

LESSON 1 Why Does Life Seem Meaningless? (Ecclesiastes 1:1–15)

Ecclesiastes, which means “one who calls an assembly,” was written to answer this question: “Why does life seem meaningless?” It contains *the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem* (1:1). Solomon wrote *Ecclesiastes* late in life, around 935 B.C. His purpose for the book was to spare future generations the emptiness of trying to live without God. As the son of King David, Solomon had the privileges of immense power and wealth. Shortly after coming to the throne of Israel, Solomon had a dream in which God told him to ask Him for anything he wanted (1 Kgs. 3:5). Solomon asked God for wisdom to judge his people. As a result, what does 1 Kings 4:29 tell us?

Solomon was a brilliant man and considered to be the wisest man to ever live. In addition to *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon wrote most of the book of Proverbs. People came from all over the world to hear his wisdom. Jesus talks about the queen of Sheba traveling from *the ends of the earth* (southern Arabia) to hear Solomon’s wisdom (1 Kings 10:1–10; Mt 12:42). Then, what does Jesus say in the last phrase of Matthew 12:42?

The only person wiser than Solomon to ever live is Jesus Christ. As Solomon followed in his father’s footsteps, he experienced success after success and became the richest, wisest man in the world. However, he drifted away from God and discovered how foolish a person can be without God in his life. Solomon wrote the book of *Ecclesiastes* about 3,000 years ago to deal with life’s most difficult questions. Yet, we find this book is still relevant today because the questions, as well as the answers, are the same. In *Ecclesiastes* 1:2, what word does Solomon repeatedly use to sum up life without God?

This word, which occurs more than thirty-five times in this book, means meaningless or empty. In this passage, Solomon gives us **six** reasons why life without God is meaningless.

1. **Work is useless.** Solomon first asks what people gain from all their hard work *under the sun* (1:3). The phrase *under the sun* is found about thirty times in this book. It refers to life on earth. So, Solomon is asking what a person profits from a life of work.

2. Life is pointless. Solomon writes that generations come and go, but *the earth remains*, or never changes (1:4). After we die, the world will go on just fine without you and me.

3. Entertainment is endless. Concerning entertainment, what does Solomon write in 1:8c–d?

4. Repetition is relentless. Solomon correctly writes that what has been will be again, and what has been done will be done again. He also writes that what is said has been said before. This is because *there is nothing new under the sun* (1:9–10).

5. Being remembered is fruitless. Solomon writes: *There is no remembrance of former things*, or former people, and those who are yet to come will not be remembered by *those who come after* them (1:11). We are destined for obscurity; we will all soon be forgotten.

6. Forgiveness is hopeless. In verses 12–13, Solomon writes that he tried to make sense out of his life apart from God. He writes that he devoted himself to seeking *wisdom*. He decided to learn everything he could to become an intellectual who knew how to deal with life. But he writes it is all *vanity*, or meaningless, and a chasing after wind (1:14).

LESSON 2 Finding Real Happiness (Ecclesiastes 1:16–2:11)

One of life's toughest and most commonly asked questions is: where can I find real happiness? Solomon searched for the answer 3,000 years ago. He was the wealthiest, wisest man in the world; so, he could check out everything the world had to offer, and he did. He had both the brains and the bucks to try everything in his search for happiness. **Four** areas in which Solomon looked for happiness are ...

1. Education (1:16–18)

Solomon thought to himself that he would acquire *more great wisdom* than anyone who had ever ruled in Jerusalem before him. He set out to learn everything *wisdom* and *knowledge* had to offer (1:16–17). But what did he learn, according to verse 18?

2. Pleasure (2:1 & 3a)

Solomon decided to try *pleasure* and *enjoy* himself. However, that also proved to be *vanity*, or meaningless. Then, he tried to cheer himself with *wine* (2:1 & 3a). It is ironic that the unhappiest people can be found at a bar during “happy hour.” But, like Solomon, they can’t find real happiness in all the drinking and partying in the world.

3. Work (2:4–6)

To deaden his unhappiness, Solomon decided to immerse himself in work. Therefore, he *built houses* and *planted vineyards*. He made *gardens* for himself and planted all kinds of *fruit trees* (2:4–5). Solomon apparently thought he might find happiness through achievement and success. So, he became a workaholic and built a great empire.

4. Wealth (2:7b–8a & 11)

Solomon owned more *herds and flocks* than anyone before him in Jerusalem. He amassed *silver and gold* that equaled the wealth of *kings and provinces*, or countries (2:7b–8a). Solomon made “big bucks.” He became the wealthiest man to ever live. He was wealthier than Wal-Mart’s Sam Walton, Michael Dell of Dell computers and Microsoft’s Bill Gates.

After trying to find happiness in **education**, **pleasure**, **work**, and **wealth**, Solomon writes: *Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun* (2:11).

You can’t find happiness in **education**, **pleasure**, **work**, or **wealth**. Someone has correctly said, “There is a God-shaped vacuum in every human heart that only He can fill.” To find lasting happiness, you must allow God to fill that vacuum in your heart.

LESSON 3 **Avoiding Foolish Mistakes (Ecclesiastes 2:12b–26)**

Someone has said, “A wise person learns from his mistakes.” While that is true, an even wiser person learns from the mistakes of others and avoids mistakes in the first place. That’s why Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. He wants us to learn from his mistakes. In this passage, Solomon gives us **four** ways to avoid foolish mistakes ...

Listen to advice (2:12b–14a)

In lesson two we discovered Solomon tried to find happiness in education, pleasure, work, and wealth. Now, Solomon writes that any king coming after him can only repeat what he has done

and will have the same results (2:12b). It has been wisely said: “Only a fool does the same thing, the same way, and expects a different result.”

Solomon continues by writing that *wisdom* is better than *folly* as *light* is better than *darkness*. The *wise* person has *eyes* to see where he is going, but a *fool* walks in *darkness* with his eyes closed (2:13–14a). This means a *wise* person looks at all the facts before making a decision.

Wise people learn all they can from others about a trade, business, or career before investing their time or money. Therefore, to avoid making foolish mistakes, **listen to advice** and ...

Keep the end in view (2:14b–17)

Next, Solomon points out that even though the *wise* man and the *fool* may have different life experiences, the *same event* awaits both without God—death. Solomon realizes what eventually happens to a fool will also happen to him (2:14b–15). Therefore, in the last phrase of verse 15, what does Solomon say in his heart about being wise without God?

No matter how wise and successful a person is, or how lazy and unsuccessful someone else is, without God they are the same in death. Remember, we didn’t bring anything into this world, and we can’t take anything out (1 Tim. 6:7). We might be wise, work hard, and make lots of money, but the lazy guy who never made much money will take just as much out of this world as we do—nothing.

To add insult to injury, Solomon continues by stating that the wise, like the fool, will die and be *forgotten* (2:16). If we don’t live for God, this is the gloomy end we all face. When Solomon pondered all this, he writes that he *hated life*, because the work he did *under the sun* was *grievous* to him. It was all *vanity*, or meaningless (2:17).

