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# What is My Goal in Life?

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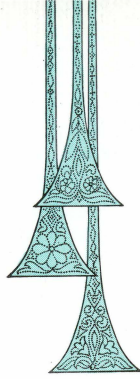
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# What Is My Goal In Life?



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# What Is My Goal In Life?

**Y**ou and I have asked the question many times in one way or another. Sometimes in disgust. Sometimes in anguish. Often simply out of weariness. The query about which I speak is not a new one, another in those dreary battles that mock so much of twentieth-century life!

No, this question was asked thousands of years ago by a man who lived life as fully as any of us lives it. Here is the question as asked by Solomon in the Old Testament: "What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:3). The question haunted Solomon, it appears, as one studies his life and writings. Later in the Old Testament book of *Ecclesiastes* we hear the same concern expressed in these words: "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:9).

If this isn't our question, asked only in modern terminology, then please explain to me why my fellow Americans spend \$100,000,000 every year consulting fortune tellers. Make no mistake about it, you and I both want to know, "What's my life all about?"

Now for most of us a thorough personal investigation of life's meaning is impossible. Our jobs, our families, all kinds of obligations prevent us from any significant medita-

tion and personal search. That doesn't excuse our failure to seriously and personally examine our goals in life but it does encourage us to look around for help from any person or persons who have carefully studied life, and can assist us in answering, "What is my goal in life?"

Solomon was perplexed by this same question. He spent much time and money examining life and its meaning. There are several significant reasons why Solomon's life offers us valuable insight into the question, "What goal have I set for my life?"

First of all, we ought to observe that he was the world's wisest man of his day. When invited by God, "Ask what I shall give thee," the king requested, "Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?" (II Chronicles 1:7-10). The wisdom of this choice is seen in God's immediate granting of special powers of discernment that were to characterize this great monarch throughout his life. God also blessed him with the riches, wealth, and honor that he had not requested "such as none of the kings have had that have been before (him)" (II Chronicles 1:12).

The Old Testament book *Ecclesiastes* reflects the experiences, the quests, the investigations, and the findings of this sage. He said, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14). He used his wisdom to seek out life's meaning, and he also experienced wisdom's burden: "For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecclesiastes 1:18). His wisdom was acclaimed all over the world. Even the Queen of Sheba came to see if what she had heard was really true about this man's fantastic understanding. After her visit she could only conclude: "The half has not been told" (I Kings 10:1, 7).

I wouldn't mind hearing from the world's wisest man, would you? I would like the benefit of his thinking (especially if he gave a lot of direct attention to it) about life's goals and meanings, wouldn't you?

Solomon's qualifications as our adviser in this study today also include the fact that he was a world-famous politician who ruled one of the most unusual countries of the world (II Chronicles 9:22, 23, 26). He was also the world's wealthiest man (II Chronicles 9:13, 14; I Kings 10:14, 15).

But I think the most significant thing for us at least, who ask today, "What goal have I set for my life?", is that



Solomon asked almost the same question. He concentrated the world's greatest wisdom, political power, financial strength, and research on the question, "What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:3). Here is the way Solomon described his search: "I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine, my heart yet guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their life" (Ecclesiastes 2:3). In other words, he had the wealth to buy the answer, the power to demand the answer, the wisdom to search for and discern the answer, and the interest to implement the whole project. Now, we have only to ask, "What did he uncover as the most satisfactory goal I can set for my life?"

Solomon first examined knowledge and wisdom as life's true goal. No one was better qualified for this search. The Bible says that "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore" (I Kings 4:29). His wisdom, the Old Testament historian says, "excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt" (I Kings 4:30).

Solomon knew the joy and the honor of being a wise man and he also knew the burden and responsibility created by such knowledge (Ecclesiastes 1:18). He came to one definite conclusion about the total devotion of one's life to becoming wise: this is not the answer! It is unwise to spend my life amassing information and gaining knowledge, Solomon said. He compared the wise man and the fool, coming to the astounding conclusion: "Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then said I in my heart, that this also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 2:15). The fool dies just like the sage, Solomon said! He talked of the writing of books, the recording of the results of scholarly studies and said, "It's a weariness" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). As a psychologist (I Kings 8:16-24), architect (I Kings 4:5), biologist (I Kings 4:33), and politician (II Chronicles 9:26) — I have given his credentials in the printed text of this lesson which you may want to examine — Solomon was imminently qualified to reject knowledge as life's major goal.

I think I know why he did such an unbelievable thing, as viewed by modern man living in the age of "the education boom" and "the information explosion." Why not knowledge as my life's goal? Without God, without the direction and integration of all one's life's experiences and wisdom that Christ provides, man only learns how to

destroy himself more frightfully. Jesus rightfully claims, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

We know so much and yet so little. No, wisdom and knowledge are not goals for which I can solely devote my life!

