Introduction and Chapter 1

The Jews called him Koheleth, the one who addressed a congregation. The Greeks translated it Ecclesiastes. Both words are titles not names. They speak of a task he performed, of a role he played.

Creation, time, meaning, work, profit, piety, death, joy, grace, freedom, vanity--these are his themes. To understand any would exhaust the wisdom of Solomon. In fact Koheleth reached back to Solomon's experiences of wisdom, pleasure, and achievement and used them as the core of his curriculum. And they make an incredible learning experience.

Ecclesiastes shows the paths in life that lead to emptiness and helps us discover true purpose in life. Such wisdom can spare us from the emptiness that results from a life without God. Solomon teaches that meaning in life is not found in knowledge, money, pleasure, work, or popularity. True satisfaction comes from knowing that what we are doing is part of God's purpose for our lives. This is a book which can help free us from our scramble for power, approval, and money, and draw us closer to God. All of his remarks relating to the futility of life are there for a purpose--to lead people to seek true happiness in God alone. He was not trying to destroy all hope, but direct our hopes to the only One who can truly fulfill them. Solomon affirms the value of knowledge, relationships, work, and pleasure; but only *in their proper place*. All of these temporal things in life must be seen in light of the eternal.

This is not a book without rhyme or reason--not just a bunch of verses stuck together. It begins with the problem stated: All is vanity in this world. Then we will find that experiments are made. Solomon will seek satisfaction through many different avenues, in many different fields. He will try science, the laws of nature, wisdom and philosophy, pleasure and materialism, as well as living for the "now." He will explore fatalism, egotism, religion, wealth, and morality. Then in the final verses of the book he will give us the result of his experiments.

Keep in mind that the conclusions in each experiment are human, not God's truth. This is man *under* the sun. Do not misunderstand what is meant by "*inspiration*" when we say that the Bible is inspired by God. Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the words of Scripture, not always the *thought* that is expressed. The context should be considered, and attention paid to the person who made the statement and under what circumstances the statement was made. For example, in the betrayal of Christ by Judas, the record of the event is inspired, but the act of Judas was not God-inspired; it was satanic. Also the statements that Solomon makes, while he is searching for satisfaction apart from God, are not always in accord with God's thoughts. Inspiration guarantees that what Solomon *said* has been accurately recorded in Scripture.

We will begin with how Solomon acquired his wisdom.

Solomon Asks God for Wisdom

*Request:*

I Kings 3:9 "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?"

*Answer:*

I Kings 3:12 "Behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you."

Solomon prayed for wisdom, and God made him wiser than anyone else had ever been. In Proverbs 1:1-9, we read Solomon's definition of wisdom: "to trust and reverence the Lord." No other human being has had the wisdom of Solomon, yet many have remained more faithful to the Lord throughout their lives. Solomon is remembered for his wisdom, but not for his faithfulness to God. We need wisdom, but even more we need a steadfast relationship with God, the source of all wisdom. Not everyone has great wisdom, but all have the opportunity to be faithful to God.

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 1

The author, probably Solomon, referred to himself as The Preacher, meaning "one who gathers or assembles." He was both assembling people to hear a message and gathering wise sayings (proverbs). Solomon, one person in the Bible who had everything (wisdom, power, riches, honor, reputation, God's favor), was the one who discussed the ultimate emptiness of all that this world has to offer. He tried to destroy people's confidence in their own efforts, abilities, and righteousness, and direct them to faith in God as the only reason for living.

Solomon had a purpose for writing skeptically and pessimistically. Near the end of his life he looked back over everything he had done, and most of it seemed futile. A common belief was that only good people prospered and that only the wicked suffered, but that hadn't proven true in his experience. Solomon wrote this book after he had tried everything and achieved much, only to find that nothing apart from God made him happy. He wanted his readers to avoid these same senseless pursuits. If we try to find meaning in our accomplishments rather than in God, we will never be satisfied, and everything we pursue will become wearying and tiresome.

All human accomplishments will one day disappear, and we must keep this in mind in order to live wisely. If we don't, we can become either proud and self-sufficient when we succeed or sorely disappointed when we fail. Solomon's goal was to show that earthly possessions and accomplishments are ultimately futile. Only the pursuit of God brings real satisfaction. We should include Him in all we say, think, and do.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

"Vanity" here speaks of emptiness. It is to waste life without any purpose or any goal. It means to live like an animal or a bird lives. There are a great many people who live like that.

J. Vernon Mcgee was in a hotel in the Hawaiian Islands where the jet set come. They fly all over the world spending a few days or weeks in Hawaii, then at Acapulco in Mexico, and then the Riviera in France, then to Spain, North Africa, South Africa, and so on. They are world travelers. He watched these folk and listened to their conversation at the dinner table, out in the hotel lobby, and in the elevators. The thing that impressed him about them was how purposeless their lives really are. They talked about people they had seen in other places. They talked about plays they had seen. They would ask, "Where are you going from here?" Someone would say, "Wasn't that place where we went last year a bore?" There was no aim, no goal, no purpose in life. This is also the conclusion of Solomon. Vanity of vanities. Emptiness of emptiness. It is just like a big bag of nothing without focusing on God.

Jesus Christ should be our purpose and aim. To become like Him should be our goal. As we worship our Heavenly Father, we are changed from the inside out. As we pray, we see things change in the world around us. Dr. David Jeremiah said, "I've heard people say, 'All we can do now is pray'. When all we can do is pray, we have resorted to the single most powerful thing we could ever do." This power gives us hope. An attitude of hope and vanity cannot co-exist. It is impossible to concentrate on gaining what this world has to offer while seeking Jesus Christ with all of our heart. When we focus on eternal things, such as love, peace, and joy, we don't get lost in the temporal world.

Ecclesiastes 1:11 "There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those shall come after."

Solomon had tried to find satisfaction in the study of science, but he had to come to this conclusion. Man tries to be important. He tried everything in the world to keep himself before the public, but it isn't long until he passes off the stage. "There is no remembrance of former things." Do you remember who were the popular entertainers of fifty years ago? Do you remember the popular athletes of fifty years ago? Could you name the president of the United States of fifty years ago? Our memories aren't very long. The Scripture says that we spend our time down here as a tale that is told and we can't go back over it again.

Ecclesiastes 1:18 "For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."

The wiser they are in things musical, the more a bad performance will pain them. The more they learn about life's tragedies, the greater will be their anguish. Wisdom and knowledge in themselves will not satisfy. By exposing life's sorry sides, they may actually increase or pain. Both the process of acquiring wisdom--the combination of midnight oil, grueling sweat, and smarting scars--and the results of wisdom bring "grief."

Wisdom cannot change reality. Only Jesus can change reality. That was its first drawback discovered by the Preacher. But wisdom can increase sorrow. That was Koheleth's second reason for doubting the value which the older wise man had credited to wisdom. With life as crooked and as lacking as it is, wisdom only calls attention to the sour notes; it cannot bring the singing into tune. If the choir cannot carry their parts, if the rhythm and the pitch are faulty, if the words are pronounced sloppily, it is better for the people listening not to be trained musicians.

The more you understand, the more pain and difficulty you experience. For example, the more you know, the more imperfection you see around you; and the more you observe, the more evil becomes evident. As you set out with Solomon to find the meaning of life, you must be ready to feel more, think more, question more, and do more. Are you ready to pay the price of wisdom?

Joy and satisfaction do not necessarily increase in ratio to the increase of knowledge. Someone has said, "when ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." There is a certain amount of truth in that statement.

As doubtful as the Preacher was about attaching too much importance to wisdom, he did not suggest that it was better to be ignorant or foolish (2:13-14). In fact, he used keen wisdom to show us what wisdom could not do. He proved how much he valued wisdom while he demonstrated the limits to its value. He pointed out its substance by the wisdom he used to argue for its futility.

Solomon highlights two kings of wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes: (1) human knowledge, reasoning, or philosophy, and (2) the wisdom that comes from God. In these verses Solomon is talking about human knowledge. When human knowledge ignores God, it only highlights our problems because it can't provide answers that need an eternal perspective and solution.

Next week, in Ecclesiastes chapter 2, we will discuss pleasure and materialism.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 "There is nothing better for a man, that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God."

