

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 | “If Only I Had...”  
*Preached on March 15, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 2 today, and we will be covering verses 1–11.  
*[pauseeee]*

Here in this book, the author is examining what we should pursue above all that’s actually worth it in the long run. *[pause]*

We saw last week that human wisdom and knowledge aren’t the key, and today, we will see whether *pleasure* is the answer.

So let’s READ the passage to see what he says. *[READ 1–11]*

A common thought that pops into our heads from time-to-time is, “If I only had...” and you fill in the blank. *[pause]*

This is reflected in the illustration of how a farmer noticed his cows constantly stretching through the fence to eat grass on the other side, even though the grass in their own pasture was just as green. *[pause]*

Like those cows, we tend to think, “If only I had *that*,” as we look out and long for something else. *[pause]*

We think, “If only I had a little more money, I would be happy.”

Or, “If only I had that new product, my life would forever be better.” *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes people think, “If only I had a boyfriend or girlfriend.” *[pause]*

“If only I got into that college, or got that job.” *[pause]*

“If only I was healthier.”

“If only I reached the next level.”

“If only I had the life that they have.” *[pauseeeee]*

Many people’s lives are a continual string of “If only I had...” statements.

But the thing is, whenever we get that thing we longed for, it doesn’t provide what we had hoped. *[pauseeee]*

They say that John D. Rockefeller was once asked, “How much money is enough?”

And the richest man in the world at the time, answered, “Just a little bit more.”<sup>1</sup> *[pauseee]*

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<sup>1</sup> Found at: <https://faithmissionwf.org/reflections/enough/>.

People never seem to be satisfied, and yet they are continuing to look for satisfaction *in things*.  
[pause]

Just consider how quickly people want the next new thing, not long after they have already received something new. [pause]

They get a new smartphone, a new one comes out, and they are ready to jump in line for the newer one. [pause]

They get a new car, but their eyes covet that other car that they saw driving down the street.  
[pauseeee]

Solomon *also* felt the tendency to think, “If only I had...”, and wanted to test out whether receiving what you longed for would truly bring satisfaction. [pause]

*He tested it out, and that’s point #1 this morning...*

### **I. Living for pleasure was tested to see if it could bring lasting satisfaction.**

When you put something to the test, you are seeing if it will work.

And in the same way, the author of Ecclesiastes tests different things in life to see if they lead to a good and worthwhile life. [pause]

One such “test” is the test of pleasure.

He says in verse 1, “I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.’” [pauseeee]

This is a real and true experiment, for he tells his heart to give into the pleasures of this life.

So this is no mere thought-experiment or theory, but Solomon *actually tried* to see if pleasure was what would bring fulfillment. [pause]

He says, “enjoy yourself.”

That is, experience pleasure and see if it brings ultimate good. [pause]

He didn’t hold back, or just dip his toe into pleasure, but gave himself over to full-on, self-indulgent delights. [pauseeee]

Here’s the thing though: his method didn’t derail his experiment. [pause]

Twice in this passage, he tells us that amidst this test, his wisdom remained with him.

Therefore, it’s not like he lost control of himself, and let himself go too far, so that he couldn’t accurately evaluate everything.

Instead, ‘he kept his wits about him,’ so to say. *[pause]*

He could wisely evaluate the test of pleasure, and give us the conclusion because he never lost control of himself. *[pauseeee]*

Now what were this man’s resources to do this experiment?

Because a poor or limited man saying that he was going to see if pleasure was the answer couldn’t be taken seriously because how could he have access to all of the pleasures? *[pause]*

Could he really do a thorough test?

No way—but Solomon was a rich and powerful king, so his resources seem almost unlimited. *[pausee]*

We are told that he builds houses, has pools, gardens, and great possessions.

And that means that the passage that we are looking at this morning is showing us what a person with *no hindrances* to getting what they wanted, found after attaining all that they desired. *[pauseeee]*

So this experiment is a controlled experiment with unlimited resources, and what exactly did he put to the test? Pleasure. *[pause]*

He is talking about sensory pleasure and the happiness that comes along with that experience. *[pause]*

The word translated as ‘pleasure’ is a word that is often used for the joy and gladness felt during a celebration.

So he’s going to use or do things that bring pleasure in life, and see if they produce lasting fulfillment. *[pauseeee]*

This pursuit of pleasure is really the pursuit of self-indulgence or self-gratification.

