Crossroads International Church Dr. Rick Griffith

6 July 2014 Message 1 of 17

NLT 40 Minutes

**Going in Circles**

***Ecclesiastes 1:1-11***

**Topic:** Purpose

**Subject:** Life’s short-lived and fleeting cycles

**Complement:** should move us to seek God

Title

**Purpose:** The listeners will seek God despite life’s transitory cycles.

**Meditation:** Eternal

**Reading:** http://www.nelsonfree.com/VoiceNT/download/6ef256d40a169b16b7dff3d5f8b0e11b/491

# Introduction

### Interest: People in Singapore walk faster than any other city (Poh Fang Chia in the 21 June 2014 edition at <http://odb.org/2014/06/21/worlds-fastest-walkers/>).

Orchard Road

#### Last month’s *Our Daily Bread* notes, “According to a study measuring the pace of life of cities in 32 countries, people in the biggest hurry live here in Singapore. We walk 60 feet in 10:55 seconds, compared to 12:00 seconds for New Yorkers and 31:60 seconds for those living in the African city of Blantyre, Malawi.”

• SIN

• NYC  
•Blantyre

#### “But regardless of where you live, the study shows that walking speeds have increased by an average of 10 percent in the past 20 years. And if walking speed is any indicator for the pace of life, we are certainly much busier than before.”

### Need: Do *you* walk fast?

You walk fast?

#### Do you walk faster or slower than 10 years ago? Lately I’ve been pondering the meaning of the MRT signs like, “Harbour Front train arrives in 1 minute.” Isn’t that the same as saying, “Hey! You better run!”

Rat circles

Why so fast?

#### Is life a rat race to you?

Rat ladder

##### Maybe you are among rats climbing the ladder…

Rat race

Rat & cat

##### As has been often noted, even if you *win* the rat race, you’re still a *rat*!

##### I realize some of us are saying, “Yeah, but if only you knew my boss!”

#### To help us gain a better perspective on life, I’ve decided to make my present preaching series expound the OT book of Ecclesiastes. This will be 17 sessions in the coming months on one of the most perplexing yet insightful books of Scripture.

Fleeting

### Background: In this study we will see that Solomon “experienced it all” (more on this next week) and also was the wisest man ever—so we should listen to his wisdom on life.

Ambition

#### Let’s get the context of this book.

##### Solomon was the author (1:1).

Author

###### Many doubt this today for a few reasons:

*Qohelet*

The word “Solomon” never appears in the book!

• Solomon

Some words in the book are said to be first used hundreds of years after Solomon’s time.

• Later

Also, verse 12 seems to imply that he *used* to be king, while we know from 1 Kings 11:43 that Solomon remained king until his death.

• 1:12

As a result, many today simply call the author the “Preacher,” from the Hebrew *Qohelet*.

###### However, an unbiased look at the book itself supports authorship by Solomon himself (Gleason Archer, *A Survey of OT Introduction*, 486-99):

The author is one of David's sons who became king (1:1). Solomon was the only son of David ever to become king (although "son" can mean "descendant"). His identification of himself as "the Preacher" cannot disprove Solomonic authorship.

Recent discoveries reveal that some of the Aramaic and Persian linguistic features were known in Canaanite-Phoenician literature even *before* Solomon's time! The language actually “fits into no known period in the history of the Hebrew language” (ibid, 489).

To say he “was king” (1:12) indicates that he was no longer king anymore is to stretch the Hebrew beyond its bounds. This is a *possible* translation but not a *necessary* translation. Many translations render it, “I *have been* king…” (e.g., NAU, NET, ESV).

The description of the author aptly fits King Solomon as being a man of wisdom (1:16), involved in extensive building projects (2:4-6), owning slaves (2:7), who was very wealthy (2:8a), possessing a harem (2:8b), and quoting proverbs (12:9).

• 6 times

Solomon

##### Since this book seems to be the musings of an old man, I presume that Ecclesiastes is the last book written by Solomon.

When written?