Resources:

*Mastering the Old Testament: Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*, by David Hubbard.

*Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*, by J. Vernon Mcgee.

*The Life Application Bible*.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2

Solomon conducted his search for life's meaning as an experiment. He first tried pursuing pleasure. He began grand public works programs, bought slaves, had many wives and concubines, set his mind on complex matters, became extremely wealthy, organized musical groups and supported the arts. But none of these gave him the satisfaction he was seeking. Some of the pleasures Solomon sought were wrong and some were worthy, but even the worthy pursuits were futile when he pursued them as an end in themselves. We must look beyond our activities to the reasons why we do them. Is your goal in life to search for meaning, or to search for God who gives meaning?

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 2

Solomon went all out for pleasure. I suppose he could have put on a performance that would make Las Vegas look like it was a penny ante or just a sideshow in a small circus. Solomon used his fantastic resources to search for pleasure. He said, "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure." But notice his conclusion: "Behold, this also is vanity"--empty. As soon as verse two, we begin to see his disappointing results.

Ecclesiastes 2:2 "For it is silly to be laughing all the time; what good does it do?"

He probably had a comedian or court jester to entertain him and tell him the latest jokes--probably many of them questionable. He said, "I found this to be a great waste of time."

My mom told me when I was young, "All of life is not a joke." I used to think I had to be laughing to be happy. I saw people laughing and looking like they were having fun, and I wanted to be like them. In reality, we can be content and joyful without laughing. Contentment and joy are deeper and more fulfilling than a simple laugh. The feeling you get when you know things are well is worth a lot. One of Satan's tools is to make us think we need something we do not. Don't discount contentment and joy if you are not laughing. Someone has said, "We should have a seriousness of purpose, but a lightness of heart."

Solomon had 1,000 concubines and wives available to him. He went for drinking and entertainment. He built houses and planted vineyards. Even today the ruins of the stables of Solomon can be seen right in Jerusalem and in several other places. At Megiddo a tourist guide will show you ruins of the troughs where the horses ate. Solomon had stables all over the land, although the Mosaic Law had expressly forbidden a king to multiply horses. He had irrigation. He had a ranch at the edge of town where he raised cattle. You may be wondering how he could afford all of this. Well, Solomon had cornered the gold in his day. He had plenty of spending money and he built in all of the comforts of life. It is now known that snow was brought down from Mount Hermon so that he could have cold drinks in the summertime. I think Solomon tried everything that a man could try for pleasure. I doubt that modern man could have anything that Solomon did not have.

You would think that all men in that position would be happy. Unfortunately, they are not. I am told that we have more suicides here in Southern California than the average for the country. One would think it would be the bums on skid row, the down-and-outers, who would be the ones to commit suicide. Life certainly wouldn't seem to be worth much to them. Actually, those are not the ones with the high suicide rate. It is the rich, the famous, the Hollywood movie and television stars, the folk who seem to have made it. They are the ones who commit suicide. Why? They have come to the same conclusion that Solomon did. He had tried everything in the way of pleasure and this was his conclusion:

Ecclesiastes 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 vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

What a statement from a man who had everything! A great many people will not take Solomon's word for it; they have to make the same experiments--although not to the extent that Solomon did. Eventually they arrive at the same conclusion. They say, "Life is empty." Don't forget Solomon's words, "All was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

It is important to remember that this term, "under the sun," refers to life without God. When we leave God out of the equation, we should check our math. Remember, pleasure promises more than it can produce. How often have we wanted to do something so badly and when we finally did it, we said, "well that wasn't so great after all." This is an important point. First, enjoy the process leading up to the event, but don't leave out God. More often than not, the process of getting from point A to point B takes longer than you spend at point B. If you can't enjoy the process, then the point is really not worth it. When we speak to God throughout the day, while working toward our goals, we can enjoy or at least cope with the difficult times of our lives. This is what "pray without ceasing" means. Of course we can't pray continually all day every day. But if we speak to God frequently and keep an attitude of prayer throughout the day, we will be accomplishing how Paul said we should pray.

Our goals should be aligned with God's goals. If we choose things only for our satisfaction, God is not in our plans. If we choose goals to glorify God and give Him praise all of the way, God is in our plans. A plan without God or a day without prayer is like taking a test without studying. You may make it to class, but when it comes time for the test, you will not be prepared. You may make it to work, but when someone steals your favorite pen or treats you unkindly, you may not react correctly. However, if you have spoken to Jesus or call on Him in your time of need, you may not need to learn the lesson again.

Ecclesiastes 2:16 "For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool."

They die just the same way. You may be innately intelligent. You may have a high I.Q. You may have been educated, even have several doctoral degrees, but none of this will help you when it is your time to die. Neither will any of that stop you from dying. When it is your time to go out the door, you will go, and there is nothing in this world that can keep you from it. Solomon realized that wisdom alone cannot guarantee eternal life. Wisdom, riches, and fitness matter very little after death--and everyone must die. We must not build our lives on perishable pursuits, but on the solid foundation of God. Then even if everything we have is taken away, we still have God, who is all we really need anyway. Incidentally, this is the point of the book of Job.

Because knowledge has its limits, the most important knowledge is found in knowing the infinite God. Amen? Amen!

Thomas A. Edison is an example. He worked in a laboratory and developed many things such as the electric light bulb and the Victrola. All of our recording instruments really go back to the work of Edison. He was a genius, but he died just like everyone else. What good did it do him after all? His laboratory is preserved in Fort Myers, Florida. If you are ever down there, it is worth the time to visit the Edison home and laboratory. He worked in that laboratory day and night. He had insomnia of the worst kind, so he had a little bed in his lab where he would lie down for little naps. He spent day and night, trying out many, many things that never worked out. I don't get the impression that life was a thrill for him. I think that Thomas A. Edison found life very boring. What was missing from his life?

Work bears no lasting fruit for those who work solely to earn money and gain possessions. However, if we pursue God and do our works in His name, we can reap blessings on earth and eternal rewards in Heaven. For information on eternal rewards, see Psalm 37:18, Job 36:7, Jeremiah 17:10, and Luke 18:22, 23.

Ecclesiastes 2:26 "For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that He may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for wind."

It is God who determines what kind of lot we have in life. And He does this on the basis of His evaluation of us. His decisions are final, though it is our duty to seek to please Him. Since He alone knows what is best for us, we must surrender to His decisions and make the best of the lot He sends us.

This final word of counsel summed up the wise man's opinion: Do not expect anything better. We only brand life's results as vanity--as futility--if we hope for too much. Someone once said, "Don't expect too much and you won't be disappointed." It is false optimism that wounds us, according to the Teacher. If we try to guarantee our own permanence, if we try to build timeless pyramids through wealth, wisdom, pleasure or achievement, we are doomed to futility. If we take God's gifts and decisions as they come and do not try to outwit God, we can snatch a measure of enjoyment from each day.

*Memorize:*

Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3:1-15

Solomon's point in this section is that God has a plan for all people. So He provides cycles of life and work for us to do. But there are many problems we face that seem to contradict God's plan. These should not be barriers to believing in Him, but rather opportunities to discover that, without God, life's problems offer no lasting solutions.

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 3:1-15

Timing is important. All the experiences listed in verses 1 through 8 are appropriate at certain times. The secret to peace with God is to discover, accept, and appreciate God's perfect timing.

When is there a time for hating? We shouldn't hate evil people, but we should hate what they do. We should also hate it when people are mistreated, when children are starving, and when God is being dishonored. In addition, we must hate sin in our lives.

Psalm 5:5 reads, "Therefore proud sinners will not survive your searching gaze, for how you abhor all murder and deception."

November 22, 1963, is an unforgettable day for those of us old enough to remember. President John F. Kennedy was shot. He, his family, and the entire nation were overwhelmed by an event over which no one seemed to have control. Ironically, we learned that day, the President had planned to cite the words of Ecclesiastes' poem as part of his address. That irony has etched in my mind the purpose of the poem. It was not to encourage Koheleth's students to do things at the *right* time as though they had full freedom to choose, which was probably to be Mr. Kennedy's point. The preacher's aim, to the contrary, was to warn them to accept God's *fixed*seasons and not to fight against His divine timing.

