. Rather than trying to seek purpose through reason and experience, Solomon now turns to faith. *Our labor is from the hand of God*. We can't really find fulfillment in life by depending on our reason or our experience. There is no amount of pleasure that will bring us a fulfillment that lasts, because we humans can't *have enjoyment without God*.

Seeking a life of meaning apart from God is *vanity*. It is trying to hold vapor. But when we see life as a gift from God, we can enjoy life in every aspect. The outcome of things is not up to us. It is up to Him. That leaves us to do what God gives us to steward—do a good job, be thankful, and enjoy life. Faith in God is the foundation for purpose and for enjoying life.

This now places the pragmatic aspects of wisdom with a constructive philosophical companion. In the earlier section, wisdom was pragmatically better than folly, as light was better than darkness ([Ecclesiastes 2:12-17](#)). But apart from faith, that wisdom did not fulfill the need for meaning and purpose in life. Rather, it led to *despair* and hatred of life. Now, with a foundation of faith and thanksgiving, rather than reason and experience, walking in light

makes sense of life. Trying to live a life of meaning and purpose apart from God is *vanity*. But receiving meaning and purpose by faith brings *enjoyment*.

Without God everything is ultimately meaningless. The only human certainty is *vanity*. Seeking meaning through human reason and experience is a vaporous chasing after the wind. We cannot discover what life is all about through reason and experience. But within life, there are *better* things to do. Although time levels everything, there are *better* things for us to do with the time given us.

Now Solomon is operating on faith, so the implied operative question is, “What purpose has God given us?” Solomon’s initial answer is that when humans *eat and drink and tell ourselves that our labor is good*, recognizing that this is a gift from *the hand of God*, **then** we can have *enjoyment* in life. Rather than *vanity*, grasping vapor, *striving* to grab hold of the *wind*, we can have joy. The starting place for enjoyment is thanksgiving; recognizing that God is our Creator, and has given us this life as a gift.

Again the wisest of men emphasizes the importance of constructive self-talk. Solomon instructs each person to choose carefully the words he might *tell himself*. We all have various voices speaking to our minds. For example, the flesh and the Spirit are at enmity with one another, and strive against one another within us, and give us contrasting admonitions ([Galatians 5:17](#)). So it is important that each person *tell himself* that life is a gift. Thanksgiving is a perspective to be chosen.

Where God places us and the *labor* God gives us to accomplish is *good*. It is from the *hand of God*. This recognition, self-talk, and decision to choose a faith perspective is the foundation for *enjoyment* of life. Its foundation is God. With this outlook, not only is there the pragmatic satisfaction of doing a good job ([Ecclesiastes 2:10](#)) but also the knowledge, based on faith, that this is from the *hand of God*. It is what God meant for us. Therefore our labor has meaning in and of itself.

The phrase *eat, drink, and tell himself that his labor is good* could also be translated as “see for himself” that *his labor is good*. [Hebrews 11:1](#) tells us that faith is the “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Solomon has already concluded that reason based on what we see and experience won’t bring us to meaning and purpose. But now he tells us that a knowledge based on faith does bring meaning and purpose.

We must “see for ourselves” something that can’t be seen or experienced. And that takes faith. Solomon says it another way when he proclaims *without God no one can find enjoyment*. There is ample evidence of God, as many passages declare; examples include [Psalm 19](#) and [Romans 1:19-20](#). But we cannot see God. We must see and know God through the eyes of faith.

The gift of life is *from the hand of God*. For *without God, who can eat and find enjoyment?* Solomon asserts that we cannot find ultimate meaning, sense or order through experience or reason. But we can find meaning and make sense of life through faith in God. And this is the foundation for enjoying life. We can *enjoy* the everyday things of life such as eating, drinking, and working when we recognize and believe they are a *gift of God*. If we see all these common things as a *gift*, it would follow that we would live our lives with gratitude.

Before this point, Solomon had reached a place of despair. When we make ourselves the center of life, and independently seek our own pleasure, our own legacy, our inevitable destiny is to despair. Now Solomon has found a place of peace by beginning with faith. We can enjoy life when we choose living a God-centered life of faith and thanksgiving, recognizing that all we have is a gift *from God*. There is *nothing better* than to live a life based on faith. No other way provides meaning and purpose. Solomon knows. Solomon, the wisest man with virtually unlimited resources tried to discover another way through reason and experience. [Ecclesiastes 2:25](#) can also be translated: “For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?”

