

FALL 2024

YOU



THRIVE:
LIVING ON PURPOSE

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**NAVIGATING
FAMILY
CONFLICT**



A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT LIVING A PURPOSE-FILLED LIFE

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Purpose is defined as the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists. Purpose answers the question of Why? From childhood to adulthood, we've always wanted to know the "why" of a matter. Whether it was why we couldn't have something we wanted as a child, why do I have to do this assignment as a teenager, or why do I have to do a certain task on my job? There has always been that need to know why.

When purpose is explained, meaning and clarity are provided, as well as a sense of direction. Almost every organization or company of which you are a part has a purpose statement. McDonald's has a purpose statement: "To feed and foster communities." I'm sure you don't think about their purpose statement as you're trying to feed your hunger, but it exists for management and other employees to operate with a common goal.

In addition to a purpose statement, McDonald's publishes a Purpose and Impact Report to assess whether they've performed according to the "why" of their company.

As believers, Christ created us with purpose. This is awesome news because our Heavenly Father created us with the "why" in mind! We are not here by accident, and He has a clear plan and purpose for our lives. If on this spiritual journey, you find yourself listless, slowly dragging along from one life experience to the other, revisit Christ's purpose for your life. A walk with Christ should be filled with joy, peace, and contentment. Over these six Bible study sessions, we're going to see the purpose for which God created us, how we can recapture that purpose, and what it practically looks like to live life with purpose. When we discover that purpose is in Christ, life takes on a meaning and richness the world cannot offer. A life where we thrive!

PURPOSE QUESTIONED

Leader pages on pp. 102-105

THE POINT:
APART FROM GOD,
LIFE IS MEANINGLESS.

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-14

MEMORY VERSE

- ¹ The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.
- ² "Absolute futility," says the Teacher. "Absolute futility. Everything is futile."
- ³ **What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?**
- ⁴ A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
- ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets; panting, it hurries back to the place where it rises.
- ⁶ Gusting to the south, turning to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles.
- ⁷ All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.
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- ⁸ All things are wearisome, more than anyone can say. The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing.
- ⁹ What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.
- ¹⁰ Can one say about anything, "Look, this is new"? It has already existed in the ages before us.
- ¹¹ There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them.
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- ¹² I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.
- ¹³ I applied my mind to examine and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied.
- ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

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KEYWORDS

Under the sun (v. 3)—This phrase corresponds to "under heaven"; both phrases represent life in this world.

The eye . . . (v. 8)—Solomon turned to the senses find the meaning of life. But seeing the nature of life left Solomon unsatisfied as well.

What has been . . . (v. 9)—People are born, live, die, and others are born and repeat the same process. In this basic sense, nothing changes.

Futile (v. 14)—The same Hebrew word for futile (*hebel*) as in v. 2, Solomon states that all human pursuits apart from God are ultimately without significance.

WHY DOES LIFE WITHOUT GOD LACK PURPOSE?

Life can often feel like a hamster in a wheel. Constantly moving but going nowhere.

- The salesman clinches a deal only to spin again on that wheel to find another customer.
- The fry cook sends out dish after dish only to clean the grill and start all over again tomorrow.
- You mow the yard only to have to do it all over again next week.
- You clean the house thoroughly, but before the cleaning supplies are put away, the dust has already started to return.

Do this long enough, and you might gravitate to that one question that's a perennial favorite among three-year-olds: "Why?" While the kid directs his question to everyone else, as adults, we often ask that question of ourselves. "Why am I doing this? What's it all for?" You can come to the end of your life with that three-year-old's "why" still reverberating in your head.

The whirl of the hamster wheel can blur your vision to the fact that your life has purpose, but that purpose is only realized when you look to the One who gave you that purpose. As Solomon discovered, looking anywhere else for your purpose is meaningless.

