

give all the oppressed of their
to those who are perishing,
those who are in anguish;
drink and forget their poverty.
remember their misery no more.
for those who cannot speak
for themselves,
rights of all who are
constitute.
and judge fairly;
the rights of the poor and
helpless.

ue: The Wife of Noble Character

of noble character who can
worth far more than rubies.
band has full confidence in her
acks nothing of value.
ugs him good, not harm,
days of her life.
ets wool and flax
works with eager hands.
ike the merchant ships,
ing her food from afar.
s up while it is still dark;
rovides food for her family.
portions for her servant girls.
nsiders a field and buys it;
f her earnings she plants a

sne can laugh at the days to come.
26She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her
tongue.
27She watches over the affairs of her
household
and does not eat the bread of
idleness.

30But you surpass them all."
30Charm is deceptive, and beauty is
fleeting;
but a woman who fears the LORD is
to be praised.
31Give her the reward she has earned,
and let her works bring her praise at
the city gate.

Ecclesiastes

Everything Is Meaningless

1 The words of the Teacher,^a son of David, king in Jerusalem:
2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."
3 What does man gain from all his labor
at which he toils under the sun?
4 Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.
5 The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.
6 The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.

Wisdom Is Meaningless

12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in
Jerusalem. 13 I devoted myself to study and
to explore by wisdom all that is done under
heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid
on men! 14 I have seen all the things that are
done under the sun; all of them are mean-
ingless, a chasing after the wind.
15 What is twisted cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted.
16 I thought to myself, "Look, I have
grown and increased more than anyone
else in Jerusalem before me; I have ex-
amined and found much of wisdom and
knowledge. 17 I applied myself to the under-
standing of wisdom, and also of madness and folly.
I have learned that
this too is a chasing after the wind."

A Bible Study
By
Terry L. Peer

Fall-2016

Ecclesiastes Lecture Notes Index

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Lesson 1

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Research for this lesson is from *Worldviews in Conflict* by Ronald H. Nash, *The Universe Next Door* by James Sire, *Naming the Elephant* by James Sire, “*What In The World is a Worldview?*” by Kenneth Samples)

A basic premise of this course on Ecclesiastes is that this Old Testament (hereafter OT) book is among other things a divinely inspired Bible book which shows explicitly and implicitly a comparison between two of the major worldviews of the world—[1] The worldview from Christianity and [2] The worldview from secularism, naturalism and/or humanism. So to appreciate more of this theme unfolded in this inspired Bible book, it would serve the student well to consider these two questions: What is a worldview? And why does worldview matter? Having some clarity in answer to these two questions will equip the Bible reader to appreciate the message of this very relevant book and apply its overall message to our times.

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

A worldview is a perspective from which a person views the world and uses this perspective to answer basic, fundamental questions about it. Worldview is related to one's most elementary, fundamental, core and basic belief system. A good comprehensive definition of worldview is offered by James Sire as follows: “*A worldview is a set of presuppositions or assumption which may be true, (partially true, totally true or totally false) which man holds consciously or sub-consciously, consistently or inconsistently about the basic make-up of the world.*” (*Universe Next Door*)

Everyone has a worldview. Whether one is consciously aware of what it is or how it is formed... every rationally cognizant human being has a core set of underlying assumptions which form the basis of all that one believes and does.

A great deal hinges on one's worldview. Out of worldview, a person arrives at his most basic beliefs. (For example many decisions related to the issues of human life like defending abortion or advocating the extinguishing of the life of an elderly person whose quality of life has significantly diminished.) At the core and behind the curtain of one's conclusions about such matters, lies a basic worldview regarding human life... and more. From one's belief systems, a set of values emerge—that is a spoken or unspoken list of what really matters or counts from the least to the greatest. And from one's value system of what is really important and what is not so important, comes everyday thoughts, behaviors, actions and responses. It is suggested that few actions of a rational man or woman are totally random and isolated from a basic value system affected by worldview. (The person who chooses to commit the crime of a drive-by shooting just “for the fun of it” is still operating out of a value system based on a worldview about man and life.) (SEE CHART – **EXAMINING THE CORE OF LIFE** attached)

Is the word, “worldview” in the Bible? NO, but the whole concept certainly is there. The New Testament (afterwards NT) Scriptures talk about the “inner man” and the “outer man” and Jesus spoke about what defiles a man is not what he ingests in the way of food

and such, but what comes out of the man from his heart and thinking. (See Mt. 15:16-20.) The Apostle Paul refers to the connections of inner and outer when he said, “**I believe, and so I spoke,” we also believe and so we also speak**” indicating that his words and our words are the result of inwardly held convictions and fundamental beliefs. (See 2nd Cor.4:13) And the NT also speaks about “hollow, deceptive philosophy...” Colossians 2:8 reads:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” (NIV)

This passage underscores the real difference and a contrast between the perspective and basic tenets of a believer with that of the secular world. We will see this comparison played out side by side repeatedly in our study of Ecclesiastes.

One has said that the shaping of one’s worldview can be traced back to what a person puts in the blank as the 4th word in the first sentence of the Bible—“**In the beginning, _____...**” We know what the Bible says, but many other options are held by those of the world such as “In the beginning was a big-bang...” or “In the beginning was eternal matter...” or “In the beginning was a simple protein organism...” and on and on. The world has so many possible suggestions. The Bible offers only ONE truth—“In the beginning, GOD...” Or think about the statement, “Jesus is _____. ” Some will say “Jesus is a great prophet like...” or “Jesus was an itinerant rabbi...” or that “Jesus is an imposter...” or “Jesus is delusional...” OR “Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.” The Bible takes only ONE position and that is eternal truth!

Ronald Nash says that “*worldview is a set of beliefs about the most important issues of life.*” (Worlds in Conflict, p.16.)

An important consideration in this introduction to worldview is that the core ideas, thoughts, values, and assumptions that a person holds stem from a common pattern or “conceptual scheme.” Few thoughts and actions are purely random and stand in complete isolation from everything else. One’s beliefs, values, and actions have a common thread running through them and that thread is worldview. Nash notes that one may consciously or sub-consciously formulate everything into that overriding scheme, but it is all tied together, nevertheless.

So what are the components of a worldview system?

Those who study the matter related to worldview suggest a variation in the number of necessary elements which comprise a worldview, but they are usually in the 4-7 range of critical areas. What are they and what are some core questions related to each one? (The following list is a summary of the 5 Essential Worldview Considerations from Nash:

1- GOD (theology)

- a. Does He exist? Is God a “person” or “impersonal force”?
- b. Is there only one true God or a number of deities for man to choose from or submit to?

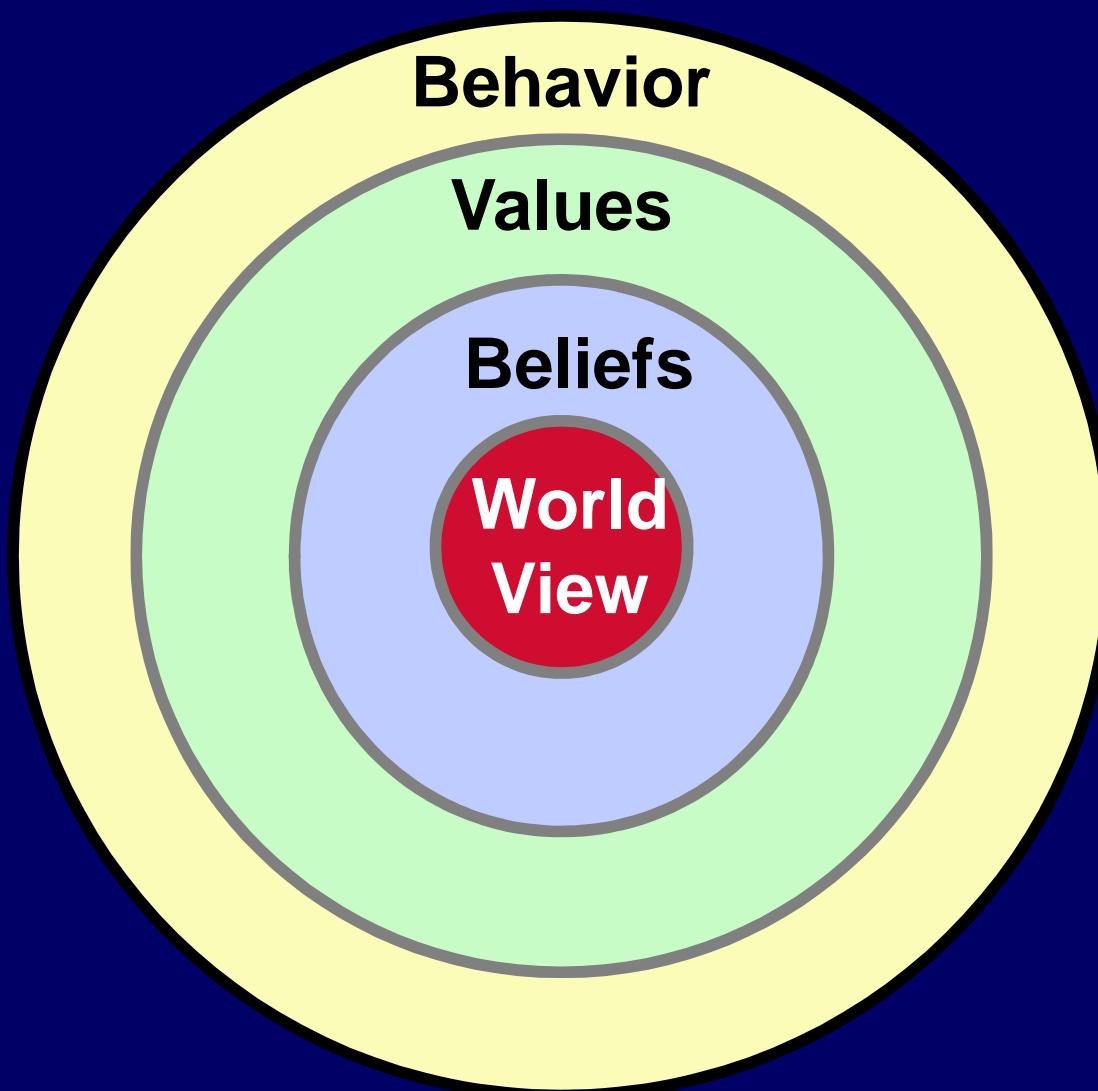
EXAMINING the Core of Life

***All decisions
and actions
from the
Inside Out***

**Behavior based
on values!**

**Values based on
beliefs**

**Beliefs based on
world view!**



- c. Is there such a thing (technically speaking) as an atheist?
 - i. "Everyone has an object of ultimate concern." (Calvin observed that "every human being is incurably religious.")
 - ii. Whatever that object of "ultimate concern" is for a person, whether it be ego, sex, power, money, a guru, science, the mind, becomes the "idol of the heart", to which all else owes allegiance.
- d. These and many other issues are related to just the basic core element of "God". Every person has "God" or a god in their life.

2- ULTIMATE REALITY (metaphysics)

- a. This pertains to what a person determines to be really real.
- b. Is the universe eternal or just a passing entity of the cosmos?
- c. Is the universe to be understood in a "mechanistic" way? That is that it functions ONLY on the natural laws that are present and govern it?
- d. Is the universe a closed system, only the product of all that happens within it or is there some outside force, power, Person that can affect what happens within it?
 - i. Is it only that which happens "naturally" the result of a combination of what happens "naturally" and supernaturally?
- e. How does God and the universe inter-relate or do they?

3- KNOWLEDGE (epistemology)

- a. Can man consciously and rationally know anything at all and if so, HOW can he know?
- b. Does man gain knowledge only through the senses and perception of the impulses sent to the brain through sight, sound, touch, etc.?
- c. Does man know primarily and best through the scientific process?
- d. Is truth relative to time, circumstance, and culture?
- e. Can there be a connection between faith and reason?
- f. How can we know what we know about God/god?

4- ETHICS (the moral ought)

- a. Is there a "moral ought" that man should live by?
- b. What or Who determines what is right and wrong?
- c. Are moral laws to be subjective (like taste)?
- d. Is it right to tell another person that they are wrong?

