



# Putting Life to the Test

*Ecclesiastes 2:1-11*

## ANNOUNCE

Pray for Honduras team

North campus interest meeting - Sunday feb 25, 6 pm.

## LAWSUIT ANNOUNCEMENT

As many of you may have already seen in the newspaper or online, I am being sued by Brian Kirk, the pastor of First Christian downtown. I am not going to speak publicly at this point in time regarding the nature of the case other than that it surrounds the library board incident that took place mid-last year. But I do want to address it because, doubtless, you will hear all kinds of narratives about me and our church, once again, that aren't aligned with the truth.

I am thankful for our wonderful elders and pastors who are all united in mind and Spirit regarding this situation we find ourselves in; it is a spiritual battle and one that should not shock us. Passages that have come to mind in the last week:

**(1Pe 3:13 NKJV) And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?**

**(1Pe 3:14 NKJV) But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."**

**(1Pe 3:15 NKJV) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a**

**defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;**

**(1Pe 3:16 NKJV)having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.**

**(1Pe 3:17 NKJV)For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**

This is a result of our church being willing to stand as a light in the darkness, and while I'm certainly not excited about it, I have perfect peace knowing that you can't go wrong standing for what's right. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus clearly told us the blessing of persecution:

**(Mat 5:10 NKJV)Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**(Mat 5:11 NKJV)"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.**

**(Mat 5:12 NKJV)"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Truth be told, by God's grace, I have not had one carnally angry, resentful, or bitter thought in this entire process. Rather, I am saddened by the bitterness that has a hold on so many people. Regarding those who stand against us, the words of Jesus couldn't be clearer:

**(Mat 5:44 NKJV)"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."**

So a few conclusions in moving forward:

1.) We will never back down from declaring God's righteousness, truth, and grace. We won't be intimidated into closing our mouths, and by the light of Christ, will continue to expose that which is in the darkness. The fear of man is a snare, but they that trust in the Lord shall be safe (Psalm 29:25).

2.) We will not assume a tone of vengeance, bitterness, or unforgiveness - Vengeance belongs to God. We will pray for those who are lost and operating according to the dictates of their hearts, bitterness, or evil intentions.

3.) We will not be distracted - when Sanballat and Tobia saw Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, they tried to threaten, distract, and discourage Nehemiah and the people to put a halt to God's work. I love Nehemiah's response to them, "I cannot come down for I am doing a great work." This church is doing a great work. We will continue preaching the gospel, loving our neighbors and community, and being the hands and feet of Jesus

wherever we go. We will not allow this one item to the point where we forget there is much good work to be done. In Nehemiah 6, Nehemiah recognized the enemy's strategy. He said, "For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, 'Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.' Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."

We will now pray together for this specific case, for those who seek to harm us, and for strength from God for what's ahead. God has already provided above and beyond all we could have asked for with the help we need to engage with this legally, and He will continue to go before us. Let's pray together.

## **BIBLE PASSAGE**

**(Ecc 2:1 NKJV)**I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity.

**(Ecc 2:2 NKJV)**I said of laughter--"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

**(Ecc 2:3 NKJV)**I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

**(Ecc 2:4 NKJV)**I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.

**(Ecc 2:5 NKJV)**I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

**(Ecc 2:6 NKJV)**I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

**(Ecc 2:7 NKJV)**I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

**(Ecc 2:8 NKJV)**I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.

**(Ecc 2:9 NKJV)**So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

**(Ecc 2:10 NKJV)**Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor.

**(Ecc 2:11 NKJV)**Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

## INTRO

Last week, Solomon, the preacher, opened his sermon by talking about the nature of life "Under the sun."

- The sun represents that which is temporal and encompasses our day-to-day lives in the short time we have on this earth.
- Ecclesiastes is a dismal commentary of Solomon's observations about people's lives and how the world works.
- He wants to come to some conclusions about the purpose of life and if there's anything in life that ultimately makes sense.
- He begins his book with a conclusion, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity and grasping for the wind!"

From the conclusion, we began to learn that life can either be grasping for the wind, pursuing things of no lasting substance or value, or grasping a hold of Christ, who is the substance and value of life. If NOTHING matters in life under the sun, EVERYTHING matters in life above the sun. I gave this concluding statement last week:

***When we seek our identity and purpose in things, pursuits, or positions, we are trading the glory of Jesus that never fades for the glory of things that won't last. We trade our relationship with the creator for a relationship with the created, only to end life with a handful of wind.***

**(Col 3:3 NKJV)For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

## ILLUSTRATION

If you've raised children, we all remember the phase of running around slapping things out of a baby's hand that he or she picked up and started to put in their mouth. It's almost like a baby's mouth has a magnet that attracts whatever is in its hand.

