



ecclesiastes

GROUP LEADER GUIDE

overview of ecclesiastes

The Book of Ecclesiastes gives us a transparent and honest look at life in a fallen world. It doesn't sugarcoat anything, and it doesn't pretend life is always neat, simple, or easy to explain. It wrestles with the questions people actually ask when the novelty wears off, when success doesn't satisfy, when wisdom can't fix everything, and when the heart starts realizing that nothing in this world can provide ultimate purpose, fulfillment, and meaning.

This isn't a shallow book for people who just want inspirational quotes and easy answers. It pulls no punches and tells hard truths. It looks straight at many of the things most people try to find satisfaction in—things like pleasure, work, wealth, achievement, injustice, suffering, aging, and death—and exposes them as empty and meaningless, as inadequate. And it forces us to confront how fragile life really is.

And yet, this book isn't meant to discourage us. Instead, it seeks to tear down the illusion that anything "under the sun," anything temporary and fleeting, can satisfy the soul apart from God.

As we walk through this book, it's important to understand what Ecclesiastes is doing. Why does it sound so heavy at times? What does "meaningless" really mean? What does Solomon mean by life "under the sun"? And how do these words help people live wisely in a world that often feels repetitive, confusing, unfair, and broken?

Ecclesiastes forces us to confront these questions. And that's exactly why this often overlooked book is still so insanely relevant today. It meets people in the search for significance and leads them toward humility, wisdom, reverence, and a right view of God . . . the only One in whom we can find significance, meaning, and purpose.

a brief overview

Ecclesiastes is part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, alongside books like Job, Proverbs, and Song of Songs. The speaker identifies himself as "the Teacher" or Qoheleth. Most scholars agree the author is King Solomon, the son of David.

This unique, poetic book deals with the raw realities of life in a world where the righteous suffer, the wicked seem to prosper, the same grave waits for everyone, and even good gifts can become empty when they're treated like gods. When you get down to it, Ecclesiastes is actually one of the most realistic books in all of Scripture. It's a book that refuses to flatter human pride or romanticize life on earth. And above all, it makes it clear that apart from God, everything is meaningless.

why was ecclesiastes written?

Ecclesiastes was written to wake people up. It confronts the fantasy that meaning can be built out of pleasure, possessions, success, knowledge, or human control. It exposes how quickly people turn good things into ultimate things . . . and how those things always break under the weight.

It also recenters us. It teaches that joy is real, but it must be received rightly. It teaches that work has value, but it can't become identity. It assures us that pleasure itself isn't evil, but it cannot become an idol. And it reminds us that even though wisdom does matter, it's not more valuable or beneficial than God's wisdom. And at the end of the day, the fear of God becomes the anchor because everything else is too unstable to hold the soul together.

what does “meaningless” mean?

One of the most important words in Ecclesiastes is often translated as “meaningless,” though “vapor,” “breath,” or “vanity” can help capture the sense more clearly. The idea isn’t simply that nothing matters at all; it’s that life is fleeting, elusive, hard to grasp, and impossible to control.

But don’t mistake this for Ecclesiastes being nihilistic in nature. It’s actually teaching human limitation. It shows that life apart from God is frustrating, temporary, and unable to provide the ultimate meaning people keep demanding from it. The problem isn’t that God’s gifts are bad; it’s that people keep asking temporary things to provide eternal satisfaction.

That’s why the phrase “a chasing after the wind” shows up so often. It’s the image of trying to grab what can’t be held. That’s what life becomes when people build everything around what’s temporary and ignore the One who is eternal.

what does “under the sun” mean?

Another key phrase in Ecclesiastes is “under the sun.” Solomon is talking about life viewed from a purely human perspective . . . life lived as if this world is all there is.

key terms found in the ecclesiastes

As you read through this book, here are several terms and ideas that appear again and again. Repetition in Scripture is never random. It helps reveal what God wants people to notice.

- Meaningless / Vanity / Vapor
- Under the sun
- Wisdom
- Toil / Labor
- Pleasure
- Time
- Death
- Fear God
- Enjoy / Gift / Portion

These repeated ideas reveal the heartbeat of Ecclesiastes: life is fragile, temporary, and often confusing, but God’s still sovereign, and real wisdom is found in fearing Him and receiving life from His hand.

key verses found in ecclesiastes

ECCLESIASTES 1:2

“‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher.
‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’”

ECCLESIASTES 1:14

“I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

ECCLESIASTES 2:22-25

“A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?”