The point is not to blame God for a tragic assassination, but to call attention to the limits to human freedom. Many of us have calendars that guide our lives. In them appointments are recorded--often months ahead of time. Once the schedules are set, that book comes close to being the governor of our lives. It sets the times by which we do things; it controls with almost rigid regularity our comings and goings. And in so doing, it greatly limits our freedom. We cannot face each day with the open question, what shall we do? We have to face it with the closed question, what have we already committed ourselves to do? Whatever regulates our time curtails our freedom.

That is what the Preacher faced in one of his most famous passages. For him, life was a calendar in which all the key events were written by the hand of God with the result that men and women had freedom neither to alter them nor completely understand them.

Wanting freedom on our own terms costs us true freedom on God's terms. That is why Jesus had to do a new thing before true freedom became a reality: "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). The new thing was that God's only Son had come. The rest of us are slaves, unable to free ourselves. Jesus came as the Son, the one who had ever and always been free. He--God's free one--had the power and authority to share His freedom with us. And what freedom it is! It is the freedom to accept life as God gives it. Ecclesiastes said the same thing, but he said it more grimly. Jesus knew the Giver better. He knew how grandly God can be trusted. And he urged us to find freedom through trust: "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field. . .will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:30). The God whom Jesus revealed can be fully trusted with the pages of our calendar. His love for us will not fail. Knowing that, we find freedom.

To expect unchanging happiness in a changing world, must end in disappointment. God's whole plan for the government of the world will be found altogether wise, just, and good. Then let us seize the favorable opportunity for every good purpose and work. The time to die is fast approaching. Thus labor and sorrow fill the world. This is given us, that we may always have something to do; none were sent into the world to be idle.

Someone has said, "God gave us the Holy Spirit to make us holy, not the happy spirit to make us happy." God cares more about our holiness than our happiness.

Your ability to enjoy your work depends to a large extent upon your attitude. You can't always control your circumstances, but you can always control your response to the circumstances. Work becomes toil when you lose the sense of purpose God intended for it. We can enjoy our work if we (1) remember that God has given us work to do and He has equipped us for particular tasks--vs.10, and (2) realize that the fruit of our labor is a gift from Him--vs. 13. See your work as a way to serve God.

We can never be completely satisfied with earthly pleasures and pursuits because God has created us in His image and has "planted eternity" in us. This means that (1) we have a spiritual thirst, (2) we have eternal value, and (3) nothing but the eternal God can truly satisfy us. The ability to enjoy life is one of God's most excellent gifts to us, although we can abuse it. God wants us to enjoy life. When we have the proper view of God, we discover that real pleasure is not found in what we accumulate, but in enjoying whatever we have as gifts of God.

Everything is as God made it; not as it appears to us. We have the world so much in our hearts, and are so taken up with thoughts and cares of worldly things, that we have neither time nor spirit to see God's hand in them. The world has not only gained possession of the heart, but has formed thoughts against the beauty of God's works. We are wrong if we think we were born for ourselves; no, it is our business to do good in this life, which is short and uncertain; we have but little time to be doing good, therefore we should redeem time. Satisfaction with Divine Providence, is having faith that all things work together for good to them that love him. God does all things, that men should fear before him.

What is the purpose of life? It is that we should fear the all-powerful God. Fear does not mean to cringe in terror, but to respect, revere, and stand in awe of God because of who He is. Purpose in life starts with *whom* we know (God), not what we know or how good we are. It is impossible to fulfill your God-given purpose unless you fear God and give Him first place in your life.

Far from feeling cramped by His control of our lives, we have the freedom to live today and to wait for tomorrow knowing that God's agenda is always best for us. The hand that writes the calendar is a loving hand, in fact a hand that loved so much it endured nails for our sake.

Away with arrogance, then! We do not control our future, God does. And away with anxiety! The God who steers us into His future is a God whose trustworthiness has been thoroughly proven--by Jesus Christ and by all who have truly followed Him.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4

Solomon keeps trying to find answers without God in his equation. He considers the oppressed, the poor, the dead, and the living. He examines the lazy people and the workaholics. And Koheleth reveals the blessings of companionship. Finally, he illustrates how success does not last.

Just because Solomon tries to find meaning and success apart from God, doesn't mean we should. However, as we examine his words and discoveries, we can learn from his mistakes and revelations.

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 4

Verses 1-3. It grieved Solomon to see might prevail against right. Wherever we turn, we see melancholy proofs of the wickedness and misery of mankind, who try to create trouble for themselves and to each other. Men are tempted to hate and despise life. But a good man, though badly off while in this world, cannot wish he had never been born. Since he is glorifying the Lord, even in the fires, he will be happy at last, forever happy in Heaven. Ungodly men have most cause to wish the continuance of life with all its vexations, as a far more miserable condition awaits them if they die in their sins. If human and worldly things were our goal, not to exist would be preferable to life, considering the various oppressions here.

To believers, earth is as close to hell as they will see. To unbelievers, earth is as close to Heaven as they will ever see.

Verses 4-6. Some people are lazy while others are worhaholics. The lazy person, seeing the futility of dashing about for success, does little and hurts both himself and those who depend on him. The workaholic can be driven by envy, greed, and a constant desire to stay ahead of everyone else. Both extremes are foolish and irresponsible. The antidote for both is to work hard but with moderation. Take time to enjoy the other gifts God has given, and realize that it is God who gives out the assignments and the rewards, not us. To workaholics, remember that even God rested on the 7th day (Gen. 2:2). To lazy people, remember that God has said (Gen. 3:17), "You will struggle to extract (work) a living from the earth."

Some people need to take a break and rest some, while others should work more. Too much of any one thing is usually bad, unless it's Jesus Christ.

Verses 7-8. Frequently, the more men have, the more they want; and because of this they are so intent, that they get no enjoyment from what they have. Selfishness is the cause of this evil. A selfish man cares for nobody; there is none to take care of but himself, yet he will scarcely allow necessary rest to himself, and the people he employs. He never thinks he has enough. He has enough for his calling, for his family, but he has not enough for his eyes and ego. Many are so set upon the world, that in pursuit of it they deprive themselves, not only of the favor of God and eternal life, but of the pleasures of this life.

Verses 9-12. Surely he has more satisfaction in life, who labors hard to maintain those he loves, than the miser has in his toil. In all things union tends to increase success and safety, but above all, the union of Christians. They assist each other by encouragement, or friendly reproof. They warm each other's hearts while they converse together of the love of Christ, or join in singing His praises. So let us improve our opportunities for Christian fellowship. Where two are closely joined in holy love and fellowship, Christ will by His Spirit come to them; then there is a triple-braided cord.

There are advantages to cooperating with others. Life is not designed for isolation, but companionship; not for loneliness, but for intimacy. Some people prefer isolation because they feel they cannot trust anyone. But we are not here on earth to serve ourselves, but to serve God and others. Don't isolate yourself from others and "go it alone." Seek companions; be a team member.

As for service and companionship, God gives us many opportunities to help others. Sometimes He drops someone right under our noses. This is like "money in the bank." Imagine God saying, "Ok, do you want earthly blessings? Do you want eternal rewards? You don't have to drive two hours to visit some prisoners in the mountains, just help out this poor person right in front of you."

Psalm 37:18 reads, "Day by day God sees the good deeds done by Godly men and gives them eternal rewards." This is one of many verses in the Bible that proves there is a kingdom in Heaven. We will receive rewards in Heaven if we've invested our earthly time wisely. This is one thing Solomon did not mention. Although people cannot control what hand they're dealt, they *can* control what they do with their resources. And they *can* control what they do with their time (another resource). I heard someone say they had no money to tithe. Then another said, "Tithe 10% of your time."

I don't believe God will say to us in Heaven, "Where is all of your stuff?" But I do believe He will say, "What have you done with what I gave you?" It is not the quantity of things we possess that truly matters, but how we got them and what we did with them.

Remember when Jesus said, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first,"? This reminds me of the freeway. Everyone is breaking the law to get somewhere fast. I know how some of them feel. I used to have to be the fastest driver on the freeway. Nobody could drive faster than me. I would take my sports car in the fast lane and push the pedal to the metal. But what was I accomplishing? Was I worried? Yes. Was I missing out on God's blessing? Yes. Was I being disobedient? Yes. Every problem in the world can be traced back to a sin problem. And all of the things that God has given us can be used for both a good purpose and a bad purpose. My transportation had turned into a sin-mobile.

