



Under the Sun

Devotional Guide

Metro HTX • Fall 2026

Welcome.

You are about to spend eight weeks with one of the most honest books in the Bible and one of the most misunderstood.

Ecclesiastes is not a comfortable book. It does not open with encouragement or a promise of better days ahead. It opens with a verdict: vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Before the author makes a single argument, he hands you his conclusion. Everything you have been reaching for, the achievement, the accumulation, the pleasure, the status, it is vapor. Real, but impossible to hold.

That is a hard way to start. But it is also an honest and freeing one. And if you are willing to sit with it, it can change everything.

This guide was created to help you read Ecclesiastes slowly and intentionally, one passage at a time, four days a week, across eight weeks. Each day gives you a passage reference, some context and reflection to help you understand what you are reading, and a couple of questions to sit with honestly. The fourth day of each week lifts your head up and gives you a chance to look at the whole week's text together, and if you are reading with friends, a guide to talk about it.

There is no pressure to have it all figured out by the end. Ecclesiastes does not require that. It demands honesty. Show up to it honestly and let it do its work. The nature of Ecclesiastes is not necessarily to fill you with knowledge but to cause you to think about and question what is the purpose of life.

About Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes belongs to what's known in the Bible as wisdom literature, a literary genre that also includes Job and Proverbs. But where Proverbs offers practical guidance for living well, Ecclesiastes wrestles with something intangible: what does life actually mean, and is any of it worth it?

The speaker identifies himself as Qohelet (*ko-HEL-eth*), a Hebrew word meaning one who gathers an assembly for instruction, often translated Teacher or Preacher. He describes himself as a son of David, king in Jerusalem, either pointing toward Solomon, or a later teacher writing about Solomon's life. What matters most is not settling the authorship question but recognizing what it means for the argument. Qohelet is not guessing at what life has to offer. He has had everything, so when he reports back, his testimony carries weight.

There is also a literary layer worth noticing. Qohelet is a character within the book, a voice the unnamed author presents and evaluates. The author speaks briefly at the opening and closing of the book, framing everything Qohelet says. He does not simply want you to hear the Teacher. He wants to help you process what you hear.

Ecclesiastes is not pessimism, but simply honest realism. The author has been labeled a cynic, but careful reading reveals something different, a man who cares enough about truth to name what is actually there, and who trusts that honesty, accompanied with a fear of God, is the beginning of wisdom, not the end of hope.

A Few Things Worth Knowing.

Hevel

Often translated vanity, the Hebrew word hevel literally means breath or vapor. It appears more in Ecclesiastes than in all other Old Testament books combined. It does not mean worthless or meaningless. It means insubstantial, real but impossible to hold. Think of a breath on a cold morning, one moment there and the next gone. That is the image Qohelet returns to again and again. The things we reach for are real, but the disappointment is that they dissolve the moment we arrive.

"Under the Sun"

This phrase appears 29 times in Ecclesiastes and is the key to reading the whole book correctly. It refers to life on earth, emphasizing the temporary and transient character of human existence. It is not a literal reference to the sun itself. It is a vantage point, the lens through which Qohelet observes all earthly activity, the domain where people live, work, play, and raise their families.

Things done under the sun possess only temporary significance. When measured against eternity, they cannot hold the weight we put on them. But the phrase is not a condemnation of earthly life. Qohelet is not saying that life on earth is meaningless. He is saying that the things of this earth, no matter how good, will not fully satisfy the eternal longing God has placed within us. Under the sun is a temporary dwelling, and temporary things cannot fill an eternal hunger.

How to use this guide.

Each week follows the same rhythm.

Days 1-3 each give you a passage reference, a Go Deeper section with context and reflection, and two questions to sit with. Open your Bible to the passage, read it slowly, then work through the page. These days are designed for personal reading, quiet, unhurried, with a pen nearby.

Day 4 is the overview and discussion day. It pulls the week's readings together, names the big themes, and gives you three discussion questions. If you are reading with friends, this is the day to gather. The questions are designed for real conversation, not easy answers.

Before each day pray and ask God to:

1. Meet you in His Word
2. Teach and encourage you with His Word
3. Compel you to desire Him more

Now turn the page.

Ephraim is waiting...

WEEK

1

Ecclesiastes 1

UNDER THE SUN

Sermon Notes: September 29

05

WEEK 1

Notes

WEEK 1 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

READ ECCLESIASTES 1:1-3

go deeper

The Hebrew title for the speaker is Qohelet, one who gathers an assembly for instruction, often translated Preacher or Teacher. The text identifies him as son of David, king in Jerusalem, pointing us toward Solomon. This matters. Solomon is not guessing at what life has to offer. He has had everything, the wisdom, the wealth, the power, the freedom to run the experiment at the highest possible level. When he reports back, his testimony carries weight.

The word at the center of these verses is *hevel*, translated here as *vanity*. The Hebrew literally means *vapor* or *breath*. Not worthless. Not fake. But *fleeting*. *Vanity of vanities* is a Hebrew superlative, like *holy of holies* or *song of songs*. It is the highest possible degree. *Qohelet* is not easing us in gently.

The question in verse 3, what does man gain from all his toil, is the book's driving question. The word translated gain is a commercial term, profit, surplus, return on investment. Qohelet is asking whether a human life produces a net return. This question echoes through all twelve chapters and only receives its final answer at the very end.

Honestly, Qohelet can kind of come off as a buzzkill. He is like the guy at the party sitting in the corner, waiting for someone to ask him how he is doing so he can take the conversation somewhere real deep, real fast. But he has a point. The question he is asking is one every single one of us has wrestled with: what is this life all about? Instead of gallivanting around in life Qohelet wants to dive deep.

But before he builds a case or walks us through his evidence, he hands us a verdict. Vanity of vanities. And the word he uses, hevel, is vapor. Think about a breath on a cold winter morning. There and then gone. That is what Qohelet is saying about the substance of this life. Not that it is worthless. But if you try to grasp the things of this world as your anchor, your meaning, your security, they will fade. He is not trying to be an obnoxious pessimist, but a refreshing voice of honesty.

reflect

1. Hevel, vapor. Something real but impossible to hold. Where have you felt that? What did you reach for that dissolved once you finally got there?
2. Verse 3 asks what we actually gain from all our toil. What is your life working toward right now, and how confident are you that it will deliver what you are hoping for?

pray

Ask God to help you see the “hevel” in life to anchor yourself on what is lasting, which is God Himself.

WEEK 1 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 1:4-11

READ ECCLESIASTES 1:4-11

go deeper

Qohelet shifts from his opening verdict to observation. He looks at the world around him and notices that everything is moving in circles. The sun, the wind, the rivers, the generations of people, all of it in constant motion, arriving nowhere. There is endless activity but no real progress.

There is a striking paradox here. Humans are the pinnacle of God's creation, and yet the material world around us has greater stability than our own existence. You can count on the sun rising tomorrow. You cannot count on whether you will rise with it.

When Qohelet says there is nothing new under the sun he does not mean nothing interesting has ever happened. He means that no innovation, technological, artistic, or architectural, fundamentally alters the human condition or delivers anyone from mortality. New things get old. What seems fresh eventually joins the long list of things that failed to satisfy. The new thing that truly changes a life can only come from a relationship with God that does not come to an end.

