

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF  
**ECCLESIASTES**

*12 Day Devotional*



**foundations**  
daily devotional

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## INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a very common form of literature in the Old Testament. It is found in the prophets as well as in books such as Psalms, Job, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. Poetry often uses comparisons, exaggerations or even humor to make a particular point. It also often is used to instill values into people as there is something about a poem that compels us to ponder life. This genre of literature also touches our hearts by using beautiful words that are arranged in ways that draw us in through rhyme, rhythm and repetition. Much of this aspect of the poems of the Bible has been lost in translation since they were originally written in Hebrew. As we read this book it is important to remember that poetry is meant to be visual and verbal, not scientific. It uses metaphors, similes and images to portray a particular thought – often about the greatness of God or about our intimate relationship with Him. Therefore we must be careful when interpreting it doctrinally.

Ecclesiastes is a book filled with thoughts of the disillusioned King Solomon who had become disenchanted by his wealth and success as he reached the end of his life. Here we find the writings of an old man who is trying to make sense out of life through reflecting back on it. His writing often reflects his thinking process so sometimes it may seem as though he is contradicting himself. Ecclesiastes asks some big questions such as: is life worth living? What is life about? How can we make the most of life? Solomon often comes across as melancholy as he writes, “*Meaningless, meaningless...everything is meaningless.*” The word meaningless can also be translated as “emptiness”. Solomon had the power and wealth to indulge himself in whatever he wanted, yet at the end of his life he concludes that it’s all been pointless and useless. In his endeavours to find happiness in agriculture, the arts, architecture, entertainment, business and commerce, philosophy and academia as well as in pleasures such as food, wine and women he finds that it all comes up short. This all left him dissatisfied and failed to meet his deepest needs. Solomon’s problem is that he was striving for fulfillment in this life instead of focusing on eternity. He assumed that death was the end of living with no thought of the afterlife. Because of this, the book of Ecclesiastes has much to speak to those in our generation who struggle with similar flaws. When we live with God at the centre of our lives, constantly pursuing Him, then our lives begin to take great meaning. When we see God’s sovereignty and align ourselves to His will then we begin to have an approach to life that satisfies.

We must remember that as Solomon writes he often examines wrong ideas alongside the good ones, which can sometimes be confusing for the reader. In his frustration he often draws conclusions that are not to be directly applied to our lives. It is important to remember not to take verses out of context but to see how each verse functions within the greater context before it is applied to life. Sometimes Solomon has a rather fatalistic and pessimistic view on life which is his perspective and not God’s. He even at times assumes that life has no purpose at all yet we know this to be untrue. So, as we read through this book, we must keep all these things in mind as we seek what the Lord has for us through this book.

**DAY 1** **READ:** Ecclesiastes 1

In the first few verses of this chapter Solomon introduces the theme of the book. Some versions use the word “*meaningless*”, where others choose the words “*vanity of vanities*” but the key idea is that life is vanity without meaning (v. 2). The writer questions the meaningfulness of toil/labour (v. 3) and then moves to talk about the cycles of life – one generation passes away and then another comes (v. 4). He observes how the sun rises and sets, the wind blows in various directions and even makes reference to what we know as the water cycle (v. 7). Nothing seems to change very much in the seemingly unending cycle of nature and nothing new is ever really produced. One may wonder if Solomon feels the monotony of life. Solomon then goes on to observe that it is not only the natural world that is meaningless but that this is also evident in human effort and endeavor (v. 8-11). There is an age old saying that the more things change the more they stay the same.

Verse 11 seems to hint at the fact that very few people actually make a lasting impact on the world – most live and die in obscurity. It would be easy for someone with this mindset to become depressed but fortunately we know that there is great significance in life for those who are in relationship with Jesus. We don’t live like those who have no hope! Solomon is questioning the significance of human existence apart from understanding that we actually have no significance outside of a relationship with God. He is searching for significance in nature and toil. Rightfully both come up short.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, then continues to ponder the significance of wisdom and knowledge (v. 12-18). You would think that the answer to the emptiness of life could be found by his superior intellect but Solomon is led further to despair. His search has come to nothing. What we see in this chapter is that God has placed in every person a desire and need to feel meaning and significance. This space inside of each one of us can only be filled with Him. Apart from an eternal and spiritual perspective there are no real answers to philosophical questions. The solution for many of the problems that people have today is not to think harder or search better. That is like grasping for the wind...the answer is only found in God.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What is one area of your life that has seemed pointless or meaningless? Ask the Lord to show you the significance of this area. How is He using this in your life to bring Him glory and to grow you? Ask Him to show you how He is in control of even the things that seem meaningless and pointless to us.
2. When we walk with God, even the smallest things can have great spiritual significance. For example, a family game night, making a meal for someone, or being on time for work, etc. Ask the Lord to show you the meaning of the little things in your life that you do and to show you how significant living a life of character really is. Take a moment to listen in prayer about what He wants to say about these things.
3. Ask the Lord to grow you in understanding His purposes, both eternal and spiritual. Pray for believers to find much hope in the Lord and to grow in optimism because of their relationship with Jesus.