Fortunately, I drive under the speed limit now. But I can't say that for most of the world. How much faster will they arrive as I will drive 64 miles per hour? Maybe 3 minutes. But I have learned peace and patience. And I have been blessed tremendously! God has changed me because I have listened to Him. The obedient ones will be rewarded. But God doesn't bless disobedience, no matter what your socioeconomic status.

Verses 13-16. People are never satisfied. But the willing servants of the Lord Jesus, our King, rejoice in Him alone, and they will love Him more and more until eternity.

Popularity and prestige are poor goals for a life's work. Although many seek them, they are shadows without substance. They can change quickly, and they are easily forgotten.

This low, long cry for justice that Ecclesiastes voiced was picked up and sounded more strongly and more hopefully by Jesus Christ. The example He set showed us the best way to deal with life's injustices.

Where He could, He not only agonized over what was wrong in life; He did something about it. Think of the Temple money-changers cheating the worshipers in the very place where prayer to the living God was to be offered. Lashing them with whip and tongue, Jesus went after them and turned them out. Where He did not change the situation, as in His crucifixion, He endured the injustice, while praying for those who persecuted Him.

Both acts were deeds of love. His concern for human welfare and for human salvation, prompted Him to firm intervention in one case and to strong intercession in the other.

What He did not do was condone injustice or despair over it. He acted in force and in love. He recognized its wrong and tried to help both those who were inflicting it and those who were afflicted by it.

He was acting as judge in both events. And He has a right to. He is the Father's appointed judge with whom all of us reckon now and will reckon in a day yet to come (Acts 17:31).

Futility was how the old Teacher described a world plagued with injustice. He knew that the systems "under the sun" could not be depended on.

When we see our governments lacking today, remember that this is completely opposite of how God's kingdom will be. The kingdom of Heaven is the only government that will be perfect and just.

We know this, but we know more. We know that God is leading His people beyond futility to a concern for justice in every area of life. More than that, we know personally the Lord who will judge all injustice and see to it that all life's stories have the tidy endings for which we so earnestly yearn.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5 - Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 5

Verses 1-3. Commit yourself to the worship of God. It takes time, but anything worthwhile takes time and effort. Keep your thoughts from roving and wandering: keep your affections from running out toward wrong objects. We should avoid vain repetitions; extravagant prayers are not here condemned, but those that are unmeaning. Godly rituals like prayer, worship and fasting are not bad, but if they become empty rituals then they become worthless. An empty ritual robs the action of meaning.

Somebody once said, "We should focus on the Father not the facility."

Verses 4-5. Solomon warns us about making foolish promises to God. In Israelite culture, making vows was a serious matter. Vows were voluntary, but once made, unbreakable (Deuteronomy 23:21-23). It is foolish to make a vow you cannot keep or to play games with God by only partially fulfilling your vow. Proverb 20:25 reads, "It is foolish and rash to make a promise to the Lord before counting the cost." It's better not to vow than to make a promise to God and break it. But it's better still to make a good promise and keep it.

God takes vows seriously and requires that they be carried out. We often have good intentions when making a vow we want to show God that we are determined to please Him. If you think it is necessary to make a vow to God, make sure you weigh the consequences of breaking that vow.

Jephthah, in Judges chapter 11, made a rash promise to sacrifice the first thing he saw when he came home. As it happened, he saw his daughter first.

It is best to count the cost beforehand, make a promise, then fulfill it.

Here is a list of some vows that were recorded in the Bible:

Person - Vow - Result - Reference

1. Esau - To give his birthright to Jacob for a meal -

He lost his birthright - Genesis 25:33

2. Jacob - To choose the one true God and give Him a tenth of everything - God protected Jacob and give back to Him who kept his vow - Genesis 28:20

3. Jephthah - To offer to the Lord whoever came out to meet him after the battle - He lost his daughter - Judges 11:30, 31

4. Hannah - To give her son back to God, if God would give her a son - When Samuel was born, she dedicated him to God - 1 Samuel 1:11

5. David - To be kind to Jonathan's son (Mephibosheth) - Jonathan's son was treated royally - 2 Samuel 9:7

6. Ittai - To remain loyal to David - He became one of the great men in David's army - 2 Samuel 15:21

7. Job - That he was not rebelling against God - His fortunes were restored - Job 27:2

8. Herod Antipas - To give Herodias' daughter anything she wanted - Herod was forced to order John the Baptist's death - Mark 6:22

9. Paul - To offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving in Jerusalem - despite the danger, he made the sacrifice - Acts 18:18

When we see something we want, our first impulse is to get it. At first we feel intensely satisfied and sometimes even powerful because we have obtained what we set out to get. But immediate pleasure often loses sight of the future. We should compare the short term satisfaction with the long term consequences--before we act.

An exaggeration of a need can often make us want to get it quicker than we need it and take extreme measures to get it.

Verses 4-8. When a person made engagements rashly, his mouth caused his flesh to sin. The case supposes a man coming to the priest, and pretending that his vow was made rashly, and that it would be wrong to fulfil it. Such mockery of God would bring displeasure.

Verses 9-17. The goodness of Providence is more equally distributed than appears to a careless observer. The king needs the common things of life, and the poor share them; they relish their morsel better than he does his luxuries. *There are bodily desires which silver itself will not satisfy, much less will worldly abundance satisfy spiritual desires.* The more men have, the better house they must keep, the more servants they must employ, the more guests they must entertain, and the more they will have hanging on them. The sleep of the laborer is sweet, not only because he is tired, but because he has little care to break his sleep. The sleep of the diligent Christian, and his long sleep, are sweet; having spent himself and his time in the service of God, he can cheerfully repose in God as his Rest. But those who have every thing else, often fail to secure a good night's sleep; their abundance breaks their rest. Riches can hurt, and draw away the heart from God and duty. Men do hurt with their riches, not only gratifying their own lusts, but oppressing others, and dealing hardly with them. They will see that they have labored for the wind, when, at death, they find the profit of their labor is all gone like the wind.

Verses 10-11. We always want more than we have. "The grass is always greener on the other side." Solomon observed that those who love money and seek it obsessively never find the happiness it promises. Wealth also attracts freeloaders and thieves who want it, causes sleeplessness and fear, and ultimately ends in loss because it must be left behind. No matter how much you earn, if you try to create happiness by accumulating wealth, you will never have enough. Money in itself is not wrong, but loving money leads to all sorts of sin. Whatever financial situation you are in, don't depend on money to make you happy. Instead, use what you have for the Lord and He will give you the intangible things that are needed.

Many people can handle life without a lot of money. But successfully living, with a lot of money, is a difficult task.

Verses 18-20. Life is God's gift. We must not view our calling as a drudgery, but take pleasure in the calling where God puts us. We cannot always control our circumstances, but we can always control our attitudes and responses to each circumstance. We cannot always control the cards that we are dealt, but we can control what we do with them. A cheerful spirit is a great blessing; it makes employments easy, and afflictions light. Having made a proper use of riches, a man will remember the days of his past life with pleasure. The manner in which Solomon refers to God as the Giver, both of life and its enjoyments, shows they ought to be received and to be used, consistently with His will, and to His glory. Let this passage recommend to all the kind words of the merciful Redeemer, "Labor not for the meat that perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life." Christ is the Bread of life, the only food for the soul. All are invited to partake of this heavenly provision.

Verses 19-20. God wants us to view what we have (be it much or little) with the right perspective---our possessions are a gift of God. They are a reason to rejoice, but not the source of joy, since every good thing comes from God. We should focus more on the giver than the gift. We can be content with what we have when we realize that with God we have everything we need.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 6 - Read Chapter 6

In this section Solomon shows that having the right attitude about God can help us deal with present injustices. Prosperity is not always good and adversity is not always bad. But God is always good, and if we live as He wants us to, we will experience contentment. \*\*\* Contentment is more satisfying than wealth.\*\*\*

Many people work hard to prolong this life and improve their physical condition (better diet, proper exercise, excellent health care). Yet people don't spend nearly as much time or effort on their spiritual health. How shortsighted it is to work hard to extend this life and not work equally hard to secure eternal life.