Dr. Jean Moorjani writes:

***"While older children and adults rely on touch, infants get a great deal of information about an object by putting it in their mouth. The mouth is full of sensory nerve endings that communicate directly with the brain by answering the basic question, 'Is this food?'"***

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## ILLUSTRATION

EXAMPLE: Coca-Cola has its headquarters in Atlanta. When we first moved there we had a chance to visit it and take a tour of the Coke building. At the end of the tour was a room that allowed you to take a sample of every product that Coke has ever made. The room was lined with probably 100 soda dispensers. I went around; some were ok, and some were horrible, but by the time I got to the end of the room, I had only accomplished one thing... becoming sick to my stomach!

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## APPLICATION

In chapter 2, Solomon decides to try a little bit of everything, regardless of whether or not it might not have the most positive outcome, to test his heart and see if he could find a greater purpose and fulfillment from all that life has to offer.

Last week, he showed us three teachers and the lessons they taught us about the vanity of life "under the sun": The teacher of nature, the teacher of history, and the teacher of knowledge.

- Like the cyclical nature of the sun, wind, and rivers continually running their course, so life seems to have motion but no meaning. People are grasping for substance but never lay hold of anything and die grasping the wind.
- Like history, which constantly repeats itself, there's nothing novel and new in life. Whatever you can accomplish has been accomplished by someone before you, and will be accomplished by someone after you, and no matter what you accomplish, not only will it never fulfill you, but some generation will eventually forget your contribution to the world.

- Like knowledge, the more you learn about life, the more frustrated you become that nothing seems to really hold any lasting value or purpose. Behind every door of answer lies greater, more confusing questions.

Solomon observes all these teachers in order to determine the purpose of man's labor in this life and comes to the human conclusion that it all seems like vanity and grasping for the wind. Next, Solomon records three tests that he undergoes to try and experience something that will help him define what is good and worthwhile in this life under the sun.

## 1 The Test of Pleasure

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:1 NKJV) I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity.**

**(Ecc 2:2 NKJV) I said of laughter--"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"**

### APPLICATION

In the process of giving himself completely to the desires of his flesh, he first tries mirth and pleasure:

- **Mirth – Amusement that is expressed in laughter and comedy.**
- **Pleasure – That which is good, pleasant and agreeable.**

Solomon enjoyed amusement and laughter and he only gave himself the best of the best... The best wine, the best food, the best women, the best of everything to find pleasure.

- Solomon didn't just like watching the comedy channel; he hired comedians to live in the palace! He didn't go to the movies; the actors came to him.

And who here can argue? I like to laugh, I like nice things. I think if we were honest we would prefer pleasure over pain and laughter over sorrow.

But again, the point is clear. If laughter and pleasures are the pinnacle of life, you will go away feeling ripped off. The funniest joke leaves me longing for something funnier; the best pleasures leave me wanting something even better.

- True is the saying, **“We live in a time where anything goes and nothing lasts.”**

EXAMPLE: Super bowl. Tomorrow, there will be people devoting their lives to preparing for the next one.

Well, pleasure and laughter are left wanting, so what if I live a season of life that is just one giant college party?

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:3 NKJV) I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.**

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**[Pro 23:29-35 NKJV] 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? 30 Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; 32 At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. 34 Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: 35 "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"**

## 2 The Test of Possessions

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### INTRO

So, the life of pleasure wasn't cutting it; the life of parties wasn't doing the trick; let's try a life of pursuits: He wants to become the stereotypical upper middle-class American materialist. He wants to see if modifying and improving one's environment can bring lasting purpose to life.

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### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:4 NKJV) I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.**

**(Ecc 2:5 NKJV) I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.**

**(Ecc 2:6 NKJV) I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.**

**(Ecc 2:7 NKJV) I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.**

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### APPLICATION

First, he got himself a **better home and garden [Image]**. But this was no ordinary garden:

- Houses - he had his palace but then all his vacation homes.
- Orchards and every type of fruit tree you could imagine.
- Vineyards with custom aqueduct systems to water them.
- He had the highest-end real estate at the prime locations in Israel.



- Herds and flocks – Hassan al Bolkiah, Sultan of Brunei, owns the largest **private car collection in the world**. 7000 cars valued at 5 billion dollars. Solomon had a similar collection of the best goats, sheep, and horses in town.

## SOLOMON'S WEALTH

- 12,000 horses and 4000 stalls
- Income of 25 tons of gold annually and trade from the surrounding Arabian nations.
- 500 golden shields
- All of his household utensils were made of pure gold
- Throne of gold and ivory
- Fleet of trading ships
- precious stones and storehouses of spices

## APPLICATION

# 3 The Test of Prosperity

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:8 NKJV) I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.**

**(Ecc 2:9 NKJV) So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.**

### APPLICATION

He had his own Mormon tabernacle choir and symphony orchestra to entertain him whenever he pleased. Had the latest home entertainment system.

At the end of verse 8, the NKJV translates this Hebrew word as musical instruments, but the actual word is the Hebrew word “Shiddah,” which in secular sources is actually the word Harem or concubines. Seeing that on top of his 700 wives, he had 300 concubines.

