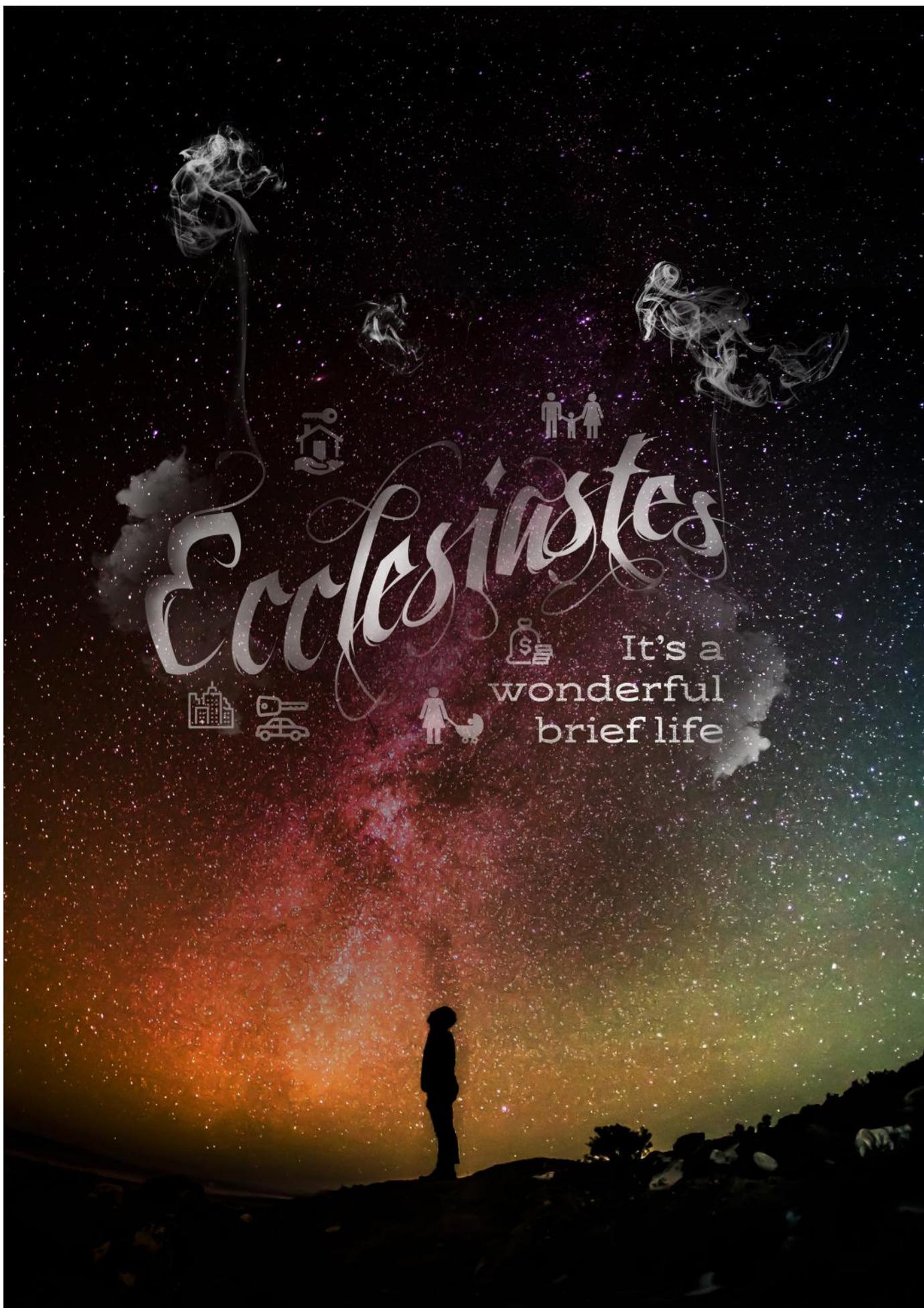
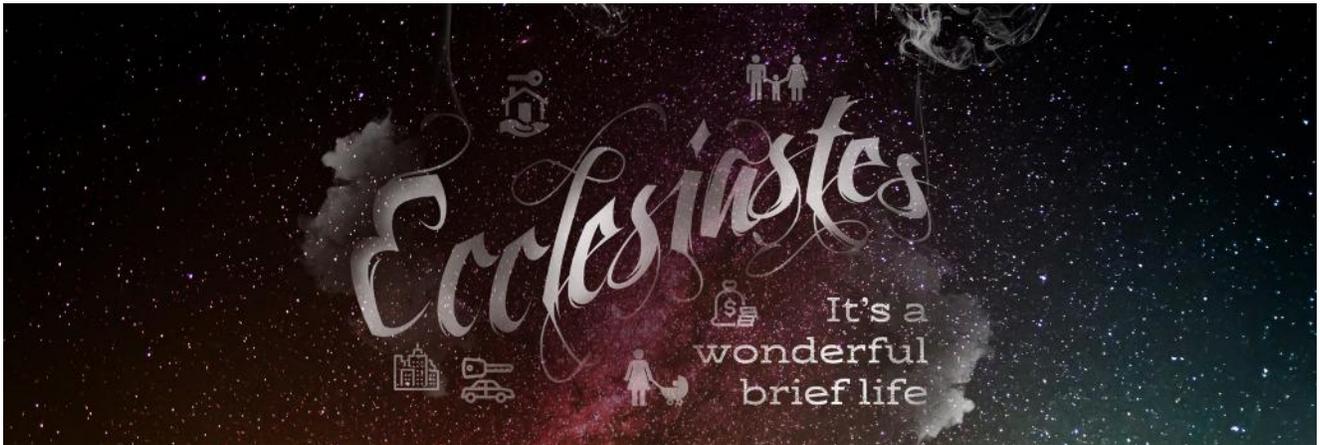


Ecclesiastes

It's a
wonderful
brief life





Study written by Cheryl Mullis, with editing help from Donna DeRoo,
Frankie Frank, Brady Lee, and Nikki Pruitt

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**These weeks may be combined as many groups will not meet the weeks of Thanksgiving

Introduction

Brady Lee

If I learned anything at St. John's College—where we revel in the great books just down the road from our church—it is that introductions can be deceiving. We introducers mean well, of course. We strive to help the reader by situating and contextualizing, giving timelines and intellectual influences, even venturing interpretations of our own. The problem is we are nearly always speaking for a mind more brilliant than our own, and too often we mold this mind in our own image. What is dynamic and alive becomes in our hands stuffy and stiff. We can sure make a mess of things.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is one of these great minds. In his book, you will encounter a thinker of astounding insight and originality, someone at once fluent in his own tradition (that is, the Old Testament and the story of Israel) who is nevertheless iconoclastic and provocative and unwilling to use his tradition to dole out pat answers. There is a sharpness here that leaves a mark—the goad of 12:11—and it pricks whether you are religious or secular, a believer or a doubter, old or young, well off or hard pressed.

So—take the following as some pointers toward reading this book well for yourself, and don't let this introduction (or any other) replace your own search. And when we say your own search, we include the preaching of the Word on Sundays, the wise questions in this Study Guide, and conversations with your Renew Group. As a community we are meant to wrestle with this text—with all of Scripture, for that matter. It is God's Word, the breath of life, and it stands on its own. May God help us as we take this journey together.

As with those of all great books, introductions of Ecclesiastes nearly always begin with discussions of historical context, authorship, and genre. It's what good introductions do! When we read a book, especially an old book, we want to see the book through the eyes of the original readers and hearers.

In our Exodus study, for instance, we talked a lot about *law*. Our modern impression of ancient Judaism is that it was unduly legalistic, but once we considered that Old Testament law was written for a people rescued out of slavery in order to form a new community in relationship with God and one another (“a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”¹) then a set of guidelines seems like a great idea. God's covenant with Israel was part of his provision for a vulnerable people in the desert.

¹Exodus 19:6; cf. Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6.

Where, then, does Ecclesiastes fit? One way to organize the Old Testament is to read it in three main sections: the Torah (or Law), the Prophets, and the Writings. Ecclesiastes is part of the Writings and is often placed in the genre—along with Proverbs and Job—called Wisdom Literature. Scholars place these books together due to similarities between them: their concern with wisdom, the numerous aphorisms and pithy sayings, and the more international or universal flavor of their concerns.

Here is the first place we need to be careful with our categories. Yes, Ecclesiastes is helpfully understood in this way, but what we miss if we typecast Ecclesiastes as merely Wisdom Literature is the ways that it interacts with the rest of Scripture—and how the rest of Scripture interacts with and informs it. For instance, wisdom literature is not the only biblical genre concerned with wisdom. The whole Bible is!

Those guidelines in Exodus we just mentioned? They are God's holy law, but please don't read simply *rules*. They are much more besides. When Moses is teaching Israel why to obey God's commands, he points to wisdom: "Keep them and do them, for that will be *your wisdom and your understanding* in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a *wise and understanding people*.'"² For Moses and the biblical writers, keeping the law was about displaying God's wisdom to the nations, and it was just as much about mission as it was holiness. What God hath joined together, let not our modern, western minds put asunder!

