

*"hebel"*



20 readings from Ecclesiastes



## Introduction

Someone has said that the great issues of life are to do with the three Ms- "meaning, morality, and mortality." What is the meaning of life? How are we to live? And how are we to face death?

The book of Ecclesiastes is about life in this world "under the sun." Although it is an ancient book, the passing of time has simply served to reinforce the truth of what is said.

It was written by a wise man, Solomon, who has experienced all that life has to offer, yet without becoming consumed by it. He says, "*my heart still guiding me with wisdom* (Ecclesiastes 2:3)."

Immediately, as you read Ecclesiastes you are struck by the constant repeat of the word "vanity!" It is used 38 times in the twelve chapters of the book. And it is helpful to know the Hebrew word here. The Hebrew word, 'hebel,' literally means "mist" or "vapour." It is fleeting, momentary, elusive- you can't gather it up, it passes away- even incomprehensible- hence the word "vanity."

As you read about life, may you come to know God – and in knowing God may you come to understand more of life:

*O God, you are the living and true God.*

*In every way You are good and Your word is ancient,  
yet fresh.*

*Keep us from muddled thinking, or from the temptation  
of expecting too much or too little of life, but lead to Christ  
Jesus, to the cross of Calvary where we find forgiveness of sins  
and to life everlasting.*

*In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*

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## Day 1- Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

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

<sup>2</sup> Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,  
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

<sup>3</sup> What does man gain by all the toil  
at which he toils under the sun?

<sup>4</sup> A generation goes, and a generation comes,  
but the earth remains forever.

<sup>5</sup> The sun rises, and the sun goes down,  
and hastens to the place where it rises.

<sup>6</sup> The wind blows to the south  
and goes around to the north;  
around and around goes the wind,  
and on its circuits the wind returns.

<sup>7</sup> All streams run to the sea,  
but the sea is not full;  
to the place where the streams flow,  
there they flow again.

<sup>8</sup> All things are full of weariness;  
a man cannot utter it;  
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
nor the ear filled with hearing.

<sup>9</sup> What has been is what will be,  
and what has been done is what will be done,  
and there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>10</sup> Is there a thing of which it is said,  
“See, this is new”?  
It has been already  
in the ages before us.

<sup>11</sup> There is no remembrance of former things,  
nor will there be any remembrance  
of later things yet to be  
among those who come after.

Who has not pondered the meaning of life only to be overcome by a sense of how futile it can seem. Life in this world is distorted and who can say they have comprehended it? There is a weariness to everything under the sun. What do we gain from all our toil? The curse of God in Genesis 3:17 – *“cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life”* - is our reality today.

Not only do we know in our minds the vanity of life, we have felt how wearisome life is as well. Rivers keep flowing and flowing- even the mightiest of rivers, the Amazon, flows into the ocean- yet what is the point? It never reaches an end. There is no goal that is attained; no point where it can rest from it's work of filling the ocean. The cycle of water simply continues on and on – and it is wearisome. All creation is truly subject to frustration (Romans 8:20).

Yet, it is not just the natural world that is like that; we are caught up in this too. You weed the garden, and then again in a month you have to do it again. We get up and go to work the same as generations before us- but what really is achieved?

So far, Solomon has asked a lot of questions, but given few answers. Yet, God's Word does not leave us there. We must think about the meaninglessness and weariness of this world, but the God who we trust and believe- the God who sent His Son to give us life- does not to leave it there. The Bible leads us to an end. The Apostle John sees something of the end when the mist of life is lifted and the curse of God lifted;

*“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.”*

- Revelation 22:3

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## Day 2- Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

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<sup>12</sup>I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

<sup>15</sup>What is crooked cannot be made straight,  
and what is lacking cannot be counted.

<sup>16</sup>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." <sup>17</sup>And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.

<sup>18</sup>For in much wisdom is much vexation,  
and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Solomon has begun his search for meaning in life. You and I do the same. What are the things of life that you value the most? What is your heart's greatest desire? Solomon is digging and searching in the same places, yet all the while he is keeping his sense of wisdom about him.

