

WISE LIVING
in the MIDST OF BAD
ATTITUDES

Life Lessons from Ecclesiastes

Dr. Troy M. Borst

**WISE LIVING IN
THE MIDST OF
BAD ATTITUDES**

*Life Lessons from
Ecclesiastes*

by
Dr. Troy M. Borst

These studies come from sermons preached at
Cincinnati Christian Church in Bloomfield, Indiana.

© Troy M. Borst 2022

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973,
1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® All rights reserved worldwide.

The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H.
Peterson

The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). ESV®
Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing
ministry of Good News Publishers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES PRIMER . . .	7
CHAPTER 1	12
CHAPTER 2	30
CHAPTER 3	46
CHAPTER 4	61
CHAPTER 5	81
CHAPTER 6	95
CHAPTER 7	110
CHAPTER 8	129
CHAPTER 9	145
CHAPTER 10	157
CHAPTER 11	171
CHAPTER 12	188

BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES PRIMER

Primer | p̄rīmər | “pry-mer” | is the stuff laid down before paint

Primer | primər | “prim-mer” | is the introduction to a subject

This section does both.

You may skip to chapter one if you like, I always do. 🖱

THE AUTHOR

The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes is King Solomon of Israel, son of David and heir to the earthly throne of the People of God. If anyone tells you different, ignore them. Seriously, just act as if they are not in the room. Somehow do that with love and understanding.

The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes is important because it is important to know who we are listening to and *who it was God inspired*¹ to write these words. We know the author of Ecclesiastes is a man named King Solomon.

We know this (not because it names him exactly) from the first verse of Ecclesiastes and a little bit of description in chapter 1:

VERSE 1: “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*”

+

VERSES 12-13: “*I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.*”

+

VERSE 16: “*I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.*”

¹ ‘Inspiration’ is a basic Christian belief that God via visions, auditory direction, messages from angels, or from the influence of the Holy Spirit had His exact Words written down by certain people to be shared.

The author of Ecclesiastes describes himself as the Teacher King in Jerusalem. He was also the son of King David. This is Solomon. This is the same King Solomon who asked God in prayer for wisdom in 1 Kings 3:7-15 and received not only wisdom, but wealth and health and peace and everything that comes with life. We see that information about wisdom in those verses.

This is the same King Solomon who built the first temple for God in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6). Solomon not only wrote Ecclesiastes, but he also wrote most of the Book of Proverbs and also the Song of Solomon (bow-chicka-wow-wow).

It is King Solomon son of David in Jerusalem who God inspired to write the Book of Ecclesiastes which teaches us about wise living when life seems pointless.

LIL BIT HOW TO READ THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

I also wanted to mention, by way of this introduction, a few things about reading the Book of Ecclesiastes (ee-klee-zee-ass-tees).

Firstly of two, Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom literature, but it is not necessarily a collection of sayings like the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs has saying after saying and each one or each section is contained in itself. Ecclesiastes is by-and-large not like that even though there are a few sections that follow this pattern.

Ecclesiastes is more like the Book of Job in that a story is being told and should be read in one sitting to get the whole impact. You might notice I am writing one chapter or so on each chapter in Ecclesiastes... which honestly is not so beneficial for the way Ecclesiastes was written.

The story of the Book of Ecclesiastes is that wise King Solomon (giving himself the nickname 'the Preacher') took a journey through life and investigated much about life and found it to be pointless and

meaningless and mundane. We get that definitely from chapter 1, but that is not the whole story. Solomon concluded that life is pointless and meaningless and mundane and temporary, but he also came to an additional conclusion that he writes about at the end of the book that then cascades back over everything he discovered about life.

The conclusion very much has to do with God.

I am going to do my expert best to bring the end of Ecclesiastes to you in each chapter to try and mitigate this piece-by-piece error in reading this type of Scripture.

Secondly of two, Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom literature that presents many ideas that are not wise. Solomon a.k.a ‘the Preacher’ is experimenting and letting loose bad attitudes like he had beans for dinner and it does not smell nice. That example is crude on purpose. Many things Solomon presents in Ecclesiastes are *terrible bad attitudes* and *wrong thinking* and *self-centered foolish living* because he’s building up to the punch line in chapter 12.

This is why quoting from Ecclesiastes is problematic.

This is why using Ecclesiastes to teach is difficult.

This is why the sermon series this book is based from was tough.

GREAT VALUE

The Book of Ecclesiastes 100% has great value for our day because #1 it is God’s Word, but also #2 we have the opportunity to look at bad attitudes and foolish decisions and willful sin and see how such things play out in the life of a person.

King Solomon was the wise fool.

We benefit.

Read on for thy benefit and may thee be blessed.

ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 1 (ESV)

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ²Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. ³What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? ⁴A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. ⁵The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. ⁶The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. ⁷All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. ⁸All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has been already in the ages before us. ¹¹There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after. ¹²I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹⁴I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. ¹⁵What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. ¹⁶I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. ¹⁸For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

CHAPTER ONE: NO REAL PROGRESS

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #1: Most of the time life is the same pile of crap on a different day. Nothing is different. Everything is the same. Woe is us.

=====

If you watch movies, you will notice that most stories or movies are remakes of previous stories and movies. Rarely are there new things that are done in Hollywood. Good stories are good stories and movie makers all want their shot at telling good stories and putting their own inspired unique spin on it.

There is no real progress in movies.
Hollywood remakes the same movies over and over.

For example:

A Star is Born: 5 times

Phantom of the Opera: 5 times

Oliver Twist: 6 times

Jungle Book: 5 times

Jane Eyre: 6 times

Robin Hood: (4 times, 5 if you add 'Robin Hood Men in Tights')

The Three Musketeers: 8 times

Hunchback of Notre Dame: 6 times

Brewsters Millions: 8 times

The Christmas Carol: over 20 times

Dracula: over 60 times

I think my favorite remakes tend to be westerns like '3:10 to Yuma' (2007), 'True Gri' (2010), and 'The Magnificent Seven' (2016). I also like the remakes of the 'Italian Job' (2003) and 'Mr. Deeds' (2002).

As I was thinking about Hollywood movies, most movies are actually the same story over and over...

... Guy gets the girl.

... Good hero triumphs over the evil villain.

... The long journey to discovery.

... A group of heroes protects a town.

... Robots destroy the earth.

Also, those combine for the ever popular: 'group of heroes go on a long journey to triumph over the evil villain robot and the lead guy gets the girl.' Those stories are told over and over just with different events or characters. There is no real progress in movies or stories.

I mention no progress in movies and remakes and that sort of idea because that is very much the central thought in Ecclesiastes chapter 1. The central thought of Ecclesiastes 1: There is No Real Progress in Life.

THE MOST USED WORD IN ECCLESIASTES

As we begin our trek in the Book of Ecclesiastes, you and I will find a word that is used over and over and over again. It is used 39 times in these chapters.

It is the word: *vanity*.

Depending on your English translation it is the word: meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting. The word primarily means 'breath' or 'vapor' which gives us the picture of a person's breath on a cold winter day. It is like fog. This is why it is described as smoke or wind.

The word is used poetically for things that are temporary or perishable or unsatisfying or mundane. Much of life is vanity. Much of life is temporary, perishable, unsatisfying, and mundane. What we will dig into in the Book of Ecclesiastes is how to live wisely when life is pretty much unsatisfying.

NO PROGRESS IN NATURE (VERSES 4-7)

The writer of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, looks at life and sees no real meaningful progress. He doesn't see anything new or different but the same 'ol same 'ol. He looks at nature and lays out four examples that he sees that illustrate the futility of life. If he were to imagine life today, he might call it a carousel, an American political debate, a traffic roundabout, or even a franchise reboot. Stuff just happens over and over and never progresses.

First, in verse 4, he sees the progressions of human generations. With the earth and the land as a backdrop, people are born and live and die and people are born and live and die. This happens over and over. The earth is still here. The land is still here. A mountain is still there. A river is still there. Houses are here and there. People come and go. This happens over and over and over again. One generation passes away as another one takes its place all the while the earth remains. Over and over.

King Solomon gets this idea from observing nature. His father King David noticed the same type of thing when he wrote some psalms. Psalm 104:5 (ESV) says, "*He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved*" and Psalm 119:90 (ESV), "*Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You have established the earth, and it stands fast.*"

Second, in verse 5, he sees the rising and the setting of the sun. Solomon observes that the sun comes and goes and comes and goes and there is no real progress. It doesn't actually get anywhere as it travels across the sky. The sun rises in the east where it did yesterday. The sun sets in the west as it will tomorrow. It just shines and heats and burns us and does the same the next day.

Again, other Scripture from the Psalms from King David confirms this observation about the sun. The sun rises and everything us under the sun's heat and this happens day after day. Psalm 19:6 (ESV) reflects,

“Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.”

Third (of four examples), in verse 6, King Solomon notes the wind as an example of purposeless activity. The wind blows north and then south and then circles and then does what? Does it all again. Wheel! The wind appears to be free blowing, but in the end really does nothing. The wind blows north. The wind blows south. Do you know what the wind will do tomorrow? It will blow north and then south. It is a circular thing with no progress. We know this about wind which is why when a person who is called a ‘blow hard’ means they bluster and boast and really don’t accomplish anything.

I cannot help but think of Jesus’ words in the New Testament when He is speaking to Nicodemus sharing something similar about the free nature of the wind. Jesus is attempting to teach Nicodemus about spiritual things and uses the wind as a ‘mysterious blowing example’ explaining spiritual things. The thought is different in terms of spiritual things, but the nature of the wind is the same. Jesus describes the wind (and the Holy Spirit) in John 3:8 (ESV), *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.”*

Fourth, in verse 7, we have an observation of the water cycle that we all learn about in science class. The waters of rivers flow into the sea and the sea evaporates and rains and then the rivers flow back to the sea. It is an endless cycle, not in the scientific way we normally think about it, but Solomon notes that no matter how much water flows into the sea that it never fills up. The cycle of water just goes on and on and on. It rains on everyone. Water falls. Then rain stops and pretty soon it rains again, but Solomon notes the ground is never satisfied or the ocean is not filled up.

The Bible talks about rain and how it pretty much falls on everybody. That’s what rain does. The Old Testament says this as does the New Testament. In Job 36:28 (ESV) we read, *“... the skies pour down; and drop*

on mankind abundantly.” Then again in the New Testament we read, “*For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust,*” (Matthew 5:45, ESV).

I was thinking about Solomon’s examples and I was trying to think of something that in my opinion just goes on and on with no progress. If I am thinking personally, I would have to say my weight. Some years I lose pounds and it seems by the end of the year I find them all again. And they are kind enough to bring friends. I work out but it really doesn’t seem to do much. I either watch what I eat and don’t exercise or exercise and don’t watch what I eat. I would also add that when I watch what I eat and exercise I also don’t see any progress, but that might just be a pessimistic bad attitude. Solomon’s bad attitudes and I would get along just fine. It is all a cycle that hasn’t changed since my mom had to buy me ‘husky jeans’ when I was a kid.

Politics in the United States also comes to mind. Danger! It’s the first chapter and we are already in the minefield of politics! It seems in the two-party system we have in our country that one political party gets elected and does their agenda and then the other party gets elected and undoes everything the other party just did and then presses their agenda. It is a cycle that doesn’t seem to end or progress much and is a pendulum that swings back and forth. Depending on your political views you think the country is going in the right direction or the wrong direction. Back and forth. Back and forth. No progress.

I also laughingly thought of Soap Operas on TV. My mom watched General Hospital growing up and I think my wife Kelly watched it when we first got married in the late 90s. I am pretty sure the same characters were doing the same thing when I saw episodes as a kid and when I saw episodes as a newlywed. Same characters doing the same things with no progress. I guess that is sort of the point of Soap Operas on TV... all our bold and beautiful young and restless children living the days of their lives. No point.

SUMMARY

King Solomon, looks at life and sees no real meaningful progress. He sees purposelessness and ceaseless movement in the world that amounts to nothing in his estimation. He sees it all. He can't really, at this point in Ecclesiastes, explain why there is no much fruitlessness and futility in the world. The meaninglessness that he sees in several parts of nature he also sees in life for human beings. Human life parallels what he sees in nature.

NO PROGRESS IN LIFE (VERSES 9-11)

The writer of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, looks at life and sees no real meaningful progress. He doesn't see anything new or different but the same 'ol same 'ol and sees that observable truth in nature (verses 4-7), but also sees it true in verses 9-11 which he relates to human life.

The same thing is true in nature as it is for people! Human history goes on and on from one generation to the next and the landscape of human mistakes are the same. Life and families and jobs and anything else you want to look at seem to be circular. History tends to repeat itself. Fads return. People claim to change. Problems seem to change, but really it is the same old pig, just with different lipstick.

Solomon says that from time to time something appears to be new, but in the end, nope... it's just a Shakespearean play refashioned with animation and some songs. Nothing is new under the sun. We are presented with the same issues as our parents and grandparents and we strive for answers.

People don't learn lessons, but repeat the mistakes of the past.
People do what they've always done and try to live in the same ways.

He says humans have short memories and we forget the lessons that humanity has already learned. I don't know if you think that is true, but

I think that's true most of the time. That seems true with the causes of wars, racism, violence in families, alcoholism, and so many other family issues and social ills. We think we are different and more advanced and have better tools and evolved worldviews, but we still deal with the same 'ol problems.

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #1: Most of the time life is the same pile of crap on a different day. Nothing is different. Everything is the same. Woe is us.

=====

Well, aren't I just a bunch of roses and sunshine spilling out of every pore?! We find Solomon with a terrible attitude in chapter 1 that will continue through the whole book. The key for Solomon's thought in Ecclesiastes is that he is correct about life!

But only to a point!

Wise King Solomon is not wrong that life is circular and many times fruitless and futile and progresses to a whole lot of nothingness. Life is most definitely meaningless, pointless, futile, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor. He is correct in this conversation up to the point at which we say... "but God!"

ECCLESIASTES 12:13

At the end of Solomon's deliberations about our terrible life in the Book of Ecclesiastes, he arrives in chapter 12 with a thought to end all thoughts. I am giving you his concluding thoughts even though we are at the beginning of Ecclesiastes (see the intro if you skipped it).

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

You see life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and makes everything make sense.

It is in following the commands of God that purpose and identity is given.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of our lives fall into place.

How does Ecclesiastes 12:13 apply to chapter 1?

First, Solomon sees the progressions of generations and concludes that people are born and live and die and this happens over and over with no progress... But God!

There is progress if we take on the mission of God each generation to share the Gospel with those who do not know Him. Sharing the Gospel message is never meaningless. Having a spiritual conversation with our son or daughter is not pointless. Bringing your family to church is not futile. Investing in Bible study so that you know what and why you believe what you do so you can pass that Truth along to the next generation is not fleeting. That is God-given, Jesus-approved, Holy Spirit-inspired living.

Hebrews 10:23-25 (ESV) reminds us about such things, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

Second, he sees the rising and the setting of the sun and it comes and goes and there is no real progress... But God!

Every day is not the same when we take our relationship with God seriously. Scripture and worship and Bible study and prayer are deep and wide and we can spend a whole lifetime getting to know God and barely scratch the surface. Of the writing of Christian books worthy of your time there is no end. Each new day as the sun travels overhead brings the opportunity to strive and dig into our relationship with God and to grow deep and wide and strong in faith. That is not futile. That is righteousness and sanctification! That is God-centered living.

The book of Hebrews again reminds us of something similar, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”* (12:1-2, ESV).

Third (of four examples), King Solomon notes the wind as an example of purposeless activity that circles and circles and makes no progress. I thought of this one a little differently because as I was writing this chapter the wind was blowing quite a bit. Branches fell. Wind can be destructive. There is progress with wind, but it is destruction and hardship and fear of a tree crashing through the roof... But God!

When the winds of life come, and they absolutely will, faith in God gives us a framework of thinking, a worldview to live out, and an identity to rest in. We have a way of living based not on ourselves, but on His strength. That is not fleeting. Faith in God is permanent and holds us fast in the midst of life's storms.

Jesus says the very same thing in Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV), *““Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew*

and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Fourth, Solomon observes the water cycle of rivers flowing into the sea and then the sea evaporates and then it rains and then the rivers flow back to the sea. Nothing is ever filled. Nothing is ever done... But God!

I think of all the times in life when we might feel empty and not filled. The Bible over and over promises that when we take our relationship with God seriously and we follow after Him that we are filled and filled and filled to overflowing. God is the Filler. Abiding in Christ and being active in your faith in God and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit is never futile, but soul-filling. A relationship with God is filling because God is the author of life and we were meant to have a relationship with Him. He fills up all emptiness.

We read such a Truth in Acts 13:52 (ESV), *“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”* and again in Ephesians 3:19 (ESV), *“to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God,”* and then again in 1 Peter 1:8 (ESV), *“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.”*

FURTHER APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 1 starts off with King Solomon observing that much of life is temporary, perishable, unsatisfying, and mundane. Life at times is pretty much a movie remake that makes us yawn and bored. Life can feel empty and unsettled and like we are just a hamster spinning on a wheel to nowhere and it is pointless.

When we have these feelings, our faith and wise God-centered living calls us to Ecclesiastes 12 to King Solomon's thought to end all thoughts.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Meaningless fades when we look to God, the Creator of Life, for meaning in life.

Pointlessness doesn't hurt us when God gives us our identity and we rest in that.

Futility lessens when we realize God gives us purpose in each relationship and for each day.

Unsatisfying feelings dry up when we are satisfied in Christ and He fills us.

When you and I deal with such feelings, we need to know that life without God is absolutely futile. We need to focus on higher values. We need God's perspective about life to become our perspective about life.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

1. What about your life feels monotonous and the same and never changes?
2. What is one thing about your life... if you could change it... that you would?
... would God want you to change it?
... would God have you change it?
... should you have already been changing?
3. How do you mirror Solomon's attitude that life is the same crap on a different day?
4. How do you mirror Solomon's attitude that 'woe is me' in day to day life?
5. Do you have a relationship with God?
... what grade (A-F) would you give yourself?
... would God say you and He have a relationship?
... would family members say you have a relationship with God?

DEEPER THOUGHTS

KEY WORD DEFINED: “VANITY”

VANITY

meaningless

pointless

futility

fleeting

breath

vapor

smoke

wind

temporary

perishable

unsatisfying

mundane

crappy

self

useless

senseless

boring

dull

routine

ordinary

vain

empty

hopeless

amorphous

stupid

ineffectual

The Hebrew word in Ecclesiastes 1:2 and the word that is repeated over and over again in Ecclesiastes is the word ‘hebel’ which means ‘vapor,’ ‘breath,’ and its figurative use is ‘vanity.’ ‘Hebel’ is used 64 times in the Old Testament.

It comes from a root word which means ‘to act emptily’ and is an idea Solomon keeps near and dear to his corrupted little heart in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The word is best understood by using it in a metaphor which is why Solomon does so in Ecclesiastes.

‘hebel’ is like grasping the wind

‘hebel’ is smoke floating away

‘hebel’ is Blockbuster stock

‘hebel’ is subtitles for the blind

‘hebel’ is a camo golf ball

‘hebel’ is furry clothing for dogs and cats

The examples above are mostly humorous, but the attitude that ‘hebel’ represents is very dangerous. This attitude when it sinks into our hearts is one that produces depression, anxiety, a feeling of uselessness, suicide, bitterness, and the like.

The *vanity* issues presented in Ecclesiastes are a clear and present danger in our hearts and in our lives. Such attitudes impact our physical, emotional, and spiritual selves. This attitude molds our relationships and how we see ourselves and others.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

The above verse is the Old Testament way of saying that you need Jesus.

The Gospel Message is this: God, the loving Father, sent Jesus the Perfect Sinless Son, to die on the cross that we might have eternal life and a restored relationship with God in spite of our sinfulness.

I am calling on you today if you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior to confess Him. You need to decide if you believe in Jesus or not. Be baptized or not. Decide to follow Him or not.

No one is promised anything about the future.

I am letting you know right here and right now that this is one solid opportunity you have to accept the gracious gift of Jesus on the cross and to obey as He has asked and to enter the Kingdom. Everything has been done and fulfilled and planned and fixed so that anyone can come to Jesus and accept Him in trusting faith.

Acts 2:36-38 (from the Bible) says, "*Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" 37 *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* 38 *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* (ESV)

FAITH: This is more than just agreeing something is true. It involves commitment and deep trust. It is something we build our lives around and becomes the center of our worldview. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Living God and is our Lord and Savior.

REPENTANCE: We recognize that we have sinned (missed the mark) and have been separated from God. Through sin we alienate ourselves from God and from other people. We have disobeyed God. We confess this freely and vow to turn from that way of living.

BAPTISM: We offer ourselves for baptism by immersion. This represents our death to our old self, burial, and resurrection to a new life in Jesus Christ. This is also reminiscent of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. It is the baptism practiced by the early church.

FORGIVENESS: Forgiveness comes at baptism. We fully accept the forgiveness of God for all that we have done. Daily we continue to ask God for forgiveness for we recognize ourselves as sinful by nature and desire to have God cleanse us from those things that keep us from Him and His blessings.

HOLY SPIRIT: The Holy Spirit then commences in every believer after baptism into the Church, the Living Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit becomes our Comforter, Counselor, and Sustainer and helps us to remember all the things that Jesus has taught and continues to teach us daily.

Go find a Christian. Get immersed. Live for Him.

ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 2 (ESV)

"I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. ²I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?" ³I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. ⁴I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. ⁵I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. ⁷I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. ⁸I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

⁹So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. ¹¹Then 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.

¹²So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. ¹³Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. ¹⁴The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. ¹⁵Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. ¹⁶For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! ¹⁷So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

¹⁸I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, ¹⁹and who knows whether he will be wise or a

fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, ²¹ because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. ²² What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? ²³ For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

²⁴ There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? ²⁶ For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

CHAPTER TWO: DELIGHTING THE SENSES

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #2:

Imma smoke it, use it, do it, love it, stick it, eat it, drink it, spend it, collect it and then imma be somebody and finally be happy.

=====

Solomon describes a bit of a journey in Ecclesiastes 2 that is a sybaritic science experiment. He wants to know what in life brings lasting pleasure (2:1). Solomon applied his heart and effort to delighting his senses and he wanted to know what would bring him lasting happiness. Area after area he experimented and lived and sought pleasure and what would permanently delight him.

Pleasure is good.

Pleasure is created by God and Heaven will be pleasurable.

Happiness is an emotion we are all created to enjoy.

It is part of us.

Pleasure and happiness and joy and ‘all the feels’ are in-and-of-themselves not sinful. Like most things God hath created, things have their use and when we go outside of His boundaries we run into issues.

The Bible links God and joy and pleasure. Psalm 16:11 (ESV) says, clearly, “*You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*” Not to be outdone by the Old Testament, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV), “*nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*”

We are meant to have happiness in this life, but is that all life is about?

We are meant to have joy in this life, but is that all life is about?

Is life all about having pleasure and being happy?

Again, Solomon applied his heart and effort to delighting his senses and he wanted to know what would bring him lasting happiness.

DELIGHTING THE SENSES: Laughter (verse 2)

Solomon says he first set his heart on laughter and silliness and harmless amusements. He wondered what lasting pleasure silly foolishness would bring in his life. His basic question in verse 2 is the same question in all of chapter 2: ‘What does it accomplish?’ Laughter and silliness are good and most of the time are harmless, but what lasting good does it do? Does humor lastingly change our heart? Not really. Humor is at times only a band aide and masks over hurt that remains even after laughter. Laughter and silliness are good, but will not bring us the lasting meaning we are looking for.

