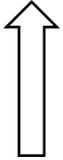


Ecclesiastes

Knowing the God of Purpose



Lesson 1 ————— Overview



Father, please give me wisdom and understanding from your Holy Spirit as I read your word. Help me to see you more clearly and gain insight on how to trust you and live for your glory in this world.

Day 1 - Read Ecclesiastes (This will take you about 30 minutes.) You could also listen to it on your Bible App.

The rest of the week we will touch on the themes of Ecclesiastes by looking at selected verses.

Underline or highlight main words, phrases or ideas that are repeated throughout the book and write them here.

Scholar's Note: At the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes we are told that *these are the words of Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem*. Most commentators, believe that this is Solomon.

The word *vanity* is found 38 times in Ecclesiastes. The original word for vanity in Hebrew is *hevel*. It literally means vapor, smoke, or breath, and is a common biblical concept. It portrays an image of something fleeting, temporal, disorienting or elusive. It also carries nuances of futility, mystery, inscrutability, and frustration. We can discover the nuances of the word from the different contexts it is applied to.¹

Picture and Ponder

"Wisdom Literature asks, what does it mean to fear the Lord in the world the Lord has made? Along with Job, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes is a meditation on what it means to be alive in a world that God made and called good, yet which has also gone so very wrong, often in catastrophic ways."²

Day 2- *The One Shepherd*

1. It is helpful to keep in mind the conclusion of Ecclesiastes as we survey its themes. Look at 12:11-14. What does verse 13 say is our only duty as we live in God's world?
 - How will everything be set right one day according to verse 14?

2. Read 3:16-17 and 8:12. How would living with the perspective that these verses give, help us to live life here and now?

3. What wisdom about God and humans does the Preacher express in 3:11, 5:2, 8:17, and 11:5?
 - How does this truth about God and human beings help you to live in this complex and broken world?



Sin has broken God's perfect world so that every aspect of our lives has been touched by its corruption. The author of Ecclesiastes in 12:11 says that *the words of the wise are like goads and like nails firmly fixed...* The words in this book poke and prod us (like a goad), forcing us to face the reality of this broken world; These uncomfortable words are given by *one Shepherd*, so we know that they are given to help us and to keep us on the right path. Our duty is to fear him (12:13), even in the bewilderment of our complex world because one day he will make everything right—this is our ultimate reality.

- ◆ Following Jesus, the Great Shepherd, is what gives meaning and hope to our often difficult lives. Meditate on these verses that tell of the future for those who follow Jesus to the end.

Revelation 21:4-5a "...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'

- ◆ For now, on this broken earth, God collects our tears and keeps them. Psalm 56:8 (NLT) *You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded them in your book.* How does knowing God as your *Shepherd* comfort you in the chaos and confusion of this world? (Ps. 23, John 10)

- ◆ List other characteristics of God that you can hold on to in the mystery and confusion of life.

Day 3- *Life Under the Sun*

Proverbs for the most part, portrays an orderly world, created by God, where if you are wise and live according to God's ways, good things result. Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, depicts a world where the order that God designed the world to run by is confused—it is broken by sin. And we are broken by sin so that our ability to know God's order is also confused.

1. In 3:16, 4:1, 7:15, and 8:14, what are some things the Preacher observes that are evidence that this world is a very broken place?

Picture and Ponder

"One of the hardest things about Ecclesiastes is letting it instruct us that there are no immediate answers for some things in this life."³

Digging Deeper

Ecclesiastes 11:8 warns us that if we live long enough, we will have many dark days. Peter tells us not to be taken by surprise by the intense trials we will face on this earth.

1 Peter 4:12-13 ¹² *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* ¹³ *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

- What part do you think our expectations play in how we are able to cope in this world?

- How does Jesus give some meaning to suffering?

2. How does 7:14 express some of the mystery we live with in this broken world?

3. What avenues to happiness, purpose and satisfaction did the Preacher pursue in vain throughout his life in 2:1-23?

Picture and Ponder

"The Preacher dismantles all the things we think will bring happiness and satisfaction in life."⁴

4. One of the things the Preacher pursued was wisdom. Even though wisdom is a worthy pursuit, what did the Preacher find out according to 7:23?
 - How does it help us in our relationship with God, as we live life in this broken world, to know that there is a limit to the wisdom we can gain as human beings?

Picture and Ponder

"We are...dependent creatures who can only know and handle a sliver of what the Creator is really doing."⁵



The things that we look to in this world for happiness and purpose are only poor imitations of what God offers us. Pursuing anything outside of God or at God's expense will never satisfy our hungry souls—we were made for more. Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God has put eternity into our hearts—there is more than just life under the sun.

