



Ecclesiastes

Life Under the Sun

(Teacher's Edition)

Ecclesiastes - Introduction

Why Study It?

- Why was the Old Testament written?

Romans 15:4 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through perseverance and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Ecclesiastes in particular helps us in encouragement and hope. The world easily tempts us to believe that other things are the answer to life, but Ecclesiastes reminds us that these earthly distractions all fail.

1 Corinthians 10:6 6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

1 Corinthians 10:11 11 Now all these things happened to them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

While in context the “these things” specifically apply to some of what happened to the people of Israel, the thought also applies to Ecclesiastes. It helps us to not set our hearts on the wrong things and serves as a warning to us.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 16 Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, 17 that each person who belongs to God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

As part of God’s scriptures, it teaches us, corrects us, and trains us.

The theme of Ecclesiastes is the futility of everything when viewed from a purely earthly viewpoint. The world sometimes recognizes this at unexpected times, at the peak of success, people sometimes ask, “Is this all there is”?

- Is Fame enough? Robin Williams hung himself in August 2014
- Is Accomplishment enough? Ernest Hemingway shot himself in July 1961
- Is Power enough? Cleopatra killed herself with poisons in 30 BC
- Are Riches enough? Eli M Black multi-millionaire CEO of United Brands leapt to his death out of a 44th floor window in Feb 1975

We know better, the things of this world are not enough. But with all of the troubles in the world, we can forget and face difficulties ourselves. Or, we can get so caught up in the race for pleasure and success in this world, we make it our goal, forgetting these things won’t satisfy us.

Ecclesiastes - Introduction

Name

In Greek this book was named Ekklesiastes, based on translating the Hebrew term Qoheleth (#6953 assembler). We can recognize the Greek name as being similar to ekklesia (#1577 assembly). Both terms, Ekklesiastes and Qoheleth, describe a Preacher or Teacher who convenes or addresses an assembly. While not addressed to a physical assembly, this teacher addresses all, with a message that all need to hear.

Author

Although not named, the verses within Ecclesiastes clearly point to Solomon.

- **Son of David**

Ecclesiastes 1:1 1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem:

Some will argue that son can be used to mean descendent:

Matthew 1:1 1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

But the other details given couldn't really apply to anyone but Solomon

- **Ruled Israel in Jerusalem**

Ecclesiastes 1:12 12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

1 Kings 11:42 42 The time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years.

- **Later the divided kingdom left only Judah ruled from Jerusalem**

1 Kings 12:20 20 When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. There was no one who followed David's house, except for the tribe of Judah only.

- **Great riches**

Ecclesiastes 2:7-9 7 I bought male servants and female servants, and had servants born in my house. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all who were before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got myself male and female singers, and the delights of the sons of men: musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9 So I was great, and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also remained with me.

Ecclesiastes - Introduction

Solomon's Background

Solomon had both advantages and disadvantages in his life.

- **He was a son of David**

He was the son of the king over Israel.

1 Chronicles 28:5 5 Of all my sons (for Yahweh has given me many sons), he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of Yahweh's kingdom over Israel.

- **David was a man after God's heart**

David, his father, is described as a man after God's own heart. Imagine having a father like that.

Acts 13:22 22 When he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, to whom he also testified, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'

- **An afflicted family after David's sin**

All was not good in his family, though. David had been warned of problems to come as a result of his sin.

2 Sam 12:10-11 10 Now therefore the sword will never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken Uriah the Hittite's wife to be your wife.' 11 "This is what Yahweh says: 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.'

His brother raped his sister and was then killed by another brother.

2 Sam 13:20 20 Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart."

2 Sam 13:32 32 Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother, answered, "Don't let my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead; for by the appointment of Absalom this has been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar."

- **Half-Brother Absalom rebelled**

His half-brother Absalom fully rebelled against his father.

2 Sam 15:10 10 But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron!'"

- **Given instruction by David**

David, being a man after God's heart instructed Solomon. Here we see one example of that.

Ecclesiastes - Introduction

1 Chronicles 28:9-10 9 You, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for Yahweh searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. 10 Take heed now; for Yahweh has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong, and do it.”

- **Asked for wisdom**

1 Kings 3:5-10 5 In Gibeon, Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask for what I should give you.” 6 Solomon said, “You have shown to your servant David my father great loving kindness, because he walked before you in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with you. You have kept for him this great loving kindness, that you have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is today. 7 Now, Yahweh my God, you have made your servant king instead of David my father. I am just a little child. I don’t know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is among your people which you have chosen, a great people, that can’t be numbered or counted for multitude. 9 Give your servant therefore an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this great people of yours?” 10 This request pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

2 Chronicles 1:7-12 7 That night, God appeared to Solomon and said to him, “Ask for what you want me to give you.” 8 Solomon said to God, “You have shown great loving kindness to David my father, and have made me king in his place. 9 Now, Yahweh God, let your promise to David my father be established; for you have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. 10 Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of yours?” 11 God said to Solomon, “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, nor yet have you asked for long life; but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge my people, over whom I have made you king, 12 therefore wisdom and knowledge is granted to you. I will give you riches, wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had who have been before you, and none after you will have.”

- **Famous for his wisdom**

1 Kings 4:34 34 People of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, sent by all kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

- **Attained Fame**

1 Kings 10:6-7 6 She said to the king, “It was a true report that I heard in my own land of your acts, and of your wisdom. 7 However I didn’t believe the words until I came and my eyes had seen it. Behold, not even half was told me! Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard.

- **Attained Riches**

1 Kings 10:27 27 The king made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem, and cedars as common as the sycamore trees that are in the lowland.

- **Turned to foreign women**

Ecclesiastes - Introduction

1 Kings 11:1-4 Now king Solomon loved many foreign women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites; 2 of the nations concerning which Yahweh said to the children of Israel, "You shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon joined to these in love. 3 He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines. His wives turned his heart away. 4 When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God, as the heart of David his father was.

Deuteronomy 7:2-5 2 and when Yahweh your God delivers them up before you, and you strike them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy to them. 3 You shall not make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to his son, nor shall you take his daughter for your son. 4 For that would turn away your sons from following me, that they may serve other gods. So Yahweh's anger would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. 5 But you shall deal with them like this: you shall break down their altars, dash their pillars in pieces, cut down their Asherah poles, and burn their engraved images with fire.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 18 It shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write himself a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the Levitical priests. 19 It shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them; 20 that his heart not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he not turn away from the commandment to the right hand, or to the left, to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children, in the middle of Israel.

- **Rebuked by God**

1 Kings 11:9-11 9 Yahweh was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from Yahweh, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he didn't keep that which Yahweh commanded. 11 Therefore Yahweh said to Solomon, "Because this is done by you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant.

- **Rebellion of servant Jeroboam**

1 Kings 11:26 26 Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also lifted up his hand against the king.

When?

Unknown - many verses show that it was after obtaining great wealth. We also can't imagine God inspiring him during his time of active rebellion against God.