Proverbs 14:13 (ESV) agrees, *“Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.”*

Solomon concludes in a brief one verse, that in terms of lasting pleasure, laughter is harmless and foolish and good, but temporary and not lasting.

DELIGHTING THE SENSES: Wine (verse 3)

Solomon says he secondly set his heart on wine. Wine is not necessarily a metaphor for something... the Hebrew word ‘yayin’ here means... wine. It could also mean the finer things in life if you want to look at it more broadly. King Solomon (one who has all the finer things in life he could ever dream of) wants to know if the finer things in life will bring him lasting pleasure and happiness and fulfillment. He also uses the word ‘folly’ which we can interpret as parties. Solomon is asking the question and investigating if drinking at parties leads to lasting pleasure and fulfillment. Does it?

For us we might ask:

- Does drinking a six-pack of beer after work help me or hurt me and also make me happy?
- Do I need to drink wine at dinner for it to taste good?
- Do I need to smoke the cigar on the back porch in order to relax and be happy?
- Do I need a joint to mellow out and relax?
- Do I need to vape to release stress?
- Do I need any kind of aid to have a good time?

The question at the moment is not if those things are right and wrong, but *do those things create lasting happiness and meaning.*

So what does someone get when they give themselves over to drinking for the long-term on a regular basis to try and find pleasure? That is the context of what Solomon is investigating. What long term joy does boozing it up give us?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says over time, excessive alcohol use can lead to the development of chronic diseases and other serious problems including:

High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and digestive problems. Cancer of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, voice box, liver, colon, and rectum. Weakening of the immune system, increasing the chances of getting sick. Learning and memory problems, including dementia and poor school performance. Mental health problems, including depression and anxiety. Social problems, including family problems, job-related problems, and unemployment. Alcoholism.²

Honestly, for me the list from the CDC could have stopped at rectum cancer, but that's just me and my rear end.

² [cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm)

Later in this section of Scripture (verse 11), Solomon will declare that everything he investigated is meaningless and a chasing after the wind. 'Tis *vanity* he says! Wine and alcohol and I would add certain types of drugs do not give long-term happiness, but short-term happiness followed by throwing up. Short term happiness is not what Solomon is looking for, but lasting fulfillment of the soul.

DELIGHTING THE SENSES: Myself (verses 4-6)

Solomon says he thirdly set his heart on doing many things for himself to see if the delight of his senses would remain. In verses 4-6, the word "I" appears 4 times and the word "myself" appears 3 times. We need to make sure we understand that Solomon did not build homes or gardens or parks or zoos or pools or even things called 'public works' for anyone else but himself and wanted his name attached to it. He did stuff for himself. All of his hobbies were for himself. He spent his wealth on himself. What did that get him? He would say in verse 11, again, nothing permanent.

Every word that we have that is tied to self is categorized by most as 'bad' and many of us would see them as negative:

"Selfish" is a word all about ourselves and is a common bad word.

"Self-involved" means only caring about yourself.

"Self-centered" means only caring about yourself.

"Self-deception" means you lie to yourself.

"Self-checkout" is annoying and takes away people's jobs.

"Self-conscious" means you don't like something about yourself.

"Self-harm" or "self-injure" is a cry for help and painful.

"Self-immolate" means to set oneself on fire as a protest.

"Self-justification" means you were probably wrong but can't admit it.

"Self-righteous" means you are not righteous at all according to the Real Righteous One.

Almost everything tied to self is negative for a reason. We cannot permanently make ourselves happy or fulfill ourselves in the long-term

even if we do something for ourselves or build something and put our name on it in big letters. Keep in mind that he includes all things he did for himself in verses 4-6 as also being “*chasing after the wind*” (verse 11).

DELIGHTING THE SENSES: Wealth (verses 7-8)

Related to verses 4-6 are verses 7-8 which continue Solomon’s thoughts about himself and serving himself. Solomon says he fourthly set his heart on using his wealth to see if having money and spending money and having more stuff would bring him happiness. It makes total logical sense that being wealthy and spending the money on yourself would bring lasting happiness. It makes sense, but it isn’t true.

We know Solomon was beyond filthy rich because in 1 Kings 3:7-15, specifically in verse 13, God promises Solomon, “*I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days*” (ESV). When I think about Solomon’s wealth, I also think about 1 Kings 4:26 which says, “*Solomon also had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen*” (ESV). He was ridiculously wealthy and had more stuff than any one person could enjoy.

I think about Solomon’s horses and chariots and then I think about cars. For a regular person, owning 3 or 4 cars is probably already a collection.

But around the globe, there are a few car collections that exceed our imaginations. One of those car collections belongs to comedian and TV host, Jay Leno. In his collection, he has over 181 exotic cars along with 160 motorcycles. Jay Leno himself is worth \$450 million and his car collection is valued around \$52 million. That is a lot of money if you were wondering. The entire collection could be worth as high as \$100 million. All these valuables are stored in his garage in Burbank, California. It started out as a 17,000 square foot space in 1991 and is almost 122,000 square feet... I think that is literally 3 acres of cars and

motorcycles. Among the 181 cars that Jay Leno has, almost all are 6 figures or more.³

I don't know what Jay Leno says, but I know King Solomon says the masses of silver and gold and horses and chariots and material things do bring pleasure, but not lasting pleasure or lasting happiness or fulfillment in our hearts that help us feel whole and full of purpose.

Money doesn't grow on trees and life is harder when you don't have it, but it also doesn't bring lasting happiness and joy in our heart... at least according to Solomon.

DELIGHTING THE SENSES: People (verse 8)

Solomon says he lastly, in verse 8, set his heart on being served in all ways by the people around him. He was free of hard labor or even light labor and was served by an army of male and female slaves. He was entertained by singers. He also mentions that his sexual desires were fulfilled by concubines. Having servants did not bring him lasting happiness. Having singers at his beck-and-call did not fulfill him. Even a rotating catalogue of women did not fulfill the longing of his heart for meaning and identity.

The truth is, there is not a person alive who will fulfill you and give you a solid identity. No one can give you esteem enough to fill the longing of your heart.

Yes, you read that right. Read it again.

Not one single solitary person in your life can give you esteem and meaning and identity enough to fill the longing of your heart. True fulfillment doesn't come from another person no matter how they look, how much money they have, how they treat you, what they say to you, and on and on.

³ motorverso.com/how-many-cars-does-jay-leno-have/

No one can fulfill the God-sized hole in your heart. Ever.
It is God-sized for a reason.

Solomon set his heart to investigate much about life and sought to delight his senses with everything he could find and I would dare say everyone he could find.

It all came to nothing.

As I mentioned before, he says in verse 11 that it was all meaningless to him. In verse 17, even after some more thoughts about him being a wise king, he says, “*So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind*” (Ecclesiastes 2:17, ESV).

=====

SOLOMON’S BAD ATTITUDE #2:

Imma smoke it, use it, do it, love it, stick it, eat it, drink it, spend it, collect it and then imma be somebody and finally be happy.

=====

I hope you understand that Solomon did this sybaritic science experiment and he totally lost. It blew up in his face and burned off his eyebrows. I am taking a wide view of Solomon’s life and his emotional and spiritual baggage from this type of living did not bode well for him.

1 Kings 11:1-8 (ESV) shares with us, “*Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, ²from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. ³He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. ⁴For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. ⁵For Solomon went*

after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. ⁷ Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. ⁸ And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.”

Let's not forget verse 9 as well: “*And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,*” (2 Kings 11, ESV).

Keep all of those long-lasting repercussions in mind as you read.

APPLICATION: VERSES 24-26

Suddenly in verses 24-26, the Teacher of Ecclesiastes gives us a glimpse of what he really believes and it parallels his thoughts at the end of the book in chapter 12. Again, remember that we are meant to read Ecclesiastes all the way through to the wise punch line at the end. In chapter 2, he describes his quest for fulfillment in laughter, wine, self, wealth, and people. He dove headfirst into those things and found only an empty pool.

In verse 24-25, he tells us that life without God is not enjoyable. Life is toil. Life is meaningless. Except for those who live for God. Without God we invest our life in everything we think is important, but in the end it either goes to someone else or comes to nothing. With God, there is a dimension to life which is endlessly fulfilling with meaning and purpose. The things from the hand of God, verse 24, are what fulfills us in life. The things from the hand of God, verse 24, are what fulfills us in life.

ECCLESIASTES 12:13

At the end of Solomon's deliberations about life in the Book of Ecclesiastes, he arrives in chapter 12 with a thought to end all thoughts which absolutely is the same thought at the end of chapter 2.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

You see life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God.

Laughter and parties are fleeting, but only joy in the Lord is lasting strength. Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV): *“Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”*

Wine and fine things are temporary, but being drunk on the Spirit leads to the eternal. Ephesians 5:18 (ESV): *“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”*

Self and doing everything for our own name leads to emptiness, but serving others is from God. Philippians 2:4 (ESV): *“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

Wealth focuses our heart on earth, but we must have a Heaven-ward focus. Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV): *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where*

thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

People only give us temporary esteem, so our identity must come from God. 1 John 3:1a (ESV): *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”*

King Solomon discovered the same truth and tells us. Earthly riches cannot satisfy. Even the acquisition of all of life’s pleasures can leave a person empty and longing for more. The king had acquired everything his heart could possibly desire. King Solomon was known for his 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11). He built vast palaces and vineyards. He acquired people and animals. He stockpiled gold, silver, and treasures. Certainly, most would assume, this type of extravagant wealth would result in absolute daily happiness. Yet the more he acquired, the more he was dissatisfied.

He describes possessions, activities, and entertainment. He wanted his mind and hands to be busy and all of his senses delighted. But it was never enough. He says in 2:10 *“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired”* (ESV).

Throughout Scripture, we see this trait of humankind: the sinful desire to have more. The thing about this Truth is that most of us hear it, but we don’t believe it is true. We want to experience it for ourselves for some reason. We don’t take Solomon at his word. So, when you find that laughter, wine, self, wealth, and people all really come to nothing, remember Solomon’s words at the end.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

1. What is the difference between happiness and joy? (yes, there is)
2. Where do your attempts lasting happiness and joy come from?
3. What about laughter (or the pursuit of laughter) can draw you away from God?
4. Why doesn't laughter bring lasting joy?
5. What about wine, beer, and the 'finer things in life' (or the pursuit of them) draw you away from God?
6. Why is wine only a band aid?
7. How does selfishness or anything self-centered block us from an abiding relationship with God?
8. Why does 'focusing on myself' not lead to lasting joy?
9. How does wealth and the pursuit of wealth draw us away from God?
10. Money buys happiness. Why doesn't it buy joy?
11. What is the drawback (if any) of basing our happiness and joy on another person?
12. How do people tend to draw you away from God?
13. How do people tend to push you towards God?

DEEPER THOUGHTS

TOPIC: How do I deepen my relationship with God?

The following items are suggestions on how to dig deep into faith and to discover God more fully. A relationship with God is different for each person, but basics remain for the Christian faith. They are in no particular order or significance. For some, these are new suggestions. For others, this will be suggestions they have seen before.

Pray for 10 minutes in the morning and in the evening increasing the time as you grow.

Offer the same short prayer throughout the day such as a Bible verse such as Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit in me.” Pray it over and over when you think about it.

Set aside 1 hour a day without distractions to focus on Bible reading, prayer, silence, and solitude. Don’t just read, study.

Write out prayers in a journal. Write out letters to God telling Him how you feel. Keep track of them so that you can see how God is answering prayer. Free phone apps exist to do this as well.

Try a “flash” prayer. When you see someone or you are in a certain place, stop right then and pray with them or for them. Pray for the place and the people in it.

Work on taming your tongue and speaking only when necessary.

Fast from TV for a week. By not watching TV for a week, you will see how much time entertainment fills your life and how it influences you. Fill the time you would have spent watching TV with family or a new hobby or Bible study.

Write out confessions to God in a journal.

Do a “treasure” check in your life. Are there material things that you prize way too much? Do you have an abundance of something that could be sold or donated? Practice giving things away.

Resolve to make two positive, encouraging, or loving comments for every negative remark you make. This is way hard.

Pray specifically that the Holy Spirit would be active in your life. Do you feel His presence in your life? Pray that the Holy Spirit would be present and active in you. Pray this before worshipping.

Attend Sunday School or small groups to connect with other Christians in a meaningful way. Better yet, start pouring into others and making disciples... step out and lead those groups. Yes you can.

Give 10% (called a tithe) of your income to God on a regular basis through the church. Put thy money where thy faith is.

Attend Church worship services regularly. Worship, communion, giving/tithing, listening to the Word, music, and prayer in a community are an important part of being a Christian. This is basic basic basic.

Do a kind deed without anyone knowing. Don't tell anyone.

Good Christian Books to read (other than the Bible):

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction by Eugene Peterson

The Wisdom Pyramid by Brett McCracken

Gentle and Lowly by Dane Ortlund

Jesus the King by Timothy Keller

The Screwtape Letters by CS Lewis

Holier than Thou by Jackie Hill Perry

The Knowledge of the Holy by AW Tozer

Messy Spirituality by Mike Yaconelli

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence

Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table by Louie Giglio

Talk about your faith in Christ with a friend or relative. We are challenged in our faith when we explain it to others. Are you ready for such a conversation? Do you pray for such a conversation to happen?

Write a verse of Scripture on an index card and place in on a mirror or in your car. Look at it often and think on it. Do this to memorize verses. Good Bible verses to memorize:

Ephesians 4:32	Isaiah 40:8	Exodus 20:1-17
John 3:16	Isaiah 40:28	James 1:22
Philippians 4:8	Revelation 3:20	Luke 16:13
Proverbs 3:5-6	Ephesians 2:8-9	Hebrews 12:1-2
Genesis 1:1	2 Corinthians 5:17	Micah 6:8
Isaiah 9:6	Romans 8:38-39	

Learn to rest.

Make sure at communion time that you are focusing on Jesus and His sacrifice. Self-examination, confession, and prayer are important parts of communion time.

Serve in the Church in one area once a week.

Go to a Christian conference or a get-away weekend that focuses on your relationship with God. Spiritual retreats exist. Go for it.

Listen to Christian radio on a regular basis.

Download “YouVersion” or “Blue Letter Bible” on your smart phone or tablet in order to read more Bible because it will be in the palm of your hand.

Make sure you have a Bible translation that you can read and understand. Suggestions (they go by letter acronyms) for you might be: NKJV, ESV, NIV, CSB, HCSB. These 5 have easy readability. It is the same Bible, just translates it a little different (slang for example).

ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 3 (ESV)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

² a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

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

¹⁶ Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. ¹⁷ I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. ¹⁸ I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. ¹⁹ For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath,

and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. ²¹ Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? ²² So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

=====

BIBLE READING NOTE:

If you are having trouble understanding any of the words you read in the Bible or what a passage is saying, you can do several things to help yourself:

#1 Read in a different translation. Try the NIV or MSG or NKJV. The YouVersion or BlueLetterBible or BibleGateway can help you access those. A google search will get you there as well.

NIV = New International Version

MSG = The Message

NKJV = The New King James Version

#2 Use a dictionary or a Bible dictionary to look up words. A more advanced step would be to use a resource like Vine's Expository Dictionary (*pronounced Vin-eyes*).

#3 Ask your pastor.

=====

CHAPTER THREE: JUSTICE IS BROKEN

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #3: I know there is a time for everything, but it seems like bad stuff happens every day. Gimme a break God! Can't You do something about all this?

=====

I was trying to think back to the first roller coaster I ever went on. Strange thought, I know. I remember going to Six Flags over Georgia with my church youth group when I was in Junior High, but I spent the whole day in the arcade and spent all the money my parents gave me on arcade games. No Mindbender or Ninja for me. I didn't even have money to eat at the end of the day and the youth minister had to pay for me. Needless to say, that wasn't a pleasant conversation when I got home. I didn't ride roller coasters then I don't think.

I could be wrong, but I believe the first roller coaster I ever went on was Space Mountain in Disney World on a family trip. I remember going with my dad. I remember he lost his sun glasses that were tucked into his shirt. Space Mountain is a wonderful ride. You jerk and twist into the inky blackness as a futuristic soundtrack echoes all around you. The ride has space and stars and all kinds of stuff fly by. I am sure by now it has been updated some since the late 1980s.

Roller coasters give us a sense of fun and thrill in all of the ups and downs even while being on a set track. I was thinking about roller coasters because as we make our way through Ecclesiastes 3, I think roller coasters will help us understand God's Word.

OBLIGATORY NOD TO THE SONG

"Turn! Turn! Turn!" is a song written by Pete Seeger in the late 1950s and first recorded in 1959. The lyrics – except for the title, which is repeated throughout the song, and the final two lines – consist of the first eight verses of the third chapter of the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes. The song was originally released in 1962 as "To Everything There Is a Season" on folk group the Limeliter's album Folk Matinee, and then some months later on Seeger's own *The Bitter and the Sweet*.

The song became an international hit in late 1965 when it was adapted by the American folk rock group the Byrds. The single entered the U.S. chart at number 80 on October 23, 1965, before reaching number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart on December 4, 1965. In Canada, it reached number 3 on November 29, 1965, and also peaked at number 26 on the UK Singles Chart. It was also number 1 in New Zealand, #8 in Germany, and #15 in the Netherlands. The Byrds' 1965 recording of the song holds the distinction in the U.S. of being the number 1 hit with the oldest lyrics.

In a 2002 interview with *Acoustic Guitar* magazine, Pete Seeger said, "All around the world, songs are being written that use old public domain material, and I think it's only fair that some of the money from the songs go to the country or place of origin, even though the composer may be long dead or unknown. With 'Turn, Turn, Turn' I wanted to send 45 percent. I was going to send it to London, where I am sure the committee that oversees the use of the King James version exists, and they probably could use a little cash. But then I realized, why not send it to where the words were originally written?" Seeger arranged for 45% of the songwriting royalties for "Turn! Turn! Turn!" to be donated to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions.⁴

Interesting.

⁴ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turn!_Turn!_Turn!

When most people think about the Book of Ecclesiastes, the beginning of chapter 3 is probably a passage that most people think of and recognize. The chapter feels like a chapter that has different sections to it, but in reality, chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes has one message.

SITUATION: GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL (verses 1-14)

Verse 1 begins by laying out the thought that everything that happens in the world happens for a reason and even the things that are opposites happen under the watchful eye of God. We are meant to remember that at the end of chapter 2, we have the clear understanding that wisdom and health and success and even happiness are empty and meaningless unless they come from the Hand of God.

That stuff is not in our control; it is under His control.

Chapter 3 is no different. Everything that happens around us and to us happens as God is sovereign over everything. In Hebrew manuscripts, verses 2-8 are written in two columns so we not only read the contrasting nature of the items, but we see it in how the words are physically written down. The Teacher King in Jerusalem named Solomon sees that no matter what happens, God is sovereign.

Each of the fourteen pairs are meant to cover, I think, pretty much every season of life and anything that happens to anyone:

Birth and death happen and there is a time for each of those. (verse 2)

Tearing something down and building up have their seasons. (verse 3)

There are times to weep and there are times to laugh. (verse 4)

Searching and giving up happen and there is time for each. (verse 6).

There are times to be silent and times to speak up. (verse 7)

The message from these contrasting verses is that each of us goes through life and we, in one season or another, deal with the same issues. At some point something will get torn up and at some point you will need to mend it (verse 7). Pick an issue and understand that many times those seasons and those events and those trials and joys have little to do with anything that we can control.

So, the inevitable question is... Who is in charge of such things?
If most of these things are out of our control, then who is in control?

Solomon says God is absolutely in charge. He is sovereign over every blade of grass and every speck of sadness. He is in control... that is what sovereign means... over every time of joy and knows where all the lost things lie.

Verse 11: God makes everything beautiful in its time.

Verse 11: God is in charge of eternity.

Verse 11: God is at the beginning of things and at the end.

Verse 13: God gives gifts to humans.

Verse 14: God does what is eternal.

Verse 14: God's will has nothing added to it and nothing taken away.

Solomon looks out at the world and notices that everything that goes on is under the watchful eye and control of God. If they had roller coasters in Solomon's day, he might have said life is a bit like a roller coaster.

Life can be a roller coaster. There are ups, downs, curves, and all sorts of twists and turns we do not control. However, the roller coaster is still headed to its designed end because the designer made the roller coaster do what it does. We like having a sense of control in our own lives, but control is often an illusion. It certainly is on a roller coaster.

All it takes is one negative word from someone or a D on a report card or a traffic jam or a pandemic to reveal how little control we have over

our lives. We don't have control on the roller coaster, but God the Designer knows every up and every down and each curve.

COMPLICATION: JUSTICE IS BROKEN (verses 15-21)

There is a complication in all of this 'God is in control' talk. Solomon brings this up in a huge way in verse 15. He brings up the complication again in a huge way in verse 16. He just piles on the complications.

In verse 15, Solomon repeats a sentiment from chapter 1 that there is nothing new in life and it just repeats and repeats. History repeats itself and God is in charge of history. If that is true and God is in charge of history, why isn't life getting any better? Why do we have to deal with the same old garbage? If God is in control, why isn't He using that control to make life better? This leaves us with complicated questions.

In verse 16, Solomon brings up the fact that justice is broken. In the place of justice and righteousness, there seems to be injustice and wickedness. Justice and 'what is right' is broken. The obvious solution to the problem is that God will make things right and bring all that into judgement (verse 17), but we don't always see that happen. If it is true that God is just and good and righteous and holy, why then does so much in life seem to be broken? Can't He do something about that? This leaves us with even more complicated questions.

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #3: I know there is a time for everything, but it seems like bad stuff happens every day. Gimme a break God! Can't You do something about all this?

=====

Life can be a roller coaster. There are ups, downs, curves, and all sorts of twists and turns you do not control... we can't control. However, the roller coaster is still headed to its designed end because the designer made the roller coaster to do what it does. Are roller coasters safe? I

mean... they are designed rides for amusement... are these designed rides for amusement safe and sound and completely controlled?

The answer if you didn't know it is... no.

In 2004, a man was thrown from the Superman: Ride of Steel roller coaster in Six Flags New England.

In 2008, two nine-year-old boys were injured on a motorcycle kiddie ride at the Carroll County Fair Grounds.

In 2013, a woman died when she fell from the Texas Giant roller coaster in Six Flags Over Texas.

In 2014, the Ninja ride at Six Flags Magic Mountain in Los Angeles derailed when a tree branch fell on the tracks. Four people were injured.

In 2016, a 3-year old boy died when he fell off from the Rollo Coaster in Idlewild and Soak Zone near Pittsburgh.

In 2016 a 10-year-old boy suffered a fatal neck injury at a water slide in Schlitterbahn Water Park in Kansas City.

In 2016 in Greenville, Mississippi a 6-year-old suffered a traumatic brain injury when a Ferris wheel at the Greene County Fair malfunctioned.

In 2016 at the Frederick County Fairgrounds in Virginia, a woman fell 40 feet when the cables at the Super Shot ride snapped.

In 2016, a kiddie roller coaster at the Bartow County Fair in Cartersville, Georgia collapsed. No injuries were reported.

In July 2017 a person died when the Fire Ball ride at the Ohio State Fair malfunctioned, seven people were also injured.

In 2019 a girl was thrown from the Xtreme Super Sizzler ride at the Harvest Festival in New Jersey, she suffered fatal head and brain injuries.

On July 2021, an 11-year-old-boy died and three were injured at Adventureland Park in Iowa after a raft from the Raging River ride overturned.⁵

The complication in all this is that we see evil in the world. We have evil done to us. We see injustice in the world. We see governments

⁵ bmwlawgroup.com/amusement-park-injury-statistics/

and laws and people and companies out of control. We see all of the things in life that are broken. Maybe we even feel broken. King Solomon saw all of that as well.