Verses 1-6. A man often has all he needs for outward enjoyment; yet the Lord leaves him so to covetousness or evil dispositions, that he makes no good or comfortable use of what he has. By one means or other his possessions come to strangers; this is vanity, and an evil disease. A numerous family was a matter of fond desire and of high honor among the Hebrews; and long life is the desire of mankind in general. Even with these additions a man may not be able to enjoy his riches, family, and life. Such a man, in his passage through life, seems to have been born for no end or use. And he who has entered on life only for one moment, to quit it the next, has a preferable lot to him who has lived long, but only to suffer.

Verses 7-12. A little will serve to sustain us comfortably, and a great deal can do no more. The desires of the soul find nothing in the wealth of the world to give satisfaction. The poor man has comfort as well as the richest, and is under no real disadvantage. We cannot say, Better is the sight of the eyes than the resting of the soul in God; for it is better to live by faith in things to come, than to live by sense, which dwells only upon present things. Our lot is appointed. We have what pleases God, and let that please us. The greatest possessions and honors cannot set us above the common events of human life. Seeing that the things men pursue on earth increase vanities, what is man the better for his worldly devices? Our life upon earth is to be reckoned by days. It is fleeting and uncertain, and with little in it to be fond of, or to be depended on. Let us return to God, trust in His mercy through Jesus Christ, and submit to His will. Then soon shall we glide through this vexatious world, and find ourselves in that happy place, where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

Verse 10. In this verse, fate is best understood as "God's providence." God is in control over our lives, even though at times it may not seem like it. As created beings, how foolish it is for us to argue with our Creator, who knows us completely and can see the future.

Verse 12. Solomon is stating the profound truth that we do not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. He ends with a rhetorical question--the answer to which is God! No human knows the future, so each day must be lived for its own value. Solomon is arguing against the notion that man can take charge of his own destiny. In all our plans we should look up to God, not just ahead to the future.

Don't put anything before God. Accept His perfect will.

We were born with nothing. One day we will die and leave everything. And God has given us everything we have. If he takes things away from us now, why would we argue? He gave them to us. Thinking that we should hoard what we have or keep it all until death is not good or true. God wants us to love others by giving.

Job 1:21 reads, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

The rich man can eat only three meals a day, he can sleep on only one bed at a time, and he cannot live longer than the poor man--no matter how many doctors he may have--and he takes nothing with him when he leaves. Job was a rich man, and he said that he had come here with nothing and he was going out the same way. It is rather empty to give one's life to the pursuit of things that do not bring happiness here and have no eternal value. Unfortunately, some people spend their lives in this kind of an emptiness.

Doing God's will is more important than gaining goods. That was another word that Jesus gave to take us beyond the frustration of the quest for wealth. His story of the man who acquired vast lands and built huge barns is painfully clear. God sabotaged his plans and rebuked him for them: "'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20-21).

"Rich toward God"--what an apt description of the direction God want us to head. We do not jump up and down in front of life's marble machines, or stay glued to the television for the lottery spins, greedy for instant gain. We gratefully receive what we have and then put it to God's purposes: our modest enjoyment and his faithful service.

On one occasion Peter and the other disciples wondered whether their sacrifice of leaving jobs and homes to go with Jesus would be recognized.

Mark 10:29, 30 reads, "Jesus . . .said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life'."

Talk about investments--one hundredfold Jesus promised, and at no risk except persecution. For God Himself is the Guarantor of the returns. And talk about wealth! Life's marble machines that promise instant gain are exposed as tawdry toys in the face of the profit Jesus promised--eternal life. It is His grace, not our gain, that leads us beyond the frustrations of earthly wealth to the riches that bring full satisfaction: the riches of fellowship with God now and forever.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 7 - Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 7

Verses 1-6. Reputation for piety and honesty is more desirable than all the wealth and pleasure in this world. It will do more good to go to a funeral than to a feast. We may lawfully go to both, when the situations arise; our Savior both feasted at the wedding of His friend in Cana, and wept at the grave of His friend in Bethany. But, considering how apt we are to be vain and indulge the flesh, it is best to go to the house of mourning, to learn the end of man as to this world. Seriousness is better than mirth, partying and frolicking. What is best for us is best for our souls, though it be unpleasing to sense. It is better to have our corruptions mortified by the rebuke of the wise, than to have them gratified by the song of fools. The laughter of a fool is soon gone, the end of his mirth is heaviness.

All of life is not a joke. Some people need to lighten up and relax more, while others need to get serious more often. Along with most things, a balance is needed. Too much of one or the other will be bad. Somebody has said, "too much of any one thing will be bad." There is truth in this statement, unless the one thing is Jesus Christ.

We should have a seriousness of purpose, but a lightness of heart.

Verses 2-4. Many people avoid thinking about death, refuse to face it, and are reluctant to attend funerals. Solomon is not encouraging us to think morbidly, but knows that it is helpful at times to think about death. It reminds us that there is still time for change, time to examine the direction of our lives, and time to confess our sins and find forgiveness from God. Because everyone will eventually die, it makes sense to plan ahead to experience God's mercy rather than His justice.

It is right to respect a deceased loved one. But don't fear death or sorrow. *If you have salvation in Jesus Christ, death is the door to Heaven.* Try and see death through God's eyes. Number your days and use them wisely.

Psalm 90:12 "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Verses 5 and 6. Have you ever been paid a compliment, knowing it was inappropriate and merely an attempt to flatter you? Some people would rather feel good than know the truth. Pleasant compliments are too often valued above helpful information. Solomon reminds us that it is far better to face honest criticism than to wallow in the compliments of fools.

Verse 6. Most people like their ego being courted. Solomon warns against this. He says that it is silly to be impressed by people saying good things about you. Flattery can be a form of control. When you hear people talking good about you, don't think you owe them the world. They may be trying to control you. Additionally, fools who praise people have little to say that is true or profitable. They are fools!

Verse 7. Money talks, and it can confuse those who would otherwise judge fairly. We hear about bribes given to judges, police officers, and witnesses. Bribes are given to hurt those who tell the truth and help those who oppose it. The person who takes a bribe is indeed a fool, no matter how wise he thought he was before. *Some say that everyone has his price, but those who are truly wise cannot be bought at any price.*

Verses 7-10. The event of our trials and difficulties is often better than at first we thought. Surely it is better to be patient in spirit, than to be proud and hasty. Be slow to anger, don't resent an insult. Don't stay angry; though anger may come into the heart of a wise man, it passes through it as a way-faring man or a sieve; it dwells only in the heart of fools. It is folly to cry out upon the badness of our times, when we have more reason to cry out for the badness of our own hearts; and even in these times we enjoy many mercies. It is folly to cry for the goodness of former times; as if nobody else has had the same complaint: this arises from discontent, and aptness to quarrel with God Himself.

Verse 10. The "good old days" are easy to talk about, but they may never have existed. Sometimes we remember only the good things about the past, forgetting that those days also had problems. Instead of living in the past, decide to live for today. Live in such a way that you will look back on today as one of the "good old days."

Verses 11-22. Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, actually, better. It shelters from the storms and scorching heat of trouble. Wealth will not lengthen the natural life; but true wisdom will give spiritual life, and strengthen men for services under their sufferings. Let us look upon the disposal of our condition as the work of God, and at last all will appear to have been for the best. In acts of righteousness, don't be carried into heats or passions, they are not from a zeal for God. Be not conceited with your own abilities; don't find fault with every thing, nor busy yourself in other men's matters. Many who will not fear God, and the dread of hell, will avoid sins which ruin their health and estate, and expose them to the public. But those that truly fear God, have but one end to serve, therefore act steadily. If we say we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves. Every true believer is ready to say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Don't forget, at the same time, that personal righteousness, walking in newness of life, is the only real evidence of an interest by faith in the righteousness of the Redeemer. Wisdom teaches us not to be quick in resenting insults. Be not desirous to know what people say; if they speak well of thee, it will feed your pride, if evil, it will stir up your passion. See that you approve yourself to God and your own conscience, and then don't worry what people say of you; it is easier to pass by twenty insults than to avenge one. When any harm is done to us, examine whether we have done as bad to others.