Ecclesiastes - Introduction

Outline

- Introduction (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3)
- Search for Meaning (Ecclesiastes 1:4-2:26)
- Observations (Ecclesiastes 3:1-6:12)
- Counsel for Life (Ecclesiastes 7:1-12:7)
- Conclusion (Ecclesiastes 12:8-14)

Phrases Used Repeatedly within Ecclesiastes:

Vanity/Meaningless/Futility

Hebel (#1892) which is generally translated vanity occurs 38 times in Ecclesiastes. While vanity is a good translation, the literal meaning is vapor. Solomon uses vapor as a metaphor similar to the New Testament use in James, where one aspect of the idea is the transitory, limited time of life is stated. Ecclesiastes explains that many of the things that people seek are like a vapor, they won't last. A second aspect of a vapor is its lack of substance. There just isn't much substance to a vapor. Ecclesiastes again makes the comparison showing the lack of substance to things that many would consider important. A vapor also has limited power, limited reliability. A vapor can't be depended upon to accomplish things. Similarly, a vapor is beyond our control.

James 4:14 14 Whereas you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.

Chasing After the Wind

An extension of the idea of many things being a vapor (vanity), is this idea that pursuing them is like chasing the wind. The thing pursued includes the ideas from vapor of transitory, lacking substance, etc., but goes further is stressing the impossibility of the pursuit. Chasing the wind is a useless pursuit. We may put in a lot of effort, but won't accomplish our goal. What would someone do if they caught the wind, could they in any sense hold it without destroying it in the process.

Under the Sun

The phrase "under the sun" is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes. It is used to refer to life on Earth, the physical realm. Specifically he is not talking about the totality of everything, which would also include the spiritual realm. As such, it also includes an element of the temporary, as nothing physical on this Earth is permanent (Matthew 24:35). It is important that we remember this distinction. Looking at life from a purely physical, Earthly perspective leads to certain conclusions. Ecclesiastes examines these conclusions and shows their limited ability to explain a purpose to life.

Matthew 24:35 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 1

Introduction (1:1 - 1:2)

Ecc 1:1-2 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.”

The book begins, as discussed in our introduction, with a statement of the author, Solomon.

The topic is introduced in verse 2. Vanity of vanities. This phrase introduces the book here, and closes the book (except for the conclusion) in Ecc 12:8.

Ecc 12:8 8 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher. “All is vanity!”

- Is a vanity of vanities different from a vanity?

When a word is used in a phrase like this, it indicates an extreme or ultimate. A king of kings is the ultimate ruler. Vanity of vanities shows the extreme worthlessness of things under the sun for use as the real purpose in life.

- Do many in the world live a life of vanity?
- Are we at risk of being influenced in the world to pursue a life of vanity?

Yes, seeing many around us, place such emphasis on money, popularity, power, and so on, can easily mislead us into making these things our goals.

- All is vanity (v2), does anything earthly have real value

Everything on this Earth is temporary and will ultimately be destroyed. To have any real value it must in some way influence eternal outcomes.

What Profit? (1:3-1:11)

Ecc 1:3-11 3 What does man gain from all his labor in which he labors under the sun? 4 One generation goes, and another generation comes; but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hurries to its place where it rises. 6 The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north. It turns around continually as it goes, and the wind returns again to its courses. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. 8 All things are full of weariness beyond uttering. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 That which has been is that which shall be; and that which has been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. 10 Is there a thing of which it may be said, “Behold, this is new?” It has been long ago, in the ages which were before us. 11 There is no memory of the former; neither shall there be any memory of the latter that are to come, among those that shall come after.

The question in verse 3 can be asked in many forms. Here it is phrased “what profit?”. Today we often hear variations, “What is my purpose?”, “What is the meaning of life”. Even people who don’t believe in God find it

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 1

difficult to deny that there must be a purpose behind it all. Solomon takes these verses to consider it from an “under the sun” approach.

- What profit does any earthly thing have compared to the eternal? (Matt 16:26)

Matt 16:26 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?

He discusses activity/movement, using several examples, but showing that for all that is done, from an earthly viewpoint nothing is really accomplished. The sun completes its cycle, only to do it all again. Powerful winds can blow, but only to blow again. Water falls and runs to the sea, only to fall again. Our lives can seem like that, a daily repetitive cycle.

About water, it is interesting how long man believed that rain fell and ran off the edge of a flat Earth and how recently we understood the hydrologic (water) cycle that was described here.

- Can life seem full of toil and trouble (v8)?

We see the world around us and recognize that there are many problems.

- We rush to see and hear, but is it ever enough (v8)?

After we see and hear, we only move on to the next thing.

- Is there ever really anything new (v9,10)?

He visits this idea several times, nothing is truly new.

- Of all that we accomplish, is anything remembered for long (v11)?

He has described the problem faced by looking at life from an “under the sun” approach. Lots of toil, but nothing really accomplished. When examined closely, life (under the sun) would be depressingly pointless.

Investigate the Matter (1:12-13)

Ecc 1:12-13 12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under the sky. It is a heavy burden that God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

- What qualified Solomon to answer this problem (did he have time, did he have resources) (v12)?

We know he had wisdom and riches. As king he would have great flexibility in deciding which efforts were worthwhile.

- How seriously did he investigate the issue (v13)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 1

He applied his heart to it, This was important to Solomon.

- What approach did he use (v13)

Not a casual approach, but one with wisdom.

Is Knowledge and Wisdom the Answer? (v14-18)

Ecc 1:14-18 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. 15 That which is crooked can't be made straight; and that which is lacking can't be counted. 16 I said to myself, "Behold, I have obtained for myself great wisdom above all who were before me in Jerusalem. Yes, my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." 17 I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also was a chasing after wind. 18 For in much wisdom is much grief; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

- What does he mean by comparing these things to grasping the wind (v14)?

Seeking these things is an impossible goal.

- Is it possible to grasp the wind (v14)?
- Can we finish a task of straightening crooked things (v15)?

No, there is always something more that needs fixing.

- Is it possible to make up for all that is lacking (v15)?

No, we help one situation, but still many needs remain.

- How did Solomon's wisdom compare to everyone else (v16)?
- How can knowledge and wisdom bring us sorrow (v18)?

The more we know, from an earthly standpoint, the more we realize that life on this Earth isn't how it should be, the people around us don't behave as they should, even our own life isn't as it should be. The more we know, the more we see the shortcomings.

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 2

Pleasure/the Good Life (2:1 - 2:11)

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth: therefore enjoy pleasure;" and behold, this also was vanity. 2 I said of laughter, "It is foolishness;" and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?" 3 I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine, my heart yet guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold of folly, until I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their lives. 4 I made myself great works. I built myself houses. I planted myself vineyards. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit. 6 I made myself pools of water, to water the forest where trees were grown. 7 I bought male servants and female servants, and had servants born in my house. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all who were before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got myself male and female singers, and the delights of the sons of men: musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9 So I was great, and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also remained with me. 10 Whatever my eyes desired, I didn't keep from them. I didn't withhold my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced because of all my labor, and this was my portion from all my labor. 11 Then I looked at all the works that my hands had worked, and at the labor that I had labored to do; and behold, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

Solomon next turns his attention to pleasure, living the good life. He concludes that this also is vanity. This section is important, because the world believes that just getting a bit more is an appropriate goal in life. We may face criticism, as if we aren't earnest enough, if we don't make it our absolute priority as well. The world does press us into the idea of keeping up with friends and neighbors.

- What type of pleasure is he discussing (v4,5)?

Not just the immoral hedonistic lifestyle, but also the more respectable pursuit of the good life. While this avoids the directly immoral behavior, it is not any more suitable as an ultimate goal for life.

