

PART 1

CONNECT GUIDE



THE MEANING OF LIFE

a series in ecclesiastes

**WALLACE MEMORIAL
BAPTIST CHURCH**

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AS WE BEGIN A READING PLAN

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WEEK ONE

DAY 1: ECCLESIASTES 1

UUPG Prayer Focus: Laba in China / Tripuri Namasudra in India

Ecclesiastes is one of the most unique books in the Bible. It also requires a lot of effort on the part of the reader. That's because Ecclesiastes is going to have certain rules of interpretation that are, once again, unique to its presentation. "Oh no, is this nerd about to go on some 10-page tangent about some sort of ancient grammar?" Thankfully, not this time. Instead, we'll be spending the first week of our study looking at one specific point each day to help us understand what's going on in this book.

The first thing we have to point out is that the book of Ecclesiastes is of the "wisdom literature" genre. This is important for several reasons. When we read New Testament letters we get used to the very simple equation of "This is what to believe, and here is what to do because of that." Those letters have a very straightforward structure: Theology, then commands. Wisdom literature on the other hand, cannot be applied as a command, especially in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Wisdom literature calls us to do something very different. Wisdom literature asks us to hear a truth about life, our place in it, who God is, and how we relate to Him, and then it asks us

to pause, sit quietly, and meditate on all the different ways we see this truth happen in our daily reality. Wisdom literature asks us to move beyond learning and memorizing facts. It asks us to move from hearing information to relating and understanding. In light of this, I'd like to ask you to reread verses 1-11. Sit and ponder how God has been faithful to all the generations for us. Think about the struggles and achievements of our ancestors in the faith and be thankful that God is always there. Always faithful and vigilant as the world turns. Remind yourself that He will watch over us like He has watched all who come before us.

DAY 2: ECCLESIASTES 2

UUPG Prayer Focus: Shabak in Iraq / Syrian Arabs in Iraq

A massive part of understanding Ecclesiastes is recognizing the difference in the very first verse. "These are the words of." That little phrase lets us know that the person who is compiling and arranging this book is not actually the person who originally wrote the words. The person arranging the book actually goes out of their way not to mention the name of the original author, but only to refer to them by their title: "the teacher."

We don't know who this person arranging the book was, and we don't know why they went out of their way to not name "the teacher." On the other hand, we know exactly who the

teacher was that this person was referring to in the book. It's almost universally agreed upon that King Solomon was the teacher. The Bible tells us that King Solomon was the wisest man to have ever lived up to that point, but the Bible also tells the story about how Solomon's wisdom wasn't enough. Solomon abandoned God in his later years in search of his pleasure and fulfillment.

It's also important to note that the person arranging Solomon's words never says, "these are the words of God." All the ideas and statements contained in Ecclesiastes are that of Solomon and this commentator. This is another reason we can never treat the individual verse of Ecclesiastes as commands. Yes, the Holy Spirit wanted these words in Scripture, not as commands to follow, but as ideas to ponder in relation to the character of God. The commentator is not calling us to read and obey, but to evaluate the statements of a man in light of what we know about a holy, perfect, and all-knowing God.

"Ummm, ok but how does that work?" I'm glad you asked. Take chapter 2 verse 1 as an example. "I said to myself, go ahead, I will test you with pleasure; Enjoy what is good, but it turned out to be futile." Neither the author of this book, nor the Holy Spirit wants you to go and test yourself with pleasure. They aren't praising the teacher, nor commanding you to act like him. They are describing what he did so we can evaluate his failure and what God would have us do instead. So today let's do just that. Take a few minutes, clear your mind, and think

about all the times you've strayed in the name of your own desires. Where did it lead you? Why was it so fleeting? What was the aftermath? What would you do instead if you were focused on the righteousness of God?

DAY 3: ECCLESIASTES 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Deaf Yemenis in Yemen / Kemant in Ethiopia

To understand Ecclesiastes we also need to understand several particular phrases that the teacher uses as he explains his thoughts on life. Today we will focus on the phrase "under the sun." This phrase first appears in verse 3 of chapter 1. The teacher asks, "What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?" This is a question that will be repeated over and over throughout the book. The teacher is basically saying, "I see so many people try so hard to do so much, but at the end of the day nothing really changes."