Remember that framing this is God's curse on us. Do you feel frustrated with life at times? Yes, that is part of God's curse (v.13). Life is crooked and we cannot straighten it (v.15). We know how it should be, we have some sense of goodness and perfection, but the frustrating part is that we can't get there.

We can try make our lives perfect, but in doing so we fall into idolatry and inevitable disappointment.

Despite this, Solomon still searches with all his wisdom for some sort of meaning to life under the sun. He thinks perhaps there is meaning in education (v.16). He masters all the subjects - mathematics, the sciences, numbers and patterns. He can understand the mechanics of the world. Also music and art - what makes things beautiful to the eye. Business, law and history. Ever learning and increasing in knowledge, skill and wisdom. But it was a disappointment – a pointless chasing after the wind (v.17). In fact, the more he acquired knowledge, the more his sorrow increased (v.18).

There are good lessons to learn from Solomon at this point. We chase that which will make us happy. But wisdom has learnt that we will never create heaven on earth. Utopian dreams are fantasy and the most unrealistic people in life are those who have abandoned a belief in sin. Ultimately, the perfection we seek will not come until Christ returns. If we trust in Him and belong to Him then at that time God,

*“who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.”*

- Philippians 1:6

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## Day 3- Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

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**2** I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. **2** I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” **3** I 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. **4** I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. **5** I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. **6** I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. **7** I 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. **8** I 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.

**9** So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. **10** And 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. **11** Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Solomon has become cynical of education and knowledge. It only brings greater sorrow. If education is not the answer, then maybe *hedonism* is the answer to life. Living



for pleasure and enjoying all that there is in life under the sun.  
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He tries laughter and wine (v.2-3). He built himself a grand house that was the envy of all. Maybe that will help give him answers in life? He constructed gardens, parks and pools. He had large flocks of animals and servants at his call. He had more wealth than he could need and concubines. Any pleasure you could set your heart on Solomon had in unrestrained hedonism - *"I kept my heart from no pleasure (verse 10)."*

But did that help him in life? Did it answer that inner longing that he had? No. In the end hedonism is full of empty promises. You may reach the peak of your career and be in demand for your skills. You may earn more income than your friends and family so that they rely on you. You may be able to enjoy holidays and travel as you please. You may enjoy a life of undiluted pleasure. Yet, just one sip from the living water Christ Jesus offers – water that quenches and springs up into eternal life – is more satisfying a thousand times over than all the pleasures of earth. None of these things are able to answer the deep questions of life. None of them are eternal. They will fade, only things of God are eternal.

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## Day 4- Ecclesiastes 2:12-26

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<sup>12</sup> So 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. <sup>13</sup> Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. <sup>14</sup> The 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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! <sup>17</sup> So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

<sup>18</sup> I 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, <sup>19</sup> and 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. <sup>20</sup> So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> 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, <sup>25</sup> for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? <sup>26</sup> 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.

Solomon is continuing to search for meaning in life. Maybe it is found in wise living? Solomon discovers that some things are better than others and there is something good to being wise. There is more gain in wisdom than folly. The fool walks in darkness, but the wise person sees where he is going.

Yet, here is the frustrating part of it all: death levels us all. We may live for 70 or 80 years on this planet and some people will spend their life wisely, which is good, but others will spend their life foolishly. In the end, it doesn't matter, because we all finish in the grave! Solomon is so frustrated by this that he questions the point of being wise in the first place (v.15). In fact, he now hates life (v.17)! Trying to understand life is like trying to catch the wind and hold it. It is a pointless exercise.

But, perhaps, hard work is the answer. No. There too, is vanity, because in the end it must be left for other people (v.21). Work is good. God gave Adam the work of caring for Eden, but now work is fragile and frustrating. The best we can do is try to enjoy it as coming from God.

Nothing in life can give what only God can give. Life begins to find meaning and enjoyment when we look to Him.

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## Day 5- Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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

<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
<sup>5</sup> a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
<sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
<sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
<sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

<sup>9</sup> What gain has the worker from his toil? <sup>10</sup> I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live;<sup>13</sup> also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Life has a rhythm and pattern that makes it right for some actions but not others. Someone who is wise will understand the seasons for planting and reaping. They will weep with those who are weeping and rejoice with those who are rejoicing. They understand that life consists of opposite actions, but that these actions must be shown at the right time. A fool will always speak, but someone who is wise knows when to keep quiet. Alternatively, a coward keeps quiet when someone who is wise knows when to speak up. Pacifism doesn't work in a fallen world, yet neither does war mongering. Each is necessary at the right moment.

