



SERIES: THE KINGS QUEST FOR MEANING IN THE REAL WORLD

Lesson #5: "Looking For Purpose in Youth"

Opening Events and Prayer

Icebreaker: In American culture, we glamorize youth, vitality, and health. The young, rich, and beautiful grace the pages of our magazines and the screens of our TVs and computers. Billions of dollars are spent in pursuit of staying young, staying fit, and staying or being beautiful. What are some of the results of this obsession?

Story: Supermodel Noemie Lenoir, 30, famous for such major campaigns as The Gap and Victoria's Secret, was found unconscious Sunday after an apparent suicide attempt. She was found on the ground in a forest in on the outskirts of Paris after allegedly taking a deadly cocktail of alcohol and drugs, the U.K.'s [Daily Mail](#) reports. According to reports, she was found near the mansion of her ex-boyfriend and the father of her son, soccer player Claude Makelele. He had called authorities earlier after he found her slumped on the floor of his home. French papers claim she woke up minutes later and cancelled the ambulance, only to leave the house and end up unconscious again several hours later out in the woods.

A man walking his dog reportedly found Lenoir and called emergency services, the Mail reports. Friends tell the Mail, she was "in a state of great distress and clearly very ill. She had clearly attempted to harm herself and had fallen unconscious." Lenoir had been under extreme stress after her current boyfriend, Swiss millionaire Carl Hirschmann, became embroiled in a sex, blackmail and extortion scandal. Hirschmann, who has previously dated Paris Hilton, is accused of being involved in orgies with young models, getting them drunk before videotaping them in deplorable sex acts. According to police, he then attempted to blackmail the models with the X-rated tapes.

In recent months, five models have taken their own lives. What does this tragic article have to say about seeking contentment and clarity in the physical: youth, beauty, and health? Or the folks that many would think possess these things they long for? Let's see what "The Teacher," Solomon discovers...

- **How did Solomon examine the youth?**
 - **Observationally** He opened his eyes to evaluate what was happening around him.
 - 2:13; 3:16, 22; 4:4, 7, 15; 8:9, 10, 17; 9:13 - 10 times he says, "I saw..."
 - 1:14; 3:10; 5:13; 6:1; 9:11; 10:5, 7 - 7 times he says, "I have seen"
 - 4:1a "Again, I looked and I saw..."
 - 2:3 "I wanted to see what was worthwhile..."
 - *Solomon is always looking around always attempting to understand his times and his people as well as himself. In essence he says, "You can learn a lot about youth from watching young people turn into old people." Simply watching people attempt to cling to youth as it slips away is instructive.*
 - **With Reason – Read Eccles. 7:25-29**



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Solomon is using his sharp intellect. He says, "I turned my mind to understand, to investigate, and to search out..." as he collected his facts and thought over the puzzle of life he says he was "...Adding one thing to another..." He's following the flow of the evidence. He is CSI Jerusalem! One conclusion or fact leads to another and as he adds them up he is building his case. He rolls the problem over and over in his mind until clarity is reached. Solomon, our teacher, has a great advantage in this area. When God asked him to choose something out of God's treasure house of gifts, he chose wisdom. He was wise like no one had been wise before him and like none after him. Imagine divinely enabled wisdom. Consider how thoroughly you could examine what was going on and put the pieces together to understand the full picture. If there was anyone who could make sense out of life, it would be this guy.

Question: What does he discover about the men and women he investigated? (Do you think maybe he may have been looking at the wrong women? I think so.)

- **With Life experience - Read Eccles. 1:16-17**

Solomon had grown up and experienced life in all its fullness. This is not the work of some kid just out of high school. This is a man who had been raised in the royal palace. He studied under the finest tutors a king could acquire. He saw the way a kingdom operated even before taking the throne. He had ruled and succeeded in large part due to his request for wisdom from God. Think about his experiences with pleasure, money and stuff, and work. He collected proverbs and examined the great wisdom of all of mankind. It was at his finger tips. Now, likely as a grey bearded old man, he writes to his people, having composed Proverbs, a book chock full of wisdom for his heirs. This is a man who has studied life intently for many years.

- **Discussion Questions:**

- *When was the last time you applied your mind to get behind the youth-seeking culture around you? (Studying The Truth Project from Focus on the Family <http://www.thetruthproject.org/> is a good way to do so.)*
- *Are we careful observers of the “what” and “why” of those things and people going on around us? Why is this important for a Christian?*
- **What did he discover about seeking contentment in youth?**
 - Time is in motion - Read 3:1-8

Question: What wisdom is contained in this thoughtful analysis?

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Time is like the waters of the Mississippi rolling ceaselessly along, never stopping. Some of those times properly belong in the youth of our lives, some to middle age and some to old age. Now always becomes yesterday. Time stands still for no one. This is why Solomon says, "Let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth... for youth and vigor are fleeting" - 11:9-10 He's pointing out that you must seize the time of youth because it passes by in a blur and life goes very quickly.