- Was Solomon qualified to discuss this?

Recall the wisdom and riches he possessed. Houses, orchards, servants, pools, flocks, herds, silver and gold so abundant they became common. Wisdom that attracted people from far and wide to hear. Both beyond anything we can begin to imagine for ourselves. Yet, he realized their limitations, while often we fail to.

- How can laughter be madness (v2)?

Remember the children's fable about being granted a wish. It often ended badly for the person making the wish without considering the consequences. Hearing that, we may be tempted to think, they should have wished for happiness. But would we really want to be happy in the midst of tragedies, suffering and death. It would as Solomon said in verse 2, but madness. Even happiness doesn't make sense as a goal.

- What does pleasure accomplish (v2)?

From an under the sun approach, does it leave us any better off once we're dead. Does it change anything in even the most microscopically small way?

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 2

- In this search, did he understand there are guiding limits (v3)?

His wisdom recognized limits. Even from an under the sun approach, we understand limits.

- Did he explore both possessions and activities (v4,8)?

In recent times, we hear the recommendation to buy experiences not possessions as even the world starts to see some of the limitations of possessions. But that isn't the meaningful answer either. Solomon sought it with music (singers and instruments). I certainly enjoy listening to music, but music and other experiences aren't the answer either. We'll always want something more, something better, something we haven't had. But that something more just shows that it doesn't ultimately satisfy. Without knowing it, we're really saying, "Is that all there is?"

- Did he rejoice in what he found (v10)?

Yes, the failure of these items to satisfy, wasn't because they failed to bring joy to him. He embraced them fully, but realized that even rejoicing in them wasn't the real answer.

- Did it have any lasting meaning or value (v11)?

What does it really change in the end? Certainly nothing physically, we'll still be dead, and spiritually, making it our goal, can only leave us worse off.

Wise vs Fool (2:12-2:16)

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16 12 I turned myself to consider wisdom, madness, and folly; for what can the king's successor do? Just that which has been done long ago. 13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness. 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walks in darkness—and yet I perceived that one event happens to them all. 15 Then I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity. 16 For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no memory forever, since in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. Indeed, the wise man must die just like the fool!

In chapter 1, Solomon discussed that knowledge/wisdom couldn't be the absolute meaning of life goal. Here he returns to the subject, but balances that conclusion by comparing the wise to the fool.

- Can anything really new be done (v12)?

With technology and the internet we have many new ways to communicate. But is it new? No, men have been communicating since the beginning. Atomic and Hydrogen bombs, new? No, men have been killing other men since the beginning. We see variations and efficiencies, but nothing new that will finally provide a meaningful answer and satisfaction.

- How does light exceed darkness (v13,14)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 2

What we think and do does matter, though. What happens when we walk around in darkness? We run into and stumble over people and things hurting ourselves and others. Little children readily admit that they don't like darkness and fear it. We act like we've outgrown such things, forgetting that we're still just as easily hurt by things we don't see or know.

- Under the sun, what happens to both (v15)?

In the end, we die. No lasting benefit to pleasure, it can't be the ultimate answer.

- Is much remembered after we're gone (v16)?

Few are remembered even a century after they die. In any case, what good would that remembrance do for them?

Despair Under the Sun (2:17-2:26)

Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 17 So I hated life, because the work that is worked under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind. 18 I hated all my labor in which I labored under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. 19 Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have rule over all of my labor in which I have labored, and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. 20 Therefore I began to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labor in which I had labored under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, with knowledge, and with skillfulness; yet he shall leave it for his portion to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what does a man have of all his labor and of the striving of his heart, in which he labors under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail is grief; yes, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. 24 There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? 26 For to the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he gives travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Looking deeply at it, from an "under the sun" approach, Solomon examines the result of our toils in this world.

- Under the sun, can this life be depressing (v17)?

Hated life, distressing work, labor and toil. Focusing on the wrong things (under the sun) can be depressing. Much like the 1st chapter where we discussed the endless repetition, it is all wearying.

- What is the result of all the earthly treasure we accumulate (v18-19)?

Matthew 6:19-21 19 "Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 2

Under the sun, neither we nor the things we accumulate are lasting.

James 4:14 14 Whereas you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.

- Does labor provide any absolute meaning (v22)?
- Where does the good come from (v24)?

James 1:16-17 16 Don't be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow.

- Can we enjoy the good without letting it become our absolute goal (v24)?
- For all the pride we take in our accomplishments, who really determines the results (v26)?

We'll visit this idea again later:

Ecclesiastes 9:11 11 I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.

God is always in control.

Acts 17:26 26 He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings,

Israel saw, over and over, that it wasn't their strength that determined what happened to their nation, but it was always God that made the decision.

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 3

A Time (3:1 - 3:8)

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

The next thing Solomon considers is Time. Not time as in a duration, but time as in an event or occurrence. He does this through a series of contrasts showing the God retains ultimate control of events and the lack of events being an ultimate, permanent answer. We generally consider one of the contrasted items to be negative from our standpoint.

- Is there a time to die? Why? (Heb 9:27)

Heb 9:27 27 Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment,

- Is there a time to kill? (Gen 9:6)

Gen 9:6 6 Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in his own image.

- Is there a time to weep? (Matt 5:4, 2 Cor 7:9)

Matt 5:4 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

2 Cor 7:9 9 I now rejoice, not that you were grieved, but that you were grieved to repentance. For you were grieved in a godly way, that you might suffer loss by us in nothing.

- How much control do we have over the times?

We can influence things, but we are never really in control. Sometimes we plan carefully and events still turn out different than we expected

- Under the sun, does any time prove an ultimate answer?

Earthly events are never the ultimate answer. We look forward to many things in this life. But most of the time, after achieving an event we just shift our focus to the next goal. Any satisfaction doesn't last long.

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 3

God-Given Task (3:9-3:10)

Ecclesiastes 3:9-10 9 What profit has he who works in that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the burden which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

Again Solomon considers what profit is there in toil and labor. He says that this is a God given task.

- Why was man given labor? (Gen 3:17-19)

Gen 3:17-19 17 To Adam he said, "Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and have eaten from the tree, about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' the ground is cursed for your sake. You will eat from it with much labor all the days of your life. 18 It will yield thorns and thistles to you; and you will eat the herb of the field. 19 You will eat bread by the sweat of your face until you return to the ground, for you were taken out of it. For you are dust, and you shall return to dust."

Labor became difficult for man after sin. But even before sin, man wasn't designed to be idle, but was given the task of tending the garden (Gen 2:15).

God is eternal (3:11-15)

Ecclesiastes 3:11-15 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man can't find out the work that 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 as long as they live. 13 Also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor, is the gift of God. 14 I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; and God has done it, that men should fear before him. 15 That which is has been long ago, and that which is to be has been long ago. God seeks again that which is passed away.

Solomon contrasts the temporary results of man's efforts with the eternal nature of God's efforts.

- Can we know all of God's works? (Isaiah 55:9)

Isa 55:9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts

God's ways are higher than ours. Sometimes his word tells us why he did certain things, other times it doesn't. We tread on dangerous ground when we start making assumptions about why God did something. With his ways higher than ours, there may have been reasons for it that we just don't understand.