Solomon understands this, but again it does little to help him. There must be more to life. We all have a sense of this, as Solomon says, God has put eternity into our hearts (v.11). We have a sense and a yearning for something greater beyond life under the sun, but frustratingly we can't grasp it. The best we can do is try and enjoy the life God has given us.

The frustrations of this world should create in us yearnings for another world. A place that endures forever and where everything is complete. It is God who has given us this yearning, so that we should fear Him (v.14). Heaven promises to be such a place;

*"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

- Revelation 21:3-4

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## Day 6- Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

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<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. <sup>21</sup> Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? <sup>22</sup> 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?

It is often those who speak the loudest about being devoted to humanity who become the greatest enemies of humanity. They speak of justice and sit in seats of justice, but in reality their hearts are evil. We should not be surprised when evil prospers in public life. In fact, we should expect it.

Thinking about God's judgment causes many people to hate Him. But try to live in a world where there is no justice and that in itself becomes horrific. Solomon knows that God is just and that one day He will hold all people to account.

Yet, God has not left all testing to the last day. God tests us by virtue of our own mortality. An ox dies in the

same way as a person dies and when we realize that it causes a sense of helplessness in us. What advantage do human beings have over animals? Although we have a sense of something greater beyond this life, at the moment of death we don't know if we are any better off than a dead dog. Our ability to see into the future stops at the gravesite.

This is true for all people. We prefer not to think of death, because it is unpleasant and unknown. And we certainly don't want to think of God's judgment. Yet when Christ, the innocent One, spoke to the thief on the cross He gave him words of eternal hope. Although, as a criminal, his body would have been discarded outside the city walls like a street dog's, Christ Jesus says to him, *"Today, you will be with me in paradise* (Luke 23:43)." This world will not give us much reason to hope for justice or life beyond the grave, but Christ's words are life to all who believe.

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## Day 7- Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

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<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. <sup>3</sup> But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

<sup>4</sup> Then 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.

<sup>5</sup> The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

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

<sup>7</sup> Again, I saw vanity under the sun: <sup>8</sup> one 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.

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup> 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! <sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

<sup>13</sup> Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. <sup>14</sup> For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. <sup>15</sup> I saw all the living who move about



under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. <sup>16</sup>There 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.

Four times in this passage Solomon says something is better than something else. X is better than Y. First, it is better never to have been born than to live a life of misery because of oppression or injustice (v.2-3). Life can be so unfair that it is better never to have been born at all. Injustice may lead people to conclude that God is *not* all-powerful, or *not* all-good; or that there is no God at all. Racism, pride and violence are often against those who are weak. The world can be cruel. A child may suffer because of the sins of their parent and they may be all alone with nobody to comfort them.

Secondly, life is better when there is a mix of calm and work (v.4-8). Laziness destroys a person or family, but over-work is equally as ruinous.

Thirdly, cooperation is better than isolation (v.9-12). When people cooperate they are more productive and able to help one another. The more cords in the rope the stronger it is.

Fourthly, wisdom is better than foolishness, even if it means poverty (v.13-16). Solomon asks us to imagine a poor boy who rose from the poverty to become king. A wonderful story! Yet, even if you climb to the top you can be left alone and quickly forgotten- or even worse, quickly turned against (v.16). This too, is vanity.

This is not the Bible's final word on any of these subjects. God promises justice for the oppressed and Christ's invitation is wonderful;

*"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

- Matthew 11:30

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## Day 8- Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

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**5** 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

<sup>4</sup> When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> 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? <sup>7</sup> For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

Some people think that religion will help them in their lives. But they may speak of God being a *part* of their life, instead of the *Lord* of their life. It is Christianity on my terms. King Saul thought he could obey God as he chose (1 Samuel 15:10-11). But Solomon asks us to examine ourselves before we come to God. Have we come with a heart that is humble before Him and more ready to listen than it is to speak?