**DAY 2** **READ:** Ecclesiastes 2

This chapter begins with Solomon testing the significance of pleasure (v. 1-3). In the previous chapter Solomon tried to find the meaning of life in wisdom and fell short so now he continues his search in the area of pleasure and amusements. Many people today subconsciously do the same thing, seeking entertainment and things that excite the senses, living for fun. Solomon concludes that pleasure cannot give life meaning or satisfaction so he then decides to search for meaning in work and accomplishment (v. 4-8).

Solomon had built great things such as houses, vineyards, gardens and orchards with pools and trees. This king acquired servants and had great possessions such as herds and flocks and much silver and gold. This chapter gives us a picture of Solomon in all of his splendor, including many wives. 1 Kings 11:3 tells us that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines which was sinful. If possessions and wealth could bring meaning to life then Solomon should have found it. He excelled and became great and did not pass up any pleasure that was before him. He had the resources to experience pleasures far greater than we can imagine and yet concluded that it all was meaningless. There was no enduring eternal sense of meaning in life for these pleasure and accomplishments (v. 11).

Solomon then turns again to the subject of wisdom (v. 12-16). Wisdom is better than folly (v. 13) but both the wise and the foolish land up dying (v. 14). The one thing that all of humanity has in common is that we will all die (except those who are alive when Christ returns). They say there are two things that are certain in life – death and taxes! Both the wise man and the fool die, which Solomon saw as meaningless (v. 15). His conclusion was to hate life because death defeated all of life’s accomplishments (v. 17-23). The man who worked hard and accomplished much must leave his work and wealth to someone else who may end up being a fool (v. 21). It seems as though death was haunting Solomon not in the sense that he was afraid to die but that he saw how death made the labour of his life meaningless. If it is true that death robs our lives of meaning then life is sorrowful. If it is true that in the grand scheme of things our lives don’t amount to anything significant then we are right to despair. This is, however, the wrong attitude to have about life as it is not a Biblical worldview.

Solomon then concludes that if work can’t make a lasting impact then at least there can be satisfaction in enjoying his work and in enjoying simple things such as food and drink. It is like he is trying to make the most of a bad situation. In the concluding verses of the passage Solomon reveals that he believes in God but he still has not connected how meaning in life is connected to God and eternity.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Thank the Lord for giving us Jesus as functional Lord of our lives. Seeking His will and living it out brings great meaning and purpose into our lives. Ask Him to show you how He has brought meaning and purpose into your life, then praise Him for this.
2. The phrase “*under the sun*” appears often throughout Ecclesiastes – six times in chapter two (v. 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22). This is significant because the meaning of the phrase speaks of living life from an earthly perspective, which is what Solomon was doing. Pray that God would reveal to you areas of your life where you may be holding on to an earthly perspective. Ask Him to give you His perspective on the various things in your life and to grow your eternal eyes.

- We can feel value and significance in life when we connect with Jesus and live for Him. God brings significance to our lives, through things like work and recreation. Pray that believers would grow in experiencing the significance that comes from wholeheartedly pursuing the Lord in all areas of their lives.

### DAY 3

 **READ:** Ecclesiastes 3

*There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun* (v. 1). In verses 2-8, Solomon describes various contrasting life activities showing how complex life really is. This passage illustrates how there are both good things in life and bad things that cannot be escaped. Solomon then goes back to talking about the topic of work, which he wrote about in the previous chapter. He sees that toil is meaningless (v. 9) but this time he goes a step further and shows that he understands that there is meaning when we do God-given tasks (v. 10). This shows that he is getting a glimpse of an eternal perspective, especially when he writes, *“He has set eternity in the hearts of men”* (v. 11). Solomon is starting to see how man has been given a longing for the eternal. This is part of being made in the image of an eternal God, yet man cannot fully fathom these things (v. 11). Solomon then writes of how, in light of God’s goodness, it is wise to see that the enjoyment of work, happiness and satisfaction are gifts from God (v. 13). He can’t seem to come up with a better conclusion at this point in the book so this is what he concludes although it isn’t really a strong deduction and it doesn’t fully answer his philosophical questions.

In verse 14 we find Solomon briefly escaping from his *“under the sun”* earthly perspective as he gives us a glimpse into the knowledge that God is eternal and that this life matters to God because there are elements of it that will endure forever. The next verse takes this thinking a step further as it shows that God will call into account the deeds of man showing that everything has meaning (v. 15).

The topic then changes to the problem of injustice, which is hard to understand properly. When Solomon looked at the world he saw great evil and injustice. Instead of fair judgment he saw wickedness and instead of righteousness he found iniquity (v. 16). He correctly concluded that God would judge both the wicked and the righteous (v. 17). Ultimately justice will be done.