- How has eternity been put into our hearts(Gen 1:26)

Gen 1:26 26 God said, "Let's make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

- What gift has God given man (3:12-13)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 3

- Can we add anything to what God does (3:14)?
- What does God require of what we do (3:15)?

Injustice (3:16-17)

Ecclesiastes 3:16-17 16 Moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there. 17 I said in my heart, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."

Next Solomon considers the injustice he sees.

- Is there injustice in the world (3:16)? Why?

We live in a sinful world and man's sin sometimes leads to injustice. God tells us what to do, but leaves us free will to choose to do it or not.

- Why does injustice bother even non-Christians?

Yes, even non-Christians decry injustice. They recognize that some things are right and other things wrong without stopping to think of the basis for right and wrong. It is more than preferences (we sometimes recognize the difficulty of doing right), more than law (we recognize many things that are legal but wrong), more than majority view (otherwise why would it have any compelling effect other than force).

- What is the ultimate result of evil (3:17)?

In the end, we will all face God's judgment

Man vs Animals (3:18-22)

Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 18 I said in my heart, "As for the sons of men, God tests them, so that they may see that they themselves are like animals. 19 For that which happens to the sons of men happens to animals. Even one thing happens to them. As the one dies, so the other dies. Yes, they have all one breath; and man has no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place. All are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21 Who knows the spirit of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, whether it goes downward to the earth?" 22 Therefore I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion: for who can bring him to see what will be after him?

Solomon next compares man to animals, in an under the sun way.

- How are men like animals?
- How are men different from animals?

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 4

Oppression (4:1-4:3)

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold, the tears of those who were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. 2 Therefore I praised the dead who have been long dead more than the living who are yet alive. 3 Yes, better than them both is him who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Next under the sun, Solomon looks at oppression. Similar to his earlier look at injustice. Both show the futility of life from a purely under the sun approach

Job 3:1-5 After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed the day of his birth. 2 Job answered: 3 "Let the day perish in which I was born, the night which said, 'There is a boy conceived.' 4 Let that day be darkness. Don't let God from above seek for it, neither let the light shine on it. 5 Let darkness and the shadow of death claim it for their own. Let a cloud dwell on it. Let all that makes the day black terrify it.

Jeremiah 20:14-18 14 Cursed is the day in which I was born. Don't let the day in which my mother bore me be blessed. 15 Cursed is the man who brought news to my father, saying, "A boy is born to you," making him very glad. 16 Let that man be as the cities which Yahweh overthrew, and didn't repent. Let him hear a cry in the morning, and shouting at noontime; 17 because he didn't kill me from the womb. So my mother would have been my grave, and her womb always great. 18 Why did I come out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

He's not saying that life is worse than death, but that looking at life we can see it isn't what it ought to be. It was meant to be better.

Genesis 1:31 31 God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

- Why is there no comforter (v1)?

True comfort cannot come from anything in this world, everything in this world is temporary.

- Is power a temptation?

Discuss ways power corrupts and how we excuse it in the name of results. The idea that the end justifies the means can be tempting even to us.

Romans 3:8 8 Why not (as we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), "Let's do evil, that good may come?" Those who say so are justly condemned.

- In what sense are the dead better (v3-4)?

Under the sun there is trouble in this world and there is nothing ultimately satisfying to offset it.

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 4

- Why is the world different than it should be?

Sin. God created it perfect. Man brought sin into this world and much of the suffering is due to continuing sin.

Toil and Idleness (4:4-4:8)

Ecclesiastes 4:4-8 4 Then I saw all the labor and achievement that is the envy of a man's neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. 5 The fool folds his hands together and ruins himself. 6 Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and chasing after wind. 7 Then I returned and saw vanity under the sun. 8 There is one who is alone, and he has neither son nor brother. There is no end to all of his labor, neither are his eyes satisfied with wealth. "For whom then, do I labor and deprive my soul of enjoyment?" This also is vanity. Yes, it is a miserable business.

Toil and idleness can both lead to problems. We can focus on getting ahead, climbing the ladder, not minding who we hurt on our way up

Proverbs 16:8 8 Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues with injustice.

We can be idle and unable to help ourselves, much less anyone else

Ephesians 4:28 28 Let him who stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, producing with his hands something that is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need.

We shouldn't be idle or illicit gain, but rather labor, not only for our own needs, but to help others. We often focus on one or the other (idleness or focus on riches), but there are warnings against both

1 Timothy 6:9 9 But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation, a snare, and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction.

- Is some toil done to be envied (v4), does it accomplish anything?

Whether in physical riches, or even in doing good, there is always the temptation to focus on what others think about us.

Matthew 6:1-2 "Be careful that you don't do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2 Therefore, when you do merciful deeds, don't sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward.

- Does idleness accomplish anything (v5)?

No, even in this life we usually regret wasted time.

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 4

- Can toil for only ourselves be pointless (v8)?

We ask the questions, why am I doing this? What is the meaning of it all?

- Will getting what we want ever satisfy us (v8)?

We will always want something more. Even when the long coveted item is attained, we only shift focus to the next thing we don't have, often not even enjoying the long sought item that we now do have.

- Can a focus on toil and attaining harm us (v8)?

Stuff isn't the answer. As discussed in 1 Timothy, If we desire to be rich it will lead us into problems.

- Under the sun, is there any real satisfaction from doing things just for ourselves (v8)?

No, selfish pursuits only leave us unfulfilled. Even non-Christians realize there must be something more to life.

Value of a Companion (4:9-4:12)

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and doesn't have another to lift him up. 11 Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one keep warm alone? 12 If a man prevails against one who is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

No man is an island (John Donne). We are responsible for our effect on others

Romans 14:7 7 For none of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself.

14:12 12 So then each one of us will give account of himself to God.

14:15 15 Yet if because of food your brother is grieved, you walk no longer in love. Don't destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.

We realize that yes we are our brother's keeper.

We need each other to complete ways we are incomplete

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 4

1 Cor 12:12-26 12 For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot would say, "Because I'm not the hand, I'm not part of the body," it is not therefore not part of the body. 16 If the ear would say, "Because I'm not the eye, I'm not part of the body," it's not therefore not part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the smelling be? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body, just as he desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now they are many members, but one body. 21 The eye can't tell the hand, "I have no need for you," or again the head to the feet, "I have no need for you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 Those parts of the body which we think to be less honorable, on those we bestow more abundant honor; and our unrepresentable parts have more abundant propriety; 24 whereas our presentable parts have no such need. But God composed the body together, giving more abundant honor to the inferior part, 25 that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. When one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

We need others when we fall

Galatians 6:1-2 Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you also aren't tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Our society seems to be emphasizing the ideas of isolation and self-reliance in an increasing way. God didn't make us to be that way.

- How are two better than one (v9)?

We depend on one another

- Can we say, "it's their own fault" when others fall (v10)?

No, we recognize our risk as well. We would want them to help us when we had problems

- Can we withstand adversaries easier when not alone (v12)?

Here he talks about a physical adversary, but we face a spiritual adversary. We recognize the saying, there is strength in numbers. Knowing all of this, why would we purposely choose to miss opportunities to be around other Christians. Why go it alone?

Ecclesiastes - Chapter 4

Popularity Fades (4:13-4:16)

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 13 Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who doesn't know how to receive admonition any more. 14 For out of prison he came out to be king; yes, even in his kingdom he was born poor. 15 I saw all the living who walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the other, who succeeded him. 16 There was no end of all the people, even of all them over whom he was—yet those who come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

We tend to think that the rich and powerful have it made, but all things happen in God's time.

