

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

The Hollow Quest for Meaning

Hollow Series

April 7/8, 2018

Main Idea:

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Discovery Questions

1. What is an example of a “useless” tool / gadget / appliance that you’ve purchased? Something you bought because you thought it would save time / money, etc., but didn’t work the way you wanted, or you never ended up using? (Think juicer, pasta maker, yard tool, etc.) What was it and why did it turn out to be “useless”? Where is it now?

This week, we’re taking a break from our Daniel series (we’ll return to it in a few weeks) to start a short series called “Hollow” about finding meaning and significance in life. In this series, we’ll take a look at the first three chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes—a book that is all about the search for meaning in this world.

Today, we’re going to look at the first several verses of Ecclesiastes 1, where the author, Solomon, begins a quest for meaning and purpose “under the sun”—i.e. apart from God—trying to find meaning based only on what he can see and observe around him. The conclusion he reaches about meaning and significance apart from God is a very provocative one, worthy of our consideration.

2. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11.

- a. What observations does Solomon make in this passage about life and the search for meaning and significance?
- b. What about it stands out to you? What do you agree with? Is there anything you struggle with about what Solomon says? Why?

3. a. How have you seen the repetitive nature of life that Solomon talks about in your own daily life or in the lives of those around you?

- b. How have you seen people try to find meaning or significance to life and “break out” of this repetitive nature apart from God? What has been the outcome of these searches?

4. a. When have you been overwhelmed by the repetitive and cyclical nature of life? What do you do with these feelings?

- b. What are some things that have happened in your life or in the life of those around you that haven’t made sense to you? Share specific examples. When things happen in life that don’t make sense, how do you usually respond to it? (Do you have an initial response that is different from a resolution you come to later?)

- c. How can we regularly remind ourselves that when things “under the sun” appear boring or hopeless, Jesus is “above the sun” providing meaning and purpose and hope?

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

5. Since life is fleeting and fragile, it's incumbent upon we Christians to make the most of each day, which means living for Jesus in every activity, since nothing we do for the Lord will ever be considered "useless" (1 Corinthians 15:58). What's one way this week that you can serve one another out of selfless love for the sake of Jesus, in the way that the Bible tells us to?

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DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Leader Guide

1. What is an example of a “useless” tool / gadget / appliance that you’ve purchased? Something you bought because you thought it would save time / money, etc., but didn’t work the way you wanted, or you never ended up using? (Think juicer, pasta maker, yard tool, etc.) What was it and why did it turn out to be “useless”? Where is it now?

This is a “lighter” question designed to get the conversation going. Spend about 5-7 minutes on this question.

This week, we’re taking a break from our Daniel series (we’ll return to it in a few weeks) to start a short series called “Hollow” about finding meaning and significance in life. In this series, we’ll take a look at the first three chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes—a book that is all about the search for meaning in this world.

Today, we’re going to look at the first several verses of Ecclesiastes 1, where the author, Solomon, begins a quest for meaning and purpose “under the sun”—i.e. apart from God—trying to find meaning based only on what he can see and observe around him. The conclusion he reaches about meaning and significance apart from God is a very provocative one, worthy of our consideration.

2. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11.

- a. What observations does Solomon make in this passage about life and the search for meaning and significance?**
- b. What about it stands out to you? What do you agree with? Is there anything you struggle with about what Solomon says? Why?**

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:1—Solomon is the only person in our Bible who fits that description), an individual who is considered one of the wisest people who ever lived. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon is on a quest searching for meaning and significance—for what we can “gain” from this life (Ecclesiastes 1:3). Solomon is going to embark upon this quest in an interesting manner, however; he’s only going to try and find meaning and purpose based on what he can see and observe and experience—life “under the sun.” It’s because of that, that Solomon comes to his very controversial and provocative conclusion in v. 2 about life—that it is ultimately “meaningless.” This is because, as Solomon explains in vv. 4-11, life is just this endless cycle of events that keep on repeating with no goal or purpose in life...we’re always moving, but never getting anywhere because there’s nothing “new” under the sun” (v. 9). The only thing we can be certain of in this life is that we will die and be forgotten (v. 11). This is a very pessimistic view of life, indeed, but it is an honest view of life when God and His Word and promises are cut out of the picture.

Spend 7-10 minutes on this question.

- 3. a. How have you seen the repetitive nature of life that Solomon talks about in your own daily life or in the lives of those around you?**
- b. How have you seen people try to find meaning or significance to life and “break out” of this repetitive nature apart from God? What has been the outcome of these searches?**

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For part “a,” we see repetitive tasks all around us: doing laundry, doing dishes, cleaning the house, weeding the garden, filling up our car with gas, most people’s jobs, etc. For part “b,” some people, for example, try to fill their life with “experiences”—trips and the like—but usually after these “experiences,” life resumes the normal repetitive nature. Even experiences themselves can become repetitive; there’s only so many places one can go, things one can do, etc.

Spend 7-10 minutes on this question in its entirety.

4.
 - a. **When have you been overwhelmed by the repetitive and cyclical nature of life? What do you do with these feelings?**
 - b. **What are some things that have happened in your life or in the life of those around you that haven’t made sense to you? Share specific examples. When things happen in life that don’t make sense, how do you usually respond to it? (Do you have an initial response that is different from a resolution you come to later?)**
 - c. **How can we regularly remind ourselves that when things “under the sun” appear boring or hopeless, Jesus is “above the sun” providing meaning and purpose and hope?**

For part “c,” going to church, reading our Bible, being in community with other people who can encourage us can help us to “focus on the things that are above” (see Colossians 3:2) rather than what we see “under the sun.” That being said, there will be times when we often feel despair at what is going on around us, and it’s in those times it’s important to realize God’s sovereign control over life.

Spend about 10-12 minutes on this question in its entirety.

5. **Since life is fleeting and fragile, it is incumbent upon us Christians to make the most of each day, which means living for Jesus every chance that we get, since nothing we do for the Lord will ever be considered “useless” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Where’s one place this week that you can serve one another out of selfless love for the sake of Jesus, in the way that the Bible tells us to?**

Jesus tells us in Matthew 25 that when we feed the hungry, give drinks to the thirsty, invite the stranger, clothe the poor, take care of the sick and visit the prisoner we are doing things for Jesus. These things will last into eternity. Consider finding a way that your group can serve together those that need God’s love and provision!

Spend 7-10 minutes on this question.