THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES



THE PREACHER

A Comprehensive Verse-by-Verse Study Guide of the Book of Ecclesiastes

REV. GEORGE H. STODDARD

BOOKLYN

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To every weary seeker who has climbed every ladder under the sun and found the top empty,
and to the God who set eternity in our hearts so that we would keep looking up.

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Welcome to The Preacher

Ecclesiastes is the most honest book in the Bible. It does not flatter us. It walks into the throne room, the treasury, the laboratory, the banquet hall and the graveyard, and it tells the truth about what it finds there. For three thousand years, people who thought they had everything have discovered that this little book of twelve chapters had already described their emptiness, and had already pointed them to the only answer.

The Hebrew title of the book is *Qoheleth*, a word built from the root *qahal*, "assembly" or "congregation." Qoheleth is the one who gathers people together and speaks to them: the Convener, the Teacher, the Preacher. The Greek Septuagint translated it *Ekklesiastes*, "one who addresses the assembly," and that is where our English title comes from. The American Standard Version of 1901, which is quoted throughout this guide, simply calls him "the Preacher." That is why this book carries his name.

This study guide walks through Ecclesiastes verse by verse. Every verse of the book is printed in full in the American Standard Version, followed by explanation, cross-references and practical application. Each chapter closes with life application, discussion questions and a prayer, so the guide can be used for personal devotions, a small group, a Sunday school class or a sermon series.

Who Was the Preacher?

The book introduces its author as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1) and says he "was king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12). He surpassed all who were before him in Jerusalem in wisdom (1:16), built great works, planted vineyards and gardens, gathered silver and gold, and had singers and every delight (2:4-8). He "set in order many proverbs" (12:9). Every one of those details matches Solomon, the son of David who asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3:9-12), whose wealth and works were legendary (1 Kings 10:14-29), and who spoke three thousand proverbs (1 Kings 4:32).

Jewish and Christian tradition overwhelmingly held that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, most likely late in life after his heart had been turned aside by his many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1-11). Many modern scholars date the book later because of features of its Hebrew vocabulary, and some read "Solomon" as a literary voice adopted by a later sage. This guide follows the traditional and natural reading: the book presents itself as the reflections of Solomon, and its message reads most powerfully as the testimony of the wisest, richest and most privileged man of his age looking back on a life that had tried everything. Whatever position a reader takes on authorship, the inspired message is the same.

The Key to Ecclesiastes: Two Phrases

Two phrases unlock the whole book.

The first is **"vanity"** (Hebrew *hebel*). It appears about thirty-eight times. The word literally means "vapor," "breath" or "mist," the puff of steam you see on a cold morning that is there one moment and gone the next. When the Preacher says "all is vanity," he does not mean that everything is meaningless in the sense of being worthless. He means that everything in this world is fleeting, insubstantial and impossible to grasp or hold. You cannot build your life on vapor. James uses the same picture: "What is your life? For ye are a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

The second is **"under the sun."** It appears about twenty-nine times. It describes life viewed only from the horizontal plane, life as it looks when you leave God out of the calculation. Much of Ecclesiastes is an experiment: the Preacher deliberately examines life from the ground level to see whether anything under the sun can give lasting meaning. His answer is no. But woven through the book is a second perspective, life viewed in the fear of God, in which the very same gifts of food, work, love and days become good gifts "from the hand of God" (2:24).

The Message of the Book

Ecclesiastes is not a book of despair. It is a book that empties our hands so that God can fill them. The Preacher tests pleasure, wisdom, work, wealth, power and religion as rivals to God, and he finds every one of them vapor. Then, again and again, he lands on the same conclusions:

- Life is a gift from God to be received with joy and gratitude, not a puzzle to be mastered (2:24-26; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10).
- God has made everything beautiful in its time and set eternity in the human heart, so nothing temporal can satisfy us (3:11).
- God's sovereignty is beyond our understanding, so we must walk humbly and reverently before Him (3:14; 5:1-2; 7:13-14; 8:17).
- Death comes to all, and God will bring every work into judgment, so we must remember our Creator now (11:9; 12:1, 14).
- The whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (12:13).

For the Christian, Ecclesiastes is a signpost to Jesus Christ. The Preacher was "the son of David, king in Jerusalem," but a greater Son of David has come. Jesus said of Himself, "a greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). Where Solomon found vapor, Christ offers life "abundantly" (John 10:10). Where Solomon saw that "all go unto one place" (3:20), Christ rose from the dead. Paul teaches that the

creation "was subjected to vanity" (Romans 8:20) and waits for redemption, and that in the Lord our labor "is not vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Ecclesiastes asks the questions; the gospel answers them.

How to Use This Guide

1. **Read the full passage first.** Each section prints the complete ASV text of the verses being studied. 2. **Work through the commentary.** Verse markers in bold (for example, **v. 4**) let you follow the explanation verse by verse. 3. **Look up the cross-references.** Scripture interprets Scripture; the references show how Ecclesiastes connects with the rest of the Bible. 4. **Apply it.** Each chapter ends with Life Application points, Discussion Questions and a closing prayer. 5. **Study in twelve weeks.** One chapter per week makes a natural quarter-long study. A twelve-week plan is included at the back of the book.

Overview of Ecclesiastes

Part	Title	Passage	Content
I	The Search Under the Sun	1:1 - 2:26	The thesis stated; the Preacher tests wisdom, pleasure, achievement and labor
II	A Time for Everything	3:1 - 5:20	God's sovereign seasons; oppression and companionship; reverence and riches
III	Wisdom in a Crooked World	6:1 - 8:17	Unenjoyed wealth; proverbs of wisdom; the king and the mystery of providence
IV	Remember Thy Creator	9:1 - 12:14	One fate for all; enjoy life now; wisdom and folly; youth, age and the conclusion

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Qoheleth	"The Preacher," "the Convener" - one who gathers an assembly and speaks to it.
Hebel	"Vanity" - vapor, breath, mist; what is fleeting, elusive and cannot be grasped.
Under the sun	Life viewed from the earthly, horizontal perspective, apart from God.
Striving after wind	ASV rendering of the Preacher's picture of chasing what cannot be caught.
Yithron	"Profit" or "gain" - what is left over at the end; the lasting surplus of a life.
Chelek	"Portion" - the share God gives each person to enjoy in this life.
Fear of God	Reverent awe, trust and obedience toward God; the book's final answer (12:13).



PART I

THE SEARCH UNDER THE SUN

Ecclesiastes 1:1 - 2:26

The Preacher states his thesis and sets out on the greatest experiment ever recorded: to find, under the sun, something that lasts. He tests wisdom, pleasure, great works, wealth and labor itself, and he reports back with brutal honesty.

CHAPTER 1

ALL IS VANITY

The Preacher States His Case



The sun rises and goes down, the wind circles, and the rivers run to the sea; yet nothing under the sun is ever finished (Ecclesiastes 1:5-7).

Chapter 1 is the overture of Ecclesiastes. In eighteen verses the Preacher announces his theme, describes the endless cycles of nature and history, and introduces himself as a king who set out to search out everything done under heaven. By the end of the chapter he has already reached a sobering verdict: the crooked cannot be made straight, and more wisdom brings more grief. The rest of the book unfolds and tests that verdict.

◆ The Preacher Introduced

ECCLESIASTES 1:1 • ASV

> **1:1** The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

v. 1 — The book opens with the speaker's credentials. He is "the Preacher," Qoheleth, the one who gathers an assembly to hear him. He is "the son of David," which identifies him with the royal line God

promised to establish forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). And he is "king in Jerusalem," the city God chose to put His name there (1 Kings 11:36). This is no armchair philosopher. He is a man with unlimited resources, unrivaled wisdom and absolute authority, the one person in the ancient world best positioned to test whether anything under the sun can satisfy the human heart.

The title "Preacher" also tells us how to read the book. This is not a private diary; it is a message addressed to a congregation. Qoheleth wants us to listen, to think and ultimately to respond. Like a preacher, he will argue, illustrate, warn and plead, and he will close with an altar call: "Fear God, and keep his commandments" (12:13).

◆ The Thesis: Vapor of Vapors

ECCLESIASTES 1:2-3 • ASV

> **1:2** Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity.
>
> **1:3** What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun?

v. 2 — "Vanity of vanities" is a Hebrew superlative, like "song of songs" or "holy of holies." It means "the most fleeting of all fleeting things," "utter vapor." The Preacher repeats the phrase twice and then sweeps it over everything: "all is vanity." The Hebrew *hebel* is the word for breath or mist. It is also the name of Abel (*Hebel*), the second son of Adam, whose life was cut short like a breath (Genesis 4:8). Under the sun, every life, every achievement and every pleasure is like Abel: here, and then suddenly gone.

v. 3 — The question of verse 3 drives the whole book: "What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun?" The word "profit" (*yithron*) is a business term meaning what is left over, the surplus or net gain. After all the effort, sweat and planning of a lifetime, what is left in the account when the books are closed? Notice the qualifier "under the sun." The Preacher is not asking whether labor done for God has value; Paul assures us it does (1 Corinthians 15:58). He is asking whether labor viewed only on the earthly level produces any permanent gain. Jesus asked the same question: "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" (Matthew 16:26).

◆ The Endless Cycles of Creation

ECCLESIASTES 1:4-7 • ASV

> **1:4** One generation goeth, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.
>
> **1:5** The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to its place where it ariseth.
>
> **1:6** The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually in its course, and the wind returneth again to its circuits.

> **1:7** All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again.

v. 4 — Generations rise and fall like waves, "but the earth abideth for ever." The irony is sharp: man, made in God's image and given dominion over the earth, passes away, while the dirt he walks on remains. Each of us is a temporary resident on a permanent stage.

v. 5 — The sun rises, sets and "hasteth" (literally "pants") back to its place, like a runner gasping as it hurries to start the same race again. Psalm 19:5 pictures the sun as a joyful strong man running his course; the Preacher sees the same sun as a weary laborer on an endless treadmill.

v. 6 — The wind blows south, turns north, and goes round and round, "and the wind returneth again to its circuits." Motion without arrival. It is a striking description of atmospheric circulation, written centuries before modern meteorology, and it fits the Preacher's point perfectly: endless activity, no final destination.

v. 7 — "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full." The water returns to the place from which it came, through evaporation and rain (compare Job 36:27-28; Amos 9:6), and the cycle begins again. Nature is busy, but nature never finishes. The Preacher's point is not to criticize creation but to show that if we look to the created order for meaning, we find repetition rather than resolution. Romans 8:20 explains why: "the creation was subjected to vanity," waiting for the day of redemption.

◆ Nothing New Under the Sun

ECCLESIASTES 1:8-11 • ASV

> **1:8** All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.
>
> **1:9** That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.
>
> **1:10** Is there a thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been long ago, in the ages which were before us.
>
> **1:11** There is no remembrance of the former generations; neither shall there be any remembrance of the latter generations that are to come, among those that shall come after.

v. 8 — "All things are full of weariness." The cycles of nature are mirrored in the human heart. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." We are made with appetites that the world can stimulate but never fill. Proverbs 27:20 says the same: "the eyes of man are never satisfied." That restless hunger is not a design flaw; it is a homing signal pointing beyond the world to God (see 3:11).

v. 9 — "There is no new thing under the sun." Technology changes, but human nature, human sin and human longing do not. The same pride that built Babel builds empires today; the same greed, lust, fear and hope fill every generation. Solomon is not denying invention; he is denying that any invention can change the fundamental condition of life under the sun.

v. 10 — When people do claim, "See, this is new," the Preacher answers that "it hath been long ago, in the ages which were before us." What seems novel is usually a rediscovery or a rearrangement of something old.

v. 11 — Then the most humbling verse of the chapter: "There is no remembrance of the former generations." Most people who have ever lived are utterly forgotten, and we will be too. Fame is vapor. Only God keeps a perfect remembrance: "a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared Jehovah" (Malachi 3:16).

