

# Is Life all Vanity? A Thematic Analysis of the Book of Ecclesiastes

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**Abstract.** *This paper sought to understand the meaning of life according to author of Ecclesiastes who, despite experiencing every pleasure and desire, declared life as "vanity." A qualitative content analysis on the 12 chapters of Ecclesiastes (NKJV) applying Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) thematic analysis, generated 58 descriptive codes and six themes. Answers to what satisfies man and how everyone ought to live were sought. Key themes include the futility of human pursuits and the inevitability of death and shared fate, shedding light on the meaning of life amidst the apparent meaninglessness. Themes on enjoying the fruit of one's labor and human companionship, combined with the rigors of everyday work, are those that satisfy the human soul. Themes on how to live wisely and peaceably with God and with other people were also generated. Lastly, the theme of fearing God and obeying his commandments defined the meaning and purpose of life. These findings downplay life's meaninglessness and lack of purpose that seem to agree with the Ecclesiastes narrative. Based on the experiences of the author, finding the meaning of life is finding its purpose, which, if appreciated, increases life satisfaction and connectedness with others, and reduces depression.*

**Keywords:** Ecclesiastes, meaning of life, qualitative content analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Life has four fundamental questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? These four basic questions pertain to identity, origin, meaning, and destiny. One of the questions, "Why am I here?" directly asks for the meaning of life.

The Purpose-Driven Life by Rick Warren (2002), one of the most influential Christian books on the meaning of life, addresses this question with a God-centered worldview. Warren presents the idea that the meaning of life is found in understanding and fulfilling God's purposes for one's life.

The search for the purpose of life has been going on for thousands of years. When Plato said "the unexamined life is not worth living," he was directly addressing the meaning of his existence (Gaudio, 2020). Warren (2002) had commented on how philosophers have discussed and speculated about this, to no avail because when it comes to determining the purpose of life, "even the wisest philosophers are guessing" (p. 7). He goes on to say that if someone were to understand why they exist, they must begin with God, who, as his very popular book says, determines the purpose of life. Today, Christian authors continue to examine the meaning of life amidst the four essential worldview questions (Guinness, 2020; Myers, 2020; Zacharias & Vitale, 2019). Zacharias (2004) had earlier argued that the answers to the four basic questions must meet the tests of truth, including that of experiential relevance. Atheists have also dismissed the question of the meaning of life. Dawkins (1998), for example, attributes existence as pure luck and a privilege, and meaning is in being conscious. Camus (1942) has said that life is absurd and that to seek meaning does not constitute living.

In the Bible, no other book has offered to answer the question of the meaning of life than Ecclesiastes. Perhaps ironically, the very first verses of the book declare that all is *hevel*. "*Hevel*" or "vapor" translates to "meaningless" or "vanity" in English Bibles, is used 38 times, appearing in 11 of the book's 12 chapters, and it serves as a central motif throughout the book (Seow, 1997; Fox, 1989).

The widely accepted author of the book of Ecclesiastes is King Solomon, the *Qoheleth*, a Hebrew word meaning "preacher" or "teacher." This claim is supported by how the book itself identifies the author as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (New King James Version, 1982, Ecclesiastes 1:1). Verse 12 of Chapter 1 indicates that this *Qoheleth* was the king over Israel. Elsewhere in the Bible, 1 Kings 4:32 refers to Solomon, "son of David, king of Israel", composing 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. The books of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon clearly identify their author as King Solomon. Moreover, the author of Ecclesiastes claimed how he had acquired "great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem" before him (Ecclesiastes 1:16). This was consistent with what God had told him in 2 Chronicles 1:11-12, how He would give Solomon wisdom and knowledge like none of the kings had who were before him. These clearly place Solomon as the *Qoheleth*, the Preacher of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Studies have confirmed the relationship between a person's estimate of the meaning of life and the prevalence of mental health issues such as depression, lower life satisfaction, and decreased connectedness (Huo et al., 2019; Steger & Kashdan, 2013). This book, authored by someone who had experienced ultimate fulfillment in all that he desired, may offer a vital counter-narrative against the meaninglessness that helps fuel mental health crises that lay dormant underneath academic pursuits, especially in young people who look for meaning and purpose in what occupies them daily.

