



# Expository Preaching from Ecclesiastes

Dr. Sam Horn

Central Africa Baptist University  
PO Box 21891, Kitwe, Zambia  
Phone: 097-741-5011  
[www.cabuniversity.com](http://www.cabuniversity.com)   [info@cabuniversity.com](mailto:info@cabuniversity.com)



CENTRAL AFRICA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

2022

# LIFELONG LEARNING FOR PASTORS' BLOCK CLASS

THEME: HELPING PEOPLE HANDLE  
PROBLEMS IN A GODLY WAY

DATES: 31 JAN- 4 FEB  
LECTURER: JOHN LEHMAN  
COST: K250

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL/TEXT:  
+260776142875



**Central Africa  
Baptist University**

# **2022 JULY BLOCK CLASS**

**DATES: 10 - 14 JULY**

**REGISTRATION FEE: K250**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL/TEXT:  
+260776142875**

# Leadership Conference 2021: Gospel Advance in Perilous Times

## Expository Preaching Track: Ecclesiastes

Times	Understanding the Gospel	Understanding our Times	Understanding our Times	Understanding our Responsibility	Where Do We Go From Here?
	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:00-9:00	ARRIVAL & REGISTRATION	Alistair Begg	Sam Horn	Chopo Mwanza	Conrad Mbewe
9:00-9:10		BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
9:10-10:10		Alistair Begg	8. Pastors' Block Class	13. Pastors' Block Class	18. Pastors' Block Class
10:10-10:45		BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
10:45-12:00		4. Pastors' Block Class	9. Pastors' Block Class	14. Pastors' Block Class	PANEL: Q&A (All Speakers) Closing Ceremony (All Attendees) @ 11:15-12:00
12:00-13:30	Opening of Conference 12:30-13:30	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
13:30-14:30	1. Pastors' Block Class	5. Pastors' Block Class	10. Pastors' Block Class	15. Pastors' Block Class	
14:30-14:45	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	
14:45-15:45	2. Pastors' Block Class	6. Pastors' Block Class	11. Pastors' Block Class	16. Pastors' Block Class	
15:45-16:00	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	
16:00-17:00	3. Pastors' Block Class	7. Pastors' Block Class	12. Pastors' Block Class	17. Pastors' Block Class	
17:00-18:00	Supper	Supper	Supper	Supper	
18:00-18:30	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	
18:30-20:00	Alistair Begg	Alistair Begg	Conrad Mbewe	Rick Holland	



# **The Way of Wisdom – Life in God’s World**

## *A Theology and Exposition of Ecclesiastes*

### ***Session 1: A Word to the Wise – Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament***

#### **Introduction:**

From the beginning of our story in Genesis to the end of our story in Revelation 21-22, Mankind has had to choose one of two mutually exclusive ways – the way of **Wisdom** or the way of **Folly**. Both ways have a definite starting point and both ways have distinct ends. Choosing a life path is a decision every human being living after the Fall has to make and God has not left us groping in the dark to discover the better way on our own. He has given us clear, plain instruction about the two ways and one of the clearest places where that information is given is in the “Wisdom Books.”

One way begins with the Fear of the Lord and its end is a city whose Builder and Maker is God. In that city is life eternal, meaningful satisfying service to God, and true joy and happiness.

The other way starts with the wisdom of Man and its end is in a lake of fire created for the Devil and those who embrace his deceptive words. In that horrific place is eternal death, unbearable torment, unquenchable agony, and the unrecoverable loss of all that makes life meaningful or pleasant.

Both paths are entered by responding to “words” that one has evaluated and embraced willingly and intentionally. One set of words comes from God who never lies, desires our good, and is set on His glory. The other set of words comes from our eternal adversary, Satan who never tells the truth, desires to destroy and kill us, and is set on his own glory.

God has always provided clear wisdom for His people – and that wisdom has come in the form of divine revelation – “words.” From the very beginning, Man has had to choose which words to believe and which words will guide his steps, shape his thinking, and establish his values and beliefs. The resulting set of values, beliefs, actions, and words is in essence “wisdom” by which men, cultures, nations, and civilizations order their lives. Wisdom is no small matter – it determines the earthly outcome and eternal destiny of every life.

## I. What is Wisdom?

### A. Definition of Wisdom<sup>1</sup>

*Skill or ability gained from God's Word enabling one to live a life of spiritual success and eternal significance.*

1. The English word "wisdom" focuses primarily on the *intellectual aptitude*:
  - *knowledge* (accumulated philosophical or scientific learning)
  - *insight* (discernment)
  - *perception* (awareness; good sense)
2. Biblical definition is determined by usage.

Sampling of how the OT uses the major Hebrew word for "wisdom": (hokmah – 42x in proverbs)

- **Ex. 35:30-33**—expertise in *metal-working, gem-cutting, carpentry and weaving*  
*30 ... the LORD has called by name Bezalel ... 31 and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in **wisdom** and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, 32 to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, 33 in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship.*
- **2 Samuel. 13:3**—adept at *scheming*  
*3 ... Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother. Now Jonadab was a very **crafty** man.*
- **2 S. 20:16,22**—adroit at *diplomacy* (cf. Ec. 9:15-18)  
*16 Then cried a **wise** woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither that I may speak with thee .... 22 Then the woman went unto all the people in her **wisdom**. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and cast it out to Joab.*
- **Is. 10:13**—genius for *tactical warfare*  
*13 [The king of Assyria] saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it [i.e., conquered Israel], and by my **wisdom**.*
- **Jer. 4:22**—adeptness at *doing evil*  
*22 "For My people are foolish, They have not known Me. They are silly children, And they have no understanding. They are **wise** to do evil, But to do good they have no knowledge."*
- **Ezek. 27:8-9**—competent *sailors and ship-caulkers*

---

<sup>1</sup> The material in this section is adapted from notes by Dr. Layton Talbert, Professor of Systematic Theology at Bob Jones University.



8 *"Inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your oarsmen; Your **wise** men, O Tyre, were in you; They became your pilots [ship captains].*  
9 *Elders of Gebal and its **wise** men were in you to caulk your seams...*

3. The Hebrew (*chakmah*; *chakam*) has less to do with intellectual powers and more to do with *practical ability*.

*It is*

- ***adeptness***
- ***proficiency***
- ***skill***

*in whatever area is under consideration in the context.*

4. It involves the application of theory to practice.

*Skill is learned and increases with practice and experience.*

This flexibility explains how Solomon can depict “wisdom” in such contrasting terms:

- Proverbs 4:7—*wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom.*
- Ecclesiastes 1:18—*for in much wisdom is much grief.*

The common denominator is a certain kind of ***skill***—but each is being used in a different context. The wisdom referred to in Proverbs 4:7 is primarily theological and practical in its orientation; the wisdom in Ecclesiastes 1:18 is predominantly philosophical and investigative in its orientation.

5. Biblical wisdom is inseparably linked, but not limited, to knowledge. “A person could memorize the book of Proverbs and still lack wisdom, if it did not affect his heart, which informs behavior” (Waltke, I:77).

Put simply, *biblical wisdom is skill at living life in the presence of God.*

## ***B. Source of Wisdom***

Wisdom that leads to eternal life, spiritual significance, and biblical success comes from God – and He gives it to those who seek Him.

### **Proverbs 2:6-8**

*For the LORD gives wisdom;  
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.  
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,  
Guarding the paths of justice,  
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.*

Wisdom is firmly situated in one's relationship to God and is expressed in two primary ways:

#### 1. Fearing Him

**Proverbs 1:7** – *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

**Proverbs 9:10** – *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

**Job 28:28** *And he said to man, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding."*

**Psalms 111:10** *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!*

- Fearing God is the fountain of true wisdom – origin of wisdom.
- Fearing God is the foundation of true wisdom – first principle of wisdom.

*The "fear of God" in the Bible is not just an inward awe over His greatness, but an outward obedience because of His God-ness—His authority to command, His ability to discipline, and His awareness of all we are and do.*

- **Fear of God = (faith + love) → obedience**
- *"The fear of God is the soul of godliness" (John Murray).*

*Reduced to its simplest and most practical level, the fear of God means **taking God seriously**.<sup>2</sup>*

- **What is the connection of fearing God to wisdom?**

---

<sup>2</sup> Talbert, notes.

- Only when we are rightly related to God, and only as we maintain that right relation to God, will we habitually make the correct choices that characterize *skillful* living—living life the way God says it ought to be lived.

## 2. Embracing His Words

### **Proverbs 2:1-6**

*My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, <sup>2</sup> making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; <sup>3</sup> yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, <sup>4</sup> if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, <sup>5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;*

### **Proverbs 4:20-27**

*My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. <sup>21</sup> Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. <sup>22</sup> For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. <sup>23</sup> Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. <sup>24</sup> Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. <sup>25</sup> Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. <sup>26</sup> Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. <sup>27</sup> Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.*

“Wisdom comes our way through reverence toward, dependence upon, humility before, worship of, and obedience to the God who presents himself in covenant to his people. . . to honor, adore, and trust God in this way, and to acknowledge in prayer that wisdom comes from him alone (James 1:5), is to be wise at the most basic level. For only God is wise in himself and always free of folly; and human wisdom is a gift of God every time, never an unaided human achievement.” (J. I. Packer, “Theology and Wisdom” in *The Way of Wisdom*)

## **C. Scope of Wisdom**

1. Wisdom is grounded in the Fear of the Lord
2. Wisdom is concerned with discerning the order God has designed into His creation – natural order, moral order, and spiritual order.
3. Wisdom focuses on discerning God's ways in specific contexts or particular circumstances.
4. Wisdom is grounded in natural revelation (created order), observed by human culture (ancient wisdom codes) but it is uniquely revealed and accurately explained in special revelation (Scripture).

In other words, wisdom as described in the Scripture touches every realm of life (temporal, eternal, physical, spiritual), every arena of life (moral, ethical, religious, cultural, political, social, public, private), and every aspect of human life (beliefs, values, thoughts, words, and deeds).

#### ***D. Sanctifying Effect of Wisdom***

##### ***Proverbs 2:9-22***

*<sup>9</sup> Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; <sup>10</sup> for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; <sup>11</sup> discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, <sup>12</sup> delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, <sup>13</sup> who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,*

Wisdom is inherently moral in nature – the opposite of wisdom is not ignorance, it is evil or wickedness.

Note:

*Wisdom is characterized by righteousness (Pr. 8:6-8, 13, 20).*

- *Antithesis is not ignorance or lack of education, but **evil**.*
- *Biblical wisdom always does the right thing (not necessarily the “smart” thing).*
- *That brings us full circle right back to the fear of the Lord as the starting point and quintessential expression of biblical wisdom.*

*One may be a genius, intelligent, educated, brilliant, accomplished, erudite, or scholarly without being wise in the biblical (esp. Proverbial) sense, which is essentially theological and sociological*

*skill—adeptness at living life as God says it ought to be lived in right relation to Him and others.*<sup>3</sup>

### ***E. Learning from Wisdom***<sup>4</sup>

***Proverbs 15:2*** *Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.*

Wisdom from God was not intended to be understood without application to daily life. In other words, wisdom was not primarily an intellectual pursuit; rather, it displayed itself in the intense pursuit of truth (what really is as opposed to what appears to be) in order to order one's personal and public life according to God's truth.

In the Bible, wisdom is not just a set of facts to be understood – wisdom is actually personified as a person; specifically portrayed as a teacher. So . . . what are the truths that wisdom teaches and by which a wise man will order his way?

#### ***1. God made everything***

Wisdom reminds us that God is the creator of all things and that by Him all things exist. He created every individual person (Prov. 22:2); He gave man his abilities, physical as well as mental (Prov. 20:12); He fashioned creation and our environment, (Prov 3:19-20).

#### ***2. God observes everything***

God is not just the original designer and creator of the universe and our lives, He is fully aware and deeply interested in what happens in and to His creation (Prov. 15:3). He observes all that happens on the surface of the earth and in the hearts of His creatures (Prov. 15:11).

Far from being a disinterested, disengaged creator, God is fully aware and engaged in the affairs of men (Prov. 5:21).

---

<sup>3</sup> Talbert, notes.

<sup>4</sup> Material in this section adapted from Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books*.

### **3. God evaluates everything**

God's knowledge of all that happens in and with His creation is not merely intellectual or informational – God acts on what He knows. He assigns value (morally, ethically, and spiritually) to every action, attitude, motive, and thought. (Prov. 16:2; 21:2).

There are things that happen in His creation or by His creatures that are morally offensive to Him – 12 different times, Solomon identified or described actions or things as abominations in God's sight (Prov. 3:32; 6:16; 11:1,20; 12:22; 15:8,9,26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10,23).

God has evaluated certain ways as evil or wicked and "hates" them and those that do them (8:13; 15:9; 12:2). He has also identified the ways that are upright and in which He delights (11:20; 12:2).

### **4. God controls everything**

God is always at work in every circumstance, good or bad, in such a way that His ultimate purposes are accomplished (Prov. 16:1,4,9; 19:21; 21:31).

Even powerful kings who rule by might and power are not outside the ultimate control of God (Prov. 21:1; 29:26).

### **5. God blesses the upright and curses the wicked**

**Prov. 3:33** *"The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesses the habitation of the just."*

God promises protection and reward to the righteous (Prov. 10:3; 10:22; 15:25; 25:22). On the other hand, He promises to punish the wicked and not let their unjust deeds go unrequited (Prov. 10:3; 10:27; 15:25; 22:12,14).

### **6. God makes wisdom available**

The Wisdom literature of the Bible makes clear that wisdom (khokmah) is essential for life. God has graciously granted

men the capacity to obtain this wisdom from Himself (Prov 2:6).

In fact, the opening section of Proverbs portrays wisdom as a woman crying out in the street inviting those lacking wisdom and desiring to become wise to enter into her house where they will find abundant wisdom for living (Prov. 1:20-23; 8:4-11; 9:1-6). By the same token, those who turn away and embrace folly will find themselves on the road to death and destruction (Prov 4:10-19; 5:22-23; 7: 21-27; 9:13-18)

## **II. Wisdom Literature in the Ancient World**

In the world of men there are civilizations, nations, and cultures that have existed since the tower of Babel. Each of those nations had a particular set of beliefs and values by which they ordered all of life on the physical, spiritual, and national arenas.

