



LESSON

2

CHASING THE WIND

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

1. SERMON & JOURNALING NOTES

Write down truths that jump out at you during the sermon or in your journaling. Spend time each day journaling through this passage in preparation for your small group discussion. Circle keywords. Underline key phrases. Put an "!" by words or phrases that are convicting or challenging. Put a "?" mark by words or phrases that you have questions about.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

[12] I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

[13] And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.

[14] I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

[15] What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

[16] I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."

[17] 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.

[18] For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

2. OPENING QUESTION

"What is one thing that, if you could completely figure it out in your life, would significantly change your life?"

3. BIG IDEA

Worldly wisdom cannot not cure this broken world.

4. SCRIPTURE MEMORY

What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

Ecclesiastes 1:15

5. BIBLE CONVERSATION

The book of Ecclesiastes is a commentary on the world we live in, exposing the vanity of trying to find meaning and purpose in created things rather than in our Creator. It reveals this truth with brutal clarity: everything is ultimately meaningless without Jesus.

READ: Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 (Take a moment to journal through this text before discussing it.)

The Great Experiment

Ecclesiastes opens with a question many of us are afraid to ask out loud: *Is this all there is?* We looked at this last week in verses 1-11, and we came to the conclusion that in every one of us there is an ache in our hearts that desperately needs to be filled. We are all on a quest to fill the emptiness and meaninglessness we feel inside. In one way or another, we are all asking the same question: *Is this all there is?* Ecclesiastes comes to a sobering conclusion—everything is never enough. Everything is ultimately meaningless without Jesus.

Last lesson, we also looked at two phrases that are repeated throughout this book. The first is "*vanity of vanities*." In Hebrew writing, it was customary to put the most important point up front. The Preacher follows this pattern, immediately piquing our curiosity: How can he say that everything is vanity?¹

The second phrase is "under the sun." The Preacher points out in verse 3 that his survey of life "under the sun" is conducted not from God's vantage point, but from man's. The Preacher will show us that in any framework that fails to account for God's existence, everything under the sun—from birth to death—is meaningless. That's heavy stuff. I'm glad you came back for more. T. S. Eliot once remarked, "Humankind cannot bear very much reality."² What we find

¹ Begg, Alistair. Ecclesiastes: Chasing the Wind (p. 16). (Function). Kindle Edition.

² ibid

throughout Ecclesiastes, however, is a heavy dose of just that: reality. Ecclesiastes lovingly forces us to evaluate our lives. How can life under the sun be vanity—a meaningless vapor?

Now, in verses 12–18, the Preacher tells us how seriously he took that question. This is not armchair philosophy. This is a lived experiment. Solomon says, in effect, “I tried to figure life out.” Have you ever found yourself facing problems and challenges in your life and feeling at a loss for answers? He pursued wisdom and came to three conclusions.

A. Human Wisdom is Limited (v. 12-14)

First, Solomon exposes the limits of human wisdom. He tells us who he is and what he did: “*I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.*” This matters. Solomon isn’t bitter because life didn’t work out. He isn’t disappointed because he lacked opportunity. He is the most qualified human being to evaluate life “under the sun.”

If meaning could be found by thinking hard enough, learning enough, or knowing enough, Solomon would have found it. And yet his conclusion surprises us: “*I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven*” (v. 13a). And what does he discover? “*It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with*” (v. 13b).

That word *unhappy* can also be translated *heavy*, *burdensome*, or *grievous*. In other words, the more Solomon understands the world, the heavier the world feels.

This is the autobiography of a man with unlimited resources, unmatched intelligence, and unrestricted access. He conducted a grand experiment—searching out all the wisdom in the world to find answers. And still, something was deeply wrong.

Wisdom was supposed to clarify life—but instead it complicated it. Understanding was supposed to bring peace—but instead it brought pressure. We assume that if we gain more information, our lives will be better. That belief fueled the Enlightenment: if we were just more educated, the world would become a better place.

Now, I’m not against education. I have an advanced degree and read about a book a week. But here’s what I’ve observed: with all the technological innovations that have given us unlimited access to information, we haven’t become wiser—we’ve simply become smarter at killing one another.

This is deeply relevant for us. We live in the information age. We assume that if we just read more, research more, understand ourselves more, or diagnose the problem more, then life will finally make sense. That’s the humanist conclusion. But Solomon is saying this: you can understand everything and still be crushed by it. It’s chasing after the wind.

Have you ever seen someone chasing the wind—literally? No. Why not? Because it’s futile. If we walked out into the parking lot and saw someone running around with a net, swiping back

and forth through the air, and we asked, "What are you doing?"—and he replied, "I'm chasing the wind"—we'd be convinced he was certifiably crazy.