There are two people portrayed here. The fool thinks a little religion will help him. He thinks that he can keep God tamed. But he knows neither God nor the wickedness of his own heart. He comes and offers a fool's sacrifice. He thinks he is

worshipping God- but it is a tame god of his own imagination, not the true and living God.

During the time of the exile, Ezekiel saw a vision of the temple in Jerusalem and there were all sorts of religious activities going on. But, tragically, God was not there. God's glory departed from the temple (Ezekiel 10:18-19).

In contrast, the true worshipper comes to worship God, expecting to meet Him, but guarding their steps. We come before God only on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Religion with a wrong heart is not simply a chasing after the wind; it is far more terrible and does far more damage than that.

Right worship involves keeping our word to God. If a person makes a vow before God, but doesn't really mean it or cannot fulfill it, then it is better not to make the vow in the first place. God is the God of truth and He places the highest value on integrity.

In all this, recognize who God is and fear Him. Because of the seriousness of sin and eternity, we dare not treat God lightly. In the end He will be worshipped by all creation;

*"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come!"*

- Revelation 4:8

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## Day 9- Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

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<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

<sup>10</sup> He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. <sup>11</sup> When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? <sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, <sup>14</sup> and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

When those in power are just and committed to helping those they rule over, then society flourishes (v.8-9). In contrast, the desire for wealth is destructive. Wealth is to be handled with great care. It reveals much about our hearts and when we set our hearts on what God has not intended them for, we take away any opportunity for lasting happiness. Like all sin, in the end the love of money fails to satisfy. Better to be a poor labourer who is contented with their lot in life, than to have a full belly and all you need yet no peace (v.12).

Even worse, is the man whose greed leads him to greater and greater risks until he loses all he owns. The tragedy is that it is his family who is most hurt by his foolishness (v.14).

The person who understands wisdom lives with the knowledge that we enter this world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing (v.15). The richest businessman leaves all his wealth behind. Again, death is the great leveller.

This is not to say that wealth is evil. If God has given you possessions – and the power to enjoy them – then receive them with a glad heart and be grateful to Him. Always keep in mind the eternal perspective. Jesus commands us to;

*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

- Matthew 6:33

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## Day 10- Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

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**6** There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: <sup>2</sup> a 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. <sup>3</sup> If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. <sup>4</sup> For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. <sup>5</sup> Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. <sup>6</sup> Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

<sup>7</sup> All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. <sup>8</sup> For 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? <sup>9</sup> Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

<sup>10</sup> Whatever 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. <sup>11</sup> The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? <sup>12</sup> For 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?

Life can be fickle. Here Solomon describes several situations that should not be. A man who has everything that life could offer, but for some reason he is unable to enjoy them. Perhaps, sickness or death kept him from being able to enjoy life. Perhaps, he is like the rich fool who had all he needed in life, but to whom God said, *"Fool! This night your soul is required of you"* (Luke 12:20). Whatever the case, it is God who has caused this.

Even worse though, is the man who has all that life under the sun has to offer, yet he is not satisfied. Discontentment arises within him and gnaws at his soul. In a sense, it is better to have not known life at all!

It is good to learn today that life will never completely satisfy. We work hard, yet there is always a need to fill. We tend to think that the grass is greener on the other side, but this is not wise. A wandering appetite leads to discontent!

It is God – the One who knows what man is and who is stronger than we are – who we must contend with. As Creator He has named all things. He knows the frailty of our humanity. Psalms 103:14 says;

*"For he knows our frame;  
he remembers that we are dust."*

God holds the future in His hands and it is foolish to try and dispute with Him. His sovereign power is contrasted to our weakness. Yet, it is also His eternal word that gives new life to all believers;

*"All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord remains forever."*

- 1 Peter 1:24-25

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## Day 11- Ecclesiastes 7:1-14

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- 7** 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.
- 3** Sorrow is better than laughter,  
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.
- 4** The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,  
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
- 5** It is better 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.
- 7** Surely oppression drives the wise into madness,  
and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- 8** Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,  
and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
- 9** Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,  
for anger lodges in the heart of fools.
- 10** Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"  
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.
- 11** Wisdom is good with an inheritance,  
an advantage to those who see the sun.
- 12** For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,  
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves  
the life of him who has it.
- 13** Consider the work of God:  
who can make straight what he has made crooked?