If God is so good, why is life so bad?

More personal for us... If God is so good, why is MY life so bad?!

If God is in control, why doesn't He prevent disasters?

If God is Who we think He is, why do many things seem out of control?

If God is sovereign, why do bad things happen to good people?

More personal... why do bad things happen to good people because I AM GOOD PEOPLE?!

If God is sovereign, why do good things happen to bad people?

These are important questions that we need to deal with because if we do not, then the fear and doubt and anxiety that remains in our hearts erodes our faith. You must take a look at these important questions and not shy away from them.

There are answers.

SOLUTION: TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (verse 22 & 12:13)

Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom literature, but it is not necessarily a collection of sayings like the Book of Proverbs where a saying has an issue and a solution all in the same verse. Ecclesiastes is more like the Book of Job in that a story is being told and should be read in one sitting to get the whole impact.

The story of the Book of Ecclesiastes is that wise King Solomon took a journey through life and investigated much about life and found it to be pointless and meaningless and mundane. In chapter 3, he discovers that life is supremely unfair and tragic. He discovers that it is supremely

unfair and tragic even under the control of God. We absolutely must remember to keep the end of Ecclesiastes in mind as we read the struggles presented in each chapter. The answer comes at the end. The conclusion very much has to do with God.

Solomon has two conclusions about this very complicated issue of God's control and the injustice and brokenness in this crazy world. I want to summarize his conclusions and then dig into them.

Solomon understands that life is unjust and out of control, but in the end understands that we must give up our need for control in our lives to our good, holy, and just God that is absolutely in control now and in the future. He will bring all things into His justice and make all things right one day in His timing. Seeking after God and having faith in Him means we give up control. Having faith in God means we faithfully and obediently follow Him through the twists and turns of life because He is right there with us.

What are we to do? Trust and obey.

First, we have verse 22 where the Teacher King tells us that we must accept the fact that we are in control of nothing and the anxiety of that truth must pass through us and out of us.

Ecclesiastes 3:22 (ESV) says, “*So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?*”

Solomon repeats his thought from verse 12 again in verse 22 and explains to us that we are not in control of anything. We cannot order any events as we would like. We are powerless to control the forces of nature, the cascading waves of consequences of sin in the world, and the providential will of God. We cannot control God. We have to accept that we are not in charge. We have to accept that all we can do is good that God calls us to in the midst of a world that is a crazy mess.

The lack of control is a complete stress for many people. We want to be in control. We want our plans to work out. We have an order to life and how things should go and that is the end of it. Actual control is an illusion. Worry over the future is pointless. Believe it or not, Jesus says the same thing to us in Matthew 6. He teaches us about control and plans and stress and worry and challenges us to seek God first in the midst of all the chaos.

Jesus says (in Matthew 6:25-33): *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* (ESV)

Jesus of Nazareth says we do not have control in the daily ins and outs of life and this is something we must accept and have anxiety and worry pass through us and out of us.

And! Interesting how Jesus points out Solomon.

And! Don't miss out on verse 33.

In the end, it is about seeking God. Jesus commands us to seek God's Kingdom and placing our focus on God in the midst of worry and loss

of control. That thought leads us to Solomon's concluding thought in Ecclesiastes.

Second, we have Ecclesiastes 12:13 where the Teacher King tells us the exact same thing Jesus Christ teaches us. In the midst of a world that cannot be controlled by us, we must seek God and find in Him answers and control.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

You see life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor and absolutely completely unjust and terrible unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God. God must be in the middle of our lives or we are lost.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and makes everything make sense.

It is in following the commands of God that purpose and identity is given.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of our lives fall into place.

How does Ecclesiastes 12:13 apply to chapter 3?

To help us with this, let's go back to our roller coaster example. There are ups, downs, curves, and all sorts of twists and turns we do not control... you can't control. Where our control ends is where we find the joy of the faithfulness of God! While life may seem like a roller coaster at times, God is bringing us to His desired end.

His desired end.
His desired end.

His faithfulness will see us through the seemingly uncontrolled twists and turns of life. What we need is a strong conviction in the faithfulness of God, who is the One who is really in control. When I learn to give up my illusion of control and truly trust God, I find that I have joy and happiness and fulfillment.

I do not mean that all your troubles simply fade away... because they absolutely won't. They don't. There is a time and season for everything.

I do mean that when I have a strong confidence in God bringing the ride of my life to His desired end, I can relax and have faith and joy and accept that He is in control.

Are you holding on to the safety bar of life with clinched fists?

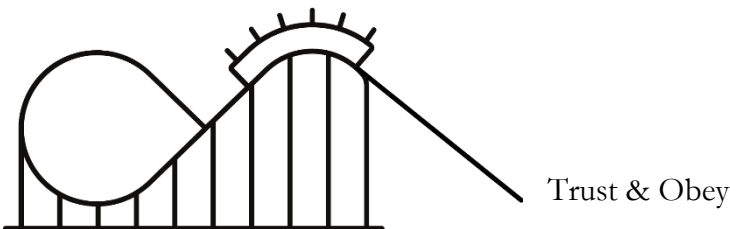
Are you angry with God because life did go how you wanted?

Do you feel you have no control in life and it brings you anxiety?

Are you at the very top of life about to rush down and you are terrorized by your own lack of control?

Does the unfairness of life make you doubt God's existence or His goodness?

Does the lack of justice bring fear and doubt?



THE CHALLENGE

The challenge for us is faith. Trust and Obey.

Followers of Jesus Christ believe that God is absolutely in control of all things and we place our faith in God because He is good and right and holy always. Trust and Obey.

The challenge for us is trust.

Followers of Jesus Christ place trust in God that He is leading us to where we ultimately need to be even though we cannot see the end or ourselves can control the twists and turns.

The challenge for us is obedience.

Followers of Jesus Christ obey God even in the midst of chaos and trouble because His way is the best way no matter what.

Followers of Jesus Christ believe that God is absolutely in control of all things and we place our faith in God because He is good and right and holy always. Followers of Jesus Christ place trust in God that He is leading us to where we ultimately need to be even though we cannot see the end or ourselves can control the twists and turns. Followers of Jesus Christ obey God even in the midst of chaos and trouble because His way is the best way no matter what.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

1. If God is in control, why doesn't He prevent disasters?
2. If God is Who we think He is, why do many things seem out of control?
3. If God is sovereign, why do bad things happen to good people?
4. Do you struggle with the 'trust' part of 'trust and obey?'
5. Do you struggle with the 'obey' part of 'trust and obey?'
(hint... they are linked... struggle with one means both)
6. Where does unfairness seem to grab your heart in your life?
7. Other than Matthew 6, can you think of other Bible passages (or find others) that impact our attitudes and outlook in this area?

REVIEW OF SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDES

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #1: Most of the time life is the same pile of crap on a different day. Nothing is different. Everything is the same. Woe is us.

=====

- Sadness
- Life is pointless
- Feeling Useless
- Stuck in the Mud

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #2:

Imma smoke it, use it, do it, love it, stick it, eat it, drink it, spend it, collect it and then imma be somebody and finally be happy.

=====

- Self-Centeredness
- Sexual Sin
- Addiction
- Wrong Priorities

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #3: I know there is a time for everything, but it seems like bad stuff happens every day. Gimme a break God! Can't You do something about all this?

=====

- Anxiety
- Anger at God
- Unmet Expectations
- Unreal Expectations

ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 4 (ESV)

Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. ²And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. ³But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

⁴Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

⁵The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

⁶Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

⁷Again, I saw vanity under the sun: ⁸one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

¹³Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. ¹⁴For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. ¹⁵I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. ¹⁶There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

CHAPTER FOUR: COMMUNITY

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #4: I don't need nobody.

=====

Beaker looked out over the lip of the nest and decided it was a long way down to the ground. Why did nests have to be built so high up? He got dizzy looking from the nest to the ground. Every time he thought about flying, he got a nervous knot in his stomach because Beaker was afraid of heights! Don't laugh. A bird that is afraid of heights is no laughing matter.

At the beginning of each day, all of the little birds would hop to the edge of the nest and the mother would instruct the birds about flight and they would encourage each other to try and fly. The encouragement was helpful and needed. Each day, one of his brothers or sisters would be successful and leave the nest and fly away. He was the only bird left and hadn't really participated with the others each day. He had been safe and secure thus far in the nest and his mother had brought him food day after day.

She'd fly away and come back and each time would say: "One day you will fly."

Each time he would say, "Oh no I will not."

She would then say: "You can't stay a baby bird forever."

He'd then say every single time: "I don't have to fly to be a bird. I can do what I want all by myself."

REMINDER ABOUT THE MOST USED WORD

We are making our way through the Book of Ecclesiastes focusing on wise living and combating the bad attitudes that King Solomon is presenting to us.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, you and I find a word that is used over and over and over again. It is used 39 times in the 12 chapters. It is used 4 times just in chapter 4 (focus of this chapter).

It is the word: *vanity*.

Depending on your English translation it is the word: meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting. The word is used poetically for things that are temporary or perishable or unsatisfying or mundane because they are temporary like smoke or our breath on a cold day. Much of life is vanity. The flavor of the word that I think fits the passage best that we are digging into in this chapter is: futile.

FUTILE / FUTILITY

The word ‘futility’ or ‘futile’ means ‘pointless’ or ‘useless.’ In my brain, the word futile means that good energy and constant effort and dedicated time and specific thought and expert plans and repeated attempts are made, but the end result does not happen. All of the effort and trying comes to nothing. There are things like that in life that try as we might, we cannot win or succeed or complete the task.

Futile.

Futile is not a good feeling.

The feeling of futility is hopelessness and a loss of power and also a loss of control. We don’t like that feeling. It is a terrible feeling. Sometimes life feels futile. Being the Star Trek fan that I am I also know that resistance to the Borg is futile, which is also not a good feeling.

Futility whether it is in real life or fiction is not good.

What do we do when our good energy comes up with no results?

What should be our perspective when our constant efforts come to nothing?

Our dedicated time and thought lead us nowhere... then what?

Repeated attempts lead us to repeated failure... then what?

FOCUS ON 4:7-12: TOIL ALONE (verses 7-8)

Verses 7-8 focus us on a person who is toiling in life alone and Solomon sees this as vanity and meaningless and futile. The picture we get is an Ebenezer Scrooge type person who is consumed with money and self and is isolated in life. He is dedicated to making money and working hard and has no one to share it with. He is isolated. He is self-centered. He is by himself. He charts his own road and goes his own way.

Money is in the background for this person and perhaps we are tempted to think that we are to focus on his money. The real importance is laid out in verses 9, 10, 11, and 12. We have in this person someone who is isolated. That is the key part of these verses.

He is by himself.

He has no family.

He has no community.

He has no fellowship.

He has no connections.

He is living in a futile manner... not because of the wealth... but because of his isolation.

This reminds me of a personal story.

Troy had just run the 12-mile Tough Mudder obstacle course and swam through muddy waters and climbed over walls and climbed under electrified wire. The Artic Enema was the coldest water he had ever been in. After 12 miles of running and obstacle after obstacle he was tired. It was fun, but he was tired. He was covered head to toe in slippery mud, dirt, and pride.

After the last obstacle it all came down to the end.

The last obstacle was Everest. Everest is a huge ramp that must be run up and conquered to completely finish the race. He paused at the bottom and gathered all his courage and ran up the ramp as far as he could and leaped forward to grab the lip of the ramp. Hands of the people he had run the race with reached out to help, but he ignored them. He grabbed the lip, but because he was literally covered in mud, his hands slipped and he slid all the way to the bottom.

His second attempt yielded the same result. On the third attempt, he ran up and hands of the people he had run the race with shot out from the top to help him up, but as he was running he yelled 'I got it!' but he lied and he slid all the way back down to the bottom. Determined he ran up the ramp again, but exhausted he only made it half way up. Every single time the hands of his companions were out to help him, but now he could not reach their helping hands. The fifth time up the ramp was also not successful. There was no way up the ramp. He finished the Tough Mudder Race completing all 12 miles and all the obstacles... except one.

King Solomon sees the futility of isolation and offers wise advice on how to live when we are tempted to isolate ourselves and chart our own path. Self-centered bird in the nest may think he need not fly, but he does. Birds need to leave the nest and have help doing it. Tough Mudders are completed by relying on others and their strength and not only self.

Wise living according to Solomon is not isolation, but rather connections and family and friends and fellowship... all of which we might summarize with the word: community.

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #4: I don't need nobody.

=====

COMMUNITY: EFFECTIVE LABOR (verse 9)

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (ESV) says to us, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.”*

Solomon explains to us that working effectively and having days when our toil is rewarded comes when we work in teams and in fellowship with other people. I am the first one to bow out of a group project, but Solomon says that is unwise and leads to futility.

There is wisdom in united strength.
There is protection in united work.

The yield for two people working together is twice what the yield would be for one person working. Solomon is rightly observing that community brings with it the combined strength of all the members together. Two people working side by side with equal effort sharpen one another, help, and allow for work to be more effective. Community is good.

In Exodus 4, Moses complains to God that the task of freeing the people of Israel is too great. God promises Moses help in the form of his brother Aaron. Many times, we think of Moses facing off against Pharaoh alone, but he was not alone! He had his brother with him as an encouragement and also as a confirmation about everything God was doing. Two was better than one.

Exodus 4:14-15 (ESV) shares with us, *“Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and He said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.”*

Community has value because it adds the strength of others to our own. This is a good and wise thing. We should participate in community because there will be someone we can lend our strength to and there might be times when we ourselves need some strength.

COMMUNITY: AID IN FALLING (verse 10)

Ecclesiastes 4:10 (ESV) wisely says to us, *“For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”*

Solomon continues his observations that community is needed in life to battle against futility. He continues his thought in verse 10 by saying that we all fall down and sometimes we need a hand up. Solomon sees it a terrible woeful thing for the person who falls and there is no one there to help.

I think Solomon makes it very clear here that at one time or another, every single person needs help. Disaster may come. Hardship is a normal season of life. Hurt is inevitable. Some of us deny this reality and we are poorer for it. Everybody needs help at some point. It is a blessing to give help when a disaster or hardship strikes. It is a blessing to receive help in a time of hurt.

It is not weak to accept help.
It is wise.

The wisest man who ever lived says it is wise to accept a hand up when you need it and I would say he would also add that it is wise to help another up when they fall.

I cannot help but think symbolically about the word ‘fall’ here in verse 10. The word literally means ‘to fall’ which is a physical action. The Bible also uses the word ‘fall’ to indicate someone is dealing with sin or gets caught up in a sinful pattern. It is a fantastic blessing for someone to come along side and gently help us back on our feet with God.

For example, the Apostle Paul commands us in Galatians 6:1-2 (ESV): *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*

Community has value because life is unpredictable and hard and unfair. We selfishly think we can do everything by ourselves, but that is not wise. Understanding what life is like means understanding help may be needed. Additionally, wisdom says you will fall. Understanding of the sinful human nature says at some point you will get yourself in a mess and need someone to help.

COMMUNITY: WELL-BEING (verse 11)

Ecclesiastes 4:11 (ESV) cozily describes, *“Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?”*

Solomon presents, in my opinion, a non-sexual example of community. Solomon is not afraid of speaking about life in sexual terms... just read the Song of Solomon (bow-chicka-wow-wow). Here he is again speaking about the wise advantages of companionship and community. The fact is that if you are out and about or camping or whatever... body warmth together will keep you warm. A fire, a coat, and not going out in the first place will also keep you warm, but that is not Solomon’s point.

Solomon's wise point is that life can be hard and cold and community helps make that better. That is it. No hidden meanings. Nothing to dig further on. Aloneness is highlighted. Isolation is not a good thing. Isolation is something that can damage us and is perilous. Loneliness leads to dissatisfaction in life and a feeling of hopelessness and futility.

How harmful is isolation?

How harmful is loneliness?

There are many alarming health and mental health risks associated with loneliness. According to a meta-analysis co-authored by Julianne Holt-Lunstad, PhD, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University, lack of social connection heightens health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or having alcohol use disorder. She's also found that loneliness and social isolation are twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity (*Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2015).⁶

The power of two or three gathered is also highlighted by Jesus in Matthew 18:19-20 (ESV): *“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I among them.”*

Community has value because it helps with the downsides of isolation and loneliness. It is community that enables us to connect to one another emotionally and spiritually and mentally and I would say even physically at times to make healthy connections. The connection of two or three is powerful.

⁶ apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation

COMMUNITY: STRENGTH (verse 12)

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV) summarizes, “*And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*”

Solomon finishes off his community focus by again highlighting that human relationships have wise value. When two or more work and live together and keep each other accountable, they can bring security and safety to each other. Solomon says the same thing elsewhere in Proverbs 27:17 (ESV): “*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*”

I think in verse 12, Solomon has a contentious situation in mind because he uses words like ‘prevail’ and ‘withstand’ and ‘broken.’ When we face off against hardship or unfairness or pressing matters or difficult people, it is wise for someone to have your back. It is wise to talk issues over with someone. Going it alone is not wise.

Community has value because division and isolation cause weakness. Community brings people together and binds us together in ways that brings strength and help and purpose and allows us to prevail and withstand and overcome the pressures of life.

One final story before you go.

The old man looked at the dentist and said, “It just isn’t going to work. My teeth are the most stubborn part of me and that is sayin’ something.”

“It will work,” the dentist said as he tied the thin string to the door handle. “I will just close the door and your tooth will just slip painlessly out of your head.” One end was already tied to the old man’s tooth. The old man just shook his head no.

The dentist quickly closed the door and the string went tight. To the dentist's surprise, the door handle came off the door and clattered onto the floor. There the old man sat with a string hanging out of his mouth with a big smile. "Toldja," the old man said.

The old man then found himself outside in the parking lot of the dentist's office. The dentist had left the tooth tied in his head, but had untied the other end from the doorknob and it was now being tied to the end of a small remote-control rocket. "This will do it," the dentist said, "I will flip the switch and the tooth will just pop out. No problem. No biggie."

The old man looked at the dentist and said, "It just isn't going to work. My teeth are the most stubborn part of me and that is sayin' something."

The dentist took the remote control in his hand and pushed the button. With a woosh the rocket took off. Oddly, the string held tight but the rocket flew in an arc right into the ground anchored by the stubborn tooth. "Toldja," the old man said.

Once again the dentist and the old man were back in the office and the man was back in the chair. "We'll just do it the old fashioned way," the dentist said grabbing a gentle pair of forceps. The old man looked at the dentist and said, "It just isn't going to work. My teeth are the most stubborn part of me and that is sayin' something. You will need help. Three people ought to do it."

The dentist shook his head no and was about to extract the tooth and then had a thought. "You've been right so far, haven't you," the dentist said to the old man. The old man just nodded. The dentist called in two assistants and all three of them took hold of the gentle pair of forceps and pulled. Out popped the tooth.

"Toldja," the old man said with a grin missing one tooth.

SUMMARY

King Solomon is observing life and notices that life in isolation is futile. He wisely observes that living life in community has advantages:

- Community increases effectiveness and laboring together produces better results.
- Community helps when we fall and enables us to cope with a hand up.
- Community ensures our well-being in harsh situations.
- Community combines our strength together when we need strength.

All of these things King Solomon sees as wise in the midst of living life that at times can be futile. We should not forget that Solomon is presenting us with his observations and findings and he has a huge conclusion in chapter 12.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

You see life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. The futility of life can become overbearing and overwhelming when we seem to be getting nowhere no matter how hard we try, when we fail, when we are in a harsh season, or when we feel weakest. The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God. God must be in the middle of our lives or we are lost.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and makes everything make sense.

It is in following the commands of God that purpose and identity is given.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of our lives fall into place.

How does Ecclesiastes 12:13 apply to chapter 4?

Ecclesiastes 12:13 applies in that we should not walk with God alone in our lives. Isolation is not for the godly and we fear Him and keep His commandments. We are meant to be in community with other believers as we fear Him and keep His commandments. Solomon sees futility in life, but does not say that community is futile... in fact... it brings security.

If only there was a regular gathering of believers to worship and study the Bible with.

If only there was a community of people dedicated to your spiritual well-being ready to talk anytime.

If only there was a community with people ready to pray with you about burdens.

Oh wait, it is called the Church.

Acts 2:42-44 (ESV) describes: *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common.”*

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 12:4-5 (ESV): *“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”*

The unnamed author of Hebrews wisely commands us in Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV): “*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*”

APPLICATION

Being part of a church body is seen as optional today and that is a lie from the pit of hell. Thinking that we do not need other believers or choosing to stay home more often than we gather is weakening our faith.

- A church community increases effectiveness and laboring together for God.
- A church community helps when we fall and enables us to cope with a hand up and prayer.
- A church community ensures our well-being in harsh situations as people minister to us.
- A church community combines our strength together when we need strength.

If church isn't a priority for you, then isolation is going to creep up and bite you in the soul.

Living in community with other believers laboring for God is not futile.

Living in community with other believers in prayer and helping when we fall is not futile.

Living in community with other believers committed to our well-being is not futile.

Living in community with other believers strengthening us is not futile.

At least, that is what a wise man said.

OK... OK... ONE MORE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a tall tower that stretched high into the sky. The top of the tower held a glass bowl filled with the “Water of Life.” Anyone who reached the top of the tower could drink from the glass bowl and could have one of several gifts given by the water.

One could have a great sense of belonging and feel part of a large family with shared goals and experiences.

One could have a sense of being cared for and can care for others in return.

One could have a clear conscience in life and have a righteous reputation.

One could have a faith in God that is deep and wide and sure and strong and sound.

One could have companions to experience life with in good times and in bad.

One could have a powerful filling of the Holy Spirit and real faith.

Do any of those sound good to you? All of them sound good to me?

Anyway, anyone who reached the top of the tower could drink from the glass bowl and could have any of those gifts described. The problem was that the tower had no doors, windows, stairs, ladders, or any way to climb. The tower was perfectly round and smooth. No hand holds. No places to climb.

Three people took on the challenge to reach the top of the tower. Crowds gathered to watch these three people attempt to reach the top

of the tower. Each of them had trained in their own way to reach the top and receive the blessing.

First, we have a woman who decided that she would train and work to run up the side of the tower. She figured that God had blessed her with speed, coordination, and bravery and she could get up such speed that she could run up the tower and reach the top. She trained and she trained. As she trained, she got faster and faster. Her feet were quick. Her balance was perfect. She outran a horse. She outran a speeding train. She outran even the wind! She was ready.

The woman got ready run. She walked away from the tower a great distance so she could build up her speed. She began to run and started off so fast that dust flew behind her. She picked up speed. Leaves blew off the trees she was running so fast. As she approached the tower, she was at top speed and she blew spectators off their feet near the tower. The runner reached the tower and was so fast she started to run up and up and up the tower. She got about half way up the tall tall tower and her speed slowed. Every step was harder. She got two thirds of the way up and then came back down. She landed with a woosh at the bottom of the tower, unhurt, but also unsuccessful.

Second, we have a man who decided that he would train and work to jump clear to the top of the tower. He figured that God had blessed him with good feet, strong legs, and the perseverance needed to jump that high. His jumping was unlike anyone who had lived before. He jumped so well that he could jump over the lake. He could jump over his house in one leap. The day before the tower challenge he jumped over the whole town. His jumping was perfect. He was ready.

The man got ready to jump. He walked to the base of the tower. He knew in his mind he was ready. The crowds cheered him all the while consoling the fast running woman. The man bent down and gathered all his will and strength. The ground underneath him shook as he jumped. Some of the crowd were shaken off their feet as he jumped.