Yet, there is something that changes the emptiness of all this. Solomon is writing about people who only have worldly wisdom. However, there is godly wisdom that will make our end much different. How do we get this godly wisdom? How does Psalm 111:10a answer that question?

Ways to avoid foolish mistakes are: **listen to advice**, **keep the end in view**, and ...

Consider what you leave behind (2:18–23)

Not only does Solomon come to hate life, but he also hates the wealth and possessions resulting from all his wisdom and work. He writes that he *hated* all the things for which he worked so hard

because he would have to leave them to someone who comes after him (2:18). No matter what we achieve, no matter what we build, no matter what we save, no matter how well we invest, we must leave it all to someone else.

To stress this vital point, Solomon writes that no one knows if the one who gets all he leaves behind will be a *wise* person or a *fool*. Either way, that person will have control over everything Solomon wisely worked so hard to accumulate. Therefore, Solomon's heart begins to *despair* over all his hard work because he has to leave everything to someone who has not worked for it. This too is *vanity* (2:19–21).

It is bad enough to think about leaving behind everything for which we have worked, but it is even worse if whoever gets control of it wastes it all. That's exactly what Solomon's son Rehoboam did. When Solomon died, Rehoboam refused to listen to his older advisers and was a harsh, mean king. As a result, the kingdom of Solomon fell apart (1 Kgs. 12:1–24).

Solomon isn't telling us not to leave our children or grandchildren any inheritance. To the contrary, what does he write in Proverbs 13:22a?

We probably have all observed that it's better to leave too little than too much. Solomon is simply saying that wealth must all be left behind.

Solomon sums up by asking what a person gets for the hard work, stress, and nights he doesn't *rest*. He concludes it is all *vanity*, or meaningless (2:22–23). In this life, we endure long work days and stress to accumulate all the stuff we desire. Then, the more we have, the more there is to worry about and maintain. As a result, after a hard day's work, our minds do not *rest* at night. That's one major reason for insomnia.

To avoid foolish mistakes, **listen to advice, keep the end in view, consider what you leave behind,** and ...

Realize everything is a gift from God (2:24–26)

Finally, putting things into perspective, Solomon decides to *eat and drink*. This is a metaphorical way of saying he should *enjoy* the fruits of all his labor because he realizes all he has comes *from the hand of God*. Through making many mistakes, Solomon discovered that apart from God he could not find joy in his possessions or success (2:24–25).

Solomon concludes this chapter by writing that God gives *wisdom and knowledge and joy* to those who please Him (2:26a). It is not enough to possess things. We must also possess the *wisdom and knowledge* to enjoy them, and true *wisdom and knowledge* come only from God.

An unsaved person may accumulate a lot of worldly possessions, but they will not be able to truly enjoy them. Solomon explains that *the sinner* may become wealthy, but God takes his wealth and

gives it to those who please Him (2:26b). This means those who don't live for God will never really enjoy the benefits of their work and possessions. Yet, those who serve the Lord will ultimately benefit from the work of non-believers.

Solomon learned that accumulating wealth apart from God is *vanity*, a chasing after wind, or "vexation of spirit" (2:26c).

Ways to avoid making foolish mistakes include: **listen to advice, keep the end in view, consider what you leave behind, and realize everything is a gift from God.**

LESSON 4 Living Life to the Max (Ecclesiastes 3:1–15)

Be prepared for the seasons of life (3:1–9)

Solomon begins: *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven* (3:1). Solomon is saying God has a *purpose* for everything He allows to happen to us. We all know there are four seasons of the year: spring, summer, fall, and winter. However, did you know there are also seasons of our lives?

In verses 2–8, the word *time* occurs twenty-eight times as Solomon talks about the different seasons in our lives. Solomon lists fourteen good seasons and fourteen bad times. He begins the contrast by writing there is *a time to be born, and a time to die* (3:2a).

This means God knew in advance when I would be born, and He knows when and how I will die. No matter what I do, I cannot change those times. Furthermore, there's not much time between the moment we enter this world and when we exit. I am sixty years old, and it seems like I have only been here a few months because time flies so quickly.

A handbreadth is the width of the hand at the base of the fingers (knuckles), or about three inches. There are three biblical measurements: a handbreadth, a span, and a cubit—the handbreadth being the smallest possible measurement.

However short our lives may be, Solomon writes that between birth and death, there is *a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted* (3:2b). This means just as a farmer learns to accept and cooperate with the seasons of the year, we must learn to do the same with the seasons of our lives. A farmer would never plant a wheat crop in the middle of winter unless he wanted disastrous results. The same is true in our lives. There is a *time* to invest and a *time* to withdraw. There is a *time* to change jobs and a *time* to stay in your current job. There is a *time* to buy a new

car and a *time* to keep the one you have. Remember to always trust God to help you know what *time* it is in your life.

Solomon also writes there is *a time to kill, and a time to heal* (3:3a).

There is *a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance* (3:4).

There is *a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing* (3:5).

There is *a time to seek, and a time to lose* (3:6a).

There is *a time to keep, and a time to cast away* (3:6b).

There is *a time to tear, and a time to sew* (3:7a).

There is *a time to keep silence, and a time to speak* (3:7b).

There is *a time to love, and a time to hate* (3:8a).

Put problems into perspective (3:10–11)

That's what Solomon does after seeing *the business, or "travail,"* God allows. But from experience he writes that God has *made everything beautiful in its time* (3:10–11a). The word *beautiful* here has a wider meaning than just being pretty or attractive. *Everything* that happens to us is not *beautiful*, but God can make something *beautiful* out of *everything*.

Our problems are like cymbals in an orchestra. If played alone, cymbals will drive you up the wall. But as a part of the whole, they add beautifully to the sound. In the same way, God can make even the worst things that happen to us *beautiful* because He will use them to make us better people. Some of the most *beautiful* people you meet have had terrible things happen to them, but they know our great and awesome God makes *everything beautiful in its time*. To help us get the right perspective on life, what does Solomon write in Ecclesiastes 3:11b?

The word translated *eternity*, or "world," ('ōlām, oh-lawm') means we know in our hearts there is more to life than the here and now. We know we are made for more than just this life. God has put a yearning for eternity into our hearts that cannot be satisfied with the things of this world. Solomon also writes we cannot *find out what God has done from the beginning to the end* (3:11c). This means no one can understand what God is doing from the *beginning to the end* of life. We cannot always understand why God allows some of the things that happen in life, but we can always trust Him to make our lives *beautiful* in the end.

To live life to the max, **be prepared for the seasons of life, put problems into perspective,** and ...

Do good in the present (3:12–15)

While we cannot understand everything in life, we can know *there is nothing better ... than to be joyful and to do good as long as we live* (3:12). This means we don't let problems rob us of happiness. Instead, we *do good!* We should *do good* because life is just preparation for eternity. It is a dress rehearsal. God doesn't want us to get so wrapped up in our own problems we become selfish brats.

Even though life can be tough, we *should eat and drink and take pleasure in our toil* because *this is God's gift* to us (3:13).

Don't let the worries of tomorrow rob you of the joy of today. Don't let tomorrow's problems, which you can't control, destroy what you can enjoy today.

