

# ECCLESIASTES

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## About this series

Ecclesiastes fits into the wisdom genre of the Bible, exploring life's meaning and purpose. We are introduced to the Teacher, who endeavours to make sense of all they see under the sun, and how to live in this fallen world.

The Teacher is never named, some think it could be Solomon due to the initial kingly persona adopted at the start of the book. However, it is unlikely that Solomon was the Teacher, but it may have been written to resemble a Solomon-like style. The precise time of writing is unknown, it possibly was written after Israel's returned from the exile.

The Teacher gives three main modes of teachings. Often the Teacher makes a series of observations from different vantage points, then the Teacher turns to speaking proverbs and occasionally the Teacher offers advice directly to the reader. The entire teaching section is framed by another voice, a narrator, who urges us to listen to the Teacher's words and then summarise the whole matter (1:1-2 [3-11]; 12:8-18).

There has been disagreement about how to interpret the Teacher's words. At times, the Teacher expresses thoughts that seem incorrect, like Job's friends, as they verbally process and reason through the problems. These lines of thinking happen for the sake of the broader argument presented in the book. At the end, the frame narrator commends the Teacher's words to us, with their own conclusion added.

While the Teacher is speaking to an ancient world, the message is timely for us today. In our modern era, where the search for meaning and purpose often falls on individuals to discover for themselves, Ecclesiastes warns against this approach, for it is fraught with danger, contradiction and could even be crushing. Our world's existential view of *from nothing to nothing*, fails to reconcile our innate sense of purpose we find in our own activities and experiences. The book of Ecclesiastes helps us to connect the macro and the micro aspects of our life and the universe, reminding us that we are limited in our knowledge and will face death.

Death renders futile all our pursuits for gain, so the Teacher advises us to enjoy the gifts we are given in the present moment. Living with faith in God, we trust His eventual judgement of all injustices. It is through God that our lives become something bigger than all that can be seen under the sun.

## About these studies

At St. Matts, we aim to empower everyone to confidently read, understand, and apply God's word for themselves. This is one of the reasons we have introduced **SOAP** as a model for daily Bible reading. These studies loosely follow the SOAP format - Scripture, Observations, Application, and Prayer, with some additional subheadings and notes to aid the Observation phase.

With this framework, the emphasis is on allowing the text to speak for itself. As a group, the goal is to allow the text to direct the content and flow of our discussions, helping us to discern the main idea and derive an application that flows out of that idea. While questions may naturally arise from the text, it is essential not to force answers that aren't explicitly present in the text. The aim is for God to guide and shape our group discussion, through the text of His Word, fostering a shared approach to the content and ensuring that everyone is literally on the same page.

To assist those who may find the text challenging, we've included **extra questions** to help facilitate deeper reflection. Additionally, each study concludes with a **conclusion of the matter**. This is to help direct our understanding of the current passage through the summary lens of the whole book. Another crucial question to consider is: How does faith in Jesus influence our understanding of this passage/topic?

Various theories exist regarding the organisation of Ecclesiastes, with some scholars seeing no discernible structure at all. In this booklet, we've attempted to divide each section logically while also trying to evenly spread the book over 10 weeks. In the Appendix, there is a detailed possible breakup of this book, outlining larger observation and wisdom collections with smaller subsections. While one or two divisions may seem unconventional, this overview serves as a helpful reference to orient you within the book and each study.

## Week 1: The Problem & The Conclusion (Eccl 1:1-18; 12:8-14)

<sup>1</sup> The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

<sup>2</sup> “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

<sup>3</sup> What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?

<sup>4</sup> Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

<sup>5</sup> The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

<sup>6</sup> The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

<sup>7</sup> All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

<sup>8</sup> All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

<sup>9</sup> What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>10</sup> Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

<sup>11</sup> No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

<sup>12</sup> I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! <sup>14</sup> I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

<sup>15</sup> What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

<sup>16</sup>I said to myself, “Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” <sup>17</sup>Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

<sup>18</sup>For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

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**12** <sup>8</sup>“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”

<sup>9</sup>Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. <sup>10</sup>The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

<sup>11</sup>The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. <sup>12</sup>Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

<sup>13</sup>Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:  
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. <sup>14</sup>For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

## Observations

Notice how there is another voice that frames the Teacher's voice in this book.

Notice the summary of the teacher's message in both passages.

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. If you were to sum up life in one word, what would you choose? How is it different to what the Teacher chose?
2. How can it be liberating, rather than frustrating, to know that life is repetitive?
3. To what does the phrase "under the sun" refer? How does that limited experience render everything we do meaningless?

