

# The Book of Ecclesiastes

*Fear God and Keep His Commandments*

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Central Africa Baptist College & Seminary

*"Training the next generation of servant-leaders in Africa for  
Great Commission living."*

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## Introduction and Overview

### Key Thoughts

- Let's learn together.

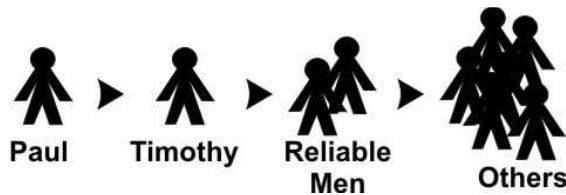
**Hosea 6:3** *Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."*

- Tell me how I can serve you.

**2 Corinthians 4:5** *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

- *Faithful disciples share what they learn with others, who, in turn, pass it on!*

**2 Timothy 2:2** *and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*



### My Prayer

May your heart be changed by the power of God's Holy Spirit as you diligently study God's Word. May your mind be filled with the truth of God's glorious grace so that you are drawn out into worship of the one True and Living God. May you be equipped by God to bless others by faithfully sharing what you learn. Amen!

# The Book of Ecclesiastes

Dig and Discover Principles

## Dig/Discover Principle #1

# The Line



**"STAY ON THE LINE OF THE WORD OF GOD"**

**The Principle:** "The Line" principle helps the preacher/teacher align his heart with the Scriptures and value the Scriptures in the same way Jesus did. Staying on the line illustrates the task of the teacher or preacher to discover what God has *actually said* in His Word and to preach or teach nothing more and nothing less. When we teach and preach the Bible we must avoid going "above the line," that is, saying *more* than what the Bible says. We must also avoid falling "below the line," meaning we say *less* than what the Bible says.

**The Result:** When we preach "on the line" our goal is to focus on God's words and thoughts, rather than our words and thoughts.

## Dig and Discover: How does Jesus view the Line of the Word of God?

**OPENING THOUGHT:** Jesus was the greatest preacher and teacher the world ever knew. Even his enemies said, "*No one ever spoke like this man!*" (John 7:46). I am going to ask some of you to read some verses where Jesus talks about his own teaching. Then I am going to ask you to identify some themes about how Jesus thought about the Word of God.

- John 5:30 *I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*
- John 8:26 *I declare to the world what I have heard from him.*
- John 12:48-50 *I have not spoken on my own authority.... What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.*
- John 14:10 *The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority...*
- John 17:8 *For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them...*

**KEY IDEA:** *Jesus' teaching during his earthly ministry was not based on his own authority, but was completely submitted to the Father. Think of all that Jesus could have said or taught during his earthly ministry, yet he did not speak self-originating words. Jesus humbled himself to limit his teaching to the words that came directly from the Father! Jesus refrained from speaking and teaching things he might have wished to speak. This is the pattern for us as we teach the Word.*

## Dig and Discover: How does Satan view the line of the Word of God?

Read Genesis 3:1-6. Discuss how Satan goes both *above* and *below* the line in tempting Eve. Do you see any ways Eve went above or below the line? What does this teach us about Satan's goal when it comes to the Word of God?

## Dig and Discover: What does the Bible say about itself?

Read Psalm 19:7-14. What descriptive words does God use to describe the Bible? Does the way we handle (teach and preach) the Word of God reflect the respect and honor we find in Psalm 19?

**CLOSING THOUGHT:** There are two basic ways to approach a text of Scripture: we can either ask, "What can I say about this text?" or, we can ask "What does this text say?"

**Which of these approaches helps us stay on the line of God's Word? Why?**

## Dig/Discover Principle #2

# Text and Framework

SUBMIT YOUR FRAMEWORK TO THE TEXT IN PRAYER



**The Principle:** When we refer to the “text” we mean the part of the Bible that we are studying, preaching, or teaching. When we say “framework” we are talking about our basic way of thinking. It affects how we read and understand the Bible.

**The Result:** We submit our life and our thoughts to the Word before we ask others to do so.

## Dig and Discover: Understanding Our Framework

**OPENING THOUGHT:** To be faithful to the line we must allow the Bible to shape our framework rather than letting our framework shape our interpretations of the Bible.

**Discussion:** How do we arrive at our framework? Why do we read and understand the Bible the way we do? List at least ten factors that influence the way we approach the Bible:

1. *Where we were born*
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

## Dig and Discover: Solomon’s framework and the Word of God

Read 1 Kings 3:3-14 and compare it with 1 Kings 11:1-8. What do you notice? Do you see differences in Solomon between these two chapters? Did Solomon’s framework change over time?

## Dig and Discover: Jesus corrects the framework of his disciples

Read Luke 24:13-35.

- How was the framework of the disciples defective?
- How did Jesus help them submit their framework to the Word of God?
- What difference did it make practically when the disciples approached the Scriptures with the proper framework?

**KEY IDEA:** *It takes a powerful working of God's Spirit in our lives for us to submit our framework to God's Word. Jesus' disciples needed a supernatural work in their lives and so do we. This is one reason we must approach studying and preaching God's Word in a spirit of prayer!*

## Dig and Discover: Submitting our framework to God in prayer

God has very lovingly given us an entire Psalm to help us adjust our framework. In fact, it is the longest Psalm or chapter in the whole Bible: Psalm 119. This entire Psalm centers on our heart attitude toward the Word of God. It leads us to value God's Word above our own thoughts, opinions, and preferences.

Break up into four groups. In your groups begin to pray together through Psalm 119. Ask God:

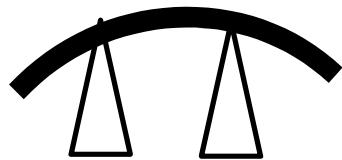
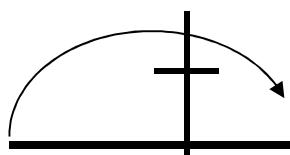
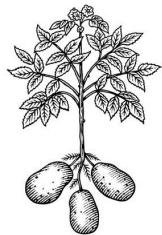
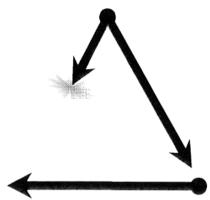
- 1) To give you a love for God's word like David
- 2) To make you aware when you are preferring your own framework to what the Bible actually says
- 3) To make you a *doer* of the Word, not just a *hearer* or a *preacher*
- 4) Pray for your brothers and sisters to love the Word and to preach it faithfully
- 5) Worship and thank God that he has given us a perfect revelation

**EACH TIME WE STUDY GOD'S WORD WE SHOULD PRAY THAT GOD WILL HELP US SUBMIT OUR FRAMEWORK TO HIS WORD. WE MAY CHOOSE TO PRAY THROUGH ONE SECTION OF PSALM 119 AS AN INTENTIONAL PRACTICE TO ALIGN OUR HEARTS WITH GOD'S HEART FOR HIS WORD.**

**CLOSING THOUGHT:** Someone has said, "It is easy to see that other people have a framework and almost impossible to see our own framework."

**Do you think this is true? Why do you think it is so difficult to see our own framework?"**

## Tools to Work the Text



## Dig/Discover Principle #3

# Asking Good Questions

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS TO DIG DEEP INTO THE MEANING OF THE TEXT



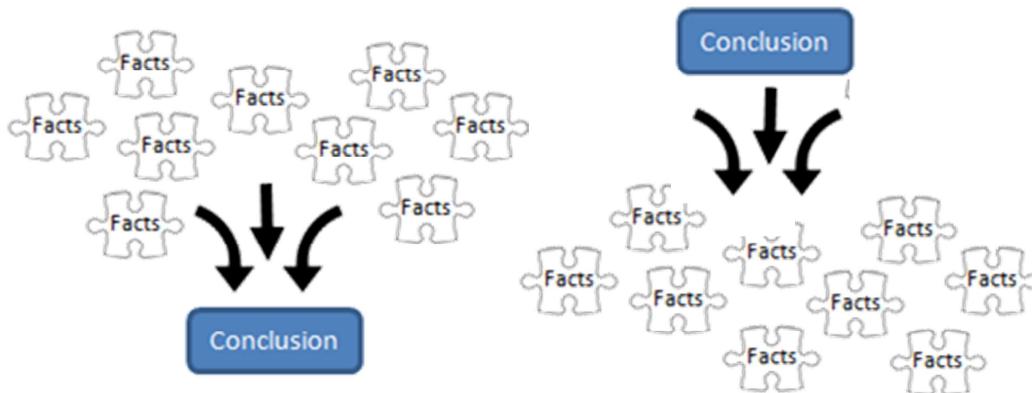
**The Principle:** Asking good questions helps us observe and understand what the Bible actually says. We can approach the Bible thinking we *already know* what it says and means, or we can approach God's Word with an open heart and mind *asking God to help us* understand it correctly. Asking questions opens the way for the Holy Spirit to teach us.

**The Result:** We submit our life and our thoughts to the Word before we ask others to do so.

## Dig and Discover: Studying the Bible Inductively

**OPENING THOUGHT:** One way to understand the importance of asking questions is to think about an *inductive* approach to Bible study as opposed to a *deductive* approach.

**ILLUSTRATION:** There are two ways to reach a conclusion. One is called *inductive*, and the other is *deductive*. The inductive approach is like the picture on the left: we try to look at all the information or facts, and then decide on the meaning. The deductive approach is like the picture on the right. We decide before-hand what we think something means and then we make the information or facts fit with what we already think.



**ILLUSTRATION:** Think about the contrast between a doctor and a lawyer:



When you go to the doctor, you want him to listen carefully to all your symptoms and not jump to conclusions about what is wrong.



When you hire an attorney you expect him to operate on your interpretation of the facts. This is *deductive*.

**KEY IDEA:** 1) What is the danger of studying Scripture in a deductive way? 2) Think about our study of the line. How does what Jesus said about Scripture relate to an inductive versus deductive approach? 3) Have someone read John 16:13-15. How can we expect the Holy Spirit to teach us and lead us into truth if we come to the Bible thinking we already know what it says and means?

## Dig and Discover: Asking good questions in Ecclesiastes 1.

**OPENING THOUGHT:** Very basic questions can lead us to very important discoveries in God's Word. When we think of *basic questions*, what comes to your mind? (Allow people to throw out ideas for a short time. We want to end up with these six basic questions ~)

**Who?**      **What?**      **When?**      **Where?**      **Why?**      **How?**

Divide into 3-6 groups. Each group read Ecclesiastes 1 and answer one or two of these questions:

1) **Who? Who is the author? What do we know about his life and rule?**

List the 3 descriptions found in Ecclesiastes 1:1. Think about why these descriptions may be important in understanding the message of the Ecclesiastes.

2) **What? What are the significant themes in this book?** Look for words and ideas that are repeated. Pay attention to the verbs/action words. **Summarize the flow of thought in each section in four or five sentences using words from the text.**

3) **When? What do we know about the time in which this story takes place?** Solomon ruled in Jerusalem from approximately 970–930 B.C. Using a Bible concordance we find Solomon's rule is described primarily 1 Kings 1:1 - 11:43 and 2 Chronicles 1:1 – 9:31. These chapters provide important back-ground about the time Solomon lived. Carefully read 1 of these historical accounts and make at least six observations about the time Solomon ruled.

4) **Where? What do we know about Jerusalem and Israel in Solomon's reign?** What information does 1 Kings 1:1 – 11:43 and/or 1 Chronicles 1:1 – 9:31 give us about Jerusalem and its people? What is there economic situation? What is the political atmosphere? How would you describe their commitment to God? Are there wars or conflicts that affect the people? Are there struggles and problems that the Bible mentions?

- 1 Kings 3 (Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom & Demonstration of Wisdom)
- 1 Kings 4:20-34 (Solomon's Wealth & Wisdom)
- 1 Kings 10:1-10 (Solomon's Fame [The Queen of Sheba])
- 1 Kings 11:1-8 (Solomon's Apostasy)
- 1 Kings 11:9-43 (Solomon's Demise)

5) **Why? What does Ecclesiastes tell us about why Solomon did what he did?** Here we are looking for his *motivation*: fear, frustration, emptiness, dissatisfaction, faith...etc. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1 – 2:26 and observe all the references to the *why*.

- 6) **How? How does God communicate the content of this passage?** This concerns the *genre* and *tone* of the passage. We will discuss this with dig and discover principle #5. Also, are there any surprises or curiosities in the passage? Does the passage suggest any questions to you?

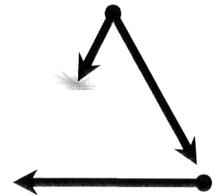
**CLOSING THOUGHT:** Groups should share their findings from asking questions.  
**Why are these discoveries important for you as the preacher? How would we use this information in preparing a message or lesson? Did you notice anything you never saw before?**

## Dig/Discover Principle #4

# Traveling Instructions

TRAVEL TO THE ORIGINAL TIME AND PLACE WHEN THE TEXT WAS WRITTEN

**The Principle:** When we read the Bible we are often tempted to make an immediate application to ourselves without first asking what the words meant to the original hearers. But we must ask, "How would they have understood these words? What was the situation that the author was addressing? What truths about God did the readers need to hear at that time?"



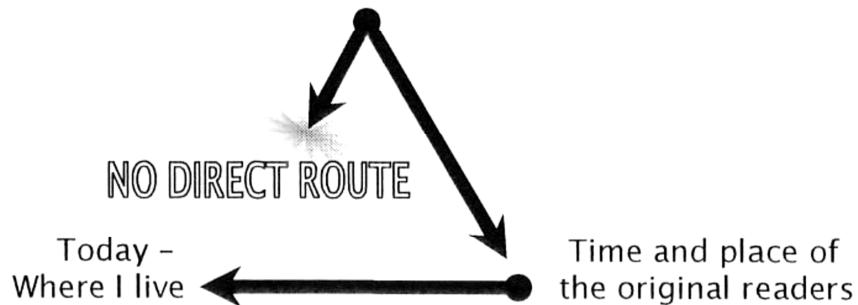
**The Result:** Until we have asked these questions we cannot be sure we have understood God's message as it was originally delivered. Consequently, any application we make may miss God's Aim. We call this understanding the CONTEXT of the passage.

## Dig and Discover: No Direct Route!

**OPENING THOUGHT:** Only when we have determined what *Ecclesiastes* meant to the original readers/hearers can we really understand what it means for people in our day.

**ILLUSTRATION:** For example, when studying *Ecclesiastes* we might be tempted to think about the people and events in terms of where we live and our life situation. But the *direct* route is not the *correct* route.

## The Word of God



**ILLUSTRATION:** Let's begin by actually searching for issues that Solomon struggled with. What are some of the things he observed that frustrated him most?

- **4:1–3 Oppression and the abuse of power**
- **5:8 oppression of the poor and violation of justice**
- **8:11 delayed justice**
- **10:6–7 the reversal of equity and fairness**

**DISCUSSION:** How does understanding these struggles affect the way we preach Ecclesiastes? What questions come to mind when we think about Solomon's rule?

**DISCUSSION:** Who *were* the people to whom Ecclesiastes was written? What do *they* think about Solomon and his perspective on life? Let's take a second look at key passages that mention Solomon and the Israelites – the people over whom Solomon ruled and taught. Remember, you can find passages like this by using a concordance:

- 1 Kings 3 (Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom & Demonstration of Wisdom)
- 1 Kings 4:20-34 (The Description of Solomon's Wealth & Wisdom)
- 1 Kings 10:1-10 (The Queen of Sheba)
- 1 Kings 11:1-8 (Solomon turns from the Lord)

**KEY IDEA:** “King Solomon began his reign as a humble servant of the Lord, seeking God’s wisdom and help (1 Kings 3:5–15). As he grew older, his heart turned away from Jehovah to the false gods of the many wives he had taken from foreign lands (1 Kings 11:1ff). These marriages were motivated primarily by politics, not love, as Solomon sought alliances with the nations around Israel. In fact, many of the things Solomon did that seemed to bring glory to Israel were actually contrary to the Word of God (Deut. 17:14–20). No amount of money or authority could stop the silent but sure ripening of divine judgment.”<sup>1</sup>

**CLOSING THOUGHT:** There are two important parts of the Traveling Instructions tool: The first is to learn about the original hearers. The second is to apply the text to our day.