It was a perfect jump with great strength. The top of the tower was coming closer and closer and closer and closer and then not so close and not so close and not so close. He got two thirds of the way up and then came back down. He landed with a woosh at the bottom of the tower, unhurt, but also unsuccessful.

Third, we have a man who decided that he would train and work to use his strength to climb the high tower with a large rope. He figured that God had blessed him with strong hands, strong arms, and very strong shoulders. He believed he could pull himself all the way to the top of the tower. He fashioned a rope with three strands and it was the strongest rope that had ever been made. He pulled a large ship with his muscles and the rope. He pulled a leaning tree straight with his strength and three-strand rope. His strength and rope were ready for the challenge.

He stretched his muscles. The crowds cheered him all the while consoling the fast running woman and the high jumping man who had both failed. The man grabbed his rope and swung swung swung it high in the air and the hook reached all the way to the top of the tower. It was secure! The crowd cheered! The man began to march up the tower hand over hand as he climbed the tower. Every step he got closer to the top. Every step his strength was being used up. He got two thirds of the way up and then came back down because his strength had failed him. He landed with a woosh at the bottom of the tower, unhurt, but also unsuccessful.

Three people took on the challenge to reach the top of the tower. Crowds gathered to watch these three people attempt to reach the top of the tower. None had been successful. The crowd sat stunned as did all three of the participants. None of them had been successful in reaching the top. In the midst of the stunned crowd, an older woman came from the crowd and gathered the three participants.

“May I offer you some advice?” she asked the three of them.

“Yes!” each of them said in unison.

“Hear my words,” the older woman said, “*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!*” ¹¹ *Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*” When she said this last part, she tapped her cane on the strong rope still hanging from the tower.

The three challengers looked at each other and realized that if anyone was to reach the top that they would need to work together. By forming a fellowship that worked together and helped one another and encouraged one another, they could reach the top. It was not necessarily about each of them, but all of them.

The three challengers huddled at the base of the tower and talked and planned and conversed about the challenge of reaching the tall tower. The crowd did not know what was happening and started to walk away home. The older woman cried out, “Pay attention! See what they will do!”

After a few more moments, the three challengers had their plan. The man with the rope cut his super strong rope into four sections. Each one of the challengers tied a section around their waist and the man had one last piece in his hand.

The three challengers walked away from the tower a great distance. The two men held on to the rope around the runner’s waist. She began to run and started off so fast that dust flew behind her. She dragged the men along. Berries blew off bushes she was running so fast. As she approached the tower, she was at top speed and she blew spectators off their feet near the tower. The runner reached the tower and was so fast she started to run up and up and up the tower.

As before she began to slow, just as she began to slow, the man who loved to jump planted his feet on the tower and jumped forward. Now it was the other two who were hanging on. They flew through the air towards the top of the tower. Just as they were about to reach the top, all three began to slow. The strong man slung the rope out, hitched it to the top, and the other two challengers hung onto him as his strength finished their way all the way to the top.

All three challengers stood at the top victorious!

The crowd cheered!

Only by working together and supporting one another could any of the challengers reach the top of the tower. All three of them drank from the glass bowl filled with the “Water of Life.” They knew in their hearts that they could not have reached the top of the tower without the fellowship of them working together.

The End.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

1. You in church weekly?
2. Do you struggle in community? Why?
3. Why does money or intelligence or a fantastic skill make us back off of community and try to 'go it alone'?
4. What in American Culture pushes us to isolate?
5. What is a person missing if they think they are a Christian, but are not part of a faith community on a regular basis?
6. How have churches (perhaps in your experience) made mistakes with folks which make churches not attractive communities of which to be a part?
7. Evaluate this statement:
"Faith is personal, but is not private"
8. Evaluate this statement:
"You can't be a believer if you don't like God's Bride"

ECCLESIASTES 5 (ESV)

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

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

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

¹³ There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, ¹⁴ and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. ¹⁵ As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷ Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

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

CHAPTER FIVE: WORTHY WORSHIP

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

=====

SOLOMON'S ~~BAD~~ ATTITUDE #5: Listen up fools, I gave God the finger once, I don't think I'll do that again.

=====

As we begin thinking about Ecclesiastes 5, I would like to dig into a few passages in the Bible that share some important truths with us before we apply brain power and spiritual effort in Ecclesiastes. It is important for us to have a good foundation before we focus on the first 7 verses in Ecclesiastes 5.

BEING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD: JACOB IN GENESIS 28

We start in Genesis 28 with an experience of Jacob the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. Genesis 28:12-18 (ESV): *“And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’ 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ 17 And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ 18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.”*

Jacob is travelling and he stays in a particular place and God gives Jacob a vision about the place he was staying. He sees angels and a peek into the spiritual world that is going on around him. The God of all Creation speaks to him in this dream and makes some wonderful promises to Jacob. God promises many children. He promises the land will belong to those children. He promises blessing and the presence of God in his life. Jacob wakes up and he realizes he is in no ordinary place. Heaven is touching Earth in this place! He calls it the 'House of God.' Jacob is humbled and afraid and excited all at the same time. He marks the place by making a small altar and worshipping there in the way he knew how. Jacob entered the House of God and his response was humility and fear and worship.

BEING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD: SAMUEL IN 1 SAMUEL 3

We also need to make sure that we stop and look in on a little boy named Samuel who literally slept in the House of the Lord and tried to sleep as close to God as he could get. 1 Samuel 3:1-5 (ESV) shares with us: *“Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. 2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, “Here I am!” 5 and ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down.”*

Samuel was to be a great prophet for God, but this event in 1 Samuel 3 happens early in his life. He hears God calling him and he thinks it is the old priest who needs help in the middle of the night. It is not. God calls him several times and eventually the priest Eli figures out God is calling Samuel and making Himself known to Him. Eli tells Samuel what to do and Samuel obeys.

1 Samuel 3:10-11 (ESV) continues: *“And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.” 11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.”*

God speaks and Samuel responds in humility and respect and with open ears. God gives Samuel a prophecy against Eli and his sinful sons and it is not good news. What we need to focus on is Samuel. Samuel slept in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant which is the symbol of the presence of God. In God’s presence, Samuel is humble and responds to God calling Him ‘Lord’ and rightly saying that he was God’s ‘servant.’ Samuel responds with open ears.

BEING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD: SOLOMON IN 1 KINGS 8

Part of our foundation before we get to Ecclesiastes 5 is also King Solomon in 1 Kings 8. Solomon son of David was tasked with building the permanent temple of God in Jerusalem. Solomon build the first permanent House of God. God does not dwell in temples, but it was to be a central place of worship and a place of sacrifices for sin. 1 Kings 8 tells us that the building was finished and the priests walked the Ark of the Covenant into its place. What happened next was a miracle. A cloud descended and the priests had to run out of the temple because the presence of God went into the temple and no one could stand to be in there.

1 Kings 8:10-11 (ESV): *“And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.*

A few verses later we see some of Solomon’s response in 1 Kings 8:22-24 (ESV): *“Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, 23 and said, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like You, in heaven above or on earth*

beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart; 24 You have kept with Your servant David my father what You declared to him. You spoke with Your Mouth, and with Your Hand have fulfilled it this day.”

God’s glory filled the temple. How did Solomon respond? He physically honored God with his humble posture. He praised God with his words. He recounted the faithfulness of God. He prayed. He praised God for keeping His promises and led the assembled people in humbleness and praising.

BEING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD: JESUS IN MARK 11

We need one last piece of our foundation. It happens to be in the New Testament and it is a period in the life of Jesus when He is in the House of God. Mark 11:15-17 (ESV) records for us, *“And they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And He was teaching them and saying to them, ‘Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”*

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, enters His Father’s House and things are not right. People are buying and selling and cheating others under the pretense of worship and sacrifice. He flipped over tables. I imagine Him literally kicking people in their backsides as He tossed them out of the temple. Jesus’ response is to make the House of God holy and to teach that it should be a place focused on prayer. God’s House is for worshipful prayer and learning about God and praising Him and it is a holy place. Jesus showed reverence by what He did. Jesus was seeking for those walking through the temple to show God the respect He deserved.

SUMMARY

So we have four different passages that we dipped into briefly to give us a little foundation and background as we look at Ecclesiastes 5.

- Jacob encounters the House of God and he responds in humility and fear and worship.
- Samuel encounters God in His House and responds with humility and respect and open ears.
- Solomon responds to God in God's house with humble posture, praise and leading others to praise the faithfulness of God, and prayer.
- Jesus Christ enters the House of God and creates an atmosphere of respect, holiness, and teaches to be dedicated to prayer.

All of that is important as we look at Ecclesiastes 5. What is also important as we look at Ecclesiastes 5 is Solomon's thoughts at the end of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

Life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and makes everything make sense.

It is in following the commands of God that purpose and identity is given.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of our lives fall into place.

How does Ecclesiastes 12:13 apply to chapter 5?

Part of a right relationship with God is wisely and in a worthy manner worshipping Him.

=====

SOLOMON'S ~~BAD~~ ATTITUDE #5: Listen up fools, I gave God the finger once, I don't think I'll do that again.

=====

This chapter is a little bit different in that Solomon is not expressing a terrible-no-good-very-bad attitude like normal, but rather is offering some pretty good advice. I look at this as Solomon coming around from a bad attitude he'd already had or more accurately... one he had later in life after his wives lead him astray.

It doesn't fit with the rest of the book. I get it. Let's just shoehorn this in and move on. The thoughts in this chapter are worthy of your attention even if they don't spring from a bad attitude from Solomon. The truths here are meant to prevent us from getting a bad attitude.

As we look at King Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 5, we see that in verses 1-6 he focuses us on reverent and devoted worship. He also tells us in verse 7 about the reason for our worship.

REVERENT AND DEVOTED WORSHIP (verses 1-6)

The whole passage begins with a warning about our steps in the House of God.

He first addresses us in terms of 'when' we go to the House of God. He does not say, 'if' or 'maybe' or 'when you want to' or 'when you feel like

it' or 'when it is convenient,' but rather on a regular basis 'when' you go to the House of God. Solomon has an understanding that worshipping God in His House is a regular on-going part of life.

Sometimes statistics can be encouraging, but most of the time statistics are discouraging. Current statistics about Christians and worship in the United States are not encouraging. Barna Research (folks I trust) report to us in 2020 that since 2000, which is 20 years, the number of practicing Christians dropped significantly so that now only 1 in 4 Americans are practicing Christians. By 'practicing Christians' they mean someone who self-identifies as faith as being very important in their lives and have attended church in the past month. Consistent Church attendance, by the way, now means once a month.⁷

I would like to encourage you to keep in mind Solomon's words about community (our last chapter) and combine those thoughts with his words about 'when' we go to the House of the Lord. Worshipping God must be a consistent priority for us as we navigate life. "Remembering the Sabbath Day" and keeping it holy (Exodus 20:8, Deuteronomy 5:15, Nehemiah 13:22) is not an optional thing for people who claim to take God seriously and want to walk in holiness with Him. Solomon has an understanding that worshipping God in His House is a regular on-going part of life. I pray you have the same understanding.

Second, he addresses us that a habit in regular worship does not necessarily mean we are sincere. Solomon is telling us to 'watch our step.' He is telling us to be mindful of our motivations. Our heart and our motivations matter when it comes to God. In verses 2-3, Solomon says that it is wise to be mindful of our words to God and how our hearts treat Him. In verses 4-6, He says that we should not flippantly make vows to God and not keep them. We all deal with the sinful nature in our flesh, but our heart and motivation matters.

⁷ barna.gloo.us/articles/signs-of-decline-and-hope

Our heart matters.

Our motivation matters.

The Bible tells us so over and over. In Proverbs 21:2 we read, *“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart”* (ESV). We also read in Jeremiah, *“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds”* (17:10, ESV). We will not leave out the New Testament for Paul writes to us in Galatians 6:7-8 (ESV): *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*

Same message over and over.

APPLICATION

How does this practically work out for you?

- On purpose set your alarm the night before to make sure you are up in time to make it not only to worship, but also Sunday School or any prayer groups. Plan to worship.
- Proactively say ‘no’ to things that on a regular basis will take you away from regularly worshipping God and shifting your focus away from Him. Reserve Sunday every single week for worship and rest and focusing on God.
- Take your Bible to church. You can also plan ahead during the week and read the passage that will be focused on in the sermon. Most of the time you can figure that out.
- Humbly pray on your drive to church that God will prepare your heart to listen.
- Humbly pray on your drive to church that you will minister to someone while at church.
- Take your children and grandchildren to church even if they don’t want to come. You are the parent. You are the adult. You are the spiritual leader. You are in charge, not them.

- Plan to tithe as you go to worship and say a small prayer as you put your tithes and offerings in the plate.
- During the worship time, don't just stand and not sing... sing to the Lord even if you don't like to sing. The songs are not for you! The songs are not about you! Who cares if you don't even like the songs... they aren't for you or about you! The praise and the voices and the worship are not for us, but directed to the Almighty God Who deserves every ounce of our worship.
- During the worship time, think about the words that you are singing. Intentionally sing the words prayerfully and humbly before God. Raise your hands if you like. Open your hands to Him in submission.
- During weekly communion (if your church does that), make sure you are not taking it flippantly. Focus when the meditation is given. Pray as you take the bread and the juice. Humbly thank God for Jesus on the cross. Confess. Confess. Confess. Repent. Repent. Repent. It matters what we do and why we do it.

SUMMARY

The Teacher King Solomon sees so much of life as meaningless and futile and pointless. Worship is not one of those things. In terms of living wisely, having humble proper devoted worthy worship for the King of the Universe is a smart and good move for your heart, your emotions, your soul, and your family. King Solomon encourages our worship! I also echo his encouragement and encourage you to worship God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength!

As I was looking over Ecclesiastes 5 and Solomon's words about worship, I noticed verse 7. I noticed in verse 7 that he ends with the reason why we must worship with reverence and respect and humbleness and everything else he talks about. In verse 7, he mentions the reason for our worship.

REASON FOR WORSHIP (verse 7)

Solomon ends verse 7 with the words, “*God is the One you must fear.*”

Those words caught my eye because chapter two in a book called ‘The Practice of Godliness,’ Jerry Bridges⁸ focuses on properly fearing the Lord and what that means for a devoted Christian. He says that the “*fear of God is the soul of godliness*” (page 24) and is part of our devotion to God as much as is our love for God. He says in the second chapter that most of the time we associate fearing God with the Old Testament, but a Christian must also properly fear God. We must have a healthy “*reverential awe of God in His glory and the childlike confidence in God as Heavenly Father*” (page 27). We must have and recover a sense of awe and profound respect for God that leads our hearts and minds in our worship and in our obedience.

Revere God because He is Creator.

Fear God because He is Awesome in Power.

Respect God because He is Absolutely Holy and Just.

Worship God because He is our Provider.

Our fear and reverence and respect and worship of God should be our primary motivator of why we obey Him in what He has laid down for us in His Word. As we seek to grow in our relationship with God, you and I need to grow in our love for God, but that is tied to how much we are in awe and respect and fear Him.

I know that King Solomon believed that the fear of God was good and proper and right and wise because even Ecclesiastes 12:13 (yes that verse again) includes this emphasis:

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

⁸ NavPress, 1983

CHALLENGE

Worship God in a worthy manner.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

1. Define the word 'worship' without referring to music or church.
2. Why is it so easy to get out of the habit of Sunday worship?
3. List three things that are irreverent when it comes to God.
4. List three things that are reverent when it comes to God.
5. Is it ok to call God, "the Man Upstairs?" Why or Why not?
6. Do you revere God? How?
7. Are you afraid of God? Why? Why not?
8. How did Jacob honor God in Genesis 28?
How can you imitate that?
9. How did Samuel revere God in 1 Samuel 3?
How can you imitate that?
10. How did Solomon honor God in 1 Kings 8?
How can you imitate that?
11. How did Jesus respect God in Mark 11?
How can you imitate that?

DEEPER THOUGHTS

TOPIC: How do I deepen my worship of the Lord?

Pray regularly for those who lead worship, singing, and play music for the church you attend weekly.

Focus on the words of the song being sung rather than the style of music being presented.

Raise your hands in worship and do not concern yourself how it looks or what other people think of you. Just praise Him.

Turn off your phone during church.

Do not fall into the trap of ‘attending’ church online, but rather go in person weekly.

Don’t rush out after the worship service, but sit in the pew/chair and spend some time in prayer cementing everything that you read, heard, and sung into your heart.

Choose to listen to worship music and sing along Monday-Saturday.

Learn how Christians have meditated on the Word and meditated in song throughout the centuries and adopt some of their practices into your daily and weekly schedule.

Write a worship song.

Begin each day on your face on the floor praying and singing a short song to the Lord.

Check your irreverent attitudes often and confess them to the Lord asking that the Holy Spirit would create in you a clean heart.

ECCLESIASTES 6 (ESV)

There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: ²a man to whom God gives 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. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil. ³If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. ⁵Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. ⁶Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place? ⁷All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. ⁸For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? ⁹Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind. ¹⁰Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. ¹¹The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? ¹²For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

CHAPTER SIX: HUNGER

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #6: I do what I want when I want and how I want and then I will be satisfied.

=====

Each of the chapters of this book are based on sermons I have preached at Cincinnati Christian Church in Bloomfield, Indiana. I am not going to lie... this sermon on which this chapter is based was extremely difficult for me.

When I originally preached the sermon from Ecclesiastes 6, I only began to write my sermon on Wednesday morning which is two full days after I normally begin. Some pastors take Mondays off, but due to wise counsel I received very early in ministry, I allow Sunday to jazz my spirit and I 'hit the ground running' on Mondays. Usually by Wednesday I am almost finished or at least pretty much on my way.

You may not realize this, but it takes about 8 hours (give or take) to write a sermon. Every pastor is different so it could be more or less for the pastors you know. I write all my sermons from 'scratch' so it actually takes all week if you count prayer and reading the Scriptures and letting the message marinate in the soul.

I didn't begin my sermon until Wednesday of that particular week because I counseled with people, talked and visited with folks, helped a family that lost their house in a fire, served a non-church family with a funeral, did church administration, and planned out lessons. I was busy it seemed like every moment that week.

I read and re-read Ecclesiastes 6. Most of the time when I read a passage I get a sense of where the sermon will go. I think that is the Holy Spirit. I also think that is 25 years of sermon writing. I read and

re-read Ecclesiastes 6 on Monday. I read the chapter in the ESV and in the NIV and then listened to it in the Message.

Nothing.

I prayed and read through a commentary. Nothing. In all the busyness I prepped my Wednesday lesson and my Sunday School lesson because I just wasn't getting anywhere on my sermon. I like to feel like I am productive. I rarely just sit around on my hands when it comes to preaching or my calling as a minister.

I read and re-read Ecclesiastes 6 on Tuesday of that week. Still nothing. I read the chapter in the ESV and in the NIV and then listened to it in the Message. I was heading home that Tuesday night listening to Ecclesiastes 6 over and over in the Message version when a verse grabbed my attention.

Ecclesiastes 6:7 (MSG)

"We work to feed our appetites; Meanwhile our souls go hungry."

It was the word '*appetites*' and the word '*hungry*' that grabbed my attention. I am pretty much always hungry and it could be that I was ready for dinner which is why those words popped out at me, but nevertheless, I noticed them. I got home and pulled into the garage and grabbed my phone and looked up Ecclesiastes 6:7 in the ESV.

Ecclesiastes 6:7 in the ESV says:

"All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied."

I selected a different translation in the app and read it again in the NIV: *"Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied"* (Ecclesiastes 6:7).

There is something to verse 7 for you and I.

Wednesday morning rolled around and I was heading to the church. My friend Jason and I, at the time, were reading through the New Testament in 90 days on the Bible app. I was driving and listening to the selection for Wednesday as I drove. Wednesday was Acts 10, 11, and 12.

I want you to read from Acts 10 because Acts 10 jumped out at me just like Ecclesiastes 6:7.

Acts 10:1-10 (ESV) says, “*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” 4 And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” 7 When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, 8 and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. 9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance...*”

Boom.

Full stop.

Did you catch the word mentioned in verse 10?

‘hungry’

‘wanted something to eat’

As soon as I heard the word *‘hungry’* I thought back to Ecclesiastes 6:7. As I am driving, I am listening to Acts 10 and notice Simon Peter is hungry and in his hunger something amazing happens to him.

In Acts 10, a man named Cornelius is hungry for God. God answers his desires. Simon Peter has a great desire to be a witness for God and God is going to use him to reach out to someone unexpected.

Well, how does this hunger and desire work out in Acts 10?

Acts 10 continues in verses 10:10-17a: *“And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” 14 But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. 17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean,” (ESV)*

Simon Peter is physically hungry and while he is physically hungry he has a vision given to him by God. God shows him animals and tells him to eat. They are animals categorized as unclean in the Old Testament that Peter has never eaten because of Jewish dietary laws. Peter doesn't know what to do with his vision because a vision from God will never contradict His already written Word. I think he has an inkling that the hunger driven dream doesn't have much to do with food.

Acts 10 continues in verses 10:17-23: *“Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate 18 and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. 19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.” 21 And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” 22 And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken*

of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” 23 So he invited them in to be his guests.” (ESV)

Simon Peter had a vision from God and received some pretty specific instructions. Peter goes downstairs and meets messengers from Cornelius who is already a believer in God, but he has not yet heard the Good News about Jesus. Cornelius has an appetite for the things of God which is abundantly clear from how the people in his household speak of him. Cornelius now has a desire to hear the Gospel.

Acts 10 continues this fantastic historical account from the early church in verses 10:23-33: *“The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.” 30 And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ 33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.” (ESV)*

Hunger and appetite are important in this passage. In Simon Peter, we see the great desire to obey God and to spread the Gospel. Peter is challenged to cast off manmade laws and to follow the command of God and he shares his realization in verse 28 that God was communicating that all people can receive Jesus and be freed from sin.

We might think ‘of course!’ but the idea that Jesus came for all people all over the world is a truth Peter is still wrapping his mind and heart around. Peter has no desire to be worshipped or given accolades, but rather wants to share the message of Jesus with those God sends his way.

Hunger and appetite are important in this passage. In the centurion Cornelius, we see a huge spiritual desire to know God. He already has a reputation of being a God-fearing man among everyone in Caesarea and he is a man of prayer (verse 30). Verse 24 tells us he gathered all his relatives and close friends to listen to Simon Peter.

He was ready!
He wanted his loved ones to be ready!
That is commitment and passion and desire!

Verse 25 tells us Cornelius is so ready to hear more about God that he improperly falls down before Peter and Peter has to gently correct him.

Acts 10 continues the narrative in 10:34-43 (ESV): *“So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. 36 As for the word that He sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), 37 you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 And we are witnesses of all that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, 40 but God raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. 42 And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His Name.”*

What does Peter do with his desire to share the Gospel? He shares it.

What does Cornelius do with his desire to hear the Gospel? He listens.

THE GOSPEL

The Gospel (the message about Jesus Christ) is not meant to be hard or complicated, but it might be difficult to accept. The Gospel begins at the beginning of time. God created the heavens and the earth and He created everything perfect.

Morally perfect.

Physically perfect.

Nothing out of place.

Right away something went wrong. God Almighty gave His created human beings a precious gift... free will. Adam and Eve (the first people) used that free will to do what they wanted against what God had said was right. They did wrong. They erred. That wrong and error is called SIN. Sin separated human beings from God.

