

CHASING THE WIND – A LIFE OF FUTILITY

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

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TEXT: Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

TITLE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW – CHASING THE WIND – THE CYCLE OF FUTILITY

BIG IDEA:

THE EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVE OF SOLOMON TESTIFY TO THE EMPTINESS OF LIFE AND THE LACK OF ANY SATISFYING ANSWERS TO THE HUMAN CYCLE OF FUTILITY

The world claims to be searching for answers. **What is the meaning of life?** How can I find fulfillment and significance? Why do I hide from the boredom of reality and seek escape in the world of entertainment and sports, the world of education and Philosophy, the world of career success and achievements, the world of materialism and possessions, the world of sex and sensual pleasures, etc? Most of our unsaved friends refuse to face the emptiness of their pitiful worldview. They do not want to be reminded of the death that awaits and the unknown eternity that follows. They do not want to consider their accountability before their Creator. They deny that they are bankrupt and lost and blind in this meaningless existence of life on this earth apart from God. They are boastful about their satisfaction with the life they have chosen for themselves. “I’m living the way I want to live.” But what will be their destiny? They need a heavy dose of THE REALITY OF THEIR FUTILITY before they will respond to the good news of the free gift of salvation and meaningful life through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Surprising that the suicide rate is not higher than it is.

Fairchild: Many in our day are looking for a **purpose to exist**. A purpose profound enough, big enough, consuming enough, that it grabs us by the shirt collar and demands our attention. Many are looking for a reason for living that will plumb the depths of our passions and sustain us until we breathe our last.

That’s why this book of Ecclesiastes is such a helpful pre-evangelism tool to use with our unsaved friends. I encourage you to seek out someone with whom you can share a copy of this book (and Swindoll’s helpful guide) and discuss its perspective. But I find that too often Solomon’s perspective of futility mirrors my own thinking as a believer .. how can that be? We all need to be reminded of the vast difference between the worldview of humanism vs one who is united to Jesus Christ and living for eternity.

Solomon’s Technique: **literary pessimism**. It’s a negative argument to demonstrate a profound truth. To learn the true meaning of life ... first view life apart from God – see it in all of its futility ... then the layer of *God-connectiveness* can be added and it will mean something

Sunday School Course Logistics

- Use of Swindoll’s book – Living on the Ragged Edge \$8 (half regular retail)
 - Bible translations used; tracks sequentially through the 12 chapters of the book
 - Some quotes, some illustrations
 - No unified analytical outline of entire book presented
- Other resources – like outline by David Malick on www.bible.org
- Outline of what we will cover each week (handout)
- Preached this 10 years ago with 2 other men (Racer, Cobb) – 4 messages each (website)

- Homework assignments
 - Reading the chapters
 - Finding at least one person to share the book with
 - Brainstorming cultural examples from today that make the message relevant

“*Under the sun*” viewpoint – mark these words throughout the book

Not everything in here is true from God’s perspective ... but accurate from Solomon’s experience

Stedman: Ecclesiastes is a collection of what man is able to discern under the sun, i.e., in the visible world. The book does not take into consideration revelation that comes from beyond man's powers of observation and reason. It is an inspired, an accurate book. It guarantees that what it reports is what people actually believe. but it is an examination of those beliefs.

I. (:1) THE PERSONA OF THE PREACHER: EMINENTLY QUALIFIED TO SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY

A. An Authoritative Blog (Public Journal)

“The words”

We are fortunate to have such a record;

Still everyone refuses to listen but stubbornly chases the wind on their own.

What if someone were to come back from the dead and give personal testimony?

Luke 16:19-31

B. A Supremely Credible Author – Identified with 3 Majestic Descriptions

1. The Preacher = title of the Book - Ecclesiastes

The Hebrew word designates a leader who speaks before an assembly of people

Our culture: the preacher is someone TV makes fun of and portrays as weak and out of touch with reality; positive not negative connotations here

2. Son of David – need to spend some time here and get some background

Stedman: Many of the critical commentators of our day question that view, and very few of them accept it. They try to date the book after the Babylonian exile, some 500 years after Solomon lived. That is the habitual stance of critics of the Old Testament.

(Try to make an argument based on the type of vocabulary and literary devices used ...)

Who is this man Solomon: name means “peace” – contrast to the wars pursued under his father King David (just finished studying 2 Samuel) – chosen to build the Temple; associated with wisdom and wealth; set up for success

2 Chron. 9:5-8; 22-28

1 Kings 4:21-34

1 Kings 11:1-11 we see God’s displeasure with Solomon later in his reign

Racer: He had the largest geographic parcel of any Israelite king; plenty of wealth; these were happy times in Israel; he was a philosopher, scientist, thinker, diplomat; He kept a journal of his life; he was more blessed by God than anyone; Still, he was not satisfied! Don't try to duplicate his pursuit of meaning in life -- Instead, learn by his mistakes.

Fairchild: Solomon is King David's son. He was born of Bathsheba, the woman David committed adultery with and had her husband murdered at the front lines of a battle. Though David loved God greatly, he was still a sinner that needed God's grace. If you ever want to read a Psalm written by someone who has committed a great sin, read Psalm 51. It is the Psalm David wrote after he had sinned against God with Bathsheba.

3. King in Jerusalem

In control of the pursuit of this special knowledge

No limitations; no restraints – we need to listen to this authoritative message from Solomon

II. (:2-11) THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PREACHER: MONOTONOUSLY BORED BY THE CYCLE OF EARTHBOUND FUTILITY

A. (:2) Simple Thesis – No Satisfaction in this life – just emptiness and futility

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

Cry of **Despair**

Hebrew literary device for **emphasis** – like calling Christ King of Kings and Lord of Lords

This insight for living comes from the same man who wrote much of the Book of Proverbs – what a different orientation

Certainly not the mindset of Christ: **John 4:34** *My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work*

Certainly not the mindset of the Apostle Paul: **Phil. 1:21-22** *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me*

B. (:3) Fundamental Question – Why do we do what we do?? What is the point??

“What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?”

Solomon is very analytical – trying to figure life out

He tried every type of pursuit imaginable – pushed the envelope to the limit

Using work here in a very general sense – all of life's pursuits and activities and endeavors; he will look at work and careers very specifically later

Stedman: After he has sucked dry all the immediate delight, joy or pleasure out of something, what is left over, what endures, what will remain to continually feed the hunger of his life for satisfaction?

C. (:4-7) Universal Illustration of the Meaningless Cycle of Nature

1. (:4) Generations don't make a Difference

*“A generation goes and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.”*

Baby Boomers – who cares

Generation X – who cares

2. (:5) Each Day is a Meaningless Repetition

“Also, the sun rises and the sun sets;

And hastening to its place it rises there again.”

Course of the sun: Thing of beauty to some – but to Solomon, just
Another reminder visually of the meaningless repetition of life --
What is accomplished?? Nothing

3. (:6) The Wind Cycles Around – Accomplishing Nothing

*“Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north,
The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns.”*

Sort of like the futility of watching NASCAR race

What is the point of it all

Life is like a Beltway – lots of cars and activities – looks like they are just going
around in a big circle

Life is like a Treadmill – you work hard and sweat; but go nowhere

Constant repetitive motion – that is what the movement of the wind symbolizes

Fairchild: We often mistake movement with progress. We think we are making progress but in reality we are driving around a cul-de-sac and wondering why the neighborhoods all look the same.

4. (:7) The Cycle of Rivers Flowing into the Sea Makes no Sense

*“All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full.
To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again.”*

Cf. little children asking the question “Why?” repeatedly;

The sea is a bottomless pit; never satisfied; can never be filled up;

All of this impressive activity seems to accomplish nothing;

Probably reminds the housewives of their daily tedious chores

The dirty clothes and the dirty dishes just keep coming

Nothing is ever Done.

For business executives, why do you think they call it a rat race?

Wiersbe: In this section, Solomon approached the problem as a scientist and examined the “wheel of nature” around him: the earth, the sun, the wind, and the water. (This reminds us of the ancient “elements” of earth, air, fire, and water.) He was struck by the fact that generations of people came and went while the things of nature remained. There was “change” all around, yet nothing really changed. Everything was only part of the “wheel of nature” and contributed to the monotony of life. So, Solomon asked, “Is life worth living?”

D. (:8-11) Frustrating Conclusion – One Man Cannot Make a Difference, an Impact –

We are a meaningless dot on the timeline of unchanging existence

There is nothing new under the sun

1. (:8) No Satisfaction or Fulfillment for Man

“All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it.

The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing.”

Our glass is always half-filled; some people you describe that way; really

Applies to all of us; no matter how upbeat and optimistic we appear
Human desire is never satisfied; restlessness

2. (:9-10) Nothing new under the sun
*“That which has been is that which will be,
And that which has been done is that which will be done.
So there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there anything of which one might say, See this, it is new?
Already it has existed for ages which were before us.”*

Design and Funding experience with inventors; selling them on what a wonderful
new idea they are trying to bring to market

3. (:11) No Legacy or Memorials
*“There is no remembrance of earlier things;
And also of the later things which will occur.
There will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still.”*

Man tries to build monuments and name roads after people – but don’t kid
yourself; you are soon forgotten
Mantra of business: no one is indispensable; you are replaceable
Ask your friends tomorrow about the legacy of Solomon ... what does his life
mean to them? (We talking about Des’s dog??)

III. (:12-18) THE PURSUIT OF THE PREACHER: DISCOURAGED AS HE DISCOVERS THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE – EXAMINING BOTH WORKS AND WISDOM

(1:12 – 2:23 Solomon examining works and then wisdom – repeated cycles ... looking for a
way to break out of the monotony and meaninglessness of life)

A. (:12-15) Examination of Works

1. (:12) Supremely Qualified Detective
 - a. Preeminent Insight
“I the Preacher”

Penned the words of the book of Proverbs earlier **12:9-12**
 - b. Preeminent Dominion
“have been king over Israel”
 - c. Preeminent Location
“in Jerusalem.”

2. (:13) Mission Impossible – Discover the Secret of Life
 - a. Supremely Focused Pursuit
 - (1). Analytical and Logical Pursuit
“And I set my mind”

Not getting some subjective, emotional reaction
This will be well thought out; enlightened; reasonable

(2). Comprehensive Pursuit -- **Swindoll**

(a) “*to seek*” – investigate the roots of a matter
Do serious research

(b) “*and explore*” – examine all sides
It’s a practical word for experimentation

Stedman: the **Searcher** – he is the ultimate investigative reporter

Here is a searching mind which has looked over all of life and seen what is behind the actions of people

(3). Gifted Pursuit – “*by wisdom*”

Who better than Solomon to investigate

(4). Unconstrained Pursuit

“*concerning all that has been done under heaven*”

Our grand juries are limited; focusing just on investigating one issue;
Can be very frustrating; can’t ask certain questions; can’t go there

b. Supremely Frustrating Mission

“*It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.*”

Wiersbe: Solomon mentions God forty times and always uses “*Elohim*” and never “*Jehovah.*” Elohim (“God” in the English Bible) is the Mighty God, the glorious God of creation who exercises sovereign power. Jehovah (“LORD” in the English Bible) is the God of the covenant, the God of revelation who is eternally self-existent and yet graciously relates Himself to sinful man. Since Solomon is dealing exclusively with what he sees “*under the sun,*” he uses Elohim.

Eaton: God has appointed an unhappy task for the sons of men to do. The verb “*give*” sometimes has the force of “*appoint*” (e.g. Je. 1:5). People may live secularly in the earthly realm, but the problems they meet are ordained by the God who occupies the heavenly realm. Mankind cannot be indifferent to or detached from the futility which besets him; it is an “inescapable fact of one’s humanity” (Rylaarsdam). *Business*, denoting mankind’s restlessness and vigour in the quest for meaning, derives from *anah*, “to engage in something”, to be active in doing something”. It points to the sense of compulsion behind the quest. Mankind thinks and plans. This he can scarcely avoid, for he want to understand where his life is going. This is the burden which, by God’s decree, every man bears; the problem of life is no optional hobby.

3. (:14-15) Theory of Futility Substantiated

Cf. Einstein and his theory of Relativity – Solomon known for his more fundamental human theory = The theory of futility

a. Comprehensive Investigation

“I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun”

b. Consistent Conclusion = Thesis of the Book Repeated

“all is vanity and striving after wind”

Wiersbe: Both the workaholic and the alcoholic are running away from reality and living on substitutes, and one day the bubble of illusion will burst. We only make life harder when we try to escape. Instead of running away from life, we should run to God and let Him make life worth living.

c. Confirmed Inevitability

“What is crooked cannot be straightened

And what is lacking cannot be counted.”

Wouldn't you like to be part of the solution; wouldn't you like to make a difference; cf all of the politicians each election promising CHANGE – they are going to step into office and enact policies and sponsor legislation that will cure our ills; take just one for example: cutting back on big govt spending ... what are the results?

How about trying to make changes in our own lives; all of the self help books; all of the inspirational speakers who try to get us all enthused about mind over matter; all of the positive thinking gurus; reality: you can't change the spots on a leopard!

Only God can transform people's lives from the inside out

B. (:16-18) Examination of Wisdom

1. Supremely Qualified Detective

“I said to myself, Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge”

I stopped at nothing; I gave it my best shot

2. Mission Impossible

“And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly;”

3. Theory of Futility Substantiated

“I realized that this also is striving after wind. Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.”

T. S. Eliot in Choruses from “The Rock”: All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance.

Racer: Why is there so much grief in Education?

1) Obsolescence -- there is always something more and newer to be learned (cf. computer software releases)

2) Hitting the wall of our own educational and mental capabilities (you can never know it all)

Zeisler: Why is this? we wonder. Why should an increase in knowledge and understanding bring grief and pain? I think most of us suffer from a 'cockeyed optimist' syndrome. We feel that if we could just understand reality, that some semblance of coherence would emerge; that there is

something beautiful awaiting us at the end of the 'yellow brick road'; that although to all outward appearances, the world seems topsy-turvy, at its core everything is good and rational. But no. If all we have to go on is life "under the sun," if heaven does not break through somewhere along the line, then the farther we penetrate in our search the more we will discover that there is no good center awaiting us at the end of our quest.

Racer: Song: "*Chasing the Wind*" -- sung by Steve Green

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) **Overview:** Read through the book of Ecclesiastes and make a list of all of the pursuits and endeavors of men that are labeled as "*Vanity*" by Solomon. Where are you tempted to find significance "*under the sun*"?
- 2) List some of your monotonous, repetitive tasks or responsibilities. What is your attitude or mindset as you perform these?
- 3) How can Solomon (writing back around 930 B.C.) claim that "*there is nothing new under the sun*"? What about the technological innovations of today? How do these mesh with the argument Solomon is making?
- 4) What are some other ways to express the theme of "*striving after wind*"? What are some cultural examples today of people who purport to have discovered the meaning of life and have something significant to live for?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

G. S. Hendry (quoted by **Kidner**): Qoheleth writes from concealed premises, and his book is in reality a major work of apologetic Its apparent worldliness is dictated by its aim: Qoheleth is addressing the general public whose view is bounded by the horizons of this world; he meets them on their own ground, and proceeds to convict them of its inherent vanity. This is further borne out by his characteristic expression "*under the sun*", by which he describes what the NT calls "the world" His book is in fact a critique of secularism and of secularized religion.

Constable: Assuming that Solomon wrote the book in its entirety, he must have done so during his lifetime and probably during his reign (971-931 B.C.). It has seemed probable to some expositors that he may have written Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs in his middle life, and Ecclesiastes in his old age (cf. 2:1-11; 11:9; 12:1).

Racer: Written in the later years of Solomon's life -- this is a journal of his wanderings "under the sun"; a view with blinders toward heaven; he writes as a broken man; Initially as king, worship had a prominent role; then money and women became an end in themselves; He ended up pursuing life apart from Jehovah God and ran into a wall; he stopped including God in his perspective

The Premise of the Book -- "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!"

Life is empty; like blowing bubbles;

Fame, etc. only brings fatigue and not true happiness;

Easy to get caught up in this perspective; Life often is not all that exciting; Life isn't always a bowl of cherries; sometimes it is the pits; Sometimes life is boring, dull; it lacks sense;

There are little dawns throughout the book where he sees beyond the blinders; there is a reality beyond the materialistic world

Themes of the book center around: What constitutes purposeful existence and how can we find it

Chuck Swindoll: Apathy rules and nobody seems to care. Life isn't simply tragic. Life is dull. H. L. Mencken said it well, 'The basic fact about human experience is not that it is a tragedy, but that it is a bore. It is not that it is predominantly painful, but that it is lacking in any sense.' No one ever said it better than Thoreau: 'Most men lead lives of quiet desperation.' We don't want to believe that. Motivational speakers who cheerlead seminars all across America hope that we won't believe that. It would blow a hole in their business. The last thing we're supposed to realize is that we have lied to most of our lives.

EXPOSING FOUR LIES ABOUT LIFE

I can think of at least four falsehoods many still call the truth.

1. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you. Cry and you cry alone.'

I've found quite the opposite is true. 'Laugh and you laugh alone. Cry and you get a crowd. The whole world will cry with you.'

2. 'Every day in every way our world is getting better, better, better.' I'd like to meet the guy who first wrote those words, wouldn't you? I'd string him up before sundown. What a tragic, disillusioning dream!

3. 'There's a light at the end of every tunnel.' Keep hoping ...keep looking for it. Murphy was right when he said that the light at the end of the tunnel was really the 'headlamp of an oncoming train.'

4. This fourth one comes from the pop music world of yesteryear: 'Things never are as bad as they seem. So dream, dream, dream.' Want to sing it with me? No, probably not. Things are not really as bad as they seem. They're often worse, and dreaming won't make them better! ...Why do they tell us those lies? ... There's one simple answer: to make us believe there's purpose and happiness if we simply keep on hoping..."

3 Temptations addressed in Ecclesiastes:

1) The sensual lure of something better tomorrow robs us of the joys offered today

2) The personal temptation to escape is always stronger than the realization of its consequences

3) The final destination, if God is absent from the scene, will not satisfy

Fairchild: Solomon was brilliant, he wrote 3 books of the bible; Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. He is considered the wisest man that has ever lived, and perhaps is the richest that has ever lived. He had a fleet of ships that would bring gold to him every day from far off lands. He had thousands of servants, tremendous amounts of land, and was a genius. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. What in the world would a man with 700 wives need with 300 concubines? Needless to say, Solomon had an answer. Solomon married a woman that God had forbid so that he would gain favor from different nations and because of their worship of a foreign, non-existent God, Solomon's eyes were taken off the Lord and instead placed upon himself and his

own wants and desires.

Zeisler: Life is futile, says the Preacher. "Vanity" means emptiness; that which is insubstantial. Like the vapor which is visible for a moment when one exhales on a cold night, a life leaves no mark, it accomplishes nothing. It is weightless, without substance, like a soap bubble which bursts and disappears, leaving no clue that it ever existed. In this sense, says the Preacher, life is vain. The earth remains always the same despite the many generations that come and go. Each generation scratches about on the earth for a while, and perhaps some may leave a mark, but eventually it is covered by green vegetation and can no longer be discerned. Human lives don't have any weight, any lasting substance.

Wiersbe: Is Life Worth Living?

In spite of his painful encounters with the world and its problems, Solomon does not recommend either pessimism or cynicism. Rather, he admonishes us to be realistic about life, accept God's gifts and enjoy them (2:24; 3:12-15, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10). After all, God gives to us "*richly all things to enjoy*" (1 Tim. 6:17). Words related to joy are used at least seventeen times in Ecclesiastes. Solomon does not say, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die!" Instead, he advises us to trust God and enjoy what we do have rather than complain about what we don't have. Life is short and life is difficult, so make the most of it while you can. . .

The **scientist** tells us that the world is a closed system and nothing is changed. The **historian** tells us that life is a closed book and nothing is new. The **philosopher** tells us that life is a deep problem and nothing is understood. But **Jesus Christ** is "*the power of God and the wisdom of God*" (1 Cor. 1:24), and He has miraculously broken into history to bring new life to all who trust Him. If you are "living in circles," then turn your life over to Him.

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11

TITLE: *LIVING IT UP WILL ALWAYS LET YOU DOWN*

BIG IDEA: INVESTIGATION UNDER THE SUN REVEALS THE FUTILITY OF PLEASURE, POSSESSIONS AND PRIDE

CONTEXT:

Transition from seeking meaning in Intellectualism and Education
He has already acknowledged that education is a grind = much grief
(rushed through this last week – but we will take up this topic next week)

Solomon bounces to the other end of the spectrum -- maybe there is some secret of the good life that I am missing by being too intellectual -- I don't want to go overboard and get into the realm of the crazy and the insane; but I'll try letting my hair down and going with the flow and just seeking pleasure

Value of the **Book** by Swindoll

Possible Titles for this message:

- 1) WHEN YOU LIVE FOR THE PLEASURES OF TODAY -- YOU ARE LEFT WITH A HANDFUL OF SMOKE
- 2) FUN UNDER THE SUN = NONE WHEN LIFE IS DONE
- .3) SOMETIMES THE MAN WHO HAS EVERYTHING HAS NOTHING
- 4) I'LL BE HAPPY WHEN . . .

REVIEW: What are some **images of futility** (in addition to chasing the wind)

Cut to the chase, don't *chase the wind*
In pursuing life apart from Jehovah, Solomon ran into a wall
Like rat or hamster running on treadmill
"*under the sun*" = not including God in the equation
like *blowing bubbles*
like spending your life *shoveling smoke*
life is *not always a bowl of cherries*, sometimes it is the pits
life is like a *black hole* -- sucking the meaning out of life
chasing dandelion seeds in the wind

Important to keep these pictures in your mind

INTRODUCTION: 1 John 2:15-17

AN EXAMINATION OF THE WORLD PROVES THAT LOVE FOR THE WORLD AND LOVE FOR GOD ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE --

LOVE FOR THE WORLD CHARACTERIZED BY 3 FUTILE PURSUITS --

- A. Futility of Unbridled Appetites = Pleasure "*the lust of the flesh*" – Maximizing Fun
Nothing wrong with fun in itself; appetites given to us by God; self control essential
- B. Futility of Coveting Possessions = "*the lust of the eyes*" – Maximizing Things

Nothing wrong with things; cannot serve both God and Mammon
C. Futility of Pride and Selfish Ambition = “*and the boastful pride of life*” -- Maximizing Worldly Fame = what others think of me – we should strive for excellence

I. (2:1-3) THE FUTILITY OF PLEASURE: PARTY ANIMALS WILL HAVE TO WAKE UP SOMETIME AND FACE THE PAIN OF REALITY -- TRYING TO MAXIMIZE FUN

A. (:1) Sneak Preview Summary

1. The Focus for This Test – Checking out Pleasure

“I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure.’”

Did not seek the counsel of others; we see him talking to himself;
Transition from investigation of education and wisdom

Solomon became the ultimate Party Animal -- surprising given what we know about his background:

- Father David = a man after God's own heart
- given the greatest gift of insight and wisdom God has ever bestowed on a man
- involved in works of spiritual significance -- like the building of the Temple

Party animals tend to burn themselves out in 2 directions:

- in a Fun Fantasy -- Pure Escapism
- in a Feeding Frenzy -- Selfish Indulgence

2. The Frame of Reference

“So enjoy yourself.”

Very selfish and self-centered in his orientation;
He gets to pick the areas of pleasure that have the potential to interest him.
Grab for all the Gusto – consistent with all the marketing slogans ...
Just Do It
You only go around once
Eat, Drink and be merry for tomorrow you die
Swindoll: If it feels good, do it
Playboy philosophy

3. The Frustration

“And behold, it too was futility.”

B. (:2) Escapism Fails to Satisfy – Comedy routines, cutting up, hanging out and having a good time

“I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What does it accomplish?’”

humor, joking around in sport; jesting; poking fun at someone

10:19 “*A feast is made for laughter*”; eating, drinking, and having a merry old time

Evaluation: It is madness; craziness; zany; off-the-wall

Cf. Swindoll illustration of man who goes in for counseling; gloomy, depressed; advised to get some comedy relief – turns out he is the clown or the comedian; what lies

behind the mask of Jay Leno and David Letterman??

C. (:3) Indulgence Fails to Satisfy -- Feeding Frenzy -- feeding one's appetites to please yourself-- totally selfish

1. Sophisticated Indulgence

"I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely"

not talking about some drunken fool here; but a sophisticated and intelligent pursuit

2. Unrestrained Indulgence – mind no longer in control here

"and how to take hold of folly"

3. Verdict

"until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives"

Limitations of his investigation:

a) limited by his nature -- looking at human endeavors
not looking at things from God's perspective

b) limited by space -- earthly sphere
not looking at things from a spiritual perspective

c) limited by time -- few years we have to spend here on earth
not looking at things from an eternal perspective

Limitations lead him to a sense of desperation to get on with the task of experimentation -- there is no time to lose in searching for the key to life, the key to happiness; sense that life is passing him by and he doesn't want to miss out

II. (2:4-8) THE FUTILITY OF POSSESSIONS – RICH FOOLS ARE STILL FOOLS -- TRYING TO MAXIMIZE POSSESSIONS

They just have bigger barns

Solomon was the ultimate Top Dog -- THE TOP DOG MENTALITY THRIVES ON COMPETITION – desire to be #1; look at your neighbor and make sure you are beating him out

A. (:4a) TOP DOG IN ARCHITECTURE -- the ultimate Achiever

"I enlarged my works; I built houses for myself"

Mega Building Projects -- Bigger and Better

Note emphasis on **selfishness** in all of these pursuits - *"for myself"* -- not for any humanitarian or philanthropic purposes -- not out to make the world a better place for others

not talking about the Temple -- that was built for God to God's specifications

other royal residences completed later in life (1 Kings 7:10-12; 9:19); Palace in Jerusalem took 13 years in building

All of his **pet, personal projects** – whatever he wanted to excel in; if there were seven wonders in the world, he dedicated himself to building something even more grandiose and impressive – What do you devote yourself to???

Danger of Pride of accomplishment -- cf. Nebuchad.in Daniel 4:30
"Look what I've done; Look what I've built" mentality

Stedman: Solomon too gave himself to this. His own house took fourteen years to build, the temple seven. He built houses for his many wives whom he brought to Jerusalem, spending time, money and interest doing so. Southwest of Jerusalem, in a place seldom visited by tourists; there exist yet today vast depressions in the earth which are still called the Pools of Solomon, which he used to water the forest of trees which he planted in an effort to find satisfaction for his own heart.

B. (:4b-6) TOP DOG IN HORTICULTURE -- the ultimate Arborist; the ultimate Environmentalist; the ultimate gentleman farmer

1. Vineyards – so he could indulge his taste for wine – Best possible drinks
"I planted vineyards for myself"

(Song of Sol. 8:11; cf. David's vineyards 1 Chron. 27:27)

Wine, drugs, narcotics -- addictive vs.3-4 "vineyards"
Best possible drinks (stimulants)

What are they searching for? Some type of fix that will satisfy; Their testimony = "My life apart from these artificial stimulants is empty and boring and meaningless"

2. Natural Works of Beauty -- creative; aesthetically pleasing; fruitful
"I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees."

Cf. kings in Germany and Bavaria – chance to tour their gardens with Jenny

word used for parks (pardesim) -- Greek word = paradise

Luxurious gardens were charac. of royalty and nobility in ancient Near East (no simple ChemLawn application)
creates almost a secular Garden of Eden; a man-made paradise

Problem: There is no paradise if God is not present

cf. people devoting their lives to the environment -- that's already been tried

1 Kings 4:33 Solomon spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish" (a little bit of the zoologist in him also)

Remember: Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart; Any ability we have to create artistic beauty is a gift from God anyway -- Direct the glory to Him

3. Irrigated Forests

"I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees"

C. (:7a) TOP DOG IN EMPIRE BUILDING -- the ultimate Authority; the ultimate boss

"I bought male and female slaves, and I had homeborn slaves."

accumulating slaves -- power, control

people to satisfy your every whim -- certainly he did not have any workload which he did not choose to bear

Some people devote their lives to climbing the ladder of power and control -- the money might not be the main thing to them; What gives them pleasure is the opportunity to command others

Remember Matt. 20:25-26 *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant"*

That does not mean that you won't be in a position of authority with a large area of responsibility (cf. the Apostle Paul) --but you won't view and treat those under you as slaves -- rather your desire is to serve them

Transition: slaves also viewed as objects of wealth

D. (:7b-8a) TOP DOG IN POSSESSIONS AND WEALTH -- the ultimate Acquirer

1. Flocks and Herds -- Best possible food

"I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem."

"Beef -- It's what's for dinner" -- no bland vegetarian diet here; forget the cholesterol, full speed ahead; Go out and slaughter the best fatted calf you can find, marinate it, and cook it up

2. Silver and Gold

"Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces."

Remember: the rich man in the parable -- Luke 12:15-34 "and he began reasoning to himself..." (many important principles in this parable)

"take your ease; eat, drink and be merry" (vs.19)

Is our security in our wealth and possessions?

Remember the principles of Accountability and Stewardship; pursue what is really important in life = furthering the kingdom of God

Faith should free us up not to be anxious about our material well-being

Collectors are an interesting lot – cf. sports memorabilia; stamps; coins; antique cars; etc.

E. (:8b) Top Dog in Entertainment – the ultimate Artistic Performer

“I provided for myself male and female singers”

American Idol example – music industry

Sports Heros

TV and movie stars

cf. How our society has adopted the pleasure-ethic instead of the old Puritan work-ethic
We live to play; we work to be able to finance our playing; We live for the weekend -- for our leisure time; We try to get away with doing the bare minimum

ASIDE: Goal is to insulate yourself from the pain of reality; numb yourself; distract yourself from the harsh realities of your meaningless existence

F. (:8c) Top Dog in Sexual Pleasures – the ultimate Adulterer; Sex Addict

“and the pleasures of men – many concubines.”

Views them as just another collectible; something to allow him to indulge his physical appetites; no relationship or companionship in view here; playboy mentality is nothing new under the sun

Best possible sex -- variety and abundance of sexual partners (1 Kings 11:1-3)

Fairchild: Have you ever noticed in rap videos that they are going for the life of Solomon? Big cars, big houses, girls running around half naked massaging and feeding them. Apparently, these men are Old Testaments scholars who have read the book of Ecclesiasts.

But this message is not a 12 step program for deliverance from alcoholism or from gluttony or from sexual addictions – this message is about the underlying philosophy that drives us to seek satisfaction in pleasures themselves apart from God

cf. ministry of John Piper – Desiring God – what do we really desire; what really satisfies??

Problems with feeding our appetites: (Hubbard: The Snares of Pleasure)

a) Pleasure always promises more than it can produce

THE PARADOX OF HEDONISM: THE MORE YOU HUNT FOR
PLEASURE, THE LESS OF IT YOU FIND

b) Pleasure satisfies only during the act itself

requires repetition and intensification -- bigger dose of drugs-- like the potato chip commercial: "I bet you can't eat just one"; Instead of being satisfied, we are thirsting for the next dose

Danger of coming under the control of something -- being addicted to something.

What type of self-control, What type of self-discipline do I show?

Banowsky: "Pleasure is a hard master, an appetite that grows on what it feeds. It is a physiological fact that a stimulated muscle reflexively demands greater stimulation, and people become enslaved by their passions in much the same way. With each overindulgence, the level of physical and emotional expectation gradually rises so that an increasingly greater thrill is required to satisfy the urge. Without finding full satisfaction, the hunger need settles into the monotony of filling and emptying. One begins by seeking pleasure to fill his boredom and ends by being bored with pleasures."

c) We get bored-- cf. cry of kids minutes after having the time of their lives: "I'm bored ... We never do anything that is any fun. I don't know what to do. There is no one to play with me"

d) If we don't get bored, we get frustrated -- unable to gain the goal

Bottom line: we can't take too many days of a feeding frenzy --

Reminds me of:

Berenstein Bears "Too Much Birthday!"

Proverbs: too much honey makes you sick

Shakespeare: "If all the years were playing holidays, to sport would be as tedious as to work"

III. (2:9-11) THE FUTILITY OF PRIDE AND SELFISH AMBITION – TRYING TO MAZIMIZE FAME AND POPULARITY

A. (:9) The Pursuit of Greatness – Mr. Popularity

"Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.

My wisdom also stood by me"

I'm sure he was getting a big head by now; but didn't completely lose touch with reality

Hebrew -- unusual force here: *"I was great, and I added"*

Solomon loved those visits from the Queen of Sheba and other visiting dignitaries

Remember: we are not called to be man-pleasers, but those who please the Lord who has bought us with His own blood

B. (:10a) Formula for Spiritual Disaster

"all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure"

How about that for a formula for raising kids?! How would that work out!

"eyes" -- outward aspects of his pleasure

"heart" – inward aspects of his pleasure

Getting dangerously close to the awful possibility that “Nothing has meaning!”

Sadly, this is the conclusion that the honest humanist must face-- The unsaved around us are wrestling with this perspective all of the time -- even though they won't admit that

Goal: trying to lift himself above the monotony of the routine of life by being the ultimate Party Animal or the Top Dog in some area or the most respected by some group of significance

Remember one of the signs of the evil last days:

"men will be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" -- 2 Tim. 3:4

The parable of the sower: the seed that fell among thorns was choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life and could bring no fruit to perfection (Luke 8:14)

Amos 6 -- *Woe to those who are at ease in Zion...who recline on beds of ivory*

1 Tim. 5:6 *the widow that lives in pleasure is dead while she liveth*

What does this say about the world's concept of Retirement??

C. (:10b) Fleeting Pleasure is the Only Reward

“for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor”

If we know all of the above, why is temporary pleasure so attractive?? Not trying to kid ourselves ... pleasure is enjoyable for the moment ..

After we have sucked dry all of the fizz of life -- What is left of any substance??