There is a consistency and longevity to the nature of this world that is meant to make you stop and question your own existence. The world keeps spinning. The wind keeps blowing. Generations rise and fall. And yet here we are, convinced that our lives, our accomplishments, our legacies may somehow be the exception.

The eye is never satisfied with seeing. The ear is never filled with hearing. We live in the most stimulating, most connected, most entertained generation in human history and yet the hunger does not go away. That is not a modern problem. That is a human problem. And no innovation, no achievement, no cultural moment has ever quite fixed it. Qohelet is not saying this to leave you in despair. He is saying it to make you cry out for something better.

reflect

1. The sun, the wind, the rivers, all of it keeps going with or without you. What feeling does it stir in you to think about the brevity of your life against the backdrop of this ancient world?
2. Verse 8 says the eye is never satisfied with seeing and the ear never filled with hearing. Where do you feel that most in your own life, that hunger that will not go away no matter how much you consume or experience?

pray

Ask God to grow your hunger for that which will fully satisfy you. Not the temptations or pleasures of this world.

WEEK 1 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

READ ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18

go deeper

Qohelet now steps forward and introduces himself more fully. He is the king in Jerusalem with access to unparalleled wisdom, resources, and freedom. And he did not dabble. He went all in. Notice the two verbs in verse 13, to **seek** and to **search** out. To seek implies penetrating depth. To search out implies a comprehensive survey. This was an exhaustive investigation, and he was the most qualified person who ever lived to run it.

The conclusion he reaches is striking. All is vanity and a striving after wind. You can feel what it means, the effort is real, the motion is real, but there is nothing to show for it. Verse 15 is the first admission of what wisdom under the sun simply cannot do. What is crooked cannot be made straight. What is lacking cannot be counted. Some problems cannot be solved. Understanding life itself exceeds what human wisdom alone can accomplish.

Verses 16 through 18 land the hardest punch. The more Qohelet learned, the more grief he experienced. More knowledge, more sorrow. This is not a warning against thinking or learning, but a warning against expecting human reasoning to satisfy your deepest longings.

Qohelet is not telling you to stop thinking. What he is saying is this: do not expect those things to deliver what they were never designed to give. What is crooked cannot be made straight. There are things in this life, injustice, loss, suffering, confusion, that no amount of wisdom, strategy, or intellectual firepower will resolve. Wisdom is good and should be desired, but wisdom alone will not satisfy the longings of your soul.

reflect

1. Where in your life have you chased understanding or knowledge looking for answers and ended up with more questions than you started with?
2. What are you hoping your accomplishments or intellect will eventually make you feel, and has it been working?

pray

Pray Proverbs 9:10 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” Ask God to give you a greater fear (awe and wonder) of God and to increase your knowledge of the “Holy one”.



Overview & Discussion

overview

What Qohelet is doing in chapter 1 is clearing the ground. He is deconstructing every false source of meaning so that something true can be built. The deeper hunger you feel, the one that accomplishments never quite satisfy, that pleasure never quite fills, that hunger is not a malfunction. God placed it in you. And it will only ever be satisfied by Him and in Him.

1. Looking back at this week's readings, where do you most feel the weight of what Qohelet is describing, that sense that what you are reaching for keeps dissolving when you get there?
2. The phrase under the sun describes life lived without reference to God or eternity. What does your day-to-day life look like when you are operating purely under the sun?
3. Qohelet says the deeper hunger for meaning cannot be satisfied by earthly pursuits. Where are you most tempted to look for fulfillment right now, and what would it look like to reorient that toward God? Confess those to someone close to you.

Read Psalm 63 and pray it in your own words. Reflect on God's character and thank Him.

WEEK

2

Ecclesiastes 2

UNDER THE SUN

Sermon Notes: October 6

11

Notes

WEEK 2 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

READ ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11

go deeper

In chapter 1 Qohelet examined the world around him and found it moving in circles. Now he turns the experiment inward. If the wisdom of the external world offers no lasting meaning, maybe pleasure, wealth, and accomplishment will. So, he runs the test. Whatever he wanted, he got. Whatever he imagined, he built. He held nothing back.

The list in verses 4 through 10 is staggering. Houses. Vineyards. Gardens. Silver. Gold. Singers. Entertainment. Solomon did not dabble in pleasure, he perfected it. And he did it all with his wisdom intact, meaning this was not a reckless binge. It was a deliberate, intelligent investigation. This is not to say it is wise to do the same, it proves to be destructive.

The verdict in verse 11 is one of the most important in the book. After all of it, after acquiring everything a human being could possibly want, he looked back and called it vanity and a striving after wind. Not because the things were inherently bad. But because they could not deliver what he was looking for.

What makes Solomon's experiment so compelling is that he did not fail. He succeeded. And when he looked back at all of it, he called it a striving after wind. That should alert you. Because most of us are living like the problem is that we just have not gotten there yet. Solomon is the guy who got there. All the way, and he is telling you it was not what it's cracked up to be.

This passage is a demolition project. Ecclesiastes tears down in order to build. It has good news waiting, once we can come to grips with what is mortal is never enough for us who have been made with a capacity for eternity. Your meaning does not come from what you accomplish or acquire. It comes from your relationship with God and your intrinsic value in the identity He created you with.

reflect

1. Solomon had access to everything and still found it empty. What does that tell you about the thing you are most convinced will finally make you feel satisfied?
2. Where in your life are you most tempted to find your sense of worth or meaning in what you have built, achieved, or accumulated?

challenge

Often, we are too easily satisfied with the pleasures of this world because they are too easy to be distracted with. Your challenge today is to spend at least 15 minutes undistracted with God. No phone, no music, not even your bible... just you and God. Maybe you go for a walk or maybe you sit in an empty room or closet whatever it takes to be undistracted. Pray this "God these next 15 minutes are yours please meet me in it and speak to me."

WEEK 2 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 2:12-17

READ ECCLESIASTES 2:12-17

go deeper

Having concluded that pleasure and accumulation leave you empty, Qohelet turns to wisdom. And here he makes an important concession, wisdom is genuinely better than folly. The wise person has eyes in his head. The fool walks in darkness. That advantage is real.

But then comes the problem. Death does not care. The wise person and the fool share the same end. One fate overtakes them both, and in the days to come both will be forgotten. If death is the final word, then wisdom's advantage is only temporary. It helps you navigate life better, but it cannot answer life's deepest problem.

This is what drives Qohelet to say in verse 17 that he hated life. That is not despair for its own sake, but the honest response of someone who has run every experiment and come up empty. He pursued pleasure, empty. He built and accumulated, empty. He applied wisdom and found that even wisdom cannot outrun death. Qohelet makes an honest admission we do not make enough room for. Being wise, working hard, living with discipline and integrity, these things have real value. They give you a better shot at navigating a complicated world. That is incredibly valuable.

But here is where it gets uncomfortable. The wise person and the fool end up in the same place. If that is the finish line, then wisdom's advantage is real but temporary. It makes the journey better, but it does not change the destination. The passage is exposing a question most of us never stop to ask: where does the meaning of your effort actually come from? Because if it is rooted in how you are remembered, death will eventually make a fool of all of it.

But this is the good news Qohelet will eventually point to in chapter 12, fear God and keep His commandments. Jesus would say it like this in Matthew 22:37-39 *"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"* The meaning of your life is to be in awe and wonder of God which leads to loving Him with your whole heart.

reflect

1. Qohelet says wisdom is genuinely better than folly but death levels them both. What does that do to the way you think about what you are building your life around?
2. Where does the meaning of your effort come from right now, your own achievement and how you are remembered, or something bigger than that?

challenge

When death comes for a soul, what are three words you would want someone to use to describe your life? Write them on a sticky note and place them somewhere. You will see every day (bathroom, mirror, dash of your car, phone background...) each time you see them ask God to grow those qualities in you to look more like Jesus.