It’s life all about you. *[pausee]*

Interestingly, there has been a philosophy called, “Hedonism,” which espouses that very thing...

They say that the goal in life should be pleasure. *[pausee]*

Now you may deem this philosophical belief as a relic of bygone eras, but it’s still alive and well today...

We hear things like, “Treat yourself,” or, “Put yourself first.” *[pause]*

Just take a glance at the booming entertainment industry, and how many people are intentionally shackled to the pleasure of entertainment. *[pause]*

Watch the commercials and other advertisements of our day and consider what they are striving to communicate...

They are telling you, “Buy this product and your life will forever be better!” *[pause]*

They are saying, “This will feel good, therefore you need it, don’t you?” *[pause]*

Advertisers are trying to tap into that desire for pleasure, and promising satisfaction and fulfillment—if only you would buy what they’re selling. *[pauseeee]*

So the author of Ecclesiastes is testing out the path of pursuing pleasure as someone’s ultimate aim in life.

And his goal is found in the latter part of verse 3...

“Till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.” *[pauseee]*

He is trying to discover what we should pursue while we live, that’s worth it. *[pause]*

What brings true purpose and meaning?

What is the actual “good life”? *[pause]*

He’s testing whether pursuing pleasure to the utmost brings lasting satisfaction.

Like, will giving into all of my desires satisfy me in the long run? *[pause]*

Will I find meaning on the road of pleasure? *[pauseeeee]*

This is what we all want—enduring satisfaction.

No one longs for *fleeting* pleasure or *temporary* happiness. *[pauseeee]*

If you’re a roller-coaster lover, you would never say, “I wish that ride ended sooner,” but what do you say? “It ended too quickly!” *[pause]*

When you eat an amazing-tasting meal, and you are still hungry, aren’t you sad when your plate is empty? *[pause]*

When a TV series that you love ends, don’t you wish for another episode, right away? *[pauseee]*

We want the pleasure to last, to endure, to not be fleeting, but do the pleasures of this world last? Solomon sure tried. *[pauseeee]*

Listen to what all he did to find out the truth about a life driven by pleasure-seeking...

First, he tried to cheer his body with wine, according to verse 3. *[pause]*

So would alcohol be the answer to his woes? *[pauseee]*

Sadly, many in our day turn to alcohol, thinking it is the key.

They are longing for an escape from the pains of life by trying to soothe it with the pleasure of alcohol.

But know that this will not work in the long run. *[pause]*

Solomon tried it, and found that it didn't work.

So no longer look to alcohol as a way to find satisfaction in life. *[pauseeee]*

Next, verses 4–6 tell us that he sought out the pleasure of achievement...

He built houses and planted vineyards.

He made gardens, parks, pools, and planted fruit trees of all kinds. *[pause]*

There's a certain pleasure in planning and completing a project.

You stand back and say, "Look at that."

Well Solomon accomplished many projects. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes people stand amazed at other people's accomplishments. *[pause]*

Maybe it's building this mansion-looking house from scratch, or obtaining a huge amount of new clients, or some other achievement.

And to that, Solomon would say, "You should have seen what *I* did." *[pauseeee]*

He accomplished the most amazing projects, and had the most amazing property.

And yet to those who look with envious eyes upon all of that—know that it will not satisfy. *[pauseee]*

No number of achievements will bring you fulfillment.

No mansion or garden or pool will fill the hole in your heart. *[pauseeeee]*

Many of you know Tom Brady, the famous football player who won many Super Bowls. *[pause]*

Back in 2005, Brady had already won 3 Super Bowls and was being interviewed.<sup>2</sup> *[pause]*

A 27-year old at the time with tons of money, you would think that he had it all.

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<sup>2</sup> Found at: <https://www.liberty.edu/champion/2021/02/22/sports-with-simmons-when-seven-rings-isnt-enough>.

But Brady said this, “Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there is something greater out there for me?”...There’s got to be more than this.” [pause]

The interviewer went on to ask him, “What’s the answer?”

To which Brady said, “I wish I knew.” [pauseeee]

Brady would go on to win 4 more Super Bowls, and he would frequently state that his favorite Super Bowl is “the next one.” [pauseeee]

There was a man who seemed to have it all: the accomplishments, the money, the fame, and yet he didn’t feel *satisfied*. [pauseeeee]

That’s like Solomon here, and we find some more things that he had: he had lots of money, power, and possessions. [pause]

He had many herds and flocks, as well as numerous slaves.