5- MANKIND (anthropology)

- a. What is the nature of man? Is he body/flesh only? Is he soul only (with only the illusion of flesh)? Is his nature that of a combination of flesh/body and spirit?
- b. What is the human soul or mind?
- c. What is the human conscience?
- d. What happens at death? Is that the end of existence altogether or the end of just a part of man?
 - i. Is there existence beyond the grave? (This of course touches on theology as well)

Nash points out that two other possible questions are related to worldview:

- A set of ideals about how things SHOULD be—a distinction between how they are and how they should be
- An explanation for the disparity between the reality of how they are and how they should be.
 - An example here would be the ideas related to the explanation of poverty in the world. Is it because of a prevailing political or economic system such as communism, or capitalism or state socialism or feudalism? Or is it due to a moral problem such as personal irresponsibility or theft by deception or violence? Or is poverty attributed to a warped value system related to spending life resources on things which don't really count and failing to use resources for food, shelter and other essential needs? Or is it due to some pervasively held religious view that a man who will not eat the meat of an animal because it may be the reincarnated body of some former ancestor? So people are starving with “steaks standing on hoof” before them.

James Sire lists SEVEN particular worldview questions which form a “system” of thought and life. (These will be examined in detail in the next lesson, but are listed here.)

- 1- What is really real? (Prime reality?)
- 2- What is the nature of external reality—the world around us?
- 3- What is a human being?
- 4- Why and how is it possible to know anything at all?
- 5- What happens to a person at death?
- 6- How do we know right from wrong?
- 7- What is the meaning of human history?

One quickly notices the overlap of these qualifying questions with the categories listed suggested by Nash. This is true for most all worldview catalogs.

There are some other insights worth mentioning in consideration of worldview:

- 1- There can be and often are variations within a general worldview system. Not every detail of a particular worldview will be shared by all proponents of that particular set of assumptions.
- 2- Some essential elements are necessary though to embrace an over-arching worldview.
 - a. For example, the true Christian worldview requires that one accept and embrace the three persons of the Godhead... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Deviations from this, no matter the profession does NOT represent a true Christian worldview.)
- 3- People can change their worldview. Conversion is possible because of the rational abilities of comprehension and comparison and existence of personal free-will.
- 4- Competing worldviews can and do form the basis of disagreement and/or conflict.

SO DOES WORLDVIEW MATTER?

Should Christian people or anyone for that matter be concerned about the subject of worldview at all? Should it be considered by the “man in the pew” or is this all just a philosophical discussion for the “academics”?

It matters and matters a great deal. I would propose the following reasons that an examination of worldview is a valuable, if not a necessary ingredient to formulating an solid overall picture of the world and life and most of all, God:

- 1- The Bible is inspired, authored, and has been preserved to give man the real answers to essential life questions which not only satisfy curiosities, but provide the ultimate explanations of existence.
- 2- Outcomes are determined by starting points. Just as a train pulls out of the station, the destination is determined by whether or not the “tracks” lead to Chicago or Dallas. Where one begins in basic assumptions will largely determine the conclusions he arrives at.
- 3- Purposeful living can be better achieved when one understands the “continuity” of ideas and ideals which lie beneath day to day decisions.
- 4- A person can be better prepared to face what is ahead when he has a good grasp of the dynamics presently at work in the world’s systems at work around him.
- 5- Man makes choices daily, if not hourly and those choices are seldom, if ever just random reflexes or reactions of the moment. Even the quickest and most spontaneous choices are inwardly linked to one’s innermost convictions.
Knowing what shapes our innermost thoughts and convictions prepares us for God-honoring decision-making.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a book which contrasts the views of the world from “life under the sun” with life “under the Son”. The Biblical worldview is set as the premiere perspective of life against the backdrop of a secular, naturalistic perspective. And our author, presumably Solomon, had the wealth, position, and experience as well as an unparalleled measure of divine wisdom to juxtapose those two views in a brilliantly crafted, Holy Spirit inspired book of spiritual wisdom. Is life **meaningLESS**, or **meaningFULL**? That will depend entirely on the worldview path one chooses to take.

<http://www.abarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Ecclesiastes-Song-of-Solomon.pdf>

Lesson 2

INTRODUCTION TO MAJOR WORLDVIEWS AND THE BACKGROUND OF WORLDVIEWS OF ECCLESIASTES

Research for this lesson is from *The Universe Next Door* by James Sire, *1 Kings 1-11, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes—The Rise and Fall of Solomon* by John MacArthur.

First a definition of terms:

- **Deism**—belief in a supreme creator God who does not intervene in the universe; rather leaves it to operate on its own under natural laws
- **Existentialism**—an overarching emphasis on the individual existence; humans define their own meaning in life through their experiences. Existence trumps essence; there is no inherent purpose in life, only what the individual makes of it.
- **Historical Biblical Theism**—a belief in the existence of one supremely powerful and personal God, existing in three conscious personalities, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Godhead.
- **Naturalism**—the belief that everything arises and operates from natural causes and has only natural properties (observable with the senses). All spiritual and supernatural explanations and claims are rejected.
- **Pantheism**—the belief that all is god, everything possesses divine nature, God is not a personality; everything in the universe is deity—personal or impersonal
- **Polytheism**—the belief in the existence of many, multiple gods
- **Postmodernism**—a contemporary movement of thought which rejects the possibility of objective based knowledge, the absence of absolute truth; accompanied by a prevailing attitude of skepticism for the objectively based truth claims. All is self-referential. Something is true only if it feels right/true for me at this time.
- **Secularism**—the rejection of religion and faith as a necessary dynamic of life. Religion must be excluded from all civil affairs; holding nothing sacred
- **Theism**— belief in the existence of god/gods, especially a belief in one God as creator of the universe.

INTRODUCING THE MAJOR WORLDVIEWS (From a chart based on the James Sire book, *Universe Next Door*) (Attached)

This chart would have to be expanded to accommodate all the views postulated by the various world religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, etc., many of which have components in Eastern Pantheistic Monism, may include bits and pieces from various segments of the worldview chart which can be common to many.

When one examines this worldview chart, a person can begin to see more clearly WHY people live the way they do and make the choices they make. As time moved from the 18th century to the present, a noticeable shift is made from a worldview based on objective, revealed truth to a subjective, fluid, and constantly changing belief system.

WORLDVIEW - A set of presuppositions (Assumptions which may be TRUE, partially true or totally False) which we hold (consciously, sub-consciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of the world.	HISTORIC BIBLICAL THEISM Beginning- A.D.1700	DEISM 1650-1750	NATURALISM 1700's	NIHILISM Early 1800's (A denial of any meaningful philosophy. We exist... period!)	EXISTENTIALISM 1800-Present	EASTERN PANTHEISTIC MONISM	NEW AGE 1960-Present	POSTMODERNISM 1970-Present (Nietzsche, Richard Rorty, Michael Foucault)
1- WHAT IS ULTIMATE REALITY... WHAT IS REALLY REAL?	God is infinite and personal (trine), transcendent and immanent, omniscient, Sovereign and good.	God created the universe but then left it to run on its own. God is not immanent, fully personal, not Sovereign or Providential. He is not a lover, not a judge.	The physical universe. Matter exists eternally. It is all there is. God does not exist. Jesus is the product of the same evolutionary process as rest of us.	Man exists in impersonal universe. Holds to the negation of everything—knowledge, ethics, reality. Nothing outside the box to reveal anything.	Matter exists eternally. God does NOT exist. Man and his freedom of choice is highest reality.	Atman-essence of the soul and Brahman is essence of soul of the cosmos. Some things are more real than others. Reality is a hierarchy of appearance. All roads lead to the ONE.	Self is kingpin-- Whatever the nature of being. Human race is on verge of radical change. The soul, integrated central essence of each person is prime.	Cosmos is all there is. Autonomy of human reason. Truth is whatever we can get our community to agree on. Shift from being to knowing to meaning.
2- WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE EXTERNAL REALITY... THE WORLD AROUND US?	God created the cosmos ex nihilo to operate with a uniformity of cause and effect in an OPEN system. (Not pre-programmed)	The cosmos God created is determined because it was created as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system—no miracle possible.	The cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system of operation. There is no “outside” influence.	2 Requirements- No meaning to universe. Necessity and chance. Man must manufacture meaning for himself.	Composed solely of matter. Cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.	Pan. Monism—All is soul, higher stages of practical reality. ----- Zen Buddhism- Final reality is void, not soul.	Imagination is same as reality. Cosmos is self-manifested in two dimensions—visible and invisible (altered state of consciousness)	No universal standard of truth or reality. Truth about reality is forever hidden from us. All we can do is tell stories. Can have meaning, but cannot have truth, except pragmatic truth.
3- WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING?	Human beings are created in the image of God and thus possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, social capacity, creativity	Human beings, though personal are part of the “clockwork” of the universe.	Human beings are complex “machines”. Personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties, all of which we do not fully understand as yet.	Human beings are conscious machines without ability to affect own destiny or do anything significant. Humans as valuable beings are dead.	Human reality appears in two forms—subjective & objective. This PH. Opt for the subjective world, ultra individualism. No fixed nature or essence. Each person totally free.	Each person is god. God is all there is, nothing exists that is not god. One loses self in the whole like a drop of water in a bucket.	Core experience is cosmic consciousness. Experience is personal. The mind-at-large (IS-NESS) Luminosity—all things essentially same make up.	Human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves.
4- WHAT HAPPENS TO A PERSON AT DEATH?	Death is the gate to life with God or to eternal separation from God. Man consciously exists for eternity, whether in heaven or hell.	God endowed man with an immortal soul. Retribution is meted out according to human works.	The body simply stops functioning. The chemical elements resort to their natural, pre-evolutionary compounds with decay.	Existence ends in outer nothingness.	Man exists... man ceases to exist. Goes into further nothingness.	To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond personality. Reincarnation—nothing really ever passes out of existence. Death is just end of individual, no change of nature.	Physical death is not end of the self. Under experience of cosmic consciousness, fear of death is removed. Reincarnation.	Know only the stories we tell about dying. Only the product of blind forces of nature and society. Coins which have lost picture, now matter only as metal, no longer coins.
5- WHY IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW ANYTHING AT ALL?	Human beings can know both the world around them and God Himself because: [1] He has built a capacity to do so [2] He takes active role in communicating with man	The cosmos / world is understood to be in its normal state, it is not fallen or abnormal. One can know the universe and can determine what God is like by studying the cosmos.	Knowledge is gained by the study of the cosmos and the processes at work in it. There is no “revealed” knowledge from an outside source.	Person has no way of knowing whether what one seems to know is an illusion or truth.	Personal experience and inner convictions or feelings are essential in arriving at truth.	Can only realize reality by becoming it. Many viable paths to get from illusion to reality. Chanting induces OM. Realize oneness with cosmos passes beyond knowledge.	Altered state of consciousness accessed thru: 1-Occult version 2-Psychedelic version 3-Conceptual version. Disjunction between objective and perceived	All stories equally valid. Dim view of any universal truth. Nothing we think we know can be checked against reality as such. Can only determined usefulness, not truthfulness.
6- HOW CAN WE KNOW RIGHT AND WRONG?	Ethics are transcendent and based on the character of God as good and loving and reveals to man objective standards of moral right.	Ethics are limited to general revelation, because the universe is normal, IT reveals what is right. Whatever IS, is right!	Ethics are related only to human beings. Moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics are totally autonomous and situational.	No external moral plumbline. Actions are self determined. Obey laws of logic, which are self-evident. No sense of oughtness.	No objective rational base for moral decisions. Moral individualism. Must choose one's own way without aid of objective universal standards.	When one realizes oneness with the cosmos, passes beyond good and evil. Cosmos is perfect at every moment. Do good to attain unity with ONE.	Both time and morality tend to disappear. Distinctions between good and evil disappear. If self is king, why worry about ethics.	Ethics is a linguistic construct. Social good is whatever society takes it to be. Greatest good is maximum pleasure. Radical ethical relativism. Decriminalization = freedom.
7- WHAT IS THE MEANING OF HUMAN HISTORY?	History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to God's purposes for humanity.	History is linear for the course of the cosmos was determined at creation. History as such is really not important.	History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without any overriding purpose.	There is no meaning. This is agonized atheism. Denies meaning, value, dignity and worth.	History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect, without overriding purpose.	Time is unreal. History is cyclical.	Closed universe. No outside influence—just recycled souls/ materials to higher, more sophisticated self-awareness.	Cutting edge is literary theory. History becomes a hall of mirrors. Just reflections of man's reflections.