Everything *God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so we will fear [revere] before him* (Ecc. 3:14). When God does something, it is perfect, so nothing needs to be added to it or taken away.

The word translated *workmanship* (ΠΟΙĒΜΑ, *poy'-ay-mah*), from which we get our word "poem," literally means "work of art" or "masterpiece." God uses the good **and** bad times to make us His masterpieces in Christ.

Solomon concludes: *That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been* (3:15a).

Living life to the max has three requirements: **be prepared for the seasons of life, put problems into perspective, and *do good in the present*.**

LESSON 5 Why Isn't Life Fair? (Ecclesiastes 3:16–4:16)

Solomon now tackles one of life's toughest questions: "Why isn't life fair?" Solomon asked that question about 3,000 years ago, and people today are still asking the same question. In his life *under the sun* Solomon observed much of life's unfairness (3:16a). In this passage he offers **four** reasons life isn't fair ...

Because of injustice (3:16b–22)

He writes: *in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness* (3:16b–d). Here on earth, *under the sun*, the wicked sometimes prosper and the righteous suffer for their integrity. People with money have always been able to influence the wheels of justice.

Solomon affirms God *will judge the righteous and the wicked* in His time (3:17). There will be a day when our patient God deals with injustice and evil. Life often isn't fair; that's why there is a heaven and a hell. Of what does Daniel 12:2 remind us about God's justice?

Solomon reminds us that, like *beasts* or animals, everyone dies. Our bodies come *from the dust, and to dust all return* (3:18–20). Therefore, just as it is for animals, anything that appeases our bodies or appetites is only temporary. However, humans are different from animals because God has set *eternity* in our hearts (3:11).

The more we forget about death and eternity, the more we act like animals. Therefore, Solomon asks: *Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?* (3:21). The word translated *spirit* (RUWACH, roo'-ah) literally means "breath." Solomon's point is that without God's revelation in the Bible, when we take our last breath we see ourselves just like an animal in death.

Don't let injustice rob you of enjoying the good things in your life. But remember, life isn't fair, because of **injustice** and ...

Because of oppression (4:1–3)

In chapter four, Solomon writes he has seen *all the oppressions ... under the sun*. He has observed the *tears of the oppressed, who have no one to comfort them, and on the side of their oppressors there was power* (4:1).

Therefore, Solomon concludes that the dead are better off than the living, and for some people, because of the oppression they must endure, it would be better to have never been born (4:2–3).

Life isn't fair ... because of **injustice, oppression**, and ...

Because of the "rat race" (4:4–12)

Now, Solomon writes *that all toil and all skill in work* in one's quest for success are motivated by jealousy or envy (4:4).

But Solomon also concludes that a *handful* of success with *quietness*, or tranquility, is *better* than two *hands full* with stress, which is a chasing *after wind*, or "vexation of spirit" (4:6).

There must be a happy medium. It is better to have less "stuff" and enjoy life more.

Solomon writes the workaholic *has no other ... there is no end to all his toil*, and he is *never satisfied with riches*. Solomon begins to wonder why then is he working so hard and depriving himself *of pleasure*. He realizes it is all *vanity*, or meaningless (4:8).

People who work too much usually don't have any fulfilling relationships.

You only need three things in life to be truly happy: someone to love, to be loved, and to have a purpose for your life. Did you notice what you **don't** have to have? Money or things!

We now come to one of the most famous verses in *Ecclesiastes*: *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil* (4:9).

Two are better than one because *if two lie together*, they can keep each other *warm* (4:9 & 11). Also, a man *alone* can be overpowered, but *two* can resist an attacker. Of what does the last phrase of 4:12 remind us?

In other words, relationships are mutually beneficial and make us stronger emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and even physically. Life isn't about money, success, or possessions. It's about relationships. Therefore, a "journey into meaningful living" requires cultivating and protecting our relationships, which can easily be destroyed in the "rat race."

Life isn't fair, because of **injustice, oppression, the "rat race,"** and ...

Because not everyone will like you (4:13–16)

Solomon writes it is *better* to be *a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king* who refuses *to take advice*. A wise youth can rise from *prison*, or *poverty*, to *the throne of success*. Then, everyone admires that youth in his success (4:13–16a–b).

Solomon concludes that trying to make everyone like us is *vanity and a striving after wind* (4:13–16). He learned you can't please everybody.

People who suffer from an approval addiction and try to please everyone will be miserable, because it is an impossible task.

Life is so much more enjoyable when you only have to please one person—God. Don't get caught in the popularity trap.

Life isn't fair because you will experience **injustice** and **oppression**, wear yourself out in **the "rat race,"** and no matter what you do, **not everyone will like you**.

LESSON 6 **Getting the Most From Worship** **(Ecclesiastes 5:1–7)**

Many people do not attend worship services because the services are not meaningful to them. Obviously, if they did get a lot from worship, they would attend every service. In this passage we will discover the requirements for **getting the most from worship**, beginning with ...

Before worship (5:1a)

First, Solomon writes: *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God* (5:1a). This means we should come prepared to worship and not be dull-minded and insensitive toward God. We should prepare our hearts and minds so when we arrive at *the house of God*, we are ready to worship.

There are at least **three** ways we can prepare to worship *in spirit and truth*.

1. Saturate the week with prayer. Pray every day for your worship leader, pastor, and other church staff. Ask God to help them prepare in a way that pleases Him, not you. Also, pray God will speak to you through the worship service and draw others to Himself.

If we **saturate the week with prayer**, the next step will be automatic ...

2. Anticipate a great worship service. Come to the service expecting God to do great things in your life and the lives of others. When we don't "get much out of it," we didn't put much into it.

Therefore, before going to worship service **saturate the week with prayer, anticipate a great worship service**, and ...

3. Cultivate your heart. In the parable of the sower, or soils, Jesus said the *seed* is God's Word (Lk 8:11). *Seed* will not take root and produce fruit in dry, hard soil.

We've discovered what to do **before worship**. Now, let's see about ...

During worship (5:1b–4)

When we arrive at a worship service, we should do **four** things ...

1. Be attentive. When we are **attentive** to God's Word, He will spotlight any sin in our lives (Heb. 4:12). How does Solomon express this principle of attentiveness in Ecclesiastes 5:1b?

The *sacrifice of fools* is offering a lot of empty, insincere words. It is also giving money without obedience because fools *do not know that they are doing evil*. So, **be attentive** to God's voice and ...

2. Be reverent. Remember who God is. Solomon writes: *Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few* (5:2). Being **reverent** requires remembering the big difference between God and us.

We worship the God who spoke the universe into existence. Therefore, **be attentive, be reverent,** and ...

3. Be focused. Solomon writes: *For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words* (5:3). The word *dream* probably refers to daydreaming, or "mental doodling," during worship. We all have so much going on in our lives it is easy for our minds to wander when we should be worshipping.

That means we must stay focused on God.

4. Don't delay your commitments. Solomon puts it like this: *When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow* (5:4). The key word is *delay*.

To get the most from worship, there are steps to take **before worship, during worship,** and ...

