



Spitting Into the Wind

I've been king over Israel in Jerusalem. I looked most carefully into everything, searched out all that is done on this earth. And let me tell you, there's not much to write home about. God hasn't made it easy for us. I've seen it all and it's nothing but smoke—smoke, and spitting into the wind.

Life's a corkscrew that can't be straightened, A minus that won't add up.

I said to myself, "I know more and I'm wiser than anyone before me in Jerusalem. I've stock-piled wisdom and knowledge." What I've finally concluded is that so-called wisdom and knowledge are mindless and witless—nothing but spitting into the wind.

Much learning earns you much trouble. The more you know, the more you hurt.

(Ecclesiastes 1:12-18, The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language)

It's not an up-up-and-away, you-can-do it, inspirational wind-beneath-my-wings kind of book. If your idea of a good read is a touchy-feely, warm and fuzzy experience, then Ecclesiastes is not for you.

This is a where-the-rubber-hits-the-road kind of book. It's real. This is a profound observation about life as it's lived and experienced. Chasing the wind, emptiness, meaninglessness and spitting into the wind is the real theme of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon is telling us, "Take it from me. I learned it all. I experienced it, I had it all. I gained knowledge. I acquired possessions. Enjoying life is elusive. Expectations that fail to materialize hurt and devastate. You're left with a handful of nothing."

Ecclesiastes is the death-bed declaration of Solomon, sharing the realities of life as he lived it. The "wisest man who ever lived" ends his life with a wise legacy.

Here's a summary of the testimony Solomon leaves us with:

- **Hedonism will never fill our emptiness.** Of course, sensual experiences gratify us, but they are unable to fill the deepest de-

sires of our hearts and souls. See Ecclesiastes 2:1-2,10; 6:1-2

- **Work will never fill our emptiness.** Building and producing and growing and acquiring are blessings, but they too are unable to meet our innermost needs. It's often been said that no one, when asked how they would live their life over again, would say, "I wish I would have spent more time at the office and less time with my family." See Ecclesiastes 2:4-6, 10-11

- **Materialism cannot fill our emptiness.** Solomon died with lots of toys, but he testified that even if we die surrounded by lots of stuff, we may still be empty. See Ecclesiastes 2:7-8; 5:10,13-15; 6:3-6

- **Information and knowledge cannot fill our emptiness.** The Internet is filled with information, of all kinds, but there are still lots of lonely people whose souls are parched and dry. Graduate degrees may fill our heads, but not necessarily our hearts.

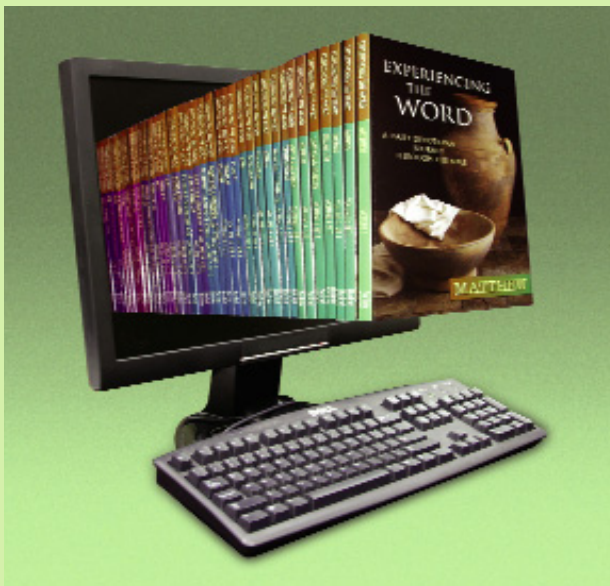
The More You Know, the More You Hurt

Fast forward about 3,000 years, from Solomon in Jerusalem to "the man in black," Johnny Cash. Johnny Cash was a Christ follower who lived an all-too-well-documented imperfect life. While his sins became well-known, he made his faith in God and his love for Jesus equally known.

Johnny Cash recorded "Hurt" in 2002, one year before his death. Some believe it to be one of his death-bed declarations.

Cash changed some of the original lyrics, as they were more explicitly about drugs and addictions, and turned the message into his own statement about the futility of life apart from God.

*What have I become?
My sweetest friend
everyone I know
goes away in the end
and you could have it all
my empire of dirt.*



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commentary

(From "Hurt"—written by Trent Reznor, first released on a Nine Inch Nails' 1994 album).

Defining our lives by how much dirt we collect in our respective sand boxes is *nothing but smoke*. No *empire of dirt* will ever meet our deepest spiritual necessity.

Alexander the Great, realizing that his empire of dirt extended as far as he could imagine, is said to have broken down in tears.

According to a popular version of Plutarch's commentary on this event, Alexander "wept with sor-

Alexander wept...because there were no more worlds to conquer.... Alexander had his empire of dirt, yet he died, one month short of the age of 33, dissatisfied...

There is only one Source that can fill you and me.

row because there were no more worlds to conquer."

Alexander had his empire of dirt, yet he died, one month short of the age of 33, dissatisfied.

Perhaps our generation could borrow from the words of Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones to explain such *spitting into the wind*—Alexander the Great couldn't "get no satisfaction."

There is only one Source that can fill you and me.

There is only one spiritual resource that is adequate to the emptiness of every human being. Here is the word of the Lord:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare (Isaiah 55:1-2). □

—Greg Albrecht

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