

JANUARY-MARCH

# ECCLESIASTES:

*It's a God thing*

2007



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for Young Adults

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Mark A. Finley



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# Ecclesiastes: It's a God Thing

JANUARY—MARCH 2007



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## This Quarter's Illustrator



A 27-year-old from Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., Matthew Bosley is currently working on graduating from Southern Adventist University with a double major in animation and graphic design. When he isn't studying, he's working IT for the School of Visual Arts and Design at Southern. He enjoys backpacking, waterskiing, roller hockey, and playing Halo with friends. His goal is to move back to the Los Angeles area and to work for one of the large postproduction houses there. He dreams of someday sailing around the world, skydiving from 32,000 feet, doing the "tourist thing," and climbing Mount Everest.

# Getting the most Out of CQ

## FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

## POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages in each week's lesson appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
  - "**introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
  - "**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
  - "**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
  - "**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
  - "**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
  - "**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
  - "**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

## CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

# The **Rise** and **Fall** of the house of **Solomon**



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“ ‘From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded’ ” (Luke 12:48, NRSV).

# Wake Up and Smell the Coffee

## INTRODUCTION

### Ecclesiastes 1

During my sophomore year of high school, my aunt gave me a diary for Christmas. Sometimes now, I go back and read parts of it, but it just saddens me, so I put it down quickly. Most of the pages are rather melancholy with frustrations concerning boys I liked; those moments where I was searching for meaning; or those days when I was contemplating my purpose in God's plan.

At times, I'm convinced I should burn every page of that diary. I would be so embarrassed if someone were to learn now how much I floundered during those years or how insecure I felt. Besides, I'm not usually as serious as those pages might lead one to believe.

As you start studying this week's lesson, keep in mind that Solomon, too, was penning his thoughts about what was important in his life. He'd been living a life of infinite spiritual and material blessings. Yet he threw it all away to experience the other side. And as we read about his life, we realize we have something in common with him.

"The book is not merely a collection of ancient philosophy, for what it talks about is very much up to date and extremely relevant. Here is what you will hear propounded in soap operas, in political speeches, in the radical or conservative movements of our day. Here is what you will hear in the halls of academia, or on the streets of any city. In this book the philosophies by which people attempt to live life are brought into consideration and examined. That is why Ecclesiastes is so practical and up to date."\*

This week's lesson is your chance to contemplate the importance of things you hold valuable, and to consider those things you have ignored for so long. Just when you thought the Old Testament was something old-fashioned and so different from what you thought the Bible was about, along comes Solomon reminding us to "Wake up and smell the coffee!" The Bible really is a book we can relate to; and Solomon shows us just how much.

**Just when you thought the  
Old Testament was old-  
fashioned, along comes  
Solomon.**

\*Part 1 of the 11-sermon series on Ecclesiastes (DP#3806-3816), preached by Ray C. Stedman in 1982, at the Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California.

## The Last Word

### LOGOS

1 Kings 3:16–28; 11:1–43; 2 Chron. 6:1–48; 7:1–4

#### Beloved of the Lord (2 Sam. 12:24, 25; 1 Kings 1)

According to the rules of inheritance, Solomon should not have received the throne (Deut. 21:15). Ammon, David's firstborn, was killed by Absalom for raping Tamar. Absalom, the third born, a popular contender for the throne, was killed by Joab. This left Chileab, David's second born and son of the righteous and generous Abigail (1 Samuel 25). Why would God overlook Chileab?

As David lay dying, his fourth son collected a following. In the company of his brothers Chileab, Abital, and Eglah, Adonijah crowned himself king. The only brother not invited to the coronation was Solomon, the baby of the family.

**What will you do if Bill Clinton or George Bush is in heaven? Will you complain to our heavenly Father?**

Adonijah might have been his own choice for king; but Solomon was God's choice (1 Chron. 22:9, 10). First Kings 1 tells us he was also Bathsheba's choice, the prophet Nathan's choice, the priest Zadok's choice, and David's choice.

#### A Wise Choice (1 Kings 3:3–28)

Fairy tales are filled with stories about young people who, upon meeting a magician or rubbing a lamp, receive the chance to wish for three things. In fiction, the protagonist frequently makes unwise wishes. But in 1 Kings 3:3–28, the young hero makes a wise choice. Thus, he confirms the confidence of his elders and the faith God had when He placed the mantle of leadership on Solomon's young shoulders.

#### Putting God First (2 Chron. 6:1–48; 7:1–4)

In 2 Chronicles 6, the king gives his testimony. Solomon serves God because He keeps His promises (verse 4), He is Israel's Redeemer (verse 5), He chose Israel, He called David to be Israel's servant (verse 6), and handpicked Solomon to fulfill this task (verse 9). The thought that God should choose him humbles this great king (verse 18).

Then Solomon prays not only for the assembled congregation, but for all future believers and their need of God's mercy. His prayer recognizes the weakness of everyone present (verse 36). Because Solomon is a preacher of God's grace, his prayer is filled with salvation. Surely we are reading the prayer of a faithful man!



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## **So What Happened? (1 Kings 11:1–7)**

The Bible gives no explicit injunction against polygamy. Rather, it contains many examples of marriages turned sour because the husband had multiple wives. In ancient times, kings cemented alliances between nations by marrying the daughter of a neighboring king. To refuse a wife was dangerously undiplomatic for the king of a small country.

First, Solomon adapted to local custom (ignoring God's command). Then he fell in love; and love turned to murder. Although there is no record of Solomon committing infanticide, he did build altars to the god Molech—the god who demanded child sacrifices.

So the lesson is simple—do not have seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines! Most likely, we are not guilty of this. However, consider that multiple wives are a symbol of the distractions Satan sends our way. Solomon will explain distracting philosophies in more detail in Ecclesiastes. Will his words “hit home” then?

## **The Last Word Is God's (1 Kings 11:9–43)**

As a Canadian, I do not vote in American elections. Yet Bill Clinton let me down. I believe he is a Christian who shares many of my social values. However, his dalliance with Monica Lewinsky seriously undermined the credibility of those values. It also damaged the reputations of fine Christians such as Tony Campollo and Jim Wallis, who supported President Clinton.

After Clinton, many American voters wanted a radical demonstration of morality; and they believe President George W. Bush is cleaning up the White House. I, however, am one of those Christians who believe that belligerent war action and the misuse of information about weapons of mass destruction are also immoral. But I blame Clinton for creating a political atmosphere which earned Bush eight years of power. When a leader messes up, the ramifications last for generations.

So it was with Solomon. We do not know if he died forgiven. We do know, however, that the consequences of his apostasy created generations of Israelites who followed pagan gods, rather than learn biblical truths. But we also know that, as the young Solomon said in his prayer, God would remain merciful and entreating (2 Chron. 6:36–39).

I suspect my words about American politics will anger some people. What will they do, though, if Bill Clinton “makes it” to heaven? What will I do if George Bush is there? Who of us will be standing outside the welcome-home party complaining to our heavenly Father? Scripture suggests, however, that it is possible for all of us to be inside dancing with Solomon. After all, didn't God forgive the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–31)?

## Solomon — A Lesson for Watchfulness

### TESTIMONY

Luke 12:48

Solomon's life should serve as a warning to all Christians that sin seeks to be a constant presence in our lives. We find ourselves asking how such a blessed man could turn his back on the source of his faith. As the son of David, Solomon inherited the kingdom of Israel. And "the LORD his God was with him and exalted him exceedingly" (2 Chron. 1:1, NKJV). Solomon initially prayed very humbly to his heavenly Father, asking Him for wisdom and knowledge, which the Lord graciously bestowed upon him. Read 2 Chronicles 1:11, 12.

Later in his reign, Solomon failed to turn to God for guidance. Thus, he strayed into many dangerous relationships with women.

"He was deceived and ruined by women. What a lesson for watchfulness! What a testimony to the need of strength from God to the very last!

"In the battle with inward corruptions and outward temptations, even the wise and powerful Solomon was vanquished. It is not safe to permit the least departure from the strictest integrity. 'Abstain from all appearance of evil.'

"Among many nations there was no king like him, beloved of his God.

But he fell. He was led from God and became corrupt through the indulgence of lustful passions. This is the prevailing sin of this age, and its progress is fearful.\*\*

Solomon allowed his weakness to overcome him. He also disobeyed God's commandment, "'You shall have no other gods before Me'" (Exod. 20:3–5, NKJV). Read 1 Kings 11:4. If our hearts are not fully and completely devoted to God and we are not fully prepared to put Him first in everything, then we are risking our very lives. Let us start each new day by asking Him to guard our hearts against the passions and lusts of this world.

### REACT

1. How can we assure ourselves that we will not fall into sin as Solomon did?
2. How much importance should we place on being obedient to the Ten Commandments in this day and age? Why do you answer as you did?

\* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 305, 306.

# Tap Into Absolute Powerlessness

## EVIDENCE

1 Kings 3:16–28; 11:1–13; 2 Chron. 9:9–14

There is a saying that “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”<sup>1</sup> Solomon did not have “absolute power”; but the wisdom from God gave him some power, influence, and great wealth. As his experience shows, he did not always apply his renowned logic to matters close to him. His lack of objectivity and clear thinking on his own behalf played a major role in drawing him into idol worship.

If Solomon had received only wisdom, and not wealth, power, and prestige, he might have been much better off. Kings, queens, and princes from far and wide came to draw from Solomon’s well of wisdom. In return, they poured gifts of precious metals, fabrics, weapons, spices, and cattle into Solomon’s overflowing storehouses. And while these rulers were drawn to his wisdom, he was drawn to their daughters. Solomon’s seven hundred wives of royal descent and three hundred concubines included Egyptians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. The Lord had warned Israel not to intermarry with these nations for fear they would turn the Israelites to idol worship. As always, the Lord was right.

**If Solomon had received only wisdom, and not wealth, power, and prestige, he would have been much better off.**

But there is hope for us all in Solomon’s story. If we ever, through God’s grace, gain wisdom, power, and prestige to rival Solomon’s, then we can examine the biblical record of his story to keep us on the straight and narrow. However, if we do not gain great wisdom, if we live our lives doing the best we can with the wisdom God has given us, we can take comfort in two things: (1) Without the great wisdom, power, and influence of Solomon, we may never fall into the traps he fell into, and (2) “If absolute power corrupts absolutely, does absolute powerlessness make you pure?”<sup>2</sup> As flippant as actor Harry Shearer may have intended his words to be, there is some truth in them.

Powerlessness may not make one pure, but a lack of absolute, or near-absolute power, would remove one avenue through which Satan could orchestrate our downfall, as he attempted to do with Solomon.

1. John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton (English Historian, 1843–1902).

2. Harry Shearer (American Actor, b. 1943).

# Can God Keep Me From Sin?

## HOW-TO

Ps. 119:11; Matt. 14:23; 1 Thess. 5:16–18

The Bible is full of stories of courageous men and women who faithfully defended God's name by living exemplary lives. However, you would be hard put to find many who did not make careless forays into sin. If these Bible characters, who like Solomon, knew the heights of God's favor, could fall under the weight of temptation, what can keep us from falling? For one thing, we have their examples of repentance and restoration. We also have some timeless guidelines, a few of which are listed below:

**1. Continuous, daily contact with our Lord (Ps. 119:11; Matt. 14:23; 1 Thess. 5:16–18).** We must take time to commune each day with God through personal Bible study and prayer. Solomon lost sight of the most basic principle that we are ever dependent upon God alone to deal with temptation. Even Christ, when

He lived on earth, needed His daily personal time with His Father in order to deal with sin.

### What can keep us from falling into sin?

**2. Obedience to the known will of God (Ps. 19:7; Ezek. 36:27).**

Being obedient to His law is not

legalistic if we are motivated to abide by God's law because of our growing trust in and love for Him. "In his youth Solomon . . . for many years walked uprightly, his life marked with strict obedience to God's commands. It was during this time in his early reign, because of his intimate relationship with God and his respect for God's law that Solomon was favored with discernment and good judgment."<sup>1</sup>

**3. Foregoing selfishness and materialism (Luke 12:22–34; 1 Cor. 10:31).** As Solomon lived a life increasingly separated from God, he became more focused on materialism and self-aggrandizement. "In seeking to glorify himself before the world, he sold his honor and integrity."<sup>2</sup> Our lives should be so consecrated to the glory of God that attaining material things and personal recognition are secondary to honoring Him and fulfilling His plans for our lives.

## REACT

1. How are we to respond when respected church members and leaders are found guilty of grievous sin?

2. Why does true repentance and forgiveness not call for the removal of sin's consequences?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 27.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

# The Loving, Jealous God

## OPINION

2 Chron. 6:14, 36–39

Solomon's life is a study in extremes. On one hand, the young king possessed spiritual maturity; intellectual stature; uncommon skill in managing large projects; good judgment and discernment in settling disputes; and wealth, fame, and influence unrivaled in Israel's history.

However, the aging king displayed an alarming lack of sound judgment in both the quantity and the character of his wives, and a lamentable ability to lead an entire nation into apostasy through the propagation of his wives' many religions.

In our bewilderment at how anyone so wise would choose to acquire hundreds of wives, or in our jealousy of people on whom God has showered superior wealth, influence, and discernment, we tend to look at Solomon as a special case—as one largely unlike ourselves. But we are wrong to do so. The difference between Solomon's gifts and our own is merely one of degree. The apostasy he descended into is one that engulfs moderns just as much as it did ancients, even if today's counterpart to the worshiper of Molech does not dance around an altar of wood and stone.

Solomon's regression from gifted spiritual leader and national ruler to disturbingly bold idolater reminds us how desperately depraved human nature really is. Does anyone of us doubt that we could act as Solomon did? Have we never asked, "Why must God be so jealous as to demand full allegiance to Himself?" The answer is illustrated in the life of Israel's most promising king, whose experience with chasing every passion under the sun left him empty and despondent. The God who created us for fellowship with Himself knows that nothing less will satisfy our desires.

**The apostasy Solomon descended into is one that engulfs moderns just as much as it did ancients.**

## REACT

1. How can gifts such as wealth, intelligence, and charisma be temptations in themselves?

2. Which kind of person do we tend to admire, and why: the highly gifted or the humbly faithful? Explain why these gifts don't need to be mutually exclusive.



# Radical Heavenly Joy

## EXPLORATION

Ps. 16:11

## CONCLUDE

Following Christ is the only thing that can bring radical, life-changing, knock-your-socks-off joy. Solomon had everything the world had to offer, but focusing on those things took him further away from the only source of true happiness—God. We aren't so different from Solomon. We search for joy by pursuing the things this world has to offer. As Solomon discovered, that doesn't work. The real solution? Stay in contact with God every day, obey as He reveals His will, and forego selfishness and materialism. God created us for fellowship with Him, and He knows that nothing less will bring us ultimate joy.

## CONSIDER

- Making a chart of your Christian experience—showing its ups and downs. Evaluate how your closeness to God impacted your perception of the events you are recording.
- Comparing or contrasting your life to that of Solomon. How can you learn from his experience?
- Composing or singing a song of joy to God for His redemptive power and love.
- Role-playing a conversation between God and you as if you were in Solomon's shoes. What would you have asked God for?
- Sharing stories with those you come in contact with about how God has blessed you.
- Journaling how materialism may be present in your life. Pray that God will redirect your focus toward heavenly things. Document how God uses this refocusing to increase your joy.

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, chap. 3.

Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read*, chap. 5, "Ecclesiastes: The End of Wisdom"; Chris Blake, *Searching for a God to Love*, chap. 8, "I Got No Time for God."



# Nothing New under the sun?



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**“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9, NKJV).**

## INTRODUCTION

Rom. 7:24, 25

This year I've seen teenagers killed in motor vehicle accidents, women with young families diagnosed with terminal disease, and families destroyed by the effects of pornography. I've watched fathers struggling to combine full-time jobs and caring for young children, and old people who are so lonely they would rather be dead. I've witnessed grief in a young couple's eyes as they care for their disabled baby.

I've seen a productive life dissolve into tatters because of false accusations. I've heard Christian leaders plead guilty to sexual assault on children. I've observed the devastation of floods, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and a tsunami.

And, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, I sometimes wonder, *What's the point of life?*

However, I also have seen individuals, families, and organizations rally to the support of those who are suffering. I've watched friends committing themselves to long-term assistance for families in desperate need. I've seen teams of volunteers provide hope and support to children. I've seen nations provide financial support for people struck by natural disaster.

The most impacting solutions have included an introduction to God and the gift of salvation.

It's easy to be cynical about life.

Just ask Solomon, at least the

Solomon who appears in the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes. He looks at nature and sees reason to despair; he seeks wisdom and finds it depressing; he looks at life as a whole and finds it meaningless. And as beings who cry out for meaning and purpose in life, we see this as a hard conclusion to live with.

How could Solomon, who undertook great projects (Eccles. 2:4), amassed silver and gold for himself (Eccles. 2:8), and became greater than anyone in Jerusalem before him (Eccles. 2:9) fall into such depression?

The first chapter of Ecclesiastes begins with a look at the futility of life lived without a knowledge of God. Meaning can only be found by including God in every aspect of our lives.

Do you want a meaningful life?

It's a God thing.

**Do you want a meaningful life?**

# What If the Sun Doesn't Really Exist?

Sunday  
January 7

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 1:9

Before the heliocentric theory surpassed the rigorous evidential requirements of the scientific community, people actually thought the sun and all the planets revolved around the earth. Changing their minds would take a lot more than empirical evidence. An acceptance that humans were wrong and susceptible to committing mistakes was also necessary. Solomon realized all along that humans are at the center of God's creation, just not in the egotistical way they would like to believe.

Post-modernism suggests we are somehow culturally beyond what was previously accepted. Since all humans naturally resist change, being "beyond" creates frustration, cynicism, and apathy. In our current state of fear, war, and strife, we tend to look inward for answers, rather than to the Almighty King who lives in the utmost highest.

Yet, in a hard-headed stance similar to Solomon's, humanity would rather lose faith and trust in human knowledge. Or to borrow George Santayana's words, "Fanaticism consists in redoubling your effort once you have forgotten your aim." And we keep heading in the wrong direction apparently for no reason.

**Solomon's apostasy can be likened to many who left the Adventist movement immediately after the onset of the Great Disappointment.**

Solomon's apostasy can be likened to many who left the Adventist movement immediately after the onset of the Great Disappointment. "In the beginning of the movement, the Sabbath truth was to this little band of Adventists purely a test of loyalty to God."<sup>1</sup> What Solomon proved in Ecclesiastes was not that humans are the intellectually superior creatures of earth. God made this obvious at Creation, creating us in His image. Rather, Solomon proved that a dialogue with God is necessary in order to stay grounded. Ellen White describes this dialogue: "Thus the Lord Jesus is still dealing with men. Some who are imperfect in character are connected with solemn, sacred interests; and when chosen for a special work, they should not feel that their wisdom is sufficient, that they need not be counseled, reproved, and instructed."<sup>2</sup>

1. A. W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Assoc., 1961), p. 127.

2. *Gospel Workers*, p. 414.

# Setting the Record Crooked

## LOGOS

Ecclesiastes 1

### Earthly Existence (Eccles. 1:1–8)

The writer (the teacher) begins this book of pronouncements and exclamations about life with perhaps the strongest of all language, “‘Vanity of vanities . . . all is vanity’ ” (verse 2, NKJV). More modern language exclaims “Useless! Useless!” (NCV) and “‘Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Utterly meaningless!’ ” (NIV). These words scream of anger and frustration mixed with a hopeless sense of resignation. A resignation that comes when a problem is unsolvable. A resignation that stems from meaninglessness. A resignation that is all too familiar in the Western materialistic societies of today.

Many young people jokingly use another word that expresses this resignation—“Whatever!” This word suggests indifference and a sense of distance from the problem at hand. It also suggests a sense of confused annoyance.

**Knowing where we stand in the march of history helps us realize that there must be some other way of viewing things.**

The teacher asks, “The cyclical monotony of our living, working, and dying is for what gain? The natural world we are a part of also echoes the monotony of our existence. The sun, the wind, the sea, all serve this world with repetitive cycles.” The teacher finds this “boring,” even tedious.

There is an uncanny sameness in nature’s mores. Because the world the teacher finds himself a part of is far too predictable for his liking, he fails to praise the life-giving purpose of these natural cycles. He would rather lament them.

He ends this passage by acknowledging that humans will never hear or see enough in one lifetime. We all thrive on recognition for the works we accomplish in life; so if no one remembers us or really cares, why bother? Life in all its predictability offers little scope for fulfillment. Here we go again . . . “Whatever!”

### History Repeats Itself (Eccles. 1:9–11)

It is not clear in this portion if the teacher is speaking about human affairs or natural occurrences. Whatever the realm, however, “there is nothing new.” History will continually repeat itself. What a damper on the creative process and new expressions that artists and writers pride themselves on creating. As the writer of

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this day's lesson, I also became resigned to the position of "what has been will be again" (verse 9, NIV). Thus I stole the title for this lesson from some other genius before me just to prove the teacher's point!

The teacher further laments that just as we do not remember what has transpired long before our time, neither will anyone remember us and what we do now. We cannot learn from one another if we simply do not have the ability or inclination to look into the past. A depressing history lesson indeed!

## **Human Intelligence (Eccles. 1:12–18)**

The teacher, who was once king over Israel, chooses to apply his immense wisdom to the problems he identified in our earthly existence. Wisdom in the face of the uselessness of living, the cyclical boredom of nature, the harshness of our work, and the futility of everything still provides no comfortable answers. Life and our living of it, is still useless and meaningless. Sadly, the equation of life that we are here to solve is neither solvable nor worthwhile puzzling over. "What a heavy burden God has laid on men!" (verse 13, NIV). Everything we do "is like chasing the wind" (verse 14, NCV). Even if you could catch the wind, you would still have nothing.

The first chapter of Ecclesiastes concludes with the teacher giving us his qualifications (verses 16–18). He can offer his observations because he is the wisest person to have ruled Israel. His summation of life and its futility is couched within authoritative language. King Solomon had an advantage in the wisdom stakes over all of us. Yet his conclusions on both the meaning of existence and the nature of possessing wisdom leave a bleak trail for even the optimistic. The very act of being wise is a path to depression and sadness.

However, while Ecclesiastes 1 fills us with despair, perhaps knowing where we stand in the march of history helps us realize that there must be some other way of viewing things.

## **REACT**

1. In what ways is your life worth living?
2. In addition to "book learning," where else does wisdom come from?
3. Based on your walk with God, what other way of viewing life would you suggest?



# A Mournful Experience — But Can We Benefit?

## TESTIMONY

Eccles. 1:2, 3, 16–18

Despite having had everything anyone could ever wish for, Solomon declares all his possessions and everything he has experienced to be unsatisfying.

Ellen White describes his situation: “Solomon sat upon a throne of ivory, the steps of which were of solid gold, flanked by six golden lions. His eyes rested upon highly cultivated and beautiful gardens just before him. Those grounds were visions of loveliness, arranged to resemble, as far as possible, the garden of Eden. . . . Youthful attendants, gorgeously dressed and decorated, waited to obey his slightest wish. Scenes of revelry, music, sports, and games were arranged for his diversion at an extravagant expenditure of money.

“But all this did not bring happiness to the king. He sat upon his magnificent throne, his frowning countenance dark with despair. Dissipation had left its impress upon his once fair and intellectual face. He was sadly changed from the youthful Solomon. His brow was furrowed with care and unhappiness, and he bore in every feature the unmistakable marks of sensual indulgence. His lips were prepared to break forth into reproaches at the slightest deviation from his wishes.