Indeed, the Bible's concern for wisdom began at Creation. Proverbs 8 is a beautiful poem looking back at how God used wisdom to create the cosmos. "When he established the heavens, I was there," Lady Wisdom says.³ And in the creation account itself, even though God told man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad,⁴ what do we imagine Adam, Eve, and God spoke about during their morning walks as he taught them how to rule and subdue the earth?⁵

Wisdom was also at issue when things went catastrophically wrong in the Garden. Note the language when Eve sees the fruit of the tree during her conversation with the serpent. She sees "that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to *make one wise*"—so she took of the fruit and ate. Adam did, too. They both chose being wise in their own eyes over God's command. We live in a world where that decision to grasp wisdom rather than allow God to generously give it⁶ mars creation to this day.

Great, so the whole Bible is concerned with wisdom. How does that canonical context get us any closer to understanding Ecclesiastes? First, as we've just seen, this shows that Ecclesiastes has

²Deuteronomy 4:6 (italics added); the whole passage is worth reading.

³Proverbs 8:27; again, read the whole chapter!

⁴The Hebrew word often translated 'evil' can also be translated 'bad'; 'bad' is in many ways a better translation, as it does not carry with it exclusively moral connotations (as 'evil' does). In other words, something can be bad but not morally evil; this is important for the biblical writers.

⁵Genesis 2:15-17; cf. 1:26-31; 3:8. Tim Mackie shared this observation, as well as the translation in the previous note, on The Bible Project Podcast.

⁶Proverbs 2:1-15; James 1:5-8, esp. 6.

a context within Scripture, that it is part of a whole. When we read in Ecclesiastes things like, “All are from the dust, and to dust all return”,⁷ or “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes”,⁸ or when we see a discussion of gardens and fruit trees and “whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them”⁹—we recognize these as echoes of other biblical passages.

Another way attention to Ecclesiastes in its canonical context helps us is that points us to Ecclesiastes in its historical context. Ecclesiastes, along with Proverbs and the Song of Songs, is connected to King Solomon, the wisest king in Israel’s history. During his reign over Israel, God visits him in a dream and says, “Ask what I shall give you.” What a question! How would you answer? And remember, Adam and Eve have already answered that they wanted to be wise in their own eyes.

Solomon, by contrast, positions himself as “a little child” and pleads that he does not know how to rule as king: “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, *that I may discern between good and bad*,¹⁰ for who is able to govern this your great people?”¹¹ Do you see what he is asking for? He is asking for what Adam and Eve took prematurely and therefore lost in the garden. God responds to Solomon by giving him not only wisdom but also riches and honor—“so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days.”¹²

This is no doubt a high point in Israel’s history, and Solomon is to a point an exceptional ruler. He was and is proverbial for his wisdom, and the passages in 1 Kings contain some beautiful stories. Sadly, even Solomon’s great wisdom is not enough to insulate him from direct disobedience to God’s law. In Deuteronomy 17, Moses set out laws concerning Israel’s kings, which included not acquiring many horses, not returning to Egypt to acquire horses, not acquiring excessive silver and gold, and not taking many wives. What does Solomon do? All of these things. In one particularly painful example, Solomon builds numerous store cities for his chariots and horseman. The other place we see these store cities? In Egypt, when Pharaoh afflicted Israelite slaves with this heavy labor.¹³ Even a wise king has become like Pharaoh in Egypt. Yes, that Egypt: the kingdom out of which God rescued Israel out of slavery and bondage—the context in which they received God’s wise law in the first place.

Things in Israel went quickly downhill from there. Solomon’s son Rehoboam rejected the counsel of his elders and foolishly doubled-down on the oppressive aspects of his father’s policies. Many of the tribes revolted. Israel became a divided kingdom and the people who God set apart to be a blessing to the nations failed to live up to its vocation. In the ensuing years, invading armies from foreign kingdoms conquered all of Israel, and the book of 2 Kings ends with the people being led out of Jerusalem and into captivity in Babylon. In the same way that Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, Israel was exiled from the Promised Land. The remainder of the Old Testament is largely spent commenting and reflecting on this tragic turn of events. This includes

⁷3:20; cf. Genesis 2:7; 3:19.

⁸7:29; cf. Genesis 3.

⁹2:1-11, esp. 4-5, 10; cf. Garden of Eden in Genesis 1-3.

¹⁰Same word as in Genesis 2:17.

¹¹1 Kings 3:1-9, esp. 9 (italics added). Tim Mackie at The Bible Project helped shape the insights from this paragraph and the following one.

¹²1 Kings 3:10-15.

¹³1 Kings 9:19; cf. Exodus 1:11.

Ecclesiastes, and one compelling way to understand the book is that its contents look back over Israel's history and comment on what went wrong.

Ecclesiastes is not a long book. You can read it in one sitting—less than an hour, perhaps. And as you read, it becomes clear that its author knew these stories inside and out. We've talked about canon and history; he would have thought in terms of Creation and Fall and a hoped-for Redemption and Restoration. God created a good world in which he placed his image-bearers to help him expand his kingdom on earth, but these very same image-bearers rejected this call and wanted to live with their eyes and stomachs. Mercifully, God still pursues people even in their sin, with the aim of redeeming and restoring them to his original design.

Herein lies the genius of Ecclesiastes. The author is acutely aware of all of humanity's broken, sinful state and how that brokenness has played out in the story of Israel. He conveys this dual portrait—of all people *and* of the people of Israel specifically—by presenting to us “the words of the Teacher¹⁴, son of David, king in Jerusalem,” whose perspective is “to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.”

On the one hand, his is a thoroughly local perspective. Some say Solomon and some say Solomon-like,¹⁵ but the point is that an *Israelite* is speaking from the throne in Jerusalem. This is national wisdom *par excellence*—even as he challenges, subverts, and questions that very wisdom. As a point of contrast, Proverbs teaches that life generally works according to certain rules—that good things happen to the wise and bad things happen to the foolish. Ecclesiastes counters with statements like: “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.”¹⁶

On the other hand, however, when this Teacher begins to speak for himself in the middle of the first chapter, he does not limit his scope to Israel; he claims that he has “seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after the wind.” He is looking at *everything* under the sun, and all is vanity. Vanity translates the Hebrew word *hevel*, literally ‘breath’ or ‘a wisp of air’, and he is not simply talking about Israel. Creation and our place in it can be ‘frustrating’, ‘unprofitable’, ‘imponderable’, even ‘deceiving’. These are all fair translations of what the Teacher is driving at.

If this sounds harsh or dour, the Teacher is patient enough to make his case, walking us through life in all its variety and complexity and bringing us again and again to these truths. He discusses subjects as far ranging as relationships, family, politics, religion, morality, work, fame, pleasure, wisdom, folly, and more besides—especially, death. No matter who we are, we must confront death, and death does not discriminate. *The same event happens to all*. He has seen all life has to

¹⁴The New International Version (NIV). The English Standard Version (ESV) translates it *Preacher*.

¹⁵For a good summary of the discussion of Ecclesiastes' authorship—which as you can imagine gets long and technical with point and counterpoint for days—see Richard P. Belcher Jr., “Ecclesiastes,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 439-456.

¹⁶9:11-12; cf. Proverbs 20:13; 28:19. Proverbs does nuance this, of course—*introductions!*

offer, and the report is not good.

Strangely, it is not all bad, either. Even though his words often bring us to the cusp of despair, they also point out our portion in life that we are meant to enjoy. We find it in savoring the small pleasures in life: the taste of a good meal, the company of friends, the satisfaction of a hard day's work, the companionship of a spouse. Right next to groaning about life's vanity—and indeed perhaps even *because of it*—are statements that it is “good and fitting . . . to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him.”¹⁷

The Teacher points us here to someone more, even as he so thoroughly dismantles all of the somethings that disappoint. This someone, God, gifts to us purpose that can be found nowhere else. Life viewed from *above the sun* transforms our outlook and gives us freedom to view life and death from a renewed perspective: one of thankfulness to our good Creator, for whom and by whom all things will be redeemed. Here we might compare the Teacher's general perspective to Jeremiah's advice specific to Israel as they sat in captivity in Babylon: “Build houses and live in them; *plant gardens* and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; *multiply there, and do not decrease*. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”¹⁸ Sound familiar?

The author of Ecclesiastes is a bit more coy in pointing to Genesis and our original design, but I think he's driving at the same thing: since the Fall, everything is compromised—*in the place of justice is wickedness, and vice versa*¹⁹—yet we are still called to live. We cannot see or know everything that God is up to, but *life itself* is a gift and proof enough of a gracious God who is with us and for us even though we remain perplexed by life under the sun.