Life Seems Pointless //

Ecclesiastes 1:1-7

"Absolutely useless." Ever said that? Maybe you've said it when work feels like "two steps forward, three steps back," or when a relationship goes south or plans go awry. When life is not going like we'd hope, we can cry out in frustration, "What's the point?" I wouldn't expect someone like King Solomon to feel like that. After all, Solomon was the wisest person in the world. God had given him "a wise and understanding heart, so that there has never been anyone like you before and never will be again" (1 Kings 3:12). Not only that, but God had

also given him "riches and honor, so that no king will be your equal during your entire life" (v. 13). Solomon wasn't stingy with what he had; he was quite generous with his wisdom. Consider all the nuggets of wisdom he shared in the book of Proverbs, truths that are so encouraging and insightful on how to get the most out of life.

Solomon began Ecclesiastes with an important question: "What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?" Solomon would keep coming back to this question in his quest to find purpose (2:11, 22; 3:9; 5:16). The



THE POINT: APART FROM GOD, LIFE IS MEANINGLESS.

key to understanding where Solomon is taking us in this book is the phrase “under the sun.” Life lived “under the sun” is life lived apart from God. It’s life viewed through the lens of someone who believes there is nothing above the sun, in the heavens. To live life only with a perspective “under the sun” is to live life with no regard for God, the One who is above the sun. Consequently, with no regard for God, we will surely miss finding any purpose or meaning in life.

God has ultimately revealed Himself in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-4). From the perspective of the Christ follower, the question changes to: “Apart from Christ, what do we actually gain from all we do in this life?” Even as Christians, we can still struggle with the seeming futility of our day-to-day lives. We live and we die, generations come and go, but the earth keeps going through its endless, repetitive, monotonous, and natural cycles. Solomon used three pictures from nature to make this point:

- **Life can seem like the repetitive cycles of the sun.** “The sun rises and the sun sets,” up and down, and it always returns to its place in a hurry. Do you work hard all the time, but feel like you always end up back where you started?
- **Life can seem like the directionless flow of the winds.** The wind goes around and around without any apparent purpose or direction. Ever feel like, no matter how fast you go, you’re getting nowhere?
- **Life can seem like the never-ending flow of the rivers into the oceans.** Rivers and streams continue to flow into the ocean without ever filling it. Does it often feel like the harder you work at some tasks, you never get finished?

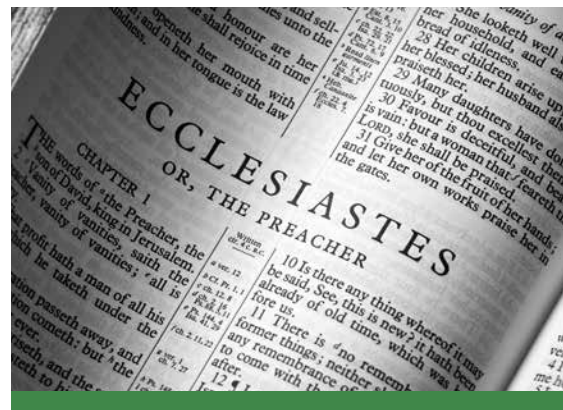
If you’ve ever felt like your life was pointless, hang on. It’s about to get worse before it gets better.

HOW DO YOU COPE WHEN YOU START TO THINK THAT YOUR LIFE OR WORK IS MEANINGLESS?

Our Wisdom is Futile // Ecclesiastes 1:8-10

It’s bad enough that what we do in life feels pointless, but the very pursuit of things will wear us out. No matter what we try to experience or own, we come away weary and unsatisfied.

- **No matter how much your eyes see, you will not be satisfied.** Surely, we’ve all seen things that took our breath away. I’ve had the opportunity to see some incredible sights such as the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and the Great Wall of China. Maybe you’ve seen the famous Monet paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Mona Lisa at the Louvre.



DIGGING DEEPER ECCLESIASTES

The word Ecclesiastes stems from the Greek root *ekklesia* which means “assembly” or “church.” Ecclesiastes is defined as “the speaker to the assembly.” This Old Testament book written in poetic form is known for its theological wisdom and reflects how meaningless life is without God. This often-quoted book of twelve chapters has served as the inspiration for many artists, including writers and musicians.¹ For example, in Ernest Hemingway’s classic novel *The Sun Also Rises*, the title stems from Ecclesiastes, and Hemingway opens his novel with a quote from Chapter One, “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” In director Oliver Stone’s critically acclaimed movie *Platoon*, a war classic based on his own experience, he begins the movie with a quote from Chapter Eleven, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.” In 1979, American musician Stevie Wonder released an album with an instrumental song entitled “Ecclesiastes.”²

On your spiritual journey, how can the book of Ecclesiastes serve as an inspiration to you?