**Why is it important to take both the steps described above?**

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

## Dig/Discover Principle #5

# Genre and Tone

ALWAYS NOTICE THE GENRE AND TONE OF THE TEXT



**The Principle:** “Genre” is a word that refers to the kind of literature we find in the Bible. The Bible is written with many different styles and genres. Examples of Genre include *Narrative* (The Gospels, Acts, I & II Samuel); *Poetry* (The Psalms); and *Epistles* (Romans, Ephesians, etc.). Can you think of other Genres or types of biblical writings?

**The Result:** When we understand the genre and tone of a text of Scripture we can match the tone of our preaching to the tone God uses in the Bible. This is another way we can “stay on the line” of God’s Word in our preaching and teaching.

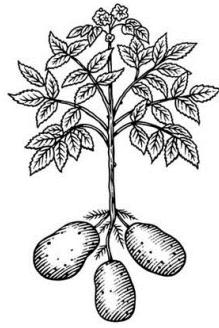
## Dig and Discover: Understanding the importance of Genre



Coffee Plant



Sugar Cane



Potato Plant

**OPENING THOUGHT:** What is the same about the three plants pictured above? (*They all need sun, air, water. They are all edible. They all grow in soil, etc.*)

What is different about these plants? (*Two grow the edible part above the ground, one below. They must be processed and cooked in very different ways.*) What happens if we try to process, cook, and serve sugar cane in the same way as potatoes? What if we served potatoes as a liquid like coffee?

**KEY IDEA:** *God created plants to be harvested and eaten in different ways. God also wrote the scriptures in different ways. A cook carefully prepares food based on the way god created that food to be eaten. The careful preacher does the same with a text of scripture. By observing how God wrote the text we see how to preach the text in a way that reflects the mind and heart of God.*

Dig and Discover: The importance of Genre in the book of Ecclesiastes.

What Genres did God use when he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes?

- Auto-biographical Narrative
  - **1:12–14** <sup>12</sup>*I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.* <sup>13</sup>*And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.*  
<sup>14</sup>*I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.*
- Proverbs: short sayings that express a truth
  - **1:18** *For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*
  - **10:12** *The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.*
- Allegory: an extended metaphor
  - **12:3–4** <sup>3</sup>*in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed,* <sup>4</sup>*and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—*
- Anecdote: a third-person account illustrating truth
  - **9:13–15** <sup>13</sup>*I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.* <sup>14</sup>*There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.* <sup>15</sup>*But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.*
- “Wisdom is the result of practical experience and the careful observation of both the natural and human worlds. Out of all of the chaos of experience, Wisdom finds customary ‘order in the world’—ways in which human beings and natural phenomena ordinarily behave. Its aim, then, is to teach men and women these ‘orders,’ so they may know how to act in harmony with the world around them.”  
(Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*)<sup>2</sup>

### How do the Genres of Ecclesiastes contribute to the mood and meaning of the book?

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<sup>2</sup>Cited by Sidney Greidanus in *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 3.

Break into four groups. Let's use what we learned about asking good questions to study Ecclesiastes 1-2.

- 1) List examples of Autobiographical Narrative in Ecclesiastes 1-2. Why is it important to notice these personal conclusions when we teach and preach Ecclesiastes?
  - a. 1:12-18
  - b. 2:1-8
  - c. 2:9-11
  - d. 2:12-17
  - e. 2:
  - f. 2:25
  
- 2) List the "*my heart*" statements of Ecclesiastes 1-2. What do these verses show us about Solomon's heart?
  - a. 1:13
  - b. 1:16 (2)
  - c. 1:17
  - d. 2:1
  - e. 2:2 (2)
  - f. 2:10 (2)
  - g. 2:15 (2)
  - h. 2:20
  - i.

**(NOTICE THE WORDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE HEART. SOLOMON IS STRUGGLING IN A VERY INTENSELY PERSONAL WAY. THIS IS A DEEPLY PERSONAL PASSAGE.)**

- a. Wisdom
  - b. Pleasure
  - c. Vanity
  - d. Sorrow
  - e. Despair
  
- 3) How would you describe the "Tone" of Ecclesiastes 1-2 (this relates to the "Why")? Be ready to explain your answers using the words and phrases in the text.  
**(NOTICE THERE ARE MANY WORDS RELATED TO THE SOLOMON'S STUGGLE. THIS STRUGGLE DRIVES HIM TO THE VERY LIMITS OF HUMAN EMOTION [DESPAIR], BUT THE PASSAGE ENDS WITH HIGH HOPE [FINDING ENJOYMENT IN HIS TOIL].)**
  
- 4) What "big themes" and ideas are in Ecclesiastes 1-2?

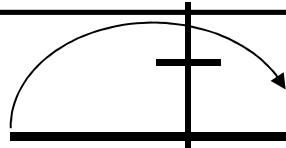
- a. What does Solomon teach about God?
- b. About man's perspective on life?
- c. About pleasure?
- d. About the futility of life?
- e. About mankind's relationship to God?

**CLOSING THOUGHT:** Would you use poetry if you were writing a newspaper article? Would you like to sing songs that were taken directly from a newspaper?

## Dig/Discover Principle #6

# Biblical Theology

CONNECT THE TEXT TO THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE



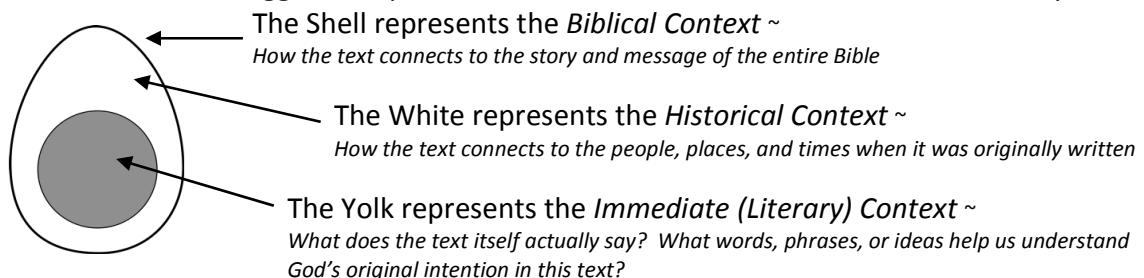
**The Principle:** The Bible is *One Book*. Each part of the Bible relates to every other part; and all the parts combine together to tell one glorious story – the story of God’s redemption through Jesus Christ. To fully understand the context of a passage of Scripture we need to think about how it fits in with the Big Story of the Bible.

**The Result:** If we consistently connect the *stories* of the Bible to the *great story line of the entire Bible* we make God and his saving plan the focus. This helps the people to whom we preach understand how the Bible fits together and builds their trust and faith in God’s love and wisdom.

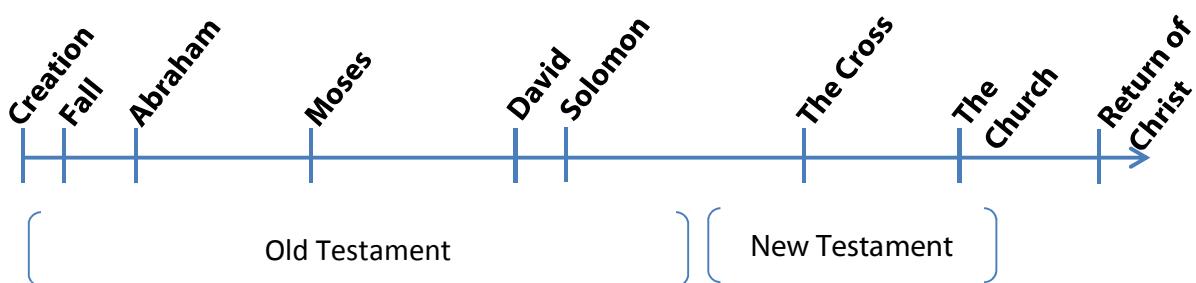
### Dig and Discover: The Importance of “Context”

**OPENING THOUGHT:** In “Traveling Instructions” we talked about the importance of *context*. Each and every day of our lives we apply the principle of context. If I said, “one of the main leaders of our country just became a Christian,” what would you think? Am I talking about “my” country or “your” country? Context helps us understand the meaning.

**ILLUSTRATION:** The Egg can help us think about the idea of “CONTEXT” in Bible study.



**KEY IDEA:** Let’s think about the *shell aspect of context*. How does Ecclesiastes connect with the big story line of the Bible? When we ask this question we are thinking about the *Theology of the whole Bible*. Biblical theology is a very important part of preaching “on the line.”



## Dig and Discover: Connecting Ecclesiastes with the BIG STORY of Scripture

**OPENING THOUGHT:** Let's think about some of the big themes and ideas we have already seen in Ecclesiastes. Let's write them on the board. Some of the themes we see include:

- The Meaning of Life
- Wisdom
- The Sovereignty of God
- Enjoyment in Life
- Despair/Sorrow
- The Reality of Death

**DISCUSSION:** How does seeing these big ideas impact our preaching?

**CLOSING THOUGHT:** Solomon was a man who struggled to understand the meaning of his life and to find genuine satisfaction. How does this reflect our lives?

**What was Solomon's conclusion at the end of his struggle?**

## Dig/Discover Principle #7

# Seeing Structure

FIND THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT



**The Principle:** The structure of a passage involves:

- 1) units of information – the sections of a passage that contain the **major ideas** of the passage
- 2) the **patterns** of words and thoughts that connect the ideas of a passage together.

**The Result:** Recognizing the structure of a passage is one of the most important ways to see the “Aim” or the main idea of the text. When God wrote all the parts of the Bible he had a purpose. The Bible is *more* than just history, poetry, or interesting stories. The Bible is a *message* from God to us. The goal of using the tools to work the text is to understand this message.

**Dig and Discover:** Why it is important to find the structure of the text:

**OPENING THOUGHT:** There are many benefits of seeing the structure of a text.

- Recognizing the structure means we recognize the major ideas in the passage. We want the major ideas in our preaching to reflect the major ideas God emphasizes in the text.
- By recognizing the structure we can arrange the major ideas in our message in a way that reflects the way God arranged those ideas in the text.
- Seeing the structure of a passage is the most important key to understanding the “Big Idea” or “Meaning” of a text.

**How do we find the structure of a passage?**

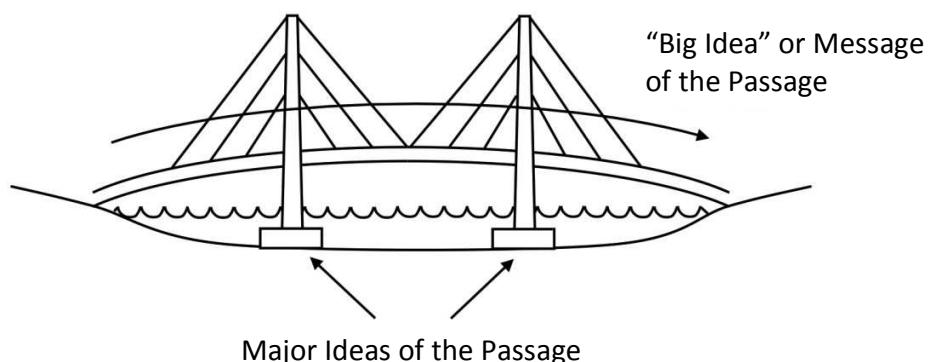
- 1) **Look for shifts in thought.** As you read the text where do you detect a shift in thought? These shifts are often shown by words like, “but,” “then,” “however,” “therefore,” etc.
- 2) **Look for patterns in the passage.** Words or ideas may be repeated. There may be a progression of thought from one idea to another. Sometimes there will be commands that set apart a new section. Often there may be comparisons or contrasts; or even key questions that are asked and answered.

- 3) Once you observe these sections write them down with the verse numbers. Try and state the major ideas of these sections clearly and simply.
- 4) Find the connections between these sections or major ideas. How does one major idea connect or lead to the next? How do all of them together lead to the Main Idea?

Dig and Discover: Finding the structure of Ecclesiastes 1-2

Break up into four groups. Each group will work together on Ecclesiastes 1-2. Follow these steps:

- 1) Ask the six basic questions about Ecclesiastes 1-2 (Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, How?)
- 2) Imagine yourself as an Israelite under Solomon's kingship reading Ecclesiastes. How might you be reacting to this autobiographical narrative? What would you be thinking and feeling?
- 3) Ask some "shell questions." What "big themes" and biblical truths do you see? What does Ecclesiastes teach about God? About life? About true joy?
- 4) Work together to find the structure of Ecclesiastes 1-2.
  - Are there key transitions or shifts?
  - Are there patterns of thought?
  - Once you write down your structure with the verse numbers try to state each section clearly and simply
- 5) Once you have your structure try and find one "Big Idea" for the whole passage. Your big idea should unify all the points of structure you found.

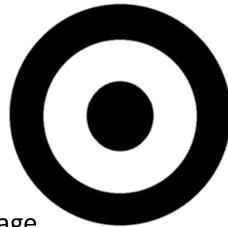


**CLOSING THOUGHT:** Every word of the Bible is inspired by God. God also inspired the way he arranged the words and thoughts (structure) – everything has a divine intention. Preaching on the line means we seek to discover God's intention for the passage we are preaching by seeing the structure. **How does the structure of Ecclesiastes 1-2 help us see the message of this section? How does seeing structure help us to preach God's words and not our words?**

## Dig/Discover Principle #8

# Finding the Main Idea

### FIND THE “AIM” OR “MAIN IDEA” OF THE TEXT



**The Principle:** The Main Idea of a passage is a one sentence statement that captures the main idea of what the text is really saying – its central message. The main idea unites all the thoughts of the text as a whole. The better we understand the Main Idea, the better we can communicate God’s heart to God’s people.

**The Result:** When we have really seen God’s message, or aim, or main idea in a passage our preaching and teaching will be clear, more effective, and more on the line of God’s heart.

### Dig and Discover: How do we find the main idea of a passage?

**OPENING THOUGHT:** How do we know the main idea of a story someone tells us? If a friend came with an important message would you be able to understand their main idea? You probably would, because you would listen carefully and also because that person would try hard to make you understand, especially if the message was important. God *wants* us to know the message of His word. Through careful study, finding the structure of the passage, and the help of the Spirit you can understand God’s message. Here are some helps:

- 1) **Read through the passage several times.**
- 2) **Use your tools to work the text**
- 3) **Look for clues about the big idea in the way the text begins and ends**
- 4) **Write down the structure. Ask yourself what all the sections “add up to.” What single idea brings together all the key ideas of the passage?**
- 5) **Look for patterns, like the repetition of key words and ideas.**

**KEY THOUGHT:** *One way to find the main idea is to ask two questions: “What is this book talking about?” and “What does this book say about what it is talking about?”*

## Dig and Discover: Finding the Main Idea of Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 5:20:

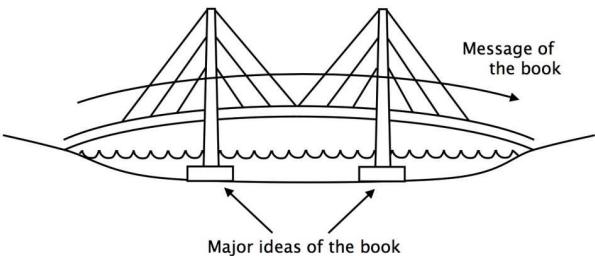
Break up into groups of 4. Each group will work together on Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 5:20. Follow these steps:

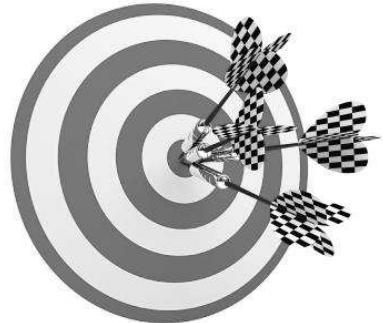
- 1) Ask the six basic questions about Ecclesiastes 3-5 (Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, How?)
- 2) Imagine yourself as an Israelite reading Ecclesiastes 3-5. How might you be reacting to this section? What would you be thinking and feeling?
- 3) Ask some “shell questions.” What “big themes” and biblical truths do you see?
- 4) Work together to find the structure of Ecclesiastes 3-5.
  - Are there key transitions or shifts?
  - Are there patterns of thought?
  - Once you write down your structure try to state each section clearly and simply
- 5) Once you have your structure try and find one “Big Idea” for the whole passage. Your big idea should unify all the points of structure you found.