◆ The King's Great Search

ECCLESIASTES 1:12-15 • ASV

> **1:12** I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
>
> **1:13** And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven: it is a sore travail that God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith.
>
> **1:14** I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.
>
> **1:15** That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

v. 12 — The Preacher now speaks in the first person: "I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem." The past tense "was" may reflect a man writing late in life, looking back over his reign.

v. 13 — He "applied [his] heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven." This was a deliberate, systematic investigation, the most thorough research project ever undertaken by a human being. His first finding is that the search itself is "sore travail," a heavy burden "that God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith." God has built into human beings a drive to understand, but under the curse (Genesis 3:17-19) that drive is accompanied by frustration.

v. 14 — "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." To strive after wind is to try to catch, herd or grasp something that by its very nature cannot be held. That is life under the sun.

v. 15 — "That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered." Human wisdom cannot fix what sin has bent, and it cannot supply what is missing. Only God can make the crooked straight (Isaiah 40:4; Luke 3:5), and the Preacher will later say that no one

can straighten what God has made crooked (7:13). This is a confession of the limits of human ability, and it prepares the heart for grace.

◆ The Burden of Wisdom

ECCLESIASTES 1:16-18 • ASV

> **1:16** I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I have gotten me great wisdom above all that were before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart hath had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.
>
> **1:17** And I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also was a striving after wind.
>
> **1:18** For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

v. 16 — Solomon "communed with [his] own heart." He reviewed his credentials: he had gotten great wisdom "above all that were before me in Jerusalem," and his heart "hath had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." God Himself had promised that no one before or after would be like him in wisdom (1 Kings 3:12). If wisdom alone could deliver lasting satisfaction, this man would have found it.

v. 17 — He studied both sides: wisdom, and "madness and folly." He wanted to understand life from every angle, including the lives of fools. His conclusion: "this also was a striving after wind."

v. 18 — "For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." The more clearly you see the world, the more clearly you see its injustice, brokenness and death. Ignorance can be a kind of anesthesia; wisdom removes it. This is not an argument against learning; Proverbs commands us to get wisdom (Proverbs 4:7). It is a warning that wisdom detached from God cannot heal what it reveals. The cure for the sorrow of knowledge is not less knowledge but the knowledge of God, "in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Colossians 2:3).

Life Application

- Name the "under the sun" pursuits you have looked to for lasting meaning: career, savings, reputation, relationships, entertainment. Ask honestly what profit they leave when the books are closed.
- Let the restlessness of your eyes and ears point you to God instead of driving you to the next purchase or screen.
- Take comfort that God remembers what the world forgets. Your faithful service is recorded in heaven even if no one on earth ever notices.
- Admit the limits of your ability to straighten what is crooked, in yourself or others, and bring those things to the One who can.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Bible includes a book that begins "all is vanity"? What does that say about God's honesty with us?

2. What does the image of vapor or breath add to your understanding of the word "vanity"?

3. Where do you see the "endless cycles" of verses 4-7 in your own daily life?

4. Why does increased knowledge sometimes increase sorrow? How does knowing God change that?

5. How does Jesus' question in Matthew 16:26 echo the Preacher's question in verse 3?

Prayer

Eternal God, You remain while generations come and go. Forgive me for building my life on vapor and chasing the wind. Open my eyes to see that nothing under the sun can fill the hunger You have placed in my heart. Make the crooked places in me straight by Your grace, and teach me to labor for what lasts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

Pleasure, Possessions and Labor Weighed in the Balance



Solomon "made me gardens and parks... pools of water" and gathered silver and gold, yet found it all vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:5-11).

Having found that wisdom alone brings grief, the Preacher turns to pleasure. He has every resource needed to test it to the limit: wine, building projects, gardens, servants, flocks, treasure, music and romance. Chapter 2 is the record of that experiment and of his growing disillusionment with labor itself. Yet the chapter closes with the first great turning point of the book: the simple gifts of life are good when received from the hand of God.

◆ Testing Laughter and Wine

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-3 • ASV

> 2:1 I said in my heart, Come now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also was vanity.
>
> 2:2 I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?
>
> 2:3 I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine, my heart yet guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their life.

v. 1 — "Come now, I will prove thee with mirth." The king addresses his own heart and sets up a test. He will enjoy pleasure on purpose, as an experiment, to see whether pleasure is "good." The verdict comes immediately: "behold, this also was vanity."

v. 2 — "I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?" Laughter is a gift, but laughter used as an escape solves nothing. The party ends, and the problems are still waiting at the door. Proverbs 14:13 says, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful."

v. 3 — He tried wine, but carefully: "my heart yet guiding me with wisdom." This was not drunken abandon but controlled research. He wanted to "lay hold on folly" in order to see "what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their life." He is asking the central question of human existence: in the few days we have, what is actually worth doing?

◆ The Great Works of a King

ECCLESIASTES 2:4-8 • ASV

> 2:4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards;
>
> 2:5 I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit;
>
> 2:6 I made me pools of water, to water therefrom the forest where trees were reared;
>
> 2:7 I bought men-servants and maid-servants, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in Jerusalem;
>
> 2:8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

v. 4 — "I made me great works." Notice how often the word "me" appears in these verses: I builded me, I planted me, I made me. The project was entirely self-directed. Solomon built houses, including his own palace that took thirteen years (1 Kings 7:1), and planted vineyards.

v. 5 — "Gardens and parks." The Hebrew word for park, *pardes*, is related to our word "paradise." Solomon tried to rebuild Eden by his own effort, filling the parks "with all kinds of fruit-trees."

v. 6 — He made "pools of water" to irrigate forests. Large ancient reservoirs south of Bethlehem have long been called "Solomon's Pools," a reminder of the scale of royal engineering.

v. 7 — Servants and maidens, servants "born in my house," and "great possessions of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in Jerusalem." Compare the daily provision for Solomon's household in 1 Kings 4:22-23.

v. 8 — Silver and gold, "the treasure of kings and of the provinces," singers, and "the delights of the sons of men, musical instruments, and that of all sorts." Silver was so plentiful in Solomon's Jerusalem that it was "as stones" (1 Kings 10:27). Nothing that money, power or art could supply was withheld from this experiment.

◆ The Verdict on Pleasure

ECCLESIASTES 2:9-11 • ASV

> 2:9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.
>
> 2:10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced because of all my labor; and this was my portion from all my labor.
>
> 2:11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

v. 9 — "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me." He did not lose his mind in the process. He was able to evaluate the experiment clearly.

v. 10 — "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them." Here is a man who never had to say no to himself. He even found a kind of joy in the work itself: "my heart rejoiced because of all my labor; and this was my portion." The process brought temporary satisfaction.

v. 11 — Then he stepped back and looked: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought... and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun." The ladder was fully climbed, and the top was empty. This is perhaps the most important testimony in the book for a consumer culture: the man who had everything found that everything was not enough. Only Christ can say, "he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

◆ Wisdom, Folly and the Common Grave

ECCLESIASTES 2:12-17 • ASV

> **2:12** And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been done long ago.
>
> **2:13** Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.
>
> **2:14** The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walketh in darkness: and yet I perceived that one event happeneth to them all.
>
> **2:15** Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then said I in my heart, that this also is vanity.
>
> **2:16** For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance for ever; seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. And how doth the wise man die even as the fool!
>
> **2:17** So I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun was grievous unto me; for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

v. 12 — The king turns again to compare "wisdom, and madness, and folly." He adds that no successor could do better: "what can the man do that cometh after the king?" If the king could not find meaning in this way, no one can.

v. 13 — Wisdom does have real advantages: "wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." The Preacher never says wisdom and folly are equal in this life.

v. 14 — "The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walketh in darkness." The wise man sees where he is going. "And yet," he adds, "one event happeneth to them all." The same death comes to both.

v. 15 — "Why was I then more wise?" If the end is the same, what is the point of all the effort? "This also is vanity."

v. 16 — Neither the wise nor the fool is remembered for long: "seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. And how doth the wise man die even as the fool!" Death is the great equalizer.

v. 17 — "So I hated life." This is raw honesty. The richest, wisest man in the world reached a point where his life felt grievous to him. Scripture does not hide such moments; Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Job (Job 3:1-26) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:14-18) all spoke similar words. God allows us to bring our darkest thoughts to Him honestly.

The Frustration of Labor

ECCLESIASTES 2:18-23 • ASV

> **2:18** And I hated all my labor wherein I labored under the sun, seeing that I must leave it unto the man that shall be after me.
>
> **2:19** And who knoweth whether he will be a wise man or a fool? yet will he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.
>
> **2:20** Therefore I turned about to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labor wherein I had labored under the sun.
>
> **2:21** For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skilfulness; yet to a man that hath not labored therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.
>
> **2:22** For what hath a man of all his labor, and of the striving of his heart, wherein he laboreth under the sun?
>
> **2:23** For all his days are but sorrows, and his travail is grief; yea, even in the night his heart taketh no rest. This also is vanity.

v. 18 — "I hated all my labor... seeing that I must leave it unto the man that shall be after me." You cannot take it with you, and you cannot control what happens to it after you are gone.

v. 19 — "Who knoweth whether he will be a wise man or a fool?" History gave a painful answer. Solomon's son Rehoboam, through foolish pride, lost ten of the twelve tribes almost immediately after Solomon's death (1 Kings 12:1-20).

v. 20 — "I turned about to cause my heart to despair." He gave up hope in the value of his work.

v. 21 — One man labors "with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skilfulness," and then leaves his portion to someone "that hath not labored therein." The unfairness of it is "a great evil."

v. 22 — "For what hath a man of all his labor, and of the striving of his heart?" The question of 1:3 returns with even more force.

v. 23 — "All his days are but sorrows, and his travail is grief; yea, even in the night his heart taketh no rest." Anxiety follows the workaholic into the bedroom. Psalm 127:2 offers the contrast: "It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of toil; for so he giveth unto his beloved sleep."

◆ The First Turning Point: Gifts from God's Hand

ECCLESIASTES 2:24-26 • ASV

> 2:24 There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God.
>
> 2:25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?
>
> 2:26 For to the man that pleaseth him God giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that pleaseth God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

v. 24 — Here the book turns a corner. "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor." This is not the hedonism of verses 1-11. The difference is in the next phrase: "This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God." Food, drink and satisfying work are not ends in themselves; they are gifts. When we stop demanding that they give our lives ultimate meaning and receive them instead as presents from a good Father, they become sources of genuine joy (1 Timothy 6:17).

v. 25 — "For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?" Some ancient versions and many modern translations read "apart from him," meaning apart from God. The capacity to enjoy anything is itself a gift from God.

v. 26 — God gives "wisdom, and knowledge, and joy" to "the man that pleaseth him," but to the sinner He gives "travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that pleaseth God." The one who lives for possessions ends up a mere collector for others (compare Proverbs 13:22; Job 27:16-17). The difference between vapor and joy is not the amount of what we have but our relationship with the Giver.

Life Application

- Examine whether you are using pleasure, entertainment or busyness to escape problems that only God can solve.
- Count the "me" in your plans. Are your goals self-directed, or offered to God for His purposes?
- If you have reached a place of weariness with life, tell God honestly. Scripture shows that He welcomes honest lament.
- Practice receiving ordinary gifts, a meal, a day's work, a night's sleep, as coming "from the hand of God," and thank Him specifically for them.
- Remember that you cannot control what happens to your work after you; invest in what God will preserve.