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

ECCLESIASTES 12:13

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”

Note: All translation references are NIV.

key themes found in ecclesiastes

THE EMPTINESS OF LIFE APART FROM GOD

Ecclesiastes shows that when people try to build life on pleasure, success, work, wealth, knowledge, or control, they always come up short. None of those things were ever meant to carry ultimate meaning, and apart from God, they’re all meaningless.

THE LIMITS OF HUMAN WISDOM

Wisdom is better than foolishness, but even wisdom has limits. Human beings cannot master life, predict everything, or fully understand the purposes of God. That doesn’t mean wisdom is worthless; it simply means it must be approached with humility.

THE REALITY OF DEATH

Ecclesiastes keeps bringing readers back to death because death destroys human pride. As the famous quote says, “Death comes for us all.” This book reminds us that no amount of money, influence, or achievement can stop the grave. And that inescapable, sobering truth is meant to draw us toward the big, eternal questions of life.

THE GOODNESS OF RECEIVING GOD’S GIFTS RIGHTLY

Ecclesiastes isn’t anti-joy. It teaches that food, work, relationships, and simple pleasures can be enjoyed, but only as gifts from God rather than as substitutes for Him.

THE FEAR OF GOD

Like Proverbs, this is where Ecclesiastes lands. After all the wrestling, all the tension and searching and frustration, Ecclesiastes points people back to the only solid foundation: the fear of the Lord.

things to look for

As you study Ecclesiastes, notice how honest the book is and perhaps use it as an opportunity to be honest about your own life. Also, pay attention to where the book leads. As much as it may seem so at times, Ecclesiastes isn't trying to leave you feeling hopeless. It's tearing down false hope so true hope can be seen clearly.

week 1

Ecclesiastes 1–2

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind . . ."

ECCLESIASTES 2:11 (NIV)

In Ecclesiastes 1 and 2, King Solomon doesn't ease into the conversation, and he doesn't pull any punches! He kicks off this book saying, "Meaningless! Meaningless. . . Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

Solomon isn't being a moody, dramatic teen here. He's being honest. He goes looking for meaning in all the places people still run to now. And one by one, he shows how empty those things become when they're asked to do what only God can do.

That's what makes this part of Ecclesiastes so powerful. It isn't cynical for the sake of being cynical, and it isn't anti-joy, anti-work, or anti-wisdom. Instead, it exposes these things as insufficient to bring satisfaction and fulfillment.

Wisdom? Meaningless. Pleasures? Meaningless. Work? Advancement? Riches? Success? All meaningless! He comes to the conclusion that apart from God, there's no meaning to life.

Now, consider the phrase "under the sun" for a minute. Solomon's talking about life from a purely human point of view—life lived as if this world is all there is, as if God isn't part of the picture, and as if meaning can be found in what can be earned, owned, experienced, or enjoyed right now.

And when life's reduced to that, even the best things begin to feel hollow. Because the truth is wisdom can't stop death, pleasure can't fill the void in our hearts, work can't create lasting significance, and achievement can't give us the identity we seek.

But Solomon doesn't leave everything there. By the end of chapter two, he shows that enjoyment isn't the problem . . . worship is. Work, food, pleasure, and good things were never meant to be gods; they were meant to be gifts!

Wisdom finds true meaning in light of knowing God. Pleasures, food, nature, art . . . these things become more vibrant and beautiful when we enjoy them in the light of knowing Him, and they cause us to give thanks to Him for making beautiful things.