WEEK 2 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 2:18-26

READ ECCLESIASTES 2:18-26

go deeper

Qohelet has already concluded that pleasure is empty and wisdom cannot outrun death. Now he turns to labor and legacy and finds the same verdict waiting for him there too.

The problem is not the work itself. It is what happens to it. Everything you build, everything you pour your energy and wisdom into, you must leave it to someone else. And that person may be wise or a fool. Verse 23 is one of the most honest descriptions of anxious striving in the entire book. All his days are full of sorrow. His work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. If you have ever lain awake at night worrying about whether what you are building will last, Qohelet sees you.

But then Qohelet does something he has not done yet in this book. He pivots. Verses 24 through 26 are not a consolation prize. They are a reorientation. The ability to eat, drink, and find enjoyment in your work is a gift from God. Apart from Him, who can enjoy anything? Your days under the sun are limited, and it is tragic to waste them through excessive labor and grief.

This passage is an invitation to recalibrate. Stop measuring your worth by what you accumulate or pass on. Ecclesiastes uses doubt and disappointment not to crush you but to redirect you toward deeper reliance on God. Life is filled with joy only when you depend on a God whose work in the world forms a long, eternal story. And only when anxiety drives you back to your Creator can you find the joy that your striving could never manufacture.

reflect

1. Verse 23 describes someone whose days are full of sorrow and who cannot rest even at night. Where do you recognize that in your own life?
2. Verses 24 through 26 describe enjoyment as a gift from God rather than something you earn. What would it look like for you to receive your life that way instead of striving for it?

challenge

Verse 24 is the first glimpse of joy found in this book. Qohelet says, “*There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.*” Make plans to share a meal or do something fun you really enjoy with close friends or family. In the midst of it, pause and thank God for the moments of enjoyment and relief from the toil he generously offers.

Overview & Discussion

WEEK

3

Ecclesiastes 3

UNDER THE SUN

Sermon Notes: October 13



17

Notes

WEEK 3 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

go deeper

You probably know this passage. You may have heard it at a funeral or seen it framed on a wall. And because it is so familiar it is easy to read it as a warm reassurance that everything works out fine. But that is not quite what Qohelet is saying.

Read it again. A time to weep. A time to mourn. A time to hate. A time for war. He is not glossing over the hard parts, he is including them. All of them. Because that is what life actually looks like. And it is worth being clear about what this poem is not. It is not a prescription telling you what to do. It is not a promise that your circumstances are about to change. Qohelet is just telling you how life is. And something in us knows he is right.

What Qohelet is observing is that there is a rhythm to creation that encompasses all of life. Every activity has its proper moment. The wise person learns to read the moment they are in and respond to it appropriately. That is a harder skill than it sounds. Most of us are either resisting the season we are actually in, or rushing toward a season we are not in yet.

Here is the thing though. You do not set the calendar. The seasons come to you. Birth and death, weeping and laughter, tearing down and building up, none of these are yours to schedule. Life happens to you. And the only real question is what you will do when the moment arrives. The answer Qohelet keeps pressing toward is this: fear God, stay close to Him, and trust that the One who ordained the season also holds you in it.

reflect

1. Which of the pairs in verses 1 through 8 describes the season you find yourself in right now, and how are you responding to it?
2. Where in your life are you most tempted to demand control over a season that God has not given you control over?

pray

Share answers with God honestly and ask him to hold you and provide endurance and/or contentment in the midst of it.

WEEK 3 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:9-15

go deeper

God has made everything beautiful in its time. That is the reassurance. But He has not revealed His appointed times to you. That is the discomfort. You live inside the routine of time, carrying out the work in front of you, unable to see the full scope of what God is doing. His work is fixed, so nothing can be added to it or taken from it.

But here is what makes verse 11 so remarkable. God has set eternity in the human heart. Not eternity in your hands, but in your heart. You were made with a longing for something that time and this life “under the sun” cannot contain. The relentless cycles of life are not meaningless. They are designed to awaken you to your need for something beyond the temporal. God has structured time so that it cannot bring ultimate fulfillment. Rather it reveals a vacuum in the human heart that only He, the one who holds eternity, can fill.

So, what do you do with that? Qohelet's answer is direct. Enjoy life and be content. Eat and drink and find satisfaction in your work. Not as a substitute for meaning but as a gift from the hand of God. Appropriate pleasures are genuinely good, enjoy them. But do not expect to find ultimate meaning in them.

Everything God does endures forever. That permanence should not produce anxiety in you; it should produce reverence. Your inability to grasp His purposes is not a problem to solve but is an invitation to trust. Receive what God provides, enjoy it as the gift it is, and let what you cannot control drive you toward dependence on the One who holds all of it.

reflect

1. Verse 11 says God has set eternity in the human heart. Where do you feel that longing most, that sense that something is still missing even when life is going well?
2. What would it look like for you to receive the ordinary gifts of today, your work, your meals, your relationships, as something given rather than something earned?

pray

The apostle Paul emphatically claims he has learned the “secret” of contentment (Philippians 4:11-13). Ask God to teach you how to be brought low and how to abound in life so that in whatever gain or loss, you too can be content in Christ alone.



WEEK 3 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:16-22

go deeper

Qohelet turns his eyes to the world around him, and what he sees is deeply unsettling. In the very places where justice should be found, there is wickedness. The courts are corrupt. The righteous suffer. The wicked prosper. And death comes for everyone regardless.

From a purely under the sun perspective, this is the darkest possible conclusion. Without God's framework there is no way to know what lies beyond death, and humanity appears to have no inherent advantage over animals. Both breathe. Both die. Both return to dust.

But Qohelet is not denying ultimate meaning here. He is exposing the futility of searching for it while ignoring God. The inequities you observe in this world will not go unanswered forever. God will judge the righteous and the wicked. There is a time for every matter and every work, including the setting right of everything that is currently wrong. The injustice you see is not the final word. It is a chapter in a story that God is still writing.

So, what does that mean for how you live now? Two things. First, take your mortality seriously. The brevity of life strips away the facades we hide behind and forces an honest reckoning with how we are spending our days. Second, engage fully with what is in front of you. Find happiness in your present work because God has ordained it. Not in a passive or dismissive way but grounded in contentment. The kind that can hold both the reality of life's injustices and the confidence of God's ultimate sovereignty at the same time.

reflect

1. Where in your life or in the world around you do you feel the weight of injustice that Qohelet describes, the sense that things are not the way they should be?
2. Qohelet says to rejoice in your work because it is your lot from God. What would it look like to approach what is in front of you today with that kind of intentionality?

pray

Micah 6:8 says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Ask God to impress upon your heart these three things Justice, kindness, and humility. Ask him to show you how and to give you the courage to be an agent of reconciliation and restoration in your city.