## The conclusion of the matter

Whatever we may learn in this book, we must remember the conclusion of the matter. In your own words, what is the conclusion of the matter? Remember this for each of our studies.

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*



## Week 2: The Problem of Pleasure, Projects & Succession (Eccl 2:1-26)

<sup>2</sup> I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. <sup>2</sup> “Laughter,” I said, “is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?” <sup>3</sup> I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.

<sup>4</sup> I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. <sup>5</sup> I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. <sup>6</sup> I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. <sup>7</sup> I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. <sup>8</sup> I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man’s heart. <sup>9</sup> I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

<sup>10</sup> I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. <sup>11</sup> Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king’s successor do than what has already been done? <sup>13</sup> I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. <sup>14</sup> The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.

<sup>15</sup> Then I said to myself, “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said to myself, “This too is meaningless.” <sup>16</sup> For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!

<sup>17</sup> So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. <sup>18</sup> I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. <sup>19</sup> And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. <sup>20</sup> So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. <sup>21</sup> For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. <sup>22</sup> What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? <sup>23</sup> All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

<sup>24</sup> A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, <sup>25</sup> for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? <sup>26</sup> To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

## Observations

Notice the things the Teacher tries out and the conclusion. Remember the Teacher also tried wisdom in 1:12-18.

Notice the difference between things that are 'gained' and things that are 'given'.

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. What do you and the people around you think is necessary to be truly happy? What strategies do you think people you know, including yourself, use to avoid facing the reality of death?
2. Why do pleasurable experiences and the accumulation of money and things not ultimately satisfy? Why might we kill ourselves at our work despite the fact that we all know we do not get to take our stuff with us when die?
3. What do we often think we need to do for God to be pleased with us? What does the Bible say is the path to God's pleasure?

4. Do you see God as a teacher who wants you to learn, a boss who wants you to work or a Father who wants to enjoy life through His gifts? What does Ecclesiastes say about this?

### The conclusion of the matter

In all our searching for gain and enjoying God's gifts remember the conclusion of the matter (12:13-14). How might this shape our searching, working, and enjoyment in life?

### Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 3: The Search for Gain in Time & Death (Eccl 3:1-22)

**3** There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

- <sup>2</sup> a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- <sup>3</sup> a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- <sup>4</sup> a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- <sup>5</sup> a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
- <sup>6</sup> a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- <sup>7</sup> a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- <sup>8</sup> a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

<sup>9</sup> What do workers gain from their toil? <sup>10</sup> I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. <sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. <sup>12</sup> I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. <sup>13</sup> That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. <sup>14</sup> I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

<sup>15</sup> Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.

<sup>16</sup> And I saw something else under the sun:

In the place of judgment—wickedness was there,  
in the place of justice—wickedness was there.

<sup>17</sup> I said to myself, “God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.”

<sup>18</sup> I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. <sup>19</sup> Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. <sup>20</sup> All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. <sup>21</sup> Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”

<sup>22</sup> So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

## Observations

Notice the seasons that are described. Notice that we are not told what to do in them.

Notice our relation to time compared to God’s relation to time.

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. Even though we do not typically live in an agricultural setting today, what are some ways our lives mirror the times in verses 2–8? What season of life do you think you are in now?
2. How could you have a wiser perspective on your time?
3. Were there trying times in your life that you did not understand at the time, but as you look back, you can see God's good purpose in all of it? What were they, and how did God use them?

4. How do you feel emotionally about the concept of a final judgment by Jesus Christ for everyone who has ever lived? What difference might that make to your worries now?

### The conclusion of the matter

As we live through time, how might we remember our eternal God who will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil?

### Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*



## Week 4: The Problem of Injustice, Work & Solitude (Eccl 4:1-16)

<sup>4</sup> Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun:

I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter.

<sup>2</sup> And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. <sup>3</sup> But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

<sup>4</sup> And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

<sup>5</sup> Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves.

<sup>6</sup> Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

<sup>7</sup> Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:

<sup>8</sup> There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless—a miserable business!

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: <sup>10</sup> If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

<sup>13</sup> Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. <sup>14</sup> The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. <sup>15</sup> I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. <sup>16</sup> There was no end to all the people who

were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

### Observations

Notice the various things the Teacher saw.

Notice what things are better.

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. What are some unjust things you see in the world?
2. In what ways do you have trouble "clocking off" when you leave work?  
What are some steps you should take to disengage from work and to rest better?
3. In what ways do meaningful relationships bring more joy than a lot of money and stuff?
4. Of the four benefits of friends and family (sharing, serving, comforting, protecting) which do you appreciate most and why?