And yet, far too many of us spend our lives chasing things that are just as meaningless. Solomon is saying that all pursuits of wisdom "under the sun" are futile. Why? He gives us the answer in the next verse.

Take a moment to answer the following questions:

- *Have you ever experienced a moment when understanding a problem more deeply actually increased your anxiety or weariness rather than bringing peace? What did that reveal about what you were trusting to save you?*
- *Solomon calls wisdom "under the sun" a chasing after the wind. What are some modern versions of this chase in our information-saturated world, and how might we be tempted to confuse being informed with being transformed?*

B. Human Wisdom Cannot Fix Our Broken World (v. 15)

Secondly, the Preacher gives us a glimpse into our own souls to help us answer the question, "*Why do we chase after the wind?*" The answer is that something is broken deep within us, and we can't fix it on our own. He is saying that something is missing deep inside, and no matter how hard we try, we cannot find it—no matter what we pursue.

Solomon then makes one of the most sobering statements in all of Scripture: "*What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted*" (v. 15).

Regardless of what you believe about God, Jesus, or the Bible, what you cannot deny is that we are all keenly aware of this "crookedness" in the world. We all sense that something is missing, but it cannot be accounted for. And so, like Solomon, we search for meaning and purpose through the pursuit of wisdom under the sun.

This is the moment when wisdom hits a wall. Solomon looks at injustice, suffering, death, oppression, and evil—and realizes, *I can see the problem clearly, but I can't fix it*. The world is not just confusing—it's crooked. And no amount of human insight can straighten what sin has bent.

This is the frustration many of us feel: you see what's wrong in your marriage—but you can't fix it. You see what's broken in your family—but you can't undo it. You see the patterns in your

heart—but you can't change them. Wisdom shows you the cracks—but gives you no power to heal them.

Take a moment to answer the following questions:

- *Where do you most feel the “crookedness” Solomon describes—**in your relationships, your inner life, or the world around you? How have you tried to straighten it on your own?*
- *Have you ever had a moment when greater insight or wisdom helped you see a problem clearly—but left you feeling more frustrated or powerless? What was that experience like?*

C. Human Wisdom Brings Us Big Burdens (vv. 16-18)

Thirdly, Solomon, in his pursuit of wisdom, concludes that human wisdom brings heavy burdens. Solomon doubles down on his experiment in pursuing wisdom. He writes, “I said in my heart, ‘I have acquired great wisdom...’” And then comes the conclusion: “For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

At first, it may seem like he is bragging about who he is and all that he has accomplished—but he isn't. He is pleading with us to listen to him, to learn from him. He is saying that he has had more wealth, power, wisdom, and women than any of us could ever dream of, and yet, in all of it, there is emptiness. He shows us that knowing more comes with greater burdens—and deeper sorrow.

I find myself watching the news or scrolling on X to see what's going on in the world, and I can waste a whole hour or more scrolling—only to feel worse than when I picked up my phone. The more I know, the more depressed I feel.

This doesn't mean ignorance is bliss. It means knowledge is a cruel savior. The more you know, the more injustice you see, the more brokenness you notice, and the more powerless you feel. Wisdom can diagnose the disease—but it cannot cure it. And that is devastating if wisdom is your savior, the place where you look for hope.

Take a moment to answer the following questions:

- *Where do you most often look for “wisdom” or information (news, social media, podcasts, education), and how does it tend to affect your heart—peace, anxiety, hope, or despair? Why do you think more knowledge so often leaves us feeling heavier rather than freer?*

- Solomon says that increased wisdom leads to increased sorrow—not because wisdom is bad, but because it cannot save. Have you ever experienced wisdom diagnosing a problem in your life without giving you the power to change it? What did that feel like?

The Good News of Ecclesiastes

At this point, Ecclesiastes feels bleak—but it's actually Good News. Solomon is mercifully tearing down false hopes before they ruin us. The preacher gives us a glimpse into our own souls to help us answer the question, “why we chase after the wind.” The answer is that something is broken deep within and we can’t fix it on our own. He is saying something is missing deep within and we can’t find it no matter how hard we try. No matter what we try. He is not saying this to depress us. He is showing us why we are depressed. He is telling us: Wisdom won’t save you. Intelligence won’t heal you. Insight won’t redeem you. All with all the information that it avoids us can not renew that which has been shattered. And that prepares us for the gospel. Because centuries later, Jesus entered this crooked world.