Ecclesiastes has always been a difficult book to read. Even its original audience struggled. Throughout history, people have wrestled with how to take the Teacher's outlook on life. This points to its relevance in all ages: that all people in all times long to find meaning and identity and search in the wrong places. This is the result of the Fall, and by ourselves we are powerless to fight against it.

Ecclesiastes, then, contains wisdom and teaching that functions as a goad; it is sharp and even painful but it moves us forward and helps prevent us from falling into one of life's many ruts. In a culture of answers and simplistic ideologies where we can become more and more insulated from different people and views, may we heed its hard-won knowledge and move toward that to which it points. Indeed, we have to wait until the end of the book to get a clear picture of the next step: “fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or bad.”

¹⁷5:18-20.

¹⁸Jeremiah 29:5-7

¹⁹Ecclesiastes 3:16.

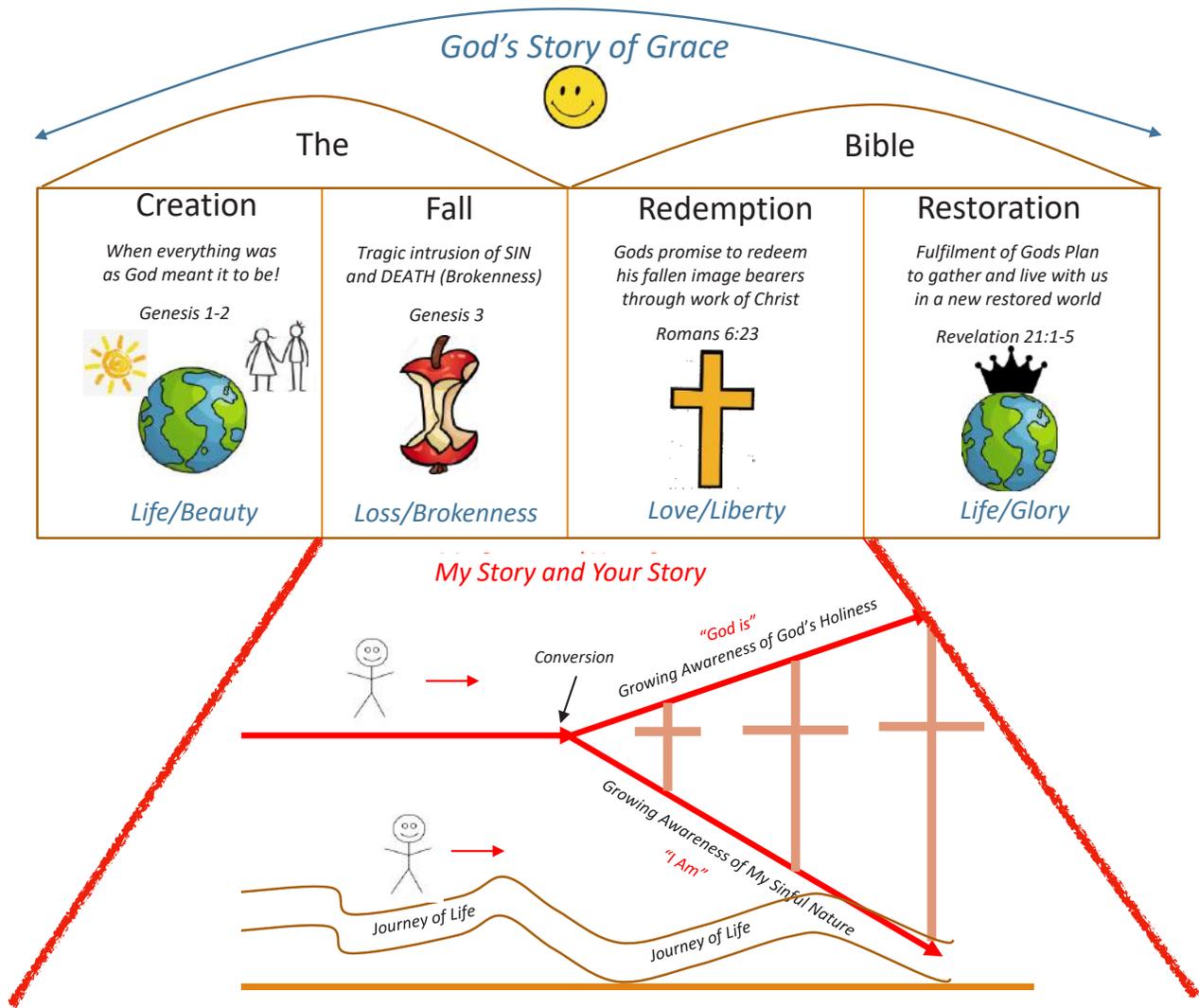
In light of all that we have learned, how are we to do this? In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that all of “creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”²⁰ This Greek word for ‘futility’ is the same word that the Septuagint²¹ uses for ‘vanity’. The New Testament affirms Ecclesiastes’ diagnosis; it also contains the solution. It turns out that we are in a position more privileged than Solomon, since we have seen the answer to God’s judgment: his Son Jesus, who was greater than Solomon and took that judgment—and the vanity of this world—and conquered it on the cross. Redemption is found for all people at the culmination of Israel’s story.

As for wisdom? It is now based on God’s revelation of his character in Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”²² In Christ, we are free to enjoy the gift of life—our portion—and, now free from death, we are also invited to resume our service to God as living sacrifices (an image the Teacher no doubt would have loved). Because we are no longer subject solely to the futility of fallen creation, we are not beholden to its rules. God’s foolishness is wiser than men; *Christ* is wisdom from God. And it is in his name we can enjoy, and respond to, the wisdom we find in Ecclesiastes.

²⁰Romans 8:20-21.

²¹The Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was used extensively by the early church.

²²1 Corinthians 1:22-25.



LESSON 1: SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged?
How were you encouraged?

Read the book of Ecclesiastes. Highlight each time the following words or phrases are mentioned (NIV/ESV):

Meaningless; vanity
Under heaven; under the sun
Labor; toil
Wisdom
Folly
Under the Sun; under heaven

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11.

1. What is the Teacher's hypothesis about the meaning of life in verses 2-7?

2. In order to gain a deeper understanding of this hypothesis, let's define some terms. The word translated "vanity" is the Hebrew word *hevel*, which refers to breath or vapor.

Use a bible dictionary to look up definitions of the following words.

vanity:

meaningless:

What do Psalm 39:5 and James 4:14 tell us about our existence? How do these verses compare with the point the writer of Ecclesiastes makes?

Consider how the Hebrew word *hevel* is used in the following verses. What words or phrases would you use to give each verse meaning and connection to present-day life?

Proverbs 31:30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain (*hevel*)
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Psalm 94:11 The Lord knows the thoughts of man,
that they are but a breath (*hevel*).

Jeremiah 16:19 ○ Lord, my strength and my stronghold,
my refuge in the day of trouble,
to you shall the nations come
from the ends of the earth and say:
“Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies,
worthless things (*hevel*) in which there is no profit

Psalm 89:47 Remember how short my time is! For what vanity (*hevel*) you have created all the children of man!

Do you see any themes in these verses? What are they?

3. In verse 3, the Teacher asks a question. Write his question here:

4. How does the teacher answer his question?

Verses 4-7

Verses 8-11

5. Understanding the Teacher's perspective will help us as we wrestle with the meaning of his words through this book. He is viewing life as the world sees it: life without connection to or revelation from God. In this context, God has not shown up; God is silent. Life is viewed without reference to God. This is life "under the sun" – meaningless, empty, hollow, shallow, painful, vain, futile. Where do we experience life's futility and frustration?

6. So if everything "under the sun" is meaningless and futile, if money, sex, power, and achievement cannot satisfy our deepest longest and needs, where do we find hope? We need to change our perspective and put God back in the picture. We need an "above the sun" perspective that brings joy and the meaning of life.

Read the following verses and comment on this new perspective.
What does the psalmist say about the sun in Psalm 19:5?

What does the sun bear witness to in Psalm 113:3?

What do we learn about the goodness and constancy of our creator in Psalm 104:3 and Job 36:27-28?

7. As our eyes begin to shift their focus from things “under the sun” to things “above the sun,” we see that God is always doing something new.

What are some things God is making new? Look up several of these verses and look for what God is making new.

Luke 22:20

Ezekiel 36:26

2 Corinthians 5:17

Revelation 21:5

Mark 1:27

Mark 2:22

John 13:34

Romans 7:6

2 Corinthians 3:4-6

Ephesians 4:20-24

8. How would you describe Peter's attitude in 1 Peter 1:3-4? What is his perspective on life?

9. Read Revelation 21:1-5. What great hope is found here?

13. If a friend said to you "Life is meaningless. Nothing I do matters. There is no hope."
How would you respond?

John Wesley on Ecclesiastes:

Never before had I so clear a sight either of its meaning or beauties. Never did I imagine, that several parts of it were in so exquisite a manner connected together, all tending to prove the grand truth, that there is no happiness apart from God.