The final verses of this chapter bring us back to the discussion about the ultimate fate of humanity which is exactly the same as the fate of animals – death (v. 19). If you take eternity out of the equation then there is little difference between the life of a human and the life of an animal since they both are from the dust and return to the dust (v. 20). Solomon seems to be unsure of the eternal destiny of humanity (v. 21) so he concludes that meaning in life comes from enjoying work because you just can’t know what happens after you die (v. 22). This conclusion is faulty as it stems from his *“under the sun”* earthly perspective. Solomon has now turned back to drawing earthly conclusions. Where did that glimpse of an eternal perspective go? Maybe he is starting to overthink things? Who knows?

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

- We are all subject to changes that we have no control over. Yet we can trust in the Sovereignty of God; He is in complete control of all of our life’s activities. Praise God for His Sovereignty! Tell Him that you trust that He is in control of your life.

- Ask the Lord to show you a situation or circumstance where you struggle with focusing on the here and now and could benefit from looking to your future reward in heaven. Ask Jesus how He wants to encourage you in this situation or circumstance.
- Our future and our hope are in living with Jesus for all of eternity! God has made an amazing world for us to live in but we were made for eternity and the things of this world cannot fully or permanently satisfy. Pray for believers to grow in having an eternal perspective.

### DAY 4

 **READ:** Ecclesiastes 4

This chapter begins with looking at the tragedy of oppression. To find that life lacks meaning is hard enough but to taste cruelty would be even worse. The writer falsely concludes that it would be better to have not been born than to experience such tragedy (v. 3). What a sad statement of despair!

The theme of work and toil is then revisited (v. 4-12). Personal success can often cause others to become jealous which takes meaning away from hard work (v. 4). When we strive to work for reasons other than serving the Lord we fail to see the true meaning of work. Solomon then references the fool who refuses to work, or *“folds his hands”* (v. 5), which isn’t any better. He concludes that the best scenario is to have less and learn to be content rather than to constantly be grasping for more (v. 6). There are three main themes that emerge in this passage:

- 1) Hard work and success are good and shouldn’t be envied;
- 2) Laziness is wrong and destroys;
- 3) We should learn to be content.

Solomon then makes a sharp contrast. What good is your success if you have no one to share it with? First, Solomon writes of a man alone without any family or close friends who labours hard and is never satisfied with his riches (v. 8). The conclusion he makes is that it is meaningless to busy yourself with all sorts of toil if you have no one to share it with (v. 8). Then, he writes about how two are better than one (v. 9). In a partnership, two can accomplish more than each individually. The sum of the parts is greater than the individual parts. If one falls the other can help him up (v. 10) and they can keep each other warm (v. 11). More importantly, if they are attacked they can fight back together bringing safety and security to each other (v. 12). The final line of this dialog is fascinating, *“a cord of three strands is not quickly broken”* (v. 12). In his previous illustration Solomon mentioned a partnership of two but here he mentions a cord of three. Is it possible that God Himself is the third strand of the cord? An example of this would be the covenant relationship between God, husband and wife in marriage.

In the final section (v. 13-16) Solomon discusses the meaninglessness of advancement. It starts with a simple proverb which states that it is better to be poor and wise (and young) than old, foolish and have great wealth and status (v. 13). If a person starts from the pit of prison and rises to the throne of a king, or if this person was born in poverty but lands up ruler of a nation (v. 14) showing many accomplishments, it is all meaningless because the fame would be short-lived (v. 16). For every leader there is another person waiting in the wings to take over and rise to power. The greatest accomplishments can’t continue much beyond our own lives. Solomon concludes that surely this is meaningless, like chasing after the wind.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. When we strive to work for reasons other than serving the Lord we fail to see the true meaning of work. How are you doing in this area? Do you struggle with laziness, or at the other extreme, being a workaholic? Ask the Lord to show you what He wants to say to you today about work.
2. Part of following God is learning to be content. This is not just true in the area of finances but also in relationships, in our work and in so many other areas. Ask Jesus what He wants to say to you today about contentment.
3. Thank the Lord for what He has shown you today through His Word. Pray that He would continue to reveal truths from His Word to you and that you would be eager to apply them to your life. Pray that believers would grow in taking theological truths and walk them out as everyday life practices.

**DAY 5****READ:** Ecclesiastes 5

This chapter begins with discussing the importance of worshipping God reverently (v. 1-7). Superficial religion is meaningless. Solomon refers to those who are quick to utter rash and meaningless words in worship, making promises to God to try to get Him to answer their prayers and then making excuses not to fulfill their promises when their prayers are answered. The writer suggests that these people should learn to keep their mouths shut during worship (v. 1) and he encourages them to quickly fulfill any pledges that they have made to the Lord (v. 4). In fact, he goes as far as to say that it is better not to make a pledge to the Lord at all than to make a pledge and not fulfill it (v. 5). He warns the people to make sure that their mouths do not lead them into sin (v. 6) as he sees how people often speak without thinking. The final council of this section is to fear God and stand in awe of Him (v. 7).