### What lessons can we learn from the repentant king?

“His shattered nerves and wasted frame showed the result of violating Nature’s laws. He confessed to a wasted life, an unsuccessful chase after happiness.”<sup>1</sup>

“Solomon’s autobiography is a mournful one. He gives us the history of his search for happiness. He engaged in intellectual pursuits; he gratified his love for pleasure; he carried out his schemes of commercial enterprise. He was surrounded by the fascinating splendour of court life. All that the carnal heart could desire was at his command; yet he sums up his experience in this sad record: [Eccles. 1:14–2:11 quoted].”<sup>2</sup>

What lessons can we learn from the repentant king? Ellen White advises us to “make God your trust. Turn your face resolutely against temptation. Vice is a costly indulgence.”<sup>3</sup> Later she notes that it was Solomon’s “pride of prosperity [that] brought separation from God.”<sup>4</sup>

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1165.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 1164, 1165.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 1165, 1166.

4. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 28, 1905.



# Hope Springs Eternal

## HOW-TO

Isa. 41:10

Depression is defined in many textbooks as a psychiatric disorder characterized by insomnia, the inability to concentrate, loss of appetite, feelings of extreme sadness, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, and thoughts of death. It seems unbelievable that a king as great as Solomon should be depressed. But from reading the first chapter of Ecclesiastes, it is safe to assume that he was seriously so.

Sadly, depression is prevalent today. There are people who feel they lack something in spite of having everything—a good career, a great family, and almost everything that money can buy. But like King Solomon, they don't know the meaning of life.

What many of us don't realize is that there's hope in the Lord. Believing in Jesus Christ gives us confidence that everything will work out for the best, whatever our situation may be at the moment. When faced with depression, we should use:

**1. Talk therapy.** Get down on your knees, and talk to God. We can tell Him everything; and we can be assured of a listening, nonjudgmental, ear. There is no need to schedule an appointment.

Claim His promise in Isaiah 41:10: “ ‘ ‘Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand’ ” (NKJV).

**The Lord always has been  
and always will be ready to  
listen.**

**2. Antidepressants.** Spend time reading the Bible and learning about what God has in store for us—His children. Realize and claim the power that is in the Bible. Learn from the experiences of Bible characters and apply what you have learned in your daily living.

**3. Community service.** Share your blessings. There's something therapeutic in sharing what we have with others who are less fortunate than we are. In giving them hope that the world is not as bad as it seems, we give ourselves the same hope. When we focus on the needs of others, we discover the elusive meaning of life and the healing power of doing good.

## REACT

1. Think of different ways you can encourage a depressed friend or family member. But don't just think. Put some of these ways into action as soon as you can.
2. What Bible verses can people claim when they are depressed?

# The Church Through Cynical- Colored Glasses

## OPINION

Heb. 12:14, 15

Quaker William Penn once said, "It would be far better to be of no church than to be bitter of any." Why is it that some people, who have found blessings in the service of the church, develop ill feelings of skepticism and suspicion toward the leadership or institution they so enjoyed helping? Over a period of time, their "evidence" against church politics, policies, or persons in charge mounts, their attitudes sour, and eventually they're no longer a blessing to anyone, including themselves.

Why does this malady seem to strike down many of the church's most dedicated workers? How do these faithful workers end up bitterly opposing the very organizations they once helped to build and nurture?

Here's how it can happen. Frequently, servants of God become cynical as they elevate themselves above the principles of policies. They begin to doubt the integrity of other people, or to assign devious intentionality to the deeds of others. Proud

perception becomes truth. For the sake of argument, let's say their allegations are true. Church politics are regrettably alive and well. Christian leaders can make bad decisions. In the process of making or upholding policy, someone could feel hurt or

### What do bitter people have to offer God?

insulted. When this happens, in perception or truth, we need to ask, "How am I going to deal with this?" Or more importantly, "How does God, through the counsel of His Word or the example of His character, want me to deal with this?"

Blind to biblical guidance, people sometimes are so determined to feel hurt, disrespected, or superior that these attitudes become the robe they wear, instead of the righteous robe of Christ. Galatians 5:19–21 says that acts of discord, division, and hatred are hallmarks of a sinful nature.

If you find yourself looking at the church through cynical-colored glasses, step back. Pray; and turn your issues over to God. Then start over. Find another ministry that does not tempt you to anger.

## REACT

1. Is there ever a time when a cynical or embittered view of the church is appropriate? Explain your answer.

2. Have you ever felt like withdrawing your efforts from church work due to bitterness or anger? What did you do, and how did it solve your problem?

# Focus, Focus, Focus

## EXPLORATION

Heb. 12:14, 15

## CONCLUDE

Jesus offers us many opportunities to be engaged in an exciting life of leading others to Christ. But so often we focus our energy on the elder at church who is critical of young people's music and lifestyle. Or we spend our time planning how we can get revenge on a friend who has hurt us. Jesus died because He loves us and He wants to save us from bitterness and greed. So why not spend your time and energy on the positive impact you can have on someone's life? Focus on the meaning of Christ's love and the hope He gives to each of us.

## CONSIDER

- Walking in nature with several friends. Consider the stars that shine, the plants that grow, the activity of small animals and birds. What is the bigger purpose of all this?
- Creating a board game about bitterness versus Christ's love. What would you call it? What would be its object? Who would win, and how?
- Painting a collage about the everyday things that give life meaning and posting it in your youth room.
- Volunteering for a humanitarian group like ADRA, UNICEF, or for a local charity in your community. Talk to the people who may be without hope. How can your volunteering bring the hope of Jesus to their lives?
- Working with several musicians in your church or youth group to write a song contrasting Christ's love to the pain of bitterness.
- Discussing with your friends or parents why people become hopeless, lonely, and feel they have no meaning in their lives. Talk about what gives you hope at the end of the day.
- Making a list of the top 100 things that give meaning to your life. Share your list with a friend and challenge her/him to focus on what is important rather than worrying about the things that really don't matter in light of the "big" picture.

## CONNECT

Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life* and *Come Thirsty*.

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Stephanie Yamniuk, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

# “All that my Eyes desired”



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“What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?” (Eccles. 2:22, NRSV).

# Cerebral Fallacy

## INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 2:10, 11

"Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (Eccles. 2:10, 11, NKJV).

I see death on faces around  
Fools smiling at darkness  
Sweating on ruins under the sun  
Eating what's rotten  
Thriving on what's not seen  
Trifling with pain, grief, misfortune  
And sliding into painted tombs  
Meaningless fools!  
While I'm a throned cerebratonic  
Walking on what's lighted  
Building, planting, mining, partying  
Living under heaven's shades  
My feats spell monuments  
And labors spring heirs  
What my eyes see—never denied!  
Until in front of the mirror . . .  
A man is flirting with the wind  
A tired, insomniac skeleton  
Bowing off intellectual hubris  
And when the head is up—  
The face wears the same death!  
A meaningless sage.

**The face wears the same  
death!**



# As Wise as the Foolish

## LOGOS

Prov. 3:13–28; Ecclesiastes 2

### Wisest of the Wise

King Solomon was renowned throughout the world of his time for his wisdom, wealth, and righteousness. He brought honor and glory to God's name for the use of his God-given talents, skills, and wealth. He brought peace and harmony to Israel. And he scattered the light of God's truth to neighboring kingdoms.

However, Solomon did not remain true to God. He allowed his cravings for flesh to overcome him. He succumbed to his passion and love for women and committed grave offenses against God. This created a period in his life which was filled with the darkness of a life lived in sin.

Fortunately for us, God knew it was necessary for Solomon to include his deep, dark secrets in the book of Ecclesiastes.

**Solomon had the world at his feet. Yet it left him chilled to his very soul.**

### From Glory to Disgrace (Eccles. 2:3–10)

"Raised to a pinnacle of greatness and surrounded with the gifts of fortune, Solomon became dizzy, lost his balance, and, fell."<sup>1</sup> His mistake was in forgetting the *One, True*

*Source* of his wisdom and power. In vain, he thought himself "strong enough to resist the influence of heathen associates."<sup>2</sup> Self-glorification, by making Israel the most powerful and grandest nation on earth, became his motivation. "In seeking to glorify himself before the world, he sold his honor and integrity."<sup>3</sup>

Imagine Solomon, wise as he was, falling prey to temptation and sin. His downfall was gradual; his apostasy almost imperceptible—at first, anyway. He allowed his possessions and relationships to draw him away from God. As his priorities and concepts of what constitutes true greatness changed, so did the manner in which he governed his kingdom—and not for the better.

As he turned from glorifying God to glorifying himself, his craving for pleasures grew exponentially. It was in Solomon's grasp to acquire riches, pleasures, and everything his eyes desired. And acquire he did, with reckless abandon.

### From Despondency to Comprehension (Eccles. 2:11–26)

The world gathered at Solomon's feet. Yet it left him chilled to his very soul.



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Vexation and discontent were all that filled his spirit. He was the world's richest . . . He was the world's wisest . . . He was the world's most powerful man alive. Yet his soul was filled with gloom, sadness, and despair.

Solomon's life was extraordinary at the onset. It would have remained so had he preserved his virtue. As long as he made God the Lord of his life and accepted His guidance, his wisdom and power were insurmountable. Yet knowing what he knew, he willfully left the safety of God's Lordship to indulge his passions.

Fortunately for Solomon, he learned the one lesson he had to learn before his life came to an end: Life without God is a hopeless end; but life with God is an endless hope. Solomon eventually understood that even if he had amassed all the riches the world held, even if he was the wisest of all men, there always would be that nagging emptiness in his heart if he lived apart from God.

## As Foolish as the Wise

Are we not just like Solomon? Do we not always seem to think that having just a little more of this or that would bring us happiness?

Solomon had everything the world had to offer. Yet, he still did not find peace or joy. He had more wealth, more honor, more glory, more fame, more power, and more pleasures than any other mortal ever had; but all of it left him parched.

So it is with us. We may not surpass Solomon in riches, fame, honor, power, and pleasure but the result of our craving for these things will be the same as it was for him.

At the end of the day, we only will be truly happy if we have an unbroken connection to the living God. "The greatest men, and the wisest, will surely fail unless their lives are marked with trust in God, and obedience to His commandments."<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

1. Why does material wealth not bring lasting happiness?
2. What should be our attitude toward the things of this world?
3. How do we remain true to God amid the blessings He showers upon us?
4. How do we keep ourselves from becoming a "victim" of relationships, as Solomon was, yet still be actively interested in the salvation of the people we encounter?
5. What does it mean to allow God to become the Lord of our lives?

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 68.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

4. *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 398.

# The Perils of Prosperity

## TESTIMONY

Eccles. 2:4-11

"Engrossed in an overmastering desire to surpass other nations in outward display, [Solomon] overlooked the need for acquiring beauty and perfection of character."<sup>1</sup> "Throughout the ages, riches and honor have ever been attended with peril to humility and spirituality. It is not the empty cup that we have difficulty in carrying; it is the cup full to the brim that must be carefully balanced. Affliction and adversity may cause sorrow, but it is prosperity that is most dangerous to spiritual life. Unless the human subject is in constant submission to the will of God, unless he is sanctified by the truth, prosperity will surely arouse the natural inclination to presumption."<sup>2</sup>

"In the valley of humiliation, where men depend on God to teach them and to guide their every step, there is comparative safety. But the men who stand, as it were, on a lofty pinnacle, and who, because of their position, are supposed to possess great wisdom—these are in gravest peril. Unless such men make God their dependence, they will surely fall."<sup>3</sup>

**"By his own bitter experience, Solomon learned the emptiness of a life that seeks in earthly things its highest good."**

"Had Solomon continued in humility of mind to turn the attention of men from himself to the One who had given him wisdom

and riches and honor, what a history might have been his! But while the pen of inspiration records his virtues, it also bears faithful witness to his downfall."<sup>4</sup>

"Man cannot show greater weakness than by allowing men to ascribe to him the honor for gifts that are Heaven-bestowed. The true Christian will make God first and last and best in everything."<sup>5</sup>

"By his own bitter experience, Solomon learned the emptiness of a life that seeks in earthly things its highest good."<sup>6</sup>

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 55

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 60

3. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

# In the Eyes of the Wise?

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 2:10, 11

The eyes are one of the most important organs of the human body, for they help us see the world around us. "The ability to see consists of two parts: the ability to focus sharply (visual acuity) and the ability to see things without looking at them directly (peripheral vision)."<sup>1</sup> A person having good visual acuity has 20/20 vision. The normal visual field of peripheral vision should extend beyond 180 degrees. Failure of the eyes to function well in either of these aspects would constitute blindness.

Solomon may not have had a literal eye problem. However, he was experiencing spiritual blindness during the height of his reign as king of Israel. During that time, he was considered the man who had everything. Most of all, he had God's favor (1 Kings 3:11–14).

Despite all this, Solomon's eyes wandered away from God. At one point, he failed to focus on God entirely, thereby losing his ability to see the pitfalls of temptations—a blindness which led to his destruction.

A person who had nothing to ask for, Solomon still wanted to find out what was good for men to do under heaven. At first, he tried pleasure. He spearheaded great projects. "He built the temple of God, the finest building in the world of that day. Almost 200,000 men labored for seven years to complete it."<sup>2</sup> Solomon amassed wealth and servants, herds and flocks. He also had a harem of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines! Yet none of it satisfied him.

**Solomon's eyes wandered  
away from God.**

He considered wisdom, madness, and folly. Wisdom exceeded folly; it did not matter, since both the wise and the fool are headed six feet under ground. Solomon then considered toil. Ironical as it seems, everything his hands were able to accomplish, was left to his successor who did not work at all for any of it. His son, Rehoboam, who succeeded him (1 Kings 12), was often foolish in his decisions.

Looking back during the twilight of his years, Solomon realized that everything was meaningless (Eccles. 1:2), a mere chasing after the wind (2:11). However, he was not being pessimistic. Rather, he was admonishing us to enjoy what God gives us, for a life apart from God is an endless search in the quest for nothing.

1. *Reader's Digest Medical Dictionary* (Reader's Digest Asia Ltd., 1971), p. 515.

2. *The Devotional Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1987), p. 283.

# Of Searching Gold and Searching God

## HOW-TO

Matt. 6:19–21

They said he had everything. But he doesn't even brag about it. His countenance is peaceful and contented. I decide I must talk to him. After a brief introduction, I begin to interview him.

"Sir, I've heard so much about you. Your properties are well-numbered; and your accomplishments are fascinating. As a youth, I have so many dreams, and I wonder what I need to do to make my life worthwhile."

He tilts his head up. Silence hangs in the air. Then, suddenly, he begins to talk.

"I understand that there's so much you want to acquire and accomplish. So I want you to learn from my mistakes. In order for you to do so, you must remember the following:

**"1. Do not crave material possessions.** They amount to nothing. I received everything I wanted; but none of it ever made me happy. It all filled my eyes with beauty, while leaving my heart empty.

**There's no answer to life  
and all its problems aside  
from God.**

**"2. Ambition and efforts to advance in life are valueless.** It's not wrong to engage in intellectual advancement, or to reach for your dreams. But they, too, will never satisfy you. I believe it's better to be wise than remain a fool. The wise man has direction, while a fool stumbles. However, in death, both the learned and the unlearned are the same."

At this point, my curiosity changed to confusion. "Pardon me, sir," I mumbled. "I just don't understand. What then, does a person gain from all his labors and accomplishments?"

"I'm afraid, my child, that the answer is nothing."

"So how can life be meaningful?" I demanded.

"I wish I could offer you a sampler of worthwhile things to do under the sun to make your life meaningful. But my child, I know of only one. That is to search God. In reality, there's no answer to life and all its problems aside from Him. It's only when people grow in divine wisdom, and order their lives in harmony with God's will, that they find the true end of existence.<sup>1</sup> It's only when they align themselves with God's will that they find meaning in everything they do, whether great or small."<sup>2</sup>

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1071; adapted.

2. *Ibid.*

# In Pursuit of Happiness

## OPINION

Eccles. 2:9–11

Knowingly or unknowingly, all of us are engaged in the quest for true happiness. We all are searching for the secret to finding delight anytime, anywhere, and under any circumstances. Through the ages, people have employed various ways to find enjoyment and delight in life. Likewise, King Solomon lived in the pursuit of happiness. He was rich beyond measure and endowed with wisdom. He was influential and acquired everything his heart desired; but still, he was empty inside. However, as we learned from this week's lesson, no possession, no relationship will continually bring contentment and delight.

King Solomon indulged himself in pleasure and laughter, great works, fame, and possessions—servants, herds and flocks, silver and gold, even concubines. But all of it left him frustrated, empty, and hating life. He concludes, "All was vanity and vexation of spirit" (verse 11).

Have you ever lived by the motto "If it makes you happy, do it"? But then, when all was said and done, you still felt empty and unfulfilled? Have you ever asked yourself why? Because the happiness this world offers is transitory. Rey Stedman writes, "Isn't it strange that the more you run after life, panting after every pleasure, the less you find, but the more you take life as a gift from God's hand, responding in thankful gratitude for the delight of the moment, the more that seems to come to you?"<sup>1</sup>

**"No thing, no possession,  
no relationship will endure  
to continually bring contentment and delight."**

We must acknowledge God. We must see that all we are and have comes from His hand—even the heart to enjoy what He gives us. "There is nothing in possessions, in material goods, in money, there is nothing in man himself that can enable him to keep enjoying the things he does."<sup>2</sup>

Life apart from God is futile and meaningless; but put God in the center of your life, and you will find peace, joy, and contentment even in the simplest things.

1. Rey C. Stedman, "Life in the Fast Lane," <<http://www.sermoncentral.com>>.

2. Ibid.



# Like Cotton Candy

## EXPLORATION

Ecclesiastes 2

## CONCLUDE

When Jesus asked, “‘For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?’ ” (Mark 8:36, NRSV), He possibly had the story of Solomon in mind. Actually, the wise man himself asked a similar question when he wrote, “What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?” (Eccles. 1:3, NRSV). The answer to both wise men’s questions is “Nothing!” Success without God is like cotton candy. Once in the mouth it melts away. “Who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him?” (Eccles. 2:25, NLT).

## CONSIDER

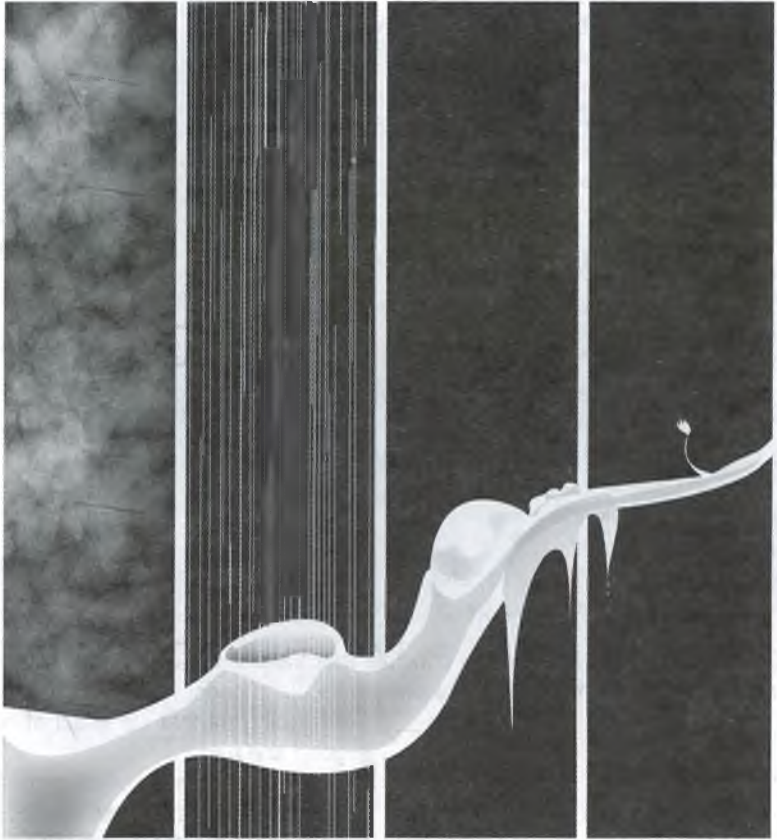
- Calculating the immensity of Solomon’s wealth described in 1 Kings 10:14, 15 in today’s monetary terms.
- Interviewing six to eight people to discover their attitudes toward their work. How many find satisfaction in their work? Does being a Christian or a non-Christian make any difference?
- Reflecting on your use of material things. For one week, keep a journal in which you note how many of your things you use in direct service for God or others. Also note any indirect use.
- Reading where Ellen G. White says it is the cup full to the brim (the life full of prosperity) that is hardest to carry (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 14, 1905, “Lessons From the Life of Solomon,” No. 13, “The Perils of Prosperity”). Then try walking across a room with a full cup of water without spilling any. What did this teach you about the difficulties of living a prosperous life?
- Creating a collage on the theme of *meaningless*. Cut out pictures from publications that depict the things Solomon says are *meaningless* in Ecclesiastes 2.

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 51–74.

David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*.

# Of **Being** and **Time**



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**"I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work" (Eccles. 3:17).**

# The Seasons of Life

## INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 3:1-8

### To Everything There Is a Season

"To everything there is a season, and  
a time to every purpose under the heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck  
up that which is planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a  
time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to cast away stones, and a  
time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to  
refrain from embracing;  
A time to get, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
A time to rend, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence,  
and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time of war, and a time of peace" (Eccles. 3:1-8).

Ecclesiastes 3 focuses on the principle that there is an appropriate time for everything. It speaks of those things which take place under heaven. Solomon is reminding us that life is full of both good and bad.

**Life is full of both good and  
bad.**

Whatever we do or have on this earth is temporary. So as long as our goal is living a life dedicated to the service of God, we have the right to

enjoy it. It is God's gift to us. One day God, will restore this earth to the way He originally created it. Then justice will reign; and we will understand why He allowed us to go through trying times. As we study this week's lesson, let us pray that the Lord will open our hearts and minds to a better understanding of how to accept the reality of life as outlined in Ecclesiastes 3.

# Learning From the Old

## EVIDENCE

Matt. 28:18–20

Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon demonstrates the vanity of all things. Ecclesiastes 1:2 warns, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” Another theme of Ecclesiastes is that life is full of disappointments.

Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes in his old age. Hence, the book is retrospective. After a life of mixed feelings, Solomon has realized that to everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven (Eccles. 3:1). This chapter tells us that whatever we work for profits us nothing. It is all vanity. In the end, we shall all die like the beasts of the field.

Our lives must reflect the character of Jesus Christ for after death, comes the judgment; and God shall judge both the wicked and the righteous. We may wonder why Solomon used symbols of life in verses 2–8. It is because God wants to tell us there is a time for everything under the sun, even a time for judgment. There is a time for every purpose. But do we allow God to direct us toward that purpose? Solomon himself did not consistently allow God to direct him. Because of that, he wanted us to understand that God’s direction in our lives is the key to understanding life itself. Are we always silent when the time comes to spread God’s Word? Or do we only speak out occasionally?

**God’s direction in our lives  
is the key to understanding  
life itself.**

In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus commissions all believers to work diligently for Him. Hence, we must avail ourselves of His guidance. One of the principles behind the United States’ concept of Manifest Destiny in the early 1900s is that weaker nations gravitate toward stronger and greater nations. Applied to Christianity, we can say that we are the weaker source, and as such, must gravitate toward God, who is the strongest and greatest Source of all. It is not worth anything for a person to gain the whole world, but lose his or her soul. It is important that we live Christlike lives. As we live life to its fullest—awaiting Christ’s second coming—others should see Him in us.

After living on earth for so long as the wisest man, Solomon finally came to grips with the fact that for everything there is a season. Therefore, we should try not to be disappointed when we see certain things happening. Let us instead trust God to carry out His will. He promises always to be there for us no matter what. What should we fear?