WHEN YOU LIVE FOR THE PLEASURES OF TODAY YOU ARE LEFT WITH A HANDFUL OF SMOKE INSTEAD OF REWARDS FOR ETERNITY

D. (:11) Concluding Perspective: Bitter Disillusionment

“Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.”

the morning after; reflecting back -- "I considered" "I faced" -- to look someone in the eye (Job 6:28) "face the facts" "turn one's attention"

Pleasure . . . Possessions . . . Popularity – all are futile pursuits apart from living to obey God

Our ultimate happiness cannot come from trying to have fun or from trying to create some

type of environment that pleases us-- our connection to God and what is important in light of eternity is the key

Stedman: That is a very honest reporting. Solomon says there were some positive things, apparently. First, he gained a degree of notoriety, he says. He became great, surpassing all who went before him in Jerusalem. Many people think that fame will satisfy the emptiness of the heart. Solomon found fame. He adds that he kept his objectivity, though. "My wisdom remained with me," he says. In other words, "I was able to assess this as I went along. I did not lose myself in this wild search for pleasure. I was able to look at myself and evaluate it as I went along. But I tried everything. I did not miss or set aside anything." He belonged to the jet-set of that day. "I enjoyed it for a while," he says. "I found pleasure in all my toil, but that was all the reward I got for my labor – momentary enjoyment. Each time I repeated it I got a little less enjoyment out of it." "My conclusion," Solomon says, "is that it was not worth it. Like a candle, it all burned away, leaving me jaded and surfeited. Nothing could excite me after that." He concludes that it was all emptiness, a striving after wind. He was burned out.

Applications:

- Don't envy the wicked their riches and comforts and pleasures
- Be bold to evangelize -- the need is there
- Practice Contentment -- Godliness with contentment is great gain
- Remember that there is a Day of Reckoning:

1 Cor. 3:10-15 -- we will be left with only a handful of smoke after all the pleasures pursued for their own enjoyment have been burned away

Solomon's Conclusion: **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

THREE PARALLEL EXAMPLES OF WRESTLING WITH THE TEMPTATION TO PURSUE A LIFE OF PLEASURE, POSSESSIONS AND PRIDE

A. Experience of Eve in Yielding to Satan in the Garden (**Genesis 3:6**)

1. Unbridled Appetites – *“the tree was good for food”*
2. Covetousness – *“it was a delight to the eyes”*
3. Pride of life – *“desirable to make one wise”* – to know like God knows

B. Experience of Moses in Choosing Suffering with the People of God (**Heb. 11:24-26**)

1. Unbridled Appetites – *“passing pleasures of sin”* vs. *“endure ill treatment with people of God”*
2. Covetousness – *“choosing reproach of Christ”* vs. *greater riches than treasures of Egypt”*
3. Pride of life – *“refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter”*

C. Experience of Christ as He Defeated the Temptation by Satan (**Matt. 4:1-11**)

1. Unbridled Appetites – *“Command that these stones become bread”* -- **Priority of Word of God**

2. Covetousness – “All these things I will give you” – **Priority of Worship**

3. Pride of life – “throw yourself down” – **Priority of Humility**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you differentiate between when pleasures are legitimate for you and when they are illegitimate?
- 2) What are some cultural examples of men and women who have expressed regrets as they faced death – sorry that they had pursued a life of emptiness?
- 3) Why are we so attracted to pleasure and possessions and popularity?
- 4) What is your answer to the question: “*I’ll be happy when . . .?*”

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Fairchild:

Plato believed that being unhappy or acting evil was due to a lack of knowledge of “the good.” Plato thought if a person knew what the good life was, he would live the good life and be happy. So training yourself intellectually will help you discover what that “good life” is all about. He also believed that there is only one “good life” for all, that it isn’t relative. He thought that goodness isn’t dependent upon human opinion, it exists apart from our feelings towards it or understanding of it, but it needs to be discovered like math. Plato also believed that moral standards were superior even to God. So instead of God revealing to us what is “good” or “bad,” God is subject to what is good like you and I are subject. If God didn’t act according to this “good” He would no longer be God.

The problem with this view is that it contradicts Paul who tells us in Romans 7:19- For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

Aristotle on the other hand noticed that men regard some people as leading what they call “good lives” and others as leading what they call “bad lives.” He also notices that the various lives that people of common sense considered to be “good” all contain one common characteristic: happiness. And in the same way, the lives that ordinary people regard as being “bad” lives all have in common the characteristic of being unhappy. So, to answer the question “what is the good life for man?” Aristotle’s answer can be stated in one sentence: “It is a life of happiness.”

He also did not agree with Plato that there was one “good life” for all to discover, but that each individual should determine what the “good life” is for himself. This was called the doctrine of the mean. Meaning there are various ways of living for different people. What is good for one person may not be good for another. So, one can’t tell before actually

experimenting or experiencing what it is. Reason alone won't tell you what the "good life" is for you, you need to experiment to find out. You should eat, but not so you become a glutton or are famished. You should drink, but not so you're a drunk, but not die of thirst. You should be proud because that is the "mean" between vanity and humility, etc. It means, in order to achieve happiness, people must act moderately, they must act so as to be striving for the mean between two extremes. If they do this, they will be happy.

Then we come to **Epicurus**, which Solomon seems like Epicurus on steroids. Epicurus must have only been able to get a copy of chapter 2 verses 3-10 of the book of Ecclesiastes to form his view!

Plato didn't think the good life was connected to pleasure. Aristotle thought moderation of pleasure will make you happy. Epicurus held a view that is today called "hedonism" which is the doctrine that pleasure is the sole good. Pleasure and the pursuit of it will make you happy. The best way to live, according to Epicurus, was to live pleasantly without suffering from any of the undesirable effects of living for pleasure.

Now on this point, I don't have much of a disagreement with how we think. Certainly I like kissing my wife over being beaten a cord. I like eating a steak over having a root canal. I would love to have a perpetual six-pack over not being able to tie my shoe laces. These things are no-brainers. And truth be told, I would much rather seek pleasure over pain, joy over suffering.

Solomon, the mad scientist who drinks his own chemical mixtures to experiment on himself came to the conclusion at the end of the last chapter that pursuing wisdom apart from God, under the sun, was as fruitful as running outside with your arms wide open trying to hug the wind. He said it was vanity!

This week, we are going to see his next great experiment as he does you and I the favor of trying out those things that we would most likely pursue to find happiness and the good life. Solomon becomes a hedonist who pursues these things with unparalleled gusto and then reports his subsequent findings.

He is going to try to answer our question for us, and he is going to try out what we put in our "blank" when we asked the question "I'll be happy when..." . . .

Solomon arranged every aspect of his external world so as to afford him maximum pleasure, but he never experienced enduring happiness and satisfaction because his internal condition remained sinful, and the highs of life experience eventually fade. He basically worshipped himself, doing everything for himself (i.e. 2:4, 2:8).

He learned that happiness is a gift that God gives to those reconciled to Him and their neighbor by grace that comes only by being and never by having.

Those of us at varying levels below Solomon on the economic food chain cling to the myth that if they could trade places with him they would be happy, satisfied, and joyful. However, the parade of history from Jim Morrison to Hendrix, Elvis, and Cobain sings the same song as Solomon. Hence, those on top of the food chain try to get happy by chasing the wind of simplicity and reducing their stuff and experiences, while those at the bottom of the food

chain try to get happy by complicating their life, chasing the wind of more pleasurable stuff and experiences. A few of us, like Michael Jordan, strive to succeed and do... only to get bored and quit to strive for a different success... only to get bored again, and return to the first thing that bored them.

What everyone shares in common is what our nation's Founding Fathers called "the pursuit of happiness." Basically, we all want to be happy and so we live solely for the pursuit of pleasure. The philosophers call this hedonism, and though many Christians denounce it, we were in fact created by God for pleasure and should live as Christian hedonists.

Our problem is not that we are hedonists, but rather that we are too easily pleased, and rather than getting pure pleasure from God's right hand (Psalm 16:11) we settle for cheap imitations that never satisfy.

Consequently, we have sex but not love, music but not worship, and wealth but not stewardship. We long for the infinite and perfect, yet settle for the finite, imperfect and fleeting pleasures on the earth, which is a sin we need to repent of, turn from, and have forgiven and cleansed by Jesus. It was He, our great God, who was tempted as we are, yet did not settle for sin and instead died for our many sins. He then rose to make us new people with appetites for the pleasures of God instead of the god of pleasure.

"All men seek happiness," says Blaise Pascal. "This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves." We believe Pascal is right. And, with Pascal, we believe God purposefully designed us to pursue happiness.

Does seeking your own happiness sound self-centered? Aren't Christians supposed to seek God, not their own pleasure? To answer this question we need to understand a crucial truth about pleasure-seeking (hedonism): we value most what we delight in most. Pleasure is not God's competitor, idols are. Pleasure is simply a gauge that measures how valuable someone or something is to us. Pleasure is the measure of our treasure.

By grace, we are then able to:

1. embrace our desire for happiness as good and not sinful
2. nourish our desire for happiness and not deny it
3. direct all of our desires to God who is our joy
4. share our happiness with others
5. gather together, needy and empty, in worship to be filled with Him

I'll be happy and satisfied when... **I find my satisfaction in God**

Dr. John Piper – www.DesiringGod.org

What Is Christian Hedonism?

My shortest summary of Christian Hedonism is: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

We all make a god out of what we take the most pleasure in. Christian Hedonists want to make God their God by seeking after the greatest pleasure—pleasure in him. By Christian Hedonism, we do not mean that our happiness is the highest good. We mean that pursuing the highest good will always result in our greatest happiness in the end. We should pursue this happiness, and pursue it with all our might. The desire to be happy is a proper motive for every good deed, and if you abandon the pursuit of your own joy you cannot love man or please God.

The Difference Between Worldly and Christian Hedonism

Some people are inclined to believe that Christians are supposed to seek God's will as opposed to pursuing their own pleasure. But what makes Biblical morality different than worldly hedonism is not that Biblical morality is disinterested and duty-driven, but that it is interested in vastly greater and purer things. Christian Hedonism is Biblical morality because it recognizes that obeying God is the only route to final and lasting happiness.

Johnny Carson: (Re his death)

"Laura and I are saddened by the death of Johnny Carson. Born in Iowa and raised in Nebraska, Johnny Carson was a steady and reassuring presence in homes across America for three decades. His wit and insight made Americans laugh and think and had a profound influence on American life and entertainment." **Pres. George W. Bush**
[quite the politically correct evaluation of a life that pursued the futility of comedy]

Carson, always cool and elegant, was a reliable presence on television. Despite a series of turbulent divorces, stories of his heavy drinking and the death of a son in a car accident, none of the personal tragedies intruded into his entertainment.

Ravi Zacharias:

How do we choose that which is legitimate pleasure and reject that which is illegitimate? More to the point, how do we learn to think on these matters constructively rather than live pragmatically, making momentary decisions?

Of particular concern to many of us is the frustration that is felt in knowing how to guide our own children, for theirs is a world of limitless opportunities. What deep struggles must engulf them as they are fed a steady diet of all that appeals to the eye and the imagination, with so little to nurture the conscience. They are being manipulated into the belief that appetite is a sufficient reason to consume anything. And what is worse, new appetites are being created that leave them hungrier than before and under the illusion that they can be met if one could only remove all restraint.

Please hear me: All pleasure does not come with a warning label.

Is it not clear, then, that we must have a philosophy of pleasure? A way to guide our children and discipline our own living? I encourage you to meditate on this with me, as we consider this theme through the week.

I think Postman is right. Any pleasure—whether good or illegitimate (and we will discuss this week how to discern between the two)—can make us slaves. Hunger for even the simple pleasure of food may become a life-dominating drive. Oscar Wilde said, "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it." He's got it wrong. The unrestrained appeasement of desire

only expands hungers. Does not our experience tell us so?

It is true. The fences of our moral pasture have been torn down, leaving us much room to graze. But let us remember what G.K. Chesterton once said: Any time you pull down a fence, always ask why it was put there in the first place. That is good advice, as we think further on this issue through the week.

Have you determined life's purpose yet. God offers that purpose and pleasure must not violate that purpose.

there is a fundamental prerequisite for defining any legitimate pleasure in life and that is to first establish the purpose of life itself. All pleasure is built upon why you and I exist in the first place. If only we could grasp this truth, how many hours and years of grief would be spared us. God never intended for life to be lived out on an ad hoc basis, taking each opportunity as an isolated choice. Life is not to be regarded as a smorgasbord of appetizers before us from which we can choose or reject with equal impunity. The undergirding philosophy of life has to be the point of reference for all choices.

Thus, here is a sound principle: Any pleasure that refreshes you without diminishing you, distracting you, or sidetracking you from the ultimate goal is a legitimate pleasure.

<https://www.rzim.org/slice/slicetran.php?sliceid=61>

Will Ferrell once called standup "hard, lonely, and vicious." Its practitioners are often thought to be flawed personalities, full of anger and unhappiness, driven by inexplicable demons into drugs and alcohol. The list of famously unhappy comedians goes on and on. In addition to Mitch Hedberg, there's Sam Kinison, Richard Pryor, Jerry Lewis, Phil Hartman, John Belushi, Paula Poundstone, and most recently, Michael Richards.

<http://www.sarasotamagazine.com/Articles/Sarasota-Magazine/2007/05/Comedy-Tonight.asp>

"the end of laughter is sadness" as the Bible says. Sometimes the ones that make us laugh the most, inwardly laugh the least. Suicide of comedian Richard Jeni

Wiersbe: Pleasure alone can never bring satisfaction because it appeals to only part of the person and ignores the total being. This is the major difference between shallow "entertainment" and true "enjoyment," for when the whole person is involved, there will be both enjoyment and enrichment. Entertainment has its place, but we must keep in mind that it only helps us to escape life temporarily. True pleasure not only brings delight, but it also builds character by enriching the total person.

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 2:12-26

TITLE: FUTILITY OF WISDOM AND WORK

BIG IDEA: A LIFE OF PURSUING WISDOM OR ACCOMPLISHMENT ONLY ACCUMULATES A LEGACY OF FUTILITY

INTRODUCTION:

You spend your life pursuing the highest levels of **education**; getting degree after degree – seeking the respect of your academic peers – What does that get you?

What does **hard work** get you? when viewed "*under the sun*"?

What is the end result when you try to make a name for yourself?

What can you leave behind that will have lasting value?

* * * * *

Cobb: In chapter 1, Solomon has states up front that everything he found on his search was empty--nothing satisfied. Not only was life empty, but on top of that we are told that the work God has left for men to do is a "*grievous task*."

In chapter 2, Solomon describes his search through the **Plains of Pleasure**. Anything and everything he ever dreamed of he got; but even in all of this he concluded, "All was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun."

As we pick up the record in v. 12, Solomon starts another quest for meaning in life. He is now entering the **Woods of Wisdom**, the **Marsh of Madness**, and the **Fields of Folly**. In his own way, I believe Solomon is going on a search to see if education holds the key to meaning in life. Education is not wisdom; yet education is the way to wisdom.

* * * * *

Then he is going to turn his attention in more detail to the life of a workaholic – what can he possibly achieve?

I. (:12-17) FUTILITY OF WISDOM – WISDOM EXCELS FOLLY BUT THE SAME END AWAITS BOTH

A. (:12) The Repetitive Investigation – Nothing New Under the Sun

“So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?”

These are his 2 options: a lifestyle marked by wisdom or folly (madness and folly grouped together here) – what should he go after?

Ryrie: Solomon’s successor may take up the same issues but will not arrive at any better solutions to the paradoxes of life.

B. (:13-14a) The Advantages of Wisdom – Light is Better than Darkness

“And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.”

Glenn: A wise man has the foresight to avoid danger while a fool gets into trouble as though he stumbles around in the dark (cf. Prov. 4:18-19 for a similar metaphorical use of light and darkness).

Eaton: To possess wisdom will give success (10:10), preserve life and protect (7:12). It gives strength (7:19) and joy (8:1), and is better than mere brute strength (9:16). Man is guided by it (2:3), toils by it (2:21), tests and weighs experiences by it (7:23). Even the practical politics of delivering cities involves wisdom (9:15). Limited it may be, but it is still indispensable. . . As God’s gift it is light; as man’s possession it is sight.

John Gill: as the light of the day the darkness of the night; the one is pleasant and delightful, the other very uncomfortable; the one useful to direct in walking, the other very unsafe to walk in: light sometimes signifies joy and prosperity, and darkness adversity; the one is used to express the light of grace, and the other the darkness of sin and ignorance; now as the natural light exceeds darkness, and prosperity exceeds adversity and calamities, and a state of grace exceeds a state of sin and wickedness, so wisdom exceeds folly.

<http://www.studylight.org/com/geb/view.cgi?book=ec&chapter=002&verse=013>

C. (:14b-16) The Futility of Wisdom – The Same Fate Awaits Both

1. (:14b) Death is Every Man’s Destiny

“And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.”

Wisdom cannot solve the ultimate question of life’s purpose

Wiersbe: The certainty of death is a topic Solomon frequently mentioned in Ecclesiastes (1:4; 2:14-17; 3:18-20; 5:15-16; 6:6; 8:8; 9:2-3, 12; 12:7-8)

2. (:15-16) Two Reasons Pursuing Wisdom is Worthless

a. (:15) Pursuing Wisdom is Worthless Because it Cannot Change Man’s Destiny

“Then I said to myself, ‘As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?’ So I said to myself, ‘This too is vanity.’

b. (:16) Pursuing Wisdom is Worthless Because it Cannot Build a Redeeming Legacy – After Death All is Forgotten

“For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!”

Swindoll talks about the Egyptian pyramids – trying to preserve their legacy
Hard to come to grips with mortality and reality; they made sure they were buried with all of the glorious possessions they hoped to enjoy in the life beyond

D. (:17) The Frustrating Conclusion – No Purpose in Living

“So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.”

Cobb: Solomon was bitter and bummed out because he realized he couldn't take it with him. He had lived a life of self. His world revolved around him and now payday was coming. It wouldn't be too long before he would stand before the God who created him and give an answer for all he was given. He squandered God's wisdom. He hoarded the wealth. There were a lot of things he had done for the Lord in his life, but along the way he was drawn away by compromises he had made.

Swindoll: I looked at all the labor, all the projects, all the little hobbies, all the plans, all the hours, all the years of education, all the investment of time and energy, and I saw it accomplishing little more than stirring up the dust of tomorrow and finally being forgotten. I hated it. Why? Because everything is futility and striving after the wind.

Kidner: If there is a lie at the centre of existence, and nonsense at the end of it, who has the heart to make anything of it? If, as we might put it, every card in our hand will be trumped, does it matter how we play?

II. (:18-23) FUTILITY OF WORK – A LIFE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT ONLY ACCUMULATES A LEGACY OF FUTILITY

The Work Ethic -- the harder you work... more commendable from society's standpoint, but what do you really have to show for it

Remember the story of Mary and Martha: (Luke 10:38-42)

devotion to Christ takes priority over activity -- there's a type of busyness that distracts us from our focus

Nothing wrong with Work -- Must understand God's design for work and commit ourself to a Biblical work ethic -- will be looking at that in future weeks

Someone that pursues the work ethic with an obsession = known as a workaholic

Characs. of a Workaholic: (think of ones you know)

- 1) preoccupied with the office even when he is home
 - all the time thinking about it
 - carries a briefcase and opens it every night
 - not just work at work; also work at home
- 2) put in long hours -- become strangers to their wives and family; more concerned with production than people
- 3) unable to relax --can't sit still in his easy chair – unless so tired he falls asleep

- buys a hammock; tries it out -- just can't get comfortable
- 4) can't find the time to take vacations – too much that needs to get done
- 5) sense of guilt -- I'm not being productive enough – either self-guilt or imagining that others are judging you as unproductive; not measuring up
- 6) driven for success -- Top Dog mentality; on the fast track
sometimes a perfectionist; wants to do things well
- 7) very control-oriented
- 8) very capable -- labored with wisdom, skill, knowledge

Dealing here with a very sophisticated super-achiever -- one who with knowledge and skill and wisdom has accomplished more than any one person we can point to today

Solomon is looking back and reflecting on his ultimate legacy -- What has he actually accomplished that will have lasting value?

A. (:18) You Can't Take it With You – Emotion of Hatred

TEST: GREEDY PAWS OR GENEROUS PURSESTRINGS

“Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.”

1. OT Example -- Lot's Wife (Luke 17:28-33) Don't look back and try to hang on to the pleasures and possessions of this life

2. NT Example -- Rich man who kept building bigger barns (Luke 12:13-14)
"you have many goods laid up for many years to come" (v. 19)
(1 Tim. 6:7-10)

His goal: Working to provide financial security for the future so that he could live selfishly a life of pleasure; never truly secure

Problem = Covetousness -- always desiring more; never content

We fail to remember some basic facts about material possessions (or accomplishments designed to accumulate possessions):

- 1) inconsequential compared to spiritual things -- not true riches -- called a little thing
- 2) belong to God ultimately; we are just stewards; Money is a test -- How will we use it? Faithfulness is the key
- 3) they do not constitute the essence of who you are – they don't give you meaning

"not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions"

Death comes quickly and often unexpectedly

Our Primary Failure: Because we have not yet seen heaven – we fail to appreciate the riches that God has in store for us;

God has things for us that are beyond our wildest dreams ;

Why are we trying to hold on to that which will rust and decay-- to the perishable?
What do we love so much that we will be sad to leave it behind?

Importance of leaving behind a Legacy of a Good Name

"a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches"

B. (:19) You Must Surrender Control to Someone Else – Emotion of Despair

TEST: ENSLAVED TO A SYSTEM OF WORKS OR EMANCIPATED BY GRACE?

“And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.”

If you realize that all you have, you obtained because of the grace of God, you will have a different attitude towards leaving a legacy for others

Wiersbe: It's bad enough that we must leave our wealth behind, but even worse that we might leave it to somebody who will waste it!

John Gill: Some think that Solomon here gives a hint of the suspicion he had, that his son Rehoboam, his successor and heir, would turn out a foolish man, as he did; *yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise, under the sun;* be he what he will, all will come into his hands; and he will have the power of disposing of all at his pleasure; not only of enjoying it, but of changing and altering things; and perhaps greatly for the worse, if he does not entirely destroy what has been wrought with so much care and industry, toil and labour, wisdom and prudence

If you are enslaved to a system of works, you will have a different perspective

1. OT Example -- Solomon and Rehoboam (1 Kings 11:41 – 12:24)

2. NT Example -- Father of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:29-32) -- involves an inheritance; Contrast good attitude of Father with poor attitude of older son

Who will get it all?? *"the man who will come after me"*

seems like a strange way to describe his son; not a very close relationship

What type of nurturing took place between David and Solomon??

Between Solomon and Rehoboam?

Sometimes the success-driven Achiever justifies his long hours away from home with the excuse:

"I'm doing it for my kids -- so that they will have the things I never had" -- how sad; what the kids really want is a Dad who is there for them

Def. of Legacy: a gift by will; a bequest; anything handed down by an ancestor or

predecessor

Solomon's will must have been most complicated of all time –all those wives

gains both possession and control (management) of all the resources

You can hear Solomon crying: "Unfair" "Foul" "I've been had"

(1) Person might not be worthy in terms of his character

"who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool" (Luke 15:29)

(2) Person might not be capable to maintain the legacy, much less cause it to grow and prosper (Luke 15:30)

Solomon labored with:

wisdom

knowledge

skill

Rehoboam comes along and the first day in office he engineers a split in the kingdom

Shows what a great politician Solomon was; holding things together -- everyone was not happy under the burden of high taxation and bureaucratic exploitation

(3) Even if a person is worthy, even if he is capable, It is still unfair because the Person did not Earn the Legacy

Conclusion: *"This too is vanity and a great evil"*

Aside: Work as an escape from other pressures -- from family, from spiritual priorities, from character flaws; from weaknesses you don't want to accept

Nice to have a comfortable work situation where you can hide and imagine you are successful, because you can control this environment

don't just assume that activity and even productivity is healthy if it is really an escape from some other responsibility (Cf. illustration from CAA – one of the directors)

Transition:

Japanese have given a name to this rat-race: *karoshi* which means death by overwork, usually from a heart attack

C. (:20) You Don't Get Any Return on Your Investment –

Emotion of Pain, Suffering, Pressure, Anxiety, Rat-race

TEST: EARTHLY POSSESSIONS OR HEAVENLY TREASURES

"Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun."

1. OT Example: contrast between Abraham and Lot
Job -- what did he get for a life of righteousness?

Jacob -- working hard for Laban for 7 years -- ended up
the first time with Leah (not Rachel)

2. NT Example: Zaccheus -- hard-working, rich tax collector
(Luke 19) no peace of heart from accomplishment

bank account got bigger; knew all about investments;
commodities trading; pressured to meet quotas by Mid-East Mafia

Very Desperate man -- wanted to see who Jesus was -- a man who
didn't have any of the world's possessions but also was free
from the anxiety and rat-race

Summary: How do we measure up against these 3 Tests from our passage this morning?

1) GREEDY PAWS VS. GENEROUS PURSESTRINGS

What are we holding on to that we need to let go? Remember Lot's wife
You can't take it with you

2) ENSLAVED TO WORKS OR FREED UP TO LIVE BY GRACE

How are we relating to others? Remember the brother of the Prodigal Son who
wanted to operate strictly on a works value system

3) HEART SET ON EARTHLY POSSESSIONS OR ON HEAVENLY TREASURES

Where are we investing? What return on investment will we get?
Remember the tragic choices made by Lot

D. (:21) Your Hard-Earned Legacy Can End Up in the Hands of the Undeserving

*“When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then
he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and
a great evil.”*

Some wealthy people do not believe in handing down the bulk of their assets to
their children

E. (:22-23) Conclusion: The Pursuit of Work Brings No Worthwhile Return

*“For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he
labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous;
even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.”*

**III. (:24-25) FLASH OF INSIGHT – ENJOY WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO
YOU (NOT WHAT YOU SEEK AFTER TO TRY TO SATISFY YOURSELF)**

Wiersbe: This is the first of six “conclusions” in Ecclesiastes, each of which emphasizes

the importance of accepting life as God's gift and enjoying it in God's will (3:12-15, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10).

Kidner: Major transition at this juncture

- God is now in view in this section
- wisdom viewed as a gift from God rather than simply man's acquisition

Here then is the antithesis of secular pessimism. The Preacher has held before his readers two ways of life; the vicious circles of a pointless world, temporary pleasures, fruitless work, futile wisdom, inevitable death, versus an enjoyable life taken daily from the hand of God, in the "assurance of faith" that he deals appropriately with righteous and unrighteous.

A. (:24-25) God's Gifts Are Good and Should be Enjoyed with Thanksgiving

"There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?"

1. Basic Gifts are the Best Gifts

- Food
- Drink
- Work

2. These Gifts are From the Sovereign, Providential Hand of God

3. No satisfaction apart from appreciation of God's Good Gifts

Swindoll: We have the idea that the world is the one that give enjoyment and God's the One who clubs us when we have fun – I mean the kind of fun that is really enjoyment (without a hangover) – then you need only one ingredient in your midst; you need a relationship with the living God. According to Solomon, *"Who can have enjoyment without Him?"* As God's people, we're the ones who ought to be having the time of our lives!

Ryrie: Solomon's solution to the paradoxes of life, set forth six times ... is to enjoy to the fullest the life that God has given, recognizing it as His gift. God has not revealed the solution to all of life's inconsistencies but has given man a life to enjoy while living in obedience to him.

B. (:26) God's Gifts Ultimately Flow to the Righteous

"For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind."

1. Different Strokes for Different Folks

- a. For the Righteous

b. For the Sinner

2. Nothing but Futility for the Sinner Apart from God

Prov. 13:22 "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, and the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous."

Wiersbe: At their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites spoiled their Egyptian masters (Ex. 3:22; 12:36), and throughout Jewish history their armies took great spoil in their many conquests. In fact, much of the wealth that went into the temple came from David's military exploits.

CONCLUSION: How should we approach the pursuit of wisdom and meaningful accomplishment?

Swindoll: How very many there are who *appear* to be suave, stable, and successful but who, down inside, are dreadfully frustrated! The term "*frustrated*" comes from a Latin term *frustra*, which means "*in vain*." In other words, one who is "*frustrated*" feels that all he does is void of purpose. In spite of great effort and constant pursuit, the frustrated individual fails to realize his dreams. A sense of helplessness evolves into hopelessness . . . even though great pains are taken to hide the awful truth. Few are those who peel off their masks and admit how greatly they struggle. When they do, however, our admiration for them is enhanced. Vulnerability is a rare but much-respected trait. (p.40)

Example of Christ -- "*came not to be ministered unto* (not to accumulate possessions and accomplishments for himself) *but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many*" -- What type of legacy did he leave behind?? Purchased eternal life for us

2 Cor. 8:9 "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich*"

- 1) He left behind all of His glory and treasure in heaven - "*He became poor*"
no clenched fists of hatred
- 2) He operated on the basis of Grace
no cries of despair
- 3) He sought an eternal return on His investment -- a spiritual return -- instead
of earthly treasures
no anxiety of heart, but instead Perfect Peace

John 14:1-3 This is our eternal destiny

No need to get caught up in a lifetime of futile accomplishments that won't add anything to our heavenly home

Oppty now is to do "greater works" than even Jesus did:

- works of faith
- works energized by the Holy Spirit
- works accomplished thru prayer

1 Cor. 15:58 *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."*
Tremendous promise of encouragement

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Think of the workaholics you have known. List their characteristics. Why do they find it so difficult to relax and enjoy life? What is motivating their drive to accomplish?
- 2) How does our culture worship education and advanced degrees? How have we separated the relationship between knowledge and wisdom? In what ways is it grievous to pursue learning?
- 3) How many generations in your family can you remember? What type of lasting legacy did people leave?
- 4) What is your worldview towards work? What are the purposes of work? What enjoyment or satisfaction do you derive from your work?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Cobb: Someone has well-said,
"You're not ready to live, until you're ready to die."

Solomon was not ready to die.

He had more money than anyone else. He had more wives than anyone else. He had the most glamorous house around. He was the wisest man of his day. But because he hadn't looked beyond the grave, he searched in vain to find meaning in life.

Have you come to grips with the fact that one day you will also die. Life as you know it will be over. You will never see another sunset. Never sit down in your present house to have another dinner. Your body will take its last breath and you

will be gone.

WHAT THEN?

Will it matter how much money you saved up during your lifetime?
Will it matter how big your house was?
Will it matter what kind of car you drove?
Will it matter what schools you went to?
Will it matter how fancy your clothes were?
Will it matter how much overtime you spent at the office
to move up the corporate ladder?
Will it matter what positions of influence you held?
Will it matter how smart you were, or how strong you were?

WHAT WILL MATTER IN ETERNITY?

Ah yes! This is the crux of the matter. This is the question we should come back to time and time again in our walk with the Lord. "What will matter for eternity?"

ONLY ONE LIFE

Only one life to offer, Jesus my Lord and King;
Only one tongue to praise Thee and of Thy mercy sing
Only one heart's devotion - Saviour Oh may it be
Consecrated alone to Thy matchless glory,
Yielded fully to Thee.

Only this hour is mine, Lord - May it be used for Thee;
May every passing moment COUNT FOR ETERNITY.
Souls all about are dying, dying in sin and shame;
Help me bring them the message of Calvary's redemption
In Thy glorious name.

Racer: The Gift of Enjoying the Fruit of One's Work

THREE WRONG VIEWS OF WORK

(from Your Work Matters to God by Douglas Sherman and William Hendricks)

1) Secular View = Work is an end in itself

I work so that I can get money so I can spend it how I want to pay the bills, etc.
God is not in the picture at all

2) Secular vs. Sacred Dichotomy --

There is some work that is less valuable to God than others. Secular work is less valuable than some type of Christian ministry; but Adam was a farmer -- even before the Fall; Christ was a carpenter for a good number of years

3) Sacred Platform -- Only one worthwhile end to work = a pulpit for evangelism

I go to work mainly to evangelize others

All these three views diminish the intrinsic value of work itself as designed by God Himself. Therefore, these views are wrong.

Let's look at the **Biblical concept of work:**

I. WORK AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

Look at work back at the beginning in Gen. 1:26-28; Gen. 3

Man holds a special place in the created realm = vice-regent;

Man has creativity, intelligence, interpersonal skills, character, moral virtue, ability to produce and ability to serve others

(These things don't happen when we sleep, play, etc.)

God gave us privilege and responsibility -- the Dominion concept

cf. quotes from Back to the Blackboard by **Jay Adams**:

"to occupy and subdue to God's glory was man's role in the world."

Education must be designed to meet that objective

We need to enter into the work of God -- leads to many exciting possibilities

cf. relationship between Boredom and Anxiety

Oliver North's radio show mentioned the Institute for the Study of Boredom and Anxiety -- there is a known cause and effect relationship between slothfulness and mental health

If you are lazy, you are not cooperating with how God designed you

If you force your children to work and to do their best you will help develop their character

Thomas Edison: "I never did a day's work in all my life -- It was all fun"

Try taking that type of enthusiasm to the workplace

II. WORK AS AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

See the context of Mark 12:28-35 -- talking about the foremost commandment

Matt. 28:38-40; Acts 20:34-35

When you work to serve someone else and provide for their needs, it eliminates the sense of vanity and purposeless (vs. Working just for myself)

We need to work not only to provide for our own family, but to have resources to share with others -- "*it is more blessed to give than to receive*"

1 Tim. 5:8; 6:18-19; Ephes. 4

Our work matters! God will see and evaluate our work.

Can you look at your work and recognize how it is an expression of love towards someone else? If you can't, you may be on your way down the road to meaninglessness!

III. WORK AS AN EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP

Matt. 22:37 *"love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and all your mind"*

Give God all that you're capable of giving; give your best effort

Work whole-heartedly -- because God is worthy; with enthusiasm -- Col. 3:23

Kidner: If one fate comes to all, and that fate is extinction, it robs every man of his dignity and every project of its point. . . . As to man's dignity, what is so mortifying (an appropriate word!) about death's final levelling of wise men and fools . . . is that if it is true, it allows the last word to a brute fact which tramples on every value-judgment we can make. Everything may tell us that wisdom is not on a par with folly, nor goodness with evil; but no matter: if death is the end of the road, the contention that there is nothing to choose between them will get the last word. The choices that we positively knew to be significant will be brushed aside as finally irrelevant.