Each civilization or culture had a particular set of “learned wisdom” that they used to order society and this “wisdom” was passed along from one generation to another in order to preserve the “story” of that nation, prepare the next generation to live successfully within the social, religious, and political framework of that culture, and to some degree affect and control the outcomes of life within the religious context of the gods of that civilization.

This learned wisdom was necessary for worship, war, life in community, understanding one’s place in society, and living successfully in the created order.

Every civilization had a way of understanding the created order and had specific ways in which one ought to live in harmony with that created order – living in ways that provided harmony, order, stability, security, justice, and equity were important aspects of this wisdom. Understanding the deities of a particular nation particularly their sphere of influence and what pleased or displeased them was also an important part of learned wisdom. Over time, this “learned wisdom” was written down and became familiar with other nations and civilizations. In fact, almost every major Ancient Near Eastern culture had collections of wisdom literature.



Wisdom literature in the ancient world came from a very different perspective than much of our modern scientific learning. In the ancient world, life was not divided up into hard and fast categories that were intended to be kept apart by clear lines of demarcation. For example, in our day we often separate our private life and beliefs from our public and national beliefs. We divide our national life so that religion is kept apart and separate from politics. Science has its own realm with its own rules and realities that are very different from the ones in religion.

But in the ancient world – these divisions simply did not exist. Life was lived cohesively rather than compartmentalized. Religion was not just present with politics, they were inseparably interwoven. “Private” life did not exist. Life was communal in nature and men viewed themselves intrinsically involved with and part of the created order as opposed to creation being utilitarian in nature – to be used and abused.

The Bible itself references some of these ancient collections of wisdom (1 Kings:4:30-31)

- A. Sumerian** – collected proverbial statements around 2500 BC.
- B. Egyptian wisdom** (Ex 7:22; 1 Kings 4:30)
- C. Edomite wisdom and Arabian wisdom** (Jer 49:7; Obadiah 8)
- D. Babylonian wisdom** (Is 47:10; Daniel 1:4))

However, without question, the wisdom literature of Israel rivaled and excelled above them all. Almost all of the collected wisdom literature of the Ancient world has been forgotten. However, the Wisdom Literature of the Scripture along with her primary sage, Solomon is known throughout the world even unto this day.

Solomon – the Sage of Scripture (1 Kings 4:32) wrote 3,000 proverbs (of which 600 are in Proverbs) and 1005 songs/psalms.

So we need to take time to understand Solomon’s wisdom.

### III. Wisdom and Solomon<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The material in this section is adapted from Talbert, Notes.



### A. *Source of Solomon's Wisdom*

How did Solomon get his wisdom?

- Compare 2 C. 1:7-12 with 1 K. 3:5-15.
- The narrative details reveal that Solomon did not receive divine wisdom because he was perceptive/wise enough to see that he needed this above all else, or even because he necessarily had his priorities right.
- The point of the narrative is that this is not ultimately Solomon's doing at all; it is all—both the gift of wisdom and even his consciousness of his need—is the grace and gift of God (like salvation itself).

### B. *Nature of Solomon's Wisdom*

What was the exact nature of the wisdom God gave to Solomon? "Wisdom" is *skill*—in whatever area is under discussion. The frequent references to Solomon's wisdom are invariably accompanied by express manifestations of that wisdom in some specific area:

- 1 K. 3:16-28—Insight into human nature, aiding his administration of justice  
*<sup>16</sup> Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.... <sup>28</sup> And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that **the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.***
- 1 K. 4:29-34—Powers of observation and artistic expression  
*<sup>29</sup> And **God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore.***  
*<sup>30</sup> Thus Solomon's **wisdom** excelled the **wisdom** of all the men of the East and all the **wisdom** of Egypt. <sup>31</sup> For he was **wiser** than all men--than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. <sup>32</sup> He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. <sup>33</sup> Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish.*  
*<sup>34</sup> And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his **wisdom**, came to hear the **wisdom** of Solomon.*
- 1 K. 5:1-12—Managerial and diplomatic prowess  
*Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, because he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always loved David. <sup>2</sup> Then Solomon sent to Hiram, saying:*

<sup>3</sup> You know how my father David could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the wars which were fought against him on every side, until the LORD put his foes<sup>1</sup> under the soles of his feet.

<sup>4</sup> But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence. <sup>5</sup> And behold, I propose to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke to my father David, saying, "Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for My name." <sup>6</sup> Now therefore, command that they cut down cedars for me from Lebanon; and my servants will be with your servants, and I will pay you wages for your servants according to whatever you say. For you know there is none among us who has skill to cut timber like the Sidonians.<sup>7</sup> So it was, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, for He has given David a **wise** son over this great people!<sup>8</sup> Then Hiram sent to Solomon, saying: I have considered the message which you sent me, and I will do all you desire concerning the cedar and cypress logs. <sup>9</sup> My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon to the sea; I will float them in rafts by sea to the place you indicate to me, and will have them broken apart there; then you can take them away. And you shall fulfill my desire by giving food for my household. <sup>10</sup> Then Hiram gave Solomon cedar and cypress logs according to all his desire.<sup>11</sup> And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand kors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty<sup>1</sup> kors of pressed oil. Thus Solomon gave to Hiram year by year. <sup>12</sup> So the LORD gave Solomon **wisdom**, as He had promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty together.

- 1 K. 10:1-9—Mastery of monarchical majesty and ceremonious royalty

Note: 1K 10:4-5—when the queen of Sheba had **seen** all the **wisdom** of Solomon, the house he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbearers, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her.

- 1 K. 10:23-24—Sagacity of speech  
So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.

<sup>24</sup> Now all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.

The text is punctuated by repeated reminders that Solomon's wisdom came from God:

- 3:12, 28
- 4:29
- 5:7, 12
- 10:24

### **C. Incongruity of Solomon's Wisdom and Folly**

Yet a bothersome question persists: *If Solomon was so wise—with divinely endowed wisdom, no less—how could he have so idolatrously strayed from the Lord?*

- Perhaps the most effective way to answer that question is to turn it around on ourselves.
- The Queen of Sheba exulted, *"Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!"*
- A thousand years later, Another called His own generation to account with this reminder: *"The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here"* (Mt. 12:42).
- We have full and unfettered access to the complete revelation of God, and to Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). How could we possibly wander idolatrously from the Lord? Yet we do
- We fail, or cease, to heed the wisdom we have been given—just as Solomon did
- Think of the *appeals* made by Wisdom in Proverbs. But wisdom must be heeded to work.

- Possession or access of wisdom does not guarantee its exercise.

*If one should ask, "If Solomon is the wise author, how could he have died such a fool?" let it be noted that he constructed his own gibbet on which he impaled himself (19:27—Cease listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge)—that is, he ceased listening to his own instruction. Spiritual success today does not guarantee spiritual success tomorrow (Bruce Waltke, Proverbs, I:36).*

### **D. Solomon's Departure from Wisdom for the Path of Folly**

- We often think of Solomon's "apostasy" as a major element of his reign. Yet, it is mentioned almost only as a postscript to an incredible testimony to his greatness.
- After the early favorable assessment of Solomon's character and God's initial appearance to Solomon near the beginning of his reign (1 Kings 3:3-15), God appeared again 20 years

into his reign and reaffirmed the promises and warnings of the Davidic covenant (1 Kings 9:1ff.; cf. 9:1, 9:10).

- If it were not for a brief passage in 1 Kings 11—at the very end of the account of Solomon’s reign—we would not know of his lapse into idolatry at all.
  - Chronicles does not mention it.
  - 1 Kings 11: 4 specifies that it occurred “when he was old.”

So – how did such a wise man become such a fool?

*“Solomon’s (and Israel’s) spiritual deterioration did not occur overnight.... The author of Kings drops hints that Solomon made certain compromises early on that set the tone for his future behavior and attitudes”:*

1. Failure to guard his own heart (Prov. 4:23).
2. His marriages to foreign women (idolaters) in contradiction to God’s express prohibition of such marriages.
  - Apparently, Naamah the Ammonitess—Rehoboam’s mother (1 K. 14:21)
  - Daughter of Pharaoh was after he came to the throne (1 Kings 3:1)
  - Multiplied wives (700) and concubines (300) in express disobedience to God’s command and disregard for God’s revealed wisdom.
  - *1 Kings 11:1–13 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, 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. <sup>9</sup> And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice <sup>10</sup> and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. <sup>11</sup> Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. <sup>12</sup> Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. <sup>13</sup> However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen."*

3. Worship of false gods at high places (1 Kings 3:3) and personal participation in idolatry and sacrificial practices that were abominable to the Lord (1 Kings 11:1-12)

We do not benefit from wisdom that we do not heed any more than Solomon did. Wisdom is God's gift; wisdom heeded is God's intention. To rely on God's gifts themselves, without relying on God Himself in our use of those gifts, is presumptuous, dangerous, and even idolatrous.

Wisdom possessed can be as valuable or as useless as a compass in the pocket; if it is to actually navigate one's way and govern one's choices, it must be accessed, consulted, and followed. The magnetic pole of God's wisdom is Christ (Col. 2:3)—the "Word of God"—and the directive *expressions* of God's wisdom are the words of God in Scripture (Col. 3:16; cf. Jer. 8:9).

#### **IV. Wisdom Literature in the Biblical Story**

The Old Testament Wisdom literature consists of five books contained in the section of the Hebrew Scripture known as "The Writings."

The books are, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

The third part of the Hebrew Scriptures, The Writings, comes after the Law (Torah) and the Prophets. Generally, this section of the Hebrew OT was intended to function in a way that provided both hope and guidance for a nation that was still awaiting the arrival of God's promised Messiah.

#### ***A. The Pentateuch or the Torah***

The Pentateuch contained the foundation of the story of the nation beginning with God's original purpose for His creation and His image-bearer, the 1<sup>st</sup> Adam to fill up the earth and rule over it in a way that would bring glory to God and blessing upon the earth that was sourced in the original blessing God bestowed upon His creation. However, sin entered through Satan's temptation of Eve and Adam's subsequent trespass and the result was a universal curse on creation marked by decay, disobedience, and death. However, God's provision of an atoning sacrifice and the promise of a coming anointed appointed champion changed everything and infused hope into the human race.

From the Pentateuch we learn that Adam's race would eventually result in 70 nations out of which God would call one nation (Abraham's descendants) through whom the champion would arise and rule the nations of the world and bring blessing on the earth (Ps 2). Later we discover that there is one tribe, Judah, out of which the champion would come. The Pentateuch contains the story of the founding of this nation, its sojourn and slavery in Egypt and the rise of its first champion – Moses who would lead this nation in an amazing exodus from Egypt and lead them on a 40 year journey through the wilderness to the land promised by God to Abraham some 400 years earlier.

The Pentateuch contains important narratives that explain the identity, nature, exclusivity, and worship of Israel's God, Yahweh. It establishes the means and manner by which Israel would worship him and it reveals that this nation is God's special nation – a nation of king-priests whose destiny is to rule the nations with blessing from Yahweh. Guiding them to this destiny is a "Torah" from God – a book that would be their wisdom in the sight of the nations (Dt 4:1-14). If they obeyed this good law God would provide, protect, and abundantly bless them in the sight of the surrounding nations but if they disobeyed and departed from



the gracious “torah” God had given and they had promised to obey, then God would punish them with devastating curses and eventual removal from the land He had given them (Dt 27-28).

## ***B. The Prophets***

The prophetic writings were divided up into the former and latter prophets. The former prophets dealt with the history of the Nation of Israel after Joshua led them into the Promised Land. The former prophets are the “historical books” that begin with Joshua and Judges and tell the story of how the nation fared in Canaan, the rise of the kingship in Israel through Saul and David, the establishment of David’s city, house, and throne. These books also describe the history of Solomon’s reign and then tell the tragic story of the dividing of this nation after his death as a consequence of his idolatry and disobedience.

The books of Kings describes the nation’s further disobedience and descent into idolatry led by her kings. Throughout this time, God raised up prophetic voices to warn the people of His judgment for departing from the Torah and to plead with them to repent and return to the Lord. Tragically, the nation resisted and instead of ruling the nations, they would rule over her as cruel captors. By the end of the prophets, this once great nation of 12 tribes has been reduced to 2 small tribes located in the remnants of a once great city worshipping in a small, unimpressive rebuilt temple – and David’s descendants who were once kings, have been reduced to governorships ruling under the authority of foreign powers – first Persians, then Greeks, and finally Romans.

In all of this, there was a need for this nation to remember the God who called them into existence and His purposes and plans for them.

It is to this nation for this purpose that the Wisdom literature was given:

Ruth may be the preface to this section – reminding the reader that God’s purposes through David have not fallen nor has He forgotten His promise to send His anointed, appointed champion.

### ***C. The Writings***

#### ***1. Psalms stands as the Liturgy of the Promise (Ezra compiler)***

- Functions as a Journal for living according to Torah
- Functions as a Divine Playlist affirming the Davidic Covenant set in a prelude (1-2), five books, and a postlude (46-50)

#### ***2. Proverbs stands as wisdom for life in the midst of competing worldviews. (Solomon)***

- A theology of Wisdom
- A description of two ways (a worthy walk)
- An assurance of hope for the wise – for those who fear God, turn away from evil, and live in the light of God's future promise.

#### ***3. Ecclesiastes stands as an explanation of how life works and what followers of Yahweh can expect as they experience "life under the sun." (Solomon)***

- Following God in the face of contradictory experience of life.
- Trusting God in the midst of the enigmas of life.
- Fearing God in the face of all the pressures and demands of life.

#### ***4. Job stands for fearing God and following the wisdom of Torah in the face of intense suffering and spiritual accusation. (Solomon)***

- Wise men described – Job feared God and turned away from evil.
- Wise men tested – Job was tested at every point over an extended period of time.
- Wise men accused – Job's friends, Job's wife, Job's ancient enemy.
- Wise men questioning and submitting – I have heard of you with my ear but now I have seen you with my eye!
- Wise men rewarded – God will keep His word.



### ***5. Song of Solomon – wisdom for worship and for marriage (Solomon)***

- Depicts the beauty and sanctify of marital love – faithfulness leads to pleasure, adultery leads to death.
- Describes the passionate love and pleasure of Yahweh for His people in terms that human beings can understand through the metaphor of human marriage.

