

## Cloudy Days, Week 2: Meaningless Pleasure

### Text: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

**Intro:** Have you ever eaten way too much of something and regretted it?

**ILL: Hot Cheetos story** — I was nervous for something the next day, so I ate a whole party-size bag of Hot Cheetos in 30 minutes. I loved it—until the bathroom reminded me of the consequences (it burned). It was good in the moment, but it left me wrecked.

That's how life works sometimes. We chase things that feel good now, but end up costing us later. We think they'll satisfy a real need—stress, loneliness, boredom—but they end up leaving us worse off.

That's exactly what the Teacher in Ecclesiastes is exploring. Last week we saw how he said life felt meaningless. So now he tries to *fill* the emptiness. He runs an experiment: **Can pleasure give life meaning?**

What he found is our **Big Idea** today: **Chasing pleasure without God will always let you down.**

### Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 (NLT)

#### Point 1: The Hypothesis (vv. 1-3)

- When we go through difficult things in life, like the Teacher, we each have our own ways of dealing with the negative feelings and experiences we have. We call those ways of dealing with things **coping mechanisms**.
- A **coping mechanism** is a way to deal with pain, stress, and other negative feelings. Some coping tools are healthy (prayer, talking with friends, going for a walk), but others can be harmful and pull us away from God (isolation, addiction, distraction).
- The Teacher is using pleasure as a **coping mechanism**. He's troubled by the meaninglessness he feels in life, and so he begins an experiment. He says to himself, "**Come on, let's try pleasure. Let's look for the 'good things' in life**" (v. 1). He is trying to "experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world" (v. 3).
- **Illustration:** We can almost imagine him like a scientist working through each step of the scientific method. (Leader Note: This could be a good moment to ask your students what the steps of the scientific method are. There is an image below and on [oneythadmin.org](http://oneythadmin.org) you can show for reference)
  - Observation: Life seems meaningless.
  - Hypothesis: Maybe meaning can be found in pleasure.

- Experiment: Try **everything**.
  - Result (Analysis): It's empty. Pleasure is meaningless.
- **Application:** (Leader Note: You can ask this rhetorically to stir thought [if doing it this way, try listing out some examples to help students process], give students the chance to respond, or let them answer the question with someone sitting close by). When you're dealing with something difficult, what's one thing you do to help yourself feel better? Do you feel like that's healthy or harmful?

## Point 2: The Experiment

The Teacher tries it all:

- **Substances** – “I cheered myself with wine.” (v. 3)
  - Some of us turn to alcohol, vaping, marijuana, etc.
- **Money & status** – “I built homes, gardens, collected treasure.” (vv. 4-8)
  - We can get caught up in the money chase. We look for things that help us not to feel poor or like we're in need. We look for the things that will impress other people. We're obsessed with the best brands and outfits, we prioritize work over everything else, even sacrificing time in church and our own spiritual health.
- **Entertainment** – “I hired singers.” (v. 8)
  - We spend our time binge-watching Youtube or Netflix, gaming, or scrolling on TikTok to avoid our responsibilities. It's easier than working hard or feeling uncomfortable.
- **Sex** – “I had many concubines” (v. 8) [Concubines were women used for sex.]
  - We find ourselves lonely and we just want to *feel something*. So we take part in our hookup culture, seeking relationship after relationship to make us feel whole. Many of us struggle with pornography, looking for a hit of pleasure to ease our frustration, loneliness, boredom, or stress.

**Verse 10** sums it up: “Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure.”

- That's a little bit of how our culture works. “If it feels good, do it.”
- **Illustration:** It reminds me of a cheesy saying that was going around when I was in high school: **YOLO—You Only Live Once**. The idea was that life is short so you might as well live it up.
- Now it's “treat yourself” or “self-care” without boundaries. But self-indulgence does not mean healing or healthiness.
- Our struggles with these things make sense. We chase these things because we want to be loved, to feel good, and to feel fulfilled in life. These are good desires, so why do we still feel empty when we indulge ourselves in them?
- It's because all the ways we try to fulfill these desires are fleeting. The party always ends, Monday always comes, the high always fades, things fall apart. So what do we do?

### Point 3: The Result (vv. 10-11)

- The Teacher's conclusion is really interesting. He says that some pleasure is good. He says he found great pleasure and reward in his hard work (v. 10b). In other words, sometimes pleasure, if it's healthy, is okay.
- But if you base your life on it, it will let you down. **Pleasure only gives a temporary reward. It's not enough on its own to make life meaningful.** It might help you feel better for a little bit, but it's not enough to give you lasting satisfaction.
- The Teacher tells us: it's all a chasing after wind (v. 11). You're left empty, with nothing in your hands in the end. You're still missing something. There is no lasting meaning in the pursuit of pleasure.

That why we need to remember that **[Big Idea] Chasing pleasure without God will always let you down.**

### Gospel Invitation

Instead, you can find ultimate meaning and satisfaction in Jesus who ultimately satisfies all of our desires. Jesus says in John 10:10-11, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Pleasure is the thief of joy that will let you down. Jesus is the shepherd that gives you a fulfilling life and lifts you up. He doesn't want to take away your fun—He wants to lead you to the kind of joy that actually lasts. And he denied himself comfort by dying on a cross so you can experience that joy.

### Questions

1. Verse 10 says, "I denied myself no pleasure." What do you think that kind of life looks like in our world today? Where do you see it happening?
2. Think about your week: What's something you've looked to for fun or escape that didn't actually fill you up?
3. The lesson talked about "coping mechanisms"—some healthy, some harmful. What's a healthy way you've learned to cope with stress or emptiness?
4. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." What do you think a *full life* actually looks like with Jesus at the center?
5. If you believed that Jesus really offers lasting joy, how might that change what you chase after this week?