- The language implies he had every sort or every kind of woman at his disposal.

### QUOTE

**“The more you pursue stuff, the more stuff will pursue you.”**

Pastor Josh

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:10 NKJV) Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. (Ecc 2:11 NKJV) Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.**

### APPLICATION

"Whatever" and "any" are broad terms. Solomon wasn't one for implementing self-control over his desires. *His eyes saw it, his heart wanted it, his feet ran to it, and his hands took it.*

## QUOTE

“*How many people have had great downfalls because they couldn't control with their hearts what they saw with their eyes?*”

Pastor Josh

## APPLICATION

My heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my reward...

- The only reward for pursuing and conquering everything in life was a sense of accomplishment, which quickly faded into another desire.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**(1Co 7:31 NKJV) For the form of this world is passing away.**

**(1Jo 2:16 NKJV) For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.**

**(1Jo 2:17 NKJV) And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

# 1 Above the Sun: Live your life for lasting pleasures

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Psa 16:11 NKJV) You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

## APPLICATION

Some might perceive me as saying that there is no point in enjoying life, and I would say that's rubberish.

- 1 Timothy 6 says that God has given us richly all things to enjoy (not sinful pleasures).
- But the pleasures of this life make a poor substitution for God. They can't bring lasting satisfaction. They can't bring spiritual meaning. They quickly fade.

Those who live for the next accomplishment, the next dopamine rush, or the next moment of exhilaration will also be the people who feel the most empty and are constantly disappointed and discontent no matter how much they have.

**When we find pleasure and contentment of Christ, then every enjoyment is a blessing from Him that we pursue to GLORIFY Him, not REPLACE Him.**

**(1Ti 6:6 NKJV) Now godliness with contentment is great gain.**

# 2 Above the Sun: Store yourself lasting possessions

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

**(Mat 6:19 NKJV)"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;**

**(Mat 6:20 NKJV)"but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.**

**(Mat 6:21 NKJV)"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

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**APPLICATION**

Jesus lays out three important principles:

- *Earthly treasures are subject to decay and injustice.*
- *Heavenly treasures are not.*
- *Treasure dictates passion.*

Solomon increased all of His possessions and will later discuss the injustice of death robbing him of his legacy and treasures and the wickedness of some fool coming along after him and squandering it all away. His son, Rehoboam, would be that very man. The kingdom would fall into civil war, and Egypt would invade and rob the temple. Everything Solomon acquired and built was either destroyed, robbed, or dismantled.

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**BIBLE PASSAGE**

**(1Co 15:58 NKJV) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

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**APPLICATION**

We need to be those who believe that there are possessions that fade and there are possessions that transfer into eternity. Paul calls them wood, hay, and stubble versus gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3). According to Paul, "each ought to take heed how he builds..." in order to prepare for eternity.

## 6 Above the Sun: Use prosperity for a lasting purposes

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(1Ti 6:17 NKJV) Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.**

**(1Ti 6:18 NKJV) Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,**

**(1Ti 6:19 NKJV) storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.**

### APPLICATION

Contrast:

**NOT: haughty** - prosperity can give a false sense of security and superiority, that somehow your increased success or wealth puts you in a higher class of humanity than those with less. Sorry to break it to you, but James 2 tells us that God has chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith and that the rich tend to be those who compromise for the sake of wealth. Jesus said that wealth can be a great hindrance for a person to enter the kingdom because it can blind one to the humility that is required to submit to Christ.

**NOT: trusting** in uncertain riches - Riches have an appearance of certainty, but, as Pro 23:5 says, *"Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven."*

**RATHER: Do good**, have the right kind of wealth (good works), and hold one's wealth with an open hand of blessing. In doing so, they will be using their temporary wealth to build an eternal storehouse and will experience the blessing of what it means to live for eternal life rather than passing and fleeting pleasures.

## APPLICATION

At the end of life, there's only one thing that passes the true test: Living for Jesus, or, as the 19th century British Missionary CT Studd wrote:

Two little lines I heard one day,  
Traveling along life's busy way;  
Bringing conviction to my heart,  
And from my mind would not depart;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
Only one life, yes only one,  
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;  
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,  
And stand before His Judgement seat;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
Only one life, the still small voice,  
Gently pleads for a better choice  
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,

And to God's holy will to cleave;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
Only one life, a few brief years,  
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;  
Each with its clays I must fulfill.  
living for self or in His will;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

When this bright world would tempt me sore,  
When Satan would a victory score;  
When self would seek to have its way,  
Then help me Lord with joy to say;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
Give me Father, a purpose deep,  
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;  
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,  
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
Oh let my love with fervor burn,  
And from the world now let me turn;  
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,  
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
Only one life, yes only one,  
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";  
And when at last I'll hear the call,  
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.