Beauty is all around us, but all the glorious sights in God's creation and all the magnificent paintings, buildings, gardens, and wonders of the world will still leave us unsatisfied.

- **No matter what your ears hear, you will not be satisfied.** I don't know what is music to your ears. Maybe it's the sounds of wildlife when you're out in nature, the patter of rain on the roof, the sound of children playing, or maybe it's actual music. I can be enraptured when I hear Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, or Marian Anderson. When the sounds fade away, what are we left with? We're left wanting more.

Maybe a new experience will be different, but that's not likely. Being new and innovative doesn't change things. As Solomon said, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun." Let's not write off Solomon as someone endorsing the Eastern worldview. Eastern religions view history as repetitive, an endless cycle through thousands of reincarnations. They sadly view our lives as reincarnating over and over and over, and they believe even the whole of history will happen again. That wasn't Solomon's view. No, Solomon was simply stating the obvious: "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

We continue to ask the same questions about life that generations before us have asked. What is life about? How does what I do matter? Though the specifics of culture may change, generation after generation keeps asking the same questions. If we keep viewing life "under the sun," we'll keep coming to the same faulty conclusion: It's all meaningless!

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS PEOPLE TRY TO FILL THE VOID IN THEIR LIVES?

We Need God's Wisdom //

Ecclesiastes 1:11-14

I was always proud of my father. As a mechanical engineer, he had multiple patents in his name that were used in the oil field. However, my father has been gone for over twenty-five years, and while his contributions are still used. Thankfully, my father didn't look to these outward contributions for the source of his purpose or significance.



That was Solomon's sad point in verse 11. "There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them." Apart from Christ, all the work we do in this life adds nothing new and is quickly forgotten.

That didn't keep Solomon from being a go-getter. Here was a man driven by exceptional wisdom and armed with the resources and means that come with being the king. He made it his mission to live life to the fullest. Yet, in all he did—and he did a lot!—purpose and satisfaction eluded him.

- He sought purpose in pleasure and "living the good life" (Eccl. 2:1-3).
- He sought purpose through the pursuit of knowledge (2:14-16).
- He sought purpose in achievement and in making something of himself (2:4-6).
- He sought purpose in his possessions and what he owned (2:7-8).
- He sought purpose in making a name for himself (2:9).
- He sought purpose in making the world a better place (4:1-3).
- He sought purpose in the pursuit of justice (8:14).

I think all along Solomon knew his purpose wasn't ultimately found in these things. From his vast wisdom, wealth, and experience, Solomon set out to expose the emptiness of a secular worldview

THE POINT: APART FROM GOD, LIFE IS MEANINGLESS.

by trying to find meaning to “all that is done under heaven” (that is, apart from God). His conclusion? It’s all meaningless, “a pursuit of the wind.”

Some of you might be feeling a little down with all this talk about futility and meaninglessness. Why are we focusing on such a negative topic? The good news is that our bad news helps point us to our ultimate hope. We might question our purpose, but we can find our purpose! That’s the whole point of this study. Over the next several sessions, we’re going to look at what God’s Word says about our purpose—and it’s a good message!

The good news is that our perspective is not limited to what is “under the sun.” Our heavenly Father, who is above the sun, created this world through Christ and for Christ (Col. 1:15-17). All God created was good! Therefore, we can enjoy this world, and we can trust that history is moving toward God’s appointed end. Our search for purpose is not miserable when we find our purpose in Christ. As we will see in the sessions that follow, as we seek Christ, all we need will fall into place.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you” (Matt. 6:33).

HOW CAN YOU BE CERTAIN THAT IT IS GOD WHO IS DIRECTING YOUR LIFE AND NOT YOU?

DID YOU KNOW?