This feeling the teacher is sharing, the whole "what's the point" struggle we often feel when working so hard, is something we can all relate to at one time or another. We give most of our life to a job, get a paycheck, and then spend it on cars and gas to go back to that same job. We see people fight, curse, and belittle others over political matters only to waffle back and forth between different leaders saying the same thing with different words. We wash the dishes, mow the lawn, and

do the laundry, only to do it again tomorrow. The unending repetition of our tasks can cause us to feel powerless and ask, "what's the point of doing this all over again?" Which is just another way of saying, "What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?"

That's why we have to understand the phrase "under the sun." Under the sun, means "if this is all there is." If you went to a college philosophy class then, "under the sun" would be described as atheistic naturalism, or the worldview that says, "there's nothing spiritual, there's just a set of biological processes. There's no afterlife of God, we're born, we die, then we cease to exist." By saying "under the sun" the teacher is saying "here, in the physical world that we can touch, taste, see, and unfortunately smell." If this is all there is, then yeah everything we do is ultimately pointless and it doesn't matter.

On the other hand, if there is a loving God, who has a plan for eternity beyond this world, that's a different story. If we live "under the sun" for a few quick years to prepare for an eternity without futility, then everything we do matters, and every act of obedience to that God has ultimate value. This is where we let what we KNOW take precedent over what we FEEL. This life will wear us down. It will make us feel futile and helpless, but what we know is that a plan from God gives every moment meaning and purpose. Yes, this sounds depressing at first, but this is the moment where we get to turn our despair into purpose. In that light, I'll ask you to reread chapter 3

verses 1-8. Think about how you've seen each of these events play out in your life. Think about how pointless they would be if this is all there is in the universe. Then go back and think about how important and meaningful each one is if our God has an eternal plan to live with Him forever.

DAY 4: ECCLESIASTES 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Khatik in India / Herero in Namibia

The other word we absolutely need to understand for the book of Ecclesiastes is "vanity." Your Bible may translate this word as vanity, meaningless, fruitless, or even pointless. It means all of those things and so much more. (Yeah, this is it. This is where we do the grammar nerd language stuff) you will read over and over in the book of Ecclesiastes that the teacher attempted to find some sort of fulfillment, but at the end of the day, it amounted to nothing more than vanity.

You and I hear the word vanity, and we think of someone staring at themselves in a mirror, or perhaps you even think of the mirror and the cabinet itself. This, however, is not what the teacher means in Ecclesiastes. The word he's actually using is "hevel" which would be directly translated vapor in English. The teacher compares life to a vapor because of the fleeting and unsatisfying nature of everything we try to accomplish here. We've all felt this before. We eat that food we were craving only to feel sad and overstuffed. We get that

promotion at work only to be burned out by more work. Your team wins a championship, but tomorrow is just another day for you. We've all tried to find and hold satisfaction, but like a vapor we can't grasp it and what we expected to be in our hands has not whisped away into nothing.

This type of unfulfilled expectation is something we can all identify with, but there's also another meaning that you and I can't see in English. The Hebrew word "hevel" is only one letter off from the name "Abel." The teacher is alluding to the fact that Abel is the epitome of how absurd this life can be. He worked hard, did what was right before God, and his life was cut brutally short anyway. One would think that Abel would be rewarded and protected for doing what's right, but instead he received only death at the hands of an evil and envious man.

If this life in this world is all there is, then the experience of Abel is just "the way it is under the sun." If, like the teacher, we think we can outthink, out party, out work the unfairness of this world then all we will find is vapor. I don't know about you, but this book makes me very thankful that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

DAY 5: ECCLESIASTES 5

UUPG Prayer Focus: Okpamheri in Nigeria / Persians in Qatar

Ecclesiastes can be difficult. If we get caught in the mindset of the teacher it can be very depressing. Luckily for us, we're not being called to obey or revere the teacher. We are being called to evaluate how his human wisdom falls short and leaves us wanting. Instead of following the teacher and ending in despair, we're called to look forward to Jesus and find our hope beyond this world in His kingdom.