WEEK 3 | DAY 4

Overview & Discussion

ECCLESIASTES 3

overview

This week you sat with one of the most familiar and most misunderstood chapters in Ecclesiastes. The famous opening, that there is a time for every activity under heaven, does not mean life is predictable or that you will understand how everything fits together. It means God has established and allowed appropriate times for all things. That is meant to humble, comfort, and challenge you. The poem in verses 1 through 8 is not a promise and it is not a prescription. It is an observation. There is a rhythm woven into creation that encompasses all of life, the good seasons and the brutal ones, the seasons you chose and the ones that chose you. And something in us knows Qohelet is right. We feel the rhythm. We sense when a moment calls for something specific. The right word at the right time feels like magic. The wrong one feels like a disaster. That is not an accident. That is evidence of an order behind the way things move.

But here is where the chapter gets harder. You do not set the calendar. Life happens to you. You can sense the rhythm but you do not control it. And Qohelet presses even further, God does. He makes everything beautiful in its time. He has placed eternity in your heart. And He will not let you grasp the whole picture. You are bound in time, longing for something that time cannot give you. That is not a cruel joke. It is a design. That longing is not meant to lead you to more knowledge or more control. It is meant to lead you to the God who holds what you cannot.

So what do you do? Two things. You live fully in the moment you are actually in, not the one you are dreading or the one you are waiting for. And you revere the God who runs what you cannot. That is the whole chapter. That is the invitation.

The purpose of Ecclesiastes 3 is not that you would finally figure out the intricate inner workings of life. It is that you would return to the master designer of life and find your rest and joy in Him. The seasons will keep coming. You will not always understand them. But you can know the One who ordained them.

reflect & discussion

1. Looking back at this week, where do you most feel the tension between wanting control over the season you are in and trusting that God has ordained it?
2. The chapter describes busyness as often rooted in the pursuit of approval or achievement rather than God's actual call on your life. Where do you see that most honestly in yourself?
3. Fearing God is described as the proper response to what you cannot control. What does that look like in a practical, day-to-day way for you?

pray / challenge

Psalm 90:12 says, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Read through all of Psalm 90 and pray in your own words as you reflect on the brevity and joy of life.

WEEK

4

Ecclesiastes 1-3

UNDER THE SUN

Review: Chapters 1-3

23

WEEK 4

Notes

WEEK 4 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14

READ ECCLESIASTES 1:2, 12-14

go deeper

This week there is no new sermon. No new chapter. Instead, you are being invited to slow down, look back at what you have already read, and let it settle in a little deeper.

The declaration that all is vanity is not cynicism. Qohelet is not a bitter man raging against the world. He is a realist, someone who has looked honestly at life and reported back what he found. The emptiness he describes comes from a specific source: pursuing earthly things as ultimate ends in themselves. When you chase wealth, status, pleasure, or achievement as your final destination, you will eventually hit a wall. Nothing in this world delivers the lasting fulfillment it promises.

Ecclesiastes uses doubt, disappointment, and uncertainty not to leave you there but to point you toward deeper reliance on God. The emptiness is not the destination. It is the diagnosis. And a good diagnosis, as uncomfortable as it is, is the first step toward getting well.

Neither life's blessings nor its hardships provide ultimate meaning on their own. But trusting God despite circumstances that discourage such trust opens a sure hope of restoration to Him. Stop expecting the world to satisfy you completely. Receive what you have as a gift from God rather than a source of identity or worth. Fear God, not as terror but as reverent trust in His greatness and holiness. That reorientation, from demanding the world make sense to you toward recognizing God's sovereignty over what you cannot control, is what transforms Ecclesiastes from depressing into liberating.

reflect

1. After three weeks in Ecclesiastes, where has the emptiness Qohelet describes shown up most clearly in your own life?
2. What would it look like for you to move from demanding that your circumstances make sense to actually trusting God in the middle of them?

look back

Look back at your prayers in week one and thank God for how he's answered them or continue to ask God to meet you in them. Pray Psalm 63 over someone in your life and encourage them by letting them know.

WEEK 4 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 2:1-2, 9-11

READ ECCLESIASTES 2:1-2, 9-11

go deeper

Coming back to these verses is worth it. Because it is easy to read Solomon's experiment in chapter 2 and think the problem was excess, that he just went too far, indulged too much, lost control. But that is not what happened.

Solomon maintained his wisdom throughout the entire experiment. He was deliberate, measured, and purposeful the whole time. And it still was not enough. Because the illusion most of us are living with is that we just have not gotten the right things yet. But Solomon got there. All the way there. And he called it a striving after wind.

The fundamental problem is not indulgence. It is expectation. The expectation that temporary things can satisfy longings that are eternal. Wisdom only deepened Solomon's awareness of the emptiness, the more clearly he could see, the more apparent the void became. That is not a reason to stop pursuing wisdom. It is a reason to stop expecting wisdom alone to fill what only God can.

The real issue is not work versus rest, achievement versus contentment. It is whether what you are doing is meaningful or compulsive. The same labor that becomes tyrannical when you use it to chase meaning can become a joyful gift when you receive it as something God has given you. Knowing God, loving Him, finding satisfaction in Him, that is the wisdom Solomon is pointing you toward through the rubble of his own experiment.

reflect

1. Solomon had everything and still felt the emptiness. What does that tell you about the thing you are most convinced will finally make you feel satisfied?
2. What is the difference between working and striving in your own life right now, and which one is driving you?

look back

On day 1 of week 2 you were challenged to spend 15 minutes distraction free with God. As you think back to that time, what was the thing that was trying to distract you most? 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us to take every thought captive in order to make it obedient/submissive to Christ. Spend another 15 minutes distraction free with God and every time something tries to distract you take note of it. At the end of the 15 minutes, you'll have a list of all the ways the enemy is trying to take you away from God. Pray and ask God to conquer each of them the same way he has conquered the enemy.

WEEK 4 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, 3:1-8, 11

READ ECCLESIASTES 2:24-26, 3:1-8, 11

go deeper

These two passages belong together. And together they give you one of the most important reorientations in the entire book.

The first passage from chapter 2 makes a quiet but radical claim. The very things that disappoint you when you pursue them as life's main goal, food, drink, work, become genuinely satisfying when you receive them as gifts from God's hand. The problem was never the things themselves. It was the expectation you placed on them. Life is brief. Devoting yourself entirely to accumulation wastes the days you have.

The second passage reinforces this. Each season of life has its proper place and perspective. God has placed eternity in your heart, which means you were made for something that transcends the temporal rhythms of ordinary life. The seasons come and go whether you are ready for them or not. The question is not whether you can control them. It is whether you can receive them.

Here is the shift these passages are pressing toward. Stop asking what you can accomplish or acquire. Start asking how you can receive what is already in your hands as coming from God. Work and its enjoyment are blessings from Him but work itself is not your life's purpose. The ultimate reorientation is this. Fear God. Recognize His sovereignty and His role as the judge of all things. Find your greatest joy in Him as the Giver of every good gift. When that becomes the foundation, everything else falls into its proper place.

reflect

1. What would it practically look like for you to shift from asking what can I accomplish today to how do I receive what God has placed in front of me today?
2. Where in your life are you missing the ordinary gifts, God has given you because you are too focused on what you have not gotten yet?

look back

On day 4 of week 2 you were challenged to memorize Psalm 16:11. Over the next week let those be your first words you speak each morning, roll out of bed, hit your knees and pray "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

WEEK 4 | DAY 4

Overview & Discussion

ECCLESIASTES 1-3

overview

This week you did not move forward. You went back. And that was the point.