Our annual visits to the eye doctor often require that we take several tests to determine the health of our eyes. You may be familiar with the apparatus called a *phoropter*. It’s the machine with the black frame that resembles the eyes of an owl. You’re asked to look into the machine, and as the doctor switches different lenses for each eye, he or she may say, “Which is better, 1 or 2? Is it clearer, here or here?” For those who wear glasses, you know that it is imperative to tell the doctor which lens provides clarity and focus because your new lens’ prescription is based upon this test, and you want to ensure that you are seeing properly. Second Corinthians 4:18 states, “So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” As concerned as we are about our physical sight, we should be just as concerned with our spiritual sight. Our spiritual perspective determines our purpose and how we see life.

Biblical Truth: “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

How clear are your spiritual lenses, and what are you seeing?

LIVE IT

What will you do this week to view life from a Christian worldview?

What do you see when looking at the world around you? If you discover that all you see is what the world has to offer, it is time to change your view. If we fall into the trap of seeing life merely from a secular viewpoint, life will feel like an endless, monotonous hamster wheel. Reset your perspective and view life from above the sun.

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- **Read further.** Block out some time to carefully read the rest of Ecclesiastes. As you meditate on Solomon’s words, consider what the Lord is teaching to you.
- **Search your heart.** Take some quiet time away from the rush of life and ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart with the question: Apart from God, what other things do you view as bringing meaning into your life?
- **Share the gospel.** We are surrounded by people with no purpose. Point them to Christ, the One who gives purpose to our lives.

DAILY READINGS

1. PURPOSE PLANNED // JEREMIAH 29:11

God has good plans for us. He created us to impact the world on purpose and with a purpose. Our purpose supplies our heart with the energy it needs to keep beating. We are alive today because there is a calling on our lives that no other human being on the face of the planet can fulfill but us, individually. Life, therefore, has no purpose without God, the one who instilled our purpose within us. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 1:2 that, "Everything is futile." He was making mention of how vain and pointless life is without God. God made us with a plan and a purpose in mind. Purpose is the set path designed to lead every believer home to God.

Purpose leads the believer to experience their expected God-given life.

2. CALL TO THE MOST HIGH // PSALM 57:2

David resolved to cry out to God who he believed would fulfill his purpose in his life. He knew deeply within his heart that he alone was incapable of not only fulfilling his call but even understanding what it was. Though God has instilled within every person on earth a unique purpose, if the believer does not intentionally seek it out, it may not be known. Ignorance of God's purpose leads to aimless wandering. God is waiting to share our purpose with us, but we must be willing to spend time with Him in silence and solitude to hear His voice. Each day offers more than its share of voices. God's voice is only discernible by a heart resolved to be led according to His purpose.

A purpose-driven life requires total dependence upon God, following His lead.

3. SEEKING THE KINGDOM // MATTHEW 6:33

Focus matters. Focus determines what one is willing to yield their time, talent, and treasure. For this reason, God admonishes the believer in Matthew 6:33 to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you." Our purpose in life cannot

be fulfilled if we are not focused on what God is focused on; and God is focused on manifesting Heaven into the earth through His people—the Church. The extent to which a believer focuses on the Kingdom of God is the extent to which they will live out the purpose of God ordained for their life. Seeking God requires a devoutness and commitment to know Him. God desires to guide us; we only need to give Him our undivided attention.

Fulfilled purpose requires an undivided attention to God.

4. ALIGNED TO GOD // PROVERBS 19:21

A popular adage states that "He who fails to plan, plans to fail." This adage emphasizes the importance of planning which is wise (Luke 14:28-29). However, when our plans do not align with God's plans, we veer away from our purpose and build our lives on the sinking sand of vanity versus the firm foundation of Christ. Plans not rooted and not motivated by the Word of God are all a waste of time. Proverbs 19:21 states that "many are the plans in a man's heart, but only the LORD's decree will prevail." In short, despite man's many plans, only God's will is of value and prevails in the end. While man has been given free will, every plan should be made surrendered to God's overall wisdom, work, and will.

Wise planning begins with God's word.

5. DIVINE WORKMANSHIP // EPHESIANS 2:10

Ephesians 2:10 helps the believer better understand the who, what, when where, and why of our purpose. This scripture explains who created us "we are His (God's) workmanship." It describes where He created the believer, "in Christ Jesus", and for what reason—"unto good works." Our purpose was created "ahead of time" so that "we should walk in them." God created mankind to walk in the good works that were instilled in all of us for His glory.