#### Chronologically in the OT Poetic books, we see:

Poetic Books

##### Job shows how to suffer.

##### Psalms shows how to pray.

##### Proverbs shows how to relate (to others).

##### Song of Songs shows how to love.

##### Finally, Ecclesiastes shows us how to live.

### Intro to MPI: What was Solomon’s summary of wisdom about life in his latter years?

### Preview: We’ll see his thesis (1:2) followed by his proofs (1:3-11).

### Text: Please turn in your Bible to Eccl. 1:1-2.

(Verse 2 gives the theme of the book that…)

# I. Every human endeavor is short-lived (1:2).

MP

## Solomon states the theme that everything man does lacks permanence (1:2).

### He declares the conclusion of his lifelong search right upfront.

### The remainder of the book reveals that by "everything" Solomon meant all human endeavors.

Vanity Video

## The Hebrew *hebel* is the key to the book’s meaning.

Hebel

### Translations include "vanity" (KJV, ESV, NAU), "meaningless" (NIV, NLT), and "futile” (NET, TLB, BKC).

Trans

#### “Vanity” is not a good word as it is easily misunderstood. So…

#### For 40 years I have taught Ecclesiastes as indicating the meaninglessness of life from a human perspective, or “under the sun”—a phrase used often in the book.

Manner of looking

Under the Sun

#### This would then be a manner of looking at life from man’s angle.

#### The book often tells us positive things, so I have tried to balance these with the negative as if Solomon were under water most of the time and then occasionally comes up for air!

Search for meaning

Water image

#### This means that the book then refers to a search for meaning.

#### So I was going to call this series “The Meaninglessness of Human Achievement & Wisdom.”

Previous Title

### But this past week I began to question this interpretation.

• But…

#### Is life really meaningless?

#### Does the book really contrast man’s and God’s viewpoints on life as if Solomon were schizophrenic?

Breath

### It literally means "a breath, wind, or vapor" (Prov. 21:6; Isa. 57:13).

Very Literal

### As a metaphor it refers to what doesn’t last (“what is without real substance, value, permanence, significance, or meaning” BKC, 1:976):

• Metaphor

#### "Other characteristics of wind or vapor" include…

##### fleeting or transitory (6:12 with 3:19; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10)

• Fleeting

##### enigmatic or perplexing (6:2; 8:10, 14)

• Enigmatic

##### unseen and obscure (11:8).

• Unseen

#### Therefore the best synonyms or translations for *hebel* might be:

Synonyms

##### Fleeting

##### Passing

##### Brief

##### Temporary

##### Momentary

##### Transitory

##### Short-lived

Chart

(So I’m not leaning towards the traditional view anymore. Instead, “under the sun” refers to the sphere of this life, not the manner of this life. And *hebel* means life is fleeting. But how would Solomon *prove* that life is fleeting? He seeks to prove his thesis in verses 3-11…)

# II. Life’s many cycles are passing (1:3-11).

MP

## Theme (of 1:1–6:9): Our work ultimately brings us nowhere (1:3).

1:3

Cycles in Life

## Proof: Life’s many fleeting repetitions bring no real change (1:4-11).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in our generations (1:4).

Human life cycle

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in nature (1:5-7).

Butterfly

#### The sun continually rises and sets (1:5).

Sunrise sunset

#### The wind blows in circles (1:6).

Wind Cycles

#### The rivers and seas cycle water endlessly (1:7).

River Cycles

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in history (1:8-11).

Woodcutter

#### History merely repeats itself (1:9a).

#### We think things are new only because we forget them appearing in the past (1:9b-11).

# Conclusion

### Life’s short-lived and fleeting cycles should move us to seek God (MI).

MI

### The flow of the passage (MPs)

MPI

#### Every human endeavor is short-lived (1:2).

MPII

#### Life’s many cycles are passing (1:3-11).

### Exhortation/Application:

Race

#### Don’t get caught up in the race, the work, and the exhaustion.

Exhaust

Work

#### Don't succeed at the wrong pursuit (Francis Chan).

Francis Chan

#### Seek Jesus as He is eternal.

### Prayer

Black

# Preliminary Questions

**Verses Questions**

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

### Since this book seems to be the musings of an old man, I presume that Ecclesiastes is the last book written by Solomon.