After worship (5:5–7)

- 1. Keep your commitments.** Solomon writes: *It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay* (5:5). This means it is better to not make a *vow* than to make one and not fulfill it. In this day of empty promises and shallow commitments, we need to heed this verse. We should never make a *vow* to God we do not keep.

Sometimes vows, or promises, are made to the Lord in an attempt to manipulate Him into making serious problems go away. Then, when the problems are gone, so are the vows made to the Lord. If you have made unfulfilled vows to the Lord, God may be telling you through this lesson it is time to start fulfilling them without delay.

Solomon continues: *Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?*

(5:6). Deuteronomy 23:21b, what is the result of making a vow to the Lord and being slow to fulfill it?

Some might think, “Well, the best thing is not to make any vows to the Lord.” No! If we never make new commitments to the Lord, we will stop growing spiritually. If you do not regularly make new vows to God, your spiritual life will become stagnant.

After worship, **keep your commitments** and ...

2. Take God seriously all week. Solomon writes *when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity* (5:7a). This means there must be a lasting, realistic response to what we know is God’s will for our lives, not just a lot of meaningless words. Then, Solomon writes: *but God is the one you must fear* (5:7b). There is no one English word that can fully translate the Hebrew word translated *fear* (YĀRĒ, yaw-ray’). Its meaning includes submission, reverence, and awe.

If we truly *fear*, or revere, the Lord, we will hate sin in our lives. It is wonderful to *fear* the Lord with good *fear* because they that *fear him* will not lack anything they need (Psa. 34:9).

To get the most from worship, be sure to take the proper steps **before**, **during**, and **after** worship.

LESSON 7 What Everyone Should Know About Money (Ecclesiastes 5:10–6:12)

Few things cause as many relationship problems as money. In fact, in the United States, personal debt is the number one factor contributing to divorce. Not knowing how to handle money also causes stress, sleeplessness, and many other problems. Everyone should know **three** things about money ...

First, the problems with money (5:10–17)

There are at least **five** problems with money ...

1. The more we get, the more we want (5:10). How does Ecclesiastes 5:10a–b describe this problem?

We never reach a point in life where we say: “When I make another \$100 I don’t want a cent more.” No one ever goes to his or her boss and says, “I don’t want any more raises; I have all the money I want.” We never reach that point because the more money we make, the more things we want.

2. The more we get, the more we spend (5:11). How does Solomon express this principle in Ecclesiastes 5:11a?

In other words, when we get more money, we will have more people in our lives to increase our expenses. There will be tax advisers, accountants, lawyers, insurance agents, financial advisers, sponging relatives, etc. Also, when that nice raise comes, instead of saving or investing the extra income, we raise our standard of living—wearing more expensive clothing, driving more expensive vehicles, buying a larger house, etc.

3. The more we get, the less we sleep (5:12). One study determined that as income goes up, so does insomnia. Solomon reminds us that the sleep of laborers is *sweet* whether they have *little or much* (5:12a). But what does the rest of that verse tell us?

4. The more we get, the more we can lose (5:13–14). Solomon writes that he has seen wealth *kept*, or hoarded, by its *owner to his hurt*. This is true because one *bad venture*, or financial “travail,” can often cause us to lose everything (5:13–14).

5. The more we get, the more we leave behind (5:15–17). We come into this world *naked* from our *mother’s womb*, and we will go out of this world the same way—with *nothing* in our hands (5:15–16).

Now that we’ve looked at **the problems with money**, let’s consider ...

Second, the purpose of money (5:18–20)

The purpose of money is to make us thankful. The Bible teaches God wants us to have money, but He wants us to remember He gave it to us. Solomon tells us it is *good and fitting* for us to *find enjoyment* in our work, or *toil* (5:18). Then, what does he tell us in Ecclesiastes 5:19 is the reason God gives us *wealth and possessions*?

It’s all a *gift* from Him. God keeps people who remember this so *occupied with joy* they have no time to worry about the past or be stressed out all the time (Ecc. 5:20). The **purpose of money** is to make us grateful, so we can have *joy* in our hearts.

Everyone should know **the problems with money, the purpose of money**, and ...

Third, the pain from money (6:1–12)

This chapter reveals the consequences of violating God's principles and purpose for money. There are at least **three** kinds of pain associated with money ...

1. Having money without meaning (6:1–6). Solomon writes that he has seen God give a man *wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them* (6:1–2).

Next, Solomon writes that a man may live a long time and have a *hundred children* (6:3a). In ancient times, having many children was considered the highest of blessings.

A person can live a long life but still find no satisfaction in life. Even if he *has no burial* (lives forever), he cannot enjoy his prosperity. Even a *stillborn child is better* off than the discontented rich person because both go to the same place, the grave (6:3b–6).

Unless we recognize all our blessings are a gift from God, we will experience the pain of **having money without meaning**. However, there can be more **pain from money** ...

2. Having success without satisfaction (6:7–9). Solomon explains we work to feed our bodies, not our souls. No matter how much or how little money we make, it translates into food, shelter, clothing, entertainment, and other material things. Money does nothing to satisfy our souls (6:7).

The *wise* and even the *poor* have no advantage over a *fool*. All have an *appetite, or “desire,”* for things that exceed the ability of their income to satisfy. *Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite* (6:8–9a). This means we should enjoy what we have, rather than desiring what we don't have and living in a wishful fantasy world.

In other words, live in the real world! However, the **pain from money** also includes ...

3. Having prosperity without purpose (6:10–12). Basically, Solomon writes that God knows all about us and has a predetermined purpose for our lives. Therefore, there is no use to *dispute with one stronger*, who is God. We can argue with God all we want, but it is *vanity* (6:10–11). Instead of trying to get God to change His plans for our lives, we need to be sure our plans fit into His purpose for our lives.

Solomon concludes this chapter by reminding us that the *days* of our lives are like a *shadow* that passes quickly. As for our future, we don't know *what will be* either before or after our death (6:12). Therefore, who can tell us what we should do?

God has great *plans, or “thoughts,”* for your life. Part of His plans is for you to know **the problems with money, the purpose of money, and the pain from money.**

LESSON 8 Why God Allows Bad Things To Happen (Ecclesiastes 7:1–14)

In chapter seven of *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon tells us life is a mix of good times and bad. Most of us always want to have the good times. However, God is far more concerned with our characters than our comfort. This passage reveals that God allows bad things to happen in our lives to teach us **three** important truths ...

Good times are deceitful (7:1–7)

Solomon begins: *A good name is better than precious ointment (7:1a)*. *Precious ointment* refers to expensive cologne or perfume. Such perfume was very expensive and a symbol of good times and prosperity. The point is, you can buy any perfume if you have enough money, but you can't buy a *good name*, no matter how much money you have. Therefore, Solomon writes *the day of death is better than the day of birth. ²It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart (7:1b–2)*. Would you rather go to a birthday party or a funeral? A birthday party, of course! Why? Because we prefer to laugh and have a good time. Yet, which event would be more likely to cause us to examine our lives and perhaps change our priorities?

God wants us to have a *good name*, not just a good time. At the end of life, it is *better* to be poor with a *good name*, or reputation, than to be rich with all the luxuries life can provide, but have a wasted life. However, Solomon is not advocating a life of sadness and gloom.