God's purpose for mankind frees us from the bondage of sin.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Complete With Purpose

This week's session focuses on our need for God in order for our lives to have purpose. Reflect on what your life was like before you developed a relationship with God. Consider what things, people, and situations have changed for you. Ponder on how God has helped you to live a purpose filled life. Share your testimony with the group. Ask if some of the learners would like to share their testimonies with the group.

Why Am I Here

Solomon was blessed with wisdom from God. Despite this, he wondered "what does a person gain for all his efforts?" Be prepared to encourage learners through this passage as they reflect on their purpose. Remind them and yourself, that while this world and life may seem meaningless, there is hope in Jesus. Be prepared to share your purpose and invite learners to do the same as they are comfortable to offer inspiration to others in the group.

LOOK BACK

Last week's discussion focused on Giving Generously found in 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15. Before beginning this week's discussion engage the class in a discussion about whether they have changed the way they give after reflecting on last week's lesson. Remind the learners that God freely gives and we should happily do so as well. Encourage some volunteers to share how they were able to "Live It" (p.21) over the last week.

TEACHING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

DO: Display a sign that says "Purpose" to introduce the session. Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts on the word "purpose."

READ: Invite a learner to read Romans 8:28. Ask

learners, "Do you believe that God has a purpose for your life? Do you expect His plans to come to fruition in your lifetime?"

SHARE: Briefly share what you believe is God's purpose for your life and how you know that it is truly His purpose. Invite the learners to share God's purposes for their lives.

TRANSITION: Review **The Point, "Apart from God, life is meaningless"** Emphasize that the session will reveal that God makes life worth living. Read the session question: "Why does life without God lack purpose?" Advise that the session will answer this by expounding on the session principles.

PACK ITEM: Focus attention on **Pack Item 1: Thrive; Living on Purpose** poster to provide and overview of the study. Also display **Pack Item 2: "Finding Meaning and Purpose"** to reinforce the introduction activity.

DIG INTO THE TEXT

Life Seems Pointless //

Ecclesiastes 1:1-7

READ: Invite a learner to read Ecclesiastes 1:1-7. Point out that this section will point out the fact that Solomon expressed his feeling of life being meaningless.

GUIDE: Use the commentary (p.102) to provide insight on verses 1 to 4. Point out that Solomon was writing this as a teacher and not a king trying to figure out the meaning of life. He recognized his own frailty despite the fact that God had given him wisdom. He referred to life as unsubstantial and fleeting. Explain that Solomon was pondering the fact that though we work we don't make a lasting change on the world.

EMPHASIZE: Ask a learner to read the paragraph that begins with "Solomon began Ecclesiastes with an important question . . ." Reflect on "life lived under the sun" (p.12). Explain that vanity means no profit or advantage. Point out that the phrase "under the sun" refers to the world and mankind in their current fallen state.

THE POINT: APART FROM GOD, LIFE IS MEANINGLESS.

SAY: “Neither changing events nor changing generations of people will leave a lasting change under the sun.” Lead a discussion about what they think life lived without God means.

READ: Recruit a learner to read the question: “How do you cope when you start to think that your life or work is meaningless?” (p.13).

Our Wisdom is Futile //

Ecclesiastes 1:8-10

READ: Invite a learner to read Ecclesiastes 1:8-10. Explain that this section will focus on the fact that the meaninglessness of life made the teacher weary and unsatisfied.

GUIDE: Use the commentary (p.105), to provide insight on verses 8-10. Point out that Solomon used the term “things” in this verse to refer back to the forces of nature he discussed in verses 4-7. Explain that the cyclical, never-ending movement of the sun, the wind, and the water are examples of the seemingly absolute futility (uselessness) of life. Point out that the word “wearisome” means working until exhausted. Explain that in verse 8 Solomon turned to the senses of sight and sound to see if he could find the meaning of life. However, even those left Solomon unsatisfied.