Research for this chart taken from [Universe Next Door](#), James Sire. Downer's Grove, Intervarsity Press. 2004.

(The exception to this observation is Eastern Pantheistic Monism which flows out of many ancient far-eastern world religions) The shift is from a God-centered life focus to a man/experience life focus. But this latter approach to understanding and explaining life is not new to these last couple of centuries. They have been around in one form or another with less or more clear definition since early on after the fall of man. In fact a person may be amazed with the number of parallels between New Age self-experience centeredness to the temptation experience of man in the garden of Eden at the fall, for example.

So with this overview in mind, where does this book of Ecclesiastes fall into the grand worldview scheme? A brief consideration of the life-journey of Solomon may provide a good starting point. Consider this summary from the MacArthur text:

“... God had given Solomon such great wisdom that he was deemed to be the wisest man of all time. The Lord had also blessed Solomon with great wealth and success over Israel’s enemies. Solomon has put that wisdom to good use throughout his reign and had even recorded many of his teachings for future generations in the book of Proverbs.

But as Solomon grew older, he clearly became more cynical and despondent. His fabulous wealth, power, and prestige permitted him to participate in whatever indulgence he desired—and he had sampled all the world had to offer. Yet when he looked back, he saw that all the world’s offerings had only led to emptiness, and life itself seemed nothing but vanity. Solomon had not chosen to love the Lord with his whole heart but had filled his life with compromises. What he valued in life was corrupted by his quest for meaning apart from God.

The book of Ecclesiastes encompasses Solomon’s conclusions on meaning of life. It is a profound book... Thus Ecclesiastes actually offers both a warning and an encouragement.” (The Rise and Fall of Solomon, p.111-112)

Two prominent worldviews are juxtaposed through Ecclesiastes. There is that of the secular/materialistic person whose life might simply be captioned as the one who lives “life under the sun.” And additionally interwoven and interspersed through the book are those concise, but clear glimpses of life as one who consciously lives “under the SON.” The former is earthly and worldly and secular, while the latter is spiritual and hopeful and God-focused. It would seem to me that this worldview comparison is distinguishing between a life that is “meaningLESS” and one that is “meaningFULL”.

Throughout this book we are going to see what life looks like without the faith-perspective. That will sound really foreign and quite strange to our ears, since we embrace life and devote ourselves to living life as Bible-believers. And that is the inner urge in us to so study and apply this book. Yet this can prove to be a most valuable undertaking, for it will help us to understand more clearly the secular mind and world and also enable us to converse more intelligently with this very secular culture in which we live.

If you've ever wondered, "Why don't people get it? (i.e. this whole Bible/Christian thing?), we are going to see more clearly how people face everyday life without being guided by faith or even giving a passing thought to faith.

The writer of Ecclesiastes looks at humanity from the vantage point of its fallenness. And that's really what secularism is—man in the resultant state of earthiness once he has rebelled against God or raised in a society and/or home that gives no consideration to God.

The "*meaningless—meaningless*" summation by Solomon is not descriptive of man in his original "created-in-the-of-God" state of Genesis 1 and 2. Here man, as first created is characterized as being:

- Innocent and Guiltless
- Industrious
- Having Integrity
- Fully Volitional
- God-centered
- Truth-focused
- Life—no experience of death or separation of any kind
- Harmony with God, his spouse, the animal kingdom and the earth.

But things changed dramatically and quickly after the events of Genesis 3. We certainly don't know the timeline of each segment of these events, but from creation week to the birth of Seth, we are told that this is a period of 130 years. (Genesis 5:1-3). It appears there was a significant period of time for man in his original created state before the fall occurs. One also gets the impression that the events of Genesis 3-4 fall toward the end of this 130 year period.

Once the fall occurs, several outcomes begin to prevail on mankind:

- With the forfeiture of access to the tree of life, the aging and dying process begins.
- God is doubted, questioned, disobeyed more readily, particularly evidenced in the life of the first natural born human, Cain.
- Jealousy, premeditation to harm, violence aggression soon occur.
- Even though God offers grace and a second chance, it is spurned.
- A proliferation towards evil which escalates so that within 1500 years, evil fills the whole earth.
- A new "knowledge" prevails among men... an experiential knowledge/awareness of sin, wickedness, godlessness, and the pursuit of the earthly.
- Within 2,000 from creation, the lifespan of man dramatically decreases. (See Chart on YEARS OF THE PATRIARCHS.)

The result is the formation of a very SECULAR world and culture, with only a small remnant of people who fear God and intentionally attempt to live in obedience to Him. By the age of Solomon's reign (circa.970-930 B.C.), secularism prevailed on the earth, with the exception to the light found in Israel, although even it was dim at times.

Solomon with his world-wide connections, exposure, and influence had a lifetime of years to contemplate and explain life's meaning from all he had learned, observed and experienced. This examination of life is recorded to set up a comparison of the world viewed without any recognition of Jehovah as God against the perspective of a believer's world viewed which is explained on the basis of revealed Bible truth and a conscious embrace of Jehovah as God.

Solomon had in his toolbox of thought and training the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), the Bible books of history on the conquest of Canaan and the era of the Judges, the books of Samuel the judge/prophet who had ordained Israel's first king (Saul) and even his own father as Israel's second king, a man after God's own heart. He possessed many of the devotional writings, many authored by his dad. He knew up close from his own family line, what happens when God is not honored. But from the innocence and earnestness and openness on the God-ward side when he first became king with world-wide renown, to the up-close influence of rank paganism invited into his own palace through hundreds of wives and concubines, the purity and devotion of his life to God was compromised. (See 1st Kings 11:1-8).

Here was a man who had walked with God and inclined his ear to the voice of God, but who later listened to the voices of foreign dignitaries and his multiple pagan-thinking wives. The Bible says they turned his heart.

Thus in his older years, this world-renowned king exhibited a mind swirling between an unparalleled heavenly wisdom and the depressing cynicism of a very secular, carnal, indulgent lifestyle, mixed with pagan philosophies and religions and fatalistic thinking.

And through it all, the careful reader examines more closely, in the midst of such a wide range of knowledge and experience and asks, "Where does God fit into this picture?" And the priceless lessons that we can glean are how a believing man can retain a spiritual focus in light of his place in a very unbelieving world. What are the keys to living a God-honoring productive life, given the quickly passing years of the average human lifespan? And equally important is the question related to how people who have been born and raised in the secular "life under the sun" worldview can make that dramatic conversion to the Godly "life under the SON". Teaching and encouraging that conversion is the mission of the church.

Lesson 3

INTRODUCTHION TO ECCLESIASTES—THE QOHELETH AND THE BOOK

Research for this lesson is from *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms* by James E. Smith, "An Introduction to Ecclesiastes" by John A. MacArthur and *Old Testament Survey* by Paul R. House.

When the student of Scripture brings an openness of mind and a thorough balanced examination of this Old Testament book, one soon discovers that this may be one of the most relevant books of the Bible for all eras of time. It provides unusual challenges in its study, but the benefits which can be gained by the diligent student prove to be greatly rewarding and faith-building.

The Book of Psalms begins with a contrast of the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. The Book of Proverbs begins with the perspective and theme of living life in view of the "*fear of the Lord*". And the Book of Ecclesiastes begins from the opposite perspective... living a secular "life under the sun" without the fear of God. It is advisable for the student to give some consideration to the following introductory matters prior to proceeding with the exegesis of the book itself.

1- THE TITLE OF THE BOOK

- A. In the Hebrew language, the title is Qoheleth (or Kohelett).
- B. The English title "Ecclesiastes" is transliterated from the Septuagint (LXX-Greek translation of the O.T.) "ecclesiastes" which is translated, "The Preacher". (NASU and others)
- C. Qoheleth and "ecclesiastes" was one who addressed an assembly.
- D. The term appears 7 times in the book: 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10.

2- THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK

- A. The authorship of the book is attributed to King Solomon. This is the view of Bible scholars from antiquity. His name does not appear in the book, but the internal references are compelling:
 - 1) The writer first identifies himself as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem." (1:1)
 - 2) The investigations and experiences of the life of the author are consistent with the record of Solomon's life in the book of Kings. The author's life fits the resources and pursuits attributed to Solomon in Bible history as described in 1st Kings 2:-11:
 - 3) The author identifies his role and purpose as "teaching knowledge and writing proverbs" (Ecc.12)
 - 4) The title Qoheleth is used in 1st Ki. 8:1) when the assembly was convened for the dedication of the temple.
 - 5) The "wisdom claims" fit Solomon.
 - i. He possessed a measure of inherent wisdom, recognized by his dad. (1st Ki.2:6,9)

- ii. He received a heaven-sent measure of wisdom from God. (1st Ki.3:7-12)
 - iii. He gained a reputation for wise decisions and problem solving. (1st Ki.3:16-28)
 - iv. He was recognized by other world leaders as having extraordinary insight and learning. (1st Ki.4:29-34)
 - v. Jesus Himself acknowledged his wisdom. (Mt. 12:42)
- 6) What can we know of the author from the book itself? One can hear his claims, see his struggles, wrestle with his competing philosophies, appreciate his transparency, and arrive at his conclusions.
 - 7) In short, Solomon fits the profile of the kind of man, given his upbringing, resources, opportunities, and experiences who could write comprehensively on the contrasting philosophies of life.
- B. For a summary of the critical views of alternate authorship theories, one refer to James E. Smith in ***Wisdom Literature and Psalms***.
 - C. This study proceeds then with the assumption and acceptance of Solomonic authorship.

3- THE DATE OF THE WRITING

- A. Since we are working from the premise of the author being King Solomon and his reign over united Israel was from 970-930 B.C., it seems most logical to place this book in the later years of his rule.
- B. It seems most reasonable then to suggest the date of the book around 935-931 B.C., in the latter five years of his life and reign.
- C. Those who hold to a view of some writer being an impersonator of Solomon and place the book in a post-exilic time (after 536 B.C.) and later than the temple rebuild before or around the time of Ezra.

4- THE ARRANGEMENT AND THEMES OF THE BOOK

- A. The book of Ecclesiastes is grouped with four other books: Ruth, Song of Songs (Solomon), Esther, and Lamentations. This group is known in the Hebrew setting as the *Migilloth* within the larger section of the Old Testament known as the *Kethubhim*. (The Writings). These books were publicly read during the Great Feasts of Israel and Ecclesiastes was read on Pentecost.
- B. Most scholars suggest two major divisions or themes unfolding in the book.
 - 1) Chapters 1-6—This section establishes the premise of viewing life the “earthly view”, which can ultimately prove to be futile and leave one cynical about all of life. The overall theme here is suggested to be the vanity of living for worldly goals alone.
 - i. Dr. James E. Smith suggests this section of the book provides a “theoretical foundation” for the discussion about the meaning of life.
 - ii. We will see that life lived out without the acknowledgment of God is actually quite futile, while a life lived out in acceptance of the providence and will of God is the only way to hope for satisfaction and fulfillment.

- 2) Chapters 7-12—The first premise is just assumed as the reader proceeds to this part of the book. Now the overall message is that life on earth can have meaning when viewed from the position of a person centering his/her life around God.
 - i. Smith calls this the practical conclusion to the observations noted in the first section.
 - ii. This section focuses on the benefits of living an “anchored-to-God” life. (RJ Kidwell).
- C. Seeking a balance between the “enjoy life” and the “fear God” is the challenge and choice for every person. If a person lives life without any regard for God, there will predictably be results such as “cynicism” or “fatalism”, or “pessimism” about it all. A “what’s the use” attitude results and our author comes back to that again and again. But within the framework of God’s presence, life can be lived purposefully and richly, despite all the negative circumstances.
- D. The contrasting views of life are repeatedly juxtaposed here and there throughout the book. Even Solomon refers to this in 12:11:
 - 1) “The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one shepherd.” The goads poke and prod while nails do just that—they nail down truths to anchor life on.