Between the postmodernistic view against *the* meaning of life (or its absurdity) and the apparent resignation by the author, it is therefore crucial for Bible-reading Christians to make sense of the book of Ecclesiastes. This paper aims to accomplish this by thematically analyzing the narratives by the writer of Ecclesiastes on the meaning of life. More specifically, this investigation sought to answer three questions: What is the meaning of life? What truly satisfies the human soul? How should humans live? When answered, these questions will reveal what the book says about the meaning of life based on actual verses in the book's chapter. This study will also give insights into what truly fulfills human desire and how each person ought to live, given the knowledge that the book reveals.

The investigation will be accomplished by performing a qualitative thematic analysis of all 12 chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes using the New King James Version (1982).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rick Warren (2011), in the second iteration of his book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, offers a theistic framework for answering one of life's most fundamental questions: *What is the meaning of life?* Central to Warren's thesis is the conviction that meaning, purpose, and hope are inseparable from a relationship with God. He asserts, "Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning" (p. 30), emphasizing that true meaning comes from living in alignment with God's purposes. Warren's approach to the meaning of life is profoundly purposeful and spiritual. Meaning is not created but discovered in God's will. A life lived on purpose, according to Warren, is one that aligns with God's eternal plan—resulting in peace, motivation, significance, and hope.

In *Can Man Live Without God?* Ravi Zacharias (1994) presents a compelling apologetic argument that the meaning of life is inextricably tied to the existence of God, specifically as

revealed in Jesus Christ. He contends that without God, essential components of meaning—wonder, truth, love, and security—remain incomplete or distorted. Zacharias asserts that a secular or atheistic worldview lacks the ontological foundation to sustain human purpose and fulfillment. Zacharias further critiques the philosophical and existential consequences of attempting to live apart from God. He warns that without a divine moral anchor, ethical systems collapse into relativism, and the pursuit of pleasure often ends in emptiness rather than satisfaction. He notes that correctly understanding God provides the answers to life's fundamental questions. For Zacharias, the deepest questions of origin, morality, meaning, and destiny can only be coherently answered through the Christian worldview.

Jeff Myers (2016) in his book *Understanding the Faith: A Survey of Christian Apologetics*, approaches the question of life's meaning also through a Christian worldview, emphasizing that a useful understanding of existence is grounded in the belief in a purposeful Creator. He asserts that humans are not mere animals driven by instinct but are unique beings created in God's image, endowed with the capacity to seek purpose and meaning beyond mere survival. This perspective aligns with the Christian doctrine that life has intrinsic value and purpose, as articulated in the biblical narrative. Myers also critiques secular worldviews that attempt to find meaning without acknowledging a divine Creator. He argues that such perspectives often lead to relativism and existential despair, which can manifest themselves in mental issues as depression. Myers encourages readers to engage with life's fundamental questions—origin, identity, meaning, morality, and destiny—through the teachings of Christianity. He posits that only within this framework can humans find true and lasting answers to the profound questions of existence.

In the book *Open Socrates: The Case for a Philosophical Life*, Agnes Callard (2025) argues that the meaning of life is achieved through the process of philosophical inquiry. Drawing upon Socrates' principle that "the unexamined life is not worth living," Callard asserts that living meaningfully requires engaging with fundamental questions before arriving at the answers. Callard (2025) positions philosophy as a social, conversational practice, and thought unfolds through dialogue. In Callard's vision, the meaning of life is bound up with living a philosophical life—one marked by continuous questioning, communal dialogue, intellectual humility, and the quest for morality.

Michael V. Fox's (1999) discourse on Ecclesiastes finds consistency within the book by not trying to reconcile the arguments at face value but instead explain how these contradictions align with traditional beliefs.

In a more modern take on the book of Ecclesiastes, Meek (2022) concludes that the very essence of being human is to obey God and keep His commands. For his part, Jamieson (2025) believes that Ecclesiastes is a question that everyone should ask themselves. He cites that the *Qohelet's* conclusions about life follow with a certain necessity that humans ought to pay attention to.

Philosophical dialogs such as these may be the underlying factors for many pessimistic worldviews in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, a study on the meaning of life and well-being involving 55 young Americans from diverse cultural backgrounds reported that the instability in the meaning of life in the respondents was linked with less well-being and more psychological distress (Steger & Kashdan, 2013). The results of another study among 242 Chinese students showed strong associations between an individual's mental health and implicit meaning in life, or the non-conscious understanding and perceived significance of one's existence (Huo et al., 2019).