## **V. Wisdom as a Way of Life**

So what does a person who has embraced wisdom do in life? How does he live life on a day-to-day basis? How do you recognize such a man?

### ***A. He Fears God***

- The Fear of the Lord occurs 18x in Proverbs. The idea here is that wisdom comes from God and it is part of His attributes – God isn't just wise – Wisdom is a component of who He is as God.
- Wisdom therefore characterizes all that God does – by definition what God chooses to do in all that He does is wise.
- Consequently, those who realize the true nature of God and the complete veracity of His Word demonstrate that they “fear God” and desire to embrace this wisdom as a guide for life.
- So a wise man is one who recognizes the truth of God's existence, embraces the exclusivity of God as the only God there is, understands the true nature of God as all wise, all powerful, all righteous, and all loving at all times. And because he fears God, this man finds and enjoys life (Prov. 19:23).

### ***B. He Follows God***

- A man who fears God has come to understand the truth of God's Word, the greatness of God's power, the awesomeness of God's sovereignty, and the graciousness of God's love – and so he willingly follows the counsel of God, obeys the commands of God, and walks in the way of God as opposed to the way of sinners, the counsel of those who deny God, and the values of those who scorn and mock God.

- This man proves his delight in the Law of God by meditating on it day and night and by living according to its instruction.

### ***C. He Trusts God***

- This man does not lean on his own understanding for life and the choices that regularly present themselves during the course of life. Instead, he wholeheartedly (unreservedly) trusts in the wisdom of God revealed in the words from God – the Torah.

### **Conclusion:**

God has revealed Himself and His will for mankind in His Word. The Torah of God reveals what God's expects of men who belong to Him and the Law contains both promises for obedience and warnings against disobedience.

Wisdom literature however, reveals both why men should embrace the Law and how they should go about incorporating it in daily living.

Being wise is not a complicated matter. It is not easy, to be sure. However, it is not complicate nor is it hidden from our understanding. Wisdom for life has been clearly laid out by God in these five books, particularly in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The Bible gives us the information we need, it provides the motivations we desire, it shows us the reward of heeding as well as the consequences for disregarding Wisdom from above. However, what these books cannot do is provide the inner strength needed for consistent, constant obedience – for that we need a new and better covenant than that of Moses. And that is what we find in Jesus, the One greater and wiser than Solomon!

# Wisdom for Life Under the Sun

## *A Biblical and Theological Perspective of Ecclesiastes*

### Session 2

#### Introductory Matters<sup>6</sup>

Jewish custom is to read Ecclesiastes on the third day of the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles – this is a feast during the annual harvest season and it commemorates and recalls Israel's experience in the wilderness (Lev. 23:33-43). When Nehemiah reinstituted this feast for Israel, it was a time of great national rejoicing (Neh. 8:9). So ... the fact that this book was the Scripture chosen to be read at a time of national rejoicing is a reflection and perhaps a hint as to how the book should be understood – not a book of pessimism or frustrated futility ... but one of thankful and joyful remembrance that God is our provider, protector, sustainer, and shepherd even as we walk through the wilderness that is often what life is like.

While this book certainly is a treatise about life under the sun, woven within its pages is an even greater and more significant treatise about the God who orders and governs all that happens under the sun! Qoheleth reminds us in these chapters of:

<b><i>Aspect of God</i></b>	<b><i>References</i></b>
God's sovereign control over man	1:13; 2:26; <b>3:1,11,14,18</b> ; 5:18-20; 6:1-2; 7:14,26; 8:15; 9:1,7
God's providential grace	<b>2:24-26</b> ; 3:13; 5:18-20; 8:15
God's eternity	3:11,14; 12:5,7
God's creatorship	3:11,14; 7:29; 8:16-17; 11:5; <b>12:1,7</b>
God's perfection	<b>3:14</b> ; 7:29; 8:16-17; 11:5
God's justice and holiness	2:24-26; <b>3:17</b> ; 5:4,6; 7:26,29; 8:2,12-13; 11:9; 12:14
God's abode	<b>5:2</b>

<sup>6</sup> Material in this lecture has been drawn from the following sources: *Ecclesiastes: The Philippians of the Old Testament*, William Barrick; "Ecclesiastes" by Richard Blecher Jr., in *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*; "Recovering the Message of Ecclesiastes Today" by Stephen Wellum in the SBJT (vol. 15 no.3 Fall 2011); "Shepherding Wind and One Wise Shepherd: Grasping for Breath in Ecclesiastes" by Jason S. DeRouchie in the SBJT (vol. 15 no.3 Fall 2011); "Everything is Vapor: Grasping for Meaning Under the Sun" by A. B. Caneday in the SBJT (vol. 15 no.3 Fall 2011); "Wisdom and its Literature in Biblical-Theological Context" by Graeme Goldsworthy in the SBJT (vol. 15 no.3 Fall 2011); and "Redeeming the Problem Child: Qoheleth's Message and Place in the Family of Scripture" by Brian Borgman in the SBJT (vol. 15 no.3 Fall 2011). NOTE: Due to the nature and purpose of the class, the material presented here in some cases is directly from the sources above and this footnote serves as recognition of and credit to the sources listed above.

God's omnipresence and omniscience	<b>5:2,6; 8:2,16-17; 11:5; 12:14</b>
God's omnipotence	<b>7:13; 11:5</b>
God's preservation of His people	<b>7:26; 8:12-13</b>
God's required reverential fear	<b>3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:1,13</b>
God's required obedience before/above sacrifice	<b>5:1,4,7; 8:2; 12:1,13</b>
God's Word	<b>12:13</b>

## Authorship/Date

Solomon / 940-930 BC

The authorship of Ecclesiastes has been greatly debated – perhaps more than any other OT book. Conventional thinking is that it was written by someone other than Solomon and at a much later date than Solomon's reign.

### *Arguments for a Post-Exilic Date:*

Arguments for a post-Solomonic date revolve around the idea that there could not be that many kings before Solomon (he was the second King in Israel) and Eccl 1:16 seems to indicate a situation where the author is comparing himself as having more wisdom and experience than “all who were before him” – something that seems overplayed if only David preceded him. However, this linguistic expression is commonly used to describe the epitome of wisdom and can be used to refer to someone who excels above all others at something (1 Kings 14:9; 16:25,30). Furthermore there were at least 3 non-Israelite kings over Jerusalem before David (Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18; Adonizedek, Josh 10:1; and Araunah, 2 Sam 24:23).

A second argument advanced for a post-Solomonic date is that the nature of the Hebrew employed by the author appears to fit the Hebrew style of the post-exilic period rather than the earlier style that would have been characteristic of Solomon's day. Some have argued that the Hebrew of Ecclesiastes represents the latest stage of Hebrew linguistic development of any OT book. This is primarily (not exclusively) due to the Aramaisms found in the book. However, since Israel and Aram would have come in contact as early as 1100 BC and since Solomon would have been familiar with the language and literature of Aram, it is entirely possible that he utilized Aramisms in his writing.

### *Arguments for Solomonic authorship and Early date:*

Internal Evidence for Solomonic Authorship is strong – the book is attributed to the son of David, King in Jerusalem (1:1, 12). Only four kings in Israel's history ruled over Jerusalem: Saul, David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. Of the four, only Solomon fits the description of a king with enough wisdom, wealth, and leisure/peace time to pursue the experiential knowledge described throughout the book. Additionally, whenever the term "Son of David" is utilized in the OT it has reference to a biological son of David.

Note: Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes and Ezra arranged it as part of the "Wisdom Literature" of the OT – primarily Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Songs. Ezra was a ready scribe in the Torah and he was responsible for reintroducing the worship liturgy and the Torah literature/tradition to Israel after the Exile. He arranged the Pentateuch to reintroduce the Torah as foundation for all that Israel believed and that Torah was to be Israel's wisdom in the sight of the nations (Dt . 4:6) and in the Pentateuch, Ezra weaves an eschatology of hope by pointing to the "latter days." The Psalter was also arranged by Ezra to point to the foundational covenant God made with Israel – the Davidic covenant – and the coming Son of David who would regather Israel and fulfill the Messianic Mission as articulated in Psalm 2 and Psalm 8. The third major component of Ezra's literary arrangement for Post-Exilic Israel were the Wisdom books – each describing how Israel was to function in and navigate through life under the sun with Torah as her wisdom.

As Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, he uses a common literary device in which a narrator appears to give both the prologue and epilogue of the book (3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative). In the prologue (1:1-11), Solomon presents the problem that the wisdom he is about to give is intended to solve. In the epilogue (12:9-14), Solomon presents a summary of the answer that he has given earlier in the book (1:12-12:8). The bulk of the book is given in first person narration through the mouth of Qoheleth. While some have argued that there are actually two different individuals in view, I believe that Solomon is the sole author of the entire book and that he frames his words in the prologue and epilogue in third person narration and he frames his words in the main section of the book in first person narrative through the mouth of a person described as a "Preacher/Teacher – Qoheleth". It is my opinion that Solomon is actually Qoheleth.

## Location/Function in Canonical Biblical Wisdom Literature

Following the sustained darkness of the time of judgement predicted and described by the early and later prophets (kings and prophets), the reader of the OT needs clarity on how to maintain fervent faith, even in the midst of ongoing darkness that does not appear to be lifting. After the amazing promises of the covenants and the encouraging beginnings with David and Solomon, the nation has cast aside its wisdom and has embraced the idolatry, immorality, and injustice that marked the surrounding nations. Consequently, like Adam, they were driven out of the Promised Land and sent into captivity. When they returned to their beloved city, it appeared broken, barren, and ruined much as did creation after the Fall. How was this small, pitiful remnant to navigate life and nation after such a fall from power and grace? Where would they find wisdom to guide them, preserve them, and protect them from the same sins and fate that befell their forefathers? Answer: A renewed understanding of and commitment to Torah!

Ezra introduced a body of inspired literature to this Remnant in order to help them remain resolute in their confidence that God remained sovereign over His creation and that He would, in time, right all wrongs through the coming of a royal redeemer – His appointed champion.

The Writings begin with Ruth and present this royal champion through His descendent, Jesse. The rest of the books in this section of Scripture lay out the wisdom God's people would need to live lives marked by wisdom, waiting, and joy-filled worship.

Specifically, Ecclesiastes acknowledges to such a nation that life is in fact enigmatic and perplexing – and God's people are not exempt from this reality. The curse created a world where rebel and remnant together experience both birth and death, love and hate, peace and war, and fullness and emptiness as they experience life under the sun.

God has chosen to use the enigmatic and unpredictable nature of life under the sun to break human pride and to cause people to seek for answers that come from a wisdom that is from above as opposed to the wisdom found among the nations. Shalom would only come as a result of embracing the right set of words .... Wisdom from God .... The wisdom of Torah. And access to such wisdom came only to those who were rightly related to the author of those words of life – YHWH. This is why the “fear



of the Lord” is such an important component of wisdom in the Wisdom literature. “Fear of the Lord’ is scriptural code for those who follow YHWH and who have truly embraced Him as their God. For such people, there is “gain” or profit in living under the sun ... There is more gain in the wisdom of Torah than there is in folly; more gain in light than darkness (2:13). Why? Because those who fear God today in this life are enabled by wisdom to enjoy this world as a gift from God and channel of worship back to Him. Those who embrace the wisdom of Torah not only navigate this life but will escape the coming wrath of YHWH in the next.

The fear of YHWH leads one to God’s approval which results in freedom to delight and rejoice in this life as we wait with confident expectation for the world to come. *“Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do”* (9:7; 2:26; 7:26).

All of God’s providence and working in this world, retain and contain a measure of unsearchableness unavailable to finite men (Rom 11:33-36) . . . who has known the mind of God?

Qoheleth’s call is to turn from striving against the creator to trusting God, who alone is in control and who alone is willing and able to help those who love and fear him and who live and walk according to His ways.

### ***Canonical Point of the Book in the Storyline of Wisdom***

God gave wisdom to Adam and Eve in the form of “words.” Satan came with alternative deceptive words that “appeared wise” and promised wisdom to Adam and Eve if they embraced them. In Genesis, these two sets of words set forth two distinct moral categories – wisdom and folly – and two distinct destinations for those who embraced them – life and Shalom or pain and death and eventually judgement.

Adam and Eve chose the wrong words and as a result, God placed His good creation under a curse. The ground that once produced only benefit and blessing for mankind now grew hard against them and grew thistles and thorns, a symbol of the curse. (NOTE: Jesus, when breaking the curse, wore the symbol of the curse on his head – a crown of thorns). As a result of following the wrong wisdom and failing to fear YHWH, Adam and mankind after him lived in pain and sorrow and were all afflicted by death.

Adam gave “words” to his sons and daughters and the sons of Cain chose to reject those words and to follow the wisdom of the Serpent and Seth and his descendants followed the words of Adam and by the time of Enosh (Seth’s son and Adam’s grandson), men began to formally follow the ways and words of YHWH (this is what it means to call upon the name of the Lord) – Gen 4:26.

God’s wisdom through Adam’s word’s and instruction was passed down through the line of Seth and eventually to Noah and through Shem up to Abraham and through the Patriarchs. In contrast, there were those who followed the words of the Serpent through the line of Cain and eventually those nations whose collective rebellion against the “words” of YHWH at Babel displayed that they were followers of the wisdom of this world found in the words of the Serpent.

Moses becomes the next major individual who receives divine wisdom via Words from YHWH. The decalogue consists of ten words of life – and eventually expanded into a law-code as well as a body of religious ceremonies and sacrifices that would bring Israel into the enviable position of the nation chosen by God to be His people and with whom He would dwell. The sacrifices were intended to be the symbol of the means by which God would cleanse His people of their sin and impurity so they could in fact dwell with Him without being harmed or consumed. The feasts and ceremonies were intended to symbolize the joyful and loving relationship and fellowship this nation enjoyed with YHWH. And the Torah was to be the wisdom by which this nation, in its national life and worship, would display the pathway back to Eden for the rest of the nations.

By the return of Israel to the Promised Land and the establishment of David and then Solomon after him, God was displaying His divine commitment to fulfill the promise made to Adam and Eve that there would be a Messianic Redeemer who would crush the serpent, break the curse, and restore Mankind to the Garden. And to guide this nation as to how Torah applied to all of life, even its most enigmatic and painful parts, God granted Solomon wisdom – and this wisdom is in the Wisdom books collated and arranged by Ezra.