Solomon also looked at wealth as life's objective. Again, he could speak and work with personal experience in this area of investigation. Solomon was richer than "all the kings of the earth," we are told (I Kings 10:23). The Bible says he "made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the lowland, for abundance" (I Kings 10:27). His income for one year amounted to 25 tons of gold (II Chronicles 9:13, 14; I Kings 10:14, 15), without attempting to compute other sources of revenue mentioned in the accounts of his reign. He engaged in international commerce. He built entire cities from the ground up. He even gave his friend to the North, Hiram of Syria, twenty cities at one time, as a gift or settlement of a debt! He wanted for nothing, but rather spent his wealth for whatever his flesh desired. A detailed account of all he purchased is found in *Ecclesiastes*, chapter two, verses 3-8. Finally, he says, "I gathered me also silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, musical instruments and that of all sorts" (Ecclesiastes 2:8). In fact, Solomon continues, "whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy" (Ecclesiastes 2:10).

Then came the examination: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). I missed the whole point of life, Solomon said. "Riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt," constitutes no worthwhile goal for life (Ecclesiastes 5:13). The rich man will die just like the poor man, he said (Ecclesiastes 5:15).

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to the same conclusion. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," He said (Luke 12:15). If you put God and His kingdom first, Jesus teaches, all life's necessities will be forthcoming (Matthew 6:33). The conclusions of both Solomon and Christ were recently illustrated in Fort Worth, Texas. A television repairman entered a beautiful home and admired it only to have the owner reply, "You know something? It doesn't mean a thing, now. I'd give it all up today if I could regain the family I lost getting

it." Solomon was right! Wealth is not a suitable goal for which to spend a life!

The wise king also examined the value of prominence, fame, and prestige as suitable goals. No man of Solomon's day knew more about fame. He was acclaimed worldwide for his wealth and wisdom (I Kings 4:34; 10:24). The Queen of Sheba came with "hard questions" and much doubt. But she left saying, "Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: thou exceedest the fame that I heard" (II Chronicles 9:6). But the fame of the entire world seemed only to intensify Solomon's awareness of who and what he really was. "For of the wise man," he mused, "even as of the fool, there is no remembrance for ever; seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. And how doth the wise man die even as the fool" (Ecclesiastes 2:16)!

Jesus, hundreds of years after Solomon's time, brilliantly revealed the wise man's problem with fame. Greatness and prominence, our Lord taught, consists of service to others, of love that puts the concerns of others first (Matthew 20:26-28). And that is Christianity's most revolutionary principle! As Christ triumphed in death, devoted to the plight of others, so Christians today experience lasting and genuine fame only in continual service to others!

Solomon also examined sensuality as a way of life. So strongly was the king moved by the lusts of his flesh that he willfully disobeyed God in marrying Pharaoh's daughter, the first of many foreign women he knew (I Kings 11:1, 2). Surely the world has never known a man who gave himself more completely to sensuality than Solomon. The Bible tells us, "He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (I Kings 11:3). Solomon discovered a principle that has operated in human lives since the Garden of Eden: the flesh is a tyrant that demands our total preoccupation with lust and impurity. The man who gives himself up to fornication in any form thus eliminates what respect and obedience of Jehovah God that he once knew. Solomon's wives, the Old Testament declares, "turned away his heart after other gods" (I Kings 11:4). He worshiped and sacrificed to pagan idols and had temples built for these false gods all around Jerusalem (I Kings 11:4-8).

But Solomon sadly discovered that "madness and folly" are a "striving after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:17). He decided that "If a man beget a hundred children and live many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul be not filled with good," then it were better for



him to die rather than live (Ecclesiastes 6:3). Lust for gold usurped God's place in Solomon's life, while his flagrant adultery enslaved his body. The king lost all sense of moral direction. With Solomon, I'm convinced that we can say today that life lived on this level is just not worth it!

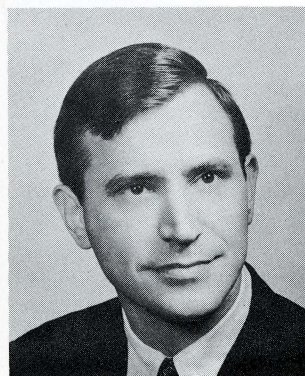
So where do we turn, if not to wisdom, wealth, fame, or the flesh? Many of us may be like the dog at the railroad station that has eaten its tag. The dog, the Railway Express people, and all who see him, know that he is going somewhere, but nobody knows where. Please don't let that be the story of your life today.

Even in the midst of saying that "time" and "chance" plague us all (Ecclesiastes 9:11), Solomon recognized that God is in control of our lives and destinies (Ecclesiastes 7:14), even if His way is difficult to discern in the concrete and particular situations of our everyday lives (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

But Solomon doesn't leave us with this less than definite conviction that all will ultimately work to our best interests. After looking at four of man's most universal goals in life, and after soundly rejecting them all out of deep personal involvement and experience, Solomon comes to this conclusion, a conclusion I pray that all of us will accept this very hour: "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

God speaks to us today in His Son Jesus Christ. He calls us to complete faith in Jesus as the Son of God (John 10:30, 31). He commands that we repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), declare our allegiance to Him publicly (Romans 10:9, 10), and unite with Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and the new life of God's way for us in baptism (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3, 4).

"What goal have I set for my life?" My answer, and I hope yours, is this: "To give my life to God through Christ and to live in honor of Him and in fulfillment of His plans for me, so help me God."



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.