



**Sermon Series:** Thrive: Living on Purpose

**To be used with** Session 1: Purpose Questioned

**Sermon Title Possibilities:** Been There, Done That, Got the T-shirt

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 1:1-14

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the Bible study “Thrive: Living on Purpose,” this sermon offers insights from someone who has been there, done that, and got the t-shirt by experiencing all of life’s wildest pleasures. With a warning for those striving to pursue anything outside of God, this sermon will demonstrate that apart from God, life is meaningless. This counter-intuitive message is not for the faint of heart but for those willing to share a perspective from a voice who has been there, done that, and got the T-shirt.

**Introduction:** In a February 21, 2024, posting on [newyorkpost.com](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/21/sports/shaquille-oneal-podcast.html), NBA Hall of Famer Shaquille O’Neal felt obligated to warn the listeners of his “The Big Podcast with Shaq” that he lived in a 100,000 square foot house with no one, not even his family. Despite making close to 300 million dollars as an NBA player, owning close to 50 brands both nationally and internationally, and achieving celebrity and fame through his television persona, O’Neal had the American dream and more. However, he found himself alone, realizing he had it all with no one there. All the money, brands, and notoriety, in the end, meant nothing. O’Neal, armed with this newfound conviction, went to social media to warn everyone about what really matters. In this text, a similar approach is taken through the writer of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, not only warns but pleads with his readers to realize what is meaningful and embrace it.

### **1. The Warning: (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2).**

The Warning: King Solomon opened Ecclesiastes with a revelation that had the potential to be devastating for individuals seeking or searching for the riches of this world. In the opening of his book, King Solomon does not question God’s existence or challenge the theology of his day. He is simply interested in prioritizing what really matters. Based on verse 2, Solomon offered the punchline before the joke was told. The question is, why is King Solomon’s statement surrounded by so many exclamation points? Because he attempted to get the attention of those who are wandering through life, seeking pleasures, fame, fortune, and riches. He presented a warning that must be acknowledged as experiential and foundational to life itself. And before we

**Lifeway**

© 2022 Lifeway Christian Resources  
[www.biblestudiesforlife.com](http://www.biblestudiesforlife.com)  
[www.lifeway.com/you](http://www.lifeway.com/you)

can be dismissive towards verse 2, the qualifications of the speaker must be acknowledged. According to the Old Testament, Solomon was the successor of his father, King David. In 1 Kings Chapter 3, Solomon received a blank check by God to ask for anything, Solomon chose wisdom. Reigning during the height of Israel's power, Solomon brought prosperity and promise to the children of Israel. So, to be clear, this was no average person giving a warning; this was King Solomon, son of King David, whose voice created laws, rendered judgments, and had the power to take life. When King Solomon talks, we all must listen. Will we heed his warning!

## **2. The Witness: (Ecclesiastes 1:3-11).**

Ever since the sin in the book of Genesis, God declared that work would be a process for meeting one's needs. However, King Solomon appears to struggle with the kind of labor that reaches beyond meeting needs into meeting wants and desires. In the Old Testament, labor was a way of life that offered many benefits. However, there seemed to be a pervasive mentality that "the harder you work, the more you get." King Solomon challenged that notion and popped the proverbial balloon of those individuals laboring in pursuit of meaningless things.

In verse 4, King Solomon addressed the monotony of labor that continues from generation to generation. While Solomon is not referring to individuals making ends meet, he challenged individuals to set their priorities beyond the philosophy that "the more you work, the more you get." King Solomon then transitions in verse 8 to the weariness of labor that takes its toll on individuals. The unfulfilling nature of meaningless things is exposed, and Solomon attempts to be a witness to the unfulfillment it brings.

Solomon then closes with the sobering reminder that no one will remember our names when we are gone, and life will continue to go on after we die. From the dust of the ground, we came, and to the dust, we will return. We live vicariously through Solomon as he put to the test the meaning of life. We have been warned; King Solomon is our witness. Now, what can we do?

## **3. The Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 1:12-14).**

King Solomon summarizes his entire journey with a final appeal for individuals to decide for themselves what they're going to do with their lives. Not only is he the king of Israel, but he also identifies as a teacher, feeling a responsibility to educate those who may find themselves lost in the pursuit of life's pleasures. King Solomon is particular about how he applied all the wisdom he gained from the experiences that he pursued. Not only did he apply himself, but he explored everything that was under heaven, considering everything a heavy burden God has laid on mankind (v. 13). Typically, the word "all" is seldom used, but King Solomon has no problem using it to define life's meaningless things. He considers them as chasing after the wind, meaning they will never be caught. While schools tell students to work hard, employers tell employees to work hard, and coaches tell players to work hard, King Solomon takes a different

**Lifeway**

approach. He seeks to course-correct those who may be lost spiritually. Meaning is what he pursued, and peace cannot be found in the frailty of humanity's desires. If it is like chasing after the wind, we all know the wind cannot be caught. Therefore, we must lift our sail and allow ourselves to be guided by the wind of life in Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion:** In December of 1862, Edward Mote shared a hymn that captured the essence of the message King Solomon presented through the book of Ecclesiastes. According to one story, Mote came up with the chorus while walking to work, and by the end of the day, he had completed the entire hymn. The chorus goes, "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand." This reflects King Solomon's message that everything is meaningless. The things we work for, hope to receive, the money we obtain, and the notoriety we crave all mean nothing. The only thing that is meaningful is Christ. May we be the kind of believers who understand that the true meaning of life is found in Christ alone.

*Dr. Mark Louis Johnson Sr. is a third-generation pastor with over 30 years of experience. He received a Master of Divinity and Master of Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry from New Orleans Baptist Theological, where he serves as a Professor and Evangelism and Pastor Ministries.*

**Lifeway**

© 2022 Lifeway Christian Resources  
[www.biblestudiesforlife.com](http://www.biblestudiesforlife.com)  
[www.lifeway.com/you](http://www.lifeway.com/you)