## Dig and Discover: Finding the Main Idea of Ecclesiastes

**OPENING THOUGHT:** Just as we can find the main idea of a passage, it is also possible to find the big idea of a whole book – and even of the whole Bible. Now let’s begin to find the message of the entire book. The process for finding the main idea of a book is much the same as for a text. We should especially take notice of the beginning and the end of the book. We should also look at the main idea of each chapter, and then see if there is an idea that connects all the chapters.

Work together to find the main idea, or message, of Ecclesiastes. “What is Ecclesiastes about?” “What is it saying about what it is talking about?” What message is God communicating to the people of Israel through Ecclesiastes?





**CLOSING THOUGHT:** We sometimes use the idea of a target to talk about how close our main idea is to the actual main idea of the text. We want to get as close as we possibly can to God's message in a passage of Scripture.

## Dig/Discover Principle #8

# From Text to Life

## SHARE GOD'S HEART FROM THE PASSAGE



**The Principle:** The Bible was not given primarily to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives. The Bible is written from the heart of God to the heart of man. The "heart" is mentioned almost 1000 times in the Bible, reflecting the truth of Mark 12:29-31:

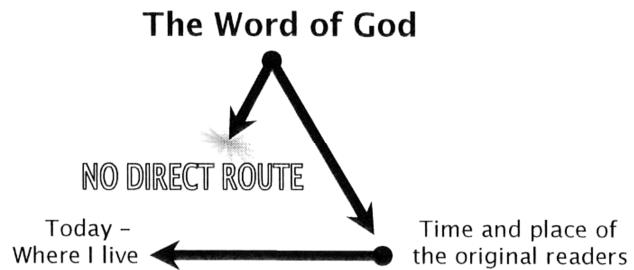
*29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

**The Result:** When we apply the Word of God to the heart of men we depend on the Holy Spirit to do His work of changing lives from the inside out.

## Dig and Discover: How do we preach the heart of God from a text?

**OPENING THOUGHT:** We already studied the principle called Traveling Instructions. We learned the importance of "traveling back" to the time, place, and people in the text.

It is not enough to travel back to the time of the original hearers. We must finish travelling *from the text to the people* in our audience. Understanding the message of the text for the original audience helps apply the text effectively to our audience.



## How do we make good application from a passage?

- 1) **Ask, "Does the passage itself make an application?"** *We should pay attention to how the author himself applies the truth of the text.*
- 2) **Ask, "How does God challenge Solomon in the passage itself?"** *What is God exposing in Solomon's heart? What does he want Solomon to think, feel, or do?*
- 3) **Ask, "What does this passage reveal about the heart of God?"** *How well are our hearts aligned with God's heart? Are there things from which we need to repent?*

- 4) Ask, "How is my situation similar to Solomon's?"
- 5) Ask, "How does this passage actually push us toward the Gospel?" *How do these truths lead me away from the world's pleasures and power and cause me to seek God?*

**KEY IDEA:** *Good application does not just focus on changing outward behavior. Good application aims for true heart change! It is also good, when applying the Scriptures, to lift up and magnify Jesus – his person and his work. This provides both the best example and the strongest motivation to change.*

### Dig and Discover: Finding good application in Ecclesiastes 3-5.

Use these questions to discover good application in Ecclesiastes 3-5. Write your observations below and be ready to share your applications.

- 1) *How does God specifically challenge Solomon's heart? How does that apply to us?*
- 2) *How do the people to whom Ecclesiastes was written (the Israelites) compare to us and our churches? How might God be appealing to his people, the Jews, through Solomon? How is God appealing to us?*
- 3) *What does this passage reveal about the nature and heart of God? How does that apply to us?*
- 4) *How does this passage point forward to Jesus and to God's big saving plan? How does that apply to us?*
- 5) *How are we like Solomon? How is our situation like Solomon's?*

**CLOSING THOUGHT:** We have now learned nine powerful tools that unlock the meaning of the Word of God and enable us to preach and teach "on the line." These tools all go together – they form a process for preparing to preach. In time, if we use these tools faithfully, it will become natural to us to study and preach the Bible in this way. Like any other skill it takes diligence and practice to master new skills.

**Which of the Dig and Discover tools was most helpful to you? Why? What did you learn about Solomon that you never knew before? What did you learn about the process of studying the Bible?**

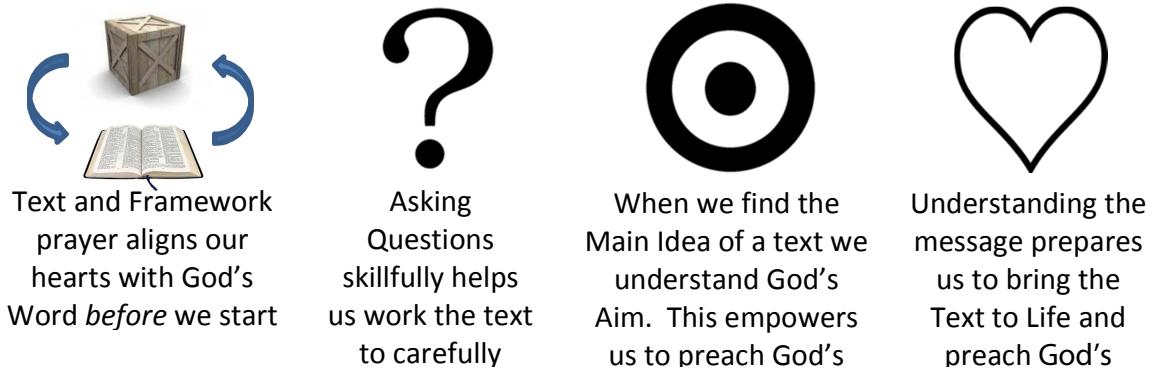
# Map of Dig and Discover Principles

How using the principles keep us “On the Line” of the Word

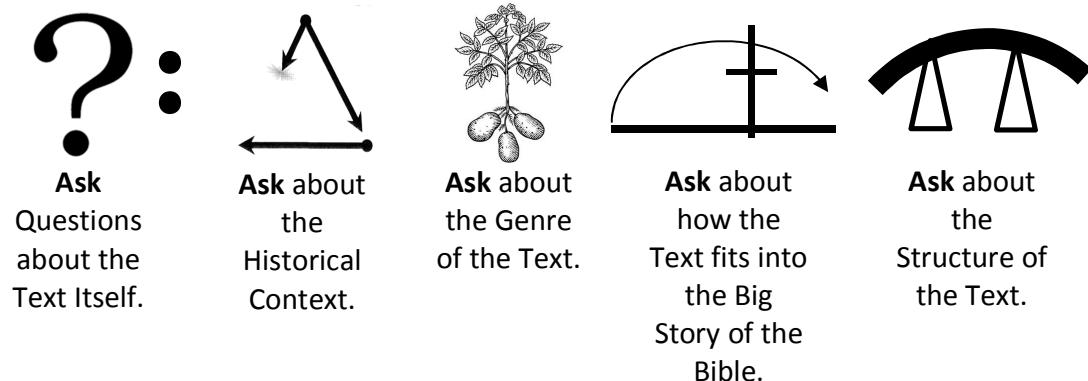
The Line: the Core Conviction that

underlies all the Dig and Discover Tools

The Process that aligns our preaching with the Line of the Word



Dig and Discover Principles for Working the Text



# The Book of Ecclesiastes

## Background and Introduction

### The Author: Solomon

#### I. Solomon's Background

- A. What is Solomon known for? What do we think of when the name Solomon is spoken?
  - 1. Son of David & Bathsheba (1:1)
  - 2. A powerful king with many servants and great accomplishments (1:1;2:4-7)
  - 3. The wisest man who ever lived (1:16)
  - 4. The richest man who ever lived (2:8)
  - 5. Many wives & concubines (2:8)
  - 6. Notice how the things we know of Solomon match the description of the author and his experience.
- B. Do you think of him as a preacher?
  - 1. Qoheleth:
  - 2. "The Hebrew root of the word *qoheleth* literally means 'to gather, collect, or assemble.' . . . The verb *qoheleth* refers to the gathering or assembly of a community of people, especially for the worship of God. So Qoheleth is not so much a teacher in a classroom but more like a pastor in a church. He is preaching wisdom to a gathering of the people of God."<sup>3</sup>
  - 3. *Ecclesiastes* is from the Greek word that we often translate in the NT as "church." Literally, it means 'one who speaks in the *ekklesia*'—that is, in the assembly or congregation.
  - 4. The point is that this is a book written by an author who is seeking to reach an assembly of people.
  - 5. "In Judaism, this book was read on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles."<sup>4</sup>
- B. Opposition to Solomon as the author
  - 1. According to Gleason Archer, some conservative and liberal scholars oppose authorship by Solomon based on the language of the book. They place the book in the exilic or post-exilic period. They conclude that the book must be from this time because some of the language in Ecclesiastes matches that of books written in the exilic or post-exilic period and not that of the writings we have from Solomon's time.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, ed. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 16.

<sup>4</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 41.

- a. This conclusion is unmerited because the language of the book as a whole matches nothing from the exilic or post-exilic periods as much as it matches nothing from Solomon's day. There is no conclusive language evidence to date the book and so deny Solomon as author of Ecclesiastes.
  - b. Solomon may have written Ecclesiastes in a genre for which we have no other writings.<sup>5</sup>
- |
- 2. Many conservative scholars oppose authorship by Solomon based on some unlikely choices in wording, unlikely perspectives, and the shift from 1<sup>st</sup> person in the prologue and epilogue to 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the main body.<sup>6</sup>
    - a. An example of one of the unlikely word choices is in **1:16** *I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."* (emphasis added).
      - 1) What problems are there with this?
      - 2) Who else ruled in Jerusalem before Solomon?
      - 3) David
      - 4) Canaanite kings
        - a) Melchizedek (Gen 14:18)
        - b) Adonizedec (Joshua 10:1)
        - c) Araunah (2 Sam 24:23)
    - b. To support authorship by Solomon most have to develop an extra biblical story about how Solomon repented later in life. This is a difficulty when 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings ends Solomon's story with his apostasy. It is unlikely that the author of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings would leave out his repentance. However, this is an argument from silence. There is still room for Solomon's repentance and writing of this book.
    - c. To see a more thorough refutation of the specific arguments of the opposition to Solomon's authorship see *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason L. Archer Jr.
    - d. Ultimately there is no compelling reason to oppose the historical position that Solomon is the author of this book.
  - 3. There seems to be a return to the belief that King Solomon is, in fact, the author.
  - C. In the end knowing the author is not absolutely essential because the message of the book is the same either way, and the author does not affect the canonicity.

## II. God's Job Description

- A. **Dt 17:14–20** “When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’<sup>15</sup> you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.<sup>16</sup> Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the

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<sup>5</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 463-67.

<sup>6</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) 249-250.

*Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’<sup>17</sup> And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.<sup>18</sup> “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests.<sup>19</sup> And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them,<sup>20</sup> that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.*

- B. **1 Ki 4:26** Solomon also had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen.
- C. **1 Ki 11:3** He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.
- D. Inaugurated at 18

### III. Solomon's Accomplishments

- A. **1 Ki 3:3–9** Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places.<sup>4</sup> And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.<sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.”<sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.<sup>7</sup> And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in.<sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.<sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”
- B. “Solomon wrote 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs (1 Kgs 4:32); most of the Book of Proverbs is attributed to him (25:1), as well as Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Psalms 72 and 127. His obituary notice mentions his literary accomplishments in the book of the acts of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:41). The Queen of Sheba came to see and hear if the fame and wisdom of Solomn was correct. After viewing all he had in Jerusalem and hearing his wisdom, her final response was a blessing to the Lord God of Israel who raised up such a wise person to sit upon such a magnificent throne (1 Kgs 10).”<sup>7</sup>

### IV. Solomon's Fall

**1 Ki 11:1–8** Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,<sup>2</sup> from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.<sup>3</sup> He had 700 wives, who were princesses,

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<sup>7</sup>Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1977.

*and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.<sup>4</sup> For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.<sup>5</sup> For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.<sup>6</sup> So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.<sup>7</sup> Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.*

## Purpose of Ecclesiastes

### I. Why was the book written?

- A. The following statement is the conclusion of Ecclesiastes and the way of life that Solomon desires every reader to adopt as their own: Ecc. 12:13-14 “*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*”<sup>14</sup> *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*”
- B. Pointing to God as the ultimate reality and pursuit- Gleason L. Archer Jr.  
“The purpose of Ecclesiastes was to convince men of the uselessness of any world view which does not rise above the horizon of man himself. It pronounces the verdict of “vanity of vanities” upon any philosophy of life which regards the created world or human enjoyment as an end in itself. . . . Having shown the vanity of living for worldly goals, the author clears the way for a truly adequate world view which recognizes God Himself as the highest value of all, and the meaningful life as the one which is lived in His service.”<sup>8</sup>
- C. Setting forth the life of faith- M. A. Eaton
  1. “The Preacher’s message is summarized in two points which concern the greatness of God and the Word of God. The Hebrew emphasizes the words *God* and *commands*. The fear of God is the realization of his unchanging power and justice (3:14). It delivers from wickedness and self-righteousness (7:18) and leads to a hatred of sin (5:6f.; 8:12f.). If it is the ‘beginning of wisdom’ (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10) it also is the end, the conclusion; no progress in the believer’s life leaves it behind. Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1). The reader is urged to keep his commandments. The order of the two points (fear ... keep) is significant. Conduct derives from worship. A knowledge of God leads to obedience; not vice versa. This is the only place in Ecclesiastes where the commands of God are mentioned. The body of the book has simply placed two alternative views of life over against each other and the life of faith has been commended.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 459.

<sup>9</sup>M. A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An introduction and commentary*, Vol. 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 176–77.

2. "The Preacher wishes to deliver us from a rosy-coloured, self-confident godless life, with its inevitable cynicism and bitterness, and from trusting in wisdom, pleasure, wealth, and human justice or integrity. He wishes to drive us to see that God is there, that he is good and generous, and that only such an outlook makes life coherent and fulfilling."<sup>10</sup>
- D. Communicating God to the Gentiles- Walter Kaiser
1. "Solomon may have intentionally written Ecclesiastes with an eye to a wider circle of readers than just the Hebrews—perhaps those Aramaean and other Semitic nations that were then subject to his government and those nations that had caused a good deal of his spiritual down fall through his attempt to placate the numerous wives who hailed from them. . . . The book would then have a missionary flavor as it attempted to use a sort of what we now call 'cultural apologetics' to call Gentiles at large to straighten out their thinking, acting, values, and preparation for their eternal destiny."<sup>11</sup>
  2. "Instead of being transformed by the culture of his subject nations and Gentile allies, he [Solomon] would begin with the very basic questions of life: What is good/ What is worthwhile? What is life meant to accomplish? How can anyone satisfy that gnawing thirst to find out the end from the beginning and bridge that 'eternity' in the heart of all men (3:11)?"<sup>12</sup>

E. Producing an honest view of life- Philip Graham Ryken

"We should study Ecclesiastes *because it is honest about the troubles of life*—so honest that the great American novelist Herman Melville once called it 'the truest of all books.' More than anything else in the Bible, Ecclesiastes captures the futility and frustration of a fallen world. It is honest about the drudgery of work, the injustice of government, the dissatisfaction of foolish pleasure, and the mind-numbing tedium of everyday life—'the treadmill of our existence.' Think of Ecclesiastes as the only book of the Bible written on a Monday morning. Reading it helps us to be honest with God about the problems of life—even those of us who trust in the goodness of God."<sup>13</sup>

**II. To whom was the book written?**

- A. Solomon is observing his many years chasing after desires and missing God in the process. Who would need to hear this message most? Who in your congregation needs to hear this most?
- B. Notice the clues that Solomon gives as to his primary audience.
  1. Ecc. 11:9 *Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.* (underlining added)
  2. Ecc. 12:1 *Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them";* (underlining added)

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>11</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, 32.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>13</sup>Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, 14.

### **III. How was the book used by OT Israel?**

- A. “Ecclesiastes was intended to be a book in celebration of ‘joy’ and God’s ‘good’ creation. In Judaism, this book was read on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles. . . . Had not Nehemiah rebuked the people of his day for mixing weeping and mourning with the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh 8:9)? His advice:” **Ne 8:10** *Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”*<sup>14</sup>

### **IV. How can the book be used in our day?**

- A. What struggles do our people face?
- B. To encourage those who are disillusioned with life by pointing them to God.
- C. To help you and God’s people see when some aspect of life has replaced God as your ultimate pursuit.
- D. To convince people of their need for God by pointing them to the sad end of their pursuit.
- E. To help people seeking transformation in the law to instead find real transformation through knowledge of God by faith.
- F. Proverbs throughout Ecclesiastes provide life wisdom.