Monday  
January 22

# Our Preference — Time or Eternity?

## LOGOS

Job 7:1; Ecclesiastes 3; Heb. 11:24, 25; 12:11

### Everything Has Its Time Limits (Eccles. 3:1–9)

King Solomon seriously reflected on the way he occupied his time. In doing so, he discovered his life was full of good and bad things. Did God allow all these things to happen? He certainly did, inasmuch as He has given us the freedom of choice to spend time loving or hating, making war or peace, and other activities cited in verses 2–8.

We do not know how much time Solomon actually spent looking back; but it was sufficient for him to question the true benefits of the course he had adopted over the years (verse 9). This question implies a negative response. “Why should people toil to improve their status in life when they are thwarted at every turn?” They must learn that the One who places tests along life’s pathway is a loving Father, disciplining His earthsome children for their eternal good (Heb. 12:11).

**God has given us the freedom to choose our own way of life.**

Few of us will have the rich experience Solomon had. So in His mercy, the Lord has given us the privilege of reading Solomon’s “diary” so we can learn from his wisdom about making the right choices while we have “time.”

### The “Things” We Do With Our Time Determine Our Destiny (Eccles. 3:10–15)

Whether living in a palace with monumental privileges or in an environment of lawlessness and poverty, our general experience as humans will be the same. The Lord knew that our earthly environment would influence our choices. Yet He has given us the freedom to choose our own way of life. God has placed in our thoughts—by design—the realization that the material world does not constitute the sum of our existence. He has planted in us the sense that there is eternal life where humans can love Him other than in an environment Jesus described as “Paradise” (see Luke 23:43).

It is God’s plan that we should partake of, in moderation, everything He has provided for us in this life. He wants us to be happy; but He also has given us sufficient insight to know that there is much more available to us beyond this life that we do not now know about and which we can enjoy for eternity! (1 Cor. 2:9).



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## A Time for Judgment (Eccles. 3:16, 17)

Solomon was not seeing anything different from what we experience today. In the very courts set up to administer justice, bribery and corruption often rule. In Jamaica, for example, a debate is being pursued as to whether a Caribbean Court of Justice should replace the Privy Council in the United Kingdom as the final court of appeal. Many who oppose the move cite political interference and influence from outside forces on the judiciary as compelling reasons why the court would not have the confidence of the people. Their experience may be similar to Solomon's. Even in the sacred halls of the church, where only righteousness should prevail, Satan often is allowed to influence proceedings and final decisions.

Like Solomon, we should remember that unjust deeds will not continue forever, because God has set a "time" for judgment, whether it be for good or evil.

In light of this all-encompassing scrutiny by the all-knowing God, it would be a wise decision to let God's Word be our guide in every thought and action.

## What Does God Know About Our Future? (Eccles. 3:18–22)

What does it mean for God to "manifest" us in the context of Solomon's thoughts? (verse 18). Solomon is expressing a desire of God to test us as a disciplinary measure. For what purpose, though? In order to cleanse and purify us (Job 5:17; 23:10).

But because God does not force His designs on anyone, this testing is only open to those who recognize and acknowledge their sinful condition. Solomon, however, gives a strong caution in Ecclesiastes 3:19: "For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity" (NRSV; also see Ps. 49:12).

In some religious circles "life after death" is expected regardless of how one has lived. Solomon, however, did not share that view. He concluded that the outlook of those not grounded in eternal things is to be satisfied only with what this life has to offer, and that by our choices, we satisfy ourselves with the mundane rather than expand our horizons to enjoy the eternal things God has prepared (1 Cor. 15:16–22).

## REACT

1. What does Hebrews 12:11 tell us about the benefits of discipline? What do you think the "fruit of righteousness" includes?
2. Our early childhood days were sometimes unpleasant; and the good times we had then can be clouded by memories of scolding, restraints, limitations, and discipline. But as we think about these things now, why do you suppose our parents and teachers took the time to correct us when we were wrong?
3. Why do we resist heaven? Is it because we long for life as it is to continue? Or are we afraid of heaven? (Adapted from Dave Dravesky.)

## Why Murmur and Complain?

### TESTIMONY

Ps. 37:12–14; 1 Pet. 4:1, 2

In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon discusses two things: (1) a time for various human activities, and (2) a time for divine judgment. Bad things always will happen; but when we allow God to be in control, we can trust Him with our lives and to make the best of dreadful situations.

“Multitudes who are wasting their time in trifles, idle regrets, and unprofitable murmurings might have all together a different experience if they would appreciate the light that God has given them.”\* If we would allow the light God has given us in Ecclesiastes 3 to be a part of our lives, we would have a much different experience. The challenges we face may be ones of total injustice, causing us to wonder how God could allow such things to happen when He says He loves us. God, however, will one day judge both the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every purpose and work (Eccles. 3:16, 17). Worldly wisdom might see injustice and try to correct the problem but have no success. Because we live in a fallen world,

injustice will be, as it has forever been, a reality. Our solution is to put the matter in the hands of God. He is the final Judge. In the same way that there is a time and season for everything under heaven, there is also a time when God shall judge all people.

**We can trust God with our lives and to make the best of dreadful situations.**

The books eventually do get balanced. Evil is eventually judged, righteousness eventually rewarded, and Jesus will come on time and in time to rescue us from all these atrocities.

Let us instead of murmuring and complaining, eat, drink, and enjoy the good of our labor while living our lives to God's service. This is God's gift to us. We may not be able to fathom what God does from beginning to end, but He has set eternity in our hearts.

### REACT

1. What would you say to people who are against the fact that things will not always go the way we want them to go?

2. Discuss: A friend is facing many problems. Things are not going the way they should. Is this friend murmuring and complaining by sharing these problems with you?

\* *Messages to Young People*, p. 202.

# What Time Is It?

## HOW-TO

Eccles. 3:1, 22; Matt. 26:41

How do we know what to do at a particular time; and how do we know it is the right time to do it? For example, as a struggling Christian in this demanding world, I find that keeping the Sabbath is difficult to keep. Before becoming a Seventh-day Adventist, I frequently found myself taking part in secular activities on the Sabbath. But there "is a place of immunity for the believer, a spiritual fortress in Christ that protects us from the attacks of the devil. For those who abide in this stronghold of God, the onslaught of the wicked one does not touch them."\* We cannot keep the Sabbath or any of God's other commandments on our own. We continually need to ask the Lord to guide us every step of the way.

Here are some important steps to keep in mind while striving to focus on what is important—your salvation.

**1. Be willing (Ps. 51:12).** First have the desire and willingness to serve God with all that He has placed within you.

**2. Relinquish all fear (Gen. 26:24).** God assured Isaac that He was with him and would bless him no matter what trial he would go through. Just as God did for Isaac, so will He do for us, if we keep our trust in Him.

**We cannot keep any of  
God's other command-  
ments on our own.**

**3. Decide clearly to walk with the Lord. (Ps. 40:8).** Let Psalm 40:8 be your desire. Once you decide to follow Christ, you will be less likely to return to your old ways.

**4. Pray (Mark 11:24).** We need to pray that God will help us to stay focused and that we may not yield to temptation.

**5. Be victorious (Ps. 60:12).** Only through continuous trust and faith in God will we truly be victorious. No temptation that Satan places before us will cause us to stumble. We will no longer ask the question, What time is it?

## REACT

1. What is the most difficult temptation you have found yourself in? How did you overcome it?

2. Is it more important to focus on the problems in which we find ourselves or on the solutions? Give reasons for your answer.

\*Francis Frangipane, *The Stronghold of God*, p. 19.

# Our Timing Is Not God's Timing

## OPINION

Eccles. 3:1–32; Isa. 40:30, 31

It's all good and well to study Ecclesiastes 3 and agree with the author about its content; but once we start living the content we will get a better understanding of what King Solomon is saying. Some of us will not readily accept that there is a time to be born and a time to die, until it reaches home.

To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the sun. Is there a time we should wait on the Lord, so we might mount up as eagles? I'm not what you might call a "born Adventist." However, God saved me according to His timing. Often throughout my journey as a Christian, I've felt like giving up because things were not working out according to my schedule. As I write this, I realize I haven't been waiting on the Lord in many aspects of my life. I believe with all my heart and soul that timing is everything to God. And whatever it is we're anxious about, I believe He is saying that "all things work together for good to those who

**All the time is the best time  
for us to wait on the Lord.**

love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NKJV).

All we must do on this journey is allow God, the One who paid the ultimate price for us on the cross, to guide us. My family is split in every direction you can possibly think of. One of my greatest desires has been to see us coming together and supporting each other. But God will not bring my family together unless I am ready. He will not allow me to get a degree in psychology unless I am ready. All I need to do is ask Him for my timing to be in sync with His. For until He comes some things will remain unclear to us. We must always remember that His timing is best.

After experiencing all the vanities this world offers Solomon came to an understanding that to everything there is a time and a season. Let us not wait until we are old before we accept God's timing as best. Now is the time for us to live, move, and breathe within His time frame. Finally, let us remember that all the time is the best time for us to wait on the Lord.

## REACT

1. What can Solomon's life teach young adults today?
2. Why is it that so often our timing is not God's timing? Why is it so important to follow God's timing?

# It's About Time

## EXPLORATION

Eccles. 3:1

## CONCLUDE

As Solomon wisely pointed out, there is a time for everything. This is good news for us because it means that there is a time for us to struggle with life on earth and there will be a time for us to live victoriously in Paradise. While there is a flipside to every circumstance in life— birth/death, laugh/cry, gain/lose—the important thing is that God is on *both sides*. He's with us in the laughing *and* the crying. He will escort us from the moments He's shared with us on earth to an eternity in heaven.

## CONSIDER

- Journaling as Solomon did and recording both the good and the bad and how God is at work in your life through it all.
- Acting out Ecclesiastes 3:6 by cleaning your house, closet, or garage, and blessing others with things you no longer need.
- Putting Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 to music and teaching your composition to a child.
- Making a scrapbook of photographs showing the progression of time through your family by using photographs of ancestors as far back as you can to the present time with pictures of the newest additions to your family tree.
- Collecting several items in nature such as leaves, rocks, twigs, or flowers, and observe how they change or do not change as time goes on. Record your observations.
- Interviewing elderly family or friends (or patients in a nursing home) about their general observations about life. Compare these observations with Solomon's.

## CONNECT

Philippians 1–4.

Tamyra Horst, *Time for All That's Important*. Compare: *The Great Controversy*, chaps. 32 and 42.



# More Life under the sun



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**“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).**

# "Two Are Better Than One"

## INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 4:9–12

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

"For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.

"Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?

"And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A three-fold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccles. 4:9–12, NRSV).

Have you ever been lonely? I mean lonely with people around you?

It was June 2003, when I thought my world was falling apart. I felt lonely, rejected, angry, and confused. But now when I look back, I think of how foolish I was for feeling like that. Now I can't thank God enough for that painful situation. I had no one to turn to except Him. Only He could understand my pain and answer all the questions I had.

I want you to know what my God did! He gave me two angels to carry my burden—my sister (Thenjiswa) and my sister-in-law (Nomonde). I

really felt my burden lighten once I shared it with them. I was so hurt, I couldn't even share my pain with "the upper room Bible study group." I regret that now. But I told them later, when everything was over.

When I was still in that miserable situation, I told myself there would be something for me to learn from it. I also encouraged myself not to let the situation make me a victim, that God would bring me through. And that is exactly what He did!

God sends His angels to help us. Sometimes these "angels" are the people around us. Sometimes the angels are strangers. You also can be an angel to someone who is carrying a burden. This person does not have to be someone you know. Even the stranger you meet on the daily rounds of life needs you to lift his or her burden. Even a smile can make a heart lighter.

We can stand alone when we choose to, but we can *never* stand alone when we have God. He turns one into two. Alone,  $0 + 1 = 1$ ; but with God,  $1 + 1 = 2$ . Together with God, we stand.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

**You can be an angel to  
someone who is carrying a  
burden.**

# Human Beings— God’s Image or Human Distortion?

## LOGOS Ecclesiastes 4

What does it mean to be a human being? That is what we are. Thinking about who we are as humans provides direction and meaning to life.

Solomon continues his reflections on the meaning of human life in Ecclesiastes 4, thereby giving us perspective on being meaningful human beings.

Four times in Ecclesiastes 4, Solomon writes, “And I saw . . .” When prophets write, “And I saw,” they are telling us that they are going to reveal a divine vision. When Solomon writes, “And I saw” (“And look,” NKJV), he is going to provide us with observations on human life.

Solomon observes four human behaviors that distort God’s original purpose for humans as outlined in Genesis 1 and 2. In each of these four observations of a distorted life, Solomon observes a “better” perspective.

**Solomon observes four human behaviors that distort God’s original purpose for humans.**

To grasp the message of Ecclesiastes 4, we must ask three key questions:

1. What is Solomon’s observation?
2. How is the observation a distortion of the original purpose for humans as set forth in Genesis 1 and 2?
3. What is Solomon’s better perspective?

Now fill in the chart below.

Verses in Ecclesiastes 4	Solomon’s observations of humans	God’s original purpose for humans	Observations as a distortion of the ideal	Solomon’s better alternative
Verses 1–3		Genesis 1:28		
Verses 4–6		Genesis 2:15		
Verses 7–12		Genesis 2:18		
Verses 13–16		Genesis 1:27, 28		

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My perspective on Solomon's observations and conclusions are listed below, but your perspective is even more important.

First, oppression leads to depression. God never intended for us to take advantage of others. But after sin, life turned unfair and difficult. With God's help, however, we can adopt Paul's attitude in Philippians 4:11–13.

Second, greed is not the only motivation to work. Work gives purpose. Having something to do that matches your skills and desires gives contentment. Contentment is a great gift (1 Tim. 6:6).

Third, life's meaning comes mainly from relationships—not things. However, good relationships take time and effort. Things do not talk back. However, dialogue is essential to maintain a link with another. Our satisfaction in life depends on what we choose to invest in—relationships or things (1 Thess. 5:12–15).

Fourth, leadership tends to be generational. What captures the heart and inspires one generation can be anathema to the next. If we lead, we need to remember it is only for a time. Others have done what they could before, and others will do what they can after. We can only do what we are appointed to do; but we must always do our best (John 3:27).

The choices we make based on such perspectives give meaning to being human.

## **REACT**

1. Which of Solomon's four observations bothers you the most? Why?
2. Which of the four observations gives you the most meaning in life now? Why?
3. Which of the four observations challenges you the most? Why?
4. What do you think are the best ways to deal with oppression, greed, loneliness, and succession, and why?
5. How will you make work and relationships more meaningful this week?

## Community: The Threefold Cord

### TESTIMONY

Eccles. 4:9–12

Matthew 18:19, 20 presents the utmost importance of community: Where two or three are gathered in His name, He is with them. It is part of our Christian duty to commune with one another. This threefold cord must be made with the fibers of unselfish love.

“Love is the silken cord that binds hearts together. When Christ takes possession of our hearts we shall no longer make the narrow circle of self the center of our thoughts and of our attentions.”<sup>1</sup>

“What a wonderful reverence for human life Jesus expressed in His life mission! He stood not among the people as a king, demanding attention, reverence, service, but as one who wished to serve, to uplift humanity. He said He had not come to be ministered unto but to minister. . . . Wherever Christ saw a human being, He saw one who needed human sympathy. Many of us are willing to serve particular ones—those whom we honor—but the very ones to whom Christ would make us a blessing if we were not so cold-hearted, so unkind and selfish, we pass by as unworthy of our notice. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

**“Love is the silken cord that  
binds hearts together.”**

“‘Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.’ Eph. 5:1, 2. This is the height of the love we are required to reach. And the texture of this love is not tainted with selfishness.”<sup>3</sup>

### REACT

1. How do you see that God has communed with you?
2. Do you show a true sense of community with those outside of church friends? With other church members? With complete strangers? If not, why not? And what can you change about yourself and your life so that you can?

1. *Our High Calling*, p. 164.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

3. *Ibid.*



# Make Poverty History

## EVIDENCE

Deut. 24:15

In 2005, at a time when poverty killed 50,000 people every day, the **MAKE-POVERTYHISTORY** Campaign demanded a policy change in the unjust trade rules that lock people in poverty. This change would fully cancel, through fair and transparent means, the debts owed by the poorest countries and deliver more and better aid to people in developing countries. These demands were made in the United Kingdom at the annual G8 meeting of the world's most powerful leaders. A few days before the summit, the G8 Finance Ministers announced that 18 poor countries would receive an immediate \$1.5 billion annually for debt relief.

Many poor countries owe huge debts to rich countries and institutions. This means that many poor governments spend a large proportion of their tax revenues on paying back their Western creditors, rather than meeting the basic needs of their people. World leaders, under pressure from Jubilee 2000 campaigners, committed to canceling \$111 billion of poor country debts under the World Bank and IMF's Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative. But to date, only \$46 billion has actually been cancelled.

In the article "Aid to Poor Countries" in the June 25–July 1, 2005, issue of *The Economist*, George W. Bush promised the MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) \$5 billion. So far, however, only \$400,000 has been disbursed. Reasons abound for this delay, while thousands go to an early grave.

Moses, like Jesus, declared that "the poor shall never cease out of the land," (Matt. 26:11; Exod. 15:11). So Moses commanded the Israelites, to "open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land" (Deut. 15:11, NRSV).

"Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7, NRSV) is appropriate in the context of relieving the poverty so rampant in our world today.

**" 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.' "**

## REACT

1. How do you contribute to the poverty of the poor and the oppressed?
2. What positive action will you take to become a "comforter" to the oppressed in your part of the world?

For more information and ideas on how you can help fight poverty, visit the following Web sites: <<http://www.g8.gov.uk>>; <<http://www.makepovertyhistory.org>>.

*Trevor Harewood, London, England*

# Catching a Personal Vision of God

## HOW-TO

Exod. 24:3; 33:11, 17, 18

Stand in a room and look at just one person for 30 seconds. Then write down everything you saw in the room, even though you were looking at just the one person. Are you disturbed that you missed some obvious things? For example: What were they doing; or what were they eating? It's not really that important. But how important would it be if it meant the difference between someone living or dying?

As we study the lives of the people in the Bible, we notice that all of them looked at God for certain amounts of time. From supposed drunkards and idol worshipping kings (Dan. 5:5) to entire nations (Lam. 1:1–11), we see people receiving visions of God.

In this week's Introduction, we saw how with God, each one of us individually becomes two. But how much time do you spend looking at God? And can you be sure the vision you have of Him is accurate? Here are a few pointers to help us catch the vision:

### Catch the vision!

**1. Look for God.** History proves

His existence! Read Genesis 1:1 and Daniel 2:11

**2. Spend a little time** with them,

and most boy/girlfriends will be just

like the cars in the movies—gone in 60 seconds. Give God more than 60 seconds, and you will see the benefits. Get to know Him by praying and asking Him questions. Put as much effort into it as you would trying to get the attention of someone you really like (2 Tim. 2:15).

**3. Trust Him.** When you spend time with people, you generally get to know, understand, and trust them. When you spend time with God, you will soon learn that He will not lie or hide the truth. He will even warn you of impending disaster. What you do with the information He gives you is up to you (Prov. 3:5).

**4. Don't rely on a person . . .** unless that person points you to God. Just remember, God uses people to enable His cause. Expose yourself to points 1–3, and you will receive spiritual discernment to help you determine if someone is on the Lord's side (Jer. 17:5).

# Bind Us Together

## OPINION

Eccles. 4:7–12

A man goes to a well for water. He fills his container, and then begins the long journey up the hill to home. At the summit, he finds his container empty, and there is a damp trail behind him. However, the cistern attached to his home is still partially full. What would you expect him to do? What would you say if he turned around and repeated his performance?

This is the absurdity that the preacher speaks of in Ecclesiastes 4:7–12.

Before you scoff at the shortcomings of the lonely man, assess whether you are sacrificing what is worthwhile in life for a wealth that cannot refund the debt incurred in its making.

Are you spending money on and laboring for that which cannot satisfy (Isa. 55:2)?

If our duty is to keep God's commandments (Eccles. 12:13; Matt. 22:37–40), then should not they be our measure of how profitable a venture is?

The preacher also looks at the effect of lending aid to one another. A major problem of vain people is that they are alone in all aspects of life. Although God is all we really need, the good things He has created, such as relationships and the ability to work together, are welcome bonuses.

The load that would easily break several loose strands is easily held by a twisted chord. Yet too often we are reluctant to come together as the support network our Lord describes (Matt. 18:20; Gal. 6:2).

A traveling companion on life's journey can offer

1. a helping hand with the work to be done;
2. an encouraging hand to lift the falling;
3. a comforting hand in harsh times; and
4. a supporting hand to withstand conflict.

It is generally accepted that "many hands make light work," and that "two heads are better than one." Those who have been bound together in loving service to one another will always remember the blessings received. Today, God invites you to receive such blessings.

**A major problem of vain people is that they are alone in all aspects of life.**

## EXPLORATION

John 10:10

## CONCLUDE

Solomon reminds us of what we all know from experience—human existence is tarnished by loneliness, injustice, discouragement, meaninglessness, and personal burdens. What results is a yearning for something better. People seek this fulfillment in many ways, sometimes to the detriment of others or at great cost to themselves. However, it is intimacy with God that shapes the values, priorities, character, and motivation required for the kind of life we not only seek, but which God wants to bestow. Read John 10:10. It is this relationship that can transform our existence. Real fulfillment is found as we enter the community of those transformed by this reality.

## CONSIDER

- Writing a poem related to an aspect of this week's lesson that you connected with.
- Collecting quotes, proverbs, and scriptures that define a meaningful life.
- Researching connections between spirituality, and life satisfaction.
- Writing and performing a drama, skit, or dance that explores the contrast between the distortion and fulfillment of God's purposes and meaning in a person's life.
- Discussing with a group of friends what is needed for your lives to be more meaningful. Share what gives each of you a sense of freedom, belonging, purpose, and connectedness. Support, encourage, and pray for those who are experiencing loneliness, injustice, discouragement, meaninglessness, and personal burdens.
- Observing people in a busy place. Collect data about the number and characteristics of people who appear to have found fulfillment in their social position, vocation, relationships, and accomplishments.

## CONNECT

Read Ephesians 4–6 and Colossians 3; 4 for a Christian perspective on freedom, belonging, purpose, connectedness, and significance.

Take the journey at <<http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/exodus>> to experience intimacy with God.

Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*.

# Rich man, Poor man



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**"The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor  
the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity"  
(Eccles. 5:10, NRSV).**



## Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?

### INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 5:10; Mark 10:17-22

More than ten million children will likely die from hunger-related diseases this year. Nearly half the world's population lives on less than two dollars per day. As technology, science, and human understanding increase, the chasm between wealth and poverty has grown pathetically disproportionate. But who can stop the seemingly interminable misery caused by poverty?

Surely there isn't a lack of resources. Indeed, it would have taken less than 1 percent of what the world spent every year on weapons to allow all of the world's children to attend school by the year 2000.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus told the rich young ruler to give all he had to the poor. But he turned and walked away.

**More than ten million children will likely die from hunger-related diseases this year.**

The gross domestic product of the poorest 48 nations is less than the wealth of the 3 richest people in the world.<sup>2</sup> Twenty percent of the population in the world's wealthiest countries consumes 86 percent of the world's goods.<sup>3</sup> What can be done differently this year that will change these statistics?

The rich young ruler could not give up any of his wealth. "The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth with gain. This is also vanity" (Eccles. 5:10, NRSV).

According to the United Nations, \$13 billion a year would help meet the health and nutritional needs of the poor around the world.<sup>4</sup> If nothing is done, more than ten million children will likely die from hunger-related diseases this year.

"There is a grievous ill that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owners to their hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture: they have nothing in their hands" (Eccles 5:13, 14, NRSV).

1. *New Internationalist*, "State of the World," issue 287, Feb. 1997.

2. Ignacio Ramonet, "The Politics of Hunger," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 1998.

3. 1998 Human Development Report, United Nations Development Programme.