Proverbs 14:16-17 "Wise people are careful and stay out of trouble, but fools are careless and quick to act. Someone with a quick temper does foolish things, but someone with understanding remains calm."

If you stay angry for 25 minutes, then 25 minutes have been subtracted from your life.

Verses 23-25. Solomon, the wisest man in the world, confessed how difficult it had been to act and think wisely. He emphasized that no matter how much we know, there are always mysteries we will never understand. *So thinking you have enough wisdom is a sure sign that you don't.*

Verses 23-29. Solomon, in his search into the nature and reason of things, had been miserably deluded. But he here speaks with godly sorrow. He alone who constantly aims to please God, can expect to escape; the careless sinner probably will fall to rise no more. He now discovered more than ever the evil of the great sin of which he had been guilty, the loving many strange women, 1 Kings 11:1. A woman thoroughly upright and godly, he had not found. How was he likely to find such a one among those he had collected? Here he warns others against the sins into which he had been betrayed. Many godly men can thankfully acknowledge that he has found a prudent, virtuous woman; but those men who have gone down Solomon's path, cannot expect to find one. He traces up all the streams of actual transgression to the fountain. It is clear that man is corrupted and revolted, and not as he was made. It is lamentable that man, whom God made upright, has found so many ways to render himself wicked and miserable. Let us thank Him for Jesus Christ, and seek His grace, that we may be numbered with His chosen people.

Verses 27 and 28. Did Solomon think women were not capable of having wisdom? No, because in the book of Proverbs he personified wisdom as a beautiful woman. The point of Solomon's statement is not that he couldn't find a wise woman, but that hardly anyone, man or woman, is wise before God (less than one tenth of one percent). In his search, he found that wisdom was almost as scarce among men as among women, even though men were given a religious education program in his culture and women were not. In effect, the verse is saying, "I have found only one in a thousand people who is wise in God's eyes. No. I have found fewer than that!"

But, God wants to give us wisdom. James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

James 3:17 "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits."

Matthew 7:7 and 8 "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Matthew 21:22 "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Pray for wisdom (and love while you're at it)!

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8

Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 8:1 "How wonderful to be wise, to understand things, to be able to analyze them and interpret them. Wisdom lights up a man's face, softening its hardness." (TLB)

Key Thought: Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective and then to know the best course of action to take. Most would agree that wisdom is a valuable asset, but how can we acquire it? In Proverb 9:10, we learn that we can begin to find wisdom through reverence and fear of God. *Wisdom, therefore, is a result of knowing and trusting God, not the way to find God.* Knowing God will lead to understanding and to sharing this knowledge with others.

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 8

Verses 1-5. None of the rich, the powerful, the honorable, or the accomplished of the sons of men, are so excellent, useful, or happy, as the wise man. Who else can interpret the words of God, or teach from His truths and dispensations? What madness must it be for weak and dependent creatures to rebel against the Almighty! What numbers form wrong judgments, and bring misery on themselves, in this life and that to come!

Verses 6-8. God has, in wisdom, kept away from us the knowledge of future events, that we may be always ready for changes. We must all die, no flight or hiding-place can save us, nor are there any weapons of effectual resistance. Ninety thousand die every day, upwards of sixty every minute, and one every moment. How solemn the thought! Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end! The believer alone is prepared to meet the solemn summons. Wickedness, by which men often escape human justice, cannot secure from death.

Verses 9-13. Solomon observed, that many a time one man rules over another to his hurt, and that prosperity hardens them in their wickedness. Sinners herein deceive themselves. *Vengeance comes slowly, but it comes surely.* A good man's days have some substance; he lives to a good purpose: a wicked man's days are all as a shadow, empty and worthless. Let us pray that we may view eternal things as near, real, and all-important.

If God doesn't punish us immediately, we must not assume that He doesn't care or that sin has no consequences. But how much easier it is to sin when we don't feel the consequences at once. When a young child does something wrong and it is not discovered, how much easier it will be for him to do it again. But God knows every wrong we commit, and one day we will have to answer for everything we have done (12:14).

Verses 12-14. Solomon's presentation, though pessimistic, nevertheless shows that *life is ultimately better with God.* His presence does not shield us from all trouble, but it guarantees us that we will have His power to meet adversity. Both our eternal destiny and our present trials are in His hands.

Verses 14-17. Faith alone can establish the heart in this mixed scene, where the righteous often suffer, and the wicked prosper. Solomon commended joy, and holy security of mind, arising from confidence in God, because a man has no better thing under the sun, though a good man has much better things above the sun, than soberly and thankfully to use the things of this life according to his rank. He would not have us try to give a reason for what God does. But, leaving the Lord to clear up all difficulties in His own time, we may cheerfully enjoy the comforts, and bear up under the trials of life; while peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost will abide in us through all outward changes, and when flesh and heart shall fail.

Verses 16-17. Even if he had access to all the world's wisdom, the wisest man would know very little. There are always more questions than answers to life. But the unknown should not cast a shadow over our joy, faith, or work because we know that someone greater is in control and that we can put our trust in Him. *Are you letting what you don't know about the future destroy the joy God wants to give you today?*

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 "Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a fool so that he may become wise. *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.* As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness;' and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile'."

Ecclesiastes Chapter 9

Ecclesiastes is the record of experiments that Solomon made with life. He tried everything "under the sun" to see if he could find satisfaction for his soul. Everything must be interpreted in that light. The Christian life is in the heavenly places where God is. Man under the sun will have a different view of life from the view of God who is above the sun. We are looking at two different worlds, two different ways of life. Life under the sun is a mundane existence apart from God. It views a future and an eternity without God. The Christian life is a contrast to this in every way because man has been saved by the grace of God and is a display of His grace.

We have seen that many of the teachings of the Book of Ecclesiastes are quite radical. They present the philosophy of man under the sun. They do not present the Christian viewpoint, nor do they represent God's viewpoint. They tell us the inevitable conclusions that are reached by the man under the sun. We must always remember that Solomon is speaking of life apart from God.

Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 9:17 "The quiet words of a wise man are better than the shout of a king of fools."

Key Thoughts: Listen closely for wisdom. When you hear something wise, remember it or write it down. Don't stop seeking God through prayer and obedience.

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 9

Verses 1-3. We are not to think our searching into the word or works of God useless, because we cannot explain all difficulties. We may learn many things good for ourselves and useful to others. But man cannot always decide who are objects of God's special love, or under His wrath; and God will certainly put a difference between the precious and the vile, in the other world. As far as the sons of men are left to themselves, their hearts are full of evil; and prosperity in sin, causes them even to set God at defiance by daring wickedness. *Though, on this side death, the righteous and the wicked may often seem to fare alike, on the other side there will be a vast difference between them.*

Verses 4-10. The most despicable living man's state, is preferable to that of the most noble who have died unrepentant. Solomon exhorts the wise and pious to cheerful confidence in God, whatever their condition in life. The meanest morsel, coming from their Father's love, in answer to prayer, will have a peculiar relish. Not that we may set our hearts upon the delights of sense, but what God has given us we may use with wisdom. The joy here described, is the gladness of heart that springs from a sense of the Divine favor.

Verses 5, 10. When Solomon says the dead know nothing, and there is no working, planning, knowing or understanding in death, he is not contrasting life with afterlife, but life with death. Once you die you can't change what you have done or suddenly plan to become a better person. Resurrection to a new life after death was a vague concept for Old Testament believers. It was only made clear after Jesus rose from the dead.

Verse 7. If death is the end of everything, then man is just like an animal. The evolutionist says that man once was an animal, and this man under the sun says man is like an animal now. The end result of both is the same. Man dies like an animal. How different it is for us who know that we have come from the creative hand of God and that we are going back to God?

Verses 7-10. Considering the uncertainties of the future and the certainty of death, Solomon recommends enjoying life as God's gift. He may have been criticizing those who put off all present pleasures in order to accumulate wealth, much like those who get caught up in today's rat race. Solomon asks, "What is your wealth really worth anyway?" It is important to enjoy God's gifts while we are able, because the future is so uncertain. But don't let them be your motivation and source of joy.

Today is a gift, that's why it's called the present. Today is God's gift to you. What you do with your day is your gift to Him.

Verse 9. Solomon wrote a proverb about marriage. "The man who finds a wife finds a good thing; she is a blessing to him from the Lord" (Proverb 18:22). How sad to be married and not appreciate and enjoy this great blessing God has given you.