- Adam and Solomon are compared as original sources of Wisdom



- Moses and Ezra are compared as applications and further instruction of that wisdom for God's nation and God's people.

Ultimately the goal and end-point of Torah, the covenants, the prophets, and the OT Wisdom Literature is Messiah – the ultimate fulfillment of the covenants, the perfect keeper of Torah, and the epitome of Divine Wisdom – in him are all the promises Yes! (1 Cor 10:31)

## Structure

Prologue: 1:1

Indicative Motto "All is Hebel": 1:2

Introductory Poem: 1:3-11

Investigation of Life: 1:12-6:9

Conclusions about Life: 6:10-11:6

Concluding Poem: 11:7-12:7

Indicative Motto "All is Hebel": 12:8

Epilogue: 12:9-14

## Purpose

The primary and foremost **purpose** for Ecclesiastes is to teach wisdom (2:24; 3:12,22; 5:18-19; 8:1-9; 11:1-6). For Qoheleth, wisdom finds its origin and its goal in the fear of YHWH – and this reverential fear expresses itself in the understanding, treasuring/valuing, and obeying of God's words.

Adam did not value God's words as wisdom and consequently plunged the earth under the tyranny of sin and the devastating brokenness and futility of the curse (imposed on creation by the Creator). And God's

people are not immune to the pain, futility, and confusion of life on a sin-cursed planet. Where will they find wisdom to navigate life under the curse? They will find that wisdom where Adam lost it – by knowing, valuing, obeying God’s Words!

The primary **goal** of the author of Ecclesiastes is that believers would feel the weight of the curse and the burden of life’s enigmas and would turn to God and rest in His purposes, delight in His ways, and fear Him in this broken, sin-cursed world while constantly living for and looking to the promised world to come.

Life under the sun is compared to “chasing after the wind” or trying to “shepherd the wind.” God alone can shepherd the wind and has done so effectively for all time – and as the great shepherd he will continue to do so. But as our good shepherd, we can rest under His sovereign providence, protection, provision, and promise. And through the coming of His good shepherd, Messiah, God will right all wrongs, establish peace, and make sense of all of life’s enigmas.

The primary **point** to the book is to motivate a new generation of Israelites who are “under-the-sun, curse-tasting believers” to fear God and to look to Him for satisfaction and shalom even when life makes no sense.

## **Theological Message**

Precisely because Ecclesiastes is inspired Scripture, it has important vital teaching as to how God’s people who belong to him and who are under His sovereign care must approach life on a planet that He placed under a curse.

Why the curse? All of creation has been placed under a curse by the Creator. The curse was the consequence of sin but it did not originate with Satan – God placed His own creation under the curse. And in doing so, all those who dwell under the sun would be affected by that curse – rebel and remnant alike!

Life on this sin-cursed planet is irreparably broken: Things are horrifically twisted, inexplicably missing, and foul and wicked. God has subjected His creation to a curse that results in its global disfigurement, distortion, deficiency, and deformity as a cosmic display of His wrath on sin and on sinners.

Things are twisted and missing (1:5) and this actually prompts man to ask the reason why life is so and to seek resolution. However, apart from Divine revelation, mankind cannot hammer out the twisted parts, supply the missing parts, or cleanse the polluted parts (1:15) – not even a global search from wisdom under the sun can provide “shalom.” Rather, such wisdom produces additional grief and frustration. How does one solve a puzzle when important puzzle pieces are missing?

The curse is intended to drive men to look for a different wisdom than what is found under the sun. And this wisdom has been given by God to Solomon and Solomon is making that wisdom available to all through inspired words that make up Ecclesiastes. However, this wisdom will only be accepted by those who first “Fear YHWH.” They alone will find “shalom” in this life and joy in the life to come.

God is the Shepherd who has given wise words, that like goads prod God’s people in the right direction and like nails firmly fix and anchor His people so they are steadfast and sure in a mixed up and confusing world (12:9-14).

And the summation of God’s Wisdom through Solomon for finding shalom in life under the sun is this: Fear God and Keep His commandments . . . and leave the ultimate evaluation to God.

The message is simple but not simplistic. Shalom is found in a different wisdom than that found under the sun. The “shalom-producing” wisdom is one that comes from YHWH and is found in Torah – and only those who love YHWH will embrace this wisdom and find Shalom.

Ezra has introduced the post-exilic remnant to the foundation of wisdom – Torah. He has reminded them in the Psalter of the fountain of this wisdom – the coming Messianic Redeemer who, in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, would be endued with the Spirit of Wisdom and would reign on earth in righteousness and peace. In Job he has shown how only Torah is sufficient to answer the destructive and painful nature of life; proverbs reminds the reader to embrace Lady Wisdom who will be like a virtuous wife and bring abundant shalom, Song of Solomon displays the joy-filled nature of the relationship one has with YHWH through embracing and displaying Torah, and Ecclesiastes displays the value of Torah in navigating life as a true follower of YHWH.

No wonder the Jewish Rabbis chose the book of Ecclesiastes as the centerpiece for the feast of Sukoth/Tabernacles.

## **Flow of the Book**

Because Ecclesiastes is inspired Scripture, it has an important vital teaching and instruction as to how God's people who belong to him and are under his care must approach life on a sin-cursed planet.

So . . . how are we to understand the flow and structure of Ecclesiastes?

1. We must first interpret the key term “hebel” or vanity, futility, or meaningless as it has been translated in various translations. The best translation is probably the concept of “vapor”.

The author does not view life as meaningless or futile – rather he affirms that life in a sin-cursed world while under God's providence, is still often elusive, enigmatic, frustrating, and full of pain while we exist under the sun. And because we do not have the ability to see or understand what is going on “above the sun” we must trust God and walk before Him in joyful obedience for life to be profitable and in order that we know and experience “shalom.”

“Hebel” is not due to the preacher's lack of knowledge – rather he is making the point that it is the universal experience of all image-bearers. No one fully knows, perceives, or understands God's sovereign purposes (cf., Job) and many image-bearers do not even know the God who stands behind those purposes.

Precisely because we are creatures and not the Creator . . . and because we ourselves have been affected by the curse, life is often inscrutable to us. Believers are not exempt from the “vaporishness” of life. We are not shielded from the temporal effects of the curse and even of sin as we navigate life for His glory.

And . . . Ecclesiastes gives us insight into how life in this context works . . . and more importantly how we are to grow in our love for, trust in, and commitment to YHWH.

2. We must remember that Ecclesiastes is designed as “Wisdom literature” – the purpose of which is to teach us how to live skillfully as God’s people.

Ecclesiastes teaches us how to live for God’s glory in the midst of the enigmatic nature of life.

- We must view everything from an eternal perspective.
- We must live circumspectly through the course of our life.
- We must enjoy the good parts of life and consider the difficulty and pain in life as opportunities to develop and display character that is shaped by wisdom from above rather than wisdom from below.

Life under the sun is coming to an end . . . we will all stand before God’s judgement throne no matter who we are . . . therefore, we must live this life in the “fear of YHWH” by walking joyfully and humbly before Him and using the circumstances He arranges for our lives as means by which we bring glory to Him.

3. We must identify Key Metaphors and Literary Terms

*a. Hebel – “vanity”*

- Note that this phrase brackets the book (1:2-12:8). Furthermore, this term “hebel” occurs five times in 1:5 – it is a key metaphor for the book.
- The term occurs programmatically or structurally throughout the book (1:2,14; 2:11,15,17,19,21,23,26; 4:4,8,16; 5:10; 6:4,9,11,12; 7:15; 8:14; 11:8,10; 12:8).
- All the activities associated with life are described by this term (1:2, 11:8, 12:8). In fact, Solomon describes his own life as “vain” (7:15)
- Usually translated “vanity” or “emptiness” or “worthless” – implying a negative or pessimistic outlook on life.
- However, the term “hebel” can have any number of meanings and its actual meaning in Ecclesiastes must be determined by context. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon associates this term with “chasing the wind” (1:14,17; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,6,16; 6:9).
- Wind is real but it cannot be grasped. It cannot be seen apart from its evidence. Wind can be beneficial and it can

be destructive. It cannot be predicted nor can it be controlled. Solomon talks about the human experience of life as “chasing wind” – it cannot be predicted or controlled but it be experienced by its effects.

- One of the meanings associated with “Hebel” is ephemeral – indicating our inability to grasp it or to control it. Life under the sun is like the experience of chasing after the wind in an attempt to grasp it, control it, contain it, or predict it.
- In other words – Solomon is not necessarily speaking to the emptiness of life but rather to its unpredictability and to our inability to control all that happens to us in this life (good or bad).
- And the attempt to try to understand it, control it, or predict it is an exercise in weariness and futility apart from a wisdom from above that has come from God.

What is considered “hebel” by Solomon in this book?

- 1) Human behavior
  - Toil and its products (2:11,18-26; 4:4,7-8,15; 5:10; 6:1-2)
  - Pleasure (2:1; 6:9)
  - Wisdom and accruing knowledge (2:15; 7:15-16)
  - Words (5:6-7)
- 2) Living beings and the times of their lives/existence (3:18-19; 6:12; 7:15-16; 11:10).
- 3) Divine behavior – events that God allows or causes as seen and experienced under the sun.
  - Divine Justice (2:15,26; 6:1-2; 8:10,14).
  - Everything (1:2,14; 2:17; 6:3-4; 11:8-9; 12:8)

So . . . in using this term and ascribing it to everything under the sun, Solomon is acknowledging that nothing under the sun (this life) is fully understandable nor is it predictable (whether one will experience good or bad). The point he is making is not that life is fruitless, empty, or worthless . . . but that it is unfathomable. And that, apart from wisdom from above . . . it actually is ultimately fruitless, empty, and worthless.

b. *Life-under-the-Sun*

This term describes life in a universe and on a planet that is time-bound and sin cursed. Life under the curse is irreparably broken, inexplicably twisted, immeasurably deficient, and morally wicked – thus even its good parts and why they come upon certain people and not others are perplexing, frustrating, and apparently incomprehensible. This does not necessarily mean that life is meaningless or that it has no significance. It simply means that apart from God and Torah, that meaning and that significance will never be rightly understood.

c. *Shepherding or chasing the wind*

1) Chasing the wind (1:14, 17; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,6,16; 6:9).

- The expression comes from two idioms “ruet-ruah” and “rayon-ruah”.
- The Hebrew root can mean shepherding or grazing.
- Qoheleth’s point is that in this enigmatic word, attempts to grasp the meaning and the predictability of life are like chasing the wind.

2) One Shepherd who can shepherd the wind (12:11).

- So where does one go to find wisdom for “wind-chasing?” Answer – in words that were given by One Shepherd – words that would be like “goads” – a gracious prodding toward water or pasture and away from danger. Words that would be like the peg that would sustain and establish the stability of a tent.
- What words are these? Torah – the words that came from YHWH – the One True God. Words that would bring life and health and that would make life bearable “under the sun.”
- Through these words – God’s people could live meaningful, significant, and beneficial lives. By not lying they would enjoy better relationships. Life works better when people don’t lie, steal, bear false witness, or commit adultery.



- And these were the beautiful and beneficial words that God gave to a particular people (1:9) and Qoheleth is trying to remind this people of the value of those words as a means of navigating life under the sun.
- The people Qoheleth is teaching are Israel – and to this nation a unique wisdom had been given in Torah. A wisdom that far superseded the wisdom of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, or Greece. Those words were “words of delight” (8:10) because, unlike the wisdom of the nation, these words were true and upright.
- Israel’s Great Shepherd ruled the wind – even the storm that destroyed Job’s goods and his children. And this Great Shepherd of Israel was also the Good Shepherd and to His people He had entrusted “good and gracious” words – the Torah. And in turn, He had given to this nation of ruler-priests the responsibility to display the benefit of this wisdom as they lived in their “portion” of the land that would flow with abundance and bounty as God granted rain – in contrast to how the nations would have to seek rain from their harsh and unhearing gods.

## **Practical Message and Outline of the Book (taken from William Barrick’s commentary)**

### *Practical Message:*

Solomon weaves three foundational truths into his message:

1. Mankind searches for happiness and enduring substance (2:24; 3:12,22; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:7-10). In view of this search, God invites His people to enjoy life in a way that is unparalyzed by life’s uncertainties – enjoy life as God’s gift (11:1-6); Undepressed by life’s shortness – enjoy life as God’s gift (11:9-10); showing reverence to and serving God in life – enjoy life as God’s gift (12:1-14).
2. Divine sovereignty and providence characterize human existence under the sun (2:26; 3:14; 7:13-14; 8:16-9:1; 11:5).



- We must believe God is the creator with whom we cannot trifle and who we cannot ignore (5:2; 12:1)
  - We must accept that God's world cannot be changed or manipulated to our liking (3:1-8; 7:13)
  - We cannot extrapolate the future on the basis of the present – life is by nature and design unpredictable and yet in accord with God's plan (7:14; 8:17).
  - Irrespective of how the wicked appear to prosper and the righteous appear to suffer what should happen to the wicked, we must believe that God is the judge and will evaluate all the deeds and thoughts of men and will bring all wickedness into judgment (3:17; 5:6; 8:12-13; 11:9; 12:7,14)
3. Wisdom for human conduct requires the avoidance of excess.
- Be content with the present (7:10)
  - Be conciliatory (10:12-14)
  - Be cautious (8:1-9; 10:8-11; 7:8-9).

Solomon addresses three universal problems all who live under the sun face:

1. The uncertainty of time and chance displays that man is not sovereign over his life (9:11-12)
2. The endemic and incurable nature of wickedness demonstrates that man is not inherently moral or good in his life (3:16; 4:1; 5:8; 7:7,20, 9:3)
3. Death has the final word in any human enterprise is proof that man is not immortal (2:14-16; 3:18-22; 8:8,10; 12:1-7).

### *Outline of the Book:*

#### ***I. From Experience, Qoheleth learned that man is powerless (1:1-2:26)***

Refrain: 2:24-16 – there is no inherent good in man. However since God alone is the giver of good, God's people can enjoy God's good gift of life in their labor and in their toil.