The next section (v. 8-17) turns to the topic of injustice in society, which leads to a discussion on wealth. If you see the oppression of the poor and the perversion of justice, do not be surprised (v. 8). Solomon can comprehend how the levels of bureaucracy lead to oppression. The field was meant to feed everyone, including the king, and so it is ironic that all depend on the same food source (v. 9) which is why the poor are oppressed. Solomon knew first hand that wealth could not bring meaning to life and ultimately could not satisfy. Whoever loves money never has enough money; whoever loves wealth never has enough income (v. 10). As goods increase, so do those who consume them (v. 11) which means that as one's net worth increases so do ones expenses, especially the number of people asking for handouts.

Solomon determines that wealth brings anxiety when he writes that the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep but that the laboring man has much less to worry about and therefore finds sleep sweet (v. 12). He also sees that the uncertainty of riches can cause some to hoard it, harming the owner (v. 13). When we hold on to material things and wealth with a tight fist we actually end up hurting ourselves. Another way that riches can hurt us is when they perish through misfortune leaving our families without provision (v. 14). Solomon understood that great wealth ultimately means nothing. Man comes into the world with nothing and leaves the world exactly the same way (v. 16). The New Testament gives us more hope in teaching us that we can lay treasures up in heaven. You can't take your wealth with you when you die but you can use it to store up treasures for

yourself in heaven by generously giving to God's work. Verse 17 is a fitting conclusion for this section on wealth. The greedy man ends his days alone and in sorrow for his selfishness resulted in a worthless life.

The chapter finishes with Solomon trying to make the best of a bad situation. We find that he still has an "under the sun" earthly perspective. He hopes to make the best of his wealth by enjoying it as a gift from God but decides not to worry about these things because he will instead concentrate on the joy that God has put in his heart. Simply he is saying, try not to think about it, just concentrate on your own joy (which happens to be from God). This is pretty lousy council to the wealthy man who finds no meaning in life.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Re-read Eccl. 5:1-7. Ask the Lord to speak to you about reverent worship, fearing God and standing in awe of Him. Ask Him to show you specifically how this should look in your life and commit to following through on what He says to you.
2. Solomon wrote about how wealth could not bring meaning to life and ultimately could not satisfy. It seems as though society has not figured this out as in our culture advertisers are constantly trying to make us believe that their product will bring fulfillment. As a result, many in our society struggle with consumer debt from buying things that they really don't need. Many have been sucked into trying to find satisfaction in clothes, houses, vehicles, cottages, vacations or entertainment and the list goes on. Ask the Lord what He wants to say to you about this sort of thing in your life. Confess as necessary.
3. Thank the Lord that through relationship with Him we can find contentment and meaning in life. Ask Him to show you 5-10 things that you can be thankful for today and then praise Him for each one.

**DAY 6****READ:** Ecclesiastes 6

This chapter begins with Solomon describing the weakness of wealth. There is tragedy when we receive great gifts from God yet are unable to enjoy them, ultimately leaving them to strangers (v. 2). In verses 3-6 a man's life is described as looking pretty well on the outside with long life and numerous children (which was considered some of the highest blessings one could ask for). But if this man could not experience goodness due to a discontented heart it would have been better for him not to have been born. These verses are full of hyperbole as Solomon exaggerates to make a point. The reference to a stillborn baby (v. 3) is a bitter statement. One that we would expect to be told by a person who had suffered much, yet Solomon, who had been blessed beyond measure still felt discontented and was filled with despair. So, back to the question, what good is it all? Man works hard for the food he eats yet that food can't satisfy his soul (v. 7). Is Solomon forgetting that man does not live by bread alone (Deut. 8:3)? It sounds a bit cynical when he concludes that a poor man gains nothing by knowing how to conduct himself before others (v. 8) and that what you can see is better than what you desire (v. 9).

The chapter concludes with a look at the futility of feeling that nothing can make things better (v. 10-12). God has already named all things and in His Sovereignty is fully in control. Man can never successfully contend with God over this (v. 10). Attempting to do this would bring more meaninglessness which would not be advantageous to man (v. 11).

The final conclusion Solomon makes in verse 12 is “*who knows?*” For who really knows what is best for man in this life? Who can tell what will happen after we die? To Solomon life seemed like a vain shadow. Tragically, Solomon ends this chapter in a depressing way and therefore we must be careful to look at these themes in light of the entirety of Scripture and evaluate it according to the complete message of the Bible.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. We often think we know what’s best for us believing that a better job, a new house, a healthier body, etc. is just what we need. Striving for things that aren’t in the will of God for our lives is sinful. Ask Jesus to speak to you about the things that you desire and strive for. How does He want to align these things to His will for your life?
2. Solomon did not understand the future glory that is offered to us in eternity (2 Timothy 2:10) and this caused him to feel depressed. Ask the Lord to speak to you about your future home with Him in eternity. How does this bring hope to any troubling circumstances in your life?
3. Thank the Lord for the Holy Spirit, who speaks to us and gives us God’s perspective on things in our lives. Pray for believers to grow in Hearing God and in making Jesus functional Lord of their lives.