Fairchild: Now Solomon comes to another of his great observations and experiments. Solomon tries wisdom and work, or in other words- getting smart and getting things done- our equivalent to getting a degree and getting a good job. But Solomon is confounded by his ultimate destination- death. Life is hard to understand, life is difficult to find meaning when we are mortal, life is frustratingly cruel when death stands in our way. Death acts as a great sandstorm that comes to flatten all of our sandcastles we are so proud of. Death is the great equalizer because no matter how high we build them, we all descend six feet under as we push up tulips. Paul calls death our last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). This explains why we spend so much of our lives obsessing over it, fearing it, sanitizing it, ignoring it, exalting it, or trying to postpone it. Yet it comes for each of us closer each minute and in every breath. . .

If we take God's gifts and decisions as they come with thanks and don't try to manipulate our outwit God, we will find our pleasure in what He gives to us daily. . .

Instead of spending all our time trying to figure out life, we should stick close to God and enjoy it. If we spend too much time trying to figure it out through wisdom, and try to straighten it out through work, we will die before getting around to actually enjoying it.

Everyone gets certain gifts from God such as life, food, drink, and work, but only the children of God who walk with Him faithfully get the gifts of enjoyment and satisfaction. This is a great secret, that our stuff and our satisfaction are two different things and that our satisfaction doesn't come from our stuff, but from our Savior.

<http://www.kaleochurch.com/sermon/I-Hated-Life>

Ray Stedman: Life in the Fast Lane

Unfortunately here [v.24] is another instance where we have lost the true meaning of the verse by a bad translation. In the next chapter there is a similar passage that properly includes the words, "there is nothing better than," but that is not what it says here. Delete from the text the words, "*better than*," because they are not in the Hebrew and they do not belong here. What this text actually says is,

There is nothing in man that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.

There is nothing in man, there is no inherent value in him that makes it possible for him to extract true enjoyment from the things he does. That is the first thing Solomon says.

What does, then? He tells us:

This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? (Ecclesiastes 2:24b-25 RSV)

That is his second declaration, and that is the true message of this book. Enjoyment is a gift of God. 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. But it is possible to have enjoyment all your life if you take it from the hand of God. It is given to those who please God. Verse 26:

For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; (Ecclesiastes 2:26a RSV)

Wisdom and knowledge have been mentioned before as things you can get from "under the sun," but they will not continue. To have added to it the ingredient of pleasure, of continual delight going on and on, unceasing throughout the whole of life, you must take it from the hand of God. The man who pleases God is given the gift of joy.

<http://www.raystedman.org/eccles/3807.html>

F. B. Meyer: The 19th-century British author **Charles Kingsley** wrote, "Thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do that day which must be done whether you like it or not."

Consider what these three people gave to the world by working with diligence: Noah Webster labored 36 years and crossed the ocean twice to produce his dictionary. John Milton rose at 4 o'clock every morning to compose and rewrite his poetry. Edward Gibbon spent 26 years writing his famous history, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

What we do may seem insignificant by comparison. But if we work "heartily, as to the Lord" (Col. 3:23), He will use our labors to provide for our needs and the needs of others. Any kind of wholesome work can be a blessing. —H. G. B.

To LEAVE LASTING FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME, WEAR WORK SHOES.

Mortality and the Fitness of Life

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22 -- Doug Smith

Do You Know What Time It Is?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

In chapter 3, Solomon continues his exploration of life “under the sun”. The chapter begins with perhaps what may be one of the most recognized portions of Scripture.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 ESV

- (1) For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
- (2) a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- (3) a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- (4) a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- (5) a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- (6) a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
- (7) a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- (8) a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

If you have been around for a few years or listen to oldies stations, you may have heard the Mamas and the Papas set these verses to music.

THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS TURN TURN TURN LYRICS

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones
A time to gather stones together

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time of war, a time of peace
A time of love, a time of hate
A time you may embrace
A time to refrain from embracing

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rend, a time to sew
A time to love, a time to hate
A time of peace, I swear it's not too late!

Chuck Swindoll begins his exploration of these verses by noting that “every morning, Someone who loves you very much deposits into your bank of time 86,400 seconds of time – which represent 1,440 minutes – which, of course, equal twenty-four hours each day.” Time is a great equalizer. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, slave or free, lofty or humble, wise or foolish; a day is a day for all of us. It is up to each of us to use the time we are given wisely. The calendar marches on and the seasons change right on time, just as the Creator ordained it. In God's perfect reckoning, “He has made everything beautiful in its time” (Ecc 3:11a ESV). Solomon confronts us with seven contrasts or extremes that span all aspects of our experience. Seven is a number that represents completeness or perfection in Scripture. He begins with the most fundamental aspect of our experience, life itself. Warren Wiersbe notes that “Things like abortion, birth control, mercy killing, and surrogate parenthood make it look as though man is in control of birth and death, but Solomon said otherwise. Birth and death are not human accidents; they are divine appointments, for God is in control.” Consider the words of the Psalmist:

Psalms 139:13-16 ESV

- (13) For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
- (14) I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
- (15) My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- (16) Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

And these words from Paul:

Ephesians 2:10 ESV

(10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

If God has prepared works ahead of time for us to accomplish, He is clearly sovereign over the course of our lives and our destiny. Next, Solomon turns his attention to the world of agriculture. Clearly, it is futile to plant at harvest time and harvest at planting time. God is in control and he is the one who provides both the means and the knowledge to bring forth produce from the land. Consider these verses:

Deuteronomy 11:13-14 ESV

- (13) "And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,
(14) he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil.

Isaiah 28:24-29 ESV

- (24) Does he who plows for sowing plow continually? Does he continually open and harrow his ground?
(25) When he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, sow cumin, and put in wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and emmer as the border?
(26) For he is rightly instructed; his God teaches him.
(27) Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin, but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod.
(28) Does one crush grain for bread? No, he does not thresh it forever; when he drives his cart wheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it.
(29) This also comes from the LORD of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.

Similarly, Solomon addresses the range of human experience that falls between life and death. He discusses killing, healing, building, scattering, weeping, laughing, mourning, dancing, embracing, not embracing, finding, losing, tearing, mending, speaking, and keeping silent. He concludes this section with a literary device called an ABBA structure or put another way, he addresses a positive, a negative, another negative and then a positive, e.g. love, hate, war and peace. The entire section emphasizes that life is filled with a series of contrasts and we constantly move from state to state, experience to experience, season to season. Some are pleasant and enjoyable and some are burdensome and painful. It would be nice to think that we could make sense of it all but unfortunately, while we live under the sun, there are some things that we cannot understand. Job never understood why he had to suffer but from God's perspective, he was loved and cherished and everything was under control. Paul had a similar experience with his thorn in the flesh. As he states:

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 ESV

- (7) So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.
(8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

- (9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul learned that there were seasons to his life and he learned to be content in every state he found himself in:

Philippians 4:11-13 ESV

- (11) Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.
(12) I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.
(13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

There are, and will always be, triumphs and tragedies under the sun but we can take comfort, when we turn our perspective from the horizontal (natural view) to the vertical (godly perspective) that all of our experiences have a purpose and we are never outside of His control. Corrie ten Boom, a holocaust survivor who was no stranger to the extremes of the seasons of life often quoted anonymous poem:

My life is but a weaving
Betwixt my God and me,
I do not choose the colors
He worketh steadily.
Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow,
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I, the underside.
Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unfold the pattern
And explain the reason why.
For the dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In a pattern He has planned.

Perhaps Paul summed it up best when under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he penned these words:

Romans 8:28 ESV

- (28) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Paul does not tell us that everything is good but the child of God can rest assured that in the end, everything will work together to form a perfect and beautiful pattern in the Weaver's skillful hand. There truly is a time and a season for everything.

Interlude of Rare Insight

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15 ESV

- (9) What gain has the worker from his toil?
- (10) I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.
- (11) He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.
- (12) I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live;
- (13) also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil--this is God's gift to man.
- (14) I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.
- (15) That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Warren Wiersbe introduces this passage by noting, “The Preacher adjusted his sights and no longer looked at life *only* “under the sun.” He brought God into the picture and this gave him a new perspective.” Chuck Swindoll used the example of one of the original astronauts seeing his first earthrise. This unique perspective changed the context of the way he looked at things. Solomon begins by returning to a question he asked earlier, “What gain has the worker from his toil?” When we originally looked at this question in chapter 2, our view was limited to being under the sun. Now that we have explored everything having a time and a season, the perspective changes based upon new evidence. The preacher now acknowledges that life is a gift and God makes everything “beautiful in its time”. More importantly, he states that man has a sense of eternity. As Wiersbe notes:

Man was created in the image of God, and was given dominion over creation (Gen. 1:26-28); therefore, he is different from the rest of creation. He has “eternity [“the world,” kjv] in his heart” and is linked to heaven. This explains why nobody (including Solomon) can be satisfied with his or her endeavors and achievements, or is able to explain the enigmas of life (1:12-2:11). God accomplishes His purposes in His time, but it will not be until we enter eternity that we will begin to comprehend His total plan.

Finally, Solomon acknowledges that life can be enjoyed now. Joy and contentment are gifts from God. Chuck Swindoll notes that money can buy pills to knock you out but sleep is a gift from God.

Psalms 4:7-8 ESV

- (7) You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.
- (8) In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Psalms 127:2 ESV

- (2) It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Similarly, money can buy fine food but enjoying a meal is a gift from God and work can bring peace instead of strife. God's works are perfect and His ways are beyond our comprehension but He seeks the welfare of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. The works of God are eternal. Even though life, from our limited perspective, may seem like a repetitive cycle, God has a purpose in it all and He ensures that everything unfolds in accordance with His plan and His will. The Psalmist expressed it this way:

Psalms 104:1-2, 14-24 ESV

- (1) Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty,
(2) covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent.

(14) You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth
(15) and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.
(16) The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
(17) In them the birds build their nests; the stork has her home in the fir trees.
(18) The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers.
(19) He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.
(20) You make darkness, and it is night, when all the beasts of the forest creep about.
(21) The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.
(22) When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens.
(23) Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening.
(24) O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Confessions of a Cynic

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 ESV

- (16) Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.
(17) I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.
(18) I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.
(19) For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity.

- (20) All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.
- (21) Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?
- (22) So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

Solomon's brief interlude into a vertical perspective quickly ends and the chapter closes. He turns his attention back to the horizontal and sees corruption and injustice. Although he acknowledges that God will judge both the righteous and the wicked, he laments the injustice and becomes highly cynical. Perverting justice is abhorrent in God's site. Consider these verses:

Exodus 23:6-8 ESV

- (6) "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit.
- (7) Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.
- (8) And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

Deuteronomy 16:19 ESV

- (19) You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous.

Deuteronomy 27:19 ESV

- (19) "'Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

And Scripture constantly affirms that God will ensure that justice is done, in His time:

Eze 7:3 Now the end is upon you, and I will send my anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations.

Hebrews 10:28-31 ESV

- (28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.
- (29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?
- (30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."
- (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Revelation 20:11-15 ESV

- (11) Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.
- (12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.
- (13) And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

- (14) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.
- (15) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Solomon's cynicism causes him to revisit the certainty of death. From the horizontal perspective, we all come to the same end. As we saw at the beginning of this lesson, God has numbered our days and because sin came into the world, we will die and our physical bodies will pass away and return to dust.

Genesis 3:17-19 ESV

- (17) And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
- (18) thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.
- (19) By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

From the horizontal perspective, how can anyone say that our fate is any better than an animal? The world has come up with several theories about what happens after death that encompass everything from reincarnation to "that's all folks." We cannot prove from under the sun that unlike the animal, man's spirit can rise (or fall). That knowledge comes from God. Because He has set eternity in our hearts and affirms this truth through His Word, we don't have to be cynical but we should be wise.

Psalms 90:1-17 ESV

- (1) A Prayer of Moses, the man of God. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.
- (2) Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- (3) You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"
- (4) For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.
- (5) You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning;
- (6) in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.
- (7) For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed.
- (8) You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- (9) For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.
- (10) The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.
- (11) Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?
- (12) So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.
- (13) Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!
- (14) Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
- (15) Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.

- (16) Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.
(17) Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!

The message to take away from this study is not “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die” but rather as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:25-34 ESV

- (25) "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"
- (26) Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"
- (27) And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"
- (28) And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,
- (29) yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
- (30) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"
- (31) Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'
- (32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
- (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
- (34) "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

TITLE: *THE FUTILITY OF CHASING WORLDLY SUCCESS*

BIG IDEA:

THE 5 ROTTEN STEPS ON THE WORLD'S LADDER OF SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION :

Hand out course outline – Doug will be teaching week 6, 8, 9

Remember the theme from last week – chap.3 - **Review:**

I. (:1-8) DIVINE CONTROL -- DIVINE APPOINTMENT DETERMINES THE SEASONS OF LIFE AND THE EVENTS THAT TAKE PLACE

II. (:9-15) DIVINE TIMEFRAME – DIVINE PERSPECTIVE ALLOWS FOR CONTENTMENT IN THE PRESENT IN LIGHT OF GOD'S PURPOSES FOR ETERNITY

III. (:16-22) DIVINE JUSTICE – DIVINE ACCOUNTABILITY MITIGATES THE FRUSTRATION FROM TEMPORAL INJUSTICE AND APPARENT PURPOSELESSNESS

Hope you have been using the book by **Swindoll** and keeping up with the reading ...

My goal is that you use this course for pre-evangelism = laying the groundwork for giving the good news of the gospel message ...

Had a **God moment** this week at work I am going to share along those lines – last week I didn't have my book with me in class – couldn't find it – this week I don't have it – had a chance to give it away . . .

Song: Turn, Turn, Turn

Quiet prayer – asking for opportunity to share this message with specific person

Topic for Today – Futility of Chasing Worldly Success

The American Dream – study hard – go to graduate school – kill yourself in med school or business school or law school; scratch and claw to get to the head of the class so that you can get the best possible job and climb the ladder of success

Solomon is speaking to the movers and shakers – As the King – He sees everything from the top down; he rubs shoulders with the most important people in the world; he knows what makes them tick

No matter where they are on that ladder to the top ... or even if they are king of the hill ... they discover that nothing satisfies .. the American Dream is a lie – when viewed under the sun; in trying to keep up with the Joneses ... what you fail to understand is that the Joneses are not as happy and content as you might imagine

Solomon is not advocating that we sit life out on the sidelines with no ambition or dedication to our work. But he wants to drive home here the harsh reality that awaits those who life is consumed by trying to climb the world's ladder of success.

Simple Outline

THE 5 ROTTEN STEPS ON THE WORLD'S LADDER OF SUCCESS

Each will be represented by a common board game or card game we all grew up playing ... so should be easy to remember – I will hand out the outline at the end today – can't give away all my surprises

[Read vv.1-3]

I. (:1-3) RUTHLESS OPPRESSION GAME: SORRY

PROBLEM: NO COMFORT

First Game is Sorry

Game: Object of the game: you get ahead by knocking others off the board and sending them back to home base; you step on others to get to the top; cutthroat -- Sorry is a strange name, because you are anything but Sorry when you send someone back to home base -- You're ecstatic!

In the business world we see this type of exploitation of the poor and helpless that's the way to really make some bucks – look at the advertising of the Credit Card companies aimed at the college students – let's hook them and get them enslaved; look at the cigarette companies who continue to churn out their cancer sticks; look at the finance companies who failed to caution people against types of mortgages that might get them in over their head

Let's look at Solomon's insights on this area of Oppression

A. Commentary: Solomon's Insights on Oppression

1. Oppression is Everywhere – The Way to the Top is to Put Others Down

“Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun.”

Solomon can easily observe these activities; not just thoughts of oppression; but the malicious deeds are carried out – openly – visibly – Political corruption especially in view – but applies to other realms as well

Look at Paul's command to masters: Col. 4:1 *“Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”*

We see examples all of the time in the workplace – a boss lording it over those who work for him; being overly demanding and unreasonable – Peter counsels us to submit to such unfair treatment in the **book of 1 Peter** – that's how one lives for eternity instead of living just under the sun (probably the best book to balance out the message of Ecclesiastes)

BY THE GRACE OF GOD, THE PERSECUTED CHURCH FINDS VINDICATION AND VICTORY THRU LIVING FOR ETERNITY, MAINTAINING COMMENDABLE CONDUCT, AND ACCEPTING SUFFERING AS THE WILL OF GOD

cf. Eccles. 8:9 good def. of lording it over another person = using your authority to the detriment of another

“All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the

sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.”

2. Oppression Enslaves Both Groups to a Life of Misery = No Comfort

“And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.”

Interesting that both groups have the same problem:

- a. easy to see that the oppressed -- those characterized by **tears** -- lack comfort
- b. but more surprising to find that the oppressors – those characterized by **power** -- have the same problem = No one that they can turn to and trust; They live on an island; someone will come along with more power and knock them off their king-of-the-hill position

we easily see the bankruptcy of the poor, but often we forget the message of Rev. 3:17
"You say I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"

3. Oppression Makes Death or Non Existence Look Better Than Life

“So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.”

Solomon using hyperbole here – not really advocating suicide

It would be interesting to study the lives of the CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies who have climbed to the top of the ladder:

(or the lives of successful politicians or judges or those in the field of education or medicine or law):

(or God forbid -- even the lives of some successful ministers of the gospel):

What type of compromises did they have to make?

What type of oppression did they engage in?

How did they really make it to the top?

What story is told by those whom they trampled on to get to the top?

Certainly it is possible to get to the top by the grace of God promoting you -- cf. Joseph and Daniel and Mordecai ...

(not apart from hard work, but in conjunction with faithful hard work)

But Solomon's commentary indicates to me that the fast track of the world has a lot of common ruts that are difficult to avoid

Jews knew a lot about oppression from their own history

cf. Egyptian bondage -- slave labor

cf. later lamenting by Jeremiah -- extreme grief and tears

God has a tender heart for the oppressed; He also has the answer for the troubled conscience of the oppressors

B. Contrast: Word of Christ: John 14:16

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you"

whatever the difficulty or grief of the situation, we have God's help immediately available; as Christ's bondservants we are not oppressed but **enabled**

it's not that we don't cry the tears or feel the pain or go thru the suffering, but we have the presence of the Holy Spirit to comfort us and to give us God's perspective and wisdom to help us in a limited way to understand what is happening to us

the presence of the Holy Spirit also equips us to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3ff)

C. Charge: Our Calling: not to oppress others, but to be a Servant to others -- make others glad, make others great, meet the needs of others

What can we do to recognize and ease the oppression of others?

What can we do to serve other people -- especially in our job?

Second Game: [Read vv. 4-6]

II. (:4-6) RATRACE RIVALRY GAME: CHESS

PROBLEM: NO CALM

Game: (could have picked a lot of games, but had to include my favorite)
intense struggle to try to outdo the other person; outthink them; out-trick them; etc.

seems like it should be a relaxing, easy-going game -- but not when you play in a tournament -- emotionally draining -- you can never let down your guard;

Like a War of the Minds -- **Ego involved** – extremely competitive

A. Commentary: Solomon's Insights on Rivalry

1. Man's Main Motivation is Competition and Rivalry – The Way to the Top is to Beat Out the Other Man

"I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor"

Most productive efforts (in school, sports, the workplace, etc.) are motivated by a desire to outperform other people and to look better than someone else -- get the glory for ourselves

the motivation = competition out of envy
instead of love for neighbor, we see a selfish form of competition; dog-eat-dog mentality

2. Competition and Rivalry Get you Nowhere

"This too is vanity and striving after wind."

3. Three Different Case Studies

"The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind."

since you see that a hard-working man will stir up envy on the part of others, don't hastily jump to the conclusion that it is better to do nothing:

a. the sluggard -- the fool -- he quits the competition

"folds his hands" -- no production; sits out the competition; doesn't participate
ends up consuming his own flesh = starves to death

b. the fast track achiever --

"2 fists full of labor" -- hard driving workaholic
admired by society; has many of the outward trappings of success
a good candidate for burnout and a heart attack

c. the fortunate few who achieve some type of balance

"1 hand full of rest"
requires saying No to some pressures from the workplace

Prov. 14:30 *"A tranquil heart is life to the body, But passion is rottenness to the bones"*

Prov. 15:16 *"Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and turmoil with it"*

B. Contrast: Word of Christ: Matt. 11:28-30

"Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light"

We don't want to spin our wheels with rat race activity

The same Jesus who proved himself Lord over all the forces of Nature when He calmed the raging storm out on the Sea of Galilee can calm our hearts and rescue us from the rat race mentality

C. Charge: Our Calling: not to strive to get glory for ourselves by outdoing one another, but to work hard to the Glory of God

Remember: We still need to work hard -- otherwise we will be like the sluggard who gives up and folds his hands and says, What's the use? But our efforts aren't motivated by rivalry but by a desire to see God glorified and a desire to serve others, not beat them out

III. (:7-8) RELENTLESS GREED GAME: MONOPOLY
PROBLEM: NO CONTENTMENT

Game: Not enough to have Boardwalk and Park Place in your possession; you have to go and build hotels on the green and the red properties as well and crush your opponent; you can never have enough properties; cf. Empire building

A. Commentary: Solomon's Insights on Greed

1. Riches Will Never Satisfy – The Way to the Top is to Accumulate the Most Things

"Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches"

(a lot to say on this subject throughout the book of Eccles.)

Examines the Miser Mentality = an irrational drive for more riches -- takes the extreme case where there is no potential beneficiary -- no dependent -- no one that needs the money -- Yet the pursuit remains as relentless as ever -- WHY?

Because the riches are desired not to meet needs but to elevate one's status -- Therefore, you never have too much; in fact, you never have enough!

Another million dollars will not change the lifestyle of the millionaire -- you can still go where you please and buy what you want

You don't have any desire to share the wealth; you are only into empire building in

order to climb the world's ladder of success

2. Selfish Motivations Will Consume a Person in Futility

“and he never asked, ‘And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?’”

There is a hidden cost associated with this pursuit of greed that is often overlooked:

often you are driving yourself so hard that you are having to forego certain pleasures of life -- rationalizing that you will slow down later and smell the roses

In fact you just keep accelerating the pace until your life burns out -- Never comprehending that: -- "Simple Pleasures are the best" -- remember that commercial??

3. What a Sorry Life!

“This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.”

B. Contrast: Word of Christ: (as quoted by example and teaching of Paul)

Acts 20:33-35 *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”*

You can't just try to not be Greedy. You must always put on the positive trait that is the opposite -- Here, Generosity

C. Charge: Our Calling: not to accumulate more and more wealth and possessions for ourselves, but to be content with what God has given us and sacrificially give to help others who are in greater need

IV. (:9-12) RISKY ISOLATION **PROBLEM: NO COMPANIONSHIP**

GAME: SOLITAIRE

Game: once you get this high up the ladder of success, no one will play with you anymore; plus you can't trust anyone anyway so you prefer to be by yourself –
Cf. Ricketts Construction – CEO lied and embezzled

it's lonely at the top; we don't tend to think of corporate executives as being lonely -- they are surrounded by so many people, but in terms of intimacy and close friendships they are often very lonely and disillusioned

A. Commentary: Solomon's Insights on Isolation

1. The Top Dog Mentality Only Allows for One King of the Hill – The Way to the Top Isolates from Meaningful Companionship

“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.”

Cf. Presidential Campaign – I'm not running for Vice President – not that we are having 2 people work together and pool their unique talents for the good of the country; all about who will end up on top

Very lonely existence

Not primarily talking about marriage here; not even primarily talking about friendship

talking about partnership and cooperation and teamwork in the workplace -- in our careers -- in our climbing of the ladder of whatever life goal we are pursuing

You've heard it said: "It's lonely at the top"

the higher you go, the less you can trust people; the higher are the stakes; the more people would love to take your place

- You long for a companion; someone in whom you can confide; someone who will truly share the workload ;
- On the other hand you don't want to share your empire with anyone -- so you are caught in a dilemma

You are especially vulnerable according to Solomon -- Uses the illustration of the risks of traveling alone without a companion

2. Three Vulnerabilities of Isolation

- a. Danger of pits or ravines -- error or mishap (:10)

"For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up."

We each have our blind spots; need one another;
Need deliverance when we slip and fall

- b. Danger of cold nights, no warmth -- adversity (:11)

"Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?"

- c. Danger of robbers -- open hostility (:12)

"And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him."

3. Principle

"A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

If two are good ... then three are even better. We all need a helping hand

Are we benefiting from the companionship of our wife as we should? Or are we going it alone??

Are we cultivating close friendships ? Or are we Going it alone?

Swindoll:

Reasons two are better than one:

- mutual encouragement when we are weak
- mutual support when we are vulnerable
- mutual protection when we are attacked

OT Biblical examples of the value of friendship:

- Elijah and Elisha
- Naomi and Ruth
- David and Jonathan

B. Contrast: Word of Christ: John 15:12-17

What a Friend we Have in Jesus -- But it helps to have some friends with flesh on them as well

C. Charge: Our Calling: not to go it alone in the Christian life, but to join together in true fellowship in the gospel as friends who genuinely love one another; importance of fellowship in the gospel; importance of the local church

V. (:13-16) RECURRING INSTABILITY GAME: CHUTES AND LADDERS **PROBLEM: NO CONTINUITY**

Game: When you think you are finally on top, you have finally made it; the wheel turns and you are crushed

A. Commentary: Solomon's Insights on Instability

1. No One Stays at the Top Forever – The Way to the Top Only Begins the Cycle that Ends with Being Replaced by Another

“A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction. For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom”

a. Look at Origins vs Endings

Wisdom cycles around to Stubbornness where the leader has outlived his usefulness; Times of transition are very volatile
What goes around . . . comes around

b. Look at Cycle of poverty and oppression vs riches and ruling

Ambiguity: Who is the one who has come out of prison??

Doesn't really matter because the unending cycle is what is in view

the higher you go on the ladder, the more rickety it gets; your footing is never secure -- one false step and you don't just get a bruised knee; when you fall from the top, you are badly hurt

2. Public Popularity is Fickle

“I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him. There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy

with him”

3. Cycle of Leadership is a Cycle of Futility

“for this too is vanity and striving after wind.”

look at the progression: the greedier you are the more isolated you get, the more isolated you get, the more unstable ;
Finally, you are foolish and not able to cover your back and someone comes along and sends you down the chute;
In no time at all you are forgotten -- yesterday's news

B. Contrast: Word of Christ: Matt. 7:24

“a wise man who built his house on the rock”

Psalm 1 – picture of tall tree and stability

C. Charge: Our Calling: not to be man-pleasers who are concerned with the fickle popularity of this world, but to only be concerned with doing the will of God -- having our life built on the Rock = Jesus Christ Himself -- and enjoying the security of abiding on top forever in union with Christ --

It's not the world's ladder of success that we want to try to climb -- it's Jacob's ladder that reaches up into heaven

CONCLUSION:

Nothing wrong with climbing the ladder of success -- as long as we do it God's way

But the climb up the ladder of success and the view at the top is not always what you expect -- especially if your climb upward involves one rotten step after another.

* * * * *

PARALLEL: STORY OF HAMAN IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER:

- I. RUTHLESS OPPRESSION**
- II. RATRACE RIVALRY**
- III. RELENTLESS GREED**
- IV. RISKY ISOLATION**
- V. RECURRING INSTABILITY**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you define the American Dream for young people who are just starting out on their career path today?
- 2) Why does the Preacher find so much frustration associated with work and ambition to succeed?
- 3) When is rivalry and competition productive and helpful and when is it sinful and selfish? How can you tell the difference?
- 4) How should leaders prepare for transition of power before they become too inflexible and stubborn to receive counsel and resist the wisdom of stepping aside at the appropriate juncture?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Life Just Isn't Fair

Solomon recorded his observations from visiting four different places and watching several people go through a variety of experiences:

1. In the courtroom (:1-3)

The king witnessed three tragedies:

- (1) oppression and exploitation in the halls of justice
- (2) pain and sorrow in the lives of innocent people
- (3) unconcern on the part of those who could have brought comfort

2. In the marketplace (:4-8)

- (1) the industrious man
- (2) the idle man
- (3) the integrated man
- (4) the independent man

3. On the highway (:9-12)

- (1) two are better than one when it comes to working
- (2) two are better than one when it comes to walking
- (3) two are better than one when it comes to warmth
- (4) two are better than one when it comes to watchcare (especially at night)

4. In the palace (:13-16)

Swindoll: The words of Solomon's journal ought to be:

- required reading at the famous business schools
- part of the content of famous textbooks on business management
- printed right below the heading of every issue of *The Wall Street Journal*
- mailed every New Year's Day to the nation's young aspiring executives
- words of warning printed on every diploma for business or finance

Zeisler: Occasionally a new voice, a new political hero, a young, energetic and enthusiastic personality comes on the scene. People begin to hope that the old, foolish, doddering king, together with his old and foolish advisers, will fade away. When the new blood takes over, they reason, things will be different. This happens, says Solomon, but the new king one day becomes old, just like his predecessor, and you are faced with the same problems. "This too is vanity," he concludes. David's son Absalom rebelled against his father and the people flocked to the young man, thinking that David had lost his ability to reign. But Absalom was not the answer to their problems. The Republicans nominated Dan Quayle, a young, attractive, energetic new face, for Vice President. Many look to Jesse Jackson, a passionate, charismatic man drawn from a tough and deprived background, as their hope for the future. Even the Forty-Niners football team has a problem deciding between a young and an old quarterback. The younger man, however, will soon become an old quarterback. Solomon says all this is vanity, striving after wind. Heroes don't last very long.

Donald Glenn: Labor is often motivated by inappropriate incentives:

- 1) Labor is sometimes motivated by envy (:4-6)
- 2) Labor is sometimes motivated by selfish greed (:7-12)
- 3) Labor is sometimes motivated by the desire for advancement and prestige (:13-16)

It is better to be poor (and without influence) than to be powerful and influential. Why? Because power, influence, and prestige are all transitory. Though the truth of verse 13 also commends wisdom over folly and commends responsiveness to criticism or counsel over unresponsiveness, these are not directly illustrated in the passage, which is confined to the futility of advancement. The point of the passage seems to be that the desire for prestige and advancement, two incentives which often motivate a person's labor, is, like envy and greed, futile or meaningless and a chasing after the wind.

Leupold: The king is merely the representative of those who have attained to high position. What is recorded is a common observation with reference to those who have held a prominent position for some length of time. Theirs will usually be a downfall that is all the harder and the more disappointing because, the longer they held such a position, the more do they cherish it and make it the goal of all their aspirations and tenaciously cling to it even after the period of their usefulness has come to an end.

Worship, Wealth and Wisdom

Ecclesiastes 5 -- Douglas Smith

What Every Worshiper Should Remember

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 ESV

- (1) Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.
- (2) Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.
- (3) For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.
- (4) When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow.
- (5) It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.
- (6) Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?
- (7) For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

Warren Wiersbe begins his Be series commentary on this section by noting that:

Solomon had visited the courtroom, the marketplace, the highway, and the palace. Now he paid a visit to the temple, that magnificent building whose construction he had supervised. He watched the worshipers come and go, praising God, praying, sacrificing, and making vows. He noted that many of them were not at all sincere in their worship, and they left the sacred precincts in worse spiritual condition than when they had entered. What was their sin? They were robbing God of the reverence and honor that He deserved. Their acts of worship were perfunctory, insincere, and hypocritical.

Worship is one of our primary joys and responsibilities but all too often, we approach worship with a casual attitude and judge its value by what we get out of it. True worship is God focused. I think J.I. Packer said it well:

Worship in the Bible is the due response of rational creatures to the self-revelation of their Creator. It is an honoring and glorifying of God by gratefully offering back to him all the good gifts, and all the knowledge of his greatness and graciousness, that he has given. It involves praising him for what he is, thanking him for what he has done, desiring him to get himself more glory by further acts of mercy, judgment, and power, and trusting him with our concern for our own and others' future well-being. Moods of awestruck wonder and grateful celebration are all part of it: David danced with passionate zeal "before the LORD" when he brought up the ark to Jerusalem, and sat in humble amazement

“before the LORD” when he was promised a dynasty, and his worship evidently pleased God on both occasions ([2 Sam. 6:14-16](#); [7:18](#)). Learning from God is worship too: attention to his word of instruction honors him; inattention is an insult. Acceptable worship requires “clean hands and a pure heart” ([Ps. 24:4](#)) and a willingness to express one’s devotion in works of service as well as in words of adoration.

(Concise Theology: A Guide To Historic Christian Beliefs, J.I. PACKER)

David understood true worship, you can get a sense of both joyful expectation, and awe in his words from Psalms 95:

Psalms 95:1-7a ESV

- (1) Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- (2) Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- (3) For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
- (4) In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
- (5) The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.
- (6) Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- (7) For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

As chapter 5 opens, Solomon turns his attention to the subject of worship and discusses four commands that all of us would do well to remember and practice. Chuck Swindoll summarized both the commands and the reason they were given this way:

COMMANDS	REASONS
Draw near and listen well!	Because God is communicating.
Be quiet and stay calm!	Because God hears the inaudible and sees the invisible
Make a commitment and keep it!	Because God believes it and doesn’t forget it!
Don’t decide now and deny later.	Because God doesn’t ignore our decisions.

Time does not permit us to delve into each one of these in detail but it is worth noting that Solomon’s warnings and exhortations are echoed throughout Scripture. Consider these examples:

Isaiah 55:6-11 ESV

- (6) "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;
- (7) let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- (8) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
- (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- (10) "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
- (11) so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Matthew 6:7-8 ESV

- (7) "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.
- (8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 ESV

- (21) "If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin.
- (22) But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin.
- (23) You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.