Ecclesiastes 1 through 3 present a fundamental tension about meaning and purpose that does not resolve quickly. If existence consists only of what happens under the sun, despair about finding ultimate meaning becomes inevitable. Wealth disappoints. Pleasure fades. Wisdom deepens your grief. The seasons come and go without your permission. And the things you build will eventually be handed to someone who did not earn them.

But here is what makes these chapters more than just an extended complaint. The author deliberately places those dark conclusions alongside passages celebrating life's simple pleasures, and that juxtaposition is rich. Life apart from God is ultimately empty. And yet even the most mundane activity, a meal, a day's work, an ordinary moment, gains profound significance when lived in relationship with Him.

That is the reorientation Ecclesiastes keeps pressing you toward. Joy does not originate from what you accomplish. It comes from your connection to your creator. The question the first three chapters leave you with is not whether life has meaning. It is where you are looking for it.

reflect & discussion

1. Looking back over the first three weeks, where has Ecclesiastes most honestly named something, you have been avoiding or pretending was not true?
2. The book places dark conclusions about life right next to invitations to joy. How do you hold both of those things at the same time in your own experience?
3. Where are you most tempted to look for meaning right now, and what would it look like to reorient that toward God this week?

look back

Revisit one of the prayer prompts or challenges in weeks 1-3 and contemplate incorporating one of them into your rhythm of life.

WEEK

5

Ecclesiastes 4

UNDER THE SUN

Sermon Notes: October 27



29

WEEK 5

Notes

WEEK 5 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:1-3

go deeper

Chapter 4 opens with a hard shift. Qohelet turns his eyes outward and what he sees is not philosophical abstraction, it is people. Oppressed people with tears and no one to comfort them. Power on the side of the oppressor. No advocate. No relief. Just the grinding weight of injustice with no end in sight.

The declaration that the dead are more fortunate than the living is emphatic language conveying how profoundly systemic corruption causes sorrow. Qohelet is not advocating for death. He is emphasizing the great burden of a world where oppression goes unchallenged and sorrow goes uncomforted.

What makes this passage important is that it refuses to treat injustice as an abstract theological problem. Oppression is fundamentally wrong because it strips people of the intrinsic value as one made in the image of God along with the freedom and joy that accompanies it. It is not just a social issue to analyze, but a human crisis to grieve.

Two things are worth sitting with here. First, selfish ambition rooted in self-sufficiency leads to oppression and alienation, which means your own pursuits are worth examining honestly. Second, even well-intentioned efforts to reform unjust systems carry the risk of reproducing the very thing they fight. Justice work requires humility about your limitations, not naive optimism about quick fixes. Real and pure justice comes from God.

The passage points toward a concrete response. Oppression thrives in isolation. The meaningful answer to a world full of uncomforted tears is the building of genuine human connection and community, standing alongside people, providing the comfort that power has withheld.

reflect

1. Where in your immediate world do you see people who are oppressed or uncomforted, and what has your response been?
2. What would it look like for you to be a source of comfort and genuine community to someone carrying a weight they were not meant to carry alone?

challenge

As a disciple of Christ, we have been given the gift of community with the body of Christ, and part of that privilege is sharing our burdens with one another. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." So today practice that. Share a burden with a trusted friend. Be vulnerable with them because often vulnerability breeds vulnerability.

→ Don't have community? Check out how you can get plugged in at MetroHTX.org

WEEK 5 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 4:4-8

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:4-8

go deeper

Qohelet makes a blunt diagnosis in verse 4 that most of us would rather not sit with. All toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. Not some toil, but all toil. The engine driving most human achievement is not love of the work or genuine care for others. It is the compulsion to outdo the person next to you. That is a hard thing to read because it might have more truth in it than you want to admit.

The passage presents two extremes and warns against both. On one end is laziness, the fool who folds his hands and ends up consuming himself. On the other end is obsessive accumulation, the person whose eyes are never satisfied with riches, who works without end, and never stops to ask the most important question in verse 8: for whom am I toiling?

That question is the center of the passage. And it is devastating precisely because the man in verse 8 has never asked it. He has no one to share what he is building. No son. No brother. No companion. Just the work and the wanting and the relentless accumulation of more. Successful by every external measure. Empty in every way that really matters.

The wisdom here is not to stop working. It is to realign your motivation. Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and striving. Modest means with inner peace outweighs abundance paired with endless craving. Working in isolation, driven by comparison, with no one to share it with, that is the tragedy Qohelet is describing.

reflect

1. If you are honest about what drives your ambition right now, is it mainly rooted in comparison with others or genuine purpose?
2. Verse 8 describes someone so consumed by work that they never ask who it is all for. Who are you building your life for, and do your actual habits reflect that?

challenge

Do a self audit. To your best ability, write out everything you do/did today. At the end of the day see if you can find a pattern or a common occurrence. What does that say about what you prioritize? Often what you devote your time to is what you value most. Evaluate if that is what you would say or what you would want to be most valuable to you.

If it is, ask God to help you steward it even better.
If it is NOT, ask God to help you realign with him.

WEEK 5 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 4:9-16

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:9-16

go deeper

Chapter 4 has moved from oppression to envy to isolation, and now Qohelet arrives at the one thing he has not called vanity. Community.

The case he makes in verses 9-12 is very practical. Two people working together produce better results. When one falls the other helps them up. When it is cold they keep each other warm. When danger comes, they stand together. The threefold cord, widely understood as God woven into the relationship, is not quickly broken. Qohelet is arguing that isolation is a liability and community is a genuine advantage in a world that is designed to knock you down.

This matters especially in light of what came before it in the chapter. The man in verse 8 worked without end and never asked who it was all for. Life is meant to be done with people, not as a productivity strategy but as the way human beings were designed to flourish. When we are in close relation to others we not only have a better survival rate, but a higher capacity to thrive.

The second half of the passage shifts to power and status. A poor wise youth rises from prison to the throne and the crowds follow him. But the popularity fades. The next generation does not remember him either. Power is as temporary as everything else Qohelet has examined. Achievement and position do not provide lasting security or meaning. Relationships do, more genuinely than anything else this chapter has considered.

reflect

1. When you look honestly at how you spend your time and energy, do your habits reflect that you believe relationships matter more than achievement?
2. The passage warns that power, popularity, and influence are all temporary. Where are you most tempted to find your sense of security or significance in something that will not last?

challenge

Now that you've done a self audit (Day 2), make a plan to prioritize the things you value or want to value most. The reality is you are either a master of your schedule or it's a master of you. Proverbs 21:5 says, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty." Use a calendar and plan out your next day with your high-priority receiving your most valuable time. Ask God to help you keep Him at the center of your life.



WEEK 5 | DAY 4

Overview & Discussion

ECCLESIASTES 4

overview

This week Qohelet turned his eyes outward and what he saw was not encouraging. Oppression without comfort. Ambition fueled by envy. A man working himself into the ground with no one to share it with. A king who rose to power only to be forgotten by the next generation.

And yet chapter 4 contains something the rest of the book has not offered yet. A genuine alternative. After exploring the poverty of isolation, Qohelet arrives at something better. Partnership. Two are better than one, not as a sentiment but as a practical argument. And it demands something in return. You have to consider another person's interests, listen to their reasoning, adjust to their pace, and keep faith with their trust.

Human connection is not a luxury or a distraction from real achievement. It is the antidote to the meaninglessness Qohelet has been diagnosing since chapter 1. Marriage, friendship, family, community, these are the investments that endure and point to the most satisfying relationship with God.

