

An In-Depth Book-by-Book Study of the Bible

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

JOB, ECCLESIASTES MAKING SENSE OF LIFE

BIBLE STUDIES
FOR THE DEAF

EXPLORE
THE BIBLE

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* Evangelistic Lesson

Accepting Christ?

Rhoda Munoz Rios de Perez



How does a person who is born in Wichita, Kansas, end up in Puerto Rico?

A missionary shared Jesus with my father. He became a Christian, and with my mother, served the Mexican community in Kansas. After I was born, we moved to Chicago to reach out to those moving there from Puerto Rico. My mom taught all five of her children God's love and good Christian values.

With the examples and teachings from my parents, I accepted Christ and was baptized in 1952. I gave my life to serve God wherever I was needed. I met my husband Tony at Woodlawn Baptist Church in Chicago. He accepted Christ in 1956. Three years later, we were married and eventually had three children.

In 1980, the Chicago weather became very cold. My husband had land in Puerto Rico, so we moved to Puerto Rico. God had a plan! I met

Rev. Robert Bell when I was teaching English in the Immersion School in Utuado, Puerto Rico. Pastor Bob told me that he needed me to help a Deaf woman, Blanca Bravo.

As it turned out, Blanca has helped me while I have helped her. God has used our lives to reach hearing, Deaf, and Deaf-Blind people for Christ. Blanca's testimony has changed many lives in Puerto Rico and the United States.

Do you ever wonder if God has a plan for you? I believe God has a plan for every person. The first step to learning God's beautiful plan for your life is to accept Him as your Savior and Lord. Have you told Him that you will serve Him wherever you are needed? It is not difficult to follow Him. Read these verses. They will help you make the decision to follow Jesus:

- **John 14:6** – Believe that Jesus is the **ONLY** way to be saved. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life. The only way to the Father is through me.*
- **Romans 3:23** – Understand that **ALL** people are sinners. There is nobody, except Jesus, who is perfect. Confess that you are a sinner. *Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard*

Romans 10:9 – Ask Jesus to save you.
If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved.

- **Romans 11:33** – Now praise God because He is wise and He has a beautiful plan for your life.
Yes, God’s riches are very great, and his wisdom and knowledge have no end! No one can explain the things God decides or understand his ways.

How to Use the Personal Study Guide

Use your Bible to read all the verses. These lessons may be used for weekly Bible study and reading at home.

Read **Accepting Christ?** on page four to find out how to become a Christian. If you are already a Christian, show this to a friend.

The **Lesson Material** outline gives verses for you to read in your Bible.

The **Bible Truth** will help you to understand the lesson better.

What These Verses Tell Us explains in a few words what the lesson teaches. Read it first to help you understand the lesson.

Before you read each part of the lesson, read the Bible verses for that part. Study the lesson and the verses to find the answers to the **Study Questions**. Write your answers and bring them to the Bible study.

You will find a **Word List** with definitions on pages 106-108. The words on the list are in color in the **Today’s Lesson** section.

Scriptures for your **Daily Bible Readings** are on pages 109-111. If you follow this plan, you will read the entire Bible in one year.

The **Leader Guide** is for the teacher. The sections on **The Bible in Context** and **Explore...** offer additional study related to each lesson.

Pray for your teachers, members of your Bible class, and lost Deaf people. Pray for God to use you to share Christ with other people.

We use the New Century Version® in these lessons. Many Deaf people like this version because they can understand it easily. You can see this translation and others online at www.BibleGateway.com.

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JOB, ECCLESIASTES

*Making Sense of Life***Job**

The man, Job, is the main character of this book, but he is not the writer. The author is unknown, but Bible teachers believe the writer was from Israel. The writing is good quality Hebrew. The writer uses the Hebrew name for God, *Yahweh* (YHWH). The writer probably knew of this story because it had been told for many generations. Before people began to write stories in books, information and history was passed from one generation to another by repeating the stories often.

The prophet Ezekiel spoke of Job as a great man who did what was right (Ezekiel 14:14-20). James referred to the patience of Job as a well-known story (James 5:11). Paul quoted Job 5:13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19.

Job probably lived about 2000 to 1000 B.C. This is about the same time as Abraham. He lived to be more than 100 years old (42:16), just like Abraham and others of that time. Job's wealth was counted in his animals and servants (1:3). He served as priest for his family (1:5).

Job lived in "the land of Uz" (1:1). The exact location is unknown, but it was in the area north of the Arabian Desert, between Palestine and the Euphrates River.

The story was probably written in a book during the time of King Solomon or some time before the Israelites were taken captive in Babylon. However, some Bible teachers believe this may have been written into a book by Moses. Others believe Moses may have learned of this book while he was in Midian and brought it to the Jews.

Many words are difficult to translate in the Book of Job. Some translators simply omit the difficult parts, while others try to guess at the meaning.



Ecclesiastes

Solomon was the author of Ecclesiastes, as implied in 1:12,16. He identifies himself as the son of King David (1:1). This book was written when Solomon was an old man, so his style of writing is different from Proverbs which was written when he was much younger.

Solomon uses the words *wise* and *wisdom* 52 times in this book. To Solomon, a wise person understood God's word. Wise persons know what God wants them to do, and they do what is good and right. He also uses the word *vanity* or *emptiness* 34 times.

Ecclesiastes is not easy to outline, just as with the Book of Proverbs. Rather, the writer has many topics presented with no organization. These topics are summarized in the final verses. Some statements seem to be written in an odd way, perhaps to get or keep the attention of the reader.

Ecclesiastes is a Greek word. The Hebrew word for the title means "the preacher." In his old age, Solomon looked back on his life and what he had learned. He turned away from God. He lived for things "under the sun" (on the earth) instead of spiritual things "above the sun." Then he repented of his sin and came back to walk with God.

Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes for young people. He encouraged them to turn from the meaningless things of worldly learning, riches, and pleasures. Instead, he told the young people to remember their creator "while you are young" (12:1).

In this book, Solomon wrote about judgment and life after death. He wrote about God as truly real to him. The word *God* is used 40 times in the book.

Jewish people read the Book of Ecclesiastes in the synagogue during the Feast of Tabernacles, at the time of the harvest.

UNIT 1



WHY ME?

Job 1:1–42:17

We have seven lessons in this unit as we study the Book of Job. These lessons help us to find biblical answers to difficulties and problems in our life. Each lesson seeks to answer a question. These are questions people often ask today. List these questions on the board to remind the class of the themes each week.

Job struggled with his suffering, but he kept his trust in the Lord (June 2). Job carefully studied

the opinions given to him by his friends, trying to explain why Job suffered (June 9). He placed his hope in God when life seemed to be unfair (June 16). Job spoke of the value of following God's wisdom (June 23). He lived by godly standards of a pure life (June 30). Job accepted God's discipline (July 7), and submitted to the **sovereign** Lord at all times (July 14).

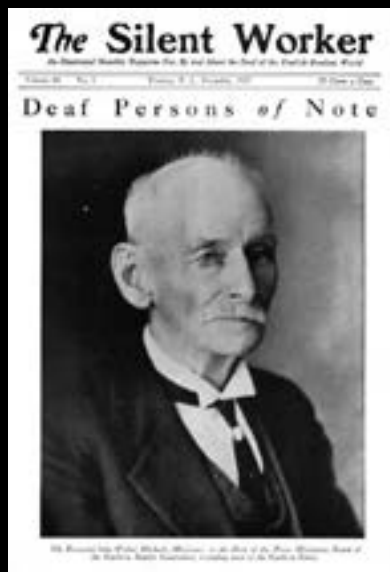
Meet Our Writer

Donnie Wiltshire
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Dr. Wiltshire has served as pastor of Deaf churches in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Memphis, Tennessee. He and his wife, Irma, live in Cary, North Carolina. They have three children.



Is This Really Happening to Me?



**Background
Study Verses:**
Job 1:1–2:13

Lesson Material:
Job 1:1-3,8-11,20-22;
2:7,9-10

Bible Truth
People can trust the
Lord even when things
go terribly wrong.

Job suffered many things, but he stayed faithful to God. Job's story makes me think about John Michaels. In 1913, Michaels was the only Deaf Southern Baptist missionary. That year was probably the hardest of his life. He started the year with a severe illness. He barely recovered from that illness when his wife, Mary, died. Michaels tried to continue his work, but soon he had some serious surgery on his face. Then he was disappointed when his daughter gave up teaching at a Deaf school. He faced great sadness when his plan for a new Deaf church in Louisville, Kentucky, was not successful. Michaels wrote these words to a friend, "I am now on the decline in health, and I am preparing to retire from work."¹ Michaels was in a situation much like Job. However, he did not quit. He served Christ faithfully until his retirement in 1939.

1. From a letter to Dr. Percival Hall, president of Gallaudet University, October 16, 1913.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Acknowledge Your Limits (Job 1:1-3)** – The people who knew Job thought Job was a great man because of what they saw in his character and his wealth.
2. **Seek Heaven's Honor (Job 1:8)** – The Lord talked about Job as His servant. Job was a man of great character and faith in God.
3. **Expect Faith's Challenge (Job 1:9-11)** – Satan said Job's faith was not real.
4. **Respond with Faith (Job 1:20-22; 2:7,9-10)** – Job kept his faith in God even after he lost his money, his children, and his health.

STUDY QUESTION

1. What kind of man was Job?
2. What did God say about Job?
3. What did Satan say Job would do if he lost everything?
4. How did Job show his unbroken faith in God?
5. Did Job sin after he lost his health?

Today's Lesson

1. Acknowledge Your Limits (Job 1:1-3)

- 1 A man named Job lived in the land of Uz. He was an honest and innocent man; he honored God and stayed away from evil.
- 2 Job had seven sons and three daughters.
- 3 He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred teams of oxen, and five hundred female donkeys. He also had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

Verse 1. The Book of Job is one of the most interesting and difficult books in the Bible. We do not know when the book was written. We do not know who wrote it. We do not know who Job was, and we do not know where the city Uz was located. However, the Book of Job is also one of the most beautiful books in the Bible. The book of Job helps us understand suffering and it helps us understand why people suffer.

Two things we know about Job. First, the Book of Job is truly ancient. We do not know when it was written, but the story best fits a time before

the kings of Israel. Job was a remarkable man. He was one of the best men who ever lived on the earth. The Bible says he was honest. Verse 1 tells us he stayed away from evil. This cannot be said about many people.

Verse 2. Job also had many blessings from God. Job had seven sons and three daughters. Seven was the perfect number in Hebrew thinking. Having seven sons was the perfect number of sons. The ancient Hebrews thought it was good to have more sons than daughters. Sons carried on the family name and brought wealth into the family. Job's children were a great blessing to him.

Verse 3. Job was also wealthy. In that ancient world, wealth was not measured in money. Wealth was counted by the value of a man's farm. Job had many animals on a large farm. He had 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He also had many servants to run his farming business. These numbers would be a large farm today.

**JOB'S REAL STRENGTH
IN LIFE WAS HIS FAITH
IN GOD.**

In that ancient world, before the kings of Israel, Job had unbelievable wealth. Job's real strength was not in the size of his herds. Job's real strength in life was his faith in God.

2. Seek Heaven's Honor (Job 1:8)

8 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him. He is an honest and innocent man, honoring God and staying away from evil."

Verse 8. We find a surprise in this verse. God and Satan had a conversation. We do not think about God talking with Satan. We think about the Satan we see in the New Testament, and we learn he is always evil. However, think about when Jesus was tempted by Satan. Jesus had a long conversation with Satan while He resisted temptation. God can talk with Satan. But Satan has always been an evil being.

But Job was not an evil person. We saw that in verse 1 and now in verse 8, God confirmed Job's character. God said Job was honest and innocent. Job honored God and stayed away from evil. God thought highly of Job. What do you think God thinks about you?

3. Expect Faith's Challenge (Job 1:9-11)

9 But Satan answered the Lord, "Job honors God for a good reason.
10 You have put a wall around him, his family, and everything he owns. You have blessed the things he has done. His flocks and herds are so large they almost cover the land."

11 But reach out your hand and destroy everything he has, and he will curse you to your face.”

Verses 9-10. Satan has always been evil. That is his plan now, and it was his plan in the ancient world—to accuse people before God. Satan will pull down everyone he can. In verse 9, he began his **scheme** to destroy Job. Satan did not believe Job was truly a good person. Satan believed Job lived the way he did because he had an easy and blessed life. Job had wealth and a large family. Satan said, of course Job acted well, because God protected him and treated him like a favorite child.

Verse 11. Satan said if everything Job owned was destroyed, Job would quickly change. Satan accused Job of being a “fake.” Satan said Job did not truly love God. He served God because God was good to him. Satan said Job’s devotion to God would leave as soon as his wealth was gone.

Many questions come from this story. Our lesson cannot answer all those questions. When you read verse 12 and the following verses you will see how God let Satan take away Job’s wealth and family. We cannot explain

**WHAT DO YOU DO
WHEN YOUR FAITH
IS TESTED?**

all of God’s purposes. Why did God let this happen? We truly don’t know. But we can learn in this story how all believers will face tests to their faith. These tests come to us throughout our lives. Sometimes the tests come with illness. Sometimes the tests come from suffering and death. We face these tests every day, and sometimes the tests are almost too much for us to handle. The question for Job and for you and me is, “What will we do when we face these tests?” Do you serve God because life is easy? What will you do when life is hard? Part of the great power of the book of Job is watching Job struggle through the hardest part of life. We also watch Job as his faith triumphs through the test. What do you do when your faith is tested?

4. Respond with Faith (Job 1:20-22; 2:7,9-10)

Job 1:

20 When Job heard this, he got up and tore his robe and shaved his head to show how sad he was. Then he bowed down to the ground to worship God.

21 He said: “I was naked when I was born, and I will be naked when I die. The Lord gave these things to me, and he has taken them away. Praise the name of the Lord.”

22 In all this Job did not sin or blame God.

.....

Job 2:

7 So Satan left the Lord's presence. He put painful sores on Job's body, from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

9 Job's wife said to him, "Why are you trying to stay innocent? Curse God and die!"

10 Job answered, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Should we take only good things from God and not trouble?" In spite of all this Job did not sin in what he said.

Chapter 1, Verse 20. In verses 13 through 19, Job lost everything he had. First he lost his animals. Then he lost his children. Job was deeply hurt and sad. In that ancient world, when Job lived, people showed sadness by tearing their clothes and shaving their head. That is what Job did. However, then Job did something surprising. He bowed down to the

PEOPLE OF FAITH MUST

BE PREPARED TO RECEIVE

BLESSINGS OR TRIALS.

ground to worship God. This might have been a hard thing for Job to do.

He must have felt like screaming.

He might have wanted to cry out to

God. Later, Job asked God many hard questions, but the first thing Job did,

after he got the terrible news about his loss, was worship God. By bowing down before God, he humbled himself to God's will. Job's heart was broken with grief, but his devotion to God continued strong.

Verse 21. Job's words are like a prayer. Job confessed how he came into the world with nothing, and when he left the world in death, he would have nothing. Job reasoned this way: if God gave him everything he had then God had the right to take everything away. Job thought this was what God did. God gave him wealth and family. Now God took away all His gifts. Then Job spoke some great words of faith. Job declared, "Praise the name of the Lord." I do not know if my faith is strong enough to do something like that. I have great respect for Job. I hope when I face terrible times, I will continue to give praise to God.

Verse 22. Job did not sin during all this. Job was sad and talked about his grief, but that was not sin. Job did not sin when he asked questions to God or when he became angry with God. If Job had turned his back on God, that would have been sin. Job did not turn away from God. He did not throw away his faith.

Chapter 2, Verse 7. Satan was not finished with Job. Job did not sin when he lost all he had. Now Satan talked with God again, saying Job would turn from God if Job lost his own health. God gave Satan permission to take away Job's health. Satan made Job suffer with painful sores all over his body. Job not only lost everything he had, he also lost his health.

Verse 9. How can we stay faithful to God when things go bad? Often we can draw strength from other people to help us through hard times. The greatest help anyone can get is from their spouse. If a wife is sick, her husband can encourage her. If a husband is sad, his wife can cheer him up. If either partner faces death, the other can put it all in God's hands. Job needed his wife to help him in this terrible time. But she did not help him. In fact, she added even more pain to him. Job's wife advised him to "curse God and die!" Job's wife also lost her children and all she had. She, too, was deeply hurt. However, she was no help to Job. She was like Satan in the way she tried to push Job away from God.

Verse 10. Job and his wife were both in deep pain. Job's wife seemed ready to turn away from God. But Job was not. Job refused his wife's advice. He knew her advice was not wise. This was the advice of a foolish person. Job knew he needed to be ready to receive both blessings and pain in life. He also knew no blessing or pain gets to us without going through God's will. Nothing gets to us by accident. It seems sometimes we experience painful things because that is what God wants for us. For example, sometimes God punishes us for our sin, and we feel it through hard times. However, sometimes hard times come to us as something God simply lets happen. Perhaps that is what happened here with Job. Job knew people of faith must be prepared to receive blessings or trials.

The last statement of the verse expresses Job's faith in God. Even though he suffered, he did not sin. Losing everything he had did not cause Job to sin. Losing his health did not cause Job to sin. The advice of Job's wife did not cause Job to sin. His faith held strong even though his life was ruined.

Now you can see why this lesson began with the story about John Michaels. Michaels lost almost everything in 1913. He lost his health. He lost his dream for a ministry. And he lost his wife. He thought about giving up. But he did not give up. He continued to serve the Lord faithfully for the rest of his life. Are you faithful to God this way?

What About You?

What would you do if you lost everything? Would you curse God like Job's wife advised? Would you question God as Job did? Would you be faithful to God? As we live, we learn how life often gets hard. Many of you reading this lesson have faced great hardship. What did you do when life got hard? This lesson gives you a great opportunity to compare your story with a great man of faith. Ask God to give you Job's kind of faith.

Applying the Lesson

Are you in pain right now from some hard experiences in your life? Here are three things you can do to help you through this hard time:

1. Pray and ask God to give you understanding and a strong feeling of His presence during this time.
2. Talk to your pastor about your painful experience.
3. Give God praise for every experience in life, and show your faith in Him.

A verse to remember: "In all this Job did not sin or blame God" (Job 1:22).

Was It My Fault?

Background
Study Verses:
Job 3:1–14:22

Lesson Material:
Job 4:6-7; 6:2-3,24;
8:4-8; 11:6b,13-15;
13:4,22-25

Bible Truth
Each of us must
think carefully
about how we
explain why difficult
things happen.



Many people think bad things happen to people, because they do bad things and God punishes them. We must be careful if we think this way. My friend John was born Deaf. He was one of thousands of children affected by the rubella (German measles) epidemic between 1963 and 1965. When John was born, his parents were upset. They did not understand why John was Deaf. They thought maybe God was punishing them for something they had done. As John grew older, his family became involved in the Deaf world. Most of his family learned American Sign Language. They met many wonderful Deaf Christians. Soon they started thinking about John's deafness in a different way. They stopped thinking his deafness was a punishment. They saw God working in John and through their family because John was Deaf. They saw God use John's deafness as a blessing to others.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **An Appeal to Justice (Job 4:6-7; 6:2-3,24)** - Eliphaz said God was honest, therefore Job got what he deserved. Job answered he did not know of any wrong he had done.
2. **An Appeal to Tradition (Job 8:4-8)** – Bildad tried to convince Job how everything happened to him and his children because of their sin.
3. **An Appeal to Logic (Job 11:6b,13-15; 13:4)** – Zophar used logic to explain how God was punishing Job and Job needed to repent.
4. **An Appeal to God (Job 13:22-25)** – Job said he wanted to take his case straight to God. Job was wrong when he thought his suffering happened because God was not just in His actions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were the names of Job's three friends?
2. To what did Job compare the weight of his suffering?
3. What did Bildad tell Job to do?
4. To what did Job compare his friends?
5. What did Job want God to do?

Today's Lesson

1. An Appeal to Justice (Job 4:6-7; 6:2-3,24)

Job 4:

- 6 You should have confidence because you respect God; you should have hope because you are innocent.
- 7 Remember that the innocent will not die; honest people will never be destroyed.
-

Job 6:

- 2 I wish my suffering could be weighed and my misery put on scales.
- 3 My sadness would be heavier than the sand of the seas. No wonder my words seem careless.
- 24 Teach me, and I will be quiet. Show me where I have been wrong.

Chapter 4, Verse 6. In our first lesson, we saw what happened to Job. Job was a godly man, and he was very rich. He had a large family. God let

Satan take away everything Job had. In the end, all his children were dead and he lost everything he owned, but he stayed faithful to God. In chapter 3, three of Job's friends came to visit him. They were deeply sad about Job's condition. They showed their sadness by tearing their clothes and putting dirt on their heads. They shared Job's sadness by sitting with him silently for one week.

When the week was finished, one of the three friends, Eliphaz, started to speak to Job. This friend hoped he could help Job understand why these terrible things happened. Read all of chapters 3–15 to get the full picture. Eliphaz thought he knew the reason for Job's problems. In fact, Eliphaz thought Job must have understood it, too. Eliphaz rightly knew how Job respected God. In verse 6, Eliphaz did not mean Job was innocent of sin, but he was innocent of misunderstanding God. Since Job understood God, Job must understand what was happening.

Verse 7. Eliphaz and Job shared an understanding of God's character. They believed God always punishes evil people for their sin and God always blesses people for their

goodness. Eliphaz and Job thought they understood how God works in the world. The “innocent will not die,” and “honest people will never be destroyed,” because God will not do those things. God is always just in His actions. Job was not innocent because God was punishing him.

Chapter 6, Verses 2-3. All of chapter 5 tells us the words of Eliphaz. In chapter 6, Job answered his friend. Job showed he was very sad. The way he expressed his sadness was by saying, “I wish my suffering could be weighed.” Suffering cannot be weighed on a scale, but still this is a very effective picture. Job said if his suffering could be weighed it would be heavier than the sands of the sea. How much do all the sands of the sea weigh? No one knows, but clearly it would be a large amount. Job felt his sorrow was even more than this. His sorrow was so great it could not be weighed. That much suffering can cause a person to say strange things.

Verse 24. Job knew he was innocent of doing sin. Go back to chapters 1–2 and see how God said the same thing. That is why Job said, “Show me where I have been wrong.” He knew he was not guilty of any wrong. Eliphaz thought Job was guilty and God was punishing him. Job knew he was innocent. Eliphaz's explanation of Job's suffering was not correct.

THE BEST RESPONSE WE
CAN MAKE TO SUFFERING
IS TO ASK GOD FOR HELP.

2. An Appeal to Tradition (Job 8:4-8)

4 Your children sinned against God, and he punished them for their sins.
5 But you should ask God for help and pray to the Almighty for mercy.

- 6 If you are good and honest, he will stand up for you and bring you back where you belong.
7 Where you began will seem unimportant, because your future will be so successful.
8 Ask old people; find out what their ancestors learned.

Verse 4. In chapter 7, Job cried out to God. In chapter 8, Bildad, the second of Job's friends, tried to reason with Job. Bildad also believed Job suffered because of his sin. You might remember in our first lesson, all of Job's children were killed when a house collapsed on the whole group.

Bildad explained in verse 4 his thinking about this accident. Bildad said, "Your children sinned against God." The reason they died was because God punished them. Sometimes people die because of sin. The gangster who murdered his enemy was later murdered by another enemy. We can see how his death came from his sinful life. We can even see how an innocent person died because of the sins of a drunk driver. But often, children die from diseases. In such a case, we cannot blame one person's sin. The reason for such suffering is lost in mystery.

**JOB KNEW HE WAS
SUFFERING, BUT HE ALSO
KNEW HE HAD NOT SINNED
AGAINST GOD.**

Verse 5. Bildad was partly correct.

The best response we can make to suffering is to ask God for help. Often God's help will remove suffering. We become sick many times in our lives, and most of the time, we get well. God is our constant help. Sometimes we ask God for help, and our suffering stays. Many times in this situation, God still helps by changing the way we think about suffering.

Verses 6-7. Will God always restore all we lose due to suffering if we are "good and honest" as Bildad said? The answer to that question, of course, is, "No." Sometimes, God might restore what is lost in times of suffering. Michaels, the Deaf missionary I wrote about in lesson 1, suffered greatly in 1913, even losing his wife. Later his health was restored, and he married a second wife.

On the other hand, Jesus was perfectly innocent of wrong, yet He suffered greatly. God did not take away His suffering. However, God used Jesus' suffering to bring salvation for you and me. So Bildad was not fully correct in what he said.

Verse 8. This verse is the heart of this section. Bildad said to "ask old people." He meant old people have seen what happens during times of suffering. They understand the traditions. Bildad thought if Job asked some old people, they would agree all suffering comes from sin. Bildad was also wrong in Job's case. **Tradition** and the knowledge of old people are not always right.

3. An Appeal to Logic (Job 11:6b,13-15; 13:4)

Job 11:

6b Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.

13 You must give your whole heart to him and hold out your hands to him for help.

14 Put away the sin that is in your hand; let no evil remain in your tent.

15 Then you can lift up your face without shame, and you can stand strong without fear.

Job 13:

4 But you smear me with lies. You are worthless doctors, all of you!

Chapter 11, Verse 6b. In chapters 9–10, Job answered Bildad. Read those chapters to get the full story. In chapter

11, Zophar, the third of Job's friends, began his speech. Zophar also believed the same thing about sin and suffering as Eliphaz and Bildad—people suffer because of sin. Zophar thought about

this theological truth from a logical position. Zophar thought Job was not only guilty of some sin, but he was guilty of much sin. This was clear to Zophar how Job must have suffered more because God had already forgotten some of his sin.

Verses 13–14. Zophar gave Job the same answers the others gave. Job needed to give his whole heart to God (verse 13). If Job would reach out to God, then God would help him (verse 13). Job was clearly suffering because of his sin. Therefore, the right action for Job was to put away his sin. Job must remove all sin from his life (verse 14).

Verse 15. If Job confessed his sin and reached out to God for help, he could expect a change in his life, said Zophar. If Job would turn from his sin, he could then lift up his face without shame. Furthermore, he could “stand strong without fear.” Probably, Zophar meant Job could stand strong in the presence of God or the presence of other men and be confident.