The topic of vows is perhaps the thing that knits these verses into Solomon's discussions in chapter 4 and the discussion that will follow in the remainder of this chapter. When Wiersbe outlined this section, he titled the chapter heading Stop Thief and his section heading was Don't Rob the Lord. The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains it well:

Since a rash vow might result in the destruction of the fruits of one's labor (and his labor might thus prove futile), Solomon compared rash vows to futile or **meaningless** dreams. This is the thought in [verse 7a](#), which may be translated somewhat literally, "Through many dreams there is futility and also through many words." So Solomon exhorted his readers to fear **God** ([v. 7b](#)), being cautious not to make rash vows ([vv. 1-2](#)) and to **fulfill** the vows they had made ([v. 4](#)).

Although we may be tempted to believe that making vows to the Lord was an "Old Testament" issue that isn't relevant for today, the reality is that people make all sort of promises to God that they never get around to fulfilling. As Wiersbe notes:

If we made our vows only to impress others, or perhaps to "bribe" the Lord ("If God answers my prayer, I will give \$500 to missions!"), then we will pay for our careless words. Many times in my pastoral ministry I have heard sick people make promises to God as they asked for healing, only to see those promises forgotten when they recovered.

People make empty vows because they live in a religious "dream world"; they think that *words* are the same as *deeds* ([v. 7](#)). Their worship is not serious, so their words are not dependable. They enjoy the "good feelings" that come when they make their promises to God, but they do themselves more harm than good. They like to "dream" about fulfilling their vows, but they never get around to doing it. They practice a make-believe religion that neither glorifies God nor builds Christian character.

Straight Talk to the Money-Mad

Solomon now moves from the realm of our responsibilities in worship to a brief discussion on earthly wealth and power. He begins by telling us not to be surprised when we see people oppressed by governmental bureaucracy.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-9 ESV

- (8) If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.
- (9) But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

Government is supposed to be an extension of God's justice but all too often, it becomes a means of gaining wealth and power for those who can navigate their way into political office. God's purpose for government is clear. Consider Paul's words:

Romans 13:1-7 ESV

- (1) Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.
- (2) Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.
- (3) For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,
- (4) for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.
- (5) Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.
- (6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.
- (7) Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Unfortunately, political corruption and oppression have been around for a long time. Because God's judgments are not always swift, as we consider swiftness, some believe that God is ignoring the plight of the oppressed. His Word makes it clear that He does see, He does care, and He will make the guilty pay.

Amos 8:4-7 ESV

- (4) Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end,
- (5) saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances,
- (6) that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?"
- (7) The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

James 5:1-8 ESV

- (1) Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.
- (2) Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.
- (3) Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.
- (4) Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
- (5) You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.
- (6) You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.
- (7) Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.
- (8) You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Clearly, obtaining wealth and power through falsehood and oppression of the poor, weak and needy is futility and striving after the wind. What is truly sad is that money, the all-encompassing passion of so many people, cannot satisfy. Solomon continues his discussion by moving to the core of the issue, mainly that loving money is an empty pursuit.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 ESV

- (10) He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.
- (11) When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?
- (12) Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

Solomon knew quite a bit about the topic of money so he is very qualified to speak on the topic. Scripture affirms that he was an incredibly wealthy man. His lifestyle would be enviable by even the rich people of today.

1 Kings 10:23-27 ESV

- (23) Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.
- (24) And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.
- (25) Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.
- (26) And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem.
- (27) And the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah.

Solomon knew how to enjoy wealth but he was also keenly aware that wealth cannot buy happiness and obtaining it and keeping it brings with it several problems. Notice that he mentions in verse 11 that when goods increase, so do the people who hang around you to

enjoy the fruits of your labor. Also, the pursuit of wealth can be an all consuming passion that keeps you from even enjoying a good nights sleep. It is important to state here that the issue is not having money but loving money. God chooses to bless some people with wealth and there are many content wealthy people. Unfortunately, we see far too many examples of the bad side of money. The evening news is filled with stories of greed and the trouble it brings to individuals, families, businesses and nations. Scripture provides clear warnings against greed and the love of money.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 ESV

- (9) But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.
- (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Hebrews 13:5 ESV

- (5) Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

“Grievous Evils” to Remember

Solomon continues his discussion by highlighting some “grievous evils” related to the love of money.

Those who have clutched can quickly crash

Ecclesiastes 5:13-14 ESV

- (13) There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,
- (14) and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.

Hoarding wealth and recklessly pursuing more can lead to disaster. I think we all know this intellectually but it is hard to resist keeping a little more for ourselves and seeing potential dollar signs instead of the potential disaster or risky investments. Christ’s parable of the rich fool provides us with another perspective of this same pitfall.

Luke 12:15-21 ESV

- (15) And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."
- (16) And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully,
- (17) and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'
- (18) And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.
- (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'
- (20) But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'
- (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Those who live high often die hard

Ecclesiastes 5:15-17 ESV

- (15) As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.
- (16) This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?
- (17) Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a U-haul? It doesn't matter how large your bank account or investment portfolio is, when you die the only treasure you will have is the treasure you have stored up in heaven. Christ's parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man shows the results of pursuing a life of indulgence instead of a life of godliness. Consider the first portion of the parable:

Luke 16:19-25 NASB

- (19) "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.
- (20) "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,
- (21) and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.
- (22) "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.
- (23) "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.
- (24) "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'
- (25) "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'

When you live with an “under the sun” perspective, it is easy to convince yourself that the road to happiness is through accumulating the best this world has to offer. God's truth is quite different. Scripture clearly affirms that you will never know true joy, contentment or success by chasing after the things of this world. Paul passed this truth on to Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:6-8 NASB

- (6) But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.
- (7) For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.
- (8) If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

Notice how similar Paul's exhortation to Timothy is to some insights provided by Job:

Job 1:21 NASB

- (21) He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

Good and Fitting Gifts to Claim

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 ESV

- (18) Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.
- (19) Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil--this is the gift of God.
- (20) For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

Wiersbe notes that Solomon ends the chapter with some sound advice:

In the closing verses of the chapter ([vv. 18-20](#)), he affirmed once again the importance of accepting our station in life and enjoying the blessings that God gives to us.

The thing that is “good and fitting” ([v. 18](#), NKJV) is to labor faithfully, enjoy the good things of life, and accept it all as the gracious gift of God. Solomon gave us this wise counsel before in [2:24](#), [3:12-13](#), and [3:22](#), and he will repeat it at least three more times before he ends his “sermon.”

Martha Snell Nicholson was a poet who learned to be content in Christ in spite of the pain of several chronic conditions that ultimately took her life. Consider the wisdom she records in her poem *Treasures* in light of everything we have discussed in Ecclesiastes 5:

One by one God took them from me,
All the things I valued most,
Till I was empty handed,
Every glittering toy was lost.

And I walked earth's highways grieving
In my rags of poverty
Till I heard His voice inviting
“Lift those empty hands to me.”

So I turned my hands toward heaven,
And he filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches
Till they could contain no more.

And At last I comprehended,
With my stupid mind and dull
That God could not pour His riches
Into hands already full.

“Treasures” by Martha Snell Nicholson

Although we have used Christ's exhortation from the Sermon on the Mount before, it is equally applicable here.

Matthew 6:30-34 ESV

- (30) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?
- (31) Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'
- (32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
- (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
- (34) "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Wiersbe concludes his discussion of this chapter in a way that I think ties this entire discussion together very well:

If we focus more on the gifts than on the Giver, we are guilty of idolatry. If we accept His gifts, but complain about them, we are guilty of ingratitude. If we hoard His gifts and will not share them with others, we are guilty of indulgence. But if we yield to His will and use what He gives us for His glory, then we can enjoy life and be satisfied.

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

TITLE: *THE FUTILITY OF CHASING THE GOOD LIFE*

BIG IDEA:

EVEN THOSE WHO APPEAR TO HAVE GRABBED HOLD OF THE GOOD LIFE STRUGGLE WITH NO ENJOYMENT, NO SATISFACTION AND NO ANSWERS TO LIFE'S ULTIMATE QUESTIONS

(:1) INTRODUCTION: CONSISTENCY OF THE GLOOMY PERSPECTIVE

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men”

Continued worldly insight into the futility of the human condition;
Book becomes somewhat repetitious as it continues to drive home the same messages and repeatedly investigates the same themes.

A. Consistency of the Ominous Observations = dark and brooding

“an evil which I have seen”

Journal of what Solomon saw as he looked around him and what he personally experienced; this is his blog and the tone is heavy

“Evil” is a pretty strong word; Solomon not sugar coating anything; not looking through rose-tinted glasses; but not making things up either; facing reality square in the face and reporting what he sees around him

B. Consistency of the Finite-Limited Perspective = *“under the sun”*

Doesn't have his *“mind of Christ”* spectacles on – despite some glimpses of light

C. Consistency of the Human Condition – *“it is prevalent among men”*

cf. *“no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man”*

1 Cor. 10:13

Sometimes as believers we view the world as divided into 2 classes of people: the saved and the unsaved; that's how we view our neighbors, our co-workers, etc. We think of all of the distinctions between these two groups – What fellowship can light have with darkness, etc. – But Solomon is thinking here of how much all of mankind has in common – what is innate to the human condition – the reality that is prevalent among men – yes, those with a divine perspective will be able to deal with this reality without the despair of the unsaved ... connectivity to Christ gives us the divine perspective ... but viewed just *“under the sun”* apart from how we deal with the reality, there are some perplexing questions in this life

I. (:2-6) NO ENJOYMENT -- THE FUTILITY OF THE GOOD LIFE – APART FROM GOD

A. (:2) The Good Life Proves Elusive

1. (:2a) Possessing the Good Life is a Gift from God – Solomon's Blessings – Riches / Wealth / Honor cf. **2 Chron. 1:11-12**

“a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires”

This is a self-portrait on Solomon's part – he is this man he references here; God asked him what he most wanted in all of the world and then God abundantly blessed him beyond his imagination.

What sorts of people do we know that have been blessed with riches and wealth and honor? Important to acknowledge that such prosperity is a gift from God.

2. (:2b) Enjoying the Good Life is Impossible Apart from a Gift of God as Well – Solomon's Frustration

- a. You Don't Get to Enjoy Your Possessions
"yet God has not empowered him to eat from them"

Imagine how frustrating this must be. Everything you want is within your reach, but for some reason you cannot partake and enjoy.

Wiersbe: Enjoyment without God is merely entertainment, and it doesn't satisfy. But enjoyment with God is enrichment and it brings true joy and satisfaction.

Eaton: "eat" means to enjoy here (Is. 3:10)

Look at the **gracious invitations** of the Lord Jesus Christ: (just picked out 4)

To those who are in need of repentance in order to experience the divine favor:

Rev. 3:20 *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."*

To those who are on the treadmill of this rat race life:

Matt. 11:28 *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."*

To those who want to discover real meaning and purpose in life:

Matt. 4:19 *"Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men."* But you must leave your nets and follow

John 6:27 *"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."* All hinges on living a life of faith

- b. A Stranger Enjoys Your Possessions
"for a foreigner enjoys them."

What types of foreigners are in view? (**Swindoll** looks at this)

- Could be national enemies that take spoils of war
- Could be things out of your control such as disease and failing health
- Could be time commitments that don't allow you the freedom to enjoy the good life
- Could be family conflicts that devour your peace of mind and your material estate

3. (:2c) Conclusion: Futility and Pain Once Again
“This is vanity and a severe affliction.”

Sobering Comparison:

B. (:3-6) The Good Life No Better Than the Non Life – In fact more painful and frustrating

1. Possible Mitigating Factors
 - a. Larger Family – language of hyperbole
“If a man fathers a hundred children”
(although you look at those polygamous relationships being investigated out West ...)
Children viewed as a blessing from the Lord – no humanistic concerns over population control here
 - b. Longer/Healthier Life
“and lives many years, however many they be”
2. Same Problem: No Enjoyment or Satisfaction
*“but his soul is not satisfied with good things,
And he does not even have a proper burial”*

Wiersbe: But his family does not love him, for when he died, he was not lamented. . . His relatives stayed around him only to use his money (5:11), and they wondered when the old man would die. When he finally did die, his surviving relatives could hardly wait for the reading of the will.

MacArthur: Not having a burial, as in the case of King Jehoiakim (Jer 22:18,19 *“a donkey’s burial”*), indicated complete disrespect and disregard for one’s life. To die without mourners or honors was considered worse than being born dead, even if one had many children and a full life.

[cf. cremation – not showing much respect for the body or much hope for the afterlife]

3. Worse State Than Non Existence
 - a. Point of Comparison
“then I say, ‘Better the miscarriage than he’”

Talking about the still born child – such expectation; the mother carries the child for 9 painful months; the agony of delivery and then the devastation of the child being still-born – isn’t this a cruel illustration on Solomon’s part .. how can the life of any man be more sorry than that sad state of affairs

- b. Unrecognized Futility Better Than Recognized and Experienced Futility
 - 1) Not Known by Anyone
*“for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity;
And its name is covered in obscurity.”*
 - 2) Not Knowing any of this World’s Evil and Suffering
*“It never sees the sun and it never knows anything;
It is better off than he.”*

Wiersbe: More than one person in the Bible became so discouraged with life that he either wanted to die or wished he had never been born. This includes Moses (Num. 11:15), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Job (3:21; 7:15), Jeremiah (8:3; 15:10), and Jonah (4:3). Even the great apostle Paul despaired of life during a particularly tough time in his life (2 Cor. 1:8-11).

Eaton: The child at least has rest; he does not have to endure the conflicts of life “*under the sun.*”

c. Same Destiny

“Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things – do not all go to one place?”

Eaton: The destination is common to all, no matter how long it takes to get there. The one place is *Sheol*, the realm of the dead.

Solomon: we know where we are all headed; let’s just get there with the minimum of suffering and frustration

II. (:7-9) NO SATISFACTION (FILLING UP) -- THE FUTILITY OF ONE’S LABOR IN LIGHT OF THE INSATIABLE NATURE OF THE HUMAN APPETITE

A. (:7) Laboring . . . Eating . . . Emptiness

“All a man’s labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.”

Swindoll: The term translated “*appetite*” is the Hebrew word *nephesh*. It’s the term often rendered “*soul*” in other Old Testament passages. The soul is not satisfied. Work doesn’t bring satisfaction to an empty life.

Leupold: lexicon meaning = refers: “to all functions through which life is maintained or strengthened, or to experiences through which it is affected.”

Man is a bottomless pit; nothing can fill him up or satisfy
Work would have some value if it could bring satisfaction

B. (:8) What’s the Point? 2 Piercing Questions:

1. No Difference – Wise Man or Fool

“For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool?”

2. No Difference – Rich Man or Poor

“What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?”

C. (:9a) Mini-Insight – Focus on What You Have

“What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires.”

Proverb: “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

Some people go through life with that grasping, covetous spirit – imagining that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence; let’s jump to that next job – it has to be better than what I’ve got here; then you find out that human nature is the same everywhere; the jerks you thought you were escaping somehow popped up over there; If I could just have X . . .

Solomon has a lot to say about the secret of Contentment

Swindoll: Balancing perspective – we still need dreamers – great quote: “The reason mountain climbers are tied together is to keep the sane ones from going home.” So it takes a few dreamers out front to tell them what it’s going to be like, to keep their hopes up. And so it is with life. But the problem comes when we live only in a fantasy land and refuse to face reality. . . Dreaming sets us on a collision course where fantasy hits reality broadside. Face the inescapable truth – You need God.

D. (:9b) Same Old Conclusion = Futility Under the Sun

“This too is futility and a striving after wind.”

Wiersbe: Is Solomon telling us that it’s wrong to dream great dreams or have a burning ambition to accomplish something in life? Of course not, but we must take care that our ambition is motivated by the glory of God and not the praise of men. We must want to serve others and not promote ourselves. If we think our achievements will automatically bring satisfaction, we are wrong. True satisfaction comes when we do the will of God from the heart (Eph. 6:6; John 4:34).

III. (:10-12) NO MAKING SENSE OF ONE’S SHORT LIFE ON EARTH -- THE INABILITY TO DETERMINE YOUR OWN DESTINY OR EVEN UNDERSTAND WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT

A. (:10-11) The Futility of Trying to Determine Your Own Destiny – 3 Don’ts:

1. The Finality of the Sovereignty of God – since your course has been determined
Don’t Think that You Can Change Your Future

“Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is”

God is Sovereign and in control – no getting around that – and we shouldn’t want to To name something is to be sovereign over it

Eaton: To “give something a name” is to study or (as here) to appoint its character. Both the world (*what is*) and man have settled characters. *One who is stronger than he* is God. Thus the Preacher is underlining the impossibility of changing the basic character of life. Man cannot escape his limitations, nor can he completely unravel the world’s anomalies (cf. 1:15). He may, like Job, wish to debate the matter with God, but God is altogether greater.

Ryrie: Man is unable to control his destiny, which is determined by God. This is contrary to fatalism, which views God as either nonexistent or uninvolved.

Donald Glenn: Solomon introduced his discussion on the limitations of human wisdom (6:10 – 11:6) by reverting to two themes he had used earlier to demonstrate the futility of human

toil, namely, the immutability (1:15; 3:14; cf. 1:9) and inscrutability (3:11, 22) of divine providence.

2. The Frustration of Any Human Speculation or Debate – since God is wiser and more powerful

Don't Debate with God

“for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.

“For there are many words which increase futility.”

Swindoll: Disputing is a waste of time and effort. So long as I fight the hand of God, I do not learn the lessons He is attempting to place before me. Everything that touches me comes through the hand of my heavenly Father who continues to love me, who continues to maintain control of my life, who continues to be totally responsible for my life. He does the same with all His created things. That's why He's God!

3. The Pointlessness of Life Under the Sun – since God trumps man at every turn

Don't Try to Beat God at His Own Game = Controlling Life

“What then is the advantage to a man?”

B. (:12) The Futility of Even Understanding Your Lot in Life – **3 Who Knows:**

1. The Uncertainty and Moral Relativism of Agnosticism –

Who Knows What is Best?

“For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime,”

2. The Brevity and Futility of This Life on Earth –

Who Knows Whether You Will Be Around Tomorrow?

“during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow.”

3. The Mystery and Dread of the Future

Who Knows What the Future Holds?

“For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where have I been able to exercise self control with respect to my appetites so that I can practice contentment?

2) Where am I striving after something I don't have rather than enjoying in the present what God has already given me?

3) What advantages do people richer than I am actually have?

4) Where do I argue with God about how He is directing my life rather than submitting to His control and acknowledging that He knows what is best for my future?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: In Ecclesiastes 6, Solomon discussed three of life's mysteries: riches without enjoyment (1-6), labor without satisfaction (7-9), and questions without answers (10-12). . .

The British essayist and poet Joseph Addison (1672-1718) wrote, "The grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, someone to love, and something to hope for." Addison probably didn't have Christianity in mind when he wrote that, but we have all three in Jesus Christ!

Swindoll: [Review:] Solomon paints realistic pictures with which his readers can easily identify. As we've seen already, his pen portraits include:

- the serious philosopher who is bored and bewildered
- the funny-face clown who makes us laugh
- the hedonistic playboy who forgets all restraint
- the "good times Charlie" who is living it up
- the industrious worker who hopes to find satisfaction in his job
- the committed worshiper who tries to connect with God
- the blue-collar welder who labors without much anxiety, yet not without his own struggles
- the entrepreneur who loses it all in bad investments, who tosses and turns through the night
- the wealthy person, the "filthy rich," who seeks to find satisfaction in his possessions

This self portrait in chapter 6 is of the disillusioned king himself.

Kidner: Secular man, heading for death, and swept along by change, can only echo, "*Who knows what is good . . .? Who can tell man what will be after him . . .?*" It is a double bewilderment. He is left with no absolute values to live for ("*what is good?*"); not even any practical certainties ("*what will be?*") to plan for.

Leupold: No man is able to discern what is coming after the situation in which he now finds himself. What the next turn of the road will bring is completely hidden from him. Why, then, make extensive preparations along one line – like amassing riches – if a man has absolutely no knowledge as to whether that will happen to be the thing that he should really have acquired? Here are cases that may develop: he may later require patience, but he laid up a stock of gold; he may require strength of character, but all he has is a strong fortune; his particular situation may call for Christian hope, but his hope is built on uncertain riches. Such a situation is a downright calamity.

David Fairchild: Some of you think that having more money and things and respect would make you happier? Is this true? Not if your heart stays the same. If your heart does not change, no matter the increase or decrease of these things will make you truly happy so that you can ENJOY life. Why? Because ultimate joy and the ability to enjoy the gifts given by the giver, must be attached to desiring and delighting in God above all else

<http://www.kaleochurch.com/sermon/Riches-Wealth-Honor>

Paul W. Martin: Enjoying the Good Life

1. (:1-6) Prosperity is not necessarily a good thing.

Describes this as a heavy weight; something that is oppressive; Illustration of life of Thompson family = richest family in Canada – no relationships, no happiness, no trust, just despair; wealth isn't life; the sinful nature ensures dissatisfaction; cf. pursuit of long life; at best they prolong their inability to find joy in this life and delay the inevitable judgment

2. (:7-9) An Ability to Work combined with an insatiable appetite is evil also.

Your appetite drives you; but you never have satisfaction; pick up and enjoy the apple you have on your table rather than laboring in the vineyards for more apple trees; Pick something and just be satisfied with it for an extra long time; Do I really need a new car? Establish: this will be my standard of living; gives everything else away for the glory of God

3. (:10-12) Intelligence with No Final Answers is an Evil.

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?chapter=6&BibleOnly=true&currSection=sermonsible&keyword=Ecclesiastes>

Pastor Thomas Leake: (vs. 13) Dealing with Temptation as Believers in Christ

Big Idea: God Provides Sufficient Help for Us in Temptation

Introduction: Effects of the Fall; cf. man-made religion and its attempts to solve the sin problem; Only God can provide the plan of salvation; We need a new birth (new life) not a moral reformation; God accomplishes this in us; But if we are a new creation and have such a whole new beginning, Why do I still have so much of the old man in my experience? We have to learn to become who we are = step-by-step process.

Eph. 4:22-24. All believers have to deal with temptations in the present. They are hard; they have a purpose. It is never wrong to be tempted. Temptations are inevitable for every believer. Jesus was tempted but never gave in to sin.

James 1:14-15. Where does our Hope to fight against sin and stand come from?

Tone: Reassurance and Hope

4 Helpful Truths About Temptations:

I. We Have Common Temptations

Difference between testing (which God brings into our life) and temptations = Intention.

Temptations designed to bring our faith down. Never from God. Deut. 8:2

All are normal, common to man temptations; no super special stuff being thrown specifically at you; not that we all equally feel the pressure of giving in to each temptation;

Same throughout history; no new temptations; Heb. 4:15; Jesus was tempted like we are; cf. survey taken of common temptations; Top Ten list; we will find our pet temptation on that list as well; same flesh; same world; all of us deal with difficult people; with uncertainties of life; with imperfect parents; with financial pressures; Satan is after all of us; We all need rest; we all need to spend time in devotions with the Lord

Lie of Satan: My situation is unique ... so for me there is no help and no hope

Implications:

- we can learn from one another
- no special gene inside of us that destines us to fall; human spirit is the problem, not the body
- Can't say to others: you don't know what I'm going through (even though no 2 cases are

exactly alike in all the particulars)

- you are not going to face a unique counseling situation

Heb. 4:12; psychology just offers excuses, not solutions

We all have a Disorder = Sin

We all have an Addiction = Selfishness

II. We Have a Faithful God

Emphasized right in the middle of this important verse. Shows that God has never broken one of His promises. Ps. 33:4; 36:5; 89; 91; 100:5; 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Thess 5:24; 2 Thess 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb 10:23; 1 John 1:9

God wants us to discover how weak we are; show us how little we are leaning on God; We have no reason to lose hope

Lie of Satan: God has abandoned you; doesn't care about your situation

2 ways that God shows us His faithfulness:

III. God Provides a Way of Escape

God knows our limits; knows exactly what we can take; Sovereignty of God to regulate temptations in our lives

Cf. Jay Adams – Christ and Your Problems

Both the temptation and the way of escape happen at the same time in your life; we must find the way of escape

Lie of Satan: You have no choice; you couldn't help it

Problem: some are not even looking for a way out; they want to indulge the flesh

IV. You Can Endure Those Temptations

You are a child of God and have spiritual capabilities; Christians have special powers that the unsaved do not have; make no provision for the lusts of the flesh

Wisdom Rediscovered

Ecclesiastes 7 – Doug Smith

Ecclesiastes 7 marks the middle of the preacher's discourse. We have already done an exhaustive study to the futility of life under the sun and, as Chuck Swindoll notes, Solomon seems to begin his journey back home in this chapter. Much of the book to this point has focused on man's view instead of God's view. Solomon is now turning a corner and begins to explore and express life from an above the sun perspective. Perhaps this explains why the writing style of this chapter is more reminiscent of the book of Proverbs than the narrative style we have grown accustomed to in the first part of this book. Proverbs are "brief, crisp, simple-sounding statements that offer insightful principles for handling life." (Swindoll) As Swindoll explains, they often come in the form of couplets and when they do, they appear in one of three ways:

- **Contrasting couplets**, connected by the terms but or nevertheless as in Proverbs 13:1. "A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke"
- **Completive couplets**, connected by the terms and or so as in Proverbs 14:13. "Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief."
- **Comparative couplets**, connected by the terms better/than or like/so as in Proverbs 15:16-17. "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and turmoil with it. Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it."

Solomon introduces this chapter with a series of "comparative proverbs" that Chuck Swindoll titles "wise words for busy people."

Wise Words for Busy People

The opening proverb begins with a concept we can all understand and then takes an interesting twist.

[Ecclesiastes 7:1 ESV](#)

(1) A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

A good name is something to be prized. Unlike ointment, or perfume as it can also be translated, it has an enduring quality and transcends the moment. When Mary anointed Jesus' feet with fragrant ointment, the beautiful aroma filled the area but the effects were only temporary, however, her good name lives on wherever the gospel is preached. Contrast that with Judas who was given a noble name by his parents but soiled it with an ignoble act.

Mark 14:3-11 ESV

- (3) And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.
- (4) There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that?"
- (5) For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her.
- (6) But Jesus said, "**Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.**"
- (7) **For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me.**
- (8) **She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.**
- (9) **And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."**
- (10) Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.
- (11) And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

The strange twist I alluded to comes in the second part of verse one. We typically see birth as a blessing and death as a tragedy so what is Solomon trying to tell us. Swindoll believes the main idea is that, for the saved, death frees us from the pains of this world and ushers us into the presence of the Father. Paul echoed this idea when he said:

Philippians 1:21-24 ESV

- (21) For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
- (22) If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.
- (23) I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.
- (24) But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

In verses 2-4, Solomon contrasts the careful contemplation of life and eternity with frivolity.

Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 ESV

- (2) It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.
- (3) Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.
- (4) The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

While it may seem odd to extol the virtues of places of mourning, it does make sense. Often, laughing and feasting provide a momentary escape from the pressures of life but they do not produce lasting change. Something about contemplating death turns our thoughts towards the eternal rather than the temporal and a mind set on the eternal is more likely to seek after God.

1 Peter 4:3-7 ESV

- (3) For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.
- (4) With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;
- (5) but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.
- (6) For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.
- (7) The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Next, Solomon returns to a subject he and other writers of Biblical Wisdom literature emphasize in verses 5-6; mainly that a wise person knows how to give and except a reproof.

Ecclesiastes 7:5-6 ESV

- (5) It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.
- (6) For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.

Notice how this theme is echoed in other verses:

Proverbs 9:8 ESV

- (8) Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

Proverbs 15:31-32 ESV

- (31) The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.
- (32) Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

Proverbs 17:10 ESV

- (10) A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.

Although it is often hard to accept a rebuke, it could make a world of difference. After all, even our Lord rebukes us at times and His ways are perfect.

Revelation 3:19 ESV

- (19) **Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.**

Wiersbe titled his comments on the next three verses “The ‘long haul’ is better than the shortcut”.

Ecclesiastes 7:7-9 ESV

- (7) Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- (8) Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
- (9) Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

Solomon is telling us that quick routes, such as bribery, never lead to true wisdom and a far better approach is to wait upon God. We have seen earlier in this series that God does see oppression and injustice and He will call the guilty to account in His time. When that time comes, those who faithfully served and patiently waited will have their mourning turned to dancing and joy and they will receive their reward. In their case, the end is truly better than the beginning.

Psalms 126:5-6 ESV

- (5) Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!
- (6) He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Romans 2:6-8 ESV

- (6) He will render to each one according to his works:
- (7) to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;
- (8) but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Romans 8:28 ESV

- (28) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Likewise, anger is a path that leads away from wisdom and towards foolishness. Other proverbs expand upon and reinforce this truth.

Proverbs 14:29 ESV

- (29) Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

Proverbs 15:18 ESV

- (18) A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Proverbs 16:32 ESV

- (32) Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Finally, Solomon concludes this section by telling us that there is no such thing as “the good old days”.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 ESV

- (10) Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

Wiersbe explains this well when he said:

When life is difficult and we are impatient for change, it is easy to long for “the good old days” when things were better. . . It has been said that “the good old

days” are the combination of a bad memory and a good imagination, and often this is true.

Yesterday is past and cannot be changed, and tomorrow may not come; so make the most of today. “*Carpe diem!*” wrote the Roman poet Horace. “Seize the day!” This does not mean we shouldn’t learn from the past or prepare for the future, because both are important. It means that we must live *today* in the will of God and not be paralyzed by yesterday or hypnotized by tomorrow. The Victorian essayist Hilaire Belloc wrote, “While you are dreaming of the future or regretting the past, the present, which is all you have, slips from you and is gone.”

Wisdom Leads to Balance

In the next section, Solomon’s main theme seems to be balance. Life is filled with pressure to move to the extremes but the wise path is most often the balanced path. In the next few verses, Solomon will look at wealth, providence, adversity and prosperity, and sin and righteousness.

Wealth

[Ecclesiastes 7:11-12 ESV](#)

- (11) Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.
- (12) For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

Solomon has already explored the futility of wealth under the sun. Wealth can lose its value but the value of Godly wisdom endures. From a practical standpoint, wealth often flows through the hands of the person who lacks wisdom so without wisdom you probably won’t have and keep wealth either. It is easy to place your trust in gold but in the end, that is futility.

Providence

[Ecclesiastes 7:13 ESV](#)

- (13) Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

We would all like to think that we are in control but the truth is that God is the one who gets to set the rules. The wise course of action is to discern God’s will and cooperate. Wiersbe has these helpful comments to say about this verse:

If God makes something crooked, He is able to make it straight; and perhaps He will ask us to work with Him to get the job done. But if He wants it to stay crooked, we had better not argue with Him. We don’t fully understand all the works of God ([11:5](#)), but we do know that “He hath made everything beautiful in its time” ([3:11](#)). This includes the things we may think are twisted and ugly.

Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson in a very vivid way when God struck him with madness until he acknowledged that it was God, not him, who was in control. He penned these words:

Daniel 4:34-35 ESV

- (34) At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
- (35) all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

Adversity and Prosperity

Ecclesiastes 7:14 ESV

- (14) In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

We have discussed both Job and Paul in previous lessons. Both these men knew times of prosperity and both experienced times of extreme trial. Although some believe that the Christian life would be a walk down easy street if we only had faith, the Biblical view is quite different. Trials are necessary and they help to build our Christian character. God will not spare us from trials but he will ensure that we provide us the strength to endure (1 Corinthians 10:13). Likewise, God gives us times of joy and refreshing. As Solomon said in Chapter 3, there is a time for every purpose and, since we cannot see the future, we need to walk by faith in the moment we are in.

Sin and Righteousness

Ecclesiastes 7:15-18 ESV

- (15) In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.
- (16) Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?
- (17) Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?
- (18) It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

Solomon exclaims, "I have seen everything". In essence, he is pointing out something that from a human perspective seems amazing to him. A righteous man dies young even though he is following God and a wicked man lives to a ripe old age. From an under the sun perspective, this is truly unfair but we have already seen that for the righteous, death is not a punishment, it is a path to life. For the wicked, the enjoyment they have in this life, which is but a fleeting moment of eternity, is all they will have and their future is eternal judgement. Remember Jesus parable of the rich man and Lazarus:

Luke 16:25 ESV

(25) But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

Next Solomon warns against self-righteousness and pride. Wiersbe explains it this way:

[Verses 16-18](#) have been misunderstood by those who say that Solomon was teaching “moderation” in everyday life: don’t be too righteous, but don’t be too great a sinner. “Play it safe!” say these cautious philosophers, but this is not what Solomon wrote.

In the Hebrew text, the verbs in [verse 16](#) carry the idea of reflexive action. Solomon said to the people, “Don’t claim to be righteous and don’t claim to be wise.” In other words, he was warning them against *self-righteousness and the pride that comes when we think we have “arrived” and know it all*. Solomon made it clear in [verse 20](#) that there are no righteous people, so he cannot be referring to true righteousness. He was condemning the self-righteousness of the hypocrite and the false wisdom of the proud, and he warned that these sins led to destruction and death.

[Verse 18](#) balances the warning: we should take hold of true righteousness and should not withdraw from true wisdom, and the way to do it is to walk in the fear of God. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” ([Prov. 9:10](#)) and Jesus Christ is to the believer “wisdom and righteousness” ([1 Cor. 1:30](#)), so God’s people need not “manufacture” these blessings themselves.

Wisdom Leads to Strength

In the final part of this chapter, Solomon shows us how Godly wisdom is a source of strength.

Ecclesiastes 7:19 ESV

(19) Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

This strength can help us walk wisely and seek God’s forgiveness when we sin.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 ESV

(20) Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

Scripture, God’s great gift of wisdom for us, will teach us how to guard our steps and points us to the only solution for our sin, Christ Jesus.

Wisdom also helps us to bear up under criticism because we know that we also criticize.