There is legitimate joy to be gained in eating and drinking and finding satisfaction in the toil/labor one exerts in life – this is by God’s design and from His hand – however, such enjoyment and significance can only come from Him and is reserved for those who Fear Him and Keep His commands.

## ***II. From Observation, Qoheleth learned that God has a design for all things (3:1-5:20)***

Refrain: 5:18-20 Life is to be enjoyed as a gift from God rather than to be overly analyzed. God has granted to each person a “lot” or a portion – that by which they would gain their sustenance. This “lot” or portion comes as a gracious gift from a wise God.

The tribes of Israel along with the families in that tribe had each been granted a “portion” or a lot in Israel – and from that portion they were to gain their livelihood. Their portion would grant them abundance and prosperity (flowing with milk and honey) – but only if they obeyed God and remained loyal to His Torah. This is how rain would come to bring an abundance of harvest. Lack of rain in Israel was usually due to disobedience or rebellion (think Ahab and Elijah).

There was one tribe – Levi – whose only portion or lot was the Lord. In other words, their sustenance and abundance would come directly from God and would depend entirely on the obedience of the Nation to God’s instructions regarding sacrifices and offerings. They were to be a living picture to the entire nation that God alone would cause their “lots” and “portions” to produce their sustenance.

This is true in our time – God has appointed our lot and our portion and the vocation we are to engage in by which we earn our living. This is why a Christian who fears God and keeps His commandment can find significance by embracing the vocation God has called and equipped him to do. For example – a Christian who works in sanitation and drives a garbage truck can see himself as doing in a small way and in a small location a temporal and temporary display of what God is ultimately going to do with His creation. The same can be said of any legitimate vocation – in a small and very temporal way, it displays something that God will ultimately do in His new creation.

III. By application, Qoheleth found the explanation for apparent inequalities and inequities in divine providence (6:1-8:15)

Solomon uses this second major section to explain what he has discovered in the first half of the book – he lays out the evaluation of man’s outward fortune (6:1-7:15); the evaluation of man’s inner character (7:16-29), and the effect of righteous and upright civil government (8:1-14).

Refrain – Enjoy life as a good gift from God (8:15)

NOTE: Solomon warns against being overly righteous or overly wicked (7:16-18). This is not permission to be less concerned about righteousness or tolerant of wickedness in one’s life. It is given to people who had received a Torah from YHWH. There would be a propensity among some to become exceedingly fastidious about their righteousness with regard to the law which would lead them to be more righteous than the Torah actually demanded. Think of the Pharisees, who in a desire to protect the righteousness mandated by the law, actually invented “righteousness” to make sure they did not violate the law. On the other hand, there were Israelites who regarded their status as God’s chosen people and their personal identification with this nation by circumcision and yet became careless about the true spirit of the Torah – and while they obeyed the outward demands of the Torah – they did not value or treasure the true intent of the Torah (think about the nation of Israel coming to worship with a deficient heart and defective offerings in Malachi’s day).

So . . . how is one to avoid these two extremes? The one who truly fears God will come out from both of these (7:18).

IV. ***In Conclusion, Qoheleth determined to fear God, obey God, and enjoy life.***

- What we cannot know about life must not affect our enjoyment of life (8:16-9:9)
- What we cannot know about life must not affect our vocation in life (9:10-11:6)
- What we do know about life – that it is short and will soon end – should infuse our life and infect our labor with God-given joy and fervency (11:7-12:8)

Refrain (12:9-14): Fear God and Keep His commandments with a view toward eternity and with confidence that you serve and love a God who will rightly evaluate all things and will eventually and effectively judge and punish all evil.

## Conclusion

Wisdom literature is not designed primarily to answer our questions about the inequities and difficulties of our circumstance in life, but rather it is designed to form a worldview by which to navigate life.

- Ecclesiastes when read through the lens of the prologue presents the truth about the nature and experience of life under the sun.
- Ecclesiastes when read again through the lens of the epilogue presents the pathway to joy in life for those who fear YHWH, embrace His wisdom (Torah), and obey His words – for them life under the sun, though difficult and painful and unpredictable can be filled with joy, significance, shalom – and eternal gain.

Throughout the narrative, Qoheleth weaves a thread of joy ... a stream of God-given joy and fulfillment by which His people can navigate life under the sun. This joy will come from wisdom/Torah – and has as its prerequisite the true embracing and following of the Author and Giver of the Torah (fear of the Lord).

So rather than presenting a pessimistic outlook on life, Solomon is actually revealing the pathway to true and lasting joy in life – by embracing YHWH and following Torah. To such a person will come shalom in this life and lasting joy in the life to come.

For NT believers, the pathway to life eternal is found in Christ who is made to us “wisdom” (1 Cor 1:30). And from Him came life giving words that were breathed out by the Holy Spirit and written down by His apostles – and when we are doers of those words and not hearers only – we too will have joy and find significance in this brief, elusive, and enigmatic life under the sun.

# **“A View from the Top of the Hill”**

## ***Perspective for the Perplexed***

### **Session 3**

#### **Text: Ecclesiastes 1:15 & 7:13**

Ecc 1:12-17      I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 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.***

I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, *all is vanity and a striving after the wind.*

**What is crooked cannot be made straight,  
and what is lacking cannot be counted.**

I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”

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.***

Ecc 7:13      **Consider the work of God: who can make straight what He has made crooked.**

#### **Introduction:**

A key theme in this book is “Life Under the Sun” and our guide is eminently qualified to lead us on our journey. Solomon, our Preacher-King, was world-renown for his ***unmeasurable wealth***, his ***unparalleled work*** and experience, and his ***unsurpassed wisdom***. And Solomon wrote “wisdom for life under the sun” in the book we are studying this morning – Ecclesiastes.

I believe it will be immensely helpful if, as we start, we get our bearings so that we have a clear perspective of the perplexing picture that Solomon has painted for us.

Illustration:      Hike in the hills above my house  
Trail starts at the base of a hill and immediately  
disappears around a turn in the trail – and it constitutes

about a mile of narrow, winding pathway bordered on either side by brush and small trees - way ahead is not fully visible and there are these little paths where people have departed from the trail and taken short-cuts up to the upper part of trail ahead.

Eventually . . . got to a wide place about a mile and a half above the starting point and could see over the valley – but there was a small trail about a quarter of a mile up to the top of a hill-top and when I got up there, I got a spectacular view of the whole valley . . . and for the first time I got to see how my entire neighborhood was laid out.

That is in essence what I want to do today . . . we have been hiking with Solomon through Ecclesiastes and we are finally at a point on the trail where we are on a hill-top and we can get a good look at the trail we have covered and we can start to make sense of what Solomon has been saying to us . . . we are starting to see that in all of this perplexity and absurdity . . . there is in fact, a unique wisdom available to a certain group of people.

So—what terrain has we experienced on our Journey with Solomon?  
What has he shown us and what has he explained to us along the trip?  
(5 Obsvts)

1. Solomon starts out with a stunning summary of life under the sun:  
***“Vanity of Vanity, All is vanity!”*** Life is unpredictable, unexplainable, and uncontrollable – no matter how carefully we plan or how hard we work . . . we cannot predict the future or control the outcome of life.

### **Life Under the Sun is Elusive and Absurd**

And the reason for this is explained in 1:15 –

- what is crooked cannot be made straight
- what is missing can’t be counted
- and in 7:15 we find out God did this!

No matter how hard you try, how long you think, or how far you go to accumulate wisdom . . . you will never be able to put the pieces together to solve the puzzle because pieces are twisted and broken and don’t fit like they were originally intended . . . and even worse . . . there are

significant pieces that are missing altogether and without them you will never get the picture right.

2. He adds to the dissonance of life by asking a very piercing question – ***“What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?”*** And his answer to this question is . . . nothing. There is not ultimate profit, no advantage or lasting gain, and no ultimate significance to all of our little, temporary success in life.

### **Life Under the Sun is Meaningless and Unprofitable**

It is an unhappy, burdensome business that God has given mankind to be occupied with . . . to be consumed and burdened with all of the days of their life.

*What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. (2:22-23)*

3. And then he adds even more weight to our backpack (as we load up for the trek through life) by observing that life is an “unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.”

Even those who pursue and obtain wisdom find “much vexation and increased sorrow.”

(Jacob . . . Gen 47:8-9) *“The days of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.”*

### **Life Under the Sun is Painful and Difficult**

**No matter how hard we engage  
No matter how long we endure  
No matter how deep we explore  
No matter how far we explore  
No matter how high we are exalted**

**Life is elusive, meaningless, painful, and brief.**

- ***Intellectually*** – life overwhelms and frustrates even the wisest of us
- ***Materially*** – life disappoints and impoverishes even the richest of us



- **Morally** – life defiles and damages even the best of us
  - **Personally** – life diminishes and damages even the strongest of us
  - **Spiritually** – life darkens and destroys even the most religious of us
  - **Eternally** – life condemns us to an eternity in deepest darkness and horrific pain apart from God.
4. This has always been the way life under the sun works . . . round and round – which is Solomon’s way of saying “*Same old Same Old . . . what goes around comes around!*”

With Solomon’s help, we have observed that the unexplained inconsistencies and unsolvable incongruities of life leave us with:

- More questions than answers
  - Frustration instead of Fulfillment
  - Emptiness instead of Happiness
  - Pain that is both senseless and unbearable
  - Purposeless Living under the Sun
5. BUT ... from our perch on the top of the hill .... Solomon shows us something **surprising** and then he gives us something **stabilizing**.

**A. Shows us a group of people who – fear YHWH**

- live in the same world
- Experience the same futile events and endure the same unpredictable circumstances
- Find themselves facing the same eventual fate . . . death and burial...just like every other person living under the sun. . . BUT. . . these people are different.
- They appear to be content with their “lot” or “portion” in life.
- They experience true and consistent joy throughout all of their life.
- They appear to live by a different value system than almost everyone else around them that gives them an unusual stability and confidence in life no matter how difficult or unexpected their lot might be.

So . . . what is their secret? They have access to a unique wisdom that has eluded even the wisest of men . . . and by means of this wisdom, these people have consistently been able to navigate life

with joy, contentment, stability, strength, and significance. And from our vantage point on the hilltop – Solomon points them out to us.

2:24-25 – they eat, drink, and find **enjoyment** in their toil!

2:26 – they have wisdom, knowledge, and joy!

3:12-13 – they are joyful and they do good for as long as they live.

3:22 – they rejoice in their work and joy in their “lot”

5:18 – they live “good and fitting (appropriate) lives by enjoying their food and drink and joyfully laboring in their vocation.

5:19 – they are content with their possessions, their vocation, and their circumstances in life (their lot).

So . . . **who are these people?** They are people who are in a unique relationship to YHWH – they are His people and He is their God. They belong to Him. They worship Him. And they follow Him – they serve and obey Him.

- They fear the Lord – they love and serve Him
- They remember the Lord – they are aligned with Him and obey Him.

## ***B. Gives us Words from YHWH***

*Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The preacher sought to find words of **delight**, and **uprightly** he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like **goads**, and like **nails** firmly fixed are the collected sayings: they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Ecc 12:9-12*

1. These words tell us the truth about life
2. These words are designed to bring joy and delight to our lives
3. These words are designed to provide direction and stability for our lives.

And for six chapters, we have been listening to Solomon and we have learned four important lessons in his world-class course on wisdom:

## **I. Life Under the Sun has Insurmountable Limits**

**A. *The Boundaries of Time are Fixed. ( 2 poems – 1:4-11 & 3:1-8)***

- The seasons and times of life are fixed
- What happens in time is unexpected and unpredictable
- What we experience in our time is difficult and painful
- Time is relentless, swift, brief, and unstoppable.

**B. *The Capacity and Ability of Man is Limited***

- no power to change our circumstances or alter our destiny
- no ability to predict our future
- no power to control our circumstances
- no ability to even enjoy our circumstances

**6:1-2** *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.*

**C. *Mortality is Reality and Death is Unavoidable***

Life is short ... it is a brief life  
Life is painful and difficult .... it is a hard life  
Life is unpredictable and unsatisfying .... it is a  
meaningless life.  
And then you die .... it is over all too soon

- The wise and the fool both die (2:16)
- What happens to men and to beast is the same ... both die (3:19-20)
- No matter how long your life ... even a thousand years ... death comes to all (6:6).
- The few days of his vain life will pass like a shadow (6:12)

**D. *Human Wisdom is Incomplete and Insufficient and True Wisdom appears inaccessible***

**2:12-16** *“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. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. 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. 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!"*

## **II. These Limits are Intentional – They are Divinely Imposed**

This is perhaps the most shocking thing we have learned from Solomon.

Life is broken and missing pieces ... that is evident to everyone. However, what is not evident is how life became broken and how the pieces went missing. Here is Solomon's explanation:

**7:13. Consider the work of God: who can make straight what He has made crooked.**

**God did this!**

Rom 8:20      *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, **but because of him who subjected it**, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

And the reason He did this is so that Mankind would "fear before Him" (3:14) and so that they would see that they are the creature and not the creator and the proof of this is that they will suffer the same fate as all the rest of the living creatures – death (3:18-21)

## **III. God Mitigates these Limits for His People**

**A. By means of His Sovereignty – over our time and circumstance**

**B. By means of His Compassion – he gives gifts, joy, and contentment in this life.**

**C. By means of His grace – He gives enablement for every circumstance in life.**

**D. By means of His Wisdom – He grants words that:**

- Tell the truth about life
- Bring good and lead to delight in life

- Provide direction and stability in life

#### **IV. Therefore Avail Yourself of This Wisdom**

##### ***A. How? – Remember Your Creator (align yourself with God – set your affections on things above)***

- Ezra – set your heart to seek the law of the Lord, to do it, and then to teach it.
- Paul and the Colossians – set your affections on things above and not on things below.
- Paul and the Ephesians – remember and return to your first love.

##### ***B. When? – Now ... In the days of your youth!***

##### ***C. What? – Fear God (Love and Serve Him) and Keep His commandments (follow and obey Him).***

##### ***D. Why? – this is the entire duty of man!***

Conclusion: What if I knew then what I know now. What if Hind-sight could actually be foresight?

