

Cloudy Days, Week 1: A Meaningless Life

Text: Ecclesiastes 1 (NLT)

Intro:

Have you ever been outside on a really cloudy or foggy day? You can't see where you're going. Everything feels heavy and unclear. It even affects your mood and energy.

Sometimes, even on sunny days, it feels cloudy inside our minds. We can't see clearly. We feel stuck.

We look at life and wonder what the point of it all is. Where is God in all this? Why doesn't life make more sense?

The Bible doesn't avoid these feelings. In the book of Ecclesiastes, a wise man called "the Teacher" went on a journey to find the meaning of life.

And here's the truth (Big Idea) he discovered: **Life is meaningless—until we look to the right place for meaning.**

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-18 (NLT)

Point 1: Life Feels Meaningless

- The Teacher starts with a pretty depressing claim: Everything is meaningless.
- That's not something you'd expect to read in the Bible! But what does the Teacher mean when he says everything is meaningless?

What he **doesn't** mean → There is no meaning in life.

What he **DOES** mean → From our human perspective there are things in life that just don't make sense.

- The Teacher uses a special phrase to talk about our perspective, "Under the sun." When he says under the sun, he means on the earth, from a human perspective.
- Under the sun, things are *really* hard. And things often don't make sense.

Recommended Question (in big group, small groups, or have the students turn to a neighbor or two): What's something in life that makes you think, "This doesn't make sense" sometimes?

My example: Why in the world do mosquitos exist? More serious one to transition to the Teacher's heavy examples: Why do so many people struggle with mental health issues?

- Here are some examples of things the Teacher sees in life that don't make sense to him:
 1. People work hard, but they die before they can enjoy the fruit of their work.
 2. We do our best to follow God, but then life doesn't go the way we wanted.
 3. Bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.

4. Bad people get power and do bad things. Good people are rejected and ignored and sometimes even worse.
5. In the end, everybody dies.

Have you ever wondered about these things? Have you ever felt confused about life? It's like a *cloudy day*. Things are unclear.

So one of the Teacher's main points is that ***from our perspective without God, life feels meaningless.***

Point 2: Life is Exhausting

- According to the Teacher, life is exhausting sometimes because it's **so** repetitive. He uses three nature images to communicate a truth that we can relate to:

Nature	Us
The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. (v. 5)	We are constantly hurrying and rushing to the next things. Whether it's the next reel on TikTok, the next level in a video game, the next personal record in a sport, the next project at school, the next relationship, or the next season in life, we're always in a rush. One day ends and we get home and it feels like the next day full of responsibilities is already starting.
The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles .	We find ourselves in cycles, sticking to the same routines and habits that keep us stuck in the same place. We keep doing the same things we said we would never do again. It feels like we're going in circles like the wind.
Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full . Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea.	We keep doing things to try to fill ourselves up so that we can feel satisfied, but like the sea we are <i>never full</i> . It's never enough.

- Life, says the Teacher, is filled with endless repetition. We hurry in circles and are never satisfied.
- The result is in v. 8, "Everything is wearisome beyond description." We can't even put into words how **tired** we are. Do you feel exhausted by life today?
- We're like buckets with a hole in it: We keep trying to fill ourselves with things that make us feel okay, but we can't hold onto it all and we are left empty. So we shovel more water in faster, but until the hole is patched we will still leak. It's exhausting.

Recommended Question: What's one thing you do to try to feel full or satisfied when you're tired or empty?

Conclusion:

The Teacher wants us to understand something crucial: Life can feel meaningless and exhausting—like chasing smoke or wind. Like he said in v. 15, Something is wrong; something is missing.

[Object Lesson]

Bring out something that produces smoke or mist (a candle, diffuser, fog machine, etc.). Ask a student to come up and say, “Your challenge: when I say go, catch as much of the smoke as you can—with just your hands.”

Let them try (maybe a second student too). When they give up or laugh, say something like:

“Exactly! It’s impossible. That’s the point.”

The Teacher says finding the meaning of life under the sun is like chasing wind or smoke (v. 14). It’s there, but you can’t fully grasp it. That doesn’t mean wind or smoke isn’t real—it just means we can’t grasp it on our own. In the same way, something might be meaningless from our perspective, but that doesn’t mean there is no meaning.

Meaning is not found *under the sun*, in just what we see or experience. It comes from *beyond* the sun—where God is.

Big Idea: Life is meaningless—until we look to the right place for meaning.

Clouds may block the sun, but they don’t stop it from shining. And the cloudy days of life don’t mean God is gone. He’s with us. Jesus stepped into our cloudy world to bring meaning, rest, and hope.

Whatever you’re carrying, Jesus invites you to find meaning in *him*.

In the next few weeks, we’ll look at what we often chase when life feels meaningless. But today, remember: meaning starts with God, not with us. Even when we struggle to see it.

Discussion Questions:

1. The Teacher says, “Everything is meaningless.” What do you think he means by that? Do you agree or disagree?
2. Have you ever had a time in life where it felt like things didn’t make sense or felt “cloudy”? What happened? How did you deal with it?
3. What are some things people try to do to feel better or find meaning when life feels confusing or empty?
4. What’s something in your life that feels repetitive or tiring right now?
5. How does trusting God change the way we see life’s confusing or exhausting moments?
6. What’s one thing you want to bring to Jesus this week—something that feels cloudy, heavy, or confusing?