Laughter is good for us, but we need both sunshine and rain. Good times can be very deceiving because we sometimes use pleasure and parties to ignore the deep needs of our souls. Therefore, what does Solomon write in Ecclesiastes 7:3?

Why is *sorrow ... better than laughter*? Because it is usually during times of *sorrow* that we examine our lives and make changes for the good.

The *wise person is in the house of mourning*, which means he or she thinks about death. However, *the heart of fools is in the house of mirth*, only thinking about having a good time (7:4). The mind of a fool is always at a party. Foolish people live for the next party because they live in a fantasy world with no meaningful purpose for their lives.

For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity, or meaningless (7:6). The *thorns* are like small kindling used to start a fire. They burst into a flame but burn out very quickly. The praise of fools and their good times are like that. Entertainment-oriented people are really fun to be with, but they lead us into an empty, meaningless lifestyle.

Surely oppression drives the wise into madness (7:7a). The word translated *oppression* can also be translated “extortion,” which turns a *wise* person into a madman. Also, *a bribe corrupts the heart (7:7b)*. If a wise person is always surrounded by people interested only in power, wealth, and good times, his *heart* will eventually be corrupted. It can cause the wise to take a *bribe*, or gift, that *corrupts* his *heart*. As a result, the wise become fools. This is because **good times are deceitful**; however ...

Bad times are helpful (7:8–10)

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning (7:8a) means we must look at the big picture, not just the temporary adversity. The *end* is *better* than the *beginning* because the whole picture comes into perspective.

Being *patient* is better than being *proud* (Ecc. 7:8b). *Patience* and *pride* are polar opposites. *Proud* people aren’t *patient*. If we are *patient*, we will finally realize moral integrity is the best way. *Pride* causes us to think we deserve an easy life, and when that doesn’t happen, we become angry. Therefore, what does Solomon write in Ecclesiastes 7:9?

The fool’s response to problems is anger. It’s foolish to get angry because then we lose our ability to think clearly. As a result, we often make our problems worse.

When we have problems, Solomon has some great advice: *Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask this (7:10)*. In other words, don’t yearn for the “good ole days.” Anyone who wants to go back to the “good ole days” doesn’t remember them very well.

God lets bad things happen to us to teach us **good times are deceitful, bad times are helpful**, and ...

Good times and bad times both require wisdom (7:11–14)

Now, Solomon talks about the value of *wisdom* in good times and in bad. In the Bible, *wisdom* means reverence for God and spiritual discernment (Prov. 9:10). *Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun (7:11)*. In other words, *wisdom* is even better when you have money because both can benefit you throughout life.

Solomon continues: *For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it (7:12)*. This means *wisdom*, like money, can give security. However, money can be lost, while *wisdom* preserves, or stays with, our lives.

Solomon reminds us there are some things in life we cannot change: *Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? (7:13)*.

Serenity Prayer, written by Reinhold Niebuhr. It says: **“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”**

In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other (7:14a–c). In other words, we must be submissive to God’s sovereignty. Wisdom gives us perspective during the difficult times of life.

In this life we cannot *find out anything* that will be *after*, or what is in the future (Ecc. 7:14d). We don’t know if prosperity or adversity is coming our way next.

Why does God allow bad things to happen? To teach us **three** eternal principles: **good times are deceitful, bad times are helpful, and good times and bad times both require wisdom.**

LESSON 9 When Life Is Puzzling (Ecclesiastes 7:15–29)

Have you ever tried to put together a 5,000-piece jigsaw puzzle? If you can’t complete it in five minutes, does that mean it can’t be done? Absolutely not! Many of life’s puzzles can’t be solved in minutes, years, or even a lifetime, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t a good answer. It only reveals our inability to figure out the answer. It just confirms what truth found in Isaiah 55:9?

This passage reveals **five** things to do **when life is puzzling ...**

1. Remember you will see clearly someday (7:15)

Solomon plays the devil’s advocate and writes that during his meaningless life he has seen *everything*, including a *righteous man* dying young and a *wicked man* living a long life (7:15). This refers to the age-old question: **Why do good people suffer and bad people prosper?** This just doesn’t seem to fit with our understanding of a loving, just God. It is one of the real puzzles of

life. Some say if we can't answer this puzzling question, God isn't real or at least He isn't the kind of God the Bible says He is. I can't answer this question, but God does.

2. Refrain from becoming self-righteous (7:16–18)

Solomon's next statement is often misunderstood: *Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?* (7:16). This verse doesn't suggest a life of spiritual mediocrity or being moderately religious. We need to keep this verse in context. Solomon is talking about the question: "Why do good people suffer and bad people prosper." He is saying we should not think we are more righteous than God and act as though we could do a better job of running the world than He does.

Next, Solomon writes about the other extreme: *Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?* (7:17). In other words, don't make foolish choices, or you will suffer the consequences.

Solomon warns us to pay attention to his words because when we fear God, we will avoid both extremes (7:18).

3. Refuse to be judgmental (7:20–22)

Solomon now writes something a perfectionist or self-righteous person doesn't like to hear: *Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins* (7:20). From time to time, we all stumble and fall into sin, either in attitude or actions.

Next, Solomon gives us some great wisdom about criticism: *Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you* (7:21). We shouldn't pay attention to every criticism because sometimes it is unfair and unjustified.

This means, if we are wise, we will listen to criticism from people who are not chronic critics. Wisdom enables us to separate the constructive from the destructive criticism.

Before coming down too hard on your critics, remember: *Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others* (7:22). We have all been guilty of unfairly judging or criticizing others. We have all gossiped about others. Why? We are all sinners. Remembering this can help us handle unjust criticism and refrain from being judgmental.

4. Rely on God's Wisdom (7:19, 23–26)

Solomon expresses it like this: *Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city* (7:19). Biblical *wisdom* is not an accumulation of facts. It is the inner strength that comes from knowing God's way is always best, even when we must suffer for doing the right thing.

God's wisdom prepares us for the "if nots" of life. Godly *wisdom* gives us strength to do the right thing, even if we must suffer for it.

Solomon tried to be wise, but he found it was *far from him, far off, and deep, very deep*. Therefore, he asks, *who can find it out?* (7:23–24). We cannot make ourselves wise because wisdom is a gift from God. So, when we lack wisdom, what does James 1:5b–c tell us to do?

Asking God for wisdom doesn't mean we are asking for the answers to all of life's puzzles. That's not wisdom. Wisdom gives us the ability to live with what we don't understand. There is an old saying: "God is not in the business of explaining but in the business of sustaining."

Solomon investigates *the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness* (7:25). He found *something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her* (7:26). Solomon is warning us, both sexes, that some of our greatest temptations and addictions involve sexual immorality. Only fools trade short-term pleasure for lifetime pain

Don't be guilty of folly and foolishness by violating God's commands. Instead, **rely on God's wisdom**.

5. Refocus on who God wants you to be (7:27–29)

We may not understand what God is allowing, but we can understand the kind of people He wants us to be. In his search for an upright person, Solomon says, *One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found* (7:27–28). Solomon gives the most beautiful description to be found anywhere of a noble woman.