Discussion Questions

1. What was Solomon really searching for in verses 1-11? Why couldn't pleasure provide it?

2. Why do you think possessions and achievements often feel empty once we have them?

3. How does the reality of death change the way we value wisdom, work and wealth?

4. What makes the eating and drinking of verse 24 different from the pleasure-seeking of verses 1-3?

5. How does verse 26 show that joy depends on our relationship with God rather than our circumstances?

Prayer

Father, I confess that I have often looked for paradise in the gardens I plant with my own hands. Teach me that every good thing I enjoy comes from Your hand. Free me from the anxious labor that keeps my heart awake at night, and give me the wisdom, knowledge and joy You promise to those who please You. In Jesus' name, Amen.



PART II

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Ecclesiastes 3:1 - 5:20

The Preacher lifts his eyes from human striving to divine sovereignty. God has appointed a season for every matter and set eternity in our hearts. Then he looks honestly at oppression, rivalry, loneliness, empty religion and the love of money.

CHAPTER 3

A SEASON FOR EVERY PURPOSE

God's Sovereign Times and the Eternity in Our Hearts



"For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Chapter 3 contains the most famous poem in Ecclesiastes. Its fourteen pairs of opposites describe the full sweep of human experience, from birth to death, and declare that every moment is held within God's appointed times. The Preacher then makes one of the most profound statements in all Scripture: God "hath set eternity in their heart." The chapter closes by wrestling with injustice and with the death that humans share with animals.

◆ A Time for Everything

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8 • ASV

3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

3:2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

3:3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

> **3:4** a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
>
> **3:5** a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
>
> **3:6** a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
>
> **3:7** a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
>
> **3:8** a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

v. 1 — "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." The word "season" means an appointed time. The poem that follows is not a list of instructions ("you should do these things") but a description of the God-governed rhythms of life. Nothing happens outside His timing.

v. 2 — "A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." The poem begins with the two boundaries of every life, birth and death, neither of which we choose. Psalm 31:15 confesses, "My times are in thy hand." Agriculture follows the same pattern: planting and harvesting each have their season.

v. 3 — "A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up." Killing here likely refers to execution of justice, war or the slaughter of animals; healing restores. Life includes seasons of demolition and seasons of construction, both for cities and for souls.

v. 4 — "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Emotions have their proper seasons. Romans 12:15 calls us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, which requires discerning which season a friend is in.

v. 5 — "A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing." Stones might be cleared from a field for planting or gathered to build a wall. Embracing has its time, and so does restraint.

v. 6 — "A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." There are seasons for acquiring and seasons for letting go, for searching and for giving up the search.

v. 7 — "A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." Tearing garments was a sign of grief (Genesis 37:34); sewing marked the end of mourning. Silence and speech each have their hour; James 1:19 urges us to be "swift to hear, slow to speak."

v. 8 — "A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace." Even love and hatred have their place: we are to love God and neighbor, and to "abhor that which is evil" (Romans 12:9). The poem ends with peace, perhaps a hint of where God's purposes are ultimately heading.

◆ Eternity in the Human Heart

ECCLESIASTES 3:9-11 • ASV

> **3:9** What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?
>
> **3:10** I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith.
>
> **3:11** He hath made everything beautiful in its time: also he hath set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end.

v. 9 — "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?" If every season is fixed by God, what can our labor add? The question of 1:3 returns, but now in the light of divine sovereignty.

v. 10 — "I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith." The Preacher repeats 1:13, but this time he goes further.

v. 11 — "He hath made everything beautiful in its time." God is not only sovereign over the seasons; He makes each one fit and lovely in its proper place. Even sorrow and loss, in God's hand, become part of a beautiful design (Romans 8:28). Then the crowning statement: "also he hath set eternity in their heart." God has planted in every human being a sense of the eternal, a longing for permanence, meaning and transcendence that nothing temporal can satisfy. Augustine prayed, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." Yet the verse ends with humility: man "cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." We sense eternity, but we cannot see the whole picture. That tension is meant to drive us to trust.

◆ Joy, Gift and the Permanence of God's Work

ECCLESIASTES 3:12-15 • ASV

> **3:12** I know that there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and to do good so long as they live.
>
> **3:13** And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor, is the gift of God.
>
> **3:14** I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it; and God hath done it, that men should fear before him.
>
> **3:15** That which is hath been long ago; and that which is to be hath long ago been: and God seeketh again that which is passed away.

v. 12 — "I know that there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and to do good so long as they live." Joy and goodness belong together. Enjoyment of life is not selfish when it is joined to doing good for others.

v. 13 — "Every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor, is the gift of God." The refrain of 2:24 returns: life's simple pleasures are divine gifts.

v. 14 — Here is the contrast with human labor: "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." Man's work is vapor; God's work is permanent. And God's purpose in this? "God hath done it, that men should fear before him." The permanence of God's work and the impermanence of ours are designed to produce reverence.

v. 15 — "That which is hath been long ago; and that which is to be hath long ago been: and God seeketh again that which is passed away." God holds all of history in His hand, and nothing escapes Him. He will call the past to account.

◆ Wickedness in the Place of Justice

ECCLESIASTES 3:16-17 • ASV

> **3:16** And moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there.
>
> **3:17** I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

v. 16 — "I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there." The courtroom, the one place where right should prevail, was corrupted. The Preacher refuses to pretend injustice does not exist.

v. 17 — His response is faith in final judgment: "God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." The poem of verses 1-8 now takes on a new dimension. Just as there is a time to be born and a time to die, there is a time for judgment. Earthly courts may fail, but God's court will not (Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

◆ Man, Beast and the Question of the Spirit

ECCLESIASTES 3:18-22 • ASV

> **3:18** I said in my heart, It is because of the sons of men, that God may prove them, and that they may see that they themselves are but as beasts.
>
> **3:19** For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; and man hath no preeminence above the beasts: for all is vanity.
>
> **3:20** All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.
>
> **3:21** Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?

> 3:22 Wherefore I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him back to see what shall be after him?

v. 18 — God allows life's injustices to test humanity, "that they may see that they themselves are but as beasts." Left to ourselves, without God, we behave and end like animals.

v. 19 — "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts... as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath." Physically, humans and animals share the same mortality. From the perspective under the sun, man has "no preeminence above the beasts."

v. 20 — "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." This echoes God's word to Adam in Genesis 3:19.

v. 21 — "Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?" Under the sun, observation alone cannot prove what happens after death. The Preacher will answer this question later by faith: "the spirit returneth unto God who gave it" (12:7). Full light comes only in the gospel, where Christ "brought life and immortality to light" (2 Timothy 1:10).

v. 22 — Therefore, "there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion." Since we cannot see beyond death by our own sight, we should receive today's work and joy as our God-given portion. "For who shall bring him back to see what shall be after him?" Tomorrow belongs to God.

Life Application

- Identify the season you are in right now. Ask God for grace to live faithfully in it rather than resenting it or rushing past it.
- When you feel the ache for something more, recognize it as the eternity God has set in your heart, and bring that longing to Him.
- Trust that God makes everything beautiful in its time, even the chapters of your story that do not yet make sense.
- When you witness injustice, work for what is right, but rest your final hope in the God who will judge righteously.
- Rejoice in today's portion, and do good while you live.

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the fourteen pairs in verses 2-8 best describes your current season? How can you honor God in it?

2. What does it mean that God "hath set eternity in their heart"? How have you experienced that longing?

3. Why is it important that we cannot "find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end"?

4. How does the promise of God's judgment (v. 17) help us respond to injustice?

5. How does the New Testament answer the question of verse 21?

Prayer

Lord of every season, my times are in Your hand. Thank You for making everything beautiful in its time, even when I cannot see the whole design. Satisfy the eternity You have set in my heart with Yourself. Teach me to rejoice and do good while I live, and to rest in Your perfect justice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 4

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Oppression, Envy, Loneliness and the Fickleness of Fame



"Two are better than one... For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

In chapter 4 the Preacher turns from the big picture of God's times to the social world of human beings. He sees the tears of the oppressed, the envy that drives competition, the loneliness of the man who works only for himself, and the short shelf-life of political popularity. In the middle of the chapter stands one of the Bible's most beloved pictures of friendship and marriage: "a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

The Tears of the Oppressed

ECCLESIASTES 4:1-3 • ASV

> 4:1 Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and, behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.
>
> 4:2 Wherefore I praised the dead that have been long dead more than the living that are yet alive;
>
> 4:3 yea, better than them both did I esteem him that hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

v. 1 — "I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun." The Preacher looks at the victims: "behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter." Then he looks at the oppressors: "on the side of their oppressors there was power." The phrase "they had no comforter" is repeated for emphasis. Power without justice crushes the weak, and under the sun no one comes to help. Scripture never hides this reality, but it also promises a Comforter (John 14:16) and a God who is "a stronghold for the oppressed" (Psalm 9:9).

v. 2 — The sight is so grievous that the Preacher "praised the dead that have been long dead more than the living." For the oppressed, death seemed better than continued suffering.

v. 3 — "Yea, better than them both did I esteem him that hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." This is the lowest point of the Preacher's view under the sun, similar to Job's lament (Job 3:11-16). It is not God's final word on human life, but it is an honest expression of how unbearable injustice can feel. The Bible makes room for such grief while pointing forward to the day when God "shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4).

Envy, Idleness and Quiet Contentment

ECCLESIASTES 4:4-6 • ASV

> 4:4 Then I saw all labor and every skilful work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.
>
> 4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.
>
> 4:6 Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and striving after wind.

v. 4 — "I saw all labor and every skilful work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor." Much human achievement is driven by rivalry: keeping up with, and getting ahead of, the neighbor. What looks like industry is often envy in disguise. "This also is vanity and a striving after wind."

v. 5 — The opposite extreme is no better: "The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh." The lazy man consumes himself; his idleness destroys him (Proverbs 6:10-11; 24:33-34).

v. 6 — The wise path lies between envy-driven overwork and self-destroying laziness: "Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and striving after wind." One hand full and at rest is better than two hands full and grasping. Contentment is the key. Paul learned "in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content" (Philippians 4:11), and "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

◆ The Lonely Miser and the Threefold Cord

ECCLESIASTES 4:7-12 • ASV

> **4:7** Then I returned and saw vanity under the sun.
>
> **4:8** There is one that is alone, and he hath not a second; yea, he hath neither son nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labor, neither are his eyes satisfied with riches. For whom then, saith he, do I labor, and deprive my soul of good? This also is vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.
>
> **4:9** Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.
>
> **4:10** For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up.
>
> **4:11** Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one be warm alone?
>
> **4:12** And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

v. 7 — "Then I returned and saw vanity under the sun."

v. 8 — Here is a portrait of a lonely workaholic: "There is one that is alone, and he hath not a second; yea, he hath neither son nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labor, neither are his eyes satisfied with riches." He works without end and without anyone to share it. He never stops to ask, "For whom then, saith he, do I labor, and deprive my soul of good?" His wealth grows, but his life shrinks. "This also is vanity, yea, it is a sore travail."

v. 9 — "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor." God made us for relationship. From the beginning He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Shared labor multiplies its rewards.

v. 10 — "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up." Whether the fall is physical, financial, emotional or moral, we need someone to help us up. Galatians 6:1-2 calls believers to restore the fallen and bear one another's burdens.

v. 11 — "Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one be warm alone?" Travelers in the cold desert nights shared warmth for survival. The verse applies naturally to marriage, but also to the comfort of close friendship and Christian fellowship.

v. 12 — "And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him." Companions protect each other. Then the climax: "and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Two strands are good; three are stronger still. Christians have long seen in the third strand a picture of God woven into a marriage or friendship. A relationship that includes the Lord at its center has a strength that no merely human bond can match (Matthew 18:20).

