



**The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes:
Choose Eternity over Futility**

Eccl. 1:1-11; 12:13-14 (CSB)

The Beginning and End of Ecclesiastes

Get wisdom, get understanding;
don't forget or turn away from the words from my mouth.
6 Don't abandon wisdom, and she will watch over you;
love her, and she will guard you.
7 Wisdom is supreme—so get wisdom.
And whatever else you get, get understanding.
8 Cherish her, and she will exalt you;
if you embrace her, she will honor you.
9 She will place a garland of favor on your head;
she will give you a crown of beauty.”

Who doesn't want such benefit? We all could use more wisdom, right?

Those who are younger, you may think this applies mostly to you. Well, it does. You not only need wisdom for regular life like all other people on earth and throughout history. You need wisdom for dealing with all the advances in technology and interconnectivity that have occurred in the past 25 years.

But you are not alone in needing wisdom. Those who are older need wisdom for everyday life. And while growing older gives more opportunities to gain wisdom, some choose not to listen to lady wisdom. Those who are wise are wise because wisdom has become a good and ever-present friend.

But there are still times where a new matter arises that an older person has not faced before. He must seek wisdom to know how to walk with God through that situation for Christ's glory, seeking to find out what is most loving to God and others.

And that wisdom is outside of ourselves. It must be sought, and it is available if you seek to know the one, true God.

Today we're introducing both a longer series and a shorter series. The shorter series is the 10-week series on Ecclesiastes that runs from today through mid-December. Ecclesiastes will be a great opportunity for us to learn of the need to seek God first and submit all our pursuits to Him and His Word.

It is one thing for us to say that all things have been put under the feet of Christ. It is another matter for us to live our days with shaping every moment as holy and actively arranging our lives to be honoring to Christ according to His Word. Ecclesiastes will challenge us and make clear for us that any other end is ultimately futile and a waste of time.

This book will equip us with the perspective needed for confronting lies that our lost neighbors are buying into. This morning I read from 1 Timothy 6:6. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Ecclesiastes helps us see that the theme song of the lost is "Can't Get No Satisfaction."

Out of love for God and love for our neighbors, we can use Ecclesiastes' perspective to point them to God's glorious grace as the only eternal and substantial basis for contentment and life.

Ecclesiastes starts us off on a 3-part series of learning from wisdom books. We'll start with Ecclesiastes, take a short break for Christmas and missions season, cover Song of Solomon and finish around Valentine's Day, and then wrap up with Proverbs.

Here are some tips on approaching Wisdom books in the Bible:

1. Wisdom is about living in line with how God created us and the world, especially since we let sin and its effects enter.

- 2. No one wisdom book gives the full picture on wisdom.**
- 3. You have to keep reading to get the fuller picture.**
- 4. You will not ever outgrow the need for wisdom in this life.**

Understand that there are 5 books in our OT canon that are considered Wisdom books. In addition to Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Proverbs, Job and the Psalms are also considered Wisdom books. Each one teaches us about how we are to walk with God in this world according to his design.

But they also take into account the effects of sin on the created order and how depravity reaches every aspect of our beings.

The three we will cover over our wisdom series especially target younger people so they can become wise without all the scars and mistakes. They speak directly to life situations spanning from youth through old age. But each has its own voice and method. Each must be heard for itself and then also heard in unison with the rest.

I've actually cheated a little by bringing in the end of Ecclesiastes at the beginning of the series. The author's manner of approach is intentionally one of frustration, desiring to make us properly frustrated with the fallen, temporal world apart from constant focus and dependence on God. It is an immersive book that is like a giant vitamin. You don't get the benefits of the vitamin only by talking about it or looking at it. You only get the vitamins and minerals by swallowing it, and it doesn't come in chewable or gummy bear form.

Today, we start with Qohaleth, the teacher of Israel, as he helps curb our self-enthusiasm that places confidence in man and our pursuits apart from God.

**1 The words of the Teacher, son
of David, king in Jerusalem.
2 “Absolute futility,” says the
Teacher. “Absolute futility.
Everything is futile.”**

**3 What does a person gain for
all his efforts that he labors at
under the sun?**

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

5 The sun rises and the sun sets; panting, it hurries back to the place where it rises.

**6 Gusting to the south, turning
to the north, turning, turning,
goes the wind, and the wind
returns in its cycles.**

7 All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

**8 All things are wearisome,
more than anyone can say.
The eye is not satisfied by
seeing or the ear filled with
hearing.**