## DAY 7

### READ: Ecclesiastes 7

This chapter begins with a list of comparisons such as “*a good name is better than fine perfume/ointment and the day of death is better than the day of birth*” (v. 1). For some people verses 1-5 may seem a bit depressing. It seems as though Solomon may have been in a discouraged mood upon writing this section, perhaps he is feeling the meaninglessness of life and so considers the day of death better than the day of life. As Christians we do not need to fear death. In fact, our eternal future is to be a central motivator in our lives and something that we yearn for (2 Cor. 5:1-10). When we die, pain and suffering are over, the struggle and conflict is finished and we can life in eternal bliss! But in the meantime, we can learn much from hard, tough times as described in verses 1-5 for tough times are often an effective catalyst in our spiritual growth and maturity.

In verses 5-9 wisdom and folly are compared. The laughter of fools, which can be noisy, flashy and short-lived, is compared to a fire that makes a great noise yet can be extinguished in a few moments. Then Solomon speaks of oppression (v. 7) which can cause even good believers difficulty, and anger which he sees as foolish (v. 9).

In the third section (v. 10-12) Solomon writes of how wisdom gives perspective. He understood how, when we look back, we tend to romanticize the past and think that it is better than the current time. He suggests that this is not wise (v. 10).

The topic then changes to prosperity and wisdom. He concludes that prosperity can be a good thing, especially if the person behaves wisely (v. 11-12). He ends this section (v. 13-14) by discussing the work of God and how He makes the good days and the bad days and how we are to trust Him nonetheless. In times of prosperity we thanks God and in times of adversity we remember that God is in control.

The last half of chapter seven discusses righteousness and wickedness (v. 15-29). Solomon saw how the good suffer and the wicked prosper, which doesn’t seem fair! Even though this is true, it is still better to live righteously. If righteousness can’t cause one to avoid suffering then why bother trying to be extremely legalistic in righteousness (v. 16)?

Extreme licentious wickedness is even more foolish (v. 17). A God fearing person will avoid extremes (legalism and licentiousness) and lead a balanced life, which is righteous and wise (v. 18). A wise man sees the usefulness of wisdom (v. 19) and also sees his own propensity to sin (v. 20). This person doesn’t take to heart everything people say as he understands how people often speak fluently and don’t mean what they say. He has done this himself and doesn’t want to be judged by it (v. 22). The fact that we have all said things that we regret should help us not be offended when we hear a rumor about ourselves. As great as wisdom is, Solomon realized that it was not something that he could create on his own (v. 23) as it is difficult to find (v. 24). In his search for wisdom, Solomon sees man’s sinfulness (v. 25-29). He found that a woman could be a danger and a trap and that godly men should not be ensnared by her (v. 26). We know that Solomon himself was caught in these snares as his wives turned his heart after other gods (1 Kings 11:4). Since this is poetry we must also remember that this woman personifies wickedness. After searching and looking at things from every possible angle, Solomon did not find what he was looking for.

What Solomon found was that only one man out of a thousand was wise and that no women had wisdom (v. 27-28). It is important to note that when Solomon is comparing his findings the “man” that he writes of comes from the generic word meaning people and the word used for “women” is a way of expressing parallelism in order to show that no one really pleases God completely. This is a poetic example of Hebrew parallelism that we must take note of so that we will not come up with a bizarre interpretation. Solomon concludes by summarizing that God created people to be upright and without sin but that they have decided to follow their own rebellious path (v. 29).

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Prosperity is not always good and adversity and affliction are not always evil. Sometimes adversity can actually be better than prosperity. Pray for the Lord to give you wisdom in navigating the ideologies of our world and to strengthen your biblical foundation so that you will not be swayed into false thinking.
2. Solomon emphasizes the importance of living wisely in this chapter. Ask the Lord to show you one area of your life that He wants you to take to Him in prayer this morning. Write down what that area is. Then, ask Him how to live with wisdom in that area.
3. Even though the righteous sometimes do not receive reward in this life and the wicked prosper, it is still better to live righteously. Pray that you will grow in desiring to be holy and righteous as a top priority in your life. Pray for you and your family to grow in honesty and integrity.

## DAY 8

### READ: Ecclesiastes 8

This chapter begins by praising wisdom and ends by showing its limitations. As we begin we must remember that in Solomon’s day the king had ultimate authority and far reaching power and that it was of vital importance to avoid the king’s wrath. Therefore, the wise will keep the king’s command because they have vowed to God that they would (v. 2). This is reiterated by Paul in Romans 13 – that we should obey government authority as part of our obedience to God. Wise people don’t quit or revolt against the king (v. 3) and will not dispute the king’s authority and sovereignty (v. 4). In summary, wisdom can enable a person to avoid the king’s wrath. The wise know how to do right (v. 5).