◆ The Fickleness of Popularity

ECCLESIASTES 4:13-16 • ASV

> 4:13 Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who knoweth not how to receive admonition any more.
>
> 4:14 For out of prison he came forth to be king; yea, even in his kingdom he was born poor.
>
> 4:15 I saw all the living that walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the second, that stood up in his stead.
>
> 4:16 There was no end of all the people, even of all them over whom he was: yet they that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

v. 13 — "Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who knoweth not how to receive admonition any more." Age and position do not guarantee wisdom. A king who can no longer be corrected is headed for ruin (Proverbs 12:1). Solomon may have been reflecting on himself; his own heart was turned in old age (1 Kings 11:4).

v. 14 — The wise youth rises "out of prison" to reign, though he "even in his kingdom he was born poor." This recalls Joseph's rise from prison to power (Genesis 41:14, 41) and David's rise from shepherd to king.

v. 15 — The crowds rush after the new leader: "I saw all the living that walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the second, that stood up in his stead."

v. 16 — But the enthusiasm is temporary: "There was no end of all the people, even of all them over whom he was: yet they that come after shall not rejoice in him." Today's hero is tomorrow's forgotten man. Political popularity, like everything under the sun, "is vanity and a striving after wind." Only the reign of Christ, the true Son of David, will never end (Luke 1:32-33).

Life Application

- Notice the oppressed around you and become, in Christ's name, the comforter they lack.
- Examine your ambition: is it driven by envy of others or by faithfulness to God?
- Choose "a handful with quietness" over two handfuls of anxious striving.
- Ask the question of verse 8: "For whom do I labor?" Make sure your work is not costing you the relationships that matter most.
- Invest in faithful friendships and in a Christ-centered marriage; weave God into your closest bonds as the third strand.
- Stay teachable at every age. The day you stop receiving correction is the day you begin to fall.

Discussion Questions

1. How should Christians respond to the oppression described in verse 1?
2. Where do you see envy driving work and achievement in our culture, and in your own heart?
3. What does "a handful with quietness" look like in practical terms for you this week?
4. Who would lift you up if you fell? Whom are you available to lift?
5. What does the "threefold cord" teach us about marriage and friendship?
6. Why is popularity such an unreliable foundation for a life?

Prayer

Lord, You see every tear of the oppressed. Make me a comforter to those who have none. Free me from envy and restless striving, and teach me to be content with a quiet handful. Thank You for the friends and family You have given me; be the third strand in every bond, so that it is not quickly broken. Keep me teachable all my days. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 5

GUARD THY STEPS

Reverence in Worship and the Emptiness of Riches



"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; for to draw nigh to hear is better than to give the sacrifice of fools" (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

Chapter 5 moves from the marketplace to the temple and back again. The Preacher warns against careless worship, rash words and broken vows, and calls us to fear God. Then he examines the love of money, showing that riches cannot satisfy, cannot give rest and cannot be carried past the grave. The chapter ends with the book's richest statement yet about receiving life as God's gift.

◆ Come to Listen

ECCLESIASTES 5:1-3 • ASV

> 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; for to draw nigh to hear is better than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they know not that they do evil.
>
> 5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.
>
> 5:3 For a dream cometh with a multitude of business, and a fool's voice with a multitude of words.

v. 1 — "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God." Watch your step; come carefully. Worship is not a casual activity. "For to draw nigh to hear is better than to give the sacrifice of fools." God values a listening, obedient heart more than religious ritual. Samuel told Saul, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). The fools here offer sacrifices while their lives remain unchanged, and "they know not that they do evil."

v. 2 — "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God." The reason is profound: "for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." Prayer is not a performance measured by length. Jesus warned against "vain repetitions" and said that God knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:7-8). Reverence produces fewer, weightier words.

v. 3 — "For a dream cometh with a multitude of business, and a fool's voice with a multitude of words." Just as a busy mind produces restless dreams, a foolish heart produces a flood of empty words. Proverbs 10:19 says, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression."

◆ Keep Your Vows and Fear God

ECCLESIASTES 5:4-7 • ASV

> 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou vowest.
>
> 5:5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.
>
> 5:6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?
>
> 5:7 For in the multitude of dreams there are vanities, and in many words: but fear thou God.

v. 4 — "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou vowest." A vow was a voluntary promise to God, often made in a time of need (Deuteronomy 23:21-23). God takes our promises seriously.

v. 5 — "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." No one is required to make a vow, but once made it must be kept. Jesus taught His followers to be people whose simple "yes" and "no" can be trusted (Matthew 5:37).

v. 6 — "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error." The "angel" likely refers to the priest or temple messenger who received the vow. Do not try to escape a promise by calling it a mistake. "Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?"

v. 7 — "For in the multitude of dreams there are vanities, and in many words: but fear thou God." Here is the antidote to empty religion: the fear of God. This phrase anticipates the book's conclusion (12:13). Reverence for God brings our words, vows and worship into line.

◆ Layers of Officials

ECCLESIASTES 5:8-9 • ASV

> 5:8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a province, marvel not at the matter: for one higher than the high regardeth; and there are higher than they.
>
> 5:9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.

v. 8 — "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a province, marvel not at the matter." Do not be shocked by corruption in government. "For one higher than the high regardeth; and there are higher than they." Each official is watched by another above him, and the system can become a ladder of exploitation. But ultimately there is One higher than all the high, God Himself, who sees and will judge.

v. 9 — "Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field." Even the highest ruler depends on the produce of the land and the work of the farmer. Everyone, from king to peasant, depends on God's provision through the earth.

◆ Money Never Satisfies

ECCLESIASTES 5:10-12 • ASV

> **5:10** He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase: this also is vanity.
>
> **5:11** When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what advantage is there to the owner thereof, save the beholding of them with his eyes?
>
> **5:12** The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the fulness of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

v. 10 — "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase." The love of money is a hunger that grows by feeding. However much you get, the desire is always for a little more. Paul warns that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). "This also is vanity."

v. 11 — "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them." More wealth means more expenses, more staff, more dependents and more people who want a share. "What advantage is there to the owner thereof, save the beholding of them with his eyes?" Often the owner can only look at his riches; he cannot consume more than one meal or sleep in more than one bed.

v. 12 — "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the fulness of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." The honest worker sleeps soundly. The rich man lies awake, worrying about investments, thieves and losses. Wealth promises security but often delivers anxiety.

◆ Riches Lost and Riches Left Behind

ECCLESIASTES 5:13-17 • ASV

> **5:13** There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt:
>
> **5:14** and those riches perish by evil adventure; and if he hath begotten a son, there is nothing in his hand.
>
> **5:15** As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand.
>
> **5:16** And this also is a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that he laboreth for the wind?
>
> **5:17** All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he is sore vexed, and hath sickness and wrath.

v. 13 — "There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt." Hoarded wealth can harm the one who hoards it.

v. 14 — "Those riches perish by evil adventure." A bad investment or a disaster wipes them out, "and if he hath begotten a son, there is nothing in his hand." The father has nothing to pass on.

v. 15 — "As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came." Job said the same: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither" (Job 1:21). "And shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand." Paul echoes it: "we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out" (1 Timothy 6:7).

v. 16 — "And this also is a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that he laboreth for the wind?"

v. 17 — "All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he is sore vexed, and hath sickness and wrath." The life devoted to accumulating wealth ends in gloom, frustration, illness and anger. Jesus told of a rich fool who built bigger barns and died that night: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

◆ The Gift of Enjoyment

ECCLESIASTES 5:18-20 • ASV

> 5:18 Behold, that which I have seen to be good and to be comely is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor, wherein he laboreth under the sun, all the days of his life which God hath given him: for this is his portion.
>
> 5:19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.
>
> 5:20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

v. 18 — Against this dark picture the Preacher sets a bright one: "Behold, that which I have seen to be good and to be comely is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor... all the days of his life which God hath given him: for this is his portion." Life itself is a God-given portion, and simple enjoyment of it is good and fitting.

v. 19 — "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God." Notice the two separate gifts: the wealth itself, and the power to enjoy it. Many people have the first without the second. The ability to enjoy what we have is as much God's gift as the possessions themselves.

v. 20 — "For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart." The person who receives life as a gift is so occupied with God-given joy that he does not brood over the brevity and troubles of life. God "answers" him, meeting him with gladness. This is the opposite of the anxious rich man of verse 12. The difference is not the size of the bank account but the posture of the heart toward God.

Life Application

- Prepare your heart before worship. Come to listen and obey, not merely to perform.
- Let your prayers be honest and reverent rather than long and showy.
- Keep your promises to God and to others, or do not make them.
- Do not be surprised by corruption; remember that One higher than the high is watching.
- Test your relationship with money: are you ever satisfied? Do your finances cost you sleep?
- Ask God not only for provision but for the gift of enjoying what He has already given.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to "keep thy foot" when going to the house of God?
2. Why does God value listening above sacrifice? What does that look like in modern worship?
3. Have you ever made a promise to God that you have not kept? What should you do about it?
4. Why does the love of money never satisfy?
5. What is the difference between having riches and having the power to enjoy them (v. 19)?
6. How can a person be "answered in the joy of his heart" (v. 20)?

Prayer

Holy God, You are in heaven and I am on earth. Teach me to come before You with reverence, to listen more than I speak, and to keep every promise I make. Deliver me from the love of money. Thank You for my daily portion, and give me the gift of enjoying it with a grateful heart. Answer me, Lord, in the joy of my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.



PART III

WISDOM IN A CROOKED WORLD

Ecclesiastes 6:1 - 8:17

The Preacher confronts the riddle of wealth that cannot be enjoyed, then gathers a collection of proverbs on how to live wisely in a world bent by sin. He counsels submission to authority and humble acceptance of a providence too deep to fathom.

CHAPTER 6

RICHES WITHOUT REST

The Emptiness of Unenjoyed Blessings



A treasury full of riches and empty of joy: "a man to whom God giveth riches... yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof" (Ecclesiastes 6:2).

Chapter 6 is short but heavy. It continues the theme of chapter 5 by describing the man who has everything except the ability to enjoy it. Long life, many children and great wealth cannot compensate for a soul that is never satisfied. The chapter closes with a series of probing questions that expose the limits of human knowledge and leave the reader looking to God.

The Man Who Had Everything but Joy

ECCLESIASTES 6:1-6 • ASV

> **6:1** There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy upon men:
>
> **6:2** a man to whom God giveth riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacketh nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but an alien eateth it; this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.
>
> **6:3** If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul be not filled with good, and moreover he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he:
>
> **6:4** for it cometh in vanity, and departeth in darkness, and the name thereof is covered with darkness;
>
> **6:5** moreover it hath not seen the sun nor known it; this hath rest rather than the other:
>
> **6:6** yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, and yet enjoy no good, do not all go to one place?

v. 1 — "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy upon men." This is not a rare problem; it weighs on humanity.

v. 2 — "A man to whom God giveth riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacketh nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but an alien eateth it." He has every outward blessing, yet he cannot enjoy them. Perhaps sickness, war, death or a restless heart intervenes, and a stranger ends up with what he gathered. "This is vanity, and it is an evil disease." This is the reverse of 5:19, where God gives both the wealth and the power to enjoy it.

v. 3 — In the ancient world, a hundred children and a long life were the ultimate signs of blessing. Yet "if a man beget a hundred children, and live many years... but his soul be not filled with good, and moreover he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he." To lack a proper burial was a final disgrace (Jeremiah 22:18-19). A life that never knew contentment, ending in dishonor, is worse than a life that never began.

v. 4 — The stillborn child "cometh in vanity, and departeth in darkness, and the name thereof is covered with darkness." Its existence is brief and unknown.

v. 5 — "Moreover it hath not seen the sun nor known it; this hath rest rather than the other." The stillborn child at least has rest, which the restless rich man never found.

v. 6 — "Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, and yet enjoy no good, do not all go to one place?" Even two thousand years of joyless living would end in the same grave. Length of life is not the measure of a good life; quality of soul is. Jesus came that we might have life "abundantly" (John 10:10), which is about fullness, not merely duration.