4. The Hunger Project, <<http://www.thp.org>>.

# Sacrifice

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 5:1-7

It is disappointing when someone does not come through for you. At such times, we wonder, *Hey, I kept my end of the bargain. What about yours? You don't respect me enough. You don't value me enough.* Then you feel betrayed and angry with the person who betrayed you.

If this is the way promises work with people, why do we make promises to an Almighty God? Are we that desperate? But there's nothing foolish about it. Most times we make promises to God when we are down and we have no way out. God wants us to come to Him, but not to make empty promises to Him. It's so easy to say, "I promise," but not so easy to follow through. Promises affect your reputation as an honest person. They affect how much people can rely on you, and they affect how much they value you at one level or another.

God loves us and will forgive us. After all, He created us. How history would have been different if God had said to Abraham, "See the stars? That is how many children you will have. Oh, no, just kidding! It's too difficult for me to do right now. Anyway, I have an appointment to burn Sodom and Gomorrah." We wouldn't even be here if God were like that, and our basis for having followed Him would surely be different. When God makes promises, He keeps them.

**Your promises affect your  
reputation as an honest  
person.**

There were a few people who kept their promises to God; and for one particular person it was painful. He promised if he would make it home safely from a war, he would sacrifice the first thing that came out of his door to greet him. That first thing was his daughter, and though he was sad, he did sacrifice her (Judg. 11:30-40). This was a rash promise, one that God did not ask for or condone. But the man was willing to keep his word (questionable though it was).

We should treat each promise to God as if it were the same as sacrificing the one thing we love the most. After all, isn't that what God did when He sent Jesus to give us eternal life?

## REACT

1. Is being baptized into God's family a vow that has to be kept throughout the week? Explain your answer as if you were talking to someone who is thinking about being baptized.
2. If you have more, do you really have to give more? Explain your answer.
3. Explain why God does not give only because we make a vow to Him.

Monday  
February 5

## Life: As I Remember It

### LOGOS

Ecclesiastes 5

#### Worship

What does it mean to be in the presence of God? Aren't we always in His presence? And if so, shouldn't our choices reflect a respect for Him?

Worshipping God in church isn't about making ourselves feel good spiritually or otherwise. Rather, it's about meeting God in the communion of believers. Our worship must not be just empty words, but words that flow into actions that glorify the God we worship. Not just in church, but throughout the week we are in the presence of God, and our lives must reflect that.

#### Vows

In reflecting the presence of God, we must remember that our prayerfully considered vows to Him are sacred. God expects us to prayerfully—using the intelligence He blessed us with—think before we make a vow. Stupid vows are just that—stupid.

**Don't compare your life with others. You are unique and your life is valuable in its own right.**

Take Jephthah vowing to sacrifice the first thing that came out of his door when he returned home from war. God abhorred human sacrifices (Judg. 11:30–40). In fact, God didn't want any sacrifice. This was all

Jephthah's idea. Yet he stuck by his honor (more than God's commandment) and fulfilled his vow. If he had gone to God in prayer, he would've realized his error and God's goodness.

It isn't so much keeping the vow that is important as much as thinking and praying about the vow you are considering. God provided you with intelligence—use it!

#### Words

Let your words be meaningful. Preaching, praying, participating in church is all about the economy of words—more meaning, fewer words. Furthermore, your words are an offering to God, not a grandstand for the congregation. Focus on Him, and make your offering appropriate. (Think of the widow with two mites in Mark 12:42–44.)

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As with your vows, think before you speak. Dedicate your mind and mouth to God, allowing His Spirit to work with you.

## Corruption

The writer of Ecclesiastes, though wise, seems to view the world through the eyes of a cynic. It's almost like he's saying, "Corruption happens. Deal with it. There will be people, in and out of the church, who will be corrupt. There is nothing you can do to change that. Fighting corruption is a losing battle."

This isn't the word of the wise, but an observation of a man who probably tried all his life to do something to change a sinful world (and probably got caught up in it) and in his old age believed all he had done was futile. Think Bono, lead singer of U2, when he's 80 and wondering if all he did really made a difference.

We like to make generalized statements. But our good actions do make a difference. Corruption may not go away, but it does decrease because someone decided to do something about it.

Just because we feel like we're losing is no reason to give up the good fight. As Paul says, we must fight and keep the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). Goodness may not always prevail, but it does ease the suffering considerably. And though age may jade our memory, we must not give in to hopelessness or cynicism. Keep the faith and believe God does right the corrupt in His own way.

## Riches and Wealth

The cynicism of the preacher is reflected in Pink Floyd's "Money." However, Pink Floyd misquotes Scripture, for it isn't money that is the root of all evil but the *love* of money (1 Tim. 6:10). We choose to make money all-consuming. This is reflected time and again in popular culture. As Meja once sang, "It's all about the money."

Here the preacher does impart wisdom. There is nothing evil about money. It is the wrong decisions we make regarding it that corrupt us. If you are rich or wealthy, remember that God has blessed you, and it is up to you to be responsible for this blessing.

Good people sleep well regardless of how much or how little they have. It is because they are good that they are content with their portion in life. Don't compare your life with others. You are unique and your life is valuable in its own right.

However, we're all going to die. To be born, to live well, and to die—it is when we get to heaven that we are all equal in these areas. Till then, live in the knowledge that "stuff happens." But regardless, your worship must be reverent, your words meaningful, your vows just, your actions clean, and your finances good.

Keep the faith; and remember there is always a time, a season, a period for everything under the sun. And now is always the right time for goodness.

## Much Wealth? Much Worry?

### TESTIMONY

Eccles. 5:12

In a world so caught up with accumulating material wealth, it is refreshing to read Ecclesiastes 5:12. This verse reminds us that having many possessions brings much anxiety.

Jesus admonished the young ruler in Mark 10 for believing that by following the Ten Commandments he would be guaranteed eternal life. "Had the ruler been willing to obey Christ, great would have been the good that he might have done in following the Saviour's example. But he was not willing. The cost of eternal life seemed too great, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. The Saviour was not so much to him as his own name among men, or his possessions. To give up his earthly treasure, which was seen, for the heavenly treasure, which was unseen, was too great a risk."<sup>1</sup>

Too often we put our faith in what we own, believing our possessions will make us happy and keep us safe. But disaster affects not only those who have little, but also those who have much. Thus, the only way to ensure happiness and safety is to put our trust in God. "Houses and lands will be of no use to the saints in the time of trouble, for they will then have to flee before infuriated mobs, and at that time their possessions cannot be disposed of to advance the cause of present truth. I was shown that it is the will of God that the saints should cut loose from every encumbrance before the time of trouble comes, and make a covenant with God through sacrifice. If they have their property on the altar, and earnestly inquire of God for duty, He will teach them when to dispose of these things. Then they will be free in the time of trouble, and have no clogs to weigh them down."<sup>2</sup>

We should not infer from these statements that wealth is always bad or even sinful. "To whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God" (Eccles. 5:19, NRSV). Furthermore, "God does not condemn prudence and foresight in the use of the things of this life, but the feverish care, the undue anxiety, with respect to worldly things is not in accordance with His will."<sup>3</sup>

God does not wish for us to carry the burden of amassing "earthly treasure" in order to secure happiness and safety. All we have to do is trust in Him. Then He will provide for all our needs. Read Mark 10:29, 30.

1. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 12, 1905, "The Condition of Gaining Eternal Life."

2. *Councils on Stewardship*, pp. 59, 60.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 159.



# Have Thine Own Will?

## HOW-TO

Ecclesiastes 5

Many times, we try to exact our own will instead of God's. But how foolish is that?

How many decisions do we make in one day on our own, instead of asking God for guidance? How many times a day do we use His name in vain instead of for His glory? How often do we seek Him in prayer?

God, the Creator of the universe, knows all. And He is waiting for us to listen to what He has to say. He is waiting to tell us of all the glorious things He has in store for us. But like fools, we chatter away rather than listen to Him. And like fools, we value worldly thoughts rather than God's thoughts and our relationship with Him. We put anything and everything before Him. We spend our time with schedules, jobs, hobbies, TV, sports, work, our families, and even religion. Yes, even our families or our religion can be a distraction from God (Luke 9:57-62; 18:29, 30). Our focus must be on God alone.

Try the following to gain a better relationship with God and to lose sight of the things of this world.

**1. Talk with Him daily and often.** Whenever He comes to

mind, converse with Him and make Him a more familiar friend. Every moment spent thinking about the Lord brings you closer to Him. In order to get to know a spouse, friend, or a new member of the family, you have to spend time with them. The same is true with our Savior. To truly know Him, we must spend time with Him.

**2. Keep your word to God.** He does not let you down. So why not return the favor? Don't let your promises to Him go unfulfilled. When you tell Him you'll do something, do it! It's that simple. In everything you do, give it your best. Christ did everything perfectly and with a purpose. As Christians, we should do the same.

**3. Love Christ first and foremost.** Nothing should come before the Almighty. Think about it. Look at yourself in the third person and try to imagine little insignificant you putting the Creator of the universe second to everything in your life. Could anything be more absurd? The Creator of the universe puts us first. So what reason do we have for not putting Him first?

**Like fools, we chatter away rather than listen to God.**

## REACT

How can even our families and religion distract us from God?

## Wealth — Blessing or Curse?

### OPINION

Matt. 6:33

I used to work with someone who was quite wealthy. He built his business from the ground up, and after being in business over twenty years, he was quite successful. He owned two homes in addition to other real estate holdings, stocks and bonds, and other investments. I admired his success and the wonderful life I was sure he had. That is, until I found out he was staying at the office until one o'clock in the morning almost every day, including weekends. Now that I think about it, he may have slept more in the office than he slept at home. Sometimes I think about what drove him to work so hard. I think he was worried about not having enough money in retirement to maintain the lifestyle he and his wife had grown accustomed to. In Solomon's words, his abundance literally allowed him no sleep (Eccles. 5:12).

Clearly, Solomon's warnings in Ecclesiastes 5 about the perils of wealth still ring true today. This is as it should be. Being one of the richest kings in history makes him an expert on the subject.

**Solomon's warnings about  
the perils of wealth still ring  
true today.**

Solomon was led astray by his quest for wealth—as many are today. Our culture seems to hold the rich in higher esteem than any other group and the pursuit of wealth above any other pursuit.

But is Solomon really saying that wealth is entirely a bad thing, and that those who possess much are necessarily bad people? I don't think so. Instead, he is warning us against the "emptiness of a life that seeks in earthly things its *highest* good."\* God has told us to seek first His kingdom, after which all of these things will be added unto us (Matt. 6:33)—not the other way around. Indeed, the Lord has blessed many in the church today with great wealth. But to those people He also has given a solemn responsibility to accept those gifts with humility, and to be conscientious stewards of His blessings. Their allegiance belongs to Him, not to the money He has given them.

Some of you reading this will be rich one day, and others of you may be living from paycheck to paycheck. But whatever your financial situation, try to make knowing Christ your first priority. After all, He is the One who gave up the "cushiest" job in the universe, just so He could get to know you and to save you from sin.

\**Prophets and Kings*, p. 76.

# Contemplating the Bling Bling

## EXPLORATION

Ecclesiastes 5

## CONCLUDE

George Washington Carver, the inventor of peanut butter, lost his entire life savings in the failure of an Alabama bank. Carver, however, was unperturbed. "I guess somebody found a use for it," he remarked. "I was not using it myself."

Solomon would have admired Carver's attitude toward money. At the end of his life, the wise king had become disillusioned with the pursuit of wealth. His observations are helpful for those of us who tend to obsess about money.

## CONSIDER

- Making a collage of pictures from magazines that illustrate the one phrase from Ecclesiastes 5 that means the most to you.
- Researching charitable organizations in your community and making a donation of time or money to the one that interests you the most.
- Doing a job that a neighbor or relative needs done and refusing to take any money in payment. Reflect on how you feel about the work you do for free versus the work for which you get paid.
- Making an inventory of all your possessions that cost you money but are now meaningless to you. Donate these items to Dorcas or your church's Community Services Center.
- Listening to a song about money or wealth. Think about which phrases in the song echo the thoughts of Solomon.
- Walking through a cemetery and guessing which gravestones mark the resting places of rich people and which mark the graves of poor people. Imagine what it will be like for those people on their resurrection day.
- Writing a poem in which you compare your financial condition to that of Christ's.
- Discussing with your friends how films and TV shows portray the concepts in Ecclesiastes 5:10–17.

## CONNECT

Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*; the first part of any biography of St. Francis of Assisi.

# Striving After the wind



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**“All human toil is for the mouth, yet the appetite is not satisfied” (Eccles. 6:7, NRSV).**

# Can All These Gains Save Me?

## INTRODUCTION

Matt. 6:19, 20

*"Man, I don't care what you say. I'm gonna get all I can as long as I live. I have to buy at least three top-class cars, build a huge house, and wear clothes that others can only wish they had. Man, I'm gonna be blinging to the max."*

Juvelton lay on his bed remembering these words to his Christian friend that he had spoken just five years ago. Somehow, he was able to achieve these goals. He had been successful as a drug dealer, managing to make enough money and stop before ever getting caught. But one bad deal caught up with him. As a result, three years later he was run off the road by a black Mercedes-Benz car, later identified as that of the person with whom he had dealt badly. Now he lay on the bed, helpless, hopeless, and having to depend on someone to do everything for him. What could all these worldly accomplishments do for him now?

*Nothing.*

Then Juvelton remembered the words of his best friend, Jody. *"I'm not telling you to not get those things. But they will bring you no real happiness. True happiness will only come if you give your heart to God."*

*"God is for poor people,"* Juvelton retorted.

*"Just remember Solomon and his experience. Although he was one of the richest and wisest men in his time, he realized he was lacking the single most important facet of happiness—God."*

With the little strength he could muster in his functional hand, Juvelton slowly turned the pages of the Bible that had been on his bed for weeks. By divine intervention, he found himself in Matthew 6:19, 20, "'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal'" (NKJV).

When we look at Solomon's life as a prime example, we learn one great lesson: Worldly gain brings temporary satisfaction to our selfish desire to get more and more. But heavenly gain satisfies the soul. When the soul is satisfied, our whole being is satisfied. Let us not waste our time chasing after things that will not give us eternal happiness. Rather, let us focus on the one source of happiness that is eternal. This is the source of our salvation—Jesus Christ.

**With the little strength he could muster in his functional hand, Juvelton slowly turned the pages of the Bible that had been on his bed for weeks.**



# When Worship Becomes the Way of Life

## LOGOS

Ecclesiastes 6

### The Human Problem

Outside of God, we can satisfy our physical needs, but not our spiritual needs. Of these two, the far greater need is to be spiritually satisfied. Those involved with God not only find purpose in the *here* but also in the *hereafter*. So their plans, works, and aspirations are not only immediate in impact but also futuristic. They desire a quiet and sure confidence in God, which satisfies their God-given desire of worship.

### The Dimensional Worship

True worship as instituted by God is vertical and horizontal. Thus, worship in its truest sense does not only allow growth in our personal relationship with God, it also enhances our relationship with our fellow human beings. This simultaneous growth is most beautifully demonstrated by the quality of service we render to humanity. The closer true worshipers grow to God, the more sensitive they become to other's need of salvation and their need to be socially satisfied. This concept is best represented in God's moral law, usually referred to as "a transcript of His character."<sup>1</sup>

**We must clearly understand  
and appreciate the danger  
involved in living a self-  
centered life.**

The first four laws deal with our obligation to God. The last six deal with our obligation to our fellow human beings. In Matthew 19:16–30, Jesus tells the rich young ruler that these six are the will of God. Therefore, His will does not allow humans to live unto themselves. Instead, His will creates the context whereby service becomes the representation of God's infinite love for humanity. Thus, the will of God not only satisfies the mouth of the servant, but also the servant's soul.

### The Living Example of a True Worshiper

The life and ministry of the apostle Paul showcases the attitude of a satisfied soul. In the closing scenes of his life, we find this stalwart apostle in a less than pleasurable situation. He has had his final trial, the outcome of which will lead to his death. He is incarcerated in a dank Roman jail, yet he is satisfied. Writing to

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Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1–3, 7–13, Paul encourages and reminds his younger fellow laborer why they do what they do in the *now*. He also illustrates how yesterday's commitment impacts today's steadfastness, which in turn, colors tomorrow's assured reality. Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8.

It is fitting that Solomon, the world's wealthiest monarch of his time, should comment on wealth and its insignificance in promoting inner peace and contentment. "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income" (Eccles. 5:10, NIV).

In 1923, the world's most successful financiers gathered in Chicago. These men controlled more wealth than was in the United States treasury. In the following years, newspapers and magazines printed the success stories of these financiers and urged youth to emulate them. However, 27 years later, some of these successful men were examples of terrible failure and tragedy. Jesse Livermore, the president of Greater Bear on Wall Street, committed suicide. Leon Fraser, the president of Bank of International Settlement, also committed suicide. Ivar Kruegar, the head of the world's greatest monopoly, committed suicide. Charles Schwab, the president of the largest Independent Steel Company, lived on borrowed money for the last five years of his life and died penniless. Arthur Cutten, the greatest wheat speculator, died abroad insolvent. Richard Whitney, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, was released some time ago from Sing Sing prison so he could die at his home.<sup>2</sup> All these men had enjoyed the pleasures of sin for a season. But rather than making their personal lives full and satisfied, it made them hollow.

We must clearly understand and appreciate the danger involved in living a self-centered life. Those who are not motivated to give or share of their talents, information, and resources with the wider human community are bound to discover how dissatisfying this mode of life is.

So amidst his inevitable fate, we find Paul, not boastful of his personal accomplishment, but rather boastful of the Christ who had accomplished these things through him. He is the ultimate example of the true worshiper of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in his worship of Christ, he served humanity, so that the will of Christ could be fulfilled through his labor. Thus, not only was his mouth satisfied, but his soul also.

God is calling us all to surrender to Him, so through lives of commitment and sacrifice, we may be agents of salvation whose labor is not for our mouths but for the souls of others.

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1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 52.

2. Paul Lee Tan, Th.D., *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations* (Rockville, Md.: Assurance Publishers, 1979), p. 832.

# The Folly of Life

## TESTIMONY

Eccles. 6:12

In the Hebrew language, Ecclesiastes is called *Qoheleth*. This means “preacher,” which the writer applies to himself in chapter 1:12. A translation of *Qoheleth* in the Greek and Latin languages is *Ecclesiastes*. The book of Ecclesiastes contains a series of pessimistic reflections on the purpose and nature of life. “‘All is vanity’” (Eccles 1:2, NKJV). These words are echoed through the entire book. Although Solomon was one of the greatest Hebrew kings both in wisdom and prosperity, he relates how all of these failed to provide him with true and lasting happiness.

Chapter 6 deals with the folly of life: the vanity of riches without use, of children, old age without riches, and the vanity of sight and wandering desires. “[Solomon] shows how impossible it is for the vanities of the world to meet the longings of the soul. His conclusion is that it is wisdom to enjoy with gratitude the good gifts of God, and to do right; for all our works will be brought into judgment.”\*

Ecclesiastes is a pertinent book for our society, because it provides the

answers to such questions as those asked in our key text (Eccles. 6:12).

It also provides a sound philosophy of life: The more wealth a person has, the less satisfied that person becomes. Solomon makes it clear that all the wealth of the world gives no satisfaction. A poor person has

**A poor person has as much comfort as a rich person. Neither has any advantage.**

as much comfort as a rich person. Neither has any advantage.

Prosperity may not always be good, and adversity may not always be bad. However, God is forever good; and if we live the life He wants us to, then we will experience contentment. And contentment is more satisfying than all the wealth of the world, for such only leads to vanity.

## REACT

1. “All is vanity.” According to this statement, should we only be concerned about our spiritual well-being and pay no attention to our physical well-being? How do we balance tending the two?

2. What advice would you give to friends who are determined to gain as much wealth as they can from this world?

\* *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1164.

# Striving After the Wind

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 6:7, 8

At some point in their lives, most children will try to complete the seemingly simple task of catching a leaf as it floats in the wind. By now, most of us know this task is usually not as simple as it seems. Early in our lives, we come to understand that we cannot see the wind and that we often cannot tell where it will go. People who live in the Caribbean and in areas prone to tornadoes learn to respect the wind, because of its power.

Both the Bible and history credit Solomon as one of the wisest people who lived on this earth. Yet for all his life, one question was foremost on his lips: "What is the purpose of life?" We are born, and then we die. But between our birth and our death, where do we find fulfillment? In Ecclesiastes 6:1, Solomon calls this issue "an evil which I have seen under the sun" (NKJV). His own account in the early chapters of Ecclesiastes shows that he tried many ways to fulfill his desires. Still, for the greater part of his life, satisfaction eluded him like the wind. Wine did not satisfy him, neither did silver nor gold. It would almost seem that satisfaction in life is like the wind. You know it must be there, but you can't lay your hands on it. Solomon concludes that even if a person were to live a thousand years twice, that person would still die searching for life's purpose (Eccles. 6:6).

**We are born, and then we die. But between our birth and our death, where do we find fulfillment?**

The biblical account of Solomon's life would seem to indicate that in his search for life's purpose, he at some point strayed from God for a period of time. The Bible, however, offers us an alternative. Yes, this life is ours to live. But one day, we must account for how we lived it and the influence we had on others. The question is: Do we trust God's Word enough to explore His alternative?

## REACT

1. Why did God include Ecclesiastes in the Bible? How far should we go in exploring the purpose of life?
2. One of the principles of the theory of evolution is that we live to survive and reproduce. How does that compare to God's purpose for our lives as revealed in the Bible?

# You've Gotta Do It Right!

## HOW-TO

Eccles. 6:7, 11, 12

Earth is bare, naked, and unfulfilling. Furthermore, our time here is short-lived. Yes, to some the opposite appears true; but if we remove all God has placed here for us to enjoy, what would we have? The joys found here are also short-lived. Mind you, the quality seems good while it lasts; but in comparison to what we can attain—is this earth enough? God loves us; and He promises us heaven. This is a sweet, everlasting promise that is satisfying and true. Our responsibility is to pluck our minds out of this earth and place them in the heaven that God is preparing for us. How do we do that?

**1. Don't be a statistic.** Hold fast to the God we serve. Many people have tried other alternatives such as drugs, alcohol, divorce, etc., only to find them empty. Don't let such things make you a statistic.

**2. Labor for heaven.** At times, there may be reasons to believe that heaven can't possibly be there, or that God is not as near as He says He is. But do not doubt for even a second, for this is when Satan tries to capture souls.

In your old age, will you be saying, "I should have done this or that in my youth"?

**3. Prove Him.** There is no need to waver between two opinions. If God is God, serve Him. (1 Kings 18:16–21) God is *wonderful*—prove Him now!

**4. Think ahead.** In your old age, will you be saying, "I should have done this or that in my youth"? Follow the truth now. Let not your labor in youth be a labor where your appetite for spiritual things will go unfulfilled, but where you will reap a bounteous harvest not only on this earth, but in the earth to come.

## REACT

1. How is it possible to accomplish steps 1 through 4 above?
2. List the pros and cons of being here on earth, versus living a life in heaven. Which do you prefer? Why?



# Filling Punctured Money Bags

## OPINION

Ecclesiastes 6

A wicked stepmother in charge of her stepdaughter always had the girl working tediously to execute all the housework. The 13-year-old got no rest from this labor, because as fast as one task was executed another awaited her. One afternoon, the stepmother wanted the girl to make some butter. As usual, she had the girl sit at the wooden barrel churn where she worked tirelessly churning the milk. On this day, the girl appeared to be churning faster than usual.