Verses 10-17 now look at the limitations of wisdom. Solomon mentions two inequities in verse 10. First, the wicked get an honorable burial and second, people forget the godly. Even in spite of these inequalities Solomon insists that it is better to fear God as the wicked will not prosper (v. 13). Today's Christians have the added perspective of knowing that justice will be done. Solomon's conclusion is that we should not worry about solving the mystery of the unfairness of life but learn to enjoy life instead (v. 15). Solomon finishes by stating that even the wisest people cannot discover everything that is occurring on the earth. No one can know everything (v. 17). As hard as we try, we will never be able to totally figure out reality in a fallen world.



### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Although wisdom offers some excellent benefits it also has limitations which are why we are to pursue God first and foremost. Thank the Lord for the wisdom that He offers you through a relationship with Him. Ask Him to show you an area where He has given you wisdom in the past, and then praise Him for this.
2. Whether you agree with the decisions of the government or not, government has been created by God. Ask the Lord to show you if you have any rebellion in your heart towards local, provincial or federal government. Confess as necessary and then pray for our government leaders.
3. Thank the Lord that the authority that He placed over us on earth helps to enrich our lives. Pray for believers to be submissive to the various authorities in their lives. Thank the Lord for how He will make all wrong things right one day. Ask the Lord to increase your hope in His return.

## DAY 9



**READ:** Ecclesiastes 9

This chapter begins with the harsh reality that death comes to all (v. 3) which is one of the results of original sin. Romans 6:23 tells us that *"the wages of sin is death"* – it's like Solomon senses how tragic this common fate is and that this is not how it should be. Solomon couldn't see sin as the culprit of this and therefore his melancholy shines through as he writes. Back in chapter seven, Solomon writes of how the day of death is better than the day of birth (7:1) yet in chapter nine he writes that it's better to be a live dog than a dead lion (9:4). So which does he mean? First, we must remember that the Bible does not contradict itself. The book of Ecclesiastes is poetry and since poetry is more concerned with emotions rather than accurate descriptions of a message we find more figurative language in poetic books than other writings in Scripture. Solomon is searching for purpose, with his overall theme being the futility of life without God. Knowing that our days are numbered should encourage us to live wholeheartedly for God. Each day matters and each can count for the Kingdom or can be squandered and wasted on self. It's our choice!

In verses 7-12 Solomon urges us to make the most of our lives because nothing is certain. We are told in this section to *"go", "eat", "drink", "enjoy", and "do"*. Solomon's perspective is that life is short and death is certain so we should live in the most meaningful way that we can. This does not give us a license to go out and sin but we can and should enjoy life. Food, friends, family and fellowship along with toil and work are all things that can be enjoyed. It is not sinful to take pleasure in what God has given but we must remember to be grateful and generous with what we have. Celebrate, enjoy your spouse and work hard while you can! Many Christians live as though it is a sin to have fun and enjoy life. Yet God

created us to live in a place called Eden, which means "delight". One day we will live on a new earth that will be like Eden once again. Maybe Solomon is feeling the need for this as he writes.

Solomon makes some interesting observations in verse 11 about the swift, strong, wise, discerning and learned and informs us that these talented individuals do not always win and find great success. Why? Because time and chance overtake them all! Time, chance and death can all catch us unexpectedly. Like a fish in a trap or a bird in a snare (v. 12) there are things in life we just can't control. Life isn't fair, nothing is guaranteed – yet should we despair? Should we quit trying? No! Instead, we should quit thinking that life owes us something, or for that matter, that God owes us anything.

The last section of this chapter (v. 13-18) speaks of the importance of appreciating the wisdom of others. Solomon begins with a short parable about a poor, wise man who outsmarts a great king. He saves the city but is not rewarded or remembered. Even though the man received no earthly esteem Solomon concludes that Godly wisdom is better than strength (v. 16a), Godly wisdom is not always heeded (v. 16b-17) and Godly wisdom can be overcome by sin (v. 18). We must guard ourselves from being contaminated by sin which will destroy Godly wisdom.



### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Take a moment to personally reflect on what gives you the necessary peace and confidence to face the uncertainty of life? How is the reality of your life being in the hand of God a comfort to you?
2. Life is brief, eternity is forever. How are you spiritually living in a way that prepares you to die?
3. Ask the Lord what He wants to say to you about enjoying life. Are you taking that too far through over-indulgence? Or, do you struggle with not enjoying life? What does Jesus want to show you today that you may not have seen before?

## DAY 10



**READ:** Ecclesiastes 10

This chapter contains proverbs about wisdom and foolishness which can be easily applied in everyday life. First, Solomon gives advice regarding personal character (v. 1-4) mentioning how a little folly can outweigh wisdom (v. 1). One person who is out of sorts with God can lead a whole group into sin. This is why it is so important to be regularly working on character issues and to confess hidden sin and for leaders to hold their people accountable. In verses 4-7 Solomon discusses our response to various leaders, beginning by telling us how calmness lays great offenses to rest (v. 4). Then he mentions how sometimes the wrong people are in charge (vs. 5-7). It doesn't make sense to Solomon that fools can rise to power but that is a reality in our fallen world. Sometimes those who work hard or are successful lose their positions to less competent and less qualified people. In verses 8-10 we are given illustrations to make the point – think before you act.