◆ The Appetite That Is Never Filled

ECCLESIASTES 6:7-9 • ASV

> **6:7** All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.
>
> **6:8** For what advantage hath the wise more than the fool? or what hath the poor man, that knoweth how to walk before the living?
>
> **6:9** Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

v. 7 — "All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled." We work to eat, and then we are hungry again. The word "appetite" is the Hebrew *nephesh*, "soul." The soul's hunger cannot be met by the mouth's food.

v. 8 — "For what advantage hath the wise more than the fool? or what hath the poor man, that knoweth how to walk before the living?" Even wisdom and good manners cannot satisfy the deepest hunger.

v. 9 — "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire." Enjoying what is in front of you is better than restless craving for what you do not have. This is the heart of contentment. "A bird in the hand" is the proverb's modern cousin. Hebrews 13:5 adds, "Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee." Yet even this practical wisdom, viewed only under the sun, "is vanity and a striving after wind."

◆ Questions Only God Can Answer

ECCLESIASTES 6:10-12 • ASV

> **6:10** Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago; and it is known what man is; neither can he contend with him that is mightier than he.
>
> **6:11** Seeing there are many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?
>
> **6:12** For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

v. 10 — "Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago." To name something in Hebrew thought was to define and know it. God has already named and determined all things. "And it is known what man is." Man is *adam*, from the dust (*adamah*). "Neither can he contend with him that is mightier than he." We cannot argue our way out of the limits God has set (Isaiah 45:9; Romans 9:20).

v. 11 — "Seeing there are many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?" Many words, many arguments and many theories only multiply the vapor.

v. 12 — The chapter, and the first half of the book, ends with two great questions. First: "For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?" Life passes like a shadow, and we do not know for certain what is best for us. Second: "For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" We cannot see the future. Both questions have the same answer: only God. That is why the second half of the book turns to wisdom for living under God's hand, and why the final answer is to fear Him and keep His commandments.

Life Application

- Thank God not only for His blessings but for the ability to enjoy them. Never take that second gift for granted.
- Measure your life by the satisfaction of your soul in God, not by its length or its outward success.
- Practice "the sight of the eyes": enjoy what God has put in front of you today instead of craving what you lack.
- Stop contending with God over the limits of your life. Bring your questions to Him in trust.
- Remember that your life is a shadow; spend it on what matters to God.

Discussion Questions

1. Why might God give someone wealth but not the power to enjoy it?
2. How can a person have "everything" and still have a soul not "filled with good"?
3. What does "the wandering of the desire" look like in modern life? How can we resist it?
4. Why is it futile to "contend with him that is mightier"?
5. How does the New Testament answer the two questions of verse 12?

Prayer

Father, You know what is good for me far better than I do. Forgive me for the wandering desires that keep me from enjoying Your gifts. Fill my soul with good, satisfy me with Yourself, and teach me to be content with what You have placed in my hands. I trust You with every question I cannot answer. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 7

BETTER THAN

Wisdom for a Crooked World



"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting" (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

Chapter 7 shifts style. Answering the question "who knoweth what is good for man?" (6:12), the Preacher offers a string of "better than" proverbs that overturn the world's values: mourning over feasting, rebuke over flattery, endings over beginnings, patience over pride. He then wrestles with the puzzles of providence, the danger of extremes, the universality of sin and the elusiveness of wisdom, concluding that God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.

The House of Mourning

ECCLESIASTES 7:1-4 • ASV

> 7:1 A good name is better than precious oil; and the day of death, than the day of one's birth.
>
> 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.
>
> 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad.
>
> 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

v. 1 — "A good name is better than precious oil." In Hebrew this is a wordplay: *tov shem mi-shemen tov*. Perfumed oil was costly and fragrant, but its scent fades; a good reputation endures (Proverbs 22:1). "And the day of death, than the day of one's birth." At birth, a life's character is unknown; at death, a good name is complete and secure. For the believer, death is the doorway to being "with Christ; for it is very far better" (Philippians 1:23).

v. 2 — "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." A funeral teaches what a party cannot: that we too will die. Moses prayed, "So teach us to number our days, that we may get us a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

v. 3 — "Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad." Godly sorrow deepens and purifies the heart. Paul writes that "godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

v. 4 — "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." The wise face reality; fools try to escape it through constant entertainment.

Rebuke, Patience and the Good Old Days

ECCLESIASTES 7:5-10 • ASV

> 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.
>
> 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.
>
> 7:7 Surely extortion maketh the wise man foolish; and a bribe destroyeth the understanding.
>
> 7:8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
>
> 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

> 7:10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

v. 5 — "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools." Correction from a wise friend is worth more than flattery from fools (Proverbs 27:6).

v. 6 — "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool." Thorns burn quickly, noisily and briefly, producing little heat. The fool's laughter is just as loud and just as useless. "This also is vanity."

v. 7 — "Surely extortion maketh the wise man foolish; and a bribe destroyeth the understanding." Even the wise can be corrupted by oppression or by bribes (Exodus 23:8).

v. 8 — "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." Finishing well matters more than starting well. "And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." Pride rushes and quits; patience endures to the end.

v. 9 — "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools." Anger may visit the wise, but it lives permanently in the fool. James 1:19-20 says, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

v. 10 — "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." Nostalgia distorts the past and breeds discontent with the present. Every age has had its sins and its blessings. God calls us to be faithful in our own generation, as David "served the counsel of God" in his (Acts 13:36).

◆ Wisdom's Shelter and God's Crooked Paths

ECCLESIASTES 7:11-14 • ASV

> 7:11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance; yea, more excellent is it for them that see the sun.
>
> 7:12 For wisdom is a defence, even as money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom preserveth the life of him that hath it.
>
> 7:13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?
>
> 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; yea, God hath made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything that shall be after him.

v. 11 — "Wisdom is as good as an inheritance; yea, more excellent is it for them that see the sun." Wisdom combined with resources is a great advantage for living.

v. 12 — "For wisdom is a defence, even as money is a defence." Both provide a kind of shelter. "But the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom preserveth the life of him that hath it." Money protects possessions; wisdom protects life itself (Proverbs 3:13-18).

v. 13 — "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" This echoes 1:15, but now it is explicitly God's work. Some things in our lives are bent by God's sovereign hand for His purposes, and we cannot straighten them. The wise response is to consider, to stop and reflect on God's ways rather than to fight them.

v. 14 — "In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; yea, God hath made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything that shall be after him." Both prosperity and adversity come from God (Job 2:10; Lamentations 3:38). He mixes them so that we cannot predict the future or trust in ourselves, but must depend on Him. In good days, rejoice; in hard days, reflect.

◆ The Danger of Extremes

ECCLESIASTES 7:15-18 • ASV

> 7:15 All this have I seen in my days of vanity: there is a righteous man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his evil-doing.
>
> 7:16 Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?
>
> 7:17 Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?
>
> 7:18 It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from that withdraw not thy hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth from them all.

v. 15 — "All this have I seen in my days of vanity: there is a righteous man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his evil-doing." Life does not always follow the pattern of immediate reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked (compare Psalm 73).

v. 16 — "Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" This is not a warning against true holiness, which God commands (1 Peter 1:16). It is a warning against self-righteousness, the proud religiosity of those who trust their own goodness and rigid rule-keeping, like the Pharisees (Luke 18:9-14). Such pride destroys.

v. 17 — "Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?" The opposite extreme, reckless sin, also destroys and can shorten life.

v. 18 — "It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from that withdraw not thy hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth from them all." The fear of God is the path that escapes both

self-righteous pride and careless sin. It is not a lukewarm middle; it is a God-centered life.

◆ No One Is Without Sin

ECCLESIASTES 7:19-22 • ASV

> 7:19 Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city.
>
> 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.
>
> 7:21 Also take not heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee;
>
> 7:22 for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

v. 19 — "Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city." Wisdom provides more protection than a city council of powerful men.

v. 20 — "Surely there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Here is a central verse on human sinfulness, echoed in 1 Kings 8:46 (Solomon's own prayer) and quoted in substance by Paul in Romans 3:10, 23. This explains why the righteous are not always rewarded on earth: no one is perfectly righteous. Only Christ "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

v. 21 — "Also take not heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee." Do not listen to every bit of gossip about yourself.

v. 22 — "For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others." Before taking offense at what others say about you, remember what you have said about others. Humility is the cure for hypersensitivity (Matthew 7:1-5).

◆ The Search for Wisdom and the Root of Sin

ECCLESIASTES 7:23-29 • ASV

> 7:23 All this have I proved in wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.
>
> 7:24 That which is, is far off and exceeding deep; who can find it out?
>
> 7:25 I turned about, and my heart was set to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things, and to know that wickedness is folly, and that foolishness is madness.
>
> 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.
>
> 7:27 Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, laying one thing to another, to find out the account;
>
> 7:28 which my soul still seeketh, but I have not found: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

> 7:29 Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

v. 23 — "All this have I proved in wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me." Even Solomon could not attain the full wisdom he sought.

v. 24 — "That which is, is far off and exceeding deep; who can find it out?" True wisdom, the full understanding of reality, belongs to God alone (Job 28:12-28; Romans 11:33).

v. 25 — He turned his heart "to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things, and to know that wickedness is folly, and that foolishness is madness." He wanted to understand both righteousness and the nature of sin.

v. 26 — "And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are bands." He describes the seductive, adulterous woman of Proverbs 5-7. Solomon knew this danger personally; his foreign wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:3-4). "Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her." The verse is about a specific kind of person, not about women in general.

v. 27 — "Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, laying one thing to another, to find out the account." He added up the evidence piece by piece.

v. 28 — "Which my soul still seeketh, but I have not found: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found." Solomon, with his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3), is reporting what he found in his own corrupt court. Truly upright people were rare among men, and among the thousand women of his harem he found none. It is an indictment of the life he had chosen as much as of anyone else. Scripture elsewhere honors many godly women, including the "worthy woman" of Proverbs 31.

v. 29 — "Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Here is the conclusion of the whole investigation into sin. God created humanity good (Genesis 1:31). The corruption of the world is not God's fault; it is the result of humanity's own schemes and rebellion (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12). The "many inventions" are the endless ways we devise to live apart from God.

Life Application

- Attend funerals and reflect on your own mortality. Ask God to teach you to number your days.
- Welcome wise rebuke; be suspicious of constant flattery.
- Aim to finish well. Cultivate patience over pride.
- Resist nostalgia that makes you discontent with the generation God has placed you in.
- In prosperity, rejoice; in adversity, consider God's hand.
- Guard against both self-righteousness and careless sin by walking in the fear of God.
- Before taking offense at others' words, remember your own.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does a house of mourning teach more than a house of feasting?
2. When has a wise rebuke done you more good than praise?
3. What is wrong with saying "the former days were better than these"?
4. How do you respond to things God has made "crooked" in your life?
5. What does "be not righteous overmuch" mean, and what does it not mean?
6. How does verse 29 explain the origin of evil in the world?