Chapter 13, Verse 4. In chapters 12–14, Job answered Zophar. Job rejected all the arguments of his friends. Job knew he was suffering, but he also knew he had not sinned against God. He knew he was not being punished for his sin. But he could not figure out why all the suffering was placed on him. The three friends could think of no other way to explain Job's terrible troubles, so they accused him of sin. Job said they were all liars. Job had no sin in his life. His friends who came to help him were like “worthless doctors.” This is a sad phrase. A doctor's goal is to help us in sickness. But if a doctor can't give you any help, then that doctor cannot

SOMETIMES
GOD USES SUFFERING
TO TEST OUR FAITH.

meet his goal. Job's friends came to help him, but they gave him no help. They were worthless friends.

4. An Appeal to God (Job 13:22-25)

- 22 Then call me, and I will answer, or let me speak, and you answer.
23 How many evil things and sins have I done? Show me my wrong and my sin.
24 Don't hide your face from me; don't think of me as your enemy.
25 Don't punish a leaf that is blown by the wind; don't chase after straw.

Verse 22. Chapters 13–14 have Job's response to his friends and to God. Job did not accept the explanations given by his friends for his suffering. Yet, Job shared their understanding about how suffering comes as a result of sin. Job was ready to answer God, if only God would call him. Or, Job was ready to question God like a lawyer questions a witness, if only God would speak.

Verse 23. Job's first question to God was, "How many evil things and sins have I done?" Since Job knew he had not sinned, he felt God was not fair. Job asked God to give a list of the sins he had done. If God could not do this, then perhaps God would see He had acted unjustly.

Verse 24. Job became bold with his words to God. But God did not answer. God answered Job later, but not at this point. Job pleaded with God not to hide or run off like an enemy. Job was ready to talk with God face-to-face.

Verse 25. Job seemed to feel he was being punished again and again. He felt like a leaf twisted by the wind, only to be punished by the wind again. God did not yet answer Job. So, at this point we are left to think about the mystery of suffering. We have learned how suffering cannot always be explained. Sometimes, suffering does come into our lives because of our sin. Sometimes, suffering comes into our lives because other people sin. Sometimes, God uses suffering to test our faith. This seems to have been what was happening to Job. Sometimes, God uses our suffering for His own glory, like in the story in John 9. And sometimes, God uses the suffering we go through to work acts of healing in the lives of other people. This is the hardest one to understand, but that is why Jesus suffered. Perhaps that is what Paul meant in Philippians 3:10.

What About You?

Do you have a hard time understanding why you suffer? Most every person has felt this way.

When you suffer, the first question to ask yourself is, “Am I living in rebellion against God?”

The second question to ask yourself is, “How can God use my suffering for His glory?”

The third question to ask is, “Can God use my hard times to draw others to Christ or to strengthen them?”

Finally, a right action to do is to ask God for help and then submit to God’s will in your life. These steps will help you deal with your own suffering and pain.

Applying the Lesson

Are you experiencing suffering in your life? Try reading these passages of scripture and write down answers from God:

Luke 13:1-5 _____

John 9:1-5 _____

Hebrews 12:4-13 _____

Mark 14:35-36 _____

Ask God to help you understand, but even more important than that, ask God to give you His grace while you are going through suffering.

A verse to remember: “(God,) don’t hide your face from me; don’t think of me as your enemy” (Job 13:24).

Who Said Life Would Be Fair?



Background Study Verses:

Job 15:1–21:34

Lesson Material:

Job 15:5-6,9-10,20;
16:19-21; 19:5-6,25-27;
21:7-9

Bible Truth

People can place their
hope in the Lord when
life seems unfair.

I have a friend with whom I frequently trade e-mails. This friend has had a difficult life. He was born Deaf, but he grew up in a hearing family. The hearing family never treated him very well. He went to the Model Secondary School for the Deaf in Washington but had problems in school. He had many dreams for his life, but most of those dreams have not come true. Now he often questions God because he did not get the life he wanted.

I have tried to help my friend understand how Jesus is the real source of help for his feelings about life. My Deaf friend has not come to understand how sometimes good people have hard lives and bad people have easy lives. I know God could truly use this person to help others who are discouraged. I pray for my friend to see how Christ has the answers he is seeking.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **You Might Be Misunderstood (Job 15:5-6,9-10,20)** - Eliphaz did not rightly understand what Job meant when he responded to the advice his friends gave. Eliphaz believed Job was proud and did not speak the truth.
2. **You Might Be Ignored (Job 16:19-21; 19:5-6,25-27)** - Job's friends ignored Job when he expressed his faith in God. Job's friends never changed their belief, "Job was guilty of sin."
3. **You Might See Others Go Unpunished (Job 21:7-9)** - Job answered Zophar by saying life can seem unfair when the wicked do well and the righteous suffer.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How did Eliphaz summarize his understanding of God (Job 15:20)?
2. Who spoke for Job in the presence of God (Job 16:20)?
3. What is a redeemer?
4. Whom did Job look forward to seeing (Job 19:26)?
5. Does God punish evil people?

Today's Lesson

1. You Might Be Misunderstood (Job 15:5-6,9-10,20)

- 5 Your sin teaches your mouth what to say; you use words to trick others.
- 6 It is your own mouth, not mine, that shows you are wicked; your own lips testify against you.
- 9 You don't know any more than we know. You don't understand any more than we understand.
- 10 Old people with gray hair are on our side; they are even older than your father.
- 20 The wicked suffer pain all their lives; the cruel suffer during all the years saved up for them.

Verses 5-6. This is our third lesson from the book of Job. You have probably noticed the structure of this book. Each of Job's friends made a long speech explaining his thoughts about Job's troubles. After each friend spoke, Job answered. This will be the outline for most of the book.

When Job spoke, he defended his reputation. Job made it clear he was not living in sin. But the friends of Job, including Eliphaz, could not think about suffering in any other way. Their understanding of God was simple: God blessed good people with an easy life, and wicked people could never know that kind of life. If a person suffered, that showed clearly he was living in sin. Job's suffering was huge. Job wanted a meeting with God so he could argue with God. Job felt God was not acting justly toward him.

Because Job said these things to God, Eliphaz was sure the root of Job's trouble was sin. Eliphaz accused Job of continued sin. "Your sin teaches your mouth what to say." Eliphaz did not believe what Job said. The more Job explained his innocence, the more Eliphaz saw Job's sin. The sin in Job's heart showed up on Job's lips, Eliphaz said. Job's words were enough to show Job was a sinner. This is what Eliphaz thought.

Verses 9-10. Job was clear in his defense. He heard the advice of his

YOU ARE A WISE PERSON IF
YOU LOOK CAREFULLY AT
YOUR LIFE DURING TIMES
OF SUFFERING
AND HARDSHIP.

friends, but he did not accept it. Job knew everything his friends said, but they misunderstood Job's words and Job's life. His friends, including Eliphaz, reminded Job how he was not smarter than they were. He did not have a deeper understanding than they had. They had all the wisdom of their age. Truly their counsel was based on the best understanding they had of God

and God's actions with people.

Eliphaz and the two other friends were not the only ones who believed this way. Verse 10 shows their theology (understanding of God) was the theology of the oldest and wisest people in their world. Even though Job and his friends were not young men, there were many other people who lived with them who were older. In that ancient culture, the wisdom of old people was greatly respected. That is why Eliphaz appealed to the wisdom of the oldest people of their culture.

Verse 20. This verse is a fine summary of the **theology** of Eliphaz and his friends. This is the way many people think today. Truly, many times wicked people suffer because of their wickedness. Sometimes cruel people suffer during all the years of their lives.

You are a wise person if you look carefully at your life during times of suffering and hardship. You are wise if you ask God to point out any sin you may have in your life. Many times, troubles come into our lives as a result of our sin. Job was wise to evaluate himself for sin. However, this is the error in the thinking of Eliphaz—not all suffering comes as a result of sin. Job's suffering was not because of sin, but his suffering was a test of Job's faithfulness.

2. You Might Be Ignored (Job 16:19-21; 19:5-6,25-27)

Job 16:

19 Even now I have one who speaks for me in heaven; the one who is on my side is high above.

20 The one who speaks for me is my friend. My eyes pour out tears to God.

21 He begs God on behalf of a human as a person begs for his friend.

Job 19:

5 If you want to make yourselves look better than I, you can blame me for my suffering.

6 Then know that God has wronged me and pulled his net around me.

25 I know that my Defender lives, and in the end he will stand upon the earth.

26 Even after my skin has been destroyed, in my flesh I will see God.

27 I will see him myself; I will see him with my very own eyes. How my heart wants that to happen!

Chapter 16, Verses 19-21. Eliphaz finished his speech against Job in chapter 15. In chapter 16, Job answered Eliphaz. Job cried out to God. Job felt even though he was innocent, God was attacking him. Job was in deep despair. Nevertheless, Job still showed his continuing deep faith in God. We can see evidence of his faith in verses 19-21. Job spoke about “one who speaks for me in heaven,” and “the one who speaks for me is my friend,” and “he begs God on behalf of a human as a person begs for his friend.”

These verses are not clear as to who Job was talking about. Job never identified who this person was. He called him “my friend.” Job might have been thinking like this: because Satan accused him in God’s presence, there was someone in God’s presence who spoke in support of Job. The Old Testament has no clear teaching about Jesus. However, in the New Testament we find Jesus is our advocate in the presence of God. He is the one who pleads on our behalf. Perhaps Job had an early feeling about this.

No matter what we may think about these verses, Job did not have a clear understanding of the work of Jesus. However, Job had a clear trust in God. Even though he lost everything and his body was in great pain, Job had faith in the greatness of God. Job believed God was acting in an unjust way toward him for some reason. However, God was still worthy of trust. We know from the New Testament, we have one who stands in the presence of God on our behalf. This one is Jesus.

WE HAVE ONE WHO
STANDS IN THE PRESENCE
OF GOD ON OUR BEHALF.
THIS ONE IS JESUS.

Chapter 19, Verses 5-6. In chapter 18, Bildad answered Job. Bildad again accused Job of sin. Bildad had no other way to understand suffering than to connect suffering to sin. In chapter 19, Job answered Bildad. Job was deeply disturbed at the accusations made by Bildad and the other friends. Job still knew he was innocent of sin. He was not suffering as a result of his sins. His friends could try to make themselves look better than he was. Blaming Job for his own suffering was, in part, a way to make themselves look better. But Job's real complaint was against God. That complaint is expressed in verse 6. Job spoke his feelings clearly when he said, "God has wronged me." This is the heart of Job's defense. Job had not sinned, but God acted in an unjust way. God did wrong against Job. If you read the opening story to this lesson, you read about my friend who has not gotten the dreams of life he wanted. My friend thinks God has done wrong against him. This sounds shocking—to accuse God of wrong

**MANY PEOPLE WILL NOT
KNOW THE FULL RESULT
OF THEIR EVIL LIVES UNTIL
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FINAL JUDGMENT.**

actions. Actually, God can accept our accusations. God will not push us away because we cry out against Him. However, when God helps you to see the truth, you will be surprised by how right God is and how wrong your thinking can be.

Verses 25-27. You might be surprised to read these verses after what we have just studied. Job accused God of being unjust. Nevertheless, in these verses Job re-expressed his faith in God. In verse 25, Job said, "I know my Defender lives." Many versions of the Bible use the word *redeemer* instead of the word *defender*. Redeemer is probably the better word. In the Old Testament, the redeemer was "the person who rescued another person out of danger or out of debt." In the book of Ruth, Boaz rescued Ruth and took her into his home.

Job stated his faith. He had a redeemer. This redeemer for Job would rescue him from death and would cause Job to see God with his very own eyes. Job truly wanted this to happen. Job wanted to see God. Job wanted to see God so he could plead his case before God. But Job also showed by these statements how his trust was still in God. No matter what had happened to Job up to this point, Job still had his hope and faith in God.

3. You Might See Others Go Unpunished (Job 21:7-9)

7 Why do evil people live a long time? They grow old and become more powerful.

8 They see their children around them; they watch them grow up.

9 Their homes are safe and without fear; God does not punish them.

Verses 7-9. In chapter 20, Zophar gave his speech. His way of thinking was exactly the same as the other friends. His thoughts are summed up in 20:5, “The happiness of evil people is brief.” Job answered Zophar in chapter 21. We are only looking at verses 7-9. We know what Job said in these verses is true but it is not a comfortable idea. Job said evil people often have easy and comfortable lives. Job said evil men live a long time. He said they see their children all around them. He said their homes are safe. All this led Job to make this hard observation in verse 9, “God does not punish them.”

You can see why this was hard for Job. Job and his friends all thought good people got God’s blessings and evil people got God’s punishment. Job was not evil, yet he had terrible trouble. This did not fit their thinking. Job said what they all had seen—often evil people have good and easy lives. This, too, did not fit their **theology**. Why did God not punish evil people? This is still a question all of us ask. Here is one of the truths from this lesson, “You might see others go unpunished.”

You can learn two things now. First, we know from the New Testament, everyone who does not turn to God will face God’s judgment. They may not have a hard life now, but hell is a real place, and God’s justice is experienced by everyone. Many people will not know the full result of their evil lives until they die and face God’s final judgment.

The second thing to learn is this: we must not follow God just because we get stuff or because we get an easy life. God is not Santa Claus. We must follow God because it is right to do so. The New Testament teaches us clearly how following Jesus includes both suffering and joy. We follow Christ, because in Christ, we know God and that is worth any price we may pay. It may appear some evil people have easy lives and some good people have hard lives.

I would rather have problems in this life and know Christ than have a comfortable life and not know Christ. Knowing God in Christ Jesus has given me peace in my heart and the one right purpose for living. I will always want to follow Him, even if I have a hard and painful life.

What About You?

Has life been unfair to you? Where do you go for help when life is unfair?

The Bible does not say God will make everything easy for you. This is not His goal for your life. But He will work through your pain to make you become like Christ.

Will you trust Him?

Applying the Lesson

Imagine your life is like Job's. Imagine you have lost everything, and your friends are no comfort for you. Where would you place your hope for the future? Mark your answer:

- ___ 1. In the government, to make life good for you?
- ___ 2. In the money you have in the bank?
- ___ 3. In your family, to fix all your problems?
- ___ 4. In the God who has saved you in Christ Jesus?

A verse to remember: "Even now I have one who speaks for me in heaven; the one who is on my side is high above. The one who speaks for me is my friend. My eyes pour out tears to God" (Job 16:19-20).

Whom Can I Trust?

**Background
Study Verses:**
Job 22:1–28:28

Lesson Material:
Job 28:1-4,12-13,
15-16,20-23,26-28

Bible Truth

People must look to
God for true wisdom.



God is the true place to find the wisdom we need for understanding life. Victor felt God calling him to be a Deaf pastor. He answered God's call and became a pastor. After several years, he felt frustrated. The Deaf people did not follow his leadership, and his wife was very unhappy. He quit the church. He started looking for answers in many places.

He went back to school and earned an advanced degree in Deaf education. He was still not happy. He got a good job and earned a lot of money. His hardships did not go away. Finally, he turned away from God. Soon his life fell apart completely. Only then did Victor come back to Christ.

Today he is faithfully serving Jesus. Life would have been so much better if Victor started with Jesus instead of ending with Him.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Recognize the Limits (Job 28:1-4,12)** - We can make progress by will power, personal intelligence, and hard work. However, we cannot get enough wisdom for the hardships of life.
2. **Acknowledge Wisdom's Value (Job 28:13,15-16)** - God's wisdom is more valuable than all earthly treasures.
3. **Seek Wisdom's Guidance (Job 28:20-23,26-28)** – We can have God's wisdom to handle the hardships of life when we live in an obedient faith relationship with God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Can miners find wisdom by digging for it in the earth?
2. What can you use to buy wisdom?
3. Who understands the way to wisdom?
4. Did the rules of nature happen by accident or by God's design?
5. What is true wisdom?

Today's Lesson

1. Recognize the Limits (Job 28:1-4,12)

- 1 There are mines where people dig silver and places where gold is made pure.
- 2 Iron is taken from the ground, and copper is melted out of rocks.
- 3 Miners bring lights and search deep into the mines for ore in thick darkness.
- 4 Miners dig a tunnel far from where people live, where no one has ever walked; they work far from people, swinging and swaying from ropes.
- 12 But where can wisdom be found, and where does understanding live?

Verses 1-4. Our last lesson stopped at chapter 21. In chapter 22, Eliphaz spoke. Job answered Eliphaz in chapters 23–24. Bildad spoke briefly in chapter 25. Job answered Bildad and all his friends in a long response in chapters 26–31. In this long speech, Job seemed to silence his three friends who accused him of experiencing God's judgment because of his sin. Job continued to argue he was innocent of sin, and therefore, the hardships in his life were not punishment due to sin. Job did not understand why

he suffered. In fact, much of the book of Job tells about Job asking God to help him understand why he suffered. Job asked for wisdom. Chapter 28 is Job's poem about wisdom.

Job recognized people were able to do some very amazing things. In verses 1-4, Job looked at the ability of men to create mines and harvest ore from the earth. Job knew silver, gold, and copper could be dug from the earth. Miners could dig into the earth and go deep under the ground. In the darkness of the earth, miners could bring light and see what no one had seen before. Miners could walk through tunnels, stepping in places where no one had walked before. It must have been amazing to Job to think about the work miners could do with picks, shovels, ropes, and knowledge. All the work of miners amazed Job.

Job would truly be amazed if he could see what people are able to do today. People have learned how to mine and drill to great depths. We have also developed our technology so we can send a person to the moon. We have learned so much we have developed bombs and weapons powerful enough to destroy the earth on which we live. We must ask this question, "We are smart, but are we wise?" We know many things, but many people do not have the wisdom to face life. Job knew even though miners were smart in their understanding of the earth, there were limits in their wisdom to understand life.

WE KNOW MANY THINGS,
BUT MANY PEOPLE DO NOT
HAVE THE WISDOM
TO FACE LIFE.

Verse 12. Job asked the question people still must answer, "Where can wisdom be found?" Yes, people have learned many things, and we are smart. But wisdom for life is different from having much knowledge. We can know a lot and be unwise in how we use our knowledge. Real wisdom does not begin with human knowledge. Real wisdom comes from God. When we try to live with knowledge but not with God's wisdom, we fool ourselves. We will study this more as we move through today's lesson.

Recently, I preached to a small group of Deaf people in rural North Carolina. After the worship time, we all went out to a restaurant to eat and talk together. I sat across from a Deaf man I had never met before. He was very bright. We started talking about current events and the news from around the world. He understood politics, history, geography, and religion. Then he said he had a different faith. I am familiar with that faith, so we talked for some time about the differences between Christianity and his faith. I have often thought about how much this man knew but how he had missed the true wisdom of knowing God through Christ Jesus.

2. Acknowledge Wisdom's Value (Job 28:13,15-16)

- 13 People do not understand the value of wisdom; it cannot be found among those who are alive.
- 15 Wisdom cannot be bought with gold, and its cost cannot be weighed in silver.
- 16 Wisdom cannot be bought with fine gold or with valuable onyx or sapphire gems.

Verse 13. Job **recognized** in verse 13 how people do not understand the full value of wisdom. While we are alive, our knowledge is limited. All the smart things of life will surely dim in the presence of God. God will not be impressed with us if we understand all the laws of physics but do not have wisdom. God made the laws of physics. Why would

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VALUE THAN FINE GOLD,
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our knowledge impress Him? Since knowing God and trusting God is the greatest display of wisdom, the man or woman who stands before God after death will understand true wisdom is to know God and to love Him. Many living people have not yet learned the importance of obeying God.

Verses 15-16. What is wisdom worth?

What would people pay to receive wisdom? That is a good question. In verses 15-19, Job considered this question. Job wrote about the worth of wisdom by comparing it to other things with great value. Gold has value in every age. Gold has always had high value. Yet, Job declared wisdom has greater value than fine gold, fine silver, or even valuable gems like onyx or sapphires. In fact, Job said all of these valuable items could not buy wisdom.

Some people think money can buy anything. Job disagreed. Job wanted wisdom because he wanted to understand God's way of working in his life. Money could not buy this knowledge. Wisdom had a special place in the thinking of the ancient Hebrews.

Read the book of Proverbs and you will understand the concept of wisdom in the Old Testament. This idea of wisdom was all Job had to help him. Money could not buy wisdom. Money could not make it possible for Job to understand the mysteries of pain and suffering. Job knew only God could give this kind of wisdom.

3. Seek Wisdom's Guidance (Job 28:20-23,26-28)

20 So where does wisdom come from, and where does understanding live?
21 It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, even from the birds of the air.
22 The places of destruction and death say, "We have heard reports about it."
23 Only God understands the way to wisdom, and he alone knows where it lives,
26 when he made rules for the rain and set a path for a thunderstorm to follow,
27 then he looked at wisdom and decided its worth; he set wisdom up and tested it.
28 Then he said to humans, "The fear of the Lord is wisdom; to stay away from evil is understanding."

Verse 20. Being smart is not the same as being wise. We have seen how wisdom has great value, but we cannot buy it. Job's next important question is in verse 20, "Where does wisdom come from?" We know where it does not come from. The next few verses will tell us a little more about where wisdom is not found.

Verse 21. Job said wisdom is hidden from the eyes of every living thing. That does not mean people cannot receive wisdom from God. It does mean wisdom cannot be found just by looking around. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, the teacher sought for meaning in life, but he could not find it. Job helped make this point clear by adding birds in the air could not see it. Birds can see far more than we can because they fly high above the earth. Even from their high points they cannot see wisdom. This kind of language to describe wisdom is odd to us. But we get the point. We understand wisdom is not an object we can find.

Verse 22. The poetry of Job is beautiful. Verse 21 told us how the birds of the air could search high and low, and they would not be able to find wisdom. Is it possible to go further than what the birds can go? Yes. One could go to the "places of destruction and death." Of course, there is no physical place on earth for destruction and death. But perhaps you get the idea. The poetry is clear: even if one could go to the places of destruction and death those places would not have wisdom. Wisdom is beyond life and death.

PEOPLE ONLY HAVE
WISDOM AND
UNDERSTANDING WHEN
THEY GET IT FROM GOD.

Verse 23. The first part of a clear answer from Job comes in this verse. Job said, “Only God understands the way,” and “He alone knows where it lives.” Job has not yet clearly said wisdom is from God, but he did say God understands the way to wisdom. We will see more in verse 28. If wisdom is so highly valued, and God alone knows where wisdom is, then we must all seek to know what God knows.

Verses 26-27. Job recognized what many people do not **recognize**. Job knew the ways of nature were designed by God. We understand the way the atmosphere works, so we understand about rain. But we do not know why God designed the rain to work the way it does. God designed nature in the way God wanted to design nature. God set the rules for the rain and God set the way for thunderstorms to follow. Nature does follow rules, but the rules are not accidents. They are the design of God. In the same way, it was God who determined the worth of wisdom. Even wisdom does not exist apart from God. God does not search out wisdom and find it. God defines it.

Verse 28. “The fear of the Lord is wisdom.” The words *fear God* in the Bible do not mean to be afraid. They mean “to honor, to worship, and to obey.”

The rest of the verse gives a small twist on the same idea: “to stay away from evil is understanding.” In this verse, and also in verse 20, *wisdom* and *understanding* mean almost the same thing. People only have wisdom and understanding when they get it from God. We get wisdom from our relationship with God as we honor and obey Him.

Job truly wanted wisdom. He wanted to be able to know why he suffered. Job still did not have much of an answer to his suffering, but he had the beginning of understanding. Job did not have all the answers to his questions, but he knew the only place to get deep answers to hard questions is from God. We will never know everything. Only God has no limits on knowing and understanding. True wisdom for living can only be found in a faithful relationship with God. A relationship with God begins in Christ Jesus. You will be a wise person when you trust in Jesus as your Savior, and when you hold tightly to Him, no matter what comes in life.

What About You?

Do you know a wise person? I do not mean someone who is smart—but someone who is wise?

My friend Fay Lanham was one of the wisest persons I ever knew. She knew God deeply, and everything she said was full of godly wisdom. Everyone went to her for help.

Fay Lanham grew in wisdom because she spent many hours studying God's Word. She knew that obedience to God is the key to wisdom.

Are you this kind of wise person? Do you study God's Word so you can grow in wisdom?

You can only have true wisdom to face the hard things of life when you follow the Lord God. Do you follow Him?

Applying the Lesson

Below is a list of ways some people might seek wisdom. Circle the ones you think will result in true wisdom.

Get a degree from college.

Spend time talking with God in prayer.

Read some good books about philosophy.

Do a "Google" search on your computer.

Read the Book of Romans in the New Testament.

Spend time in worship at church.

A verse to remember: "The fear of the Lord is wisdom; to stay away from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28).

What Do I Do Now?



**Background
Study Verses:**
Job 29:1–31:40

Lesson Material:
Job 31:5-6,9-10,
13-17,24-30,33-34

Bible Truth

The Lord holds people responsible for living in godly ways.

What is the right way to live? Many people think each person can live the way he or she wants to live. This is very different from the kind of life described by God's Word, the Bible.

Andrew was a Deaf post office worker. He claimed to be a Christian, but he seldom behaved like one. He lost his job when he was caught taking money from a letter at work.

William worked at the same post office. William was also Deaf. Facing temptations and the pressures at the post office were not easy, but William lived his Christian faith at work every day. After thirty years, William retired from the post office. When he retired, he was respected by all his coworkers because he lived his Christian faith in a right way. This is called "living with **integrity**."

Which of these two Deaf men lived to please God?

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Be Honest and Faithful (Job 31:5-6,9-10)** - Job said he was honest and faithful to his wife.
2. **Be Fair and Merciful (Job 31:13-17)** - Job said he treated his servants fairly as people made by God, and he said he helped widows and orphans.
3. **Be Focused on God (Job 31:24-28)** - Job said he did not trust in his wealth, in his own ability, or in other gods.
4. **Be Compassionate and Understanding (Job 31:29-30,33-34)** - Job said he was not happy when his enemies had trouble and he did not act with hypocrisy.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. On what kind of scales did Job want to be weighed?
2. In verses 13-14, Job knew he must finally answer to _____.
3. What are two things Job did not worship?
4. How did Job feel when his enemies had trouble?
5. Did Job have hidden or secret sin?

