

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

MORE MILES OF BAD ROAD

ECCLESIASTES 2:12–26



The Heart of the Matter

With disillusionment and despair casting ever-enlarging shadows across his path, the writer of this journal began to intensify his reactions. Intellectualism didn't satisfy. Pleasures finally fell flat, landing with a dull thud. Laughter failed to lighten life's load. Possessions, projects, parks, livestock, collections of precious gems, slaves, singers, and even sex did nothing to remove the monotony of existence. As life continued to cave in all around Solomon, he pondered the possibility of things changing in the *next* generation. "Maybe the answer lies in those who come after me," he mused. But, as we shall see, not even that gave him any hope. The result? Twice he said it: "I hated life. . . . I hated all the fruit of my labor" (Ecclesiastes 2:17–18). Doesn't anything work? Isn't there any pursuit that will truly satisfy?



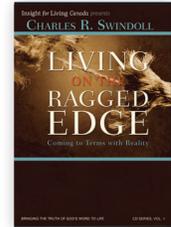
Discovering the Way

1. A Glance Back

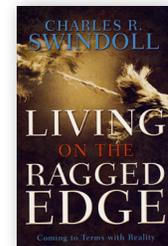
At this point in his desperate journey, Solomon described the utter frustration he felt after having traveled down paths that led to emptiness. They were all "vanity and striving after wind" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). He had tried intellectual pursuits, comic relief, building projects, and sensual pleasures (1:1–2:11). Although some of these produced good feelings for a time, all of them had no lasting benefit. Yet running into a few dead ends wouldn't stop Solomon. In Ecclesiastes 2:12–23, he recounted three more routes he took and what he discovered along the way.



Tools for Digging Deeper



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2. The Search Continues (Ecclesiastes 2:12–23)

The next leg of Solomon’s journey included three distinct paths of mental exploration. Solomon compared and contrasted: wisdom and folly (2:12–17); the immediate and the ultimate (2:18–21); and daily work and evening relief (2:22–23).



GETTING TO THE ROOT

The Groan of Futility

For “futility” in Romans 8:20, Paul used the Greek word *mataiotes*. The Greek translation of Ecclesiastes uses the same word for “vanity” or “futility” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, etc.). In Romans 8:18–23, Paul used several complementary terms to describe the futility of this present world. He used “sufferings,” “anxious longing,” “slavery to corruption,” “waiting eagerly,” and “groans.” All of these terms express a sense of emptiness in all things “under the sun.”

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Starting Your Journey

With a flash of insight, Solomon discovered the essential part of the equation for meaningfulness. In Ecclesiastes 2:24–26, Solomon underscored the dilemma by concluding that:

- Human beings have no inner ability to extract enjoyment and purpose from the things they do or to make these things worthwhile.
- Enjoyment is God’s personal gift for those who walk closely with Him. This view cuts across the secular mentality which says that the world gives joy and God steals joy.
- Those who are right with God derive the benefit of *everyone’s* labor.

Evaluate your life and your walk with God. Do you find satisfaction in life? Are you receiving God’s gift of joy? Why, or why not?