### **V. How should we preach Ecclesiastes?**

- A. Confidently
  1. Dillard points out that some conservative scholars view the main body of the book as being full of theological error much like the speeches of Job’s friends. They see the epilogue, 12:8-14, as the only portion spoken from a theologically correct perspective. Dillard speaks of Job and Ecclesiastes when he says, “The bodies of both books contain dubious teaching when judged in the light of the rest of the canon (the speeches of the three friends, Elihu, and Job). Not that everything that is said is wrong, but nearly so. The same is true of the book of Ecclesiastes.”<sup>15</sup> There is little confidence in preaching from this position
  2. However, the above approach to the book does not see Solomon as the author and misses the point of most of the book. The above approach gets bogged down with the pessimism of the discourses and misses the point of portions like 3:9-15 where Solomon shows how life is to be viewed and lived according to God as the ultimate reality. We must understand what Andrew Hill observes, “the summary offered in verses 13-14 [of chapter 12] is simply a restatement of what Qoheleth is saying all throughout the book.”<sup>16</sup> When we view the book this way it is no longer full of theological error. Rather, the book is understood as communicating the harsh realities of life and how they can be viewed in light of God as the ultimate reality. With this corrected worldview we will live the life of thankfulness and service to God that Solomon proposes throughout the book.

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<sup>14</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, 41-42.

<sup>15</sup>Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 253.

<sup>16</sup>Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 296.

3. Many portions that are misunderstood as pessimistic and void of right theology include the phrase “under the sun” or at least reflect this theme. We must understand the meaning of this phrase if the book is to be properly understood and confidently preached. By “under the sun” Solomon means “the reality of life on earth.” Solomon observes that life on earth is full of vanity. Joys are momentary and painful realities are everywhere. Solomon spends much time on this reality in order to communicate that life “under the sun” is not an end in itself. He instead points to God himself as the ultimate end to be pursued. Only when God is viewed as the ultimate end will life “under the sun,” with all its joys and pains, be lived with purpose and fullness.
  4. This book can be confidently preached when every discussion is seen as pointing to 12:13-14.
- B. Practically
1. “A good way for preachers to respond to the scholarly gridlock is not to get caught up in the complex literary structures, but to examine the book for a more modest overall structure that will help in understanding the parts.”<sup>17</sup>
  2. Follow Solomon’s road signs
    - a. “I saw/have seen/observed” (3:16; 4:1, 7; 5:18; 7:15; 8:9; 9:11, 13)
    - b. “All is vanity and a chasing after wind” (1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9)
  3. Organized into “Goads and Nails”
    - a. **12:11** *The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.*
      - 1) Goads: the painful realities of life that move us toward the Lord.
      - 2) Nails: the fixed truths of God that hold our lives together and keep us secure
  4. 4 Sections (Kaiser’s outline)
    - a. *Enjoying Life as a Gift from God* (1:1-2:26)
    - b. *Understanding the All-Encompassing Plan of God* (3:1-5:20)
    - c. *Explaining and Applying the Plan of God* (6:1-8:15)
    - d. *Removing Discouragements and Applying God’s Plan to the Lives of Believers* (8:16-12:14)
    - e. Note: Each section ends with Solomon’s conclusions regarding life.
      - 1) These may be considered the *nails firmly fixed* that Solomon speaks of in 12:11.
      - 2) Such a structure provides a framework for you to preach.
  5. Don’t be content to just preach proverbs out of context. Many passages have great statements that seem to make sense but if they are not understood in light of Solomon’s argument we can miss the powerful point.
    - a. **2:12-14a** *So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.*<sup>13</sup> *Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light*

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<sup>17</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 16.

*than in darkness.<sup>14</sup> The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.*

- b. **Point:** If you stopped here and just preached the above you would miss the point of this passage.
- c. *2:14b-17 And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them.<sup>15</sup> Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.<sup>16</sup> For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!<sup>17</sup> So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

# The Genre and Forms of Ecclesiastes

- I. **Ecclesiastes is wisdom literature.**
  - A. Definition of *wisdom literature*: a body of literature where authors share observations, questions, and conclusions about life.
  - B. Explanation: “Wisdom is the result of practical experience and the careful observation of both the natural and human worlds. Out of all of the chaos of experience, Wisdom finds customary ‘order in the world—ways in which human beings and natural phenomena ordinarily behave. Its aim, then, is to teach men and women these ‘orders,’ so they may know how to act in harmony with the world around them.” (Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*)<sup>18</sup>
  - C. Ecclesiastes place in the genre of Wisdom literature:  
“The Wisdom writings have a twofold scope. First, they set out the rules of life for an individual who wishes to be a member of a prosperous society and who looks for the right way to build up a God-fearing conscience. These rules form the Book of Proverbs. Society, however, is not ideal; mankind has a fundamental twist, and there will always be cases where a person finds things happening to him that he cannot reconcile with the promises of Proverbs. He may suffer when he expects the temporal blessings of God, and others who deserve punishment may prosper. This second scope of Wisdom writings is taken up by Job and Ecclesiastes, each in its own way. Job shows the nature of testing and something of Satan’s challenge, but Ecclesiastes explores these things more widely.”<sup>19</sup>
- II. **Forms and Word Pictures**
  - A. Reflection: “I applied my mind,” “I said to myself,” “I have seen.”
    - 1. *9:13–16 I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.*<sup>14</sup> *There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.*<sup>15</sup> *But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.*<sup>16</sup> *But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man’s wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.*
  - B. Proverb: A brief, highly stylized statement of a truth about life
    - 1. *10:12 The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.*
  - C. Instruction: Some kind of teaching intended to convince the reader toward or away from some kind of behavior or thinking.
    - 1. *5:2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.*
  - D. Autobiographical Narrative: a first-person description of an experience
    - 1. *7:23ff All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me.*
  - E. Anecdote: a third-person account illustrating truth

<sup>18</sup>Cited by Sidney Greidanus in *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, 3.

<sup>19</sup>J. S. Wright, “Ecclesiastes,” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, Vol. 5, ed. F. E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1144.

1. **9:13–15** *I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.<sup>14</sup> There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.<sup>15</sup> But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.*
- F. Metaphor: a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one object or idea is used in place of another forming a likeness or comparison
  1. In **12:6** death is compared to objects being broken- *the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern*
  2. The most often repeated metaphor is that life is “vanity” or “vapor.”
- G. Allegory: an extended metaphor
  1. **12:3–4** *in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed,<sup>4</sup> and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—*
- H. Juxtaposition: a comparison or contrast made by placing two things next to each other
  1. “days are full of sorrow; his work is full of vexation” (2:23) and “eat, drink, and find enjoyment” (2:24)

## Major Themes

- I. **The Fear of the Lord**
  - A. “That fear was not some extraordinary, numinous feeling of terror or even of awe, but instead it was an attitude of receptivity that manifested itself in belief, obedience, and love for the living God.”<sup>20</sup>
  - B. **Pr 14:27** *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.*
  - C. **Le 19:14** *You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.*
  - D. **Le 19:32** *You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.*
  - E. **Le 25:17** *You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God.*
  - F. **Le 25:36** *Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you.*
  - G. **Le 25:4** *You shall not rule over him[your poor brother] ruthlessly but shall fear your God.*
  - H. **Pr 10:27** *The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.*
  - I. **Pr 19:23** *The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.*
  - J. **Pr 22:4** *The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.*

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<sup>20</sup>Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, ed. J. A. Motyer (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976) 34.

## II. The Coming Judgment of the Lord

- A. **Ec 3:17** *I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.*
- B. **Ec 5:6** *Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?*
- C. **Ec 8:12–13** *Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.<sup>13</sup> But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.*
- D. **Ec 11:9** *Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.*
  - 1. “Solomon does not condone a hedonistic Epicureanism or even a relativistic stance that judges the worth of everything by one’s own feelings. He urges enjoyment, but likewise cautions that even that rejoicing is reviewable by the God who judges all.”<sup>21</sup>
- E. **Ec 12:13–14** *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

## III. Joy/Rejoicing

- A. **Ec 2:1–2** *I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity.<sup>2</sup> I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?”*
- B. **Ec 2:10** *And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.*
- C. **Ec 2:26** *For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.*
- D. **Ec 3:12** *I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live;*
- E. **Ec 3:22** *So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?*
- F. **Ec 4:16** *There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.*
- G. **Ec 5:19–20** *Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.<sup>20</sup> For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.*

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<sup>21</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, 36.

- H. **Ec 7:14** *In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.*
- I. **Ec 8:15** *And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.*
- J. **Ec 9:7** *Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.*
- K. **Ec 10:19** *Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.*
- L. **Ec 11:8–9** *So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.<sup>9</sup> Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.*

#### IV. **Wisdom**

- A. **Ec 1:16–18** *I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.<sup>18</sup> For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*
- B. **2:26** *For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.*
- C. **7:12** *For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.*
- D. **8:1** *Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.*
- E. **9:16** *But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man’s wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.*
- F. **10:10** *If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.*

#### V. **Vanity**

- A. Definitions of *vanity*
  - 1. “A wisp of vapour, a puff of wind, a mere breath—nothing you could get your hands on; the nearest thing to zero. That is the ‘vanity’ this book is about. What makes this reading of life disturbing is that this airy nothingness is not seen as a mere flicker on the surface of things, where it might even have had a certain charm. It is the sum total.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kidner, 22.

- Kidner suggests that “vanity of vanities” may be a parody of “holy of holies.” “Utter emptiness stands here in mute contrast to utter holiness, that potent reality which gave shape and point to the traditional piety of Israel.”<sup>23</sup>

## VI. Life Under the Sun

- A. **1:3** *What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?*
- B. **1:9** *What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.*
- C. **1:14** *I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.*
- D. **2:11** *Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*
- E. **2:17-20** *So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.<sup>18</sup> I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me,<sup>19</sup> and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.<sup>20</sup> So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun*
- F. **3:16** *Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.*
- G. **4:1-3** *Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.<sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.<sup>3</sup> But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.*
- H. **4:7** *Again, I saw vanity under the sun:*
- I. **4:15** *I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king’s place.*
- J. **5:13** *There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,*
- K. **5:18** *Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.*
- L. **6:1** *There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: 2 a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.*
- M. **6:12** *There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.*

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 22.

- N. **8:9** All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.
- O. **8:15** And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.
- P. **8:17** then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.
- Q. **9:2-3** It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.<sup>3</sup> This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.
- R. **9:6** Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.
- S. **9:9** Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.
- T. **9:11** Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.
- U. **9:13** I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.
- V. **10:5-7** There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler:<sup>6</sup> folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.<sup>7</sup> I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

## **Outline of Ecclesiastes**

Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, Inter-Varsity Press

- I. The Author, the Motto and Survey of the Scene (1:1-11)**
  - A. The Author (1:1)
  - B. The Motto (1:2)
  - C. The Treadmill (1:3-11)
- II. The Search for Satisfaction (1:12-2:26)**
  - A. The Seeker (1:12)
  - B. The Summary (1:13-15)
  - C. The Sampling of Life (1:16-2:11)
  - D. The Assessment (2:12-26)
- III. The Tyranny of Time (3:1-15)**
- IV. The Harshness of Life (3:16-4:3)**
- V. The Rat Race (4:4-8)**
- VI. Interlude: Reflections, Maxims and Home Truths (4:9-5:12)**
  - A. Companionship (4:9-12)
  - B. Popular Acclaim (or approval) (4:13-16)
  - C. Pious Talk (5:1-7)
  - D. Official Predators (5:8-9)
  - E. Money (5:10-12)
- VII. The Bitterness of Disappointment (5:13-6:12)**
  - A. The Crash (5:13-17)
  - B. A More Excellent Way (5:18-20)
  - C. Tantalization (6:1-6)
  - D. Unanswered Questions (6:7-11)
- VIII. Interlude: More reflections, Maxims and Home Truths (7:1-22)**
  - A. You may as well face the facts! (7:1-6)
  - B. You may as well be rational (7:7-21)
- IX. The Search Goes On (7:23-29)**
- X. Frustration (8:1-17)**
  - A. An Irresistible Force (“Force Majeure”) (8:1-9)
  - B. Moral Perversity (8:10-13)
  - C. Small Expectations (8:14-15)
  - D. The Riddle Remains (8:16-17)
- XI. Jeopardy (9:1-18)**
  - A. Is it love or hate? (9:1a)
  - B. Death (9:1b-10)
  - C. Changes and Chances (9:11-12)
  - D. The Fickleness of Men (9:13-18)
- XII. Interlude: Be Sensible! (10:1-20)**
  - A. Folly (10:1-3)
  - B. The Social Tightrope (10:4-7)
  - C. Plain facts of Life (10:8-11)

- D. Sense and Nonsense (10:12-15)
- E. Mostly about Rulers (10:16-20)

**XIII. Towards Home (11:1-12:8)**

- A. Be Bold! (11:1-6)
- B. Be Joyful! (11:7-10)
- C. Be Godly! (12:1-8)

**XIV. Conclusion (12:9-14)**

- A. The thinker as teacher (12:9-10)
- B. Teachings with a point (12:11-12)
- C. The point of arrival (12:13-14)

**J. Stafford Wright**, “Ecclesiastes,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*

- I. The Meaninglessness of Nature, Wisdom, and Wealth (1:1–2:23)
  - A. The Theme: All Is Frustration (1:1–3)
  - B. The Frustration in Nature and History (1:4–11)
  - C. The Frustration of Wisdom (1:12–18)
  - D. The Frustration of Unlimited Wealth (2:1–11)
  - E. The Ultimate Frustration: Death (2:12–23)
- II. The Divine Order of Life (2:24–3:22)
  - A. Daily Life to Be Enjoyed (2:24–26)
  - B. God’s Plan for Living (3:1–8)
  - C. The Pieces and the Whole (3:9–15)
  - D. The Consequences of Mortality (3:16–22)
- III. The Frustration of Politics (4:1–16)
- IV. The Frustration of Life (5:1–7:29)
  - A. Quiet Before God (5:1–7)
  - B. Money and Mortality (5:8–20)
  - C. The Unfulfilled Life (6:1–9)
  - D. What Is Good? (6:10–12)
  - E. Practical Advice for Daily Living (7:1–14)
  - F. Moderation Commended (7:15–22)
  - G. Bad Relationships (7:23–29)
- V. Life in View of Death (8:1–9:18)
  - A. The Inevitability of Death (8:1–14)
  - B. Life to Be Enjoyed (8:15–9:10)
  - C. Uncertainty and Inequity (9:11–18)
- VI. Proverbs (10:1–20)
  - A. Wise Relationships (10:1–7)
  - B. Wise Planning (10:8–11)
  - C. Wise Speech and Thought (10:12–20)
- VII. Wisdom for the Future and the Present (11:1–10)
  - A. The Uncertain Future and Present Behavior (11:1–6)
  - B. The Certain Future and Present Behavior (11:7–10)
- VIII. The Frustration of Old Age (12:1–8) Epilogue (12:9–14)
  - A. The Credibility of the Author (12:9–12)
  - B. The Conclusion of the Matter (12:13–14)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>J. Stafford Wright, “Ecclesiastes,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1151.

**Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary**

1. Introduction (1:1–2)
2. On Time and the World (1:3–11)
3. On Wisdom (1:12–18)
4. On Wealth (2:1–11)
5. On Wisdom (2:12–17)
6. On Wealth (2:18–26)
7. On Time and the World (3:1–15b)
8. On Politics (3:15c–17)
9. On Death (3:18–22)
10. On Politics (4:1–3)
11. On Wealth (4:4–8)
12. On Friendship (4:9–12)
13. On Politics (4:13–16)
14. On Religion (5:1–7)
15. On Politics (5:8–9)
16. On Wealth (5:10–6:6)
17. Transition (6:7–9)
18. On Wisdom and Death (6:10–7:4)
19. Transition (7:5–6)
20. On Wisdom and Politics (7:7–9)
21. Transition (7:10)
22. On Wisdom and Wealth (7:11–14)
23. On Religion, Wisdom, and Evil (7:15–29)
24. Transition (8:1)
25. On Politics (8:2–6)
26. Transition (8:7–8)
27. On Theodicy (8:9–9:1)
28. Transition (9:2)
29. On Death and Contentment (9:3–10)
30. Transition (9:11–12)
31. On Politics (9:13–10:17)
32. Transition (10:18–20)
33. On Wealth (11:1–6)
34. On Death and Contentment (11:7–12:7)
35. Conclusion (12:8–14)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 281.