Prayer

Lord, teach me to number my days and to apply my heart to wisdom. Give me a teachable spirit that welcomes correction, a patient heart that finishes well, and a humble mind that does not take offense. When You make my path crooked, help me to consider Your work and trust You. Keep me from self-righteousness and from sin, and let me walk in Your fear. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 8

THE KING'S WORD AND GOD'S WAYS

Authority, Injustice and the Unsearchable Providence of God



"I counsel thee, Keep the king's command, and that in regard of the oath of God" (Ecclesiastes 8:2).

Chapter 8 addresses life under human authority and under divine providence. The Preacher counsels wise submission to the king, acknowledges that power is often abused, and wrestles with the delay of justice. He affirms that it will be well with those who fear God, commends joy again, and ends by confessing that no one, however wise, can fully find out the work of God.

◆ Wisdom Before the King

ECCLESIASTES 8:1-5 • ASV

> **8:1** Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.
>
> **8:2** I counsel thee, Keep the king's command, and that in regard of the oath of God.
>
> **8:3** Be not hasty to go out of his presence; persist not in an evil thing: for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.
>
> **8:4** For the king's word hath power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?
>
> **8:5** Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment:

v. 1 — "Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?" Wisdom is rare and valuable. "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the hardness of his face is changed." Wisdom softens a hard expression and brings a gracious countenance, much as Moses' face shone after being with God (Exodus 34:29).

v. 2 — "I counsel thee, Keep the king's command, and that in regard of the oath of God." Obedience to rulers was tied to a covenant oath made before God. Submission to legitimate authority is ultimately an act of obedience to God (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

v. 3 — "Be not hasty to go out of his presence; persist not in an evil thing: for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him." Do not rashly abandon your post or stubbornly persist in rebellion, for a king has great power.

v. 4 — "For the king's word hath power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?" Ancient kings had nearly absolute authority. The same question, "What doest thou?", is rightly asked of no one but God (Daniel 4:35).

v. 5 — "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment." The wise person knows not only what to do but when and how to do it. He discerns the proper time and procedure for every matter.

◆ The Limits of Human Power

ECCLESIASTES 8:6-9 • ASV

> **8:6** for to every purpose there is a time and judgment; because the misery of man is great upon him:
>
> **8:7** for he knoweth not that which shall be; for who can tell him how it shall be?
>
> **8:8** There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power over the day of death; and there is no discharge in war: neither shall wickedness deliver him that is given to it.
>
> **8:9** All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man hath power over another to his hurt.

v. 6 — "For to every purpose there is a time and judgment; because the misery of man is great upon him." The theme of chapter 3 returns. Discerning God's timing is essential because human life is full of trouble.

v. 7 — "For he knoweth not that which shall be; for who can tell him how it shall be?" No one knows the future (Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13-15).

v. 8 — The Preacher lists four things no one can control. "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit"; no one can hold back the wind or keep his breath from leaving at death. "Neither hath he power over the day of death." "There is no discharge in war"; no soldier can simply walk off the battlefield. "Neither shall wickedness deliver him that is given to it"; evil cannot save the evildoer. Even the mightiest king is powerless before death.

v. 9 — "All this have I seen... there is a time wherein one man hath power over another to his hurt." Power is often used to harm others, and sometimes it ultimately harms the one who abuses it.

◆ When Justice Is Delayed

ECCLESIASTES 8:10-13 • ASV

> **8:10** So I saw the wicked buried, and they came to the grave; and they that had done right went away from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city: this also is vanity.
>
> **8:11** Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.
>
> **8:12** Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and prolong his days, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, that fear before him:
>
> **8:13** but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

v. 10 — "So I saw the wicked buried, and they came to the grave; and they that had done right went away from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city." The wicked receive honorable funerals while the righteous are forgotten. "This also is vanity."

v. 11 — "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Delayed justice emboldens wrongdoers. When consequences do not come quickly, people conclude they will never come. But God's delay is not indifference; it is patience, giving time for repentance (2 Peter 3:9; Romans 2:4).

v. 12 — "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and prolong his days, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, that fear before him." Here is faith speaking against appearances. The Preacher's observation says one thing; his conviction says another: "surely I know."

v. 13 — "But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." In the end, the fear of God makes all the difference. The wicked man's life, however long, is a shadow.

◆ Joy Amid Mystery

ECCLESIASTES 8:14-17 • ASV

> **8:14** There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.
>
> **8:15** Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be joyful: for that shall abide with him in his labor all the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun.
>
> **8:16** When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes),
>
> **8:17** then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because however much a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea moreover, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

v. 14 — "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous." Life often seems upside down. The Preacher refuses to pretend otherwise.

v. 15 — His response: "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be joyful: for that shall abide with him in his labor all the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun." When we cannot solve the riddle of providence, we can still

receive each day's gifts with gratitude. Joy is not denial of life's puzzles; it is trust in the God who holds them.

v. 16 — "When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes)." He labored day and night to understand.

v. 17 — "Then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun... yea moreover, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it." This is the humblest and most important conclusion of Part III. God's providence is too vast and deep for any human mind to comprehend. Paul exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" (Romans 11:33). The wise man's task is not to master God's ways but to trust and fear Him.

Life Application

- Respect and obey legitimate authority as an act of obedience to God, while never obeying a command to sin (Acts 5:29).
- Ask God for discernment to know not only what to do but when and how.
- Remember the four things you cannot control: your breath, your death, your release from life's battles, and the outcome of sin.
- When justice is delayed, do not conclude that God does not see. Say with the Preacher, "surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God."
- When you cannot understand God's providence, receive today's gifts with joy and trust Him with the rest.

Discussion Questions

1. How should a Christian balance submission to authority with obedience to God?
2. Why does delayed punishment embolden wrongdoing? How does God's patience fit into this?
3. What helps you hold on to "surely I know" when appearances say otherwise?
4. How can joy and unanswered questions exist together in a believer's life?
5. Why is it humbling, and freeing, that no one can "find out the work of God"?

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, Your ways are past finding out. Help me to honor those in authority as unto You, to discern the right time and way for every matter, and to trust that it shall be well with those who fear You. When justice seems delayed and life seems upside down, fill me with joy in Your daily gifts and confidence in Your perfect wisdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.



PART IV

REMEMBER THY CREATOR

Ecclesiastes 9:1 - 12:14

The Preacher faces death squarely and calls us to live fully and wisely now: to enjoy life with those we love, to work with all our might, to sow generously, and above all to remember our Creator before the silver cord is loosed. Then he gives the conclusion of the whole matter.

CHAPTER 9

WHILE YOU LIVE

One Fate for All and the Call to Live Joyfully



"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart... Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest" (Ecclesiastes 9:7, 9).

Chapter 9 opens the final movement of Ecclesiastes. The Preacher stares directly at death, the common destiny of the righteous and the wicked, and from that sobering vantage point issues his strongest call yet to live fully: to eat with joy, wear white, love one's spouse and work with all one's might. He then reflects on the unpredictability of success and the undervalued power of wisdom.

◆ All Are in the Hand of God

ECCLESIASTES 9:1-3 • ASV

> 9:1 For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them.
>
> 9:2 All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.
>
> 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

v. 1 — "For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God." This is the foundation of everything that follows. However mysterious life is, the righteous are held in God's hand (John 10:28-29). "Whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them." From outward circumstances alone, no one can tell whether a person is under God's favor or displeasure.

v. 2 — "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not." Death comes to everyone, the religious and the irreligious alike.

v. 3 — "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event unto all." Because of this, "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead." Many conclude that if death levels everyone, moral living does not matter. That conclusion is the madness of a heart that sees only under the sun.

◆ A Living Dog and a Dead Lion

ECCLESIASTES 9:4-6 • ASV

> 9:4 For to him that is joined with all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion.
>
> 9:5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.
>
> 9:6 As well their love, as their hatred and their envy, is perished long ago; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun.

v. 4 — "For to him that is joined with all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion." In Israel, dogs were despised scavengers and lions were symbols of royal strength. Yet a despised creature that is alive has more opportunity than a mighty one that is dead. While there is life, there is

hope: hope to repent, to serve, to love and to know God (2 Corinthians 6:2).

v. 5 — "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." From the earthly perspective, the dead no longer participate in life under the sun. They earn no more wages and are soon forgotten. This verse describes the dead's relationship to this world, not a full doctrine of the afterlife, which the New Testament reveals more clearly (Luke 16:19-31; Philippians 1:23).

v. 6 — "As well their love, as their hatred and their envy, is perished long ago; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun." Their opportunities on earth are finished. The point is urgent: whatever we intend to do, we must do now.

◆ Live Fully Now

ECCLESIASTES 9:7-10 • ASV

> 9:7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy works.
>
> 9:8 Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack oil.
>
> 9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life of vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all thy days of vanity: for that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun.
>
> 9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest.

v. 7 — "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy works." This is a command, not mere permission. Enjoy daily food with gladness. The reason is striking: God has already approved this kind of life. Grateful enjoyment of His gifts pleases Him (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

v. 8 — "Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack oil." White garments and anointing oil were signs of celebration and festivity. Live every day with a festive spirit. Christians may also see here a picture of the white robes of righteousness given in Christ (Revelation 3:4-5; 19:8).

v. 9 — "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life of vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun." Marriage is one of God's richest gifts in this fleeting life. Cherish it; do not postpone love for a later season that may never come (Proverbs 5:18-19). "For that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun."

v. 10 — "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest." Sheol is the realm of the dead. Since

opportunity for earthly work ends at death, we must give ourselves fully to the tasks God sets before us now. Paul echoes this: "Whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). Jesus said, "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

◆ Time and Chance

ECCLESIASTES 9:11-12 • ASV

> **9:11** I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.
>
> **9:12** For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

v. 11 — "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." Talent, strength and skill do not guarantee success. Unforeseen events intervene. "Chance" here means what is unforeseen from the human viewpoint; from God's viewpoint, nothing is random (Proverbs 16:33). This verse humbles the proud and comforts the overlooked.

v. 12 — "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Disaster and death can come without warning (Luke 12:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:3). Readiness for eternity cannot be postponed.

◆ The Poor Wise Man

ECCLESIASTES 9:13-18 • ASV

> **9:13** I have also seen wisdom under the sun on this wise, and it seemed great unto me:
>
> **9:14** There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.
>
> **9:15** Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.
>
> **9:16** Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.
>
> **9:17** The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

> **9:18** Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good.

v. 13 — "I have also seen wisdom under the sun on this wise, and it seemed great unto me."

v. 14 — "There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it." The odds were overwhelming.

v. 15 — "Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man." His wisdom saved everyone, yet he was quickly forgotten because he was poor. Compare the wise woman of Abel who saved her city (2 Samuel 20:16-22).

v. 16 — "Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." Wisdom is powerful, but society often ignores wisdom that comes without wealth or status.

v. 17 — "The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the cry of him that ruleth among fools." Quiet wisdom outweighs loud foolishness.

v. 18 — "Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good." Wisdom can save a city, but a single foolish or wicked person can undo great good. Achan's sin brought defeat on all Israel (Joshua 7). The poor wise man is also a faint picture of Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (2 Corinthians 8:9), delivered His people, and was despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3).

Life Application

- Rest in the truth that you are in the hand of God, whatever your circumstances.
- While you live, there is hope. Do not postpone repentance, reconciliation or obedience.
- Eat your bread with joy and thank God for His approval of grateful living.
- Cherish your spouse and family now; do not wait for a better season to love them well.
- Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might as unto the Lord.
- Be ready for eternity today, since no one knows his time.
- Value wisdom even when it comes from humble people, and beware the damage one sinner can do.