<sup>14</sup> In 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.

The word "better" is used seven times in these verses to describe one situation over another. In this fallen world, by its nature, some things are better than other things.

Solomon tells us that it is better to spend an hour sitting at a gravesite than almost anywhere else. The day of death has more to teach us than the day of birth, because that is our end. The prayer of Psalm 90:12 is, *"Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."*

In life, it is better to be rebuked by a wise man, than to have a moron give you life advice (v.5). A fool is corrupted by a bribe (v.7) and unlike God who is slow to anger (Exodus 34:6), a fool is unable to control his temper (v. 9).

In all this, the wise person knows God and trusts that all things are in His hands. In God's sovereignty, life is crooked and it cannot be made straight! He is sovereign over our best and our worst days and that ought to humble and comfort us. A fool will try to buck against God's sovereignty. Instead, we are to cling fast to the promise that Christ Jesus gave to the Apostle Paul;

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

- 2 Corinthians 12:9

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## Day 12- Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

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<sup>15</sup> In 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. <sup>16</sup> Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? <sup>17</sup> Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? <sup>18</sup> It 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.

<sup>19</sup> Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

<sup>20</sup> Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

<sup>21</sup> Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. <sup>22</sup> Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

<sup>23</sup> All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. <sup>24</sup> That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while

adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things—

<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

The Scriptures say, "Be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23)." But sometimes it doesn't look that way and right living, or righteousness, is no guarantee for success in life (v.15). A selfish, wicked man may live to an old age, whilst a good man may be cut down whilst he is still young. This is *not* how it should be, but often it is! Life under the sun is unpredictable.

Since this is true, Solomon tells us not to be over righteous or too wise. God is righteous and we are to seek His righteousness (Matthew 5:48), but Solomon's point is that wisdom avoids extremes. An over righteous person may be zealous for a good cause, but in a rash or critical way that brings trouble on themselves. In contrast, there are those who are overly wicked and think that they can get away with anything. This might be the case sometimes in life under the sun, but not always and "why die before your time? (v.17)"

The wise person is not judgmental for they know their own sin (v.22). A fool is quick to bear a grudge, but wisdom knows when to overlook an offense. In all this, Solomon is teaching us that the way of wisdom is more powerful than ten rulers in a city (v.19).

Although Solomon has spoken wisely, he still admits that wisdom is beyond him (v.24). He says he has only understood ("found") one upright man in a thousand and that he couldn't even understand one upright woman (v.28)! Yet, this single truth he does understand: the heart of our problem is that we go searching in the wrong places, instead of searching after God (v.29). When we know the diagnosis of our problem we can begin to seek a cure. When Peter was confronted with the ugliness of his sin, he said to Jesus, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" But Christ's response to him was, "*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men* (Luke 5:8-10)." Christ Jesus exposes the ugliness of our sin, yet brings us lovingly to God.

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## Day 13- Ecclesiastes 8:1-13

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### 8 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.

<sup>2</sup>I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. <sup>3</sup>Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. <sup>4</sup>For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" <sup>5</sup>Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. <sup>6</sup>For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. <sup>7</sup>For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? <sup>8</sup>No 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. <sup>9</sup>All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

<sup>10</sup>Then 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. <sup>11</sup>Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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.

Wisdom brings joy and softens a person. Yet, despite this, to one degree or another, we are all at the mercy of those in authority over us. Solomon says that it is in our best interests to obey our authorities. On oath God in His sovereignty has placed them there (v.2). The Lord Jesus Christ at His trial said to Pontius Pilate, *"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above (John 19:11)."*

Beware not to support a bad cause, because if it doesn't succeed, then you will face the king's wrath and he will do as he pleases (v.3). In addition, learn how to go about things in the proper way. Someone may support a good cause, but in ignorance or zeal they may go about the wrong way of achieving it. Wisdom knows the right way to go about things even though we don't know the future (v.7).