5- SIGNIFICANT SUBJECTS OF THE BOOK

- A. God—Elohim (The creator), rather than YAHWEH/JEHOVAH (The Redeemer/Savior/Lord. We will come out on the other side of chapter 12 with a renewed appreciation for the providence of God.
- B. Death—the passing on of man is all quite certain. It is the “fly-in-the-ointment.”
- C. Life—from the view expressed in the book, it is all too brief.
- D. Work—much will be said about work, both the frustrating side of it as well as the beneficial and productive side of it.
- E. Joy—the reader will appreciate that a great measure of personal joy can be discovered in the simple gifts of life.
- F. The supreme good—Where can one find satisfaction and happiness? Is there a way to discover the meaningFULL life amidst all the frustrations of life?
- G. The “**Ten Vanities**” (As noted by Smith, p.704)
 - a. 2:15-16—Human wisdom
 - b. 2:19-21—Human labor
 - c. 2:26—Human purpose
 - d. 4:4—Human rivalry
 - e. 4:7—Human avarice (greediness/covetousness)
 - f. 4:16—Human fame
 - g. 5:10—Human insatiety (inability to be satisfied)
 - h. 6:9—Human coveting
 - i. 7:6—Human frivolity
 - j. 8:10,14—Human awards

H. In view of the many theme and subjects covered in the book, Leland Ryken calls Ecclesiastes “the most contemporary book of the Bible”.

6- THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

- A. King Solomon himself appears to review his writing with this stated purpose: *“In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.”* (Eccles.12:9-10)
- B. The book of Proverbs (most of which were written by Solomon) argues from the primary perspective of fearing God while Ecclesiastes begins with the primary perspective of what life is like and what happens to man when he doesn’t fear God.
- C. D.A. Carson points out that one significant purpose of the book is to elaborate on “the impact of the curse”. Consider Romans 8:20-21:
 - a. Rom 8:18 *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”* (NASU).
 - b. Here in Ecclesiastes, we can see just how this “anxious longing” and “futility” gets played out, particularly by people who will not live life under the SON of God.
- D. So the ultimate question is argued thoroughly: Shall one live dominated by the culture or on the basis of faith in the Creator?

Lesson 4

THE QUESTION RAISED—JUST WHAT IS “hevel”? Is Everything Really Meaningless?

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

When giving directions, having a clear beginning point is crucial. That principle is particularly true when beginning the study of a Bible book. When approaching a book with certain assumptions or biases or conclusions already held, the lessons to be learned and the actions expected of the reader/hearer suddenly are limited to those conclusions already held and embraced. The views of Ecclesiastes are all “over the map” literally to the point that some find the book refreshingly spiritual which provides a deeper look into life on earth to the opposite extreme of being a book not worthy of Scripture written by a highly neurotic, impotent bureaucrat, etc... (F. Zimmerman in *The Inner World of Qoheleth*). David Hubbard noted that “few O.T. writings have produced such a flurry of opinions as to how they should be read...” I personally have found that most readers make a hurried trek through the book and cling to only a few special passages that sound more “Christian” and leave the rest of the passages largely unexplored. Here’s a fresh perspective by Walt Keiser Jr.:

Ecclesiastes is the best news around for such baffled and confused postmodern men and women. It is the book for persons who want to live again—now. It is the working person’s book: it answers the residual boredom and loneliness of postmodernity, especially for those who are tired of the routine joylessly eating, drinking, and earning a paycheck—but with no sense of any enjoyment in the whole process, or even of where any of it comes from, much less with what any of it means.

Ecclesiastes is also the thinking person’s book. Its author knew that the reader is haunted by the questions: What does a person get for all his or her toil and struggles in life? Who am I, anyway? What is the meaning of this treadmill called life? Why is there so much change and why are there so few points of reference, or any solid ground, where I can plant my feet, from which I can view the whole of life? Should I be “worldlier-than-thou” or should I adopt a “holier-than-thou” position? Or is there a third alternative that is simultaneously world-accepting and God-honoring? ...

My prayer is the Living God, who delights in restoring the joy of this life, and the joy of living significantly, for those who would otherwise be little more than empty, plastic men and women of the twenty-first century, will use Ecclesiastes and this revised set of studies to provide a Biblical definition of the relationship between Christ and culture. The need is as great for many believers who are held in a postmodern, Western, cultural, and consumerist captivity, as it is for many unbelievers who are similarly saddled with ideas that are hostile to their image-bearing of God and who likewise swim in the technological and non-theistic eddies of our day and unthinkingly adopt pagan solutions to the questions of life and truth.¹

¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. *Coping With Change*. (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus 2013), 12-14.

1:1 Identification of the Author (See Previous Introductory Lesson 3) While “ecclesiastes” is translated in many versions as “The Preacher” including the NASU, and since “ecclesiastes” refers to one who calls out the assembly and gathers and collects and assembles, some have suggested other options like “The Searcher”, “The Teacher”. Be that as it may, this is from one who addresses the assembly.

1:2 Five times in this one verse is the word “hevel” or “hebel” It is translated in a variety of ways, with most of our English Bibles using “vanity”. How did that get to be the way “hevel” is translated? When the “hevel” was translated to the Greek by LXX translators, they used the Greek word—mataiotes= emptiness, or futility. And when Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, he translated the mataiotes=vanitas. And then when the English Bible translators did their work, they “transliterated” the word from the Latin, vanitas to “vanity.”

The word “hevel” or “hebel” actually from Hebrew means “breath, breeze, fog, smoke, cloud of steam, vapor.” This word is found in the Bible some 70 times, with 37 of those times being in Ecclesiastes. It was used as something which could not be grasped, not having substance to hold on to it, and even something baffling or puzzling. It is used primarily in the Bible related to life as referring to ***life's brevity, without permanence, or something being transitory***. It has been translated as vanity- (RSV, NAS, ASV, KJV, NKJV), meaningless-(NIV, NLT), futile- (LB), useless- (TEV), smoke- (Msg). Only Petersen’s Message gets close to the original meaning of “hevel” as being a vapor or fog or breeze, or breath.

Maybe the obvious parallel in the New Testament is the best commentary on this key word in Ecclesiastes. James 4:13-15 “***Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.***” (NASU).

Just think how the rendering of this one word affects our take on the whole book. At least it has a real impact on how we approach the book. There is a huge difference between something being “meaningless” and “vanity” as opposed to something being “temporary” or “transitory” or “a passing mist”.

In the author’s quest to see what life is about, he begins to unfold the first conclusion from the “earthy” perspective. The “vanity” view or the secular view will be contrasted throughout the book against a backdrop of things considered as a “***gift from God***”. (See 2:24-26; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7-9)

While the mood of the reader/student may be deeply affected by the negativity sound of “vanity/meaningless”, watch for the words “simchah”=joy and “samach”= to rejoice, be glad. These words are used 17 times in Ecclesiastes.

Some who are intent on the “vanity” view of the book, keep coming back to this question, “Is this all there is to life?” An old Peggy Lee song which won a Grammy in 1970 directly from this thought: “Is That All There Is?” continues to have response and discussion. Is that all there is to a house-fire, a circus, a love affair—which all end up to be disappointments?

Harold Kushner in *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough* (p.17-18), wrote:
So the woman who dreamed of marrying a successful doctor or corporate executive and living in a fancy house in the suburbs may find herself well married and living in her dream house but cannot understand why she goes around every morning saying to herself, “Is this all there is to life?”

1:3 “life under the sun”—this is the term our author uses to describe life from the earthly perspective, the natural mind, the SECULAR view.
So the first question raised in the pursuit—**WHAT ABOUT WORK?** In our time, one is called a workaholic whose whole life is wrapped up in this work. The workaholic is one who “doesn’t work to live, but who lives to work.” Is work mere drudgery or can it be purposeful? There will be more said about this matter of work later in the book (2:11; 3:9; 5:16)

1:4-8 This section describes the seeming endless cycles of repeating occurrences on earth. This may be a metaphor for the endless repeating cycles of human life.

- A. The sun rises and sets—v.5
- B. The winds blow from the south and then the north—v.6
- C. The rivers flow to the sea and then evaporate and fall back on the land to do it all again—v.7
- D. V-4...From the earthly view, humanity is temporary and transient while the earth and nature are permanent. Even from generation to generation of man... comes and goes. (Actually, theologically, we know just the opposite is true... this earth will come to an end, but man will live forever.—yet this is the conclusion of the secular view... just another case where man’s view gets it all wrong)
- E. V.8—This view can lead to dissatisfaction of man. If man does not find meaning outside the earth’s observable cycles, it can become depressing and seem pointless, boring (a buzz word of today). Man in this state becomes weary and restless.

1:9-10 Just the “same-ole, same ole” routines, nothing new. Even when something “brand new comes along”, it is old and obsolete in an instant.

1:11 The peril of forgetfulness. Oh, our faulty memories. And the longer we live, the more we are conscious of our forgetfulness. (We laugh about Old-Timers disease)

1:12 **WHAT ABOUT ACADEMICS/EDUCATION?** (The Teacher’s qualifications)

1:13 He set his mind... “to seek the roots of a matter” explore. Note the impact of determination. It is a powerful motivator. In all the intellectual achievements, degrees, books published, Nobel Prize, PhD.

“Given to the sons of men” Actually it is “sons of man” (adam)

1:14 All that man applies himself to when viewed from a purely natural or secular worldview is a chasing after the wind.

1:15 Can any real substantial change be affected by all the pursuits and efforts of man? Despite all that is done in most any project, it seems there is always more to do, something yet unachieved, some new discovery, some new cure, always something. It is endless. Some thought sending man to the moon would be the end in itself, but it only proved to be a small stepping stone for all quest in space travel and space achievements with satellites and the like.

There are limits even to the highest levels of knowledge.

1:16 The Teacher describes the vast breadth of knowledge and learning, the unparalleled scope of his intellectual pursuits and yet despite it all, from the secular view, it left frustration because man learns how much he does not know yet.

1:17 As an end it itself, it is just a striving after the wind.

1:18 There is grief in wisdom, pain in knowledge. (Students love to quote this statement) Learning is a painstaking labor, but the alternative to not learning is “foolishness” and that is the greater peril.

- The One who possessed all wisdom and all knowledge ever on earth was called “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Is.53:3) JESUS.

This is just the beginning of the view from below—the earthy view. The view from “**where there is no vision (revelation), the people perish**”—(Pro.29:18). Now this is not all there is to the secular view, but it is the basis of it. Looking at life only through this lens can leave one cynical, depressed, pessimistic, and fatalistic. So there it is, but we’re not done with the earthy/secular view by a long way. But there is another worldview and that is the perspective of our Creator and living out life as an image-bearer following the example of Jesus is ultimately fulfilling. This perspective brings to one’s life true joy and results in meaningFULL living, albeit still transitory.

Lesson 5

MORE NATURAL/SECULAR DOMAINS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Given the fact that there would exist no chapter breaks in the book, the thought progression continues on with additional pursuits of The Teacher, as well as a more expansive consideration of concerns already mentioned. For a summary of the vastness and significance of Solomon's achievements and wealth, read [1st Kings 4:20-28](#).

Text: **Ecclesiastes 2:1-26**

Section 1—WHAT ABOUT PLEASURES AND POSSESSIONS (1-11)

2:1 These pursuits did not “happen”. They were planned and calculated as part of this grand experiment about meaning and life. How much can one find fulfillment from the “have-it-all” lifestyle? So the person who takes on life with the “go for the gusto” mentality will be able to relate well to this.

2:2 Anything that would bring laughter, be entertaining, and provide personal or even sensual gratification was pursued. They kept the laughs flowing by joke-tellers and humorists to keep the atmosphere intentional light and frivolous.