Discussion Questions

1. What comfort does verse 1 offer in the face of life's uncertainties?
2. What does "a living dog is better than a dead lion" mean for how we use our days?
3. Why is the command to "eat thy bread with joy" so significant coming right after the discussion of death?
4. What tasks has God put in your hand that you need to do "with thy might"?
5. How does verse 11 humble the strong and encourage the weak?
6. How does the poor wise man point us to Jesus?

Prayer

Lord, my life is in Your hand. Thank You that while I live there is hope. Teach me to eat my bread with joy, to love my family well, and to work with all my might at every task You give me. Make me ready for the day I cannot foresee, and let me value Your wisdom above every weapon and every crown. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 10

A LITTLE FOLLY

Proverbs on Wisdom, Folly, Words and Rulers



"If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct" (Ecclesiastes 10:10).

Chapter 10 is a collection of proverbs, much like the Book of Proverbs, illustrating the closing thought of chapter 9: "one sinner destroyeth much good." The Preacher shows how a little folly spoils great wisdom, how folly in high places turns society upside down, how carelessness invites accidents, how a fool's words destroy him, and how a nation rises or falls with the character of its leaders.

A Little Folly Spoils Much

ECCLESIASTES 10:1-4 • ASV

> **10:1** Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odor; so doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor.
>
> **10:2** A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.
>
> **10:3** Yea also, when the fool walketh by the way, his understanding faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.
>
> **10:4** If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for gentleness allayeth great offences.

v. 1 — "Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odor; so doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor." A few dead insects can ruin a whole jar of precious perfume. In the same way, a single foolish act can destroy a lifetime's reputation. One moment of sin, one careless word or one reckless decision can undo years of faithful living. Paul warns, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9).

v. 2 — "A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left." In the ancient world, the right hand symbolized skill, strength and favor. The wise man's inclinations lead him toward what is right and good; the fool's lead him astray.

v. 3 — "Yea also, when the fool walketh by the way, his understanding faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool." A fool does not need to announce his folly; his conduct advertises it everywhere he goes (Proverbs 13:16).

v. 4 — "If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for gentleness allayeth great offences." When a superior is angry with you, do not resign in a huff or react rashly. A calm, gentle response can defuse even serious offenses. "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

The World Turned Upside Down

ECCLESIASTES 10:5-7 • ASV

> **10:5** There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as it were an error which proceedeth from the ruler:
>
> **10:6** folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place.
>
> **10:7** I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking like servants upon the earth.

v. 5 — "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as it were an error which proceedeth from the ruler." Bad leadership produces social disorder.

v. 6 — "Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place." Here "the rich" refers to those of noble character and proven worth. When foolish people are promoted and capable people are sidelined, society suffers (Proverbs 30:21-22).

v. 7 — "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking like servants upon the earth." The normal order is reversed. Under the sun, merit is not always rewarded. Yet in God's kingdom, reversal works the other way: "he hath put down princes from their thrones, and hath exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:52).

◆ Hazards of Work and the Value of Wisdom

ECCLESIASTES 10:8-11 • ASV

> **10:8** He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh through a wall, a serpent shall bite him.
>
> **10:9** Whoso heweth out stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood is endangered thereby.
>
> **10:10** If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.
>
> **10:11** If the serpent bite before it is charmed, then is there no advantage in the charmer.

v. 8 — "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh through a wall, a serpent shall bite him." Every task has risks. Those who dig pits may fall in; those who tear down old stone walls may disturb snakes hiding in the cracks. The proverb also carries a moral: those who set traps for others often fall into them (Psalm 7:15; Proverbs 26:27).

v. 9 — "Whoso heweth out stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood is endangered thereby." Quarrying and woodcutting are dangerous. Ordinary work requires care and wisdom.

v. 10 — "If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct." A dull axe requires more effort. Taking time to sharpen the blade, to prepare, plan and learn, saves wasted energy. Wisdom is the sharpening stone of life. Working smarter honors God as much as working harder.

v. 11 — "If the serpent bite before it is charmed, then is there no advantage in the charmer." Skill is useless if it is applied too late. Timing is essential; wisdom acts before trouble strikes.

The Fool's Mouth

ECCLESIASTES 10:12-15 • ASV

> **10:12** The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.
>
> **10:13** The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.
>
> **10:14** A fool also multiplieth words: yet man knoweth not what shall be; and that which shall be after him, who can tell him?
>
> **10:15** The labor of fools wearieth every one of them; for he knoweth not how to go to the city.

v. 12 — "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself." Wise speech wins favor (Colossians 4:6); foolish speech is self-destructive.

v. 13 — "The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness." The fool starts with nonsense and ends with dangerous madness. His talk gets worse the longer he speaks.

v. 14 — "A fool also multiplieth words: yet man knoweth not what shall be; and that which shall be after him, who can tell him?" The fool talks endlessly and confidently about the future, which no one knows.

v. 15 — "The labor of fools wearieth every one of them; for he knoweth not how to go to the city." The fool exhausts himself because he cannot even find the obvious road to town. He lacks the basic common sense that wisdom provides.

Leaders, Laziness and Loose Talk

ECCLESIASTES 10:16-20 • ASV

> **10:16** Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!
>
> **10:17** Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!
>
> **10:18** By slothfulness the roof sinketh in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaketh.
>
> **10:19** A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh glad the life; and money answereth all things.
>
> **10:20** Revile not the king, no, not in thy thought; and revile not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the heavens shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

v. 16 — "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!" A nation suffers when its ruler is immature (whether young in years or in character) and its officials begin the day

feasting instead of working (Isaiah 5:11).

v. 17 — "Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!" Blessed is the nation whose leaders are noble in character and disciplined in their appetites (Proverbs 31:4-5).

v. 18 — "By slothfulness the roof sinketh in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaketh." Neglect leads to decay, whether of a house, a nation, a marriage or a soul. Small acts of maintenance prevent great collapses.

v. 19 — "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh glad the life; and money answereth all things." This describes the attitude of the careless rulers of verse 16, who think money can solve every problem while they party. It is an ironic observation rather than an endorsement.

v. 20 — "Revile not the king, no, not in thy thought; and revile not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the heavens shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." Be careful what you say, even in private, because words travel in unexpected ways. Our modern saying "a little bird told me" captures the idea. In an age of recordings and screenshots, this proverb is more relevant than ever. And God hears every word (Matthew 12:36; Luke 12:3).

Life Application

- Guard your reputation. Ask God to keep you from the "little folly" that could spoil a lifetime of faithfulness.
- When a superior is angry, respond with gentleness rather than walking away rashly.
- Take time to "sharpen the axe": prepare, plan, learn and rest so your work is wise and effective.
- Let your words be gracious and few; avoid confident predictions about what only God knows.
- Attend to the small repairs in your home, relationships and spiritual life before the roof sinks in.
- Pray for leaders to be mature, disciplined and noble.
- Speak in private only what you would be willing to have heard in public.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of examples where a "little folly" destroyed a great reputation? How can we guard against this?
2. What does it look like in your life to "whet the edge" instead of just working harder?
3. Why do fools tend to multiply words?
4. What areas of your life show signs of "slothfulness" that could lead to collapse if neglected?
5. How does verse 20 apply in the age of social media?

Prayer

Lord, keep me from the little follies that spoil great good. Make my heart incline to what is right, my words gracious, and my work wise. Teach me to sharpen the edge before I swing the axe, to tend the small things before they become great ruins, and to speak in secret only what honors You. Raise up leaders of noble character in our land. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 11

CAST THY BREAD

Generosity, Diligence and Joy in the Days of Youth



"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand" (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

Chapter 11 turns from observation to exhortation. Because the future is unknown, the Preacher urges bold generosity, steady diligence and grateful enjoyment of life. Uncertainty is not an excuse for paralysis; it is a reason to sow widely and to live joyfully, while remembering that God will bring all things into judgment.

◆ Generosity in an Uncertain World

ECCLESIASTES 11:1-2 • ASV

> **11:1** Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days.
>
> **11:2** Give a portion to seven, yea, even unto eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

v. 1 — "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days." The picture may come from maritime trade, sending grain overseas and waiting for the return, or from generous giving that seems to float away but comes back as blessing. Either way, the principle is the same: invest boldly and give generously, trusting God for the return. Jesus said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38).

v. 2 — "Give a portion to seven, yea, even unto eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Seven and eight represent completeness and beyond. Be generous to many. Some read this as wise diversification: do not put everything in one venture, since you do not know what disaster may come. Others read it as charity: give widely now, because hard times may come when you can no longer give, or when you will need the goodwill of those you helped (Luke 16:9). Both readings counsel open hands in an uncertain world.

◆ Do Not Wait for Perfect Conditions

ECCLESIASTES 11:3-6 • ASV

> **11:3** If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be.
>
> **11:4** He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.
>
> **11:5** As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the work of God who doeth all.
>
> **11:6** In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

v. 3 — "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be." Some things follow fixed laws we cannot change. Rain falls when clouds are full; a fallen tree stays where it lands. Our job is not to control these things but to respond wisely.

v. 4 — "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." The farmer who waits for perfect weather will never plant or harvest. Endless caution becomes paralysis. There will always be a reason to delay obedience, generosity or evangelism; the wise act anyway (Proverbs 20:4).

v. 5 — "As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the work of God who doeth all." Some things are mysteries known only to God: the path of the wind and the forming of a child in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16). Jesus used the same image of the wind to describe the mysterious new birth by the Spirit (John 3:8). Since we cannot understand all of God's work, we should trust Him and get on with ours.

v. 6 — "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Sow all day long. We do not know which efforts God will bless, so we should be faithful in all of them. This is a powerful word for parents, teachers, evangelists and every servant of God: keep sowing, and leave the harvest to God (1 Corinthians 3:6-7; Galatians 6:9).

◆ Light Is Sweet

ECCLESIASTES 11:7-8 • ASV

> **11:7** Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.
>
> **11:8** Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

v. 7 — "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." Life itself is a delight. Every sunrise is a gift. The Preacher who began by describing the sun's weary circuit (1:5) now calls its light sweet.

v. 8 — "Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all." Rejoice in every year God gives, not only the easy ones. "But let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many." Remembering that hard days and death are coming does not diminish joy; it deepens gratitude for today. "All that cometh is vanity": the future, too, is a passing breath.

◆ Rejoice, Young Man, and Remember the Judgment

ECCLESIASTES 11:9-10 • ASV

> **11:9** Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.
>
> **11:10** Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

v. 9 — "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." God wants the young to enjoy the energy, freshness and opportunities of youth. This is a genuine encouragement, not sarcasm. But it comes with a vital balance: "but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Freedom is not license. Every choice will be reviewed by God (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Enjoyment that would not survive God's judgment is not true enjoyment.

v. 10 — "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh." Get rid of anxiety and vexation in the heart and evil in the body. Do not waste your youth on worry or on sin. "For youth and the dawn of life are vanity." The bloom of youth is a vapor; it passes quickly. Use it well, because it will not last.

Life Application

- Give generously and invest boldly in God's kingdom, trusting Him for the return "after many days."
- Stop waiting for perfect conditions to obey God. Sow your seed today.
- Keep sowing in your children, your church, your workplace and your community, even when you see no immediate harvest.
- Thank God for the light of each new day and rejoice in every year He gives.
- If you are young, enjoy your youth fully and freely, but live every choice in light of God's judgment.
- Put away both anxiety and sin; neither belongs in a life that is passing like a breath.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean in practical terms to "cast thy bread upon the waters"?
2. Where are you "observing the wind" instead of sowing? What has kept you from acting?
3. How does verse 6 encourage parents, teachers or anyone who serves without seeing results?
4. How can remembering "the days of darkness" increase our joy rather than diminish it?
5. How do the encouragement and the warning of verse 9 work together?