Resist measuring your life by individual accomplishment or accumulation. Build relationships that matter. They are the only things in this chapter Qohelet does not call vanity.

reflect & discussion

1. Looking back at this week, where do you most honestly see the cost of isolation in your own life, whether you are the one working alone or the one who has left someone else without comfort?
2. Qohelet describes partnership as requiring sacrifice, considering others' interests, adjusting to their pace, keeping faith with their trust. Where is that kind of investment hardest for you right now?
3. The chapter ends with a king who was celebrated and then forgotten. Where are you most tempted to build your sense of security or significance on something that will not last?

challenge

Our relationships are important and valuable in this life. 1 John 4:7-8 says *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”* There is a direct link between our relationship with others in our relationship with God. The stronger your relationship with God, the greater your capacity for strong relationships with others. Choose a day in the next 10 days to spend a day with God. Mark it on your calendar and spend the day (or ½ day) with just you and God.

Bonus: Plan the same time with some friends and meet up at the end of the day to talk about how you spent it with God.

34

WEEK

6

Ecclesiastes 5-7

UNDER THE SUN

Sermon Notes: November 3



35

WEEK 6

Notes

WEEK 6 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

READ ECCLESIASTES 5:1-7

go deeper

Chapter 5 opens with a sharp command: guard your steps when you go to the house of God. After four chapters examining what fails to satisfy under the sun, Qohelet now turns to something unexpected, how you show up before God. And what he finds there is the same problem in a different form.

The sacrifice of fools is not offered by people who do not believe in God. It is offered by people who do, but who show up to impress rather than to listen. They come with elaborate gestures, grand promises, and plenty of words. And Qohelet says they do not even know they are doing evil. The problem is not irreligion. It is religious performance that has lost its anchor in genuine love and humility.

The reason Qohelet gives is simple and worth sitting with. God is in heaven and you are on earth. You cannot negotiate with God as an equal. You cannot impress Him with your religious effort. Your proper posture is humble dependence, showing up to listen rather than to perform.

The same principle applies to vows. Better not to make a promise to God than to make one and break it. Words spoken carelessly before God are not neutral. They reveal what you think of Him.

True reverence is not the performance of religious acts. It is dependence on God's grace, the recognition that your blessings come only through His mercy, and the honesty to show up before Him as you are rather than as you want to appear.

reflect

1. When you think about how you approach God in prayer or worship, how much of it is genuine listening and how much of it is performing or negotiating?
2. Where in your life have you made a commitment to God, or to someone else in God's name, that you have not kept? What is standing in the way of following through?

pray

Today simply pray this "God I am here to listen. Please speak to me." then sit in silence as you wait for him to speak to you

WEEK 6 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:12

READ ECCLESIASTES 5:8-6:12

go deeper

Qohelet turns to wealth, and the portrait he paints is uncomfortably familiar. The person who loves money will not be satisfied with money. That is not a warning about extreme cases. It is a description of how the pursuit of wealth actually works. The more you acquire the more you want. The craving intensifies rather than quiets. And the wealth that was supposed to bring security brings anxiety instead. It's been famously and notoriously said that "No money" often creates "No problems".

The reasons wealth fails are specific. The pursuit never ends. Riches attract people who consume them. And finally the hardest truth, you arrived in this world with nothing and you will leave with nothing. Whatever you built, whatever you gathered, whatever you secured, you cannot take it with you.

But then Qohelet makes a move that should reframe everything. The ability to enjoy what you have is itself a gift that may or may not be given to you. Enjoyment is something God gives, and it can be present right now in whatever is already in your hands, or it can be entirely absent in a life of abundance. The difference is not the amount. It is the source.

God is a generous giver. He provides both the toil and the capacity for enjoyment. Take a step back and recognize that contentment comes from receiving life as a gift rather than from endless striving to secure it.

reflect

1. The passage describes wealth-chasing as producing anxiety rather than rest. Where in your life does the pursuit of more leave you more anxious rather than more content?
2. Qohelet says the ability to enjoy what you have is itself a gift from God. What would it look like to receive what is already in your hands today as something given rather than something earned?

pray

Ask God to give you a content heart. Thank him for all the blessings he has already given you.

WEEK 6 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

READ ECCLESIASTES 7:1-29

go deeper

Chapter 7 opens with a series of “better-than” proverbs that cut against every natural instinct. The day of death better than the day of birth. The house of mourning better than the house of feasting. Sorrow better than laughter. On the surface this sounds like Qohelet has given up on life. But he has not. He is making a more honest point.

Both pleasant and unpleasant days are under God's control. Difficult seasons are not meaningless interruptions. They are where wisdom forms. The house of mourning forces a reckoning with what actually matters that the house of feasting never will. Verse 14 lands the theological point. In prosperity be joyful. In adversity consider. God has made both. The inability to predict the future keeps you dependent on the One who holds it.

The second half of the chapter adds a warning against extremism. Be not overly righteous, which sounds strange until you understand what Qohelet is targeting. He is not endorsing sin. He is warning against a harsh, self-righteous rigidity that becomes its own form of pride. Being unreasonably demanding on yourself about moral and religious duties does not produce holiness. It produces self-destruction.

Verse 29 closes the chapter with the most honest anthropology in the book. God made man upright. We are the ones who have sought out many schemes. That recognition should produce humility, and a deeper dependence on God's grace for yourself and greater compassion for everyone else navigating the same broken world.

reflect

1. Qohelet says the house of mourning teaches more than the house of feasting. What is a difficult season in your life that ended up profoundly shaping you?
2. Verse 29 says God made man upright but we have sought out many schemes. Where in your own life do you most clearly see that pattern?

pray

Ask God to give you wisdom as you reflect on the good seasons and the hard seasons of life. If you are in a hard season, don't try to pray a “proper” or “polished” prayer, simply tell him how you honestly feel and ask him to sit with you in it.

WEEK 6 | DAY 4

Overview & Discussion

ECCLESIASTES 5-7

overview

This week Qohelet systematically dismantled three things people routinely bet their lives on, wealth, religious performance, and self-improvement, and found the same verdict waiting at the end of each one.

Pursuing wealth never reaches satisfaction. The desire for more only intensifies the more you acquire. Even your religious efforts can become hollow, showing up to impress God with elaborate sacrifices and grand vows rather than humble dependence on His grace.

What ties all of it together is one honest assessment of your condition. God is in heaven. You are on earth. You are mortal, small, and prone to fail. That is not meant to crush you. It is meant to put you in your proper place, humble obedience, dependent on God's mercy rather than your own religious achievement or material accumulation.

The reverence Ecclesiastes keeps returning to is not dread. It is the recognition that everything you have comes by God's grace and not by your own hand. Contentment with what you have outweighs exhausting yourself for more. And fearing the Lord, trusting that it will ultimately be well for those who do, is the only foundation that holds when injustice surrounds you and every other path has run out.

reflect & discussion

1. Which of the three false paths Qohelet addresses this week, wealth, religious performance, or self-improvement, are you most personally tempted to believe it will satisfy you?
2. The passage describes humility before God as recognizing that everything you have comes by His mercy. What does that change about how you approach your work, your money, or your worship?
3. Qohelet says it will ultimately be well for those who fear God, even when injustice surrounds them. Where do you find that hardest to believe right now?

pray

As you reflect on these questions, ask God to reveal where you may be trusting in external things and not in him alone. Read Psalm 139, specifically verses 23-24, and pray it in your own words.