Seeing how quickly the butter was forming, the stepmother poured more milk into the churn. To the girl's dismay, all the butter turned into liquid once more. All that afternoon, as soon as the butter was about to be formed, the stepmother would pour in more milk. The stepdaughter wondered, *How could Stepmother be so discontented and mean?*

This tale exemplifies the theme of Ecclesiastes 6—the vanity of gain and honor, the desire for more. In the pursuit of earthly gain, we obtain much. But somehow we are still dissatisfied—we are always putting our effort into the churning of more butter. While we do understand that we cannot find true, lasting happiness in the things of this earth, we still continue to labor for our mouth—desiring wealth, fame, and status. We yearn after more butter and filling our moneybags and fail to realize that we are not allowing the butter to form—that we are content with small amounts before desiring more.

**What does it mean to be satisfied?**

The Lord encourages us to occupy till He returns (Luke 19:13). But while we do so, we should set our eyes on the “bigger thing”—the Lord's return in glory. We should always labor with this return in mind. Being content with what the Lord has provided and acknowledging our purpose here on earth is the key to satiating our appetite for the desires of this world.

## REACT

In Philippians 4:11, Paul states: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content ” (NKJV). How do Christians differentiate between being contented in Christ and being lackadaisical in goal-setting and reaching their full potential?

# Searching for Life's Meaning

## EXPLORATION

Ecclesiastes 6

## CONCLUDE

Everyone is asking, "Why am I here?" Many are looking for an answer in all the wrong places: get-rich-quick schemes; high-paying CEO positions; McMansions; sexual gratification; escape through alcohol/drugs; etc. Yet when they achieve their goals, they still feel empty. Like trying to catch the wind, we can't catch peace or joy. We can't find satisfaction in things. Deep contentment is only found in a relationship with Jesus, where our focus is outward rather than inward and our agenda harmonizes with His.

## CONSIDER

- Listing the things you spent money on during the past week. How much did you spend on self-gratification and how much on others?
- Reflecting on the time you spent doing a service for someone else. How did you feel when it was over?
- Drawing a picture or writing a story about the happiest experience you had during the last week. What made it so joyous?
- Listening to music that makes you feel upbeat, and music that makes you despondent. What made the difference between the two, and why?
- Trying to catch an object blowing in the wind. How difficult was it? How did you feel when you caught it, if you caught it? How does this experience relate to life?
- Discussing with a friend the things you enjoy doing alone, with someone else, or for someone else. Which brings you the most satisfaction? Does the satisfaction depend on the "inside" of you or the "outside" of you?
- Meditating on why Solomon was so depressed and negative in chapter 6. Then list ways we can avoid depression and negativism.

## CONNECT

Philippians 4:11–13.

*Prophets and Kings*, chap. 5. Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven® Life*, "Shaped for Serving God," chap. 30.

# God made us upright. So **What Happened?**



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“Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (Eccles. 7:29, NKJV).

# Lost Possibilities

## INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 7:29

I have an excellent memory. The only problem is, it's a very short memory. That explains why I simply can't recall how old I was, what the exact setting was, or who was doing the reading. However, the images etched on my young mind are as vivid today as they were then.

The voice intoned, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27).

I recall imagining God to be this big, stern, white dude sitting on a majestic throne surrounded by adoring angels. He had long, snowy-white hair, a beard, and white garb. His massive structure towered over the less imposing nude guy—Adam, whom He had just created from the dust of the earth, in His very image. Wow, a God who plays in the dirt. Awesome!

I imagined Adam standing tall, somewhat dark and very handsome. He glowed in full health and strength; shoulders broad, and muscles firm—the epitome of manhood. Then came Eve, and she was the bomb! Like a brand-new, customized automobile, Eve came fully loaded from the Master's hand and looking mighty fine.

God bestowed His blessings on the pair and encouraged them to engage in farming and mathematics. The only thing He forbade was to eat of the forbidden tree.

Sounds easy, right?

Unfortunately, things take an unpleasant turn. It seems that a talking serpent sold Eve on eating from the forbidden tree. Shortly after, Adam himself also tasted of the "let's mess up the future of the human race" cuisine.

When God came a-calling next, Adam was wearing fig leaves, and so was his wife. He was not standing erect as his Maker; in fact, he was not standing at all. He was cowering with his wife behind the trees and shrubs, hiding from their Creator.

Over the years, my fiery indignation over what Adam and Eve did has cooled, for I have seen in my own life this stupid propensity toward engaging in things God adamantly opposes. I now fully endorse Solomon's comment: "God made men and women true and upright; we're the ones who've made a mess of things" (Eccles. 7:29, *The Message*).

As you study this week, ask yourself this question: What carnal invention have I sought that is affecting my spiritual posture?

**What carnal invention have I sought that is affecting my spiritual posture?**

# Strength in Strife

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 7:3

Solomon suffered from the sorrows and disappointments of life. We also suffer from life's sorrows and disappointments. Did you know that experiencing emotions such as sadness or sorrow make you a better person? This principle is found in Ecclesiastes 7:3, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (NKJV). This verse brings us to the realization that to be strong in the Lord means we push through the sadness, so that when the hard time is over, we are stronger than before.

Some circumstances are harder to bear than others. Even from a psychological aspect, we can read the different steps our mind goes through so we can have peace and a stronger heart. Recognizing what or who it is we lost or don't understand is the first step toward peace and strength. Solomon must have felt lost and confused until the Lord gave him meaning.

The second step toward peace and strength is to allow ourselves to feel emotion. We all experience emotions such as sadness, sorrow, fear, anger, and guilt when the going gets tough. We know that feeling joyful and happy are emotions that can move us to laughter. But as pleasant as those emotions are, feelings such as sorrow can strengthen our hearts as well.

**It's no secret that our Savior  
Jesus Christ experienced  
the same emotions we do.**

The third step toward peace and strength is to recognize and accept our emotions. Recognize what we are experiencing, because when we are knowledgeable of our obstacle, we more likely will be able to overcome it.

Jesus experienced the same emotions we do (John 11:35; Luke 22:39-44), and like us, His heart was made stronger as a result. Jesus faced the cross for us. We should follow in His steps by facing whatever we are going through. With Him by our side, we are forever strengthened.

## REACT

1. Has there ever been a situation that got you down, but made you stronger and a better person because of it? How could you encourage someone else using your situation as an example?
2. As Christians, what do we face that may cause us sorrow?



# A Word to the Wise

## LOGOS

Prov. 26:12; Ecclesiastes 7; John 3:30; 1 Cor. 1:22–24

### Overview (Ecclesiastes 7)

Ecclesiastes 7 highlights the value of wisdom by showing the desirable characteristics of being wise and the negative attributes of being foolish. In verse 13, the author asks us to “consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?” (NKJV). This proposes that God’s wisdom surpasses all others, because no one can undo what He has done. Here is a clue as to the type of wisdom one ought to pursue—the type that gives credence to, and shows appreciation for, the power of God in the affairs of humankind.

There is also a caution against being “overly wise” (verse 16, NKJV), as this would lead to destruction. The phrase “overly wise” within the context of chapter 7 seems to suggest a perception of infallibility. The word *over* is used in the King James Version. It is translated from the Hebrew *yowther*, which means “over and above.”<sup>1</sup> This conveys the idea of someone who is conceited in his or her wisdom.

**The name you make for yourself is nothing if it is not an outgrowth of your relationship with God.**

### Wisdom in a Good Name (Eccles. 7:1)

At the time of this writing, my wife is pregnant with our first child; and through the marvel of ultrasound, we believe we’re having a boy. One of the things we’re enjoying is finding a name for our baby. Because both of us are acutely aware of the importance of this venture, we are trying to find that “good” name.

Our search for that good name brings to mind Ecclesiastes 7:1—“A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth” (NKJV). Name in this sense speaks of a “mark or memorial of individuality, implying honor, or character.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the meaning of a name really denotes a lifestyle. It infers living well. The comparison of the time of birth with the time of death emphasizes “that the person who lives honorably and attains to a good reputation [or good name] need have no fear of death.”<sup>3</sup>

What’s your name?

### The Wise Consider God (Eccles. 7:13)

“Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made

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crooked?" (Eccles. 7:13, NKJV). In other words, God has the ability to do things human beings are incapable of doing—and human beings cannot change what God has done. In light of this, wisdom dictates that God be considered intently, especially as we go about our affairs on this sinful earth.

As we try to live in this world, it is imperative that we develop deep within our hearts a respectful fear for God. The name you make for yourself is nothing if it is not an outgrowth of your relationship with Him. According to Ecclesiastes 7:18, it is the fear of God that will enable you to live the life of wisdom.

## **The Wisdom of God (Eccles. 7:29)**

Solomon sought a reason for the things of this life (verse 27), and this is his grand conclusion: "Truly, this only have I found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (verse 29, NKJV). Adam and Eve were perfect in all their ways.<sup>4</sup> However, being empowered with freedom of choice, the first human pair turned from moral integrity to moral depravity, and since the Fall, all others "have sought out many schemes."

In spite of our scheming, God gave us a lovely and merciful view of His wisdom when He saved humankind from their foolishness. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, so we could spend eternity rapt in the wisdom of God. First Corinthians 1:24 records that Christ is both the wisdom and power of God.<sup>5</sup> Here's a word to the wise: Get in tune with Christ.

## **REACT**

1. Which would you rather be: the wisest person in the world or someone with an average IQ? Why?
2. How can personal talents and giftedness such as practical wisdom affect your relationship with God?
3. Why is Christ described as the wisdom of God?

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1. James Strong, *The Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible: Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary* (Iowa Falls: World Publishers), p. 49.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1086.

4. *My Life Today*, p. 126.

5. Read all of 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 to get an understanding of the foolishness of humans contrasted with the wisdom and power of God. There you will find that even the foolishness of God is smarter than our wisdom.

## "His Wisdom More Sparingly to Men"

### TESTIMONY

Eccles. 7:29

"Our first parents, though created innocent and holy, were not placed beyond the possibility of wrongdoing. God made them free moral agents, capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience. They were to enjoy communion with God and with holy angels; but before they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested. At the very beginning of man's existence a check was placed upon the desire for self-indulgence, the fatal passion that lay at the foundation of Satan's fall."<sup>1</sup>

"In strength of intellect, men who now live can bear no comparison to the ancients. There have been more ancient arts lost than the present generation now possess. For skill and art those living in this degenerate age will not compare with the knowledge possessed by strong men who lived near one thousand years.

"Men before the Flood lived many hundreds of years, and when one hundred

years old they were considered but youths. Those long-lived men had sound minds in sound bodies. Their mental and physical strength was so great that the present feeble generation can bear no comparison to them. Those ancients had nearly

**"True knowledge has  
decreased with every  
successive generation."**

one thousand years in which to acquire knowledge. They came upon the stage of action from the ages of sixty to one hundred years, about the time those who now live the longest have acted their part in their little short life time, and have passed off the stage. Those who are deceived, and flattered on in the delusion that the present is an age of real progress, and that the human race has been in ages past progressing in true knowledge, are under the influence of the father of lies, whose work has ever been to turn the truth of God into a lie."<sup>2</sup>

"When the earth was repeopled, the Lord trusted His wisdom more sparingly to men, giving them only the ability they would need in carrying out His great plan. (Letter 175, 1896)."<sup>3</sup>

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 48.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 1089, 1090.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 1089.

# Intimacy with Jesus: Keep Close

## HOW-TO

Mic. 6:8

The day I wrote this article was Gaga's 93rd birthday. Gaga is my grandmother, and during our weekly telephone calls, I ask her what she has to tell me. Her reply is always the same, "Keep close to the Lord."

Anyone who has ever been threatened knows the importance of sticking close to the one who can protect them from the threat. All of us are threatened by Satan (1 Pet. 5:8). However, we have Friends in high places that are more than willing to come to our rescue.

The Godhead is more than equal to the task of keeping us upright, but we must be willing and active participants. Real intimacy is not intellectual; it is not emotional; it is life-sustaining. How do we get this intimacy?

**1. Recognize that we cannot do anything.** We are weak; but Jesus is strong. We need to give ourselves to Him daily, hourly, even moment by moment.

**2. Let Him lead.** Our way may seem right, but it leads to destruction. (Remember Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar [Genesis 16]; and Jacob, Rebecca, and Isaac [Genesis 26–28]?) Think of a time when you have *led* God and a time when you have allowed God to *lead*. Which was better in the end?

**3. Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow.** Don't read your Bible, forget to pray every day, and you'll shrink.

**4. Trust God wholeheartedly.** It is impossible to serve two masters (Luke 16:13).

**5. Realize you cannot be intimate with Christ without being involved with Him personally.** The Bible promises us a way to personalize our relationship with Him. Make those promises yours. As you read the following verses, put *your* name in them: Jeremiah 28:11; 31:3; John 3:16.

**6. Shun the very appearance of evil.** Decide to make your environment a little heaven on earth where He will always be present.

**7. Occupy yourself in the service of the Lord.** Commit yourself and your work to the Lord so your motives will always be wholesome.

**8. Show and tell.** Show by your actions that you know Christ Jesus, and tell everybody what He means to you.

Decide to make your environment heaven on earth.

Some ideas in this article are based on "Fan the Flame," by Sammy Chilson <<http://www.adventistreview.org/2003-1527/story2.html>>. Retrieved 7/3/03.

## Solomon: A Favored King

### OPINION

1 Kings 3:5–13; Ecclesiastes 7

There is no question about King Solomon's exceptional wisdom. He was only about twenty years old when he became king of Israel.\* Considering his youthful age, he easily could have abused his distinguished position, using it as an avenue for personal gain. Instead, he recognized he could not effectively lead God's people without divine guidance. It was with that sense of inadequacy that he asked God for "an understanding heart to judge [His] people" and to "discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9, NKJV). The Lord was so pleased with Solomon's request, that in addition to granting it, He promised riches and honor that would exceed all the other rulers of his time.

God kept His promise. Yet as Solomon matured, prospered, and gained experience, he also became discouraged and disappointed with life. A learned philosopher, he reviewed the meaning of life and concluded that it is futile and transient. Are we then to believe happiness is illusive? After all, the poor often toil endlessly to achieve financial stability. The words "if only I had been born rich" are frequently

**Everything we acquire in  
this life we must one day  
leave behind.**

uttered by people we know (and sometimes even by us) as if being rich is a panacea for life's challenges. Many rich people are often featured in the news, not for noble deeds, but for activities that clearly indicate their lives are empty.

While we learn from Solomon's life, and the lives of other people, we see that earthly things do not guarantee happiness. We also must understand that complete happiness is found only in living a Christ-centered life.

God's intent is for us to live uprightly and happily. Solomon himself tells us that "'God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes'" (Eccles. 7:29, NKJV). In His infinite wisdom, God has provided us clear instructions for a fulfilled life. Our great Benefactor is able to satisfy our every need; but we have a responsibility to live a life that pleases Him. It is our deviation from God's plan for our lives that often results in our emptiness, hopelessness, and despair. Lest we become cynical and bitter, we must focus less on this earthly life, because everything here is temporary. Everything we acquire in this life we must one day leave behind. Instead, let us place our emphasis on things eternal.

\*C. Flowers, et al, *Who's Who in the Bible* (Pleasantville, N.Y.: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1994).



# What's the Problem?

## EXPLORATION

Ecclesiastes 7

## CONCLUDE

Some say humanity is improving with time. After all, we have better technology and are understanding more about the world we live in. However, the daily news tells us we are going downhill fast. What's wrong? Certainly Adam and Eve started it, but we continue it. As time marches on, humans are more and more inclined to seek their own way—a way without God. But the good news is, we have a choice. We can choose to renounce the world and follow God's plan—a plan that leads to wisdom and salvation. He will write His law on our hearts and give us a new name.

## CONSIDER

- Rewriting Ecclesiastes 7:1, 3, 13, 29, in your own words. After each verse, interact with the text by responding with details from your personal experience.
- Listening to a recording of Charles Gounod's "O, Divine Redeemer." Think of how God redeems us from the problem of sin—from following our own way instead of His.
- Creating a sculpture that represents the new life in Christ.
- Brainstorming with a small group ways in which God demonstrates His wisdom.
- Making a list of how you can allow God to write His law on your heart and give you His wisdom, and choosing one or two items on that list to practice during the following week.
- Documenting ways in which sin has marred the natural world. Which of these ways breaks your heart the most? How can you help repair some of the damage now (recycling, picking up trash along the roadside, etc.)? Rejoice that God will restore everything when He returns.

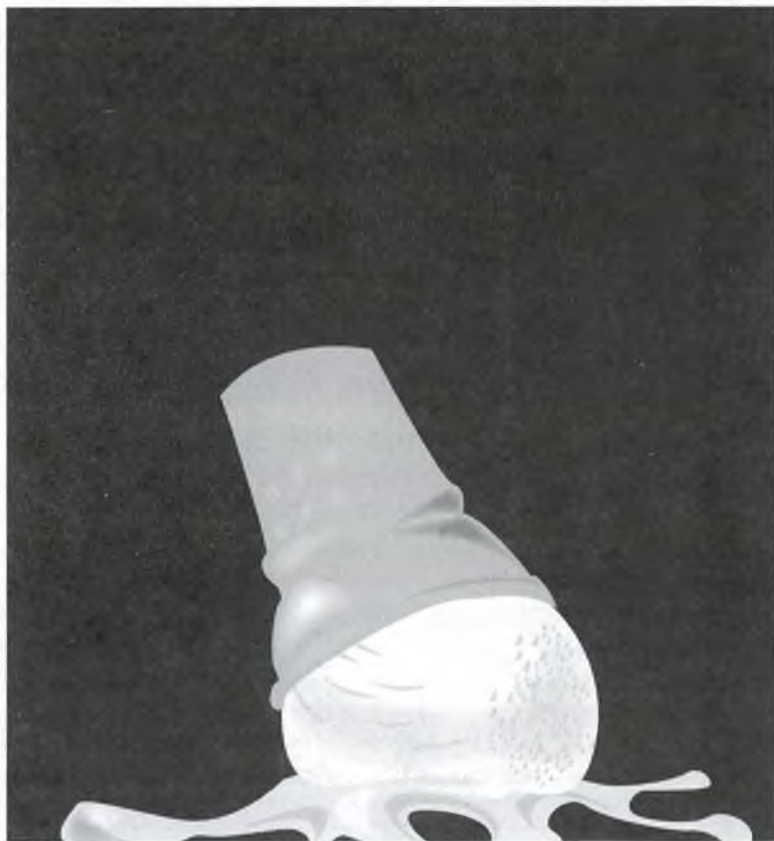
## CONNECT

*Messages to Young People*, p. 253.

James Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, chap. 9, "The Wages of Sin";

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, chap. 9, "Counting the Cost."

# Seeing through a glass Darkly



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**“Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him”  
(Eccles. 8:12, NRSV).**

# Looking Through the Right Mirror

## INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 8:12

It's 12:10 P.M. The sun is shining. The sky is blue. I could be at the beach; but here I am, at Grand Valley State University, sitting on a bench with my new friend Heather.

In front of us is a large window that also serves as a mirror. It's a little dirty, but almost everyone who walks by slows down to look at themselves in it. It's quite interesting to see people actually check their teeth and their hair in front of this "mirror"; maybe they don't realize we are behind it!

"Look at that girl!" Heather exclaimed. "Can you believe she has that great body without doing a thing?"

"Do you know her?" I asked.

"Yeah, she's a friend of my sister. I have to practically live in the gym just to look halfway decent. It's not fair!"

"Well," I responded, "maybe the only difference you see between your body and hers is how they look on the outside. But think about this: Your body is healthier than hers because you exercise!"

**Life is not fair.**

I don't think my statement made my friend feel any better. But it did help me understand Ecclesiastes 8:12.

I've been in Heather's place—looking at people around me who have everything I wish I could have—a new car, a big house, the perfect job. Yet they're not close to God. I, on the other hand, always seem to be trying. I read my Bible. I serve Him with my talents. I go to church every Sabbath. I give my tithes and offerings. Why can't I have all those blessings?

It's not fair!

Solomon reminds us in Ecclesiastes 8:12 that even though it might look like the wicked are prospering, it will still go better with God-fearing people who are reverent before God. He has promised us countless blessings. Those who love Him live with the joy and contentment that is possible only through a relationship with Him. We must learn to follow the hand that cannot be seen, but that can be easily felt arranging our lives according to a better order.

No, life is not fair, and it will never be while we live in this sinful world. But our hope is that a new beginning is near, and that Jesus will be back soon to take us home.

# In Search of Wisdom

## LOGOS

Ecclesiastes 8

### Wisdom (Eccles. 8:1–8)

In Ecclesiastes, we read about the wisdom acquired over the author's lifetime. Ecclesiastes 8:1 gives a description of what makes a person wise—a wise person is one who knows the interpretation of a thing. Solomon hopes that we may learn how to apply this wisdom to our own daily lives. The main point in Ecclesiastes is that without honoring God and having a relationship with Him, all the wisdom, possessions, pleasures, and works in the world are vanity, "useless."\* The author concludes by admonishing us to "fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone" (Eccles. 12:13, NRSV).

Ecclesiastes covers three topics that affect all of humanity: (1) our time and what we do with it, (2) obedience/righteousness, and (3) death. The wisdom we gain in this world is determined by what we dedicate ourselves to daily. Our daily living is guided by a level of obedience within the framework of our lives and those

around us. In due time, this will culminate in our death. The true question is: What does 70 or 80 years of living mean without Christ?

It means we will miss what God has prepared for us through Christ.

### What does 70 or 80 years of living mean without Christ?

"In my Father's house there are many mansions: . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3). God's plan of salvation gives us hope for a future beyond the grave. It allows us to develop a relationship with Christ who will be our counsel before our heavenly Father in the day of judgment. Comparatively speaking, what are 80 years compared to the eons we will spend with Christ?

### Character (Eccles. 8:1–6)

We live in the information era. Those with the right information have power over those with no information or the wrong information. In Ecclesiastes, we read how a person's character is affected by the acquirement of knowledge/wisdom: "Wisdom makes one's face shine, and the hardness of one's countenance is changed" (8:1, NRSV). This indicates that acquiring wisdom will cause a person to behave in a manner to which he or she is not accustomed. Wisdom normally pro-

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duces a sense of cockiness and empowerment.

Wisdom's effects are not to be feared if you attribute your wisdom to the One who has given it to you. If we do not respond to the Holy Spirit's urgings or accept the transformation Jesus wants to effect in our lives, all the wisdom in the world will not make a difference.

### **It's Only a Matter of Time (Eccles. 8:12)**

Years ago, the United States of America was enthralled by the O. J. Simpson trial. One segment of the country was enraged at the "fact" that a sentence against an evil deed was not executed speedily against the perpetrator. Another segment was of the idea that only O. J. and God knew if he was guilty. In other situations, we see just people who remain in misery while the wicked prosper.

Some ask: Where is God in all this? The fact is, we live in a sinful world, and the wages of sin is death. The Bible says in Galatians 3:22, "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (NIV). See also Romans 3:10, 23. This is the main reason for God's plan of redemption. Sin has caused a separation between us and God. The only way to overcome sin, to bridge the chasm, is through Jesus Christ's death on the cross. The atonement provided by Christ's blood gives us the opportunity to once again be in communion with the Father.

### **Wisdom-seeking, worship-driven life (Eccles. 8:16, 17)**

It's evident that Solomon was a student of life who continually searched for knowledge and wisdom. He describes how he undertook immense building projects, sought out pleasure, and acquired unimaginable wealth. Yet even after achieving all these feats, there was still no fulfillment in his life. So he concluded that "all is vanity." Because he knew that eventually he would perish, he wondered how valuable all of his accomplishments really were. There was no meaning to all he had done when viewed from a worldly perspective, for you cannot take your worldly accomplishments with you when you go to the grave.

His conclusion was that true wisdom comes from beholding the limitless works of God and worshiping Him rather than the things He created. The only One that can save you from the second death is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Each day is another opportunity to seek and worship Him so our lives may reflect the light He shines upon us.