- Can you think of a poor, wise (shepherd) boy who trusted God and a king who followed his own ways and didn't listen to correction? What was the result?

Contrast David (lowly shepherd boy) and Saul (king, handsome, looked the part). One trusted in God, the other in himself, depending on his own ideas. Saul was later rejected as king.

- Under the sun, is either a permanent answer?

Even becoming king isn't an ultimate answer. Under the sun, they both die and physically, how is one better than the other?

- In what way is seeking power, like grasping for the wind?

Power can be an elusive goal slipping away no matter what we do. God controls nations and their boundaries, he decides who will rule.

Acts 17:26 26 He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings,

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 5 and 6

Speech and Vows (5:1-7)

In chapters 5 and 6 Solomon turns to some more practical advice, including being careful of what we say.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 Guard your steps when you go to God's house; for to draw near to listen is better than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they don't know that they do evil. 2 Don't be rash with your mouth, and don't let your heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and you on earth. Therefore let your words be few. 3 For as a dream comes with a multitude of cares, so a fool's speech with a multitude of words. 4 When you vow a vow to God, don't defer to pay it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Don't allow your mouth to lead you into sin. Don't protest before the messenger that this was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams there are vanities, as well as in many words; but you must fear God.

- Why go prudently to the house of God (Ecc 12:13, Prov 9:10)?

Ecclesiastes 12:13 13 This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.

Proverbs 9:10 10 The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

- Are there ways we can imprudently approach the house of God today? (no thought, habit, distracted, etc)

Being prudent requires effort. It is all too easy to slip into doing things by habit.

- What is the sacrifice of fools (1 Samuel 15:22)?

1 Samuel 15:22 22 Samuel said, "Has Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying Yahweh's voice? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

They substituted the easy task of making burnt offerings for the more committed task of truly following what God commands. Can we do that today? Can we assemble correctly, follow the right steps to become a Christian, but not let it really change our lives?

- Why should we avoid hasty words (James 1:19)?

James 1:19 19 So, then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger;

- Why should our words be few (Prov 10:19)?

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 5 and 6

What isn't lacking when there is a multitude of words? Do we really believe that sin will be there when we have many words?

- Why shouldn't we delay keeping vows (James 4:17)?

James 4:17 17 To him therefore who knows to do good, and doesn't do it, to him it is sin.

Vanity of Riches (5:8-17)

Solomon returns to the topic of the futility of riches.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-17 8 If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a district, don't marvel at the matter, for one official is eyed by a higher one, and there are officials over them. 9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all. The king profits from the field. 10 He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase: this also is vanity. 11 When goods increase, those who eat them are increased; and what advantage is there to its owner, except to feast on them with his eyes? 12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not allow him to sleep. 13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: wealth kept by its owner to his harm. 14 Those riches perish by misfortune, and if he has fathered a son, there is nothing in his hand. 15 As he came out of his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. 16 This also is a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go. And what profit does he have who labors for the wind? 17 All his days he also eats in darkness, he is frustrated, and has sickness and wrath.

- Why should we not be surprised at oppression and injustice (v8)?

There is sin in this world. Many seek only their own good.

- Why does one official need to watch over another (v8)?

We considered injustice. Even the world recognize that many will fall to temptations and need to be watched.

- Who benefits from the profit of the land (v9)?
- Can having things ever satisfy us (v10)?
- When we have more, do we just find more demands on our resources (v11)?
- How does abundance prevent sleep (v12)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 5 and 6

- How can riches hurt us (v13, 1 Timothy 6:9-10, James 5:3)?

1 Timothy 6:9-10 9 But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation, a snare, and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

James 5:3 3 Your gold and your silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be for a testimony against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up your treasure in the last days.

Metal typically corrodes most when not used. We leave things sitting in the garage or tool shed for ages and then find them corroded. Corrosion shows that we accumulated not to use but to have (lust of the eye). In that sense the very corrosion is a testimony against us.

- Will riches last (v16, Matthew 6:19-21)?

Matthew 6:19-21 19 “Don’t lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don’t break through and steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

A similar idea with the moth. Our clothes aren’t consumed when we wear them, but instead when they sit idle in a closet. Were we acquiring just to possess or were we acquiring to use? Were we laying up treasures on the Earth?

- What can we actually take out of this life (v15, Mark 8:36-37)?

Mark 8:36-37 36 For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? 37 For what will a man give in exchange for his life?

- How can a focus on riches leave us sick and sorrowful (v17)?

Gift of God (5:18-20)

If riches are vain, how should we think about the good things of this life?

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 18 Behold, that which I have seen to be good and proper is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor, in which he labors under the sun, all the days of his life which God has given him; for this is his portion. 19 Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. 20 For he shall not often reflect on the days of his life; because God occupies him with the joy of his heart.

- Where do the good things of this life come from (v18, James 1:17)

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 5 and 6

James 1:17 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow.

Every good gift comes from God. God has given us much to enjoy in this world. We should use it properly and with thanksgiving.

- Can we dwell unduly on this life (v20)?

A focus on the things of this life (life under the sun) and become depressed at the vanity of it.

Fleeting Riches (6:1-6)

In chapter 5 we saw that God is the one who gives good things. Now, Solomon addresses having good things, but being too focused on riches to actually enjoy them.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-6 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy on men: 2 a man to whom God gives riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him no power to eat of it, but an alien eats it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease. 3 If a man fathers a hundred children, and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not filled with good, and moreover he has no burial; I say that a stillborn child is better than he: 4 for it comes in vanity, and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. 5 Moreover it has not seen the sun nor known it. This has rest rather than the other. 6 Yes, though he live a thousand years twice told, and yet fails to enjoy good, don't all go to one place?

- Can we have everything we desire and still not be happy (v2)?

Riches ultimately do not satisfy. Their temporary nature makes them a false goal.

- In what way can a stillborn child be better than a rich man (v3-6)?

Focusing on and doing wrong is worse than having never been born.

- Can we be rich and still not see goodness (v6)?

It is often a temptation to seek after something and then not enjoy it, but only start seeking after the next "missing" item. We repeat the cycle without really enjoying what God has given us.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 5 and 6

Vanity (6:7-12)

Under the sun, we labor without being satisfied.

Ecclesiastes 6:7-12 7 All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. 8 For what advantage has the wise more than the fool? What has the poor man, that knows how to walk before the living? 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind. 10 Whatever has been, its name was given long ago; and it is known what man is; neither can he contend with him who is mightier than he. 11 For there are many words that create vanity. What does that profit man? 12 For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he spends like a shadow? For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

- How is seeing better than desiring (v9)?
- Can the things we labor for, in any way, make us better (v11)?
- Who does know what is good for man (v12, Jeremiah 10:23)?

Jeremiah 10:23 23 Yahweh, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 7 and 8

Unexpected Comparisons (7:1-8)

Solomon next turns to some practical sayings. This section includes several unexpected comparisons.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-8 A good name is better than fine perfume; and the day of death better than the day of one's birth. 2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living should take this to heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the face the heart is made good. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. 5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity. 7 Surely extortion makes the wise man foolish; and a bribe destroys the understanding. 8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning. The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

- How valuable is your reputation (v1, Prov 10:7, Prov 22:1)?