**Warren Wiersbe, Be Satisfied**

Theme: Is life really worth living?

Key verses: 1:1–3; 12:13–14

I. THE PROBLEM DECLARED—Ecc. 1–2

Life is not worth living! Consider:

- A. The monotony of life (1:4–11)
- B. The vanity of wisdom (1:12–18)
- C. The futility of wealth (2:1–11)
- D. The certainty of death (2:12–23)

*Enjoy life* (2:24)

II. THE PROBLEM DISCUSSED—Ecc. 3–10

He considers each of the above arguments:

- A. The monotony of life (3:1–5:9)
  - 1. Look up (3:1–8)
  - 2. Look within (3:9–14)
  - 3. Look ahead (3:15–22)
  - 4. Look around (4:1–5:9)

*Enjoy life* (3:12–15, 22)
- B. The futility of wealth (5:10–6:12)
  - 1. Employing wealth (5:10–17)
  - 2. Enjoying wealth (5:18–6:12)

*Enjoy life* (5:18–20)
- C. The vanity of wisdom (7:1–8:17)
  - 1. We make life better (7:1–10)
  - 2. We see life clearer (7:11–18)
  - 3. We face life stronger (7:19–8:17)

*Enjoy life* (8:15)
- D. The certainty of death—(9:1–10:20)
  - 1. Death is unavoidable (9:1–10)
  - 2. Life is unpredictable (9:11–18)
  - 3. Beware of folly (10:1–20)

*Enjoy life* (9:7–10)

III. THE PROBLEM DECIDED—Ecc. 11–12

- A. Live by faith (11:1–6)
  - B. Enjoy life now (11:7–12:8)
  - C. Prepare for judgment (12:9–14)
- Enjoy life* (11:9–10)

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# The Book of Ecclesiastes

## Outline and Notes

## ***Enjoy Life as a Gift from God!***

### **Ecclesiastes 1:1-2:26**

Philip Ryken writes of Ecclesiastes: “Ecclesiastes captures the futility and frustration of a fallen world. It is honest about the drudgery of work, the injustice of government, the dissatisfaction of foolish pleasure, and the mind-numbing tedium of everyday life. . . . Think of Ecclesiastes as the only book of the Bible written on a Monday morning.”<sup>26</sup>

#### **I. WHAT IS THE POINT? (1:2-3)**

##### A. An honest observation

1. **1:2** *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*
  - a. *Vanity* occurs 29 x's in 27 vss.
  - b. *Vanity*: (לְבָנָה) vapor, breath; what is lacking substance or weight
  - c. **Prov 21:6** *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.*
2. *Vanity* seems to stand in contrast to the biblical concept of *glory*.
  - a. *Glory*: (כָּבוֹד) Ps 19:1 *the heavens declare the glory of God*, i.e., they enumerate the weight or substance of His Person. Our galaxy and our solar system have a message. We're supposed to study the heavens and its objects, like the Sun 93M miles away, blazing at nearly 10,000 degrees F on its surface, its light traveling to us in 8:19, supporting most of Earth's life through photosynthesis, and say, “Someone of great significance is behind this!”
  - b. Solomon is looking around and saying, “What I see around me, lacks substance.”
  - c. So that leads him to a very important question:

##### B. A serious question

1. **1:3** *What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?*
2. *Gain*: (לִזְמָן) profit, advantage
3. *Toil*: (לַמְעָן) heavy, wearisome labor

#### **II. ARE WE JUST GOING IN CIRCLES? (1:4-11).**

##### A. The circuits of life (4-7)

1. Generations come and go, but the earth remains (4).
  - a. Every generation feels like the younger ones are worse than ever and the younger generation feels like the older generation is stuck in the past.
  - b. “The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents . . . and tyrannize their teachers.”( Socrates, 469–399 B.C.)<sup>27</sup>
2. The sun rises and sets and goes around again (5).
3. The wind blows on its same circuits (6).

<sup>26</sup>Philip Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Crossway, 14.

<sup>27</sup>Socrates, <http://www.bartleby.com/73/195.html>

4. The water cycles from sky to sea (7).
- B. We are going in circles! (8-11)
1. We live in a world of wearisome activity (8).
    - a. **1:8 All things are full of weariness [כִּיְגָדֶל]**; *a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*
    - b. **Weariness:** (**עֲגָדָה**)
  2. We live in a world where there really is nothing new (9).
    - a. **1:9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.**
    - b. Objection: *It has been already in the ages before us.*
      - 1) “Isn’t all this technology new?”
      - 2) Yes, the technology may be new, but mankind has always had tools to assist his productivity.
    - c. Explanation: The problem is our memory! <sup>11</sup>*There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.*

### III. IS THERE MEANING IN MY LIFE? (1:12-2:11)

- A. Maybe there is meaning in Life’s Experiences (1:12-18).
1. The depth of Solomon’s search (13-14)
    - a. *Applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done*
    - b. “He ‘searched’ (from a Hebrew word meaning ‘to seek the roots of a matter’) and ‘explored’ (the Hebrew literally meaning ‘to investigate a subject on all sides”).<sup>28</sup>
    - c. This is an all-out effort on Solomon’s part!
  2. The breadth of Solomon’s experience
    - a. *I have acquired great wisdom*
    - b. *Surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me*
    - c. *my heart has had great experience (16-17)*

\*What are some illustrations of searching for meaning in life’s experiences?

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3. The conclusion of Solomon’s search
  - a. *All is vanity and striving after wind (1:14, 2:1, 2:11)*
  - b. Deficiency of what is in the world (15)
  - c. *I perceived [came to know] that this is striving after wind (17)*
  - d. *much vexation . . . increases sorrow (18)*
    - 1) **vexation:** (**בֹּזֶב**) a feeling of anxiety and sadness in a distressing situation<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Walter Kaiser, *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, Moody Press, 53.

<sup>29</sup>James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

- 2) *sorrow*: (אֲבָבָה) anguish, grief, mental suffering, i.e., an emotion of anguish, as the figurative extension of a physical pain of the body<sup>30</sup>
- B. Maybe there is meaning in Life's Pleasure (2:1-3).
1. *Test you [my heart] with pleasure* (2:1)
    - a. *Enjoy yourself*: (רִאֵה טֹובֶב) "see the good!"
      - 1) *Laughter*: (חַזְקָה)
      - 2) *Pleasure*: (חַנְצָה) festivity
      - 3) *Cheer*: (שְׁעָמֵד) to seize in order to draw, as a man drawing a bowstring.
        - i. **Ps 36:10** *Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart!*
        - ii. **Job 24:22** *Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power; they rise up when they despair of life.*
        - iii. i.e., create an altered state of cheer by use of intoxicants, either modestly or immodestly<sup>31</sup>
        - iv. Notice Solomon's "moderation."
        - v. *My heart still guiding me with wisdom*
        - vi. *How to lay hold on folly*, i.e., to seize, to take possession of what is foolishness, what lacks wisdom or insight
      - b. What did this look like?
        - 1) **1 Ki 4:20** *Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.*
        - 2) **1 Ki 4:22–23**<sup>22</sup> *Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal,<sup>23</sup> ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl.*
        - 3) The cattle alone probably amounted to 5-6K lbs. of meat!
        - 4) **1 Ki 4:27** *they let nothing be lacking*
      2. Solomon's purpose: *till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life* (3b).
      3. Solomon's conclusion:
        - a. *laughter . . . it is mad!*
        - b. *pleasure . . . What use is it?*
    - C. Maybe there is meaning in Life's Enterprises (4-8).
      1. Extravagant building projects (4-6)
        - a. 1 Kings 7 re: his royal residence, 13 years in the making
        - b. So much cedar used in the house that it was called "The House of the Forest of Lebanon"
        - c. The Hall of Pillars, the Hall of the Throne
        - d. Pharaoh's daughter's house
        - e. *All these were made of costly stones* (1 Ki 7:9)
      2. Big business (7)
        - a. *Slaves*

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<sup>30</sup>Swanson.

<sup>31</sup>Swanson.

- b. *Great possessions*
  - 3. Retirement planning (8a)
    - a. *Gathered for myself silver and gold*
    - b. **Lk 12:15–21** <sup>15</sup>*And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* <sup>16</sup>*And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,* <sup>17</sup>*and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’* <sup>18</sup>*And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.* <sup>19</sup>*And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”* <sup>20</sup>*But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’* <sup>21</sup>*So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*
    - c. We live with the same kind of thinking! “If I can just get enough money set aside, then I can relax.”
  - 4. Arts and Entertainment (8b)
    - a. *Singers*
    - b. *Many concubines: 1 Kings 11:3 300 concubines*
  - 5. **Q:** Do you find yourself a little bit envious of Solomon?
    - a. One pastor wrote of people in the United States: “Generally speaking, we live in better homes than he did, with better furniture and climate control. We dine at a larger buffet; when we go to the grocery store, we can buy almost anything we want, from anywhere in the world. We listen to a much wider variety of music. And as far as sex is concerned, the Internet offers an endless supply of virtual partners, providing a vast harem for the imagination.”<sup>32</sup>
    - b. What about your country and community?
- D. Maybe there is meaning in Life’s Accomplishment (9-10)
- 1. The prestige of accomplishment (9)
    - a. *I became great and surpassed all who were in Jerusalem before me*
  - 2. The pleasure of accomplishment (10)
    - a. *My heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward*
  - 3. **1 Ki 10:23–25** <sup>23</sup>*Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.* <sup>24</sup>*And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.* <sup>25</sup>*Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.*
  - 4. **Point:** It seems like things are going very well for Solomon!
  - 5. God lets us read a page from his private journal.
  - 6. **2:11** *Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*
  - 7. **Q:** What is going on?
  - 8. **A:** Solomon is experiencing the futility of a life that is lived apart from God.

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<sup>32</sup>Ryken, 51.

#### IV. So What's the Point? (2:12-23)

A. The experiences, pleasures, enterprises and accomplishments of life cannot stand alone.

1. There is no apparent advantage to being wise (12-17).
  - a. *More gain in wisdom:* (*בְּרִית*) advantage (cf. v. 3)
  - b. *The same event happens to all of them* (14-16)
    - 1) *No enduring remembrance . . . all will have been forgotten* (16)
    - 2) *The wise dies just like the fool* (16)
    - c. *The wise dies just like the fool* (17b)
2. There is no apparent advantage to hard work (18-23).
  - a. **2:21** *because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.*

B. Life Peg #1 (2:24-26)

**12:11** *The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.*

1. Life's good things come from God.
  - a. **2:24** Eat, drink, make your soul see the good in your work. These things come from the hand of God!
  - b. That's what a multi-millionaire golfer needs to see. The ability and opportunity come from God!
  - c. That's what a BMW assembly-line worker needs to see. The ability and opportunity come from God!
  - d. That's what 6<sup>th</sup>-graders need to see. That's what moms of newborn babies need to see. That's what retirees need to see.
  - e. **Point:** The experiences, pleasures, enterprises and accomplishments of life are not intended to bring you the kind of benefit and gain that you are looking for. God, from whose hand, all of these things come, is what you are looking for.
2. Life's good things can only be enjoyed as we are rightly related to God.
  - a. **2:25** *for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?*
  - b. **Answer:** Nobody! But in right relationship to Him, your food should taste better.
3. Life must be lived for the pleasure of God.
  - a. **2:26** *pleases Him . . . pleases God*
  - b. Translation has to do with doing good before the face of God, in the presence of God.
  - c. When you see your life as a calling to live out the good always in the presence of God, you have found your meaning in life.

#### C. Application Questions:

1. What are the main points that God wants us to teach our people?  

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2. How can you preach or teach this with sensitivity and care for the individuals and families who are suffering?

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3. How does Ecclesiastes drive us to Christ?

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4. "This passage is not a contradiction to the gospel but a call for it. The world is in bondage; and humanity is unable to explain, find satisfaction in, or alter it. Only the Word, who came into the world from above, can open the way of understanding and escape (John 8:23, 31–32). He has done a new thing: he has created a new covenant, given the new birth, new life, and a new commandment (Jer 31:31–34). He gives a new name that will last forever. Everything else is old and passing away."<sup>33</sup>
5. **Closing Prayer:** Take a few minutes to thank God for the Word He has given us. Ask Him to make the Word real to you so that you may be able to preach and teach effectively for Him.

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<sup>33</sup>Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 288.

## **Accept Your Place and Rejoice in Your Work: God is in Control! Ecclesiastes 3:1-5:20**

"Solomon's personal experience and the restlessness of nature laid the groundwork for the inescapable conclusion that enjoyment and happiness, if they are ever going to be within man's reach, must come as direct gifts from God to men of faith."<sup>34</sup>

### **V. Recognizing God's Sovereign Control is a great advantage for living life (3:1-8).**

- A. God appoints the times.
  - 1. *For everything there is a season*
    - a. *Season:* (יָמִן) a fixed time
    - b. Cf. 3:11
- B. God arranges the times.
  - 1. *A time for every matter*
    - a. *Time:* (זָמֵן) a period
      - 1) **Dt 11:14** *he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil.*
      - 2) Ill.: How frustrating it would be to plant flowers and crops during a warm spell only to see random frosts devastate the tender plants.
      - 3) Cf. **Ec 8:5-6**
    - b. *Matter:* (עֵדֶן) desire, pleasure; that in which one takes delight, his business.
      - 1) Cf. Isa 53:10 *the will of the Lord (or the good pleasure) will prosper in His hand.*
      - 2) **Is 58:13** "*If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure* (business) *on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable*
- C. God governs the times.
  - 1. *Under heaven*
    - a. **Ps 103:19** *The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.*
    - b. **Ps 47:2** *For the Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.*
    - c. Heaven is the location of God's throne.
    - d. To be under heaven is to be under the dominion of God.
- D. Solomon illustrates God's providence in 14 pairs (2-8).
  - 1. The pairs demonstrate that Solomon has the totality of life in mind.
  - 2. God has appointed the day of your birth and the day of your death.
  - 3. God appoints the seasons of planting and harvest.
  - 4. God appoints times of mourning and celebration.
  - 5. God even appoints times of keeping and throwing away (6).

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<sup>34</sup>Kaiser, 60.

E. Illustrated in the life of Moses

1. **Ex 2:1–6** <sup>1</sup>*Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman.* <sup>2</sup>*The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.* <sup>3</sup>*When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.* <sup>4</sup>*And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.* <sup>5</sup>*Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it.* <sup>6</sup>*When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”*

F. The nagging question: *What gain has the worker for his toil?* (9)

1. Aren’t the people we know asking questions like this?
2. “I understand that God is in control, but what about my day-to-day life?”

**VI. Seeing God’s Aesthetic Intention is a great advantage for living life (3:9-13).**

A. God designs beauty into all of life (9-11a).

1. Work is *toil*: (**עֲנָל**) wearisome labor; expending huge amounts of energy in your work
2. God has given us *business*: (**עַבְנִים**) occupation
3. **Point**: God has not only ordered the seasons and times of life, but fit all of this together beautifully.
4. *Beautiful in its time*: (**יְפֵה**) fair, beautiful
  - a. **Job 42:15** *And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job’s daughters.*
  - b. “Gn 39:6; v 6 (of Joseph); of Jerusalem **יְפֵה נֹזֶף** ψ 48:3; of a singer **יְפֵה קֹול** Ez 33:32; of trees: olive Je 11:16; cedar (fig. of Egypt) **יְפֵה עֲנָתָא** Ez 31:3.”<sup>35</sup>
  - c. **Ec 5:18** *Behold, what I have seen to be good and **fitting** is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.*
  - d. “Instead of frozen perfection there is the kaleidoscopic movement of innumerable processes, each with its own character and its period of blossoming and ripening, *beautiful in its time* and contributing to the over-all masterpiece which is the work of one Creator.”<sup>36</sup>
5. *All things*:
  - a. This means that my wearisome labor has a purpose in God’s design and that it is important to the fulfillment of His eternal purpose.
  - b. I may never fully understand my place in this world, but what I am is essential to His plan. What I do is indispensable to His purpose.

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<sup>35</sup>Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 421.

<sup>36</sup>Kidner, 39.