Things like work, advancement, and riches find purpose and calling in Him. Our relationships, families, and marriages are all made richer and more fulfilling in the Lord, and they draw us into a deeper relationship with Him.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Psalms 90:12; Mark 8:36; Luke 12:15–21;
Colossians 3:1–4; James 4:13–14

application challenge

Choose one intentional act this week that pushes back against self-centered striving. Encourage someone who's exhausted, discouraged, or caught in the rat race. Take a meal to someone, serve without needing credit, or invite someone into an honest conversation about where real joy is actually found. Let Ecclesiastes move beyond reflection and into visible love for others.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from these chapters most related to or applied to your week?
- Why do Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 feel so honest and unsettling at the same time?
- What are some modern versions of Solomon's search for meaning through pleasure, success, knowledge, or achievement?
- Why do people keep chasing things that never truly satisfy, even when they know better?
- What does it practically look like to live "under the sun" versus living with God with eternity in view?
- How can work, enjoyment, and success become idols, and how can they instead be received rightly as gifts from God?
- What would it look like this week to slow down, reject the pressure to prove something, and live with deeper gratitude before God?

week 2

Ecclesiastes 3

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him. Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account. And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there. I said to myself, God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.' I also said to myself, As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate

of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?' So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?"

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-22 (NIV)

the tension of time

We don't struggle with time as much as we struggle with timing. There are seasons we'd extend if we could—moments of connection, clarity, or joy that feels too brief. And then there are seasons we quietly resist—the ones that feel slow, unclear, or heavy. The ones we'd fast-forward through if given the choice.

Ecclesiastes 3 meets us right there—not by fixing our timing, but by reframing our trust. "A time to be born, and a time to die . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh." These words aren't just poetic; they're deeply grounding. They remind us that life's not a random sequence of events, but a series of appointed seasons. Many of them are uncomfortable. Not all of them make sense. But none of them are outside God's awareness.

And that's where the tension begins. Because if we're honest, we don't just want God to appoint seasons—we want Him to explain them.

We want clarity in the waiting.

We want purpose in the pain.

We want resolution without the process.

But Ecclesiastes gently interrupts that demand. It tells us that God “has made everything beautiful in its time,” while also placing eternity in our hearts. We’re created with a longing for things to feel complete, settled, and understood—but we live in a space where everything isn’t revealed. That gap can feel unsettling, but it’s also intentional. It draws us into a different kind of posture—not of control, but surrender; not of full understanding, but quiet trust.

There’s a subtle shift in this chapter that’s easy to overlook. After acknowledging the mystery of time and the limits of human understanding, the writer lands on something surprisingly simple: We’re to receive life as it is. Eat. Drink. Take joy in our work—not as distraction, but as acceptance.

There’s a kind of peace that comes when we stop trying to figure everything out (and we release the need to); when we’re willing to be present in what God’s doing now, instead of constantly reaching for what’s next or resisting what is.

That doesn’t mean every season feels good. It means every season can still be held—not by our understanding, but by God’s steady hand. Even in the parts that feel unfair. Even where injustice seems to linger. Ecclesiastes doesn’t ignore that reality, it acknowledges it directly. It also reminds us that God’s justice isn’t absent, only patient, which means what feels unresolved isn’t unseen, and what feels delayed isn’t necessarily denied.

So the invitation here isn’t to rush our way out of a hard season or cling too tightly to a good one. It’s to trust that God’s not only present in the trials and the victories, but intentional in the transitions.

There’s a time for everything. Even when we don’t understand the timing of our season, we’re not forgotten by God. We’re just in a season. And somehow, whether we can see it yet or not, God’s already at work within it.

supporting scripture

Read this week’s Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Psalms 37:3-7, 62:5-8, 40:1-3

application challenge

Look for someone to serve. Respond to a friend, a loved one, or even a stranger’s season—most people give what they want, not what the moment requires.

If it’s time to mourn, be present, not just positive. If it’s time to build, offer a helping hand, not just encouraging words. If it’s time to rejoice, celebrate without quietly comparing. If it’s time to be silent, don’t try to fill the space with noise, practice being comfortable in silence.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from this chapter most related to or applied to your week?
- Why do you think we struggle more with timing than with circumstances themselves?
- Which part of the “a time for everything” section challenges you the most and why?
- How can you balance trusting God’s timing without becoming passive or disengaged?
- What does it practically look like to “enjoy the moment” in a difficult season?
- How can you encourage someone who feels stuck in a season they don’t understand?

week 3

Ecclesiastes 4

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

“Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves. Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. ‘For whom am I toiling,’ he asked, ‘and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?’ This too is meaningless—a miserable business! Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. 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. Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king’s successor. There was no end

to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

ECCLESIASTES 4:1-16 (NIV)

For two years now, I’ve had a post-it note right above my computer on my desk. Each time I sit at my desk, I look up at my note and see these two questions: “What’s your life purpose? What’s your life’s attitude?” I feel like those questions get at the heart behind the message of Ecclesiastes. What are you really living for?