Remember this whenever you get frustrated, sad, angry, or disappointed with everything in life that is getting broken, falling apart, going wrong. Remember this when you feel overwhelmed and are tempted to wonder why you should even bother – with your work, in a relationship, with your faith. You were made for a new and better world. The very fact that you are weary of this life is pointing you to Jesus as the only One who can satisfy your soul.

Ryken *Why Everything Matters: the Gospel In Ecclesiastes*, pages 15-16.

As we grow in grace, we begin to see ourselves differently. We also begin to see how our perspective on life, what's going on inside us, affects our relationships. Read over these charts. What resonates with you?



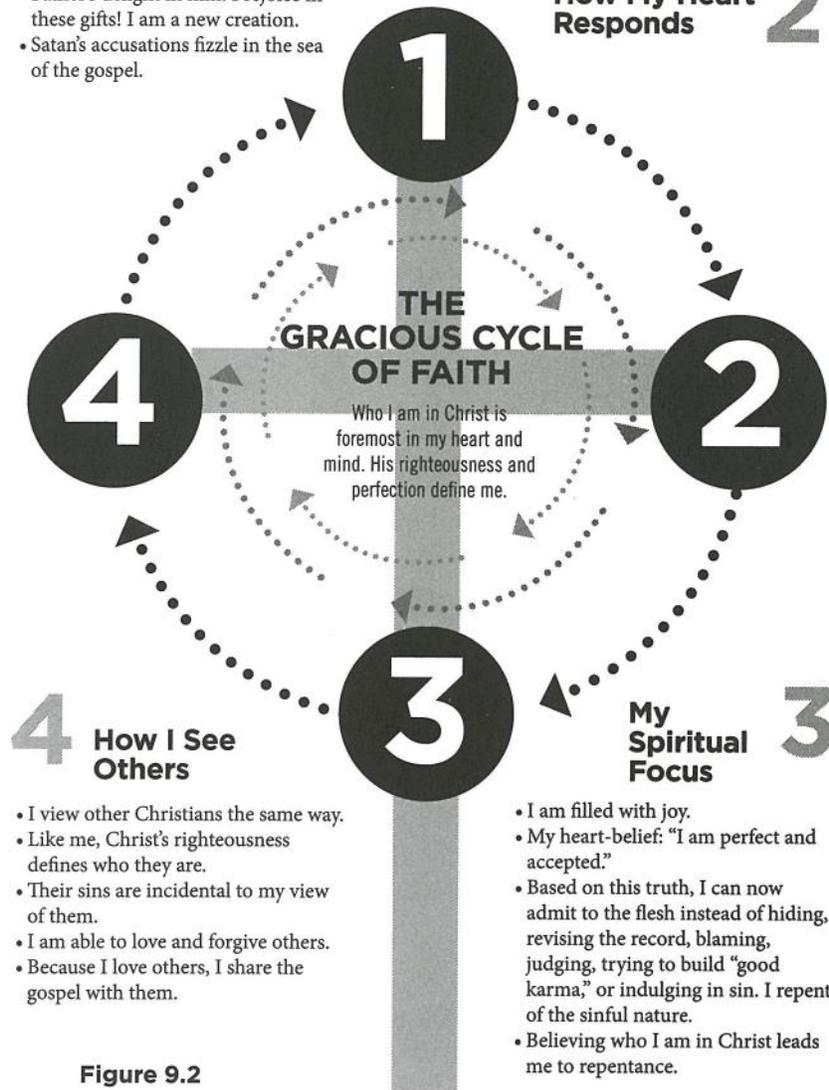
Figure 9.1

1 How I See Myself

- I am focused on Jesus.
- I see: Christ and his righteousness, perfection, obedience, and the Father's delight in him. I rejoice in these gifts! I am a new creation.
- Satan's accusations fizzle in the sea of the gospel.

- I conclude: 'This is who I really am!'
- Christ's righteousness, obedience, and perfection define me.
- I know why Paul starts his letters, "To all the saints in...; holy and faithful...; grace and peace from God our Father."

How My Heart Responds 2



4 How I See Others

- I view other Christians the same way.
- Like me, Christ's righteousness defines who they are.
- Their sins are incidental to my view of them.
- I am able to love and forgive others.
- Because I love others, I share the gospel with them.

My Spiritual Focus 3

- I am filled with joy.
- My heart-belief: "I am perfect and accepted."
- Based on this truth, I can now admit to the flesh instead of hiding, revising the record, blaming, judging, trying to build "good karma," or indulging in sin. I repent of the sinful nature.
- Believing who I am in Christ leads me to repentance.

Figure 9.2

LESSON 2: SEPTEMBER 15, 2019

Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged?
How were you encouraged?

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

1. What are the results of the Teacher's search for the meaning in life? See Ecclesiastes 1:12-14.

2. He observed everything done under the sun and found that all is meaningless and a striving after the wind. Ecclesiastes 1:15 says that what is crooked cannot be made _____.
And what is lacking cannot be _____. Another way to say this is that *What is wrong cannot be made right* and *What is missing cannot be found*. Life is hard. The Teacher is telling us that sometimes the tragedy, pain, grief, and loss squeeze the hope right out of us. And he is lamenting the effect that sin has on the world. Without God, what is wrong cannot be made right. What is missing cannot be found. Like the author of Ecclesiastes, the psalmists also express deep sorrow, grief, or regret. Their lamentations are prayers that acknowledge their pain to God and cry out to him for help. Psalms of Lament incorporate an affirmation of God's faithfulness and end with a vow of praise to God.

There are 52 Psalms of Lament in the Bible.

Take some time to meditate on some of these psalms of lament (pick one):

Psalm 13

Psalm 22

Psalm 42

Psalm 44

Psalm 73

What comfort do these psalms offer you as you wrestle with life "under the sun"?

The Cross Chart

The Paradox of Christian Growth

People tell me I'm growing in grace, but I don't feel I'm any better—especially when I consider my thought life (envy, lust, jealousy, greed, a critical spirit, the lot). The truth is, I need the Holy Spirit's power now more than ever. That's the paradox. I know I'm stronger than when I was a new Christian, but I feel weaker. Perhaps that's the point. Could it be that weaker is stronger? (1Cor. 15:9)

The chart explained: Before I knew Christ, I was in the dark concerning God's holiness and the magnitude of my sin. (the solid gray area on the left) The new birth changed all that. As a babe in Christ, two things began to dawn on me—the absolute holiness of God, and the ugliness of my sin—especially in light of the new life of love to which God was calling me. But, when I made a mess of it, I would repent, look in faith to Jesus, and trust in his righteousness to "bridge the gap" between what I should be and what I was. (the small cross)

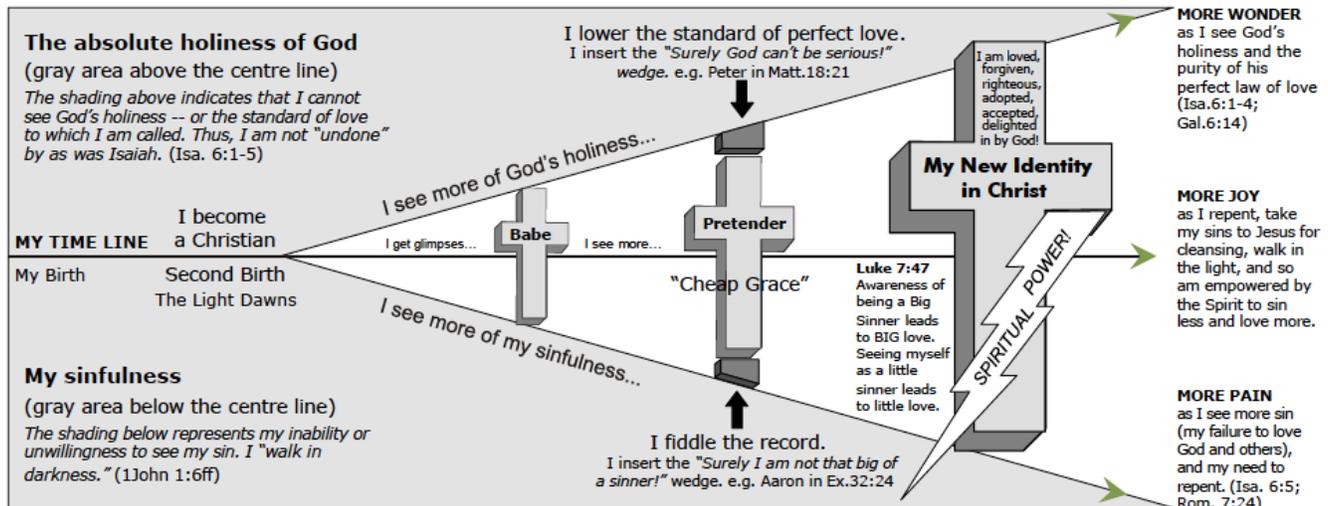
Still today, the battle is in the choosing. Every time I'm exposed as a sinner, I'm faced with a choice.