Verses 11-12. Men's success seldom equals their expectations. We must use means, but not trust to them: if we succeed, we must give God the praise; if crossed, we must submit to His will. Those who put off the great concerns of their souls, are caught in Satan's net, which he baits with some worldly object, for which they reject or neglect the gospel, and go on in sin until they suddenly fall into destruction.

Input does not determine outcome. Life is not a predictable computer. God's patterns are not predictable. It seems that chance often has as much influence on our well-being as human behavior. God's wisdom is far beyond our comprehension.

Romans 11:33-34 "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, no man can fathom his ways! Who has known the mind of the Lord our offered Him any counsel?"

Job 38:4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" This was God's response to Job. He wanted Job to understand that He has a bigger plan and that he should patiently trust God.

The winner of the race isn't always the one who runs the fastest out of the starting blocks, but the one who keeps on running. *The one who finds God is the one who keeps seeking Him.* The one who finds success is the one who keeps obeying God.

Jeremiah 29:13 "When you seek Me with all of your heart, you will find Me." Seeking God with all of your heart is not a one time thing. It isn't simply an altar call. It is a process that begins with prayer, obedience, and discipline.

Verses 13-18. A man may, by his wisdom, bring to pass that which he could never do by his strength. If God be for us, who can be against us, or stand before us? Solomon observes the power of wisdom, though it may labor under outward disadvantages. How forcible are right words! But wise and good men must often content themselves with the satisfaction of having done good, or, at least, endeavored to do it, when they cannot do the good they would, nor have the praise they should. How many of the good gifts, both of nature and Providence, does one sinner destroy and make waste! He who destroys his own soul destroys much good. One sinner may draw many into his destroying ways. See who are the friends and enemies of a kingdom or a family, if one saint does much good, and one sinner destroys much good.

A wisely worded question can do more good than an angry threat. When someone comes up with an answer, in their own mind, how can they reject it?

Hebrews 10:24 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Verse 15. Who was that man who came and brought deliverance? His name was Wisdom, and Wisdom is a name for Christ. He came to this earth in poverty. Jesus could actually say, "...the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has no where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). He was a poor man. This was a prophetic statement.

Listen closely for wisdom. Our society honors wealth, attractiveness, and success above wisdom. It is sad to see people strive to look important in man's eyes while ruining their relationship with God.

Don't wax your car and forget to take out the trash that is building up inside.

1 Samuel 16:7 "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

We each have a circle of influence. There are people that we speak with on a daily basis. How are you leading them?

There was a father who had some whiskey hidden in his barn. Each morning he would walk out to the barn and drink some. One snowy morning he walked out to the barn. As he was reaching for his whiskey, he heard footsteps. Turning around he saw his son. He asked, "What are you doing here?" His son answered, "I'm following in your footsteps, dad." They boy had been walking in his dads footsteps through the snow. He told his son to go back into the house. Then he took the whiskey bottle and broke it.

There is somebody watching us and following in our footsteps. Whose footsteps are we following?

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10

Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 10:10 "If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success."

A dull axe requires great strength; be wise and sharpen the blade.

Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 10:19 "A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything."

"Under the sun," and away from God, money is the logical answer. However, God is the spiritual answer that we need more than money.

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 10

Verses 1-3. Those especially who make a profession of religion, should keep from all appearances of evil. A wise man has great advantage over a fool, who is always at a loss when he has anything to do. Sin is the reproach of sinners, wherever they go, and shows their folly.

Verses 4-10. Solomon appears to caution men not to seek restitution in a hasty manner, nor to yield to pride and revenge. Do not, in a passion, quit your post of duty; wait awhile, and you will find that yielding pacifies great offences. Men are not preferred according to their merit. And those are often most forward to offer help, who are least aware of the difficulties, or the consequences. The same remark is applied to the church, or the body of Christ, that all the members should have the same care one for another.

Verses 5-9. By describing these circumstances that aren't fair or don't make sense, Solomon is saying that wisdom alone can't bring justice. Solomon continues to build his conclusion that *everything we have (from wisdom to riches) is nothing without God. And what little we have, when God is using it, becomes all we could ever want.*

Verse 5-6. This is one of the things that has happened in our day and age; a dignity has been given to sin. There was a time when sin was down on the side street. It was considered dirty and filthy, and it savored of that which was low and foul. But today sin has moved up on the boulevard. Sin is committed with great dignity, and it has been given a prominent place. It is given a prominent place on TV shows.

I noticed the other day that they interviewed a stripper on a television show, that is, a girl who takes off her clothes in a nightclub. I knew people who would sneak off at night and go to such shows. It was dirty; it was filthy. Today they call it an art form! Today sin is handled in such a dignified way. "Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place."

Have you heard interviews with the ordinary citizen or with the ordinary Christian? These are the people who are making the finest contribution to their community and to their society. Are they the ones who are interviewed? No, they occupy a low place. You never hear of them. The attention is focused on the ones who are the sinners and the oddballs.

However, don't completely discount somebody for being an oddball. Pray for them. Know that Jesus can change their life just like He has changed ours. Dennis Rodman comes to mind when I think of oddballs. This guy has tattoos and body piercings. He has colored and shaven hair. He is definately an oddball. But think. If he were to surrender his life to Jesus, he could be a powerful testimony. Romans 12 tells us not to be conformed to this world. If we are different to draw attention to ourselves, we are wrong. But, if we are different to draw the attention to Jesus Christ, then it is good. Don't condemn the oddballs. God loves them and we should, too.

Verse 10. Trying to do anything without the necessary skills or tools is like chopping with a dull axe. If your tool is dull, you sharpen it to do a better job. Similarly, if you lack skills, you should sharpen them through training and practice. In each situation, sharpening the axe means recognizing where a problem exists, acquiring or honing the skills (or tools) to do the job better, and then going out and doing it. Find the areas of your life where your "axe" is dull, and sharpen your skills so you can be more effective for God's work.

Don't go out untrained. Take the time for sharpening.

Verses 11-15. There is a practice in the East, of charming serpents by music. The babbler's tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; and contradiction only makes it the more violent. We must find the way to keep him gentle. But by rash, unprincipled, or slanderous talk, he brings open or secret vengeance upon himself. Would we duly consider our own ignorance as to future events, it would cut off many idle words which we foolishly multiply. Fools toil a great deal to no purpose. They do not understand the plainest things, such as the entrance into a great city. But it is the excellency of the way to the heavenly city, that it is a high-way, in which the simplest wayfaring men will not err, Isaiah 25:8. But sinful folly makes men miss that only way to happiness.

Verses 16-19. When the Hebrews had immature and irresponsible leaders, their nation fell. The books of 1 and 2 Kings describe the decline of the kingdoms when the leaders were concerned only about themselves. Verse 18 pinpoints the basic problem of these selfish leaders--laziness.

Verse 19. Government leaders, businesses, families, even churches get trapped into thinking money is the answer to every problem. We throw money at our problems, but just as the thrill of liquor is only temporary, the soothing effect of the last purchase soon wears off and we have to buy more. Scripture recognizes that money is necessary for survival, but it warns against the love of money. *Money is dangerous because it deceives us into thinking that wealth is the easiest way to get everything we want. The love of money is sinful because we trust it, rather than God, to solve our problems.* Those who pursue its empty promises one day discover that they have nothing, because they are spiritually bankrupt.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

1 Timothy 6:10 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Hebrews 13:5 "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

If your treasures are on earth, each day you are moving away from them. If your treasures are in Heaven, each day you are moving toward them.

Verses 16-20. The happiness of a land depends on the character of its rulers. The people cannot be happy when their princes are childish, and lovers of pleasure. Slothfulness is of ill consequence both to private and public affairs. Money, of itself, will neither feed nor clothe, though it answers the occasions of this present life. *But the soul, as it is not redeemed, so it is not maintained with corruptible things, as silver and gold.* God sees what men do, and hears what they say in secret; and, when He pleases, brings it to light by strange and unsuspected ways. If there be hazard in secret thoughts and whispers against earthly rulers, what must be the peril from every deed, word, or thought of rebellion against the King of kings, and Lord of lords! He sees in secret. His ear is ever open. Your curses cannot affect Him; but His curse, coming down upon you, will sink you to the lowest hell.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11 - Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 11

Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 11:4 "If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done."