There’s a prescriptive way of living that’s instilled in us from a young age and it’s interwoven into how our culture operates. It’s called “the winner’s script” and goes something like this: You’re what you achieve. Your value comes from being ahead, admired, significant, desired, secure, powerful, or impressive. You must keep performing, comparing, striving, curating, and consuming.

Ecclesiastes says living like that isn’t only meaningless, but “a miserable business.” Pastor Jon Tyson says, “The winner’s script demands that we raise ourselves up out of nothing and make ourselves into something to which the world aspires and that it envies.” And Ecclesiastes 4 calls that “chasing after the wind.” According to Ecclesiastes, chasing the winner’s script is all vanity.

This is what Ecclesiastes 4 is all about: Life’s not about our status, our works, our retirement accounts, or even our status of employment. There’s another way to live. Tim Keller defines idolatry as “treating a good thing as an ultimate thing—trusting in anything besides God for your happiness, meaning, significance, or security.” There are so many good things in life, but when we make those things ultimate things and put them on the throne of our heart, we begin chasing the wind instead of chasing the one true God.

If you've found yourself chasing the winner's script and you're emotionally and spiritually exhausted, there's still hope. There's a source of power and strength, a source of identity and purpose that doesn't depend on your status, your failures, or even your accomplishments. The gospel of Jesus tells us that even for all the times we've been faithless or doubting, He remains faithful.

And if you feel like you've been chasing the wind in life, I believe the gospel is actually the very thing your heart has been looking for this whole time. All the times you've been wanting to build financial security . . . that's your heart longing for the provision only God provides. All the times you've put your identity and value in finding love and acceptance . . . that's your heart longing for the true love and acceptance only found in the gospel. St. Augustine wisely said, "You have made us for yourself O Lord and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Romans 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 1 John 5:21

application challenge

What area(s) of your life do you find yourself living under the winner's script? Is there a specific area you need to confess to the Lord and bring to light?

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from this chapter most related to or applied to your week?
- Where do you feel the pressure to prove that your life matters?
- In what area of your life are you most tempted to believe that you are what you achieve?
- When you compare yourself to others, what does that reveal about what your heart's really seeking?
- Have you built your life in a way that's making you successful on the outside but lonely on the inside?
- What might it look like for you to stop chasing the wind and start receiving your identity from God instead?

week 4

Ecclesiastes 5

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, ‘My vow was a mistake.’ Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God. If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields. Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them? The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep. I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit. Everyone comes naked from their mother’s

womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands. This too is a grievous evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind? All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger. This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.”

ECCLESIASTES 5:1-20 (NIV)

If I can be honest with you, I don't rest very well. I tend to move on from thing to thing, from one project to another. Is that you, too? Does life just feel out of control and fast paced for you, too? I think there's a unique invitation from the Lord in our passage, an invitation to press pause and rest in God's provision.

When we read this passage, it could be seen like the author is saying, "Work is hard, so make sure you enjoy your paycheck." But I think he's saying something deeper. The message of Ecclesiastes 5 is this: Because all of life is out of our control, when God provides periods of rest, when He provides care for our souls, we ought to receive that as a gift of mercy rather than something we've earned. This passage isn't only about enjoying the fruit of our labor, but more about receiving the fruit of our labor as a gift from a gracious God. We receive those gifts with a heart of gratitude!

We cannot control life and we cannot secure ourselves with wealth. The author even reminds us that no matter what, we cannot outrun death. So when we experience a deep Sabbath rest, or when we open up our fridge and see yesterday's leftovers, or even when we sit with our friends and have a good laugh, we receive all these things as a mercy from God.