Unknown to Adam and Eve, serious consequences flooded into their lives and creation. Sin ruined everything. Sinful people could no longer interact with the Holy God. Sickness happened. Thorns and storms and disasters happened. God, in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, knew this would happen. He made us anyway.

Salvation was needed.

Forgiveness was needed.

The sin that had happened... and continued to happen... needed to be made right, paid for, and satisfied. Sin creates a debt between people and God. God, in His wisdom and knowledge, also knew that we could

not earn salvation or argue for it or luck into it. God revealed His plan for us.

The plan of God centers on Jesus coming to Earth Himself to fix what was broken. God became a human being. He sent His Son, Jesus, to live perfectly and to die on purpose. The whole purpose of Jesus' life was to offer us Redemption, Grace, Forgiveness, and Freedom from Guilt.

Acts 10 concludes in 10:44-48 (ESV): *“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.”*

In a purposeful reversal, God sends His Spirit before baptism to confirm for Peter and the other believers standing there that His Hand was at work and that the vision the days before was indeed from Him. Peter shares the Gospel. Cornelius and the whole household accept the Gospel. The coming of the Spirit and baptism happens! Acts 10 is an amazing historical story of the Early Church.

Yes! We are in Ecclesiastes and not Acts. Acts 10 is a perfect example of the working out of the wise principle expressed by King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 6:7.

Ecclesiastes 6:7		
NIV	ESV	MSG
<i>“Everyone’s toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.”</i>	<i>“All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.”</i>	<i>“We work to feed our appetites; Meanwhile our souls go hungry.”</i>

King Solomon observes in Ecclesiastes 6 that much of the toil and effort and energy we spend in life ends up leaving us hungry and not satisfied. He actually says this all throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes. So much under the sun is useless and pointless and leaves us asking more questions than having answers. So much in life is working to feed our appetites, but in the end really just leads to emptiness.

Our lives are filled with family, friends, co-workers, enemies, acquaintances, activities, hobbies, reading, sports, TV, movies, music, social media, classes, food, drink, vacations, stay-cations, jobs, and everything else under the sun that promises to fill our hunger and desires.

They don't.

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #6: I do what I want when I want and how I want and then I will be satisfied.

=====

At the end of Solomon's deliberations about life in the Book of Ecclesiastes, he arrives in chapter 12 with a thought to end all thoughts. It is a thought that directly relates to Ecclesiastes 6:7 and even Acts 10.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

Life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. Almost everything in life leaves us hungry and full of desire. The futility of life can become overbearing and overwhelming when we seem to be getting nowhere no matter how hard we try, when we fail, when we are in a harsh season, or when we feel weakest.

The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God. God must be in the middle of our lives or we are lost.

God fills.

God satisfies.

How does Ecclesiastes 12:13 apply to Acts 10 and Ecclesiastes 6:7?

In Acts 10, Simon Peter is sitting on a rooftop hungry and has a vision from God. He absolutely has a choice. He can spend mental and emotional and spiritual effort pondering that which God has given him or he can go downstairs and have dinner. He can let the men come inside who are knocking at the door or he can say 'go away' and go back to his regularly scheduled program. He could walk into Cornelius' house and see a bunch of Gentiles and walk right back out again wrongly concluding that Jesus didn't come for those kind people.

Simon Peter chooses to desire the things God desires.

Simon Peter chooses to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Simon Peter chooses to do what will last and invest in the eternal.

In Ecclesiastes 6:7, King Solomon is reflecting that much of life is temporary and does not satisfy our deepest longings and desires and hungers. The answer comes in Ecclesiastes 12 when he says that we should seek out God and His commands and a personal intimate relationship with the God of the Universe. He brings us satisfaction.

How do I know all this is true?

How do I know that all of this connects together?

Psalm 17:15 (ESV) tells us, "*As for me, I shall behold Your Face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with Your Likeness.*" And then in Psalm 65:4 (ESV) we read, "*Blessed is the one You choose and bring near,*

to dwell in Your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, the holiness of Your temple!” The again in more writings from King Solomon we read: *“The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm”* (Proverbs 19:23, ESV).

Further in the Old Testament the Prophet Jeremiah says, *“I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, declares the Lord”* (Jeremiah 31:14, ESV).

We even have this truth taught by Jesus Christ in the New Testament in the Gospel of Matthew (among other places): *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* (Matthew 5:6, ESV)

CHALLENGE

May we commit ourselves to our relationship with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit because anything we do for God lasts.

May we commit ourselves to our relationship with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit because anything we do for God satisfies.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

Do you actually believe that there is a God-sized hole in everyone's heart that only He can fill?

What is filling about each of the following items and why don't they fully satisfy us?

Family?

Friends?

Co-workers?

Enemies?

Acquaintances?

Activities and hobbies?

Reading?

Sports?

TV and movies?

Music?

Social media?

Education and classes?

Food and drink?

Vacations, and stay-cations?

Buying material things?

Work and career?

What perspective about life does a person have who believes 'money doesn't buy happiness... it buys tons of happiness?'⁹

Where does your self-worth come from?

What do you hunger and thirst after in your life?

What do you do for God?

⁹ Marshall Bruce Mathers III

DEEPER THOUGHTS

TOPIC: Identity

The Enemy is afoot in our world attacking identity. In today's culture, every aspect of identity is being shredded in the woodchipper of liberalism and postmodernism. 'Family' has been under attack for decades. 'Marriage' is hotly debated. 'Sexual identity' and 'gender' is now even a fluid topic. All three of those, plus several other foundational ideas, are being stretched and changed and manipulated.

Where does your identity come from? I your identity comes from... family or job or marriage relationship or even gender... you have based your sense of self on something easily broken, given up, taken away, or redefined.

For the believer in Jesus Christ (and I'm not even using the word 'Christian' because that word is tied to a whole bunch of garbage), our identity and worth must come only from Jesus Christ.

Please think on 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV) which wisely describes: "*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" Our core identity and worth must come from what God declares about us and not how we self-identify.

Yes, you can deal with same-sex attraction., but that struggle/lifestyle must not define you... Jesus must define you. Yes, your marriage and family are important relationships, but not relationships more important than your relationship with God. Yes you need to make money to live and to provide, but money and a career should not be all-consuming.

The Enemy is afoot in our world attacking identity. Set your identity in God alone Who is the solid foundation for all parts of us.

ECCLESIASTES 7 (ESV)

A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.² It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

³Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

⁴The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. ⁵It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. ⁶For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity. ⁷Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart. ⁸Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. ⁹Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools. ¹⁰Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. ¹¹Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.

¹²For 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. ¹³Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? ¹⁴In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

¹⁵In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. ¹⁶Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them. ¹⁹Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

²⁰Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. ²¹Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. ²²Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. ²³All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. ²⁴That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

²⁵For 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. ²⁶Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? ²⁷In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

²⁸In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. ²⁹Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ³⁰Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ³¹It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them. ³²Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

³³Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. ³⁴Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. ³⁵Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. ³⁶All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. ³⁷That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

³⁸For 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. ³⁹Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? ⁴⁰In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

⁴¹In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. ⁴²Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ⁴³Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ⁴⁴It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them. ⁴⁵Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

⁴⁶Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. ⁴⁷Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. ⁴⁸Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. ⁴⁹All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. ⁵⁰That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

⁵¹For 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. ⁵²Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? ⁵³In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

⁵⁴In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. ⁵⁵Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ⁵⁶Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ⁵⁷It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them. ⁵⁸Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

25 I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness. 26 And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. 27 Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— 28 which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. 29 See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CROOKED THINGS

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #7: Life sucks and God doesn't really help all that much.

=====

There is an old English story called "The Crooked Tree."¹⁰ I found it interesting and familiar as it seems to me a lot like "The Ugly Duckling." I added a couple of lines to it to fit for our purposes:

Once upon a time, there was a huge forest where every tree was tall, upright, and had huge branches. Each tree was a perfect specimen of its kind. Now in that forest, there was one particular crooked tree. Its trunk was oddly shaped. Its roots stuck out in an ugly manner and all of its branches were twisted and sagged to the ground. Again, all the other trees around it were upright and reached to the sky and the crooked tree stood out. Why did it stick out? Because it was crooked.

The crooked tree looked around at the rest of the trees and thought, "How fine and straight they are!" Then it added in a very sad leafy voice, which sounded a lot like a bark, "I am so unlucky. Why should I alone, in this entire forest, be crooked and ugly? God, would you reach down Your Divine Creator Hand and make me tall and upright so I can reach to the sky like all the other trees?"

God heard the crooked tree and sent an angel with a message: "Consider the work of God: who can make straight what He has made crooked?"

One day a burly woodcutter came with a big axe to the forest looking for good timber. He looked at all the tall straight trees and saw dollar

¹⁰ Public Domain

signs with all that he would be able to cut. He looked at the crooked tree and said to himself and aloud to no one in particular, "This tree is absolutely useless for me." He selected all the fine upright trees and cut every single one of them down.

After that day, standing tall as the only tree in the entirely chopped down forest, the crooked tree had no more complaints and saw purpose from the Hand of God because it survived.

CROOKED

We are reading through Ecclesiastes and have come to chapter 7. The Teacher King who is writing to us, Solomon, uses a word that is only used 26 times in the whole Bible. Solomon uses the word 15/26 (58%) of the times it is used in the Bible. He uses it twice in Ecclesiastes and 13 times in Proverbs. He likes this word a lot.

The word is 'crooked.'

The word we translate as 'crooked' in the Old Testament here in Ecclesiastes 1 and 7 means '*to be bent.*' Not a complicated word. It means what it means. The first time the word is used in Ecclesiastes is chapter 1.

Ecclesiastes 1:13-15 (ESV) says: "*And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.*"

Solomon says that he looks over life and sees the same thing over and over. In this passage, the words '*unhappy business,*' '*everything done under the sun,*' '*vanity,*' '*striving after the wind,*' '*crooked,*' and even the word '*lacking*' are all parallel words. Those words present to us a view of life that is

pessimistic with a dash of anger and frustration. Life is at times all kinds of crooked. I am pretty sure we all would agree with that.

Depending on your English translation the word: vanity, meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting makes its appearance often in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Much of life is temporary, perishable, unsatisfying, and mundane and in 1:15 Solomon also says '*crooked*.' We are meant to think that life gets crooked because of things we do, but also life in general is not fair and ends up crooked. Crooked things are allowed to happen and we hate that because it is completely unfair.

Solomon again uses the word '*crooked*' in chapter 7. Solomon is presenting his thoughts as he is spiraling in the uselessness in life. Remember, Solomon presents these depressive, lost, hurting thoughts and conclusions for 12 chapters until the end of chapter 12 where he has a final God-centered thought.

As we look at this passage in general:

- Solomon observes that in life there are things that are straight and easy and there are things that are crooked and difficult. God allows them both.
- Solomon observes that in life there are days of joy and there are days of adversity. God allows them both.
- Solomon observes that in life there is righteousness and good-doing and there is wickedness and evil-doing. God allows them both.

Let's look at this passage not just in general, but drill down more specifically.

HUMAN LIFE IS CROOKED

King Solomon says that human life is made up of crooked things. We all experience events and people and circumstances and illness and accidents that create in our lives... crookedness. Trials and problems make life lacking and hurtful.

A relationship trial is crookedness.

Disappointments in our job is crookedness.

Difficult people who are permanently part of our lives are crookedness.

Illnesses that we have that are chronic is crookedness.

Pervasive mental illness is crookedness.

We all deal with something that is crooked. No one's life is without drawbacks no matter what their social media looks like or what their church mask looks like.

The Bible shares with us the lives of people who dealt with the straight and easy and the crooked and difficult. They dealt with days of joy and days of adversity. Their lives were filled with righteousness and also wickedness.

ABRAM AND SARAI: GENESIS 15

I think of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 15. Genesis 15:1-3 (ESV) says, "*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'*" 2 *But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will You give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?'*" 3 *And Abram said, 'Behold, You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.'*"

God had promised Abraham children and blessing and Abraham didn't see it. Abram waited and waited and nothing happened. He doubted. He was frustrated that God promised one thing and yet his life was no different for no children had been born. His heir was a trusted servant.

Abraham was completely frustrated with God and His lack of action. That's crooked.

NAAMAN IN 2 KINGS 5

I think about Naaman in 2 Kings 5. I often think of Naaman because I clearly remember my favorite Bible story book when I was a little kid and it was the story of Naaman. 2 Kings 5:1 (ESV) shares with us, *“Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper.”*

Naaman is an interesting person because the Bible says clearly that the man was not of the people of Israel and yet God gave him victory for his king. God was with him. He was an awesome warrior, but he had leprosy. That disease had stopped life in its tracks. God gave him military victory, but also allowed illness. That's crooked.

APOSTLE PAUL IN 2 CORINTHIANS 12

I most definitely think about the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was the sent messenger of Jesus about the Gospel and if anyone's life should be good and smooth and normal or upright or a straight path it should be his. Actually, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12 that because he had such a close relationship with God and his knowledge of theology was so far beyond any other living people... his life was given crookedness and God refused to take it away.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (ESV): *“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may*

rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

That is all kinds of crooked.

THE HUMAN RESPONSE TO CROOKEDNESS

I know that if you are reading this book you are either my dad or a believer in Jesus Christ.¹¹ Not everyone who may read this book is a Christian, but most. We (Christians) are people of faith so we view our lives with God as a key part of our existence. We believe God loves us unconditionally. We believe God is only good. We believe God is holy and righteous and there is nothing that God does that is evil. We believe what the Bible says about God.

For example, Deuteronomy 32:4 (ESV) says about God: *“The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He.”*

We believe those word and those truths create deep important tensions in us... like it did for King Solomon... because life is crooked and bent and difficult and on the most basic level of our thoughts God should undo all of that is lacking in our lives. He is the Solid Rock and the Perfect Deliverer and Savior who is always just. He is the Way Maker and Compassionate All Powerful God Who makes all things new.

He is always faithful.

He is always upright.

We believe all that and yet God still allows crookedness in our lives. It seems a bit unfair. In Solomon’s disillusionment he says that God makes crooked things. He does not, but He certainly does allow them, so in that sense He makes them.

¹¹ See dad, I did mention you.

The tension that we feel when life is lacking and crooked and difficult leads us to ask questions:

- Following God means a constant flow of blessings from Heaven... doesn't it?
- Following God means we get what we want from God when we ask... doesn't it?
- Following God means I get a good life and people without God get the suffering... doesn't it?

Those questions lead to some other questions:

- Who is to blame when life is crooked?
- What is our reaction when life is lacking and God isn't doing what we think He should?
- When does the unfairness of life end and we get to have a life without issues or complications?
- Why do we have to suffer?
- How do we feel when crookedness comes into our lives?

The human response to this kind of tension is to have all kinds of emotions and attitudes that center on us questioning God and feeling let down by Him. Not always, but sometimes. The human response at times is to doubt that God is Who He says He is or perhaps if God even exists. Fear can creep into our lives because we do not feel protected by God Who promises to love us and never leave us.

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #7: Life sucks and God doesn't really help all that much.

=====

Solomon observes in 7:13 that in life there are things that are straight and easy and there are things that are crooked and difficult. God allows them both. We don't want crooked things in our lives and it seems fair that part of the benefit of believing in God is that God always makes life better the way we want.

Solomon observes in 7:14 that in life there are days of joy and there are days of adversity. God allows them both in our lives. God disappoints us when He allows adversity in our lives because we associate joy with God and rightly so! He is supposed to be our hedge of protection against all the garbage of the world and give us joy. When joy is absent, we wonder.

Solomon observes in 7:15 that in life there is righteousness and good-doing and there is wickedness and evildoing. God allows them both into our lives. We can feel let down by life or by God when bad things happen to us, not because of anything we have done, but because of the sinful mistakes of other people. If we are honest with ourselves, we expect hardship or trial or discipline from God when we sin, but we do not expect hardship or crookedness or a sense of lack when we have been faithful and trusting and walking with Him.

The normal human response to this perceived unfair crookedness is feeling let down, anger, doubt, a feeling of being lost, feeling weak, apathy, anxiety, and perhaps some other emotions and attitudes I haven't even thought of.

We (Christians) are people of faith so we view our lives with God as a key part of our existence. We believe God loves us unconditionally. We believe God is only good. We believe God is holy and righteous

and there is nothing that God does that is evil. This creates deep important tension in us... like it did for King Solomon... because life is crooked and bent and difficult and God should undo all of that is lacking in our lives. He is the Deliverer and Savior and Way Maker and Compassionate All Powerful God Who makes all things new.

THE PROPER RESPONSE TO CROOKEDNESS

What do we do with this?

What is the proper response to all the crooked things in life?

Just as a preview, it is in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12 (which I already mentioned) and in Ecclesiastes 12:13 (which we come back to every chapter) that we find our answers and right thinking and correct beliefs when it comes to the crooked things of life.

WISDOM FROM DALLAS WILLARD

Dallas Willard (1935-2013) was a Christian author and speaker and author. I have appreciated his books on spiritual disciplines myself.

After graduating college and his ordination as a Southern Baptist minister, Dallas knew there was much more to learn. He considered himself "abysmally ignorant" about God and the soul, and a "hazard" to those who listened to him preach. So, he decided to attend graduate school and study the "big ideas" of philosophy, knowing that Jesus and his teachings were addressing the same questions philosophers have been wrestling with throughout human history.

It was at this time that God gave Dallas a prophetic message: "If you stay in the churches, the university will be closed to you; but if you stay in the university, the churches will be open to you." Dallas allowed God to direct his steps into academia and was offered an Associate Professorship at the University of Southern California in 1965 without even applying for the job. He taught at USC until 2012... that's 47

years! I tell you all that to say that this gentleman can be trusted. His belief in Jesus Christ did not waver one inch in all his years teaching and preaching and writing and speaking.¹²

He said something in his book 'Renewing the Christian Mind' which is important for us as we think about crooked things and Ecclesiastes 7.

He said: 'Faith in God is not just believing that He exists. Faith in God is believing that He is right.'¹³

Sit with that truth a moment.

...

...

In order for us to process life properly when it is crooked and lacking and futile and useless and temporary and all the other adjectives that King Solomon uses in Ecclesiastes, we must have a fundamental faith that God is right and what He does is right.

Solomon observes in 7:13 that in life there are things that are straight and easy and there are things that are crooked and difficult. God allows them both and when He allows the crooked He is right to do so for our benefit because He knows what will benefit us.

Solomon observes in 7:14 that in life there are days of joy and there are days of adversity. God allows them both in our lives and He is right to allow adversity into our lives because He knows what is eternally best for us.

¹² dwillard.org/about

¹³ 'Renewing the Christian Mind' by Dallas Willard.

Solomon observes in 7:15 that in life there is righteousness and there is also wickedness and evil-doing. God allows them both into our lives and when God allows someone to sin against us He is right to do so because He is right and at some point will make it right.

What I am writing to you is very difficult.

Difficult and true.

Difficult and helpful.

Difficult and pressuring you to grow up in faith.

“Faith in God is not just believing that He exists. Faith in God is believing that He is right.”

This thought bears out in what the Apostle Paul has already told us in 2 Corinthians 12: 9-12 (ESV): “*9 But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

Paul says that God is right. Paul sees that in his weakness Jesus is made powerful in his life in ways that would not be present if he did not struggle. He believes God is right and he perseveres in faith to be content and relies on God in his weakness. That is the proper response to crookedness.

This thought also bears out in what Solomon says at the end of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

You see life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life.

Crooked things happen.

The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God. That is not just believing that He exists. A proper relationship with God means we believe He is right and works for our good and is compassionate and loving even as He allows crooked no good bad things into our lives. God does not do evil, but He does allow it. God is Who He is and in faith we must accept His will. His good, pleasing, and perfect will (Romans 12:2... it is good and pleasing and perfect... for HIM).

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and makes everything make sense.

It is in following the commands of God that purpose and identity is given.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of our lives fall into place.

CROOKED TREE STORY REDUX

Once upon a time, there was a huge forest where every tree was tall, upright, and had huge branches. Each tree was a perfect specimen of its kind. Now in that forest, there was one particular crooked tree. Its trunk was oddly shaped. Its roots stuck out in an ugly manner and all of its branches were twisted and sagged to the ground. Again, all the other trees around it were upright and reached to the sky and the crooked tree stood out. Why did it stick out? Because it was crooked.

The crooked tree looked around at the rest of the trees and thought, "How fine and straight they are!" Then it added in a very sad leafy voice, which sounded a lot like a bark, "I am so unlucky. Why should I alone, in this entire forest, be crooked and ugly? God, would you reach down Your Divine Creator Hand and make me tall and upright so I can reach to the sky like all the other trees?"

God heard the crooked tree and sent an angel with a message: "Consider the work of God: who can make straight what He has made crooked?"

One day a burly woodcutter came with a big axe to the forest looking for good timber. He looked at all the tall straight trees and saw dollar signs with all that he would be able to cut. He looked at the crooked tree and said to himself and aloud to no one in particular, "This tree is absolutely useless for me." He selected all the fine upright trees and cut every single one of them down.

After that day, standing tall as the only tree in the entirely chopped down forest, the crooked tree had no more complaints and saw purpose from the Hand of God because it survived.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

What are the 'crooked' things in your life that are not fair?

Does God owe you a constant flow of blessings from Heaven?

Do you expect God to answer your prayers?

Does following God mean that person gets 'a good life'?

Who or what is to blame when life is crooked?

... God?

... Satan meddling?

... The person has secret sin?

Do you know in your mind and heart that God is good, but do your actions show another belief?

Does God owe your faith in Him a life without issues or complications?

To whom should God provide blessings and a smooth road?

Why do you suffer?

How do you feel when crookedness comes into your life?

What is the use of 'faith in God' if the person with faith suffers crookedness exactly like a person without faith?

BIBLE VERSES IN ECCLESIASTES TO MEMORIZE

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV)

¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 (ESV)

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before Him.

Ecclesiastes 4:6 (ESV)

Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (ESV)

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 5:1a (ESV)

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 (ESV)

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 6:7 (ESV)

All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (ESV)

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 (ESV)

Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. ¹³ But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

Ecclesiastes 9:18 (ESV)

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 (ESV)

As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ 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 deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

REVIEW OF SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDES

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #1: Most of the time life is the same pile of crap on a different day. Nothing is different. Everything is the same. Woe is us.

=====

- Sadness
- Life is pointless
- Feeling Useless
- Stuck in the Mud

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #2:

Imma smoke it, use it, do it, love it, stick it, eat it, drink it, spend it, collect it and then imma be somebody and finally be happy.

=====

- Self-Centeredness
- Sexual Sin
- Addiction
- Wrong Priorities

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #3: I know there is a time for everything, but it seems like bad stuff happens every day. Gimme a break God! Can't You do something about all this?

=====

- Anxiety
- Anger at God
- Unmet Expectations
- Unreal Expectations

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #4: I don't need nobody.

=====

- Selfishness
- Rejection of God's Community
- I Can Do it All by Myself

=====

SOLOMON'S ~~BAD~~ ATTITUDE #5: Listen up fools, I gave God the finger once, I don't think I'll do that again.

=====

- Reverence for God is a Good Thing
- Worship should be a Priority

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #6: I do what I want when I want and how I want and then I will be satisfied.

=====

- Hedonism
- Idolatry
- False Self-Worth

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #7: Life sucks and God doesn't really help all that much.

=====

- Anger at God
- Expectations not to Suffer
- God is a Vending Machine
- Self-Entitlement
- God is Unfair

ECCLESIASTES 8 (ESV)

Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed. ²I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. ³Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. ⁴For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" ⁵Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. ⁶For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. ⁷For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? ⁸No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. ⁹All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt. ¹⁰Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. ¹¹Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. ¹²Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. ¹³But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God. ¹⁴There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. ¹⁵And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun. ¹⁶When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, ¹⁷then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DEATH

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #8: I don't understand why good people die and bad people die. Death is a horror and wipes out any hope. Just kill me now.