1. I can try to save face by lowering the standard, rationalising, fiddling the record, shifting the blame, or otherwise making excuses for my shortcomings ("inserting wedges"). At this point, my growth will "flat-line".

2. Or, in repentant faith, I can bridge the gap by "letting the Cross grow bigger" as I run to Jesus with my sin. (the big cross) There is no power in the discovery of sin. New life comes as I "work the Gospel"—i.e. take my sin to Jesus, rest in my new identity in him, and rely on the Holy Spirit to produce his fruit in me. (Gal. 5:22)

READ & DISCUSS Luke 7:36-47 (see reverse side) With which character do you identify in this story?

The Cross Chart illustrates the Luke 7:47 principle - that "He who is forgiven much loves much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little."



THE POINT? Spiritual growth comes as I see my sin, admit it, and "let the Cross grow" in my life. The power to change flows from this faith-action. Concept by Richard Lovelace (Renewal as a Way of Life, IVP, page 162). Adapted by Paul Miller for Sonship ©1988. Adapted by John W. Long, Jr. for SONSHIP for Africa ©2002, and Grace4Life ©2006 London UK.

3. What has the Teacher learned in his lifelong quest for knowledge or understanding?

About the meaning of life:

About wisdom:

About folly:

About pleasure:

About acquiring possessions/building an empire:

About being great:

About work:

4. What does the Teacher conclude in 2:17?

5. The Teacher tells us that all of the pleasures “under the sun” will not satisfy our deepest longings. The only pleasure that is safe for us and that truly satisfies is when God is present; when we understand that every pleasure is a gift from God. What do these verses tell us about this pleasure that comes from God?

Psalm 16:11

Matthew 25:21

Ecclesiastes 9:7

Nehemiah 12:27-30

Colossians 3:23

1 Timothy 4:3-4

Matthew 6:19-21

6. Describe the Teacher's attitude toward work in Ecclesiastes 2:18-23. What does he see as unfair?

7. The following verses give us insight on the labors of our hands—our work. What can you learn about God's perspective on our work?

Genesis 1:28; 2:15

Ecclesiastes 2:10

1 Corinthians 10:31

Colossians 3:23-24

8. Ecclesiastes shows us the savior we need. What do we learn about Jesus in these verses?

Matthew 12:42

1 Corinthians 1:24

Hebrews 11:6

James 1:5

1 Peter 2:21-14

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

9. Are you finding God's strength in the work he has given you to do? In what ways are you participating in the great work of Jesus Christ? See 1 Corinthians 15:58.
10. If you are a follower of Jesus, how should your attitude toward work be different from or the same as Ecclesiastes? See 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12.
11. What hope do you find in Ecclesiastes 2:24-26?

From Paul Tripp:

Hope for the believer is not a dream of what could be, but a confident expectation of a guaranteed result that shapes his life.

If you are a human being, you hope. You attach your security, your sense of peace and rest to something every day. The question is not whether you hope, but what holds your hope. Take a moment to think about hope with me:

1. *You hope in something.* You could argue that the life of a human being is propelled by hope. From the little momentary hope of the young child for food or a toy to the profound hope of the young adult for meaning and purpose, we all hope. We all place our hope in someone or something, and we ask that person or that thing to deliver something to us. What are you placing your hope in right now?
2. *Hope is a lifestyle.* Your hope shapes the way you live. Your hope causes you to make the decisions that you make. A lack of hope causes you to feel stuck and demotivated. Confident hope makes you decisive and courageous. Wobbly hope makes you timid and indecisive. Hope is not just something you do with your brain. You always live in your hope in some way.
3. *Most of our hopes disappoint us.* We all do it. We place our hope in things in this fallen world that simply can't deliver. Your spouse can't make you happy. Your job won't make you content. Your possessions can't satisfy your heart. Your physical health won't give you inner peace. Your friends can't give you meaning and purpose. When our hopes disappoint us, it is a sign that we've put our hopes in the wrong places.
4. *There are only two places to look for hope.* The theology of hope is quite simple. There are only two places to put your hope. You rest in the hope of your life in the hands of the Creator or you look to the creation for hope.
5. *Hope in God is sure hope.* When you hope in the Lord, you not only hope in the One who created and controls the universe, but also in One who is glorious in grace and abounding in love. Now, that's hope that is well placed and will never disappoint.

For further study and encouragement: Psalm 40.

Paul Tripp, *New Morning Mercies*, August 1

LESSON 3: SEPTEMBER 22, 2019

Ecclesiastes 3:1-16

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER

RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged? How were you encouraged?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11.

1. Circle or underline the words **everything**, **season**, and **under heaven/under the sun**.

2. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-11, the Teacher highlights the orderliness of God. There is a time and a season for everything under the sun. The language in this poem in these verses resonate with the human heart. They capture the truth about life under the sun, but more than that, they celebrate the purpose that God has in all of this.

To help us gain the right perspective on these verses and view this part of God's Word with the right lens, let's learn more about God.

A. Read Isaiah 46:8-13. What do these verses tell us about God and the viewpoint from which he sees the world?

How is God's view point different from ours?

B. Read Psalm 139. Underline all the verbs in this psalm.

What can you add to your understanding of God from what you have read in Psalm 139?

What is the psalmist's response to knowing that he is fearfully and wonderfully made? See verses 14, 17, and 23-24.

C. Read Acts 17:24-28.

What do these verses tell us about the time and place in which we live?

Why is it important for us to view our lives through this lens?

The previous verses teach us that our God sits above all eternity and sees all that ever is, was, and will be all at once. God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient. God is in the heavens; he does whatever pleases him (Psalm 115). He stands above, beyond, and within eternity and he sees it all at once. His vision is not limited in any way.

God has determined the allotted time when and place where you and I will live. And he has a purpose in all of this.

3. Re-read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. The Teacher shows us the scope of God's sovereignty with pairs of related opposites. List them here:

Think of these pairs as a list of ingredients—not just as a list of things that occur in life, but a list of things that God sends us. This is a list of ingredients that God mixes together in your life and mine, in our allotted time and place, to accomplish the purpose he has for each one of us.

As you read through this list, which ingredients would you prefer? Which would you choose? Which would you rather not include?

How does understanding that the ingredients listed in these verses are things that God does inform your perspective about the seasons of life?

Read and respond to the following quote:

Some people would prefer a one-dimensional deity. They like to think of God as giving life, but not appointing the time of death. They would rather see God as planting and building than uprooting and tearing down. But God is not either/or. He is both/and, depending on what time it is.

Ecclesiastes 3 gives us the complete picture: to know God and to understand our place in His world we need to accept that both halves of each pair tell us the truth about His character. God makes 'time for every matter under heaven' because at the right time everything in this poem is fully in keeping with who He is: birth and death, mourning and laughter, love and hate, exclusion and embrace, war and peace.

Why Everything Matters: The Gospel in Ecclesiastes, Philip G. Ryken, page 63

4. To see God's timeliness with more clarity, let's look to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Read these verses and write down what they teach you about Jesus and time.

Birth:

Galatians 4:4-5

Death:

John 7:30

Romans 5:6

Hosea 6:1-3

Luke 24:45-46

1 Corinthians 15:4

Work:

Mark 1:15

Planting and Plucking Up:

John 15:5

Matt 15:13

Mark 11:12-14, 20-21

Healing:

Luke 19:45

Building Up:

Matthew 16:15-18; 7:25

Emotions:

Isaiah 53:3

John 11:35, 38

Luke 19:41-44

Matt 9:36

Luke 10:21

Speaking and Keeping Silent:

Matthew 27:14

Acts 8:32

Isaiah 53:7

1 Peter 2:21-23

We can conclude from these verses that Jesus knew the right time for everything. We see God's sovereignty gloriously displayed in the life, death, and work of Jesus Christ.

5. Read Ecclesiastes 3:9-11. God has a purpose for your life. What does verse 11 tell us about God's purpose for your life personally and communally?

6. According to verse 14, why has God made the world the way he has? What does it mean to have a good fear of God?

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH:

7. How are you using your time?

8. When something good happens to you, what sort of conclusion do you usually come to?

- God is blessing me because I am one of his children.
- God is rewarding me for the good things I do.
- Aren't I worthy to have had this happen to me?
- Some other reaction:
- What would be the reaction of the Teacher?

9. When something bad happens to you, what sort of conclusion do you usually come to?

- God isn't really in control, or else he wouldn't let this happen.
- God is punishing me for my sin.
- What did I do to deserve this?
- This is my fault; I should have seen this coming and avoided it somehow.
- Some other reaction:
- What would be the reaction of the Teacher?

10. How can you trust God when bad things happen to you and the ones you love? See Romans 8:28.

Read and reflect on the words of this song. What truth about God do these words speak to your heart?