- ◆ What things have you pursued in your life that have not brought you lasting satisfaction or joy?

- ◆ Jesus says in John 15:11 *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* How does Jesus give you joy?



God it is only in your presence through Jesus my Savior that there is fullness of joy and pleasures evermore (Ps. 16:11) Help me to believe this, so that I live it, and look first to you for true joy and satisfaction.

Day 4- *The House of Mourning*

1. What does the Preacher say about death in 3:19-21 and 9:1-3?
2. 9:5 tells us that one advantage to being alive is that *the living know they will die*. How would keeping in mind that you do not have unlimited time on this earth help you to live wisely?
3. 7:2 in the NIV says, *It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.* This is a shocking statement, especially for those who have lost loved ones, but what could you learn in a house of mourning that you might not learn in a house of feasting?

For Discussion

How does thinking about death help you to enjoy life more?

Picture and Ponder

“Will you let death teach you the limitations of your life? Will you let it reshape your goals, your attitudes, the things you long for and work for and pray for and hope for the most?”⁶



To paraphrase the Preacher in chapter 9, he says that the wise and righteous are in God’s hands, but since everyone dies how can we tell if God is for us or not? The life, death and resurrection of Jesus answers that question. Even when we suffer, we can know that yes, God is for us, yes he loves us—he sent Jesus to rescue us so that suffering we experience here on earth and death itself will not have the last word!

- ◆ In 3:21 the Preacher questions where our spirit goes when we die. He wonders, *who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the beast goes down into the earth?* Have you asked that question about yourself yet? Ecclesiastes forces us to face the fact that death is a certainty for all of us. But in John 11:25-26 Jesus says,

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

If you want certainty about where you will go when you die, you have only to place your trust in Jesus and follow him as your King and you will receive the gift of eternal life.

- ◆ Spend some time talking to God about how your goals, attitudes, longings and prayers might need to be reshaped in light of your limited time on earth.

Day 5- A Time for Everything

1. Read 2:24, 3:12-13, and 5:18-19. What is the main point of these verses?
2. The proverb in 7:10 tells us it is not wise to look back to “the good ole’ days”. Why do you think this is true? (Think of this in relation to God and the present.)
3. 8:7-8 in the NLT says, ⁷Indeed, how can people avoid what they don’t know is going to happen? ⁸None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no escaping that obligation, that dark battle. And in the face of death, wickedness will certainly not rescue the wicked. Along with 9:11-12, what are these verses expressing about our control over our lives?



So the question is, how do you live life in the midst of *hevel*—*in the midst of the fog of life*? The Preacher in Ecclesiastes tells us that we should “accept that all of life is out of your control and trust God. This is the only way to enjoy the gifts of God as you experience them and not as you think life should be.”⁷

Even though life on this broken planet is confusing and mysterious to us we are so blessed because we live at a time in history where Jesus the Savior has been revealed to us. Jesus is who gives meaning and purpose to our lives under the sun. It is through Jesus we see that suffering leads to resurrection. God has a plan—life is not left to chance—and though we don’t see all the details of his plan we know that because of Jesus, God’s plan leads to redemption.

- ◆ How can believing God and trusting that he is in control help you to take the moments of happiness and goodness and enjoy them even in the midst of sorrow or trials?

- ◆ From anywhere in the Bible, find one verse to share that shows that God is in control or that he has a plan.

¹ Gibson, David. Living Life Backward. P.19 Crossway 2017, and ESV Study Bible

² Gibson, David. Living Life Backward. P. 23 Crossway 2017

³ Gibson, David. Living Life Backward. P. 161 Crossway 2017

⁴ Dr. Tim Mackie The Bible Podcast Ecclesiastes E1 Not Another Proverbs

⁵ Akin, Daniel L and Jonathan. Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes P. 42 B & H Publishing group 2016

⁶ Gibson, David. Living Life Backward. P. 98 Crossway 2017

⁷ Dr. Tim Mackie The Bible Podcast Ecclesiastes E1 Not Another Proverbs

Day 2- *The One Shepherd*

12.11-14, 3.16-17, 8.12, 3.11, 5.2, 8.17, 11.5

Day 3- *Life Under the Sun*

3.16, 4.1, 7.15, 8.14, 7.14, 7.23, 3.11

Day 4- *The House of Mourning*

3.19-21, 9.1-3, 9.5

Day 5- *A Time for Everything*

2.24, 3.12-13, 5.18-19, 7.10, 9.11-12,