### Chronologically in the OT Poetic books, we see:

#### Job shows how to suffer.

#### Psalms shows how to pray.

#### Proverbs shows how to relate (to others).

#### Song of Songs shows how to love.

#### Finally, Ecclesiastes shows us how to live.

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

### We all are perplexed how to live—how to know where meaning ultimately lies.

### Ecclesiastes answers the dilemma of the ages by identifying with our weary search and pointing the way to God.

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

### It seems that when all of our basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter are addressed, it is at this point that we begin to ask what genuinely counts in life.

### Not surprisingly, Ecclesiastes was penned during the so-called “Golden Age” in Israel—during the nation’s greatest period of prosperity and peace, Solomon raises the question of purpose.

# Questions

### What is meant by the Hebrew word *Qohelet* (1:1a)? Should this be translated “Preacher” (KJV, NAU, WEB, ESV) or “Teacher” (NIV, NET, NLT)?

### Is the author Solomon (1:1b)? How do we know?

### If Solomon wrote it, why isn’t he named specifically?

### What is meant by “meaningless” (1:2)?

#### The better translation is “insubstantial, transient, foul (odor).” See Douglas B. Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic Use of lbh” *JBL* 117/3 (1998): 437-454.

### How could Ecclesiastes tell us that everything is meaningless when the rest of the Bible tells us that life has great meaning?

### How can it be that work is not ultimately worthwhile (1:3)? Doesn’t God want us to work? So why would he tell us that all work is meaningless?

### What is the point of listing all the cycles of life (1:4-11)?

# Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

Life without God is meaningless cycles.

When life offers only meaningless cycles, God gives meaning.

### Interest: What do people say brings satisfaction in life? To what are people looking to for satisfaction?

### Need: Where are you seeking satisfaction right now?

### Background: Solomon had all these things and yet was still unhappy—until he found his satisfaction in God.

# Possible Illustrations

### Abraham Lincoln’s best teacher was his mother.

### Dr. James Provine

### Examples of meaningless cycles: revolving door

## Some doubt whether Ecclesiastes should be in the Bible.

Canon?

### This is partly due to the book’s pessimism.

Pessimism

### It is also due to supposed contradictions.

Contradictons

## I Love You Son video clip

After skipping over extended periods of his life during which his father has passed away, Michel travels back to the last time they saw each other to say goodbye.

Themes: [Neglect](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/neglect), [Fatherhood](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/fatherhood), [Love-Father's](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/love-fathers), [Regret](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/regret), [Priorities](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/priorities), [Workaholic](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/workaholic), [Family](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/family), [Sentiment](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/sentiment), [Elderly](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/elderly), [Death](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/death), [Appreciation](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/appreciation), [Relationships](http://www.wingclips.com/themes/relationships)

### http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/click/i-love-you-son

# Possible Applications

### Share life’s meaning with the people around you who see no meaning in life.

### Jesus said, “I have come to give life, and life abundantly” (John 10:10).

**Going in Circles**

***Ecclesiastes 1:1-11***

**Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)**

# *Exegetical Idea*: The way Solomon proved every human endeavor as transitory was by ceaseless cycles of life (1:1-11).

## Title: Solomon declares himself the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem (1:1).

## Theme (for 1:12–6:9): The transience of human endeavors is proven in man's transience, nature, and history (1:2-11).

### Stating the Theme: Every endeavor is transient (1:2).

### Proving the Theme: The transience of human labor is shown in man's short life, nature, and history (1:3-11).

#### Theme: No profit exists in human labor (1:3).

#### Proof: Proof: Life’s many fleeting repetitions bring no real change (1:4-11).

##### Ceaseless cycles are evident in man's generations (1:4).

##### Ceaseless cycles are evident in nature (1:5-8).

###### The sun continually rises and sets (1:5).

###### The wind blows in circles (1:6).

###### The rivers and seas cycle water endlessly (1:7).

###### All things people see, hear and experience don’t ultimately satisfy us (1:8).

##### Ceaseless cycles are evident in history (1:9-11).

###### History merely repeats itself (1:9a).

###### We think things are new only because we forget them appearing in the past (1:9b-11).

**Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)**

The listeners will seek God despite life’s transitory cycles.