▪ You have to take life as it comes to you – Read 6:7-12; 8:2-9

*The time you have to work is now. Each of us is granted youth while it lasts. We shouldn't squander it by wishing away our lives hoping to attain some perfect, later day when things will all be right. It's like a man waiting to marry until he can find the perfect woman; he never does because she never is. If we wish our lives away hoping for the perfect time when everything will be free and easy, we end up later wishing our lives were back to square one so we could make it all right. You can't change the way life comes at you. It's like whitewater rafting. If you are up stream you **WILL** go down stream. Nothing you do with the raft will reverse the flow of the river, but what you do right now can change the way you ride out the rapids.*

▪ Youth gives way to old age – Read 12:1-8

Question: What does Solomon seem to be saying here? In these verses Solomon is attempting to help the young get a picture for what it means to be old and about to leave this world. In the height of vigor and the heady days of youth, it's nearly impossible to think of a day with limits, but alas, that day will come. The teacher's message? Don't take for granted what you have right now, wherever you are in your journey between birth and death, because the body and opportunity diminish and fade away at some point.

▪ You can only be the flavor of the day – Read 4:13-16

Just like Culver's custard, each day has a flavor. OR Think of the latest hot celebrity. Remember when Lindsay Lohan or Brittany Spears were hot property? Youth is here today gone tomorrow. That's the reality of it. No matter what sort of efforts you make to try to stay in the "prime of life" the clock just keeps running and your efforts are fruitless. You can't stop it. There will come a time, when people will move on from you. You'll be long gone and maybe even forgotten.

Question: How do you think this helps keep a right perspective on our life?

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- **Young people rarely worry about their path through life – Read 5:18-20**
On the one hand young people go on like there was no tomorrow, like today could last forever. That's one of the things that appeals to people and motivates the endless pursuit of youth. "Oh for the carefree days of youth, when life was simple and easy and mom and dad paid all the bills." On the other hand, young people make tragic mistakes at times because they live without giving attention to what they are doing. Solomon, in a sort of perplexing twist, advocates living a throttle-wide-open, circumspect life as we see throughout the book.
- **What satisfies the young is short-lived – Read 7:6**
Thorn branches are quickly consumed in the fire. They flash brilliantly and then die out. It's the same way with what youth attains to. One moment you are on top of the world, the next, what was so wonderful is now gone or lost its luster. It went up in a flash! High School romances are typically an example. They flash brilliantly into flame with emotions and hormones going everywhere, then, just as suddenly, go dark.
- **The pursuit of youth motivates nostalgia and dissatisfaction – Read 7:10**
Once what has been makes you feel like a has-been, some people pine away for the good old days when life was better when everything was right with the world in their eyes. Often the good old days weren't as good as we remember they were.
- **Discussion Questions:**
 - *Have you ever wished that you could make time stand still? What would you have missed out on later if it had?*
 - *Why does nostalgia breed dissatisfaction? Why is it such a subtle threat to contentment in life?*
- **Is concern for dress, health, beauty, youth, and physical fitness good or bad?**
Vanity is a common English translation for hebel, somewhat fitting for the topic at hand today. Is it truly vain to be concerned about the way we dress, our health, physical fitness, and youthfulness of heart if not body? Is it a bad thing because this is all temporary, earthly stuff? Should we be focused completely on inner beauty, on spiritual fitness, or on becoming "mature", whatever that means?

Let's apply a little of Solomon's wisdom here: God made us physical beings. Now there is some debate as to whether or not he made Adam and Eve with the intent of aging, but I imagine he did. In a pre-fall Eden, aging wouldn't necessarily mean decay. Aging as a process of decay is more a factor of the fall and the passing of time leading to death.



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In the beginning, God pronounced his newly created physical universe good and man very good. It is clear from Scripture that God made many physical things beautiful to include the body. Without the fall this was not a problem, but with it a beautiful body that ages and decays can become one.

***Perversity** becomes a problem. Looking upon the human form with a view of the physical body not in accord with God's design is a tragic outcome of the fall of man, from pornography to extremes in plastic surgery. Perversion also includes looking at the human form in a falsely idealized manner. It distorts reality and strips away the diversity of God's design to expect humanity to conform to some limited, man-contrived shape or body composition. It also includes the distorted idea that our bodies weren't meant to change, but remain in some abnormal, static state. This becomes a worship of the creature rather than the Creator issue. Both Ex 20:4 7 Rom 1:25 point out this error. People place too high a premium on youthful physicality. However, simply because things CAN be distorted need not mean they MUST.*

*God **commands** us to care for our bodies in a variety of ways because they are valuable. Lev 19:27 strongly commands us not to abuse the body. Ps 139:13-14 & Eccl 11:5 – make it clear that our bodies were handcrafted by God. (This is doubly true in Adam's situation as he was formed by the very hand of God from the earth.) Eph 5:29, 1 Tim 4:8 - point out that caring for one's body is normal and physical training is of "some value", not ultimate value, but it has a positive component.*

1 Cor 6:19 - says that our bodies are a place worthy of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, in a sense equivalent to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and later Solomon's Temple. This elevates the physical component of who God made us to be into an equal position with the Soul and spirit components. He made us body, soul, and spirit.