EMPHASIZE: Point out that “what has been is what will be” means that nothing changes. Explain that new inventions cannot break the cycle of sin, suffering, and death. Point out that all of us are sinful people and need the love and forgiveness of God found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Explain that apart from God, life and its experiences are filled with toil, drudgery, anguish, futility, and repetitiveness.

DISCUSS: Invite a learner to read Isaiah 40:28-31. Explain that God never suffers setbacks but He helps those who do. Point out that human strength is fallible but God promises to sustain human perseverance.

EXPLAIN: Invite a learner to read the paragraph that begins with “We continue to ask the same questions. . .” (p.14). Lead the learners in a discussion about whether they believe that our lives are futile.

ASK: “How can a sense of futility cause physical and mental weariness?”

We Need God's Wisdom //

Ecclesiastes 1:11-14

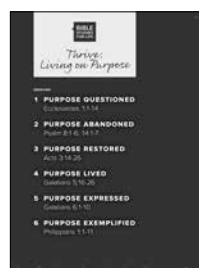
READ: Recruit a learner to read Ecclesiastes 1:11-14. Point out that this section will help us see that the teacher looked for purpose but only found futility.

GUIDE: Use the commentary to provide insight on verses 11 through 13. Explained that the words “there is no remembrance of those who came before” was Solomon saying that ultimately most people, what they've done, and the memories of them are forgotten with the passing of time. He was saying that even if something was done that was memorable in their lives the significance of the people and events mean little or nothing once they die. Remind learners that Solomon was the king of Judah and Israel and had great wisdom, education, power, and wealth however he still did not get full satisfaction.

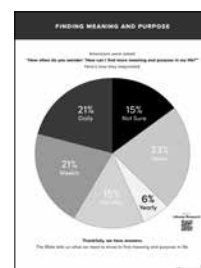
EXPLAIN: Recruit a learner to read Ecclesiastes 2:11. Explain that during Solomon's search in life none of the pleasures he pursued provided meaning to life. He did not find fulfillment or profit. He concluded that all of the pleasures of life are like chasing after the wind that can't be caught.

DISCUSS: Ask a learner to read the paragraph that begins with “Some of you might be feeling a little down with . . .” Lead a discussion with the learners about the purpose that God has for each of us and the hope that we have in this.

ASK: “How can you be certain that it is God who is directing your life and not you?”



PACK ITEM 1



PACK ITEM 2



OBJECT LESSON

DO: Bring a picture of heaven above the sun and the sun above the earth to display during the lesson.

GUIDE: Ask learners to describe what they believe is the of significance of God placing the sun in the sky above the earth but under the heavens. Consider how God allows the sun to rise and fall daily and that even the sun is following His purpose for it. Relate His control of the sun to how He has complete control over our lives.

ASK: “How does knowing that it is God who is in control of all things give you comfort? How have you been encouraged by knowing that your life and purpose have been ordained by Him?”

CLOSE THE SESSION

SUMMARIZE: Paraphrase the session reiterating the key points. Inspire the learners to share what impacted them the most about this week’s lesson. Review “Live It” (p.15).

CHALLENGE: Encourage the learners to make efforts to complete the recommendations found in “Live It” and be ready to share with the group this coming week.

ASK: “What will you do this week to view life from a Christian worldview, a view from above the sun, where our Creator God dwells?”

PRAY: Pray that the learners don’t question the purpose God has given them but that they live it out in their daily lives. Pray that they are able to discern the wisdom of God for their lives.

COMMENTARY

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-7

Connection to the Point. The Teacher saw everything in life as meaningless.

Verse 1. The exact meaning of the Hebrew term (*qoheleth*) is uncertain. It may refer to “a speaker in the assembly.” The term is also translated in some Bible translations as “Preacher.” It is a title, not a proper name. Solomon wrote not as a king handing down decrees, but as a teacher seeking and providing understanding regarding the meaning of life. As the Teacher, he was the leader of a group of believers and his demeanor was that of an older, repentant leader—particularly in regard to his period of pagan worship (11:1-13)—who knew his own frailty and personally sought meaning in life.²⁴

Verse 2. This is a translation of the double use of the Hebrew word *hebel* for emphasis, hence the use of the term absolute. *Hebel* means “breath” or “vapor.” It is used as a synonym for the wind (Isa. 57:13; see Eccl. 1:14). In the context of Ecclesiastes, *hebel* refers to the insubstantial and transitory nature of life.