The word for “pleasure” (*b^atowb*) is found 4 times in this section (v.1, v.2, v.10 2x). The lifestyle represented by this is referred to as hedonism—a lifestyle aimed at being satisfied by pleasure.

2:3-10 This section provides the list of his pleasure/possession quest. But as we read, notice the I, me, myself in the text. In Hebrew, it is found 13 times in these 8 verses.

- A. v.3—Wine—the liquid merry-maker.
- B. V.4—Expansive building projects, houses and gardens. (See 1st Kings 7:1-12 for a description of his own palace) And this was just the beginning of it.
- C. V. 5—Gardens and terraces and parks, all arrayed with trees of every variety and fruit trees... the endless pursuit of his horticulture interests.
- D. V.6—Large irrigation reservoirs and channels to water all the lush gardens and orchards.
- E. V.7—Numerous slaves and servants, flocks and herds.
- F. V.8—Silver and gold, singers and many concubines. (See 1st Kings 10:27 for the way silver became commonplace in Israel.) His vast wealth increased as his fleet of ships carried precious cargo from lands far away. The TEV says that he “had all the women a man could want”. (1st Ki. 11:3 says that he had 700 wives, princesses and 300 concubines...)
- G. V.9—The extravagance and luxury and indulgence and goods he amassed had no equal, nowhere in the world.

H. V.10—He denied himself nothing that appealed to his eyes. Literally, whatever “his heart desired”... he gave in and pursued every impulse (Msg). This whole section describes the true playboy lifestyle.

2:11 hinneh (everything in sight) –hakol (all) –hevel (temporal)—his summation was that it was all, every bit of it was worthless, temporary, and left him empty. It was nothing but a re’ut ruach—a pursuit of the winds. It is all too reminiscent of Luke 12:19 of the rich fool. But something was still missing.

Section 2—WHAT ABOUT WISE PHILOSOPHY? (2:12-17)

2:12 He decides to examine the distinctiveness between what is really sensible and what is non-sensible. (the wise and the foolish)

2:13 There are certainly advantages to being “smart” in life. In the same way light is better than darkness, one can see farther ahead, make better judgments and choices. With a little “smarts” one can even learn from mistakes of the past.

2:14 But it is more than just sight—it is insight which has incredible value. **HOWEVER**, even the wise and brilliant man’s life comes to an end.

2:15 There is still an end to it all, whether the sensible or not. Neither path eliminates the certainty of life’s ending. There is a common destiny for all men—the grave. (See Hebrews 9:27)

2:16 It can be completely frustrating to wonder if anyone will ever remember our mark left on earth? Will I be completely forgotten when I’m gone? In Solomon’s case, we do remember, alright.

2:17 When a person is left to just this perspective, the sensible and the insensible both die, and if that is the only consideration, one can become cynical and bitter about life. Without God, a “what’s the use?” mentality can prevail. How can one be positive about it all when this is all one can see? He can’t! But there is another dimension and perspective that can change all that.

Section 3—ANOTHER TIME—WHAT ABOUT WORK? (2:18-26)

2:18 When a man spends so much of himself on a project and when it’s all done and it still doesn’t satisfy, it is all too easy to feel contempt for it. And especially when one realizes that “I have to leave this to someone else.” It’s true—you can’t take it with you. So the man who devotes his whole life to some specific pursuit and gets to the end and realizes, it’s over and who gets all this? Wow, can depression set in!

2:19 Will those who inherit the estate (stuff) when I’m gone handle it wisely or not? The one who’s worked for it and saved it and toiled over it all no longer has control of it. How painful the thought! (Unless one has discovered the joy in giving... See Pro. 13:22 for the value of leaving a legacy for even the grandchildren)

2:20 The materialist faces the prospect of dying and leaving it all with a sense of despair, rather than feeling blessed for the goodness he has had to enjoy during his lifetime and can then pass it on to for others to enjoy.

2:21 It is so sad that a man would be resentful about leaving a legacy. Yet how much greater to leave a legacy of godliness rather than what can be measured by a ledger sheet.

2:22-23 Is this all you get? How sad, what a limited view of life and possessions? But this is the value system of the materialist. The long hours, the hard work, the restless nights weigh heavily on him as he faces his end. When a man's energies are given to work and the stuff work can provide, there is a real shortage of fulfillment.

2:24 It is much better to take the positive view of productivity. Work is NOT the curse, not even originally in the garden. Work was given to man before the fall—he was placed in the garden of Eden to tend it and to keep it. (Gen. 2:15) God created man to be industrious—that is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. So a man's perspective about work is that work itself comes from the hand of God. There, that is the perspective that has been missing. And that makes all the difference in the world. There is JOY IN WORK!

2:25 Who can find real enjoyment in life and life's pursuits without God? NO ONE! But with God in the center and accepting the role as the created under the Creator, life and work takes on a whole new meaning. True fellowship with God changes the whole scene.

2:26 Here is the whole difference summarized between the righteous and the sinner when it comes to a right value system. It may be “puzzling” (hevel) or “temporary”, but it is significant to know that there is meaning to it all. So don't be surprised when you hear people unable to sort out all the mysteries of life... even Jedidiah struggled until he brought God into the discussion.

Lesson 6

TIME AND ETERNITY

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: **Ecclesiastes 3:1-22**

This is probably the most famous and oft quoted passage in Ecclesiastes, both in the Christian community and in the secular world. It has been quoted to support various perspectives about time and time management as well as to lend weight to arguments over social issues, such as war.

Given the fact that there was no original chapter and verse breaks and divisions, this noteworthy passage is still written in the greater context of labor and toil. Consider the paragraph before the “time” passage in 2:18-26 and the one after in 3:9-10, which both speak of the views and values of labor “under the sun”.

3:1 The major point of the first half of chapter 3 is that there is time for all the events of life. Given the average life-span of man, as the seasons of life unfold, most all of these “events” will be experienced. God sees and knows all about them but they sort of “unfold” typically for people through a lifetime. Verse 1 is the premise stated for this whole section. There is an appropriate or right time for everything.

How much time does one have? Think a bit about that... Over 70 years, one lives about 25,567 days, has about 3,650 Sundays, and a whole lot of living and experiences can get squeezed into those years. But time can be squandered as well. So one should consciously make the most of “living in the dash”. (The dash on a tombstone between one’s birth and death is when life is lived.)

3:2-8 Now Qoheleth makes a list of many of the significant things that can take place in a lifetime. However, the wise person realizes that some of these things are in our hands and control and some of them are not.

In 1954, Pete Seeger wrote these words into a song and later in the ‘60’s made famous by The Byrds:

“*To everything—turn, turn, turn,
There is a season—turn, turn, turn,
And a time for every purpose under heaven.*”

These are not the only things that can happen in a lifetime! But these are presented in contrasting couplets. (This is a typical feature of O.T. poetry) There a time:

- To be born and a time to die
- To plant and uproot the planted
- To kill and heal

- To tear down and build up
 - To weep and to laugh
 - To mourn and to dance
 - To throw stones and gather stones
 - To embrace and refrain from embracing
 - To search and to stop searching
 - To tear apart and sew together
 - To be silent and to speak
 - To love and to hate
 - For war and for peace
- To keep and to throw away

What are some other significant “life events” not on the list?

So how is one to view time? It passes by so quickly, like a vapor or mist or morning fog. (hevel—temporary, brevity, swiftly passing) Life should be lived purposefully, meaningfully, and with an appreciation for the value of each day.

3:9-10—Now back to the worker, given this perspective about time, what profit is there in it all? How one answers that will depend on one’s perspective to life, whether positive or negative.

So these are the activities that God has given to men to occupy themselves.

C.S. Lewis wrote, “Our heavenly Father has provided many delightful inns for us along our journey but He takes great care to see that we do not mistake any for home.” (Mere Christianity)

Note v.17b—“There is a time for every matter and every deed.” When people say, “I just don’t HAVE time for …”, the truth is we have the time. We just don’t take the time. Most people generally do what they want to do! They will make time for what is important to them.

A question for thought: How key is it that one does the *right* thing at the *right* time? _____

3:11- “He has made everything “appropriate” in its time.” (NASU). The word is yapheh-- which is properly translated appropriate or beautiful. (Consider the words to the hymn... In His Time)

It takes wisdom to discern what is appropriate for each day, each activity and each task. (The screensaver—“Make sure that what you do with today really matters, for you are going to spend one day of your life doing it.”)

“HE SETS ETERNITY IN THE HEARTS OF MEN.” Every man has some measure of inner sense that there is more to life than this 70 years.

But man is finite and God is infinite—so we will not fully understand all that God is or what God is doing. We can know what has been revealed. (See Deut. 29:29)

3:12-13—True satisfaction is to rejoice and do good (the positive view of life) One look to see good in his labor. This is a gift from God.

3:14—Keep in mind these Biblical faith principles!

- God's work is lasting
- God's work is complete and comprehensive—nothing needs to be added to it or subtracted from it.
- God intends for men to “fear” Him... (not utter terror, but with awe and honor) (However, if one does NOT honor Him as creator and God, there is a good reason to be terrified of Him.)

Live life without these principles of truth at the foundation and one winds up just how Qoheleth describes... bored, empty, frustrated, miserable, and feeling it is all meaningless.

3:15—God has designed the cycles of life and nature. It is part of the created order of things.

3:16-17—Sometimes on earth, justice and injustice (or righteousness and unrighteousness) get inverted. Is that fair? Of course not! But given the world is under the curse of sin, and men are given to sin, and the devil is making an all-out assault on all that is holy, this injustice will often prevail.

v.17—But God is not fooled by all this and He will settle all accounts. (See Heb. 10:30-31)

3:18-21—From the secular worldview, man is just another animal. That is what the teaching of evolution demands.

The same end, under this view, awaits all—the grave. If this view of existence is correct, what difference does it make if one just lays down and dies and body is eaten by worms or vultures or get the body dressed up in a nice suit and put in a pine box?

Physically—dust to dust. (See Genesis 3:19)

v.21—Who knows? God knows! And Bible-believers know because it has been revealed the outcome of animals and mankind. The breath (soul) of man goes up while the ‘breath’ of animals just goes into the earth.

3:22—So a proper view of life and work and effort is to find fulfillment in all the activities you can. Someday, it will be all over here... but then eternity begins! You have the time!

Lesson 7—Part 1

Concerns From The Earthy View

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

While some “chapters and sections” of the book speak of God and His plan along with the gifts for life He provides for the enjoyment and fulfillment of man, no mention of God is found in chapter 4. This is truly a section concerning the view of life from “under the sun”—another look at the secular worldview.

Note that these conclusions are based on the observations of Qoheleth in his survey of man’s life without the God/eternal perspective.

4:1—“I looked again...”

4:4—“I have seen...”

4:7—“I looked again...”

4:15—“I have seen...”

He became a student of life as it was happening all around him in others.

4:1-3— The problem and prevalence of injustice

Just examine the language of the range of difficulties of the oppressed:

- the tears
- without comforters, lonely
- powerless
- at times, better off dead (remember, this is the secular worldview)

(How many fall prey to this fatalistic view today!)

This whole matter of social justice/injustice is such a pressing issue—then and now!

Thought question: Just who are those most “victimized” by an unjust society today? _____

And how are they hurting? _____

The answer to these and other related questions point Christians to the most sensitive areas of life need!

4:4-6— Some observations related to labor and toil:

Why do some work so hard to achieve, get ahead, and even hoard stuff? V.4 provides an insight here. Too often it is to “keep up with or get ahead of the Jones’.” This is the green monster of envy. Getting ahead of others can become an obsession.

v.5 speaks of the opposite extreme—idleness.

v.6 speaks to what must be balanced—work and rest.

4:7-8— James Limburg calls this man the “lonely workaholic”.

- Consider Ps. 127:2
- This man does not “work to live”. Rather he “lives to work.”
- With no one to partner with or leave his earnings and achievements to, it ends up being all for naught.