If you could go back to November of last year and make an investment in the garment industry ... what would you invest in ... knowing what you know now some 12 months later? Jeans? Shirts? Purses? Sox? MASKS.

One small garment company in LA (remains anonymous) made 4.1M from April through June. One individual in LA made 1.5M.

Solomon is giving foresight to those who Fear YHWH – if you will embrace it and align your life according to this wisdom, it will radically impact your journey under the Sun!

**“It’s Not Fun Under the Sun”**  
**Making Sense of Life in a Sin-Cursed World**  
**Session Four: An Introduction to Ecclesiastes**

**Text: Ecclesiastes 12:9-14**

*“In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.” (NASB95)*

**Introduction**

This year our Pastor’s track is drawn from the book of Ecclesiastes – a book that for many believers has seemed to be a barren wasteland of confusing, contradictory, and at times even “un-Christian” advice for how life works. For many, Ecclesiastes is the “Dark Side” of the Biblical Canon.

However, not all of God’s people have viewed Ecclesiastes in this light. For example, the ancient Jews would read Ecclesiastes on the third and central day of the Feast of Booths – a day of intense rejoicing and celebration. Whatever you may think of Ecclesiastes – they considered it to be a book filled with Joy and worthy of great celebration.

So what makes the difference? How are we to go about navigating Ecclesiastes when its main message appears to be that life is not fun under the sun. It is brief, painful, unpredictable, repetitive, and then it is over all too soon!

I want to take time the big story that Solomon is telling in the book in an effort to set the stage for where we are headed this week. And the best way for me to do so is to tell you a story about one life under the sun – because at the end of the day, while there are billions of individual lives living on this planet under the sun – there is only one you and the only life you experience is the one you live. So, at the end of the day, however else we may consider Ecclesiastes, we have to start here – with our own individual life and the story God is writing for us on this broken, sin-cursed world “under the sun.”

The story I want to recount for you is about one life – the life of Emilio Maldonado. Emilio was born in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas more than 60 years ago. He was the oldest son of a very large family—8 children. Emilio was athletic, good looking, and brilliant. He had a

particular proclivity for math and science and early on began to show promise as a mechanical engineer, particularly in the field of communication (radio and TV). The local university was reaching out to him and scholarship offers were coming his way. Outwardly, Emilio seemed to have a good life with a promising future.

BUT . . . things are not always what they appear, and life does not always turn out the way you expect it to. Emilio's dad was an agnostic, filled with bitterness and anger at the way life had turned out (or not turned out) for him. He turned this anger toward his family and behind the scenes, Emilio saw and experienced this more than his siblings. This anger boiled over into the home and poisoned the marriage to the point that one morning, his dad in a fit of drunken anger took Emilio's mom by force into a car that he had rigged up with explosives and blew them both up in front of Emilio's watching eyes – and Emilio's world exploded that tragic morning.

Emilio, seeking order and structure in an effort to find a way to make sense of his new reality, joined the Army and after boot-camp was immediately shipped off to fight in a war that made even less sense than what he had witnessed the day his parents burned to death – he went to Viet Nam.

Most Americans under 40 years of age have no real understanding of that war – it was a war that made no sense because it was unwinnable from the start. Boys became men in a world of mayhem and death – witnessing and participating in unspeakable acts of military violence. And many never made it out alive – and those that did come home, “didn't come home” – they were not the same people.

Emilio was one of the unlucky ones who actually came home – he never talked about what he had seen and what he had done in Nam. He didn't have to – his life went from broken and twisted to devastated and destroyed. His mind was never the same – he turned to a life of alcohol, drugs, and whatever else he could find to numb the pain and to avoid the questions he could never seem to answer. For the next 40 years he would wander from job to job, from city to city, living on the streets, often hungry, homeless, and desperately lonely.

But there was one anchor point in his broken world – a Christian aunt who loved him unconditionally and prayed for him and witnessed to him regularly. Her home was always open to him – and from time to time, unexpectedly and unannounced, Emilio would appear for a few days or a week – and she would feed him, pray for him and with him, and share the gospel and a dose of unconditional love – no matter how bad he looked or what shape he was in when he showed up, he was



treated as her own son. And then, after a few days he would disappear into the night to continue his desperate search for answers to a life that had no meaning.

This went on for more than 40 years. Until one morning, his aunt received a call from a city morgue in Houston, Texas letting her know that Emilio's body had been found in the back of an abandoned truck where he apparently had been sleeping. When they searched his body they found a ragged wallet with a tattered piece of paper with her name and number that had obviously been in his wallet for a long time.

**I know this story to be true because that woman is my mother, and Emilio was my cousin.**

This story has had a profound impact on my life – not just because of the tragedy that occurred to my cousin but even more so, that my life took such a different path than his. He was ten years older than me so my memories of him are distant. But his story isn't – it is profoundly personal. How could life unfold in such dramatically different ways to two people who shared the same family line? How do you make sense of this sort of tragedy when it is up close and personal? What do you do with this kind of brokenness and twistedness when it actually happens to someone you love and care about – and more importantly, what do you do when life unfolds in this way for you?

How do you find your way? How do you navigate life under the sun when it isn't filled with fun, promise, success, and goodness? How do you make sense of life when you end up standing in front of your own version of a burned out vehicle containing the ashes of what you hold most dear in life?

God's answer to those fierce questions was written by a man who had tasted deeply of all that life had to offer under the sun – the good as well as the bad. The pleasure and blessing of God – as well as the discipline and judgment of God. The man was Solomon and the wisdom he wrote is in Ecclesiastes.

## **I. The Author of Ecclesiastes – God's Sage on the World's Stage**

Solomon – universally known for his wisdom, both in his own day and throughout all of subsequent history.

Solomon gained wisdom from three sources: Inspired Divine Revelation, Unparalleled Human Experience, and Unbridled Restraint that led to Sin and Failure.

*"Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom surpassed the*

*wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.” (1 Kings 4:29–34)*

And he wrote this wisdom down in three massive works – Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes.

## **II. The Nature of Ecclesiastes**

Wisdom literature – designed to instruct God’s people so that they would navigate life in a sin-cursed world.

It all started with God giving wisdom for life on His earth through authoritative, good words – like the ones He gave to Adam. However, there was another source of wisdom – another set of words – given by someone who promised a different path for navigating life – and Adam and Eve chose to follow those words.

As a consequence of choosing the wrong wisdom, “wisdom from below” – God expelled His image bearers from the glorious garden and placed His creation under a curse – and the undeniable evidence of that curse is the universal experience of death after a life of futility, brokenness, pain, and that is often contradictory, unpredictable, and uncontrollable – where what should happen to the wicked often happens to the righteous and vice-versa.

How are God’s people supposed to navigate this broken, barren, darkened wasteland? Where will they find light and guidance? What will be their wisdom?

And one day, on the top of a mountain, God spoke words and wrote them down for a man named Moses. And Moses brought these words to God’s people and said to them . . . These words (this book) shall be your wisdom in the sight of the nations!”

Solomon is actually reminding you of something you already know – that there is another set of words, and if you choose to live by those words, you will navigate life under the sun on a sin-cursed planet filled with image-bearers who are marred and scarred by

the sin and who are living mind-numbing, death-dealing lives on their journey to the grave.

### III. The Value of Ecclesiastes (Eccl 12:10-11)

**12:10-11.** *The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.*

Ecclesiastes does many things and teaches many valuable lessons – two are worth mentioning this morning and they are both in our text this morning:

- A. Solomon's words reveal the truth about life under the sun. They are accurate and correct in that they tell you what life is really like and not just what you wish it were like or hope it will be like.
- B. Solomon's words establish a point of stability upon which you can build your life and navigate whatever comes to you throughout your life.

And the reason these words are so valuable is not because they came from Solomon, as wise as He was – but because they are the words of One Shepherd – the Great Shepherd who is also the Good Shepherd. The One who gave the original words of wisdom in Eden is again giving wisdom to His image-bearers.

### IV. The Central Question in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 1:2-3; 12-14)

*“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?”*

*“I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.”*

**Central Question:** What profit or gain is there in living life in a world like this?

More importantly – how do I navigate life and make sense of life when it is like chasing wind?

It is unfathomable, elusive, contradictory, unpredictable, painful, uncontrollable, twisted, broken, brief, and meaningless at the end?

What is the pathway to navigating life in this sort of world successfully? Where is the wisdom that will give life significance and meaning?

***Solitary Answer:*** Wisdom is found in Words that come from One who lives above and beyond the sun . . . from a wise and good shepherd who alone can shepherd you! And whose Own Spirit – divine wind/breath – imparts wisdom through inspired, breathed out words that are the very breath of God on the pages before you!

## **V. The Wisdom from Ecclesiastes. (12:1; 13-14)**

### **A. What Should I Do to Obtain this Wisdom?**

*Remember Your Creator! (12:1)*

- There is Someone who created and designed all of this!
- And He created you . . . He owns you, has a purpose for you, and has made promises to you, and will guide and sustain you!

### **B. When Should I do this?**

*In the days of your youth before the evil days come. . .”*

**Now!** At this stage of your life – when you have all of your life ahead of you. While you have the strength of your life before you!

Don't waste your life on you! Invest your life in ways that will bring meaning and significance to all that you experience in this unpredictable, uncontrollable life that God has placed before you.

Live joyfully the life you have, not the one you wish you had!

### **C. How Should I do this? (12:13)**

*The conclusion when all has been heard . . .*

1. Worship and Serve God lovingly –with all of your heart and soul and mind!
2. Obey God joyfully!

Do Justly; Love Mercy; Walk Humbly before God and man  
for this is the whole duty of man!

***D. Why Should I do this? (12:14)***

*For God will bring every act to judgement; everything which is hidden, whether it is good or bad.*

The fact that I can't control life doesn't mean that no one can control life. And that is the point of the book – God, the master designer, is fully controlling all of life under the sun to His end and for His glory.

And He cares deeply about how I respond and act in life because it reflects on His glory – and because this is so, He will evaluate and judge every action I undertake.

Life under the sun isn't the only life there is . . . there is more life to come and what I do with this life and in this life determines that life in the world to come!

## **“Chasing the Wind”**

### **Session 5: Searching for Significance in a Sin-Cursed World**

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

**Text:** Ecclesiastes 1:12-14

*“I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I **set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom** concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.” (NASB95)*

In 1977 a well-known musician named Kerry Livgren was at home working out a strumming pattern on his guitar. His wife happened by and was captivated by the simple beauty of the melody flowing from her husband’s fingers. She stopped, listened, and suggested that he write lyrics to go with the simple, haunting melody.

Kerry took her advice and wrote the lyrics to a song that eventually catapulted his band to prominence and fame that far outlived the band itself. In fact, this song became their all-time highest single on all the music charts and was one of two 1M selling gold singles produced by the band in its 40-year history. When Kerry played the song for the other members of the band – they sat around in stunned silence until one of the bandmembers said, “Dude, where has this song been?” The band was **Kansas** and the song was **“Dust in the Wind.”**

Listen to the lyrics that haunted the hearts and connected to the souls of an entire generation – and still does today:

*I close my eyes . . .  
Only for a moment, and the moments gone.  
All my dreams . . .  
Pass before my eyes, a curiosity.*

***Dust in the wind . . . all they are is dust in the wind.***

*Same old song . . .  
Just a drop of water in an endless sea.  
All we do . . .  
Crumbles to the ground though we refuse to see.*

***Dust in the wind. . . all they are is dust in the wind.***

*Don't hang on. . .  
Nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky.  
It slips away. . .  
And all your money won't another minute buy.*

***Dust in the wind. . . all we are is dust in the wind!***

Kerry got the content of the song from a book of American Indian poetry he was reading at the time. However, what you may not know is that he got the title from two verses from the book we are studying this week – Ecclesiastes.

1:14      *I have seen everything that is done under the sun and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

3:19-20      *For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.*

What is it about this song that connected so deeply with the hearts and souls of generation after generation of people? Why do these lyrics haunt us and connect with our deepest desires and aspirations for life?

The answer is that this song exposes and brings to the light of day a question that burns in our hearts and souls but that we dare not ask out-loud for fear of what we have already come to suspect is the answer – “What is the real meaning to life?” And more importantly, “What is the significance of our own life – the 70+ years we live on this planet and journey around the Sun?”

Where do we go to find answers to this profound question? We live in a world that does not have the ability to provide ultimate satisfaction or significance to men who were created for more than life under the sun! Solomon tells us that when God created us in His image, He put eternity in our hearts (3:11).

There is a God-sized, God-shaped hole in our hearts that cries out for more . . . and ultimately, nothing under the sun . . . no matter how much, how great, how often, or how momentarily pleasing will fill that hole –



Greatest Showman – Loren Allred sings Jenny Lind’s famous song – Never Enough! *“Towers of gold are still too little; these hands could hold the world but it’ll never be enough. . .never be enough, for me.”*

And this has been true since Solomon’s day!

We are often reminded that we live in a big, wide world that we can spend the rest of our life exploring and if we just look long enough, go far enough, and work hard enough – we will find our place in this big, wide world and make our mark.

Solomon is actually saying the opposite – the world, in all of its entirety under the sun, is too small to fill the eternity God has put in the heart of Man.

Left to explore life by ourselves and with our own devices, we will find that the world, far from being our oyster, will actually devour and destroy us from the inside out to the point that we will be driven to despair and even to despise life itself.

***This world will intellectually overwhelm us, materially impoverish us, morally scandalize us, personally diminish us, relationally isolate us, and spiritually destroy us!***

And when you try to fill your heart with what the world has to offer – you will find only disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and deep pain at the end – and left to yourself and to life only under the sun, you will eventually despise your life . . . just like Solomon predicted (3:17).

*So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind! (3:17)*

And this is why “Dust in the Wind” resonates with so many of us!

So where do we go for answers? What wisdom is there that will help us find the path to significance on our journey through this life as we make our way to the life that really matters?

Solomon has that wisdom and he wrote down good words designed to bring us delight and true words designed to inform us so that we can navigate life under the sun successfully.

But good words that bring delight must be accurate words that tell us the truth about life under the sun . . . and that is what Solomon does in Ecclesiastes. And this morning we want to begin our journey through these words that Solomon got from God, from wide experience, from thoughtful examination, and from personal failure.