There's an invitation from the Lord for us to end our day with a posture of receiving. We receive ordinary gifts from God, gifts such as an evening dinner with friends, a family meal around the table, a small group gathering, or a family movie night. Ecclesiastes 5 teaches us to receive our daily portion, the ordinary gifts God places in front of us today, instead of constantly grasping for the life we wish we had tomorrow. It invites us to stop striving to master life and start receiving life as gift.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Psalms 62:5-8; 1 Corinthians 4:7; James 1:17

application challenge

At the end of each day this week, name three ordinary gifts from God—a meal, a conversation, a moment of laughter, a quiet drive home, leftovers in the fridge—and thank Him for them. Learn to take on a posture of receiving instead of striving.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from this chapter most related to or applied to your week?
- Why is it so hard for you to slow down and simply receive life as a gift from God? What do you think that reveals about your heart?
- Where are you most tempted to look for security right now: money, productivity, control, recognition, or something else? Why does that thing feel so powerful?
- Have you ever noticed that even when life gives you something good, your heart quickly moves on to the next thing? What does that say about the human condition?
- What ordinary gifts from God are you most likely to rush past, dismiss, or take for granted? Why do you think we struggle to enjoy what's right in front of us?
- Do you think your life is marked more by receiving or grasping? More by gratitude or restlessness? What has shaped that posture in you?

week 5

Ecclesiastes 6

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity . . . I say that a stillborn child is better off than he."

ECCLESIASTES 6:3 (NIV)

"Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied. What advantage have the wise over fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Whatever exists has already been named, and what humanity is has been known; no one can contend with someone who is stronger. The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?"

ECCLESIASTES 6:7-11 (NIV)

In Ecclesiastes 6, Solomon wrestles with a sobering reality: a life filled with riches, wealth, and honor can still feel empty if there's no ability to enjoy it. He describes someone who appears outwardly blessed—long life, large family, financial success—yet internally lacks satisfaction. It's a sharp reminder that having isn't the same as experiencing.

This is where the weight of the chapter lands. The issue isn't simply what someone possesses, but whether they're able to receive and enjoy it as a gift from God. Without that, even a "full" life can feel hollow. Solomon goes as far as to say that a life never truly enjoyed is worse than one never lived at all. It's intentionally jarring, meant to wake us up to how easily we can spend our lives chasing what we never actually experience.

He then turns the focus toward the future—something we can't control. All the work, effort, and accumulation we spend our lives building comes with a question mark: What happens to it after we're gone? The honest answer is, we don't know. That uncertainty exposes how fragile it is to build our identity and hope on what we produce or possess. If everything we work for can be handed off, mishandled, or forgotten, then it can't ultimately carry the weight we place on it.

Verse seven captures the ongoing tension:

"Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied." Life can become an endless cycle of striving and consuming, but never arriving. Whether someone is wise or foolish, rich or poor, the same limitation remains: We don't control satisfaction, and we don't fully understand what's best for us.

The movement of this chapter is clear: A life centered on accumulation without God leads to emptiness, and a life built only on what we produce is uncertain at best. True contentment is found not in what we gain, but in trusting God with what we have—and learning to receive even simple things as gifts from Him.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

1 Timothy 6:6-10; Luke 12:15; Psalm 39:4-6;
James 4:13-15

application challenge

Live open handed this week. Instead of tightening your grip on what you're building or accumulating, intentionally share it. Give your time, resources, or encouragement to someone else as a reminder that what you have isn't meant to be held tightly, but received and passed on.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from this chapter most related to or applied to your week?
- What part of this chapter feels most challenging or uncomfortable to you?
- Have you ever experienced a season where you had a lot but struggled to enjoy it?
- How does the uncertainty of the future change the way you view your work or goals?
- What does it look like to receive enjoyment as a gift from God in everyday life?
- Where are you tempted to place your identity in what you build or achieve?
- How can you encourage each other to live with greater trust and contentment this week?

week 6

Ecclesiastes 7–8

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

“Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.”

ECCLESIASTES 7:13–14 (NIV)

In Ecclesiastes 7–8, the writer shifts from broad observations about meaning into practical wisdom for how to live in a world that doesn't always make sense. These chapters read more like a collection of reflections than a single argument, but they're tied together by a common thread: Wisdom isn't about controlling life; it's about navigating it with humility, reverence, and trust in God.

Chapter 7 challenges our assumptions about what is “good.” It says things like sorrow can be better than laughter, and a good name is better than wealth. At first glance, that feels backward. But the writer is pointing out that hardship often produces depth, character, and clarity in ways comfort cannot. Wisdom pays attention to what lasts, not just what feels good in the moment.