### **REACT**

1. Are you finding fulfillment in life, and is Christ at the center of it? If not, what might you need to change?

2. Take the time to meditate on God's love and compassion for humanity—He sent His only begotten Son to die for us on the cross!

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\*Max Lucado, *The Inspirational Study Bible* (Word Publishing, 1995), p. 782.



Monday  
February 26

# The Son Will Come Out Tomorrow

## TESTIMONY

John 17:15

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15, NKJV).

Sometimes it seems as though Christians who deny themselves each day and earnestly seek the will of God tend to go through horrific trials, while others who may openly reject the Savior are blessed with good grades, a great wardrobe, wonderful friends, etc.

It is difficult to explain the prosperity of “sinners” while Christians continuously go through pain and suffering.

However, the “most trying experiences in the Christian’s life may be the most blessed. The special providences of the dark hours may encourage the soul in future attacks of Satan, and equip the servant of God to stand in fiery trials. The trial of your faith is more precious than gold. You must have that abiding confidence in God that is not disturbed by the temptations and arguments of the deceiver. Take the Lord at His word.”\*

**In the Christian life, we are  
training for heaven.**

Being a Christian does not exempt you from hardship. The mere fact of living in a sinful, broken world is cause enough for difficult times. But rejoice in your trials. Trust that

God will see you through. He promises to protect you from evil, although you may have to endure problems in your lifetime.

Training for any type of sporting event requires tough discipline and endless hours of exercise accompanied by painful blisters and muscles. Keeping your mind on your goal makes the pain you endure not only worthwhile, but also the driving force toward your reward. In the Christian life, we are training for heaven. And our training coach, Jesus, gives us difficult exercises that will strengthen our muscles to tackle the “offense.” Jesus knows that our training program is difficult, because even He went through it. He knows which exercises will make us the strongest; and although these exercises will be painful, they will get us in shape for the battle.

## REACT

1. What explanation can be given for the trials of a Christian?
  2. How can Christians keep their minds on the final goal despite their trials?
  3. What hardships have you experienced that prepared you for future trials?
- Share with your class this coming Sabbath.

\* *That I May Know Him*, p. 257.

# Some Things Never Change

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 8:15

Solomon's tone in chapter 8 is fairly dark. People getting punished, people plotting evil, people hurting each other. Does all this sound familiar? Just turn on the news, and you will find all these things occurring today just as they happened during Solomon's time. Just modernize the details and voilà, it's déjà vu.

Fortunately, Solomon doesn't just leave us hanging with all this bad taste in his mouth. He offers us a light at the end of the tunnel. Sure, Solomon didn't have to worry about things like keeping his antivirus updated; but he's made it rather clear that nine hundred years before Christ, they had their own brand of problems and issues to deal with. I'm sure it wasn't easy to fluster someone as smart and sophisticated as Solomon. Remember, this man was the "brain" of his time. Nevertheless, he probably figured most of this out toward the end of his life. Can we learn from him even though we're young?

One of his answers is found in verse 15, "So I recommend having fun, because there is nothing better for people to do in this world than to eat, drink and enjoy life. That way they will experience some happiness along with all the hard work God gives them" (Eccles. 8:15,

NLT). Now, let's not misunderstand this verse. It's not saying we have to go out and pursue endless happiness. This verse makes it clear that this world is a difficult place in which to live, and that none of us are excused from its hardships. The important thing we need to learn from this is a concept that is difficult for many of us—the idea that we each need to experience *contentment*.

How do we achieve contentment? It's not by having everything just the way we want it. Rather, it comes to us when we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God is with us through the good times and the times when our world seems as if it's upside down. Read Isaiah 43:1–3.

**Contentment comes as a  
gift from God, regardless of  
what you are going  
through.**

## REACT

1. Are you currently going through some struggles? What do you think contentment could do for you?

2. Why won't contentment solve all the problems in your life? What does contentment really do for us?

## You Have a Choice

### HOW-TO

Rom. 8:28

As young adults, we make decisions that can affect the rest of our lives: decisions regarding our education, career, and friends. And sometimes we may wonder if God is leading us. Joseph is an amazing example of someone who, amidst disheartening circumstances, made the most important decision of his life. He decided to trust God, no matter what. God revealed to Joseph that he needed to trust Him, because He had a plan for his life. Being sold into slavery by his brothers could have been enough reason for him to desert his faith. But that is not what he did! Even though it seemed as if life handed him only grief and disillusionment, he never let go of God's powerful hand. Thus, he ultimately lived a dream that only could have been born in the heart of the Creator. Following are a few things we can learn from Joseph:

**1. Trust God everyday.** Sometimes we encounter challenges that make us wonder if God is really in control. Then we need to understand that God is working behind the scenes to accomplish good. Read Proverbs 3:5.

Despite the situations we  
face, God is working behind  
the scenes to accomplish  
good.

**2. Ask God for help in your daily life.** There are 3,573 Bible promises to help you connect with what God has in store for you. Unleash the power of the Almighty by asking and believing. Read John 16:24.

**3. Forget the past.** Joseph could have let bitterness consume him. But despite the hurt and disappointment

of the past, he allowed God to prosper him on a daily basis. It doesn't matter how bad we feel about things we have done or how deep our hurt has been, nothing can separate us from God's love! "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13, 14, NIV).

Be prepared for whatever God wants you to do. His plan is perfect. Be ready to follow His lead no matter how incomprehensible it may seem at the time. Trust in the One who has your best interests at heart, and the power to do more than you could ever imagine. " 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' " (Isa. 55:9, NIV).

### REACT

1. Is it possible to never receive your "reward" here on earth? Explain.
2. How does God show Himself to you during difficult times?

# Impunity

## OPINION

Prov. 8:10

*Impunity.* Is there really such a thing? Solomon seems to think so. But then again, he didn't live in the times of Pol Pot. He didn't get to see him die at the ripe old age of 73. I could probably mention in one breath at least a dozen people who apparently never got what was coming to them. Can you feel it? . . . I can. That ache in your stomach. It's called righteous indignation, with emphasis on the *righteous*.

*Quandary.* Let's face it. Many who committed horrendous crimes never faced the law. Is God's justice fair? Dare we utter the premise that bad deeds sometimes go unpunished? Could it be possible that the retribution we get (when we get it) is nowhere close to what it should be? Can we trust God to decide?

*Hell.* The ultimate spa, tailor-made for the wicked. Taking a dip in a 30,000 degree Fahrenheit pool of lava and disappearing into thin smoke. Is it just me? Does this sound like a punishment that fits the crime? I am expecting torment, years of torment, centuries of agony! From where I stand, this does not feel like *justice*.

*Elusive.* This isn't an adjective you want associated with the noun *justice*. I struggled for years with the story of King David. In my mind, his was a clear case of elusive justice. He committed a horrendous crime,

yet God gave him a slap on the hand. I guess I'm a selective reader, because I missed the part where sorrow followed him until the day he died.

*Excruciating, emotional pain.* The worse kind. Solomon learned first hand from his father David that you cannot and will not escape God's justice. *Final.*

*Truth.* I have a few slaps on the hand coming my way. Do you? I am no Pol Pot, but then again . . . we are all sinners. In this case, dare I say it? . . . We are all in the same Pot? Sobering thought, isn't it? Your little white lies put you in the same category as a mass murderer. It's all sin.

If wisdom is knowing the path to follow, then prudence is applying yourself to the task. Solomon showed us the way: The fear of the Lord.

It is up to us to follow it.

**Hell. The ultimate spa,  
tailor-made for the wicked.**

## REACT

1. Do evil people really get away with their crimes? Explain.
2. God forgives the murderer and the liar. How do you feel about that?
3. How can you demonstrate God's love to incredulous people?
4. How can you walk in the fear of the Lord?

# Building Your Decision-Making Muscles

## EXPLORATION

John 17:15

## CONCLUDE

One of God's gifts to us is the power to choose. You can decide how hard you will work to understand God's great plan for your life and for this world. You can spend hours worshipping with others and studying the Bible to understand why God decided to send Jesus, His only begotten Son, to this earth to die for our sins. Or you can spend your time looking to your peers for answers and getting your decisions about lifestyle made for you by slick ad campaigns. Flex your decision-making muscles and have a great workout each day spending time with your Best Friend Jesus. Ask Him to help you to lead others to Christ. Ask Him for wisdom and strength to understand the unfair situations you, your family, and your friends will encounter. Trust Him enough to ask for His guidance in your life.

## CONSIDER

- Talking to a Christian counselor about some of the unfair situations that they see. How do they still know God is in control and that He is fair?
- Volunteering to help a young child through a local charity which arranges for such care. Share your wisdom with this child about how you see God as a fair God. Listen to their worries about what's happening in today's world, in their world.
- Asking a child about what their definition is of "fair." How does that definition open your eyes to the fairness of our loving God?
- Making a list of the things that aren't fair in life. Make another list of how God's love and our Savior's coming to earth makes a difference in our lives. Share this list with a friend. Always go to the Bible or a trusted spiritual mentor and friend for advice when you're confused. Don't rely on your own wisdom—the Bible has all the answers you need.
- Memorizing John 17:15 and writing a prayer for strength instead of asking God to remove evil and hardships.

## CONNECT

Louis R. Torres, *Gaining Decisions for Christ*; Nancy and Ron Rockey with Kay Kuzma, *Belonging*.



# **“Whatever Your Hand finds to do”**



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**“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might,  
for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither  
working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Eccles.  
9:10, NIV).**

# Enduring the Inevitability of Death . . .

## INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 9:1-6

King Solomon has given us counsel concerning enduring the inevitability of death. He assures us that death comes to all. This inevitability is the focus of this week's study.

Death happens to both the righteous and the wicked (Eccles. 9:1-3). Death is the *nadir*, the very epitome, of all meaninglessness. But in Christ, we believe meaninglessness has met its greatest Foe. Therefore, the grave becomes redolent with resurrection hope. For now, the death of a beloved is still a tragedy. However, it is not the ultimate tragedy for those whose spiritual address is "in Christ." Yes, death does come to all. It is a common fate. It even can serve as a reminder that no matter what social, economic, racial, or other stratifications people try to live by, everybody will arrive at the same level spot in the playing field.

While we live, there is hope. Ecclesiastes 9:4 reminds us that a "living dog is better than a dead lion" (NRSV). The smallest measure of animal existence is better than the largest measure of dead matter. Why? Because as long as there is life, there is still time to prepare for death.

**While we cannot escape death, there is no reason to give up on life!**

Sometimes people die unexpectedly, like animals caught in a trap (Eccles. 9:12). Again, this points to the importance of using our time on this earth to prepare for death. Hence, there is danger in delaying the work of God. When we anticipate the unexpected, it is likely to overwhelm us when it occurs.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 states that "the living know that they shall die" and "the dead know not any thing". What does this verse emphasize?

Do not vex yourself over the inevitability of death. Instead, enjoy the blessings of life God has provided for you. And remember to "let your garments always be white" (Eccles. 9:8, NRSV). That is, keep yourself free from sin, and work diligently while you are alive (Eccles. 9:10). We cannot redeem lost opportunities in the grave.

Finally, notice that there is a *what*, a *how*, and a *why* in this passage to consider. The *what* is our *efforts on this earth*. The *how* is *with your might* (determined, fully convinced, maximum effort). And the *why* is because of "*Sheol*." While we cannot escape death, there is no reason to give up on life!

# Solomon the Hopeful–*Dum spiro*

Sunday  
March 4

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 9:4

Solomon exhorts us to be mindful of the Lord's business while we are alive. Our salvation is dependent upon our faith and hope in Him who provides for both the righteous and the wicked while they are on earth. No matter what the circumstances in life, there is opportunity for the willing heart to reconcile with God. In death, all is lost. The dead have no memory, nor knowledge of what has become of them. Even their memory fades from the minds of those who are still alive. Therefore, we are to work with all our might in God's service while we are living. "The living know that which the dead have no knowledge of, particularly they know that they shall die, and are, or may be, thereby influenced to prepare for that great change which will come certainly, and may come suddenly."

Solomon also reminds us of the hope those have who are still alive: A "living dog is better than a dead lion" (Eccles. 9:4). The Canaanite woman in the Gospels recognized this hope (*esmen*),<sup>2</sup> who when talking to Christ the Provider, Healer, and Creator, responded earnestly with " 'even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table' " (Matt. 15:27). Thus, she realized her dependence on the Master for all of her needs, and therefore, did not have to worry. Even what seems like crumbs to others would be sufficient for her needs. She saw the *dum spiro* in the life of a dog, as opposed to that of princes, the mighty ones.

**Our first care must be to make peace with God.**

Solomon encourages us to use our God-given wisdom, to make the best of life while we have it, and not to be ensnared by what our hands can do. Our first care must be to make peace with God, and obtain His favor, to do that which He will accept, and enjoy the fruits of our hands. Joy only comes to those whose works God has accepted. Such people have reason to be cheerful and ought to be so.

## REACT

1. How can we enjoy what our hands do without losing sight of our role on earth?
2. What biblical principles does Solomon lay out for living and enjoying life?

1. Matthew Henry, "Commentary on Ecclesiastes 9," *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Blue Letter Bible, 01 Mar 1996, <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Ecc/Ecc009.htm>> (24 June 2005)

2. LexiConc results for "hope" in

<<http://cf.blueletterbible.org/search/lexiconc.cfm?ss=hope&searchtype=any>>

Monday  
March 5

# The Fate of the Human Race

## LOGOS

Ecclesiastes 9

### The Fate of the Human Race (Eccles. 9:3)

In Ecclesiastes, we have a wealth of knowledge about the ways of the world—ways that are unique to the *human* world. Though written centuries ago, Ecclesiastes is contemporary in its content and bears a wealth of meaning for modern society.

King Solomon brings out the emptiness of life, no matter how rich, wise, or righteous a person may be. This thought is reflected in the Bible as a warning to humanity.

We find that King Solomon is skeptical about life in general. Despite all the wisdom he had, he could not resist the temptations of this world. Does this mean that no matter how religious we are, we are doomed by the first sin, that we are still paying the price for Adam and Eve's bad choice?

**Christ is a Truth beyond  
science.**

At a glance, Solomon seems to be advising us to enjoy life while it lasts, since the end of each person is the same—death. No amount of knowledge and wisdom can help us

predict when we will die. Therefore, we should enjoy all that life has to offer.

King Solomon also gives us insight into the world of the dead—a world that is still an enigma to people today. No scientific research has been able to investigate the after life. What do we have in store after this world? We are made of five elements that perish after death. There is absolutely no concept of soul, spirit, or sin in science.

But herein lays a cliché. Once you enjoy the pleasures of life, what's next? You still feel that emptiness, that urge for something different and meaningful. That is, you have lost interest in the present world. Is that not one reason why we have so much violence and unrest around us? Each of us is searching for something, something that would fill this emptiness in us.

### Christ—Our Fate and Faith (Eccles. 9:5, 6)

That which we have been searching for always has been available right from the day any one of us was born—God the Almighty Father. Often, we are so blinded

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by our own importance that we fail to see Him patiently waiting for us to ask Him to fill our emptiness with His love, compassion, and wisdom.

The sacrifice of His only begotten Son for the sins of this unfaithful race reflects His awesome fondness for us—a Son so obedient that He left His heavenly Father to come to this sinful world in order that we might know how to live a righteous life. He lived as a normal human being. But He remained sinless. His sacrifice is the ultimate example of godly love. His sacrifice is our hope. In His death, is our eternal life; and the concept of nothing beyond the grave, which Solomon seems to espouse, is defeated.

As Christians, we have a hope—a hope that Christ has given us. This hope is a hope in death. It is the hope of eternal life. We need not fear death, because through Christ, death becomes our door to eternity. Because death is not the ultimate end to life, our lives should not be influenced by the sinful pleasures of this world. Life for us denotes a mere beginning, a beginning of a world that is beyond the purview of this sinful world. The world beyond is a world of permanence, a world full of love and compassion that this world is not familiar with.

King Solomon was indeed aware of the world beyond the earthly one, even though Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6 suggest otherwise. When we study these verses in a deeper way, we clearly see their underlying meaning. Solomon is questioning the intelligence of people who allow themselves to be blinded by the material world. Eternity has been God's gift to us from time immemorial. But many have not accepted this gift. And many are still refusing it. We need to look beyond the grave. Beyond this world lies all we have strived for, all we have thirsted for, all we have hungered for. While the whole world is scurrying to find a scientific solution for eternal life, God has been offering it to us all along. A life of forever-love. A life forever with Christ. He is our Salvation, Friend, Guide, and Master. He is the Ultimate Truth—a Truth no amount of science can deny.

Indeed, He is a Truth beyond science.



Tuesday  
March 6

## It Is My Pleasure to Serve the Lord

### TESTIMONY

Eccles. 9:7–10

The temperature outside reaches between 43 and 48 degrees centigrade. While I walk with my résumé in my pack bag, the hot sand-filled wind blows in my face. I am in Dubai, of United Arab Emirates. And I am searching for a job in order to support myself and my family back home.

Suddenly, my cell phone rings. Somebody on the other end offers me a job; but the first thing that comes to mind is: *Do I get Sabbaths off?* When I asked my potential employer, he gave me two options. "You must be able to work on Saturday. So either work or keep your Sabbath." I decided to remain jobless.

The only thing that keeps me moving on is Matthew 6:33—"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (NKJV). According to Ecclesiastes 9:7–10, we should eat our food with gladness. But I know I could never do that if I worked on the Sabbath. Solomon had everything the world offered him; but he didn't find contentment. As a result, he concluded that all of life is vanity.

I tried to compromise once by working on Sabbath. When I received my check at the end of the first month, I thought, *Is this all? It's not worth it. I'll never find peace using this money.*

**I decided to remain jobless.**

This experience taught me that no matter how inviting worldly pleasures may seem, they never will give us true peace of mind. They never will allow us to enjoy the fruit of our labor. It is always a pleasure to serve the Lord; and in doing so, our needs always will be taken care of.

"All who have chosen God's service are to rest in His care. Christ pointed to the birds flying in the heavens, to the flowers of the field, and bade His hearers consider these objects of God's creation. 'Are not ye of much more value than they?' He said. Matt. 6:26, R. V. . . . How much more does He care for man, who is the image and glory of God."\*

How much more did God care for me? Now I'm working as an interior architect in one of the largest international construction consulting firms in the world. My office is in the World Trade Building in Dubai. Many other applicants for the position were better qualified than I! That is how much more!

Now I can truly eat with enjoyment and drink with a merry heart, because my garments are white with the righteousness of Christ.

\* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 313.

# How to Honor My Maker

## HOW-TO

Eccles. 9:7, 8

The Christian way is not to deify our bodies or to make health and beauty ends in themselves, as modern pagans do. Nor is it the Christian way to despise our bodies, making scruffiness a virtue, as some ancient pagans and Christians once did. Rather, we are to accept one's body as part of God's good creation. We are to be stewards of our bodies and to gratefully enjoy them. Thus we honor our Creator.

The Bible opposes all long-faced asceticism. God created us to enjoy health, good appetite, physical agility, and marriage in the way He meant for us to enjoy them. Such delight should be a daily occurrence and a natural part of our service to God, for without it we would soon become ungrateful for these gifts.\*

Jesus invited His disciples to "Follow me" (Matt. 8:22). These two little words teach us that He forces no one to follow Him. Instead, we are to decide whether to follow Him or not. Following Him means that He is our Example. Through His life on earth, we learn how we should live for heaven.

The question is, Will we enjoy heaven more if we do better while on earth? Of course, when we all get to heaven, the thief on the cross, the eleventh-hour laborer, and the deathbed convert all will enjoy heaven immensely. So the point is that the greater our trust in the Lord, the greater will be our capacity for loving and knowing Him.

The sooner we learn this concept, the less remorse and guilt we will experience. The less we fall into sin, the less scarring of our soul there will be. Pound a nail into a board, then pull it out. The nail is gone, but the hole remains. We praise the Lord for His forgiveness and for His guidance in helping us to use the abilities and talents He gives to us. Also, we should praise His name every time we win a victory, through His power, over temptation.

**Through Jesus' life on earth,  
we learn how we should  
live for heaven.**

## REACT

1. Explain how we honor our Creator when we gratefully enjoy our bodies as His gift.

2. How is the Christian enjoyment of our bodies different from the pleasure seekers' enjoyment of their bodies?

\*Adapted from *Daily Devotions* by J. I. Packer.

# It Is All Vanity

## OPINION

Eccles. 2:1

Ecclesiastes discusses in detail what people are dreaming for. And in doing so, Solomon shows how all of our dreams are vanity. Solomon got all of what he wanted or dreamed for. But after getting what he wanted, he realized how meaningless it all was. "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.' But again, this also was vanity" (Eccles. 2:1, NRSV).

It is true that the world promises too much, and that in reality it gives us very little. I remember when I had a mobile phone with a voice command. The phone was so small, I could hide it between my hands. I was proud of myself for having this phone. But it took only a few months before another company released a mobile phone that had more features and that was much smaller. The phone I bragged about having was now obsolete! What vanity!

"Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all" (Eccles. 9:11, NRSV).

**The phone I bragged about  
having was now obsolete!  
What vanity!**

As we look around us or recall from our own experience, we may be tempted to think that what we have in life—be it education, material things, or position—makes us important or puts us at an advantage over others. However, this is not

so, because the time will come when all these things will be useless.

Ecclesiastes portrays how Solomon had a chance to contemplate his life and had opportunities to taste life to its fullest. It teaches us that all that really matters is how we use our time and the opportunities we have. Have you really considered that your decisions regarding your time and opportunities are subject to God's judgment, and that they will determine your destiny between earthly treasure or heavenly reward?

## REACT

Think of a piece of technology you recently purchased that is already obsolete. How should Christians respond to the rapid progress in this area of life? How can we strike a balance between having to have the latest and making do for a while with what we already have?

# Dealing With the “D” Word

## EXPLORATION

Ecclesiastes 9

## CONCLUDE

Whether we use the polite phrases “passed away,” “sleeping in Jesus,” “returned to the dust,” or the less reverential “kicking the bucket,” “biting the dust,” or “croaked,” we’re talking about owning up to our mortality, facing our death. Solomon tackles this delicate subject head-on. He decides that death is real and that while we have a chance, we should live life to the fullest. “A living dog is better than a dead lion” (Eccles. 9:4). Eat, celebrate, love, and work with all your might, Solomon says, because none of us can do that in the grave.

## CONSIDER

- Singing or listening to at least two hymns that are often associated with death (“Nearer My God to Thee,” “It is Well With My Soul,” etc.). What is the message of these songs to your heart? What do they say about living?
- Memorizing the first few lines of the poem “Only One Life.” Share these lines with a friend to get his/her reaction (<<http://whosoeverwill.ca/devotionsonlyonelif.htm>>).
- Planning a dinner party for those in your church who think life has passed them by (senior citizens, shut-ins, etc.). Here’s one recipe you can use: Invite them to wear white. Use your best crystal. Celebrate life and happiness. Laugh and enjoy.
- Drawing a large hourglass on poster board. Cram the bulbs with pictures of activities you enjoy. Trace an outline of Jesus over the hourglass.
- Figuring out how many hours you will have worked by the time you retire. Consider how many of those hours were fulfilling and how many were sheer drudgery. What can you do to make your work joyful and fulfilling?

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 51–74.

Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 14, 1905, “Lessons From the Life of Solomon,” No. 13, “The Perils of Prosperity.”

David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*.

# Dead Flies and Snake Charmers



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“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; *so does* a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor” (Eccles. 10:1, NKJV).