So let's jump right in and listen carefully to Solomon as he teaches his own son, Rehoboam, how to find **true meaning, lasting satisfaction,** and **eternal significance** as he lives life under the sun. And it might surprise us to hear Solomon's opening words -

## I. **A Perplexing (Stunning) Conclusion – vanity of vanity, all is vanity (1:2)**

*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*

This is a key phrase in the book – and we need to make sure we understand what Solomon means when he states that all of life is vanity!

Vanity – “hebel”

- Usual but inaccurate ideas behind this term:  
Worthless, Fleeting, Empty, Useless
- Actually, the term has to do with the idea of “frustration” due to failing to achieve its purpose or disappointing one's expectations.
- Describes something that is incongruous, that makes no sense, that does not fulfill logical expectations. It is disproportionate or absurd.
- Examples:
  - 8:14 – righteous sometimes suffer the fate of the wicked and the wicked sometimes experience what should be the lot and reward of the righteous.
  - 2:15 – what ultimately happens to the fool also happens to the wise – they both die and are forgotten.
  - 2:18-21 – a man can work his entire life to build wealth and a kingdom only to come to the end of his life and leave it to someone who did nothing to build it, and who will eventually squander and destroy all that was built.

- Solomon is observing that this is not the occasional happenstance in life – this is actually how life under the sun often works. And it makes no sense. It follows no logic. It is incongruous, irrational, and absurd! Therefore, it is the ultimate frustration – “vanity of vanities”
- By the way, this is exactly how Paul describes all of creation around us – *“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God!” (Romans 8:20-21)*

## II. A Piercing Question – what does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? (1:3)

*What does man gain (profit) by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?*

- Gain/Profit – accounting term. What is left over after everything has been added up and accounted for?
- After all of man’s labor and a life-time of toiling away under the sun ... when all is said and done and all is added up ... what is the profit or the advantage to that man?
- What difference will his life of labor and toil have made on this world? What advantage will he have gained ... what will he have accomplished for having lived and died? ***Solomon’s answer is ... nothing.***
- Here we must be careful – Solomon told us that he is giving us good words that are intended to bring us delight. He told us that he is giving us accurate words that are designed to tell us the truth – so how are we to take these words?
- By marrying them to another expression that Solomon uses ... “under the sun.”
- In other words, Solomon is giving you a huge clue as to how to understand what he is saying – he is telling you that as an image-bearer created with eternity in your heart – you were designed for more than life “under the sun” – you were designed for a world that was not broken and marred by sin and the curse.
- And the reason that life under the sun is like this is found in 1:15 –

*“What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted!”*

- Life under the sun on a cursed and broken planet is twisted – it is horribly broken and bent – nothing fits and nothing functions as God originally designed it to work.
- Life under the sun on a cursed and broken planet is actually missing pieces and parts without which, life will not work as God designed. And we can’t even number or account for the parts that are missing!

### **III. A Pervasive Observation – Round and Round (1:4-11)**

- Life has been twisted, broken, bent, and missing parts for a long, long time!
- A generation comes and a generation goes but the earth remains the same old broken, twisted, and incomplete world filled with ***unsolvable riddles, incongruous outcomes, unpredictable experiences, and illogical conundrums.***
- Generation after Generation . . . there is nothing new under the sun . . . this is the common experience of man . . . *“All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it! (1:8)”*
- Life is a day-after-day 70 year chase after answers that, to mirror the words of Bob Dylan, “The answers, my friend, are blowing in the wind, the answers are blowing in the wind!”
- To a generation that links meaning in life with productivity, significance in life to role in life, and satisfaction in life to successful outcomes in life . . . Solomon reveals that this foundation is not able to support the weight of the futility and frustration of life under the sun!

*BUT . . . how does Solomon know this? And more importantly, how can we be assured that he has come to the right assessment of life under the sun?*

### **IV. A Personal Examination – a three-fold quest or a journey (1:12-2:26)**

#### ***A. A Comprehensive Exploration of Common Human Experience in life (1:12-18)***

- Solomon uses his vast wealth and wisdom to explore every activity, institution, and behavior available to him and to

men under the sun! *"I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven."* (1:13).

- Here is his conclusion – *"It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man (Adam) to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind!"*
- And to make things worse, the more I sought and found wisdom, the more my frustration increased! *"I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. 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! For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge, increases sorrow."* (1:16-18)
- The more I find out about the world and about life under the sun . . . the more frustrated I grow and the more sorrow I discover as I learn about the way life under the curse is twisted, broken, and lacking important components that are missing from the original design as God intended life to work.

### ***B. A Careful Examination of what is Considered Good, Noble, Pleasurable, and Desirable in Life (2:1-11)***

*Come now, I will test you with . . .*

- Unrestrained Pleasure (2:1-3)
- Unmeasurable Possessions and Accomplishments (2:4-6)
- Unmitigated Passion (2:7-8)
- Unsurpassed Power and Reputation (2:9-11)

*So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 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. 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."* (2:9-11)

### ***C. A Considered and Thorough Investigation of Wisdom and Folly in Life (2:12-23)***

- Solomon now turns to investigate the moral and ethical dimensions of life . . . wisdom and folly.

- Is it better to strive to live morally and ethically in this life? Or given the futility of life under the sun, should you cast all moral and ethical restraint to the wind and live for what makes you happy at any given moment in life?
- And while Solomon clearly discovered that even in a broken world, wisdom is far better than folly – at the end of the day, pure morality and good ethics are not enough to provide lasting satisfaction. While they make life better and are essential to life working under the sun . . . at the end of the day, they do not fill the eternity-sized hole God placed in the heart of man!
- And . . . the same thing happens at the end . . . both wise and fool die and are forgotten (2:16)
- So . . . after a life spent in pursuit of Intellectualism, Hedonism, Materialism, and Moral Relativism . . . Solomon reveals where his journey as taken him . . . life apart from God and without His wisdom leads to a deep Cynicism about life under the sun.  
*“So **I hated my life**, because what is done under the son was **grievous** to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. **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.” (2:17-18).*

**Ernest Hemingway** – wrote his most famous novel in 1926 called “*The Sun Also Rises*” – a title taken from Ecclesiastes 1:5. It was his crowning literary work and it propelled him to a life of unrestrained pleasure, the pursuit of power and significance, the accumulation of fame and wealth – and a worldwide reputation as a rough and tough man who had conquered the world and all that it had to offer. In the eyes of the world, he was the epitome of all that a man should be – a perfect mix of brain and brawn. But a mere 35 years later . . . early Sunday morning on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1961 Hemingway quietly got out of bed, went downstairs, pulled out his favorite hunting rifle, firmly seated both barrels against his forehead, and proceeded to blow out his brains. He had pursued a Solomonic-like quest for 57 years and had finally arrived at the destination Solomon predicted – Intellectualism led him to hedonism, then materialism, and moral relativism until life



lost all its meaning and death became preferable to more life under the sun.

Solomon put it this way: *“What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity! (2:22-23)*

So . . . what is the answer that Solomon wants to point us to with these words that are both accurate and good? That both pain us and bless us? That prod us to look for a better answer –

**V. A Profound Summarization – there is a path to significance, and it is in the realization of three important truths. (2:24-26)**

**A. *There is nothing good in man that will allow him to truly enjoy life as God designed and intended life to be (2:24)***

- There is nothing good in man that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.
- Note the translation issue – nothing good in man . . . nothing in man’s moral constitution as a fallen image-bearer that enables him or capacitates him to find meaning and enjoyment in life.
- In other words, it is not just the world that is broken, twisted, and missing key components – so is Man.
- He is inherently unable to find true meaning and satisfaction in this life no matter how hard he works, how long he looks, or how much he accumulates and achieves in life.
- And Solomon reveals an astonishing but important truth – This is actually from the hand of God (2:24b).

**B. *Only God is able to give good gifts in life (2:25)***

*... for apart from Him, who can eat or who can have enjoyment.*

- God designed life in a sin-tainted, morally broken, Creator-cursed world in such a way that His image-bearers would never find satisfaction from things in this world.
- So that they would have to look elsewhere for that satisfaction that their hearts so desperately desire and their souls long to experience. And He alone is the source of that satisfaction!



***C. He gives those gifts to those who love, serve, and please Him  
(2:26)***

God gives wisdom, knowledge, and JOY to the ones who please Him! How? By fearing Him (worship and serve) and loving and obeying Him!

**“The Time of Your Life”**  
***Redeeming the Time in Evil Days***  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-22  
Session Six

**Texts:** Ecc. 3:1-22; Ephesians 5:15-18

**Ecc. 3:1** *For everything there is a season, and a time or every matter under heaven:*

**Ecc. 3:11** *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*

**Ecc. 3:14-15** *I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.*

**Eph. 5:15-18** *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

## **Introduction**

One of the most intriguing questions that someone can ask is this: “What time is it?” Though the question appears simple on the surface, in actuality there is great depth and profoundness in the question itself – because it reveals something about us. It reveals that, at the end of the day, we are obsessed with knowing the time. And this has been true since the beginning of time.

Throughout human history Man has struggled to understand and master time – constellations, sundials, hourglasses, Chinese water-clocks, sextants, watches, and now I-phones and apple watches – and now, in our day we are a culture obsessed with time!

All of our life we have been told things about time by those above us, around us, next to us, and beneath us:

- What time is it? When is it going to be time for ??
- Now is not the time for xyz. It is almost the time for xzy.

- It is high time . . . Now is the time . . . It is way past time for xyz!

And the reason we are so obsessed with time is because time matters immensely – the entirety of our life is boundaried by time! We live and we die within the framework of a precise amount of time marked by two specific dates! All of our life is organized, regulated, restrained, governed, and orchestrated by the rhythm and constraints of time. Therefore, whoever controls time . . . has immense power in our life.

Many people have written about time in an effort to understand its nature and explore its boundaries. Aristotle wrote the first definition of time in 350 BC. Julius Caesar established a calendar named after him in 45 BC. Galileo experimented with time in the 1600's. Newton devoted years of his life to the study of time. Albert Einstein redefined our understanding of time. Stephen Hawking wrote a fascinating work called "A short history of time". However, of all the works men have written about time, the chapter before us this morning is arguable the most significant treatise on time ever written.

And. . . for the sake of time. . . I want to sum up the five major observations that Solomon set forth in this chapter to help you live successfully in the time God has granted you under the sun.

## **I. God is the Sole Architect and Sovereign Ruler of Time (3:1-8)**

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.*

### **A. Note the use of the word "time" – 29x in these 8 verses**

- Clearly this is about the seasons of life and the experiences and opportunities one will encounter in life.
- The opening line states there is a season . . . a time for everything.
- And the first thing you are told about life . . . is that there is a time to be born and a time to die.
- This is a merismus – it identifies the two outside events and includes everything in the middle! The "dash" between two dates on a tombstone.
- So what happens in the "dash" between the dates?

### **B. Note the structure of the 14-stanza poem about time**

- 28 different things listed in 14 pairs

- Encompasses everything we will experience in life
- Encompasses all of our relationships in life
- Encompasses all of our responsibilities in life
- Encompasses all of our joys and sorrows, our pains and pleasures in life.
- And at the end of life . . . there is death and it comes to all regardless of who they are or how they have lived.

**C. Note the importance of the phrase “under heaven” (3:1)**

- Up to this point Solomon has been talking about life “under the sun” to refer to life on a sin-broken, curse bound earth.
- However, here Solomon points us to something beyond life under the sun! He points us to life under heaven!
- In other words, there is Someone in Heaven who has architected and who is ruling over everything that happens under the sun!
- God regulates all that happens in time; He rules over it all; and will one day redeem and restore all that has been ruined and lost in time!
- And this person, because He made time and controls time and all that happens in it . . . is the most powerful being in the Universe! But . . . what is God doing with time?

## **II. God is at Work in Time (3:9-13)**

*“What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.” (NASB95)*

Solomon has discovered something (3:12) – first of two “I perceived” statements in this chapter. So what has Solomon discovered?

**A. God has Called Men to Work: He assigned work/vocation to man with which they are to occupy themselves. (3:9-10)**

- You have a God-given vocation from God
- He has equipped you for it
- He has called you to it
- He will capacitate and energize you for it

- He will bless you in it
- He will satisfy you with it

***B. God is Himself at work doing the right thing at the right time! (3:11a)***

- God makes everything beautiful in its time . . .
- He does the right thing at the right time – appropriateness
- He will, at the right time, make what is crooked straight, repair what is broken, and supply what is lacking (Rom 8:20)
- But in the meantime. . . He currently takes all things and uses them for good in the lives of His people (Rom 8:28).

***C. God has placed eternity in Man's heart (3:11b)***

- God made us in time and subjected us to the constraints of time but we were not made for “a time” or to be the slaves of “time.”
- We were made for more . . . so much more! We were made for a world very different than this one!
- And we instinctively know this and we yearn to understand!

***D. God has Hidden a full understanding of His Work from Men who only look for answers Under the Sun.***

*Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*

**III. God has a Purpose for Time (3:14-15)**

*“I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.” (ESV)*

Note – this is the second “I perceived” statement.

- Solomon notes that God alone rules over time and He alone understands His purposes for all that He has orchestrated in time.
- Further, God alone knows everything comprehensively about time – He knows what will happen, what is happening, and He alone can recover what has happened in the past!
- And God has limited our understanding of time so that our desire to know the meaning of time will actually drive us to the

only One who can bring joy, satisfaction, and meaning to our “time”.

***So . . . what does God want us to know about our time?***

#### **IV. God Assesses the Moral Character of Our Time (3:16-21)**

##### ***A. Our “time” on earth is an “evil” time. (3:16-17)***

- In the place where righteousness and justice should be, there is actually the presence of wickedness and corruption.
- Paul talked about this in Ephesians 5:16 when he talked about our need to “redeem the time” because the days are evil days.

##### ***B. Our “time” on earth is a limited time. (3:18-21)***

- Death comes to us all
- Those who say, “eat, drink, and make merry for tomorrow we die” are right about one thing – tomorrow we die!
- Heb 9:27 – *to every man it is appointed once to die!*
- So why not just eat, drink, and make merry?
- Answer is the second part of Heb 9:27 . . . after this the judgement. That is exactly what Solomon said in 3:17 – *God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work!*

#### **V. God Will Redeem Time (3:22b)**

*Who can bring him to see what will be after him?*

God will do this! God will help men see what is after him!