There Is No One Higher Than Our God

Our father, creator
You hold our hearts together
There's no one higher than you
Redeemer, defender
Our great and mighty savior
There's no one higher than you
You are always with us
Gracious to forgive us
By your power we've been set free
And lord we stand amazed in your presence
Astounded by your mercy and love
Our hands are lifted high in surrender
Your grace for me is always enough
And there is no one higher than our God
There is no one greater than you
Let my life forever praise
The glory of your name
There is no one higher than you
Majestic in wonder
You reign with love forever
There's no one higher than you
Your beauty, your splendor
Your glory knows no measure
There's no one higher than you
There is no one higher, no one greater, no one like our god
There is none more able, Christ our savior, great and glorious

Songwriters: Seth Condrey / Steve Fee / Heath Balltzglier

No One Higher lyrics ©Worship Together Music, Sixsteps Songs, Levibear Music Publishing

LESSON 4: SEPTEMBER 29, 2019

Ecclesiastes 4:7-16

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER

RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged? How were you encouraged?

Read Ecclesiastes 4:1-16. As you read, highlight, underline, or circle references to **oppression, vanity, striving after the wind,** and **under the sun.**

In Ecclesiastes 4, the Teacher is frustrated by the things in life he has observed. He is wrestling honestly with God, trying to make sense of the suffering, pain, betrayal, and oppression that he has seen and experienced. He acknowledges the brokenness of life "under the sun" and admits that sometimes there are no easy answers.

1. What does the Teacher say about oppression and the oppressed in verses 1-3? How does he react to the oppression seen in the world?
2. What reality about human nature causes so much pain?
3. What oppression have you seen that has caused you to mourn?

Note: As humans, we long for justice. When we are sinned against, all of us hunger and thirst for a righteous judgement, whether we follow God or not. When we see another human being mistreated and misused in our communities or on the news, we feel outraged and inwardly agitated, as when we watch a crime show on television and the wicked get away with it amid a botched justice system. It is only when we are the ones committing sin or when we are receiving a lifestyle benefit from those who are winning that we resist and complain about accountability and justice.

Our human longing for right judgment makes sense. Good judgment is authentic. It says what is true. The eternity pressing into our hearts, the eternity that Eden was made for, the eternity that life under the sun beats up, stomps upon, ridicules, and dishonors, will finally also behold its vindication. God himself will take his rightful place and we, as Eden intended, will again bow, fully satisfied, as his creatures. (*Recovering Eden*, Jack Eswine, page 223)

4. Describe the four attitudes toward work found in verses 4-8.

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

Verse 8:

5. What motivates people to work hard? What do we sacrifice when we work all the time?

6. Read Colossians 3:23-24 to find out what Paul says about work.

7. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. You might be wondering why the Teacher transitions from talking about our work in verses 4-8, to our relationships in verses 9-12. Let's think about how our work and our relationships are connected. How does having a misguided and faulty view of work damage our ability to live in meaningful relationships with each other?

The world is broken. In the middle of all this brokenness, we need each other. We desperately and in a very deep and real way, with Christ in the center, need each other.

8. What are the benefits of healthy relationships? See verses 9-12.

9. So the big question is this, why do so few of us have relationships like this? Or to put it another way: *Why is it difficult for us to walk in these deep, life-giving relationships with each other?* The Teacher gives us answers to this question. In verses 9-12, he gives us four enemies of real community. What are they?

10. Read the following verses that remind us of our need for relationships in a world where no earthly relationships are sure. Look for ways that Jesus our savior identifies with us and promises never to leave us or forsake us. Also notice what they say about the Christian's need for fellowship.

Proverbs 18:1

Matthew 27:46

Hebrews 13:5

Matthew 18:15-20

Mark 6:7

Hebrews 10:24-25

Colossians 3:13

Galatians 6:2

Proverbs 27:17

1 Corinthians 12:25-27

1 Peter 4:8-11

Romans 12

Philippians 2:3-16

11. To whom must we be united to find true contentment in life? See John 15:5-8.

12. How does our union with Christ imply unity with others in the church? See John 15:11-13.

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

13. What does an attitude of contentment look like in our modern world? Are you content? Or have you given up? Or are you always seeking more? If this is a struggle for you, confess it to God and ask him to make you content with what you have, rather than always seeking more.

14. How have you, because of your sin nature, the deep depravity that lies within each of us, caused pain to the people you love through selfishness, thoughtlessness, or manipulation? Be still before the Lord. Be honest. Consider how the Spirit might be prompting you to move toward those who you have caused pain.

15. Are you a primarily dependent or independent person? How does this lesson challenge you to grow in your interdependence with others?

LESSON 5: OCTOBER 6, 2019

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged?
How were you encouraged?

In the first four chapters of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher took us on a tour of things in life that are meaningless. If this life is all there is, it is all meaningless, worthless, pointless. He tells us that meaning in life is found, not under the sun, **but above the sun**—only in relationship with our Creator God.

In Ecclesiastes 5, it appears that the Teacher is taking a break from lamenting the universe, everything "under the sun". But when we take a closer look, we'll see that the teacher is showing us that there is a way of relating to God that is just as meaningless as these other pursuits. Meaningless religion.

The Teacher turns his attention to worshippers, individuals who come routinely to worship. He addresses worshippers whose religion has lost sight of who God is. They don't see God as a transcendent God, but a god who is right here beside them. They don't view God as a god who holds them to account in the face of the law, but rather a god who sees life the way they see life. As a result, they turn praise and worship inside out.

So **be careful**, worshipper of God! If our whole worship experience begins with ourselves (how I am feeling, what I am hoping for, and what I desire to get out of this opportunity) then ends with ourselves as we walk away giving points for content, length, song choice, and humor (all directly related to who I am) then we are making a tragic mistake.

True worship is so much more. Ephesians 2:19-22 says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens** with the saints and members **of the household of God**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone**, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a **holy temple in the Lord**. In him, you are also being built to-gether into **dwelling place for God by the Spirit**."

Let's take a look at what the Teacher wants us to know about worship.

Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7.

1. Ecclesiastes 5:1 says “**guard** your steps when you go to the **house of God**.” The house of God refers to the temple. The Teacher is telling us something important about how we approach God, how we approach worship. What does he say? You may want to look up the word guard in the dictionary to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to “guard your steps.”

2. What do these verses add to our understanding of worship?

Nehemiah 10:39

Psalms 27:4

Psalms 84:1-4, 10-12

Psalms 34:4

Colossians 3:16-18

How might we prepare our hearts to worship God?

3. After the Teacher asks us if our feet are moving toward the house of God, leading us to worship, he says, "to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools."

Find the definitions of/synonyms for

Listen:

Sacrifice:

Fool (see also Psalm 14:1):

(Optional) Look up the following verses to learn more about what God desires from us.

1 Samuel 15:14

Psalm 40:6-8

Proverbs 21:3

Isaiah 1:11-13, 16, 17

Jeremiah 7:22-23

Micah 6:6-8

Hosea 6:6

4. Using what you have learned about worship and the definitions of the words above, rewrite Ecclesiastes 5:1 in your own words.

5. What warning is given in Ecclesiastes 5:2?

6. Explain what the Teacher says about words and vows in verses 3-7. Note: one commentator has compared the words of a fool to “verbal doodling,” which in the end has no effect. The words are empty and useless. How many of your words might be described as “verbal doodling”?

7. Ecclesiastes 5:7 ends with the phrase, “but God is the one you must fear.” It’s important to understand what the Teacher means by fearing God.

So what does it mean to fear God?

We need to make some important distinctions about the biblical meaning of “fearing” God. Martin Luther made the distinction between a *servile* fear and a *filial* fear.

Servile fear: Dreadful anxiety in which someone is frightened by the clear and present danger that is represented by another person. Like the fear that a prisoner might have for his executioner.

Filial fear: Tremendous love and respect that a child may have for his mother or father and wants to please them. He has a fear or anxiety of offending the one he loves, not because he’s afraid of torture or even punishment, but rather because he’s afraid of displeasing the one who is the source of security and love.

This is a helpful distinction as we seek to understand what it means to fear God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The focus here is on a **sense of awe and respect for the majesty of God.** (R.C. Sproul, *What does it mean to Fear God?* Jan 2, 2018, ligonier.org)

8. What does it look like for us to engage in true worship? What does it look like to stand in awe of God? See Luke 18:8-14.

LESSON 6: OCTOBER 13, 2019

Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged?
How were you encouraged?

The Teacher continues to show us things in life that are meaningless. His thesis is, *If this life is all there is, it is all meaningless*. But, he gives us glimpses of where to find meaning. Meaning in life is not found "under the sun" but above the sun in relationship with the Creator God.

Ecclesiastes 5 begins with the Teacher's reflections on worship, words, and obedience. In our subsequent study, we learned that obedience is better than sacrifice and that Jesus has offered the obedience that God requires. Jesus is the sacrifice that cleanses us of our sins.