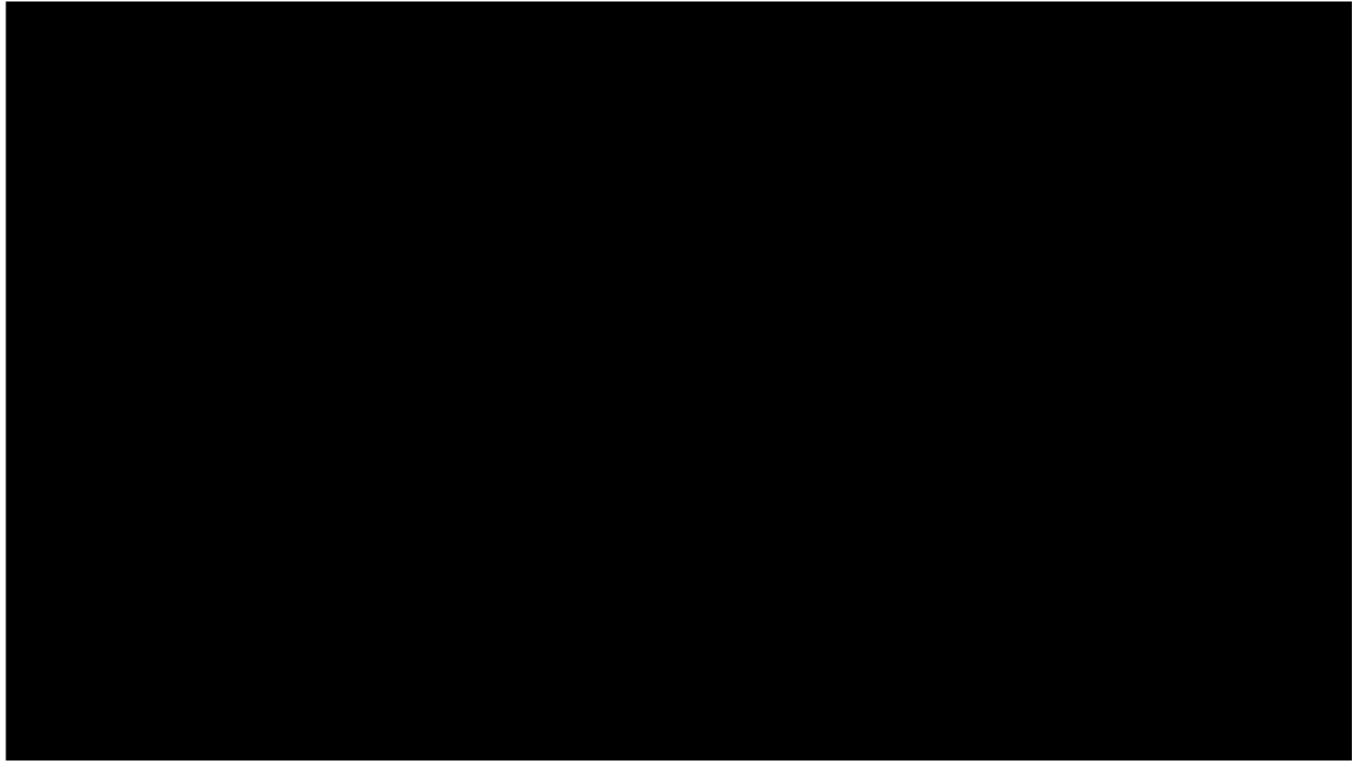
**9 What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what
will be done; there is nothing
new under the sun.**

**10 Can one say about anything,
“Look, this is new”? It has
already existed in the ages
before us.**

**11 There is no remembrance of
those who came before;
and of those who will come after
there will also be no
remembrance by those who
follow them.**

**12:13 When all has been heard,
the conclusion of the matter is
this: fear God and keep his
commands, because this is for
all humanity.**

**14 For God will bring every act
to judgment, including every
hidden thing, whether good or
evil.**



Pray

**Ecclesiastes is written to curb
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What is life about and how do you know?

Do you go to school to learn it? Or read a great number of books?

But aren't all those teachers and authors just finite beings like us?

So, even if they learned from other mere human beings, how do they really know? How is anything knowable?

BTW, when I use the word knowledge, I am referring to belief that is true and justified.

We live in a timeframe in which people, who are made in the image of God, are bombarded with an endless amount of claims for truth, claims that are contradictory.

Each person's version of truth is waged against everyone else's version of truth. The result is that people are left questioning if there is any truth at all and are left to try to figure it out for themselves, even though they never come to a proper end of it for themselves.

Through Ecclesiastes God speaks clearly into the lives of people hungering for something substantial and lasting.

The human author and speaker of these words is apparently Solomon, who is referring to himself as Qohaleth, which is a Hebrew word related to Qahal. Qahal can

basically be translated to be assembly, but it carries with it the understanding in the Hebrew Bible of the believing assembly of the Old Covenant for Israel.

Qahal is often translated in the LXX to ekklesia, the word we most often translate as church in the NT. That is why it got the title Ecclesiastes.

Qoheleth does not simply mean teacher. He is convening the assembly for the sake of teaching.

Now, when you go to listen to a teacher, how do you expect the conversation to go?