On the other hand, we can't simply dismiss the teacher, because his wisdom is still present. Particularly in chapter 5 he gives us a warning that we should absolutely take seriously. Chapter 5 verses 1-7 tell us that we should take care when approaching God. In the modern evangelical church, we spend most of our time focusing on the love, grace, and mercy of God. That's because we get to joyfully experience so much of this when we find forgiveness in the work of Jesus. This, however, does not overturn our need for reverence and awe in the face of God that we so often read about in the Old Testament. Even though we are adopted as sons and daughters through Jesus, it's still true that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom.

"But doesn't fear just mean awe and amazement?" It definitely means awe and amazement, but it also means caution, and a recognition of God's power in the face of our own fragility. I

was in awe of the Grand Canyon. I saw how beautiful it was, but I also stayed back from the edge because that beauty could absolutely destroy me if I didn't respect it. I'm always amazed by the animals at the zoo, but I know for a fact that the lion in the exhibit could end me in a second.

Yes, we should "approach the throne of grace with boldness," but only because God Himself has invited us to do so. Only because our faith in Jesus has allowed us to trade places with Him. We should praise God for His tender mercy, but we should also recognize His tremendous incomparable power and approach with reverence. Our God is not small enough to be either/or when it comes to mercy and justice. He is the fullest expression of both. Our God is not limited to either grace or wrath. He is the ultimate wielder of both. We love God like a father, but we must also approach Him with the respect and even fear He deserves.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: APRIL 12, 2026

WEEK ONE: ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18

This week we went over key terms to understand as we approached the book of Ecclesiastes. Specifically, we learned about how life “under the sun” is a reference to the temporary world, and how futility, or vapor, describes the frustration of never being able to find fulfillment in this life. Today, your campus pastor will tell you more about how the teacher applied his wisdom to the problems in the world, and what we can learn from it, as followers of Jesus.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 1

- Have you ever had a problem you couldn't fix? What was it? How did you deal with the frustration? Does it still bother you?
- Verse 15 says that what is crooked cannot be straightened. This means that there are problems that simply can't be fixed. What types of problems do you see in the world that can't be fixed? How will Jesus eventually change things to undo this problem?
- How does knowledge increase grief? How does wisdom bring sorrow? How does trusting God when things are beyond our understanding bring us peace?
- The teacher tried to amass knowledge, but ultimately said it was like chasing after the wind. What types of activities and pursuits in our culture often leave us feeling empty and unfulfilled.
- Who do you know that has big questions about the nature of life? How can you use what we're learning in Ecclesiastes to engage people and answer these questions?

WEEK TWO

DAY 1: ECCLESIASTES 6

UUPG Prayer Focus: Sikka in Indonesia / Syrian Arabs in Qatar

If there is no God and no afterlife then nothing matters. If all we have are these few days “under the sun,” then it makes no difference what we do, it makes no difference how we act, and it makes no difference if we live or die. I know there’s a voice in the back of your head right now saying “whoa, whoa, whoa... hang on! That’s way too far.” Is it though? If life is just a cosmic accident then there is nothing outside of your own desires, and those desires are just chemicals causing electrical impulses to move through your brain.

People can claim there is no God, but it is not possible to consistently live like there is no God. A personal God with a will, a design and a purpose, however, gives meaning to everything. If our choices in this life change our eternity then every moment of our lives matter. In Ecclesiastes 6, the teacher says that “under the sun,” we’re better off being dead than having to participate in the suffering. This would be true if our short Earthly lives were all that we had, but we know that’s not all there is to it.

The teacher says that it’s a sickening tragedy that someone else will inherit his wealth. Jesus tells us to sell our possessions and give it all to the poor. The teacher says that the wise

person has no advantage over the fool, Jesus says the wise man will build his house upon the solid foundation of God's plan. The teacher says there's no point because we can't know what will happen after we leave, but Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would join Jesus in paradise.