How? By redeeming lost men and by restoring His broken creation!

Galatians 4:4-7: *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”*

But heirs of what? A new Creation!! Rom 8:18-25

*“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in*

*the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:18–25, ESV)*

## **Conclusion – so what should I do with the time of my life?**

### **1. Wait patiently for God’s Timing in your life**

**Ps. 31:14-15** *“But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!”*

### **2. Live with the Reality that my Time is Limited**

**Heb 9:27** *“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,”*

### **3. Prepare for my time and seize every opportunity it affords**

**2 Cor 6:2** – *“For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”*

### **4. Invest my time for the Lord . . . live for eternal things in this temporal world.**

**Eph 5:16** *“making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”*

### **5. Live Joyfully and Submissively in the season of time you are in and not the one you wish you were in.**

**Ecc 3:12-13.** *“I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.”*



# **“When What You See Isn’t What You Get”**

## ***Taking in the Sights Under the Sun***

### ***Session Seven***

**Text: Ecclesiastes 4-6**

Ecc 4:2-3 *So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun!*

#### **Introduction:**

Our theme this semester is “Life Under the Sun” and our guide is eminently qualified to lead us on our journey. Solomon, our Preacher-King, was world-renown for his ***unmeasurable wealth***, his ***unparalleled work*** and experience, and his ***unsurpassed wisdom***. And Solomon wrote “wisdom for life under the sun” in the book we are studying this week – Ecclesiastes.

- Solomon starts out with a stunning summary of life under the sun – one that we did not see coming: ***“Vanity of Vanity, All is vanity!”***
- He adds to the dissonance of life by asking a very piercing question – ***“What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?”***
- And then he adds even more weight to our backpack (as we load up for the trek through life) by observing that this has always been the way life under the sun works . . . round and round – which is Solomon’s way of saying ***“Same old Same Old . . . what goes around comes around!”***
- And to add credibility to these discouraging conclusions – Solomon recounts his own quest for answers – 1:12-2:26. He sought carefully and thoroughly for answers by ***exploring common human experiences***; carefully ***examining what is good, noble, and desirable in life***; and thoroughly ***investigating wisdom and folly*** and at the end of his life-long quest, Solomon states that “all is vanity.”

BUT . . . things aren't always what they seem . . . and Solomon is actually leading us to an unexpected, unanticipated, and often unrecognized reality that, when grasped, changes the whole picture and brings deep meaning and significance to our journey under the Sun. There is a different way of looking at life under the sun . . . one that leads to present joy and eternal satisfaction!

And the first major place that Solomon stops to adjust our vision is in chapter 3 where he stops and talks to us about the beauty of time!

- God is sovereign over time. (3:1-8)
- God is at work in time (3:9-13)
- God has a purpose for time (3:14-15)
- God has assessed the moral character of our time (3:16-21)
- God will redeem time (3:22)

Oh yeah? If that is really the case, then why is it that everywhere I look, I see things that say the exact opposite? I see evidence all around me that would lead me to conclude that God is totally absent from life, or if He is present He either doesn't know and doesn't care about what is actually going on or He is powerless to change what is wrong or fix what is broken.

***Which is why I have pointed us to one of the most shocking statements Solomon makes in this book – 4:2-3***

*So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun!*

Now there is a boatload of encouragement for you this morning!

*You are better off dead than alive*

*And you would be even better off had you never been born!*

Solomon . . . thanks for the encouragement. What in the world??? Who in their right mind would ever come to such a horrific, irrational conclusion?

But actually, thousands of people in the United States agree with Solomon every day! And every day, approximately 143 of them decide to end their life by suicide. And that number is growing by leaps and

bounds. This past June, a survey taken of over 5000 college students revealed that 1 in 4 had seriously contemplated suicide that month. That is a stunning statistic.

The highest group at risk for suicide in the United States is men between the ages of 45-65!

So . . . what is it about life under the sun that would cause a person, made in the image of God created to live for eternity, to so despise life that they would choose to end it prematurely? And Solomon tells us the answer – because of what they see and experience in life!

So . . . this morning I want us to let Solomon guide us through this important section of the wisdom he has written down for us and I want us to let the weight of what He has said lead us to two important realities:

1. The Weight of Life under the Sun
2. The Way to Joy and Satisfaction under Heaven

So let's begin where Solomon begins – and he points us to some things that he has seen and that he wants us to see: Six stunning sights that stop the traffic of life and transfix our eyes even as we want with all our might to look the other way!

## **I. Strong Objections (3:16-4:16)**

After revealing the amazing wisdom that God is sovereign over time and is making everything beautiful (good) in its time . . . Solomon immediately points out six massive, undeniable, painful realities that pose a strong objection to the idea that God is making things beautiful in their time:

### ***A. I Saw Unexpected Injustice – no justice in life (3:16-17)***

- In the place of justice – there is wickedness
- In the place of righteousness – there is wickedness

### ***B. I Saw Unavoidable Mortality – no permanence in life (3:18-22)***

- The same thing that happens to the beasts on the earth happens to men who live upon the earth – they both die and their bodies go down into the grave and corruption.

- They both return to the dust from whence they came.

***C. I Saw Unrelieved Oppression – no comfort in life (4:1-3)***

- The surprising multiplicity of the acts of oppression
- The sheer magnitude of the oppression
- The unstoppable misery of the oppression
- Everywhere I looked under the sun . . . I saw cruelty and oppression being done by powerful people against those less powerful or less fortunate. Hate, cruelty, abuse, murder, oppression, trafficking, etc.
- And . . . there was no one to comfort them . . . no one who could put a stop to this!

***D. I Saw Unsatisfied Jealously – no relief or rest in life (4:4-6)***

- I saw people hard at work . . . and the closer I looked at their work, the more I saw that behind all their hard work was a deep jealousy and envy to have what their neighbor possessed . . . and not just to have what their neighbor had . . . but to have more than their neighbor!
- And to add insult to injury . . . Solomon keeps looking at this picture and sees right next to the man driven by envy who is working himself to the bone is an indolent, lazy man who doesn't work and still has his food to eat (consumes his flesh) . . . and Solomon concludes that this lazy man may actually fare better in the end than the guy who works hard his whole life to get bigger and better things than his neighbor.
- This makes absolutely no sense – this is completely broken!

***E. I saw Unmitigated Loneliness – no companionship in life (4:7-12)***

- The reality – many people go through life alone! They work and labor their entire life and they do it for themselves and by themselves.
- The ideal – two are better than one! God made you for relationships! But even better than two are three . . . and in this

reference, Solomon may be hinting that one of the three should be God.

***F. I saw Unanswerable Meaninglessness – no remembrance for accomplishments in life (4:13-16)***

- Solomon gives a parable of a wise young man who rises up and replaces an old and foolish king who won't listen to wise counsel.
- At first, this young man is widely acclaimed and well-received . . . but eventually he himself becomes the old king and is replaced by a second young man who appears and is well liked and well received.

And the cycle continues over and over! President's come and president's go. Steve Job's came and went. Walt Disney came and went. Kings come and kings go.

***All of this is vanity and a striving after the wind!  
So . . . what am I supposed to do with all of this brokenness  
that I see going on all around me? Where do I go to find  
wisdom to guide me safely on this journey?***

**II. A Spiritual Instruction – Go to God's House to find wisdom (5:1-7)**

- ***Remember your Creator***
- ***Fear God and Keep His Commandments***

You desperately need wisdom . . . And . . . this wisdom is found in worship . . . so go to the House of YAHWEH . . . but when you go, don't go with the purpose of venting out your words . . . go with the desire to hear His Words.

***A. Guard your steps (5:1)***

- Come with clean hands and a pure heart

***B. Guard your thoughts and words (5:2-3)***

- Be slow to speak, quick to hear, slow to anger (James 1)

***C. Guard your vows (5:4-6)***

***D. Guard your heart and mind (5:7)***

In other words . . . Fear God! (6 biblical components)

- Trust God completely (Ps 115:11)
- Experience God's Forgiveness truly (Ps 130.4)

- Delight in God's Word Sincerely (Ps 112.1)
- Obey God's Word Consistently (Ps 119.63)
- Hate Evil Passionately (Prov 8:13)
- Love God faithfully (Ps 147.11)

So Solomon, what is your point?

When you go to God's house . . . don't allow what you have seen in these six horrific realities cause you to raise your voice to God! Don't come with your arguments against God but rather . . . come to listen to His Words! As Qoheleth, I am giving you good words - true and accurate. I am giving you delightful words good and beneficial!

### III. **A Striking Admonition: Do not be amazed when you see (5:8-17)**

#### ***A. Injustice at the highest levels (5:8-9)***

Injustice exists at every level . . . don't expect deliverance to come through a political regime. **Power is not the answer to what your eyes have seen!** Why? Because at the highest levels, money and wealth is what drives officials rather than justice!

***Money and power can be bad investments.***

#### ***B. Insatiability at the deepest levels (5:10-12)***

Money doesn't satisfy . . . don't expect rest and satisfaction to come from what you can buy with your money! Money and possessions just make more work! **What money can buy is not the answer to what your eyes have seen!**

***Money and power can be sad investments!***

#### ***C. Instability at the foundational levels (5:13-17)***

Wealth does not stay . . . no matter how much you amass and how long you hoard it and hold on to it . . . eventually it slips away and you can't take it with you. No matter how much you own . . . you will exit life just like you entered life . . . with nothing in your hand! Wealth is not the answer to what your eyes have seen!

***Money and power can be harmful investments!***

#### **IV. A Stunning Statement – Satisfaction Not Guaranteed (6:1-12)**

##### ***A. Wealth Does not Satisfy (6:1-6)***

Even if a man fathers 100 children lives many years . . . he will not find satisfaction in wealth . . . it will go to another. And if that man who receives this wealth lives for two thousand years it won't be enough time to find satisfaction in his wealth!

##### ***B. Work Does not Satisfy (6:7)***

You work hard all day to earn bread to eat.  
You eat bread and yet your appetite is never fully satisfied.

No matter what you buy . . . you want more!

##### ***C. Wisdom Does not Satisfy (6:8-11)***

- What advantage does the wise man have over the fool?
- What advantage does the poor man have over the rich?
- No matter what you search for . . . it has already been found.
- No matter what your argument . . . it has already been refuted.
- No matter how many words you read or master . . . at the end of the day it is all futility . . . “hebel.”

Which leads us to precisely the place where Solomon has been guiding us – to two inescapable questions that are at the heart of this book:

1. *Who can tell what is good for us during the course of our life?*  
(6:12)
2. *Who can reveal what will happen to us at the end of our life?*  
(6:12)

#### **Conclusion: A Spiritual Solution**

So . . . what are we to do with what we have seen with our eyes? Solomon has already told us to go to the House of the Lord and listen to the Words from God. So what exactly does God tell us to do in light of



what we have seen? We must learn to see with our ears more than we see with our eyes.

If Work, Wealth, and Wisdom don't ultimately lead to satisfaction . . . then where do we find it? Answer: In words that Solomon gives us from the Shepherd!

***Eccl 6:18-20:***

*Here is what I have seen to be **good** and **fitting**: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which **God has given him**; for this is his **reward**.*

*Furthermore, as for every man to whom **God has given** riches and wealth, **He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor**; this is **the gift of God**. For he will not often consider the years of his life, **because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart!***

1. Embrace your Lot in life . . . God has given you a vocation and you are to labor at that vocation during the few years of your life.
2. Enjoy your Portion . . . God has wisely assigned you a portion in life . . . an amount of riches and wealth . . . and you are to eat from that wealth and to rejoice in the labor that produces that wealth.
3. Celebrate your God as the chief occupation and gladness of your heart! Do not find your ultimate satisfaction in your wealth or your significance in your work . . . rather use your work and your wealth as a means to celebrate the God who gave you the ability to earn and enjoy them.

And use your wealth and your work as the means by which you cause others to see the worth of Christ!

The answer to all the brokenness in the world will never be in work, wealth, or wisdom . . . no matter how much you have, how hard you work, or how high your wisdom allows you to rise. The answer ultimately is God and so seek His wisdom and use your life to elevate His Name!

## Resources for Reflection on Ecclesiastes

### Biblical Theology

1. Belcher, Richard P. "Ecclesiastes" in *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*. Miles V. Van Pelt, ed. Crossway:2016. Pp., 439-456.
2. Belcher, Richard P. *Finding Favour in the Sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature*. New Studies in Biblical Theology, D.A. Carson, ed. IVP:2018. Pp., 133-187.
3. Estes, Daniel J. *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*. Baker:2005. Pp., 271-392.
4. Kidner, Derek. *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, & Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature*. IVP:1985. Pp., 90-115.
5. Zuck, Roy B. "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs" in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*. Roy B. Zuck, ed. Moody:1991. Pp., 207-256.

### Exegetical Commentaries

1. Bartholomew, Craig G. *Ecclesiastes* in Baker Commentary of the Old Testament. Tremper Longman III, ed. Baker:2009.
2. Barrick, William D. *Ecclesiastes: The Philippians of the Old Testament*. Christian Focus:2003.
3. Eaton, Michael A. *Ecclesiastes* in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Vol 18. IVP:1983.
4. Fredericks, Daniel C. *Ecclesiastes & the Song of Songs* in Apollos Old Testament Commentary. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, eds. IVP:2010.
5. Garret, Duane A. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* in The New American Commentary. Vol 14. Broadman:1993.
6. Hubbard, David. *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* in Mastering the Old Testament. Lloyd J Ogilvie, ed. WORD:1991.
7. Kaiser, Walter C. *Ecclesiastes: Quality Living*. Moody:1979.
8. Kidner, Derek. *The Message of Ecclesiastes* in The Bible Speaks Today. J. A. Motyer, ed. IVP:1976.
9. Longman, Tremper III. *The Book of Ecclesiastes* in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, eds. Eerdmans:1998.

### Expositional Commentaries

1. Greidanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes*. Eerdmans:2010.
2. Gibson, David. *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End*. Crossway:2017.
3. Olford, Stephen F. *A Time for Truth: A Study of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*. AMG Publishers:1999.
4. Ryken, Philip Graham. *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* in Preaching the Word. R. Kent Hughes, ed. Crossway:2010.