Maybe you are thinking of sitting in a classroom and taking occasional notes. For some of you, it may be an opportunity to goof off with friends and pay very little attention to the person up front. Maybe you expect the teacher to be really nice so that he can try to get a 5/5 stars on Rate My Professor. That's not the kind of teacher Qoheleth is.



Qoheleth is more like the professor who takes you outside on a field trip and says try to keep up and not get lost. He gives you tests that show you how little you know. He gives tests that no one in your class gets an A on, and he never uses the bell curve. He insists that he cares more about your perspective on life than your grade, much less your self-esteem. He is targeting your self-esteem because he believes your own perspective about yourself is insufficient for determining what is good and right for you. And he actually cares about you enough to do something about it. He is not willing to accept agreeing to disagree. He initiates class debates in order to destroy any arguments that do not have bedrock foundations.

Why? Because life is precious but fleeting.



Ultimately, the journey leads you to realize your need for right relationship and dependence on God.

He does not want us to make it purposeless by unsubstantial pursuits that are like trying to grab our breath vapors on a cold day.

The term translated to meaningless or futile can be used to refer literally to vapor. The year has already started to transition to the colder season. Within two months, you'll have a morning in which you should be able to see your breath in front of your face. Qohaleth is telling us that our pursuits that do not originate and persist in God's will for us and through right relationship with him are like trying to grasp that breath and keep it in our hands.

Recognize that you are made for eternity and the weight of glory.

2. Recognize that you are made for eternity and the weight of glory.

Anything not in line with reality as God created and prescribes for us will frustrate you and abandon you.

Qohaleth lists several images of things that involve full processes, but the cycles just keep repeating. The earth turns in such a way that it appears the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. The amount of light for each day changes throughout the seasons, but the seasons keep repeating.

He cites wind patterns for different seasons. Growing up in Louisiana, we were well acquainted with hurricane season. I have friends here today from PR who know well that hurricane season officially begins on June 1. People in Florida have been devastated by the result of combining a tropical wave, warm water, thunderstorms, and low wind shear, a hurricane. I now can't remember a year in which a hurricane has not devastated a city or region in the Caribbean or North America. But each year hurricane season ends and people rebuild if they can. And we stop worrying and go on with our lives for another 6-9 months before preparing for it again.

The water cycle continues to occur. Rain falls, rivers flow, the oceans and seas fill, water is evaporated, and the process starts over again.

Each process should have purpose, but the cycles do not end. They just keep going, so that the processes lose prominence in our eyes.

You know what does end? Your life in this world comes to an end at some point.

Something inside of you recognizes that you were made for eternity and for the weight of glory.

You do not have the power to change history that came before you. You should make yourself aware of what came before, but such knowledge is not enough to satisfy that thirst for eternity.

C.S. Lewis describes our glory in light of God's glory. Our glory is found in the approval of God, most aptly noted by Christ's statement to those who truly know Him and have evidenced that knowledge by faith working itself out in love. Jesus says to His own at the end, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Lewis stated,

"It is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex for ever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero's book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty. . . . In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. . . . Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall "stand before" Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

We are made for such glory, but the busy, repetitive cycles of life tempt us to focus on the particulars instead of the universals. We are tempted to make ourselves the center of all things instead of focusing on God from whom all things come and in whom only all things find life.

And even if one generation shows they know the Lord, that is not a guarantee the next generation of that church or family will hold to the truth in walking with Christ.

The frustration of knowing we are made for eternity and glory is that we still live in a world affected by sin.

If we do not make disciples of Christ who then can make disciples of Christ, then our church will not last into the distant future. But even if we strive to make disciples, we cannot guarantee that people will come to faith and come to know the One who is true.

So what is the point of it all?

**Learn now, not later, that all of
life is ultimately fleeting and
purposeless apart from a right
relationship with God.**

3. Learn now, not later, that all of life is ultimately fleeting and purposeless apart from a right relationship with God.

13 When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

God is glorious, and we exist for His glory. He alone gives lasting efficacy to the manner, reason, and substance of our pursuits. Our realization of glory is not found in our accomplishments or our accounts. Our glory is not found in our possessions, experiences, or emotions. Our glory is not found in our knowledge, skills, or designs.

Our glory is found simply, simply in the simple affirmation and pleasure of God. He is distinct from us, and so we cannot say for ourselves that we have done well and been found acceptable to God. God alone can give this affirmation, and He has made clear the means to enter into such rest is by means of the cross of Christ, so that He who knew no sin might become sin for us and so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Qoheleth is trying to teach us by immersion in frustration to appreciate what Paul would later state in 2 Corinthians.

16 From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a [mere] worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! 18 Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. 19 That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God."

Everything has been subjected to the futility that Ecclesiastes speaks of, subjected to futility so that we might look to Christ by simple, saving faith.

“What is our only hope in life and death?” one catechism asks. “Our only hope is that we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.”

Extend offer of salvation