- 1) If you are so big and strong that you can dig a huge pit be careful that you stay away from the edge or you might fall in and break your neck!
- 2) If you are strong and can break down a wall – be careful because there may be a snake on the other side of that wall. It's great to have strength but you need wisdom to go along with that strength!
- 3) It's typically better to work smarter instead of harder.

- 4) It's not enough for a person to know how to charm a snake if the snake bites him before he can charm it (v. 11).

There are probably many areas in our lives where we know the right thing to do (eat right, exercise, have devo's, forgive someone, pay our bills on time, watch spending, disciple our kids, set a boundary, etc.) but knowing it all in our heads isn't good enough. We actually have to use these skills and put them into practice in our lives – that's wisdom!

Verses 12-15 encourage us to control our words. Fools often have lots of words to say. We should consider the benefits of talking less. In verses 16-17 Solomon tells us that some leaders try to solve problems with food and drink. We should eat to live, not live to eat. One who controls his appetite can probably control other areas of life. Self-discipline is critical in leadership.

Verse 18 talks about the sloth – the person who should be doing work, taking care of things, providing for those whom he/she is responsible for but instead the house is falling down and the roof is leaking. On a surface read, verse 19 may not make sense to us. We know that Solomon is being sarcastic here because in chapter 5:10 he writes of how money can never satisfy.

The chapter concludes with applying wisdom to criticism. The wise person won't even criticize someone in the privacy of their own bedroom. Be careful what you say about those who are in authority over you. A wise person doesn't say something in private that he/she wouldn't want repeated in public. The same is true for his/her actions – don't do something in private that you wouldn't want people to know about. We should always use caution, discretion and control.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

- Verse one says that a little folly outweighs wisdom. This means that one person who is negative can put a wet blanket on everyone else. Or, that one person who is super-critical can create single-handedly, an atmosphere of discouragement. Do an internal check to see if you have a secret sin or character issue that needs to be dealt with today so that you aren't that fly in the ointment. Confess as necessary.
- Verse four says that if your boss gets angry at you, let it go, stay calm and keep our cool, maintaining composure. Is there anyone in your life who gets under your skin easily? Ask God to show you areas of your character that you need to work on in order to be able to deal with this person in a godly way.
- Verse eighteen talks about procrastination. In what areas do you struggle with this? Commit to following through on in these areas, giving yourself a reasonable timeline.
- Verse 20 affirms the importance of not speaking critically about others. Today, will you recommit yourself to holding your tongue? Will you refuse to participate in gossip? If someone wants to talk to you about another person, will you shut him or her down? Write a prayer of commitment to Jesus about holding your tongue.

## DAY 11

 **READ:** Ecclesiastes 11

In this chapter Solomon writes of wise practices in the light of the uncertainty of life. In verses 1-2 he is basically speaking of diversifying your investments. Yes, it seems as though Solomon is providing us with financial counsel. What a relevant book! Since life is so uncertain, spread your financial investments out. In verse 1 he is referring to the

commercial enterprises of sea trade (remember that this genre is poetry). Casting bread upon the waters refers to trading grain with other nations. It would be less risky to keep your grain and make bread. Sending it out to sea may mean that you don't get a return (pirates could get it, the ship could become shipwrecked, etc.) but there is also the chance that you could receive back a dividend. Any kind of investing requires faith – no risk, no reward. Solomon is saying, don't play it safe, take a few risks. This thought unfolds more in verse 2. Here Solomon clearly encourages us to diversify our investment through dividing portion. This makes a lot of sense because if one portion is destroyed or lost you won't lose everything. Note how we are not guaranteed that all our investments will do well, in fact, we are told to diversify to protect ourselves from sudden misfortune which could very well happen to us.

In verses 3-6 Solomon encourages us to seize opportunities. He begins by stating that God is in control of things like nature (rain and trees falling – v. 3) before he writes criticizing the overcautious mentioning that the farmer who spends all his time trying to read the skies will become distracted from the task at hand and won't get the job done. Basically, this tells us to stop procrastinating. Verse 5 continues with more analogies of the unpredictability of life. Just as we can't know the path of the wind and we can't know how babies are formed in the womb there are just some things that are unseen and unknowable. Sometimes we look at things in the world and we don't have a clue what God is doing but we have to trust Him because He is in control. So, what are we to do with all this uncertainty? Verse 6 concludes this section by telling us to "sow your seed". We don't know if the seed will sprout, grow and produce a harvest but we sow nonetheless. This speaks of working hard and leaving the results up to God.