4:9-12— This section is shown in sharp contrast to the person who has to face life, work and death alone. It extols the value of having someone to partner with. This principle is true, even for unbelievers in the world. It speaks to the value of partnership and companionship.

- When a person falls, the other can help them up to their feet again.
- When a person is cold, the other can see that they are warm
- When one is attacked, the other can help defend him.

A cord of THREE is not quickly broken. In the world, a person may have one other to help along the way. But for all of us who are Christians, one has self, a friend /partner/companion AND THE LORD.

4:13-16— The poor and the privileged.

The advantage of a poor, wise youth rises above an old, foolish king.

Notice what makes the king foolish—with age, he may get more stubborn and hard to reason with. But worse than that, he no longer is willing to receive instruction. So it is possible even for a young person from prison to be released and come to power. So what Bible character(s) came out of prison to a high place of leadership in the land? _____, _____.

There is no telling how many people a king may rule over—but when he’s gone, Qoheleth wonders if anyone will be grateful or remember what he has done?

Somewhere out there, there is a young person who will eventually come along to replace the one who currently leads. (True for every field of life, even ministry)
So what then should one do? _____

Lesson 7—Part 2

God Is In Heaven

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: **Ecclesiastes 5:1-20**

While chapter 4 was all about concerns of the earthy and secular without God in the picture, a positive contrast is found in chapter 5, which speaks of life issues with God in view. Note how this chapter can be divided:

v.1-7—refers to God 6 times

v.18-20—refers to God 4 times

And v. 8-17 demonstrates how this is all in contrast to the backdrop of life “under the sun” in the world.

5:1-3— There is to be a measure of respect and sacredness which ought to be observed and practiced when approaching God.

v.1—“Guard your steps”—entering the presence of God is not just casually popping in the back door of your best friend or neighbor. It is not being flippant or nonchalant.

v.1—One should approach God with the intent of listening. (How often do we do that?)

v.2—One should carefully consider how a matter is brought before the Lord.
Words should not be spoken rashly and disrespectfully.

v.2—We need to remember our place. We are “on earth”. God is in heaven! This is a reference not only to the dwelling place of God, but also to His transcendence. (See Ephesians 4:6)
The TEV says, “think before you speak”.

5:4-5— Making vows to God. This is a serious matter. God expects the vows we make to be kept.

- Consider Hannah in 1st Samuel 1:9-11
- Note Deuteronomy 23:21-23. (Careful here... taking the easy route of never making a vow means that one is promising God nothing!)
- This passage written by Qoheleth concerns making a vow for some special gift. And this matter of making and keeping vows is a way of honoring and worshipping God.
- A “faith-promise” mission vow or a “call to ministry” vow can be other examples.

5:6-7— We are accountable for our words. One needs to guard against making rash statements and pledges. Jesus said, “**But I tell you that every careless (idle) word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the**

day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words, you will be condemned.” (Mt.12:36-37 NASU).

Note the connection between one’s words and work in v.6—“**Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?**”

- v.7—Above all, FEAR GOD! This is man’s chief duty in life. And the book continues to move toward that ultimate conclusion of it all! One ought to hold God in highest regard, as the highest Being, holding the highest authority, with the highest power, deserving the highest respect! Anything short of that is IDOLATRY!

5:8-17— In contrast to all that remains this world where man exists during his mortal life.

- v.8—There is oppression and injustice, often in the very presence of “order” that is to be supplied by government. With all the governments of the world, these social evils are never completely eliminated in society.

- v.9—At least with civil leadership, there are usually crops to feed society.

- v.10—Man thinks money will satisfy every need and be the answer to every problem. So man easily becomes preoccupied with getting money. (See 1st Timothy 6:10) And how tempting is it to “love money”!

v.11—The “haves” of this world often display their “stuff” in order to admire all their achievements. Remember the rich man of Luke 12:16ff.

v.12—But with many goods and belongings come many sleepless nights. For the person who trusts in riches, he will worry over it to the point it robs him of a good night’s sleep.

v.13-17—And people who hoard up riches can lose them all in an instant. How uncertain they are!

And when they are lost, one cannot even support his dependents.

It is all too easy to forget that materialism is intended to meet needs while living here in this life and use them to honor God as good stewards.

So one must be careful not to sell his soul for “stuff” that will be left to someone else someday.

5:18-20— Now back to the heavenly perspective—

v.18—Finding fulfillment in life is a great blessing from God, for life passes by all too quickly.

v.19—It should be considered a gift to be able to work, earn, invest, save, and give in order to appreciate the good things of life.

v.20—One who sees life from the God-perspective appreciates the blessing of work and its benefits. Staying busy at it keeps one from being and staying depressed over life’s brevity. So one need not be overly anxious; rather one should find creative ways to do good with all God provides and leave the outcome in God’s hands. This is the life of faith!

Thought question—So will we live in the past or live only for today or live with a respectful appreciation of the past, live productively and positively for today with our eye on a future that we trust to God’s hands? Each of us must answer that. What shall it be? _____

Lesson 7—Part 3

How The Knowledge of God Changes a Person's Life

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: **Ecclesiastes 6:1-12**

Every man has to decide: How will the knowledge of God impact me? Each of us will answer that consciously and intentionally, or by willful ignorance and neglect answer it sub-consciously. Either way, we each decide what we will do with the knowledge of God. So how will it impact me?

- None at all. Will give it no real consideration
- A little here and there, when convenient or suits me.
- Some, when I'm feeling religious or have a life need that I can't handle, in times when it serves my purpose.
- Significantly. In every conscious aspect of life, I will be sensitive to His presence and will.

Here's a crucial question: Will the knowledge of God lead me to the fear of the Lord?

(Note 5:7 and anticipate 12:13)

6:1-6— Things are not always what they seem to be.

Here is the consideration of a man who acquires a lot in his lifetime, but in the end, it is all left in the hands of strangers. OR,

A man lives a long, fruitful life, but never finds peace or satisfaction. And then he dies tragically in some remote place, without even a proper burial by loved ones. His life ends in obscurity.

Qoheleth says that for this man without the perspective of heaven, it would have been better to have been miscarried or still-born. (v.3-4) Now deep grief even in heart of the righteous can cause one to regret his birth, (see Job 3:3,11), but this man doesn't even know of God to call out to him in his distress.

If all a man can see ahead is the grave, how empty and depressing is that!

6:7-9— Some never manage to be satisfied, no matter how much they attain. A poor man, if he knows how to walk day to day through life is so much better off than a wealthy man who craves more and more.

v.9—“**What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires (goes after).**” The NLT says, “**Enjoy what you have rather than what you don't have.**” Being consumed by want-itus is not a good way to live.

6:10-12— So how is one to face the future? Who really knows how our days can be spent? GOD DOES! So man should trust Him.

v.11—Verbosity is not going to prolong life! There are times when it is most appropriate to just get to the point.

v.10 & 12 Foreknowledge or Determinism?

God already knows what is ahead. God's foreknowledge is infinite. But remember that His foreknowledge is NOT the same as determinism. The world gets this so confused. According to a secular worldview, one's fate is predetermined and real choice is only an illusion. "Qe sera, sera", whatever will be, will be." That is rank fatalism. But God created us as free moral agents, having the real capacity of personal choice. It is called volition. And along with this blessing of personal choice (to choose good or bad), there comes accountability.

Who knows what is ahead? None of us, except what God has revealed. But God knows. So again, trusting Him is the right choice for life.

So God has established this truth—real and lasting enjoyment cannot be found by possessing things.

Jesus said it this way: "*Life does not consist in the abundance of things a man possesses.*" (Luke 12:15)

Who really knows the future? God does! Trust HIM!

Lesson 8—Part 1

Matters of Wisdom—Earthly and Heavenly

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: Ecclesiastes 7:1-8:1

It is good for the student of Ecclesiastes to remember that there are two types or classes or levels of wisdom. Consider James 3:13-18

13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise! 14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie. 15 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil. 16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. 18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness. (NLT).

Remember that Solomon, much earlier in his life, when we was first ascending the throne, requested wisdom from God. (See 1st Kgs 3:6-12) And God blessed him with great wisdom, unparalleled wisdom. But as the years passed, what God provided was actually set to the side for a preferred “experiment and experience” of life “under the sun”. And it wound up costing him his faith and the stability of his kingdom.

A great lesson of wisdom... one should always live up to his best knowledge! (That is true for every facet of life. Secondly, there is no wisdom out there which can surpass the wisdom God provides.

The first 14 verses of this chapter are terse statements of practical wisdom. They are presented in a type of Hebrew parallelism, which can be presented in various forms.

- Synonymous—basically restates the same truth. (i.e. 10:18)
- Antithetic—states a matter and its opposite (i.e. 10:12)
- Reasoned/explained—where the parallel is logically fitting or deduced. (i.e. 10:15)
- Numerical—where there is an actual counted out rhythm (i.e. Prov. 30:18-19)
- Comparative—where one element is put in comparison to another, either very much like it or quite the opposite, but one is of greater value. (i.e. 7:1-4)

These comparative “proverbs” are in answer to the question posed in 6:12—“For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime?” (The best thing would be to be satisfied with God’s answer to these concerns.)

7:1—The great value of a good reputation/name. (See Prov. 10:7 and 22:1)

7:1b-2—A burial day over a birthday? Here Qohelet speaks to the value of a funeral gathering over a party. The living can take to heart the seriousness of a real concern for one's lifetime, and what really counts. It is not advocating being morbid all the time, but to be intentional and selective about how we live.

Funerals remind us that we are NOT immortal. The CEV says, “Funerals remind us we all must die.” Jesus even said, **“Blessed are those who mourn.”**

7:3—The value of sorrow. There is a point to being able to take life seriously. One need not mope and moan through every day, but taking a sober approach to life can prevent one from squandering time away frivolously.

Sorrows could be the Lord’s discipline. (Prov. 3:11-12 / Hebrews 12:6)
Sorrows from trials could be the Lord’s testing and refinement. (Jms. 1:2-3)
It is true that the Bible says “Laughter is good like medicine...” (Prov.17:22), but if one goes to the extreme that he does not take life seriously, it can become sheer folly.

7:4—The difference between the wise and foolish. The wise person realizes that life is brief, but the fool is only about having a good time. One can gain insight with a reminder of our mortality. Contrary to the perspective of the young, we are not bullet-proof. So which house is more beneficial to visit, the house of mourning or the house of a good time?

7:5—We all will respond to criticism, but it is in our own power to decide how we will respond. And we can make that choice ahead of time. If it comes from a wise, respected person, one would do well to consider it seriously. Yet many people would just rather get praise, even if it is merely empty words from a fool. (See Ps.141:5)

7:6—The frivolity and laughter of a fool just goes up in smoke. (This is the person who refuses to take life seriously.)

7:7—When oppression comes, or a person is motivated by bribes, the innocent can be quickly victimized. What pressure this puts on a person or a society! What things are typically behind the oppression or offering/taking bribes?

7:8—The satisfaction of reaching the end. How much greater the satisfaction of finishing a project! The beginning may be marked with enthusiasm (which could be short-lived), but to complete something, there is a huge sense of satisfaction. How many things are started but never finished! We need to “get them off the books”. This all speaks to the burden of procrastination.

7:9—The cost of uncontrolled anger. One's temperament and reaction to situations in life should be Spirit-controlled. Being an out-of-control “loose canon” and always volatile is both unpleasant and dangerous. The N.T. says “**Be angry and sin not and do not let the sun go down on your anger.**” (Eph.4:26).

7:10—Oh, the good-ole-days. They were probably not as good as we remember them. (That old Oldsmobile did not have air-conditioning, cruise control, or CD player.) Israel forgot that message—(Num.11:4-6). We tend to forget the hardships of the good-ole-days. Nostalgia tends to filter out all the negatives.

7:11—One is well-served when an inheritance comes if one has sound wisdom to manage it. Managing received blessings is a tribute to the giver and often proves to be an on-going benefit to the recipient. But a squanderer loses it all.

7:12—There are pluses to both practical wisdom and money, but sound knowledge can preserve life.

7:13—One should be respectful of the works of God, even if/when you don't understand them. Man cannot undo what God decides to do!