Today's Lesson

1. Be Honest and Faithful (Job 31:5-6,9-10)

- 5 If I have been dishonest or lied to others,
6 then let God weigh me on honest scales. Then he will know I have done nothing wrong.
9 If I have desired another woman or have waited at my neighbor's door for his wife,
10 then let my wife grind another man's grain, and let other men have sexual relations with her.

Verses 5-6. Our last lesson was from Job chapter 28. Job was speaking in that chapter. Job continued to speak all the way through the end of chapter 31. Job lost everything he had, including his health. He did not understand why this happened to him. His friends said he had trouble

because of sin in his life. But Job did not agree. Job was innocent of living a life of rebellion against God, and he knew it. In chapters 29–31, Job, like a lawyer, made his case before God defending his innocence. We will look at the words of Job to learn how we must live our lives.

Job asked God to “weigh me on honest scales.” If there were some kind of scales to clearly show honesty or dishonesty, Job knew the scales would prove his plea of innocence. When Job said, “If I have been dishonest or lied to others,” he meant he was not dishonest and he had not lied to others. This is the kind of life God wants us to live. Job did not cheat other people, and God wants us to live this way, also.

Verses 9-10. Job lived with **integrity** with other people. Integrity means “to live right at all times, even when no one sees you.” That was how Job lived with his neighbors, and that is how he lived with his wife. It seems strange to say something like, “If I have desired another woman, then let other men have sexual relations with my wife.” Job was not offering his wife to commit adultery. Job was so confident in his sexual purity he would risk his wife in the “court trial” before God. Job was confident he had not desired another woman and he had

never sought to have adultery with his neighbor’s wife. Job had lived with sexual integrity.

Living with sexual integrity is perhaps one of the biggest challenges for people. In our culture, we are blasted with sexual temptation on every side. We see tempting pictures in magazines, TV, movies, books, and on the internet. We are constantly told by the media and by popular culture how sexual relationships outside of marriage are fine and normal. The right living taught by Christ is ignored by our culture. Living sexually pure is a big **challenge**, but we can win when we trust in Christ.

2. Be Fair and Merciful (Job 31:13-17)

- 13 If I have been unfair to my male and female slaves when they had a complaint against me,
- 14 how could I tell God what I did? What will I answer when he asks me to explain what I’ve done?
- 15 God made me in my mother’s womb, and he also made them; the same God formed both of us in our mothers’ wombs.
- 16 I have never refused the **appeals** of the poor or let widows give up hope while looking for help.
- 17 I have not kept my food to myself but have given it to the orphans.

Verses 13-14. Job defended his actions toward needy people. He claimed he treated people fairly and mercifully. The first people he spoke about were his servants. Some translations of the Bible call them his slaves. Job knew if he was unfair to his servants, then he would be unable to answer God when God held Job **accountable** for his actions. I want you to get two thoughts from this statement. Job meant he treated his servants or his slaves fairly. He treated them with respect and not as property. The second thought is this: God holds us accountable (responsible) for the way we treat other people, and especially the way we treat people who are pushed to the side by most people in our culture.

Verse 15. This verse tells us why we must treat all people fairly. The value of people is not in the worth the world decides. The value of people is in the creative work of God. Job declared in this verse, “God made me!” Job **recognized** God made all the other people in the world including those who are overlooked as unimportant by our culture. The world may think little of poor people but God does not. The world may think lowly of people with special needs. God does not. The world may push aside people who have been broken by life, but God does not. God, by his creation, put the same value in every living person. Based on this truth, we must treat every person with equal dignity and respect.

**GOD HOLDS US
ACCOUNTABLE
(RESPONSIBLE) FOR THE
WAY WE TREAT
OTHER PEOPLE.**

Job said God formed people in their mothers’ wombs. The creative work of God put value in each person even before they were born. Value begins long before birth in the work of God forming a baby inside a mother. We, therefore, must value life even before a person is born.

Verses 16-17. These verses highlight the merciful actions of Job. Not only did he treat his own servants well, he treated other people well when they were hurt and broken by life. These verses name the poor, the widow, the hungry, and the orphan. By these actions, Job showed us his heart and the heart of God. Job also showed us how God expects us to live.

I am sure if I asked you the names of the richest people in the world, you would know some of them. If I asked you the names of the poorest people in the world, you would not know them. This shows the way we value people. The world values the rich but does not value the poor. Read the parable of Jesus in Luke 16:19-31. This is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. We only know the rich man as the “rich man.” The man who lived in terrible poverty had a name—Lazarus. God’s values are different from most people. We must change to God’s way and value all people, especially those who have been hurt and broken by life.

3. Be Focused on God (Job 31:24-28)

24 I have not put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, “You are my security.”
25 I have not celebrated my great wealth or the riches my hands had gained.
26 I have not thought about worshiping the sun in its brightness nor admired the moon moving in glory
27 so that my heart was pulled away from God. My hand has never offered the sun and moon a kiss of worship.
28 If I had, these also would have been sins to be punished, because I would have been unfaithful to God.

Verses 24-25. Believers can lose their focus on God easily. Many things distract us from Him. We can get too busy in work to think about God.

**HAVE YOU KEPT YOUR
FOCUS ON THE TRUE GOD
SO NOTHING ELSE HAS
STOLEN YOUR FOCUS
FROM HIM?**

We can get too busy in church life to focus on God. One of the big distractions people face is money. We make money. We spend money. We save money. We love money. Many people think constantly about how to get money and how to spend it. Paul said the “love of money causes all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Money can move our focus from God.

Job did not lose focus on God and pay attention to money. He said this in four different ways. He said he did not put his trust in gold. He also said he did not find his security in gold. He did not celebrate his wealth. He did not find joy in the riches he earned with his own hands. Yes, Job was a rich man before this tragic loss, but he never loved riches. He never turned to riches and away from God.

Verses 26-27. People can lose their focus on the real God and turn their attention to false gods. False gods for us today could include money, power, fame, or false religions. When Job lived there were hundreds of false gods the people worshiped. In other Sunday School lessons, you have read about Baal and Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Molech. These were false gods worshiped by the people who lived around the Israelites. But Job never turned from the true God to worship these gods. Job particularly named the sun and the moon. He never let his heart be pulled away from worshiping God. Can you say that? Have you kept your focus on the true God so nothing else has stolen your focus from Him?

Verse 28. Job knew to love money and lose focus on the true God was sin. Job did not want to sin. He also knew doing these things would bring

God's punishment. Being unfaithful to God can bring punishment on our lives through hard times. Job had not sinned in these ways, so he knew his hardships were not the result of these kinds of sins.

You and I must not behave in good ways just so we might get money. Many people do that today. They give money to a church or to a TV preacher because they think they will get money back from God. We must not give for this reason. We must do right things only because we love God.

4. Be Compassionate and Understanding (Job 31:29-30,33-34)

29 I have not been happy when my enemies fell or laughed when they had trouble.

30 I have not let my mouth sin by cursing my enemies' life.

33 I have not hidden my sin as others do, secretly keeping my guilt to myself.

34 I was not so afraid of the crowd that I kept quiet and stayed inside because I feared being hated by other families.

Verses 29-30. Finally, Job helps us learn about caring for an enemy and how to live with **integrity**. Job said he did not act badly when his enemy experienced trouble. People are usually happy when bad things happen to their enemy. The Bible teaches us to live differently from that. Look at Proverbs 20:22 or Matthew 5:43-48. Jesus taught us to love our enemy. Job had the mind of Christ. Even in this **challenge** to treat enemies right, God requires us to live differently from the world—to live like Jesus did. Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were killing Him (Luke 23:34).

Verses 33-34. Some Bible teachers understand these verses to show Job's integrity by connecting verses 33-34 to verse 32. Job took in strangers and cared for them. That may be the right way to explain these verses. One thing is clear though—this final section shows Job's integrity. He did not have hidden sin, sexual or otherwise. He did not hide his guilt. Even though his hardships and suffering caused his neighbors to mock him and hate him, he acted correctly toward them. We must not only have right actions, but we must also be right within ourselves. Secret and hidden sin is perhaps the worst kind, when we hide sin from others and we lie to ourselves. God calls us into the light, where we live our lives right when people see us and right when no one sees us. This is living life with integrity. Do you live this way?

What About You?

Our lesson today gives us some good ways to check our integrity. You are wise if you ask yourself these questions:

1. Am I honest and faithful?
2. Am I fair and merciful?
3. Am I **focused** on God?
4. Am I **compassionate** and understanding toward other people?
5. Am I living my life with **integrity**?

How did you do on this self-test?

Applying the Lesson

Here are some ways to compare your life to Job's life.

1. In verses 5-6, Job said he did not lie. Are you guilty of lying?
____ Yes ____ No
2. In verses 9-10, Job said he had not committed adultery. Are you guilty of adultery? ____ Yes ____ No
3. In verses 13-14, Job said he treated other people fairly. Do you treat others fairly? ____ Yes ____ No
4. In verses 24-25, Job said he did not put his trust in gold. Do you trust in money? ____ Yes ____ No
5. In verses 26-28, Job said he was faithful to God. Are you faithful to God?
____ Yes ____ No

A verse to remember: "I have not put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security'" (Job 31:24).

Am I on the Right Path?

**Background
Study Verses:**
Job 32:1–37:24

Lesson Material:
Job 33:13-22; 36:8-12

Bible Truth

God sometimes disciplines His people through painful circumstances.



I graduated from college in 1975. God called me to Deaf church work. However, I have always had a love for airplanes. The summer after graduation, I got a job working for a crop-duster pilot. I loved the job. I hoped the pilot would teach me to fly his planes. My sense of God's calling seemed to become weaker because of my love for planes.

One day during that summer, I woke up with a terrible headache. Before that day was over, I was in the hospital emergency room and was soon diagnosed with a disease attacking my brain. Quick medical treatment saved my life. It took all summer for me to heal from this disease. I needed to give up my crop dusting dream.

Later, when I thought about these things, I realized how God worked through my sickness to direct my life in the way He wanted.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Receive God's Revelation (Job 33:13-16)** - Elihu rebuked Job for not seeing how God was speaking to him.
2. **Recognize God's Reasons (Job 33:17-22)** - God may speak to people in many different ways. Sometimes He uses pain to turn people from wrong ways of thinking and living.
3. **Respond** to God's **Refining** (Job 36:8-12) - People must respond in a right way to God's discipline by repenting from sin and obediently serving Him.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Does God give answers to us when we seek wisdom?
2. Name two ways God speaks to us (Job 33:15-16).
3. Why does God warn people about sin?
4. What can pain help us do?
5. What happens when we obey God?

Today's Lesson

1. Receive God's Revelation (Job 33:13-16)

- 13 Why do you accuse God of not answering anyone?
- 14 God does speak—sometimes one way and sometimes another—even though people may not understand it.
- 15 He speaks in a dream or a vision of the night when people are in a deep sleep, lying on their beds.
- 16 He speaks in their ears and frightens them with warnings

Verses 13-14. When we ended our last lesson in chapter 31, Job was speaking. Remember how Job lost all he had, and he also lost his health. Job had three friends who tried to prove Job suffered because he sinned against God. Job questioned God, and Job accused God of being unfair, but the three friends were wrong—Job had not sinned against God. In chapter 32, we meet a fourth man. His name is Elihu. Elihu was a young man, and so he allowed the older men to speak first. Elihu was upset because the three older men failed to prove Job's sin. Elihu felt he could do better than the other three.

Elihu had the same theology (understanding of God) as Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Elihu thought all suffering comes into our life as a result of personal sin. Elihu did not add much to the arguments of the other three. Elihu tried to make Job see how God cannot judge someone unjustly, and in this Elihu was correct. In our lesson today, we are not going to review the **theology** of the three friends and Elihu. We are going to look at Elihu's speech and find some helpful statements he made. Studying God's Word this way will help us learn to **respond** in a right way to God's discipline.

Elihu made a right statement. Job accused God of not answering anyone. Job felt God did not answer him. Sometimes you might have felt this way, also. However in this case, Elihu came closer to the truth than Job did. Job wanted answers, and God did not give him answers. At least the answers were not the way Job wanted them. But God does speak to us, and by the time we finish our study of the Book of Job, God will speak to Job.

**SOMETIMES GOD SPEAKS
TO US IN UNUSUAL WAYS.**

God speaks to us in many ways. Sometimes those ways are common ways like through the words of the

Bible or through a preacher or a teacher. Sometimes God speaks to us in unusual ways. God is not locked into one way of responding to us. Job wanted a court hearing with God. God was not going to give him a court hearing. But God, according to Elihu, sometimes speaks one way and sometimes He speaks a different way. Our experience shows this is true.

The final statement in verse 14 is very true, "people may not understand it." Sometimes people have a hard time understanding what God is saying. Actually, this is not God's fault. This is the fault of people who interpret God according to their wants and prejudices. God does not hide His will from us. God wants us to know Him and His will. We are the ones who put blocks between us and God. Sometimes God is quiet. As odd as it may seem, when God is silent, this too can be His answer to us. When God is silent, we must wait.

Verses 15-16. Elihu listed some of the ways God speaks to people. Elihu spoke about dreams, and he talked about spoken warnings. God still speaks in these ways. Not many of us claim to have heard God speak. However, I had a Deaf friend who told me about his dream when he saw what he thought were God's hands signing to him.

God often gives us warnings. I think the most frequent way Christians receive warnings from God is through reading the Bible. Recently, I preached to a group of Deaf adults in Greensboro, North Carolina. We were studying Romans 12:1-2. Those verses give us a strong warning not to be like the world but to be fully changed by having a new mind. God is truly speaking a warning to us.

2. Recognize God's Reasons (Job 33:17-22)

- 17 to turn them away from doing wrong and to keep them from being proud.
18 God does this to save people from death, to keep them from dying.
19 People may be corrected while in bed in great pain; they may have continual pain in their very bones.
20 They may be in such pain that they even hate food, even the very best meal.
21 Their body becomes so thin there is almost nothing left of it, and their bones that were hidden now stick out.
22 They are near death, and their life is almost over.

Verse 17. Verse 17 is connected to verse 16. Verse 16 tells us God speaks warnings to people. Verse 17 tells us why God gives these warnings. We find two reasons listed in this verse. First the warnings from God turn people from doing wrong. God wants us to live in right ways, so He not only gives us His rules for right living, but He warns us away from wrong living. Second, God's warnings keep people from being proud. People cannot keep themselves from evil. Only with God's help can we do right.

God's warnings prevent pride.

CHRISTIANS ARE VERY WISE
IF THEY EXAMINE THEIR
LIVES FOR SIN WHEN
THEY EXPERIENCE PAIN
AND SUFFERING.

Verse 18. In addition to the reasons listed in verse 17, this verse adds one more. God's warnings can keep a person from death. A warning from God can prevent death. God's Word tells us to do no murder. God warns us murder is against His will. Anyone obeying this warning would surely never do it. If people will receive this warning from God, millions of deaths

will be avoided. God's Word also warns us to love as God loves. If people will love the way God loves, they will respect each other.

Verses 19-22. Elihu spoke about pain and suffering in these verses. This was something Job understood quite well because he was in the middle of a terrible time of suffering. Elihu only knew one reason for suffering: personal sin. Job was not suffering because of his sin, so in this understanding, Elihu was wrong. However, Elihu described pain and suffering as a warning from God. I completely agree. Pain and suffering can be a warning from God. And one more thing: our pain can be an opportunity for us to find God's leading in our lives.

Suppose a Christian began a secret sin like watching pornography on the internet. I would not be surprised if soon that Christian begins to feel

spiritual pain in his heart. No doubt, this is God's warning. Have you ever felt pain as a result of your sin? Many Christians have. Christians are very wise if they examine their lives for sin when they experience pain and suffering.

We have seen how Job suffered, but not because of his sin. Much suffering comes into our lives from causes other than our sin. Suppose there is suffering in your life. You have sought the Lord and His direction. You have examined your life. These are right things to do. Now, here is one more thing to do. Use your pain and suffering as an opportunity to seek God's direction in your life. In the introduction to this lesson, you read a story about how this happened for me. My friend, Carol, had breast cancer twice. Her testimony is how God has led her to minister to other women who get breast cancer. That is a perfect example of seeking God's direction during pain and suffering.

WHEN GOD SPEAKS TO
YOU ABOUT SIN IN YOUR
LIFE, RESPOND WISELY
BY REPENTING AND
OBEYING GOD.

3. Respond to God's Refining (Job 36:8-12)

- 8 If people are bound in chains, or if trouble, like ropes, ties them up,
9 God tells them what they have done, that they have sinned in their pride.
10 God makes them listen to his warning and commands them to change from doing evil.
11 If they obey and serve him, the rest of their lives will be successful, and the rest of their years will be happy.
12 But if they do not listen, they will die by the sword, and they will die without knowing why.

Verses 8-10. Elihu thought about suffering the same way the other three friends did. They thought all suffering was a result of personal sin. In this, Elihu was wrong. Suffering can come from many other sources. For example, all people who grow old will experience increasing suffering and will often die in serious pain. This is the course of life. We cannot avoid physical death by becoming a Christian. This is not suffering as a result of sin. This suffering just comes with life.

Nevertheless, a great many times in life people feel bound, in trouble, and tied up. Often people are in sin, as God said in verse 9. Finally, verse 10 tells us God gives a warning and commands a change away from evil. When this happens to you, listen carefully to what God says.

Verses 11-12. How we **respond** to God's warning about sin, is very important. Elihu said if sinners obey and serve God, happiness will be a

result. Of course, not every sinner who repents will have a perfect life after he repents. But repentance from sin brings great godly blessings of life. The opposite is also true. If a sinner does not listen to God's warning, then in the end, there is only death.

Many years ago I met two Deaf young people. They were twins. When I met them, they were both following Jesus. As the years passed, one of the Deaf twins started to drift away from God. He stopped going to church. He started hanging out with people who influenced him in wrong ways. A few years later, still not following God, he died as a young person.

The other twin went in a different way. She followed the Lord's direction. She was not a perfect person, but she always tried to obey the Lord. She joined a mission team and spent many years serving the Lord that way. During that time, I made some mission trips with her and saw how much she loved the Lord and how faithfully she told the story of Jesus. She has not lived without trouble. She has faced some very hard times. But every time I see her, she has a deep joy.

We can see the words of Elihu happening in these two lives. One did not follow the warning of God and eventually lost his life. The other followed God carefully and has known great joy as a Christian. When God speaks to you about sin in your life, respond wisely by repenting and obeying God.

What About You?

Like so many lessons from Job, this one gives all of us a good opportunity to test our own lives. Are you having a difficult experience? Are you living with sickness and pain?

Do not make the mistake of Elihu and the other friends. Do not think all suffering comes from personal sin. However, you will be very wise if you use this experience in your life to search for God's direction. Look for sin and repent. Look for God's warning. Look for God's leading.

Applying the Lesson

Here are some steps you can take if you have a difficult or painful experience in life.

1. Pray for God's leading and wisdom.
2. Listen to God to sense His warnings.
3. Search your life for sin and turn away from that sin.
4. Talk with a wise spiritual leader about your situation.
5. Surrender your suffering to God for His glory.
6. Follow Him wherever He leads.

A verse to remember: "God does speak—sometimes one way and sometimes another—even though people may not understand it" (Job 33:14).

What Am I Supposed to Learn?



**Background
Study Verses:**
Job 38:1–42:17

Lesson Material:
Job 38:1-4; 42:1-12a

Bible Truth

God wants people to
surrender to Him at
all times.

Has God ever asked you to do something you felt was hard to do? Did you resist God's will, or did you surrender to His will? That is what our lesson is about today. I have written many stories about John W. Michaels, the first Southern Baptist Deaf missionary. Michaels started teaching at the Deaf school in Virginia in 1882. He taught for two years. Then he went to the Arkansas school for the Deaf and taught for almost twenty more years.

In 1905, God called Michaels to become a missionary to the Deaf. I have often thought about how hard it must have been for Michaels to decide to change his life and leave the school. But Michaels surrendered to God's call and became a missionary. From 1906 to 1939, Michaels faithfully obeyed God's call to be a missionary. Are you surrendered to God's call on your life?

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Listen to God (Job 38:1-4)** - God was kind and spoke to Job. God showed how He is the all-powerful and all-knowing God of the universe.
2. **Submit to God (Job 42:1-6)** - Job confessed he had not been thinking right. He surrendered to the Lord and repented of the words he had spoken in ignorance.
3. **Intercede Before God (Job 42:7-9)** - Job obeyed God by praying for his friends who spoke falsely about God.
4. **Rely on God (Job 42:10-12a)** - Job surrendered to God and then he depended on God to meet his needs.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What question did God ask in Job 38:3-4?
2. Why did Job change from demanding answers from God to submitting to God?
3. What did Job decide to do as a response to God?
4. What did Job do for his friends?
5. What happened at the end of Job's life?

Today's Lesson

1. Listen to God (Job 38:1-4)

- 1 Then the Lord answered Job from the storm. He said:
- 2 "Who is this that makes my purpose unclear by saying things that are not true?
- 3 Be strong like a man! I will ask you questions, and you must answer me.
- 4 Where were you when I made the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand."

Verses 1-2. By now in your study of Job you have learned all the different people in the story. All of Job's friends told him he suffered because of his sin against God. Job knew he had not sinned, but he could not explain the reason for his difficulties. Elihu was the last speaker. Elihu was a young man who thought he knew all the answers. He was wrong, just like the other three friends. Our last lesson ended with Elihu speaking. His long speech continued on through chapters 36 and 37.

Many times in chapters 1–37, Job asked God to speak. Finally in chapter 38, God began to speak to Job. Most of the rest of the Book of Job contains God's words to Job. Here is one of the most interesting things about God's answer—God did not answer the exact questions Job asked. God did not explain what He was doing in the life of Job. Instead, God revealed Himself to Job. First, God spoke directly to Job. Verse 1 says, “The Lord answered Job from the storm.” If God spoke to you, it would be very different from speaking to a person. The very fact God spoke showed Job the nature and character of God. God revealed Himself through His words, and that revelation changed Job.

The second way God revealed Himself to Job was to show Job His great power. I encourage you to read all the rest of the book of Job. As you read chapters 38–42, you will see everything God has done and everything God knows. God, the creator of the universe, has power beyond our

GOD WILL ANSWER OUR QUESTIONS WHEN WE SEEK HIS WISDOM.

imagination. Nothing can exist beyond or above Him. Therefore, God asked Job in verse 2, “Who is this that makes my purpose unclear?” Truly, Job did not know God's purpose, but God did. God knew what He was doing in Job's

life. Job's mistrust of God was improper.

Verses 3-4. God **challenged** Job. God called on Job to be strong and to face God's questions like a man. Job asked God many questions, and it is all right to ask God questions when you do not understand. God will answer our questions when we seek His wisdom (James 1:5). But now, God asked Job some questions. By asking these questions, God revealed who He is and what He can do. The first question was, “Where were you when I made the earth's foundation?” The point of the question is easy. Job thought he had the wisdom to question God. God quickly showed Job he did not know nearly as much as he thought he did. Job was not around when God made the universe. Neither were we. We can never have enough wisdom to understand the great mysteries of God.

But here is a final statement for us to understand. When God speaks—listen. God does not often speak to people the way God spoke to Job. But God speaks in many ways. Most clearly, God speaks through His Son, Jesus. The way most of us usually experience God speaking is through the Bible. Any time you sense God speaking to you, pay careful attention.

2. Submit to God (Job 42:1-6)

1 Then Job answered the Lord:

2 “I know that you can do all things and that no plan of yours can be ruined.

- 3 You asked, ‘Who is this that made my purpose unclear by saying things that are not true?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand; I talked of things too wonderful for me to know.
- 4 You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak. I will ask you questions, and you must answer me.’
- 5 My ears had heard of you before, but now my eyes have seen you.
- 6 So now I hate myself; I will change my heart and life. I will sit in the dust and ashes.”

Verse 1. God started speaking in chapter 38. In chapter 40:1-5, Job gave a short answer to God. God continued to speak in chapters 40 and 41. Finally, in 42:1-6, Job answered God a final time.

Verse 2. As you read these verses, you can see how Job changed. In the earlier chapters, he demanded answers from God. Now Job heard God, and he was no longer demanding.

Now Job was submissive to God.

Keep in mind, Job was still suffering

at this point. He had not become

well. But his attitude toward God

changed. Job thought things were out

of control. His experiences did not fit

his understanding of God. Job decided

God was unfair or God was not in control of events. Now Job

confessed God was always in control. Job did not understand, but

he was ready to submit.

Verse 3. Job quoted what God said in Job 38:2. This was God’s main question to Job, “Who is this?” This is one of the deepest questions people must face. Who are you? Do you find your identity in the God of the universe, or do you find your identity in something far less? As soon as God began to speak, Job started to see things differently. He knew he had spoken of things he “did not understand,” and he knew when he spoke about God, he spoke about things “too wonderful to know.” Again, we see God did not answer the questions of Job. Why? God was the answer to Job.

Verses 4-6. Job quoted what God said. Job was overwhelmed simply by the fact God spoke. Therefore, in verses 5-6, Job expressed the deepest lesson he learned. God answers every question simply by His presence. Job said he heard of God before, but when God spoke, Job “saw” Him and that was all the answer Job needed. Immediately, in verse 6, Job was ashamed of what he said to God. Job said, “I hate myself.” This was Job’s way of showing his sorrow. Job was ready to repent from his attitude toward God. The words *change my heart and life* mean “to repent.” *Repent* means “to turn and go the other way.” Job questioned God. Now, Job was ready to submit to God.

JOB DID NOT
UNDERSTAND,
BUT HE WAS READY
TO SUBMIT.

3. Intercede Before God (Job 42:7-9)

- 7 After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job did.
- 8 Now take seven bulls and seven male sheep, and go to my servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will listen to his prayer. Then I will not punish you for being foolish. You have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job did.”
- 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did as the Lord said, and the Lord listened to Job’s prayer.