If this life "under the sun" is all there is then go nuts, do what you want, nothing matters... but you and I both know we can't live like that. Instead let's take the words of Jesus seriously. Let's take every moment and every thought captive to prepare ourselves to follow Jesus for eternity. If this is all there is then the temporary nature of life makes everything an act of absurdity. If, however, we could spend eternity with Jesus then we need to capture every moment and work diligently to invite as many people as we can to join Him.

DAY 2: ECCLESIASTES 7

UUPG Prayer Focus: Dasari in India / Konyanke in Cote d'Ivoire

Chapter 7 of Ecclesiastes looks more like the type of wisdom literature that most of us are used to seeing. In chapters 1-6 we saw how the teacher conducted life experiments to find fulfillment and ultimately ended up with frustration, defeat, and despair. Chapter 7 is primarily a collection of wise sayings and platitudes. There are several chapters throughout the Bible that are collections of wise sayings and individual lines of

couplets. When we come across this type of writing we want to slow down and make sure we're absorbing and contemplating as much of each line as possible.

Verse 10 of chapter 7 is one such verse that we should all stop and ponder for some time. "Don't say 'why were former days better than these' since it is not wise of you to ask this." This one line attacks a common human pitfall that is one of the most dangerous and destructive attitudes in the church... nostalgia. As people we love to reminisce and tell old stories. There's nothing inherently wrong with this, until it begins to change our perception about what really happened. When we are in the middle of something we feel all the emotions of that situation. We experience the good and the bad. We struggle to process as we move forward. However, as more time passes and those situations become distant we begin to romanticize our past. We forget the difficulty, we remember the parts we want, and that warped nostalgia starts to creep in.

This can lead us down a terrible road of trying to reclaim some type of glory days that never actually existed. Because we're aware of all the complexity and difficulty of the current moment, but we remember the past with an unnatural fondness we begin lamenting "how bad things have gotten." The truth is there were no glory days and looking backward to reclaim that which never existed is like trying to clutch a vapor. This type of nostalgia leaves us resentful and takes us away from the present task the Lord has set before us. So, let's follow this

bit of wisdom. Let's not search for a past that never existed, but seek the Kingdom where God has us in the moment. Don't chase after a false greatness, there is nothing to be made great again because that former greatness is just the product of a fallen human mind.

Let's learn from the past but never worship it. Let's stand on the shoulders of those who struggled before us and honor their sacrifice by extending the grace of God to those around us here and now.

DAY 3: ECCLESIASTES 8

UUPG Prayer Focus: Mashan Miao in China / Serifi in Sudan

Sometimes we get caught up in the false perception that our time and context is completely unique. Yes, we have technology, borders, cultural structures, and daily tasks that look very different from the teacher who lived almost 3,000 years ago, but we still have the same corrupt human hearts acting on their sinful impulses. Governments, cultures, technologies and ages come and go, but one thing about the nature of human sin remains true: If people can do something evil and get away with it, they will absolutely keep on doing whatever evil that happens to be.

In the teacher's world, there were corrupt kings who thought they were Gods, so they became warlords who enslaved

and oppressed people. In our world we have dictators and tyrants who become warlords and destroy people's lives for money and resources. We see people get acquitted of crimes on technicalities, only to turn around and see the innocent convicted because a jury doesn't like their skin color. We've watched corporate CEOs get multimillion dollar bonuses even though they received government "bailouts," while at the same time we people who make minimum wage get forced into bankruptcy over missing a single payment. In the face of all this corruption it would be very easy to say, "why bother?" What's the point of doing the right thing if nothing works like it should?

In this case, however, the teacher has some sound wisdom for us. "It will not go well with the wicked, and they will not lengthen their days like a shadow, for they are not reverent before God." We rightly lament over the lack of justice that is dealt in this world, but as believers we should always keep in mind that at the end of this life EVERYONE will face the same judgment. No sin, no act of corruption, not even a stray thought will go uncovered. Whether we embezzled millions, started a war, or just had impure thoughts, everyone will either be condemned or saved based on where they stand with Jesus. So, by all means, shout the need for justice, take action to see it done here on Earth, but always keep the humility of knowing we would be facing far worse if not for the saving grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus.