=====

Some people like movies and TV and can quote their favorite characters at the drop of a hat. I can do that sometimes. I do enjoy good stories and movies and TV. Sometimes those that write movies or TV share with us memorable lines that stick with us. Our topic in this chapter 'death' which is not necessarily a happy topic, but there are many quotes about death from Hollywood that are memorable:

"Death smiles at us all. All a man can do is smile back." Maximus in *Gladiator* (Russell Crowe)¹⁴

"Fear of death is what keeps us alive." Doctor McCoy in *Star Trek Beyond* (Karl Urban)¹⁵

"What are you so afraid of? It's only death." Young Bjorn Ironside in *Vikings* (Nathan O'Toole)¹⁶

"God doesn't punish the wicked and reward the righteous. Everyone dies. Some die because they deserve to; others die simply because they come from Minneapolis. It's random and it's meaningless." Mitch Leary in *In the Line of Fire* (John Malkovich)¹⁷

¹⁴ Universal Pictures, 2000

¹⁵ Paramount Pictures Studios, 2016

¹⁶ MGM Television, 2013

¹⁷ Columbia Pictures, 1993

“Every man dies. Not every man really lives.” William Wallace in *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson)¹⁸

“On a long enough timeline, the survival rate for everyone drops to zero.” Narrator in *Fight Club* (Edward Norton)¹⁹

"End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain-curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass, and then you see it. White shores and beyond. A far green country under a swift sunrise." Gandalf to Pippin in *The Return of the King* (JRR Tolkien)²⁰

Sometimes there are nuggets of truth that come out as human beings write stories and movies and TV shows. The above quotes come from fiction, but the Bible is not fiction and offers us real wisdom when it comes to wise living and even a wise death.

We can learn wisdom about death. We can learn what to think and what to believe and how to feel when it comes to this life changing event.

REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTES: DEATH

In Ecclesiastes 8, King Solomon talks about submitting to kings and authorities, death, trouble for righteous people, judgment against wicked people, and also the mysteries about the ways of God. He covers a lot I think. The topic of ‘death’ grabbed my attention because King Solomon talks about death a lot. Death shakes his world and makes him jaded and cynical about a whole lot of life.

¹⁸ Paramount Pictures Studios, 1995

¹⁹ Twentieth Century Studios, 1999

²⁰ New Line Cinema, 2003

Ecclesiastes 2:16 (ESV) says, *“For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!”*

Solomon thinks that because the wise are wise that they should somehow escape death. But they don't. Wise folks die. Foolish folks die. This shakes his world because wise good people should somehow be rewarded with longer and better lives, but death comes to us all.

Ecclesiastes 3:2 (ESV) states, *“a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted”*

King Solomon looks at life and notices the cycle of birth and living and dying and death. There is a time for everything. This thought, in 3:2, directly connects with Ecclesiastes 8.

Ecclesiastes 3:19 (ESV) observes, *“For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity.”*

Solomon looks around creation and notices that it is not just people that die, but animals also die. Human beings do not have any kind of advantage in his mind when it comes to life and death. Animals and plants die. People die. This shakes his world.

In his jadedness about death, he is actually incorrect that human beings and beasts are all the same. Human beings and animals are different. Yes, death comes to both, but it is only the human being that is the imager of God (Genesis 1:27). God created one being on this planet in His image and that is the human being. We bear God's image and so we are in most ways completely different from animals, but yes, both die.

Ecclesiastes 4:2 (ESV) laments, *“And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.*

King Solomon in Ecclesiastes airs out his depression about life and death. He shares with us his thoughts and feelings and I don't know if you know this or not, but depressed feelings make your brain think poorly. You think what you think, but each thought is colored by the depression. We see Solomon struggling in Ecclesiastes in this way. There are days when death shakes him, but then there are days when it seems like being dead is better than living. He struggles with these thoughts.

Then we come to chapter 8 and he again mentions death.

Ecclesiastes 8:6-8a (ESV) recounts, *“For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. 7 For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? 8 No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death.*

There is a time for living and there is a time for death. We know that from 3:2 and that thought comes up again here. Solomon thinks basically life is trouble and then you die. Solomon reflects that no one has the power to retain his or her spirit in their body to keep their life going. No one, not even a great king, has the power over death. That is actually true.

Try as we might, death comes when it comes.

Death may come by accident or sickness or someone else's sin, but he pretty much says: 'when it is your time it is your time.' I know chapter 9 of Ecclesiastes is getting ahead of us, but Solomon also mentions death again in chapter 9.

Ecclesiastes 9:3-6 (ESV): *“This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil,*

and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. 4 But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

Again, King Solomon is depressed and dejected and maybe even a little afraid and angry about death. Okay very angry about death. Death happens to everyone and he doesn't understand why the good and wise can't escape death. That is a concept that just makes sense to him... good people live and bad people die. Yet, everyone dies. He also thinks about death and realizes he does not know much about it. He doesn't know what dead folks know. He doesn't know what dead folks feel. It is a mystery to him.

=====
SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #8: I don't understand why good people die and bad people die. Death is a horror and wipes out any hope. Just kill me now.
=====

SUMMARY

Solomon thinks a lot about death. He thinks a lot about death in Ecclesiastes and to be honest in Proverbs he writes about it over and over.

He doesn't like death.
We do not like death.

WE DO NOT LIKE DEATH²¹

We do not like what death does to our bodies.

We think about death and we wonder what it will physically feel like. Will we hurt? Will we be uncomfortable? These are not nice thoughts, but we do think about them when it comes to death.

Death didn't happen to us physically, but death brings grief which is stressful and physical and with it comes nausea, dizziness, fatigue, rashes, headaches, back pain, weight loss, weight gain, and insomnia. We may feel sick for no reason. None of that is fun or something to look forward to.

We do not like what death does to our bodies.
We do not like how death makes us feel.

We think about death and because there is no absolute written road map of what happens after death, we feel fear. The unknown can be scary. We think about leaving our loved ones behind and because we do not know how life will go for them, we want to push off death for as long as possible.

Death brings us mental anguish and mental suffering and intense feelings of sadness. The sadness does not immediately go away because the dear person we are missing is not coming back. Death can also change how we view ourselves as we apply words like widow, widower, or orphan to our name. We feel different because we are dealing with death. We label ourselves different because we are dealing with death.

We deal with feelings of shock and disbelief because death is a final change in our lives and a definite new chapter. We feel like life is

²¹ Adapted from Chapters 4-5, 'The Grieving Teen' by Helen Fitzgerald, Touchstone 2000

completely unfair because other people do not feel what we feel. There might also be anger, guilt, regrets, depression, fear, and worry.

We do not like how death makes us feel.

We do not like what death does to our minds.

We think about death and sometimes we don't know what to think. We wonder if we have done enough to earn heaven... *the answer is 'no' by the way.* We wonder if we have done enough to earn hell... *the answer is 'yes' by the way.* We don't know what to think about death and that is unsettling.

Death means at times we are tired, but we can't sleep because we think about the person who died and what happened in our lives. Food sometimes even loses its taste and you don't feel like eating. Grief over a death also makes us forgetful and we just kind of walk around in a daze. Concentration might be hard as well as driving.

We do not like what death does to our minds.

DEATH IS UNAVOIDABLE

Death is one of those circumstances and events and truths in life that absolutely cannot be avoided and it is terrible. Solomon does not like death. We do not like death. The Bible does not leave us without wisdom in this area. Solomon presents some pretty hopeless and dire thoughts when it comes to death, but again, his thoughts in chapters 1-12 are not the end of the matter. The end of the matter comes in 12:13.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

You see life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor and completely unjust and terrible unless you

and I have a God-given perspective about life... and a God-given perspective about death.

The meaning and identity that God gives us in our relationship with Him does not stop at death's door, but pushes through to life after death and anchors us when we are here left dealing with death.

The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God. God must be in the middle of our lives or we are lost even when it comes to death.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and even makes death make sense.

It is in following the commands of God that purpose in death is given.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of death fall into place.

GOD-GIVEN PERSPECTIVE ABOUT DEATH

So, what is a God-given wise perspective about death?

Where do we get such wise thoughts?

How should we feel about death and dying?

The Bible shares with us God's Words on many subjects including death. Death is not a topic shied away from as God inspired people to write down His Words. God knows all about death. We do not, but He does. The Bible has much to say about death and much to communicate to our minds, hearts, and spirits as we think about this thing we don't like to think about.

This topic is important because many of the debates, news articles, laws, and social issues that surround us these days (as I write in 2021-2022) deal with death in one form or another.

For example, we are still dealing with the after effects of COVID-19 even though it is 2022. It is the gift that just keeps on giving. The world shut down in 2020 because it was afraid of the spread of sickness that leads to death.

Mask debates and vaccine mandates raged in 2021 and even in 2022 because people don't want to get sick and die. There is much fear of dying. From what I can tell, Christians and non-Christians alike are afraid of dying. Fear makes us stay home. Fear makes us inconsistent in that we will go out to eat, but not to church.

I even saw news articles from the Super Bowl Sunday about tons of pro-mask folks walking around the Super Bowl with no masks and I think I even saw a quote that the mayor of LA said he held his breath the whole time.²² The initial fear over death was real and perhaps even now it is real, but there is some ridiculousness mixed in there as well.

Death makes us think and do strange things.

It is my hope that God's Word will frame your thoughts and feelings and beliefs about how you live and work and play and educate and socialize. This is a needed part of our worldview as we live life and deal with death.

#1 DEATH IS NOT BIGGER THAN JESUS

Acts 2:24 (ESV) states, "*God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.*"

This verse is from Acts 2 in Peter's first sermon at Pentecost where he shares about the life and death and victory of Jesus. Jesus did in fact die. Our chapter is not about the theological ramifications of that death, but what I want you to notice is that death could not hold Jesus.

²² Dailymail.co.uk; Published 3 Feb 2022

Death is powerful.

Death is final.

Death is one chapter ending and another beginning.

Death was not more powerful than Jesus.

Death was not final for Jesus.

Death was only mid-chapter for Jesus.

The fear and the overwhelming finality of death is taken away for those of us who believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus has been there dead. Jesus has done that death thing. Jesus has come back and conquered death with His breath and conquers it still because He ascended into Heaven and still lives! Death could not hold Him.

If Jesus had died and stayed dead, then death would be more powerful than Jesus and should absolutely be something to fear. We should fear death if Jesus was still dead. We should be afraid for those we love who die if Jesus was still dead. Death would still be completely unknown. Death would be a power, like Solomon wrongly believed, that comes to everyone and dashes all hopes. Yet, because Jesus died and because Jesus lives and because Jesus is Who He says He is and because He conquered death... we who believe in Him are well cared for when we die and so are those we love who are believers. He's got us and He can be trusted. He's taken care of us when we die and blazed a trail through death because He has already been there.

Romans 6:9 (ESV) reminds us, "*We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.*"

#2 DEATH IS THE DOOR TO BE WITH JESUS.

1 Thessalonians 4:16b-18 (ESV): "*And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.*"

We who are in Christ will be with the Lord after we die. Verse 17 tells us that we who trust in the Lord Jesus and believe on Him have absolutely nothing to worry about when death comes knocking on our door.

It will come knocking.
Have no fear, but rather have courage.

You and I can have courage in the face of death. There are unknowns about death, but past those unknowns is the God of the Universe Who loves us and wants us to be with Him forever. We need not fear. We need not needlessly shake over death. God has death and eternity well in hand. This truth that death is just the door to Jesus prepares us not only for our death, but the death of those around us. Death is nothing to fear. Nothing that can kill you is anything to be feared because Jesus has taken care of what comes after.

Sometimes we hold onto this life way too much. We cling to this body and material things way too much. I am not saying to throw our lives away, but in Christ understand that Jesus has prepared life after this one. This is not all there is! To be absent from the body is to be present at home with God for us and for those people we love.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 (ESV) shares, *“So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”*

#3 DEATH IS POSITIVE CHANGE FOR US WHO DIE IN JESUS

1 Corinthians 15:50-53 teaches us, *“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For*

this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”

The Apostle lays out a great truth for us about death. It is a mystery! We do not know every single detail. We do not know a whole lot about death. Death is a positive change for us when we die. We do know that those who believe in Jesus who die will be changed and we will be imperishable and be different than we are now. He says we will put on eternal life because we are connected with the source of eternal life.

Those same truths are present for those of us who have lost someone who is a believer. They are cared for by Jesus and are changed. They are with Him putting on the imperishable and the incorruptible and they are absolutely in a better place and in a better condition.

That is hope.

That is hope rooted in the Person of Jesus Christ Who ushers us into the Kingdom of God.

A BIT OF REVIEW

We do not like what death does to our bodies.

We do not like how death makes us feel.

We do not like what death does to our minds.

We have a choice to make and I challenge you with this choice even as you read: You and I can follow the thoughts of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 1-12 and we can be fearful of death and unsettled by it and we can unnaturally hold onto this physical life and become cynical.

or

You and I can realize there is a better way... a wiser way... that considers fearing God and our relationship with Him.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV)

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

May we choose to believe and be encouraged that...

#1 Death is not bigger than Jesus.

May we have confidence amidst the unknown that...

#2 Death is the door to be with Jesus.

May we find joy in the belief that...

#3 Death is positive change for us who die in Jesus.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

Is there someone you need to talk to or reach out to before it is everlasting too late?

What makes you most uncomfortable about death?

Do you have any worries about life beyond this life?

Google beliefs about death (or talk to friends and family). What do you see/hear that is Biblical or unBiblical?

What do you want to know about death that is impossible to know?

ECCLESIASTES 9 (ESV)

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. ²It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. ³This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. ⁴But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. ⁶Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun. ⁷Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. ¹⁰Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going. ¹¹Again I saw that under the sun 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. ¹²For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them. ¹³I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. ¹⁴There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. ¹⁵But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. ¹⁶But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. ¹⁷The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among

fools. ¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

CHAPTER NINE: ALL ATTITUDES SPIRAL

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #9: One bad attitude leads to another and leads to another and I am spiraling into a thought life that is devoid of God and I don't care!

=====

I was at a lunch once many years ago and the discussion got heated about politics. Imagine that... right? Now, we didn't get so far that the dinner rolls were tossed about and drinks were thrown in people's faces, but we (as they say in the South) were pert-neer-close.

Everyone at the table seemed to have a bad attitude and those that did not, at the start of the conversation, ended up with a bad attitude by the end of the meal. Why?

Bad attitudes are contagious.
Negativity is infectious.

More than that, in my experience, bad attitudes tend to mesh with other bad attitudes and spiral into even worse attitudes. I was introduced to the word 'spiraling' not too long ago. 'Spiraling' is commonly used to describe a person's depressive or agitated state which becomes increasingly difficult to control leading to negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors getting worse very quickly.

I can't help but notice King Solomon doing some spiraling in Ecclesiastes, but more than that I noticed it a whole lot in chapter 9. Chapter 9 has for us one bad attitude after another. He spouts things in this chapter that are absolutely wrong and his attitudes just seem to get worse and worse.

Why does this matter?

It matters because we are not reading just any 'ol book here. We are reading from the inspired inerrant Word of the Almighty God. We are also reading from a work of literature that has metaphor, symbols, exaggeration, poems, prophecy, history, laws, biography, autobiography, and just about any other kind of literature of which you can think. Some of those kinds of literature are read differently than other kinds.

The Bible describes things it does not endorse.

Please read that above statement again.

This is a truth that is difficult for many people to digest about the Bible; especially those who are non-believers. The Bible is indeed full of 'thus sayest the Lord' commands, but it is also full of descriptions of people's lives at their worst. Just because it is in the Bible does not make it a command for living life. This is true and calls for discernment.

Example: The favoritism of Abraham shows one of his sons in Genesis is completely sinful is never addressed. This sin is damaging and is passed down to his son Isaac and his son Jacob and results in the tragedies that befell Joseph.

Example: I am tempted to say the whole Book of Judges, but Judges 19 will suffice. A Levite cuts up a young woman who had been sexually mistreated. The Bible describes the situation and maddeningly makes no comment.

The Bible is full of commands and the way of life given by God which is for our benefit and is the best life you can possibly live given by the Author of Life. Those truths are not in dispute here. What we do need to notice is those times when the Bible describes life as it should NOT be (the whole life of Samson for example) or describes attitudes we should NOT have. I believe Ecclesiastes 9 is the latter.

Let's take a look at King Solomon's spiraling in this chapter, but keep in mind that chapter 9 is built upon chapters 1-8. He has been building bad attitudes and negativity for some time and these attitudes have warped his mind. He is describing attitudes that are NOT CORRECT.

VERSES 1-3

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. ²It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. ³This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

It is true that human beings are in the hand of God. It is true that we do not know the future and goodness and evil are in front of us just as those two elements of life are also behind us. It is also true that our hearts are full of evil.

His thinking here is tied to later verses in this chapter. He does not understand why good and evil happen to all people and so he erroneously concludes that it doesn't matter what we do. Solomon sees the good (do-gooding) person as the same as an evil (do-badding) person.

What is incorrect in his thinking is that just because good and evil happens to us... it then does not matter what we do. Wrong. It matters our actions and Matthew 5-7 would say to us that not only do our actions matter, but the motivation of our hearts behind our actions also matter.

VERSES 4-6

⁴But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. ⁶Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

As we talked about in the last chapter, Solomon and death do not mix. He stumbles and fumbles when death is presented to him. His thoughts about death are mostly wrong.

It is equally good to be alive or dead, but for the believer in Jesus Christ it may be more of a blessing to be alive. Romans 14:8 and 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 are clear that dying is a blessing and is a mixed bag for the believer. We lose this life and our loved ones are crushed, but we gain Christ.

It is true that once we die we no longer impact life under the sun, but life does not end at death. No one is forgotten who dies and those that die do know and continue to live for souls continue once the physical life is over. Solomon is wrong. The dead continue. The dead live. The dead experience an existence that we cannot comprehend or imagine.

VERSE 7

⁷Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

It is quite a dangerous attitude to think you have a 'blank check' with God and whatever we do is approved by Him. Nope. Wrong. God is God and His character does not change. He approves what He approves and disapproves what He disapproves. Living our life doing what we want and thinking 'God approves it' is utterly sinful. God's approval does not follow us, but rather we follow Him.

VERSES 8-10

Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. ¹⁰Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Again, it is true that we do not know what the future holds and many times days in our lives are difficult. Yes, you should have a good marriage and good sex. Yes, we all have to work for a living. Those things do not mean we should just serve ourselves and go after the finer things in life. Solomon sees the futility in life and concludes that in the face of futility, we should just do whatever we want. You do you and God will have to sort it out. No. Wrong.

Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:5, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Philippians 2:3 and so many other passages share with us the truth that 'self' is our enemy and doing what we want when we want and how we want leads only to our destruction.

Going after the finer things in life (in the verses: white garments, oil on head) can create in us a need to climb the corporate ladder and place the almighty dollar as priority in our lives. Most of the time we set God aside to do so.

VERSES 11-19

Again I saw that under the sun 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. ¹²For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them. ¹³I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. ¹⁴There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. ¹⁵But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that

poor man. ¹⁶But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. ¹⁷The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. ¹⁸Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Yes, wisdom is the way of life we should pursue. I would go a step further and say that Godly wisdom is great gain for us, but I would just be repeating the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 6:6.

What is the bad attitude here? Where is the error in Solomon's thinking in these last verses of chapter 9? I perceive that King Solomon would have wanted the wise poor man to become famous and rich. He wants the poor wise man rewarded for his city saving wisdom. This attitude parallels Solomon's own heart in that he himself was widely known for wisdom and his wealth (1 Kings 10:23, 2 Chronicles 1:11). This is wrong.

Jesus Christ tells us in Matthew 6:3 to do good for the sake of doing good and not to be well-known or famous or to be rewarded. In God's Kingdom, the servant is greatest and being the least is prized (Matthew 23:11, Luke 22:26). This truth is opposite of Solomon's bad attitude of wanting to be famous and rich for being wise and doing good.

SOLOMON'S SPIRALING ATTITUDES

See thee how this man presented ideas and attitudes that are not correct (approved by God), but are described in Scripture. Solomon is writing out his thought process and as we see his thoughts we also see his sin. We see his sinful bad attitudes compounding upon one another.

=====
SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #9: One bad attitude leads to another and leads to another and I am spiraling into a thought life that is devoid of God and I don't care!
=====

THE NEGATIVE SPIRAL

It is my hope that you see the errors in King Solomon's thinking and in how his heart was perceiving the world. He had God in his thoughts, but they were not correct. These types of attitude problems tend to be very personal. For example, Solomon was fatalistic when it came to death and bad things happening to good people (called the Theodicy Problem if you'd like to look it up) threw him for a loop. Plus, he was a rich spoiled brat. All of that combined for Solomon's issues with God.

What about you?

What circumstances or issues cloud your attitudes?

Where is your thought life in error?

It could be that you have issues with one or more of your parents and therefore God as your Heavenly Father is a hurtful paradigm that that has spiraled you away from Him.

It could be that your identity is tied up in your gender and your sexuality and those issues have spiraled you away from God. You might think I am speaking of same sex attraction, and I am, but heterosexual horn dogs also have issues that compound and lead to erroneous thinking.

It could be that you grew up poor or with parents that stressed making money and so as a result making money is a chief goal for your life. Such attitudes will spiral you and compound as you get jobs, sacrifice family time, and buy and purchase bigger and bigger toys.

Again, this negative spiraling that Solomon dealt with is not unique to him. The spark or momentum maker for his spiraling was unique to him. What is yours?

BREAKING THE NEGATIVE SPIRAL

So, how might we fight these negative spirals in our lives? How might we identify the places where sinfulness has crept into our hearts and pull up on the dive and soar back into normalcy?

#1 Be watchful for negative attitudes and thoughts that are errors daily. Being self-aware and prayerful is going to be the first step. We cannot fight a negative attitude that we don't know we have. 'Lord, reveal to me my sin' is a powerful prayer and a needed one. Ask it. Listen.

#2 Be mindful of your emotions. I feel like Obiwan talking to Anakin here, but be mindful of your emotions. Not only can our mind impact us, but our hearts can as well. Emotions come from thoughts and generate actions and words in us. Allow the self-awareness and prayerfulness leak over into your emotions.

#3 Ruminant and repeat Scripture. Once you know what errors are in your thinking, read the Bible to find Godly wisdom to combat your attitude problem. Write a verse on a index card and keep it in your pocket to read throughout the day. Screen shot it and make it your wallpaper on your phone or PC. Think on repetitively the Truth from the Scriptures to realign your mind and heart.

#4 Do something physical while you ruminant. Take a walk while saying the Scripture aloud. Do sit ups and say the verse one word at a time with each sit up. Same for push-ups. The idea is that the positive endorphins from the exercise (physical) mix with the Scriptures (spiritual) to create emotional change.

#5 Re-evaluate and avoid the original negative thoughts and attitudes. I realize, for myself, that negative attitudes can be conquered, but they also tend to sneak back in because they are the natural state of my sinful nature. I need to make sure that my mind and heart are clear of negative attitudes and that I am settled on correct attitudes often.

A THOUGHT FROM PHILIPPIANS

I can't help but think of the words of the Apostle Paul from Philippians 4. Philippians 4:4-9 (ESV) says: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*”

The Apostle Paul is commanding us to focus on joy and rejoicing in the Lord. He knows that you and I will face attitude issues and anxiety and wrong thoughts, and commands us to pray and align our hearts with God. He knows this brings peace.

