

# How Would You Define Success in Life?

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

How would you define success? I suspect that for many of us, the answer might be varied. I know that there are those in the world today that for them to become a successful business person, that that would really, in many ways make life for them a success. Others, they think success comes in the realm of academics or athletics.

You know, many times when we talk about success in life, it tends to lean toward the secular. That is the physical realm, the material realm. And I know that there are people in the world today that for them, success is defined materially or monetarily. But the question that we're asking today, how would you define success? That is a question that we want to probe in our study today.

And what I want us to do is to go back and look at the book of Ecclesiastes, because when we look at Ecclesiastes, we're reading about a man by the name of Solomon that in many ways examine life. And he did so from top to bottom, side to side in his investigation of life he was trying to find, okay, what is life all about?

Because many of us today, we want to know what's the purpose of life. What's my purpose here on planet Earth? And that's, I think, a reasonable thing to ask. So when you look at the book of Ecclesiastes, it's as if Solomon is going into a laboratory like a scientist, and it begins running a series of tests or experiments, and then he draws his conclusion, or he evaluates what he studied.

Now, when you look at Ecclesiastes, let me invite you to turn in your Bible today to the book of Ecclesiastes, because I want us to look together at some passages here that I think help to accentuate what we're going to be discussing for the next half hour. Now, Solomon is looking at things initially from that which is described by him as under the sun, a phrase that's used about 29 times in the book.

And you remember strictly from a material vantage point, or we might say, strictly from the physical realm. Solomon, in his quest to determine what life is all about, will use the expression vanity of vanities. All is vanity, and the word vanity or vanities is found about 38 times in the book. Again, a key word here. So what I want us to do is just go with Solomon throughout this book and look at some of the various things that he analyzed.

And then what we want to do is note his evaluation in chapter 12. So pick up with me, if you would, beginning in verse 12, because Solomon begins to accentuate some things in his life that in many ways many would say, well, you know, if we could somehow acquire these things, then that would make us a real success.

So look at verse 12. Solomon said, I, the preacher, was king over Israel and Jerusalem. Now Solomon succeeded his father David to the throne. Solomon was a man of immense power. Now you imagine having that kind of power. You're the king over the United Kingdom. I think about people today in our world. For them, the pinnacle of success would be to sit in our nation's highest office, the presidency.

And I have no doubt that when someone acquires that position in life, that that brings about a great sense of power. And sometimes power can be intoxicating. Well, Solomon was a man of

incredible power. But then look at verse 16. In verse 16, Solomon talks about his popularity or his prominence. He said, I commune with my heart saying, look, I have attained greatness.

Now you remember it was said of Solomon in the long ago, that the Queen of the South came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And her response was, the half hasn't been told. Can you imagine the greatness of this man? Now are there not people in our world today that for them success would be for their name to be a household name?

We live in the South, where Elvis Presley lived for many years. Elvis has been gone almost 50 years, and yet his shadow continues to loom large over the city of Memphis. Well, he was a great man, and I suspect that you could go just about anywhere in this world. And if you just say the name Elvis, people know exactly who you're talking about.

Well, Solomon, he was a man of immense power. And not just power, but also prominence or popularity. But then note in chapter two, beginning in verse four, because here Solomon chronicles the vast possessions that he enjoyed in this life. Listen to him in verse four. I made my works great. I built myself houses and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards.

I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. He said. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. He said yes. I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold, and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces acquired male and female singers.

And he said, the delights of the sons of men and musical instruments of all kinds. So Solomon was a man that was, materially speaking, very wealthy. Now, again, there are those in the world today. They would say that wealth no doubt brings happiness, contentment, satisfaction that if you are a wealthy person, then by all means, by the standard of the world, you are a success.

Well, is that true? You know, over in chapter five, Solomon made a statement. But that, I think, helps to sort of put into perspective the idea of materialism and money and success. Solomon said, he who loves silver, listen to him, will not be satisfied with silver. You know what he was saying? All he was saying in the long ago was the more you have, the more you want.