When Solomon says he didn't find one upright woman, it's because he surrounded himself with 300 concubines and 700 pagan wives who turned his heart away from God (1 Kgs. 11:3). Women were his undoing. How much better for him to have had one good wife, which he apparently figured out too late!

God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes (7:29b–c). God created the human race to be good people, but with the freedom to choose whether to be good or evil.

When life is puzzling ... remember you will see clearly someday, refrain from becoming self-righteous, refuse to be judgmental, rely on God's wisdom, and refocus on who God wants you to be.

LESSON 10 How To Know If You're *Wise* (Ecclesiastes 8:1–17)

Solomon begins this chapter by asking: *Who is like the wise?* (8:1a). In other words, what are the characteristics of a *wise* person? To further clarify his first question, Solomon asks: *who knows the interpretation of a thing?* (8:1b). This refers to someone who can analyze and explain things. Solomon then reveals **four** traits your life will exhibit if you are *wise* ...

1. Have a shining face (8:1c–d)

During times of adversity we can become very bitter and hard if we are not *wise*. However, Solomon writes: *A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed* (8:1c–d). In the Bible, a **shining face** speaks of blessings and happiness.

If you have biblical wisdom, your face will *shine* because, even though you don't understand everything, you know the One who does. Your face may not be shining now because of some problem in your life. However, if you are *wise*, your face will *shine* even in the midst of adversity that seems so unfair.

If you are *wise*, your face will be radiant with joy in the midst of problems because you know God has a purpose for allowing all your problems (Rom. 8:28).

If you are *wise*, you will **have a shining face** and ...

2. Be patient when life is unfair (8:2–7)

Solomon writes: *Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him* (8:2). Solomon is writing to the Israelites who took an *oath* before God to obey the king of Israel. Then, he continues: *Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases.*⁴ *For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"* (8:3–4).

Solomon continues by writing: anyone who obeys the king's *command will know no evil thing*, and those who are *wise* will find a *time* and way to do what is *just*, or right. *There is a time and a way for everything*, even when our *trouble is heavy upon us* (8:5–6). This means there is a proper *time* and procedure for dealing with problems. If we are *wise*, we will wait for God to reveal that *time* and *way*. *Wise* people are not impulsive. They wait for the right *time* and way to take care of a problem.

We do *not know what is to be* in the future, and no one *can tell* (8:7). There are many things in life we can't control, so we must be patient.

Wise people wait in expectation, knowing God has a *time* and *way* to take care of every problem. If you are *wise*, you will **have a shining face, be patient when life is unfair**, and ...

3. Accept what you can't change (8:8–14)

Some of us are “control freaks,” and it drives us crazy for someone else to be in charge. Solomon has a word for “control freaks”: *No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death* (8:8a). We can't control how long we live, even if we are health-conscious, eat right, and exercise.

For all of us, *death* is just a heartbeat away, and nothing we do can change that. This truth should cause us to have a greater sense of urgency to live the kind of lives God desires.

Also, Solomon writes: *There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it* (8:8b). We all have obligations we can't avoid, and *wickedness* will ultimately be judged. Solomon thought deeply about these things *under the sun*, where people have the *power* to *hurt* one another (8:9). That's life, and sometimes it's very hard to accept. We can't live in a world filled with people without getting hurt.

Solomon next writes about seeing *the wicked buried* and being *praised* in the place they committed crimes (8:10). Apparently, Solomon is writing about a magnificent funeral he had attended. The deceased was a man who had frequently come to the temple and received much praise from the people. However, he had lived a *wicked* life.

Not only was this a problem in Solomon's day, it is also one of the major problems with the justice system in our country. Punishment is not *executed speedily* because of technicalities and endless appeals.

If you are *wise*, you will **have a shining face, be patient when life is unfair, accept what you can't change**, and ...

4. Enjoy life now (8:15–17)

In this life that can be so unfair, Solomon recommends *joy* because there is nothing *better* in this life *than to eat and drink and be joyful*. This way we will experience joy in the *toil* God gives us in this life *under the sun* (8:15). This means we must not let injustice and things we don't understand keep us from enjoying God's blessings. Life often isn't fair; that's why there is a heaven and a hell.

In his search *to know wisdom* Solomon discovered that no one can figure out everything God is doing or allowing *under the sun*. No matter how much a person *may toil in seeking*, *he will not find it out*. *Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out* (8:16–17).

Instead of complaining and becoming bitter about what you don't understand, give thanks for what you do understand and enjoy God's blessings right now. This is basically remembering *the LORD is good*.

If you are *wise*, you will **have a shining face, be patient when life is unfair, accept what you can't change, and enjoy life now.**

LESSON 11 **Making Every Day Meaningful (Ecclesiastes 9:1–18)**

A tombstone in a century-old cemetery bears the following epitaph: "Pause, stranger, when you pass me by. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so you will be. So prepare for death and follow me." An unknown passerby read those words, and underneath scratched this reply: "To follow you I'm not content, until I know which way you went." This brings us to the first step in **making every day meaningful ...**

Realize death is inevitable (9:1–6)

Death is a topic we don't like to discuss. However, we should talk about death because it is inevitable for all of us. We describe death in many ways: "They bought the farm," "kicked the bucket," "bit the dust," or "croaked." But we also describe death in such phrases as: "They're gone," "passed away," "gone to a better place," or "asleep in Jesus

When Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, he was coming to the end of his life. He writes: *But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him* (9:1). This means we cannot use good and bad events as criteria for deciding whether or not God loves us. God loves us unconditionally, even though our lives are a mix of both good and bad events. Solomon continues that the same destiny—death—ultimately awaits all of us, whether we are good or bad (9:2–3).

Solomon continues that *the dead have no more reward* and are *forgotten* because they have no part of anything here on earth. They can no longer love, hate, or envy because they have no *more share in all that is done* here (9:5–6). Solomon is telling us we should take advantage of the opportunities of life because death will end all opportunities.

To make every day meaningful, **realize death is inevitable** and ...

Recognize opportunities to enjoy life (9:7–10)

Next, Solomon gives us some advice about living: *Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do* (9:7). This means we should enjoy life now, even though life can be unfair, we have problems we don't deserve, and we are going to die.

The point is to enjoy the ordinary, everyday things of life. Solomon continues that our clothing should always be *white* and our heads anointed with *oil* (9:8). Wearing *white* garments and anointing one's head with *oil* speak of celebration or a joyful party. God wants us to enjoy life.

Solomon writes we should *enjoy life* with our spouses through all of what can seem like a meaningless life (9:9). This means we shouldn't allow the inequities and problems of life to keep us from enjoying our families. Enjoying life requires doing whatever we do with all our *might* because when we go to *Sheol, the grave*, there will be no working, planning, or wisdom (9:10). We only have one life to live, so we should enjoy it. One way we do that is to work hard, be loyal, and do a good job. Each of us should be such a good employee, executive, teacher, home builder, farmer, small business owner, etc. that our employers or customers would never consider getting anyone to replace us.

To make every day meaningful, **realize death is inevitable, recognize opportunities to enjoy life,** and ...