This study used the 1982 New King James Version of the Bible, one of the literal, word-for-word translations other than the King James Version. Literal translations are preferred over thought-for-thought translations, such as The New International Version and the New Living Translation, or

even over paraphrase versions such as The Living Bible or The Clear Word. This is because literal translations are closest to the original text (What Are Different Bible Translations, 2025).

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Research Design

This paper follows a qualitative content analysis, a research methodology whereby the process of analysis reduces the volume of text collected by systematically lifting the categories and themes to seek understanding (Bengtsson, 2016). This design proves that in addition to traditional exegesis and hermeneutics, current scholarly research methods are also applicable to the investigation of Biblical text. This implies that it is possible for every researcher to understand Scripture even without extensive theological background.

#### Data Sources

The source text is the book of Ecclesiastes, which has 222 verses and is organized into 12 chapters. Other Scriptural references are also used to cross-reference texts. Books and online journals were used to compare different perspectives on the meaning of life.

#### Procedures

This study began with defining the research questions. These questions were crafted to investigate the seeming resignation of the author of Ecclesiastes on the meaning of life. The preparation of the data involved downloading the whole book into a word processor in preparation for a manual coding. The author initiated the data familiarization reading and re-reading through the whole book. Thereafter, codes were lifted from each line of text and written in the adjacent columns. The three research questions were considered in the selection of each code, and only those codes that were relevant to each question were selected.

#### Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) analysis method. The initial steps included familiarization by reading through the book text by text, often repeatedly. A combination of in vivo and descriptive coding methods was implemented. After the author generated the initial codes, intra-rater reliability was performed whereby recoding was done after two weeks, comparing the initial and the repeat coding before deciding on the final codes. As coding is an iterative process, several passes on the texts and renaming codes were required. These codes were then grouped into categories (subthemes) according to their conceptual similarities.

The next step made sense of the patterns in the codes that answer the three research questions. The themes underwent iterative revisions to ensure that they represented the codes that were extracted from the text in the book. The codes supported the final names for each theme.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative content analysis of the Book of Ecclesiastes generated a total of six themes and 61 codes. Each of the three research questions was assigned two themes each. For the first research question, Table 1 presents the themes, codes, and the verses supporting each code.

Table 1. Themes, Codes, and Verses for Research Question 1

Research Question 1. <b>What is the meaning of life? Is life all vanity?</b>	
All is vanity	1:2

<b>Theme 1. The Futility of Human Pursuits</b>	No profit under the sun	1:3
	Nothing new under the sun	1:9
	All works under the sun are grasping for the wind.	1:13, 14
	Wisdom brings grief	1:18
	Pleasure was also vanity	2:1
	Pursuing good or folly was all vanity	2:3
	Building and planting were all vanity	2:4-6
	Possessions and entertainment were all vanity	2:7
	Getting all he wanted was vanity, grasping for the wind.	2:10-11
	Greatness, wisdom, and knowledge were all vanity	2:16
Life's burdensome toil was also vanity	2:22-23	
<b>Theme 2. Inevitability of Death and Shared Fate</b>	The same fate happens to all	2:14; 3:19-20, 9:2
	The wise and the fool both die in the end	2:16
	God put the sense of the hereafter in men	3:11
	Men and animals all have one breath- both die.	3:19
	Must leave the fruit of his labor to his predecessor	2:18
	Man cannot know the future	8:7
	A man's death can suddenly come	9:12

### **The Meaning of Life**

Solomon's pursuit of the meaning of life caused him to look at the variety of human endeavors. "I set my heart to seek and search out ... all that is done under heaven..." (1:13). This investigation was evident mostly in the first three chapters and sets the motif for the whole book. The search for the ultimate meaning also leads to the inevitable end that all humans must face. These two themes are thus discussed.

#### ***The Futility of Human Pursuits***

The author first finds that everything runs in a predictable cycle and "nothing is new under the sun" (1:9); therefore, "all works under the sun are grasping for the wind" (1:13-14). The author repeatedly asserts that labor, pleasure, wisdom, and even success amount to "vanity" (2:16). Planting and building were all vanity. "Pleasure was also vanity" (2:1).

Although Solomon did not withhold his heart from any pleasure he desired (2:10), he still did not find profit in doing those. The first two chapters of the book largely run the theme of the author lamenting the futility of every human pursuit. Despite efforts to achieve or accumulate, there is a pervasive sense that human pursuits under the sun fail to yield lasting meaning or satisfaction. This is a relevant message for today's youth who are planning their life's directions.