WEEK

7

Ecclesiastes 8-10

UNDER THE SUN

Sermon Notes: November 10

41

WEEK 7

Notes

WEEK 7 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

READ ECCLESIASTES 8:1-17

go deeper

Chapter 8 opens with a genuine commendation of wisdom, it illuminates the face, softens hardness, and helps you navigate authority with discernment. But Qohelet is honest about what wisdom cannot do.

Life consistently reveals your inability to control your circumstances. Even the wisest person cannot fully explain the contradictions and senselessness that arise. Death remains the unavoidable equalizer against which no one can prevail. The wicked prosper. The righteous suffer. And no amount of intelligence or effort changes that equation.

Verse 17 lands the point plainly. You cannot find out the work of God. However much you toil in seeking, you will not get there. Even the person who claims to know does not. This is Qohelet's exhortation to stop trusting your own understanding as the primary guide for your life.

Only God possesses absolute authority to accomplish whatever He pleases. The proper response to living in a world beyond your control is not anxiety or withdrawal but trusting in the One who is in control. And then Qohelet once again commends joy. Eat, drink, be joyful. Find enjoyment in your work. These are not distractions from the hard questions. They are the God-approved response to them. Recognize the gift and thank the giver by enjoying it.

reflect

1. Where in your life are you most tempted to believe that if you just understood your circumstances better, you could fix them, and what would it look like to release that to God?
2. Qohelet commends joy in the middle of life's injustice and confusion. What makes that difficult for you personally right now?

challenge

Write down three things that you are thankful for. Then next to each thing, write down how you can actively enjoy them this week. As you enjoy them, pause to thank God for the gift that it is.

WEEK 7 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

READ ECCLESIASTES 9:1-12

go deeper

Qohelet does not soften this. Death is the common fate of both the righteous and the wicked. Cruel people rise to power. Good people suffer while the wicked prosper. Time and chance happen to everyone. He is not glossing over this reality; he is sitting in the tension with you.

But that is not where he stays. Recognizing that God is good and just, even when His ways are beyond your understanding, is what enables you to find meaning and joy in a world that often feels brutal and disappointing. Revere God, not in terror but in genuine respect for His sovereign authority. And embrace life.

Verses 7 through 10 are some of the most urgent in the book. Eat with joy. Drink with a merry heart. Enjoy your relationships. Do your work with everything you have. You have one opportunity to live this life, so actually live it. God has set the table for you to be free from the anxiety of constantly trying to earn your place if you trust Him.

Verse 11 lands a final dose of honesty. The race is not always to the swift. The battle is not always to the strong. You are governed by time and circumstances beyond your control. Qohelet is not encouraging a passive mentality, but one that holds your plans loosely. Invest in what matters and trust the One who holds what you cannot.

reflect

1. Qohelet says death comes for the righteous and the wicked alike. How does the reality of your own mortality sharpen or change what you are investing your life in?
2. Verses 7 through 10 are a call to receive life fully, your meals, your relationships, your work. What is one area where you are holding back from fully engaging with the life God has given you?

challenge

Write down all the things that “your hand finds to do” your job, responsibilities, hobbies, service, investing in relationships, etc., while it says to do it with your might, or other translations say do it with “gusto”! Next to each thing, write down one actionable step you can take to do it with more might, gusto, zeal, excitement, joy.

WEEK 7 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:20

READ ECCLESIASTES 9:13-10:20

go deeper

The poor wise man saved a city, and nobody remembered him. That is the opening image of this section, and it sets the tone for everything that follows. Wisdom accomplishes genuine good. And it does not always get credit for it.

Qohelet is honest about this tension. Wisdom is better than weapons of war. But one sinner destroys much good. The asymmetry is real; it takes far more effort to build something wise than to ruin it. Dead flies in perfumer's ointment ruin the whole batch. A little folly undoes far more than its size suggests.

What follows in chapter 10 is a series of practical observations. Laziness leads to decay. Incompetent rulers cause widespread damage. Reckless words surface at the worst possible moment. Small acts of foolishness compound into catastrophic consequences. This is a realistic assessment of how fragile wisdom's gains really are in a fallen world.

So, what do you do with that? You cultivate wisdom anyway. Not because it guarantees recognition or protection from folly's damage, but because it is genuinely better. You act with integrity even when it goes unnoticed. You speak carefully even when others do not. You sharpen your edge rather than working harder with a dull blade. And you receive the satisfaction of your work and relationships as gifts from God, not contingent on whether the world rewards you for them.

reflect

1. The wise man saved the city and was forgotten. Where in your own life have you done the right thing and received no recognition for it, and how did you respond?
2. Qohelet warns that small acts of folly can destroy much good. Where in your life is a small compromise or careless habit slowly undermining something worth protecting?

challenge

Find an opportunity to bless someone today without any recognition for it. Jesus, in Matthew 6:1-4 says, "your Father who sees [your good works] in secret will reward you."

WEEK 7 | DAY 4

Overview & Discussion

ECCLESIASTES 8-10

overview

This week Qohelet gave you a framework for living in a world that often feels unjust and beyond your control.

The world often rewards wickedness. Cruel people gain power. The righteous suffer while the wicked prosper. Wisdom saves a city and gets forgotten. A single fool undoes what took years to build. Qohelet does not pretend that doing good always produces good for you. He looks directly into the broken reality of this world and says no matter the outcome, wisdom and righteousness is still better.

But he also refuses to let you stay in despair. Two things hold the chapters together. First, God will ultimately set things right, even when you cannot see how. Some mysteries belong to Him alone. Second, joy is not a distraction from the hard questions. It is a divine command to find genuine satisfaction in your food, your work, and your relationships. Because it honors the God who gave them to you.

The practical takeaway is simple but not easy. In a world beyond your control, trust the One who is in control. Work diligently. Enjoy what is genuinely good. Hold your plans loosely. And accept that the gap between what you can understand and what God is doing is not a problem to solve. It is an invitation to trust.

reflect & discussion

1. Where in your life do you feel the injustice Qohelet describes most acutely, and how has that affected your trust in God?
2. Qohelet calls joy a divine command, not just a coping mechanism. What does it look like for you to receive your daily life as something worth celebrating rather than just enduring?
3. The chapters repeatedly press on the limits of human understanding. Where are you most tempted to demand an explanation from God rather than trusting Him in the not-knowing?

challenge

Look for Jesus. In the attention of pursuing righteousness and wisdom despite the outcome, where do you see Jesus in that? Hebrews 12:2 says it was Jesus's joy to pursue what is good even though the world would call it foolish.

WEEK

8

Ecclesiastes 11-12

UNDER THE SUN

Sermon Notes: November 24

47

WEEK 8

Notes

WEEK 8 | DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 11:1-8

READ ECCLESIASTES 11:1-8

go deeper

After weeks of sitting with life's limits and uncertainties, Qohelet does something unexpected. He tells you to act anyway.

Cast your bread on the waters. Diversify your investments. Sow in the morning and in the evening. Do not wait for perfect conditions because they are not coming. The person who watches the wind will never sow. The person who studies the clouds will never reap. Waiting for certainty before you act is not wisdom. It is paralysis disguised as prudence.

You cannot predict outcomes. We understand little about the processes governing the world, no more than we understand how life forms in the womb. That is Qohelet's point in verse 5. The limits of your knowledge are real. But those limits are not a reason to stop. They are a reason to be creative and wise, to work consistently, and to trust that God is doing something in the process that you cannot fully see.