Ecclesiastes 7:20-22 ESV

- (21) Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.
- (22) Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

To paraphrase Chuck Swindoll, in all likelihood what has been said about us is only the tip of the iceberg when we take into account what we know about ourselves. Some people are “blessed” with the gift of criticism and we are bound to meet one at some point in our lives.

A third area of strength is accepting the fact that we cannot grasp everything God is doing in this world.

[Ecclesiastes 7:23-25 ESV](#)

- (23) All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.
- (24) That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?
- (25) I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

Wiersbe addresses this aspect this way:

Even Solomon with all his God-given wisdom could not understand all that exists, how God manages it, and what purposes He has in mind. He searched for the “reason [scheme] of things” but found no final answers to all his questions. However, the wise man knows that he does not know, and this is what helps to make him wise!

Finally, wisdom gives us strength to face the sinfulness of humanity in general.

[Ecclesiastes 7:26-29 ESV](#)

- (26) And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.
- (27) Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things--
- (28) which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.
- (29) See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

Solomon illustrates this by describing a wayward woman who ensnares a man through sensuality. This was something Solomon would have been keenly aware of because his life spiraled downward when he allowed his wives and concubines to turn his heart from the true God to idols. He follows this illustration by concluding that it is hard to find truly wise people on this earth but we can always count upon God. Turning again to Wiersbe:

Created in the image of God, man has the ability to understand and harness the forces God put into nature, but he doesn't always use this ability in constructive

ways. Each forward step in science seems to open up a Pandora's box of new problems for the world . . . And beside that, man has used his abilities to devise alluring forms of sin that are destroying individuals and nations.

Yes, there are many snares and temptations in this evil world, but the person with godly wisdom will have the power to overcome. Solomon has proved his point: wisdom can make our lives better and clearer and stronger. We may not fully understand all that God is doing, but we will have enough wisdom to live for the good of others and the glory of God.

Rulers and Riddles

Ecclesiastes 8 – Doug Smith

Solomon continues his exploration of life under the sun tempered by wisdom in chapter 8. He begins by looking at rulers and discusses their power and our duties towards them. He closes the chapter by exploring a riddle many have struggled with throughout the ages, why does evil seem to prosper and good seem to go unrewarded. He has touched on both of these themes already but this chapter will provide greater insights.

Rulers and Rules

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9 ESV

- (1) Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.
- (2) I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him.
- (3) Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases.
- (4) For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"
- (5) Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.
- (6) For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him.
- (7) For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be?
- (8) No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.
- (9) All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

The backdrop for this passage was probably drawn from Solomon's unique perspective. Not only was he wiser than all the kings who preceded him or would come after, he was also the most powerful king to sit upon the throne in ancient Israel. Solomon's advice is fairly straight forward, be wise, be loyal, and you will avoid the wrath of the king.

Be Wise

Ecclesiastes 8:1 ESV

- (1) Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

Dealing with those in authority requires wisdom. Solomon has already discussed the superiority of wisdom in earlier chapters. We have learned that "wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness" (Ecc 2:13) and that "wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city" (Ecc 7:19). Wisdom is required in our present discussion because without it, we would not be able to act properly before those in authority. Wisdom gives us confidence and strength, as shown by a good countenance (makes his face shine), and helps us obey God's command to behave with proper respect and courtesy to those in authority and towards all men.

Titus 3:1-2 ESV

- (1) Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,
- (2) to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

Be Loyal

Ecclesiastes 8:2-4 ESV

- (2) I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him.
- (3) Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases.
- (4) For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

Solomon gives some very practical advice on why we should be loyal to the king. First, we are duty bound as citizens to obey. In ancient times, people were often required to pledge an oath of loyalty to the king. We may not be required to do that today but we do have a responsibility before God to be law-abiding citizens. Also, we are not to limit our obedience because we don't like what we have been commanded to do. Consider Peterson's paraphrases of verse 3 in *The Message*:

Ecclesiastes 8:3 MSG

- (3) Don't worryingly second-guess your orders or try to back out when the task is unpleasant. You're serving his pleasure, not yours.

A second reason we should obey is that the king is powerful. Although we may be tempted to question a king's decisions, chances are, he will win the argument.

A fair question to ask at this point might be, is there ever a time when it is proper to disobey a ruling authority? Scripture does provide one exception. When obeying an earthly authority would cause you to disobey God, you are not required to obey the earthly authority. The midwives disobeyed Pharaoh when he commanded them to kill all the Hebrew male children. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar when he commanded them to bow down and worship an idol. Daniel continued to pray even though he knew a law had been passed that no one could pray to anyone except the king for 30 days. The apostles continued to proclaim the Gospel even though they were commanded to stop. Wiersbe summarizes this issue this way:

When it comes to matters of conscience and the law, devoted believers have pretty much agreed with Peter: "We ought to obey God rather than men" ([Acts 5:29](#)). Christian prisoners and martyrs down through the ages testify to the courage of conscience and the importance of standing up for what is right. This doesn't mean we can resist the law on every minor matter that disturbs us, but it does mean we have the obligation to obey our conscience. How we express our disagreement with the authorities demands wisdom and grace . . .

Avoid the Wrath of the King

Ecclesiastes 8:5-9 ESV

- (5) Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.
- (6) For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him.
- (7) For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be?
- (8) No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.
- (9) All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

Solomon continues his practical advice by reminding us that the best way to avoid the wrath and punishment of a king is to remain obedient. As we see elsewhere in Scripture, God established earthly authority and the power of the sword comes with that authority.

Romans 13:1-5 ESV

- (1) Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.
- (2) Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.
- (3) For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,
- (4) for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.
- (5) Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

1 Peter 2:13-17 ESV

- (13) Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,
- (14) or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.
- (15) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.
- (16) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.
- (17) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

The wise person knows there is a proper time and purpose for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) even if we cannot know what may happen ahead of time. This uncertainty can cause a certain degree of misery (man's trouble lies heavy on him) and malice. Just like we cannot contain the spirit, stop our own death or decide to desert from the military in the midst of war, we cannot escape the consequences of our own wickedness. This truth applies to rulers as well. We may not be able to ask them "what are you doing?" but God can, and will. Consider James warning to those who use their riches and power to oppress others:

James 5:1-8 ESV

- (1) Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.
- (2) Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.
- (3) Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.
- (4) Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
- (5) You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.
- (6) You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.
- (7) Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.
- (8) You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Riddles, Restlessness and Rejoicing

Ecclesiastes 8:10-17 ESV

- (10) Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.
- (11) Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.
- (12) Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.
- (13) But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.
- (14) There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.
- (15) And I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.
- (16) When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep,
- (17) then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

In this section, Solomon turns his attention to a troubling situation. He begins by examining a case of a wicked man who died and was buried. After his death, it appears as though his wickedness was forgotten and people had nothing but good things to say about him in public. You may have heard the ancient proverb “don’t speak ill of the dead” but this was ridiculous. Also, Solomon observed that evil deeds often appear to go unpunished and that failure to bring swift judgment often encourages the wicked to continue in their wickedness. To make matters worse, he saw that righteous people often endure the hardships that justice would seem to indicate were more appropriate for the wicked and the wicked enjoy benefits that justice would indicate are more appropriate for the righteous. Psalms 73 echoes this riddle:

Psalms 73:1-18 ESV

- (1) A Psalm of Asaph. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
- (2) But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.
- (3) For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- (4) For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek.
- (5) They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
- (6) Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment.
- (7) Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies.
- (8) They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression.
- (9) They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.
- (10) Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them.
- (11) And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
- (12) Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.
- (13) All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.
- (14) For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.
- (15) If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children.
- (16) But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,
- (17) until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.
- (18) Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

Asaph, like Solomon, came to the correct conclusion, "it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him." They could not explain, any more than we can, why the wicked sometimes seem to prosper in this life and why the righteous suffer hardship but they could place their trust in God that He would make sure everything would work out right in the end. Solomon struggled with this question day and night before he accepted the fact that only God knows some things.

Deuteronomy 29:29 ESV

- (29) "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Romans 11:33 ESV

- (33) Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

So what are we to do? Solomon advises us for the fifth time, be joyful and enjoy the simple blessing of food, drink and fellowship. We are not promised an easy life but we can be joyful and thankful. Wiersbe puts it this way:

Having shown that there are enigmatic contradictions in the doctrine of retribution—righteousness is not always rewarded and wickedness is not always punished, and sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous meet with disaster—Solomon again recommended **the enjoyment of life**. He said that life's best is to enjoy the fruits of one's labor (i.e., **to eat and drink**; cf. [2:24](#); [3:13](#); [5:18](#)) and "to rejoice" or **be glad** (cf. [3:12](#); [5:19](#)). Also he noted that this **joy** would enliven one's labor (i.e., it would **accompany him in his work**). As is obvious from earlier occurrences of this theme (cf. [2:24-26](#); [3:12](#), [22](#); [5:18-20](#)), this is not Epicurean hedonism based on despair but is a

note of submission. Man cannot control or predict adversity or prosperity; however, each day's joys should be received as gifts from God's hand and be savored as **God** permits ([3:13](#); [5:19](#)). All this is to be while one is **under the sun** (twice in [8:15](#); cf. [comments](#) on [1:3](#)).

Paul echoed Solomon's advice. In a world of rulers and riddles, rejoicing is the path to peace.

Philippians 4:4-8 ESV

- (4) Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
- (5) Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;
- (6) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
- (7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- (8) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

TITLE: LIFE JUST DOESN'T ADD UP –
BUT WE CAN STILL RESOLVE TO LIVE IT UP

BIG IDEA:
**THE ENJOYMENT OF THIS LIFE DOES NOT COME FROM FIGURING
OUT LIFE'S DEEP ENIGMAS**

INTRODUCTION:

[What's your **favorite parable** in the Scriptures?]

Despite the repetition of common themes in this Book of Ecclesiastes, I find one aspect to be especially puzzling – to what extent does the view of Solomon ever rise above the “under the sun” perspective and benefit from God’s perspective of eternity? More difficult question than it might seem ... Commentators differ on their views here.

“*enigma*” – something obscure; inscrutable; mysterious

Kidner: The fascination of this book throughout its length arises very largely from such collisions between obstinate facts of observation and equally obstinate intuitions. So it pushes us towards a synthesis which lies mostly beyond its own pages; in this case, the prospect of reward and punishment in the world to come.

3 AREAS OF WRESTLING . . . 1 AREA OF RESOLVE

**I. (:1-6) WRESTLING WITH THE EARTHLY FATE OF THE RIGHTEOUS
VS THE FATE OF THE WICKED – SINCE IT LOOKS LIKE THEY END UP
THE SAME**

A. (:1) Man’s Earthly Fate Lies in the Hand of the Sovereign God

1. Should be a source of comfort and encouragement to the Righteous

*“For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men,
wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God.”*

Baxter: this verse introduces Solomon’s **Review** of his entire quest and summarizes his conclusions – chaps 9-12

2. But Unpredictability is Unsettling

*“Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits
him.”*

Talking about outcomes that are dispensed from the hand of God

Ryrie: Love = happy circumstances; Hate = unhappy circumstances

Swindoll: Being in the hand of God is not synonymous with or a guarantee for being economically prosperous, physically healthy, shielded from pain, enjoying a trouble-free occupation, and having everyone smile and appreciate us. As Solomon wrote

“Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.” But what does help is the knowledge that behind whatever happens is a God who loves us and cares, who hasn’t lost a handle on the controls.

Eaton: the point is that the treatment the righteous will receive is unknown; who can tell what the future will bring? Righteousness and wisdom have no built-in guarantees of an easy life.

B. (:2-3) No Difference Between the Righteous and the Wicked – in terms of their earthly fate

1. Same Fate Awaits All

“It is the same for all.”

2. Five Sets of Contrasts Between the Character of All Men / Yet One Fate for Both

a. *“There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked;”*

b. *“for the good, for the clean and for the unclean;”*

c. *“for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice.”*

d. *“As the good man is, so is the sinner;”*

e. *“as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.”*

Is it good or bad here to take an oath?

Eaton: refers not to profane or rash swearing (the majority interpretation; cf. Ex. 20:7; Mt. 5:34), but to swearing “*by the Lord’s name*” (cf. 6:13; 10:20) which was part of allegiance to the covenant. . . This view is upheld by the fact that in the series of contrasts the good characteristic comes first (as **Plumptre** observes).

3. One Fate for All Men / Character of Men Apart from God is Ultimately the Same = Evil and Insanity – Moral and Mental Twistedness

“This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.”

Swindoll: We’ve heard about the doctrine of depravity all our lives, but not much about the doctrine of insanity, right? . . . Lurking in the human heart is a permanent mixture of evil and insanity . . . What an awful mixture -- meanness and madness!

Nightly news is just an accounting of the day’s experiences of evil and insanity being worked out in different circumstances. Nothing should surprise or shock us anymore. Those who hold to a humanistic philosophy of the inherent goodness of man have a

tough sell.

4. Same Fate Awaits All

“Afterwards they go to the dead.”

Longman: The abrupt syntax at the end of the verse is intentional and reflects the suddenness of death in the midst of life.

C. (:4-6) Hope Remains as Long as Life Lasts – there is a difference between the dead and the living

1. Hope is an Intrinsic Part of Life

“For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope;”

2. Illustration: Life is always better than Death

“Surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.”

Wiersbe: dogs were despised in that day . . . Solomon was emphasizing the importance of seizing opportunities while we live, rather than blindly hoping for something better in the future, because death will end our opportunities on this earth.

Lion is the most majestic and powerful of the animal kingdom – Lion King – good combination of terms for a title

Look at a powerful horse like the filly Eight Belles yesterday that ran her heart out in the Kentucky Derby against those powerful colts; nothing more futile than that picture of the dead carcass – once the life is gone, what is left?

3. Expectation of death better than Cessation of thinking

“For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything,”

Constable: "The dead do not know anything" does not mean they are insensible. Later revelation indicates that the dead are aware of their feelings, the past, and other things (cf. Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:19-31; et al.). In the context this clause means the dead have no capacity to enjoy life as the living can.

4. Death Quickly Erases All Legacy and Reward in this life

“nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.”

Eaton: earthly life cannot be enjoyed in retrospect

Longman: *reward* likely refers to the end of all earthly wages or benefits, and thus Qohelet is not leaving open the possibility of heavenly rewards. The thought does not even cross his mind.

II. (:7-10) RESOLVING TO LIVE THIS EARTHLY LIFE TO THE FULLEST – ENJOYING ALL THE GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN

Solomon keeps coming back to this common thread – the closest he can come to any type of solution to the enigmas of this life – still he does not have much of an eternal perspective

4 Areas of God's Gifts to Us in This Life:

A. (:7) Grateful Eating and Drinking

“Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.”

Last phrase here is one of the most difficult in the chapter to interpret – *“for God has already approved your works”* – this is the important **motivation clause** for enjoying God's good gifts: to whom is this addressed? what are the possible meanings? Can't mean God's unlimited approval of all deeds of all men

Agrarian society; the fact that the fields have already yielded fruit from your labors only comes as the blessing of God; otherwise your fields would be barren and you would be experiencing drought and famine; so if you have something to eat, partake in recognition that it is only the goodness of God that has so blessed your labors

We are not called to a life of asceticism like the monks of the Middle Ages who imagined that they could draw closer to God by abstaining from all worldly comforts and pleasures

Baxter: This advice in Ecclesiastes has nothing of Epicureanism or godless, fleshly indulgence in it. It is simply a periphrasis for living in a legitimate comfort and prosperity (see Jer. Xxii. 15), due to Jehovah's bountifulness.

C. J. Mahaney: Sermon on addressing the **sin of Complaining**, murmuring, grumbling – this is an offense against God – Who are we not to be grateful and thankful and content with the gifts that God has provided? Look at how seriously God treated those who sinned in this area – study book of Numbers; look at NT commands – sin of complaining lumped right in there with others – but we treat it so lightly; we have our own expectations; when those are not met, we grumble; what does that say about our view of the Goodness of God and His Providence in our life; how do we feel as parents when our kids grumble and complain

B. (:8) Joyful Enjoyment of the Comforts of Life (or Festive Occasions)

“Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.”

Eaton: make life more comfortable in a hot climate

Longman: The hot, dry climate of Palestine is the reason for both the white clothes, which reflect rather than absorb the heat, and the oil, which protected against dry skin (Ps. 23:5; 45:7; Prov. 27:9; Isa. 61:3).

Lots of people take very elaborate symbolic interpretations here ... white representing clothes of righteousness and oil being a symbol of the Holy Spirit – I don't think anything very complicated is going on here – sometimes the simple view is the best one – Why wear a cloak of camel's hair like John the Baptist and limit your diet to locusts and wild honey?

Whybray: both were signs of joy and associated with festive occasions

C. (:9) Happy Marriage -- Refreshing Love and Companionship

“Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.”

Recognition that life is hard and difficult; laborious; not enjoyable; frustrating

Enjoy the relationship in terms of the companionship it provides ...

Enjoy the physical side of the relationship with all of the pleasures that God has designed into sex ...

Issue of concern for many singles:

Swindoll: mentions book by his sister, **Luci Swindoll**, Wide My World, Narrow My Bed – what a great look at the single life – the freedoms and opportunities it affords ... Contentment and God's providential provision for you personally must be embraced

D. (:10) Hard Work -- Diligent Labor and Accomplishment

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.”

Work is not a curse!

Great verse for church administrators!

Pleasure and leisure are not intended to be an escape from the responsibilities of activity, planning, knowledge, wisdom ... a break, Yes ... a change of pace, Yes ... But just like the major league pitcher – most of the time you want to throw that fastball ... all of life cannot be a change of pace

Eaton: life is to be active and energetic

Robert Laurin: The Hebrews of ancient times thought Sheol was a pit deep under the earth where the dead abode (cf. Deut 32:22). It is uniformly depicted as the place to which both righteous and unrighteous went after death, and where there were not punishments or rewards (cf. Eccl 3:19, 20; 6:6). It was a “land of forgetfulness” (Ps 88:12) and darkness (Job 38:17), where men existed as shadowy replicas of their former selves (cf. Isa 14:9, 10). Here (Eccl 9:10) is one of the strongest statements in the OT about the nothingness of Sheol.

The sense of eternity and expectation of future judgment are only hinted at in this book
Perspective = “under the sun” – looking at Sheol from that perspective as well

III. (:11-12) WRESTLING WITH THE VALUE OF AMBITION VS THE FUTILITY OF FINITENESS AND FAIRNESS – SINCE MAN’S EARTHLY FATE IS UNPREDICTABLE AND UNDESERVED

A. (:11) What’s the Point of Trying Hard in Life?

1. Futility of Life Under the Sun

“I again saw under the sun”

2. Five Inequities of Life – accomplishments which do not guarantee success

a. *“the race is not to the swift”*

b. *“and the battle is not to the warriors”*

c. *“and neither is bread to the wise”*

We will be looking more at the poor wise man in the last section of this chapter

d. *“and wealth to the discerning”*

Far from it – those with the greatest discernment in the NT church had very few material resources

e. *“nor favor to men of ability”*

James 4 – you must say “If the Lord wills ...” – you are not the one in control

3. Enigma of Finiteness and Fairness – Fate is Unpredictable and Undeserved

“for time and chance overtake them all”

Look at all of the cosmetic gimmicks designed to try to slow down or thwart Father Time – let’s cover over the wrinkles; let’s see how long we can prolong our looks and even our life

Who knows when your next breath will be your last?

* * * * *

Study of Psalm 33 (:13-19) GOD CAN BE COUNTED ON TO SAVE THOSE WHO ARE COUNTING ON HIM

- God Sees the Basis for Our Confidence

He knows the orientation of our heart = the object of our trust

- God has the best vantage point for such observation

“looks from heaven” = “His dwelling place”

no limitations on God

- God as the Creator has the ultimate understanding of the heart of man

- God is not fooled by the False Confidences that are attractive to man

-- *“the king is not saved by a mighty army”*

-- "a warrior is not delivered by great strength"

-- "a horse is a false hope for victory"

-- "nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength"

- God is looking for those who fear Him and hope in His lovingkindness
*"the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,
on those who hope for His lovingkindness"*

- God Can be Counted on to Deliver from Death and Preserve from Danger
*"to deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine"*

* * * * *

B. (:12) Man's End Comes Suddenly and Surprisingly

*"Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net
and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time
when it suddenly falls on them."*

The fish and the birds did not wake up that morning and go forth with the expectation that they were in grave danger that day; in fact that day looked like any other when they could spend their time not in the panic of anxiety but enjoying God's gracious provision for their daily sustenance – flying around from place to place; paddling around in the depths of the sea – enjoying the good life – Then all of a sudden out of nowhere – Zap – they are captured and killed – no time to get their life in order; no time to say good bye to their young – destruction suddenly falls on them

Wiersbe: our abilities (:11-12) and opportunities (:13-18) are no guarantee of success

Swindoll: various ways to view life. Although each is popular, each has its own set of problems.

Optimism – rose colored glasses; not facing reality

Pessimism – grim existence; lack of joy

Suspicion – everyone is out to get you; lack of trust

Fatalism – whatever will be will be; lack of hope

IV. (:13-18) WRESTLING WITH THE VALUE OF WISDOM VS THE FUTILITY OF WISDOM – SINCE WISDOM IS IGNORED AND DESPISED IN THIS LIFE RATHER THAN RECOGNIZED AND REWARDED

A. (:13) Expectation that Wisdom Would be Rewarded as Impressive

"Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me."

We would expect wisdom to be impressive; we would expect others to value wisdom and exalt it and promote it and reward it ... we would be wrong!

B. (:14-15) Parable of Wisdom Ignored and Despised – Packed with meaning
“There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it and constructed large siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.”

Who knows this parable? A forgotten parable!

Contrast between the great king and the small city and poor nobody

Contrast between the superior offensive troops and armaments and the weak Defenses

Miraculous deliverance accomplished by Wisdom – What Power!

Unbelievable and Pitiful Conclusion: *“Yet no one remembered that poor man.”*

Why didn't the city bless the poor man for his heroic efforts?

Lessons for us: (get class to suggest)

- don't pursue wisdom with the thought that this world will receive you as a hero and thank you for your contributions – look at all my sacrifices; look at all my contributions

- God will reward wisdom abundantly – because you surely aren't getting the reward in this life

- How did Christ feel after He cleansed the ten lepers and they failed to return and give thanks?

- Look at the apostles – silver and gold have I none – very poor men ... but rich in wisdom and in their contribution to the foundation of the church

C. (:16-18) Contrast Between the Value of Wisdom and the Futility of Wisdom

1. Better than Strength? Despised and Ignored

“So I said, ‘Wisdom is better than strength.’

But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.”

2. Better than Political and Military Power? Fragile and easily Destroyed

“The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”

Swindoll: Some people are selling their souls to a secular therapist. They are listening more to the well-educated psychologist than they have ever listened to the Lord or paid attention to His Word. And as they take their cues from their counselor, they are being seduced by today's psychology.

[cf. yesterday's conference: Equipping the saints for ministry of counseling]

What did people learn yesterday about the limitations of man's wisdom and the

sufficiency of God's wisdom in the area of counseling?

- People today put their faith in drugs
- People today don't think the Bible is sufficient to deal with major behavior issues; in fact only the Bible can get beyond the visible presenting issues to the core root issues that must be addressed

Kidner: In the pattern of the chapter this is one more example of what is unpredictable and cruel in life, to sap our confidence in what we can make of it on our own. The last two verses give an extra thrust to the parable by showing first how valuable and then how vulnerable is wisdom. We are left with more than a suspicion that in human politics the last word will regularly go to the loud voice of verse 17 or the cold steel of verse 18. Seldom to truth, seldom to merit.

Longman: Summary of Chap. 9

In ch. 9, Qohelet gives advice in the context of statements of deep skepticism. Indeed, this chapter might be judged the most depressing of the entire book.

Qohelet begins the chapter with a powerful evaluation of life (9:1-10). He states that it does not matter who one is or what one does, death renders everything meaningless. After all, death is the end of everything for an individual (vv. 6, 10). From this basic, though sad, truth, Qohelet advises his readers to seize the joy of the day.

The next unit (9:11-12) continues the depressing thoughts of the previous one by asserting that time and chance rule the lives and the deaths of all people. Qohelet once again puts an emphasis on death – that is, no one knows when the end is going to come. There is absolutely nothing that anyone can do to prevent or predict one's death.

This appropriately leads to two further units that question the effectiveness of wisdom. First, wisdom has its limits (vv. 13-16). A wise man may save a city, but he will not be remembered. Second, wisdom has power and is, on a surface level, to be preferred to foolishness, but it does not take much to spoil the good that it might produce (vv. 1-18).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do the uncertainties of life tend to frustrate you?
- 2) Do you find people to be willing to face up to the reality of death and speak of death in realistic terms?
- 3) How is Solomon's advice in vv. 7-10 different from Hedonistic philosophy?
- 4) Where have you seen the poor man of wisdom neglected and despised and run over by the political machine of man's power and bluster?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jim Ehrhard: Living Joyfully -- No Matter What

1. Mysteries that steal our joy
 - a. The Mystery of Death-one event, one reason, one concern
 - b. The Mystery of Life
 - *Not the swift
 - *Not the strong
 - *Not the smart
 - *Not the skilled
 - c. The Mystery of Man
 - *Ignored
 - *Forgotten
 - *Despised

2. Certainties That Protect our Joy
 - a. God's sovereignty-He is in control
 - b. God's majesty-He will be glorified
 - c. God's justice-He will judge

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?currPage=1&keyword=Ecclesiastes&BibleOnly=true&currSection=sermons bible&chapter=9&AudioOnly=false&SortBy=bible>

David Silversides: Faith not Sight

Solomon tackles the apparent anomalies of God's Providence in this world under the sun. He keeps coming back to this theme again and again – dealing with the objections of the unbeliever.

1. (:1-3) God's approval or displeasure not clearly discernible in the events of this life
 - a. Confidence of Faith – from what is visible, you cannot tell whether the person is under God's blessing and favor or under His wrath; sometimes the roles seem reversed in terms of conditions of life
 - b. Shared Providences and their tendencies (:2) – the same event of prosperity or adversity come upon both the wicked and the godly; the same thing happens to them both; no obvious benefit in this present world

Why doesn't God vindicate righteousness in this life? The genuine of godliness must exist when then is no evident outward benefit. Cf. testing of Job; We cannot determine whether someone is godly from looking at the level of their material prosperity

2. (:4-6) The death of the wicked is to be feared
 - a. There is hope for those who are not in hell yet – only hinted at here; once you are dead that is it; if you are not a Christian there is no hope;
 - b. The possibility that the living will prepare for death (vs. 5); no prospect of betterment after death; we can see what is on the stage under the sun; just hinting at what we cannot see beyond this life
3. (:7-10) The heavenly wisdom is worth having
 - The worldly man looks at just what is under the sun and concludes there is no value to godliness; you need to look at heavenly wisdom by faith; God accepts the

works of the wise; saved by grace but works will be rewarded; enjoy the Lord's provision in a way the unbeliever cannot; glorify God with vigor while we are here on this earth (:10); attaining wisdom belongs to this world

4. (:11-12) The uncertainties of life – something of a division occurs here

No sure favorites – doesn't work out the way people thought (cf. Kentucky Derby); wisest man doesn't always prosper; something happens beyond their control despite all their ability; things don't always work out like we imagine; trouble can catch us like fish caught in a net (:12)

5. (:13-15) Even when wisdom delivers it is not appreciated by those who benefit

Wisdom doesn't guarantee success; not always appreciated by the beneficiaries; people forget; only a momentary hero; true in the long view of history; look at the freedoms enjoyed in this country – to whom do we owe this great debt?? Who remembers them with honor now?

6. (:16) Wisdom not only not valued; it is despised

Unimpressive, poor man – his wisdom is not valued unless it is accompanied by the trappings of this world –

7. (:17) This wisdom might be heard more in calmer circumstances than tumultuous times

8. (:18) One wicked man can ruin things

Overall thought: true wisdom which is from above is worth having even though it is often not acknowledged, not heeded, despised, its influence seems small, and its achievements can so easily be marred by the wicked – Why?? Because those who are truly wise in Christ take joy in his salvation and gracious gifts in this life and look forward to blessing in the next life; answering the cynical objection: Is it really worth it to pursue God's wisdom??

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?currPage=1&keyword=Ecclesiastes&BibleOnly=true&currSection=sermons bible&chapter=9&AudioOnly=false&SortBy=bible>

David Malick: IV. FOURTH DISCOURSE:

Even though there are many futile aspects to life from a natural viewpoint, a divine viewpoint enables one to enjoy life, to prefer it to death, to use it for the benefit of others, and to live with a fear of God and in obedience to His word knowing that there will be a future judgment 6:1--12:14

C. Life Is Preferable to Death: Although there is no explanation, apart from God, for the hurtful, capricious nature of life, it is still preferable to death because God has designed it alone to be enjoyed and used for the benefit of others 8:16--9:18

1. Life Is Unexplainable Apart from God: Because one does not receive from life what one puts into life, it is impossible to explain the experiences of life outside of the hand of God 8:16--9:1

a. Life Cannot Be Thoroughly Known: No matter how wise, diligent, or hard-working one is to explain life which God has given to man, its unifying principle cannot be known 8:16-17

b. God Holds Life: The experiences of life are in the hand of God and not appropriately awaiting those who "are" or "act" in a certain way 9:1

2. The Universality of Death: Death is a fate which awaits everyone, even those who pursue evil and deserve worse 9:2-3
 - a. Death Awaits All: Death is a fate which awaits every person no matter how he stands in relation to God 9:2
 - b. Those Who Do Evil Only Die: It is especially evil that those who specialize in doing wrong receive exactly the same as all others in that they only die 9:3
3. Live is Advantageous: Life is more advantageous than death because the living are still able to enjoy life and especially impact the lives of those around them 9:4-10
 - a. Living Mark Life: Because the dead, even though once great are no longer able to make any mark upon life, the living are at a great advantage 9:4-6
 - 1) Living Have Hope: Just as a living dog can do more than the king of animals--the lion--who is dead, so is it true that as long as one is alive there is hope 9:4
 - 2) Living Affect Life: Even though the living can foresee their eventual death, they are at an advantage over the dead because they can no longer make any affect upon life 9:5-6
 - a) Living Can Do Things: Even though the living can foresee their death they are at an advantage by virtue of what they can do 9:5a
 - b) Dead Cannot Do Things: The dead are at a disadvantage to the living because of what they can no longer do with mankind 9:5b-6
 - (1) No Future: The dead have no future to look toward 9:5b
 - (2) No Reward from Men: The dead have no further reward to receive by men since they are forgotten 9:5c
 - (3) Passion is Expended: The dead have expended all of their passion for life and are no longer effective 9:6a
 - (4) No Effect on Life: The dead no longer have an ability to affective life on earth 9:6b
 - b. Life Has Refuge: God has designed life to have enough refuge to be enjoyed while one strives hard to do the tasks God has given one in the time available 9:7-10
 - 1) The Good of Life Is a Refuge: One should enjoy the good aspects of life (fruit, parties, partners) because God has designed them as a refuge with toil 9:7-9
 - a) Enjoy The Good Fruits of Life: The living should enjoy the fruits of life as approved gifts of God 9:7
 - b) Enjoy the Festivity of Life: The living should enjoy the festivity of life 9:8
 - c) Enjoy the Partnership of a Mate: The living should enjoy the partnership of a mate in life because God has given this person to be a refuge in the midst of toil 9:9
 - 2) Use Life to Do One's Tasks: One must use their life to do the tasks before them because this is the only time one has 9:10
4. Wisdom Is a Source for Life: Even though the experiences of a person's life may be capriciously hurtful to any individual, one's skill in life will be a source of life for many 9:11-18
 - a. Time and Chance: There is not a natural cause-and-effect relationship to life because all are subject to the limitations of time and the capriciousness of chance 9:11
 - b. Time and Turmoil: Time seems to capriciously throw men into turmoil just like helpless animals in a trap 9:12
 - c. Wisdom Can Provide Life: Although skill for living may be capriciously despised or hurt by evil, it can be used to provide life for many 9:13-18

http://bible.org/page.php?page_id=963

Wiersbe: In this chapter, Solomon drew two conclusions: death is unavoidable (1-10) and life is unpredictable (11-18). That being the case, the best thing we can do is trust God, live by faith, and enjoy whatever blessings God gives us. . .

How people deal with the reality of death reveals itself in the way they deal with the realities of life. Solomon pointed out three possible responses that people make to the ever-present fear of death.

- 1) **Escape** (v. 3)

- 2) **Endurance** (vv. 4-6)

3. **Enjoyment** (vv. 7-10)

Robert Laurin: Since God's ultimate purposes are unknowable (8:15-17), since there is no afterlife (9:1-10), and since the length of life is uncertain (9:11-16), the wise course of action is to enjoy oneself here and now.

Baxter: The Cause and Cure of Pessimism

Three lines of pessimism in Koheleth's review – although his conclusions are not pessimistic:

- 1) First, he views life selfishly rather than socially. He has lived to get, instead of to give; and he has found what all such persons find, namely, that the more one lives for self, the less do earthly things satisfy.
- 2) But second, Koheleth views life as apart from God rather than as controlled by Him. God is scarcely mentioned, and even then only distantly. All seems in the hands of men (iv. 1-3).
- 3) And third, Koheleth views human life as bounded by the grave rather than as having destiny beyond.

Koheleth's final conclusion is right. It is fully right, as far as it goes; but it is far from adequate. That is, it is far from adequate as a motive and power to inspire human conduct. We can learn very much from what he has told us; but as we have said, we need to turn on through the pages of holy writ and see how much more its developing revelation from God has to say to us. We must turn on to the pages of the prophets and find there whole continents of further truth and wonderful new horizons spreading out before us. And most of all, we must turn on to the New Testament, to the crown of Divine revelation, even the incarnate Son of God Himself.