Solomon then pictures two opposite people: the wicked man and the man who fears God. The wicked man is praised in the city. He seems a religious type of man, coming and going from the holy place (v.10). But this is vanity and it will not go well with him. In contrast, for the person who fears God and honours Him, it will go well in the end. Psalm 1:2-3 describes such a blessed man;

*"... his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers."*

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## Day 14- Ecclesiastes 8:14-9:6

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<sup>14</sup> There 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. <sup>15</sup> And 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.

<sup>16</sup> When 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, <sup>17</sup> then 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.

**9** 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. <sup>2</sup> It 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

Although it is true that those who fear God are blessed, life is not like a mathematical equation where you put in the right numbers and you know what the outcome will be. Sometimes the righteous get what the wicked deserve and vice versa (v.14). Life can be all mixed up and God in His infinite wisdom has ordained it to be so (v.17). Since life can be so unpredictable, we should at least try to enjoy what we can (v.15).

Once again, death is the great leveler. In life under the sun, you could be righteous, good, ceremonially clean before God, offer sacrifices – and yet you will die. Or, you could be wicked, evil, ceremonially unclean before God, selfish, ungratefully, bitter and unloving – and yet both you and the good man face the same destiny – death! Every funeral is a reminder of this and it makes life seem vain.

The Lord Jesus knew the futility of death when He wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. Yet, His tears were neither helpless nor powerless. He said to the grieving Martha, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* (John 11:25-26) He then spoke and Lazarus returned to life, walking free from the tomb. Christ removes the vanity of death. His own resurrection as the first fruits of all who believe in Him is the assurance that God's promises are true.

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## Day 15- Ecclesiastes 9:7-18

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

<sup>8</sup> Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

<sup>9</sup> Enjoy 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. <sup>10</sup> Whatever 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> For 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.

<sup>13</sup> I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. <sup>14</sup> There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. <sup>15</sup> But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. <sup>16</sup> But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

<sup>17</sup> The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. <sup>18</sup> Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.



Despite the unpredictability of life, there is still much that God has given us in life under the sun to enjoy, such as food, drink and family. We are not to receive these with a selfish attitude that asks, “what is in it for me,” but with a spirit of gratitude to God.

Enjoy your work. It may cause worry and stress, but work is given by God and is good. Enjoy your marriage and family. Enjoy food and drink. Enjoy all good things as God’s approves (v.7). It is true, as Solomon has been saying all along that life is vain, but this will help balance it. When we understand that life is a gift from God, then it becomes sweeter.

At the heart of humanity is idolatry. The fool makes education, pleasure, wealth, food, drink, sex, family or work an idol – and in doing so he may realize that these things fail to satisfy in an eternal way. The good things of life are only to be received with gratitude as gifts from God and never turned into gods.

Yet again, though, Solomon is overcome by how unpredictable life is. Speed, strength, wisdom or intelligence are no guarantee of success. We don’t know what evil we may be caught up in (v.12). Like Joseph, wisdom may help save a city, but in the end there arose a new Pharaoh, “*who did not know Joseph* (Exodus 1:8).” Wisdom is good, but it may not be appreciated by others.

Nonetheless, Solomon teaches us to seek out the quiet voice of wisdom. It speaks softly and though it is nearly drowned out by the loud shouts of fools, it is there to be heard (v.17). God will ensure that in every generation His wisdom will never die out – even though many will despise it.

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## Day 16- Ecclesiastes 10:1-11

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**10** Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench;  
so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

<sup>2</sup> A wise man's heart inclines him to the right,  
but a fool's heart to the left.

<sup>3</sup> Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense,  
and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

<sup>4</sup> If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your  
place,  
for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.

<sup>5</sup> There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an  
error proceeding from the ruler: <sup>6</sup> folly is set in many high  
places, and the rich sit in a low place. <sup>7</sup> I have seen slaves on  
horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

<sup>8</sup> He who digs a pit will fall into it,  
and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

<sup>9</sup> He who quarries stones is hurt by them,  
and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

<sup>10</sup> If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge,  
he must use more strength,  
but wisdom helps one to succeed.

<sup>11</sup> If the serpent bites before it is charmed,  
there is no advantage to the charmer.