7:14—It is advisable then for one to thank God for prosperity and enjoy it while it is available. But do NOT stop honoring Him when hard or lean times come. Job models this correct spirit in Job 2:7-10.

So, present grief and pain can and do have some value—especially when viewed over the big picture and redemptively.

EARTHLY WISDOM HAS ITS LIMITS!

7:15—It is truly perplexing when a younger righteous man prematurely dies, while an evil man's days are extended.

7:16-18—When one thinks himself to be wise... there is danger. One just wise in his own eyes can easily be out of step with God and miss out on true righteousness. Walt Keiser Jr. says that “Real righteousness has no limits.” However pseudo or self-righteousness puts everyone in peril.

It is usually best to avoid extremes in most any pursuit. One can get “too smart for his own good” or too foolish to really “get it”.

Fearing God still promises the best outcomes for life.

7:19-25—There is great value in living wisely. (19). However, NO ONE is sinless. One should be careful in listening to what others say about them. This applies to what others say about us and what we say about others. (v.21-22).

Even when one is determined to take the high road of wisdom, there are times when it is just elusive. (v.23) As hard as we try, there are limits to figuring it all out.

7:26—Seduction and lust are dangerous paths. The man who is pleasing to God must draw some hard boundaries.

7:27-29—A totally virtuous person in this life is rare indeed. When Qohelet says he could not find one virtuous woman among a thousand, remember that he actually took this path. (This may be part of his confession!) All those women morally and spiritually bankrupted him. And Prov-31... Solomon did not write that.

The universal outcome of men, with or without earthly wisdom, is that we all became sinners.

NOTE: Consider the contrast between how God created man and what man became when WE chose our own path. Every man needs a Savior.

8:1—While wisdom is limited outside the revelation of God and the helpful presence of Holy Spirit, it still does hold significant value.

Lesson 8—Part 2

LIVING LIFE UNDER CIVIL AUTHORITY

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: **Ecclesiastes 8:2-17**

A righteous government is of great value, while an unrighteous one is a great burden.
Consider **Romans 13:1-7**

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (NIV).

8:2-8—The authority of civil government. Be obedient citizens up to the point where the law of the land conflicts with the law of God. A human governmental mandate or policy requirement does not trump the spiritual law of God. (See Daniel 3:8ff, and 6:6ff, Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-28). Is there a limit to the “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s”?

An important distinction must be kept in mind. Old Testament Israel/Judah was a government initiated and set in place by God, based on His holy laws of the Mosaic covenant. The surrounding nations were not under this umbrella of “holy law”, for their government systems were the formations and organizations of men, but still under God’s sovereignty over all the earth. And God used them at times to accomplish His international, disciplinary, and kingdom purposes. In New Testament times, the church found itself existing and functioning under a secular pagan government and went about its kingdom business as peaceably as was possible with some Biblical/spiritual mandates to guide her actions in relation to governmental powers. (i.e. praying for them, paying taxes, obeying laws, etc.)

The civil government is the God-ordained means of keeping order and keeping injustice in check. That is its intended purpose. However, even though ordained of God, remember that government roles and positions are filled by men/women, who either assume, seized or elected by other men. Keiser says that the primary “purpose of government is the righteous administration of justice.”

Resisting authority can carry a stiff penalty. (v.3-4)

A law-abiding citizen has fewer worries about retribution from a government authority figure by respecting and keeping law than breaking it. (v.5)

Timing in any circumstance is crucial (v.6-7)

It is appointed unto man once to die—Heb.9:27. Wickedness does not provide security or hope for the evil doer. (v.8)

And Qohelet reminds men that there is no holding back that which is uncontrollable. (the wind... v. 8)

Sometimes the line is blurred between the righteous and the wicked, but God is not fooled. (See Malachi 3:16-18).

8:9-17—Even with governments in place, injustice sometimes abounds.

Some rulers misuse or abuse their power and authority to hurt others. (v.9) Not many rulers are faithful to their God-given purpose with integrity.

10- Many wicked get a hero's burial, and sometimes in the very place where they did their evil or injustice.

11- When punishment for the wicked is delayed, evil continues to spread.

12- No matter how good it looks for the wicked in getting ahead in the end, real hope is reserved for those who fear God. And the end is dark for the man who refuses to fear God, whether ruler or the rest of men. (v.13)

14- So many times in this life, the good man is treated unfairly and in particular when examined against how the unrighteous often “gets the breaks”. It all seems terribly unjust.

15- So Qohelet advises man to enjoy the good that comes from God while it is in your hands to do so—there will be days when this will not be possible. And “*God's gift of enjoyment is to be preferred over all the accumulations of the wicked.*” (Keiser, p.146)

8:16-17—As hard as man may search, he will never in his finite mind be able to resolve all the mysteries surrounding life. Again there is a limit to being able to grasp and reasonably explain all the happenings in this life, outside the explanations provided by God in His Word. And what is not explained, we trust Him with our future.

Lesson 9—Part 1

Life In The Hands of God

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: **Ecclesiastes 9:1-18**

This chapter/section will acknowledge that not everything is in man's hands and control, not immediately or eternally. As best as one plans and hopes, there are still so many circumstances that are simply beyond us. As diligent Qoheleth has been in applying himself to pursuits of life and their meaning, there is just so much beyond finding out. So following Jesus' counsel, "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Mt.6:34, NASU).

This chapter sets side by side those things which are in the hands of God and those things which are in the hands of men. (9:1 and 9:10). One of the greatest challenges of life is to know of both categories and what is in our hands to do and when to trust a matter completely to the hands of God.

9:1-9—All men face the common end—the grave.

9:1—All men are ultimately in the hands of God. Since this is true... we are fully known by our Creator and will finally give an account of our life to Him, one should be ever so careful as to how one lives and exerts oneself to make the most of every opportunity.

9:2—The same “fate” or outcome is ahead for all. Death is certain. “There is no getting out of here alive!” The righteous and the wicked both face the same destination--the grave. There is no distinction for the two when it comes to human mortality. Fate—(miqreh) is best translated “event or happening”.

9:3—It appears as an evil that there is the very same thing awaiting at the end of man's days, whether righteous or wicked. (Of course we believers know that it is what lays beyond the grave that makes all the difference.)

9:4—So as long as there is life, there is hope... hope in preparing to face God, hope of making life efforts really count.

9:5—Once in the abode of the dead (Sheol—the grave), chances and opportunities of fulfilling all those good intentions are past. There is nothing one can do about those opportunities and options in life after man's departure.

John 9:4b—“ **We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.**”

9:6—Once death comes, all earthly opportunities are gone. Man will then no longer share in the activities of the living.

9:7-9—Here's the instruction in light of this reality: Take advantage of all life's opportunities while there is time. It should be a delight for man to enjoy the blessings God intended. "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Ps. 118:24)

v.7—The times together at the table.

v.8—The times to be festive (white clothes) and well-groomed. (This is in to the "sackcloth and ashes" look!)

v.9—"See life with the wife you love." Enjoy the bliss of marriage. (For specific instructions on this, one can read the "Song of Solomon".

This life God has already accepted.

One should not allow the perplexities of life to steal away the joys God provides.

9:10-18—Going about the business and busyness of life.

9:10—Man should pour his whole self into his work. (See Colossians 3:17 and 24-25)
Once in Sheol (the grave) no opportunities are left for such. The opportunities of life are a stewardship—make the most of them.

9:11—Keep in mind the factors of "time" and "chance" (mirqreh) happenings. We must remember that we are not in complete control of our lives. Even though many factors may go into making life more "predictable", still other things can happen.

9:12—The sons of men can be ensnared by random and unexpected circumstances. Even Jesus talked about the 18 souls who were killed in a construction accident. They could not have predicted such a "happening" in their day.

9:13-16—Sometimes wisdom exercised can provide deliverance, but even that may not be remembered shortly thereafter. Man does not always profit from the presence or practice of wisdom, even though wisdom can triumph over brute force. Yet wisdom is not always heeded.

9:17-18—The words of the wise are of great value. They are better than weapons of war. Sometimes conflict can be averted by considering the path of wisdom. However, an evil person (sinner) can do great damage. Not all conflict can be avoided here on earth.

Lesson 9—Part 2

When Wisdom and Foolishness Get Throw on the Balance Scale

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: **Ecclesiastes 10:1-20**

The principles and comparisons of this section are set down in the same “proverbial” format as Proverbs 10-29. This passage provides a collection of various subjects which might be encountered or experienced in a lifetime. But through it all, there is a wise pathway to take and a foolish pathway to take. Every person decides which road to travel.

10:1—This probably should be connected to 9:18... “one sinner can do a lot of damage.”
One dead fly can spoil a bottle of perfume. The point? An isolated act of foolishness can have more impact than a whole package of wisdom and good.

10:2—There is an overall “tenor” of life in a person, whether for the good or the bad.

10:3—The path of the fool is obvious to many as soon as he steps foot out of his door.

10:4—One great tidbit of wisdom—when under intense threat, retain your composure and hold to your position of integrity. A wise and meek spirit can withstand much and can sometimes calm a storm of accusation or anger.

10:5-7—Because of man’s easily confused and distorted value systems, a humble and productive man is sometimes put in the servant’s role while a foolish man is given a more prominent position. Often the most qualified find themselves in lesser positions while the more incapable are put in higher positions because of partiality or less than sound judgment.

10:8-11—**All actions in life can and often do have risk.**

v.8-9—what one applies his efforts to can sometimes return to bite him.
--dig a pit, fall into it.
--break through a wall, get bitten by a snake
--quarry out stones, get hurt by them
--split logs, get injured doing it.

v.10—if one doesn’t sharpen a dull axe, it takes more strength to fell a tree.
v.11—if a person gets bitten by a serpent, it is useless for the snake charmer to get his flute out. Help is useless if it comes too late.

10:12-15—**The tongue can be used wisely or unwisely.**

- v.12—Words can be gracious or self-destructive. Getting a grip on the tongue is a most difficult undertaking. The Christian today is blessed to have Holy Spirit help in getting control of it.
- v.13—A loose tongue can go from nonsense to sheer insanity. How many times have we thought or said, “That’s just crazy!”
- v.14—The fool doesn’t know when to stop talking. After all, he has no idea what the future holds or what he is talking about.
- v.15—The fool is all talk and no work. And if he should actually work a day’s work, he is too exhausted to find his way home. We use the phrase, “If talking could get it done, there’s not limit to what could happen.”

10:16-20—**So what can one do to succeed in life?**

- v.16—Realize youthful leaders are often subject to vanity. They value luxury and extravagance, which is often a prescription for heartache. (Just think of Solomon’s own son Rehoboam and the foolish decision he made which resulted in the division of the nation. 1st Kings 12:6-8) Wisdom indeed seek out counsel from others, but one must be ever so careful to choose mature and wise advisors. We can always find someone to tell us what we want to hear.
- v.17—There is something to be said for maturity, experience, timeliness, and soberness in leadership.
- v.18—Neglect, laziness, slothfulness will literally bring a house down.
- v.19—Here is a sure-fire prescription for a collapse—the downfall of a home, a business, a nation, or a church... taking what God intended for joy and making it a god. Hedonism, (the pursuit of pleasure or the good life) is at the core of many a broken family or nation.
- v.20—So one should always use discretion and guardedness. It is often true, being too loose with one’s tongue can result in a whole flood of hurt and evil happening. Gossip can kill a fellowship. So often, it just happens... “a little birdie told me...”

So to succeed, be prudent, get sound advice, be diligent, and guard your tongue.

Lesson 10—Part 1

Diligence In Life

Research for this lesson is from *Is This All There Is To Life?* By Ray Stedman, *Encountering Ecclesiastes* By James Limburg, *Coping With Change* By Walter Keiser Jr., *Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon* by R.J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt

Text: **Ecclesiastes 11:1-10**

This closing two chapter section is Qoheleth's final appeal to live life significantly. He has tried to face the truths of existence from every angle, both academically and in Solomon's case, experientially. The former has made for quite the learning of life-truths. The latter however, has made for the weakening of his faith and compromising his initial commitment to God. For a man with such unparalleled wisdom, who gave such meaningful counsel, who was recognized world-wide for his understanding of life, he personally caved in on the side of success run-amuck and pleasing and catering to women who did not share his faith.