There's also a strong warning against extremes: “Do not be overrighteous. . . . Do not be overwicked” (Ecclesiastes 7:16–18 NIV). This isn't permission to sin—it's a correction to the belief that we can earn control over life through our own righteousness. Trying to manage outcomes by being “perfect” is just as misguided as ignoring God altogether. Wisdom walks humbly, aware of both sin and grace.

Chapter 8 builds on this by focusing on authority, justice, and the limits of human understanding. Wisdom, we're told, “brightens a person's face (Ecclesiastes 8:1 NIV)”—it changes how we carry ourselves because it reshapes how we see reality. One expression of that wisdom is obedience. We honor authority not just for its own sake, but ultimately as an act of reverence toward God (Romans 13). Even when leadership is imperfect, our posture reflects who we trust.

At the same time, the writer is realistic. Justice doesn't always play out the way we expect. The righteous don't always receive good, and the wicked don't always face consequences right away. That tension can feel unsettling. But instead of trying to solve it, the writer points us to our limits: We cannot control the future, predict outcomes, or fully understand God's ways.

So, what does wisdom look like in light of that? It looks like fearing God—living with reverence and trust—even when life feels unresolved. It looks like continuing to pursue what's right (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:17), while also releasing the need to figure everything out. And it looks like enjoying life as a gift—receiving simple things like food, relationships, and daily work with gratitude instead of striving endlessly for more.

The overall movement is clear: Wisdom isn't found in having all the answers. It's found in trusting God within the mystery, living faithfully, and receiving life as it comes.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Romans 13:1–5; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:6–7; James 1:5

application challenge

Choose one area this week where you've been striving for control (e.g., your future, your work, or a relationship) and intentionally release it to God. Then, redirect that energy outward (e.g., serve someone, share a meal, or invest time in a relationship). Practice enjoying what God has already placed in front of you.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from these chapters most related to or applied to your week?
- What part of Ecclesiastes 7–8 feels most challenging or counterintuitive to you?
- Where do you find yourself trying to control outcomes instead of trusting God?
- How do you personally wrestle with the reality that justice doesn't always seem immediate?
- What does it look like to fear God in everyday decisions?
- How can you grow in enjoying life as a gift instead of striving for more?
- What's one step you can take this week to live with greater humility and trust?

week 7

Ecclesiastes 9–11

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

“So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. . . . Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”

ECCLESIASTES 9:1–6, 10 (NIV)

“As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Even as fools walk along the road, they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are. If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest. There

is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler. Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones.”

ECCLESIASTES 10:1–6 (NIV)

“As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. . . . Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.”

ECCLESIASTES 11:5, 7–8 (NIV)

As we near the end of Ecclesiastes, the tension present throughout the book suddenly becomes the very place where eternal wisdom, joy, and life can be found. Let’s look at some key themes in Ecclesiastes 9–11.

LIVE IN LIGHT OF YOUR END

In Ecclesiastes 9:3, Solomon says, “The same destiny overtakes all.” Everyone, regardless of how they live their life, has an expiration date. So how can everyone who is living have hope (vs. 4) if their end is death? Solomon’s writing about those who only view life “under the sun.” These people might say, “You only live once,” as an excuse to live carelessly or selfishly. Yet, there’s a deeper truth hidden here. If you live aware of your end, then you can make your life worthwhile. Anyone who lives with an eternal perspective has hope to live well and purposefully.

WORK HARD AS UNTO GOD

Solomon writes that whatever your hand finds to do, you should do it with all your might while you can. Again, from an earthly perspective, it seems like everything that matters begins and ends within your life here. Yet there's an element of wisdom in this. Solomon doesn't want people to be consumed or defined by their work. The key to working with diligence and integrity is found in the first verse of chapter nine, "that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands." When you view your life and your work as being in God's hands, you can pursue them without making idols out of them and trusting that the outcome is in God's hands.

WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS ARE NOTICEABLE

The wise have gracious speech, while the fools get tired out and multiply madness. Yet, it's not a guarantee that the wise are entrusted with more power or influence. Oftentimes, the fools are. They're lazy and value parties, alcohol, and money. Still, jealousy and gossip don't get you anywhere either. While this chapter ends focusing on the negative impacts of foolish leadership, it leaves you hungry for wisdom, righteousness, and a life with God.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF LIFE

The last half of Ecclesiastes 11 might seem disheartening if you don't consider yourself to be "young" anymore. That's not the real point, though! Solomon wants the reader to know that growing up and growing old is a guarantee. Even youth and vigor will not last. While there's value in enjoying one's youth, there's also a responsibility before God as Judge. Regardless of your age, living in light of eternity means making the most of every moment for the glory of God!

Therefore, live wisely and enjoy life with God, because a life apart from Him is both unwise and unenjoyable in light of eternity and the very intimacy we were created to have with Him.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Ecclesiastes 9-11 (entirely); James 3:13-17;
1 Timothy 6:17; Colossians 3:23-24;
1 Corinthians 10:31

application challenge

Choose one intentional act of service this week where you can "give your full effort" for someone else. This could look like:

- encouraging or checking in on someone who might be overlooked
- helping a coworker, classmate, or neighbor without being asked
- volunteering your time or skills in a small but meaningful way

As you do it, pay attention to your attitude, words, and effort to make sure they reflect wisdom, care, and love.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from these chapters most related to or applied to your week?
- How does believing your life is “in God’s hands” change the way you respond to life’s uncertainty and apparent unfairness?
- Where in your life are you tempted to see things as meaningless, and how does living “for God’s glory” reshape that perspective?
- What would it practically look like for you to approach your daily responsibilities as worship rather than obligation?
- How can you enjoy your life (work, rest, possessions) without letting those things become your source of identity or security?
- When you examine your speech, decisions, and reactions, which kind of wisdom (earthly or godly) is most evident in your life right now?
- If you truly lived with both your mortality and eternity in mind, what specific changes would you make in how you spend your time, energy, and relationships?

week 8

Ecclesiastes 12

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless!’ Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

ECCLESIASTES 12:8–14 (NIV)

Ecclesiastes may have felt annoyingly repetitive, refreshingly honest, or even surprisingly comforting in its questions about life’s meaning. We must remember it’s part of God’s inspired Word.

Ecclesiastes 12 opens with various artistic metaphors for the rhythms of life that are all around us. Your zest for life will fade just as everything else grows weary. Death is certain, and dust will return to dust. When this life is all you set your mind on, it’s all meaningless. Even God’s earthly gifts are temporary. The greater assurance is that this frustration will also one day cease. The eternal gifts are only found in relationship with and obedience to God, the Good Shepherd.

the bottom line is this

Though Solomon and the Teacher seem skeptical at times, God’s real to them. God’s revealed will is enough for us to know how to fulfill His purposes and live in communion with Him. Solomon sums it up in Ecclesiastes 12:13b (NIV): “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.” Does he really mean we were made to simply fear and obey? Here’s what these ideas really mean:

- To fear God is to not let the fear of anything else control you. To fear God is to have a profound awareness of His holiness and His unmerited grace towards imperfect and sinful people. To fear God is to be completely captivated by a life **with** Him because a life **apart** from Him is what terrifies you most.
- To keep God’s commandments is to trust that God created them for **our good**. They exist to bring us into a closer relationship with Him by making us aware of our shortcomings and pointing us to the need for a Savior. As Jesus said Himself, the greatest commands are to love God with our entire being and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

This is what we were made for!

supporting scripture

Read this week’s Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Ecclesiastes 12 (entirely); 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Matthew 10:27–31; Hebrews 12:28–29; Deuteronomy 10:12–13

application challenge

This week, intentionally invest in something that has eternal value. Choose one action—encourage someone in their faith, serve someone in need, or share truth with a friend—and do it even if the outcome is uncertain. Then, reflect on how walking in the simple purpose of loving God and loving others changes your heart and mind.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

- Which piece of wisdom from these chapters most related to or applied to your week?
- What part of Ecclesiastes 12 do you find most encouraging—or most uncomfortable—and why?
- How can you practically “enjoy life” without falling into a mindset that ignores eternity?
- What are some modern examples of things people chase that ultimately prove to be “meaningless”?
- How would you explain “fearing God” to someone who thinks it only means being afraid?
- In what ways do God’s commandments actually lead to freedom rather than restriction?