## The conclusion of the matter

How can we fear God and remember His command to love others when we see injustice, when we are at work and when we are with others?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 5: The Search for Honest Worship (Eccl 5:1-12)

<sup>5</sup> Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

<sup>2</sup> Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. <sup>3</sup> A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool.

<sup>4</sup> When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. <sup>6</sup> Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? <sup>7</sup> Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God.

<sup>8</sup> If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. <sup>9</sup> The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.

<sup>10</sup> Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.

This too is meaningless.

<sup>11</sup> As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?

<sup>12</sup> The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.

## Observations

Notice the setting and activities in the first 7 verses.

Notice a possible theme/idol in the remaining verses.

Notice the change from "I" to "you/your".

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. In what contexts might we be at risk of being quick with our mouths and hasty in our hearts before God?
2. Have you ever been in a rut in your religious rituals? What did you do to get out?
3. Is your heart towards money reflected in your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your income, or in your sleep?
4. What practical difference does it make if you see God as the centre of worship rather than yourself and your wealth?

## The conclusion of the matter

How can we fear God and keep His commandments with our worship, speech, and wealth, knowing He is going to judge our actions, whether good or bad?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*



## Week 6: The Problem of Wealth & Death (Eccl 5:13-6:12)

<sup>13</sup> I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, <sup>14</sup> or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit.

<sup>15</sup> Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands.

<sup>16</sup> This too is a grievous evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind? <sup>17</sup> All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.

<sup>18</sup> This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. <sup>19</sup> Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. <sup>20</sup> They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

**6** I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: <sup>2</sup> God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

<sup>3</sup> A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. <sup>4</sup> It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. <sup>5</sup> Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man— <sup>6</sup> even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

<sup>7</sup> Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.

<sup>8</sup> What advantage have the wise over fools?

What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before

others?

<sup>9</sup> Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite.  
This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

<sup>10</sup> Whatever exists has already been named, and what humanity is has been known; no one can contend with someone who is stronger.

<sup>11</sup> The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?

<sup>12</sup> For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?

## Observations

Notice the good and evil the Teacher sees.

Notice what God does and doesn't give.

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. How do you view the gains you make in the face of death?
2. How can you focus not on gain but enjoy what God has given you? How does not knowing the future help in this area?
3. In what areas of your life are you content? In what areas are you discontent? How might you enjoy your lot in life?
4. As a Christian, how might you answer the questions in verse 12?

## The conclusion of the matter

How can you fear God and keep His commandments by enjoying His gifts and your lot in life today?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 7: The Limits of Death, People & Wisdom, pt1 (Eccl 7:1-29)

<sup>1</sup> A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.

<sup>4</sup> The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

<sup>5</sup> It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools.

<sup>6</sup> Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools.  
This too is meaningless.

<sup>7</sup> Extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

<sup>8</sup> The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.

<sup>9</sup> Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

<sup>10</sup> Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions.

<sup>11</sup> Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. <sup>12</sup> Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it.

<sup>13</sup> Consider what God has done:

Who can straighten what he has made crooked?

<sup>14</sup> When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other.

Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.

<sup>15</sup> In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these:

the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness.

<sup>16</sup> Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy yourself?

<sup>17</sup> Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? <sup>18</sup> It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes.

<sup>19</sup> Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city.

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.

<sup>21</sup> Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you— <sup>22</sup> for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

<sup>23</sup> All this I tested by wisdom and I said,

“I am determined to be wise”— but this was beyond me.

<sup>24</sup> Whatever exists is far off and most profound—who can discover it?

<sup>25</sup> So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.

<sup>26</sup> I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.

<sup>27</sup> “Look,” says the Teacher, “this is what I have discovered:

“Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things <sup>28</sup> while I was still searching but not finding— I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.

<sup>29</sup> This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.”

## Observations

Notice the first 14 verses are not observations, but more proverbial comments.

Notice all the things that are better and what is said about wisdom.

Notice the teacher is mentioned in third person and their conclusion.

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. When was the last time you went to a funeral? How did you feel? What can you learn from that?
2. Which of these things— greed (v7), anger (v9), impatience (v8), nostalgia (v10)—do you need to ask God to help you deal with more wisely?
3. What are some things you would love to know the answer to, but you know you will not get the answer? What does this lack of knowledge tell you about the human condition?
4. How can you grow in wisdom? Who do you need to spend time with? What things do you know are right and just need to do? What do you need to read?

## The conclusion of the matter

How does knowing that people are sinful, will die and are not all-knowing like God, help us to fear and follow God, knowing there is also judgement coming?



## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 8: The Limits of Death, People & Wisdom, pt2 (Ecc1 8:1-9:10)

**8** Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things?  
A person's wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance.

<sup>2</sup>Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. <sup>3</sup>Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. <sup>4</sup>Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

<sup>5</sup>Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.

<sup>6</sup>For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery.

<sup>7</sup>Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come?

<sup>8</sup>As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death.

As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

<sup>9</sup>All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. <sup>10</sup>Then too, I saw the wicked buried—those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.

<sup>11</sup>When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. <sup>12</sup>Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. <sup>13</sup>Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

<sup>14</sup>There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the

righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. <sup>15</sup> So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.

<sup>16</sup> When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night—<sup>17</sup> then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

**9** So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. <sup>2</sup> All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

As it is with the good, so with the sinful;  
as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.

<sup>3</sup> This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. <sup>4</sup> Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

<sup>5</sup> For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten.

<sup>6</sup> Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

<sup>7</sup> Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. <sup>8</sup> Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. <sup>9</sup> Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. <sup>10</sup> Whatever your hand finds to do,

do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

### Observations

Notice all the things no one can do or know.

Notice how parts are addressed to "you" and not reflective "I" passages.

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

### Extra Questions

1. What strategies do you and people around you use to try to control the deep and profound uncertainties of life?
2. How do people explain seeing terrible tragedies and the misapplication of justice in the world?
3. Do you think you ponder your death too much, too little, or about enough? How can contemplating death lead you to enjoying life more?
4. What might it look like to love life in this world even though the world is passing away? How can you fully enjoy your life right now in a godly way?

### The conclusion of the matter

How are we to live knowing that one day we will die and God will judge all that we have done, good or bad?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 9: The Limits of Wisdom, Wealth & Wickedness (Ecc1 9:11-10:20)

<sup>11</sup> I have seen something else under the sun:

The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

<sup>12</sup> Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come:

As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

<sup>13</sup> I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: <sup>14</sup> There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. <sup>15</sup> Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. <sup>16</sup> So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

<sup>17</sup> The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. <sup>18</sup> Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

**10** As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

<sup>2</sup> The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.

<sup>3</sup> Even as fools walk along the road, they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are.

<sup>4</sup> If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest.

<sup>5</sup> There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: <sup>6</sup> Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. <sup>7</sup> I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.

<sup>8</sup> Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. <sup>9</sup> Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.

<sup>10</sup> If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.

<sup>11</sup> If a snake bites before it is charmed, the charmer receives no fee.

<sup>12</sup> Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, but fools are consumed by their own lips. <sup>13</sup> At the beginning their words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness—<sup>14</sup> and fools multiply words.

No one knows what is coming—who can tell someone else what will happen after them?

<sup>15</sup> The toil of fools wearies them; they do not know the way to town.

<sup>16</sup> Woe to the land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. <sup>17</sup> Blessed is the land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time— for strength and not for drunkenness.

<sup>18</sup> Through laziness, the rafters sag; because of idle hands, the house leaks.

<sup>19</sup> A feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry, and money is the answer for everything.

<sup>20</sup> Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

## Observations

Notice the proverbial style.

Notice the categories or rich/poor, king/slave, wise/fool, and their connection or disconnection.



### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

### Extra Questions

1. What is your honest gut level response to hearing that you cannot control your future?

2. What lessons can we learn from various actions described in this passage?
  
3. How is wisdom linked with leadership and wealth? What does that association tell you about wisdom?
  
4. What wisdom has God already given you that you simply need to act upon and obey?

### The conclusion of the matter

In our wealth or poverty, our work and positions how can we be wise and fear God and keep his commands, knowing He will judge the wise and the fool.

### Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 10: The Limits of Age (Eccl 11:1-12:7)

**11** Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return.

<sup>2</sup> Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

<sup>3</sup> If clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth.

Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie.

<sup>4</sup> Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

<sup>5</sup> As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.

<sup>6</sup> Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

<sup>7</sup> Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

<sup>8</sup> However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all.

But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many.

Everything to come is meaningless.

<sup>9</sup> You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.

Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things

God will bring you into judgment.

<sup>10</sup> So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

**12** Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"—

<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;

<sup>3</sup> when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop,  
when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking  
through the windows grow dim;

<sup>4</sup> when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades;  
when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;

<sup>5</sup> when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets;  
when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along  
and desire no longer is stirred.

Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

<sup>6</sup> Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl  
is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel  
broken at the well, <sup>7</sup> and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and  
the spirit returns to God who gave it.

## Observations

Notice the advice given to the youth and the descriptive descent of aging.