- c. This is the beauty of God's order. He has so designed and fit all things together that we may stand in awe and worship Him.
- 6. Understanding this truth is great gain.
- B. God builds frustrating limitations into our experience (11b).
  - 1. *He has put eternity into man's heart*
    - a. Every one of us knows that there is more to life than what we can see, more than what these finite bodies and minds can grasp.
    - b. This is what makes us build spacecraft and fly to the moon and send unmanned ships to Mars. It's what makes a 4-year-old ask, "Why?" a thousand times a day. It's what motivates some people to study psychology and others to postulate about "Dark Matter" or spend 40 years looking for "The God Particle." It's what lies behind running a marathon or exploring the South Pole or researching nano technology.
    - c. "This quest is a deep-seated desire, a compulsive drive, because man is made in the image of God to appreciate the beauty of creation (on an aesthetic level); to know the character, composition, and meaning of the world (on an academic and philosophical level); and to discern its purpose and destiny (on a theological level)."<sup>37</sup>
    - d. But here's the problem . . .
  - 2. *So that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*
    - a. *Cannot find:* (נָאַתְּ) find, attain
    - b. Ill.: It's like being stuck inside an enormous yard with a fence around it. We know there is more beyond what we can see and touch, we just can't get outside the fence.
    - c. Part of God's design includes this limitation and frustration so that we will know that we are not ultimate creatures.
  - 3. Q: Are you willing to accept the fact that God is infinite and eternal and you are not?

## VII. Reaching the right conclusions is a great advantage to living life (3:12-15).

- A. Cultivating a heart of joy is a profound gain (12-13).
  - 1. *I perceived:* (יִתְּعַתֵּר) "I know"
  - 2. *Be joyful:* (בִּרְאֶשׁ) to rejoice, take pleasure in
    - a. How can we be joyful in this world with all its difficulty and pain, its injustice and insanity?
    - b. We can be joyful knowing that God has ordained the days of our births and the days of our deaths and all the days in between.
    - c. That God has established our times and our seasons as part of the beautiful tapestry of history He is weaving in His sovereign will.
    - d. That we have a God-given place in this world which He deems to be essential to His purpose to make all things beautiful.
- B. Creating a plan for doing good is a profound gain (12).
  - 1. *Do good:* (בְּזִבּוֹן) a good thing, benefit; welfare
    - a. Illustrated by the Proverbs 31 woman.

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<sup>37</sup>Kaiser, 66.

- b. **Pr 31:12** *She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.*
  - c. **Pr 31:13–22** <sup>13</sup>*She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.* <sup>14</sup>*She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.* <sup>15</sup>*She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.* <sup>16</sup>*She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.* <sup>17</sup>*She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.* <sup>18</sup>*She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.* <sup>19</sup>*She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.* <sup>20</sup>*She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.* <sup>21</sup>*She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.* <sup>22</sup>*She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.*
  - d. God desires that His people do good.
    - 1) The *good* includes all the ordinary day-to-day activity of life.
    - 2) The *good* includes looking for opportunities to bring blessing and benefit to others.
    - 3) Q: What would that look like in our communities and villages?
  - e. God is not looking for superstars and celebrities to bless His planet. For all that we preach and post and initiate regarding global causes and radical living, passages like this help us to see the significance and power of ordinary lives.
  - f. He's looking for ordinary, finite people who know Him and know that rejoicing in life and bringing simple benefits to others is what life is about.
- C. Cultivating a grateful, contented heart is a profound good (13).
1. *Eat and drink and see good in all his toil*
  2. *This is God's gift to man*
    - a. We do not have the capacity to create this pleasure for ourselves. If God withholds this gift from us, our eyes will remain blind to all the good that He has put into the world.
    - b. Q: Have you ever been around someone who seems to have a limitless capacity to enjoy life? Don't you wonder how they can do that? How do they avoid getting bogged down in the headlines and the struggles?
    - c. Right thinking produces right living.
  3. **Point:** If good things in life are gifts from Him, then that means that we didn't really earn them. And if they are gifts from Him then shouldn't we be grateful for all things?
- D. Cultivating a humble, worshiping heart is a profound gain (14-15).
1. *Whatever God does endures forever*
    - a. "Behind man's free action and volition stands the will of God, which orders events with a view to eternity, and that man can alter nothing of this providential arrangement (comp. Isa. 46:10; Ps. 33:11). **Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it.** We cannot hasten or retard God's designs; we cannot add to or curtail his plans."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Ecclesiastes*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 62.

2. *Fear before Him*

- a. In the presence of this God who appoints seasons and times, who works His purposes sovereignly and exclusively, the only proper response for finite people like us is holy reverence and awe.

VIII. **If God is in Control why are there so many conflicts between people? (3:16-4:16)**

- A. We see **injustice** where there should be **righteousness** (3:16-17).
  - 1. Justice and righteousness are replaced with wickedness.
    - a. *Justice*: the act of deciding a legal suit or case with fairness and equity
    - b. *Righteousness*: do what is right according to a standard
  - 2. *Wickedness*: violence and crime against civil law
  - 3. **Q:** What examples of injustice in our day illustrate the same kind of injustice that Solomon saw in his day?

- B. We see **death** when we expect something **better** (3:18-21)

- 1. Are we no better than animals?
- 2. *God is testing them [us]* (18)
  - a. How so?
  - b. To see if we will face our mortality.
  - c. Ill.: [Happiness in this World](#), Reflections of a Buddhist physician , by Alex Lickerman, M.D. <sup>39</sup> (Dr. Lickerman describes a series of life-threatening illnesses that he endured beginning in 2007.)
  - d. “The true significance of my denial wasn't made clear to me, however, until I was diagnosed with [PTSD](#). The anxiety that began to envelop me at that point was of an entirely different order than I'd ever experienced before. It began to interfere with my ability to function, which made plain to me that what my brush with death—twice—had taken from me was *my ability to believe I would never die*. Knowing *intellectually* that death awaits us is quite clearly a different thing from *believing* it, much in the same way knowing intellectually gravity will make you fall is a different experience from actually swooning at the edge of a parapet at the top of tall building. Ultimately, being ill brought me to the realization, contrary to what I'd always believed in my heart, that there was nothing special about me at all. Like everyone else, I was only a piece of meat that would eventually spoil.”
  - e. “I've tried to resolve my fear of death intellectually and come to the conclusion that it can't be done, at least not by me. Some kind of practice that actually has the power to awaken me to the truth is required (assuming, of course, the truth ends up being what I hope it to be). Thus, my grand experiment continues. What about yours?”

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<sup>39</sup><http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/200910/overcoming-the-fear-death>

3. If we read 3:21 as a question, we might remain uncertain, as Dr. Lickerman is, about what is next.
  - a. It should not be read as a question.
  - b. **12:7** *and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*
  - c. **12:14** *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*
- C. We see **oppression** when there ought to be **comfort** (4:1-3)
  1. Oppressors have all the power.
    - a. *Oppressions:* causing hardship and difficulty for another; likely through financial extortion or exploitation
    - b. “The verbal root ‘āšaq is concerned with acts of abuse of power or authority, the burdening, trampling, and crushing of those lower in station.”<sup>40</sup>
    - c. Examples of oppression:
      - 1) Ethnic oppression
      - 2) Religious oppression
      - 3) Gender oppression
      - 4) Financial oppression
      - 5) Cultural oppression
  2. The oppressed have no comfort
    - a. *Comfort:* somebody or something that provides relief from pain or suffering.
      - 1) To comfort someone is to bring relief.
      - 2) Illustrations:
        - b. Solomon says that to be dead or unborn is preferable to living without comfort (2-3).
- D. We see **envy** when there ought to be **partnership** (4:4-6).
  1. [“Envy is the art of counting the other fellow's blessings instead of your own.”](#)  
[\(Harold Coffin\)](#)
  2. Solomon observes competition motivated by envy!
    - a. *Envy:* “a state of ill will ranging even to anger, based on a perceived advantage, or a desire for exclusivity in relationship”<sup>41</sup>
    3. Withdrawal as a result of fear or frustration (5)
    4. A *handful of quietness* [rest, calm] is better (6)
    5. Illustrations:
      - a. In the U.S.A. we frequently hear about “the war on women”, “the war on poverty” and “class warfare.”
      - b. What examples of cultural envy can you think of?

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<sup>40</sup>Ronald B. Allen, “1713 פָּעַל,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 705.

<sup>41</sup>Swanson.

- E. We see **isolation** when there ought to be **relationship** (4:7-12).
1. *Two are better than one* (9)
    - a. A good reward for their work
    - b. Safety if one should fall
    - c. Protection against threats (like cold nights and personal attacks)
  2. *A threefold cord is not quickly broken*
    - a. What does this mean?
    - b. Is this a suitable text for a wedding? Why or why not?
  3. Conclusion: "Society begins with one's neighbor. Two acting together are better than one selfish individual; they can support each other when there is need for support. This proverb applies to all relationships and is certainly relevant for members of the body of Christ. Individualism and divisions make for weakness. There is a proper complex of power in a three-strand rope, provided the strands are good and support one another."<sup>42</sup>
- F. We see **fickle popularity** when there ought to be **honorable remembrance** (4:13-16).
1. *Those who come later will not rejoice in him*
  2. What is the problem with humanity?
  3. Consider how the following NT examples illustrate this kind of power struggle within the church?
    - a. 1 Corinthians 1:10-17
    - b. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
  4. What is Paul's solution for this kind of oppression inside the church?
  5. Consider how Paul's solution is similar to Solomon's.

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<sup>42</sup>J. Stafford Wright, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1166.

## **IX. Since God is Sovereign we ought to serve Him exclusively (5:1-20).**

### **A. We must fear God exclusively (5:1-7).**

1. Listen to Him attentively, but don't lecture Him (5:1).
  - a. *Draw near to listen*
  - b. *Do not offer the sacrifice of fools*
  - c. *Let your words be few*
  - d. "True piety is the only remedy for every temptation offered us to spew out a sally of empty words against God's good operation of all things."<sup>43</sup>
2. Commit to Him fully, but don't manipulate Him (5:2-3).
  - a. *Be not rash with your mouth*
  - b. *Nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word*
  - c. *God is in heaven, you are on earth*
  - d. *Therefore let your words be few*
  - e. **Mt 6:7-9**<sup>7</sup> "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.<sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.<sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."
3. Speak of Him carefully, but don't neglect Him (5:4-7).
  - a. *Pay what you vow* (4)
  - b. *Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before His messenger [lit., angel] that it was a mistake*
  - c. This is "the well-meaning person who likes a good sing and turns up cheerfully enough to church; but who listens with half an ear, and never quite gets round to what he has volunteered to do for God."<sup>44</sup>
  - d. <sup>7</sup> *For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.*
  - e. "The dreams appear to be daydreams, reducing worship to verbal doodling."<sup>45</sup>

### **B. We must trust God confidently (5:8-9).**

1. God's justice will triumph over man's oppression because God's court is higher than all others.
2. **3:17** *I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.*
3. "Such inequities God Himself will rectify in the future judgment, although they appear temporarily to run unabated. Wronging the innocent and clearing the guilty is dangerous business, for all who practice such crookedness and demagoguery will face the Judge of all judges in that final judgment."<sup>46</sup>
4. **Consider:** The Cross is the greatest injustice (oppression) of history.
  - a. **2 Co 5:21** *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin . . .*
  - b. But it is also the place of greatest mercy and comfort.

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<sup>43</sup>Kaiser, 75.

<sup>44</sup>Kidner, 52.

<sup>45</sup>Kidner, 53.

<sup>46</sup>Kaiser, 69.

- c. . . so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
  - d. That's a good word for those who are oppressed by sin and even oppress others by their sin.
  - 5. Don't trust in earthly resources (5:10-17)
    - a. Income never matches one's appetite for wealth (10).
    - b. Increasing goods means increasing responsibilities (11).
    - c. Riches can make it harder to sleep well (12).
    - d. Riches can be quickly lost in a bad venture (13-14).
    - e. Rich people die like the rest of us (15-17).
  - C. We rejoice in God daily (5:18-20)
    - 1. Life is short: *The few days of his life*
    - 2. Enjoyment is a gift from God (19).
      - a. The enjoyment of life is superior to the possessions of life (18-19).
        - 1) Eat
        - 2) Drink
        - 3) Find enjoyment
      - b. *To be good and fitting* is lit., "it is a good thing which is beautiful"
    - 3. Contentment is a gift from God (19-20).
      - a. Note the effect: *God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.*
      - b. "We catch a glimpse of the man for whom life passes swiftly, not because it is short and meaningless, but because, by the grace of God, he finds it utterly absorbing."<sup>47</sup>
      - c. Are you finding enjoyment in the simple things of life like food and drink?
  - d. Let us ask God for the kind of joy and contentment that occupies our hearts more than the frustrations of life in this world.
4. **Closing Prayer:** Take a few minutes to thank God for the Word He has given us. Ask Him to make the Word real to you so that you may be able to preach and teach effectively for Him.

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<sup>47</sup>Kidner, 59.

## ***Eat, Drink and Be Joyful: What Else Are We Supposed to Do? Ecclesiastes 6:1-8:15***

### **I. Prosperity isn't always good (6:1-12).**

- A. Prosperity comes from God (2a).
  - 1. *Wealth*
  - 2. *Possessions*
  - 3. *Honor*
  - 4. Q: Why aren't the world's richest people always the most content and satisfied?
- B. Power to enjoy prosperity comes from God (2b-8).
  - 1. *Power to enjoy them* (2): (*אכל*) lit., "Power to eat."
    - a. This is in contrast to 5:19
    - b. "Prosperity without the divine gift of enjoyment is nothing."<sup>48</sup>
  - 2. *His soul is not satisfied* (3): (*שׁבָע*) to eat or drink one's fill
    - a. "One could have the things men dream of—which in Old Testament terms meant children by the score, and years of life by the thousand—and still depart unnoticed, unlamented and unfulfilled."<sup>49</sup>
    - b. *Life's good things* in and of themselves, like having many children and a long life, cannot satisfy our desires.
    - c. *Things* don't have the power in themselves to satisfy us.
      - 1) Ill.: It's like expecting your coffee to supply the RDA of vitamin C. It's not in there!
    - d. Better to be stillborn than to have prosperity without satisfaction!
      - 1) Why is a stillborn baby better off than this man?
      - 2) A stillborn baby finds rest that eludes this man in his life.
    - e. Q: Do godly people struggle with this same thing? (Compare Job 3:11-13; Jeremiah 20:14-18.)
  - 3. *His appetite is not satisfied* (7): (*מִלְא*) filled
    - a. Here is a man who works hard so that he can eat--and he's able to put really good food on the table--but his soul remains hungry for more.
  - 4. Is there really any benefit to living this life? (8)
    - a. Wise or fool? [Rich or] poor?
    - b. A: Not without the power to enjoy life!
- C. Contentment is better than prosperity (9-12).
  - 1. Defining contentment: satisfaction with things as they are.
  - 2. A proverb: *better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite*
    - a. *Appetite*: (*רֹעֵשׁ*) also translated "soul" as in 6:7.
  - 3. Christian contentment is the result of:

<sup>48</sup>Kaiser, 80.

<sup>49</sup>Kidner, 59.

- a. Accepting our place in God's world (10)
- b. Trusting God for what is good in my life (12)
  - 1) *Who knows what is good for man?*
  - 2) *Who can tell a man what will be after him?*
  - 3) The only right question to both of these questions is God!
- c. Look up the following NT passages. Do they agree or disagree with Solomon?
  - 1) Philippians 4:11
  - 2) 1 Timothy 6:8
  - 3) Hebrews 13:5
- d. "Today the business world contains many clever men who work hard because they are obsessed with piling up money, while on the other side there are those who are ever alert for a quick profit—honest or dishonest. In between come the average men and women who, though poor in material things, have come to terms with life (v. 8b). They also work for their living but are content with what they have ("what the eye sees"), without the wandering desire that tries to grasp the elusive wind (v. 9)." <sup>50</sup>

**D. Application Questions:**

- 1. Are you satisfied in life?
- 2. If "yes," then praise God for giving you the power to enjoy your work, possessions and relationships.
- 3. If "no," then are you seeking satisfaction in something other than God?
  - a. Are you expecting to be satisfied through the people around you?
  - b. Are you expecting to be satisfied through the opportunities in front of you?
  - c. Are you asking God to give you power to enjoy your life as it is and practicing contentment with things as they are?