He gathered treasure upon treasure.

He was a super wealthy, powerful man. [pauseeee]

Many people in our day would think that a life like Solomon had is the epitome of success and fulfillment—he had it all! [pause]

In our day, people still think money, power, and possessions are the key to a fulfilled life.

Just look at how people become obsessed with the lifestyle of celebrities. [pause]

Look at the popularity of social media’s influencers, and how people can’t help, but gawk at all that they have in life. [pause]

This is because people think that money, power, and possessions will satisfy them, so they long for those things.

Well here’s King Solomon saying, “I had all that, and it *still* didn’t bring me what I longed for!” [pause]

Will we listen to his wise words? [pauseeeee]

Lastly, Solomon had lots of entertainment and sensual pleasure. [pause]

He had men and women singers, so he was able to hear good music all the time. [pause]

If he wanted a live concert at any time, he probably just had to say the word. [pauseeee]

He had many concubines, which points to the fact that he had many women at his beck and call. [pause]

This is what many people pursue as a goal in their lives—they are all about entertainment or sensual pleasure.

They think that it will bring them contentment, but it never does. *[pausee]*

Others are pursuing that relationship or that next sexual experience, thinking that if only they had *that*, then they wouldn't long for more. *[pausee]*

Know that King Solomon had those things, and yet it didn't provide what he desired. *[pauseeee]*

Solomon was not hindered in his goal of putting pleasure to the test.

He really and truly tested out pleasure to see if it would be the key to a good, fulfilling life. *[pause]*

He tells us in verses 9 and 10 that he “became great and surpassed all who were before [him],” and that whatever he desired, he gave into that desire. *[pause]*

Most people would say, “Wow, that sounds amazing! I want that life, I think it would be so satisfying and fulfilling, and I would be utterly and truly happy.” *[pause]*

*To many people that's the dream, yet listen up...*

## **II. Living for pleasure failed the test!**

Failing a test isn't fun, but it can be helpful, if you get another chance to take the test. *[pause]*

The reason why it's helpful is because after failure you now have the opportunity to learn from it.

For if you fail, you now know what answers *to avoid giving*. *[pause]*

So though Solomon's test failed, we now know what NOT to pursue as an end—we are not to pursue pleasure above all. *[pauseeee]*

Let's look back up to what Solomon said in verses 1–2...

After testing pleasure, he says, “Behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, ‘It is mad,’ and of pleasure, ‘What use is it?’” *[pauseeee]*

He took a giant step back to really view laughter and pleasure.

So he thought about the question, “Can I make my life all about laughter? Would that bring me ultimate gain?” *[pausee]*

After evaluating everything, he said that laughter is mad. *[pause]*

What he's saying is that if life is all about laughter, then you are living like a senseless person because you aren't dealing with the real, hard facts of life. *[pause]*

If everything is a joke to you, and all you seek out is the next moment of fun, then you are living in a “make-believe world” in your mind. *[pause]*

This is what many people do: they try to use fun and laughter as a way to numb themselves to the realities of life.

But you cannot live your life that way, and expect to find lasting satisfaction. *[pause]*

You can’t laugh your way to true meaning and purpose. *[pauseeee]*

Laughter provides you with no real answers to the biggest questions of life, so living a life solely for laughter is crazy. *[pauseeee]*

Likewise, pleasure can’t be your ultimate goal in life, for he says, “What use is it?” *[pause]*

Pleasure doesn’t make any ultimate changes to things, nor does it provide answers. *[pause]*

What good is it in the grand scheme of things, for it’s momentary and fleeting.

It doesn’t provide lasting satisfaction or significance. *[pause]*

Pleasure-seeking is searching after momentary thrills that fade as soon as you grab a hold of them. *[pause]*

Listen to what C.S. Lewis said happens to the person who seeks these thrills of pleasure...

He says, “If you decide to make thrills your regular diet and try to prolong them artificially, they will all get weaker and weaker, and fewer and fewer, and you will be a bored, disillusioned old man for the rest of your life.”<sup>3</sup> *[pauseeee]*

He’s saying, “The more thrills you seek, the less exciting they become, and so you get bored more quickly and feel empty.” *[pause]*

What a sad existence—our lives are not to be centered on the pleasure of things found in this world. *[pauseeee]*

Solomon’s conclusion is made the clearest in verse 11...

“Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” *[pauseeee]*

After all was said and done, he said, “Vanity!” *[pause]*

He tried it all, he had it all, he accomplished so many things, experienced so much, and yet what ultimate gain was there from this endeavor of pleasure-seeking? *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 111.

Solomon had everything that our world thinks makes “the good life.” *[pause]*

We often say, “If only I had...” and Solomon tracked down and got everything that made him say, “If only I had...”

But it didn’t fulfill him, and yet so many are trying to do what he already tried. *[pauseeee]*

There’s this one video that I haven’t forgotten. *[pause]*

It was a video taken after a college basketball game, and it looked like a bunch of college students were walking down fast to get on the court to celebrate their team’s victory. *[pause]*

So you’re watching these students all walk down from the stands and onto the basketball court.

But as time goes on, you see one after another trip on something and fall down. *[pause]*

What was shocking is that even though those first people tripped, the people that came later *still* tripped, even after seeing what happened to those who went before them. *[pause]*

They didn’t learn from those who tried to walk and failed, and that’s what people are like throughout history...

Even though Solomon tried pleasure and showed that it failed to bring lasting satisfaction, swaths of people are trying out exactly what he proved didn’t work. *[pause]*

They are like those people tripping even after watching a handful of people trip before them.

And so our culture is a prime display of a people still trying out Solomon’s test, which has already been proven a failure. *[pauseeeee]*

*You see...*

**Living for pleasure will never bring you lasting satisfaction.**

No longer live for the things of this world. *[pause]*

No longer live for fun, laughter, entertainment, pleasure, possessions, money, and power as your ultimate aim in life.

They will not work to give you what you truly and deeply long for! *[pauseeee]*

Businessman Stephen Covey used this illustration to talk about being a leader, but I want to make use of it for our purposes today. *[pause]*

He talks about climbing up a ladder super fast, but realizing that the ladder was on the wrong wall.

So he says, “If the ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step we take just gets us to the wrong place faster.”<sup>4</sup> *[pauseeee]*

So also, are you trying to climb up the ladder of pleasure, possessions, money, or experiences?

Realize that if you do so, you are just climbing up a ladder that’s on the wrong wall. *[pauseeee]*

So what’s the answer? *[pause]*

Well C.S. Lewis once wrote, “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”<sup>5</sup> *[pauseeee]*

We were made to live in a world with *God* as our center and aim.

For it’s really in the Lord that we find true and lasting satisfaction, meaning, purpose, and fulfillment.

And we can know Him through Jesus Christ, who came and revealed Him to us through His person and work. *[pause]*

He died for our sins and then rose again, so that our relationship with God could be restored, and now we can truly and deeply *know Him*. *[pauseeee]*

In Christ, the bread of life, we no longer have to hunger, nor thirst!<sup>6</sup>

In Him, we have all that we need—you don’t have to go anywhere else! *[pause]*

He is what your soul needs and truly longs for.

Don’t look elsewhere, for nothing else does the job. *[pauseeee]*

There’s a lot of fake bread out there in the world, calling us to eat it, but it doesn’t satisfy.

It’s like eating bread crumbs—it doesn’t fill, it doesn’t satisfy, because *it can’t*. *[pauseeee]*

Deep down people know that inside of them there is a core emptiness that needs to be satisfied. *[pause]*

They know that there has to be something more to life than just living and dying, more than the material possessions and fleeting pleasures of this world. *[pause]*

They turn to all sorts of things to find satisfaction, but these things are things that may look like bread, but they are not bread.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Covey. Found at: <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/393593>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://quotefancy.com/quote/13204/C-S-Lewis-If-I-find-in-myself-desires-which-nothing-in-this-world-can-satisfy-the-only>.

<sup>6</sup> A reference to John 6:35.

No, Jesus and Jesus alone is the true bread that satisfies the hunger and thirst of your soul, and who gives you eternal life. *[pauseeee]*

Living for pleasure will never bring you lasting satisfaction, so no longer live as though pleasure was a god, but live as though it is a gift. *[pause]*

You were made *by* God and *for* God, so you will only find meaning and fulfillment in knowing Him. *[pauseeee]*

So will you keep looking to the pleasures of this world, or to the One at whose “right hand are pleasures forevermore”?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 16:11.