Prov 10:7 7 The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot.

Prov 22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches, and loving favor is better than silver and gold.

- How is our reputation like an ointment (v1)?

Ointment/perfume is noticed even before coming close. Our reputation goes far and wide

- How is the day of death better than the day of birth (v1)?

Just consider where we go after dying. Isn't Heaven better than anything in this world of troubles.

- How is mourning better than feasting (v2)?

Mourning can lead to repenting

- How is sorrow better than laughter (v3-4)?

We can come closer to people in shared sorrows.

- How is rebuke better than praise (v5-6)?

We learn from rebuke, praise just tempts to pride.

- How is the end better than the beginning (v8)?

We are usually excited to start, but that isn't the goal.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 7 and 8

Advice (7:9-14)

Next we see a series of short statements (almost like those in Proverbs) giving advice

Ecclesiastes 7:9-14 9 Don't be hasty in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. 10 Don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not ask wisely about this. 11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance. Yes, it is more excellent for those who see the sun. 12 For wisdom is a defense, even as money is a defense; but the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. 13 Consider the work of God, for who can make that straight, which he has made crooked? 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; yes, God has made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything after him.

- Why shouldn't we be quick to anger (v9, Prov 19:11, James 1:19-20)?

Prov 19:11 11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger. It is his glory to overlook an offense.

James 1:19-20 19 So, then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God.

Our anger doesn't produce good results. Almost everyone can recall times of anger that they regret.

- Are we tempted to think that the former days were better (v10)?

Gen 6:5 5 Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was continually only evil.

As tempted as we are that things are falling apart. In truth, we realize that things have been worse. Certainly the description in Genesis 6:5 sounds worse than today. When we take time to reflect, we realize that we are recalling a lot more of the good from our youth, and ignoring a lot of the bad.

- How is wisdom a defense (v12)?
- How should we look at what happens to us (v14, Philippians 4:11-12, Romans 8:28)?

Philippians 4:11-12 11 Not that I speak because of lack, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content in it. 12 I know how to be humbled, and I also know how to abound. In everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in need.

Romans 8:28 28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.

We will go through many situations in our lives. Many of these situations will be unpleasant and difficult. But God can cause good to come from them. We can serve God, wherever we are.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 7 and 8

Wisdom about Justice and Wickedness (7:15-24)

Ecclesiastes 7:15-24 15 All this I have seen in my days of vanity: there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his evildoing. 16 Don't be overly righteous, neither make yourself overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Don't be too wicked, neither be foolish. Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you should take hold of this. Yes, also don't withdraw your hand from that; for he who fears God will come out of them all. 19 Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. 20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and doesn't sin. 21 Also don't take heed to all words that are spoken, lest you hear your servant curse you; 22 for often your own heart knows that you yourself have likewise cursed others. 23 All this I have proved in wisdom. I said, "I will be wise;" but it was far from me. 24 That which is, is far off and exceedingly deep. Who can find it out?

- Does righteousness guarantee everything will go our way in this life (v15)?

No, we have many examples in the Bible of righteous men who suffered much.

- What does Solomon mean by overly righteous and overly wise (v16)?

Prov 3:7 7 Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil.

Perhaps he is talking about being wise in our eyes and righteous in our own eyes. Other verses certainly speak of the trouble that either of these can cause.

He could also be speaking of human wisdom and human righteousness. This echoes back to the first chapter.

Ecclesiastes 1:18 18 For in much wisdom is much grief; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Earthly (under the sun) wisdom sometimes serve to point out all the weaknesses and sorrows in this world. The more we know, the more we see it.

- If our wisdom and righteousness isn't the answer, what is (v18)?
- Is anyone always good (v20, Rom 3:10,23)?

Rom 3:10 10 As it is written, "There is no one righteous; no, not one.

Rom 3:23 23 for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;

- How concerned should we be about what people say about us (v21)?

No matter what you do, it seems there is always someone to condemn it. Just recall some of the condemnations that Jesus faced.

- Even extensively seeking wisdom, what will be true (v23-24)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 7 and 8

Warnings (7:25-29)

Next some warnings, also with some similarities to Proverbs.

Ecclesiastes 7:25-29 25 I turned around, and my heart sought to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity, and that foolishness is madness. 26 I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and traps, whose hands are chains. Whoever pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner will be ensnared by her. 27 “Behold, I have found this,” says the Preacher, “to one another, to find out the scheme 28 which my soul still seeks, but I have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all those. 29 Behold, I have only found this: that God made man upright; but they search for many schemes.”

- Is it more bitter than death to be deceived by someone who pretends to care for us (v26)?
- Do we recognize sin as entrapping us, contrary to the world’s view of sin as freedom (v26)?
- How rare are good people (v28)?
- Why isn’t man good (v29)?

Obey Authorities (8:1-9)

We are instructed to obey authorities. We have similar New Testament instructions in Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9 Who is like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed. 2 I say, “Keep the king’s command!” because of the oath to God. 3 Don’t be hasty to go out of his presence. Don’t persist in an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him, 4 for the king’s word is supreme. Who can say to him, “What are you doing?” 5 Whoever keeps the commandment shall not come to harm, and his wise heart will know the time and procedure. 6 For there is a time and procedure for every purpose, although the misery of man is heavy on him. 7 For he doesn’t know that which will be; for who can tell him how it will be? 8 There is no man who has power over the spirit to contain the spirit; neither does he have power over the day of death. There is no discharge in war; neither shall wickedness deliver those who practice it. 9 All this I have seen, and applied my mind to every work that is done under the sun. There is a time in which one man has power over another to his hurt.

Romans 13:1-7 13 Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. 2 Therefore he who resists the authority withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. Do you desire to have no fear of the authority? Do that which is good, and you will have praise from the authority, 4 for he is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid, for he doesn’t bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil. 5 Therefore you need to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. 6 For this reason you also pay taxes, for they are servants of God’s service, continually doing this very thing. 7 Therefore give everyone what you owe: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if customs, then customs; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 7 and 8

1 Peter 2:13-17 13 Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; 14 or to governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and for praise to those who do well. 15 For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16 as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

- Are we similarly bound to obey by a commitment to God (v2, 1 Cor 6:20)?

1 Cor 6:20 20 for you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

We may not think of it as an oath. But, as Christians, we've died to ourselves, we were bought with a price, we are not our own

- Where does the king get his power (v4, Rom 13:4)?

Rom 13:4 4 for he is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid, for he doesn't bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil.

- Is verse 5 a guarantee (consider Uriah and Jesus)?
- Do we often act like we know what will happen in the future (v7, James 4:14)?

James 4:14 14 Whereas you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.

We often use this verse to show the brevity of life, but it is also showing us that we don't know the future. We make plans assuming what will happen. But, not knowing, our plans are sometimes interrupted.

Death Comes to All (8:10-17)

Returning to his theme of vanity under the sun, Solomon again reminds us that we all face death.