**II. Pain isn't always bad (7:1-10).**

- A. Funerals are better than parties (1-4).
  - 1. Funerals remind us that a good name is better than precious possessions (1).
    - a. Note: Solomon uses a play on words in these comparisons
      - 1) 7:1 "name" (Hebrew *shem*) and "ointment" (Hebrew *shemen*)
      - 2) 7:5-6 "song" (Hebrew *shir*) and "pot" (Hebrew *sir*) and "thorns" (Hebrew *sirim*).
      - 3) A comparison in English might be "As the noise of *nettles* under the *kettle*."<sup>51</sup>
    - b. *Good name* and *precious ointment*
    - c. *day of death* and *day of birth*
    - d. **Point:** A good name and a life well-lived both have influence beyond their own existence. Perfume spreads its fragrance beyond where it is applied. A life well-lived spreads its influence beyond its duration.
  - 2. Funerals remind us of what is important (2-3).
    - a. *The living lay it to heart*
    - b. *By sadness of face the heart is made glad*

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<sup>50</sup>Wright, 1172.

<sup>51</sup>Kaiser, 83.

3. Funerals remind us that our day of death is coming (4).
    - a. *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning*
    - b. Wise people always keep their funeral in mind.
  4. “To be in the presence of sickness or death has a tendency to bring us quickly to the really crucial issues of life” (Kaiser, 83).
  5. Developing application:
    - a. Tell me about your funeral practices.
    - b. How often do you attend funerals?
    - c. What kinds of things do you think about when you attend a funeral?
    - d. What kinds of things do you want your people to think about at a funeral?
- B. Rebuke is better than entertainment (5-6).
1. A wise man unveils the realities of life.
    - a. *Rebuke*: (גָּזְעָרָה) a correction that may include warning or alarm
    - b. **Proverbs 13:1** *A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.*
    - c. **Proverbs 17:10** *A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.*
  2. A foolish friend masks the realities of life.
    - a. His heart is set on trivialities (5).
      - 1) *The heart of fools is in the house of mirth*: extravagant partying
      - 2) “The song of fools is, if not immoral, yet morally and spiritually hollow, senseless, and unbridled madness.”<sup>52</sup>
    - b. His heart is entertained by those things lacking long-term significance (6).
      - 1) The illustrating proverb: *crackling of thorns under a pot.*
      - 2) Q: How long do thorns burn?
      - 3) Ill.: Our recent acquisition of a wood stove. The hard, heavy, dry wood of the oak tree makes the best firewood. It burns hot and long.
      - 4) His laughter has as much substance in it as flames made from thorns.
- C. Patience is better than revenge (7-10).
1. Patience is necessary for life (8).
    - a. “It is better to wait for God's timing than to be impatient” (Kaiser, 84).
  2. Self-control is necessary for life (9).
  3. Contentment is necessary for life (10).

### **III. Wisdom is always Profitable (7:11-8:15).**

- A. Wisdom is profitable for handling wealth.
1. Wisdom provides more than an inheritance alone (11).
    - a. **Prov 8:35** *For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord,*
    - b. **Prov 16:16** *How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.*
  2. Wisdom gives protection beyond what money can do (12).
- B. Wisdom gives perspective on life's challenges (13-14).

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<sup>52</sup>Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 727.

1. God is sovereign over all things (13).
  2. God is sovereign over prosperity and adversity (the *crooked*) (14).
  3. A helpful paraphrase: “Look with wonder, admire, and silently wait for the result of God’s work! The contrasts of life are deliberately allowed by God so that men should ultimately develop a simple trust and dependence in God. For prosperity and the goods from God’s hand, be thankful and rejoice. But in adversity and the crookedness of life, think. Reflect on the goodness of God and the comprehensiveness of His plan for men” (Kaiser, 84-85).
- C. Wisdom gives perspective on self (15-18).
1. Wisdom is necessary to rightly understand the contradictions of life (15).
    - a. What Solomon observes doesn’t make sense to us.
    - b. Remember that this is man’s perspective *under the sun*.
  2. Wisdom protects us from self-righteousness (16).
    - a. *Do not make yourself too wise* can be understood as “Do not think yourself to be more wise than you are.”
    - b. “The only thing a pseudopious kind of scrupulosity will yield is the judgment of God” (Kaiser, 87).
    - c. A NT example: **Col 2:20-23**<sup>20</sup> *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—*<sup>21</sup> *“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”*<sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?<sup>23</sup> *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*
  3. Wisdom protects us from unrighteousness (17).
  4. Wisdom guides us in the way of true righteousness (18-19).
    - a. *The one who fears God shall come out from both of them*
      - 1) God is not teaching us to find a balance between self-righteousness and unrighteousness.
      - 2) God is seeking to protect us from both because both are sin!
    - b. *Wisdom gives strength to the wise man* (19).
      - 1) *Strength:* (τέλος) having ability to use force, implying confidence and security
      - 2) This strength is compared to one city having 10 wise rulers over it.
- D. Wisdom gives perspective on our sin (20-26).
1. Nobody is perfect (20).
    - a. Psalm 14:1-3
    - b. Romans 3:10-12
  2. You are not better than others (21-22).
    - a. Wisdom gives perspective on criticism
  3. Sin is a potential snare to all (23-26).
  4. The one who lives to please the Lord escapes such snares (26).
- E. Wisdom gives understanding concerning the scheme of life (27-29).

1. *Scheme*: (**חַשְׁבָּן**) “plan, accounting, i.e., a reckoning as a rational thinking in decision making (Ecc 7:25, 27; 9:10+), note: in these contexts, either from God’s cosmic plan ‘the grand scheme,’ or other personal plans of a person”<sup>53</sup>
  2. Wisdom teaches us that pleasing God is our purpose in life (26).
    - a. *He who pleases God escapes*
  3. Wisdom recognizes that man’s depravity leads him away from God (29).
    - a. *God made man upright*: (**עַמְצָר**) that which is right, pleasing to God
      - 1) God’s one “grand scheme” for mankind is that we would live for His pleasure.
      - 2) What has happened?
    - b. *They have sought out many schemes*: (**חַשְׁבָּנִים**) devices, inventions
      - 1) Mankind wants to come up with his own “grand scheme.”
      - 2) Mankind ends up with man “schemes.”
      - 3) Doesn’t this explain why there are so many religions and worldviews?
  4. “Character is not built by multiplied acts of ostentatious worship, nor is it to be presumed to be just naturally a part of all men and women. Unfortunately, just the reverse is true. Foolishness and sin are so much a part of humanity that only by submitting to the Lord in the fear of God will anyone be able to understand both the wisdom of God and the stupidity of wickedness” (Kaiser, 88).
- F. Wisdom transforms those who acquire it (8:1).
1. Wisdom positions a man for significant service.
    - a. *Who is like the wise?*
    - b. *Who knows the interpretation of a thing?*
      - 1) Daniel
      - 2) Nehemiah
  2. Wisdom positions a man for the favor of others.
    - a. *Makes his face shine* is probably parallel to Numbers 6:25.
    - b. “Commentaries and translations uniformly assume that the *wise man’s* face is made to shine, but this disregards the fact that the shining of the face is the bestowal of favor from a more powerful figure (in the benediction, God) to a weaker figure.”<sup>54</sup>
  3. Wisdom changes the spirit of a man.
- G. Wisdom provides skill for serving under authority (8:2-9).
1. Be faithful in your service because of your promise (2).
  2. Be patient in your service because of your position (3-4).
    - a. The king *does whatever he pleases*
    - b. *The word of the king is supreme*
  3. Be prudent in your service because of your opportunity (5-7).
    - a. *Proper time and just way*
  4. Be realistic in your service because of your mortality (8).
- H. Wisdom provides hope for living in a difficult world (10-15).
1. The contradictions of life could discourage us!

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<sup>53</sup>Swanson.

<sup>54</sup>Garrett.

- a. The wicked die and receive honorable burials (10).
- b. Delayed justice encourages evil (11).
2. God's sovereign justice gives us hope!
  - a. God blesses those who fear Him (12).
  - b. God judges those who do not fear him (13).
3. Live life with God's wise perspective.
  - a. What we see is not the final story (14).
  - b. Eat, drink and be joyful because of your relationship with God! (15)

**I. Application for Life**

1. Make a list of the contradictions you struggle with.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  - f.
  - g.
2. How does Ecclesiastes address your struggles?
3. Are yours similar or identical to Solomon's?
4. What does God want you to focus on at this moment?
5. How will God's word make a difference in your life this coming week?

## ***Let Us Live the Life God Create Us For!***

### **Ecclesiastes 8:16 – 12:14**

#### **I. DON'T LET LIFE'S MYSTERIES GET YOU DOWN (8:16-9:9).**

- A. God controls all of life (A nail) (9:1).
  - 1. Many mysteries to life.
    - a. *I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun*
    - b. Defining a mystery: "Something we know somewhat better because of God's disclosure on the subject, but which still contains baffling aspects" (Kaiser, 93).
  - 2. *Their deeds are in the hand of God*
    - a. What difference does this truth make in your unpredictable life?
- B. God places mysteries into life (more goads).
  - 1. Mystery #1: Why is death so unavoidable? (9:2-10)
    - a. Death is imminent (2-6).
      - 1) *it is the same for all . . . death* (2-6)
    - b. Point: The unavoidable nature of death is designed by God to bring us to depend on Him for all things.
  - 2. Mystery #2: Why is life so unpredictable? (11-12)
    - a. Success doesn't always come to those who deserve it!
    - b. *Snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them*
    - c. **Point:** The unpredictable nature of life is designed by God to bring us to depend upon Him!
  - 3. Mystery #3: Why are people so unpredictable? (13-18)
    - a. Wisdom is better than might (16).
      - 1) One wise man can make a difference.
    - b. Wisdom is not always valued (16b)
      - 1) Contradiction: *no one remembered that poor man* (15)
      - 2) *One sinner destroys much good* (18).
- C. God calls us to live life to the fullest in the knowledge that He delights in what we do (7-10).
  - 1. Eat and drink with a cheerful heart (7).
    - a. *Approved what you do:* (רַצָּה) to delight in or find pleasure in
    - b. Joy: (הַנְּתַפֵּשׁ) joyful happiness and cheerfulness
    - c. *Merry heart*
  - 2. Celebrate continually (8).
    - a. What you wear reflects what you believe (8).
    - b. **Q:** If we are people continually celebrating the grace of God, what kind of attire should we wear?
    - c. **Q:** Does this have application for every day of the week?
  - 3. Enjoy your family (9)
    - a. God gave you relationships to enjoy (9).

- b. Illustrated by marriage
- 4. Seize the opportunities God puts in front of you (10).
  - a. **Col 3:23** *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.*
  - b. “Believers are to be rebuked for rejecting God’s worldly gifts and refusing to use them in a proper way. Out of a distorted view of worldliness, wherein every pleasure ordained by God for man’s enjoyment is either denied or begrudgingly used, many have developed a superpious, unhappy, and even miserable existence. This text proclaims liberation to them. Brother and sister: rejoice in God’s good gifts, and ask for His ability rightfully to use them.” (Kaiser, 101).

## II. DON’T LET LIFE’S MYSTERIES SLOW YOU DOWN (9:11-11:6)

<sup>11</sup>*Again I saw that under the sun . . .*

- A. The mystery of time and chance (11-12).
  - 1. Examples of time and chance
    - a. *the race is not to the swift*
    - b. *nor the battle to the strong*
    - c. *nor bread to the wise*
    - d. *nor riches to the intelligent*
    - e. *nor favor to those with knowledge*
  - 2. *but time and chance happen to them all*
    - a. *chance:* (עַמְלָה) an event that happens, which to man appears to be random chance, but because we know God has appointed a time for everything, believers recognize that this too is controlled by Him.
    - b. The point of this phrase is further explained by the following statement.
  - 3. *Man does not know his time*
    - a. Death is the final “chance” we experience.
    - b. Note Solomon’s illustrations:
      - 1) *Fish taken in an evil net*
      - 2) *Birds that are caught in a snare*
    - c. *So the children of men are snared at an evil time*
      - 1) *Evil time:* should be understood as having to do with God’s judgment
      - 2) *Snared:* When God springs His trap and closes time to us, there is no more opportunity to enjoy the life He has given us by loving Him and loving others!
    - d. Make the most of your days!

<sup>13</sup>*I have also seen this example . . .*

- B. The mystery of unpredictable outcomes (13-18)
  - 1. Wisdom is a greater asset than strength (13-16a).
    - a. A poor man’s wisdom is better than a great king’s power (13-16).
    - b. *Wisdom is better than might* (16a)
  - 2. Wisdom is not always headed (16b).
    - a. *No one remembered the poor man*
    - b. *Wisdom is better than weapons of war* (18)
  - 3. Wisdom is better than loud calling (17).
  - 4. A wicked man’s work can destroy the work of many righteous (18).

- C. A collection of observations concerning Folly & Wisdom (10:1- 20)
  - 1. Understanding the nature of folly (1-3)
    - a. A little folly outweighs wisdom and honor (1)
      - 1) Illustrated by dead flies in perfume.
      - 2) We would think that the fragrance of the perfume would be greater than the stench of dead flies, but not so.
    - b. Folly starts in the heart (2).
      - 1) *Inclines him to the left* or away from what is right, ultimately away from God.
      - 2) “The fool is characterized . . . by impulsive disobedience, self-centered arrogance, and rash disregard for the holiness of God.”<sup>55</sup>
      - 3) **Q:** What direction is your life going at this time?
        - a) Toward God and righteousness or away from Him and toward sin?
    - c. Folly reveals itself in the lifestyle (3).
      - 1) *Walks on the road* could be literal or figurative
      - 2) **Prov 13:16** *In everything the prudent acts with knowledge, but a fool flaunts his folly.*
      - 3) **Prov 18:2** *A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.*
      - 4) **Prov 18:6** *A fool’s lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating.*
      - 5) “In all of life he openly proclaims that he is a fool to all who meet him” (Kaiser, 107).
      - 6) **Q:** What are some examples of folly from your life or experience?
  - 2. Dealing with folly in government (4-7, 16-17, 20)
    - a. Calm perseverance quiets an angry ruler (4).
      - 1) *Calmness:* (אֲמָרָה) “a peaceful, contented emotional state or attitude, not angry or worried”<sup>56</sup>
      - 2) *Offenses:* (אַפְּגָנָה) “the doing of wrong and so an offense against a standard”<sup>57</sup>
    - b. A foolish ruler brings trouble to the nation (5-7).
      - 1) **Prov 28:12** *When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves.*
      - 2) **Prov 29:2** *When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.*
      - 3) “Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.” (American author and humorist Mark Twain)
      - 4) “The errors are the natural fruit of partiality, tyranny, and despotism” (Kaiser, 108).
    - c. Incompetent leadership brings woe to a nation (16).
      - 1) “‘Youth,’ has here the meaning of ‘too young’ (H. Hertzberg). The young king is unequal to the responsibilities of his office, as the conduct of the princes

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<sup>55</sup>Ryken, 232.

<sup>56</sup>Swanson.

<sup>57</sup>Swanson.

demonstrates. Drinking at an early hour is a sign of debauchery (Isa 5:11) and a breakdown in leadership (cf. Isa 5:22–23).<sup>58</sup>

- d. Competent leadership brings blessing to a land (17).
  - 1) “Of noble lineage,’ is not in strict opposition to ‘youth,’ it conveys the idea that the king is fully in charge, that he lives up to the standards of a royal family, and is not a parvenu. The contrast between v 16 and v 17 lies in the style of the leaders, not merely in the age or lineage of the king.”<sup>59</sup>
  - 2) **Proverbs 31:4–5** <sup>4</sup>*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink,*<sup>5</sup> *lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.*
  - 3) **Q:** Is this a principle that is applicable for God’s leaders today?
- e. Guard your thoughts and words about leadership (20).
  - 1) *Curse:* (לְלִגְנָה) “blaspheme, revile, i.e., invoke divine harm to an object, implying anger or great displeasure toward the object”<sup>60</sup>
    - a) **1 Samuel 17:43–44** <sup>43</sup>*And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.*  
<sup>44</sup> *The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.”*
    - 2) *A bird will carry voice*
    - 3) **Q:** Can you think of examples of your words being carried to another by a bird?
- 3. Assuming risk in life (7-11).
  - a. Examples of risk
    - 1) Digging pits could mean falling into pits.
    - 2) Breaking down walls could mean snakebites.
    - 3) Quarrying stones could mean injury by stones.
    - 4) Splitting logs could mean harm to oneself.
    - 5) Chopping wood could mean overexertion
    - 6) “These sayings illustrate the uncertainty and the unexpected in life’s affairs. There is always the possibility of an accident, even in the most pedestrian activity. These sayings fit well with 9:11–12 and 10:14 about the “evil time” and human ignorance.”<sup>61</sup>
  - b. Wisdom can remove some of the risk
    - 1) *Wisdom helps one to succeed* (10b)
    - 2) Wisdom is like the charming of a snake. It is best if made before the snake bites (11).
    - 3) So wisdom is most useful before the harm of any risk befalls a person.
- 4. Words have great power (12-15)
  - a. Power to gain favor; power to gain consume (12)

<sup>58</sup> Roland Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, vol. 23A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 105.