#### ***Inevitability of Death and Shared Fate***

This theme reflects the temporal, fragile, and finite condition of human existence as observed in Ecclesiastes. The author emphasizes that regardless of one's wisdom, righteousness, or status, all share the same inevitable fate—death (2:14; 3:19). The uniform end for both the wise and the foolish nullifies any perceived advantage, intensifying the sense of futility. "And how does a wise man die? As the fool!" (2:16). Solomon also reminds his readers that in death, men have no advantage over animals:

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity (3:19).

This universal mortality underscores the transient nature of life "under the sun" and the impossibility of attaining an enduring legacy or understanding through human effort alone. The

author underscores the short-lived nature of his legacy, as he says, "I must leave it to the man who will come after me" (2:18). Death, according to him, can suddenly come as when a fish is caught or a bird snared. "For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them" (9:12).

This theme forces a reflection on the limits of human control, a reminder that human achievement is not permanent, and that mortals must seek beyond the ordinary. Proverbs 16:9 echoes this thought, "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

### What Truly Satisfies the Human Soul

While arguing that all of man's endeavors are unprofitable, Solomon digresses and considers that there is satisfaction in spite of the seeming lack of meaning in life. He argues that God gifts man with the capability to enjoy those human endeavors, and even if the end is the same for everyone down the road, there is meaning in everyday labor. Table 2 presents the themes and the codes, as well as the supporting verses to answer the second research question.

Table 2. Themes, Codes, and Verses for Research Question 2

Research Question 2. <b>What truly satisfies the human soul?</b>		
<b>Theme 1. Divine gift of enjoyment</b>	The fruit of man's labor is from God	2:24
	Better to rejoice in doing good	3:12
	Satisfaction in simplicity	4:6
	Two are better than one	4:9-12
	Riches do not satisfy	5:10
	A good name better than riches	7:1
	Eat, drink, and be merry	8:15, 2:24
	Live joyfully with your spouse whom God has given you.	9:9
Rejoice in your youth but put away evil from your flesh.	11:9-10	
<b>Theme 2. Meaning in everyday labor</b>	Man to enjoy the fruit of his labor	2:24, 3:13, 22, 5:18, 9:7
	God-given tasks to keep man busy	3:10, 5:19-20
	Rejoice and do good	3:12
	Work brings peace	5:12
	Do with might what work is at hand	9:10
	Time and chance important	9:11
	God will bring every work into judgment	12:14

### *Divine Gift of Enjoyment*

This theme affirms that enjoyment in life, whether through food, drink, companionship, or labor, is not merely the product of human effort but a gift from God. While the author acknowledges the futility of human striving, he simultaneously affirms the goodness of momentary joy. Enjoyment is framed as a humble response to divine provision in the present moment.

**Reliable Source.** Solomon reminds his readers that his assessments have valid foundations. Having obtained everything he wanted that ordinary people can only dream of, he says, "For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?" (2:25). From what he has learned, he continues that everyone should rejoice in doing good and enjoy the fruits of their work because it is the gift of God (3:12–13).

**Companionship.** Having a companion is also one of the ways that will satisfy the human soul. The verses in 4:9, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor," first recommend the presence of another person to work together with, and the following verses

explain why this makes practical sense. "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion... and if two lie down together, they will keep warm..." (4:10-11). In a similar thought, Solomon later encourages the reader to "live joyfully with your spouse whom God has given you" (9:9), repeating the divine gift of a spouse in the context of divine enjoyment. This admonition aligns with what Solomon had also written in Proverbs 18:22: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." This theme underscores a basic human need—companionship—that many forget today.

**No Satisfaction.** The divine gift of enjoyment has its own caveat, according to the author of Ecclesiastes. The quest for enjoyment, even as a result of one's hard work, can eventually lead to riches and material possessions. Here, Solomon cautions that the pursuit of riches does not satisfy. "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase" (5:10), echoing the elusive nature of satisfaction itself. This pursuit, he said, is also vanity. Sharing what he has learned and observed on the topic, Solomon would later conclude that "A good name is better than riches" (7:1).

Solomon's advice resonates in the New Testament when the Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16-22) chose his wealth over heeding the invitation of Jesus to follow Him.