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest: People in Singapore walk faster than any other city.

### Need: Do *you* walk fast? Is life a rat race to you?

### Background: Solomon “experienced it all” (more on this next week) and was the wisest man ever so we should listen to his wisdom on life.

### Intro to MPI: What was Solomon’s summary of wisdom about life in his latter years?

### Preview: We’ll see his thesis (1:2) followed by his proofs (1:3-11).

### Text: Please turn in your Bible to Eccl. 1:1-2.

# I. Every human endeavor is short-lived (1:2).

## Solomon states the theme that everything man does lacks permanence (1:2).

## The Hebrew *hebel* is the key to the book’s meaning.

## Some doubt whether Ecclesiastes should be in the Bible.

(How would Solomon *prove* that life is fleeting? He seeks to prove his thesis in verses 3-11…)

# II. Life’s many cycles are passing (1:3-11).

## Theme (of 1:1–6:9): Our work ultimately brings us nowhere (1:3).

## Proof: Life’s many fleeting repetitions bring no real change (1:4-11).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in our generations (1:4).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in nature (1:5-7).

#### The sun continually rises and sets (1:5).

#### The wind blows in circles (1:6).

#### The rivers and seas cycle water endlessly (1:6).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in history (1:8-11).

#### History merely repeats itself (1:9a).

#### We think things are new only because we forget them appearing in the past (1:9b-11).

# Conclusion

### Life’s short-lived and fleeting cycles should move us to seek God (MI).

### Exhortation/Application: Seek Jesus as He is eternal.

**Older Outline: Meaningless Cycles**

***Ecclesiastes 1:1-11***

**Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)**

# *Exegetical Idea*: The way we perceive in our humanness that every human endeavor is meaningless is by seeing the ceaseless cycles of life (1:1-11).

## Title: Solomon declares himself the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem (1:1).

## Theme (for 1:12–6:9): The meaninglessness of human endeavors is proven in man's transience, nature, and history (1:2-11).

### Stating the Theme: From the human perspective every endeavor is meaningless (1:2).

### Proving the Theme: The futility of human labor is shown in man's transience, nature, and history to warn others not to see work as an end in itself (1:3-11).

### Proving the Theme: Nature shows the futility of human labor is shown in man's transience, nature, and history to warn others not to see work as an end in itself (1:3-11).

#### Theme: No profit exists in human labor (1:3).

#### Proof: Man's short life span, nature, and history are ceaseless and circular (1:4-11).

##### Ceaseless, circular rounds are evident in man's short lifespan (1:4).

##### Ceaseless, circular rounds are evident in nature (1:5-7).

##### Ceaseless, circular rounds are evident in history (1:8-11).

**Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)**

The listeners will find life’s meaning in God despite life’s cycles.

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### Interest: How is it that many people see life as meaningless?

### Need: Do *you* think life is meaningless? Is it a rat race to you?

### Background: Solomon “had it all” (more on this next week) but he still felt as if life had no ultimate meaning.

#### Let’s get the context of this book.

##### Solomon was the author (1:1a).

##### Since this book seems to be the musings of an old man, I presume that Ecclesiastes is the last book written by Solomon.

#### Chronologically in the OT Poetic books, we see:

##### Job shows how to suffer.

##### Psalms shows how to pray.

##### Proverbs shows how to relate (to others).

##### Song of Songs shows how to love.

##### Finally, Ecclesiastes shows us how to live.

### Intro to MPI: How do we know that Solomon struggled with life in his latter years?

### Preview: We’ll see his thesis (1:2) followed by his proofs (1:3-11).

### Text: Please turn in your Bible to Eccl. 1:1-2.

(Verse 2 gives the theme of the book that…)

