

Renewed Mind Bible Studies

Ecclesiastes - Session 1 (Chasing Meaning)

Ecclesiastes 1

(Use this sheet to take notes, reflect personally, and contribute to discussion.)

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 (The Vapor of Life)

- The Hebrew word used here is Qoheleth (koh-HEH-leth), which refers to someone who gathers people together to speak _____ to an assembly.
- He identifies himself as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” This is why many readers have connected this voice with _____. That is important because Solomon represents someone who had access to literally _____ people normally chase.
- The Teacher says, “Everything is meaningless.” The Hebrew word translated “meaningless” is hevel (HEH-vel), and many translations have also called it “vanity”. But the word does not literally mean pointless or worthless, it means vapor, _____, or mist. It describes something that is real and visible, but impossible to grasp or hold onto for long.
- The Teacher doubles down this idea by repeating the phrase again: “completely meaningless.” In Hebrew, it literally reads “_____ of _____,” which is the strongest possible way to express the idea.
- We expect encouragement when we read scripture, or maybe even a neat formula for how life works. Instead, Ecclesiastes begins with _____. The Teacher is acknowledging something most people eventually feel but rarely say out loud: life can feel confusing, temporary, and _____ to fully control.
- When we try to force _____ out of the things we chase, it slips through our fingers like vapor. Until we admit that reality, we will spend our lives chasing things that cannot satisfy.

Personal Insight:

- **When have I experienced something in life that felt meaningful at first but later seemed fleeting or temporary?**
- **How do I usually respond when life reminds me that some things are beyond my control?**

Ecclesiastes 1:3-7 (The Endless Cycle)

- The Hebrew word translated “get” or “gain” is yitron (yit-RONE), a word that means advantage, profit, or _____. It was often used in business language to describe what remains after all the work is finished.
- The phrase “under the sun” is another key expression that will appear throughout Ecclesiastes. In Hebrew, it is tachat hashemesh (TAH-khat hah-SHEH-mesh). It describes life viewed purely from an _____ perspective...life measured only by what we can see, accomplish, and control in this world.
- Even the word for wind carries an interesting layer of meaning. The Hebrew word is ruach (ROO-akh), which can mean wind, breath, or _____ depending on the context.
- The realization that things feel like an endless cycle can lead people in two very different directions. Some respond with discouragement, while others begin to recognize something deeper: if life “under the sun” is a repeating cycle, then meaning cannot come from the cycle itself. It must come from something _____ than it.
- Hard work can accomplish many good things, but it cannot ultimately answer the deeper question of meaning. When we ask our careers, achievements, or accomplishments to give us lasting significance, we eventually discover that even those things are part of the same endless rhythm.

Personal Insight:

- **Where in my life do I feel like I am caught in a repeating cycle of effort, responsibility, or pressure?**
- **Could my perspective change if I stopped looking to my work or accomplishments to provide my deepest sense of meaning?**

Ecclesiastes 1:8-11 (Nothing Truly New)

- The word translated “wearisome” comes from the Hebrew word yagea (yah-GAY-ah), which means exhausted, worn out, or _____ from labor. The Teacher is describing the deep tiredness people feel from constantly striving, searching, and chasing fulfillment.
- The eye never has enough seeing, and the ear never has enough hearing. The Hebrew verbs here refer to the idea of something that is never filled or _____. No matter how much we experience, we still want more.

- The phrase “nothing new” comes from the Hebrew word chadash (khah-DAHSH), which means new, fresh, or _____. The Teacher is pointing out that the core patterns of human life remain the same.
- Ecclesiastes is exposing the fragile nature of the things we often _____ on for meaning. If our hope is found in novelty, recognition, or lasting fame, we will always find ourselves disappointed.

Personal Insight:

- **Where do I find myself chasing the next new experience, opportunity, or achievement, hoping it will bring deeper satisfaction?**
- **Does it change my spiritual perspective to realize that recognition or lasting fame cannot ultimately give life its meaning?**

Ecclesiastes 1:12–15 (The Search for Wisdom)

- The Hebrew word translated “wisdom” is chokmah (KHOK-mah). This word refers to more than intelligence or knowledge. In the Old Testament, chokmah describes skill for living well, the ability to _____ how life actually works and how to navigate it wisely.
- The Teacher intentionally set out to study life. The phrase “search for understanding” comes from the Hebrew verb darash (dah-RAHSH), which means to investigate, examine carefully, or seek something diligently. He is describing a serious, thoughtful pursuit of _____.
- “What is wrong cannot be made right. What is missing cannot be recovered.” The Hebrew wording here is translated as “wrong” and comes from ivvath (eev-VAHTH), meaning something bent, twisted, or _____. It describes a world that does not function the way it was originally intended.
- Wisdom can just help us see that distortion more clearly, but it can't always fix it. There are broken systems, painful circumstances, and _____ that human effort alone cannot straighten.

Personal Insight:

• Where in my life have I assumed that gaining more knowledge or understanding would solve a deeper problem?

• How do I typically respond when I encounter situations that wisdom can explain but cannot fix?

Ecclesiastes 1:16–18 (The Burden of Knowing)

• The teacher examined both the wise ways people live and the foolish ways people live. The Hebrew phrase “applied my mind” comes from the word natan lev (nah-TAHN lev), which literally means to “give one’s heart” to something. The Teacher poured his attention, energy, and thought into _____ life.

• After all that searching, he says the result is like “chasing the wind.” The Hebrew phrase here is re’ut ruach (reh-OOT ROO-akh), which can literally mean trying to _____ the wind.

• That realization leads to the final statement of the chapter: “The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.” Throughout the Bible, wisdom is described as a gift from God. But what he is acknowledging is that wisdom opens our eyes to _____.

• Knowledge removes the illusion that everything is simple. It reveals suffering we cannot fix, questions we cannot fully answer, and tensions we cannot easily resolve. In that sense, wisdom can feel heavy because it exposes truths we might prefer not to face.

• This realization is also preparing us for the deeper message of Ecclesiastes. If wisdom alone can't provide lasting meaning, then meaning must come from somewhere else. The Teacher is slowly guiding us toward the understanding that life cannot be fully explained or controlled from “under the sun.” True wisdom will eventually point us _____ the sun...toward God Himself.

Personal Insight:

- **When has greater knowledge or awareness made life feel heavier or more complicated for me?**
- **How can wisdom lead me toward humility and dependence on God rather than frustration or despair?**

Group Discussion Questions – Session 1 (Chasing Meaning)

1. The Teacher begins by describing life as “vapor.” Where have you experienced something in life that felt important or meaningful at the time but later seemed fleeting or temporary?
2. Ecclesiastes asks what lasting “gain” comes from all our work under the sun. Where do people today most often look for that sense of lasting profit or significance?
3. The Teacher describes the repeating cycles of life: generations come and go, the sun rises and sets, and the wind keeps circling. Do you ever feel like life is running in those same kinds of cycles? What helps you step back and see life from a bigger perspective?
4. Solomon pursued wisdom with everything he had, yet he discovered that knowledge alone cannot solve every problem in the world. How do you balance the desire to understand life with the humility of knowing that some things remain beyond our control?
5. The Teacher says that greater wisdom can sometimes bring greater grief because we begin to see the brokenness of the world more clearly. When have you experienced that conflict between growing in understanding and feeling the weight of what you see?

Tonight, have each person at the table to share one area of life where they feel like they are “chasing” something: success, control, recognition, security, or simply the feeling that their life matters.