Like two pathways cutting the landscape in opposite directions, so Solomon describes the way of the wise in contrast to the way of the fool (v.2); one goes to the right and the other to the left. Yet, if wisdom and folly were weighed, their weight would *not* be equal. Folly outweighs wisdom (v.1)! A little foolishness, such as a hurtful word, can be very destructive.

A leopard can't change it's spots – so too, a fool can't change his behavior. The fool simply lives out what is in his

head and heart. Even doing the simplest of tasks, such as walking on the road, his foolishness is seen by all (v.3).

In contrast, the wise person is calm. They don't catastrophise or fall to apart when things go wrong, but keeping their wits about them, they keep doing their job (v.4).

We don't always get what we deserve in life; whether good or bad (v.5-6). Nonetheless, a fool is more likely to cause themselves harm by their foolishness. They will dig a pit and fall into it, be bitten by a snake behind a wall, hurt by stones they are quarrying or logs they are splitting.

Wisdom understands life and whilst it is no guarantee of success, wisdom does generally help a person to succeed (v.10). James teaches us always to submit ourselves to God's sovereign will;

*"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."*

- James 4:13-17

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## Day 17- Ecclesiastes 10:12-20

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- <sup>12</sup> The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor,  
but the lips of a fool consume him.
- <sup>13</sup> The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness,  
and the end of his talk is evil madness.
- <sup>14</sup> A fool multiplies words,  
though no man knows what is to be,  
and who can tell him what will be after him?
- <sup>15</sup> The toil of a fool wearies him,  
for he does not know the way to the city.
- <sup>16</sup> Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child,  
and your princes feast in the morning!
- <sup>17</sup> Happy 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!
- <sup>18</sup> Through sloth the roof sinks in,  
and through indolence the house leaks.
- <sup>19</sup> Bread is made for laughter,  
and wine gladdens life,  
and money answers everything.
- <sup>20</sup> Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king,  
nor in your bedroom curse the rich,  
for a bird of the air will carry your voice,  
or some winged creature tell the matter.

This passage is full of wisdom for right living. Solomon begins with what we say. It is our words that reveal what is within us (v.12-13), as Jesus said, *"what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person"* (Matthew 15:18). The fool loves to hear himself talk - and as he talks on and on he moves further and further from the truth (v.13). It is better to keep your mouth shut.

There is something tiring or wearisome about a fool. Even finding his way to a city is a problem for him. In addition, a fool is irresponsible. He has not learned to redeem the time that God has given him, and so he feasts instead of doing his duty (v.16).

The fool is lazy, so much so, that he will not even repair his house (v.18). And the fool is a gossip. With no restraint over his tongue, let alone his thoughts, he is bound for trouble with those he slanders.

In contrast to the fool, those who are wise speak graciously (v.12). They are always ready with a kind word, or a simple word of encouragement. Knowing the grace of our Lord, they prefer gentleness to slander. Proverbs 15:4 says, *"a gentle tongue is a tree of life."* They are slow to anger and use their words to heal rather than to hurt. Those who are wise fulfill their obligations and are a blessing to their people (v.17).

Many of the ideas of this passage are echoed in Paul's words to the Christians in Colossae – and this becomes our prayer;

*"Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."*

- Colossians 4:5-6

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## Day 18- Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

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- 11** Cast your bread upon the waters,  
for you will find it after many days.
- <sup>2</sup> Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,  
for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.
- <sup>3</sup> 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.
- <sup>4</sup> He who observes the wind will not sow,  
and he who regards the clouds will not reap.
- <sup>5</sup> 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.
- <sup>6</sup> 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.
- <sup>7</sup> Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.
- <sup>8</sup> 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.
- <sup>9</sup> 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.
- <sup>10</sup> Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from  
your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

Solomon is drawing his book to a close. Again, he is struck by the unpredictability of life. We don't know what disaster may await us (v.2). Nor do we know if prosperity will

meet us (v.6). Just as there is something mysterious in how God forms a child in the womb, so there is something mysterious about God's work in the world (v.5). Nonetheless, life's unpredictability should cause us to be conscientious and generous with what we have. A person who is over-cautious with life will achieve little. The unpredictability of the weather will hold them back (v.4). Instead, we are to "cast (v.1)," "give (v.2)," "sow (v.6)," "not withhold (v.6)" and "rejoice (v.9)." Proverbs 14:21 tells us, *"whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor."*

