**The Futility of All Endeavors** (Ecclesiastes 1)

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

**2** “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher. “Vanity of vanities! All [that is done without God’s guidance] is vanity [futile, meaningless—a wisp of smoke, a vapor that vanishes, merely chasing the wind].”

**3**What advantage does man have from all his work which he does under the sun (while earthbound or from his own worldly perspective)?

**4**One generation goes and another generation comes, But the earth remains forever.

**5**Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hurries to the place where it rises again.

**6**The wind blows toward the south, Then circles toward the north; The wind circles *and* swirls endlessly, And on its circular course the wind returns.

**7**All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again.

**8**All things are wearisome *and* all words are frail; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing.

**9**That which has been is that which will be [again], And that which has been done is that which will be done again. So there is nothing new under the sun.

**10**Is there anything of which it can be said, “See this, it is new”? It has already existed for [the vast] ages [of time recorded or unrecorded] Which were before us.

**11**There is no remembrance of earlier things, Nor also of the later things that are to come; There will be for them no remembrance By generations who will come after them.

**The Futility of Man’s Wisdom**

**12**I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. **13**And I set my mind to seek and explore by [man’s] wisdom all [human activity] that has been done under heaven. It is a miserable business *and* a burdensome task which God has given the sons of men with which to be busy *and* distressed. **14**I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity, a futile grasping *and* chasing after the wind. **15**What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is defective *and* lacking cannot be counted. [There are harmful circumstances and problems in life that cannot be fixed]

**16**I spoke with my heart, saying, “Behold, I have acquired great [human] wisdom *and* experience, more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of [moral] wisdom and [scientific] knowledge.” **17**And I set my mind to know [practical] wisdom and to discern [the character of] madness and folly [in which men seem to find satisfaction]; I realized that this too is a futile grasping *and* chasing after the wind. **18**For in much [human] wisdom there is much displeasure *and* exasperation; increasing knowledge increases sorrow. [Often, the more we know the more depressing things seem]

**Scriptural references for the principles found in Ecclesiastes:**

**Old Testament:**

* **Psalms:** Psalms of lament and reflection, such as **Psalm 39** and **Psalm 90**, echo the themes of human mortality and the fleeting nature of life found in Ecclesiastes. These Psalms, like Ecclesiastes, encourage seeking meaning and comfort in God and not apart from Him.
* **Job:** The Book of Job shares Ecclesiastes' exploration of the problem of suffering and the seeming injustices of life. Both books grapple with understanding God's ways and the limitations of human wisdom (Job 28:28 and Ecclesiastes 3:11).

**New Testament:**

* **1 Timothy 6:17-19**: Paul's advice to be content with what we have and to focus on spiritual wealth rather than material riches echoes Ecclesiastes' reflections on the futility of accumulating wealth.
* **Romans 8:20-21:** Paul's discussion of creation being subjected to frustration and the hope of liberation from decay echoes the themes in Ecclesiastes about the vanity of the world and the hope for something greater.
* **Matthew 6:19-21**: Jesus’ teaching about storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth reflects Ecclesiastes' emphasis on the transient nature of worldly possessions and the importance of spiritual focus.
* **Matthew 16:26**: Jesus’ question about the value of gaining the world but losing one’s soul resonates with Ecclesiastes’ questioning of the purpose and value of earthly pursuits.

**Futility of Pleasure and Accomplishments:**

* **Proverbs 14:13**: "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief." This reflects the temporary nature of pleasure.
* **Luke 12:16-21**: The Parable of the Rich Fool emphasizes the futility of accumulating wealth without being rich toward God.

**Wisdom and Folly:**

* **Proverbs 1:7**: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." This contrasts wisdom and folly similarly to Ecclesiastes.
* **James 1:5-8**: The discussion on seeking wisdom from God, highlighting the superiority of divine wisdom over human understanding.

**Inevitability of Death:**

* **Psalm 39:4-5**: "Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is."
* **Hebrews 9:27**: "Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."

**The Limits of Human Wisdom:**

* **Job 28:12-28**: The search for wisdom and the recognition that true wisdom comes from the Lord.
* **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**: Paul’s discourse on the wisdom of God versus the wisdom of the world.

**The Unpredictability of Life:**

* **James 4:13-15**: Discusses the uncertainty of life and the need to submit to God's will, echoing the unpredictability highlighted in Ecclesiastes and Job.

**The Value of Simple Pleasures:**

* **Psalm 128:2**: "You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours." Appreciating the simple blessings of work and family.

**The Fear of God:**

* **Proverbs 3:5-6**: Trusting in the Lord with all your heart while not leaning on your own understanding - the conclusion of Ecclesiastes is to fear God and keep His commandments.