Verse 7. An interesting thing happened next. After God spoke to Job, God spoke to Job’s friends. If you have read all the chapters in the Book of Job, you are familiar with Job’s friends. Eliphaz and the other friends must have felt somewhat like Job did. Job was moved deeply by hearing from God. The friends must have felt the same. God expressed His anger

**GOD’S WORD TEACHES US
TO PRAY FOR THOSE
WHO ARE IN NEED.**

at the friends. The friends had a chance to comfort Job and to help him genuinely understand what was happening in his life. They missed the chance. Job was in great distress over his loss and his sickness, but he never turned from God. The friends did not turn from God either, but they gave Job no help in his time of need. When God spoke to the friends, they immediately saw they were wrong.

Verse 8. The friends misrepresented God. Their words about God were not right. God said that same statement in verses 7 and 8. The wrong words from the friends amounted to sin, and sin needed forgiveness. God instructed the friends to take a sacrifice to Job for Job to offer to God. The words the friends spoke truly pushed Job away from God. Job was going to pray for his friends, and the sacrifice with the prayer would bring forgiveness for the friends.

Verse 9. The friends did what God demanded, and God listened to Job’s prayer. God granted forgiveness. Are you amazed to learn Job was willing to do this? The prayer of Job for his friends reminds us how God calls on us to pray for the people around us. It does not matter if people are good to us or not. God’s Word teaches us to pray for those who are in need.

Eduardo was a Deaf man who lived in Central America. He lived a life of sin. Many of his Deaf friends prayed for him. When Eduardo accepted Jesus, his Deaf friends rejoiced because he was saved and God answered their prayers.

4. Rely on God (Job 42:10-12a)

- 10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord gave him success again. The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had owned before.
- 11 Job's brothers and sisters came to his house, along with everyone who had known him before, and they all ate with him there. They comforted him and made him feel better about the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave Job a piece of silver and a gold ring.
- 12 The Lord blessed the last part of Job's life even more than the first part. Job had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand teams of oxen, and a thousand female donkeys.

Verse 10. In this verse, the story makes a great change. Up until this point, Job was in great suffering and pain. At verse 10, Job prayed for his friends just as God asked. Job's prayer is an outward sign of his obedience to God. The next words we see after this act of obedience show God's restored blessing. The Lord blessed Job with twice as much as he had before. I do not want you to get a wrong idea at this point in the story. We must never think if we do good things, God is going to give us a lot of stuff. Life is not about stuff. Life is about living in relationship with God through Christ Jesus.

Job lost his possessions, and at the end of the story, God restored them. You and I will suffer in life in many ways. There may come a time in life when God places in your hands wealth and possessions. But this will not be the best indication of God's blessings. God's greatest blessing is to know Him and to live in a right relationship with Him. That is what Job learned. That is what we must learn. If things come along with that, then we must be grateful for that, too, and be willing to share what God gives to us.

Verses 11-12a. Job's family and friends were also part of God's blessing for Job. Here, at the end of the story, we can see they all came to him to help him. They all gave Job objects of value to help him. At the end of Job's life, God blessed Job more than He had during the first part of Job's life.

Job learned many lessons through his terrible suffering. In the end, he learned he could trust God. Job never fully understood why he went through the suffering, but he found God in the midst of his suffering. That is often where we meet God. When you have hardships in life, trust God.

What About You?

Where are you in your life? Are you learning about God and about yourself, while going through some especially difficult experience? Here are two great truths you must hold:

First, God is in control of all things. Another word for this truth is **sovereign**. God is sovereign in His control over all.

Second, when you submit yourself to God in every circumstance of life, you will find God's help and comfort. This is what Job learned. I hope you will learn this, too.

Applying the Lesson

Christians have learned when life is hard and they do not know what to do, they can go to God in prayer. God meets us in prayer and helps us by giving Himself to us.

Are you suffering or in pain now? Pray this prayer or share it with a friend who needs it: "Lord God, here I am—hurt and confused. Help me with my pain and show me Yourself. I trust You through this, and I promise to submit myself to Your will and control, no matter what happens in my life. Amen."

A verse to remember: "Then Job answered the Lord: 'I know that you can do all things and that no plan of yours can be ruined'" (Job 42:1-2).



UNIT 2

IS IT WORTH THE EFFORT?

Ecclesiastes 1:1-12:14

The six lessons in this unit are from the Book of Ecclesiastes. They focus on the purpose of life. The first lesson, for July 21, is about trying to find meaning in life. The second lesson, July 28, asks the question, “Why Do I Feel Empty?” The emphasis is on worshiping God. The lesson for August 4 is, “Am I Headed for Failure?” Failure comes from trusting in earthly things

instead of God. On August 11, the theme is our need to trust God no matter what happens. The fifth lesson, for August 18, is about hope and our need to see how everything we have is a gift from God. The final lesson, on August 25, asks the question, “What’s the Answer?” The writer of Ecclesiastes concludes that only by honoring God can we find true meaning in our life.

Can I Find Meaning?

Background

Study Verses:

Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26

Lesson Material:

Ecclesiastes 1:1-4, 12-14; 2:1-3, 12-14, 24-26

Bible Truth

People can find meaning in life when they seek it.



In January, 2011, Dr. Daniel Johnson, the editor of these Deaf Sunday School lessons, died from cancer at age 50. His death has been a great loss. I do not think I know anyone whose life had more purpose than Daniel. He became Deaf at age eight while living in Chile, South America, with his missionary parents. Daniel worked hard in school, and when he finished seminary, he became pastor of a Deaf church. Through the years of his life, he pastored four churches, worked in missions, edited these Bible study materials, volunteered at the Deaf school, directed the TriState Deaf School of **Theology**, and raised a wonderful family. Meaning for life is partly found in the work we do, and this was true for Daniel. But our greatest purpose in life is serving God. Daniel knew this and served the Lord faithfully to the end of his life.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Life Can Seem Pointless** (Ecclesiastes 1:1-4) - Life sometimes seems to go in circles. This can lead a person to believe life has no purpose.
2. **Experience Seems to Affirm Futility** (Ecclesiastes 1:12-14; 2:1-3) - The experiences of life can cause a person to get lost, looking for purpose.
3. **Trust in God's Blessings** (Ecclesiastes 2:12-14,24-26) - When one gets wisdom and satisfaction from one's work, these things actually point to God who gives us the wisdom and ability to work.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who wrote Ecclesiastes?
2. The teacher concluded everything is _____.
3. Name three things the teacher tried, but these things did not give him true meaning.
4. Which is better—the way of wisdom, or the way of foolishness?
5. If people please God, what will God give them?

Today's Lesson

1. Life Can Seem Pointless (Ecclesiastes 1:1-4)

- 1 These are the words of the Teacher, a son of David, king in Jerusalem.
- 2 The Teacher says, "Useless! Useless! Completely useless! Everything is useless."
- 3 What do people really gain from all the hard work they do here on earth? Things Never Change
- 4 People live, and people die, but the earth continues forever.

The word pointless, in this section, means "to have no purpose or reason."

Verse 1. Our lessons for the next six weeks come from the Book of Ecclesiastes. The word *Ecclesiastes* comes from a Greek word which means "called out or the gathering." In the New Testament, the Greek word, *ecclesia*, is almost the same as Ecclesiastes, and it is the word used for "church." Verse 1 tells us the book comes from "the teacher" who was a "son of David,

king in Jerusalem.” Many Bible teachers say this teacher was Solomon, the son of David. Through most of Jewish history and Christian history, Bible teachers have said verse 1 refers to Solomon. Solomon’s name is not mentioned anywhere in the whole book. We cannot prove Solomon wrote this book, but his name has been connected to this book for hundreds of years. In these lessons we will talk about Solomon as the writer.

Verse 2. This verse is very sad. Solomon wrote, “Useless! Useless! Everything is useless.” Is this true? Is everything in life useless? We need to understand the idea of uselessness as the theme of this book. Solomon looked for meaning in life. Solomon looked at work. He looked at wisdom. He looked at pleasure. He looked at so many things. He decided all these things were useless. None of these things bring true meaning to life.

Life is not useless. But the things of this earthly life cannot give true meaning to life. In this, Solomon was exactly correct.

Verses 3-4. These two verses help us to see how Solomon looked at things. He asked what gain people can realize from working hard here on earth.

Solomon saw people doing hard work. He saw people building his palace and the great temple in Jerusalem. He saw

people working hard in the fields to raise food. Solomon asked, “What do people really gain?” This is a great question. It does not stop us from working, but it does help us to see our purpose in life must be bigger than just having a job. Jobs are good. I have a job, and I enjoy my job. But my reason for living rests in God, not in my job.

Solomon watched the cycle of life. He saw people being born, and he saw people dying. The life span of any individual was short. Today the average lifespan in America is between 70 and 80 years. When Solomon lived, the lifespan was much shorter—about 40 years. Solomon realized no matter how long an individual lived, life was still short. If people look for meaning in life based on long years of life, then they will not find anything meaningful there. The “earth continues forever,” Solomon said, but our lives are short. We must look for purpose in life in something even bigger than our number of years to live.

THINGS OF THIS EARTHLY
LIFE CANNOT GIVE TRUE
MEANING TO LIFE.

2. Experience Seems to Affirm Futility (Ecclesiastes 1:12-14; 2:1-3)

Ecclesiastes 1

12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 I decided to use my wisdom to learn about everything that happens on earth. I learned that God has given us terrible things to face.

14 I looked at everything done on earth and saw that it is all useless, like chasing the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2

- 1 I said to myself, “I will try having fun. I will enjoy myself.” But I found that this is also useless.
- 2 It is foolish to laugh all the time, and having fun doesn’t accomplish anything.
- 3 I decided to cheer myself up with wine while my mind was still thinking wisely. I wanted to find a way to enjoy myself and see what was good for people to do during their few days of life.

The word **affirm** means “to show something is true.” **Futility** means “worthlessness.”

AFTER LEARNING MANY THINGS AND ACQUIRING MUCH WISDOM, SOLOMON REALIZED THE THINGS DONE ON EARTH ARE USELESS.

Chapter 1, Verse 12. The writer of Ecclesiastes was the king over Israel in Jerusalem. After Solomon, there was no king over Israel living in Jerusalem. Israel and Judah split apart after Solomon’s death. The king of Judah lived in Jerusalem after Solomon. The king of Israel lived in Samaria. The important thing about being the king was this: he had plenty of time and money to look for purpose in life.

Verse 13. We know from 1 Kings 3:4-14, Solomon was very wise. That was his hope. With his wisdom and great learning he wanted to find the true meaning of life. One of the first things he learned as he studied wisdom was, “God has given us terrible things to face.” In the lessons from Job, you saw Solomon was right. In this life, we will face much hardship. Not all hardship comes from the hand of God. Because we live in this world, we face many trials and suffering. God is **sovereign** over our suffering, but He does not cause all suffering. However, Solomon is still correct—God allows and sometimes sends hard things for us to face.

Verse 14. After learning many things and acquiring much wisdom, Solomon realized the things done on earth are useless. Solomon compared earthly things to chasing the wind. One cannot chase the wind and catch it. That would be a useless activity. Finding the true meaning in life by learning and by acquiring wisdom is like chasing the wind. Later, Solomon said it is better to be wise than foolish (2:13), but the true purpose in life is not just to acquire wisdom.

Chapter 2, Verses 1-2. Next, Solomon decided to seek meaning for life in having fun. Perhaps the purpose of life is just to enjoy ourselves. But

this is the conclusion Solomon reached: “I found this is also useless.” Solomon did not mean all fun is bad. He just meant the purpose of life cannot be found in just having fun. We all need to have fun. But life is bigger than fun.

Solomon said laughing all the time was foolish. Seeking pleasure did not accomplish anything. This would be a wise lesson for us to learn. In our age, laughter and having fun is of high value. People will compromise their beliefs about right and wrong, if they can just have a laugh. Let me explain what I mean. Many shows on TV are evil and ugly. They put down Christian values. They make sex the most important thing. Many Christians who strongly disagree with the ideas of the show will watch it because it is funny. We often value laughter more than Christ. Solomon found his search for pleasure was useless.

Verse 3. Finally, Solomon chased pleasure in wine. He thought perhaps he could cheer himself up with alcohol.

Millions of people today try the same thing. Today, we have even stronger drugs than alcohol. Many people, including many of our Deaf friends, have ruined their lives with alcohol and drugs. They thought this way of pleasure would give them happiness. They thought these drugs would be the answer to life. Instead, these kinds of addictions bring destruction in life. Chasing pleasure and enjoyment does not satisfy our need for a purpose in our life.

SOLOMON LEARNED THE
BLESSINGS OF FOOD AND
THE PLEASURE OF LIFE
CAN ONLY COME TO US
BECAUSE GOD BLESSES US.

3. Trust in God's Blessings (Ecclesiastes 2:12-14,24-26)

- 12 Then I began to think again about being wise, and also about being foolish and doing crazy things. But after all, what more can anyone do? He can't do more than what the other king has already done.
- 13 I saw that being wise is certainly better than being foolish, just as light is better than darkness.
- 14 Wise people see where they are going, but fools walk around in the dark. Yet I saw that both wise and foolish people end the same way.
- 24 The best that people can do is eat, drink, and enjoy their work. I saw that even this comes from God,
- 25 because no one can eat or enjoy life without him.
- 26 If people please God, God will give them wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But sinners will get only the work of gathering and storing wealth that they will have to give to the ones who please God. So all their work is useless, like chasing the wind.

Verses 12-14. Solomon compared wisdom and foolishness. Perhaps even if Solomon could not completely answer the question about the true meaning in life, he could at least move in the right direction. Which activity was more likely to point the way toward true meaning in life—foolish, crazy behavior, or wise living?

Solomon finally hit on a fruitful path for understanding. If a person chases meaning in any one way such as work, wisdom, or pleasure, that person finds these things do not provide the true reason for living. But if a person compares two different paths, perhaps that person will find signs pointing in the right direction. When Solomon compared the path of foolish and crazy behavior to living wise, he found living wise was much better. Just as light is more helpful than darkness if you want to find your way, so wisdom is better than foolishness if you want to find purpose in life. Solomon said it this way, “Wise people see where they are going, but fools walk around in the dark.”

Verses 24-25. As we study the book of Ecclesiastes, we will find many things truly do not provide meaning for life. In the verses we study today, we will not see Solomon come to the final conclusion. However, we will see Solomon getting close to the right conclusion. We have seen Solomon search for meaning in work, wisdom, and fun. We have not seen him search for meaning in God. In the first two chapters, Solomon only mentioned God once. In that verse (1:13), Solomon said God gives us terrible things to face.

Now in verse 24, Solomon came back to God again. Solomon saw God not only gives us terrible things, He also gives us blessings. The specific blessings he mentioned are food, drink, and pleasure in work. Solomon did not yet see how the true purpose of life is found in God.

Verse 26. Finally, Solomon decided it is important in life to please God and to turn away from sin. Solomon did not yet see how pleasing God and turning from sin are the right things to do so one can know God. At this point in his search, Solomon only knew if one pleases God then God will give wisdom and joy. And if one lives a life of sin, all the possessions that person collects in life will be lost. Solomon figured out how God’s blessings are best, and pleasing God is the right way to get those blessings.

Can you imagine what it would be like if there was no God? What would be the point of anything? There would be no reason to live a good life, because who knows what a good life is? God set the standard for good for us. Why be kind? Why love? A world in which there was no God would be a world of selfishness and terrible power. Solomon did not yet see these things, but he started to understand. He saw the blessings of God point toward God as the source for the answers for life. Real purpose and meaning in life are truly only found in God. We can only know God when we have a right relationship with Christ Jesus, the Savior of all.

What About You?

People today are like Solomon. People still need purpose in life. People are also the same because they try to find purpose in the wrong places.

Are you looking for the real meaning in life in work, wisdom, and pleasure? You will not find it there.

Do you know the only place you can truly find **ultimate** meaning? That place is in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you have that kind of relationship?

Applying the Lesson

Answer the following questions true or false.

1. T F The ultimate purpose in life can be found in wisdom.
2. T F If you work hard, you will find purpose in life.
3. T F The greatest thing in life is just to have fun.
4. T F God's blessings in life help us to see the true purpose in life is found in God.

A verse to remember: "If people please God, God will give them wisdom, knowledge, and joy" (Ecclesiastes 2:26).

Why Do I Feel Empty?



Background Study Verses:

Ecclesiastes 3:1–5:7

Lesson Material:
Ecclesiastes 3:1,10-14;
4:9-12; 5:1-7

Bible Truth

We can find meaning
in life when we
worship God
with humility
and reverence.

A few years ago the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf (SBCD) met in Georgia. Deaf people and Deaf ministry workers from all over the United States attended. On Sunday evening during the worship time, several Deaf missionaries were commissioned to go to various nations around the world. That was a deeply moving experience of worship. We did the usual things in worship, such as praying and singing. We also saw testimonies from the missionaries going overseas. Plus, we saw a strong **challenge** from Dr. Tom Elliff, president of the International Mission Board, to go to all the world with the gospel when God calls us. Dr. Elliff challenged us to respond to the call of Christ to take the gospel to the world. More than 100 people went forward during the invitation, pledging to be on mission for Christ. Everyone in that room felt we met God that night. We truly worshiped.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Time is a Threat** (Ecclesiastes 3:1,10-14) - We cannot control time. This truth helps us to **recognize** the sovereignty of God and the limits of people.
2. **True Friends Can Help** (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) - Friends are blessings God gives us to make life bearable.
3. **God Alone is Worthy** (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7) - When we worship God we must be reverent, sincere, honest, and we must think carefully about Him.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Solomon said there was a time for what?
2. What will we do when we understand God's eternal nature?
3. Why are two people better than one?
4. Which is better, to offer foolish sacrifices or to listen to God?
5. What will happen when we rightly worship God? (See Ecclesiastes 5:7.)

Today's Lesson

1. Time is a Threat (Ecclesiastes 3:1,10-14)

- 1 There is a time for everything, and everything on earth has its special season.
- 10 I saw the hard work God has given people to do.
- 11 God has given them a desire to know the future. He does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing.
- 12 So I realize that the best thing for them is to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live.
- 13 God wants all people to eat and drink and be happy in their work, which are gifts from God.
- 14 I know that everything God does will continue forever. People cannot add anything to what God has done, and they cannot take anything away from it. God does it this way to make people respect him.

Verse 1. Have you ever thought about time? What is time? Did God invent time? How is the right way to think about time? When Jesus lived, the Greek people thought about time in two ways. They thought about

the progress of time like first one thing happens and then a second thing happens. They also thought about the events of time like seasons of time.

Solomon thought about time, too. Solomon looked at the events in his life, and he realized there is a time for everything to happen. Solomon was not thinking about the order in which things happen. He was thinking about the certainty of each event. Verses 2-8 are a beautiful poem Solomon wrote about the events of time. Everything has a time when it will happen. You can know as surely as birth comes, so also death will come. As surely as love comes, so also hate will come.

Verses 10-11. We need to ask about God's relationship to the time in which we live. Solomon did that, too. Solomon saw how God established work for people to do. Work is not punishment, but work can be hard. However, Solomon said God gave people a desire to know the future. I often see people talk about the future. Many times people ask me what the

**"PEOPLE CANNOT ADD
ANYTHING TO WHAT GOD
HAS DONE, AND THEY
CANNOT TAKE ANYTHING
AWAY FROM IT."**

Bible says will happen in the future. They truly want to know what God is going to do. We know we must work hard now, but in the future we wonder if things will be different.

Solomon said God does everything right and on time. However, when we see God act in time, we do not truly understand what God is doing. Just like

the lessons we studied in the Book of Job, we want to understand what God is doing in the world and in our lives. But just like Job, often we do not know what God is doing. Most of the time, we do not know the future. So what is the right way to think about what God is doing in time? The answer to that question is in verses 12-14.

Verses 12-14. These three verses show us what we can do with our time, but they also show us God's relationship to our time. We cannot change the facts. The events of time will come (birth and death, war and peace). We must be happy in life (verse 12). We must do the necessary parts of life like eating, drinking, and working with happiness. After all, these are gifts from God (verse 13).

We are caught in time, and we watch it develop. However, God is actually in control of the events of our time. In other lessons we have seen this word **sovereign**. That word means "God is in control." The way Solomon wrote about this was to say, "People cannot add anything to what God has done, and they cannot take anything away from it." We believe the events of time are under the sovereign control of God. God has made the sovereign decision to let people make free choices.

These are difficult ideas. However, these thoughts must have at least one big effect on you—they must make you have a deep respect for God. And

that is exactly what Solomon said in verse 14. Our time is but a moment. God's time is eternal. Maybe this is why we look forward to the future. In the future, all Christian believers will be safe in God's eternal heaven where time is no more. There we will live with Him forever.

2. True Friends Can Help (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

- 9 Two people are better than one, because they get more done by working together.
- 10 If one falls down, the other can help him up. But it is bad for the person who is alone and falls, because no one is there to help.
- 11 If two lie down together, they will be warm, but a person alone will not be warm.
- 12 An enemy might defeat one person, but two people together can defend themselves; a rope that is woven of three strings is hard to break.

Verses 9-10. We are caught in the events of time, and there are many things we cannot change. But we must not feel helpless in life. We have many resources to put goodness in our lives. One of those resources God gives to us is friends. Solomon talks about friendship in this section (verses 9-12). "Two people are better than one," Solomon said. One reason for this is because they will get more done. Solomon valued work so whatever made people more productive was a good thing.

**A TRUE FRIEND IS A FRIEND
WHO IS CLOSE TO YOU IN
TIMES OF NEED AND IN
TIMES OF HARDSHIP.**

But friendship also has a benefit for the two friends. "If one falls down, the other can help him up." If a person is alone there is no help when that person falls. The world around us does not understand the true meaning of love very well. The world seems to teach sex is the same as love. But the world around us understands the value of having friends.

Verses 11-12. Solomon described the benefits we get from friendship. When I read verses 11-12, I thought about Proverbs 18:24. A true friend is a friend who is close to you in times of need and in times of hardship. Solomon described times of need by saying, "If two lie down together, they will be warm." This is not a verse about a sexual relationship. Solomon may have had in mind the work of a shepherd or friends on a trip. Shepherds, or people on a trip, were exposed to the cold at night. A friend brought warmth. But a friend also brought help in the face of an enemy. Three people make a greater strength, as Solomon illustrated with a rope having three strands woven together.

WE CAN GO TO WORSHIP
AND DO ALL THE RIGHT
THINGS, BUT IF WE ARE
NOT LISTENING TO GOD,
WHAT WE OFFER TO
GOD IS ONLY "FOOLISH
SACRIFICES."

Solomon knew life is not easy. When we face the difficult times of life, we need friends around us. Five years ago my doctor told me I had cancer. The best chance at a cure for me was surgery. I asked several of my friends to pray for me. One of my best friends was Jerry Seale, who was the Deaf pastor in Knoxville, Tennessee. On the morning of my surgery, I walked into the waiting room at about 6:30.

Jerry Seale sat there, waiting for me to arrive. He had come all the way from Knoxville to Cary, North Carolina to be with me. Jerry sat with me, prayed with me, laughed with me, and blessed me with his friendship. I believe part of my healing from cancer came from Jerry Seale's friendship. Friends help make life right and good.

3. God Alone is Worthy (5:1-7)

- 1 Be careful when you go to worship at the Temple. It is better to listen than to offer foolish sacrifices without even knowing you are doing wrong.
- 2 Think before you speak, and be careful about what you say to God. God is in heaven, and you are on the earth, so say only a few words to God.
- 3 The saying is true: Bad dreams come from too much worrying, and too many words come from foolish people.
- 4 If you make a promise to God, don't be slow to keep it. God is not happy with fools, so give God what you promised.
- 5 It is better not to promise anything than to promise something and not do it.
- 6 Don't let your words cause you to sin, and don't say to the priest at the Temple, "I didn't mean what I promised." If you do, God will become angry with your words and will destroy everything you have worked for.
- 7 Many useless promises are like so many dreams; they mean nothing. You should respect God.

Verse 1. The final section of our lesson today is about worship. Solomon was very familiar with worship because he built the temple in Jerusalem where Israel worshiped God. Solomon's palace was very close to the temple. Every day he saw the priests at the temple and the people going to the temple to worship. Solomon, as the king, had a role in many acts of worship. Early in his reign as the king of Israel, Solomon himself was a strong

follower and worshiper of God. Verses 1-7 show us the great importance of worshipping God.

The first verse describes two important parts of worship. The first part is “be careful.” In another Bible translation, the words are, “guard your steps.” The idea is this: a person must not approach God lightly. We must be careful in our approach to God. Worshipping God can truly be joyous, but we must **recognize** the majesty and greatness of God. Worship is an awesome thing.

The second part is the idea of listening. We often think worship is our praying or singing or the preacher talking. Certainly, these are important parts of our worship to God. However, we often forget a major part of worship when all of us listen (with hearts and minds) to what God wants to say. In fact, worship is not true worship until we “hear” from God. Worship is two-way communication between God and His people. We offer ourselves to God, and God gives Himself to us. That is when true worship happens.

We can go to worship and do all the right things, but if we are not listening to God, what we offer to God is only “foolish sacrifices.” When Solomon lived, the sacrifice of animals was a major part of their worship. We no longer do this because Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins. However, we do offer to God our praise, our gifts, and our lives. But if we have not been listening to God, then the sacrifices we give to God may truly be wrong.

Verses 2-7. When we worship God we must think before we speak (verse 2). We must be quick to keep any promises we make to God (verse 4). We must not let our words or signs cause us to sin (verse 6). This can happen when we make promises to God and then we do not keep our promises. Solomon was very clear. We must not make promises to God in worship and then not keep those promises later. Have you ever done something like that? Perhaps you promised to follow Christ, but later you slipped away from Him. What you must do now is renew your promise to God and continue to follow the Lord.

This section on worship ends with the words, “You must respect God.” This is where we started in the first section from 3:14. God in His sovereignty is worthy of respect. God must be given respect when we worship Him. True worship of God will lead us to a life of meaning and a life with purpose. That was what Solomon was seeking.