DAY 4: ECCLESIASTES 9

UUPG Prayer Focus: Mossi in Niger / Gavara in India

There is a strange desire among humans. Whenever we reach a milestone, or an end of some endeavor in our lives we start asking ourselves "How will I be remembered?" For most people we'll be briefly memorialized in a funeral service and a few speeches, or in this day perhaps a car window sticker or a yearly Facebook memory. For most of us the reminder of our presence here on Earth will be reduced to nothing more than a few pictures and a headstone after a matter of weeks. Some people will have plaques, or statues, or even buildings named after them, but soon enough those names become more associated with the landmark than the actual person.

This idea had literally driven some people insane. They want to make a change, they want to be remembered, they want to be celebrated for what they did here on Earth... but the passage of time eventually erases everything. For those who take the idea of legacy and warp it into a desire for personal validation there will be no happy ending. There will only be one more goal they can never achieve. They'll work hard and sacrifice only to see their memory slip through their hands like a vapor. The teacher sees this and calls it a "terrible evil." In other places in the book, he even laments that his children will inherit (and probably waste) everything he worked so hard to build. He ends the matter in chapter 9 by saying "enjoy your

time now, because you won't even remember it in Hell." The teacher himself seems to have also been driven insane by his search for personal validation.

On the other hand, if we put our faith in Jesus, then we get the biggest reward of all: We don't have to worry about who does or does not remember us, because all that matters is Jesus. We can exchange statues, and plaques, and honors for a legacy of faith and a movement that can't be stopped. As believers we get the joy of saying that the most important thing in our lives isn't anything we've done, but what Jesus has done for us. When we put our faith in Jesus we are freed from the worry of building our own kingdom because we are joining one that will never end. We don't have to fight for remembrance because we want people to focus on Jesus instead of us. It might feel like a sacrifice in the moment to give up whatever small amount of glory or recognition that we have here, but when we look at eternity it is a privilege and a great freedom to offer our legacy and our memory up so people can see Jesus instead.

DAY 5: ECCLESIASTES 10

UUPG Prayer Focus: Yemeni Arabs in Saudi Arabia / Bania in India

One of my favorite Bible study teachers is a man by the name of Dick Lucas. Lucas was a pastor in England. He devoted much of his time to helping people understand how to read

and interpret the Bible. One of his interpretation rules was: "He's not talking to you, stupid." I always enjoyed the sarcastic humor that was so deeply ingrained in his presentation. I also love it because it's true, and it's something we always have to remember when reading the Bible. The Bible wasn't written to 21st century westerners. They didn't know this land existed. They didn't think we'd be around. The authors of Scripture definitely weren't using our idioms or our language or our culture when they wrote the Bible because those things didn't exist yet!

We have to keep that in mind when we come across verses that could be interpreted differently based on our culture. If it couldn't have meant something for the original audience, then it can't mean that for us either. Ecclesiastes 10:2 is a fantastic example of this. "A wise person's heart goes to the right, but a fool's heart to the left." If we interpreted this verse based on the 21st century symbolism then this could easily be falsely manipulated into a political statement. IN our culture "right" and "left" are euphemisms for political ideology. If we read this as if it were written to us then we would think the Bible is making a statement about political parties. That, however, cannot be true. Why? Because those terms didn't refer to political ideology until the 1790s. Right and left became political terms during the French Revolution based on where in the room certain political parties chose to sit together. The teacher of Israel would not have even been capable of referring to a term that wouldn't exist for almost 3000 years.