Where Solomon said: “What is crooked cannot be made straight,” Jesus said: “I am making all things new.” Jesus didn’t just understand the brokenness of the world—He entered it. He took on: our confusion, our sorrow, our weariness, and our futility. On the cross, Jesus bore the full weight of life under the sun—so that we could live above it. Solomon says: “Much wisdom brings sorrow.” The gospel says: Grace brings rest—the rest we all long for.

Trusting is better than Knowing

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 teaches us something crucial: The meaning of life is not discovered by understanding everything—it is received by trusting Someone. Many of you will bristle at this statement. You want to know not trust. We think knowing is better than trusting. We tend to believe that *knowing* will save us. If we can just understand more, explain more, connect more dots—then we’ll finally feel secure. But Scripture consistently shows us that clarity is not the cure for the human condition. Trust is. Knowing seeks control. Trust embraces dependence. Knowing says, “If I can see the whole picture, I can manage my life.” Trust says, “Even when I can’t see the picture, God is still faithful.”

From the very beginning, humanity’s great temptation was not immorality but autonomy through knowledge. In the garden, the serpent didn’t promise pleasure—he promised insight: “You will be like God, knowing...” The problem wasn’t information; it was misplaced trust. We reached for knowledge instead of resting in God.

Ecclesiastes exposes this same lie. Solomon knew more than anyone. He didn’t dabble in wisdom—he mastered it. And yet his conclusion is devastating: “In much wisdom is much vexation.” Why? Because knowledge expands awareness but not capacity. The more you know, the more brokenness you see—and the more powerless you feel to fix it.

Knowing can diagnose the disease. Only trust can carry you through it. That's why God rarely gives us full explanations—but constantly calls us to faith. He does not say, "*Understand me fully*," but "*Trust me completely*." He does not promise answers; He promises His presence. Trusting is better than knowing because knowing inflates the illusion of control, while trust forms the posture of worship.

Trust says:

- God is good even when life is confusing.
- God is sovereign even when outcomes feel random.
- God is near even when He feels silent.

This is ultimately where wisdom must land—not in mastery, but in surrender. And this is where Jesus redefines wisdom altogether. He doesn't say, "*Come to me, all who understand*." He says, "*Come to me, all who are weary*." Not those who have figured life out—but those who have finally stopped pretending they can. To trust God is not to abandon thinking—it is to place thinking in its proper place.

Because at the end of the day:

- Knowing cannot save you.
- Knowing cannot carry you.
- Knowing cannot resurrect you.

But trusting Christ can. Trusting is better than knowing—because faith doesn't rest in answers. It rests in a Savior.

Wisdom is a good gift, but it is a terrible savior. Jesus is not just wiser than Solomon—He is what Solomon was searching for. So if you are weary: of thinking, of striving, of trying to figure everything out, hear what Jesus said centuries later in Matthew 12:42, "and behold, something greater than Solomon is here."

The answer to life's heaviness is not more knowledge. It is a crucified and risen Savior. In Christ: Wisdom becomes life-giving, not crushing. Knowledge leads to repentance and faith, not despair. Sorrow gives way to resurrection hope. Paul puts it plainly: "In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2:3) Under the sun—everything is vanity. In Christ—everything is redeemed.

Solomon asks the question Jesus alone can answer: "Is there meaning in this broken world?" And Jesus answers—not with an explanation, but with Himself.

Take a moment to answer the following questions:

- *The article says "the ache isn't a flaw—it's a signal." Where do you currently feel that ache most (restlessness, weariness, confusion, disappointment), and what might it be revealing about where you've been looking for life "under the sun"?*
- *The article says wisdom is a good gift but a terrible savior. How does Jesus being "greater than Solomon" reshape the way you view wisdom, knowledge, and faith in your everyday life this week?*

6. MISSION

Have you ever wondered why God has you living in Fort Lauderdale? In Broward County? This is your mission field. It's where God has called you to make His name known. I want to help you answer that call. It's called the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. God is calling you. Who's your PLUS one? Who is the one person God is calling you to share the Good News of the gospel with? Write their name down now. Don't run from this assignment.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Here are 3 simple steps of obedience to answer God's call to be on mission with Him:

- **Intercede** - Who is ONE person that you can be praying for that needs to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ?
- **Invest** - How can you invest in them relationally?
- **Invite** - Begin praying for courage to invite them to church.

Don't say, "But God, you don't know my neighbor." Answer God's call. Join Him in this great redemptive mission of rescuing sinners so that they may know the riches of God's grace, mercy, and salvation.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRAYER

- What is one thing you need to remember from this lesson that you can apply to your life this week?

- How can your group pray for you personally?

- How can you pray for your group members?