Waiting for perfect conditions will mean inactivity. This practical insight is especially applicable to our spiritual life. If we wait for the perfect time and place for personal Bible reading, we will never begin. If we wait for a perfect church, we will never join. If we wait for the perfect ministry, we will never serve. Take steps now to grow spiritually. Don't wait for conditions that will never exist.

Verses 1-6. Solomon presses the rich to do good to others. Give freely, though it may seem thrown away and lost. Give to many. Don't excuse yourself from doing good because you have done good things in the past. It is not lost, but well laid out. We have reason to expect evil, for we are born to trouble; it is wisdom to do good in the day of prosperity. *Riches cannot profit us, if we do not benefit others.* Every man must labor to be a blessing to that place where the providence of God casts him. *Wherever we are, we may find good work to do, if we have hearts to do it.* If we magnify every little difficulty, start objections, and fancy hardships, we will never go on, much less go through with our work. Winds and clouds of tribulation are, in God's hands, designed to try us. God's work will agree with His word, whether we see it or not. And we need to trust God to provide for us, without our anxious, distressing worries.

Galatians 6:9 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Verses 3-5. Solomon's pessimistic writing is designed to teach us not to embrace a materialistic lifestyle. Solomon shoots down most common beliefs about life. He attacks these false philosophies so that we may escape the bitterness he experienced. Solomon does not support a despairing attitude. Just because life is uncertain does not mean we should do nothing. We are to face life's opportunities with Godly attitudes.

Verse 5. The formation of the fetus and the physical birth of a baby are still great mysteries today. Spiritual rebirth is an even greater mystery. You do not know how the Spirit will move. The Lord Jesus said that, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). There is a great deal that we do no know.

I believe the point is simply this: Don't let what you don't know disturb what you do know. Let me give you an example. Any person knows enough to sit in a chair. There is an empty chair in my dining room right now. I don't mind getting up and going over there to sit down. Now there are a lot of things I don't know about that chair. I don't know anything about its construction--who made it or how it was made--but I do know that I can sit in that chair and it will hold me up. That is really all I need to know about the chair. So don't let what you don't know disturb what you do know.

Verse 7-8. Solomon is no dreary pessimist in 11:7-12:14. He encourages us to rejoice in every day but to remember that eternity is far longer than a person's life span. Psalm 90:12 says, "Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should." The wise person does not just think about the moment and its impact; he takes the long-range view from eternity. Approach your decisions from an eternal perspective. Consider their impact ten years from now and forever. Live with the attitude that although this life is short, we can life with God forever.

Verses 7-10. Life is sweet to bad men, because they have their portion in this life; it is sweet to good men, because it is the time of preparation for a better; it is sweet to all. Here is a caution to think of death, even when life is most sweet. Solomon makes an effecting address to young persons. They would desire opportunities to pursue every pleasure. Then follow your desires, but be assured that God will call you into judgment. Many give in to every appetite, and rush into every vicious pleasure! But God registers every one of their sinful thoughts and desires, their idle words and wicked words. Solomon evidently means to condemn the pleasures of sin. His object is to draw the young to purer and more lasting joys. This is not the language of one grudging youthful pleasures, because he can no longer partake of them; but of one who has, by a miracle of mercy, been brought back into safety. He would persuade the young from trying a fateful course. If the young want to live a life of true happiness, if they want to secure happiness hereafter, let them remember their Creator in the days of their youth.

Verse 10. We often hear people say, "It doesn't matter." But many of your choices will be irreversible--they will stay with you for a lifetime. What you do when you're young does matter. Enjoy life now, but don't do anything physically, morally, or spiritually that will prevent you from enjoying life when you are old.

It is very important that you make the right choices now. How many men have lived wasted lives and are living them today, because they made the wrong choices in their youth. Your youthful days are empty if they are not lived right. Life is a gift that is given to us by God, given one day at a time, in fact, one second at a time. It is a precious gift, and it is to be used for the glory of God.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12

We have seen the experiments that Solomon made in life. He is probably the only man who ever lived who was able to experiment in all of those different areas, attempting to find a solution and satisfaction apart from God. Throughout Ecclesiastes the key expression has been "under the sun." He tried nature and natural science as his first experiment.

A great many people today feel that they will solve their problems by getting back to nature. There is a great exodus out of the cities and into the suburbs and beyond the suburbs to a little cabin by a lake or by a river or up in the mountains. "Let's get away from it all. Let's get back to nature." Well, this didn't solve Solomon's problems, and it will not solve our problems. So Solomon tried wisdom and philosophy; he tried pleasure and materialism; he experimented with fatalism; he tried living life for self. He turned to religion and found ritual but no reality. Then he tried to find the answer in wealth. Finally Solomon tried the good life, the life of the moralist, which he found to be an insipid sort of existence. I think that is why the young people today rebel against it.

Solomon now comes to his final conclusion in this chapter.

Read Ecclesiastes Chapter 12

Key Verses: Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14 "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

Key Thought: Fearing God is to reverence, worship, and obey Him. "And keep His commandments," would mean to meet God's condition for salvation--in any age--grounded on faith in God. For Cain it meant bringing a lamb. For Abraham it meant believing the promises of God. For the people of Israel it meant approaching God through sacrifice in the tabernacle and in the temple. For us it is to "...believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:31).

Solomon's poetic picture of old age:

Verse 2. Things don't seem as good as they used to be. When you become old, you can go out and have a great day, but you must rest for days afterwards.

Verse 3. They legs will tremble. Your posture will decline. You will lose you teeth. Your eyesight will become poor.

Verse 4. The hearing will begin to fail. Your sleep will become lighter, waking up at the sound of a bird. Your voice begins to fail, especially your singing voice.

Verse 5. You become afraid of heights. A blossoming almond tree is white. You will have white hair, if any. Little things that never used to be a burden, become burdensome. Romance will be gone. You won't be like you used to be.

Verse 6. Here is a list of the organs of the body: spinal cord, brain, lungs, and heart. They will deteriorate.

Verse 7. There is no soul sleep. Your soul will go back to God.

Verses 1-7. We should remember our sins against our Creator, repent, and seek forgiveness. We should remember our duties, and set about them, looking to Him for grace and strength. This should be done early, while the body is strong, and the spirit is active. When a man has the pain of reviewing a misspent life, his not having given up sin and worldly vanities until he is forced to say, "I have no pleasure in them," renders his sincerity very questionable. Then follows a figurative description of old age and its infirmities, which has some difficulties; but the meaning is plain, to show how uncomfortable, generally, the days of old age are. As the four verses, vs. 2-5, are a figurative description of the infirmities that usually accompany old age, vs. 6 notices the circumstances which take place in the hour of death. If sin had not entered into the world, these infirmities would not have been known. Surely then the aged should reflect on the evil of sin.

Verses 8-14. Solomon repeats his text, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." These are the words of one that could speak by experience of the vanity of the world, which can do nothing to ease men of the burden of sin. As he considered the worth of souls, he gave good heed to what he spoke and wrote; *words of truth will always be acceptable words.* The truths of God are as goads (spurs, motivators, or catalysts). The Shepherd of Israel is the Giver of inspired wisdom. Godly teachers and guides all receive their communications from Him.

Verse 12. Education will not solve the problems of life.

All things would be vanity and vexation, except they led to this conclusion, *That to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole of man.* The fear of God includes in it all the affections of the soul towards Him, which are produced by the Holy Spirit. There may be terror where there is no love, resulting in hatred. But this is different from the gracious fear of God, as the feelings of an affectionate child. The fear of God, begins in the heart, and includes its practical results in life. Let us attend to the one thing needful, and now come to Him as a merciful Savior, who will soon come as an almighty Judge, when He will bring to light the things of darkness, and manifest the counsels of all hearts. God records in His word, that "all is vanity," to keep us from deceiving ourselves to our ruin. He makes our duty to be our interest. May it be graven in all our hearts.

*The result of Solomon's experiments:*

*Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is all that concerns man.*

Fearing God will result in a changed life. Fearing God will protect you from evil. You will either fear man or you will fear God. If you fear God, you will not have to fear man.