The chapter concludes in verses 7-10 by speaking of rejoicing. We are told to enjoy life and to rejoice in all of the days that we are fortunate to live. Enjoying our ordinary lives can be harder than it seems. Sometimes life is mundane or even trivial, but blessed is the person who can enjoy it. As Christians, we should be able to live life fully every day. Rejoicing in life does not mean becoming morally corrupt because God will judge (v. 9). Christians should be able to have more fun than anyone, but we should be pure and blameless in how we have fun, knowing that God will judge our actions. The final verse commends us to remove three entities from our lives – grief, anger and pain. Basically, we are being told not to overly dwell on our problems and to quit complaining about them.

### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

- Describe the prospective of life that Solomon gives in this chapter. How does this line up with your perspective?
- Ask the Lord to show you a brief list of your resources, skills, assets, time, energy and possessions. Then, bring this list to the Lord in thanksgiving and rejoice for what He has given you.
- Re-read today's chapter asking the Lord to speak to you from a couple verses. Is there anything in these verses that He wants you to obey? Commit to following through on what He shows you.

**DAY 12** **READ:** Ecclesiastes 12

This chapter begins with Solomon exhorting youth to remember their Creator. Forgetting about God can lead youth to bad choices that permanently affect their lives. Bad choices often begin with small compromises that end up resulting in disaster. But, if you remember God in your youth you set yourself up for much less headache as you get older. Choosing to abstain from sexual immorality, marrying a godly person, seeking the Lord on your career and making good financial decisions are all wise and godly things to do!

In verses 2-7 we are given a glimpse into the process of aging through the analogy of a decaying house. This illustrates what we can expect in old age and should motivate us to serve God while we can. In these verses we find Solomon to be a bit of a grumpy old man who is living out the final years of his life so he is going to tell things the way they are. The “*grinding*” in verse 3 refers to teeth, the doors being shut refer to the loss of hearing (v. 4) and the fear mentioned in verse 5 refers to fear of injury due to frailty. Many metaphors are used in this passage showing that growing old is not for the faint of heart. Death is the returning of the body to the dust and the spirit returning to God (v. 7). In verse eight he concludes this section with a phrase that has become quite familiar to us through this book – “*vanity*” or “*meaningless*” says the teacher! We have seen how the use of this phrase, along with the other common phrase, “*under the sun*” is Solomon’s way of writing about the fleeting, frailty and hopelessness of life without God. Yet in spite of the brevity of life and its disappointing nature apart from God, life is good and is meant to be enjoyed with God.

The final verses of Ecclesiastes (v. 9-14) bring us to the conclusion of the entire book. In verses 9-10 we learn of the care that Solomon took when writing this book. As an older man who had learned a thing or two in life, Solomon felt a duty to impart what he had learned to the next generation. Solomon wrote thousands of proverbs, carefully thinking through what he wrote and the wise person will listen to what he has to say. In verses 11-12 Solomon continues to describe how Ecclesiastes can be used in people’s lives. He says that the words in this book are powerful and uses the analogies of a goad (long wooden rods used for driving oxen and other animals) and nails (hammered to keep something in place). The same could be said of the entirety of Scripture! Solomon says that the book is powerful because the words have been given to him by the Shepherd (v. 11) which is God. This means that we can fully trust the integrity of this book. He then writes a warning about studying too much. It is important to recognize that he isn’t talking about studying Scripture too much but rather he is warning people about reading things outside the inspired word of God. The Word of God must take priority over any other reading; this includes the newspaper, the internet and could even include movies and other forms of media in our modern culture. We need to be careful not to put human writings above the inspired Word of God!

Solomon then comes to the end of the matter (v. 13). After all his thoughts on life and wisdom Solomon urges us to prepare for judgment day by fearing God and keeping His commands. These two things are not suggestions for believers but commands. Many people misunderstand the phrase “*fear God*”. Some people define it as reverential awe. But our definition of fear must also encompass His judgment. To keep his commandments is to obey the Bible. So why are we called to fear God and obey His commands? The answer is clear in verse 14, “*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil*”. There is a coming day of judgment where we will have to give an account for our lives. Every thought, motive, word and deed will be judged. We will answer to God for everything, whether hidden or obvious, good or evil. The glory and reward we have in eternity will all hinge upon the lives we live here on earth. When we fear God we are motivated to live our lives in such a way as to be aligned with His Word and receive great rewards in eternity.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Thank the Lord for putting together the Word of God with such great care. Pray that you would grow to love the Bible more and more as you spend time reading and meditating on its truths.
2. Ask the Lord to show you if there is an area of small compromise in your life that you need to deal with today.
3. Ask the Lord to speak to you about fearing God and keeping His commandments. In what ways are you making this a priority in your life? In what areas is God asking you to grow in these two things?

## The Book of Ecclesiastes

Is life really worth living? Can I find peace and purpose in this life? The author of Ecclesiastes attempts to answer these questions by proving that satisfaction in life can only be found in looking beyond this world.

### **Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NIV)**

*"...here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind."*