# Are You an Eagle or a Prairie Chicken?

Sabbath  
March 10

## INTRODUCTION

Ecclesiastes 10

In his book, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, Charles Swindoll tells the story of an eaglet that hatches along with a group of prairie chickens. The eaglet never learns his true identity and believes he, too, is a prairie chicken. One day, he observes the grand flight of an eagle overhead and sighs at the magnificence of the bird's ability. "What is that bird?" the eaglet eagerly asks a nearby prairie chicken. "That," replies the prairie chicken, "is an eagle—the chief of all birds! But don't even think about it. You can never be like him!" Because of those words, the eaglet lived the rest of his life never stretching his wings. He died believing he was a prairie chicken.\*

This can happen to us when we choose to make foolish choices. Poor choices limit us. It may not be immediately apparent, but there comes a time when we know that a foolish choice we've made is going to keep us from doing something important. It might be something as simple as partying too many nights instead of studying for that really tough class. The end result is a low semester grade. Maybe it's not crucial in the overall picture of life. But make enough bad choices, and a pattern of doing so is established. Then you're busy being a prairie chicken, despite the fact you were born to be an eagle.

**Are you ready to turn your eyes to the skies and soar?**

In this week's lesson, we'll examine what Solomon had to say about wise and foolish choices. Solomon had his moments when he chose wisely—asking God to grant him wisdom. However, there were times when he chose foolishly—for instance, when he just had to brag about all the gold and riches in his kingdom to a foreign superpower (1 Kings 10).

It's easy to imagine him berating himself for the foolish choices he made during his life while he was writing what we now label as Ecclesiastes 10. Like Solomon, we too can become so bogged down in the mistakes we've made that we can't remember the wise choices we've made.

This week, we'll also examine whether there is a difference between choosing foolishly and immature choices. As we learn to make wise choices, we can stretch our wings little by little until we are soaring at our full God-given potential. Are you ready to turn your eyes to the skies and soar? Or do you want to continue grubbing your way through life with your eyes on the ground?

\*Charles Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985).

# Making God-Wisdom Choices

## LOGOS

Ecclesiastes 10; Exod. 16:7, 8; Numbers 12; 1 Kings 2:13–25; Prov. 24:17; Matt. 5:43, 44

“Folly is a term we don’t use that often, but it is a term used rather frequently in Scripture. It suggests a lack of good sense, lack of foresight, failing to realize the consequences of a stupid act before it occurs. Scripture calls that ‘folly’ or ‘foolishness.’ And it can happen in our day just as it happened in Solomon’s day.”\*

## The Beginning of the End

When Solomon chose to ask God for wisdom, God granted his request. For a time, Solomon made the most of this gift. However, there were things that began to eat away at it. He chose to surround himself with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. To him, this probably seemed like the thing to do. Many of these relationships symbolized alliances with surrounding nations.

**As Christians, a wise response involves trusting that God is in control.**

What Solomon didn’t realize was that these women began to affect his judgment. Their desires, requests, and perhaps even their wheedling, began to rip apart his relationship with God. Then, probably nearing the end of his life, Solomon realized

he had done some really foolish things. Perhaps he wanted to pass on more than a legacy of being a fool by advising the reader to make God-wisdom choices.

## Use Your Brain (Eccles. 10:1–4)

In Ecclesiastes 10, Solomon is trying to make the reader think by using a variety of topics, advice, and observations. In verses 1–4, Solomon sets the stage by describing the differences between a wise person and a fool. He wants us to understand that it doesn’t take much foolishness to ruin our lives. His opinion is that wise people naturally do the right thing, but the fool just as naturally does the wrong thing.

How can it be natural to do the wrong thing? As a person begins to develop a habit, pathways in the brain are carved out. Each time the habit is repeated, the pathway in the brain becomes more embedded. After a while, the habit is the natural thing to do—whether it is foolish or wise.

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## **Choices Bring Consequences (Prov. 24:17; Eccles. 10:5–11; Matt. 5:43, 44)**

Solomon is both troubled and cautionary in verses 5–11. He begins by asking, “Why do incompetent people get put into positions of authority and responsibility?” You’ve probably seen someone get a position they weren’t qualified to hold. Maybe you even had the very credentials needed for the job, but were passed over. It hurts and eats away at you.

If that happens, it’s necessary to ask, “What is the wise response to this situation?” Don’t come off looking like a fool because you haven’t taken the time to think wisely about your response to the situation.

In verses 8–11, Solomon gets down to the nitty-gritty of making wise choices. If you’re busy making a trap for someone else to fall into, be careful. You just might be caught yourself. The wise choice here might be to “pray for your enemies.” Read Proverbs 24:17 and Matthew 5:43, 44.

## **Why It Doesn’t Pay to Be a Fool (Eccles. 10:12–15)**

Solomon cuts to the heart of his message in verses 12–15—fools destroy themselves with their own words. He reiterates that fools start out with silliness but end up saying and doing things that are pure madness. Foolishness has a snowball effect—the more it rolls along, the bigger it grows and can’t be controlled.

## **Pray for Wise Leaders (Eccles. 10:16–20, Exod. 16:7, 8; Num. 12; 1 Kings 2:13–25 )**

Solomon ends his discourse on fools by discussing leaders. Was he talking about himself? His wise counsel here is to be careful in plotting anything against those who have power over you. Perhaps he was recalling Adonijah’s attempt to undermine him in 1 Kings 2:13–25.

We may not always agree with those in power, but God expects His followers to use wisdom and to trust Him. In Exodus 16:7, 8 and Numbers 12, He demonstrated His displeasure with those who chose to plot against their leaders.

As Christians, a wise response involves trusting that God is in control, even when it doesn’t seem like that’s the case. Perhaps, like Solomon, our daily prayer should be how to decide what is right and wrong and to receive God-wisdom daily.

## **REACT**

How do you feel about praying for your enemies, and loving those who choose to hurt you (Matt. 5:43, 44)? How does God-wisdom help you understand this difficult idea?

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\*Charles Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), p. 287.

# Foolishness Destroys Any Future Good

## TESTIMONY

Prov. 3:13, 17; Eccles. 9:18; 10:1, 5, 6, 17

"Solomon's repentance was sincere; but the harm that his example of evil-doing had wrought could not be undone. During his apostasy there were in the kingdom men who remained true to their trust, maintaining their purity and loyalty. But many were led astray; and the forces of evil set in operation by the introduction of idolatry and worldly practices could not easily be stayed by the penitent king. His influence for good was greatly weakened. Many hesitated to place full confidence in his leadership. Though the king confessed his sin and wrote out for the benefit of after generations a record of his folly and repentance, he could never hope entirely to destroy the baleful influence of his wrong deeds. Emboldened by his apostasy, many continued to do evil, and evil only. And in the downward course of many of the rulers who followed him may be traced the sad influence of the prostitution of his God-given powers. . . .

**"However contracted may  
be our sphere, we still exert  
an influence for weal or  
woe."**

"Among the many lessons taught by Solomon's life, none is more strongly emphasized than the power of influence for good or for ill. However contracted may be our sphere, we still exert an influence for weal or woe. Beyond our knowledge

or control, it tells upon others in blessing or cursing. It may be heavy with the gloom of discontent and selfishness, or poisonous with the deadly taint of some cherished sin; or it may be charged with the life-giving power of faith, courage and hope, and sweet with the fragrance of life. But potent for good or for ill it will surely be."<sup>1</sup>

"Wisdom's 'ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' Proverbs 3:17. Let every youth in our land, with the possibilities before him of a destiny higher than that of crowned kings, ponder the lesson conveyed in the words of the wise man, 'Blessed art thou, O land, when . . . thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!' Ecclesiastes 10:17."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 84, 85.

2. *Education*, p. 206.

# Solomon's Wisdom Literature

Tuesday  
March 13

## EVIDENCE

Ecclesiastes 10

The book of Ecclesiastes can be a somewhat controversial book. Within the scholarly community, there is division over the authorship. Did Solomon really pen these words? Or was someone else years later trying to pass their writings off as those of Solomon? But then, what would be the purpose of that? It's not as if they would have garnered a large book contract and royalties that would have been passed down from generation to generation.

Most scholars agree there is enough evidence to attribute the writing to Solomon and that the few questionable items can be explained with research and a bit of sleuthing out the minor details often overlooked.

Before the Age of Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, the authorship of Ecclesiastes was not called into question. The Jews considered the book to be inspired, so much so that, traditionally, they read it on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Also, because of the Jewish belief that it was inspired, Ecclesiastes was included as one of Solomon's works in the Talmud and the Mishnah. Josephus, in his writing, credits Solomon with the authorship of Ecclesiastes; and Solomon's authorship of the book was approved in the early Christian era.

**Before the Age of Enlightenment, the authorship of Ecclesiastes was not called into question.**

In today's world, the book of Ecclesiastes would be similar to reading someone's personal journal. Some of the passages seem to come only from a person who has seen and experienced a great deal, and who has perhaps become jaded and disillusioned. Yet in spite of disappointment, the author is prepared to share advice on how to use wisdom and avoid foolishness.

Ecclesiastes is part of Hebrew wisdom literature. It also is part of a larger body of material influenced by Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Canaanite-Phoenician cultures. The role of wisdom literature was to give readers practical advice on how to make a whole, productive life out of a life that has been broken.

Solomon recognized that the greatest thing he could ask for and receive from God was wisdom. Today, we can ask God for the same wisdom. We also have the advantage of reading what Solomon learned and learning how we can apply it to our own lives.

## REACT

How could we incorporate more of Solomon's advice into our daily lives?

*Jordan Wagner, Great Barrington, Massachusetts, U.S.A.*



# How to Smell Good

## HOW-TO

Eccles. 10:1

A few years ago, we noticed an odd smell in our house. As days passed, the odor grew more intense. Disgustingly, it was the central focus as soon as you entered the door. We finally discovered the cause. A mouse had ventured deep into the body of our old upright piano, and there he died.

This tiny source of smell made our house a miserable place. No one took notice of the comfortable armchair, the fireplace, or the pictures on the walls. And Mom's delicious cooking just wasn't very appetizing anymore.

Our home had the necessary elements to create a comfortable environment. But one little detail ruined the whole effect.

Our character is much the same. Though I have many winning characteristics, is there some sin, some mistake I continue to do that stinks up my life?

Good hygiene—both physical and spiritual—does not happen by accident.

Follow these steps to smell good:

**1. Examine yourself from someone else's perspective.** If there is something stinking in your life, your nose may have grown used to it. Try to examine your behavior as someone else perceives it. Think about your parents, teachers, room-

mate, or the clerk in the store. Does your attitude or your behavior stink?

The most important opinion to consider is Christ's. He sees it all—past, present, and future. He does not excuse the sin in our life; but He does promise to cleanse us from it and to keep us from getting smelly again!

**2. Check in the hidden places.** Your examination must go deep. Not all sources of smell are easy to find! Just like the mouse that burrowed deep in the piano, sin can be well hidden. We don't present our most selfish thoughts to the world if we can help it. Sometimes, we can even trick ourselves into thinking we are just about perfect.

**3. Don't leave it there—it won't go away on its own!** Holding your nose or going out for a walk are not solutions to the problem. The smell exists because the sin is there rotting. You'll have to take action!

**4. Call in the exterminator.** Jesus is the sin exterminator. He not only kills the sin, He removes the evidence. The best part is, He also promises to protect us against being infested by it again.

**If there is something stinking in your life, your nose may have grown used to it.**

# No Dead Flies in My Ointment

## OPINION

Ecclesiastes 7:1; 10

In Ecclesiastes 7:1, Solomon compared a good name to a fragrant perfume. Now, in chapter 10, he gives the reader the image of a dead fly in that perfume. Have you ever noticed how quickly a person's name becomes tarnished after they've made a foolish choice? As Christians, we should be careful to make choices that reflect well on our personal name or the name of our church. This isn't to bring glory to ourselves, but glory to the name above all names—Jesus Christ.

Whether you are voting for a national leader or for a local church elder, use wisdom. Learn something about that person. Remember, your voice in choosing someone for leadership is important and will direct the way of a nation or of a church.

Solomon doesn't mince words when he speaks to workers in verses 8–11. His advice is, if your axe needs sharpening, take time to do it so you won't get hurt. Don't try to rush through your work and lose focus on the main objective. If you do, you will look foolish to those you are trying to impress.

There are several ways to be a wise talker. Choose gracious words rather than destructive ones. Choose words that make sense rather than words that incite non-

sense. You've probably met talkers who act like they are the world's expert on any topic of conversation. What makes it even worse is, they don't give anyone else a chance to speak. And after enough time, they show they don't have a clue about anything they've said. Use controlled words. Make sure you say what you mean and you mean what you say.

Lastly, don't speak boastfully. People quickly grow tired of people who are so busy bragging, they don't accomplish anything else.

The world is watching and "smelling" our witness. Are there flies in *your* ointment? If we seriously follow Solomon's advice, the church will be more credible as we share the story of Jesus with a lost world.

**The world is watching and "smelling" our witness. Are there flies in *your* ointment?**

## REACT

1. Why do some people make foolish choices?
2. Can people who first chose foolishness but later gain wisdom ever totally overcome the effects of their foolishness? Why or why not?

# From Here to Eternity

## EXPLORATION

Titus 2:11–13

## CONCLUDE

It's easy to get so caught up in living that you lose track of what you're actually doing. Even Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, fell for that trap. It wasn't until he looked back on his life that he realized what had happened. But we're looking forward at life and we can make changes now that will keep us from wandering down a side road. We can do that by making sure we keep God front and center, so He can lead us every step of the way. Make every step count. Determine to live purposefully.

## CONSIDER

- Mapping a timeline of your life. Include future, planned, acts of service to God. List three goals that will keep you on track.
- Putting together a jigsaw puzzle upside down so you can't see the picture. Reflect on how much easier it is to accomplish a goal when you can see how the pieces fit together and you can picture the end result. How does this relate to your life?
- Choosing a theme song for your life. Review your favorite CDs and hymns to find a song that embodies your life's goals in Christ.
- Reaching out deliberately to one person this week, even someone you don't know well.
- Taking a prayer walk around your campus or neighborhood, sowing the seeds of prayer and Bible promises throughout the area.
- Drawing a picture to illustrate Ecclesiastes 10:1. Place it on a mirror or near your computer where it will remind you to make good choices that honor God.

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 1–6.

John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*; Randy Maxwell, *If My People Pray*.

# The Way of the Wind



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“As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how  
the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so  
you do not know the works of God who makes all things”  
(Eccles. 11:5, NKJV).

# The Void

## INTRODUCTION

Ecclesiastes 11

When you lose touch with God, the enemy will try his best to make your life miserable and empty. Jim Hohnberger tells the story of a time when he felt emptiness in his life.

"I was thirty years old, had graduated from college and spent five years selling computer systems, and was now the sole proprietor of the Hohnberger Agency—a multi-line insurance agency, specializing in automobile, homeowner's, life, and health insurance. I had a lovely home, new vehicles, a good income, and a prospering business. I was chasing the American dream, believing that happiness comes from the things that make life interesting, comfortable, and exciting.

"Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, summed it up so well when he said, 'All is vanity' (Eccles. 1:2, NKJV). Vanity is emptiness, a mirage, something you can never get your hands on. I was pursuing this emptiness, this American myth, and God needed to get my attention. But how? He simply waited . . . until the time was right. . . . Little did I know how drastically my life would be changed."

**"I was chasing  
the American dream."**

How did Jim change? How can we have more meaning in our lives as well? In his book *Satisfied*, Mark Finley offers four ways Jesus will fill our deepest void.

"First, God both shows us and tells us that **we matter to Him**—that we are special and important. . . .

"Deep, inner, lasting satisfaction comes from knowing that the Creator of the universe loves [you] with an incredible love. . . .

"Second, God . . . is always planning the very best for us. . . . [See Romans 8:28].

"Third, enduring inner satisfaction comes from knowing that **the grace of Christ is greater than all our failures** [Rom. 8:1]. . . .

"Fourth, the greatest satisfaction of all is in knowing that one day **Jesus will make a complete, total, and utter end of sin**." And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' —Revelation 21:4."<sup>2</sup>

We don't know what God is thinking or what the future will bring, but we all have to have trust in Him. The decision is yours.

1. Jim Hohnberger, *Escape to God* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2001), p. 19.

2. Mark Finley, *Satisfied! How God Can Meet Your Deepest Needs* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2002), p. 125.



# A Time to Sow

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 11:1–6; Isa. 49:4

Solomon used illustrations that made difficult concepts more accessible to the people of his day. These illustrations contain eternal truth that helps us better understand God's kingdom (Matt. 13:11). Today, however, these illustrations don't make much sense. So it's important for us to put our own cultural lenses aside in order to understand Solomon's time so we can apply his words to our lives.

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (Eccles. 11:1, NKJV). At first glance, this verse seems odd. Won't your bread become soggy? But in Solomon's day, it made perfect sense. The ancient Egyptians sowed their grain along the marshy areas of the Nile. When the water receded, the plants would begin to grow. After many days, an abundance of food was ready to be gathered.\*

This makes sense agriculturally, but how does it apply to our lives? When we look at Ecclesiastes 11:1 in light of the gospel and the New Testament, a new picture appears. Solomon doesn't say "cast your seed." Rather, he uses the word *bread*—something that is already whole and perfect. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, NKJV). And in Revelation 17:15, "waters" refers to a multitude of people. Christ has given us the same commission Solomon is giving us: Go to all nations, all people, all languages, and spread the good news (Matt. 28:18–20).

**If we wait for the perfect  
circumstances to witness,  
we will never do so.**

Verse 3 says, "If a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie" (NKJV). When we embark on the Great Commission, we don't know who will choose life or death (Matt. 13:19–23). And if we wait for the perfect circumstances to witness, we will never do so. But just as the Holy Spirit is sent to every heart, we also should give the message to those who are unlikely to accept it. We are not to judge their readiness to hear about Christ. Only the Father, who knows the secrets of the universe; only the Holy Spirit, whom we cannot understand; only Jesus, who can change the hearts of any person; only these can change people. Our duty is to plant the seeds of life (Eccles. 11:5, 6).

\*Power Bible CD, *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* (Bronson: Online Publishing, Inc., 2001).  
Power Bible CD, *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary* (Bronson: Online Publishing, Inc., 2001).

# Starvation in the Land of Plenty

## LOGOS

Ecclesiastes 11; Matt. 6:16–19; 10:8; Luke 6:38; 12:16–21; Rom. 8:32

### A Fear of Scarcity (Luke 12:16–21)

The Bible consistently reflects our fear that there just isn't enough to go around. Jacob worried that his brother would receive all of God's blessings. So with Rebecca's encouragement, he tricked his father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn, trying to fulfill God's promises with his own hands (Genesis 27). Achan hoarded gold, silver, and clothing under his tent in a desperate attempt to provide for his own needs and desires (Joshua 6; 7). James and John went to Jesus asking for dibs on the best seats (Mark 10:35–44).

Not having enough or the best is a natural fear for us to have. After all, we live in a world that offers limited security and resources. So when Solomon says to give liberally to others because there is a risky road ahead, it just doesn't make sense (Eccles 11:1–6).

Jesus tells of a man who had scarcity issues. He stored all his wealth in a barn, thinking it would give him a sound and safe future. But it didn't. One night, he lost it all (Luke 12:16–21). Jesus says, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25, NRSV).

**It is riskier to hoard God's blessing for ourselves, than it is to give liberally.**

In Ecclesiastes 11, Solomon is addressing a group of people who are afraid to share what they have. There are uncertainties and risks that make it difficult to resist going into survival-of-the-fittest mode. God calls us to let go of those fears.

### Freedom From Fear (Matt. 6:16–19; Luke 6:38)

Christ exhorts us to not store wealth on earth where it can be destroyed and stolen. Rather, He urges us to store eternal wealth in heaven (Matt. 6:16–19). "Sell what you have and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven have no holes in them" (Luke 12:33, NLT). Jesus isn't just talking about the material possessions we will get in heaven; He is also referring to other people. Solomon is saying the same thing. Whether things are risky or not, we need to share God's love with others. It is riskier to hoard God's blessing for ourselves, than it is to give liberally. Look at what happened to the servant with one talent. He thought he could hide the gift Jesus had given him, only

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to discover he had lost it when he didn't use it (Matt. 25:14–30).

The Bible tells us that we don't need to be afraid of giving when it comes to the physical and spiritual world (Luke 6:38). Bible math works differently than Algebra 206. The more we give and use God's gifts, the more they grow and flourish. We are not using up God's resources—we are expanding them. The widow of Zarephath discovered this principle when she gave Elijah her last meal. Her flour and oil never ran out (1 Kings 17:9–16). Jesus demonstrated it when He fed the five thousand (Matt. 14:16–21). The unforgiving servant lost sight of it when he unmercifully demanded payment of a debtor (Matt. 18:21–35). The thief on the cross experienced it when he liberally received God's pardon and grace (Luke 23:39–43).

## **The Extravagance of God (Rom. 8:32)**

Before we can ever give, we must first receive from God, who has lavished His love on us (1 John 3:1). "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32, NKJV). When God gives, He doesn't measure how much He will portion out to each of us. He provides for us all abundantly. John 3:16 tells us that everyone who accepts Christ will receive His life. He does not exclude anyone. He gave His life, risking that no one might accept His sacrifice. He offers each of us the Bread of Life with no strings attached. Jeremiah 31:3 tells us that God has loved us with an everlasting love. Jesus tells us to just ask and we will receive (Matt. 7:7). God offers us *every* spiritual blessing that is in Christ (Eph. 1:3). He came to give us an abundant life (John 10:10).

## **Giving Out of an Abundance (Matt. 10:8)**

Giving abundantly doesn't make sense in a world where people steal, lie, and cheat to get ahead. It doesn't make sense to go the extra mile when it doesn't seem to make a difference in the lives of others. In Ecclesiastes 11:6, Solomon acknowledges the possibility that giving and sharing God's love with others might not make a difference, "Plant a variety of crops, for you never know which will grow—perhaps they all will" (NLT). Notice that God doesn't withhold His mercy from the unmerciful servant even though He knew the servant would not forgive his fellow servant. Likewise, God didn't wait to secure our promises of faithfulness before He gave Christ up in our place. In fact, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NKJV). While we were still His enemies, He gave up everything.

"'Freely you have received, freely give'" (Matt. 10:8, NKJV).

## **REACT**

1. What do you need to receive from Christ today?
2. What can you give to those who need to hear about Christ?

## A Record of Folly

### TESTIMONY

Eccles. 11:9

"From the joy of divine communion Solomon turned to find satisfaction in the pleasures of sense. A word-picture portraying this experience is given, in the language of Solomon himself, in the book of Ecclesiastes. 'I communed with mine own heart,' he confesses, 'saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me. . . . And I gave my heart to know . . . madness and folly.' 'I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure.'"<sup>1</sup>

"Solomon's later writings reveal that he realized the wickedness of his course, and sought to warn those who were in danger of going astray. With sorrow and shame he confessed that in the prime of manhood, when he should have found in God his comfort, his support, his life, he had lost sight of the rich experience of his youth and of the signal blessings bestowed at the time of the dedication

**Solomon's "object is to draw the young to purer and more lasting joys."**

of the temple. How sad the confession recorded in Ecclesiastes! For a time, he had turned from the light of heaven and the wisdom of God; he had confounded idolatry with religion."<sup>2</sup>

"Life is sweet to bad men, because they have their portion in this life; it is sweet to good men, because it is the time of preparation for a better; it is sweet to all. Here is a caution to think of death, even when life is most sweet. Solomon makes an effecting address to young persons. They would desire opportunity to pursue every pleasure. Then follow your desires, but be assured that God will call you into judgment. How many give loose to every appetite, and rush into every vicious pleasure! But God registers every one of their sinful thoughts and desires, their idle words and wicked words. If they would avoid remorse and terror, if they would have hope and comfort on a dying bed, if they would escape misery here and hereafter, let them remember the vanity of youthful pleasures. That Solomon means to condemn the pleasures of sin is evident. His object is to draw the young to purer and more lasting joys. This is not the language of one grudging youthful pleasures, because he can no longer partake of them; but of one who has, by a miracle of mercy, been brought back in safety. He would persuade the young from trying a course whence so few return."<sup>3</sup>

1. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 28, 1905.

2. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 8, 1906.

3. <<http://www.htmlbible.com/kjv30/henry/H21C011.htm>>.

# How to Live in God's Reality

## HOW-TO

Prov. 23:7; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:4; Phil. 4:8

Elijah was running from Jezebel in response to her threats to kill him. He had heard of her intent, had accepted it as truth, and had acted in accordance with his belief of her reality for him. Had Elijah known God's reality, he would have acted differently. Instead, he believed the enemy's illusion concerning his life. The way of the wind for Elijah was upward—not death, not destruction, but eternal life.

What about you? Are you living in the illusions of Satan or the realities of God? How can you know and live in God's reality for you? Here are a few steps:

**1. Change your picture of God.** See that "God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. Jesus said, 'If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.' God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of His intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends."<sup>1</sup> By beholding this picture of God, you become changed.

Are you living in the  
illusions of Satan or the  
realities of God?

**2. Know His thoughts for you.**

Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God knows the plans and thoughts He has for you. They are plans for your prosperity, health, and success. Ask Him to reveal these thoughts and plans to you. Then live accordingly.

**3. Think on these things.** Philippians 4:8 tells us what type of things to think about. Thinking truth results in walking in truth. "We need a constant sense of the ennobling power of pure thoughts. The only security for any soul is right thinking. As a man 'thinketh in his heart, so is he' (Proverbs 23:7). The power of self-restraint strengthens with exercise. That which at first seems difficult, by constant repetition grows easy, until right thoughts and actions become habitual. If we will, we may turn away from all that is cheap and inferior and rise to a high standard; we may be respected by men and beloved of God."<sup>2</sup>

1. Graham Maxwell, *A Message From Graham Maxwell*. Retrieved June 10, 2005, from <<http://www.pineknoll.org/ibelieve.html>>.

2. *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 285.



## Finding Meaning in Emptiness

### OPINION

Eccles. 11:7–10

We live in a dualistic society that demands we smile when we are broken and that we act like we have everything together. Some find relief in drugs, alcohol, or sex. Others pursue wealth, power, or busyness to deafen the cry of an aching soul. More subtly, there are those who hide their pain behind religious zeal, attempting to mask or dull the burning sting of life. But it is not that simple. At a deeper level, we are trying to achieve for ourselves something only God can give. We are listening again to the serpent's claim that we can be like God if we just taste for ourselves the fruit of our own labor.

Then it happens. The cold reality of life becomes painful enough to cut through our gaudy façades that we have flimsily constructed to convince others and ourselves that everything is under control. Then, somewhere, somehow, in the midst of life's stormy challenges, our perspectives change, and we can see how small and incapable we really are. Even then, many of us continue struggling, frantically

working to fulfill God's promises with our own cheap, earthy imitations. Limited as we are, it is easier for us to focus on the physical rather than the spiritual and to see the temporary rather than the eternal. Like the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, we

**God has come down and entered personally into our struggle.**

expect God to take care of our problems that only His second coming will be able to eradicate fully. We are not alone, however. God has come down and entered personally into our struggle, hoping we will see He is not our enemy, but our Savior; that He is not the problem, but the solution; that His promises are better than we ever could imagine.

Many of us don't really know what God is like. Neither do we understand what He has promised us. The only way our imitations can be exposed is for us to see a clear picture of who God is, to come out from hiding in the dark recesses of our own self-sufficiency and protection and stand fully exposed in the light of His glorious presence. Only then will we discover how insufficient we really are. Only then will we find where we truly are and how our every need can be met.

### REACT

1. What do you turn to for relief in this life instead of Christ?
2. How can you start relying more on Him?

# Life Assessment

## EXPLORATION

John 3:8; Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 10:31

## CONCLUDE

Life can be meaningless whether we are young or old. This calls for a realistic assessment of our attitudes and actions. Each of us should flee from a life of sorrow or evil (Eccles. 11:10) and embrace the joy of life in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Solomon invites us to squeeze every drop of goodness out of life by taking risks, trusting in God, and living with integrity, generosity, and optimism, even when the rest of the world isn't.

## CONSIDER

- Creating an artistic work that expresses the contrast between age and youth.
- Surveying a group of older people to discover how they found a relationship with God and the purpose for living.
- Researching the causes and preventative measures of youth suicide and at-risk behaviors. Consider sharing your findings with teens or youth in your church or community.
- Presenting a musical program in an aged-care facility as a means of bringing encouragement and grace to people's lives and allowing them to feel young again.
- Undertaking an extreme sport and an extreme service activity in one weekend. Compare the impact on yourself and others.
- Making a list of things you want to do, see, or experience before a certain age or before you die. What things will you do with God before that time?
- Studying meteorology or anatomy to discover something more about wind, rain, bones, and pregnancy as a window into God's work in your life.

## CONNECT

1 Timothy 4:11–16; 6:11–14; 2 Timothy 1:3–7.

*Education*, pp. 57, 58, 253–261.

Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn, *Every Young Woman's Battle: Guarding Your Mind, Heart, and Body in a Sex-Saturated World*; or Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker, with Mike Yorkey, *Every Young Man's Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation*.

# The Conclusion of the Matter



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**“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone” (Eccles. 12:13, NRSV).**

# Ramblings of a Bitter Old Man?

## INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 12:13

Have you ever wondered what life is all about? Maybe you've had a bad experience or made some bad choices and are suffering the consequences. Perhaps the things you see going on in the world just don't seem to make any sense. Life can be very confusing, no matter how much of it you've experienced; and you may feel like it's impossible to figure it out for yourself. So where can you go to find some answers?

Imagine listening to an older gentleman give his perspective on life. He calls himself the philosopher. He begins by recounting all of the mistakes he made when he was young. He laments not being wise enough to make better decisions and not listening to those who knew better than he did, particularly God. He complains about the injustices in the world and the futility of life. "Life is useless!" he exclaims.

He gives you some advice by warning you not to be lazy or foolish. "Enjoy life while you can," he states soberly, "before you are too old to enjoy it." He manages to offer some pearls of wisdom before warning again that the things of this life—money, women, pleasure-seeking—are worthless.

On the surface, this sounds rather depressing, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, it can be quite difficult to listen to someone this pessimistic. And it can be quite easy to dismiss his advice as the ramblings of a bitter old man. But the truth of the matter is, there is plenty to be learned from the experiences of someone who has seen so much of life. Perhaps he's been through some things you might be facing now, or might face in the future. Maybe he's asked some of the same questions about life you've asked. After all, there isn't much he hasn't seen or heard.

Finally, he gets to the point of life, to the conclusion of the whole matter. He has one last piece of advice for you. Do you lean forward to catch the words? Or do you think you already have all the answers? The philosopher believes in the wisdom he has gained from his experiences, so he is desperate to teach anyone who will hear.

Are you ready to listen to his conclusion?

**Do you think you already  
have all the answers?**

# The Preacher Tried

## LOGOS

### Ecclesiastes 12

In Ecclesiastes 12, Solomon gives illustrations from the human body to describe what he has been discussing in the previous 11 chapters. The only proper thing to do is to be diligent throughout life, because this is what is going to happen: (1) “keepers of the house tremble” (verse 3a, NKJV)—our arms and hands will tremble in old age; (2) “strong men bow down” (verse 3b, NKJV)—our legs are bent in feebleness; (3) “grinders cease because they are few” (verse 3c, NKJV)—our teeth are mostly gone; (4) “those that look through windows grow dim” (verse 3d, NKJV)—we lose our eyesight.

Verses 4–6 repeat in a similar fashion the need to be diligent and to not try to outguess God and His ways.

When Solomon uses the word *remember* in verse 1, he is not implying that we have forgotten something. Rather he is stating that we must act now. So he repeats himself once again by saying: “Vanity of vanities, . . . All is vanity” (verse 8, NKJV).

**“When you find yourself  
lost in the mountains, never  
go down, always go up.”**

In other words, it is foolish to have lived life without knowing the key to successful living. So, Solomon is now ready to bring his book to a close by summarizing what he has written. He begins by letting us know he is qualified to do this. Verses 9

and 10 bear his credentials. “I have done my homework,” he is telling us. In verse 11, he gives us the ultimate source of this book—the Shepherd (NKJV).

Now, after 220 verses, Solomon summarizes the beginning, the middle, and the end of life. “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccles. 12:13, 14, NRSV). What do you receive, what is the profit from all our work? We get the living God. Did you get it? Was it clear?

Marketing experts try to get their message across in as few words as possible—“GOT MILK?” “WHERE’S THE BEEF?” etc. As God’s marketing expert, Solomon is now qualified to summarize his belief on how to live. It’s a big subject; but when you’ve experienced it all, you can simply say: “Fear God, and keep his commandments” (Eccles. 12:13, NRSV).



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Solomon has kept his promise to tell us how to avoid being a failure. The tragic thing though is that he tells his story after the fact. He did all these things. He had everything to live with, but nothing to live for. The question each of us must ask as the book closes is: Can I succeed without risking failure, without knowing what failure is? Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes so we could avoid traveling the same road he did.

The preacher has told us about life from a totally different viewpoint than we are accustomed to. That is why this book is quite possibly the strangest book in the Bible.

The author is a rationalist, a skeptic, a pessimist, and a fatalist. Why then is Ecclesiastes included in the Bible? The Mishna records that it was retained "because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching." Some scholars also believe it is the most moving Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament, while others believe that life's pursuits are useless in order that we might be forced to contemplate heavenly things.

A man who was raised in the Great Smoky Mountains tells how he thought he could never get lost. As a child, the mountains were his playground. As an adult, they were his hunting area. One day, however, he found himself groping through the brush and clambering over the rocks, hopelessly confused. Suddenly, to his relief, he came upon a cabin where an elderly man lived. He said he would never forget the advice the man gave him: "When you find yourself lost in the mountains, never go down, always go up. At the top of the ridge you can get your bearings and find your way again."

We can become lost like Solomon was. We can go down and try everything the world offers, or we can keep heading up. When we reach the top of the ridge, we will be able to see God's commandments pointing in the only true direction. God offers to always be there, just like He was for Solomon.

It seems beyond belief that after Solomon's fall, God would ask him to write a book for Him. But Ecclesiastes teaches that when we come back to God's commandments, He will accept us as if we had never gone astray. What a God!

Monday  
March 26

# For Time and Eternity

## TESTIMONY

Ecclesiastes 12

"Solomon's repentance was sincere; but the harm that his example of evil-doing had wrought could not be undone. . . .

"His influence for good was greatly weakened. Many hesitated to place full confidence in his leadership. Though the king confessed his sin and wrote out for the benefit of after generations a record of his folly and repentance, he could never hope entirely to destroy the baleful influence of his wrong deeds. Emboldened by his apostasy, many continued to do evil, and evil only. And in the downward course of many of the rulers who followed him may be traced the sad influence of the prostitution of his God-given powers.

"In the anguish of bitter reflection on the evil of his course, Solomon was constrained to declare, 'Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.' 'There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: folly is set in great dignity.'

"Among the many lessons taught by Solomon's life, none is more strongly emphasized than the power of influence for good or for ill. However contracted may be our sphere, we still exert an influence for weal or woe. Beyond our knowledge or control, it tells upon others in blessing or cursing. It may be heavy with the gloom of discontent and selfishness, or poisonous with the deadly taint of some cherished sin; or it may be charged with the life-giving power of faith, courage, and hope, and sweet with the fragrance of love. But potent for good or for ill it will surely be.

"That our influence should be a savor of death unto death is a fearful thought, yet it is possible. One soul misled, forfeiting eternal bliss—who can estimate the loss! And yet one rash act, one thoughtless word, on our part may exert so deep an influence on the life of another that it will prove the ruin of his soul. One blemish on the character may turn many away from Christ.

"As the seed sown produces a harvest, and this in turn is sown, the harvest is multiplied. In our relation to others, this law holds true. Every act, every word, is a seed that will bear fruit. Every deed of thoughtful kindness, of obedience, of self-denial, will reproduce itself in others, and through them in still others. So every act of envy, malice, or dissension is a seed that will spring up in a 'root of bitterness' whereby 'many' shall be defiled. Hebrews 12:15. And how much larger number will the 'many' poison! Thus the sowing of good and evil goes on for time and for eternity."\*

\* *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 84, 85.

# The Secret Code

## EVIDENCE

Eccles. 12:8; Matt. 24:30, 31

The year was 1987. The setting was a district in the western part of Kenya. A group of Adventists read and interpreted prophecy, and according to them, had deciphered “the secret code.” To recruit members more rapidly, the founders of this group targeted church elders, who once converted to their way of thinking, would join them along with a swathe of their church members. Adherents of the group left their jobs, sold their farms and houses, and when buyers weren’t readily available, simply abandoned their belongings.

Children stopped going to school. People deserted their families—disowning those who couldn’t join them. The “true” believers converged in halls, which became their new homes and worship places, as they waited for the “great day,” hoping it would be a sweet ending of their solitary escapade; a moment when they would behold the heavens opening with glory.

When the day finally arrived, all seemed normal, save for the eagerness in the people’s hearts. As the day progressed, the members’ eyes were transfixed on the skies, scanning for any indication of heaven’s glory descending. The sun finally set, and the moment they had waited for so eagerly ended without Christ descending. They were so deeply disappointed. Many gave up being Christians and backslid into the world. Some formed offshoots, still keeping the seventh-day Sabbath in their own way. Many who had sold their property—including houses—are leading miserable lives.

**Many gave up on being Christians and backslid into the world.**

The coming of Christ will climax this earth’s history. It will be the conclusion of the whole matter. The Lord will descend as King with glory and power to take His faithful ones home (Mark 13:27; John 14:3), where there won’t be any sickness, sorrow, or death; where our taxes will never come due nor rent for our homes. Christ will wipe all tears from our eyes that are there because of the pain and loss we have suffered on earth (Rev. 21:4). Of all His promises, His promise to return stands as the day. God has invited all individuals to prepare for this grand destiny. He has warned us against setting dates for it (Matt. 24:36). He did, however, give landmarks to show His coming is near (Matt. 24:1–34). Christ was emphasizing that it is not the when but the how to be prepared (2 Pet. 3:11, 12; Luke 13:35–40).

## REACT

1. How are you preparing for Christ’s soon return?
2. How do you react to claims that Jesus will appear and snatch people in secret? What is the significance of Christ’s public descent?

# Breaking the Vanity Chain

## HOW-TO

Eccles. 4:4; 12:8; Rom. 3:23

Solomon concluded that all was vanity (Eccles. 12:8). According to him, hard work is what brews envy between neighbors (Eccles. 4:4). These damning conclusions could easily cause us to question the meaning of life. What is the purpose of living if the end result is death for the evil and the good, the rich and the poor, the happy and the sad, the young and the old, etc.?

Has life always been useless? Is there anything that can be done to reverse the situation? These are difficult questions. And the answers can only come from our Creator.

The Bible tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, NKJV). Therefore, vanity could not possibly find its origin in Him. He created Adam and Eve in a perfect form—physically, mentally, and spiritually—and placed them as rulers over all living things. Harmony prevailed. Simple beauty abounded, because God's love reigned.

**God calls for complete surrender if the vanity chain is to be broken.**

Unfortunately, Satan had other ideas. Employing all the subtlety of his intellect, he managed to get the first human pair to sin. One of the results was vanity; and the rest is history. Sin negated every good thing God provided for enjoyment

and refreshment, including work. Because Adam is our ancestor, we are all sinners and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). The wages of all this is death (Rom. 6:23). However, because God is love, He has provided release from vanity through the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Those who have surrendered to Jesus and experienced His saving grace know that all is *not* vanity. Sadly, not all professing Christians have tasted and found the Lord to be good, because they want to try a little vanity while at the same time experiencing the joy of being in Christ. God, however, calls for complete surrender if the vanity chain is to be broken.

## REACT

Why is it impossible to be in Christ and still find everything under the sun to be vanity?

# Why Wait?

## OPINION

Eccles. 12:8

The aroma of lattes fills the air as I study in the local café. The world of obstetrics and gynecology swirls about in my head. My test is in three days, and I'm cramming like crazy! As I feverishly scan the pages of my book, I think of my Bible, nestled in the bottom of my bag, reminding me of my recent lack of personal devotions and how this would be a great time to reestablish contact with God.

Sweat beads on my brow as the forces of good and evil battle within me. I know I need to stay in contact with Jesus if I'm to accomplish anything worthwhile in this life. Yet, I keep on studying, forsaking counsel from the only true Healer for a few more chapters on complications during pregnancy and good prenatal care.

As a medical student, with clinical duties during the day and a few hours at night to study, putting off prayer and Bible study almost seems justified. After all, God got me into medical school. I'm sure He wouldn't want me to fail. I should definitely read my textbook now and my Bible later.

Then I realize I'm missing the point. God is the One who got me into medical school, and it's only by His grace that I am still here. God has given me everything I have,

and apart from Him, nothing makes sense. To echo the words of the great teacher, without the purpose of God in our lives, "Everything is meaningless!" (Eccles. 12:8, NIV). Although it seems that nothing will surpass what we are going through right now, all things are transient. Medical school, post-graduate training, and careers all will come to an end. The only constant is God.

I don't want to race through this maze of life without guidance from God, only to wake up 50 years from now to realize my life has been meaningless. So today, in the bustle of a busy café, I decide to take a lesson from the great teacher and to seek God in the sweetness of my youth (Eccles. 12:1). I invite you to do the same.

**Sweat beads on my brow as  
the forces of good and evil  
battle within me.**

## REACT

1. When was the last time you read your Bible?
2. If God is always there for us, why not wait until the fun of life is over to seek a personal relationship with Him?



Friday  
March 30

# The Heart of the Matter

## EXPLORATION

Eccles. 12:13

## CONCLUDE

Tom Brady is a superstar in the big-money game of American football. He dates a movie star and can hardly go anywhere in public without being surrounded by fans. But even in his twenties, he's expressing the same thoughts that an aged king wrote down in Ecclesiastes. "Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there is something greater out there for me?" he asked a news reporter. "A lot of people would say, 'This is what it is. I reached my goal, my dream . . .' Me, I think, 'God, it's got to be more than this.' I mean, this isn't . . . what it's all cracked up to be." At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon sums up the meaning of life for quarterback Tom Brady and for the rest of us.

## CONSIDER

- Reading the biography of a person whom you feel had a meaningful life—perhaps a missionary, an inventor, or a humanitarian.
- Making a time sheet that accounts for all your time in a typical week. How much time do you spend working? sleeping? surfing the Net? Then add up the total hours you feel you spend in meaningful pursuits.
- Looking through your old photos and reflecting on those times that were fulfilling for you and those times that seem empty as you look back on them. How does this make you want to live your life in the future?
- Visiting a nursing home and talking to the residents about what has given them the greatest sense of meaning. What part does God play in their lives?
- Visiting a planetarium or a friend with a telescope. As you peer at space, meditate on your place in the universe and your relationship to its Creator.
- Listening to a random selection of sacred and secular songs. Which songs have themes of hope? In what or whom is that hope placed?

## CONNECT

Jim Hohnberger with Tim and Julie Canuteson, *Escape to God*; Wintley Phipps with Goldie Down, *The Power of a Dream*.

<<http://cbs.sportsline.com/cbssports/story/9021353>>.

## Next Quarter's Lessons

# Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet: The Bible for Today

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 2007, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

### Lesson 1: The Voice From Heaven

**Logos:** Gen. 3:8, 9; 2 Sam. 12:1–7; Isa. 59:2; Jer. 38:14–19; Ezekiel 4; Amos 3:7; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; 3:1.

**Memory Text:** “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIV).

**Key Thought:** Since the fall of humanity, the Lord has been communicating with us through various means.

How much is a human worth? From a purely chemical standpoint, quite a bit. According to various estimates, the value of the proteins, enzymes, RNA, DNA, amino acids, and bio-chemicals within the human body, may make a person worth, literally, millions of dollars.

Of course, our true worth can be understood only through the life and death of Jesus. If our value wasn't infinite in the sight of God, such an infinite price would not have been paid for our redemption.

How, though, has the Lord revealed to us the good news of our worth and our redemption? This week we begin by looking at the various means in which God has been communicating with us. Yes, God is still talking to us sinful and degraded creatures. The crucial question is: Will we listen to what He is saying?

### Lesson 2: The Final Word

**Logos:** Matt. 4:4–10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Gal. 1:11, 12; James 2; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 3:16.

**Memory Text:** “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NIV).

**Key Thought:** From where does the Bible derive its authority?

We all live under one final authority or another, whatever it happens to be. As Christians, we believe that the final authority is God, whose will is expressed in

the Bible. Hence, the Bible is the final word.

But why should any one of us put ourselves under the authority of a book? The answer is that the Bible isn't just a book; it is, instead, the Word of God.

Thus, by virtue of whom its Author is, the Lord God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Book comes with its divine authority built in. After all, who has authority over God? No one. That's why the Bible has to be the foundational and final Word.

This week we'll take a look at the authority of the Scripture. What does the Scripture say about itself? What claims does it make about itself and its origins? How did the Bible writers view other books of the Bible? And, most important, what does Jesus Himself have to say about the Scriptures? After all, He—the Lord Himself—would have, no doubt, the final word on the final Word.

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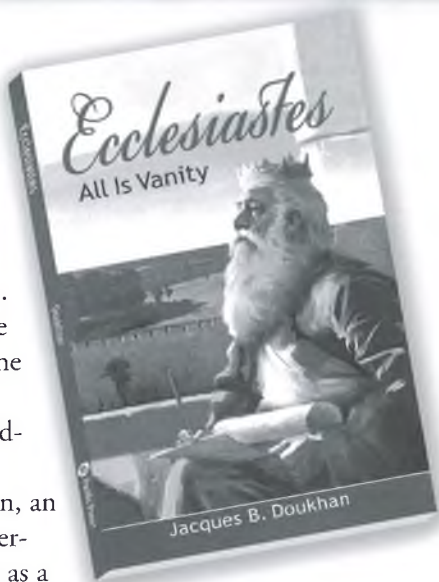
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The companion book to the Adult Bible  
Study Guide for the  
*first quarter 2007.*

**All Is Vanity!**  
On earth, that is.

Solomon the king is approaching his death still haunted by his past. When first on the throne, he had asked for wisdom. He was granted that and much more. But looking back over his life in an effort to pass on what he has learned to his successor, Solomon finds his journey riddled with contradictions.

Author Jacques B. Doukhan, an Adventist scholar of Jewish heritage, identifies contradiction as a symptom of our human condition. "Ecclesiastes affirms the value of work, wisdom, life, and happiness. But all these good values—including religion and even righteousness—contain the potential of corruption and evil."



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# Finding Jesus in the City

How does one introduce Christ to people too busy to care? Show God's face to those who don't know where to look? Plant a church in a city where most churches stand nearly empty?

Geneva, Switzerland, is one of the most secular cities in the world. Its historic churches stand empty while people pass by pursuing their futures. A group of dedicated young people at the Adventist seminary in Collonges, France, have set their sites on Geneva. Their challenge is to find ways to present the gospel that is relevant and appealing to the unchurched in Geneva.

And it's working. The young people are creating new and deeply meaningful encounters with God, brushing away 2000 years of dusty tradition. At one meeting some 60 people, mostly college-age students and many university students in Geneva, gathered for a meal and an encounter with Christ. These young people are searching for God, for meaning, and the Adventist youth are helping them find it.

I want to help these young people, hold up their spiritual hands, support their efforts to build a vibrant, living group of believers in this great city of Europe. I can do that through my mission offerings and especially through my Thirteenth Sabbath Offering part of which will help plant this church. For me it's personal.



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