Read Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9 to find out what the Teacher wants us to know about the meaningless of wealth and honor.

1. Highlight or underline all references to wealth or money.
2. Summarize the points the Teacher makes about wealth or money.

Verses 6-8

Verses 10-12

Verse 13-17

3. Does money or wealth satisfy? Why or why not? Use the verses in Ecclesiastes to support your answer.

4. What happens to all of the possessions that we accumulate over our lifetimes?

5. Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. Compare the person who greedily pursues death with the person who finds enjoyment in work. *Why* is one able to enjoy his labor, or work?

6. The point that the Teacher is making in Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9 is that man thinks he will find meaning and value and worth in his wealth. He wants his readers to know that he has tried this, and it doesn't satisfy. All the money, possessions, and wealth that man is able to accumulate in his lifetime is worth nothing. He reminds us that we came into this world naked and we'll go out of the world naked. Gaining wealth is just striving after the wind. Vanity.

Where *can* contentment and satisfaction be found?

What does Jesus tell us about our greed?

Matthew 6:24

Colossians 3:5

What do the following verses teach us about contentment and satisfaction?

Matthew 6:19-21

Colossians 3:1-4

1 Timothy 6:6-10

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

7. Do we seek fleeting satisfaction in wealth and possessions, or do we find genuine joy in the labor God gives us?

8. What do our lifestyles say about our devotion to Christ?

9. If you struggle with greed, ask the Spirit to help you see your greed and to change your heart.

10. How do we find true contentment in Christ?

Here's a glimpse of a heart that is content in Christ:

I pray for joy, wait for joy, long for joy; give me more that I can hold, desire, or think of. Measure out to me my time and degrees of joy, at my work, business, duties. If I weep at night, give me joy in the morning. Let me rest in the thought of thy love.

"Joy", in *Valley of Vision*, 162.

LESSON 7: OCTOBER 20, 2019

Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER

RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged?
How were you encouraged?

Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-14.

1. The Teacher give us a number of pithy proverbs in verses 1-8. Fill in the blanks below:

7:1 _____ is better than _____

7:2 _____ is better than _____

7:3 _____ is better than _____

7:5 _____ is better than _____

7:8 _____ is better than _____

2. He also contrasts wisdom and folly or the wise man and the fool. Record what Chapter 7 says about each.

VERSE	WISE MAN	FOOL

3. Draw some conclusions about wisdom and folly.

- Why is having a good name important?

- Why is death better than life?

- Why is wisdom found when we mourn rather than when we go to parties?

4. How do the Teacher's words in 7:14 give us perspective regarding prosperity and adversity? Where do both joy and sorrow come from?

5. What is the purpose in both joy and sorrow?

6. Ecclesiastes is part of a bigger story. In order to for the message of Ecclesiastes and the Teacher's quest for wisdom to be complete, we need to look to Christ and the New Testament. What does the apostle Paul tell us about Christ as the embodiment of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1:30 and Colossians 2:3?

7. What insight about suffering, pain, and death do we find in these verses?

Romans 8:28-32

1 Corinthians 15:55-58

8. Read Ecclesiastes 7:15-29. What troubles the Teacher in verse 15?

9. Do both the wicked and the righteous have the same end?

10. What do the following verses tell us about sin, death, and righteousness?

Romans 6:23

Romans 3:10-18

Galatians 2:16

Romans 8:3

11. In this chapter, the Teacher tells us that both self-righteousness and unrighteous are things to avoid. They both lead to destruction and death. So how do we avoid these dangers? See 7:18.

12. What hope do we find in Christ? See Hebrews 4:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. Who is our righteousness?

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

Read and reflect on the following quotes:

WHY GOD ALLOWS SUFFERING

When we really do fear God, it will help us look beyond our present difficulties and see the work of God, accepting all the crooked things in our lives until He chooses to make them straight.

Earlier I mentioned Thomas Boston and his classic sermon on Ecclesiastes 7:13. Boston ended that sermon by listing some of the many reasons why God makes some things crooked. These were biblical lessons that the man had confirmed through his own experience of grief and pain. Why does God leave some things crooked, even when we pray for Him to make them straight?

First, Boston said, the crooked things in life are a test to help us determine whether we really are trusting in Christ for our salvation. Think of Job, for example, who was afflicted with many painful trials in order to prove the genuineness of his faith. Our own sufferings may have the same purpose: by the grace of God, they confirm that we are holding on to Christ (or else help us see that we still need to trust Him for our salvation).

Second, God carefully designs whatever crooks we have in our earthly lot to turn our hearts away from this vain world and teach us to look for happiness in the life to come. Suffering is part of our preparation for eternity. Consider the Prodigal Son, who did not return to his father until he lost everything he had. His sufferings were part of a pilgrimage that led him back home, where he belonged. When something in life seems crooked, remember that a day is coming when God will make it straight.

Third, God uses the crooked things in life to convict us of our sins. The reason that anything is crooked at all is because there is sin in the world, including our own iniquity. The Holy Spirit often takes the crooks in our lot and uses them to touch our conscience, reminding us of some particular sin that we need to confess. It would be a mistake to think, every time we suffer, that this must be because of our sins. But it would also be a mistake to miss the opportunity that every trial brings to repent for any unconfessed sin.

Fourth, God may use the crooked things in life to correct us for our sins. There are times when suffering serves as an instrument of God's justice. So it was for David, after he had murdered Uriah: God justly decreed that the sword would never depart from his house (see 2 Sam. 12:10). When we suffer it may be because, as a consequence for our sin, we are under the judgment or the discipline of God.

These are not the only reasons why God makes some things crooked. Thomas Boston listed several others. Sometimes God allows us to suffer in order to keep us from committing a sin, or else to uncover a sinful attitude of the heart so deep that it could only be revealed by suffering a painful trial. Or maybe—and this is the happiest reason of all—God puts a crook into our lot in order to display His grace through our godliness under trial. We are prone to what Boston called ‘fits of spiritual laziness’. But when we have a crook in our lot, it rouses us from our spiritual slumber and produces ‘many acts of faith, hope, love, self-denial, and other graces.’

THE SHEPHERD’S CROOK

The point of listing these possible reasons for our suffering is not to suggest that we can always figure out why God has put some particular crook in our lot. The point rather is that God knows why He has put it there. When something in life seems crooked, we are usually quick to tell God how He should straighten it out. Instead, we should let God straighten us out! In His sovereignty over our suffering, God is at work to accomplish our real spiritual good. We are therefore called to trust in Him, even for things that seem crooked.

Whenever we have trouble believing that God knows what He is doing, we should consider the work of our Savior. Remember that our Good Shepherd once had a crook in His lot—a crook that came in the shape of a cross. In His prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked His Father if there was any way to make Calvary straight instead of crooked. But there was no other way. As Jesus considered the work of God, He could see that the only way to make atonement for our sin was to die in our place. So, Jesus suffered the crooked cross that it was his God-given lot to bear. And He trusted His Father through His sufferings, waiting for Him to straighten things out when the time was right by raising Him up on the third day.

If God can straighten out something as crooked as the cross, then surely we can trust Him to do something with the crook in our lot. This was the testimony that James Montgomery Boice gave the last time he spoke to his congregation at Philadelphia’s Tenth Presbyterian Church. Dr Boice had been diagnosed with a fatal and aggressive cancer; by the time he announced his illness, he had only weeks to live. This was the crook in his lot. So, in his farewell address Dr Boice raised a serious question that was based on the sovereignty and goodness of God. ‘If God does something in your life,’ he asked, ‘would you change it?’ To say this in the way Qoheleth would have said it, ‘If God put a crook in your lot, would you try to make it straight?’

Well, would you? Would you get rid of your disability or disease? Would you change your job or your financial situation? Would you change your appearance, or your abilities, or your situation in life? Or would you trust God for all the crooked things in life and wait for Him to make them straight, even if you had to wait until the resurrection, just like Jesus did when He died for you on the cross?

Dr Boice answered his rhetorical question by testifying to the goodness of God’s sovereign will. He

said that if we tried to change what God has done, then it wouldn't be as good; we would only make it worse. The Preacher who wrote Ecclesiastes said something similar. 'Consider the work of God,' he said. 'Do not try to straighten out what God has made crooked.'

Our Savior would tell us the same thing. 'When you consider the work of God,' he would say, 'remember most of all my love for you through the crooked cross, and trust our Father to straighten everything out in His own good time.'

Why Everything Matters: The Gospel in Ecclesiastes (Ryken, pages 110-113)

LESSON 8: OCTOBER 27, 2019

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged?
How were you encouraged?

Read Ecclesiastes 8:1-17.

1. In verses 1-9, what does the Teacher tell us about our attitude toward human authority?

2. What reasons does he give for this attitude? See verses 2-9.

3. Read Romans 13:1-7 to add to your understanding of God-ordained authority.

4. Read Ecclesiastes 8:10-13. Summarize the point that the Teacher is making.

5. When faced with the injustice of evil men, where does the Teacher find hope? See verse 12.

6. Christ also trusts God in the midst of his great suffering and injustice at the hands of evil men. How did we see this in Hebrews 5:7-8, Job 13:15, and Mark 15:34?