At this point in Ecclesiastes, Solomon had not quite figured out the highest purpose in life, but he was on track as he leads us to think about the importance of meeting God in worship.

What About You?

Do you feel empty at times? Part of our empty feeling comes from our desire to get to heaven. Earthly things cannot fill us.

Do you have close and godly friends to help you through life? I hope you do. You can find friends in the family of God.

Finally, I encourage you to worship God regularly. Go to church faithfully because we worship God in church with God's people.

Watch carefully for what God wants to say to you. Listen to God and live obediently to God's leadership in your life.

Applying the Lesson

On a separate piece of paper or in the margin of your Sunday School book write answers to these questions.

1. How do you know God is **sovereign** over time?
2. In what ways do you wish for heaven?
3. Who are your godly friends?
4. How do you show godly friendship?
5. What does the word *worship* mean to you?
6. Do you listen to what God is saying to you?

A verse to remember: "I know that everything God does will continue forever. People cannot add anything to what God has done, and they cannot take anything away from it. God does it this way to make people respect him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

Am I Headed for Failure?

Background

Study Verses:

Ecclesiastes 5:8–6:12

Lesson Material:

Ecclesiastes 5:8-16,
18-20; 6:10-12

Bible Truth

If we place our faith only in getting things, then we will have only **corruption**, frustration, emptiness, and loneliness.



Over thirty years ago I was pastor of the Deaf church in New Orleans. We had a good church, and the members tried to share Christ in our city. One of our members, Mary, was almost 90 years old. She was a wonderful Christian and at one time had been an officer of SBCD. Mary did not have much money, but she had a nice little house, and she managed her limited income well.

Mary had one son who was hearing. He decided early in his life not to be in the Deaf world. He had a wonderful singing voice, so he became an actor and moved to Chicago. He was very successful and made a lot of money. I do not think his money brought him any happiness.

Mary died with a happy heart and a deep faith in God. She was loved by everyone who knew her.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Headed Toward Dishonesty? (Ecclesiastes 5:8-9)** - Many people think it is acceptable to become rich by dishonest methods.
2. **Headed Toward Loneliness? (Ecclesiastes 5:10-16)** - Living only for getting and holding onto wealth will not bring satisfaction. It will only bring a life of loneliness.
3. **Headed Toward Joy? (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)** - When we see the things we have as a gift from God which we must use in the right way, we will have a life of satisfaction.
4. **Headed Toward Frustration? (Ecclesiastes 6:10-12)** - We are limited in our ability to understand and explain the mysteries of life.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who are the people most often mistreated?
2. What do wealthy people gain?
3. What do people have when they come into the world and when they leave the world?
4. What are some of God's gifts in verses 18-20?
5. We must live for God because life is _____.

Today's Lesson

1. Headed Toward Dishonesty? (Ecclesiastes 5:8-9)

8 In some places you will see poor people mistreated. Don't be surprised when they are not treated fairly or given their rights. One officer is cheated by a higher officer who in turn is cheated by even higher officers.

9 The wealth of the country is divided up among them all. Even the king makes sure he gets his share of the profits.

Verse 8. I will never forget when I built my house in New Orleans. One day after the plumber had finished his work, the city plumbing inspector came by to inspect the plumbing to be sure it passed code. After the inspector looked at everything, I saw the plumber give him a twenty dollar bill. I thought that was strange. Later I asked what that was for. The

plumber said the inspector would not pass the plumbing without some kind of **bribe**. I was angry and disappointed to know our city government had that much **corruption** in it.

You have probably faced situations like this, too. Maybe you got a ticket from a dishonest policeman. Maybe you had a case heard in court by a bad judge. Maybe you needed to pay a bribe before you could get help. The majority of government and business people in America are honest. But there are a few in every place who give a bad name to all the good ones. In our lesson today, we learn when we chase meaning for life in wealth, we will be terribly disappointed. A great many people love their possessions more than anything else in life. Such love of things will always lead to poverty of spirit.

Solomon knew how the poor people of the world suffer the most from this corruption. Leaders can take advantage of poor people. Many people have no way to protest, so officials can take advantage of them. Solomon knew there were many levels of government, and at each level someone can cheat those at a lower level.

THE MEANING AND
PURPOSE OF LIFE COULD
NOT BE FOUND IN
ACQUIRING WEALTH.

Verse 9. I am sure Solomon saw how officials took advantage of the poor. Then he saw how higher officials took advantage of lower officials. Solomon even **recognized** the person at the top, the king, could take advantage of everyone under him. Here in America, we remember President Richard Nixon who resigned as president of the United States because of scandal and corruption in his administration.

Solomon did not pass judgment on the corrupt practices of these government leaders. However, this whole section from 5:8-17 is concerned with acquiring wealth and possessions. Solomon discovered the meaning and purpose of life could not be found in acquiring wealth. The mood of the whole section helps us to see Solomon did not approve the corruption he saw. The people described in verses 8-9 were dishonest and were therefore breaking God's law. That was wrong behavior, and it was condemned by both the teaching of the Old Testament and the teaching of the New Testament. (See Luke 3:12-14.)

2. Headed Toward Loneliness? (5:10-16)

- 10 Whoever loves money will never have enough money; Whoever loves wealth will not be satisfied with it. This is also useless.
- 11 The more wealth people have, the more friends they have to help spend it. So what do people really gain? They gain nothing except to look at their riches.

- 12 Those who work hard sleep in peace; it is not important if they eat little or much. But rich people worry about their wealth and cannot sleep.
- 13 I have seen real misery here on earth: Money saved is a curse to its owners.
- 14 They lose it all in a bad deal and have nothing to give to their children.
- 15 People come into this world with nothing, and when they die they leave with nothing. In spite of all their hard work, they leave just as they came.
- 16 This, too, is real misery: They leave just as they came. So what do they gain from chasing the wind?

Verses 10-11. People have always been tempted to love money. The deeper temptation is to trust money for meaning in life instead of trusting God. People must decide if they love and trust God or if they love and

**NO MATERIAL THING CAN
GIVE YOU A TRUE PURPOSE
AND MEANING IN LIFE.
ONLY GOD CAN DO THAT.**

trust money. You know how this is exactly what happens in the lives of many people.

Solomon knew people faced this temptation. He also knew loving and acquiring money would not make a person happy. Someone who loves

money, Solomon said, can never get enough of it. No matter how much money people may get, they are never satisfied. They always want more. Gaining wealth does not help you gain friends. There will be people to help you spend your money (verse 11), but they are not true friends like the ones we saw in 4:9-12. These are friends who just want your money. The only reward to come with wealth is the opportunity to look at your wealth.

Verse 12. Of much greater value than wealth, is good work to do. A person who works hard sleeps well. Of course, it is better to have enough to eat than to go hungry, but Solomon is not trying to make a point about food in this passage. He is talking about inner peace. Wealth does not bring inner peace. People who struggle financially think if they were rich they would be happy. Solomon found this was not true. Wealthy people may have a level of comfort, but their wealth does not produce joy.

Verses 13-14. Solomon described two sad things he had seen related to wealth. Solomon was not speaking against saving money. Saving money can be very wise. Solomon was speaking against **hoarding** money. Hoarding money means to get it, keep it, and then get more just to hold on to it in greed. Those who love and hoard money actually push people away.

The other sadness Solomon saw was someone having money but losing money in a bad deal, so as to have nothing left to leave to his children as an inheritance. The idea is the rich person took a chance with his money, hoping to get even richer. The outcome was to lose it all much like many

people did in the stock market crash of 1929, which led to the Great Depression in America.

Verses 15-16. Solomon reminds us of a truth in our hearts we all know. The truth is this: we came into the world with nothing, and we will leave the world with nothing. When you were born, what did you have? Nothing, of course. When you die what can you take with you? Again, nothing. This truth does not lead us to misuse the money and resources God gives us in life. In many places in the Bible, we learn to be good stewards of all God trusts into our hands. Solomon is not speaking here about Christian stewardship. Solomon is speaking about wealth as a means toward finding a true purpose in life. No material thing can give you a true purpose and meaning in life. Only God can do that.

THOSE WHO DO NOT
WORRY ABOUT THE
NUMBER OF YEARS IN LIFE
LIVE OUT OF A LOVE
FOR WHAT GOD LEADS
THEM TO DO.

3. Headed Toward Joy? (5:18-20)

18 I have seen what is best for people here on earth. They should eat and drink and enjoy their work, because the life God has given them on earth is short.

19 God gives some people the ability to enjoy the wealth and property he gives them, as well as the ability to accept their state in life and enjoy their work.

20 They do not worry about how short life is, because God keeps them busy with what they love to do.

Verses 18-20. We have seen how some people will try to get rich even if they must be dishonest. We have seen how seeking only wealth will leave a person frustrated and lonely. In this section, we see a positive outcome from a right use of God's gifts. We must **recognize** the joy described in this section does not come from a person working for selfish gain. It comes from receiving God's gifts. In verse 18, Solomon wrote about the life God has given. In verse 19, Solomon said God gives some people the ability to enjoy the life God has given them. Three times in these verses we read about God as the giver.

Solomon said eating and drinking and pleasure in work are gifts from God. In verse 19, Solomon said people who enjoy the wealth God has given them have the ability to enjoy life even if life is short. Finally, Solomon said those who do not worry about the number of years in life

live out of a love for what God leads them to do. Immediately, you can see the big difference between the earlier verses we studied and these. In the earlier verses, people sought meaning in life by accumulating wealth. The people in verses 18-20 find joy in life from the gifts of God. These are two very different approaches to life.

Twenty years ago, my wife and I went on a mission trip to share Christ with Deaf people in the Dominican Republic. One day we ate lunch with a Deaf family who lived behind the church building where the Deaf people met. The house was poor, with dirt floors and sheets for doors. There was no running water in the house. Water came from an outside faucet. Chickens ran around in the back yard and through the house. However, the house was full of love and kindness. We ate a wonderful meal of rice and chicken and shared the kindness of this Deaf Christian family. Money did not give them joy, but the presence of Christ filled their lives and their home.

4. Headed Toward Frustration? (6:10-12)

- 10 Whatever happens was planned long ago. Everyone knows what people are like. No one can argue with God, who is stronger than anyone.
11 The more you say, the more useless it is. What good does it do?
12 People have only a few useless days of life on the earth; their short life passes like a shadow. Who knows what is best for them while they live? Who can tell them what the future will bring?

Verses 10-12. As you read these verses, keep in mind how Solomon did not have the New Testament. He did not know the hope we have in Christ. Nevertheless, what Solomon wrote is true. Solomon expressed his frustration in life. He saw life happening, and people could do nothing to change the circumstances of life. A person could try to argue with God to change things, but no one can argue with God (verse 10). A person could complain and fuss about the problems of life but “the more you say, the more useless it is.” Talking about the problems of life does not make them go away.

Solomon decided life is short, and no one knows what the best thing to do is. No one (but God) knows the future. We could get frustrated with that and a great many people do. A better approach to these frustrations Solomon described is to confess we have limits in life. We do not know everything. We do not know the easiest way of life to choose. We cannot make our lives long by wishing them to be long. We are limited. We can find peace, though, in trusting God. God knows what is best for us. God will give us all the days of life we need, as we trust Him. And God will give us peace with our lives today. Solomon did not see these things as clearly

as we can see them today because we have the story of Jesus and the revelation of the New Testament. When life is frustrating; trust God.

What About You?

How do you get money? How do you think about money? How do you use money? These are all important questions from this lesson. God has trusted you with many things, including family, life, home, work, friends, and money.

God expects you to use for Him all He sends into your life. You will find if you cheat to get money and if you hoard what you have, you will not know the Lord's peace.

Applying the Lesson

Here are some great questions you can talk about with your Sunday School class:

1. Have you seen anyone cheating to get money? Why is this wrong?
2. Why does **hoarding** lead to loneliness?
3. What gifts has God given you? How are you using those gifts from God?
4. Life is short. How do you plan to live it?

A verse to remember: "Whoever loves money will never have enough money; whoever loves wealth will not be satisfied with it" (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Can I Keep on Going?



**Background
Study Verses:**
Ecclesiastes 7:1–8:17

Lesson Material:
Ecclesiastes 7:11-14,
15-18; 8:10-12,16-17

Bible Truth

We can trust our
perfect God in this
imperfect world.

Why do some good people suffer? Why do some bad people seem to have easy lives? Why do some children die young? Why do people hurt other people? Maybe you have seen these things happening and wondered why.

Cedric sat on stage in his wheel chair. His body was badly bent from a birth defect. He also had a mental handicap. He could not do what many of his friends did easily. Yet, he was willing to perform in the camp talent show. We watched Cedric and cried as he signed, “in Jesus all things are possible.”

So many of the hard questions we asked could be asked for Cedric. Why does he face all these **challenges**? Why does he have such deep faith? Even though we live in a world with many things wrong with it, we can trust our God who lives with us and in us.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Accept Godly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:11-14)** - Godly wisdom can lead our lives toward meaning.
2. **Avoid Extremes (Ecclesiastes 7:15-18)** - We must not become enslaved to a set of religious rules built around self-denial. Living this way can cause us to miss some of God's blessings.
3. **Know God is in Control (Ecclesiastes 8:10-12,16-17)** - Life has many **inequities** and uncertainties. Nevertheless, we can know God is **ultimately** in control and this can help us live in hope.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When life is good, what must you do?
2. Who knows what tomorrow might bring?
3. What happens to some good people and some evil people?
4. The better life for any person is to do what?
5. Can anyone completely understand God?

Today's Lesson

1. Accept Godly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:11-14)

- 11 Wisdom is better when it comes with money. They both help those who are alive.
- 12 Wisdom is like money: they both help. But wisdom is better, because it can save whoever has it.
- 13 Look at what God has done: No one can straighten what he has bent.
- 14 When life is good, enjoy it. But when life is hard, remember: God gives good times and hard times, and no one knows what tomorrow will bring.

Verses 11-12. Solomon wrote a lot about wisdom. When Solomon lived, people thought about wisdom differently from the way we think of wisdom. When we think about someone who is wise, we think about a person who has learned from life how to make good decisions. We think about a person who is able to figure out what is right and wrong, or what is best from what is good. These are people with wisdom.

When Solomon lived, wisdom was almost like a natural element one could find. As people find gold, so people may find wisdom. Wisdom was from God, just like everything in the earth. That is why we find the language of Solomon a little odd. Solomon goes seeking wisdom. We think about someone who becomes wise, not because they sought wisdom, but because they had life experiences to lead them to wise choices.

Solomon said another thing about wisdom. “Wisdom is better when it comes with money.” Solomon knew older people tend to be wiser. But he also saw if you can be wise and have money, that is a good thing, because then you would use your money in a wise way.

However, Solomon also saw if you need to choose one or the other, choose wisdom. Wisdom is of greater value than money, because wisdom could save your life in a difficult situation. As we have seen in other lessons, money, and especially the love of money, can get a person into a lot of trouble.

**WE ARE WISE WHEN WE
LIVE LIFE IN GOD’S WAY
AND DO NOT TRY TO
CHANGE GOD’S WAYS.**

Verses 13-14. Solomon did not know Christ like you and I do. However, every time Solomon pursued wisdom, his thinking found its way back to God. In these two verses Solomon thought again about the actions of God and this

helped him understand life a little bit better.

Solomon said God is in control of the directions of life. He did not say that in the way we would say it. Here is what he said: “No one can straighten what He has bent.” Do you know of anything God has bent? Do you know anyone trying to straighten what God has bent? Those are odd sentences. They mean God is not under our control in any way. We are wise when we live life in God’s way and do not try to change God’s ways.

I love verse 14. We have all learned how sometimes life seems to be sweet. At other times, life is hard. We **respond** to this in different ways. We pray all the time but especially in the hard times. God hears and responds to our prayers. But another response to the sweetness and hardness of life is to enjoy the sweet times and remember in the hard times how life goes through many changes. Do not give up in the hard times. We can trust God when life is hard and thank God for every gentle and sweet moment of life.

2. Avoid Extremes (7:15-18)

15 In my useless life I have seen both of these: I have seen good people die in spite of their goodness and evil people live a long time in spite of their evil.

16 Don’t be too right, and don’t be too wise. Why destroy yourself?

17 Don't be too wicked, and don't be foolish. Why die before your time?
18 It is good to grab the one and not let go of the other; those who honor God will hold them both.

Verse 15. If we are not careful we might conclude Solomon is teaching us to be a little bit bad, but not too bad. Of course, we know this is not the way of God so we cannot reach this conclusion. Part of our help in interpreting these verses comes from understanding Solomon and what he was doing in this whole book. Solomon looked very closely at life to find meaning. He discovered life was short and would end in death. So, all through this book Solomon described life as “useless.”

You and I know life in Christ is not useless. But this understanding helps us grasp Solomon's point. Solomon was a follower of God, but he did not know Christ as we do. Solomon was so rich and so powerful he could explore every part of life. He found nothing in this world to give life true meaning and purpose. So he decided the things of this world are useless. In this he was right. The things of this world will not give us true meaning for life.

WE MUST NOT SEEK GOD
IN OUR OWN RIGHTNESS,
AND WE MUST NOT GO THE
WAY OF WICKEDNESS.

If you are looking for life to treat you “right,” then you will truly be disappointed. Solomon saw good people die young. He saw evil people who lived a long time. This does not mean all good people die young nor does it mean all evil people live a long time. But sometimes, good people die young and evil people live on and on. Therefore, Solomon decided even being good or bad did not bring true meaning for life. You and I have learned this too. God wants us to live right. But we cannot be good enough to satisfy God. We need Jesus as our Savior, and that alone satisfies God.

Verses 16-18. Since good people can die young and evil people can live long, Solomon thought it wise to avoid extremes. Here is where we must be cautious interpreting Solomon. We must not understand these verses to teach we should be a little bit good and little bit bad. We know we must be dedicated totally to Christ. This is where we get some help interpreting these verses. We can be like the Pharisees in the time of Jesus, and try to be so good following the rules we think God is satisfied with our law-keeping. Such a person would see himself as righteous based on keeping the rules. Keeping the rules does not make us righteous. A person like this must let go of the rules and seek a relationship with God. But there are others who abandon the rules completely. I know some people like this and perhaps you do too. They are lost in wickedness. Such a life will almost always end tragically.

So Solomon's advice was to hold on to some of both. We must not hold on to sin. But we must **recognize** how living by the rules will not make us right with God. So we give up the search for righteousness in the rules. This is what Solomon means in verse 16 when he said, "Don't be too right." Of course, we must recognize living in an evil way is against God's will. We must leave wicked living. This is what Solomon means in verse 17 when he said, "Don't be too wicked."

How do we honor God? Solomon said, "Don't be too right" and "don't be too wicked." We must not seek God in our own rightness, and we must not go the way of wickedness. We must hold on to both of these true statements. We must not try to hold on to both goodness and wickedness.

GOD IS NOT LIMITED TO WHAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND OF HIM.

That is a wrong interpretation of these verses. You can honor God today by trusting in Jesus and following Him. When you trust Jesus, you are not trying to get to God on your own righteousness, and when you trust

Jesus, you will repent from sin and reject evil ways.

3. Know God is in Control (8:10-12,16-17)

- 10 I saw the funerals of evil people who used to go in and out of the holy place. They were honored in the same towns where they had done evil. This is useless, too.
- 11 When evil people are not punished right away, it makes others want to do evil, too.
- 12 Though a sinner might do a hundred evil things and might live a long time, I know it will be better for those who honor God.

Verses 10-12. Many things in life do not seem fair. Solomon mentioned some of these in verses 10-11. Solomon saw people do evil things. Some of those evil people lived **hypocritical** lives. Solomon described people who went to worship, but they were truly evil. Those same people would do evil in a town and later be honored by the same town in which they had done evil. It does not seem fair for evil persons to put on the show of holiness at the temple or at worship but have evil in their heart, and then we see those people honored at their funeral.

Still, we read in verse 12, no matter if an evil person gets away with their evil or not, it is better to be the person who honors God. Solomon pointed out in this verse, the evil person might live a long time, but "it will be better for those who honor God." Because we know God is still in control, we can continue on with life, even when things are not fair.

Verses 16-17. Solomon tried to understand how everything happens on earth. He watched people and saw the number one activity for people is work. He understood how people will work night and day, even to the point of exhaustion. You have seen people do this, too. In today's difficult economy, many people need to work two or three jobs just to pay their bills. Solomon recognized doing meaningful work is a good thing. However, we do need to learn not to push ourselves too hard. Hard work is rewarding, but hard work does not give us true meaning and purpose in life. Only God can do that.

Then Solomon tried to look at the activities of God. Solomon said he "saw all God has done." I know Solomon did not see everything God has done. Solomon looked at the activity of God as he understood things with the **theology** of his day. Solomon considered God as Old Testament theologians understood Him. Even looking at God in this limited way, Solomon knew he could not understand the person or the activities of God. One of the wisest statements by Solomon in this whole book is the statement in verse 17, "Even if wise people say they understand, they cannot: No one can truly understand it."

This is a great thing to learn. First, God is much bigger than any person. God is not limited to what we can understand of Him. Second, it is comforting to know God's ways are above our ways. This is exactly where faith is strongest. When we get to the end of our understanding and wisdom, and then put ourselves into the hands of our loving, powerful, and **sovereign** Savior, we show the kind of faith God wants us to have. God is one of those "things" in life we cannot understand. However, we can keep going on through life with our limited understanding, and trust our perfect God in this imperfect world.

What About You?

Are you learning anything about godly wisdom from the study of Ecclesiastes? I am sure you have received advice from many different people in your life. Whom do you listen to?

Are you listening to what the teacher of Ecclesiastes needed to say?

Always remember the world we live in has been deeply damaged by sin. Trust our perfect God, and He will lead you through all the circumstances of life.

Applying the Lesson

Circle the choice you would make:

great wisdom - or - much money?

to be good - or - to be wicked.

to live a long life - or - live to honor God.

to understand people – or - to understand God.

A verse to remember: “When life is good, enjoy it. But when life is hard, remember: God gives good times and hard times, and no one knows what tomorrow will bring” (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

Is There any Hope?

Background

Study Verses:

Ecclesiastes 9:1–10:20

Lesson Material:

Ecclesiastes 9:3-12,
15-18

Bible Truth

God expects His people to find satisfaction in being good stewards of the opportunities and things He provides for them.



Think about your blessings. I have a great wife, three wonderful children, a godly daughter-in-law, a missionary son-in-law, and two terrific grandsons. I am truly blessed. Can you count the blessings you have in life?

Some people have learned to celebrate the blessings. Other people are never content but always see what else they want. Years ago a Deaf pastor friend of mine had every good blessing. He had a great wife and family. He was the pastor of a fine and growing church. But he was not satisfied with all these blessings from God. He wanted power over people. Within a very short time he lost everything—his family, his church, and his joy. We must learn to be happy with the blessings God gives us and use those blessings for His glory.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **As Long as You're Alive (Ecclesiastes 9:3-6)** - God expects us to do something with the time He gives us to live.
2. **Give Your Best (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10)** - People can find joy in celebrating the blessings of life.
3. **Letting the Chips Fall (Ecclesiastes 9:11-12,15-18)** - The joy of living must motivate us more than the rewards we may or may not have as a result of our actions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What happens to everyone at the end of life?
2. With whom must you enjoy life?
3. How must we do our work?
4. Why doesn't the fast runner always win?
5. What effect can one sinner have?

Today's Lesson

1. As Long as You're Alive (Ecclesiastes 9:3-6)

- 3 This is something wrong that happens here on earth: What happens to one happens to all. So people's minds are full of evil and foolish thoughts while they live. After that, they join the dead.
- 4 But anyone still alive has hope; even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!
- 5 The living know they will die, but the dead know nothing. Dead people have no more reward, and people forget them.
- 6 After people are dead, they can no longer love or hate or envy. They will never again share in what happens here on earth.

Verse 3. Solomon wrote this book after he spent time seeking meaning and purpose in life. Solomon looked everywhere for the meaning of life and he concluded he could not find the meaning of life in the things of earth. So far, he has not said where he found meaning.

Solomon found something on earth he called wrong. By wrong Solomon did not mean morally wrong. He meant what he found was

distasteful and contrary to his desire. What Solomon found was this: everyone shares the same fate of death. This is what he meant by, “happens to one, happens to all.” This led many people to have minds full of evil and foolish thoughts. Of course, not everyone who faces death gives up on living right, but many do.

Verse 4. Many times in these lessons from Ecclesiastes, I have said Solomon did not have a New Testament understanding of God. Solomon had a negative view of death. In the New Testament, Paul and others wrote about the victory of the Christian in death. Solomon did not have a clear idea of heaven or hell. Death for him was like a shadow.

Hope, for Solomon, was found in life, not death. Solomon said anyone who was still alive had hope. Solomon was more right than he knew. In the New Testament we learn how anyone still living has the opportunity to trust in Christ and be saved. That is where true hope in life is found. After a person is dead there is no chance to trust in Christ. So Solomon was right. In this life, our only hope for salvation is in Christ.

IN THIS LIFE, OUR ONLY
HOPE FOR SALVATION
IS IN CHRIST.

Verses 5-6. These verses give me a sad feeling. Solomon did not have a clear view of heaven. For Solomon, living on earth was all he could see clearly. Solomon thought dead people know nothing. In this he was wrong, as we know from the New Testament. Solomon knew dead people cannot receive any more rewards on earth. He was right when he **recognized** how after someone dies, living people forget about them.

After we die, we can no longer participate in the activities of earth. Solomon wrote about love, hate, and envy. We will not be able to do these earthly activities when we are dead. We need to do all the good we can before we die, because after we die we will not be able to influence the world for good any more. Certainly, your reputation and influence are not completely gone when you are dead, and perhaps someone will still be influenced toward God as a result of your life even after you are dead. But Solomon was correct in seeing how after death, we cannot have the impact on lives we have had during life. Therefore, live for Christ, love people deeply, tell the gospel story, and do good to all.

You have only this one life to get it right. After you are dead, it is too late to get life right. As long as you are alive, there is hope you will get life right. You will only get life right when you give your life to Christ and when you live for Him every day.