Peace = Right thinking
Peace = Right attitudes
Peace = Right emotions
Peace = Spiraling up

That peace from God will guard us as we navigate daily the pressures that seek to bring us down. This is not theory, but practical spiritual living. You and I must be prayerfully rejoicing and focusing on what is true and right and commendable to ward off the garbage of the world. The garbage of the world is infectious and piles up and pushes us downward.

Spiral up!

This then leads us to the same verse in Ecclesiastes 12 that we center on in each chapter of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV): “*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*”

Being mindful of our purpose in God (and Christ) and not being waylaid by our sinful nature is important. We should want our minds and hearts and emotions to be focused and aligned with God. Solomon says this is our duty.

A believer in Christ is one who identifies the sinfulness in our lives and seeks to abide in Christ and allow the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us and make us holy. He changes us. We let Him change us. We align to Him. This is the way a Christian lives... not for ourselves, but we live for Him and by Him and He molds our thoughts and attitudes.

May this be true for you.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

Are there passages in the Bible that you can think of where the Bible 'describes something it does not endorse'?

Do you see yourself in King Solomon?

What might be a trigger for you to spiral downward?

Sit and think. Got bad attitudes?

What is something Godly and true in your life?

What is something honorable in your life?

What is just in your life? Where can you give justice?

What is pure in your life or how can you purify something?

What is lovely in your life?

What should you be commended for?

What do you always try to do with excellence?

What praises do you have for God Almighty?

ECCLESIASTES 10 (ESV)

Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. ²A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. ³Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool. ⁴If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest. ⁵There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. ⁷I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves. ⁸He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. ⁹He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. ¹⁰If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. ¹¹If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer. ¹²The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him. ¹³The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. ¹⁴A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him? ¹⁵The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. ¹⁶Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! ¹⁷Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness! ¹⁸Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. ¹⁹Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything. ²⁰Even 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.

CHAPTER TEN: THE FOOLISH BLIND SPOT

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #10: I'm no fool.

=====

Aesop told fables in the 500s BC. Many of them have great messages. I happen to like this one quite a lot: There is an old story about how a donkey found a lion's skin left in the forest by a hunter. He dressed himself in it and amused himself by hiding in a thicket and rushing out suddenly at the animals who passed that way. All the animals ran away the moment they saw him. The donkey was so pleased to see the animals running away from him, just as if he were King Lion himself, that he could not keep from expressing his delight by a loud, harsh bray. A fox, who ran away with the rest, stopped short as soon as he heard the voice. Approaching the donkey, he said with a laugh: "If you had kept your mouth shut you might have frightened me, too. But you gave yourself away by opening your mouth."

It is the same message said by famous American author Mark Twain: "It's better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than open it and remove all doubt." That quote is also attributed to Abraham Lincoln.

It is a rendering of Proverbs 17:28 (NIV): "Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue."

Our topic in this chapter is foolishness as it is presented in Ecclesiastes 10, but foolishness is mentioned often in Ecclesiastes. The topic of foolishness is mentioned often by King Solomon in his writings:

93x in the Book of Proverbs

32x in the Book of Ecclesiastes

King Solomon had wisdom given to him by God (1 Kings 3) and he wrote down wise ways of living in many areas and encourages all of us still to push away from foolishness.

FOOLISHNESS IN ECCLESIASTES

King Solomon has mentioned foolishness many times as we have read through the Book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is not like Proverbs where there are self-contained sayings verse by verse, but Ecclesiastes still has some of those nuggets of wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 2:14a (ESV): *“The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.”*

As he thinks about fools, Solomon notes that foolish people do not tend to pay attention to the world around them. Wise people watch and learn. Wise people know how the world works because they see what happens around them, but a foolish person is the opposite. A foolish person walks through life not watching and not learning and not using light that is available to them.

Ecclesiastes 4:5 (ESV): *“The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.”*

Well that’s not a pretty sight! Foolish people are lazy and destroy themselves and bring ruin on their lives. That is not a hard verse to figure out even if the word picture is a bit repulsive.

King Solomon also notes further down in Ecclesiastes 4 after this verse in verse 13 that a foolish person does not know how to listen to advice. Listening to others is wise. Listening to others and acting on wise words they give us and tossing out unwise words they give us is wiser still.

Ecclesiastes 4:13 (ESV): *“Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.”*

Then as we read through Ecclesiastes we come to Ecclesiastes 5 which absolutely echoes the truth written down by Aesop and humorously

mentioned by Mark Twain and Abraham Lincoln. Foolishness often comes out of our mouths.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 (ESV): *“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. 2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.”*

He says later in verse 6 to not let our mouth lead us into sin. I don't know about you, but I think probably 50% of my sin comes from my words. Foolish folks just say what they want and don't care or hope for the best. Foolish folks often have to add, “just sayin'” or “no offense” to their words because they are foolish through and through with words.

We are taking some time to review a bit of Ecclesiastes because these verses earlier in Ecclesiastes about foolishness are all part of the thought about foolishness in chapter 10. It is about context. King Solomon goes on in chapter 7:4-6 (ESV): *“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 for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.”*

These verses are a little difficult to understand. Basically, a foolish person takes nothing serious and laughs at everything to their detriment. The foolish laugh loud about everything and ignore everything wise anyone tells them. Laughter isn't foolish, but there is a time and place for everything and every attitude.

Even in the rest of Ecclesiastes 7 (verses 17, 25) and then again in Ecclesiastes 9 (verse 17) foolishness is not something we should aspire to be... foolishness is the opposite of wise living. Foolishness is the opposite of good thinking or keeping our mouth shut or accepting wise advice.

ECCLESIASTES 10

Ecclesiastes 10 begins talking about foolishness and continues to talk about being a fool and ends talking all about foolishness. It feels like an exhaustive list of what foolishness is like:

- * Foolish people give into foolish living and their life stinks (verse 1)
- * A foolish person's heart leans towards the wrong direction (verse 2)
- * A fool is a fool and knows but doesn't care (verse 3)
- * Anyone can be a fool from the lowest to the highest (verses 4-7)
- * A fool digs a hole they can't get out of (verse 8)
- * A fool breaks a boundary and gets hurt (verse 8)
- * A fool isn't careful when doing dangerous things (verse 9-11)
- * Foolish people let their words get the best of them (verses 12-14, 20)
- * It is foolish to work with no direction in mind (verse 15)
- * A fool parties when there is work to be done (verses 16-17)
- * A foolish person is lazy (verse 18)
- * A foolish person thinks money is the answer everything (verse 19)

I don't know about you, but I think that summarizes foolishness, folly, and fools pretty well. We may not be able to define foolishness exactly, but we sure know it when we see it and Ecclesiastes 10 explains it over and over with lots of examples.

What do we do with all this foolish talk? Here again, Ecclesiastes 12:13 comes into play with answers and an anchor for us as we think through these truths.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV): *“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”*

Life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor and absolutely completely unjust and terrible unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. Foolishness is probably the inevitable result if we keep God outside of our lives instead

of in our heart. The meaning and identity that God gives us in our relationship with Him pushes through foolishness and brings wisdom into our lives.

The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God which is the wisest relationship we can have. God must be in the middle of our lives or we are lost to foolishness.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning.
It is in following the commands of God that we find purpose.
It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of life fit together.

THE FOOLISH BLIND SPOT

When you read how Scripture defines a fool, who first comes to mind? For me, it's always someone else. I don't consider myself a fool, at least not very high up there on the 'foolishness index' Scripture provides in the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. I am many things... a fool isn't one of them.

When I read Ecclesiastes 10 I do not see myself. I don't use the word 'fool' when I think about myself. I am willing to bet that you don't think of that word when you think of yourself either. We just don't see the foolish ways we act, the foolish things we say, and the foolish decisions we make. We are blind to it.

Foolishness is in our blind spot.

I think we all have a 'foolish blind spot' when it comes to ourselves and because we don't see it, we think we are not foolish. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 tells us something different. He tells me something different. He tells you something different.

Ephesians 5:15-18 (ESV) says, “*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...*”

These verses warn me that without intentionally walking in wisdom, I can quickly drift toward foolish living. Paul’s commands in that passage are challenging. They tell me I’m not wise by default like I think I am. They tell me that I can look wise and accomplished to the world and the church; but to God I’m a fool at times.

=====

SOLOMON’S BAD ATTITUDE #10: I’m no fool.

=====

I don’t know if there is an exhaustive description of foolishness anywhere, but Ecclesiastes 10 does a good job. While Paul doesn’t provide an exhaustive description of what foolishness looks like, he does share three key elements of what it looks like to live wisely. Wise believers are to make “*the best use of time*” (verse 16), “*understand what the will of the Lord is*” (verse 17), and “*be filled with the Spirit*” (verse 18).

PAUL POINTS OUT: Best Use of Time

It is foolish to not care about wasting time.

If you surf the internet without aim for hours on end, constantly browse your Facebook or Twitter or Instagram feed, or watch TV like the average American, you might be a foolish Christian. The average amount of screen time in 2021 for Americans is 7 hours and 11 minutes.²³

²³ comparitech.com/tv-streaming/screen-time-statistics

Life is a vapor (James 4:14). Each hour wasted is an hour that we can never get back. Wise Christians pray for God to teach them to number their days to gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12 (ESV) reminds us, “*So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*” Numbering our days involves paying attention to our days, hours, and minutes in how we spend our time. We can easily be lost without intentionality and setting the right priorities and boundaries.

Why are we to make the best use of time? Why? The Apostle Paul says we live in evil days (Ephesians 5:16) and there is a great temptation in our society to waste time. In so doing, we are less potent in our faith.

PAUL POINTS OUT: Understand the Will of the Lord

God’s will is not magical or mystical or unknowable. God’s will is not in a safe in God’s bedroom in Heaven where no one can get to it. God wants us to know His will for us; that’s why He has given us specific revelation (the Bible and Jesus).

Hebrews Chapter 1 shares with us that God communicates specifically about Himself through the prophets and His Word and also specifically in the Person of Jesus Christ. If you read the Bible, you know God. If you know Jesus Christ, you know God.

I’d like to focus on the fact that God reveals Himself to us in the Scriptures. We know what to believe, how to live, and what our part is in God’s mission on earth through the Scriptures. The Bible contains everything we need for righteous living and for bearing fruit in Him. Through wise prayerful obedience to the Word and a faithful pursuit of a relationship with Jesus Christ, we can know and follow God’s will for our lives and grow in His wisdom.

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) shares with us, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Foolishness comes to us in heaps by neglecting Scripture and prayer and in doing so we make no effort to discern God’s good and pleasing and perfect will. We must seek to understand the will of the Lord and live according to His will and not our own.

PAUL POINTS OUT: Be Filled with the Spirit

A Christian is someone who allows God to live through them by the blood of Jesus and fueled by the Holy Spirit. Most of the time we live life under our own power and we manage our lives and direct our own steps. You and I can be foolish when we ignore the Holy Spirit and His promptings in our lives.

The Spirit-controlled Christian is characterized by an unnatural flow of Scriptural truths and deep thankfulness to others and to the Lord from our mouths and in our actions. I say ‘unnatural’ because our nature is sinful... we are talking about the opposite of that.

The Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:16 (ESV) says, *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”* We as believers must live and walk by the Spirit. Christianity is abiding in Christ. Christianity is a relationship with the Spirit of God pushing out self and aligning ourselves with Him... constantly.

CHALLENGE

The challenge before us is to stop being foolish. That same challenge is presented to us in Ecclesiastes and also in other passages of Scripture like Ephesians 5. May we commit ourselves to not living unwisely, but to walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and wisdom.

It is in following the commands of God that we find purpose and wise decision making.

It is when we seek after God's Kingdom that all the pieces of life fit together as they should.

We must must must consider our lives honestly and prayerfully and see if there be any foolish way in us.

We'd be fools not to.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

What decisions are you making that lead you away from God?

What is your heart telling you that you know is foolish?

Do you care when you act foolishly or spout foolish words?

Is everyone around you foolish but you?

Is there a situation you have gotten yourself into that you cannot get out of?

What God-given boundaries do you break and thereby create hurt or chaos in your life?

Where (or with whom) are you not careful?

In a span of three days, how often do your words get away from you?

Do you need to be wiser at work or how you work?

Do you party (friends, alcohol, etc) too much?

Are you lazy?

Are you in control of your money or does your money control you?

How would your spouse/mother/father/bae answer the above questions for you?

AN INCOMPLETE LIST OF FOOLISH CHRISTIAN THOUGHTS & STATEMENTS

A Bible falling apart belongs to someone who is not.

A real Christian parent has kids who all accept Christ.

All Christians are good people and will not hurt your feelings.

All Christians are Republicans.

Background checks don't need to be done on church volunteers.

Children and teens should decide for themselves if they go to church.

Disasters always happen as the judgment of God against people's sin.

Depression can be cured with just a little more prayer and faith.

Everything happens for a reason.

Facebook is a great place to correct people's attitudes.

Faith can fix anything.

Fossils exist to test the faith of believers.

Go sin so you have something for God's grace to cover.

God helps those who help themselves.

God made me same sex attracted so it is permissible for me.

God won't give you more than you can handle.

Hardships mean you sinned and you have to get right with God.

He or she isn't a Christian, but it is okay to date them or marry them.

I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.

I covet your prayers.

I'm just not getting fed at this church.

If you fizzled at the finish, then you were never saved at the start.

If you don't believe in God, then you cannot be a moral person.

Jesus had two dads and He turned out fine.

Jesus was a refugee.

Judging others is forbidden in the Bible.

Lauren Daigle can't sing.

My faith is private.

No one is as big a sinner as me.

Non-Christians should act like Christians.

OMG

Oprah Winfrey is so wise.

Pornography is no big deal.

Public schools do not indoctrinate children, that's silly.

Racism is not a sin.

Resisting that temptation will be no big deal for me.

Science and religion do not mix.

Show people Jesus by how you live and when needed use words.

The KJV is the only Bible.

The pastor hurt my feelings so I'm going to go to another church.

True Christians think just like me.

United States of America is a Christian nation.

United States of America is God's chosen people.

Veggie Tales are only for kids.

Voting against Donald Trump is voting against God.

We don't need brownies at the church potluck.

When God closes a door, He always opens a window.

You are never more safe than when you are in God's will.

You can be a Christian and not go to church.

You can't be mean to someone you have prayed with.

Your family member died because God needed another angel.

ECCLESIASTES 11 (ESV)

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. ² Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth. ³ If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth, and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. ⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. ⁵ As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. ⁶ In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. ⁷ Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. ⁸ 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. ⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. ¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: WARNINGS OF THE HEART

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #11: I think I'll just follow my heart.

=====

A *Fist Full of Dollars*²⁴ is the best western movie ever written and acted in the history of all movies. You may want to argue with me, but you'd be wrong.

One scene towards the end of the movie is quite memorable. Explosions go off in the distance in town and the eyes of every bad hombre on the street looks to the horizon. The big boss of the bad guys, Ramon, steps forward and peers into the smoke. The smoke blows through town and when it clears, the 'Man with No Name,' the good guy, is standing there. He just stands there as a challenge. Each of the bad guys look at each other and they don't know what to do.

Ramon gathers his rifle and his gang members and steps forward. The Man with No Name also steps forward. It is a classic wild west standoff in the middle of town. Townsfolk cower. Mothers and fathers hide their children.

"Heard you wanted to see me?" the good guy says.

"You are dead," Ramon says. He shoots the good guy and he falls back to the ground. The bad guys chuckle until the hero rises from the dirt and is clearly not dead. Shock. Awe. A little bit of worry.

"What's wrong Ramon," the hero taunts, "Are you losing your touch?" Another shot. The hero falters, but he does not go down.

²⁴ United Artists, 1967

“You afraid Ramon?” the hero questions. Then he instructs, “To shoot to kill you better hit the heart. Those are your own words, Ramon.” This was what Ramon thought he had already done twice. Two more rapid shots and the Man with No Name is again on the ground. He gets up. There is doubt on every face.

“The heart Ramon, don’t forget the heart,” the hero taunts again moving closer to the desperados.

Shot.

Shot.

Shot.

Shot.

The hero rises. And then it happens. Ramon fears.

The Man with No Name steps forward and lifts his cloth poncho to reveal a metal plate slung over his neck and covering his chest. The large metal plate slides to the ground. Every shot Ramon made had hit home right to the heart. There is much tension.

The desperados draw on the hero and he not only takes out all of the bad guys, but shoots the rifle right out of the hand of Ramon, the chief bad guy. I don’t need to tell you the end of the story, the good guy wins the day.

Best. Movie. Ever.

We are in Ecclesiastes 11 and King Solomon says to us the very same thing the Man with No Name says to Ramon... “The heart, don’t forget the heart.” Solomon mentions the word *‘heart’* 34x in Ecclesiastes so he talks about the heart a lot and the condition of our heart is always in view. I would say that much of the Book of Ecclesiastes Solomon, the Teacher King, has a whole lot of rottenness in his heart he is dealing with. Ecclesiastes is one long attitude problem after another where his

heart is jaded, cynical, sad, angry, clueless, lost, and wants desperately to find a wise way of living. He rightly sees that life is difficult and unfair and many times he's not sure how to deal with it all. For King Solomon, the heart is an unhappy place whether his heart is seeking after wisdom or he is throwing himself into foolish things.

THE 'HEART' IN ECCLESIASTES

In Ecclesiastes 1:13 (ESV) he says: *“And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.”*

In Ecclesiastes 2:1 (ESV) he says in contrast: *“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.’ But behold, this also was vanity.”*

His heart is so lost that in wise things and in foolishly pleasurable things he finds no meaning. We talked a few chapters ago about how Solomon is often shaken to his core about death. He sees wise people die and he sees foolish people die. It all seems pointless. His heart is filled with sadness.

In Ecclesiastes 2:15 (ESV) he says: *“Then I said in my heart, ‘What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?’ And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.”*

He also knows that it is in the heart where bad things lie. He specifically, in chapter 7, identifies that anger is a problem in the human heart as well as cursing others which to me sounds a lot like anger in action.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 (ESV) says, *“Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools”* and Ecclesiastes 7:22 (ESV) also says, *“Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.”*

SUPREME WARNING OF THE HEART

The human heart is in full view in the Book of Ecclesiastes and the human heart takes a final bow at the end of chapter 11. The thing is, Solomon is not wrong to focus on the human heart. Our hearts are an important part of our identity and how we view the world.

When we talk about ‘*the heart*’ we mean...

- ... most of all the seat of all our emotions both good and bad
- ... the part of us that connects our emotions with wisdom and decisions
- ... a symbol for love and lust and kindness and compassion
- ... a memory of our relationships
- ... a place where much of our identity resides

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 lays out for us a supreme warning of the heart. Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 (ESV) says: “*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. 10 Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.*”

I want you to read this passage from the Message Version as well. Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 (MSG): “*You who are young, make the most of your youth. Relish your youthful vigor. Follow the impulses of your heart. If something looks good to you, pursue it. But know also that not just anything goes; You have to answer to God for every last bit of it. 10 Live footloose and fancy-free— You won’t be young forever. Youth lasts about as long as smoke.*”

I want you to read this passage from the King James Version as well. Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 (KJV): “*Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. 10 Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*”

What does he say? No matter how many times we read this passage and no matter what Bible translation we choose to read from, the message and meaning is exactly the same. In these verses are a supreme warning to our heart!

HEART EXAMPLES

I do not know how to talk about these verses without giving concrete examples so I am going to do that. What do these verses mean?

Yes, you can give into youthful passions and hormones and sexual desires. Yes, you can have sex with whoever you want whenever you want and you can live together before you are married and... yes... you can make physical pleasure a priority, but on the other side of that is the judgment of God on sin and suitcases full of emotional baggage. Yes, that is what Solomon is saying! God's boundaries about sex, for any person of any age by the way, are not to remove anything from our lives other than hurtful emotional ties and physical baggage that wrecks our soul.

Yes, you can give into whatever your eyes want to watch. Yes, you can watch pornography and hide it and think that it is no big deal, but every single time you watch you heap twisted sin into your life and your marriage or even your future marriage, your view of beauty, your view of sex, and your view of yourself. It all gets twisted by Satan. Yes, that is what Solomon is saying! When a heart is filled with lust, Satan uses that to draw us away from God because of our thoughts, feelings, and actions which lead us right to judgement.

Yes, you can believe you are gay. Yes, you can absolutely give yourself over to same-sex attraction and say to yourself that you are just following what your heart is telling you to do. The heart wants what the heart wants. It is what it is. Yes, you can, but any homosexual relationship in no way can produce life and such a relationship is not blessed by God. Yes... you can make your sexual identity the defining

characteristic of your heart, but on the other side of that is the judgment of God on our sin and complete brokenness. Yes, that is what Solomon is saying!

Yes, you can get divorced. You believe that love is a feeling and when that feeling is gone you feel like the other person just isn't worth it. You decide that you don't love your spouse anymore and that divorce is the only option. The reason for marriage is love and sex and companionship and so many other feelings, but when the feelings of love go away we decide that getting out of the marriage is best. Yes, that is what Solomon is saying! Following the whims of our heart leads us to give up on a marriage relationship and cause pain for kids, pain for grandchildren, brokenness in promises, and more than anything we break a covenant we made with God. Judgement is on the other side of the sin of divorce.

Yes, you can smoke or vape or drink alcohol or snort or sniff or shoot up drugs for the purpose of hiding emotional pain or physical pain. Yes, you can drink beer to relieve stress. Yes, you can get addicted to prescription drugs because you are tired of pain. Yes, you can, but being mastered by such things is a sin and an absolute lack of self-control and damages you and the people around you. Yes, that is what Solomon is saying! Letting our heart dictate what it needs often leads us to sin and more sin and then another sin and pretty soon we are foolish in our actions and natural consequences are more than we can bear.

Yes, you can decide to not forgive and hold a grudge and give into the emotions of hate and un-forgiveness. Let me let you in on a little secret... people suck. Yes, you can hold onto hurt in your heart and decide to completely cut people off from your life if they hurt you. Yes, you can remove emotional pain in that way and on the outside that seems like self-care and we are being emotionally healthy. Yes, that is what Solomon is saying! You can do that, but giving into our heart's desire to not forgive only hurts us in the end and it also, based on other Scripture, removes God's willingness to forgive us. Heart health and

emotional health comes not from removing those that hurt us and thereby exacting our revenge, but rather forgiveness and mercy and pity.

Yes, you can decide to only do what makes you happy in life. There are some relationships or situations or events or experiences that are guaranteed not to make us happy and bring us anxiety. Yes, you can actively avoid those things in an effort to pursue peace and happiness and tranquility and remove all anxiety from your life. Yes, you can, but only pursuing what makes you happy you will miss worthy difficult things God has for you. Yes, that is what Solomon is saying! Life is not always an easy happy path and sticking to only the easy happy path will at times lead us outside of the will of God and land us square into God's judgement.

None of these things are easy because they all are rooted in our hearts.

Yes, all of these things are what Solomon is saying!

In Solomon's jaded sinful attitudes in the Book of Ecclesiastes about life and death and money and pleasure and sadness and purpose and work, he realizes that our heart is not on our side.

It is never on our side.

=====
SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #11: I think I'll just follow my heart.
=====

The default of our heart is to be on sin's side. Your heart does not have your best life in mind. Please understand that our hearts are colored by the sinful nature and so if we allow our hearts top priority in decision making, relationships, or our identity... we end up nowhere but away from God and subject to His judgment.

Your heart is not your friend.

Your heart is not to be trusted when making decisions.

Your heart lies to you about relationships.

Your heart warps your identity in Christ.

Your heart helps you to sin.