# I. Every human endeavor is meaningless (1:2).

## Solomon states the theme that, from man’s viewpoint, every human endeavor is meaningless (1:2).

### He declares the conclusion of his long-term search in life right upfront.

### The remainder of the book reveals that by "everything" Solomon meant all human endeavors.

## The Hebrew *hebel* means “meaningless” or "vanity” or “futility.”

### Translations: "vanity" (KJV, ESV, NAU), "meaningless" (NIV, NLT), "futile” (NET, TLB, BKC).

### It literally means "a breath, wind, or vapor" (Prov. 21:6; Is 57:13).

### As a metaphor it refers to what doesn’t last (“what is without real substance, value, permanence, significance, or meaning” BKC, 1:976):

#### "what is unsubstantial or without real value"

#### "other characteristics of wind or vapor," what is…

##### fleeting or transitory (6:12 with 3:19; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10)

##### enigmatic or perplexing (6:2; 8:10, 14)

##### unseen and obscure (11:8).

## Some doubt whether Ecclesiastes should be in the Bible.

### This is partly due to the book’s pessimism.

### It is also due to supposed contradictions.

(Why would Solomon write that life is meaningless? He seeks to prove his thesis in verses 3-11…)

# II. Meaninglessness is seen in life’s many cycles (1:3-11).

## Theme (of 1:1–6:9): Our work ultimately brings us nowhere (1:3).

## Proof: Life has many futile repetitions (1:4-11).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in our short lifespan (1:4).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in nature (1:5-7).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in history (1:8-11).

# Conclusion

### Life without God is meaningless cycles (MI).

### The flow of the passage (MPs)

#### Every human endeavor is meaningless (1:2).

#### Meaninglessness is seen in life’s many cycles (1:3-11).

### Exhortation/Application: Learn now what truly matters in life.



**Rick Griffith**

6 July 2014

Message 1 of 17

**Going in Circles**

***Ecclesiastes 1:1-11***

# Introduction

### People in Singapore walk faster than any other city.

### Do *you* walk fast? Is life a rat race to you?

### Solomon “experienced it all” (more on this next week) and was the wisest man ever so we should listen to his wisdom on life.

# I. Every human endeavor is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(1:2).

## Solomon states the theme that everything man does lacks permanence (1:2).

## The Hebrew *hebel* is the key to the book’s meaning.

### Translations include "vanity" (KJV, ESV, NAU), "meaningless" (NIV, NLT), and "futile” (NET, TLB, BKC).

### But…

#### Is life really meaningless?

#### Does the book really contrast man’s and God’s viewpoints on life as if Solomon were schizophrenic?

### It literally means "a breath, wind, or vapor" (Prov. 21:6; Isa. 57:13).

### As a metaphor it refers to what doesn’t last (“what is without real substance, value, permanence, significance, or meaning” *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:976). Wind or vapor is…

#### fleeting or transitory (6:12 with 3:19; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10)

#### enigmatic or perplexing (6:2; 8:10, 14)

#### unseen and obscure (11:8).

(How would Solomon *prove* that life is fleeting? He seeks to prove his thesis in verses 3-11…)

# II. Life’s many \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are passing (1:3-11).

## Theme (of 1:1–6:9): Our work ultimately brings us nowhere (1:3).

## Proof: Life’s many fleeting repetitions bring no real change (1:4-11).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in our generations (1:4).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in nature (1:5-7).

#### The sun continually rises and sets (1:5).

#### The wind blows in circles (1:6).

#### The rivers and seas cycle water endlessly (1:6).

### Ceaseless cycles are evident in history (1:8-11).

#### History merely repeats itself (1:9a).

#### We think things are new only because we forget them appearing in the past (1:9b-11).

# Conclusion

### Life’s short-lived and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ cycles should move us to seek God (Main Idea).

### Seek Jesus since He is eternal.

**Thought Questions**

1. How do these verses illustrate Solomon's point? What specific objects does he use to bring home his thesis?
2. Does the writer have a linear or circular view of history? of nature? of life in general? Is this a Christian view?
3. Would you say that this initial passage is a view of life with or without God?
4. In what area do you need to change after seeing this passage?

Text