<sup>59</sup> Murphy, 105.

<sup>60</sup> Swanson.

<sup>61</sup> Murphy, 102.

- 1) *Favor*: ( Gn) also translated in some places as *grace*
  - 2) *Consume*: ( בְּלֻעַ) swallow up, engulf
  - 3) **Proverbs 14:3** *By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them.*
- b. From beginning to end, the words of a fool are disaster (13).
    - 1) *Foolishness*: ( סָכְלִיתָה) lacking insight, understanding and prudence
    - 2) *Madness*: ( הָזְלִילָה) delusion; and extreme lack of understanding
  - c. Fools talk like experts even though they don't know what is to come (14).
    - 1) *A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?*
  - d. A fool's conduct is as futile as his words (15).
    - 1) <sup>15</sup> *The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.*
    - 2) The walk and talk of a fool is worthless!
5. Miscellaneous proverbs (18-19)
    - a. Slothfulness creates discomfort and concern (18).
    - b. Living life requires money (19).
      - 1) An interpretative challenge here
      - 2) Some options:
        - a) Negatively: "Most commentators think that these proverbs refer to careless rulers. Williams, however, treats v. 19 as an isolated encouragement to work and earn money rather than to sit and feast."<sup>62</sup>
        - b) Positively: "Verse 19 should be rendered, 'People prepare food for pleasure, and wine makes life joyful, but money pays for both.'"<sup>63</sup>
        - c) Negatively: "A return to the description of riotous and ruinous conduct as given in verse 16. לְשֹׁׂחֵךְ "for laughter," as elsewhere בְּשֹׁׂחֵךְ with laughter; comp. for this use of לְ 2 Chron. 20:21; Ps. 102:5.—literally, "they make bread;" i.e., they give banquets, have riotous feasts. עֲשָׂה לְקָם literally, "is therefore used here in a sense different from that in Ezek. 4:15, where it signifies "to prepare bread, to bake bread;" comp. הַשְׁׂלֵךְ in chap. 3:12; 6:12.—**And wine maketh merry.**—The suffix is wanting just as in עֲשָׂים the מְ was left out. Comp. moreover, Ps. 104:15, where an innocent and reasonable enjoyment of wine is meant\* whilst here the allusion is to a perverted and debauching use of it, as in chap. 7:2 ff.—**But money answereth all things.**—That is, to these luxurious rioters, who, counting on their wealth, declare in drunken arrogance that "money rules the world," "for money one can have everything that the heart desires."<sup>64</sup>

D. Counsel for bold investment and industry (11:1-6)

    1. Investment includes risk but will yield a reward (1).
      - a. What happens to bread when thrown into the water?

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<sup>62</sup> Wright, 1188.

<sup>63</sup> Garrett, 336.

<sup>64</sup> John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, Otto Zöckler, et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Ecclesiastes* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 143.

- b. Yet God promises a return.
  - c. **Q:** Do you think this refers to charitable giving, investment of money/resources in business ventures or something else? Why do you think that?
2. Diversifying investments will minimize catastrophic loss (2).
  3. Fear of the unknowns must not paralyze you (3-6).
    - a. Many things in life are beyond your control (3).
      - 1) Rain and trees fall where God designs.
    - b. Many things may never come to pass (4).
      - 1) The wind and clouds may look threatening, but bring nothing.
      - 2) "This saying rests on the fact that there is a propitious time for sowing (wind) and for reaping (dryness). But the "right" time is ever uncertain, and the danger is that if one remains always on the watch for the perfect moment, one will never act. Hence the saying is aimed at those who are paralyzed by their concern for the right time. Once again human ignorance and impotence are scored, but the observation will not tolerate simple inaction. One has to get on with living (cf. v 6 and also 9:10) and give up the luxury of being 'certain.'"<sup>65</sup>
    - c. The work of God is beyond our understanding (5).
      - 1) Compare to **Psalm 139:14–16**<sup>14</sup> *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*
    - d. The work of man will eventually be blessed of God (6).
      - 1) *Sow your seed*
      - 2) *Withhold not your hand*
      - 3) *This or that may prosper!*
      - 4) *Both alike may be good!*
4. **Q:** How do these truths impact the way we do pastoral ministry or serve in our churches?
- E. **Summarize:** Write a one-sentence summary of chapters 9:1-11:7.

### III. FINDING LIFE'S PURPOSE WHILE YOU ARE YOUNG (11:7-12:8).

- A. Remember the brevity of life (7-8)
  1. *Light is sweet . . . pleasant* means that it is good to be alive.
  2. *The days of darkness will be many*
    - a. Q: What darkness is Solomon referring to?
  3. Compare these verses to Christ's words **John 12:35** *So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.*
- B. Rejoice in your younger days (9a).

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<sup>65</sup>Murphy, 109.

1. **Q:** What allows a young believer to live with joy in this broken world?
- C. Remember that you are responsible to God (9b)
1. *Walk in the ways of your heart*
  2. **Q's:**
    - a. Does this verse contradict **Numbers 15:39** *And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after?*
    - b. Why or why not?
  3. The coming judgment of God ought to shape every decision we make.
  4. "The exhortation to follow one's inclinations (v. 9) does not endorse the reckless following of every impulse. Awareness of divine judgment turns the pursuit of joy away from crossing over into sins. The meaning is that one should not be weighed down by vexation over the human condition to the degree that carefree happiness is impossible (v. 10). The days of youth and vigor are few."<sup>66</sup>
  5. "Taken by themselves, the words could present a picture of God as a grim condemning judge, but this would be out of keeping with what the Teacher says elsewhere of God's approval of our enjoyment (e.g., 9:7). Rab, a Jewish teacher of the third century a.d., commented, 'Man will have to give account for all that he saw and did not enjoy.'"<sup>67</sup>
- D. Remove discouragement from your heart!
1. *Vexation:* (וּבָד) "1. **sorrow**, grief, i.e., a feeling of anxiety and sadness in a distressing situation (1Sa 1:16; Ps 6:8[EB 7]; 10:14; 31:10[EB 9]; Pr 17:25; Ecc 1:18; 2:23; 5:16[EB 17]; 7:3; 11:10+); 2. **anger**, fury, i.e., have a strong feeling of displeasure and annoyance based on a wrong, real or perceived"<sup>68</sup>
  2. *Pain*
  3. Point: It seems that some of what Solomon has in mind would include the choices we make that will have negative physical consequences in the future. We're not avoiding pain, but we are to avoid the things that would unnecessarily bring pain.
- E. Passionately serve your Creator while time is on your side (12:1-8).
1. *Remember:* (זִכְרָה) "to remember our Creator calls for decisive action based on recollection and reflection on all that God is and has done for us."<sup>69</sup>
    - a. Remembering is a key to our growth in the life of faith.
      - 1) **Deut 7:17–18**<sup>17</sup> "*If you say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?'<sup>18</sup> you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt.*
      - 2) **Ps 77:11–14**<sup>11</sup> "*I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.<sup>12</sup> I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.<sup>13</sup> Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>66</sup> Garrett, 340.

<sup>67</sup> Wright, 1191.

<sup>68</sup> Swanson.

<sup>69</sup> Kaiser, 118.

*You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.*

- b. “The word “remember” (זִכְרָה) is, of course, a remembering with becoming reverence, as well as with a feeling of gratitude for the many blessings received. It is therefore substantially the same with the *fear* expressly recommended in chap. 12:13, and in substance, at least, in chap. 11:9, second clause.”<sup>70</sup>
  - c. Remembering God our Creator is the key to finding joy in life.
  - d. “To remember Him is no perfunctory or purely mental act. It is to drop of self-sufficiency and commit ourselves to Him. Such at least is what, in Scripture, it demands of man in his pride or extremity. At its best and strongest, remembrance can be a matter of passionate fidelity, a loyalty as intense as the psalmist’s towards his homeland: ‘Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, If I do not set (you) above my highest joy!’[Psalm 137:6] When remembrance means as much as this, there can be no half measures or temporalizing. Youth and the whole span of life are not too much to pour into it. It is in this spirit that we are made to face once more the fact of our mortality.”<sup>71</sup>
2. *Creator*: the title reminds us God as sovereign over all that He has created.
  3. Life and strength will not last forever
    - a. *In the days of your youth*:
    - b. *Before the evil days come*
      - 1) Notice the description of the *evil days*.
      - 2) **Q:** What genre is Solomon using to describe the *evil days*?
      - 3) Solomon uses the allegory of an old, decaying house.
    - c. The point is that we should devote the days of light and strength to serving God.
  4. **Q:** How do we passionately pursue God?

#### IV. LET'S BOIL IT DOWN (12:9-14)

- A. The Ministry of the Preacher
  1. The character of the Preacher
    - a. *Being wise*
    - b. “The term marked him as a member of one of the three great institutions of his day: prophet, priest, and wise man (compare Jeremiah 8:8-9; 18:18; Ezekiel 7:26). The designation was a technical one, marking him as a member of the wise to whom God gave wisdom, just as the priest had the Law and the prophet had the Word.”<sup>72</sup>
  2. The commitment of the Preacher
    - a. *Taught the people knowledge*
      - 1) *Weighing*: to give serious thought, to consider carefully
      - 2) *Studying*: explore, search out, examine
      - 3) *Arranging*: to set in order, to arrange in a meaningful way

<sup>70</sup>Lange, 153–154.

<sup>71</sup>Kidner, 100-101.

<sup>72</sup>Kaiser, 123.

- 4) *Many proverbs*: short, vivid, easy to remember sayings
- 5) Solomon is giving us insight as to how he wrote this book!
- 6) **Q:** Shouldn't our ministries be characterized by that same kind of effort?
- b. *To find words*
  - 1) *Delight*: to take pleasure or enjoyment in something
  - c. *Uprightly he wrote*: he wrote with sincerity and without pretense
    - 1) *Truth*: what is firm or faithful
  - d. *Words of the wise*
    - 1) *Goads*: rods with points, sometimes made from iron, used to move cattle
    - 2) *Nails*: used to fasten tents to the ground or hold timbers together.
    - 3) Point:
      - a) The Word of God gets us moving the right direction in life.
      - b) The Word of God anchors and stabilizes us in life.
  - e. *Given by one Shepherd*
    - 1) Clearly Solomon believes that what he wrote was inspired by God.
    - 2) **Ps 80:1**<sup>1</sup> *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.*
    - 3) "He is the real source of the words of this book; not cynicism, not skepticism, not worldliness—not any of these sources. He gave the ideas and aided Solomon in the composition of Ecclesiastes."<sup>73</sup>
- 3. A warning from the Preacher (12)
  - a. *Beware*: be warned that there is something ahead that is dangerous and has consequences to be avoided
  - b. *Anything beyond these*
    - 1) Is Solomon saying that God's people shouldn't study any other books outside of the Bible?
    - 2) "The contrast is not between the study of canonical versus noncanonical wisdom but between failure to appreciate wisdom on the one hand and excessive zeal for study on the other."<sup>74</sup>
    - 3) "It is not worldly literature, in general, in contrast to the spiritual literature of Divinely inspired writings, against which the author utters a warning (Hengstenberg), but the useless and deceitful literature of others which he contrasts with that genuine wisdom taught by him."<sup>75</sup>
  - c. *Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh*
    - 1) Some people worship study and research, education and learning.
    - 2) **Q:** How do Christians sometimes fall into the trap of *much study*?
    - 3) "Your study of physics and other sciences is not worth a rush, if it be not God that you seek after in them. To see and admire, to reverence and adore, to love and delight in God, as exhibited in his works--this is the true and only

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<sup>73</sup>Kaiser, 125.

<sup>74</sup>Garrett, 344.

<sup>75</sup>Lange, 168.

philosophy; the contrary is mere foolery, and is so called again and again by God himself.”<sup>76</sup>

B. The Conclusion of the Preacher (13-14)

1. Man’s created purpose

a. *The end of the matter*

- 1) Remember 1:13 *And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.*

- 2) This is the summary statement of a lifetime of investigation and experience.

b. *The whole of man*

- 1) *The whole of man* “means ‘this is the whole of man.’ הַלְּכָדָם, like the traditional use of the English “man,” refers to all of humanity corporately and to the characteristics of humanity as they exist in individual women and men.”<sup>77</sup>

2) *Fear God*

- a) To fear God is to live in the constant awareness of the presence of God.
- b) “The fear of God implies our constant consciousness of relation to God. . . . The fool says in his heart ‘There is no God’ and God is not in all the thoughts of the wicked (cf. Psalm 14:1; 10:4). The first thought of the godly man in every circumstance is God’s relation to him and it, and his and its relation to God. That is God-consciousness and that is what the fear of God entails.”<sup>78</sup>

3) *Keep His commandments*

- a) This is the first mention of keeping God’s commands.

1. The instructions and proverbs and conclusions of Ecclesiastes are specifically what Solomon has in mind.

2. But the entire Canon of Scripture is included.

b) **Q:** What is the connection between *fearing* and *keeping*?

1. Keeping God’s commandments is the outward expression of the inward reality.

2. Illustrations:

- c) “No formula of legalism is this ‘keeping of His commandments.’ Neither is it a method of earning favor to be used when facing God. It is a summary of the beginning, middle, and end of life as we know it on this earth: coming to know and trust the living God; receiving the gifts of life’s goods; learning how to enjoy those mundane gifts; understanding the major part of the plan of God; and being guided into joyous and strenuous activity in the art of living, even while portions of life remain enigmatic [hard to understand].”<sup>79</sup>

- 4) “Throughout his book the Teacher has investigated the situation of ‘ādām Now, surprisingly, he affirms that the whole of humanity consists not in its

<sup>76</sup>Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 58.

<sup>77</sup>Garrett, 344.

<sup>78</sup>John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 237-38.

<sup>79</sup>Kaiser, 125.

mortality or ignorance but in its dependence on God. And yet the conclusion is not surprising. It not only flows naturally from all that has gone before but is the book's final look at Gen 2–3. Humanity sought to become like God in disobeying him, but instead they lost the one thing that made them truly human.”<sup>80</sup>

2. God's final judgment
  - a. *every deed or work*
  - b. *every secret thing* or those secret and hidden things we don't want others to see
    - 1) See Romans 2:16; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10
  - c. *whether good or evil*
    - 1) Some secret things are good!
  - d. *God will bring . . . into judgment*
    - 1) **Ro 14:10–12** <sup>10</sup> *Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;* <sup>11</sup> *for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”* <sup>12</sup> *So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*
    - 2) **Q:** How does this truth impact your heart?
  - e. “The last verse of all drives home the point just made, with a final blow that is sharp enough to hurt, but shrewd enough o jot us out of apathy. It kills complacency to know that nothing goes unnoticed and unassessed, not even the things that we disguise from ourselves. But at the same time it transforms life. If God cares as much as this, nothing can be pointless.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Garrett, 344.

<sup>81</sup> Kidner, 107.

**3. Conclusion and Application Questions:**

- a. What is God impressing on your heart as you listen to His Word?
- b. What changes do you need to make in your life?
  - 1) Are you truly living in the fear of God?
  - 2) Are you genuinely seeking to keep His commands?
- c. How does Solomon's conclusion to the whole investigation drive us to Christ?
- d. In 2-3 sentences, write out how God has used the study of Ecclesiastes to convict, challenge and grow your heart.

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- e. How will you practice the things that you have learned?

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**Closing Prayer:** Let's spend time praising the Lord for His Word as we have studied it together. Let us ask our Lord to help us be *doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves*. Let us ask the Spirit of God to move through our hearts, our families and our churches that we may be people who *fear God and keep His commandments*. Let us thank the Lord for privilege of serving His people and churches.