Prayer

Generous God, You have given me every good thing. Make my hands open to give and bold to sow. Deliver me from waiting for perfect conditions; help me to be faithful morning and evening, trusting You with the harvest. Thank You for the sweetness of light and for every year of life. Teach me to rejoice freely and to live wisely, remembering that I will give account to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER 12

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

Remember Thy Creator and Hear the Conclusion



"Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth... before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain" (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6).

The final chapter of Ecclesiastes is a masterpiece. The Preacher calls the young to remember their Creator before old age and death arrive, and he describes aging in a series of haunting poetic images. He returns to his opening theme, "all is vanity," then steps back to describe his own work as a teacher and to deliver the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, keep His commandments, and prepare for His judgment.

◆ Remember Before the Darkness

ECCLESIASTES 12:1-2 • ASV

> 12:1 Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;
>
> 12:2 before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain;

v. 1 — "Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth." This is the climactic command of the book. To "remember" in Hebrew means more than to recall; it means to acknowledge, honor and act upon. The word "Creator" reminds us that we belong to the One who made us. Do this "before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." The time to give your life to God is now, while you have strength, before the hardships of age make it harder to change.

v. 2 — "Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain." Old age is pictured as the dark, rainy season of life, when the lights dim and troubles come one after another, like clouds returning after a storm without the relief of clear skies.

◆ The Portrait of Old Age

ECCLESIASTES 12:3-5 • ASV

> 12:3 in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows shall be darkened,
>
> 12:4 and the doors shall be shut in the street; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low;
>
> 12:5 yea, they shall be afraid of that which is high, and terrors shall be in the way; and the almond-tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets:

v. 3 — The Preacher now paints old age as a great house falling into decline. "In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble": the arms and hands, which protect the body, begin to shake. "And the strong men shall bow themselves": the legs weaken and bend. "And the grinders cease because they are few": the teeth are lost, and chewing becomes difficult. "And those that look out of the windows shall be darkened": the eyes grow dim.

v. 4 — "And the doors shall be shut in the street": the ears close to outside sounds, or the lips close over toothless gums, or the aged simply stay indoors. "When the sound of the grinding is low": the daily sound of the household mill grows faint to failing ears. "And one shall rise up at the voice of a bird": the elderly sleep lightly and wake early at the first chirp. "And all the daughters of music shall be brought

low": the voice weakens and the ability to sing or hear music fades.

v. 5 — "Yea, they shall be afraid of that which is high, and terrors shall be in the way": heights become frightening and walking outside feels dangerous. "And the almond-tree shall blossom": white almond blossoms picture white hair. "And the grasshopper shall be a burden": even the lightest weight becomes heavy, or the once-agile person now drags himself along like a grasshopper at the end of summer. "And desire shall fail": appetite and passion fade. The underlying Hebrew word refers to the caper-berry, which was used to stimulate appetite. "Because man goeth to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets": death arrives, and the funeral procession begins.

◆ The Silver Cord and the Return of the Spirit

ECCLESIASTES 12:6-7 • ASV

> **12:6** before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern,
>
> **12:7** and the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it.

v. 6 — Now the images turn to death itself. "Before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken": a precious golden lamp hangs from a silver chain; when the chain snaps, the lamp falls and shatters, and its light goes out. "Or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern": the vessel and the wheel used to draw water break, and the flow of life-giving water stops. Life is precious like silver and gold, yet fragile like pottery.

v. 7 — "And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it." This reverses Genesis 2:7, where God formed man from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. Here the Preacher answers his own question from 3:21. The body returns to dust, but the spirit returns to God, its Giver and Judge. Death is not annihilation; it is a return to God. For those in Christ, it means to be "absent from the body" and "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8), awaiting the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

◆ The Preacher's Final Summary and His Craft

ECCLESIASTES 12:8-10 • ASV

> **12:8** Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.
>
> **12:9** And further, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he pondered, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.
>
> **12:10** The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth.

v. 8 — "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity." The book ends where it began (1:2), forming a frame around the whole. Everything under the sun is vapor. But now the reader has learned that this is not the end of the story: there is a Creator to remember and a spirit that returns to God.

v. 9 — At this point the voice shifts to a narrator describing the Preacher. "Because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge." He was not content to keep wisdom to himself. "He pondered, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs." He weighed, researched and arranged his teaching with care (1 Kings 4:32).

v. 10 — "The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth." He aimed for words that were both delightful and true. Good teaching is not only accurate but pleasing and well crafted. Ecclesiastes itself, with its poetry, proverbs and vivid images, is an example of truth spoken beautifully.

◆ Goads, Nails and One Shepherd

ECCLESIASTES 12:11-12 • ASV

> 12:11 The words of the wise are as goads; and as nails well fastened are the words of the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.
>
> 12:12 And furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

v. 11 — "The words of the wise are as goads; and as nails well fastened are the words of the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." Goads were sharp sticks used to prod oxen in the right direction; wise words sting and motivate. Nails firmly driven provide stability; wise words anchor the soul. And all true wisdom is "given from one shepherd," God Himself, the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 23:1; 80:1). This is a statement about the divine source of the wisdom in this book. For Christians, it points to Christ, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

v. 12 — "And furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." Human writings multiply endlessly, and study apart from God's revealed wisdom becomes exhausting. The warning is not against learning but against seeking ultimate answers anywhere other than the words of the one Shepherd. All other books must be measured by His Word.

◆ The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14 • ASV

> **12:13** This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.
>
> **12:14** For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

v. 13 — "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." After every experiment and every observation, the conclusion is simple and clear. To fear God is to revere, trust, worship and submit to Him. To keep His commandments is to live in loving obedience. This is "the whole duty of man," or literally "the whole of man": it is what human beings were made for. Everything else is vapor; this is substance. Jesus summarized the commandments as loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40), and He makes obedience possible by giving new hearts through the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 14:15-17).

v. 14 — "For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." The final reason to fear God is that He will judge everything, including the secret things no one else ever saw. This gives ultimate meaning to every choice. Life under the sun may look like vapor, but in God's sight nothing is meaningless; every work matters forever. Paul writes that God "will judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16). The good news is that the Judge is also the Savior. Those who trust in Christ are covered by His righteousness (Romans 8:1), and their works done in Him will not be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). The Preacher's search ends at the feet of God; the gospel shows us that God has come to us in His Son.

Life Application

- Remember your Creator today. If you are young, give Him your strength now; if you are older, give Him every remaining day.
- Use the images of aging as a reminder to number your days and to honor and care for the elderly.
- Live in light of the truth that your spirit will return to God who gave it.
- Value teaching that is both accurate and beautiful, and pursue it in your own speaking and writing.
- Let God's Word be the nail that anchors you and the goad that moves you.
- Embrace the whole duty of man: fear God and keep His commandments.
- Live every hidden moment as before the God who will bring every work into judgment, and rest in Christ, who bore judgment for all who trust Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does the Preacher urge us to remember our Creator "in the days of thy youth"?

2. Which image of aging in verses 3-6 struck you most? What does it teach about the brevity of life?

3. How does verse 7 answer the question of 3:21?

4. How are the words of the wise like both goads and nails?

5. What does it mean that fearing God and keeping His commandments is "the whole duty of man"?

6. How does knowing that God will judge every hidden thing change how you live today?

7. How does the gospel of Jesus Christ complete the message of Ecclesiastes?

Prayer

My Creator and my God, I remember You today. Before the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken, I give You my life. Thank You that my spirit will return to You, and that in Christ I have nothing to fear in Your judgment. Fasten Your Word in my heart like a nail and move me by it like a goad. Teach me to fear You and keep Your commandments all my days, for this is the whole of my life. In the name of Jesus Christ, the true Son of David and the Good Shepherd, Amen.

Christ in Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes asks the deepest questions of the human heart. The New Testament reveals that their final answer is a Person.

- **The true Son of David.** The Preacher was "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). Jesus is the greater Son of David whose kingdom has no end (Luke 1:32-33), and "a greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42).
- **Freedom from vanity.** The creation "was subjected to vanity" (Romans 8:20), but in Christ it will be set free. Because of His resurrection, our "labor is not vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- **The answer to eternity in the heart.** God "hath set eternity in their heart" (3:11). Jesus gives "eternal life" (John 17:3), satisfying that longing in the knowledge of God.
- **Living water.** The eye is never satisfied (1:8), but Jesus said, "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:14).
- **Victory over the common grave.** "All go unto one place" (3:20), but Christ "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).
- **The poor wise man.** The forgotten deliverer of 9:15 foreshadows the One who "became poor" to make many rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- **The one Shepherd.** All true wisdom is "given from one shepherd" (12:11); Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).
- **The Judge and Savior.** God will bring every work into judgment (12:14), and He will do so "by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Key Verses to Memorize

- 1:2 — "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity."
- 2:24 — Enjoying good in labor is "from the hand of God."
- 3:1 — "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."
- 3:11 — "He hath made everything beautiful in its time: also he hath set eternity in their heart."
- 4:9-12 — "Two are better than one... a threefold cord is not quickly broken."
- 5:2 — "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."
- 7:14 — "In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider."
- 7:20 — "Surely there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

- 9:10 — "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."
- 11:1 — "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days."
- 12:1 — "Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth."
- 12:13 — "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

Twelve-Week Reading Plan

Week	Reading	Theme	Weekly Practice
1	Ecclesiastes 1	All Is Vanity	Write down three things you have looked to for lasting meaning.
2	Ecclesiastes 2	The Great Experiment	Thank God for three ordinary gifts each day this week.
3	Ecclesiastes 3	A Season for Every Purpose	Name your current season and pray for grace in it.
4	Ecclesiastes 4	Two Are Better Than One	Reach out to a lonely person or strengthen a friendship.
5	Ecclesiastes 5	Guard Thy Steps	Prepare your heart in silence before worship on Sunday.
6	Ecclesiastes 6	Riches Without Rest	Practice contentment: go one week without an unnecessary purchase.
7	Ecclesiastes 7	Better Than	Ask a trusted friend for honest feedback.
8	Ecclesiastes 8	The King's Word and God's Ways	Pray daily for those in authority.
9	Ecclesiastes 9	While You Live	Do one task "with thy might" and enjoy a meal with loved ones.
10	Ecclesiastes 10	A Little Folly	Repair one neglected "roof" in your home, work or soul.
11	Ecclesiastes 11	Cast Thy Bread	Give generously to someone in need without expecting return.
12	Ecclesiastes 12	The Whole Duty of Man	Write a personal commitment to fear God and keep His commandments.

A Word for Leaders

This guide is designed for individual study, small groups and classes. For a twelve-week group study, assign one chapter per week. Begin each session by reading the chapter aloud, using the full ASV text printed in each section. Walk through the commentary highlights, invite members to share answers to the Discussion Questions, and close with the chapter prayer. Encourage members to complete the weekly practice from the reading plan and to memorize one key verse each week. Because Ecclesiastes speaks honestly about grief, injustice and death, be sensitive to those in the group who are walking through hard seasons, and always lead the discussion toward the hope of the gospel.

About the Author

Rev. George H. Stoddard is an ordained minister, author, songwriter and founder of In His Hands Ministries International. Through the Booklyn imprint he has written an extensive library of Christian books, verse-by-verse study guides, biographies and devotionals designed to help believers read, understand and live the Word of God. His prayer for every book is that readers will meet the Author of Scripture in its pages. Learn more at inhishandsministries.com and revgeorgestoddard.com.