11:1-6—Be diligent in how you go about living your life!

v.1-2—Cast your bread on the waters. This is NOT what a farmer does, he does not take the bread from his grain crop and throw it in the river. Rather one should take the produce (fruit) of our labors and send it out to points beyond the limits of one's own sight. It is not advisable to only share your blessings it is under your watch and control. No outcomes are guaranteed or assured but more times than not, generosity will flow back to you.

Don't be limited or stingy in your benevolence. J. Smith says that that "X + 1" formula means in a unlimited way. "**Divide your portion to seven, or eight...**" is a way encouraging ongoing generosity. Look beyond the immediate.

The return, while not guaranteed, is more likely when one has been a generous sower. And one never knows, when at some point down the road, that he/she may be the one in need.

v.3—Some things are pretty predictable, and others not! But once the tree falls, that's where it is. Then you just have to deal with it. This applies to so many circumstances in life.

v.4—If a person waits for just the perfect moment to begin a task or take action, he will never get around to doing it. Diligence says go ahead and get busy.

v.5—There is a limit to what man can know. There are certain things of God, which remain a mystery to man, unless He reveals them to us. Consider even the "mystery" of breath and the formation of the unborn. With all the

sophistication of medical science today, so much still remains a mystery. How much more in these ancient times before ultra-sound and DNA testing!

v.6—When there is work to be done, work at it diligently, morning and evening. One never knows where the yield will come from. This is not just a farming principle. We might say today, “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

Don’t just sit there—do something! Be productive!

11:7—The Sweetness of Life

v.7—With the light of the dawn, a new day comes as a gift to be enjoyed and utilized for good. It is another opportunity to maximize life and honor God with how we live.

Two things said to be sweet—The sleep of the laborer (5:12) and the light of a new day. (11:7) Sweetness refers to the pleasantness of the experience.

11:8-10—Appreciation and diligence for the aged and the young

v.8—Counsel for the aging or aged. The aged should be glad for another new day. Have appreciation for every day and every opportunity. The light of v.7 represents another day of life that dawn. One should not forget that life has its dark moments—so one should maximize the good and the blessedness. Make the most of every moment. This moment, right now, is actually all you have for certain.

v.9-10—Counsel for the young. God has provided so much for man to enjoy, so enjoy it while you are younger and can! While one has the energy, resources, and abilities, pursue your heart’s desire. This does NOT mean one should be licentious! This is not a blank check, a carte blanche to just live recklessly or sensually or carnally. That would be the secular worldview and value system.

Know this! There is a coming accountability. Every person will answer to God for the life-choices made.

To enjoy the blessings God has given for man to enjoy, one must remove the anxiety-makers (grief, anger, evil) for childhood/youth pass by so quickly and the “prime of life” is so fleeting. (hevel—a vapor, mist, smoke)

Lesson 10—Part 2

Remember!

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Text: **Ecclesiastes 12:1-14**

This is not an admonition to live in the past! It is rather an earnest appeal to respect the past, make the most of your present, but live for the future. People who overly dwell nostalgically on the “good ole days” may not be making the most of where they really are in life and what they can do for God, His kingdom and themselves right now! So Qoheleth continues his counsel for the younger generation in both direct appeal and a brilliant metaphor both aimed at challenging the most meaningFULL life!

12:1-8—Remember... before...!

v.1—Remember your Creator! We are the created, HE (Jehovah) is the Creator. And this remembering is not just an exercise in mental cognizance. It is more than mental recall of the past. Rather it is to consider God' is at work in life! He acts decisively and purposefully on behalf of His children. And when one remembers God in this way, it requires that we take decisive action given our opportunities.

WHY? Because days are just ahead when a person will no longer be able to do all that he/she desires or may no longer receive the enjoyment from it.

v.2-6 This passage explains the “before...” Qoheleth uses two metaphors to describe what is “just around the corner” or “coming down the road” for all men. This is a challenge to maximize the opportunities, to live all-out for God while one can. The two metaphors are [1] the sudden outburst of a middle-eastern storm blowing in from the Mediterranean (v.2), or [2] the dilapidation of an old house that is deteriorating from age and weather. Both metaphors describe a passing by of life all too quickly. Walt Kaiser Jr. provides a list or table describing the challenges to life that come with age:

REFERENCE	MEANING/APPLICATION
Keeper of the house trembles (v.3a)	Arms weaken and become feeble.
Heroic, mighty men bent (v.3b)	Legs and knees weaken and begin to totter
Grinders cease, become few (v.3c)	Lost and broken teeth
Sight through windows grow dim (v.3d)	Vision and sight starts to fade and dim.
Doors on street are shut (v.4a)	Chewing becomes more difficult.
Sound of grinding of the mill fades (4b)	Have to resort to softer foods to eat

One rises at sound of a bird (v.4c)	Sleep is lighter, wakened easily
Daughters of song brought low (v.4d)	Sounds of music harder to hear
Fear heights and terrors on road (v.5ab)	Afraid of falling, or travel is harder
Almond tree blossoms (v.5c)	Hair turns white
Grasshopper drags along (v.5d)	Pace and gait in ones steps slow
Caperberry ineffective (v.5e)	Normal desires fade, stimulants fail
Person goes home, mourners in streets(5fg)	Death finally comes
Silver cord broken (v.6a)	Neurological issues, spinal cord ailments
Golden bowl broken (v.6b)	Mind fades
Pitchers shattered at spring (v.6c)	Heart gives out
Wheel shattered at the well (v.6d)	Circulation diminishes

The final four (**Bold print**) are the typical things which contribute to one's dying!

v.7—And at the end, this body which was formed from dust of the earth (the same elements of the earth) is returned to that dust. (see Genesis 2:7 & 3:19)

And the spirit (ruach—life-breath) returns to God who gave it.

v.8—So a life comes and goes. Is life meaning**LESS** or meaning**FULL**? The determining factor is not about how long a life is lived, but rather HOW a life is lived.

We know by now—it is vanity—temporal, a mist or vapor. It passes by all too quickly.

How sad if one has not known the key to living!

12:9-14—The Conclusion of it all

v. 9—Qoheleth has taken the role of a teacher, a thoughtful contemplator, and an author who has pursued the two primary views of life—from the secular (without God) and the spiritual (with God).

v.10—He has searched and exhausted his resources to find appropriate words that reflect truth correctly.

v.11—Wise words have a two-fold purpose:

- [1] goads—to prod man in the right direction
- [2] nails—to fasten things there they belong, and where they can be most useful.

They come from ONE SHEPHERD—Jehovah! He is the true God, the highest source of all instruction (knowledge) and wisdom (application)

v.12—There is no end to the amount of available information. One can easily get bogged down and wearied to the bone in trying to amass and consider it

all. There is such a thing as the peril of information overload. It that were the case then in Qoheleth's day, imagine how it is now!

v.13—The conclusion to approaching life spiritually and purposefully—
FEAR GOD—have an uncompromising respect and awe of Him and all His eternal and infinite divine qualities.

KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS—This is living out the will of God.
Obey Him from the heart.
This is the whole duty of man!

The CEV says, “*This is what life is all about!*”

v.14—For there is ultimate accountability for how we have lived life, the choices we have made, the principles we have lived by and the values we have put at the top of the list. (See 2nd Corinthians 5:10 & Revelation 20:12-13)

So how might the Bible student sum up this great book on contrasting worldviews?

A suggestion:

- 1) Know and fear and remember God, your Maker.
- 2) Recognize all the avenues of goodness designed and provided by God, the Creator for man's abundant living!
- 3) Respect time. Understand the “hevel” factor. (It all passes like a vapor)
- 4) Work diligently at whatever you do.
- 5) Acknowledge that justice and injustice occur side by side in this world.
- 6) Be mindful of your mortality.
- 7) Live and share generously.
- 8) Death comes to all men, so prepare your “departure” by growing in Godly fear, true spirituality, dignity and obedient faith.
- 9) Prepare yourself for accountability—you are going to meet God.
- 10) Don't expect to learn and know everything—only God knows ALL!

And a final word... for the Jews at the feast of Tabernacles in the fall after the crops were gathered, (comparable to our Thanksgiving), they publicly read the book of Ecclesiastes. For this describes the meaningFULL life!

Ecclesiastes 1

1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."
3 What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun? 4 A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever. 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there again. 6 Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns. 7 All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again. 8 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. 9 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. 10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages Which were before us. 11 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.

12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.

16 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." 17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

Ecclesiastes 2

2:1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men--many concubines.

9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 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.

12 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? 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one

fate befalls them both. 15 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." 16 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! 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.

18 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. 19 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. 20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. 21 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. 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity. 24 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. 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? 26 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.

Ecclesiastes 3

3:1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--
2 A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. 3 A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear 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 throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. 6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away. 7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak. 8 A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace. 9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? 10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. 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.

12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; 13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor--it is the gift of God. 14 I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. 15 That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

16 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. 17 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. 18 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." 19 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. 20 All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. 21 Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth? 22 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?

Ecclesiastes 4

4:1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. 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. 2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. 3 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.

4 I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. 5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. 6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

7 Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. 8 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 and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. 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. 11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? 12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

13 A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction. 14 For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. 15 I have seen all the living under the sun throng to

the side of the second lad who replaces him.
16 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, for this too is vanity and striving after
wind.

Ecclesiastes 5

5:1 Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. 2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. 3 For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

8 If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them. 9 After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. 11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? 12 The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. 14 When those riches were lost through a bad investment

and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. 15 As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. 16 This also is a grievous evil--exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? 17 Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

18 Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. 19 Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

Ecclesiastes 6

6:1 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men-- 2 a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires; yet God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction. 3 If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, "Better the miscarriage than he, 4 for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity. 5 "It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he. 6 "Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things-- do not all go to one place?"

7 All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied. 8 For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living? 9 What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.

10 Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is. 11 For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man? 12 For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 7

7:1 A good name is better than a good ointment, And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy. 4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure. 5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools. 6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool; And this too is futility. 7 For oppression makes a wise man mad, And a bribe corrupts the heart. 8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. 9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools. 10 Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this. 11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good And an advantage to those who see the sun. 12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors. 13 Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent? 14 In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him. 15 I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. 16 Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? 17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool.

Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.

19 Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. 20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. 21 Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you. 22 For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

23 I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. 24 What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it? 25 I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness. 26 And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

27 "Behold, I have discovered this," says the Preacher, "adding one thing to another to find an explanation, 28 which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these. 29 "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."

Ecclesiastes 8

8:1 Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.

2 I say, "Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God. 3 "Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases." 4 Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"

5 He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure. 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, though a man's trouble is heavy upon him. 7 If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen? 8 No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it. 9 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.

10 So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility. 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. 12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. 13 But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

14 There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of

the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. 15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

16 When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), 17 and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover.

Ecclesiastes 9

9:1 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. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.

2 It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear. 3 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. Afterwards they go to the dead. 4 For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. 6 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.

7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. 8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. 9 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.

10 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.

11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor

wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. 12 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.

13 Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me. 14 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. 15 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. 16 So I said, " Wisdom is better than strength." But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded. 17 The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Ecclesiastes 10

10:1 Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor. 2 A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left. 3 Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool. 4 If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler- - 6 folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. 7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.

8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall. 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them. 10 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. 11 If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. 12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; 13 the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. 14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him? 15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city. 16 Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning. 17 Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time--for strength and not for drunkenness. 18 Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks. 19 Men prepare a meal for enjoyment,

and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything. 20 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.

Ecclesiastes 11

11:1 Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days. 2 Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth. 3 If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies. 4 He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap. 5 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.

6 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.

7 The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. 8 Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.

9 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.

10 So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

Ecclesiastes 12

12:1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; 2 before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; 3 in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; 4 and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly. 5 Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. 6 Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; 7 then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. 8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

9 In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. 10 The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.

11 The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.

13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments,

because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.