2. Give Your Best (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10)

- 7 So go eat your food and enjoy it; drink your wine and be happy, because that is what God wants you to do.
8 Put on nice clothes and make yourself look good.
9 Enjoy life with the wife you love. Enjoy all the useless days of this useless life God has given you here on earth, because it is all you have. So enjoy the work you do here on earth.
10 Whatever work you do, do your best, because you are going to the grave, where there is no working, no planning, no knowledge, and no wisdom.

Verse 7. In the first section of this lesson we saw Solomon looking toward death. Solomon did not have a New Testament Christian view of death or a New Testament view of heaven. Therefore, many times in Ecclesiastes Solomon told his readers to enjoy life. This advice from Solomon is wise. But we need to look at it carefully. Solomon first told us to eat our food.

Food can be abused by eating too much, but food is a gift from God. Jesus often enjoyed eating with His friends.

Several times in Ecclesiastes, Solomon advised people to drink. This time Solomon added to “drink your wine and be happy.” In Solomon’s day, wine was one of the few drinks safe and clean to drink. Water was often polluted and unhealthy. Wine was a milder alcohol than it is today. They did not have the modern **distilling** methods people use today to make alcoholic drinks with much greater alcohol content. I have found it wise in my life to never drink alcohol and wine. I suggest you pray carefully to seek God’s will for you concerning wine and other alcoholic drinks.

Verse 8. This is a new thought in Solomon’s list of things we must enjoy. Solomon advised us to dress in nice clothes and make ourselves look good. A more accurate translation is, to wear white clothes and to anoint oneself with oil. Either translation of the verse is about joy and celebration in life. This is a bit of a stretch for Solomon, because his view of life was quite negative and **pessimistic**. However, on occasion he found reason for joy and celebration. This is a wonderful note for Christians. We Christians believe Jesus came to give us life and to give us that life in abundance (John 10:10).

Verses 9-10. This section ends with two areas of life in which we must do our very best. The first area is in our marriage. Solomon, being a man, wrote from the viewpoint of a man. Therefore, his concern was how to live with one’s wife. He made this wonderful statement, “Enjoy life with the

wife you love.” This does not mean marriage is just a fun event. Marriage is hard work. Marriage also requires deep commitment to each other. I have found my marriage is best when my wife and I follow Christ. But marriage is also fun. At the time of this writing, my wife and I have been married 38 years. We have gone through much together, including hard times and financial difficulties. However, what stays in my heart and mind after all these years is the great joy we have had together. We look forward to many years of fun and faith in the future!

The other area in which we are to do our best is the area of our work. “Whatever work you do, do your best.” This was one of the first verses I memorized as a child. The reason I learned it was because my mother often quoted it. Mother would say it from the King James Version, “Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might.” This is great advice. Solomon said to do this because we cannot do meaningful work after death. This is true. I would add; we must work this way because it is the right way for Christians to work. (See Colossians 3:23.) Some parts of life are very hard. Truly, many parts of life are sweet blessings from God. We must always celebrate these great gifts.

WE RECOGNIZE HOW
GOD MOVES TIME ALONG
ACCORDING TO HIS PLAN.

3. Letting the Chips Fall (Ecclesiastes 9:11-12,15-18)

- 11 I also saw something else here on earth: The fastest runner does not always win the race, the strongest soldier does not always win the battle, the wisest does not always have food, the smartest does not always become wealthy, and the talented one does not always receive praise. Time and chance happen to everyone.
- 12 No one knows what will happen next. Like a fish caught in a net, or a bird caught in a trap, people are trapped by evil when it suddenly falls on them.
- 15 Now there was a poor but wise man in the town who used his wisdom to save his town. But later on, everyone forgot about him.
- 16 I still think wisdom is better than strength. But those people forgot about the poor man’s wisdom and stopped listening to what he said.
- 17 The quiet words of a wise person are better than the shouts of a foolish ruler.
- 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much good.

The title of this section means “we should not worry about things we cannot control.”

Verses 11-12. Why must we live in joy? Why must we follow God? Is it right for us to do these things just so we will receive a great reward? Solomon recognized doing things the best and even doing them right does not always reward a person. This was Solomon's observation and what he saw is clearly described in these verses. What Solomon observed is opposite to what a person might expect. If you are the fastest runner, it makes sense you will always win the race. If you are the strongest soldier, everyone expects you will win the war. It certainly seems if you are wise, smart, and talented, you will be the one who has food, wealth, and praise. But all of us know life does not always work out this way.

At least two experiences of life can cause the unexpected to happen. The first of these we have experienced are the unexpected circumstances of life. Solomon called this the "time and chance" of life. We have all seen the fastest runner at the Olympics lose because he pulled a muscle on the start, or the quickest relay team loses because they dropped the baton. We **recognize** how God moves time along according to His plan. But when we look at life from our perspective, we see the circumstances of life happening with no particular reason.

Solomon wrote at the end of verse 12, people are trapped by evil. Solomon may have had in mind the "evil" of being caught in a trap like a fish or a bird. But sin is just like this, too. Sin catches us, and even if we are fast, strong, smart, or talented, sin will trap us like a fish in a net. Therefore, run from sin and run to Christ.

Verses 15-18. This is a short story about a town attacked by a powerful enemy army. The town would have been destroyed but for the actions of a poor but wise man who saved the town. However, after the crisis was over the people of the town forgot the poor wise man. They no longer listened to him. Solomon drew some conclusions from this story. He concluded the quiet words of a wise man are better than the shouts of a foolish ruler. Further, he stated wisdom is better than weapons. The opposite of this is also true. One sinner can create great damage.

We cannot always expect rewards for the good things we do. The best **motivation** for doing good is because it will please God. We cannot explain many of the reasons things happen. We cannot explain why a hero today is forgotten tomorrow. We can know God is bigger than all the events of life. We will be most happy in life when we live out of love for God and not out of the desire for reward.

What About You?

Do you find hope in life or are you always looking for the next thing? This lesson shows us how you can have full hope in Christ but you need to trust in Him while you are living. It is too late after you die.

You can find great joy in life when you appreciate God's wonderful gifts to you. You may sometimes receive rewards for the good you do. But the greatest reward in life is to live because you love God.

Applying the Lesson

Think about the questions below. They may help you recognize where you find your hope:

1. Knowing death will come, do you find your hope for life in Christ?
2. Knowing God has blessed you greatly, do you experience joy in His gifts?
3. Knowing there are many events in life you cannot understand, do you still love God?

A verse to remember: "The quiet words of a wise person are better than the shouts of a foolish ruler" (Ecclesiastes 9:17).

What's the Answer?



Background Study Verses:

Ecclesiastes 11:1–12:14

Lesson Material:

Ecclesiastes 11:1-5,
9-10; 12:13-14

Bible Truth

We can have meaning
and purpose in
life when we give
reverence and honor
to God.

When I was a young boy I learned about God. I learned about Him at church, and I especially learned about Him at home. I believed I could know God by trusting in Jesus as my personal Savior. I made that decision and followed up that decision by publicly professing my faith in Him by believer's baptism. That was not the end of my faith story. That was the beginning.

I have spent the past fifty years seeking to know Christ and to follow Him with all my heart. Following Jesus has been my greatest desire in life. I have not done this perfectly, and I have often made mistakes along the way. But I have done it faithfully. In this, I have found the only true meaning in life. The one great purpose in life is to honor God by trusting in Him and following Christ the Lord.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **Invest in Life (Ecclesiastes 11:1-5)** - While it will not guarantee success, we must invest in life if we expect to discover meaning in life.
2. **Work Within the Boundaries (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10)** - God desires for people to enjoy life within the limits He has revealed.
3. **Revere and Honor God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)** - To revere and honor God sums up the duty of all people.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If you wait for perfect weather, what is it you will never do?
2. Does anyone know everything God is doing?
3. What is one thing everyone needs to remember about God?
4. What was Solomon's final advice?
5. Where do we find the greatest meaning and purpose for life?

Today's Lesson

1. Invest in Life (Ecclesiastes 11:1-5)

- 1 Invest what you have, because after a while you will get a return.
- 2 Invest what you have in several different businesses, because you don't know what disasters might happen.
- 3 If clouds are full of rain, they will shower on the earth. A tree can fall to the north or south, but it will stay where it falls.
- 4 Those who wait for perfect weather will never plant seeds; those who look at every cloud will never harvest crops.
- 5 You don't know where the wind will blow, and you don't know how a baby grows inside the mother. In the same way, you don't know what God is doing, or how he created everything.

Verses 1-2. We have come to the final lesson from the Book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon, in this book, has explained his search for meaning in life. Now, at the end of the story we will see what Solomon found. The final answer will come at the end of this lesson, but the lesson begins by talking about investing in life. The idea of investing in life is a positive one. Solomon has been very negative or **pessimistic** through most of this book. In these verses he changed his tone.

This first verse, in the New Century Version (NCV) of the Bible, has these words “invest what you have” because there will be a return on your investment. Many English Bibles use the more familiar phrase of “cast your bread upon the waters.” The NCV is easier to understand. The idea in the words is this: when you put effort and resources into something up front, later you will receive a reward back from what you have done. This is true in business, in farm life, and in relationships. If you put money into a business, you may receive more back. If you develop friendships you will receive friendship back. This is true spiritually, also. If you grow in the Lord you will find a much better life.

The second verse is also about investing. The interesting thing about this verse is the advice from Solomon to diversify your investments. Put your money or your effort in many different ventures. Disaster may wipe out one, but success will come in another.

WHEN YOU PUT EFFORT
AND RESOURCES INTO
SOMETHING UP FRONT,
LATER YOU WILL RECEIVE
A REWARD BACK FROM
WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.

Verses 3-5. There can be no investment in life without taking some risk. To take a risk means to try even if you may fail. Many people are too afraid to try. Taking a risk does not mean being foolish and doing things you know will end in disaster. But if a person is too afraid to try, he will never do much. Solomon encouraged us to launch out into the unknown and the uncertain and try. Isn't that an

interesting thought? The truth is, that is the definition of faith. Faith goes to the edge of what is known, and then takes a step into the “darkness.” Solomon called on his readers to do the same thing.

Here are the faith ideas in these verses. First, we already know if clouds are full of water they will pour water on the earth. Some people do nothing but keep their eyes on the clouds. They never plant. They are always afraid when they plant because a storm may come. These same people never harvest. They keep looking to the sky, thinking the rain will fall at any minute. We must step out in faith and plant. Trust the Lord and harvest.

A second picture of faith is in the wind and the tree. We know the wind will blow and when it blows, trees will fall. Solomon said they will fall to the north or they will fall to the south. But after they have fallen, they will stay where they are. Yes, we do not know the path of the wind, but we do not need to fear the fall of the tree. Don't live your life in fear. Live your life in faith. Be wise. Be careful. But do not live your life in fear and fail to invest in life.

Life has so much more than we know about. When Solomon lived, they did not know how the human body was formed in the mother's body. We know a great deal about that now, but we still do not know why the body develops as it does. We cannot understand all God knows, so we live in trust. God knows what He is doing and we can trust Him. God is the maker of all things and that includes us. He made us. Therefore, we can trust Him. When we do this, we can begin to see the true meaning of life.

2. Work Within the Boundaries (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10)

9 Young people, enjoy yourselves while you are young; be happy while you are young. Do whatever your heart desires, whatever you want to do. But remember that God will judge you for everything you do.
10 Don't worry, and forget the troubles of your body, because youth and childhood are useless.

Verses 9-10. After reading so many negative words from Solomon, it is refreshing to read such a positive statement. He said to "enjoy yourselves while you are young." Don't get too excited, because at the end of verse

10 he will call youth and childhood useless. Even at that point, we must keep in mind Solomon is looking for the permanent true meaning in life. Youth and childhood cannot provide that permanent true meaning because their years are short then gone forever.

A good lesson to take from these verses is the understanding of boundaries. Boundaries has the idea of what lines I must not cross. If you walk up to a property line with a "no trespassing" sign, you know that is the boundary you must not cross. In life, there are boundaries we must not cross.

Solomon **recognized** great good in childhood and youth. Young people have lots of energy. Young people have imagination. Young people are excited about ideas and about friendships. I love to see young people who serve Christ with energy and imagination. Solomon advised young people to enjoy youth. He said to be happy while you are young. He instructed us to do what we want. However, he also added, "God will judge you for everything you do."

God has built within us a sense of right and wrong. We call that a **conscience**. God has also given us the Holy Spirit and the Bible to lead our lives. We know God's boundaries and we must follow them. God calls us to live holy. God calls us to follow Jesus faithfully. God calls us

IN LIFE, THERE ARE
BOUNDARIES
WE MUST NOT CROSS.

to be sexually clean. God calls us to care for those who are in need. These few sentences can give you some ideas about where God has put your boundaries.

3. Revere and Honor God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

- 13 Now, everything has been heard, so I give my final advice: Honor God and obey his commands, because this is all people must do.
14 God will judge everything, even what is done in secret, the good and the evil.

Verse 13. Finally, we come to the conclusion of this whole book. Chapter 12 brings Solomon to the end of his search. He searched through all of life, and through all the wisdom of life, to find the true purpose for living. He could not find that purpose in any of the parts of earthly life. He tried work, food and drink, fun, women, friendship, power, the temple, and wisdom. All of these things ended with death and left nothing permanent. Solomon concluded they were all useless. None of these items or activities gave Solomon the meaning

for the life he sought.

Finally, in verse 13, Solomon came to the right conclusion. Solomon gave this advice, “Honor God and obey His commands, because this is all people must do.” The meaning of life comes to us when we honor and obey God. Solomon was close to this answer before. He pushed us toward faith. Now, at the end, he made the truth clear. Only in God, who is not of this earth and therefore not useless, can we find the true purpose and meaning in life.

How do we honor God? We honor God by obeying Him. That includes living in right and sinless ways. Jesus gave us the best answer to this question when He called us to follow Him. (See Mark 1:17.) We honor God when we believe in Jesus as our personal Savior. As we continue to follow Him, we learn His ways and we copy His ways. Do you want an example of His ways? Read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

When we honor God by following Christ, we find the perfect meaning and purpose for life. Nothing else comes close. And here is why: God is eternal. When we live for Him we are not living for a **temporary** reason. All the uselessness Solomon saw was in temporary things. God is eternal, so living for Him means we are involved in eternal activities. When we

follow Christ, we live forever (John 8:51). That is the answer for Solomon. Following Christ is not useless, because He alone gives us eternal life.

Verse 14. The final verse of the book reminds us of the consequence if we do not get this part of life right. God is the one who gives us true meaning in life, and God is the one who judges us if we miss Him and live our lives in the uselessness of sin. Solomon also said God knows all we do—the parts people can see and the parts done in secret. Therefore, we cannot fool God. God knows us from the inside out.

I do not know what these two verses do to you, but they touch my heart. They tell me I must not live a life of sin because God will judge me guilty for that. They tell me when I live my life right I will find what I have truly been searching for.

Two Deaf friends went through life from school days all the way through to old age. They had been in the Deaf school together in Jackson, Mississippi. One of those friends lived life for himself. He was married and divorced several times. He had children, but he never invested his life in them and they did not do well. He never had a meaningful job even though he was a gifted carpenter. He was too lazy to work. He hated church. He died miserably.

The other Deaf friend had one wife and three wonderful children who all raised successful families. He worked hard in a newspaper career. He served God faithfully in his church and told the story of Christ all over America and in many nations of the world. At this writing, this Deaf person is an older man, happy in life, and ready to meet God. Which life had purpose? I think you know.

What About You?

Have you found the true purpose in life? I hope you have. If you have been reading the lessons from Ecclesiastes you have seen things without a real purpose and you have seen the one place you can find purpose and meaning in life.

Today, will you give your life to God by trusting in Jesus as your Savior, and live your life by following Him?

Are you doing this? Will you do this?

Applying the Lesson

Have you found your true purpose in life? If you have never trusted Christ here is a prayer for you:

"God I know you are real. I decide right now to turn from the uselessness of sin and give my life to you. I believe Jesus died for me and lives today. I want Him to live in me. My promise to you, God, is to follow you all the days of my life. Amen."

A verse to remember: "Honor God and obey his commands, because this is all people must do. God will judge everything, even what is done in secret, the good and the evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Unit 1

Session 1

1. The greatest man who lived in the East.
2. He was honest, innocent, honored God, and stayed away from evil.
3. He would curse God.
4. He praised the name of the Lord.
5. No. See Job 2:10.

Session 2

1. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.
2. To the sands of the sea.
3. Ask God for help and pray for mercy.
4. Worthless doctors.
5. Ask Job some questions and answer Job's questions.

Session 3

1. The wicked suffer pain all their lives.
2. His friend in heaven.
3. One who rescues or saves another.
4. God.
5. Yes. Many times evil people have easy lives but no one escapes God's final judgment.

Session 4

1. No.
2. Nothing, not even gold, silver, or jewels.
3. Only God.
4. By God's design.
5. "The fear of the Lord is wisdom" (verse 28).

Session 5

1. Honest scales.
2. To God.
3. The sun and the moon.
4. He was not happy, and he did not laugh at them.
5. No.

Session 6

1. Yes, but sometimes we must wait for those answers.
2. Through dreams and through spoken warnings.
3. To turn people from wrong, keep them from pride, and save them from death.
4. Turn to God.
5. We live our lives in happiness and joy.

Session 7

1. Where were you when I made the earth's foundation?
2. Because God spoke to Job.
3. Change his heart and life (repent).
4. He prayed for them.
5. God blessed him even more than at the first part of his life.

Unit 2

Session 1

1. A teacher. A son of David. Probably Solomon.
2. Useless, unimportant.
3. Work, Wisdom, Pleasure.
4. The way of wisdom.
5. Knowledge, wisdom, and joy.

Session 2

1. Everything.
2. We will respect Him and have reverence for Him.
3. They can do more work and help each other as friends.
4. Listening to God is better.
5. We will respect God.

Session 3

1. The poor.
2. Nothing except to look at their riches.
3. Nothing.
4. Food, drink, work, life, ability to enjoy wealth, ability to accept their situation in life.
5. Short.

Session 4

1. Enjoy it.
2. No person on earth—only God.
3. Some good people die in spite of their goodness and some evil people live long lives in spite of their evil.
4. Honor God.
5. No.

Session 5

1. We die.
2. Your wife.
3. Do our very best.
4. Because time and chance happen to everyone.
5. One sinner can destroy much good.

Session 6

1. Plant crops, harvest crops, take a risk.
2. No. Only God is sovereign.
3. He will judge you for everything you do.
4. Honor God and obey His commands.
5. In God alone.

A

Accountable – Responsible.

Acknowledge – Recognize, pay attention to.

Affirm – Recognize, support, show something is true.

Appeal – Ask for help.

B

Boundaries – Limits.

Bribe – To give someone money for a special favor.

C

Challenge – Ask someone to do something difficult, or to dare.

Chips (let the chips fall) – an expression meaning to let something happen and cause other things to happen.

Compassionate – Kind and loving.

Conscience – The inner feeling we have, helping us to know right from wrong.

Corruption – Getting money or success dishonestly.

D

Distasteful – Something we do not like.

Distilling – The process for making alcoholic drinks.

E

Err – To make a mistake, to do it wrong.

F

Fatalistic – Is destined to happen no matter what.

Focused – Looking at something the right way.

Fraternal twins - Not identical twins but two babies born at the same time with the same mother and father.

Futility – Uselessness, worthlessness.

H

Hoarding – Getting many things, especially money, and keeping all of what you get.

Hypocritical – To live like a hypocrite, to live “two faced.”

I

Inequities – unfair situations.

Integrity – To live one’s life in a right way when people are watching or when people are not watching.

Integrity – Live right at all times.

Intercede – Ask for help for someone else.

L

Logic – Good reasoning.

M

Motivation – Reason to do something.

P

Pessimistic – To look negatively at life.

Pointless – Without meaning, useless.

R

Recognize – Identify, pay attention to.

Refining – Making pure.

Respond – Answer.

Revere – Honor, have reverence for.

S

Scheme – a plan.

Sovereign – To have full control, more powerful than everyone or everything.

T

Temporary – Lasting for only a short time.

Theology – What we think about God, what we understand about Him.

Threat – Danger.

Tradition – The way we have always done something, customs.

U

Ultimate – The best or the final.

V

Vanity – Uselessness.

MONTH 1

- ☐ 1. 1 Samuel 8–10
- ☐ 2. 1 Samuel 11–13
- ☐ 3. 1 Samuel 14–15
- ☐ 4. 1 Samuel 16–17
- ☐ 5. 1 Samuel 18–20
- ☐ 6. 1 Samuel 21–24
- ☐ 7. 1 Samuel 25–27
- ☐ 8. 1 Samuel 28–31
- ☐ 9. 2 Samuel 1–3
- ☐ 10. 2 Samuel 4–7
- ☐ 11. 2 Samuel 8–11
- ☐ 12. 2 Samuel 12–13
- ☐ 13. 2 Samuel 14–15
- ☐ 14. 2 Samuel 16–18
- ☐ 15. 2 Samuel 19–20
- ☐ 16. 2 Samuel 21–22
- ☐ 17. 2 Samuel 23–24
- ☐ 18. 1 Kings 1–2
- ☐ 19. 1 Kings 3–5
- ☐ 20. 1 Kings 6–7
- ☐ 21. 1 Kings 8
- ☐ 22. 1 Kings 9–10
- ☐ 23. 1 Kings 11–12
- ☐ 24. 1 Kings 13–14
- ☐ 25. 1 Kings 15–17
- ☐ 26. 1 Kings 18–19
- ☐ 27. 1 Kings 20–21
- ☐ 28. 1 Kings 22
- ☐ 29. 2 Kings 1–3
- ☐ 30. 2 Kings 4–5
- ☐ 31. 2 Kings 6–8

MONTH 2

- ☐ 1. 2 Kings 9–10
- ☐ 2. 2 Kings 11–13
- ☐ 3. 2 Kings 14–16
- ☐ 4. 2 Kings 17–18
- ☐ 5. 2 Kings 19–21
- ☐ 6. 2 Kings 22–23
- ☐ 7. 2 Kings 24–25
- ☐ 8. 1 Chronicles 1–2
- ☐ 9. 1 Chronicles 3–5
- ☐ 10. 1 Chronicles 6–7
- ☐ 11. 1 Chronicles 8–10
- ☐ 12. 1 Chronicles 11–13
- ☐ 13. 1 Chronicles 14–16
- ☐ 14. 1 Chronicles 17–20
- ☐ 15. 1 Chronicles 21–23
- ☐ 16. 1 Chronicles 24–26
- ☐ 17. 1 Chronicles 27–29
- ☐ 18. 2 Chronicles 1–4
- ☐ 19. 2 Chronicles 5–7
- ☐ 20. 2 Chronicles 8–11
- ☐ 21. 2 Chronicles 12–15
- ☐ 22. 2 Chronicles 16–19
- ☐ 23. 2 Chronicles 20–22
- ☐ 24. 2 Chronicles 23–25
- ☐ 25. 2 Chronicles 26–28
- ☐ 26. 2 Chronicles 29–30
- ☐ 27. 2 Chronicles 31–33
- ☐ 28. 2 Chronicles 34–36
- ☐ 29. Ezra 1–2
- ☐ 30. Ezra 3–4
- ☐ 31. Ezra 5–6

MONTH 3

- ☐ 1. Ezra 7–8
- ☐ 2. Ezra 9–10
- ☐ 3. Nehemiah 1–2
- ☐ 4. Nehemiah 3–4
- ☐ 5. Nehemiah 5–6
- ☐ 6. Nehemiah 7
- ☐ 7. Nehemiah 8
- ☐ 8. Nehemiah 9
- ☐ 9. Nehemiah 10–11
- ☐ 10. Nehemiah 12–13
- ☐ 11. Esther 1–2
- ☐ 12. Esther 3–4
- ☐ 13. Esther 5–7
- ☐ 14. Esther 8–10
- ☐ 15. Job 1–3
- ☐ 16. Job 4–6
- ☐ 17. Job 7–9
- ☐ 18. Job 10–12
- ☐ 19. Job 13–15
- ☐ 20. Job 16–19
- ☐ 21. Job 20–22
- ☐ 22. Job 23–27
- ☐ 23. Job 28–30
- ☐ 24. Job 31–33
- ☐ 25. Job 34–36
- ☐ 26. Job 37–39
- ☐ 27. Job 40–42
- ☐ 28. Psalms 1–10
- ☐ 29. Psalms 11–19
- ☐ 30. Psalms 20–27
- ☐ 31. Psalms 28–34

God's Hand at Work



By George Joslin

Introduction

God began His work of taking Jesus to the Deaf people of the world more than sixty years ago! When the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf (SBCD) was organized in 1948, one of their goals was to spread the gospel to Deaf people around the world. The SBCD mission statement included Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. Southern Baptist missionaries in several countries had some contact with Deaf people and found ways to minister to them. The IMB expressed a desire to reach Deaf people for Christ around the world and looked for ways to overcome some of the obstacles they faced. Deaf people in churches in the US prayed for Deaf people around the world, and sent money to help missionaries in other countries, and many of them went on mission trips to work with Deaf people. And finally, in 1988, the first missionary was appointed to work with Deaf people in Colombia. Through the years, many things

happened in many places, involving individuals, churches, the Southern Baptist Convention. The door opened to the Deaf around the world! And God prepared "men and women of peace" to welcome those who are sent to share the gospel.

God's Hand at Work in the Hearts of Deaf People

Our first career Home Missionary to the Deaf, Dr. J. W. Michaels, in the early 1900s expressed his concern for Deaf people around the world. His concern was echoed by Deaf people in churches all across the US. Many Deaf persons in many churches had a heart full of love for lost Deaf people. By 1980 many were praying for Deaf people in other nations who needed someone to tell them about Jesus. They worked through the SBCD to find ways to reach out to other nations. They wrote letters. They prayed.

When hearing church members began to go overseas, some Deaf people joined those teams. A large Deaf

team went from Applewood Baptist Church in Denver to Korea in 1986. These teams found Deaf people in many places. They touched the hearts of hearing missionaries and hearing members of Baptist churches in other nations. Later, they heard how those missionaries in that nation felt the burden and began to reach out to the Deaf people around them.