Your heart pushes you to seek out only happiness.

ANOTHER MOVIE SCENE

In a very moving scene near the closing of *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*²⁵, we see Princess Amidala and Jedi Anakin Skywalker, two main characters, having a tear-filled and moving argument. The scene is a landing pad with a space ship. Fire and smoke fill the air. There is a lot of anger and sadness in the air as well.

Anakin looks at the pregnant love of his life with angry eyes and hate and says, “The Jedi turned against me. Don’t you turn against me.”

The young lady is crushed. Her eyes fill with tears. She shakes her head not understanding anything about the man standing in front of her. She does not recognize her husband.

“I don’t know you anymore,” she says with tears. With even more pain she says, “Anakin, you are breaking my heart. You are going down a path I cannot follow.”

Referencing their mutual mentor, he asks her, “Because of Obi-wan?”

²⁵ 20th Century Studios, 2005

She responds immediately: “Because of what you’ve done. What you plan to do. Stop now. Stop. Come back.” She is begging him to step away from the anger and hatred that has filled his heart. She wants him to return to the way he was and to goodness. He seems unwilling to do so.

Anakin looks behind her into the space ship where he sees his mentor, Obi-wan, waiting in the distance to see how this conversation goes. He is not pleased to see him. Anger wells in the young man.

The young lady cries out in desperation: “I love you.”

The young man yells back in anger which has now fully consumed his heart: “Liar. You are with him. You brought him here to kill me.”

Princess Amidala is in shock. She backs away in fear. Anakin Skywalker uses the force to choke the love of his life and she is in visible pain. The mentor from the ship sees that things have not gone well, comes forward, and he shouts, “Let her go, Anakin!”

The end result of this argument is an epic lightsaber battle of good versus evil as the teacher and former student face off. The immediate end result of the battle is Anakin Skywalker is severely and life-changingly wounded. The final result of the choice of Anakin Skywalker to give into his heart is that he becomes Darth Vader.

I know that it is fiction, but the path of Anakin Skywalker to become Darth Vader is indeed one of the heart. His heart wants certain things that are out of bounds. His heart is consumed with guilt and anger and fear. His heart wants what it wants and eventually he destroys himself because of the desires of his heart.

FURTHER WARNINGS OF THE HEART

King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 11 is not the only warning that our heart is not our friend and will lead us down a path that someone might say to us: *'You are going down a path I cannot follow.'*

I want to briefly cover three other passages from the Bible to show you that King Solomon is not off his rocker in Ecclesiastes 11 and that the message of Scripture is united in communicating Truth. The united message of Scripture is that our hearts should not be trusted and we need to seek God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to redeem our mind our actions and even our heart.

First, we have the Prophet Jeremiah who shares with us that we should not trust our heart because it is deceitful. Jeremiah 17:9-10 (ESV): *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.'"*

Notice that not only does Jeremiah tell us that our hearts deceive us, but also, he doubles-down that it is desperately sick. Then he triples-down (if that is even a thing) and says that we cannot understand our own heart. God says in verse 10 that He tests the heart and judges what He finds there. Same message as Ecclesiastes 11. To say to someone to 'follow your heart,' is literally the worst advice you can ever give because you are telling them to follow a source that by default is deceitful and sick.

Second, we have the Prophet Ezekiel who more than once in his book uses the same metaphor talking about the heart. You see our heart can become hard and calloused and refuse to listen to God. Our heart can become weighed down by sin and become hard. Ezekiel 36:26 (ESV): *"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."*

We need God and His Spirit to change our heart from a hard heart to one that accepts Him and will listen. It is not an automatic thing to accept the Word of the Lord into our heart. It is a decision and it is a changing of our heart. If our heart was fine and dandy just the way it is, God would not need to change it out.

Third, let's listen to Jesus. Jesus Christ lets us know where all the bad stuff in our life comes from. Jesus teaches us that our sinful actions begin in our heart. Matthew 15:18-20 (ESV): *“But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”*

We are unclean and sinful people because of our heart. It is our heart that is the problem. Jesus says so. If you want to murder someone, it started in your heart. If you are having an affair, your heart is off. If you are dealing with sexual immorality, your heart is the problem. It is the same with theft and lying. Our heart defiles us.

So, what do we do about our heart?

The answer in Ecclesiastes to any question we have leads us to 12:13. Yes, here we are again. Every single chapter in Ecclesiastes leads us to the end where Solomon concludes with correct godly wisdom for the issue at hand. Our issue in this chapter is our heart.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV): *“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”*

Life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor and absolutely completely unjust and terrible unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. Our hearts will lead us into foolishness and away from God unless we give our heart over regularly to God. The meaning and identity that God gives us in our

relationship with Him washes over our heart and chips away at the hardness and reconditions our heart towards God away from sin.

The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God which is the wisest relationship we can have. He will change our heart. He will allow us to navigate life properly even though our heart is deceitful.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning when our heart is lost.

It is in following the commands of God that our heart finds real purpose.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that God gives us a healthy heart.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

What Western would you pick as better than 'Fist Full of Dollars?'

Why is it wise NOT to rely on your heart?

REVIEW OF SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDES

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #1: Most of the time life is the same pile of crap on a different day. Nothing is different. Everything is the same. Woe is us.

=====

- Sadness
- Life is pointless
- Feeling Useless
- Stuck in the Mud

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #2:

Imma smoke it, use it, do it, love it, stick it, eat it, drink it, spend it, collect it and then imma be somebody and finally be happy.

=====

- Self-Centeredness
- Sexual Sin
- Addiction
- Wrong Priorities

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #3: I know there is a time for everything, but it seems like bad stuff happens every day. Gimme a break God! Can't You do something about all this?

=====

- Anxiety
- Anger at God
- Unmet Expectations
- Unreal Expectations

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #4: I don't need nobody.

=====

- Selfishness
- Rejection of God's Community
- I Can Do it All by Myself

=====

SOLOMON'S ~~BAD~~ ATTITUDE #5: Listen up fools, I gave God the finger once, I don't think I'll do that again.

=====

- Reverence for God is a Good Thing
- Worship should be a Priority
- Life is unfair

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #6: I do what I want when I want and how I want and then I will be satisfied.

=====

- Hedonism
- Idolatry
- False Self-Worth

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #7: Life sucks and God doesn't really help all that much.

=====

- Anger at God
- Expectations not to Suffer
- God is a Vending Machine
- Self-Entitlement
- God is Unfair

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #8: I don't understand why good people die and bad people die. Death is a horror and wipes out any hope. Just kill me now.

=====

- Fear
- God is Unfair
- Death is Unknown

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #9: One bad attitude leads to another and leads to another and I am spiraling into a thought life that is devoid of God and I don't care!

=====

- Anger and Depression
- Thoughtlessness
- Wallowing
- Giving in to the Sinful Nature

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #10: I'm no fool.

=====

- Not Being Self-Aware
- Wastes Much Time
- Unconcerned about God's Will

=====

SOLOMON'S BAD ATTITUDE #11: I think I'll just follow my heart.

=====

- Deception
- Accepting the Lies of Self
- Not Trusting in God
- Idolatry of Self

ECCLESIASTES 12 (ESV)

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"; ²*before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,* ³*in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed,* ⁴*and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—* ⁵*they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—* ⁶*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,* 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.* ⁹*Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.* ¹⁰*The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.* ¹¹*The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.* ¹²*My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.* ¹³*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 deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

CHAPTER TWELVE: WHOLE DUTY

Focusing on Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

=====

SOLOMON'S ATTITUDE CORRECTION

=====

The Practice of the Presence of God is a book of collected teachings of Brother Lawrence who was a monk in the 1600s in France. The book includes letters, as well as records of his conversations kept by Brother Lawrence's friends. Brother Lawrence was not a great and mighty teacher or held some kind of office, but rather the gopher, cook, and kitchen manager. The basic theme of the book is the development of an awareness of the presence of God in our lives. I am pretty sure I read this book once a year.

I would like to share with you one of the letters from his book. It happens to be the first letter. It is not very long. The language is a little old fashioned, so I fiddled with it some, but as we begin to think about Ecclesiastes 12, he has much to say to us:

Since you desire so earnestly that I should communicate to you the method by which I arrived at that habitual sense of GOD's Presence, which our LORD in His mercy has been pleased to give to me; I must tell you, that it is with great shy embarrassment that I answer your question. I will share with you only if you agree to my terms... that you show my letter to nobody.

If I knew that you would let it be seen, all the desire that I have to share with you would fade away and I would not be able to write to you. The account I can give you is this: Having found in many books different methods of going to GOD, and diverse practices of the spiritual life, I was puzzled in seeking after God because all I wanted to do was to become wholly GOD's.

This made me resolve to give my all for the All: So after having given myself wholly to GOD, to make all the confession I could for my sins, I renounced for the love of

Him everything that was not He; and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world.

Sometimes I considered myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge; at other times I beheld Him in my heart as my FATHER, as my GOD: I worshipped Him as often as I could, keeping my mind in His holy Presence and recalling myself back to Him as often as I found myself wandering from Him.

I found no small pain in this exercise and yet I continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that occurred, without troubling or chastising myself when my mind had wandered involuntarily.

I made this my business all day long, in addition to the appointed times of prayer; for all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my busyness, to drive away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thoughts of GOD.

Such has been my common practice ever since I became a Christian; and though I have done it very imperfectly, I have found great advantages in it. I well know the mercy and goodness of GOD because we can do nothing without Him. I need Him more and more.

When we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our willfully offending Him and doing anything that may willfully displease Him, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may be so bold a familiarity with GOD whereby we stand in His grace which we need.

I find, by often repeating these acts and this mindset, that they become habitual and the presence of GOD is rendered as it were something natural. Give Him thanks, if you please, with me, for His great goodness towards me which I can never sufficiently admire, for the many favors He has done to so miserable a sinner as I am. May all things praise Him. Amen²⁶.

I like that.

²⁶ Public Domain

Why share that with you?

Brother Lawrence, a Christian from the 1600s is saying the same thing to us that King Solomon is saying to us in Ecclesiastes 12 and the Truths are completely relevant to our lives.

ECCLESIASTES 12

As we look over chapter 12, Solomon makes a final statement about all the sadness and anger and questions and garbage he has been dealing with. The book of Ecclesiastes is a record of all of Solomon's attitude problems and questions about life. He is struggling with life and we are privileged to see it in Ecclesiastes. I say 'privileged' because we can see his struggles and learn from him. Among other things (this is just what I picked out) he says...

In chapter 1, that all of life is meaningless and there is no real progress on anything.

In chapter 2, that even pleasurable things do not bring meaning, but are empty.

In chapter 3, justice is broken and we are not in control of so many things.

In chapter 4, worship of God can be a struggle to find meaning and we feel lost.

In chapter 5, life is so hard and unfair and knocks us down, but community can help.

In chapter 6, we hunger for a lot of things that just leave us feeling empty.

In chapter 7, crooked things happen to everyone and it makes us angry and sad.

In chapter 8, death comes to everyone and it is completely unfair.

In chapter 9, you only live once and it isn't that great with only a few bright spots.

In chapter 10, foolishness is so very attractive, but leads to brokenness.

In chapter 11, we cannot even trust our heart because it deceives us.

Yeah, King Solomon is great.

Meaningless.

Emptiness.

Brokenness.

Feeling lost, helpless, sad, and angry.

That is pretty much the entire book of Ecclesiastes. We are meant to read Ecclesiastes 1-11 and see those places where our outlook on life matches his. We too can feel like life is meaningless, empty, broken, and we can feel lost, helpless, sad, and angry. He felt that way... nothing is new under the sun... we can feel that way as well.

This is where chapter 12 comes into play. Chapter 12 is the end of the book and the '*end of the matter*' as he says in verse 13. King Solomon, the Teacher King, has three more things to say to us in chapter 12.

THE RUN-ON SENTENCE SAYS... (verses 1-7)

“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”; 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, 3 in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, 4 and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— 5 they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— 6 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, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

King Solomon grabs our attention with a 207-word run-on sentence. I believe the nature of the sentence is meant to shake us and have us focus even as we are reading. We are used to periods and new thoughts. Verses 1-7 is one continuous ongoing connected thought. That one continuous ongoing connected thought is that no matter what is going on around us, we must remember our Creator and keep Him front and center in our lives.

When days are evil and you find no pleasure, remember your Creator.

When you aren't sure what the future holds, remember your Creator.

When the people you trust are shaking in fear, remember your Creator.

When economic hard times come, remember your Creator.

When the future is certain and terrible, remember your Creator.

When you are dealing with death, remember your Creator.

When you lose money or jobs, remember your Creator.

Solomon squishes all of those thoughts and probably even more that I missed into those 207 words. Solomon is correct in Ecclesiastes... life is hard and unfair and drags us down and many times has no answers. In those times, in verses 1-7, he says to remember our Creator.

What does that mean?

The Hebrew word used in 12:1 means ‘to recall,’ ‘to bring to the mind,’ ‘to keep in remembrance by making a memorial.’ I was thinking about what that means in this context? What do we need to remember and recall and bring to mind about God?

Psalm 139 gives us a hint. Psalm 139:13-14 (ESV): “*For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.*”

I think Zephaniah 3:17 also gives us a hint. Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV) says, “*The LORD your God is in your midst, a Mighty One Who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.*”

When life is terrible no good and very bad, our focus needs to not be on the terrible unfairness around us or the bad people or the circumstances we cannot control, but rather our focus needs to be on God our Creator Who made us and loves us and is in our midst.

He formed us and loves us.

He formed us and knows exactly who we are and is not surprised by is or by life.

He is the Mighty One Who saves.

He will be with us and rejoice over us and show us love and sing over us.

God is the for-sure rock-solid foundation for our lives that does not change. When life is storms and garbage and unknown, we must place our trust and focus on our God Who has a plan for us and is for us. He is for our good. He is with us in the midst of hardship. King Solomon says in a run-on sentence that we need to focus and remember our Creator.

Solomon does not stop there. He continues in this last chapter to focus and refocus us after he spent 11 chapters telling us how terrible and unpredictable and unfulfilling life can be.

The reality of life stinks.

What do we do about it? He first says that our focus and our minds must be centered on God our Creator. This is our starting point when life is overwhelming and hard. What is next?

THE WISE TEACHER PREACHER SAYS... (verses 8-12)

“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity. 9 Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. 10 The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. 11 The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. 12 My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”

I noticed that in verses 8-12 King Solomon focused on wise knowledge and words of truth. More than anything, we should notice that verse 11 points out that the knowledge, truth, wisdom, and words that we need come from one Shepherd. Solomon is clearly directing us to God’s Word when we feel lost and broken. There are a whole lot of

books out there (verse 12), but only one book contains the Word of Truth and wisdom from God.

Our Great Shepherd has not left us alone in life without any direction, but has inspired His Words perfectly to be written down that we might have His directions and heart and pattern of life permanently before us. We find Bible verses that tell us this same truth in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Psalm 119:105 (ESV) shares, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”*

Jesus says in Matthew 4:4 (ESV): *“It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* and the Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV): *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

The writer of Hebrews says in 4:12, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* (ESV)

What do all of these verses in concert tell us?

You and I need to be reading and studying and memorizing the Bible. You and I need the Bible as a daily part of our life. The Word of God is light for our dark days and God-sense and commonsense in the midst of nonsense. God shares with us order in His Word when we deal with chaos.

How do we do that?

We can currently read and study our Bibles in freedom and openly in our homes. There is absolutely no barrier to us reading and meditating

on the Word of God daily in our lives. We must make the time to do so. We must have the will and the commitment to make time with God a priority. Our relationship with God is not a Sunday-only thing, but a daily give and take with the Almighty. We can follow the wisdom of Solomon by daily reading and thinking about the Bible.

Solomon does not stop there. He continues in this last chapter to focus and refocus us after he spent 11 chapters telling us how terrible and unpredictable and unfulfilling life can be. The reality of life stinks.

What do we do about it?

He first says that our focus and our minds must be centered on God our Creator. Second, we must take in the teachings of the One Shepherd... God. Then comes the last two verses which we have actually referenced every single week as we went through Ecclesiastes.

THE END OF THE BOOK SAYS... (verses 13-14)

13 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 deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

At the end of Solomon's deliberations about life in the Book of Ecclesiastes, he arrives in chapter 12 with a thought to end all thoughts.

You see life is absolutely meaningless, pointless, futility, fleeting, a brief breath and a quick vapor and absolutely completely unjust and terrible unless you and I have a God-given perspective about life. The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived was that the whole duty of a human being is to live in a proper right relationship with God. God must be in the middle of our lives or we are lost and broken and have no hope.

It is the right relationship with God that brings meaning and makes everything make sense.

It is in following the commands of God that purpose and identity is given.

It is when we seek after God and His Kingdom that all the pieces of our lives fall into place.

THE END OF THE MATTER

The end of the matter for the wisest person who ever lived is that it is only in our relationship with God and abiding in Jesus Christ and relying on the Holy Spirit that any of us have any hope to correct the sin errors in our minds and hearts. We cannot self-correct the self. We need Jesus Christ and Him crucified to lay waste to our terrible sinful nature and gift us rightness with God our Father.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

What is stopping you from jumping head first into your duty with God?

What attitudes do you need to lay at His feet?

What conversation do you need to have with others so you can uncover where your heart is sinful and you need help with a bad attitude.

OTHER BOOKS AUTHORED OR CO-AUTHORED BY TROY BORST

THESSA- LOOPIANS

BIBLICAL WISDOM FOR THIS CRAZY WORLD
STUDIES IN 1ST AND 2ND THESSALONIANS

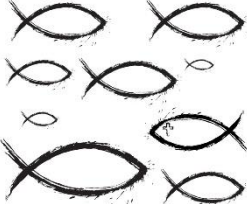
DR. TROY M. BORST

If you don't think this world is crazy, then you probably are off-your-rocker delirious with visions of little green gnomes flying around in airplanes made of cheese. Our hope in this life is to trust in Jesus Christ and Him crucified and to abide in Him daily to guard our hearts and minds while we live each day.

Based on sermons from Cincinnati Christian Church in Bloomfield, IN.

SEEKING AFTER CHRIST

Thoughts on the Christian Life from 1 Peter

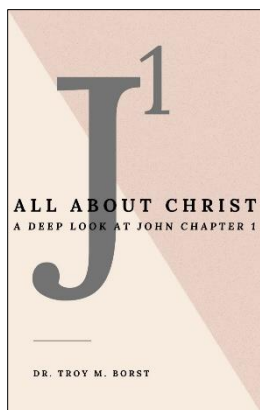


DR. TROY M. BORST

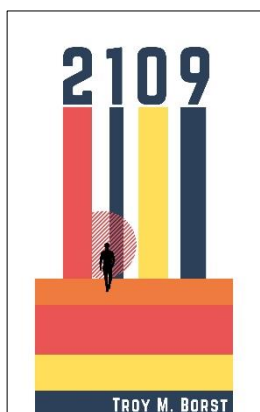
Either you seek after Christ or you don't. Dive into 1 Peter and study to discover the wisdom from the Apostle Simon Peter who wanted believers after him to seek after Christ. He also wants us to remain faithful to Jesus Christ in a world that wants believers to bend and break in different directions.

You bending?

You breaking?

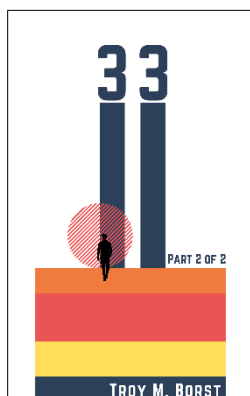


John Chapter 1 is a passage of Scripture rich with theology and language that introduces us to Jesus Christ. This book digs section by section of one chapter of Scripture. Each passage reveals a little more about Jesus Christ. This book is all about Jesus. This book was developed from a sermon series preached at Cincinnati Christian Church in Bloomfield, Indiana.

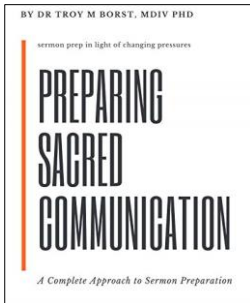


When Dr. Tak Briar suffers a catastrophic time-travelling accident, he finds himself stuck 4,000 years in the past. While he waits in the distant past, Tak finds Abram, Sarai, Lot, Hagar, Melchizedek, and other historical Biblical people as he makes his way home. This fast-paced Christian fictional story covers the events of Genesis 13-14.

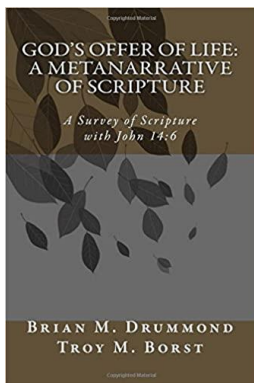
This fictional story also presents some theological Truth that God is good and His will in our lives always works for good.



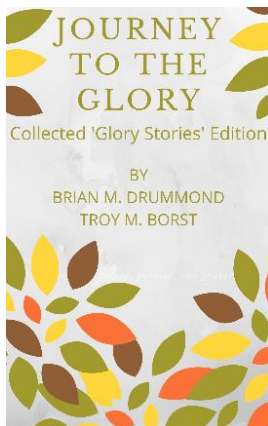
Follow the adventure of Dr. Tak Briar as he navigates a time-traveling adventure to fix a time-altering mistake he made in the distant past. His fix? Ask Jesus of Nazareth for help. He not only faces terrorists and becomes a horse thief, but tries desperately to meet Jesus to make a request. This fast-paced Christian fictional story covers the events of Jesus' Last Week in the Gospels. This fictional story also presents some theological Truth that Jesus is about life, resurrection, and salvation.



“Preparing Sacred Communication” is focused on a comprehensive step-by-step process of preparing a sermon which takes into consideration solid academic research, proven practice, and technological advances. This book refines the sermon preparation process for any sacred communicator.

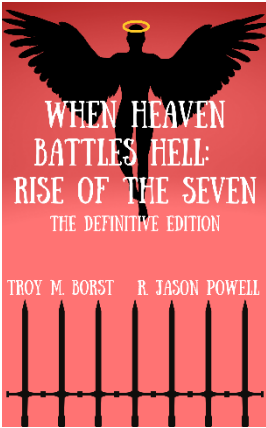


“God’s Offer of Life” is a theological treatise looking at Genesis-Revelation in light of John 14:6. You will find much theology and Scripture as well as hand-drawn illustrations, stories, poems, and questions to think about in order to drive home the point of the correct thoughts about God contained within this book.



“Journey to the Glory” is an allegory that takes place in a fictional world centered on two main areas: Receding and the Land of Hashem. This work follows the journey of one person from Receding to Hashem in which he discovers what God is like which encourages him to imitate those qualities.

This edition collects short stories which are ‘further adventures.’



“When Heaven Battles Hell” is Christian Historical Science-Fiction work which relates a Biblically-based good vs. evil tale. Satan will seek to carry out the end of the world by bringing forth his Four Horsemen before the prophesied time, but God has already made plans to counter the evil of Satan by raising up seven chosen warriors to battle the armies of Hell behind the scenes in history.

=====
Website to which the author contributes regularly:
www.dwellinginscripture.com
=====

About the author:

Rev. Dr. Troy M. Borst is a 20+ year veteran of local Christian church ministry in Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Indiana. He has taught on the post-secondary level in the areas of public speaking, preaching, and worldview. He enjoys martial arts, science fiction, SEC College Football, and the Tampa Bay Lightning (NHL). He lives in Indiana with his wife and has three college-age children.

Twitter: @troyborst

Twitter: @sacredcomm

Twitter: @D_I_Scripture