Solomon rejoices in life! There is a sweetness to life and he addresses both the elderly and the young, telling them to rejoice. But he also warns us that difficulty and death also await us (v.8). And beyond that is God's judgment (v.9). Wisdom lives in light of eternity and the boundaries that God has given us. The wise person will, *"flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:22)."*

God's future judgment looms over us all and sets what we do in the present into a new light. When Paul spoke to the philosophers of his day at Mars Hill he told them that God has, *"fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31)."* Christ's resurrection gives meaning and purpose to life and is the assurance that there is a judgment beyond the grave.

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## Day 19- Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

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**12** 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”;<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> 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—<sup>5</sup> 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—<sup>6</sup> 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,<sup>7</sup> and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.<sup>8</sup> Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

Solomon has searched down every path to find wisdom and purpose to life. One path remains. It is the path that leads to God. Seek God in your youth, because nothing will prepare you for life like knowing, loving and obeying God (v.1). Felix, being overcome with fear, let go of the opportunity to hear more of Christ and salvation (Acts 24:25). Solomon is saying to us, “grasp hold of God now, whilst you can!”

With old age everything grows darker (v.2). Many of life’s pleasures are lost. Though you were once strong, if you live long enough, one day you will be bent over (v.3). There is a



vulnerability that comes with old age – and a fear (v.5). Things that were once beautiful or useful fall into disrepair (v.6).

The fool thinks he will seek after God later in life. He may think that obeying God now would rob him of joy in this life. He thinks God is unaware of the shallowness of his thinking. Yet nothing will prepare you for dealing with the disappointments of life and the sense of meaninglessness, as well as the joys of life, like knowing God. Life without God lacks purpose – or worse still, we seek a wrong purpose. If God is our Creator, then it makes sense that work, family, wealth, pleasure – indeed every part of our lives – should be subject to His Lordship. That is true freedom!

To remember God means to fear, honour and obey Him in every situation. It is learning to pray, *“Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name... Your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10).”* Remembering God means worshipping Him and treasuring Him as Saviour;

*“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*

- Ephesians 2:12-13

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## Day 20- Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

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<sup>9</sup> Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. <sup>10</sup> The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

<sup>11</sup> The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. <sup>12</sup> My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

<sup>13</sup> The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. <sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

In this closing passage of Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us to listen well for his wisdom is true and delightful (v.9-10). Far from despairing of ever finding meaning and truth in life, Solomon says God is the source of all wisdom. If you desire to learn how to live, then begin by knowing that all true wisdom finds its source in God. He is the one Shepherd who guides us like a shepherd, ensuring that his sheep are not lost. His Shepherd's goads may be gentle, or they may jolt and hurt, but they are for the good of us, His sheep.

Many people think that God is obliged to them; obliged to prove Himself to them or to forgive them. But Solomon asks us, "What obligations to we have to God?" His answer – and command - is that we are to fear and obey God.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). This will mean swimming against the tide of culture and our own self-righteousness. The rich, young man did not

fear God and thought he was good enough for heaven on his own (Matthew 19:20–22).

Fear of God is not a servile fear, but a trusting fear; like the healthy fear that a child should have for his parent. Why should God be feared? Because He is just and He will judge all things. Jesus said, *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:36)."*

The first act of obedience to God is repentance and faith – to hate our sin and turn from it, to trust in Christ wholly for salvation and to take God at His Word. Solomon searched for wisdom, satisfaction and meaning in life. He found it in God. Jesus Christ satisfies our yearning and quenches our thirst for life. He said;

*"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*

- John 6:35

*O God, You are good and all your ways are good. You have led us in Your ways of wisdom.*

*You have led us see that life is meaningless, unpredictable and elusive – like the morning mist.*

*But You have also led us to see that You have created us to know and love You, and only You, O God, can satisfy in the joys and sorrows of life.*

*Let us drink from the living waters that Christ offers.*

*Praise be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forever three, forever one.*

*In Jesus' Name. Amen.*