Ecclesiastes 8:10-17 10 So I saw the wicked buried. Indeed they came also from holiness. They went and were forgotten in the city where they did this. This also is vanity. 11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. 12 Though a sinner commits crimes a hundred times, and lives long, yet surely I know that it will be better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. 13 But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he lengthen days like a shadow, because he doesn't fear God. 14 There is a vanity which is done on the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked. Again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. 15 Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun than to eat, to drink, and to be joyful: for that will accompany him in his labor all the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 7 and 8

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on the earth (even though eyes see no sleep day or night), 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man can't find out the work that is done under the sun, because however much a man labors to seek it out, yet he won't find it. Yes even though a wise man thinks he can comprehend it, he won't be able to find it.

- We sometimes don't live that way, but will we all face death (v10, Heb 9:27)?

Heb 9:27 27 Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment,

- The wicked in verse 10, did they start out evil?
- Why don't we react to evil speedily (v11)?
- What confidence do we have, even when surrounded by evil (v12)?
- Do bad things sometimes happen to good people (v14)? Give some biblical examples.
- Even seeing everything around us, what has God given us (v15)?
- Are there limits to what we can know (v16-17)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 9 and 10

Everyone Will Die (9:1-12)

Solomon again considers the reality of life “under the sun” reminding us that we all face death.

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12 For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hatred, man doesn't know it; all is before them. 2 All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, to the clean, to the unclean, to him who sacrifices, and to him who doesn't sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath, as he who fears an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event to all: yes also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. 4 For to him who is joined with all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything, neither do they have any more a reward; for their memory is forgotten. 6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy has perished long ago; neither do they any longer have a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun. 7 Go your way—eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. 8 Let your garments be always white, and don't let your head lack oil. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your life of vanity, which he has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity, for that is your portion in life, and in your labor in which you labor under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor plan, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, where you are going. 11 I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. 12 For man also doesn't know his time. As the fish that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly on them.

- Who is in control of everything (v1)?

Everything is in the hands of God, while we often have responsibilities to act, in the end it is God that determines results.

- Are we fooled sometimes by what is right before us (v1)?

We can be deceived about love and hatred even when we see someone right before us. Are own feelings can also be deceptive, as we sometimes later learn.

- What is the one thing that happens to all (v2-3)?

Death happens to all. Nothing physical is permanent

- How is living better than death (v4-5)?

With the living there is hope. We still have an opportunity to change our outcome, after death is the judgment and our outcome is fixed.

- Will the dead ever have any share or role of any kind in the world “under the sun” (v6)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 9 and 10

Nevermore have a share in anything under the sun (the physical world)

- What “religious” errors are ruled out by v6?

Reincarnation, an earthly physical resurrection, a second chance on the Earth

- Even knowing we will die, has God given us much good to enjoy (v7-9)?

God has blessed us in many ways in this life, we should not reject these blessings but use them as God intended.

- Why should we do things with all our might (v10)?

After we die it is over, there is no longer an opportunity to do things.

- We plan (James 4:13-16), but who is really in control of outcomes (v11-12)?

God always retains ultimate control. We imagine that our diligent efforts, abilities and wisdom control the results, but while they may influence the results, they do not control it.

Value and Limits of Wisdom (9:13-18)

Solomon again reminds us of the value of wisdom, but also that in the ultimate sense it too has limits.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18 13 I have also seen wisdom under the sun in this way, and it seemed great to me. 14 There was a little city, and few men within it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. 15 Now a poor wise man was found in it, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. 16 Then I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. 17 The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the cry of him who rules among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.

- Is Solomon considering wisdom from a spiritual or physical approach (v13)?

This is an “under the sun” physical consideration.

- Can wisdom outdo strength (v14-16, Prov 21:22)?

Yes, we’ve seen it in our own lives when we plow ahead with maximum effort until we finally give up, stop and take time to consider a better approach.

Proverbs 21:22 22 A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the strength of its confidence.

The strong may not be able to break a cities walls, but they might be more easily scaled

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 9 and 10

- Are we tempted to ignore or dismiss the poor (v15,16, Prov 14:20, Prov 18:23)?

Yes, our society is often dismissive and even contemptuous toward the poor.

Proverbs 14:20 20 The poor person is shunned even by his own neighbor, but the rich person has many friends.

We can be tempted to show partiality

James 2:1-4 My brothers, don't hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with partiality. 2 For if a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, comes into your synagogue, and a poor man in filthy clothing also comes in, 3 and you pay special attention to him who wears the fine clothing and say, "Sit here in a good place;" and you tell the poor man, "Stand there," or "Sit by my footstool" 4 haven't you shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Proverbs 18:23 23 The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly.

We can be tempted to let the rich get away with things (not that failing to hold them accountable is really good for them. Without correction we all continue in our faults).

- In arguments are we sometimes tempted to use volume instead of wisdom (v17)?

We often see this in our arguments, where we get louder and louder to make our case. But while volume does get attention, saying this louder or using more words never proves anything.

- How much harm can one person cause (v18)?

Whether in the Bible or our own lives we see the great damage one person can cause (kings of Israel).

Danger of a Little Folly (10:1-3)

Solomon shows that even a little folly is dangerous

Ecclesiastes 10:1-3 Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to produce an evil odor; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor. 2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left. 3 Yes also when the fool walks by the way, his understanding fails him, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

- Can small things cause big problems (v1, Galatians 5:9)?

Yes, small things have a way of growing.

Galatians 5:9 9 A little yeast grows through the whole lump.

Unhandled/uncorrected evil/sin has a way of growing

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 9 and 10

- Are we tempted sometimes to ignore “small” problems?

From an earthly perspective we often wrongly conclude it is only a small thing and ignore matters that we should correct. We see it in physical matters - ignoring small maintenance items in our houses and cars - we see it in spiritual matters - ignoring signs that our brothers and sisters are facing difficulties until they are gone and it becomes too late.

- Are we tempted to allow a little folly from an otherwise respected person (v1)?

Reputation often influences how we react to others. We need to be careful though to call right right and wrong wrong regardless of who it is and our feelings for them. Right and wrong are absolute.

- What does he mean by saying his heart is in his right hand(v2)?

An unclear statement, but we realized that for most of us we work with our right hands. Our hearts should influence what we do, not just think about doing good and then doing nothing.

- Can actions without words expose a fool (v3)?

Yes the fruits of our actions often show more clearly than our words what is really in our heart.

Rulers and Princes (10:4-7)

Here we have a few nuggets of advice concerning rulers.

Ecclesiastes 10:4-7 If the spirit of the ruler rises up against you, don't leave your place; for gentleness lays great offenses to rest. 5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, the sort of error which proceeds from the ruler. 6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place. 7 I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking like servants on the earth.

Do not leave your post. We are often tempted to run from problems, but instead we have a responsibility to face and resolve them.

- How much harm came to Israel under evil kings (v5)?

Evil kings influenced the whole nation causing them to go astray even to the point of being taken over by other nations.

- Even with bad rulers, were some in Israel faithful?

Even in bad situations we still can do right. In Israel there was a faithful remnant. When we see evil in our day, that shouldn't make us give up, but instead strengthen our own resolve to do what is right.

- Does the world sometimes elevate the wrong things (v6-7)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 9 and 10

Yes the world gets mixed up on what is right and wrong. We seem surprised at this, but the world acting this way has been happening since Biblical times.

Unexpected Outcomes (10:8-15)

Even with all of our plans, as humans we don't know how things we start will end.