To be clear, I'm not particularly concerned with what political party anyone is associated with, and the point here is not to make a political statement. The point is that we have to read the Bible as it was written. We have to seek out the intent of the original author. We have to do the work of trying to read the Bible like the original audience would have. If we fail to seek the original context then we will end up wildly misusing the Bible and essentially we attempt to put our own words in the mouth of God. So, as we continue to read, always remember, let's be authentic and honest in our work to be better Bible readers. Let's not try and refashion the Scripture to conform to our culture, but let's instead submit ourselves and our thoughts to the judgment of Scripture itself.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: APRIL 19, 2026

WEEK TWO: ECCLESIASTES 2:1-3

This week we analyzed some of the teacher's sayings and also saw how the same principles and phenomena are at work in our world today. We stopped to make sure we're understanding context, and we were, as always, reminded of our need for Jesus. Today your campus pastor will lead you into a deeper discussion on how the teacher looked for the meaning of life in his own pleasure.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 2

- What do you do for fun? What activity do you turn to when you want to enjoy yourself? Why is this your favorite thing to do? Does your favorite hobby or activity give you the opportunity to share Jesus?
- When does a hobby become an obsession? When does obsession become sin? Can we have too much of things that are good? Can we become too obsessed even with activities like Bible study, or church?
- Our culture is full of pitfalls that prey on our desire for pleasure. What are the biggest ones? How can we resist these big temptations? How can we offer help to people who are already struggling?
- How can you help someone who is stuck searching for meaning in pleasure? How is Jesus the solution to the problem of unfulfillment?

WEEK THREE

DAY 1: ECCLESIASTES 11

UUPG Prayer Focus: Hungarians in France / Levantine Arabs in Tunisia

Instead of an explanation on what this chapter is saying, I'd like to offer something different. I'd like for us to try a different way of reading today. Normally, we try to get a direct explanation of what we should do or believe, then we do the difficult personal work of trying to change our habits so we can honor God with our conduct. While this is a great practice, it's not the only way we're called to do spiritual discipline. Right now we live in a world of streaming services, smartphones, podcasts, and so much information it's starting to alter our mental health.

Ecclesiastes chapter 11 on the other hand, is more than just a list of facts. These are more than commands, or rules, or even ideas. Wisdom literature like Proverbs, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes call the reader to slow down. They call us to ponder all the different ways these sayings and observations could apply to our lives. As believers they call us to wonder how life is different apart from our sinful nature, and how things work differently in Jesus' kingdom. Most of all this text is calling us to quiet our minds and listen to what the Holy Spirit has to tell you about the nature of life.

So today, I'd ask you to read this chapter slowly. Then take a few minutes and just be quiet. Think about the words of the text and let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Don't rush yourself. Have enough respect for God to wait on Him in this moment. I think that if we can do this we'll be blessed with a deeper understanding of what it means to live in step with the wisdom of God.

DAY 2: ECCLESIASTES 12

UUPG Prayer Focus: Reddika in India / Cape Malay in South Africa

The teacher seems to end where he began. Everything is futile. It's just a vapor. I'm going back to the dust. Ecclesiastes is ultimately a tragic story of the wise man who missed the point. The teacher, Solomon, seemed to have everything but he never enjoyed it because he focused "under the sun." It's a story of a man who knew all the right information but didn't rely on God or submit to Him. To better understand this story, we'll study the life of Solomon next.

Today though, I want us to see the commentator's words after the teacher has finished. We haven't heard from this guy who has arranged the teacher's writings since he greeted us in the first verse. He praises the teacher's wisdom and his efforts to instruct the people. He reminds us that wisdom itself is always valuable. Most importantly though, he gives us a warning. He

reminds the reader that we are not just “under the sun.” He reminds us that the futility of the world is superseded by the goodness of God’s law. He reminds us that there is something beyond this world “under the sun.” He reminds us that when we arrive there everything will be set right and God’s judgment will expose everything and bring an end to futility.

The commentator reminds us that the Teacher was the wisest man ever, but he missed the point. He made it about himself. He made it all about the temporary things. He never put his faith in God or what happens beyond this world. Whoever this commentator is, he’s reminding us that it’s better to know God and miss everything else, than it is to be smart and wealthy but miss who God is, and how He is to be worshipped.