Remember life is unpredictable (9:11–18)

Solomon puts it like this: ... *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all* (9:11). This means our abilities and efforts are not guarantees for success. The fastest runner doesn't always win the race. The smartest or most skilled worker doesn't always get the best job.

The phrase *time and chance happen to them all* does not refer to luck but to unanticipated events. This means regardless of our abilities or efforts, nothing is certain because life can be unfair.

Like a fish caught in a *net* or a bird *caught in a snare*, we are sometimes *caught* by unexpected events that change our plans (Ecc. 9:12). We should plan our work and work our plan, understanding that unexpected things sometimes happen to change our plans. Solomon now cites a great example of wisdom he has seen that is not rewarded. A *great king* and his army besieged a *little city with few men in it*. However, in this *little city* was a *poor, wise man* who saved the city with his *wisdom*. Yet, no one remembers that *poor man* (9:13–15).

This is an example of the fact that wisdom, though often unrewarded, is better than power, riches, or prestige. In the end, wisdom wins!

Wisdom does the right thing even when it is tough, and there is no immediate reward or appreciation. That's why Solomon writes: *wisdom is better than might and the words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war* (9:16–18a). *Wisdom* provides better security than power, brute military force, or a foolish ruler taking advice from *fools*.

The phrase *one sinner destroys much good* (9:18b) is like the old saying, “One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel.”

That's why, if you are wise, you will choose your friends very carefully.

To make every day meaningful, **realize death is inevitable, recognize opportunities to enjoy life, and remember life is unpredictable.**

LESSON 12 Working God's Way (Ecclesiastes 10:1–20)

Success requires **working God's way**, which has at least **eight** principles ...

1. Work wisely (10:1–3)

Imagine buying an expensive bottle of perfume and when you open it, you see a badly decayed fly floating on top. Would you keep it? No, it's ruined! Solomon tells us *dead flies* cause perfume to stink. Likewise, *a little folly* can spoil *wisdom and honor* (10:1). In the same way, one foolish decision can ruin a good reputation that took a lifetime to create. *A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left* (10:2). This doesn't mean God is a Republican! In the Bible, the *right hand* is the place of strength and blessing.

Even when a fool walks down a road his behavior *says to everyone that he is a fool* (Ecc. 10:3). Walking down the road was a common figure of speech for repeated foolishness. Therefore, **work wisely** and ...

2. Work patiently (10:4–7)

If your *ruler*, or boss, is angry at you, *do not leave your place*—don't quit! Remember, *calmness*, or patience, can put *offenses to rest* (10:4). Never make a major decision when you are hurt or angry. Solomon explains that he has seen a ruler make *an error*. This is because foolish people are sometimes given *high places*, or great authority, while *the rich* (people of worth) are given a *low place* (10:5–6). Solomon had also *seen slaves, or servants*, riding on horseback, while *princes*

were *walking* (10:7). In other words, just hang in there and your wisdom—doing the right thing—will eventually reward you.

3. Work carefully (10:8–9)

If you don't **work carefully**, when you dig *a pit*, or well, you could *fall into it*, and when you break down, or demolish, a wall, you could be bitten by a snake. Also, if you don't **work carefully**, you can get *hurt* in a stone quarry or be *endangered* when splitting *logs* (10:8–9). Even though you have incredible energy and competence, if you take foolish chances, you or someone else could be hurt or killed.

4. Work skillfully (10:10–11)

Solomon writes: *If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed* (10:10). If you are going to the woods to cut down a tree, the time and energy used sharpening the axe are well-spent. Get the training or education you need to be “sharp” at your occupation. Also, continue to sharpen your skills in your occupational field. Great workers never stop learning.

Solomon continues: *If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer* (Ecc. 10:11). In other words, if a snake bites the person who knows how to charm it, his skill is worthless. Therefore, the important thing is not just to have skill and knowledge, but to use them.

5. Work graciously (10:12–15)

If we are *wise*, our words will be gracious and bring us *favor*. However, if we talk like fools, our words will *consume* our reputations (10:12).

Speaking of the fool, Solomon writes: *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness* (10:13). A fool bases his words on foolish assumptions and will end up talking *madness*. Also, *the fool multiplies words* (10:14a) because fools are big gossips who are always running down people, especially those in places of authority. They also start being critical before they get all the facts.

Solomon writes: *though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?* ¹⁵*The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city* (10:14b–15). Solomon is using a little humor. Foolish people talk about the future as though they know all about it. However, they don't even know the way to town from their own house.

6. Work equitably (10:16–17)

Solomon writes: *Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!* Immature, incompetent leaders gather family and friends around them who reflect their behavior and desire to feast, or party, instead of employing people who deserve the job. On the other hand, *happy*, or “blessed,” is the *land*, or business, whose *king*, or leader, is noble. They *feast*, or party, *at the proper time* to gain *strength* for their work *and not for drunkenness!* (10:16–17). Lazy, incompetent people who want to party all the time will cause any organization to collapse. This is true of nations and businesses. Yet, the opposite is also true. People who work God’s way, whether for a country, a business, or themselves, will be *blessed*.

7. Work enthusiastically (10:18–19)

Because of *sloth*, or laziness, *the roof sinks in*, and because of *indolence*, or “idleness,” *the house leaks* (10:18). A lazy person does not maintain his house or things at work. However, what does Proverbs 18:9 declare?

This means “goofing off” at work is as bad as destroying things at work.

God commands us to be enthusiastic about our work. You may be a teacher, a truck driver, a custodian, a brain surgeon, or whatever, but God says, *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men* (Col. 3:23). Now that should get you excited because the average person works about 88,000 hours in a lifetime. That being the case, you don’t have to waste those 88,000 hours you spend on the job. If you *work ... as for the Lord*, they can count for God and eternity. Isn’t that great?

Solomon summarizes the philosophy of a fool: *Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything* (10:19). However, money really only gives a fool the ability to be a bigger fool.

8. Work submissively (10:20)

So the question is, “What should I do when my boss is a fool?” Solomon warns: *Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter* (10:20). The phrase “a little bird told me” probably originated with this verse. Fools are sometimes vindictive and those who have reached places of authority almost always have people anxious to report any bad thing said about them. Therefore, be wise—trust God and work as He says.

To work God’s way, work **wisely, patiently, carefully, skillfully, graciously, equitably, enthusiastically, and submissively.**

LESSON 13 Living in an Unpredictable World (Ecclesiastes 11 & 12)

The only thing certain about the future is that it is unpredictable. We don't know what is going to happen next week, next month, or next year. However, God (the Creator of all things, including time), does know all about the future and has given us principles to follow. Through Solomon, He tells us how to live in this unpredictable world.

First, invest carefully (11:1–6)

Solomon, the richest and wisest person in the world, now gives us some investment advice. He writes: *Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days* (11:1). Some see this as an exhortation about the rewards of being generous. However, this idea is not consistent with the context because Solomon is not talking about rewards but about investments in this passage.