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

TITLE: NUGGETS OF WISDOM – WISE RESPONSE TO FOOLISH LEADERSHIP

BIG IDEA:

FOLLY ON THE PART OF RULERS PUTS A NATION IN JEOPARDY AND REQUIRES A RESPONSE OF WISDOM – YET WISDOM IS PRECARIOUS AT BEST

INTRODUCTION:

Most people would find no structure in these proverbs – similar to chap. 7 – Those that try to group the verses in some type of pattern don't agree as to the main topics ...

Whybray: This section consists of short apparently independent pieces, of which the majority are similar in form to the sayings in the Book of Proverbs (cf. Eccles. 7:1-14). Although some of them appear to have been arranged roughly according to theme, it is not possible, despite various attempts which have been made, to find any overall structure in the section as a whole.

But I think there is a common theme running through these verses dealing with the relationship between rulers and their subjects. Certainly Solomon was qualified to speak on this subject as the great and wise king of the nation of Israel. He starts out with some more general observations comparing wisdom and folly; but then makes the more specific application to the realm of civil government. These same principles would apply to other realms as well: leadership and submission in the home; in the church; at work; etc.

I. (:1-3) FOLLY LEADS TO RUIN

A. (:1) Ruining That Which Otherwise Would Be Good --
One Rotten Apple Spoils the Barrel

“Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.”

Kidner: It takes far less to ruin something than to create it. . . it is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness.

B. (:2) Ruining the Fool's Course of Life by Consistently Making Bad Choices --
Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide – If You Have a Good Conscience
(Divine Guidance for Political Campaigns)

“A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.”

Longman: Wisdom and folly go in two different directions

Leupold: Since we believe that the author is writing coherent discourse and has logical sequence of thought we shall expect the thought of the first verse to remain in the forefront, vis., how low the now esteemed Persian monarchy shall be brought by its folly, which is already operative. We have, therefore, not only general observations that contrast folly and wisdom but thoughts which bear very distinctly upon the historical situation. The emphasis is, therefore, not chiefly on the “*wise man*” and his tendencies. He is brought in only as a foil to the “*fool*.” The thought, by way of contrast, runs about as follows: Had the ruling people been wise they would have turned to the right, for the heart of wise men is thus inclined; but being fools, they have directed their attention toward that which is not right.

C. (:3) Ruining the Fool’s Own Reputation and Legacy --

A Fool is Easy to Spot

“Even when the fool walks along the road his sense is lacking, and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.”

Eaton: the fool cannot conceal himself. Thus the fool’s inner deficiency comes out in the open for all to see.

We are going to see that when he opens his mouth, it is obvious he is a fool . . . but even as he just moves through life .. he does not live wisely

II. (:4-7) FOLLY ON THE PART OF RULERS CAN FRUSTRATE THE WISE WHO ARE IN A POSITION OF SUBMISSION

A. (:4) Tempted to Run Away From Your Circumstances --

Keep Your Cool / Hold Your Water

“If the ruler’s temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.”

Don’t have a knee jerk reaction; “I’ll just quit” is the easy way out
What about the need for endurance?? In your job; your church; your family
The “I want to move to Kansas” mentality – what am I going to accomplish for the Lord in Kansas?

Eaton: The same vocabulary (“*anger . . . soothed*”) occurs in Judges 8:3 which illustrates the point.

B. (:5-7) Tempted to Resent Inequities --

The Prince and the Pauper – Incompetence Exalted over Competence

“There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler-- folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.”

“Smarter people than I are making the decisions here . . .”

Often the right people are not promoted to the right jobs ... inequities; not our job to try to right every wrong; cf. Peter Principle – someone eventually promoted to one level higher than their level of competence

Wiersbe: Solomon's son Rehoboam was proud and unyielding, and this led to the division of the kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-24). Instead of following the advice of the wise counselors, he listened to his youthful friends. He made the elders walk and he put the young men on the horses. On the other hand, more than one king in Jewish history has been so pliable that he turned out to be nothing but a figurehead. The best rulers (and leaders) are men and women who are tough-minded but tenderhearted, who put the best people on the horses and don't apologize for it.

Leupold: sees God ultimately as the "Ruler" here

III. (:8-11) WISDOM IS SUPERIOR BUT PRECARIOUS

A. (:8-9) Wisdom Understands the Dangers and Uncertainties of Life --

Accidents Happen – They are Unavoidable – Fine line between production and catastrophe – No Guarantees of Success in this life; God's Sovereignty and Providence governs all circumstances; the Fool is not in control

(Cf. Haman in Book of **Esther 7:10**)

Sometimes: What goes around, comes around

4 Examples:

1. Digging a Pit

"He who digs a pit may fall into it,"

2. Breaking through a wall

"and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall. "

3. Gathering Stones

"He who quarries stones may be hurt by them,"

4. Splitting Logs

"and he who splits logs may be endangered by them."

You can be your own worst enemy

Longman: The thought, though not the motivation, is similar to Psalm 7:15: *He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made.* The context of the Psalm is clearly one of just retribution. The enemy tries unjustly to trap an innocent person, but ends up in his own trap. Qohelet's use of this image is the opposite. Here an innocent person is simply engaged in his occupation, and he is accidentally injured. This is the first of four illustrations of people who are simply doing their jobs and who fall prey to the dangers that are inherent in their occupations. Their injuries are simply accidental. They are not punishments for bad behavior, and they are not mentioned so that the wise person can avoid them; they are unavoidable accidents. No matter how careful people

are they may fall into the pit they dug, and they might be surprised by a snake on the other side of the wall they are demolishing.

Wiersbe: Solomon was describing people who attempted to do their work and suffered because they were foolish.

B. (:10) Wisdom Must be Applied Skillfully -- Work Smart / Use the Right Tools
“If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.”

C. (:11) Wisdom Must Be Applied at the Right Time -- Timing is Everything
“If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.”

Wiersbe: Snake charmers were common as entertainers in that day (v. 11, and see Ps. 58:4-5 and Jer. 8:17). Snakes have no external ears; they pick up sound waves primarily through the bone structure of the head. More than the music played by the charmer, it is the man’s disciplined actions (swaying and staring) that hold the snake’s attention and keep the serpent under control. It is indeed an art.

IV. (:12-15) FOLLY LEADS TO RUIN

A. (:12-14a) The Folly of Speaking Stupidly

“Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness. Yet the fool multiplies words.”

1. Destructive words – James 3:1-12
2. Wacko words – they don’t even make any sense
3. Multiplication of words – Prov. 10:19

B. (:14b) The Folly of Thinking Stupidly – Presumptuous Boasting

“No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?”

C. (:15) The Folly of Working Stupidly

“The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.”

Eaton: Any form of *toil* the *fool* finds wearisome. The result is incompetence. The second half of the verse specifies his “utter ignorance of the things easily come-at-able and familiar to everybody” (Ginsburg).

Whybray: The fool's efforts are bound to come to nothing: he remains as before one who cannot even find his way home. The second half of the verse is probably a popular saying about people who **"do not know enough to come in out of the rain"** (**Gordis**).

V. (:16-20) FOLLY ON THE PART OF RULERS CAN FRUSTRATE THE WISE WHO MUST BITE THEIR TONGUE AND EXERCISE DISCRETION

A. (:16-17) Contrast Between Foolish and Wise Leadership –
The Quality of Leadership Makes All the Difference

1. Foolish Leadership – Cursing on the Land

"Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning."

2. Wise Leadership – Blessing on the Land

"Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time-- for strength, and not for drunkenness."

Cf. Is. 5:11-13; 21:5

Eaton: Another criterion of national wisdom is self-control. Drinking in the early hours of the day marked a dissolute, slothful approach to life, with emphasis on luxury and personal indulgence. As we have frequently seen personal enjoyment had a place for the Preacher and the antithesis to indulgence here is not asceticism, but self-control. The mark of such pleasure is that it is to be enjoyed in a state of strength, not in a state of drunkenness. The enjoyment of life's pleasures as the outworking of a position of wisdom-strength is a mark of national bliss; the pseudo-enjoyment of self-centered indulgence is a mark of national danger.

B. (:18) Laziness on the Part of Leaders Leads to Ruin

"Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks."

You could debate whether vs. 18 applies to the leaders or just to everyone in general

How the Wise can avoid Frustration?

C. (:19) Response: Enjoy Your Life as Best as Possible (or applied sarcastically to rulers? Just raise taxes to try to fix everything)

"Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything."

D. (:20) Response: Bite Your Tongue -- Discretion is the Better Part of Valor

"Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound, and the winged creature will make the matter known."

“*Furthermore*” connects vs. 19 and 20 – speaking to the same group of people

Wiersbe: Even if we can’t respect the person in the office, we must respect the office (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). “*You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people*” (Ex. 22:28).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what sense is foolishness more powerful than wisdom?
- 2) How do the principles of submission from 1 Peter 2 apply to these instructions by Solomon?
- 3) How do our political leaders measure up to the standards set forth in this chapter?
- 4) Think of some counseling situations where you could apply some of these proverbs about the distinction between foolishness and wisdom.

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Silversides: Wise Sayings Concerning Wisdom and Folly

1. The threat of folly to the wise (:1)

Cf. last verse of chapter 9; destruction is far easier than building up; This is true even with the reputation of the godly; ointment is beautifully fragrant but delicate; dead fly will ruin it; a little destroys all that was fragrant and beautiful; immense harm done; everything is spoiled and ruined; Ps. 73:13-15; is godliness a waste of time? Asaph kept back from speaking such discouraging words – would have marred his testimony and done harm to the people of God; a reputation for godliness increases the expectation of others – you will be watched and standards will be set for you by others

2. Wisdom and Folly as Ways of Life (:2-3)

Wisdom is here used in the godly sense of the believer living by the Word of God; Folly is used in the sinful sense of ignoring God’s Word; he never thinks what glorifies God; he is careless, thoughtless, foolish; does what his impulses tell him; godly thinking leads to effective work and practice; what we do with our right hand is usually well done since most of us are right-handed; fool is like someone who is right-handed but tries to do everything with their left hand; botches everything up; Prov. 17:28 -- as soon as a fool speaks he is found out

3. Warning against Foolish Reaction to an Angry Ruler(:4)

What are we to do when the ruler is angry? Yield and submit and stay where you are; 1 Pet. 2:21-23; Pride makes us storm off in an indignant huff and makes the matter worse; acknowledge their authority in lawful things; Tries to justify that he was standing on principle, but that was not the case; beware of inventing principles that don't exist; act in meekness; accept the oppression that may result

4. The Folly of Rulers (:5-10)

- a) Promoting Fools in the place of experienced leadership; the promotion of the incompetent
- b) Reversal of Order (:7) – servants usually make bad masters; those who aren't used to power but are given it are worse than just normal tyrannical rulers
- c) (:8-9) Brutality on the part of those in authority and its dangers
- d) (:10) Blunt ax – not getting very far; ruler just tries to use more brute strength; a better idea would be to sharpen the blade; we are to seek God's direction to guide us rather than just pushing harder in our own fleshly wisdom; are there areas of our life where we are chopping away with our own ideas; are we following the godly approach; are we bringing the Word of God to bear – we've always done it this way and never questioned whether it was the right way

5. The Folly of Words (:11-15)

Man or woman whose tongue has never been tamed will do great harm just like a venomous serpent; contrasting words in vs. 12; an uncontrolled tongue will always end up in wickedness; vs. 14 – the limits of our knowledge – but this doesn't stop the fool from spouting off; pride of man is so great – he loves to pontificate and speak as if he knows

6. Bad Rulers (:16-20)

Self indulgent, childish ruler; they don't do a day's work of usefulness and then have a rewarding meal at night; govt of a nation – if a ruler is slothful there will be downfall of the nation; if the rulers just give themselves over to feasting and drinking and money, the nation will slide down hill; Warning not to curse the king even if he is bad; you never know who might report you

Conclusion: we need the application of godly wisdom; you are surrounded by ungodly and unreasonable people; how should you respond? Don't lose your patience or throw the towel in or stomp off in a huff; need grace for the day-to-day trials of abuse of power and injustices and pressures

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=42005184437>

Timothy Worrell: Proverbs to Rulers and Those Ruled

These principles primarily oriented to civil govt but applicable to other realms as well (family, church, business). Going to nail us with a lot of proverbs very rapidly; this is all application

1) Preserve your Reputation (:1-3)

- a) (:1) Warning to the wise man -- Eccles. 7:1; Song of Song 1:3 ointment refers to reputation; watch out for those little foxes or dead flies; only takes one misstep in front

of the public and all of a sudden you will stink; a danger to the wise; self-government is the most difficult of all government;

b) (:2) the efficiency of wisdom – working best with his right hand; and a wise man has his heart in his work

c) (:3) Fools can't hide their foolishness; wants to appear wise before the world; his behavior shouts to everyone that he is a fool

2) Humbly Submit to Our Superiors (:4-10)

a) (:4) don't quit your post in anger and haste; whether you have entered into that relationship voluntarily or not; 1 Pet. 2:18-19 – Follow Christ in this regard; if you can submit when the ruler is wicked and unjust, that is pleasing in God's sight; all wrongs will be righted by Him

b) (:5-7) we must accept the fact that the right men or women don't always get the positions of leadership; you might not be in the pecking order where you think you should be; you are not getting the influence you think you deserve; rulers don't always evaluate character very well; "richness" regarding nobility of character and gifts; often you don't get what you deserve; cf. class financially with class spiritually;

c) (:8-9) don't be given to change – 4 metaphors; don't start breaking up a hedge (divide up family farms) – moving the boundary of your estate; fear the Lord and the king; don't be always trying to start a revolution and try to establish a more equitable regime; that is not the way forward; they who are impatient of rule over them, have ruin close to them; there may be a time to leave our church or corporation, but don't be hasty; don't be hanging around with revolutionaries

d) (:10) don't bang our head against the wall; there's a time to say something to your ruler, but you had better be prepared and have a sharpened edge before you cut; don't do it hastily but thoughtfully and prayerfully; Prov 25:15 – by long forbearing is a prince persuaded – this is how we sharpen our axe; we may have to tell someone a lot of times before they get it; must be gentle

3) Govern Our Tongues in These Situations (:11-15)

a) (:11) Tame that serpent of our tongue; don't be a babbler or we will be offensive; we should enchant the serpent rather than out-hiss him (**Matthew Henry**)

b) (12-14) – Fools talk a great deal, but don't say very much; his talking will catch up with him; Pharisees started with questions but ended with stones and anger; Prov. 29:22; when we are angry we don't think straight; too busy talking to listen

c) (:15) fools are easily overwhelmed; they always are over their head; not working according to wisdom; they don't know how to handle themselves in political situations with their superiors; Jew had to go to the city to get their controversies resolved

4. 4th Admonition – the Rulers Govern Discreetly (:16-19)

a) (:16-17) Rulers being a curse or blessing -- not going to go well with you when your king is a child and when your princes eat in the morning; bad rulers are a judgment from God; Josiah was a child king; 2 Chron. 13:7 – Rehoboam was acting like a child in not listening to counsel; experience does

teach certain things ; son of nobles = brought up right and trained for leadership; it's rarely the first generation Christian that becomes the Spurgeon; brought up with ethical purity; the morning is the time for serious labor – before it gets too hot in the Middle East

b) (:18-19) Consequences of slothfulness – homeowner – constantly having to make adjustments; maintenance that has to be done; don't just think that everything is on autopilot and neglect the problems; Is. 58:12; leave the institution better than they found it; the slothful man can desire to do good but just doesn't get around to doing it; always making excuses; be involved in building – vs 19 related to vs 16 – child always seeking to use his position for his enjoyment; labor to put a little away; don't be spending every extra tax dollar for your enjoyment; don't burn it all up on vanity; having a little bit stored away can be helpful; money is an instrument of commerce; don't dissipate the wealth of your realm

5. Don't Speak Evil of Rulers (:20)

Acts 23:5 – it doesn't do you any good; doesn't do anyone any good; don't even curse them in your heart; Ezek. 11:5; don't even be careless in private; God knows our thoughts; kings have many eyes and ears; also long and strong arms to punish us when they find out; our sins will find us out

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?chapter=10&BibleOnly=true&currSection=sermons&keyword=Ecclesiastes>

Leupold: This situation is naturally of such a kind as to provoke any man to cry out against the injustice of it all, to charge the offenders publicly with their misdeeds, and to make public denunciation of them. Yet such a course is not the part of wisdom. The situation would not be improved. The individual who protested would be imperiling his very life in the days when absolute monarchs ruled with the very highest degree of unlimited power. Therefore the caution of v. 20, which at the same time gives us the author's own explanation as to why he has spoken largely in figures and extended parables.

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

TITLE: *SECRETS TO A PRODUCTIVE AND ENJOYABLE LIFE*

BIG IDEA:

BY OPPORTUNISTIC FAITH AND JOYFUL CONTENTMENT WE CAN LIVE BOTH A PRODUCTIVE AND ENJOYABLE LIFE

INTRODUCTION:

We need balance in our lives. Some people concentrate so much on being productive and achieving something ... they seem to have no enjoyment of life. Others are so consumed with enjoying life that they seem to waste opportunities to invest in being productive for God's Kingdom. God has designed our lives to be both productive and enjoyable.

I. (:1-6) FIVE SECRETS TO A PRODUCTIVE LIFE – EXERCISING OPPORTUNISTIC FAITH

A. (:1) Aggressively Invest Your Resources for the Widest Possible Blessing -- Expecting Your Generous, Sacrificial Investment to Yield Unexpected Dividends – Trust God to reward you / The way to Reap is to Sow Aggressively

1. Counsel: Strategically Bless as Many People as Possible

“Cast your bread on the surface of the waters,”

Bread = that which has value to you and others; that which provides sustenance; instead of hoarding it for yourself and making sure you have enough security and provision for your later years ... invest it in ways where you must trust God for the results – Pragmatic person would respond: “You will never see that bread again; it's gone forever!”

[This is a key verse for me for Internet ministry of distributing Bible commentaries]

Three alternatives:

1) Agrarian society – speaking of sowing and reaping

Yuen Who Voon: In an agrarian society, seeds speak a different language to the people. To the sower, the seed gives hope of a bountiful harvest, whilst to the farmer's wife, the seed can be processed into bread for food today. One can sow the seed or use it to make bread, but one cannot do both with the same seed. This is the “sower-eater” dilemma.

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=106030&Sermon%20CASTING%20BREAD%20–>

[%205%20PRINCIPLES%20ON%20SOWING%20by%20Yuen%20Woh%20Voon](http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=106030&Sermon%20CASTING%20BREAD%20–%205%20PRINCIPLES%20ON%20SOWING%20by%20Yuen%20Woh%20Voon)

2) Commerce – shipping of goods

Brian Atwood: In the first verse of Ecclesiastes 11, Solomon describes the risks taken by merchants in his day. They would “*cast their bread upon the waters.*” That is, they would put their merchandise on boats to be shipped to foreign ports, hoping for a

profitable return "after many days."

But consider these facts:

- In Solomon's day, an awful lot of ships wrecked. Merchants would often take a total loss.
- Pirates frequented the seas. Cargo was stolen.
- Ship captains were often dishonest.
- There certainly weren't any insurance policies to cover losses.
- And to top it off, there was a long wait to see if you were going to make any money.

Why would merchants take these risks? Because the reward was great!

By using this illustration Solomon is encouraging his readers to be risk takers. Not only does this scripture encourage us to be risk takers - but it encourages us to be high-risk takers!

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=36119&Sermon%20Calculated%20Risk%20Taking%20by%20Brian%20Atwood>

3) Common proverb of the day

Stedman: The idea expressed there is one of openhanded generosity. Give freely, wisely, but generously to the needs of those about. This phrase, "Cast your bread upon the waters," was a proverb in Israel for what looked like wasteful expenditure. No one would take good bread and throw it in the river; he would be regarded as a wastrel for doing that. But here we are enjoined to do that very thing. This is not encouraging us to be spendthrifts, to thoughtlessly and carelessly give away our money, spending it like a drunken sailor. What is meant is, be willing to take a chance where a real need is evident.

Application is the same:

Are we hoarding or investing?

Are we more concerned for providing security for ourselves for the future or investing by faith and trusting God for the future?

Are we satisfied with some very narrow use of our spiritual gifts or do we have a large vision for blessing many people?

Wiersbe: Solomon used two activities to illustrate his point [life is an adventure that must be lived by faith]: the merchant sending out his ships (vv. 1-2) and the farmer sowing his seed (vv. 3-6). In both activities, a great deal of faith is required, because neither the merchant nor the farmer can control the circumstances. The ships might hit a reef, meet a storm, or be attacked by pirates and the cargo lost. Bad weather, blight, or insects might destroy the crop, and the farmer's labor would be in vain. However, if the merchant and the farmer waited until the circumstances were ideal, they would never get anything done! Life has a certain amount of risk to it, and that's where faith comes in.

2. Promise: Patiently Look for God to Bear the Fruit
“for you will find it after many days.”

“No Deposit, No Return” – title one preacher gave this passage
What reward have I received? No joy of interaction ... not seeing people grow and respond ...

Application: What resources has God committed to you?? How are you investing those?

B. (:2) Wisely Allocate Your Resources Across Different Ventures – Avoiding putting all your eggs in one basket – mitigating the risk factor in light of the uncertainties of life; Sow widely, not narrowly; Sow abundantly, not sparingly

1. Counsel: Strategically Spread Your Resources in a Number of Key Directions

“Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight,”

Seven = number of perfection of completion; even go beyond and divide Your portion to eight

It would be presumptuous to put all of your eggs into one basket; cf. investment portfolios

2. Caution: Misfortune May Hit Where You Least Expect It
“for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.”

You give now to others because you have abundance and they have need; what about when misfortune strikes you; who will come to your aid??

2 Cor. 8:7-15; 9:10-11 – key passage – if we knew our OT better ... when we study the NT we would illustrate the truth by these OT examples

Application: Why are you limiting what God can do through you to one area? Why are you failing to be generous to as many as possible?

C. (:3-4) Take Reasonable Risks – Not waiting for ideal circumstances

(Chiastic Structure: **A B B A**) -- Best to take these two verses together ...

Some people come up with some wild interpretations here .. But Solomon is making one main point

1. Certain Obstacles are Inevitable – Deal with Them
 - a. Expected Cause and Effect Relationships –

“If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth;”

Difficult to tell here whether rain is viewed as a good thing = The blessing of rain is essential for the harvest – you can expect it ... but no guarantees ... Deal with the hand that is dealt you – Or is rain viewed as a negative thing = prevents you from working in

the fields and gathering the harvest; or maybe even a symbol of God pouring out His judgments

In either case the application is similar: You can't be overly cautious and try to put off work because of your guesses about the weather ... do what is in your power when you have opportunity

Leupold: Since *"the evil that shall be upon the earth"* has just been referred to, it is best to regard this verse as a further reference to this evil. Since *"clouds"* are elsewhere in the Scriptures referred to as visible tokens of God's coming judgment, cf., Isa. 19:1, Ps. 97:2; 18:11; Rev. 1:7, we have ample ground for here, too, thinking of God's judgments as we find these judgments to be the *"evil"* referred to at the close of the preceding verse.

[OR: God has blessed you so that you can bless others?? So Stedman below]

[**Stedman:** The first reason is that we are to give generously because it is the natural outflow of a full life; like clouds that are filled with rain and empty themselves again and again and again upon the earth.]

b. Isolated and Unpredicted Events – Wind knocks down trees

"and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies."

Again, deal with unexpected circumstances that are out of your control and move on.

Alternative Views:

[**Spurgeon:** Use your opportunities now ... once your tree has fallen, no more chance to change direction – speaking of being saved or not]

[**Stedman:** "Bloom where you are planted." That is, it is God who controls the fall of the tree out in the forest; whether it falls to the south or the north is within the scope of divine providence to determine, but where it falls, that is where it is to be. This is Solomon's way of saying to us, "Where God has put you, in your present circumstances, that is where you are to give. Meet the needs around you. Supply the needs of those with whom you come in contact."]

2. Don't Let Future Uncertainties Rob You of Present Productivity

a. Sow while there is opportunity

"He who watches the wind will not sow"

Hag. 1:2

b. Reap while there is opportunity

"and he who looks at the clouds will not reap."

Jeff Strite: A Georgia farmer, ragged and barefooted, was standing on the steps of his tumbledown shack. A stranger stopped for a drink of water and just to pass the time of day he asked: "How is your cotton coming along?" he asked. "Ain't got none," replied

the farmer. "Did you plant any?" asked the stranger. "Nope," was the reply, "afraid of bollweevils." "Well," continued the stranger, "how is your corn?" "Didn't plant none," came the answer, "'fraid there weren't going to be no rain." The visitor persevered: "Well, how are your potatoes?" "Ain't got none. Scairt - of potato bugs." "Really, what did you plant?" pressed the stranger. "Nothin'," was the calm reply, "I jest played safe."

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Application: Where are you **making excuses** for failing to step out in faith and trust God and get busy in building His kingdom? Why are you procrastinating? Why are you scared to take risks? – *“All authority is given unto me ... Go .. Make Disciples”*

D. (:5) Don't Try to Unscrew the Inscrutable – leads to being overly cautious and paralyzed – you don't have to have everything figured out – Trust God to work
“Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.”

Cf. Jesus using this thought in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3

You might object: I don't see how my investing in the kingdom will really make much of an impact ... What can God possibly do with this mysterious teaching ministry over the internet? I can't see the process or the results?? When I witness, I don't see any amazing conversions ... doesn't seem like it matters ...

How about if the **obstetrician** threw up his hands and said .. I'm not going to use my skills to help with this delivery of this new life into the world ... I don't fully understand how it all works ... I know the facts of life ... but they don't make a lot of sense to me ... How does God create a new life ... How do the bones form and grow?? I give up ..

Application: Takes faith to minister and leave the results to God
Must live by **conviction:** God's Word is powerful; your labor is not in vain in the Lord; can't walk by sight .. but by faith; God is the one who creates life; God is the one who brings forth fruit .. He wants us to Abide in Him – not to have a comfortable, risk-free life ... but to bear fruit ... have a productive life ... and bear fruit abundantly ..

E. (:6) Seize Every Opportunity for Productive Living – Give yourself every chance for success; don't limit yourself by laziness or procrastination; leave the results in God's hands – Trust God to bring forth fruit
“Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.”

Application: Think of the context of witnessing You want to witness by your life

... great ... Do it ... but don't neglect speaking up in the workplace and confronting evil as lights in this world; you are not big on street preaching ... OK ... but how about giving out a tract ... how about supporting missionaries ... How can you sow seed in the morning and in the evening – all day long, every day; through all the seasons of life .. as a teenager ... as a retired grandparent ... when you feel like it When you don't feel like it .. when it's easy ... when it's not so easy ...

II. (:7-10) FOUR SECRETS TO AN ENJOYABLE LIFE – PRACTICING JOYFUL CONTENTMENT SEASON BY SEASON – STARTING IN YOUTH

A. (:7) Appreciate Every Day You are Alive

The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.”

Connection between light / sun and life in the Scriptures

Enjoyment does not come from our possessions ... but from our attitude ... and our ability to appreciate God and His good gifts

B. (:8) Prepare for Death -- by Counting Your Blessings Every Day

“Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.”

You are not ready to live until you are ready to die; Death is coming

Could be talking about difficulties we encounter in this life; but more probably a contrast with death; we will spend more days in the ground than above it ...

C. (:9) Pursue Your Dreams -- Take Advantage of Each Season of Life – Yet with Balance Guarding Against Indulgence

“Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.”

Chad Forrester: One thing for sure, we're not getting any younger. Time is surely linear. Someone described the seven stages of man's life like this: spills, drills, thrills, bills, ills, pills, wills. If you're going to do something with your life now is the time, now is your window of opportunity.

Ps 39:4-5 says

"Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered— how fleeting my life is. You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath."

NLT

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=103063&Sermon%20The%20Mystery%20of%20the%20Future%20of%20Life%20by%20Chad%20Forrester>

Wiersbe: “Walk in the ways of your heart” (NKJV) is not an encouragement to go on a youthful fling and satisfy the sinful desires within (Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:20-23). It is rather a reminder for young people to enjoy the special pleasures that belong to youth and can never be experienced again in quite the same way. Those of us who are older need to remember that God expects young people to act like young people. The tragedy is that too many older people are trying to act like young people.!

D. (:10) Practice Contentment -- Try to Mitigate Emotional and Physical Distractions – *Tempus fugit* --

“So, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.”

Vexation: combines anger and resentment – we don’t think things are fair that we are experiencing; we resent the hand God has dealt us; opposite of contentment

Godliness with contentment is great gain

We will not always be dealing with ideal circumstances and conditions

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does it seem foolish to us to cast our bread upon the waters? What are the obstacles to our faith?
- 2) Where am I procrastinating or making excuses for not doing what God wants me to do?
- 3) How can I more aggressively pursue my dreams and by faith take risks in the areas where God wants me to be aggressive in investing for Him?
- 4) Do I tend to focus on pain and vexation and magnify my problems or do I practice contentment?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Timothy Worrell:

I. Talking about Giving to God --

A. Lesson stated Twice (:1a, 2a) – Give Much; Give to Many --

Throw out that seed that will produce bread on the low places on the ground where there is still residual water; fertile ground; waters = multitudes of people (Is. 8:7; Rev. 17:15); Is. 32:20 – give our resources to people; Repeating the thought in (:2a) – be

generous towards others; Job 31:17; don't hoard everything and leave the hungry without food; be concerned about the needy; give an adequate provision – not just a pittance; spread it out

B. Two Reasons (:1b, 2b)

- 1) Our Reward is Certain – God won't forget our labors; He will reward;
- 2) Our Opportunity is Uncertain --

Some say: "Because life is short, eat your dessert first." Solomon says, "Give your dessert away." This wealth I possess may be gone tomorrow. You have the opportunity now; you don't know if you will have the opportunity tomorrow; Give it now. Turns an excuse into a motivation;

C. Answers to 4 Objections:

- 1) **Objection:** "It's my portion; I don't have to give it." – Why do the clouds get full of water??

Answer: God wants you to bless others; God fills them with water not just for their good but to pour it out on the earth

- 2) **Objection:** "I don't know where to give; there are so many needs; I don't know where it will be profitably used."

Answer: Where you give, there it will prosper. Where God in His Providence places the gift through you.

- 3) **Objection:** We tend to procrastinate; we think of all of the potential outcomes; Good farmer does not try to guess the weather; he just works hard whenever he has opportunity; the weather is not the problem; it is the lack of desire in your heart to work hard; Prov. 22:13; our minds can make up many excuses to put off working hard

Answer: Say No to those objections that rise up in our mind; don't make a mountain out of a molehill about how hard it will be

- 4) (:5) **Objection:** "I don't see how the blessing is going to come. I don't see how helping these people will work out."

Answer: Yes, it is somewhat mysterious and hidden from you – the positive effects that God can bring about; but God will use our giving for the extension of His kingdom and His glory; God wants to keep us humble; it is always appropriate to be sowing seed Ps. 126:6 –sowing in tears but reaping in joy; for certain that he will reap; sow in the morning of our lives and in the evening of our lives – addresses the youth and the elderly; it is always appropriate to be serving God and His people; Ps. 92:14

II. (:7-10) Admonition: Think About Dying – How to Die Well

(Had taught us earlier about How to Live Well)

A. (:7-8) Speaks to the Aged – the sweetness of life – not eternal --

Light refers to Life; Job 3:20-21; but think about death while you are enjoying it; it is not endless; "*days of darkness*" – lying in the grave – Job 10:21 – you will spend more time underground than above ground; all vain if you are outside of Christ

B. (:9-10) Speaks to the Young – gives a caution in vs 9 and an exhortation in vs. 10;

1. (:9) Caution -- is not a concession but using irony; Go do whatever you want – but you better know you are going to be judged; not walking in God's counsel; Ps. 25:7; you don't see straight in all your zeal and energy; throwing off the important things of

life; making too much of other things; must read the owner's manual

2. (:10) Exhortation: as enjoyable as it all is, it is coming to an end; "sorrow" – root of word means trouble – anger, discontentment – with God's authority over you however it is exercised over you; get your heart right and your behavior right; 2 Cor. 7:1; Pursue God; Don't wait to serve God until the evening of your life

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?chapter=11&BibleOnly=true&currSection=sermons&keyword=Ecclesiastes>

David Silversides: Redeeming the Time

I. (:1-6) Don't Hold Back Because of the Unknown

A. (:1-2) Do what is our responsibility – Is. 28:28 – bread corn = same word – refers to Eastern practice of scattering seed corn while fields still have residual water; may seem haphazard; but necessary if there were to be any harvest at all; waters would subside and eventually there would be a harvest; the return would come in due course; Generosity of spirit; possibility of evil to come, then the opportunity to show this generosity will not be there; so serve the Lord now; urging fulfillment of present opportunity -- Is. 32:8; Prov. 11:24; Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6; Heb. 6:10; what seems safe ends up not safe; what seems risky ends up being what is appropriate and blessed by God; to serve the Lord is always the safe way and way of blessing; application: spread the truth of God

B. (:3) Reminded of things over which we have no control

We cannot control the clouds and the rain – but that mustn't prevent us from doing what the Lord requires of us; When a tree falls we are not consulted about it; it happens outside of our control; comes about in the Providence of God; may signify our condition at death – state of salvation or condemnation – accentuates the need for the right use of the present life because the end of it is not in our hands – we do not know when our lives will be brought to an end

C. (:4) Present obligations are not to be put off

Illustration from the natural realm applies to seeking the Lord and serving the Lord; there are no ideal circumstances or infallible guarantees; don't always be waiting for a more suitable time; Hag. 1:2 – people sounded pious; not that we are not interested; apparently it was the right time to build their own houses and attend to their own affairs; it is always the right time to obey the Word of God

D. (:5-6) Unknown Outcomes

We have our limits spelled out in vs. 5; word for spirit and for wind are the same; we don't know how God puts the soul in man; we don't understand all of the works of God or what God will do in the future; do all that God requires unselectively; we can't tell what God will prosper; we don't know who the elect of God are – just evangelize wherever we have opportunity; we don't need to know; we must obey

II. (:7-10) Seeking the Right Kind of Joy and Seeking it Early

A. (:7-8) Life at Best is Short

It's good to be alive; but what follows even a long life is infinitely longer than life

under the sun; death and judgment follow; such a life on earth only produces vanity in what follows

B. (:9) Youth is Short

He does have his whole life before him; even at his peak he is most given to this feeling that it is good to be alive; finds it relatively easy to enjoy himself; walks in the way of his own heart; fit, well, has energy; but there is an end; youth doesn't go on and on; gives way to middle age and then old age

C. (:10) Childhood and Youth are Vanity

This young man doesn't think he even has any sorrow; but it will come; he will get old and his pleasures will evaporate; that's why 12:1 begins how it does; childhood and youth are vanity; spend far more years looking back wistfully

Application:

- it is always the right time to obey the Word of God, put away sin, seek Christ and holiness; it is always the right time to evangelize

- seek the joys that last – fellowship with Christ and with those in Christ

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=4210534210>

Wiersbe: Is life worth living? That was the question the Preacher raised when he began the discourse that we call Ecclesiastes. After experimenting and investigating “*life under the sun*,” he concluded, “No, life is *not* worth living!” He gave four arguments to support his conclusion: the monotony of life, the vanity of wisdom, the futility of wealth, and the certainty of death. . . Now Solomon was ready for his conclusion and personal application. What he did was present four pictures of life and attach to each picture a practical admonition for his listeners (and readers) to heed. The development looks like this:

Life is an ADVENTURE – live by faith (11:1-6)

Life is a GIFT – enjoy it (11:7-12:8)

Life is a SCHOOL – learn your lessons (12:9-12)

Life is a STEWARDSHIP – fear God (12:13-14)

These four pictures parallel the four arguments that Solomon had wrestled with throughout the book. Life is not monotonous; rather, it is an adventure of faith that is anything but predictable or tedious. Yes, death is certain, but life is a gift from God and He wants us to enjoy it. Are there questions we can't answer and problems we can't solve? Don't despair. God teaches us His truth as we advance in “the school of life,” and He will give us wisdom enough to make sensible decisions. Finally, as far as wealth is concerned, all of life is a stewardship from God; and one day He will call us to give an account. Therefore, “*fear God, and keep His commandments*” (12:13).