7. How do the observations in Ecclesiastes 8:10-13 highlight our need for the gospel?

8. In Ecclesiastes 8:14-17, the Teacher revisits the dilemma that the righteous seem to receive the reward of the wicked and the wicked receive the reward of the righteous of Ecclesiastes 3:16-17. Is there an answer to this dilemma? Cross reference Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 and 5:18-20.

9. What human limitations are highlighted in 8:16-17?

10. Jesus speaks truth into our lives that give us perspective and comfort when faced with our human limitations. How does the message of Ecclesiastes 8:15 compare with the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34?

11. Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 50-58.

- Paul is writing to believers who know what overcomes the barrier to finding the meaning that the Teacher has identified. What is it? How is power involved?

- Regardless of this barrier, what might Paul have assumed about the experience of life for the believers in Corinth if he needs to write to them with a strong exhortation not to consider their toil to be in vain?

- Why should we expect the Teacher's conclusions about toil to still be relevant to Christians, even though we live after Christ's resurrection?

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

12. What does submission to governing authorities look like in a modern democratic society? When, if ever, is it appropriate for a Christian not to submit? What would this look like?

13. Pray for your government leaders. Pray that they will lead our country wisely and with great justice. Ask God to help you show respect and submission to earthly authorities.

Take some time to reflect on the words of this song.

YOUR NAME IS POWER

Rend Collective

You're the only answer to the darkness
You're the only right among the wrong
You're the only hope among the chaos
You are the voice that calls me on
Louder than every lie
Our sword in every fight
The truth will chase away the night
Your name is power over darkness
Freedom for the captives
Mercy for the broken and the hopeless
Your name is faithful in the battle
Glory in the struggle
Mighty it won't let us down or fail us
Your name is power
Your name is power
I know it is written, hope is certain
I know that the word will never fail
I know that in every situation
You speak the power to prevail
Louder than every lie
Our sword in every fight
The truth will chase away the night
Your name is power over darkness
Freedom for the captives
Mercy for the broken and the hopeless
Your name is faithful in the battle
Glory in the struggle
Mighty it won't let us down or fail us
Your name is power
Your name is power
When you speak you scatter darkness
Light arrives and heaven opens
Holy spirit
Let us hear it
When you speak the church awakens
We believe the change is coming
Holy spirit

Let us see it
When you speak you scatter darkness
Light arrives and heaven opens
Holy spirit
Let us hear it
When you speak the church awakens
We believe the change is coming
Holy spirit
Let us see it
Your name is power over darkness
Freedom for the captives
Mercy for the broken and the hopeless
Your name is faithful in the battle
Glory in the struggle
Mighty it won't let us down or fail us
Your name is power over darkness
Your name is power in the chaos
Your name is power

Source: Musixmatch

LESSON 9: NOVEMBER 3, 2019

Ecclesiastes 9:1-11

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Reflect on this week's sermon. What truths were meaningful to you? How were you challenged? How were you encouraged?

As the Teacher writes Chapter 9, he begins to summarize and revisit some of themes of Chapters 1-8. He reminds us that God has ordained all authority and we should submit to earthly authority, not because we fear man, but rather in fear and awe of God. He also tells us that if we fear God, we will do well. If we don't fear God, we will encounter his just judgment. And finally, he teaches that even through the suffering, pain, and difficulty of life we must trust in God's care. God knows our suffering. He sees and he understands. When we see God as He revealed himself to us in the crucified Messiah, we see that God in flesh suffered greatly on the cross so that we would be delivered from our sin and death.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:1-7.

1. What is the significance of *under the sun*? What does it mean to us?

2. The Teacher starts this section telling us that he has examined how the righteous and their deeds are in the hands of God. Why is this significant? How does this shape your perspective and understanding of the rest of the chapter? Read these verses to get a deeper picture of being in the hands of God: Psalm 16:6-11; Isaiah 25:7-8 and 26:19; Acts 2:27-36. Rewrite one or two of these verses in your own words.

3. In verses 1-3, the Teacher contrasts different types of people (Fill in the blanks):

The righteous and the _____

The good and the _____

The clean and the _____

Those who sacrifice and those who _____

The good one and the _____

Those who swear an oath and those who _____

What does the Teacher say all these people will face? What makes life meaningless for all?

4. In verses 4-6 some hope is given. Does this satisfactorily answer the dilemma that all men face?

5. If we are believers in Christ, we don't need to fear death. Read 1 Corinthians 14:55-58 to find out why. How does the resurrection of Christ give the church hope in the face of death?

6. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:55-58 also give us insight into our work. What does Paul say about work?

7. Where is our hope anchored (See Colossians 1:27; Romans 15:13; 1 Peter 1:3, 20-21.) How does this truth inform our view of life?

8. In Ecclesiastes 9:7-11, the Teacher gives us some advice on how to approach life. How would you express in your own words what he says in these verses?

9. What can we learn from the scripture about celebrating and enjoying life? See Matthew 11:19; John 2:1-11; Psalm 104:15-16.

10. The Teacher mentioned four aspects of life in Ecclesiastes 9:10. What are they? Why are they significant?

LESSON 10: NOVEMBER 10, 2019

Ecclesiastes 10:1-7

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Read Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:1-7.

1. How does Ecclesiastes 9:13-18 inform the message of the Teacher in verse 10:1-7?
2. What attributes of the wise does the Teacher point out in these verses? What is the result of being wise?
3. What attributes of the fool does he point out in these verses? What is the result of being foolish?
4. Where is wisdom found? See 1 Corinthians 1:22-30 and Colossians 2:1-3.
5. How does God show us His wisdom through the weak and foolish things of the world?

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

6. Consider your life in the light of these verses. In what ways are you wise? How are you foolish? What changes is the Spirit prompting you to make?

LESSON 11: NOVEMBER 17, 2019

Ecclesiastes 1:1-6

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER

RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-7.

1. Underline the phrase **you do not know** or **you know not** each time it appears in these verses. What point is the Teacher making and why?

2. Life has many uncertainties. List all of the uncertainties that the Teacher mentions in verse 1-6.

3. Read Matthew 6:25-34. What should be the perspective of the follower of Christ in regard to the uncertainty of life?

4. According to Ecclesiastes 11:5, what we can know with certainty?

5. Where does the Christian find his confidence? Explain how that works. Romans 8:31-34 and 1 Corinthians 10:31 will help.

LESSON 12: NOVEMBER 24, 2019

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Read Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8

1. Ecclesiastes 11:7-10 Focuses on the joy of youth. What does the Teacher say about enjoying life? What warnings does he give?

2. In Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, what does the Teacher want us to remember?

3. List the images he gives to make his point in the following verses:

Verse 2

Verse 3

Verse 4

Verse 5

Verse 6

4. What conclusion does he make in verse 7?

5. The Teacher makes three important points in Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8.

First, he says Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

Second, when a man gets old and dies, he goes to his eternal home.

Third, God will judge man.

Why does he make these points? Why are they significant?

6. The New Testament tells us more about what it means to remember our creator. Read John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-16; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5; 1 Corinthians 15:47-49. Record your insights.

7. What does it mean to remember Christ? How do you do that in your life?

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

8. How does our world cope with the reality of aging and death?

9. Take a look at the Apostle Paul's perspective on life and death in Philippians 1:18-26. How does Paul's attitude differ from the attitude given in Ecclesiastes 12 and the attitude of our world? What enables Paul to have this view?

Ask God to give you the Apostle Paul's view of death. Pray that God might use your life to bring glory to Christ.

LESSON 13: DECEMBER 1, 2019

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

LIVING UNDER THE WORD

Sermon Notes

LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER RENEW GROUP DISCUSSION

Whew! You made it. I don't know about you, but I was a little doubtful whether I would be able to hang on for thirteen weeks of meaninglessness and vanity of life! But looks like we made it.

We've learned that everything in life under the sun is meaningless, like a wisp of air, **hevel**. When we focus our eyes up—above the sun—we see that God uses every event in our life to grow us and give our lives meaning. May our prayer be that God in Christ through the Spirit will transform our hearts and minds according to the mind of Christ. Let us live our lives fully, with joy, eager to share the good news of Jesus with everyone we meet.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

1. Describe the things that the Teacher taught the people? How are his words described?
2. The author describes the words of the wise as goads. A goad is a spiked stick used to prod cattle to get them going in the right direction. How are the words of the wise like goads?
3. Verses 13-14 are the end of the matter. What does it mean to fear God?
4. Do you fear God? How might the fear of God be demonstrated in your life?

LIVING OUT OUR FAITH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

Take some time as a group to reflect on what you have learned through this study of Ecclesiastes.

Share, pray, enjoy being together, and thank God for the meaning, wisdom, and hope found in Him.

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