Solomon's wise investment made of lot of money from international trade (1 Kings 10:11, 15, & 22). In his day, like today, one of the main trade commodities was grain. The merchants of Solomon's day loaded their grain onto ships and sent them off. Did you notice that in the phrase *cast your bread upon the waters*, the word *waters* is plural? The idea is to not put all your grain on one ship because shipping involves many risks, such as shipwrecks, pirates, dishonest ship captains, etc.

Next, Solomon advises to *give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth* (11:2). In other words, diversify your investment portfolio. This is like the old saying, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." Because life is uncertain, be smart and don't have all your money in one type of investment.

Using the context of sowing and reaping, Solomon reminds us the weather is beyond our control (11:3). Then, what advice does he give in verse 4?

We can sometimes let uncertainty paralyze us. There is an old saying, "**To over analyze is to paralyze.**" We shouldn't be careless or ignore the risks, but we shouldn't let the uncertainties of life paralyze us. If we wait for ideal circumstances to invest our money, we will *not reap* a return.

We can't accurately predict *the wind*, or weather, during a harvest season, nor can we know how God puts the breath of life into a baby in *the womb*. These are examples of many things we don't understand about *the work of God* (11:5). Therefore, Solomon's advice is to *sow your seed* in the morning but keep busy all afternoon at some other profitable enterprise. You don't know which investment, possibly even both, will *prosper* and bring a profit (11:6). We may have to try many things in life because we don't know which one God is going to bless. Too often we want God to give us some "insider trading information," but God will not do that. We must in faith follow the principles about money found in God's Word.

Stick with what has been proven to work. In an uncertain world, **invest carefully** and ...

Second, live joyfully (11:7–12:8)

When are you going to start enjoying life? Some might say, “When I have so much money,” “when I live in a certain kind of house,” or “when I have a certain job,” etc. However, if you don’t know how to enjoy life now, you never will. Solomon tells us we can live joyfully in spite of the uncertainties, if we remember *it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun*, or the dawning of a new day (11:7). *So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity*, or meaningless (11:8). In other words, don’t let the uncertainty of coming problems and adversity steal your joy. Because God is the Maker of all things

God will bring everything we do into judgment (Ecc. 11:9). To enjoy life, start young because old habits are hard to break. Solomon is not advising us to party and indulge in sinful desires. He is saying we should do things we enjoy. If we have kids, we should do things we can enjoy with them.

To live joyfully, *remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity* (11:10). The word translated *vexation*, or “sorrow,” (KAAS, kah’-as) means anxiety or worry. You can’t live joyfully if you constantly worry. That’s why you must banish *vexation* from your heart. To live joyfully, don’t be a “worry wart”!

The phrase *put away pain from your body* means to get rid of things that are bad for your body. It may be the way you eat, or it might be drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or immorality. If you don’t take care of your body when you are young, you will pay for it when you are old.

To live joyfully, Solomon next writes: *Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”* (12:1). We should live joyfully, but responsibly, in our *youth*, before *the evil days* when our physical abilities deteriorate with old age. How does Solomon describe aging in verse 2?

Aging affects our minds. The phrase *the clouds return after the rain* may refer to our mental processes when our minds become cloudy. Did you hear about the man who went to his doctor and said, “Doc, I have a big problem; I can’t remember anything anymore.” The doctor asked, “How long have you had this problem?” The man paused for a moment and said, “What problem?”

In verses 3–5, Solomon describes getting old. The *keepers of the house*, probably referring to our arms and hands, begin to *tremble* (12:3a). As we get old, we tend to be *bent*, or slumped (12:3b). *The grinders cease because they are few* refers to teeth, which often become fewer as we get older (12:3c). Also, as we age, our eyes are *dimmed* and we need bifocals, or even trifocals (12:3d). The *doors on the street being shut* and *the sound of the grinding is low* means we begin

to lose our hearing (12:4a–b). Have you noticed that older people often *rise up at the sound of a bird*, early in the morning, wishing they could sleep longer (12:4c)? The *daughters of song* being *brought low* may refer to the weakening of our voices.

In verse five, Solomon tells us, as we age, we become more *afraid also of what is high* because, if we fall and get hurt, we don't bounce back like we did when we were younger. Because of our poor vision, as we age, we also develop more *terrors, or "fears,"* about traveling alone on the road, such as flat tires, rain storms, etc. As we grow older, our hair will turn white like *almond tree blossoms* (if we have any hair left). Age also causes us to be like a dying *grasshopper* at the end of summer that *drags itself along*, or is with "*burden.*" The phrase *desire fails* is literally translated "the caperberry will be ineffective." In Hebrew, "caperberry" means "provocative of desire." It is native to the Mediterranean region and was taken as a stimulant for the senses. Losing its effect refers to the loss of vitality, taste, and appetite.

As verse five ends, Solomon reminds us we will eventually go to our *eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets* (will come to our funerals).

Solomon urges us to remember the Lord *before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern* (12:6). The words *snapped, broken, and shattered* refer to becoming worn out. That's what happens when we get old. We call it "over the hill." However, Art Linkletter reminded us, "It's better to be over the hill than under it." When we are far enough "over the hill," we die. How does verse seven describe death?

Because we are going to return to *dust* (Gen. 3:19c), Solomon concludes life is *vanity*, or meaningless, without wisdom from God (12:8). In an unpredictable world, **invest carefully, live joyfully**, and ...

Third, face judgment confidently (12:9–14)

Solomon concludes this book by telling us about its author. It was written by a wise *Preacher*, or teacher, who studied and with *great care* classified his studies into *many proverbs* to impart *knowledge* to the people. He sought just the right words to express the *words of truth* accurately (12:9–10). Solomon also wrote the book of Proverbs. A proverb is a short saying expressing truths that apply to life.

The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd (12:11). *Goads* were sharp, pointed sticks used to prod oxen to keep them moving in the right direction. *Nails firmly fixed*, or "*fastened,*" refers to a nail-studded stick with which a shepherd drove sheep. Likewise, the God-given writings of Solomon contained in the Bible are to keep us moving in a godly direction. Solomon says they are *given by one Shepherd*, which means the Shepherd of Israel, God Himself. God gave us the Bible to be a goad, or prod, in our lives. How does 2 Timothy 3:16 express this fact?

Solomon warns us to *beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh* (12:12). This means there are endless opinions and books about how we should live. However, true wisdom can only be found in the Word of God. Solomon isn't telling us not to appreciate other books. We should learn all we can from other books (Prov. 18:15), but we must remember, when it comes to morality and holiness, the Bible is the only authority.

The book of Ecclesiastes cannot be understood without reading the last two verses, which Solomon calls *the end*, or "conclusion," *of the matter*. We should enjoy life but not forget to *fear*, or revere, *God* and *keep his commandments* because *this is the whole duty of man* (12:13). According to verse 14, why is this critically important in an unpredictable world?

Although there is much in life we don't understand, we do know enough to be held responsible at the Judgment for what we do or fail to do. However, if we live by God's Word, which teaches us to *abide* in Christ, when He appears we can have *confidence* and *not be ashamed* (1 Jn 2:28).

To live a meaningful life in this unpredictable world, **invest carefully, live joyfully, and face judgment confidently.**¹