Question: How can failing to take care of your body hurt God's ministry plans through you? Failure to properly care for your body can diminish the things that God can do with your life. If you spend a significant portion of your life in ill health due to preventable issues, all that time spent with doctors and in restricted activity, is lost to active involvement in your life and the lives of others that could make a greater Kingdom impact.

Clearly, in the context of marriage and Godly romance beauty is encouraged - Ruth 3:3, Song of Solomon. So beauty is something we can appreciate, but it's in the appreciating that it often becomes something that we fear. We fear if concentrate on inner beauty or if we make any positive statement regarding physical beauty, that lust will arise. We fear that arrogance or conceit will over take us so we err on the other side, "just to be safe," and in so doing minimize



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something God has made good. It's challenging to keep strong appetites in check and properly aligned to God's will, but Jesus calls us to hard things. Remember Christianity isn't for weak-kneed, lily-livered souls. That's not how God made us. He gave us a spirit of power, NOT timidity

Exhibiting the beauty God has given in a God-honoring manner is one thing, displaying it seductively to be noticed for your own self-gratification or desire to find contentment and clarity apart from God, is another. This is where one must consider his or her dress. On the one hand, there is nothing wrong with presenting yourself as well put together.

Additionally, God made us aware of our physical nature and it has a connection to our emotions. Dress does have a certain emotional impact. Derek's college baseball coach used to say, "neat, clean, and presentable," is a good thing. Dressing to attract undue attention or to impress others with your fashionableness, is a different matter entirely because it seeks contentment and clarity in the praise of humanity rather than God.

Once again, the key element in the physical side of life is where is your heart in this matter? Are the motives and desires God-pleasing, self-pleasing, or others-pleasing?

- **Discussion Questions:**
 - *Is 1 Peter 3:1-7's teaching on inner beauty saying anything negative about outer beauty? Explain.*
 - *As a Christian, what is the purpose of physical fitness and healthy eating? Does it occupy an important place in your theology? How have you struggled with this as a Christian?*
- **How do you properly play out the physical side of life?**

God wants you to grow up to become who he meant you to be, trying to remain forever young flies in the face of his purpose. Solomon's focus on making things happen before you're too old or too dead, is not about maintaining youth or feeling like "Back in the good old days, when I was young." To Solomon, that's pointless. His point is God wants you to make your life count everyday because your days are short. God has things for you to do. Why else would he tell you to "redeem the time" or "make the most of every opportunity" in Eph 5:16?

When it comes to the physical...

- **Be representative of who God made you to be physically.**

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The uniqueness and diversity of people of all shapes, sizes, colors, and abilities, demonstrates God's limitless creativity. If he'd made a single approved form, life would be far less robust and our understanding of beauty warped. Caring for what he's given you in a manner consistent with your understanding of his will and your relationship with him is an act of faithfulness. The only person God is comparing you to is who he made you to be. God wants you to turn out looking exactly how he intended you to right now.

- Since you have to take life as it comes to you, make the most of right now.

Be like the young living life in the moment, unafraid, with abandon. Take great risks for God. Live like you're invincible. When opportunity knocks, answer the door, because it's the flavor of the day and will soon pass.

Don't be like the young, living in the moment, recklessly. Consider your path. While we enjoy life to the full and the physical things including the vigor and possibilities of youth, that's not life's purpose. This is the benefit of wisdom that generally comes with age. Don't be satisfied with the rush that satisfies the young; instead seek the deeper, lasting things.

Life, because it is constantly in motion, must be lived dynamically while looking ahead. God has a design and has set history in motion for his purposes. He is future-focused, yet our physical abilities limit his work in us to now, not past, not future, but now. We are in motion and must adjust dynamically as history unwinds with all its interesting twists and turns. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." 9:10

Consider youth the appetizer of life's potential. Life is simple: God designed you to be conformed to the image of his Son that is what you really need to worry about. Life is endless: Through the grace of God we can live forever, beginning right now and on into the perfected world of God's promised future. A limitless God can take you anywhere to do anything he's designed to be part of life, if not now in that promised future. Only in him can we realize life's full potential. We can't grasp it by clutching at what used to be. We must take hold of what he's made us to become.

- **Discussion Questions:**
 - *How can you live a more wide-open-throttle and circumspect life?*
 - *Are you accurately representing who God made you to be physically, or do you need to make some changes?*
- **For Further Investigation or use for a breakout group**



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- *What does the Bible say has happened to the physical world as a result of the fall? Where does creation now stand?*
- *When Scripture says “I make all things new!” in Revelation 21:5 or speaks of a “new earth” in Revelation 21:1 and 2 Pet 3:13 what does this say about the physicality of the future?*