Verse 3. Under the sun refers to what existence looks like from a merely earthly perspective without God, an afterlife, or a final judgment. Solomon’s presupposition was that he had restricted the scope of his inquiry to only those things that were under the sun.

Verses 4-5. The Hebrew term (*dor*), like the English word “generation,” can refer to a period of time or to those living in a specific time period. The size and expanse of the world remain constant throughout all generations. People are born, live, die, and are forgotten, but the world stands unmoved and indifferent. The word for panting (*shaaph*) can have either positive or negative connotations. In Ecclesiastes 1:5, it could mean either the sun joyously rushes from sunrise to sunset, or that the sun toils from sunrise to sunset with no rest.

Verses 6 & 7. The ancient Israelites were primarily an agrarian society. Dependent upon the land, water, and weather for their food, they understood the yearly growing cycles related to planting, tending, and harvesting their various crops. However, they did not have our modern, scientific understanding of the earth (v. 4), the sun (v. 5), the wind (v. 6), and water (v. 7). Nature was monotonously predictable but at the same time incomprehensible.

ECCLESIASTES 1:8-10

Connection to the Point. This meaningless life made the Teacher weary and unsatisfied.

Verse 8. The primary use of this Hebrew word (*yagea*) means “to work until one is tired or exhausted.” In the context of Ecclesiastes 1:3-8, the term *yagea* summarizes the meaninglessness of both human life and the world itself—all is vain repetition. This phrase is interpreted in two ways. First, the wearisome pursuit of life under the sun left Solomon wanting more of an explanation. Second, it could also be translated, “No one is able to speak.” Faced with the monotonous drudgery and seeming meaninglessness of life, Solomon had no words to say. Solomon had heard, even from those considered to be wise (Eccl. 8:1), failed to provide a meaningful explanation of the nature of the world and life. They left Solomon wanting more.

Verses 9-10. Solomon was not stating that technology could not advance and improve how we live life. But new inventions cannot break the cycle of sin, suffering, and death. Furthermore, people of every generation pursue the same things—fame, power, wealth, happiness, and so forth—and these things remain for the most part elusive. Even those who achieve such goals at the end of their lives find having those things changes nothing. Death still comes and all of one’s accolades, accomplishments, and possessions are left behind.

Even with all the advances and improvements by humanity in how we live, the central issue in life remains the same—sinful people need the love and forgiveness of God found in the gospel of

Jesus Christ. Apart from God, human experience and history for the most part consist of repetitive lives of toil, anguish, drudgery, and futility. “The past, the present, and the future are filled with oppression, hard work, and loneliness (4:1-12). There is nothing to look forward to.”²⁵

ECCLESIASTES 1:11-14

Connection to the Point. The Teacher looked for purpose but only found futility.

Verse 11. Solomon noted that ultimately most people, their deeds, and the memories of them are forgotten with the passing of time. Few are those who make such a mark under the sun that they are remembered and memorialized. But even such remembrance is in the end forgotten; the physical memorials may remain (for a time), but the significance of the people and events behind such memorials mean little or nothing to those who will come after.

Verses 12-13. Solomon, king of the united monarchy of Judah and Israel (reigned 970–930 BC), had the advantages of great wisdom, education, power, and wealth. This clause describes the focused and intentional manner with which Solomon searched for the meaning of life—he had set his heart (his whole being) on this search. Solomon did not despise education and human pursuits. He merely recognized that they had their limitations in a life that does not include God.

Verse 14. Solomon again acknowledged that all human pursuits apart from God are ultimately without lasting meaning and significance. Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon noted the futility of searching for meaning and purpose in the pursuit of such things as wisdom and knowledge (1:12-18; 2:12-17), wealth and possessions (2:4-11; 5:10-20), pleasure (2:1-3), work (1:2-9), and politics (4:13-16; 5:8-9). These pursuits easily can and do become idols unto themselves.

Note: Additional commentary can be found at you.lifeway.com.