### ***Meaning in Everyday Labor***

This theme emphasizes the value and satisfaction in engaging with one's daily work. While the author of Ecclesiastes admits to the futility of labor as a source of ultimate meaning, he nevertheless presents honest toil as a dignified and appropriate response to life's paradoxes. The author encourages embracing one's labor as part of God's design—neither idolizing work nor despising it but accepting it as one's "portion" (9:9). According to him, labor is "God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied" (3:11). Moreover, the topic of man enjoying the "good of his labor" and that "Nothing is better for a man" than to do this is affirmed many times along the second and third chapters, the fifth, and the ninth (3:13, 3:22, 5:18, 9:7).

The value of daily labor is also emphasized in 5:12, "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep." Here, work results in peace. Its importance is underscored by a rather prominent text that says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might..." In other words, men are to take every task at hand with diligence.

**Timing and Chance.** In man's interaction with daily labor, Solomon reminds that timing and chance are important factors that are also at play. The results are not always proportionate to man's competencies:

I returned and saw under the sun that— The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all (9:11).

This verse closely aligns with the sentiment that man's efforts are in vain without God's blessing. Psalm 127:1 states, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." This verse emphasizes that even diligent work and careful planning can be unproductive without divine favor and blessing.

The significance of everyday labor in Ecclesiastes mirrors that of Exodus 20:8, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God." Here, God endorses daily labor as a prelude to a holy Sabbath rest for His people. Every day labor is moderated by rest at the end of the week. Toward the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon admonishes his readers to be judicious with the work he has been tasked with, as evidenced by the very last verse in the book. "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:14). This verse is both a reminder and a warning for readers in the present time.

## How Humans Should Live

The third research question seeks to understand how people should live in light of all that has been considered previously. After making sense of the author's contemplation on the futility of life's endeavors and the discovery of what truly satisfies the human soul, there is now a need to conclude the matter. Table 3 presents the themes and codes generated by the texts, which provide insight into how people ought to live.

Table 3. Themes, Codes, and Verses for Research Question 3

Research Question 3. <b>How should humans live?</b>		
Theme 1.	Better a poor and wise than old and foolish	4:13
<b>Living Wisely</b>	Walk prudently with God and hear Him	5:1
	Do not be rash with your words and let them be few	5:2
	Do not let your mouth cause you to sin	5:6
	Go to the house of mourning	7:2, 4
	Keep your vows	5:4-5
	Hear the rebuke of the wise	7:5
	Do not get angry easily	7:9
	Wisdom is better	7:12, 8:1, 9:16,18
	Too much of everything is not good	7:16-17
	God made man upright	7:29
	Do not take offense when scolded by your ruler	10:4
	Consequences for our actions	10:8
	Laziness brings decay	10:18
	Do not curse the king	10:20
Theme 2.	Fear God and keep His commandments	8:12-13; 8:5
<b>Fearing God and Obeying Him</b>	God's work is complete and lasts forever. Men should fear Him.	3:14
	Rejoice in your youth but put away evil from your flesh.	11:9-10
	Remember your Creator while young	12:1
	Man's duty is to fear God and keep His commandments	12:13

### *Living Wisely*

This theme emphasizes the interpersonal dimensions of wisdom in everyday life. Solomon highlights the value of cooperation while warning against pride and rash decisions. Wisdom involves knowing to live peaceably and humbly with God and among others, recognizing one's limitations. This theme connects moral insight with social intelligence, framing wise living as inherently relational.

**Foundational Wisdom.** The topic of the importance of wisdom runs through the whole book of Ecclesiastes. The author considers wisdom to be foundational. "... the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it" (7:12). "A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed" (8:1). This virtue is seen as "better than strength" (9:16), and even better than riches. "Better a poor and wise youth than... old and foolish..." (4:13).

Living wisely also entails approaching God prudently (5:1), guarding one's words (5:2), fulfilling vows (5:4-5), and resisting the temptation to act impulsively (7:9). Solomon warns against laziness because "it brings decay" (10:18), and against excesses in trying to be either righteous or wicked (7:16-17). He also cautions men not to take quick offense when scolded by the one who rules over him (10:4) and, in the same thought, not to curse the king (10:20).

**Wisdom in Mourning.** Among the practical wisdom is advice not found elsewhere in Scripture. In 7:2 it says, "Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting,

for that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart." This advice seems counterintuitive at first, but a closer examination will reveal the wisdom in how those alive only see the value of life after it is lost in others. Elsewhere in the Bible, it says how trials (including mourning for the death of a person) produce patience that leads to perfection of character (James 1:2-4).