The passage closes with a genuine celebration of life. Light is sweet. Living is good. Rejoice in your years. But hold them with open hands because the days of darkness are coming too. This kind of honest awareness makes you more fully present to the life you have right now. Enjoy life fully. Fear God. And work faithfully, not because you can control the outcome, but because faithfulness is your part and the outcomes belong to Him.

reflect

1. Where in your life are you waiting for perfect conditions before you act, and what would it look like to move forward faithfully without them?
2. Verse 8 calls you to rejoice in your years while remembering that hard days are coming too. How does holding both of those realities at the same time change how you live today?

pray

What is God wanting you to act on? Ask him. Then ask him to give you the courage, wisdom, and the ambition to do it. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-7 and consider the examples of obedience in action.

WEEK 8 | DAY 2

Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:8

READ ECCLESIASTES 11:9-12:8

go deeper

Qohelet speaks directly to the young, and what he says is not what you might expect from a book that has spent eleven chapters diagnosing life's futility. Rejoice. Let your heart cheer you. Walk in the ways of your heart and what your eyes see.

But he does not stop there. Know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. That combination is the heart of this passage. Enjoy life fully and remain accountable to God. Not two contradictory commands but one mature posture. The freedom to enjoy and the responsibility of accountability is real. Neither cancels the other out.

Life is like light, intrinsically good and worth savoring, precisely because your days are brief and darkness follows. Remembering your mortality does not diminish life. It deepens your appreciation for it. The person who forgets they are going to die tends to waste the time they have. The person who holds their mortality honestly tends to live more fully.

The allegory of aging in chapter 12 makes this vivid. The strong men stoop. The grinders cease. The windows grow dim. The silver cord is severed. The dust returns to the earth. The spirit returns to God who gave it. And then Qohelet returns to where he started. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. But now you have traveled the whole journey with him, and that declaration has started to land differently than it did in chapter 1.

reflect

1. Qohelet tells you to enjoy your youth while you have it and to remember your Creator before the hard days come. What would it look like for you to do both of those things more intentionally right now?
2. The closing allegory of aging is a reminder that your capacity for life will not always be what it is today. What does that reality change about how you want to spend your time and energy?

pray

Thank God for the Youth you still have. Ask him to help you steward it well so you may leverage your life for his good purposes and your joy.

WEEK 8 | DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

READ ECCLESIASTES 12:9-14

go deeper

After twelve chapters of honest, searching, sometimes brutal examination of life under the sun, Qohelet arrives at his conclusion. And it is simpler than you might expect.

Fear God and keep his commandments. That is it. That is the whole of the matter. Throughout this book the Teacher has systematically dismantled every false source of meaning, wealth, pleasure, achievement, wisdom, legacy. Not because those things are evil but because they cannot bear the weight, we put on them. The point was never to make you cynical. It was to shake you lose from false hopes so that something true could take their place.

And here it is. Meaning and purpose do not emerge from your circumstances. They come through your relationship with God as Creator and Judge. A routine day becomes meaningful not because of its external significance but because you are living it in conscious connection to the fact that God has given it to you to cultivate something great with it. Joy does not come from what you accomplish. It comes from embracing the gifts of this life with the gracious giver of them.

Verse 14 closes the book with the final reframe. God will bring every deed into judgment, every secret thing, whether good or evil. That is not a threat designed to produce anxiety. It is the truth that gives weight to everything. If God sees it all and will call it all to account, then nothing is ultimately meaningless. Every act of faithfulness matters. Every quiet obedience counts. The things done in secret that no one saw, God saw. A life lived in reverence and obedience to Him is never wasted.

reflect

1. After eight weeks in Ecclesiastes, how has the book changed the way you think about what makes a life meaningful?
2. Verse 14 says God will bring every deed into judgment, including the secret ones. How does that reality change the way you think about the faithfulness that no one else sees?

pray

Think about God as a righteous judge, is there anything you need to confess and ask him to forgive? Confess those things to him and ask him to forgive you. Read Romans 10:9.

Think about God as a gracious father, what do you need to give him and trust him with? Thank him for his forgiveness and provision, for his adoption of you as his son/daughter. Read Romans 8:12-17.

WEEK 8 | DAY 4

Overview & Discussion

ECCLESIASTES 11-12

overview

This final week Qohelet stopped diagnosing and started calling you to act.

Everything he has argued across twelve chapters builds to this. Life is brief. Your accomplishments will fade. Death is coming. And yet, enjoy your days, fear God, and move. That is not a contradiction. It is the framework the whole book has been building toward. Do not become so consumed by the need for perfect information that you never act. Work diligently. Diversify. Sow in the morning and in the evening. You cannot control outcomes, but faithfulness is yours to give, and God works in it. Remember your Creator before the hard days come. Youth is a gift with an expiration. The capacity for joy, for bold action, for wholehearted engagement with life, these do not last forever. Use them now.

And then Qohelet closes. **Fear God and keep his commandments.** That is the whole of the matter. Not because obedience earns meaning but because relationship with God is where meaning lives. Joy does not come from what you accomplish. It comes from your connection to Him. A life lived in reverence and faithfulness to God, however ordinary it looks from the outside, is never wasted. Despite everything this book has shown you about life's injustice and futility, it does not end in despair. It ends in trust. That is the only posture that holds.

Why do we trust him?... In the midst of this broken and chaotic world, that our sin caused, God himself entered it. In the form of Jesus, he walked this life as we walked, but in complete perfection. He showed us what this life is all about, in relationship with God, the father. He in his righteous wisdom and compassion, pushed back the darkness and healed the brokenness. And though he should have been worshiped, he was killed, murdered on our behalf. Jesus took the penalty of sin upon himself. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* And Romans 6:23 says *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Though it seemed bleak, and without reason, it seemed to be hopeless and was proven to be powerful. Three days after being crucified and buried in a tomb, Jesus rose from the dead. Defeating sin and death so that we may be forgiven and reconciled back to God. Jesus, God himself, now stands as our advocate against the sin and brokenness of this world, and gives us new life to cherish, steward, and use to glorify and enjoy God. It is by his wonderful grace, through the gift of faith in Jesus that you may be saved. Romans 10:9 says, *"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* You no longer have to look at this life as meaningless but now you get to see it as a gift in a mission that your creator has set you on to do as he has done: Push back the darkness in this world and bring healing to what is broken.

reflect & discussion

1. Looking back over the entire study, what has Ecclesiastes most honestly named about your life that you needed to hear?
2. Qohelet calls you to enjoy life fully while fearing God. What does it look like practically for those two things to coexist in your daily life?
3. The book ends with fear God and keep his commandments; this is the whole duty of man. As you close this study, what is one concrete way you want to live differently because of what you have read?

pray

Look back through your notes, prayers, and challenges from the past eight weeks. Where did God meet you? Where did He challenge you? Where did you grow? Write down one thing He showed you that you want to carry into the next season of your life. Then read Psalm 16 in its entirety, the same psalm you were pointed to in Week 1. Notice how differently it may land now. Pray it in your own words as a response to everything God has shown you through Ecclesiastes.

52

Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes Devotional Guide

Metro HTX



Sources.

This guide was shaped by the careful work of many scholars, pastors, and teachers who have spent their lives in this text. We are grateful for the following resources that informed its preparation.

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