Leupold: In regard to every kind of work that might be done with a look to the future men might grow pessimistic and lose all spirit of enterprise and do only what must be done to maintain life and to eke out a meagre existence. Any enterprise of greater

moment that might seem in danger of miscarrying because of the perils and the uncertainties of the times is liable to be slighted because the dangers of failure seem so prominent. Reasonable caution with reference to undertakings on a major scale is naturally dictated by common sense. If men are going to be only cautious and undertake nothing they will be like unto the farmer that is about to sow but observes a strong wind that might blow away some of his seed and so puts off the sowing until a time when the wind is entirely suitable. Such a one may never get his sowing done.

Swindoll:

I. (:1-6) Be Bullish

Honestly now, can you remember the last time you broke with routine and did something unusual? I'm told there's a sign along the Alaskan Highway that reads: "Choose your rut carefully. You'll be in it for the next 200 miles."

Are we allowing someone or something to enslave us, so that we will live our lives and ultimately pass from time to eternity without ever discovering who we are? Some do. That's not living; that's existing.

- A. Instead of protecting, release yourself!
- B. Instead of hoarding, give and invest.
- C. In place of drifting, pursue!
- D. As an alternative to doubting, trust!

II. (:7-10) Enjoying Life Now, Not Later

It was a great moment in my adult life when I realized that life was meant to be enjoyed rather than simply endured. . . For most people, life has become a grim marathon of misery, an endurance test full of frowns, whines, groans, and sighs. . .

What are you waiting for to enjoy life?

- I'm waiting until I have the things I've always wanted. When that happens, then I'll be happy.
- I'm waiting for a person who will fulfill my life.
- I'm waiting until I have achieved my goals and realized my dreams.

"The chief end of man is to love God and enjoy Him forever." . . . Happiness is to pervade all the years of our life. . . What hinders the pursuit of happiness?

- self-appointed excuses keep us from claiming daily joy.
- a self-styled independence that keeps us from remembering our Creator

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

TITLE: *THE POINT OF IT ALL*

BIG IDEA:

**THIS LIFE HAS MEANING WHEN WE RISE ABOVE THE FUTILITY OF
MAN'S WISDOM TO EMBRACE GOD'S WISDOM =
FEAR GOD AND OBEY HIM BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE BECAUSE WE ALL
WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE**

INTRODUCTION:

Our culture: Getting older; living longer, more healthcare and elder care issues

Swindoll: story of woman with painful arthritis reading a book entitled: I Don't Want to Live Like This Anymore – cf. helping your parents in the twilight of their years

Common feelings and emotions of the elderly:

- uselessness – I am in the way, I am over the hill
- guilt – I have totally fouled up my lifeIf only . . .
- bitterness and resentment
- fear of the unknown and the future – What's going to happen to me?

As young people – how do we live right now in anticipation that old age will come sooner than we think?

As older people – how do we graciously accept the challenges of the aging process

How do we live right now in such a way that our life has meaning – that we are not caught up in the futility of life under the sun?

I. (:1-7) THE URGENCY OF EMBRACING GOD'S WISDOM: FIGURE LIFE OUT SOONER . . . RATHER THAN LATER . . . OLD AGE IS FAST APPROACHING

A. (:1a) It is Never Too Soon to Submit to the Lordship of Your Creator
“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth”

1. Remember God by Submitting to His Lordship

Def. of *“Remember”* in this context: much more than keeping God in your memory; deals with how you regard God and how you respond to Him

Swindoll: used in 1 Samuel for Hannah when she was without a baby. She really wanted a baby, and she prayed for a baby. And Scripture says, *“The Lord remembered Hannah.”* God acted on her behalf and caused her to conceive. It's the same term. It means “to act decisively on behalf of someone.”

Quotes **Derek Kidner**: To remember Him is no perfunctory or purely mental act; it is to drop our pretense of self-sufficiency and to commit ourselves to Him.

Stedman: The thought is: recall God's presence daily; live in a relationship with him; seek to discover the greatness and glories of God while you are still young, before it is too late.

2. Respond to God as your Creator

Say No to Evolution – does it matter what you believe about Creation?

You bet!

Says a ton about accountability and how you are going to live your life

Should the pot talk back to the potter? Relationship of Creator to Creature; yet not animal but privileged human being into whom God has breathed His Spirit so that we are made in his likeness

You are not your own; made for a purpose

3. Recognize the Brevity of Life – Youth = Opportunity

“days of your youth” –

You are younger today than you will be tomorrow

Stedman: When you are young, life seems to stretch endlessly before you; it seems that you will never approach old age. But as you live day by day, life seems to speed by rapidly; it is very brief. You suddenly find yourself exhibiting the appearances and experiences of age. As someone has well said, "Just about the time your face clears up, your mind begins to go!" This is how brief life seems to be.

B. (:1b-7) Graphical Description of the Decay Involved in the Aging Process

We are on a downward path that leads to increasing darkness and pain and hardship

1. General Description of Old Age

a. Time of Trouble

“before the evil days come”

b. Time of Distress

“and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’”

c. Time of Darkness and Gloominess

1) Prime of Life Extinguished

“before the sun and the light,”

2) Twilight of life Fading

“the moon and the stars are darkened,”

Stedman: These mental faculties are described in terms of light. The mind, with its powers of reasoning, of memory and of imagination begins to fade, like the fading of the light of the sun. The reasoning power of the brain, perhaps the greatest gift that God has given to us, begins to lose its ability, and the memory fades. That is one of the first marks of old age. There are three things that indicate the onset of old age: the first is losing the memory, and I can't remember the other two!

Leupold: All joys are dimmed very materially in old age.

3) Depression / Gloominess Persisting
“and clouds return after the rain”

Stedman: a reference to a kind of second childhood, of senility, which comes on in old age. As a child, one's life revolves around three simple things: eating, sleeping, and going to the bathroom. When one gets old that same cycle returns again.

Swindoll: The cloudy weather represents the aging mind as it begins to get dull. Senility steals so much of the joy of living.

Whybray: The unexpected return of the clouds soon after a storm, once more shutting out the light, is a bad sign and brings gloom, both literally and psychologically.

Mind does funny things to old people as they become confused and disoriented.

2. Specific Signs of Deterioration and Decay

a. Loss of Strength

1) Trembling Hands – arms/hands used to provide a strong Defense

“in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble”

How steady are your hands?

2. Crooked Legs – You used to stand tall
“and mighty men stoop”

Legs are mighty – controlled by the largest muscles in the body

Ps. 147:10-11 *“He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness.”*

My older sister just lost her father-in-law – stooped over at almost 90 degree angle

b. Loss of Essential Functions of the Body

1) Chewing Capability – only a few Teeth left

“the grinding ones stand idle because they are few”

Liked Swindoll's story of the older man buying baby food – strained peas – it was for him, not for his grandkids

- 2) Vision Capability – eyes grow dim
“and those who look through windows grow dim”

All sorts of eye problems; lens get thicker; can't read anything up close; cataracts develop

- 3) Hearing Capability – ears have trouble hearing
“and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low”

Wiersbe: Either your hearing starts to fail, or you close your mouth because you've lost your teeth.

Leupold: Doors are means of communicating with the outside world. The mouth and its teeth have been referred to (3c). Therefore the author is at this point referring to the *ears*. They are shut to the outer world as is attested by the fact that that common sound of the grinding of grain, which was heard daily about the Oriental home, is scarcely perceived by the unfortunate old man.

- 4) Sleep Capability – no more sound sleeping
“and one will arise at the sound of the bird”
Awakened by the least disturbance; trouble getting back to sleep

- 5) Speech/Lung Capability (Or Hearing Capability again??)
“and all the daughters of song will sing softly”

Wiersbe: Your voice starts to quaver and weaken.

Kidner: participation in singing . . . or enjoyment of the singing of others ??

Adam Clarke: The VOICE, that wonderful instrument, almost endless in the strength and variety of its tones, becomes feeble and squeaking, and merriment and pleasure are no more. The tones emitted are all of the querulous or mournful kind.

Stedman: One of the signs of old age is that everybody seems to talk in a much lower tone of voice than they used to; people mumble all the time, as *“the daughters of song are brought low.”*

– start to go deaf; need hearing aid – **2 Sam. 19:34-36 ??**

Are we presently Giving God Thanks for these basic functions?

Or do we take these for granted each day?
Is our happiness and contentment dependent on these functioning well?

- c. (:5) Loss of Virility – Increasing Fears
 - 1) Loss of Boldness and Courage
 - a) Fear of Falling
“Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place”

Need railings installed; every step is a potential disaster; break one hip ... break two hips ...
Things that used to be easy to accomplish are now difficult or impossible

- b) Fear of Attack
“and of terrors on the road”

Afraid of driving at night; afraid of driving on the beltway;

- 2) Loss of Strength and Vigor
 - a) Loss of Hair – Or Change to White or Gray Hair
“the almond tree blossoms”

You can try to use various hair products to mask this inevitable process; you aren't kidding anybody; like the white blossoms of the almond tree

- b) Loss of Mobility
“the grasshopper drags himself along”

Go to the assisted living facility and watch as the residents drag themselves along; takes forever to get anywhere; stiffness just gets worse; difficult to move around

- c) Loss of Appetite (maybe sexual reference)
“and the caperberry is ineffective.”

Eaton: The caperberry was apparently a stimulant to bodily appetites

- 3. (:5b-7) Ultimate Pictures of Departure and Devastation and Death
 - a. **Departure** from This Life
 - 1) The One Who Leaves for a New Destination
“For man goes to his eternal home”

Always liked the imagery of the departed one setting sail for a new destination; mourners grieving on one shore as the ship disappears; but other joyful ones gathered on the other shore to greet the new arrival

- 2) The Ones Who Remain to Mourn the Departed
“while mourners go about in the street”

b. Two Pictures of **Devastation** of the Physical Body

1) Life is Valuable and Precious – But Broken and Crushed

*“before the silver cord is broken
and the golden bowl is crushed”*

Extinguishing of the light of life

2) Life Seems Endless – But is Shattered and Crushed / Fragile

*“the pitcher by the well is shattered
and the wheel at the cistern is crushed”*

No more flow of water of life

Eaton: The final act of dying is pictured in four expressions, which divide into two pairs. In the first pair a golden bowl is attached to a silver cord or chain. When the chain is removed the bowl falls and is irreparable damaged. The image points to the value of life, and the drama in the end of a life whose pieces cannot be put together again.

The second pair of images visualizes a pitcher lowered into a well by a rope running round a wheel. Death is the smashing of the jar.

Leupold: Do not attempt to discover the specific meaning of “*silver cord*,” “*bowl*,” etc. They have no specific meaning; they are only a part of the background of the picture.

c. **Death** = Separation of Body and Spirit

1) Physical Decay – back to dust

“then the dust will return to the earth as it was”

2) Spiritual Return – back to God

“and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

**II. (:8) THE NEED FOR GOD’S WISDOM = THE FUTILITY OF LIFE
UNDER THE SUN: APART FROM GOD . . . ALL IS VANITY**

“Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘all is vanity!’”

Review of previous chapters:

**C1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW – CHASING THE WIND – THE CYCLE OF
FUTILITY**

**THE EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVE OF SOLOMON TESTIFY TO THE
EMPTINESS OF LIFE AND THE LACK OF ANY SATISFYING ANSWERS TO
THE HUMAN CYCLE OF FUTILITY**

C2:1-11: LIVING IT UP WILL ALWAYS LET YOU DOWN

INVESTIGATION UNDER THE SUN REVEALS THE FUTILITY OF

PLEASURE, POSSESSIONS AND PRIDE

C2:12-26: *FUTILITY OF WISDOM AND WORK*

A LIFE OF PURSUING WISDOM OR ACCOMPLISHMENT ONLY ACCUMULATES A LEGACY OF FUTILITY

C3: *WRESTLING WITH ETERNITY –THE FUTILITY OF TRYING TO COMPREHEND THE DIVINE MASTER PLAN*

THE INSCRUTABLE NATURE OF ETERNITY WILL FRUSTRATE MAN'S EFFORTS TO FIGURE THINGS OUT – JUST SUBMIT AND TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

C4: *THE FUTILITY OF CHASING WORLDLY SUCCESS*

THE 5 ROTTEN STEPS ON THE WORLD'S LADDER OF SUCCESS

C5: *WORSHIP, WEALTH AND WISDOM*

C6: *THE FUTILITY OF CHASING THE GOOD LIFE*

EVEN THOSE WHO APPEAR TO HAVE GRABBED HOLD OF THE GOOD LIFE STRUGGLE WITH NO ENJOYMENT, NO SATISFACTION AND NO ANSWERS TO LIFE'S ULTIMATE QUESTIONS

C7: *WISDOM REDISCOVERED*

C8: *RULERS AND RIDDLES*

C9: *LIFE JUST DOESN'T ADD UP –*

BUT WE CAN STILL RESOLVE TO LIVE IT UP

THE ENJOYMENT OF THIS LIFE DOES NOT COME FROM FIGURING OUT LIFE'S DEEP ENIGMAS

C10: *NUGGETS OF WISDOM – WISE RESPONSE TO FOOLISH LEADERSHIP*

FOLLY ON THE PART OF RULERS PUTS A NATION IN JEOPARDY AND REQUIRES A RESPONSE OF WISDOM – YET WISDOM IS PRECARIOUS AT BEST

C11: *SECRETS TO A PRODUCTIVE AND ENJOYABLE LIFE*

BY OPPORTUNISTIC FAITH AND JOYFUL CONTENTMENT WE CAN LIVE BOTH A PRODUCTIVE AND ENJOYABLE LIFE

II. (:9-14) THE COMMUNICATION OF GOD'S WISDOM: THE PREACHER FAITHFULLY DRIVES HOME THE MESSAGE OF TRUTH

[Note: no need to view this section as an appendix added by later editors – Leupold defends Solomon as the author]

A. (:9-10) The Expository Role of the Preacher: Communicating God's Truth

Accurately and Effectively

1. Prerequisite: Preacher Must be a Wise, Godly Man
“In addition to being a wise man”
2. Goal of Edification – Systematic, Thorough Teaching
“the Preacher also taught the people knowledge”
3. Dedication to His Craft – can be a tedious process involving much discipline
Wrestling with the text and how to unfold it
 - a. Insightful Observation / Meditation / Analysis
“and he pondered”
 - b. Diligent Investigation
“searched out”
 - c. Methodical Organization
“and arranged many proverbs”

Eaton: The Preacher’s skill at his task is set before us in three verbs: *pondered*, *searched out*, *arranged*. The first (literally “weighed,” a rare word) points to careful evaluation, indicating his honesty, caution and balance; the second to thoroughness and diligence. The third, *arranged*, points to the skillful orderliness of his presentation and reminds us that there is an artistic element in his work (as in all preaching and writing).

4. Choice of the Best Possible Words – for Accuracy and Effectiveness
 - a. Make it Interesting -- Don’t be Boring
“The Preacher sought to find delightful words”

Swindoll: winsome, easy to grasp, readily applied

The most effective communicators are those who can make the complex simple.

- b. Make it Accurate -- Don’t be Wrong
“and to write words of truth correctly”
Rightly dividing the Word of truth –

2 Tim. 2:15 *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”*

How can people imagine that you just open your mouth and expect the Holy Spirit to fill you with the right words to say ... that is presumption and laziness; much of what you hear on TV = repetitive gibberish – who listens to that stuff??

B. (:11-12) The Productive Impact of the Preacher: Applying God’s Wisdom to Stir People to Action and to Drive Home God’s Truth

1. 2 Illustrations:
 - a. Goats that Prick People Into Action

“The words of wise men are like goads”

used on an ox to get the ox going forward; painful

Prosperity preachers have put away the goad; all sugar and spice and everything nice

If no one ever gets upset at your preaching, you are not fulfilling your mission; Conviction of sin; need to change behavior; making people feel uncomfortable – all necessary

b. Stakes that Drive Home God’s Truth

“and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails”

Swindoll: A well-driven stake keeps the tent in place. It secures it to the ground.

Eaton: establish teaching in the memory

2. Unity and Authority of God’s Wisdom -- Sourced from One Shepherd

“they are given by one Shepherd”

That is why the word is so powerful and impactful; accomplishing the Master’s purpose

Distinction between the One Head of the Universal Church and multiple undershepherds in each local church

3. Contrasted with Weariness of Book Learning – Accumulating Man’s Wisdom

“But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.”

Constable: This verse does not say that all study is tiring, though that is true. It means that study of books other than what God has revealed to learn wisdom is an endless, wearisome occupation. This is not to say we should avoid reading books other than the Bible. Nonetheless the main place to look when you want to find true wisdom is God’s Word.

C. (:13-14) The Main Message of the Preacher: Fear God and Obey His Commandments Since You Will Be Held Accountable

1. Summary Lesson – The Point of it All

“The conclusion, when all has been heard,”

Book has been building to this great climax

2. Simple Secrets to Purposeful Living –

Two Commands that summarize the Law:

a. Fear God

“is fear God”

b. Obey God

“and keep His commandments”

3. Scope of Solomon’s Counsel

“because this applies to every person”

4. Supreme and Total Accountability

“For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden whether it is good or evil.”

Zeisler: Solomon asked all the questions and looked squarely at all of life, its hopes, dreams, joys and sorrows. In the last analysis he declares that we must cease asking questions and worship God. Our most important choice is to bend our knee before God and receive answers from him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does Solomon seem to focus his closing address on young people rather than the elderly?
- 2) As we visit the elderly in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, what parallels do we see to the observations Solomon makes in these verses?
- 3) In what sense have specific texts of Scripture served as goads or nails in our life?
- 4) What contributes and what detracts from our living life in the fear of the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Silversides: The Christian and the Aging Process

- (:1) Youth is short – a time to seek the Lord; then come the days of trouble and decay; and affliction
- (:2) The winter of life comes
- (:3) Trembling arms; strong men = the legs; the teeth; the eyes
- (:4) not able to speak as we once were and declare our mind and wishes; the slightest thing troubles the elderly and alarms them
- (:5) everything high becomes a problem; things that used to be easy are now difficult; appetite for food and sexual desire now decline; The end comes; man goes to his home beyond the earth
- (:6) silver cord = spine; Wheel broken –
- (:7) Gen. 3:19 fulfilled

Description of the process of decay that ends in death

What are we to make of this description?

1) Why growing old involves decaying

It wasn't always so; don't know how long Adam and Eve lived in state of innocence
Because of sin; every illness is just a forerunner of death

2) Anticipating the aging process

Unless taken early, we must expect decline

There is a wrong type of anticipation as well as a right anticipation

Wrong Anticipation:

- counsel of despair – throw yourself into having a good time without any significant restraint; but no one knows when they will be taken from this world;
- running to meet old age as an excuse for offloading responsibilities – danger of convincing yourself you can no longer do some things you are still capable of doing; making excuses for what you don't want to do

Right Anticipation:

- young people should use the energy they have well; they won't always have that energy; not to follow the wicked indulgent counsel of sin; redeeming the time;
- seek a well settled assurance of salvation in Christ and fellowship with Him
- when physical and mental decline come; can only be contently endured if we are submitted to His will; can't have happiness dependent on our physical strength

3) Submission to the will of God as we get older

There are lessons from the aging process; life is short; Psalm 39:4-5

Our inheritance in Christ should be increasingly precious to us; Ps. 71:7-9

Assurance of God's faithfulness should be sought from the Word; increased awareness of preciousness of Christ; use the remaining time for God's glory – study Ps. 71

Don't try to deceive people desperately by cosmetic means regarding our age; presenting oneself smartly in a manner consistent with honesty is fine; there is a line; accept the Providence of God; don't try to hang on to a youthful appearance that you no longer have

4) the place of regret as we get older

Beware of unspecified regrets; just general feeling of sadness about the past; Why do I feel sad about the past? Don't be murmuring against God; that our youthful vigor was not prolonged longer, etc; need to examine our regrets; we should always regret sin; still rejoice in forgiveness in Christ

5) the place of thankfulness as we get older

Cf. Christian upbringing – even though not perfect; kindness of God

Timothy Worrell: First part of book was a recounting of his pursuit for meaning apart from God; all was vanity; this book is a record of Solomon's repentance

Beginning of chap 7 – Solomon turns to wisdom

Much like proverbs; grand crescendo of 12:13-14; do not delay in serving God; very graphic picture of old age; give God the best of our days – the strength of our days; now he moves on and begins to wrap up

I. (:8) Reaffirmation of thesis

Reminds us of the vanity of this world; wants us to see how meaningless, empty, valueless it all is

II. (:9-12) Vindication of this book

A. (:9a) speaks of himself

B. (:9b-10a) Speaks of his preparation

How he actually put this book together; file knowledge in the right place so we can benefit; put together outline and then put the appropriate words into the content

C. (:10b-12) Preacher's subject = Words of Truth

1. Nature – inspired words

- upright

- words of truth = the instrument of our sanctification; how much do we value truth? Would we not be in the market to obtain it more; to hold onto it; if you don't value truth much you easily lose it

2. efficacy of the Word of God – the effect – 2 holy illustrations :

- goads – pricks that sting; used on an ox to get the ox going forward; painful

- nails, stakes – convicts; Ps. 19:11 the word is to prick sharply and hold firmly

(not telling us about all of the purposes of the Word of God)

Fastened and riveted upon us as we hear them expounded by the instrumentality of gifted preachers; we don't grow just through preaching; but it is supremely important to hear God's Word preached accurately

3. authority of the Word of God – these words all come from one Shepherd; one

author; coming through the various authors and preachers

By these words be admonished – learn something from these words

I've been down the path of studying all of the greats of human learning – vanity

No end to who is writing about something; what a waste; focus on the Word of God

Yes, it has its place ... but limited – contrasting this worldly knowledge with

knowledge of God

Don't fall into the trap that I did; serve God earlier in life than I did

III. (:13-14) Conclusion of this book – heart of his message

A. (:13) Duty of Man

Summary of all that I have been saying = crux of the matter

Ordinarily the Hebrews would not use large letters

Deut. 6:4 and here in this verse – begins with a capital

Means of perfect happiness and tranquility of mind

Fear of God in the mind as the root; obedience in the life as the fruit

1. Fear of God:

Delightful and reverent thoughts about God

- the holy fruit of forgiveness Ps. 130:4
- consistent with the love of God -- fear of God combined with cleaving to God – not inconsistent; not one that keeps us from coming to God; but causes us to cleave to God
- living life in the presence of God

2. Obedience = Fruit

If we reverence someone, we delight to know what they want us to do so that we will obey it

Obedience = barometer of our fear of God

B. (:14) Reason: the Judgment of God

Every work; not just partial judgment

What we do now matters for eternity;

- Hedonism – just live for pleasure in the Now
- pessimistic, nihilistic view – what happens now is valueless

Solomon has written this book as an evangelistic tool – reminds us of the paths he had taken that were empty; points us to meaning in God; not vain to fear God

Stedman: Everything hangs upon that word, "*Fear God.*" I know that this is a difficult word for us to comprehend. Most of us think of it in terms of abject terror, of running from God, of seeing him as a threat, but that is never the biblical meaning of the word. I have tried to put it in the form of an acrostic to make it easier for us to remember what the elements of fearing God include.

First, "**F**" stands for faith in his existence. You cannot come to God unless you know he is there. Hebrews 11:6 says, "*He that comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.*" There is where fear begins: faith that God exists. The whole of the created universe is shouting that at us. All the inner responses of our heart are confirming it. The Word of God declares it. History confirms it. There is a world of evidence that God is there. Francis Schaeffer says that this is the great and first truth of the gospel -- The God Who Is There.

Then "**E**": experience of his grace. You never can properly fear God until you have learned what kind of a God he is. He is a God of mercy, of grace, of forgiveness. Until you have stood before him and felt your guilt, acknowledged it, known you were wrong and corrupt, and heard him say in your inner heart, "*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more*" {John 8:11 KJV}, you will never be able to properly fear God. One element of fear is the experience of the wonder of forgiveness, that God forgives and sends you out again with a whole new purpose and a new resource available.

That leads to the third element. "**A**": awe at the majesty, the wisdom and the wonder of God. What a Being he is! What a marvelous mind that can comprehend all the billions of pieces of information in this universe and hold them continually before him, that can hear every voice and relate to every person who has ever lived! What a marvelous God! Awe at the sense of his majesty, his comprehensiveness, his unfailing wisdom and

power, is part of fearing God.

The last letter, 'R,' stands for resolve. Resolve to do what he says, to obey his word, to "keep his commandments," as the Searcher puts it here. There are only two commandments; Jesus himself said that. All the law and the writings can be reduced to two simple things: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind," {Matt 22:37 RSV}. That is in response to his love already shown to you; love him because he first loved you. And two, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's it. As Micah put it, "What does God require of man, but to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly before his God," {cf, Mic 6:8}. There it is: to obey him, to follow him, to keep the commandments. So this is what it means to fear God:

Faith
Experience
Awe
Resolve

Chad Forrester: I heard the story about the group of seniors at the nursing home who were sitting around talking about all their ailments. "My arms have gotten so weak I can hardly lift this cup of coffee," said one. "Yes, I know," said another. "My cataracts are so bad I can't even see my coffee." "I couldn't even mark an "X" at election time, my hands are so crippled," volunteered a third.

"I can't turn my head because of the arthritis in my neck," said a fourth. "My blood pressure pills make me so dizzy!" exclaimed another. "I forget where I am, and where I'm going," said another. "I guess that's the price we pay for getting old," winced an old man as he slowly shook his head. The others nodded in agreement. "Well, count your blessings," said one woman cheerfully, "and thank God we can all still drive".

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=103063&page=2>

Francis Camacho: The Pursuit of Happiness

- Remember your Creator
- Redeem the time
- Reverence God
- Resolve to keep His commandments

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=48261&Sermon%20The%20Pursuit%20of%20Happiness%20by%20Francis%20Camacho>

The Four Calls

The Spirit came in childhood and pleaded, "Let me in,
"But oh! the door was bolted by thoughtlessness and sin;
"I am too young," the child replied, "I will not yield today;
There's time enough tomorrow." The Spirit went away.

Again He came and pleaded in youth's bright happy hour;

He came but heard no answer, for lured by Satan's power
The youth lay dreaming then and saying, "Not today,
Not till I've tried earth's pleasures." The Spirit went away.

Again He called in mercy in manhood's vigorous prime,
But still He found no welcome, the merchant had no time;
No time for true repentance, no time to think or pray,
And so, repulsed and saddened, the Spirit went away.

Once more He called and waited, the man was old and ill,
And scarcely heard the whisper, his heart was cold and still;
"Go leave me; when I need thee, I'll call for thee," he cried;
Then sinking on his pillow, without a hope, he died!

http://preceptaustin.org/ecclesiastes_illustrations_ii.htm#12

William MacDonald

<http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=15913>

An Overview of Ecclesiastes

PDF

The Book of Ecclesiastes describes Solomon's search for the meaning of life, by his own unaided intellect and apart from divine revelation. His conclusion was that life is vanity and as futile as chasing the wind.

We know the book was written by Solomon because he was the only son of David who was king in Jerusalem, 1. 1. We do not know what period of his life he is describing.

The key to the book is the expression 'under the sun.' It occurs 29 times. Solomon tries to solve the riddle of life by his own wisdom and by his own observations. His conclusions are the same as you and I might draw if we did not have a Bible.

Two expressions confirm that the book represents man's wisdom under the sun. In 3. 18, Solomon said in his heart that men are like beasts. He said this in his heart. He is speaking from personal observation and not from divine wisdom. Then in 3. 21, he said, 'Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the beast, who goes down to the earth?' This is not divine revelation but human ignorance. He says that nobody knows. However, we know what happens at the time of death, because we have the Bible.

If this book contains nothing more than human wisdom, why did God allow it to be included in the Scriptures? Its purpose is to save us from walking the same dreary path of frustration, pessimism, and meaninglessness. If the wisest and richest man could not find fulfilment 'under the sun,' what chance do we have?

Because the findings are 'under the sun', some of them are true, some are half-true, and some are not true at all. Some are true, e.g. 'A good name is better than ointment', 7. 1a; 'For there is not a just man who does good and does not sin', 7. 20. Some are only half-true, e.g. 'And the day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth', 7. 1b. This is true only if the person is a believer. Some are not true at all, e.g., the earth does not abide forever, 1. 4; man does have an advantage over beasts, 3. 19; the dead do have knowledge, 9. 5; 'do not be overly righteous', 7. 16, is not good advice, God would never say that. On the contrary, He does say, 'My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin', 1 John 2. 1. In other words, don't sin at all.

The fact that there are untruths in the book does not affect its inspiration. The inspiration of the sacred word does not guarantee the truthfulness of what the devil says, Gen. 3. 4-5, or of what man says by his own wisdom. God said to Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, 'You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has', Job 42. 8. Yet, Eliphaz's words are in the Bible. The Lord gives a faithful record of what is said and done, and that record is inspired even if it records some of man's mistakes. He wanted those things to be in the word for our instruction and correction.

Solomon uses Elohim for the name of God in these twelve chapters, never the name Jehovah. Anyone can know that there is an Elohim, that is, a Mighty One. But the name Jehovah speaks of God in covenant relation with man. A fool can know that there is an Elohim, but only a believer can know Him as Jehovah.

The king tried to find fulfilment in education, pleasure, materialism, wealth, music, philosophy, status, and sex, 1. 17 – 2. 11, but concluded that life is meaningless and futile. The argument is that if the richest and wisest could not find fulfilment in these things, what chance do we have? 'For what can the man do who succeeds the king?' 2. 12.

In chapter 3. 1-8 he listed 28 activities of life, half of which seem to be active and the others counteractive. Usually the second member of each pair cancels the first. Fourteen minus fourteen equals zero.

This would seem to imply that life is a big zero. The king concluded that when it comes to dying, man has no advantage over a beast. They all go to the grave, 3. 18- 22. Accumulating riches is folly; when a man dies, he leaves it all, perhaps to a son who is a fool. The son did not work hard for it, so he goes out and wastes it.

Mingled with some words of wisdom are many other expressions of pessimism. The struggle of life simply is not worth it.

The king covers most of the spectrum of human life. He tackles the main questions that plague mankind, and comes up with his own answers. Because God's ways and works are inscrutable, the best philosophy of life is to have a good time while you can. Solomon grieves over injustice, wickedness, and inequalities. The competitive spirit is vanity. Religion that is insincere is vanity. The insatiable desire for more is vanity. All is vanity.

Did Solomon ever get above the sun in this book? The jury is still out on that question. There is no agreement among students of the word. I don't think he did.

His closing advice for young people to remember their Creator is reinforced by a classic description of old age with its multiple infirmities, 12. 1-7. It is a masterpiece of symbolic literature. Jesus summarized the message of Ecclesiastes when He said, 'Whoever drinks of this water [the world] will thirst again', John 4. 13. Only God can fill the vacuum of the human heart. The way of fulfillment is to get above the sun where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 2:12-17

TITLE: WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET – JOHN COBB

INTRODUCTION

One night as Solomon lay on his bed, he heard loud rattling, almost like that of chains, just outside his door. He climbed out of bed and yelled for whoever it was to quiet down. He went back to bed only to be awakened again a few minutes later by the same rattling sounds, only this time they grew louder. Now he was a little frightened. "Guards!", "Guards!" he yelled, but not one soldier appeared.

"Ebenezer Solomon" a low moaning voice said in the wind that blew through the darkness of the room.

"Now I'm hearing things in the wind," said Solomon as he tried to gain his composure. "I knew I shouldn't have eaten that pizza with the the works so close to bedtime."

"EBENEZER SOLOMON!" came the voice again with much more intensity and a strong gust of wind.

"Who dares call my name and disturb my sleep!?" Solomon responded, as if he weren't afraid.