DAY 3: 1 KINGS 1-3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Tharaka in Kenya / Bozo in Mali

When the book of Ecclesiastes refers to “the teacher” who was king in Israel and the son of David, everyone at that time would have immediately recognized this as Solomon. Ecclesiastes was almost certainly a collection of Solomon’s writings, but they are also clearly written in the latter part of his life, because he had to have time to make all the observations and engage in these experiments. Because the writings are so late, and arranged by someone else, it’s pretty clear that this is a book that came after Solomon’s death, and in many ways acts as a

commentary on his life. A life that every Israelite would have known much about, but you and I need to get some backstory.

Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba, yes the same Bathsheba that David had an affair with before killing her husband. While there was repentance for this, we have to imagine it still affected a young Solomon when he ultimately found out. We also see that the beginning of his kingship was a contested transition. His older brother believed he was in line for the throne, and this tension ultimately ended in his execution. Solomon had to make difficult and even brutal decisions to establish his rule over Israel. Considering he was probably a teenager when this happened these decisions were heavy weights that surely made a psychological impact on the boy.

In 1 Kings chapter 3 we get to see a foreshadowing of Solomon's greatest contribution and his biggest failure. Solomon had already been through difficulty. He had massive expectations placed on him with his father's dying wishes and the word of the prophets. The weight of leading a kingdom had to be an immense and ongoing pressure. So, when God asked Solomon what he wanted to help him rule, the boy asked for wisdom, and this request greatly pleased God. The Lord gave him numerous other gifts as well. It would be this wisdom that ended up being Solomon's greatest strength. His alliance and marriage however, was another story.

Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh. Just like the

Israelites in Joshua and Judges, Solomon began to intermarry with cultures that worshipped idols. Even in his great wisdom he could not see that his willingness to compromise his own household would eventually lead to his downfall.

DAY 4: 1 KINGS 4-6

UUPG Prayer Focus: Bolla in India / Are Kapu in India

Solomon's wisdom, and more importantly God's promises, lead the kingdom to peace and prosperity for a number of years. The border disputes were settled, and the leaders of other nations had massive respect for Solomon and the wisdom that the Lord had given him. This is the first time since Israel left Egyptian slavery that we see no invading armies or internal conflicts. We see that Israel was secure and prosperous. This prosperity is described as everyone having their own tree and their own vine. This would have been the ancient world's way of saying there was so much to go around that each and every person was able to provide for themselves.

Without immediate threats, and in light of the prosperity, Solomon set out to fulfill the aspirations of his father and began the preparations to build the temple. The description of the building material and the proportions may not mean much to us, but a reader from the ancient world would be astounded by the quality of the materials and the sheer scope of the temple. Solomon seems to have spared no expense, and

he treated those who he traded with well, which increased the reputation of both his nation and the God they worshipped. Everything seems great... right?

Even in the prosperity we see decisions being made that will have difficult consequences. "King Solomon drafted forced laborers from all Israel." Yes the temple was beautiful, and yes it was designed to honor God, but at what cost? This would be the first of many construction projects that Solomon undertook, and later in 1 Kings we find out the people are becoming tired and restless because of the burden Solomon was placing on them. Solomon was great with economics and diplomacy. He was quite the ambitious builder. Even with all of this success, however, the truth still remains: we needed something better. We need a king who would build His kingdom for His people and not at their expense. Solomon had a lot of achievements, but we still needed Jesus.

DAY 5: 1 KINGS 7-8

UUPG Prayer Focus: Arabs in Pakistan / Murgji Birked in Sudan

Chapters 7 and 8 of 1 Kings are particularly integral to our understanding of Ecclesiastes. The words of Solomon we read in chapter 8 of 1 Kings are that of a faithful ruler who is attempting to honor God and make His name known among the nations. This was after all, the purpose of God having a chosen people. Israel wasn't chosen just to receive special

blessings; they were chosen to make God and His character known to the world so that everyone could come worship Him. This is also the second direct mention of keeping God's commandments and remaining faithful.