If you have \$1, you want to. If you have 1 million, you want to. That's just the way life is. Now look at verse nine. He said I became great again. This idea of his prominence and popularity, he said and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me. Solomon was a man renowned for his wisdom.

And then look at verse ten. In verse ten, Solomon said, whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. He said, I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. So now we're talking about a fellow that from the vantage point of the pleasures of life, again immersed himself in the various pleasures that the world has to offer.

Paul in Second Timothy chapter three, talks about those who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Can I get to a point in life where I think that success is about gratification? Pleasure? That it's about me, myself and I. What I want, what I think, what I need, etc.. Sure. And then let me share with you one other thing.

Solomon talks about his productivity again in chapter two. Solomon said, I hated all my labor in which I had taugh under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come

after me. Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool, yet he will rule over all my labor, and which I have told, and which I have shown myself wise unto the sun.

This also is vanity. Now the word vanity means breath or vapor. And you think about in James, in the book of James, James compared life to a vapor that appears for a little while. And then what he said was it vanishes away. Solomon said, therefore I turned my heart and desired and despaired of all the labor in which I told under the sun.

For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, yet he must leave his heritage to a man who is not labored for it. This also is labor and a great evil. So you had this sense from reading the writings of Solomon that in one, in one sense of the word there is this hopelessness or despair or sense of emptiness.

Now back up and look at verse 17 in chapter two, in verse 17. Now we've talked about what Solomon acquired in life. He was a man of power, a man of great popularity and prominence. A man who enjoyed an abundance of possessions, pleasures, productivity in terms of the works of his hands. So there are a lot of people today, if we were to say to them, you can have all of these things, or maybe you just have 1 or 2.

If we were to ask them, do you think that would make you successful, that that would make you happy and content and satisfied in life? What would they say? I would imagine that for many people they would say, you know what? If I could somehow get that in my life. I wouldn't have any more needs. But here's what Solomon said, verse 17, chapter two.

Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me. For all is vanity and grasping for the wind, it's almost as if you're grasping for something, but there's nothing there. So here is this examination of life, if you please. So now the question is, what about the evaluation? What would be the conclusion to Solomon's study?

Let's turn it over to chapter 11 for a minute. I want to begin in verse nine, because again we're talking about Solomon and his examination of life. Now, there are a lot of people today. They're looking at life strictly through the lens of the world that we live in from a humanistic standpoint. What we need to do in order to really grasp what life is all about success, happiness, contentment, and all those things.

What we really need to do is look at those things from the vantage point of the Word of God, through the lens of the Word of God, because God's Word is going to bring clarity to the question of what really define success in life. So in verse nine, here's what Solomon said rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you.

In the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart and put away evil from your flesh. For childhood and youth are vanity. Let's make the transition into chapter 12 and note what the emphasis is by Solomon.

Solomon writes, remember now your creator in the days of your youth. Here's a question. What do you think? Solomon would encourage readers of all ages to remember their creator in youth or when they're young. It's my conviction that the reason why people need to remember the creator to begin building a life around God in youth is because as we grow older in life, we become settled in our ways, and sometimes we develop habits.

And those habits are hard to break. They're very difficult to extract from our daily lives. And so what we need to do is develop a tender heart before God. You remember it was said of

David, the father of Solomon, that he was a man after God's own heart. Now, David made a lot of mistakes in life, and he wasn't by any stretch of the imagination.

He was not an infallible individual, but nonetheless, he did have a heart that was tender before God. And so Solomon said, remember now, your creator in the days of your youth. Now note before the difficult days come and the years draw near, when you say, I have no pleasure in them, while the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are not darkened.

And the clouds do not return after the rain. So again, emphasis is on youth and making God the focal point of life in our tender years. But in verse three he said that we're to remember our creator before we began to grow old in life. And so, in a very poetic way, Solomon now is going to talk about the aging process.