Ecclesiastes 10:8-15 8 He who digs a pit may fall into it; and whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. 9 Whoever carves out stones may be injured by them. Whoever splits wood may be endangered by it. 10 If the ax is blunt, and one doesn't sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but skill brings success. 11 If the snake bites before it is charmed, then is there no profit for the charmer's tongue. 12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but a fool is swallowed by his own lips. 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. 14 A fool also multiplies words. Man doesn't know what will be; and that which will be after him, who can tell him? 15 The labor of fools wearies every one of them; for he doesn't know how to go to the city.

- Do sometimes bad results happen, even with hard work (v8-9)?

The things Solomon talks about here aren't necessarily bad things, digging pits, breaking a wall, quarrying stones, splitting wood. But even in pursuing innocent tasks, we don't know the outcome. Maybe not a pit, but we may have fallen over something we were working on. Maybe not quarrying stones, but perhaps hurt by something that fell while we were working. We need to remember that we don't know the end from the beginning. We just need to focus on what we are doing and make sure it is right in God's sight.

- Do we improve our chances by using wisdom (v10)?

Yes. We don't act blindly, but consider what we should be doing.

- Is there danger from foolish babblers (v11-12)?

Yes, many are led astray by one who can speak well.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 When I came to you, brothers, I didn't come with excellence of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith wouldn't stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

- Does foolishness have a tendency to increase, if not stopped (v13)?

We've all seen that not stopping something early only allows it to grow. Here he talks about someone starting as a fool but ending with raving madness.

- Is there a danger in many words (v14, Prov 10:19)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 9 and 10

Just as we studied earlier with thinking that loud words prove something we can also be misled to think that many words prove something. In fact there is danger in many words

Proverbs 10:19 19 In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely.

Kings and Princes (v16-20)

Solomon returns with more about kings.

Ecclesiastes 10:16-20 16 Woe to you, land, when your king is a child, and your princes eat in the morning! 17 Happy are you, land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! 18 By slothfulness the roof sinks in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaks. 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes the life glad; and money is the answer for all things. 20 Don't curse the king, no, not in your thoughts; and don't curse the rich in your bedroom: for a bird of the sky may carry your voice, and that which has wings may tell the matter.

- Why can a child king bring woe (v16)?

Although Judah had some good kings that started young, there is a danger in youth. The young are inexperienced and can more easily be influenced. We remember Rehoboam

1 Kings 12:8 8 But he abandoned the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him.

- What would princes feasting in the morning be a symptom of (v16)?

Idleness. They appear to be more interested in their own pleasure than in their responsibilities to the nation.

- Can things get worse through simply doing nothing (v18)?

As we studied earlier, doing nothing can lead to small problems growing larger. Doing nothing to a small problem in the house can lead to a roof leaking. Spiritual matters follow that same principle.

- Do we need to be careful about what we think as well as what we say (v20, Matt 15:18)?

Yes, although controlling our tongue is difficult, controlling our thoughts, our heart is often more so.

Matthew 15:18-19 18 But the things which proceed out of the mouth come out of the heart, and they defile the man. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 11 and 12

Uncertainty Doesn't Mean Do Nothing (11:1-8)

Ecclesiastes 11:1-8 Cast your bread on the waters; for you shall find it after many days. 2 Give a portion to seven, yes, even to eight; for you don't know what evil will be on the earth. 3 If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth; and if a tree falls toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falls, there shall it be. 4 He who observes the wind won't sow; and he who regards the clouds won't reap. 5 As you don't know what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child; even so you don't know the work of God who does all. 6 In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening don't withhold your hand; for you don't know which will prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both will be equally good. 7 Truly the light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to see the sun. 8 Yes, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that comes is vanity.

In this section of Ecclesiastes, we begin moving toward a conclusion. Solomon has spent much of Ecclesiastes reminding us of things “under the sun” that are vanity, and like chasing the wind.

As Solomon discusses (and has discussed), there are limits to knowledge, much we don't or sometimes can't know. But that isn't an excuse to give up and do nothing.

- What does it mean to cast your bread upon the waters (v1)?
- Why give a serving because of evil on the Earth (v2)?
- Are there things we just don't know (v3)?
- Can we know what we need to know (2 Peter 1:3)?

2 Peter 1:3 3 seeing that his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue,

- Too close a focus on what we don't know has what results (v4)?
- Not knowing the results, what must we do (v6, Matt 13:3-8)?

Matthew 13:3-8 3 He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, “Behold, a farmer went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Others fell on rocky ground, where they didn't have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of earth. 6 When the sun had risen, they were scorched. Because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Others fell on good soil and yielded fruit: some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty.

- Is there good in this life (v7)?
- Is there evil in this life(v7)?

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 11 and 12

Seek God in Your Youth (11:9-12:1)

Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1 Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. 10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. 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 pleasure in them;"

Next Solomon gives instructions to the youth. In youth, we often feel that special time will last forever.

- What needs to be kept in mind about how we spend our youth (v9)?

In the end, God will hold us accountable

- What two things are to be avoided in your youth (v10)?
- How are childhood and youth vanity (v10)?
- Why should we remember our Creator in our youth (v1)?
- What difficult days is Solomon discussing (v1)?

Description of Difficulties of Aging (12:2-8)

Ecclesiastes 12:2-8 Before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain; 3 in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look out of the windows are darkened, 4 and the doors shall be shut in the street; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; 5 yes, they shall be afraid of heights, and terrors will be on the way; and the almond tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goes to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets: 6 before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the spring, or the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. 8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher. "All is vanity!"

There are different opinions about some of the specific references in this text, but the general theme is that it will become more difficult for us is obvious.

- How do things become more difficult for us as we age?
- Are there also advantages as we age?

Job 12:12 12 With aged men is wisdom, in length of days understanding.

Ecclesiastes - Chapters 11 and 12

Psalms 71:8-9 8 My mouth shall be filled with your praise, with your honor all day long. 9 Don't reject me in my old age. Don't forsake me when my strength fails.

Proverbs 16:31 31 Gray hair is a crown of glory. It is attained by a life of righteousness.

There are advantages and disadvantages of most of life's stages. We can often spend our time wishing for what was or wishing for what will be in the future. But, God expects us to serve him now, with what we have now. If we spend our life thinking... after I'm out of school, out of college, have a job, am married, have kids, kids are grown, retired, wish I had the strength I used to have... we'll never get around to doing the things God would have us do. We can always imagine it will be easier later.

- What should we do regardless of our age (v6)?
- What is the end of all (v7)?
- Knowing all of this, what conclusion do we reach with a strictly "under the sun" approach (v8)?

Conclusion (12:9-14)

Having concluded that from a strictly "under the sun" approach that all is vanity, Solomon switches to the broader topic to discuss the real meaning of life.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 Further, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge. Yes, he pondered, sought out, and set in order many proverbs. 10 The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written blamelessly, words of truth. 11 The words of the wise are like goads; and like nails well fastened are words from the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. 12 Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13 This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.

- Had Solomon put much effort into this topic (v9-11)?
- Who is the one shepherd (v11)?
- Can we get distracted in studying everything without realizing the importance of the conclusion(v12)?
- What is man's all (v13)?
- What important reminder did Solomon give as reason for this (v14)?
- Can anything we do really be hidden (v14)?

Thinking back over Ecclesiastes, we see it not as a depressing book, but a book that shows only that Earthly pursuits are futile. But that isn't man's all, our goals should be higher, and those goals are worthwhile.