The theme of living wisely emphasizes the importance of wisdom in every decision that humans make, however unpopular that decision may be. Wisdom is shown to affect how a person chooses to behave not only with God but also with others.

### ***Fearing God and Obeying Him***

This theme is the author's final conclusion about duty and how humans ought to live. Amid reflections on the transient nature of life and its apparent meaninglessness, the fear of God emerges as the only enduring purpose. To "fear God" is not to be afraid, but to live with reverence, humility, and accountability, recognizing the Creator as the Sovereign Ruler. Obedience to God's commandments is portrayed as the essence of a meaningful life. This fear is the lens through which life's ambiguity is to be interpreted and faithfully endured.

**Remembering God While Young.** This theme highlights the behavioral posture that accepts God's sovereignty and justice. Having gone through life and everything it had to offer, Solomon wisely counsels the youth to remember their Creator while they are young (12:1). They are to rejoice in their youth and, like him, pursue happiness and pleasure, but with one very important piece of advice, "But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment" (11:9-11). Solomon's closing verse repeats this warning, "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:14). After a lifelong search for the meaning of life, his conclusion captures the essence of life and the purpose for living, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (12:13).

This theme summarizes the author's decision on what life really is and how it should be lived. His conclusion's focal point is God, man's Creator and final arbiter. Solomon's decision may well be the decision of every man.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

This paper analyzed the Book of Ecclesiastes using thematic analysis with the purpose of understanding the meaning of life according to the writer of Ecclesiastes, finding out what awaits every living soul, and knowing how everyone ought to live. In many times during the analysis and to avoid isolating the book from the rest of the Scripture, verses from other books of the Bible were used to validate what was said in Ecclesiastes.

Three main questions guided this inquiry, first asking for the meaning of life and why the author of the book calls it vanity. The question of what truly satisfies the human soul was also investigated, and how humans ought to live after considering everything.

The first few chapters of Ecclesiastes reveal the author's lament over the futility of, and repetitive nature of earthly pursuits, whether it be labor, pleasure, wisdom, or wealth. Life is portrayed as short-lived, pointless, and marked by an inevitable end, with human accomplishments ultimately fading. This theme also captures Solomon's meditation on mortality, where death is portrayed as the great equalizer.

Satisfaction comes from enjoying the divine gifts of emotional fulfillment from material success and from enjoying what God provides—work, companionship, wisdom, and simple pleasures. God designed that we would not be satisfied with the here and now. "He has put eternity in their hearts" (3:11); nevertheless, present fulfillment can be found through mindful participation in daily tasks, especially when such effort is grounded in the awareness that every work is accountable

to God. When labor is viewed in this light, it becomes not a burden, but a channel for contentment and satisfaction.

Humans should live wisely, applying wisdom not as abstract knowledge, but as a practical ethic for daily living. The practice of wisdom manifests in speech and conduct, especially in contrast to foolishness. Solomon warns that careless words and excessive talking are signs of folly that lead to destruction. Wise individuals, by contrast, speak with restraint, grace, and discernment. The theme extends to social and political contexts, urging respectful behavior even in private thought. Words are shown to carry immense weight—capable of building or destroying—and thus should be used cautiously and constructively. Ultimately, wisdom is not only a matter of what one knows, but how one behaves and communicates.

While wisdom cannot eliminate uncertainty or prevent misfortune, it equips individuals to live effectively and peacefully amid life's seeming contradictions. This practical wisdom offers guidance for navigating complex social and personal situations. Fearing God and obeying Him is best done early on, remembering the Creator in the youthful days.

Solomon did not spare himself of any conceivable pleasure, yet in the end he declares that all is vanity. "Meaninglessness does not come from being weary of pain. Meaninglessness comes from being weary of pleasure" (Zacharias & Vitale, 2019, p. 65, quoting G.K. Chesterton). Is life all vanity? The results of the analysis of the Book of Ecclesiastes uphold the earlier premise that the meaning of life is found in understanding and fulfilling God's purposes for one's life. In the absence of purpose and fulfillment, life is indeed vanity. Solomon's conclusion is also this paper's conclusion—"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all." This is the meaning, the purpose, and the fulfillment of life.

#### AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

The author of this paper was solely responsible for conceptualizing the topic, conducting the research, analyzing the data, and writing the manuscript.

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