We might say the brevity of life. Now, as we think about the brevity of life. I mentioned a moment ago in James chapter four at verse 14, that James compared life to a vapor that appears for a little while. And then he said, it vanishes away. You remember the Hebrew writer said, it is appointed under man once to die.

After this comes the judgment in Psalm 90. Moses, of course, is the writer of that psalm. And Moses said, we might live to be 70 or 80 years on earth. But he said, life here on earth is accompanied by sorrow. And so in verse 12 he would encourage, because he said, life is soon cut off and we fly away.

And that's what he's going to say in Ecclesiastes. That's what Solomon is going to say in Ecclesiastes. Chapter 12. But nonetheless, in verse 12, Solomon, or rather in verse 12 of Psalm 90, Moses said, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. So now we come back to Ecclesiastes chapter 12. We think about the brevity of life and what Moses recorded, and how life is but a vapor.

And so now look at verse three of chapter 12. Solomon said that we're to remember the creator before the difficult days. Come the year draw near when we say there's no pleasure in them. In the day when the keepers of the house tremble as we grow older, sometimes we begin to tremble and shake. The strong men bowed down.

We become stooped or we are bent over, physically speaking, when the grinder ceases, because there few we lose our teeth. Those that look through the windows grow dim. Our eyesight is not what it once was. When the doors are shut in the streets and the sound of grinding is low, we don't hear as well as we once did.

When one rises up at the sound of the of a bird. As we grow older, sometimes sleep tends to escape us. I remember years ago when my grandmother was alive, she used to talk about waking up at maybe three in the morning, and she had lie in bed and just listening to the radio. Well, as we grow older, sometimes it's not nearly as easy to sleep as it once was, and all the daughters of music are brought low when they are afraid of heights and terrace in the way.

Now here's the idea that as we grow older, we're not nearly as daring as we once were. We gained some wisdom, he said. When the almond tree blossoms, the hair begins to gray. The grasshopper, he said, is a burden. That is, our strength is diminished and desire fails. Now listen to what he said, for man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

So in verse six, again the admonition, remember your creator. But you need to remember your creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well. Now look at verse, verse

number seven. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

Solomon here simply saying that unless time runs out, at least for those of us who live today under the New Covenant, we understand the Lord Jesus will one day come. Now he might come. In our lifetime, we don't know. But nonetheless, if he delays his coming, then we will walk the corridor of death. And when we do as Solomon said, the body is going to return to the dust and the spirit will go to God.

Now look at verse eight. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. All is vanity. All right. What then? After having examined life, what then? Solomon, is your evaluation. What's the conclusion to your study? Now imagine he's sitting in his office. He's been running a series of experiments, and now he's tallying up what he has come to realize life is all about.

That being said, look at verse 12 and further, my son, be it by these of making many books, there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments. Now listen to him, for this is man's all. Now some translations say, for this is the whole duty of man.

And really the word duty has been inserted, and not in the original. But the idea is the summation of life. What life is all about is fearing God, serving him, keeping his commandments. And then he said, For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil. I read a quotation a few days ago by a very famous entertainer, and he was talking about life from his vantage point.

This is a man that is worth well over \$100 million, a well-known household name. And he said, I think everyone ought to enjoy success. He said, I think everybody ought to be famous and have everything that they would ever desire in this life, and realize that that is not it. Now you know what? He gets it. He recognized that you can have everything this world has to offer, but still have nothing.

Are there not people today who in many ways they have everything the world has to offer? But when it comes to spirituality, when it comes to feeling that void or vacuum in life, something's amiss. There's only one thing that can fill the void or vacuum in life. It's not money. It's not material goods. It's not power. It's not work.

It's not greatness. No, it's God. It's focusing our lives on God, building our lives, if you please, around God now. That being said, if we were to say fear God and keep his commandments, what would we take away from? In other words, how could we build a life that will be genuinely successful, not necessarily from the vantage point of the world, but from the Word of God?

I think, first and foremost, to understand that we have to believe that this book is really the template for life, and that the Word of God has been given to us so that we might be able to navigate through this life or through the world. You know, there are a lot of people today. They have a copy of the Bible.

