

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18 & 12:9-14

Everything is Futile!

In the movie 'Groundhog Day' the character played by Bill Murray finds himself trapped in a day that repeats itself over and over again - at the end of every day, no matter how it ends, he wakes up and it all starts to happen again.

Why would such an existence seem meaningless (even if at first it might seem fun to be able to do whatever you want without any apparent consequences!)?

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 1, verses 1-11

The book of Ecclesiastes presents the words of 'the Teacher' who is identified as "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (v1, 12). An editor has collected the words or sayings of this teacher, and presents them to us as words of truth that we need to hear (1:1, 12:9-14).

What overarching question is the Teacher exploring (v3) and what answer does he come up with (v2)? (Dig Deeper: see also 3:9, 5:16, and 1:14, 2:11, 5:16-17, 12:8)

→ What is the significance of the phrase 'under the sun' for the Teacher's search for answers about life's big questions?

Note: the word translated 'futility' or 'meaningless' is a Hebrew word that essentially means 'vapour' or 'mist'. The Teacher finds it a perfect word to describe the experience of trying to gain something from life 'under the Sun' - it is like trying to grasp hold of vapour.

What is it about the world that makes life seem so futile (vv. 4-11)?

→ The time we live in has seen incredible technological developments, which have changed our lives quite dramatically. Do you think it's still fair to say that 'there is nothing new under the sun'? Why / why not?

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-18.

If this is what life is like according to the Teacher, what does that do to his ability to understand it?

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14.

How does the Editor describe the Teacher's conclusions?

→ Why would he describe such depressing conclusions in this way?

What conclusion does the Editor arrive at (v13-14)?

→ How do you think this relates to the message or conclusions of the Teacher?

Read Romans 8:18-21.

Who has subjected creation to futility? (Compare with Ecclesiastes 1:13)

How does the hope of the gospel transform the experience of living with the futility of life under the sun?

Reflect and Pray

Sometimes we really need a solution to a problem, but sometimes simply making sense of a problem or frustration can dramatically change our experience of living with it.

Think about something in your life (some task or relationship) that seems to capture the frustration or futility of life in this world.

→ How does Ecclesiastes 1 help you understand the situation? How might that help you live through it?