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. How much of your life is shaped by confident predictions about the future?
2. Do you shelter yourself from the fear of failure by having space only for the predictable in your life? Could you change this?
3. Reflect on your attitude to old age. How does Ecclesiastes challenge you?
4. If you are young, how can you "remember your Creator"?

5. If you are old, how can you rejoice in God's gifts and be thankful for gifts past?
  
6. What is your view now of the book of Ecclesiastes? Pleasure, pain, perspective, preparation—which of these have made the biggest impression as you have read Ecclesiastes?

### The conclusion of the matter

In youth with opportunities, or in aging when the senses grow dim, what will help you to fear God and keep His commands?

### Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Appendix A: Possible Breakup of Ecclesiastes

- I. 1:1-2 Introduction to the Teachers Words
  - a. 1:1 Introduction to the Teacher
  - b. 1:2 The problem of vanity
  
- II. 1:3-11 Opening Poem
  - a. 1:3 The question: what gain?
  - b. 1:4-8 Five examples in the cosmos
  - c. 1:9-11 Response to the question
  
- III. 1:12-2:26 Observation Panel 1
  - a. 1:12-18 I saw the vanity of work
  - b. 2:1-11 I saw the vanity of achievement
  - c. 2:12-23 I saw the vanity of inheritance
  - d. 2:24-26 Conclusion: I saw two ways to work
  
- IV. 3:1-9 Wisdom Collection 1
  - a. 3:1 For everything a season
  - b. 3:2-8 "Sonnet" on time
  - c. 3:9 Is there any gain?
  
- V. 3:10-4:16 Observation Panel 2
  - a. 3:10-15 I saw beauty in the midst of burdens
  - b. 3:16-22 I saw justice in the context of death
  - c. 4:1-4 I saw that the problem of oppression makes death seem preferable
    - i. 4:5-6 Wisdom interlude: on work, rest and moderation
  - d. 4:7-16 I saw the solution to two vanities
  
- VI. 4:17—5:11 Wisdom Collection 2
  - a. 4:17 or 5:1—5:6 Honour God with your words and deeds
  - b. 5:7-8 Oppression is counter to natural (and God's) justice
  - c. 5:9-11 If you see oppression, be assured that you can still sleep well

- VII. 5:12-6:12 Observation Panel 3
  - a. 5:12-16 I saw an evil sickness
  - b. 5:17-19 I saw God's good gift
  - c. 6:1-12 I saw humanity
  
- VIII. 7:1-14 Wisdom Collection 3
  - a. 7:1-6 What is better in the midst of death
  - b. 7:7-12 What is better than the way of fools
  - c. 7:13-14 Considering what God has made will teach us to live wisely
  
- IX. 7:15-9:13 Observation Panel 4
  - a. 7:15-28a I've seen it all, and I did not find righteousness or wisdom
  - b. 7:28b-8:9 I saw that God made people upright; they pursued many schemes
  - c. 8:10-16 I saw the wicked confused with the righteous
  - d. 8:17-9:10 I saw how hard it is for people to understand God
  - e. 9:11-13 I saw there is wisdom in understanding the limits of human perception
  
- X. 9:14—11:6 Wisdom Collection 4
  - a. 9:14-10:4 Might does not mean right
    - i. 10:5-7 Observation interlude: I saw foolish rulers
  - b. 10:8-20 Negative examples of act-consequence
  - c. 11:1-6 Limitations of human knowledge
  
- XI. 11:7-12:7 Concluding Poem
  - a. 11:7-10 Wisdom introduction on youth
  - b. 12:1 Remember your creator of everything
  - c. 12:2-6 Five examples of death drawing near
  - d. 12:7 Remember your creator
  
- XII. 12:8-14 Conclusion to the Teacher's Words
  - a. 12:8-12 The problem of vanity and the importance of listening to wisdom
  - b. 12:13-14 Fear and obey God, the judge of everything



## References and Resources

### Most of the Questions have come from:

Akin, D. L., & Akin, J. (2016). *Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes*. Holman Reference.

Gibson, David (2017). *Living Life Backwards: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Ligh of the End*. Crossway.

Driscoll, Mark (2015). *Ecclesiastes: Meaningless Life?*<sup>1</sup>

### Appendix A comes from:

Fyfe, Douglas R. (2019). *Seeing What Qohelet Saw: The Structure of Ecclesiastes as Alternating Panels of Observation and Wisdom*. Wipf & Stock

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons and questions can be found here: <https://realfaith.com/sermon-series/ecclesiastes/> While we do not necessary endorse of affirm Driscoll or his character, we found some questions he asked to be helpful.