Next, Solomon introduces another insight that will help form the conclusion of the book. *To the person who is good in God’s sight*, this joy of life is given. To be *good in God’s sight* means to gain God’s approval. Throughout scripture God grants the favor of His acceptance by faith. We see this from Genesis to Revelation (for example, [Genesis 15:6](#); [Revelation 21:6](#)). It is a constant message in the Bible. Becoming God’s child, a member of His family, a part of spiritual Israel, is simply a matter of faith. This was also the core of the Apostle Paul’s gospel ([Romans 4:2-4](#); [Galatians 3:6-7](#); [Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). No one can gain acceptance by God through deeds. We all fall short ([Romans 3:23](#)). God’s acceptance is an unconditional gift.

However, each person’s work will be judged in order to see if it meets God’s approval, in order to gain rewards, good or bad ([2 Corinthians 5:10-11](#); [Revelation 20:12](#); [Romans 5-11](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:13-14](#)). Jesus remarked that in His final judgment, the city of Capernaum would suffer a worse

judgment than the city of Sodom, because they had a greater accountability before God due to having seen the works of Jesus ([Matthew 11:23-24](#)).

The Jews did not doubt whether they were accepted by God. Quite the contrary. Even the Jews of Jesus' day believed they were accepted by God as His people just by virtue of being physical descendants of Abraham ([Matthew 3:9](#); [John 8:39-59](#)).

But Israel often incorrectly presumed that God's acceptance guaranteed His approval. For example, they took the ark into battle, believing it would protect them, even though God intended to chastise them for disobedience ([1 Samuel 3:13-14](#); [4:5-11](#)). Also, the Jews failed to properly discharge their assigned responsibilities in order to gain the promised blessing ([Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)).

This passage is consistent with the pattern of God granting a conditional covenant that offers rewards for faithfulness. Solomon states that living life based on faith and thanksgiving toward God brings great reward. In fact, the *sinner* adds to the reward for the faithful. *He gathers and collects* to the stockpile that will be enjoyed by those who gain God's favor through faithful living. The word translated *sinner* can also be translated "offender." This is someone who has offended God's order for His creation.

How could a *sinner* add to the reward of the faithful? Perhaps partly through the contrast of outcomes. Attempting to live life apart from God will ultimately lead to futility and hatred of life. The offender then, whose objective is to seek for themselves, might instead be *gathering and collecting* for the benefit of those who are *good in God's sight* by helping them gain a proper perspective. The book of Hebrews tells us what it takes to gain God's approval, to be *good in His sight*:

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

[\(Hebrews 11:6\)](#)

Gaining God's acceptance just requires belief. But gaining approval, pleasing God, requires believing that pleasing God will bring more reward in life than seeking pleasure through our own reason and experience. The enjoyment of life, even with all its unpleasant aspects, is possible when one recognizes pleasing God as the ultimate source of fulfillment.

Although the power of faith provides a redemptive turn in these concluding verses of Chapter 2, Solomon ends with his familiar refrain, *this too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind*. Solomon is holding fast to his conclusion that life is vaporous, but he has established two different kinds of vapor. If we trust only in our own senses and intelligence, our reason and experience, we only discover a vapor of frustration and meaninglessness. Our reason and experience leads to madness. But if our starting place is a trust in God, the ungraspable realities of life become reasons to worship, celebrations of the vast mystery of God and His Kingdom. Our reason can become wisdom and our experience can turn to joy born of gratitude. It is a paradox of discovery through letting go (and trusting God).

The Book of Hebrews says faith is the “evidence of things not seen” and the “substance of things hoped for.” The paradox is that faith turns the intangible (hope and things invisible) into something enigmatically tangible (substance and evidence). We can never fully understand experientially, but through faith, that which is incomprehensible can become knowable. And our limited experience can transcend physical limitations. We can live with joy, purpose, and the peace that passes understanding, even while we dwell in the vapor that envelopes us.

Biblical Text:

²⁴ There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? ²⁶ For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God’s sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.