

session 6 study guide

the “feel-good” factor

message

Everyone wants to feel good about themselves. And we try all sorts of things to try to accomplish this feeling. We do things we like, buy things we like, spend time with people we like. And let’s be frank: Drugs and alcohol can make you feel good—at least for a while. But that feeling isn’t true joy, and it doesn’t last.

The Bible shows us examples of people searching for the “feel-good” feeling too. In Ecclesiastes 2, the writer struggles with the question of what brings true joy and true fulfillment in life—the real “feel-good” feeling. The passage at times seems contradictory, but remember that we are seeing the writer’s thoughts as he is trying to figure out what matters in life and what can bring true joy.

Read the following passage in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11,17-25. As you read these verses, consider the following questions: (1) What kinds of things does the writer try to find fulfillment in? (2) What does the writer conclude at the end of the passage?

I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. “Laughter,” I said, “is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?” I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the

delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

*I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.
My heart took delight in all my work,
and this was the reward for all my labor.
Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun. . . .*

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

dig

1. What things does the writer try in an attempt to find out “what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives” (verse 3)?

2. What was the effect of the writer’s attempting to cheer himself with wine (see verse 3)?

3. According to verse 11, what does the writer realize about all of his attempts to feel good?

4. Can you relate to the writer’s feelings? What would be included on your list of things you thought would make you feel good but ultimately didn’t?

5. What does the writer conclude at the end of the passage?

6. So what does this passage have to say about using drugs and alcohol to make us feel good—whether it is just for fun or to forget a problem? Is this an effective solution? Is it a godly solution?

Remember that when you use drugs or alcohol, you are actually destroying nerve receptors in your brain, which can cause you to become forgetful, slow your thinking process, and at times blunt or deaden your emotions so that you don’t feel pain. But just because you may not be experiencing the pain doesn’t mean that the pain has gone away. The pain still exists.

True joy, fulfilling happiness and the real “feel-good” feeling can only come through Jesus. The high from drugs and alcohol will wear off. Friends will disappoint. Life will let you down. But Jesus promises this: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

apply

1. Is someone who uses drugs or alcohol every once in a while any better in God’s eyes than someone who uses frequently? Why or why not?

2. When people start using drugs and alcohol, they tend to change in four stages:

Stage 1: Experimental Stage. They may make comments such as, “Just one sip”; “I’ll only get high this once”; or “What’s the big deal?”

Stage 2: Social Use. This leads to regular use with an increased tolerance.

Stage 3: Dependency. This includes a daily preoccupation with drugs or alcohol, the use of harder drugs and alcohol, a higher usage per week and changes in behavior, such as getting lazy and letting grades drop.

Stage 4: Addiction. This includes a preoccupation with getting high, a loss of control, violation of personal value system and moving from one peer group to another.

What does “slippery slope” mean?

3. Have you seen examples in your friends or in your own life of how drugs and alcohol use can be a slippery slope? What was the result?

4. Is it possible to keep yourself from moving from one stage of change to the next? Why or why not?

5. Besides the fact it is illegal to use drugs and illegal for those under age to use alcohol, what is the problem with using drugs or alcohol to forget a problem or deaden a pain?

6. At whatever age people start relying on drugs or alcohol to deaden their pain, that is the age at which they quit coping with stress properly. Using drugs and alcohol can have both short-term and long-term impacts. Read the following scenarios, and then think about the short-term and long-term consequence that might result from each situation.

Scenario 1: You are having a horrible day. So many things have gone wrong that it's almost funny. Almost. A friend invites you over to hang out at his house with some mutual friends of yours. His parents are gone and suddenly someone pulls out a bottle of booze. You don't normally drink, but you've had such a bad day, you decide to take a sip—and then another and another until you are light-headed and doing karaoke on the living-room table. You've forgotten all about your bad day, but you've also forgotten where you put your wallet and are starting to feel a bit queasy.

What are the potential short-term consequences?

What are the potential long-term consequences?

Scenario 2: *All your hard work has paid off and, as a freshmen, you are on the varsity basketball team. After practice, some of your teammates decide to hang out behind the locker room to smoke a joint someone stole from his brother. You want to be accepted by your older teammates and stay behind with them. When the joint gets passed to you, the coach suddenly comes around the corner. Everyone runs and you are left alone, holding the joint.*

What are the potential short-term consequences?

What are the potential long-term consequences?

Scenario 3: *It’s only your third date with him, but he’s taken you up to “Make-Out Point” to watch the sun go down. You love spending time with him, and he always does romantic things to make you feel special. This time he has brought along some chocolate-covered strawberries and a bottle of his parent’s wine. You have reservations about drinking, but you really like this guy and don’t want to lose him. After you have just a few sips, you notice that he has finished his first cup and has poured himself another.*

What are the potential short-term consequences?

What are the potential long-term consequences?

7. Drugs and alcohol can seem like a quick fix to a problem, but as we’ve talked about, neither is truly a solution. What are some creative ideas that *don’t* involve drugs or alcohol for dealing with or solving the following problems?

Your boyfriend or girlfriend broke up with you

Your parents have been fighting or have gotten a divorce

You’re feeling bad about yourself

You don't have anything to do on a Friday night with your friends

reflect

1. Habits can begin unintentionally but, once set, are hard to break. What is your habit for dealing with a problem in your life? Is this a healthy way to deal with problems?

2. How does a low self-image relate to drug and alcohol use?

3. If you saw a friend having problems with drugs or alcohol, how would you intervene and help?

4. Why are drugs and alcohol a dangerous “solution”?

5. Think of some famous people or others you know (without using their names) who have crashed and burned because of drug or alcohol use and abuse. How did drugs or alcohol affect their careers, relationships and health?

6. How is your faith impacted when you rely on drugs and alcohol to cope with your problems?

meditation



“I have set the Lord always before me;
Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope.
You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

PSALM 16:8-9,11, *NKJV*