

ULC Sermon Study Resource

Idols — Experientialism

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Prayer: Pause for a few moments to go to the Lord in prayer. Ask that He would draw near to you in this time, and open your heart and mind to hear His Word.

Icebreaker: What's been your favorite vacation or trip that you've taken?

Reading: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Outline:

- I. The Reality of Experientialism (v. 1)
 - a. The Preacher (also known as King Solomon, Qoheleth, or קֹהֵלֶת) seeks to find meaning through a whole host of experiences, and he finds pleasure and happiness in them.
 - b. Pursuing experiences and “the journey” has become a Western cultural ideal as well.
Q: Why are experiences enjoyable? How did King Solomon pursue experiences?
- II. The Futility of Experientialism (v. 2-11)
 - a. The Preacher finds pleasure through many experiences: eating and drinking, friendships, work, accomplishments, nature, power, wealth, travel, entertainment, sex, and wisdom.
 - b. But he concludes that all of these things are futile and worthless in the end.
Q: How did Solomon's focus on experiences lead him to fall astray (cf. 1 Kings)?
- III. The Promise of Home (Luke 15:20)
 - a. Like the father in the parable, God welcomes us home to him with arms open wide.
 - b. God invites us to abide in him and rest secure in his loving embrace.
Q: Why is the father's response surprising here? How does God welcome us?

Reflection/Application Questions:

- 1) What experience or life event are you most dreaming of and looking forward to? Is it tempting to put your hopes of happiness, fulfillment, and identity in journeying through experiences?
- 2) Why is it dangerous to use God for a spiritual experience instead of worship God for who he is?
- 3) How can we encounter God and experience his joy and peace without turning this into an idol?
- 4) How can our sense of home or community also turn into something we trust and worship?
- 5) How can we make God the one who defines our pursuit of home and experiences?

Suggestions for further study:

- Habakkuk 3:17-19 **Q: How does Habakkuk praise God in the midst of bad experiences?**
- Luke 15:11-32 **Q: How does the father lovingly invite the prodigal son to return home?**
- John 6:22-27 **Q: Why does Jesus rebuke the crowd for seeking to experience His works?**

Closing Prayer: “God, we give you thanks that you are a good God. We praise you for being an amazing Creator who has made an amazing world in which we can experience so much. Lord, you invite us to experience your creation and to live a full and abundant life, but we often take what you've created to be good and turn it into an idol by placing it above you. So God, we pray that we would turn from idolizing experiences and instead return to rest in your arms in the embrace you've extended to us by sending your son Jesus into this world. May we know you and see more and more of your heart as we stand amazed by Jesus' work on the cross to take our sin, shame, and idolatry, and make a way for us to live eternally with you. Turn our eyes towards you Lord. In Jesus name, Amen.”