Some Deaf people felt God calling them to go. They contacted the IMB to find out the requirements to become a missionary. They went as volunteers for short term mission projects.

There used to be policies and regulations that made difficult the appointing of deaf people as missionaries. This is not discriminating against the Deaf. It is the practical problem of the missionary's need to communicate with the people in the other nation. The IMB had no Deaf applicants who were qualified to go! All missionaries must have seminary training and some church leadership experience.

The SBCD began to do more and more and they developed a World-Wide Missions Committee and collected money to send to the International Mission Board for Deaf missions. They worked with the IMB to make surveys. Kevin Kreutzer, Donnie Wiltshire, and Ray Bearden, went with Clark Scanlon from the IMB to Trinidad, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. They prepared a large

report on the needs of Deaf people in those nations. Vesta Bice (now Sauter) and Sue Hill spent time in Europe doing surveys of the Deaf communities. Others made similar surveys.

God's Hand at Work in the Hearts of Missionaries Overseas

Cayman Islands as early as 1985. Nancy Buttemere was appointed to work with hearing people in Costa Rica, but in 1988 she met some Deaf people and God used them to lead her to work with the Deaf. Others had a similar experience and some were able to transfer to work only with Deaf people. These pioneer missionaries to the Deaf include Nan and Ed Jordan in Japan, Mary Swanner in Uruguay, Donna Hastey in Paraguay, Peggy and Robert Mulkey in Ecuador, Jerry and David Browder in Venezuela, Doris and Tuffy Goforth in Trinidad, and Billie Dixon in Brazil. Each of these missionaries has an interesting story about how God called them. Usually it was because God led them to meet a Deaf person and they felt His call to learn the sign language of that nation and tell the Deaf about Jesus.

God's Hand at Work Through IMB

The first "short-term" missionary appointed for work with the Deaf was Lin Wilson (hearing), appointed in January 1987 to work in Trinidad. The first career missionary appointed

to work just with the Deaf was Janet Mahall (now LaSalandra) in Colombia in December 1988. Lynn and Stan Stepleton were appointed to work with Deaf people in the Dominican Republic in August 1989. And since that time many others have been called, prepared, and sent.

The first Deaf person was appointed in 1990 to work with Deaf people overseas! Yvette Aarons first applied to the IMB when she was in seminary in 1984. She learned she must have her seminary training and some experience working in a church. But the IMB policy also said they did not appoint a person who was deaf. She finished seminary and then worked with DOOR and with Woodhaven Baptist (Deaf) Church in Houston. Because the missionaries in Trinidad requested a Deaf person to work with Deaf people, the IMB approved her for a three-year term. The prayers of God's people, the request from the missionaries in Trinidad, and Yvette's training and experience all came together in God's time! After her three-year term, Yvette was appointed as the first full-time (career) Deaf missionary to work with Deaf people with the IMB.

God's Hand Is Still at Work

In 2010, the Deaf were recognized as one of the nine Affinity Groups with the IMB. By 2012, the number grew to 40 missionaries in 20 nations. One-third of the missionaries are Deaf! The IMB has identified twenty-

five major cities in the world where the gospel has not yet reached the Deaf. The door is wide open and the IMB needs teams of both Deaf and hearing people to reach these strategic cities. Go to <http://deafpeoples.imb.org/pray> to see mission stories from missionaries to the Deaf and learn how to pray.

Is God's Hand at Work in Your Life Today?

If you feel God is calling you to go as a volunteer or as a career missionary, contact the IMB. Go to www.imb.org and select "deaf". You can learn how the SBCE continues to support missions in other nations at www.sbce.org. Read about the work of the North American Missions Committee and the International Missions Committee, and learn how you can help. Talk to leaders in your church and learn if there are any plans for a mission team from your church going to another nation. Volunteer to go with them and contact Deaf people.

**Name changed*

EXPLORE
THE BIBLE

BIBLE STUDIES FOR THE DEAF
LEADER

Job, Ecclesiastes



BIBLE STUDIES FOR THE DEAF

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* Evangelistic Lesson

Introduction

Job, Ecclesiastes

Making Sense of Life

Five books in the Old Testament are called the “books of Wisdom.” These are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. This is because the value of wisdom is emphasized so strongly in these books

Oswald Chambers said each of the five wisdom books teach us something: Job, how to suffer; Psalms, how to pray; Proverbs, how to act; Ecclesiastes, how to enjoy; and Song of Solomon, how to love.

Job

Job is one of the earliest writings ever discovered. The author is unknown. The story of Job’s suffering is presented as a drama. It is presented in 12 scenes. The language is often like Hebrew poetry.

Job lived in the land of Uz, in northern Arabia. The language and culture in the book suggest it was written about the time of Abraham. For example, sacrifices were offered by the head of the family, rather than by a priest as the Jews did after the Exodus. One reference to money (Job 42:11) suggests a date at least as early as Joshua (Joshua 24:32) or earlier (Genesis 33:19).

The purpose of the book seems to be to help godly people who are suffering, and the suffering is causing them to doubt their faith. It tries to answer the question, “Why do good people suffer?” Perhaps a better question is, “How should the righteous suffer?” Job never got a clear answer to the first question, but he gave us an example to follow in answering the second question. In the Old Testament, Jewish people believed strongly that sin led to suffering, and suffering was always because of sin. Jesus’ disciples asked him a question that showed this belief was common in New Testament times, also (John 9:2-3).

Ecclesiastes

The title of this book in Hebrew is *Kohleleth*. The word *Ecclesiastes* is the Greek word that means the same thing. In English the word means “preacher.”

Most Bible scholars agree King Solomon is the author of this book. The author is described as the king of Israel, and this seems to be Solomon, the son

of King David. King Solomon asked for wisdom, and God gave it to him. Read about this in 1 Kings 3:4-14.

The purpose of the book is to show how meaningless it is to seek only earthly things instead of true wisdom from God. This is summarized in his words, "Now, everything has been heard, so I give my final advice: Honor God and obey his commands, because this is all people must do. God will judge everything, even what is done in secret, the good and the evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

The Book of Ecclesiastes has some interesting scientific notes. See 1:4-7 (sun, wind, rivers) and 11:5 (wind). It also has some important theological truths. See 3:11 (God's wisdom) and 7:20 (all have sinned).

In each lesson this quarter, you will find suggestions for a teaching method to help you have variety in your teaching. Seek to give assignments to each pupil each week. Ask several to be prepared to sign a verse—in ASL, of course! Ask others to discuss the information in "Explore . . ." and "The Bible in Context."

As you prepare each lesson, determine your goal for that lesson: salvation, spiritual commitment, witnessing, increase in knowledge, or dealing with specific problems. You are the one who can make the general suggestions in this Leader Guide have specific meaning to individuals in your class.

At the end of each lesson, evaluate the class response, under the heading, "So What?" How did this lesson help one pupil?

Unit 1

Why Me?

Job 1:1–42:17

- »The goal of this unit is to lead your class to find biblical answers to questions they have when tragic and painful events affect their lives and the lives of their family and friends. As you prepare, think of what hard questions about life each of your class members may be asking.
- »Encourage your class to read all of the Book of Job, not just the verses selected for each lesson. Tell them not to become lost in some of the long speeches, but always look for what God wants them to know. Encourage them to think of this as a drama—with several speakers making long speeches in each of the twelve “acts.”
- »As you start this unit, help the class get an overview of the quarter. Use the material in the introduction to the quarter, above, and from the pupil’s material. Write on the board the theme for the quarter: “Making Sense Out of Life.”
- »Use a Bible map to show where to find the place where Job lived, in the land of Uz, in northern Arabia.
- »Point out the two units for this quarter. Note that each unit covers one book of the Bible. Then focus on the title for this first unit, “Why Me?” That is probably a question you and your class members have asked many times. “Why did this bad thing happen to me?”
- »As you prepare to teach, read through the text several times. Look for special verses that can be applied to your Bible class. Look for opportunities to make assignments for class members to prepare and present to the class.
- »At the beginning of each lesson, give a brief summary of the lesson to be studied that week and its relation to the previous lessons.

Meet the Writer

George Joslin became involved in ministry with Deaf people in California in 1957. He served as a missionary to the Deaf with the Baptist Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) for seventeen years in California, Texas, and Virginia and served Deaf people in other employment throughout his career. George is now retired and lives in Springfield, Missouri. After retirement, he and his wife, Lorene, served eighteen months with the International Mission Board helping to start a Deaf church in Ecuador, South America. George has been writing for LifeWay since 2001.

Is This Really Happening to Me?

Background Study Outline

1. **Wealth Test**
(Job 1:1-22)
2. **Health Test (2:1-10)**
3. **Effective Sympathy**
(2:11-13)

Lesson Material

1. **Acknowledge Your Limits (Job 1:1-3)**
2. **Seek Heaven's Honor**
(1:8)
3. **Expect Faith's Challenge (1:9-11)**
4. **Respond with Faith**
(1:20-22; 2:7,9-10)

Bible Truth

People can trust the Lord even when things go terribly wrong.

The Bible in Context (Job 1:1-3)

What do we know about Job? His name means something like persecuted. The story begins with Job as a very rich man with a wonderful family and a good relationship with God. He lived right and turned away from evil. Then, because of Satan, he had a long period of suffering. He lost everything except his own life. At the end of the story, his blessings were restored and he lived 140 more years. He is named in the books of Exodus, Ezekiel, and the letter written by James in the New Testament.

Explore . . . Satan (Job 1:8)

In the Bible, Satan is also called the devil, the wicked one, the ruler of the world (John 14:30), the father of lies (John 8:44), and the one who holds the power of death. Satan has power to cause pain to the righteous (Job 1:12), to blind unbelievers to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:3-4), and to appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Jesus called him Beelzebul (or Beelzebub) in Matthew 10:25. The way Jesus used this word, he meant Satan was the prince of the demons. The first reference to Satan is in Genesis 3:1-5 when he tempted Eve.

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- Prepare large signs with the names of the characters in the Book of Job. Let that person sign his character's words from the verses in the lesson. You will need signs for Job, each of his friends, God, Satan, and the "storyteller."
- **Make the lesson come alive!** There is so much information to present as you introduce this study, it may be a good lesson for a basic lecture method of teaching, along with asking questions to generate discussion. Discuss each section using information from the pupil quarterly, and then ask questions to see if the class has understood. Discuss the truths in each section, taking time to explain the deeper meaning of some of the key words. Ask for discussion or questions before you start on the next section.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss Job from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- The title and theme of today's lesson is the question, "Is This Really Happening to Me?" Ask if any class members have felt like asking God this question. Ask, "Is it OK to ask God questions?" Ask the class to look at the lesson titles in the introduction on page 3. All of these are questions we might want to ask God. How would class members answer a 57-year-old Deaf woman, dying from cancer, when she asks, "Why me?"

STEP TWO – ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR LIMITS (JOB 1:1-3)

- Ask your "character" for the "narrator" to sign the words in verses 1-3.
- Discuss the material presented in the pupil section, along with your insights from other study.
- Emphasize the importance of measuring the value of a person by spiritual things, not material things.

STEP THREE – SEEK HEAVEN'S HONOR (1:8)

- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of Satan from "Explore . . .," above and other resources.
- Ask your "characters" for the narrator, God, and Satan to sign their words in verses 6-8, as if in a drama.
- Discuss the material from the pupil section, along with your insights from other study. Be careful not to let the discussion lead into imagining what verse 6 can imply.

STEP FOUR – EXPECT FAITH'S CHALLENGE (1:9-11)

- Use your "characters" to sign the text, including verse 12.
- Discuss the text. Answer questions from class members.

STEP FIVE - RESPOND WITH FAITH (1:20-22; 2:7,9-10)

- Have your characters sign the text.
- Place your emphasis on verse 22.

STEP SIX - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using the Study Questions.
- **So What?** Ask class members what they have learned. Does this lesson have meaning for them today?

Was It My Fault?

Background Study Outline

1. **A Cry of Desperation**
(Job 3:1-26)
2. **An Appeal to Justice**
(4:1-7:21)
3. **An Appeal to Tradition** (8:1-10:22)
4. **An Appeal to Logic**
(11:1-13:19)
5. **An Appeal to God**
(13:20-14:22)

Lesson Material

1. **An Appeal to Justice**
(4:6-7; 6:2-3,24)
3. **An Appeal to Tradition** (8:4-8)
4. **An Appeal to Logic**
(11:6b,13-15; 13:4)
5. **An Appeal to God**
(13:22-25)

Bible Truth

Each of us must think carefully about how we explain why difficult things happen.

The Bible in Context (Job 6:24)

Job asked God to show where he did wrong. Second Kings 10:31 has a good definition of sin: "Jehu was not careful to follow the teachings of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart." In Psalm 51:1-3, David used three Hebrew words for "sin." The first word is *wrongs* or *transgressions*, in verse 1. This is the idea of "breaking the law, or rebellion." In verse 2, the word is *guilt* or *iniquity*. It is the idea of "a sinful way of life." In verse 3, the word is *sin*. This word means to "miss the target, or not live up to God's standards." David wrote, "People cannot see their own mistakes. Forgive me for my secret sins" (Psalm 19:12).

Explore . . . Sin Revealed (Job 13:23)

Job went directly to God to find an answer for his suffering. God did not answer him at this time, but later God spoke to him. Job said, "Don't think of me as your enemy." In this verse, Job wanted to know if he was guilty of sin by his ignorance, or involuntary sins, or sins of omission, or sins he did as a child. He asked God to show him any sin he had done. How many sins did he have? How big were his sins?

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "Was It My Fault?" Begin discussion about sin and suffering. Is sin the only cause for suffering? (No. This is the theme of Job.)
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Use group study to teach this lesson. Divide the class into four groups, one for each section. Ask them to discuss it in their group, then bring a report to the class. Encourage them to use the material in the pupil section and the notes below. (If your class is small, let each group do two sections.)

STEP TWO – AN APPEAL TO JUSTICE (4:6-7; 6:2-3,24)

- Continue using the posters to identify who is speaking.
- Review the format of Job. Each of his friends speak, and Job responds. Remember, what these friends said is not necessarily true. It is what the Jews believed at that time. There is some truth in what they say, but the deeper truth comes at the end of the Book of Job.
- Eliphaz said, "You sinned. God punishes sin. Therefore God is making you suffer because God is a just God." This is one man's thinking. It is not God's words.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss sin from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library. Encourage discussion of the three types of sin in Psalm 51:3.

STEP THREE – AN APPEAL TO TRADITION (8:4-8)

- Bildad said, "Our ancestors taught us how sin leads to suffering. All suffering is from sin. Our ancestors said this for many generations. Therefore it is true."
- Again, this is one man's thinking. It is not God's words.

STEP FOUR – AN APPEAL TO LOGIC (11:6B,13-15; 13:4)

- Zophar said almost the same as the others. It is logical. You sinned. God punishes sin. Therefore God is punishing you for your sin.

STEP FIVE - AN APPEAL TO GOD (13:22-25)

- This is Job's response. He wanted God to answer, not these men with their own thinking. Job continues to ask God the questions, "Why? Why me?" Ask if class members have asked these questions, or know of others suffering from pain who asked these questions. Is it a sin to ask God these questions? (No, if they are sincere questions asked in faith.)
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of sin revealed from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Encourage class members to read all the chapters in each lesson in order to get the full story.

STEP SIX - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "What About You?" and "Applying the Lesson."
- **So What?** Ask class members if they understand how this drama is developing. This is not the end of the story.

Who Said Life Would Be Fair?

Background Study Outline

- 1. An Appeal to Justice, Part 2 (Job 15:1–17:16)**
- 2. An Appeal to Tradition, Part 2 (18:1–19:29)**
- 3. An Appeal to Logic, Part 2 (20:1–21:34)**

Lesson Material

- 1. You Might Be Misunderstood (Job 15:5-6,9-10,20)**
- 2. You Might Be Ignored (16:19-21; 19:5-6,25-27)**
- 3. You Might See Others Go Unpunished (21:7-9)**

Bible Truth

People can place their hope in the Lord when life seems unfair.

The Bible in Context (Job 16:20)

Job said he poured out his tears to God. Psalm 56:8 has a colorful idiom in the Hebrew language. It says God puts our tears in His wineskin (bottle)! This means God knows about our tears, and He cares. Another time, David said, “My bed is wet with tears” (Psalm 6:6). God told Hezekiah He had seen his tears (2 Kings 20:5). One of the worship psalms tells us how people who “cry as they plant crops will sing at harvest time” (Psalm 126:5).

Explore . . . Redeemer / Defender (Job 19:25)

Job’s faith led him to believe God would redeem him. (See the discussion of this verse in the pupil lesson.) This may be the verse quoted most often from Job. He expressed his faith in God who will redeem him in the future. When the Jews crossed the Red Sea to escape from the Egyptians, they spoke of this as redemption (Exodus 6:6, Deuteronomy 7:8, Psalm 77:15). God redeemed the Jewish people from captivity in Babylon (Isaiah 43:1-7; 48:20; 51:11). In the Psalms there are often cries for redemption (Psalm 26:11-12; 31:1-5). David said, “Lord, You are my Rock, the One who saves me” (Psalm 19:14).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "Who Said Life Would be Fair?" Encourage discussion of this topic. Most class members will probably agree, "Life is not fair!"
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Try using your class members to teach this lesson. Two weeks ahead, assign one class member to each of the three sections. Ask them to use the material below and from the pupil lesson material. Be prepared to supplement what they present. Let them know how many minutes they will have, and ask them to use ASL!

STEP TWO – YOU MIGHT BE MISUNDERSTOOD (JOB 15:5-6,9-10,20)

- Continue using the posters to identify who is speaking.
- Review all of chapter 15.
- Eliphaz spoke again. This time he said Job lied when he said he had no sin (verses 5-6). He again spoke about the wisdom of the ancestors (verses 9-10 and 18).
- Encourage discussion of how often we do not truly understand when someone tells us about a problem. We need to be sure we understand so we can pray and advise properly.

STEP THREE – YOU MIGHT BE IGNORED (16:19-21; 19:5-6,25-27)

- Review all of the discussion in chapters 16-19.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss tears from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- Emphasize this is Job speaking. These verses have a great statement of his faith, but his friends ignored what Job said.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of redeemer / defender from "Explore. . .," above, and other resources.
- Ask someone to sign one or two verses of the hymn, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."
- Encourage discussion of how we must not ignore what others say if we want to help them.

STEP FOUR – YOU MIGHT SEE OTHERS GO UNPUNISHED (21:7-9)

- This is Job's answer to Zophar. Review all of chapters 20–21 so class members can follow the whole story.
- This is a very old question. "Why do good people suffer and bad people have no suffering?" Encourage discussion of this. We know punishment and rewards will come, but it may not happen until we get to the final judgment. See the last paragraph of this section in the pupil material.

STEP FIVE - CONCLUSION.

- **So What?** Ask class members what they learned from this lesson. Do the teachers feel they learned more by teaching?
- Review the lesson using "What About You?" and "Applying the Lesson." Encourage discussion.

Whom Can I Trust?

Background Study Outline

1. **An Appeal to Justice, Part 3 (Job 22:1–24:25)**
2. **An Appeal to Tradition, Part 3 (25:1–27:23)**
3. **The Source of Wisdom (28:1-28)**

Lesson Material

1. **Recognize the Limits (Job 28:1-4,12)**
2. **Acknowledge Wisdom's Value (28:13,15-16)**
3. **Seek Wisdom's Guidance (28:20-23,26-28)**

Bible Truth

People must look to God for true wisdom.

The Bible in Context (Job 28:12)

The Bible tells us much about God's wisdom. "The Lord is a God who knows everything" (1 Samuel 2:3). Isaiah said, "No one can understand how great His wisdom is" (Isaiah 40:28). Daniel wrote, "He knows what is hidden in darkness" (Daniel 2:22). God knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8). The Lord knows what wise people think (1 Corinthians 3:20). Zephaniah 1:12 has an interesting picture word, that God will search the heart of every person with a "lamp." Amos said it is not possible to go high enough or deep enough to get away from God's search (Amos 9:3). Jesus knows what is in each person's mind (John 2:25). See also Acts 15:8.

Explore . . . Fear of the Lord (Job 28:28)

In this verse, we have a definition of wisdom, "to fear the Lord." This does not mean to be afraid, but it is the concept of reverence, honor, and respect for God. This fear (respect) is commanded in Deuteronomy 10:12. Joshua encouraged the Israelites to fear (respect) the Lord and serve Him (Joshua 24:14). Peter said to do three things to show respect for all people, "Love the brothers and sisters of God's family, respect God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "Whom Can I Trust?" Of course, we know the answer is God.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Use Scripture search as a teaching tool for this lesson. In each of the sections, ask your class members to find things Job compares to God's wisdom. Ahead of time, use a Bible dictionary to find the meaning of some of the terms and explain these to the class.

STEP TWO – RECOGNIZE THE LIMITS (JOB 28:1-4,12)

- Today, Job is the only speaker. Job talks about God's wisdom.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss God's wisdom from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library. Ask someone to sign verses 1-4. Ask if anyone has ever visited a mine or seen pictures or videos of miners at work.
- Verse 12 is the key verse in this section. Job said wisdom is not found in the deepest mine.
- Refer to the title of the lesson. We cannot trust in anything on earth.

STEP THREE – ACKNOWLEDGE WISDOM'S VALUE (28:13,15-16)

- In these verses Job uses more examples. God's wisdom is not found in the ocean or within gold or silver.
- Ask someone to sign verses 17-20. Discuss these other valuable items.
- Remind the class Job had much wealth and lost it all. Here he said all of that wealth would not buy God's wisdom.
- Refer to the lesson title. We cannot trust in silver and gold.

STEP FOUR – SEEK WISDOM'S GUIDANCE (28:20-23,26-28)

- Ask someone to sign verses 20-28. Look at the picture words Job uses to talk about God's wisdom: birds, death, wind, water, rain, and thunderstorms. These represent power or wisdom greater than that of man.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of fear of the Lord from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Make sure the class understands the use of *fear* in the Bible to mean "worship, reverence, or honor," and not to be afraid.
- Refer to the lesson title. We cannot trust in anything except God.

STEP FIVE – CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using the study questions. Each week, encourage your class to answer these questions. Take a few minutes each week to help them check their answers.
- **So What?** What did your class learn from today's lesson? Encourage discussion of God's greatness as Creator. He is worth all our honor and worship. He is the only one we can trust.

What Do I Do Now?

Background Study Outline

- 1. Previous Glory
(Job 29:1-25)**
- 2. Present Humiliation
(30:1-31)**
- 3. Protest of Innocence
(31:1-40)**

Lesson Material

- 1. Be Honest and Faithful (Job 31:5-6,9-10)**
- 2. Be Fair and Merciful
(31:13-17)**
- 3. Be Focused on God
(31:24-28)**
- 4. Be Compassionate
and Understanding
(31:29-30,33-34)**

Bible Truth

The Lord holds people responsible for living in godly ways.

The Bible in Context (Job 31:16-17)

The Bible speaks strongly against selfishness. Solomon wrote a proverb, "Whoever ignores the poor when they cry for help will also cry for help and not be answered" (Proverbs 21:13). The prophet Malachi spoke for God and said we steal from God when we are selfish and do not give our tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:6-12). The Old Testament Law said, "If there are poor among you in one of the towns of the land the Lord your God has given you, do not be selfish or greedy toward them. But give freely to them and lend them whatever they need" (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).

Explore . . . Hospitality (Job 31:32)

Among the many things Job lists about his life, he speaks of showing hospitality. In Old Testament times, there were few public hotels or inns. Travelers depended on the hospitality of others. The Law required hospitality for every traveler, including runaway slaves or foreigners (Deuteronomy 23:15-16; Leviticus 19:33-34). Rahab's hospitality was rewarded because she helped the spies in Jericho. Her family was saved when the Israelites destroyed that city (Joshua 6:22-25). In the New Testament, her hospitality was praised, also (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "What Do I Do Now?" Job continues to defend his life of faithfulness to God.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Use "readers" to present the text for each section. Assign one person for each section. Ask them to study it and be able to sign it clearly in ASL. If you have access to the ASL Bible, encourage each reader to study the way the Bible verses are presented in that DVD.

STEP TWO – BE HONEST AND FAITHFUL (JOB 31:5-6,9-10)

- Ask a reader to sign verses 1-12 in order to have the whole story. Pick out words that describe Job's character as honest and faithful. (eyes, v. 1; steps, v. 4; honest, did not lie, vv. 5-6; turned away from sin, did not become unclean, vv. 7-8; faithful to wife, vv. 9-10.)
- Ask class members if they would want to stand and publicly make claims like these!
- Emphasize verse 6, about God's honest scales to measure our faithfulness.

STEP THREE – BE FAIR AND MERCIFUL (31:13-17)

- Ask a reader to sign verses 13-23. This is Job's statement about the way he treated other people.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss selfishness from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library. Verse 15 is a great statement about equality of all people.

STEP FOUR – BE FOCUSED ON GOD (31:24-28)

- Ask a reader to sign verses 24-28. This is similar to last week's lesson. Job emphasized his trust was only in God.
- Job also spoke against idolatry and worship of the sun and moon. These were popular idols during Old Testament times.

STEP FIVE - BE COMPASSIONATE AND UNDERSTANDING (31:29-30,33-34)

- Ask a reader to sign verses 29-40. In verses 29-34, Job continues to defend his life before his friends and God.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of hospitality from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Verses 35-40 are Job's closing argument. We still have two more lessons before we come to the final act in this drama.

STEP SIX - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "What These Verses Tell Us."
- **So What?** What did your class members learn today?

Am I on the Right Path?

Background Study Outline

1. Denial of False Assumptions (Job 32:1–33:33)
2. Defense of God's Justice (34:1–37)
3. Denouncement of Self-Righteousness (35:1–16)
4. Declaration of God's Goodness and Power (36:1–37:24)

Lesson Material

1. Receive God's Revelation (Job 33:13–16)
2. Recognize God's Reasons (33:17–22)
3. Respond to God's Refining (36:8–12)

Bible Truth

God sometimes disciplines His people through painful circumstances.