And this book, I believe, answers the questions of life and answers questions like, where do we come from? What are we doing here? Where are we going? Those are profound philosophical questions. And you can look from the humanistic side and ask those questions. But the Bible gives sense or gives a sense of what life is all about. The Bible is what makes sense when it comes to our origin.

The Bible is what makes sense when it comes to eternity and our leaving this world. That

being the case, what then would it mean for me to fear God and keep his commandments? I would say first and foremost that if I want to enjoy genuine success in life, happiness, contentment, if I want to have the peace that passes all understanding, then I need to develop a rock solid faith.

And I do that by listening to the teaching of Jesus, the teaching of Scripture. And then what I want to do is weave that teaching into my everyday life. You remember Paul said, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. In Colossians three at verse 16, the idea of being that we're to allow the Word of God to find a home in our heart, you remember, you remember Jesus.

And the great sermon on the Mount said that whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, he said, him will I liken unto a wise man that built his house on the rock. The rains descended, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on that house. And he said it fell not because it was founded upon the rock.

So a wise person in Solomon deemed the wisest man of his era the wisdom of Solomon. And yet, in many ways, Solomon demonstrated a lot of foolishness in life, didn't he? So when it comes to wisdom, wisdom results in taking the teaching of Jesus and following it. Jesus would say in this very context, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that do it, the will of my father which is in heaven.

Jesus would ask the question, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? So I want to have a rock solid faith. Paul said on one occasion I know whom I believed, and in persuaded he's able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day. So I want to have that kind of faith, that faith that cannot be shaken by the world.

Oh, I understand we live in a world where trials, tribulations and temptations come our way daily. But I want to have the kind of faith that will not buckle. My trust needs to be deeply rooted in God. As Solomon said in Proverbs three. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not under your own understanding, and all your ways acknowledge him, and he'll guide your paths.

Now faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Paul said in Second Corinthians chapter five, verse seven that we walk by faith and not by sight. So if I'm walking by faith, that means that I am trusting that what God has said is indeed true, and all the promises that are outlined in the Bible. You remember Peter talked about how God has given unto us all things pertaining to life and godliness.

And he said, as a result of that, they're given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, a lot of promises in the Bible. I wouldn't know anything about it. Separate and apart from this book that we call Scripture. So I would say, first and foremost, what we want to do is build our home, build our life on the Lord, to have faith in God.

The kind of faith that, again, will not shrink in the midst of adversity and temptation and so on. But then there's a second thought when it comes to fearing God and keeping his commandments. One of the one. One of the wonderful things about life is family. So I want to make sure that my faith is rock solid. And then what I want to do is equip my family so that they too can fear God, keep his commandments because the goal is to one day be in heaven, isn't it?

Solomon said that God's going to bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing for the good, or whether evil. So in light of the fact that one day I'm going to stand before God, what I want to do is make sure that my life is in harmony with the will of God.

And then I want to point my children in the direction of God as a father, as a husband.

We are to be the spiritual leader in the home, and we set the tone in the home. Now, there are a lot of fathers that have abdicated that responsibility, and by default, the mother has assumed that role, or the wife has assumed that role. That's not God's plan. I'm grateful that there are faithful women that are willing to stand up and stand in the gap when there is an absentee father, but that's not God's plan.

So I want to build my life around faith in the Lord and then my family. I want my family to be equipped so that they will know what life is really all about and what's important in life. And it's not about the things of this life. It's not about money and materialism and power. It's not about greatness. No, it's about serving God, living for him.

Could I ask you today how would you define success? Genuine success is living for God. What would you need to do to become a Christian? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. John 8:24. Repent of your sins. Acts 17 at verse 30 to confess with your mouth what you believe in your heart, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and then to be buried with Christ in baptism so that all your sins can be washed away.

Acts 23:8 And God will put you in the church, and a faithful life will result in being with the Lord one day in eternity. God bless.