"EBENEZER SOLOMON! EBENEZER SOLOMON! came the voice again and with such a cold chilling wind that Solomon shivered all the way down his spine and got all goose-pimple. Just then a spooky-looking figure came floating through the bedroom door. He was about 15 feet tall and was wrapped in chains and shackles.

"Wh-wh-o-o-oo are you?" muttered the king, as he felt his heart beating way up high in his throat.

"I am the Angel of Kingdom past, Kingdom present, and Kingdom future."

"What have you come here for?"

"I have come to show you your life Ebenezer Solomon" answered the strange visitor.

"You must have the wrong king Mr. Spirit. My name isn't even Ebenezer. That's the name of a rock several miles west of here. I'll tell you how you get there..."

"EBENEZER SOLOMON! DON'T TRY MY PATIENCE!" said the angel as he lifted one chain covered arm and then swung the giant chain down upon the large wooden chair next to Solomon.

"Hey look here now big fellow, the Queen of Sheba gave me that chair in recognition of all my wisdom!"

"Looks like she had the wrong man! replied the stranger with a laugh that shook the whole castle.

"This is why I have come, Ebenezer Solomon. I have come to show you that your kingdom was once the grandest of all. Come, let me show you." And he showed Solomon scenes from the best of the good old days as Barbara Streisand sang "Memories" in another corner of the room.

"Do you remember all these things Ebenezer Solomon?" asked the angel.

With tears in his eyes Solomon nodded yes.

"They were happy days for you Ebenezer Solomon. But now I must show you what is to come. Please brace yourself, for it isn't pleasant."

And in the blink of an eye he had whisked Solomon out of his bedroom out to the cemetery.

"Why are we out here? I'm getting kind of cold" complained the king.

"Ebenezer Solomon, look behind you," beckoned the ghost.

And as Solomon turned, he noticed freshly dug grave. He overheard the men who were digging the grave talking about what a greedy rich man this was they were about to bury, but what a fool his son was who was going to inherit all the wealth.

As Solomon heard this, he thought of all the men he had known who had this kind of oldest son and wondered which one of them had died.

Just then, he caught a glimpse of the tombstone. It read,

KING SOLOMON - HE DIED WITH THE MOST TOYS AND

WE THOUGHT WE DIED UNDER HIS HEAVY TAXES!

Then he realized that this was a scene that was yet to come. Then the angel bid him take a hard look at his own grave, and he pushed him so that he fell right into it.

"What good will your gold do you now, Ebenezer Solomon?" asked the angel. "Who will own all that you have earned and gathered?"

And Solomon had no reply as he spit the dirt from his mouth after his taste of the grave.

Then he suddenly felt himself shaken and opened his eyes to hear his servant announcing that breakfast was prepared. He looked around and noticed that he was in his bed and the morning had come.

"I still have time" he thought to himself. "I still have time!" he then shouted all the way through the castle.

He entered the royal library and wrote out the lesson he had learned.

PLEASE OPEN YOUR BIBLES TO ECCLESIASTES 2:12-17 TO SEE WITH ME WHAT HE HAD TO SAY.

The aged Solomon has taken the pen and ink and written for us a journal, a diary of his exploits. Some great men of the past have sought to explore the oceans, some the jungles, some the mountains, some the wild frontiers, but Solomon explored life itself to find out what life really is. To see what would last. To find whatever it was that was really worth living for. To bravely go where no man had gone before!

In chapter 1, Solomon has states up front that everything he found on his search was empty--nothing satisfied. Not only was life empty, but on top of that we are told that the work God has left for men to do is a "grievous task."

In chapter 2, Solomon describes his search through the Plains of Pleasure. Anything and everything he ever dreamed of he got; but even in all of this he concluded, "All was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun."

As we pick up the record in v. 12, Solomon starts another quest for meaning in life. He is now entering the Woods of Wisdom, the Marsh of

Madness, and the Fields of Folly. In his own way, I believe Solomon is going on a search to see if education holds the key to meaning in life. Education is not wisdom; yet education is the way to wisdom. So let's read the passage together.

I think this passage breaks down into two simple issues:

1. Mankind's fate (vv. 12-16)
2. Solomons' hate (v. 17)

Let's look first at Mankind's Fate. (Read vv. 12-16)

I. MANKIND'S FATE (:12-16)

So far the conclusions of Solomon have been depressing. They have shown the worthlessness and futility of a life lived for self. They have exposed the emptiness of a life lived for the moment, as well as the money. Neither do fame or fortune fill the soul. But now we turn a new corner in the journal.

Solomon took a hard look at his own grave.

Someone has well-said,
"You're not ready to live, until you're ready to die."

Solomon was not ready to die.

He had more money than anyone else. He had more wives than anyone else. He had the most glamorous house around. He was the wisest man of his day. But because he hadn't looked beyond the grave, he searched in vain to find meaning in life.

Have you come to grips with the fact that one day you will also die. Life as you know it will be over. You will never see another sunset. Never sit down in your present house to have another dinner. Your body will take its last breath and you will be gone.

WHAT THEN?

Will it matter how much money you saved up during your lifetime?

Will it matter how big your house was?

Will it matter what kind of car you drove?

Will it matter what schools you went to?

Will it matter how fancy your clothes were?

Will it matter how much overtime you spent at the office
to move up the corporate ladder?

Will it matter what positions of influence you held?
Will it matter how smart you were, or how strong you were?

WHAT WILL MATTER IN ETERNITY?

Ah yes! This is the crux of the matter. This is the question we should come back to time and time again in our walk with the Lord. "What will matter for eternity?"

Let me ask you to think about your own life with the question:

WHAT ARE YOU DOING THAT WILL LAST FOR ETERNITY?

WHERE ARE YOU HEADING IN LIFE TO PREPARE FOR ETERNITY?

Like Solomon, you are not ready to live unless you are ready to die. Are you ready?

Please turn in your Bible to 2 Cor. 5:9:

"THEREFORE WE HAVE AS OUR AMBITION, WHETHER AT HOME OR ABSENT, TO BE PLEASING TO HIM."

Brothers and sisters, can you say this about your own life before the Lord? Is the driving force of your life to be pleasing to the Lord? Do you live day to day to one day hear the Lord say "Well Done", or by the way you live will he say "Rare"!

As we were over at Halethorpe last Sunday, I noticed a picture on one of the walls. The picture was of a saint who most likely had just entered heaven and the Lord was greeting him.

HOW WOULD YOU HAVE PAINTED SUCH A PICTURE?

HOW DO YOU PICTURE THE LORD WELCOMING YOU?

Well this particular artist showed the scene as if the camera were about 15 feet behind the saint. Both the saint and the Lord Jesus are standing on clouds in a beautiful setting. But the center of the picture is what stands out. The Lord Jesus has a big smile on His face as He embraces this saint. It's as if He were saying, "Oh it's so great that you are finally here."

How about you?

Do you love the Lord so much that you are longing for Him
to return, or would you be satisfied if he would let you
accomplish a few more of your own plans first?
Are you living from day to day seeking God's kingdom or your own?
Have you become attached to what you can see rather than what you can't see?

While we are still in 2 Corinthians, look back at 4:16-18.

**WHAT IS IT THAT KEEPS THE SOUL RENEWED WHEN THE BODY IS
FALLING APART?**

Keeping our eyes on what is not seen

**WHAT IS IT THAT KEEPS US FROM LOSING HEART WHEN LIFE IS
OVERWHELMING?**

Keeping our eyes on what is not seen

WHAT CONVINCES US THAT PAIN HAS A PURPOSE IN OUR LIVES?

Keeping our eyes on what is not seen

Please listen up. The things you can see will all perish.
Things will not enter eternity. Your car, your house, your
furniture, cabinets, rugs, grass, trees, bikes, baseballs,
dolls, money, and every other thing will one day burn (if it is
still around on judgment day!)

Consider some examples of people who saw what couldn't be seen:

Hebrews 11:7 - "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things
not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of
his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an
heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

11:8-10 Abraham

11:13 *KEY PASSAGE*

11:24-27 Moses

Eph. 1:18-19

Rev. 3:17

As Solomon's life came to culminate,
He took pen in hand to articulate
What treasures on earth he did excavate,
the lessons of life he did accumulate.
and the facts of life he did contemplate.

Now Solomon was the potentate,
A journal he wrote to delineate,
his findings he did propagate,
for in the realm of wisdom, he was a heavyweight.

But though his palace was quite ornate,
and many his wisdom sought to imitate,
his treasures were actually not so great,
for empty were they, and some reprobate.
They ended up making him nauseate.

Pleasures he tried to stimulate,
and wealth he tried to accumulate,
and with wives he tried to hibernate,
with gardens he turned to recreate,
But all this served only to irritate
the longing of his soul.

He thought maybe wisdom would evaporate
the hunger his soul did disseminate,
then a look at the grave set his thinking straight
that this life would soon be o'er.

You see Solomon learned much too late
under the weight of your freight the soul suffocates,
and that the fire will one day eliminate
all that you called your own.

Now Jesus says, "Choose your gate,
and the gate you choose will determine your fate.
Follow Me and your reward in heaven will be great!
Which will you choose today?"

We have looked at MANKIND'S FATE, now let's take a look at

II. SOLOMON'S HATE (:17)

2:17 - "So I hated life, for the work which had been done under

the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind."

Solomon was bitter and bummed out because he realized he couldn't take it with him. He had lived a life of self. His world revolved around him and now payday was coming. It wouldn't be too long before he would stand before the God who created him and give an answer for all he was given. He squandered God's wisdom. He hoarded the wealth. There were a lot of things he had done for the Lord in his life, but along the way he was drawn away by compromises he had made.

Compromising with the wives led to drifting away from the Lord.

I remember back in high school taking a boat trip up the Atlantic coast. I was steering the cabin cruiser one afternoon. As you navigate the waterways, your course to follow is to stay between the buoys as they line up across the horizon. This isn't too difficult under normal conditions. This one particular afternoon I was admiring the beautiful scenery all around me when I heard a sudden grinding sound. While I thought we were following the path just right, we had actually drifted a little too far to one side and were scraping the bottom of the channel. You see I got distracted. I drifted from the course. I didn't intend to, and I didn't want to, but I did.

How about you? In your all-consuming love for the Lord Jesus Christ, have you begun to drift? Have things come into your life that are taking the time you once had for Him? Have you compromised somewhere along the way and now become a slave to your choice? Have you fallen prey to the love of the world?

Solomon hated life in the end. If you choose his path you will do the same. Consider the words of Jesus as you consider surrendering all afresh today to follow Him:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

Psalm 73 - the bitterness of life the Psalmist experienced is similar to our situation. Sometimes we feel it is in vain to serve God.

ONLY ONE LIFE

Only one life to offer, Jesus my Lord and King;
Only one tongue to praise Thee and of Thy mercy sing
Only one heart's devotion - Saviour Oh may it be
Consecrated alone to Thy matchless glory,
Yielded fully to Thee.

Only this hour is mine, Lord - May it be used for Thee;
May every passing moment COUNT FOR ETERNITY.
Souls all about are dying, dying in sin and shame;
Help me bring them the message of Calvary's redemption
In Thy glorious name.

Only one life to offer - Take it dear Lord, I pray;
Nothing from Thee withholding, Thy will I now obey
Thou who hast freely given Thine all in all for me,
Claim this life for Thine own to be used My Savior,
Ev'ry moment for Thee.

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 2: 24-26

TITLE: *WHERE DOES GOD GO WHEN YOU GO TO WORK? – JOHN COBB*

**BIG IDEA: THE SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE –
WHAT IS WORTH POURING YOUR LIFE INTO?
WHAT WILL LAST FOR ETERNITY?**

A VISIT FROM THE BOSS

Tw'as the day after Sunday, and all through this house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The tools were all hung on the stairway with care,
In case the crew's boss should show up 'round there.
The workers were nestled all snug in their boots,
While dreaming of payday and cashing their loot.

Sam in his kerchief, and Tom in his cap,
Had settled their brains for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
They sprang from their beds to see what was the matter.

Away to the windows they flew like a flash,
Put on their toolbelts and threw up the sash.
The sun in its brightness gave pain to their eyes,
As they now looked like workers -- a cunning disguise!
When, what to their wondering eyes should appear,
But the boss man himself, and them full of fear!

He walked in the house, and what to his wonder,
No work had been done, not a plank cut asunder.
"You call yourselves Christians!" he said with a sneer,
"You take your religion and get out of here.
If going to church makes men like this shirkin',
I'll never step in, 'cause I'd rather be workin'."

Don't tell me you're saved, and don't tell me you pray,
I know God in heaven didn't make you this way.
He made men to work, to conquer these lands,
Not to hide in some corner and then fold their hands.
I've known men who drink, and who gamble and swear,
But even they do their work when the boss isn't there."

Now the point of this story I hope is quite clear,
The Christian should work out of faith and of fear.
The most that some people will see of your God,

Is the man in your boots who is plowing the sod!

You talk about Christ when you get with the crowd,
But most folks can't hear, 'cause you life is too loud.

* * * * *

As Solomon scans the horizon in search of life worth living, he comes upon a bright spot. Work for a man is from the hand of God. A man can find satisfaction in labor.

2 Kinds of work:

1) **WORK UNDER THE SUN**

and

2) **WORK UNDER THE SON**

1) Work done under the sun has temporal profit. God made man to work. But if this life is all there is, the profits of work are short-lived.

You can fix a car and feel satisfaction that something that was fixed now works.

You can wash 6 piles of clothes and feel good because the family is all set to go.

You can work to learn a beautiful arrangement on the piano, and enjoy the fruits of your labor as you listen to it and play it with skill.

You can enjoy a harvest after all the work of tilling, planting, and weeding.

You can enjoy a paycheck after all the hours of work you put in throughout the week. This is satisfying.

Work under the sun is satisfying, but it is like eating a delicious meal, you are hungry again 4 hours later. It doesn't give permanent satisfaction.

WORK UNDER THE SON adds a new dimension and facet to work --

-now you fix your neighbor's car because he needed help and couldn't afford a mechanic, and he opens up to you about the

struggles he is facing in his life. You get to share your testimony and the Friend you've met called "Jesus" with him.

-You learn a piece of music on the piano because it appeals to you aesthetically and spiritually. Now you want to play it and enjoy and offer it to God as praise from your heart.

Look with me at Eph. 4:28

-Why should a man work rather than steal?

So he can live an honest life and have money in the bank? NO, at least that is not the reason God wrote.

He is to work so that he can share with those in need!

Have you looked around for anyone in real need lately?

How about the boy who lives on your street who has no father, and his mother is barely scraping by as she works to take care of the family.

How about that relative who can't afford a vacation, but you could fly them out to stay with you for a week.

How about that missionary who really made a difference in your life, and \$10.00 would really encourage.

WHERE DOES GOD GO WHEN YOU GO TO WORK?

-- with you, or do you act as if He's nowhere around?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHRISTIAN MAN DOESN'T WORK?

1 Timothy 5:8 - ...he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

I went to Bible college with a man whose wife worked while he went to college. They had 2 or 3 kids. When he graduated, he started an inner-city church and went around seeking support for this church as a missionary to the inner city. His wife was still working. This is wrong and a sad example to the flock.

Why has he "denied the faith" by not providing for his own?

-because a Christian is one who is guided by the standards of

love and responsibility. I as a father and husband work to meet the needs of my family. I don't work to drive a new sportscar while my family is out on the street. I don't go to the bar with my paycheck and waste all our grocery money. If I call myself a Christian, I need to walk in the footsteps of Christ.

1 Timothy 5:9-16

What happens when women slack off and fail to do the work God has for them?

v. 13 - ...they learn also to be idle
...but also gossips and busybodies, talking
about things not proper to mention.

v. 14 - ...and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.

What is a woman to do?

vv. 9-10 - A REPUTATION FOR GOOD WORKS consists of:

"if she has brought up children"

"if she has shown hospitality to strangers."

"if she has washed the saints feet."

"if she has assisted those in distress"

"if she has devoted herself to every good work"

v. 14 - "Therefore, I want younger widows (or women) to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach."

*** THIS IS WORK THAT WILL COUNT FOR ETERNITY !!! ***

1 Thess. 4:9-12 - 3 Commands: **MAKE IT YOUR AMBITION TO:**

1. "TO LEAD A QUIET LIFE"
2. "AND ATTEND TO YOUR OWN BUSINESS"
3. "AND WORK WITH YOUR HANDS"

the reason:

"so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need."

BUMS !!!

There are all kinds of people around the church who have learned how to work the system. They don't work for their money; they leech it off the church.

When our van broke down a couple of years ago out in West Virginia, a man who lived nearby came out to help us. He wasn't employed at the time, and in his yard were the remains of several cars that he had put to death right in his own back yard. As he was sharing some of his mechanical insights with us, he mentioned that if we were tight on cash, the church down the street has a fund he was sure we could get money from.

It is not right that members in a church work and sweat to earn a paycheck to give to the Lord only to have incompetent leadership throw their money away. Money in the church didn't come easy; it ought always to be cautiously and wisely handed out.

2 Thess. 3:6-15

* Those who do not work should not eat

* those who do not work should be put out of the assembly, so that they are put to shame.

"Eat your own bread," the apostle said, as he wrote to some brotherly bums; We worked night and day, so that you wouldn't pay, for our loaves, or even our crumbs!

Titus 1:12-13 - Cretans were lazy gluttons. They needed to be rebuked.

Titus 2:9-10

ADORN THE DOCTRINE OF GOD where you are!!!

WHAT KIND OF WORKER ARE YOU?

WHINING

DINING

RECLINING

MALIGNING

OR SHINING?

BEWARE OF GOING OVERBOARD -

* Eph 6:4 - Fathers are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

"Cats in the cradle" song

- some fathers only resemble God in one way --
they are invisible!

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE CALLS FOR AN EXAMINATION OF PRIORITIES !!!

1. How are you spending your time?
2. Have you drifted from God's list of priorities?
3. What are you going to do about it?

WORK FOR GOD

1 Cor. 15:58

Gal. 6:6-10

Hebrews 6:9-20

CONCLUSION

ARE YOU SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITIES GOD IS GIVING YOU?

LOOK AT HOW YOU ARE SPENDING YOUR TIME AND ENERGY AND SEE IF THESE THINGS WILL LAST FOR ETERNITY.

ARE YOUR PRIORITIES RIGHT?

DO THINGS HAVE A STRANGLEHOLD ON YOU?

TOO MUCH WORK?

TOO LITTLE WORK.

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 3:1-22

TITLE: MORTALITY AND THE FINITENESS OF LIFE – JOHN COBB

INTRODUCTION:

Just how much of everyday life does God have under His control?

What happened this past week that was outside of God's control?

When bad things happen people feel there is a problem with the way God is running this world. They generally come to one of two conclusions:

- 1) God doesn't care, or
- 2) God wanted to stop this from happening, but He couldn't--He was too weak; this wasn't within His power.

I. Appointed Times (:1-8)

A. God is running this world on His timetable.

B. Some Specifics:

A TIME TO TEAR DOWN

* When the works of our lives are worthless, we need to tear down the junk so that the new can be built. Sometimes we need to point out to others the need for them to tear down the rubbish in their lives.

A TIME TO BUILD UP

* Do you realize that in the body of Christ this is the ministry God wants each of us to have to each other? (Eph. 4:14-16) What are you doing to help build this body to be what God wants it to be?

You can't meet needs in the lives of others if you don't know them. What are you doing to know your brothers and sisters better?

Are you one who tries to build others up, or are you the steam-roller in the body of Christ who is excellent at flattening out the other members of the body?

C. God's personal control and care over the world

1. Ps. 139:13-16
2. Matt. 10:26-33
3. James 1:2-4, 12
4. Col. 1:16-17
5. Romans 8:28-29

II. Anointed Times (vv. 9-15)

A. God makes everything beautiful in His time.

1. Relationships: Marriage, Family
2. Problems at Work
3. Neighborhood

* The problems of life take on purpose and meaning when the hand of God brings them and anoints them to be fruitful, beneficial, and beautiful in the end.

* Sometimes we must wait for God to bring the beauty. Waiting on God is hard. But the time of waiting teaches us to rely on the Lord. It teaches us to know Him and to seek Him. It teaches us our limitations and weaknesses so that we can know God's strength.

B. Man should rejoice and do good.

1. Is your life one of Joy? If not, why?
2. John 15:11 - Does this describe you?
3. Gal. 6:9-10

4. Heb. 13:16

C. "THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND"

III. Finger Pointed Times (vv. 16-22)

A. Life is short. One day we will all return to the dust.

WHERE IS YOUR LIFE HEADING? RUTS?

ARE YOU WASTING YOUR TIME?

B. Judgment Day is coming: Are YOU READY?

1. Matthew 7:13-23

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TEXT: Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

TITLE: *WRESTLING WITH ETERNITY--THE FUTILITY OF TRYING TO COMPREHEND THE DIVINE MASTER PLAN*

BIG IDEA:

THE INSCRUTABLE NATURE OF ETERNITY WILL FRUSTRATE MAN'S EFFORTS TO FIGURE THINGS OUT – JUST SUBMIT AND TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

I. (:1-8) DIVINE CONTROL -- DIVINE APPOINTMENT DETERMINES THE SEASONS OF LIFE AND THE EVENTS THAT TAKE PLACE

A. (:1) God's Appointed Times

*"There is an appointed time for everything.
And there is a time for every event under heaven--"*

B. (:2-8) Seven Contrasting Seasons – Viewed as Extremes
Seven is number of completeness in Scripture; 14 comparisons

1. (:2) Life vs Death

*"A time to give birth, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted."*

2. (:3) Hurting vs Healing (Edifying)

*"A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to tear down, and a time to build up."*

3. (:4) Grief vs Joy

*"A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance."*

4. (:5) Hugging vs Throwing Stones

*"A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing."*

5. (:6) Persistence vs Resignation

*"A time to search, and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep, and a time to throw away."*

6. (:7) Confrontation vs Forbearance (Union)

*"A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent, and a time to speak."*

7. (:8) Love (Peace) vs Hate (War)

"A time love, and a time to hate;

A time for war, and a time for peace.”

Application: Use our time wisely in submission to God’s overall plan and His wisdom, even when we cannot understand everything about our particular season of life. God is in control.

II. (:9-15) DIVINE TIMEFRAME – DIVINE PERSPECTIVE ALLOWS FOR CONTENTMENT IN THE PRESENT IN LIGHT OF GOD’S PURPOSES FOR ETERNITY

A. (:9-11) Connection to Eternity Can Be Frustrating Right Now

1. (:9) Work Seems Futile

“What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?”

2. (:10) Yet God Desires Responsible Living

“I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.”

3. (:11a) Life Must be Lived According to God’s Schedule

“He has made everything appropriate in its time.”

4. (:11b) Man Cannot See the End from the Beginning

“He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.”

You won’t find dogs leading a frustrated existence; they have no connection to eternity. It does not bother them that they cannot understand the eternal purposes and plan of God.

B. (:12-13) Contentment Now Comes from Staying Positive and Seeing All Good Things as a Gift from God

1. Cultivate an Attitude of Rejoicing – Stay Positive

“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice”

2. Cultivate Actions that Benefit Others – Do Good

“and to do good in one’s lifetime”

3. Cultivate Appreciation for God Supplying Your Needs – Partake Thankfully

“moreover, that every man who eats and drinks”

4. Cultivate Awareness of All of God’s Good Gifts – Work Purposefully

“sees good in all his labor – it is the gift of God.”

C. (:14-15) Control Must Be Yielded to the Eternal Unchanging Sovereign God

1. (:14a) God’s Works Last Forever

“I know that everything God does will remain forever;”

2. (:14b) God Does Not Need Our Help
“there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it”
3. (:14c) God Wants Men to Fear Him
“for God has so worked that men should fear Him.”
4. (:15) God Operates Outside of the Constraints of Time
“That which is has been already, and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.”

Application: **Doug Smith:** The works of God are eternal. Even though life, from our limited perspective, may seem like a repetitive cycle, God has a purpose in it all and He ensures that everything unfolds in accordance with His plan and His will.

We need to fear God and live lives of contentment, appreciating all of God’s good gifts and allowing God to work out His eternal purposes.

III. (:16-22) DIVINE JUSTICE – DIVINE ACCOUNTABILITY MITIGATES THE FRUSTRATION FROM TEMPORAL INJUSTICE AND APPARENT PURPOSELESSNESS

- A. (:16) Frustration from Temporal Injustice --
“Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.”
- B. (:17-21) Frustration from Apparent Purposelessness – How is Man Different from Beast?
 1. (:17) Expectation of Accountability
“I said to myself, ‘God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,’ for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.”
 2. (:18-21) Examination of Ultimate Destiny
“I said to myself concerning the sons of men, ‘God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts.’ For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?”
- C. (:22) Existential Philosophy is the Best One Can Hope for Under the Sun
“And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?”

Application: We have no need to be anxious or cynical because God holds the future in His hands and will establish righteousness.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what ways do we try to resist God's timeframe and find ourselves frustrated? What seasons of life has God brought you through recently?
- 2) Are we realistic in the counsel that we offer to others or do we expect them to arrive at a state of unrealistic understanding of the divine purposes behind their trials?
- 3) How is man different from the beasts in terms of his sense of eternity? What practical difference does this make in man's thinking and in man's behavior?
- 4) Is Solomon just advocating a "Whatever will be, will be" philosophy? Is this godly counsel or just the conclusion of an observer looking at life "under the sun"?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Time and Toil

Solomon discovered four factors that must be considered before you can say that life is monotonous and meaningless:

1. Look up: God orders time (:1-8)

God is in control of time and balances life's expectations; If we cooperate with God's timing, life will not be meaningless

2) Look within: eternity is in your heart (:9-14)

This links man to God

- man's life is a gift from God (:10)
- man's life is linked to eternity (:11)
- man's life can be enjoyable now (:12-14)

When the well-known British Methodist preacher William Sangster learned that he had progressive muscular atrophy and could not get well, he made four resolutions and kept them to the end:

- (1) I will never complain
- (2) I will keep the home bright
- (3) I will count my blessings
- (4) I will try to turn it to gain

3) Look ahead: death is coming to all (:15-22)

4) Look around: life is full of problems and burdens (4:1 – 5:9)

Faith learns to live with seeming inconsistencies and absurdities, for we live by promises and not by explanations. We can't explain life, but we must experience life, either enduring it or enjoying it.

Kidner: The Tyranny of Time

Perhaps “*tyranny*” is too strong a word for the gentle ebb and flow described here, which carries us all our days from one kind of activity to its opposite, and back again. . . Yet in the context of a quest for finality, not only is a movement to and fro no better than the endless “*circling*” of chapter one, but it has disturbing implications of its own. One of them is that we dance to a tune, or many tunes, not of our own making; a second is that nothing we pursue has any permanence. . .

Qoheleth in verse 11 enables us to see perpetual change not as something unsettling but as an unfolding pattern, scintillating and God-given. The trouble for us is not that life refuses to keep still, but that we see only a fraction of its movement and of its subtle, intricate design. Instead of changelessness, there is something better: a dynamic, divine purpose, with its *beginning* and *end*. Instead of frozen perfection there is the kaleidoscopic movement of innumerable processes, each with its own character and its period of blossoming and ripening, *beautiful in its time* and contributing to the over-all masterpiece which is the work of one Creator. We catch these brilliant moments, but even apart from the darkness interspersed with them they leave us unsatisfied for lack of any total meaning that we can grasp. Unlike the animals, immersed in time, we long to see them in their full context, for we know something of eternity: enough at least to compare the fleeting with the “*for ever*”. We are like the desperately near-sighted, inching their way along some great tapestry or fresco in the attempt to take it in. We see enough to recognize something of its quality, but the grand design escapes us, for we can never stand back far enough to view it as its Creator does, whole and entire, *from the beginning to the end*.

Laurin: God has ordered all life's occurrences according to his will. He has also given men minds that look beyond daily occurrences to the total sweep of life. Yet the human mind has been limited, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh; he can never solve all the seeming paradoxes of life. God has given man reasoning power, but he has not given him enough to unravel all mysteries.

Donald Glenn: Human labor is without profit because people are ignorant of God's eternal plan, the basis by which He evaluates the appropriateness and eternal significance of all their activities. Because of this ignorance there is an uncertainty and latent temporality to the value of all one's labor.

TEXT: ECCLESIASTES 9:7-18

TITLE: *A WISE PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE:
REJOICE & GIVE THANKS / LIVE TODAY WITH ALL YOUR HEART
-- JOHN COBB*

INTRODUCTION:

One fate for everyone; No guarantee of tomorrow; This is how we should live

Story of a pre-game talk in the locker room preparing the team for its once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience this event.

1 Opportunity to live with all your might; no regrets when you look back; the same opportunity will never present itself again; Live in the Present; wherever you are, be all there all the time

I. CLOTHES THAT ARE WHITE (v.7-9)

REJOICE IN LIFE / GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING (v.9)

v.7 -- Attitude is everything -- Happiness; cheerful heart; enjoy life; You can't control circumstances, but you can control your life

Significance of clothes that are white = Attitude of Festivity (vs. black clothes for mourning)

Husbands, how is your relationship with your wife?
Are you ecstatic that this is your wife?

Are you keeping the relationship warm and intimate, or has your previous love grown cold?

When was the last time you thanked God for the wife He has given you, even with her faults?

What are you doing to rekindle the fires of marriage?

Are you bitter toward your wife? What are you going to do to change?

Illustration:

"Story of Johnny Rio who lived in Hawaii many years ago. He decided upon a wife, and went to her dad to do the bargaining. The dad knew she was the runt of the brew, so he only asked 1 cow for the one Johnny had chosen. (Now the normal price was 4

cows.) So Johnny Rio went home to get the goods to buy his bride. But when he came back to pay, he didn't just have one cow, or even two cows, or even 4 cows as everyone knew was the norm; he came down the road leading 10 cows.

This strange event became the talk of the town. They all thought Johnny Rio a fool. They thought he had lost his mind to do such a dumb thing. But Johnny Rio just walked right on over to his new little wife and told her he loved her.

Soon they were off on their honeymoon, but the laughter of the town didn't stop. For some time, the mere mention of 10 cows would bring laughter.

Then one day it happened. Johnny Rio came back into town with a knockout of a woman on his arm. She was dignified and carried herself like a princess.

"Who is that?" the townspeople wondered. And Johnny responded with a smile, "This is my 10 cow wife. When you treat a woman like she's worth 10 cows, there's no telling what might happen."

Moral: Don't take your wife for granted; give her time and attention

Illustration of Pat Williams.

Pat Williams was the general manager of the 76ers at the peak of their glory years. He was a committed Christian who was faithful to his wife, led a Bible study, and was very successful as a team manager. One day his wife Jill came to him and told him she no longer loved him. She wouldn't leave him, but her love for him had died. He had time for all his other pursuits in life, but he had let the fires of their love grow cold by neglect over the years.

Pat felt like he had been stabbed in the heart. For the first time he took a hard look at what he had done to their marriage by his neglect. In brokenness before God, he repented and purposed in his heart to do whatever it would take to rekindle the fires of love.

He began to do the little things to show Jill he really did love her. A note left on the table saying "I love you." Flowers just to say "You're special to me." Planned dates carved out of the schedule. But none of this made any

difference. Jill didn't believe it was real, and just went on with her deadness of soul day after day.

But Pat was committed and didn't give up. After really loving Jill in a way he never experienced before, his efforts finally bore fruit. Jill grew to believe Pat really meant it now. And with more time they grew to have the deepest love they ever knew for each other. And now they wouldn't trade it for the world.

Moral: Rekindle any love that has grown cold
You need to do the little things that are important; You can't sacrifice your family today in hope of tomorrow patching things up

II. LIVE WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT (v.10-12)

Find what is worth doing in this short lifetime, then do it with all your heart.

We half-live too much of our lives. If you are going to be somewhere, be all there. If you are going to do something, do it wholeheartedly. If your hand finds something to do, do it with all your might. Give it all you've got.

Grab ahold of life and squeeze all you can out of every experience!

Live life intentionally.

Accept every day as a mission from the Lord to do His will in it.

Have you found the joy that little things in life all around can bring?

A majestic sunrise

A baby's soft skin

A small answer to prayer from God that reminds you He loves you.

an encouraging word at a discouraged time

a quiet, starlit night

just the right verse from God when you need it

the moment your kid finds there is only one more M & M in the pack and offers it to you.

a simple song of praise to God from the heart

sharing a few dollars with one who really needs them

the smile & "Thanks a million" of the widow you helped

warm blankets on a cold night

the hush of fresh snow at night

the pleasure of a job well done

air conditioning after working in the heat all day

a homecooked meal after a fast food diet

a mountain-top view after a mountain side climb

freeze pops after you've have wisdom teeth pulled

turning out the lights and watching a thunder storm

1 Thess. 5:16-18 -- Practice these 3 simple things consistently

Story of telling some friends Karan & I would be going out to dinner soon, and asking them if they had any favorite places. I mentioned how nice it would be to find a place that served hushpuppies. We did go out the next night, and as we were on our way to a place an hour away, we decided to try out a different place a little closer. As we went in to eat, one of the first things I noticed on the buffet table was hushpuppies. What a small but significant way the Lord spoke to my heart assuring me that He can and does give me the best if I will trust Him.

We miss so much in life because we don't give God thanks in everything.

vv. 11-12

Savor life.

There is no guarantee that you will get what you are after. A man's life is in the hand of God. No man knows what will unfold tomorrow.

SO LIVE LIFE TODAY WITH ALL YOUR HEART !

III. (ASIDE: v. 13-18 -- "The Unsung Hero") A WISE MAN'S PLIGHT

As we consider the passage at the end of chapter 9, I want to raise a question.

What do you think should have been done for the man who saved the city from destruction?

Perhaps another question may help:

-When the town leaders decided it was time to restructure their defences, who do you think should have been first on the list to advise them?

-When the town was in need of wisdom in leadership, who should have been first on their list?

But sadly to say, what happened to the poor wise man who delivered the city from destruction?

HE WAS FORGOTTEN

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