The Bible in Context (Job 33:14)

In Old Testament times, people knew God spoke to them in many ways, including dreams and visions. God spoke to prophets through dreams and visions but spoke with Moses face to face (Numbers 12:4–8). Job said God frightened him with dreams and visions (Job 7:14). God spoke to Abraham in a vision to give him peace about having a son (Genesis 15:1–16). Later God spoke to Jacob in a vision about his future (Genesis 46:1–4). Ezekiel had several visions, including the one about the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14). We have God's written revelation, the Bible, as the most common way God speaks to us today.

Explore . . . Repent (Job 36:10)

Elihu spoke the truth in this verse, about God wanting all people to “change from doing evil.” Other translations use the word *repent*. In Isaiah 22:12, God told the people to express repentance by shaving their heads and wearing rough clothing. God told the people to change their hearts and stop sinning (Ezekiel 18:30–32). Hosea told the people to come back to the Lord and ask Him to take away all their sin (Hosea 14:2). All these verses give us a picture of the word *repent*.

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "Am I on the Right Path?" Elihu is the speaker and he makes some strong statements about God.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** In this lesson, there are some great truths about God's work. You will want to help your class understand these truths clearly. It is a good lesson to use the lecture method, but seek to draw out discussion from the class.

STEP TWO – RECEIVE GOD'S REVELATION (JOB 33:13-16)

- Identify Elihu as the speaker. He is the younger one of the group of Job's friends. His speech starts at 32:1.
- Ask someone to sign Job 33:1-10. This gives something of the attitude of Elihu. All of Job's friends still think God is punishing Job because of his sin.
- Ask someone to sign Job 33:13-16.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss God speaks from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- Discuss how God speaks today through the Bible and through mature Christians.

STEP THREE – RECOGNIZE GOD'S REASONS (33:17-22)

- Ask someone to sign verses 17-26.
- Discuss God's reasons for speaking to people (to turn them from wrong, v. 17; to make them humble, v. 17; to keep them from death, v. 18).
- Emphasize this is Elihu's idea, not necessarily God's truth. We find some truth in it. God does speak in order to keep us faithful to Him.

STEP FOUR – RESPOND TO GOD'S REFINING (36:8-12)

- Note Elihu's speech goes on through chapters 34–36. Encourage the class to continue reading every verse in Job so they follow this long dramatic story.
- Ask someone to sign verses 8-12.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of repent from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources. Explain repent as making a U turn on the highway, turning from sin to Christ.
- Refer to the pupil material for a good discussion of this section.

STEP FIVE - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "What About You?" and "Applying the Lesson."
- **So What?** What did your pupils learn today? Was this a difficult lesson to understand? It will become clearer in the next lesson.

What Am I Supposed to Learn?

Background Study Outline

1. **Supremacy**
(Job 38:1–41:34)
2. **Submission** (42:1-6)
3. **Restoration**
(42:7-17)

Lesson Material

1. **Listen to God**
(Job 38:1-4)
2. **Submit to God**
(42:1-6)
3. **Intercede Before God** (42:7-9)
4. **Rely on God**
(42:10-12a)

Bible Truth

God wants people to surrender to Him at all times.

The Bible in Context (Job 38-41)

God answered Job from the storm. Chapters 38–41 give us a beautiful description of God. It begins with the creation and tells of God's power in all the earth. In the middle of this, Job answered God, "I am not worthy" (Job 40:4). He was in awe of God while God spoke to him. Earlier Job asked, "Why?" Now he knew he stood before the sovereign Lord. Moses felt this at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6). Joshua also felt this reverence (Joshua 5:13-15). The prophet Habakkuk reminds us, "The Lord is in His Holy Temple; all the earth should be silent in His presence" (Habakkuk 2:20).

Explore . . . Burnt Offerings (Job 42:8-9)

God told Eliphaz to make a burnt offering. Burnt offerings were made to restore a person's relationship with God. In the Law, only a priest could make this offering. Often the person would place his hand on the animal to show the animal was taking his place and dying for his sin. The animals had to be perfect and complete. The entire animal was burned (Exodus 29:10-18). Elijah sacrificed one bull in the challenge against the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:30-39). When the Jews rebuilt the temple after they returned to Jerusalem, they offered 100 bulls along with other animals (Ezra 6:16-18).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "What Am I Supposed to Learn?" This is appropriate after these five lessons from Job. What must we learn from this study?
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Consider using group study for this lesson. Assign pupils to each of the four sections. Select a leader for each group. Let them discuss their part of the lesson, using material from the pupil section, and then choose one person from their group to present the information to the class. You may want to make some notes ahead of time to help them. Be prepared to encourage discussion or answer questions after their presentation.

STEP TWO – LISTEN TO GOD (JOB 38:1-4)

- Continue using the posters to identify who is speaking. In section 1, it is God; section 2, Job; section 3, God and the narrator; and section 4, it is the narrator.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss God's sovereignty from "The Bible in Context," above. Ask this person to read (at home) all of Job 38-41 and include other verses that show God's sovereignty.
- The point in this section is that God spoke to Job. God's first words reminded Job of God's great power.
- Call attention to some of the words God used in the rest of chapter 38 and in chapters 39-41.

STEP THREE – SUBMIT TO GOD (42:1-6)

- Ask, "What was Job's attitude after God spoke?" (Humility, repenting of his questions to God.)
- Emphasize verse 5. This is Job's way of saying he now understood much more about God than he did in the past.

STEP FOUR – INTERCEDE BEFORE GOD (42:7-9)

- In this section God spoke to Job's friends. Ask, "What did God tell the friends to do?" (Offer sacrifice of repentance.)
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of burnt offerings from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.

STEP FIVE - RELY ON GOD (42:10-12A)

- Review verses 10-11. Job's sisters and brothers are not named in the early part of this story. Now, they come to comfort him.
- Ask someone to sign verses 12-17. This is the happy ending to the story of Job's suffering.

STEP SIX - CONCLUSION

- **So What?** Ask the class what they have learned from Job.
- Encourage the class to read all of Ecclesiastes 1-2 for next week.

Unit 2

Is It Worth the Effort?

Ecclesiastes 1:1–12:14

- »The six lessons in this unit are from the Book of Ecclesiastes. They focus on the purpose of life.
- »The first lesson is about trying to find meaning in life.
- »The second lesson asks the question, “Why Do I Feel Empty?” The emphasis is on worshiping God.
- »The third lesson is, “Am I Headed for Failure?” Failure comes from trust-ing in earthly things instead of God.
- »In the fourth lesson, the theme is our need to trust God no matter what happens.
- »The fifth lesson is about hope and our need to see how every-thing we have is a gift from God.
- »The final lesson asks the question, “What’s the Answer?” The writer of Ecclesiastes concludes that only by honoring God can we find true meaning in our life.

Can I Find Meaning?

Background Study Outline

- 1. A Seemingly Endless Circle of Life
(Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)**
- 2. Grasping for One More Escape
(1:12-2:11)**
- 3. A Glimmer of Hope
(2:12-26)**

Lesson Material

- 1. Life Can Seem Pointless
(Ecclesiastes 1:1-4)**
- 2. Experience Seems to Affirm Futility
(1:12-14; 2:1-3)**
- 3. Trust in God's Blessings
(2:12-14, 24-26)**

Bible Truth

People can find meaning in life when they seek it.

The Bible in Context (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

The word translated *useless* is expressed in other translations as “vanity, without meaning, pointless (without reason), and without purpose.” In Hebrew, it is a poetic form, “vanity of vanities.” Like the words, “holy of holies” the repetition makes it stronger. This word is used 37 times in this book. It means something that passes away quickly and completely, or something that fails to satisfy. Throughout this book this word is contrasted with God’s control of everything.

Explore . . . Materialism (Ecclesiastes 2:1-3)

The word *materialism* is not used in the Book of Ecclesiastes, but Solomon describes it clearly. In verse 1, it is having fun. In verses 2 and 3, it is to “cheer myself up with wine” and “anything I saw and wanted, I got for myself.” Materialism is not new. It was common in Old Testament times, also. Isaiah criticized the leaders of Israel because they only wanted to please themselves (Isaiah 56:9-12). Paul criticized people who “do whatever their bodies want, they are proud of their shameful acts, and they think only about earthly things” (Philippians 3:19).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is, "Can I Find Meaning?" The idea is to find meaning to life. Maybe some of your pupils have asked, "What can I do to make my life worth something?" These lessons try to answer that question.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** You may feel the need to use the lecture method for this lesson, with so much material to present in introducing the Book of Ecclesiastes. You can do it as a verse by verse study. Look for themes you can use to draw out discussion. Many of your class members may feel their life has no meaning. Let this lesson encourage them.

STEP TWO – LIFE CAN SEEM POINTLESS (ECCLESIASTES 1:1-4)

- Introduce the book here, and the writer, Solomon, later in the lesson.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss *useless* from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources. Note this is the theme of the book. All is useless without recognizing God's hand in everything.
- Point out the frustration expressed in verses 4-11.

STEP THREE – EXPERIENCE SEEMS TO AFFIRM FUTILITY (1:12-14; 2:1-3)

- Introduce the author, Solomon, from verses 12 and 16. Ask someone to sign 1 Kings 3:1-14 when God promised to give Solomon both wisdom and riches.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of materialism from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Ask someone to sign verse 14. Ask, "Do you often feel like that?"
- In 2:1-3, Solomon listed some things he tried. Ask, "What other things do people try to do to find meaning in life?" (Hard work, family, travel, drugs, other religions).

STEP FOUR – TRUST IN GOD'S BLESSINGS (2:12-14, 24-26)

- Solomon compared wisdom and foolishness. Encourage discussion of the meaning of the last part of verse 14. Solomon didn't say what that way is, but he implied it means death. We know it means facing God in judgment.
- Ask someone to sign verses 24-26. Ask, "What is the point of these verses?" (Everything is a gift from God. Looking for meaning in life from any other thing is like chasing the wind. This expression is used several times to mean useless.)

STEP FIVE - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using the study questions. Encourage class members to do these each week and compare answers in class.
- **So What?** What did class members learn from this lesson? Encourage discussion of the need to keep God at the center of our life, then everything else has meaning.

Why Do I Feel Empty?

Background Study Outline

- 1. God Controls Time
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-15)**
- 2. God Controls Life
(3:16-4:3)**
- 3. God Provides
Friends (4:4-16)**
- 4. God is Worthy of
Worship (5:1-7)**

Lesson Material

- 1. Time is a Threat
(Ecclesiastes 3:1,
10-14)**
- 2. True Friends Can
Help (4:9-12)**
- 3. God Alone Is Worthy
(5:1-7)**

Bible Truth

**We can find meaning in
life when we worship
God with humility
and reverence.**

The Bible in Context (Ecclesiastes 3:10)

Work is honorable, according to the Bible, especially the work we do for the Lord (Romans 12:11). The Book of Proverbs has many verses about working and not being lazy (Proverbs 13:4). Usually a person who works hard for the Lord is also a good worker on his job. Paul said our work for the Lord is done through faith and love. Paul called his fellow workers, “yokefellow.” This is a picture word that suggests two oxen working together with a wooden yoke between them. Ephesians 6:7 tells us to do our jobs with enthusiasm, as if we are working for God.

Explore . . . Promises (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7)

The Bible is clear about keeping promises. God wants His people to do what they promise. In Old Testament times, agreements were made by speaking, not writing, and with other persons as witnesses. Too often a man was known as one who did not do what he promised. We must not make promises without thinking they are serious. Jesus said a simple “yes” is usually enough (Matthew 5:33-37). And it is even more serious if God’s name is used in the oath (James 5:12).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is, "Why Do I Feel Empty?" You may have several in your class who are ready to ask that question. Encourage discussion of their feelings that life has no meaning to them right now.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Are you ready to use student teachers again? This can take more preparation than just lecturing, but you may be developing a future teacher. Give them an opportunity to use the gift God has given them. If one pupil seems capable, ask that one to do the full lesson, with your help. Encourage the student to study the pupil material carefully. After each section, you can help encourage discussion and present more information.

STEP TWO – TIME IS A THREAT (ECCLESIASTES 3:1,10-14)

- Ask someone to sign verses 1-8. This is a kind of Hebrew poetry. All but two of these involve man's choice—birth and death. The word *season* has the idea of "the appropriate time."
- Ask someone to sign verses 10-14. Note the conclusion in verse 14—the need to respect God. Everything we do must honor God, even routine work.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss work from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library. Ask, "How can you honor God in the place where you work?"

STEP THREE – TRUE FRIENDS CAN HELP (4:9-12)

- Ask someone to sign verses 9-12. Encourage discussion of how much a friend can help, not only in physical things like moving furniture, but in spiritual things like comfort and encouragement.
- Encourage testimonies of how a friend has helped. Perhaps someone has lost a family member in death. Did they find help from their church family? Has a friend helped with physical things, like mowing a yard, or baking a cake?
- Consider how class members might help some who are not regular in attending Bible study. Do they need a ride? Do they need encouragement? Especially consider the needs of members who are homebound.

STEP FOUR – GOD ALONE IS WORTHY (5:1-7)

- Ask someone to sign verses 1-7.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of promises from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Encourage discussion of making promises to God.

STEP FIVE - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "What These Verses Tell Us."
- **So What?** Ask pupils what was especially helpful in today's lesson. Do they feel less "empty" after this study?

Am I Headed for Failure?

Background Study Outline

1. Headed Toward Abuse (Ecclesiastes 5:8-9)
2. Headed Toward Restlessness and Loneliness (5:10-17)
3. Headed to Work (5:18-20)
4. Headed Toward Frustration (6:1-12)

Lesson Material

1. Headed Toward Dishonesty? (Ecclesiastes 5:8-9)
2. Headed Toward Loneliness? (5:10-16)
3. Headed Toward Joy? (5:18-20)
4. Headed Toward Frustration? (6:10-12)

Bible Truth

If we place our faith only in getting things, then we will have only corruption, frustration, emptiness, and loneliness.

The Bible in Context (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

Envy means “wanting what someone else has.” *Greed* means “wanting more, more, more!” There are several examples in the Bible of greedy people. Amos described the Israelites as so greedy they would sell a poor person in order to buy a pair of shoes (Amos 2:6). When the city of Jericho fell, one man named Achan stole some of the gold and hid it. This caused Israel to lose a battle and Achan to lose his life and his family (Joshua 7:1-26). Judas’ greed led him to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16). Greed caused the people of Philippi to put Paul and Silas in jail (Acts 16:16-24). See also 2 Peter 2:14-15.

Explore . . . Life Is Brief (Ecclesiastes 6:12)

Some people who live to be 90 years old will comment on how short their life has been. Solomon often commented about life as brief. David said our days on earth are like a shadow (1 Chronicles 29:15) or a breath (Psalm 39:5). Job said his days were like a weavers shuttle (Job 7:6), or a runner (Job 9:25). James said life is like a mist (James 4:14). Isaiah said the end of life is like a weaver rolling up the rug he has just finished (Isaiah 38:12).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is another question, "Am I Headed for Failure?" Again, it is a question many people ask themselves.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** This is a difficult lesson, so you may feel safer using the lecture method! Try to find a way to end each section on a positive note—honesty brings rewards, fellowship with Christians can help us to be less lonely, we can find joy in Christ and His church, and we can avoid frustration through faith.

STEP TWO – HEADED TOWARD DISHONESTY? (ECCLESIASTES 5:8-9)

- Ask someone to sign verses 8-9. Encourage discussion of experiences class members have had with dishonest officials. Refer to the example given in the pupil material.
- Make the application that through Christ, we can rise above dishonesty in our own life. We can treat others properly. Christ will help us succeed in this, if we let Him.

STEP THREE – HEADED TOWARD LONELINESS? (5:10-16)

- Ask class members if they know the verse about the "love of money." (The love of money, not money itself, is the root of evil.)
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss greed from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- Ask, "What is the opposite of greed?" (Faith in God to provide for our needs. Generosity. Sharing.)
- The emphasis in this section is loneliness because of greed. The opposite is joy because of fellowship with other Christians in sharing money, time, and love.

STEP FOUR – HEADED TOWARD JOY? (5:18-20)

- The theme in these verses is "when we are busy we will enjoy life."
- Again, emphasize our faith in Christ and fellowship with His people gives us joy.

STEP FIVE - HEADED TOWARD FRUSTRATION? (6:10-12)

- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of life is brief from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Ask, "What makes you frustrated in your life?" (Probable answers will focus on money, health, family problems.)
- What is the answer to the frustrations of life? Faith in Christ and fellowship with His people!

STEP SIX - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "What About You?" and "Applying the Lesson."
- **So What?** Ask if this lesson helped anyone feel better about himself and not feel like a failure.

Can I Keep on Going?

Background Study Outline

- 1. When Exposed to Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:1-14)**
- 2. When Trapped by Extremes (7:15-29)**
- 3. When Facing Inequities (8:1-17)**

Lesson Material

- 1. Accept Godly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:11-14)**
- 2. Avoid Extremes (7:15-18)**
- 3. Know God is in Control (8:10-12,16-17)**

Bible Truth

We can trust our perfect God in this imperfect world.

The Bible in Context (Ecclesiastes 7:13)

God's work cannot be changed. Solomon said no one can straighten what God has bent. By this he means God is in charge of both the good (straight) and the bad (bent). God controls all the events in our lives. Paul wrote God does this for our own good (Romans 8:28). We must accept everything with thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and be content with our situation in life (Philippians 4:11-12). Both James and Peter said it is good to go through times of trouble (James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:5-7). Solomon said to treasure the good times to help carry us through the bad times.

Explore . . . God's Ways (Ecclesiastes 8:17)

Even a wise man like Solomon cannot understand the ways of God. Solomon frequently wrote about eating, drinking, and being joyful, but he always said these things cannot bring total joy. Life is filled with work, uncertainty, dangers, and sufferings. We can look back at the result of Adam's sin and find the beginning of these difficult things in life. Job spoke about the difficulty in understanding God's ways. See also Romans 11:33-35.

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "Can I Keep on Going?" The idea is being faced with so many frustrations, problems, and suffering, makes us wonder how we can keep on trying to make sense out of life.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Is this a good time to use group study again? Divide the class into three groups, one for each section. Have some notes ready to help them find the meaning of these verses. Tell them to use the pupil material as well as this leader guide. Ask them to relate the title of their section to the title of the lesson. These three sections are answers to that question.

STEP TWO – ACCEPT GODLY WISDOM (ECCLESIASTES 7:11-14)

- Ask someone from the group to sign verses 9-14.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss God's work from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- Emphasize God's control as expressed in verse 13.
- Ask, "Where do we get godly wisdom?" (From the Bible, from Bible study with mature Christians.)

STEP THREE – AVOID EXTREMES (7:15-18)

- Ask someone from the group to sign verses 15-20.
- Solomon used extremes to emphasize the need to use wisdom in what we do and say. See the discussion of this section in the pupil material.
- Ask, "Did Solomon mean we should have both good things and sin in our life?" (No, he exaggerated in order to make his point of simple obedience. Don't go into sin. Don't become hypocritical as a believer.)

STEP FOUR – KNOW GOD IS IN CONTROL (8:10-12,16-17)

- Ask someone to sign verses 9-17.
- Ask how can we answer the question in verse 14, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" (Bad things happen to good and bad people.)
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of God's ways from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Ask, "Does this mean we must not try to understand what God is doing?" (No, but we must realize how much we are limited in our understanding.)
- Ask someone to sign the last paragraph for this section in the pupil material (beginning with "Always remember"). This is the heart of today's lesson.

STEP FIVE - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "What These Verses Tell Us."
- **So What?** Use the section, "What About You?" to discuss what this lesson means to your class members.

Is There Any Hope?

Background Study Outline

1. **Living in Spite of Death (Ecclesiastes 9:1-10)**
2. **Timing and Providence (9:11-18)**
3. **Wisdom and Foolishness (10:1-20)**

Lesson Material

1. **As Long as You're Alive (Ecclesiastes 9:3-6)**
2. **Give Your Best (9:7-10)**
3. **Letting the Chips Fall (9:11-12,15-18)**

Bible Truth

God expects His people to find satisfaction in being good stewards of the opportunities and things He provides for them.

The Bible in Context (Ecclesiastes 9:8)

In the Bible, white clothing usually refers to the garment worn in heaven, or a reference to godly living. Isaiah described the coat of goodness (Isaiah 61:10). At the transfiguration, Jesus was seen with white clothing (Matthew 17:1-3). John saw the elders in heaven dressed in white (Revelation 4:4). In the Book of Revelation, the redeemed are dressed in white (Revelation 3:4-5,18; 7:9-12). Revelation 19:8 shows the redeemed wore white garments made of fine linen. The fine linen represents their righteous acts.

Explore . . . The Future (Ecclesiastes 9:12)

We cannot know what is in the future. This is said frequently in God's Word. Solomon said, "Don't brag about tomorrow, you don't know what may happen then" (Proverbs 27:1). James wrote, "You do not know what will happen tomorrow" (James 4:14). Only God knows the future. Secret things belong to the Lord (Deuteronomy 29:29). But God, in His time, will reveal what we need to know (1 Corinthians 2:7-10). The Holy Spirit will lead believers to know the truth (John 16:13-15).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is another question: "Is There any Hope?" Lead your class to recognize their hope is in Christ.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Begin class by singing the hymn, "Count Your Blessings." Ask class members to help you list their blessings on the board. Try to get a response from every class member. After the blessing, put the first name of class members who have received that blessing. Be sure the list includes life and time (section 1), food, clothing, family (section 2), and spiritual wisdom (section 3).

STEP TWO – AS LONG AS YOU'RE ALIVE (ECCLESIASTES 9:3-6)

- Ask someone to sign verses 1-6.
- Solomon wrote how we need to be thankful for life and hope.
- Note how negative Solomon seems in these verses. The pupil material points out how Solomon did not have the New Testament. Because of Jesus, we can have hope for the future.

STEP THREE – GIVE YOUR BEST (9:7-10)

- Ask someone to sign verses 7-10.
- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss white robes (verse 8) from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- Ask class members to list the things Solomon said in these verses that we must be thankful for. Note the ones you already have listed on the board.
- Call attention to the paragraph in the pupil material about drinking (under verse 7). We need to recognize this difference between today and Old Testament times.

STEP FOUR – LETTING THE CHIPS FALL (9:11-12,15-18)

- Discuss the meaning of the idiom, "let the chips fall where they may." (Act without worrying about the consequences, or not worry about things we cannot control.)
- Ask someone to sign verses 11-18.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of the future (verse 12) from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- Ask class members if they pray for wisdom. Encourage them to pray for wisdom for you, as teacher, and for your pastor. Leaders need wisdom in order to use their skills more effectively for the Lord.

STEP FIVE - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "Applying the Lesson." These questions focus on the theme of this lesson. Challenge your class with these very serious questions.
- **So What?** Ask class members if they have learned of more things to be thankful for and if their hope has been strengthened.

What's the Answer?

Background Study Outline

1. **Invest in Life**
(Ecclesiastes 11:1-6)
2. **Know the Boundaries**
(11:7-10)
3. **Remember Your Creator** (12:1-8)
4. **Revere and Honor God** (12:9-14)

Lesson Material

1. **Invest in Life**
(Ecclesiastes 11:1-5)
2. **Work Within the Boundaries** (11:9-10)
3. **Revere and Honor God** (12:13-14)

Bible Truth

We can have meaning and purpose in life when we give reverence and honor to God.

The Bible in Context (Ecclesiastes 11:9,14)

God is the supreme judge. Everyone must answer to God for what he has done or has not done (Romans 14:12). God also judges our secret thoughts (Romans 2:16). Jesus said, "On the Judgment Day people will be responsible for every careless thing they have said" (Matthew 12:36). Paul told the Galatian Christians each person is responsible for himself (Galatians 6:5). The word for this is *accountability*. We are accountable for our words (Matthew 12:36) and for our stewardship of possessions (Luke 12:13-21,48).

Explore . . . Honor God (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

We understand the word *obey* better than the word *honor*. Sometimes in the Bible the word *fear* means the same as "honor or respect." How can we honor God? Psalm 29:2 says to praise Him. We can praise Him privately and in public worship (Psalm 107:32). Joshua commanded the Jewish people to respect God and be sincere when they obey Him (Joshua 24:14-15). Isaiah wrote we should honor God because He is holy (Isaiah 8:13).

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is a final question, "What's the Answer?" We must first decide, "What's the question?" After all the things Solomon said in this book, what did he say is the final answer to the question of our purpose in life?
- This is the evangelistic lesson for this quarter. Ask one or two class members to give their testimony about their salvation experience.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Several weeks before this lesson, assign class members the responsibility of talking with an elderly person and asking the question, "What has been the most important thing in your life?" At the beginning of class, ask your pupils to report on what they learned. Try to apply these comments to today's lesson.

STEP TWO – INVEST IN LIFE (ECCLESIASTES 11:1-5)

- Note this is the final lesson from Ecclesiastes and we finally get to Solomon's conclusion about the meaning of life.
- Ask someone to sign verses 1-8. Note this colorful word picture of old age. Some translations use a Hebrew idiom in verse 1, "Cast your bread upon the water." The NCV gives a literal translation of that idiom.
- Solomon does not use the word *faith*, but it is implied in these verses. We must trust God in all we do.

STEP THREE – WORK WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES (11:9-10)

- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss God as judge from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- What are the boundaries (in the title of this section) in our life? (Obedience to God's teaching and His will.)

STEP FOUR – REVERE AND HONOR GOD (12:13-14)

- Ask someone to sign verses 9-14.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of honor God from "Explore . . .," above, and other resources.
- After all of Solomon's searching, he found the meaning for life is to honor God. All through the Old Testament, God blessed His people when they honored (obeyed) Him. God still honors those who are faithful to Him.

STEP FIVE - CONCLUSION

- Review the lesson using "What About You?" and "Applying the Lesson." Encourage class members to trust Christ. If you have unsaved class members, ask them to talk with you or the pastor today.
- **So What?** Challenge class members to honor and obey Christ today.
- Introduce next quarter's study from the Gospel of John.