The man who is sacrificing to God and extolling His law in 1 Kings 8 is also the same bitter old man writing about the futility of his construction projects in Ecclesiastes 2. How could the man who was consecrating the temple, evangelizing the world, and teaching the people, also be the same guy that ends up saying "this is all pointless." There's a tragic lesson that we see happen all throughout human history: It's not how you start, it's how you finish. Solomon and all the people he was responsible for leading had peace and prosperity as long as they remained faithful to God. Moreover, the people would be blessed ONLY if their leader was faithful.

This moment of consecration seems to be the high point of Solomon's life, and for the kingdom of Israel as well. Solomon began by acknowledging his need for God's wisdom, now he has fulfilled his father's desires and expectations. The principle does not need to be lost here: when Israel had proper focus on God and the mission of worldwide evangelizing He gave them, then even sacrifice and difficulty resulted in blessings. The height of Solomon's reign shows us what life looks like when we are working with a proper perspective. The bitter remembrance of Ecclesiastes is a warning of what happens when we lose sight of God as the center of our being.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: APRIL 26, 2026

WEEK THREE: ECCLESIASTES 2:4-11

This week we finished our study of the teacher's findings in Ecclesiastes. We learned that the one arranging and commentating on the teacher's work was showing us wisdom and warning in the teacher's words. We also began our study of the life of Solomon so we can understand how he became the man so obsessed with life's futility. Today your campus pastor will talk to you about wealth, how it's ultimately unfulfilling, and how Jesus offers us something better.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 3

- The teacher says that in the end all his accomplishments and wealth were meaningless. Why are people so driven by money and success if this is the case?
- Jesus said that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. How can we use any wealth and resources we have to make sure our treasure is with Jesus?
- Paul says that the love of money is a root for all types of evil. The teacher did numerous immoral things with his wealth (polygamy, slavery, etc.). Why does money so often lead to corruption?
- We are told to be good stewards with our wealth, but when does financial savvy become a love of money? When does saving become hoarding? When does property become excess? How do we know where the line is between being prepared and being greedy?

WEEK FOUR

DAY 1: 1 KINGS 9-11

UUPG Prayer Focus: Yerwa Kanuri in Niger / Pendar in India

I know, the foreshadowing of Solomon's fall has been a bit dramatic, but it's something that inherently looms across all of his backstory. We've noted the small missteps along the way, and we've heard the warnings from God about remaining faithful. Because we started in Ecclesiastes we know something had to happen to corrupt Solomon's perspective. We would naturally expect this to be a singular traumatic event or personal tragedy. We might expect to see Satan himself appear to take down this wise ruler. Sadly, Solomon fell to the same thing that so often drags down the wealthy and powerful... he got exactly what he wanted. It wasn't one tragic failure; it was a slow series of personal compromises Solomon made because he found something he valued more than God.

The Bible is pretty clear on exactly what happened. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines who turned his heart away from God. He abandoned the God he swore his oaths to at the temple consecration and went as far as building temples and altars to idols all around Israel. Solomon loved polygamy far more than he loved God. He chose more and more wives and their Gods instead of the faithfulness he was called to. Solomon's life could have been a testament to God's blessing,

but instead he became a warning: Without faithfulness, power, riches, safety, and even wisdom mean nothing.

Because Solomon rejected God, his enemies were supernaturally strengthened against him. His foreign enemies reclaimed territory. Solomon's thirst for achievement had world the people hard, and God found a man among the workers to raise up and take back the kingdom from the inside. Solomon could have left a legacy of peace, instead he left bitter musings about his lack of fulfillment. He lived to see his own downfall and called it all vanity.

We've read his thoughts on futility, and now we've followed his life to understand why he thought that way. We can learn much from the wisdom of Solomon, but we're better off taking his warning. Neither wealth nor power can satisfy, neither pleasure nor achievement will last. If we let our focus be "under the sun" then we'll miss the kingdom beyond this world and none of it will make any sense. So as much as we'd all like to be wealthy, safe, wise, and powerful we know now that without faithfulness it's all just vanity.

DAY 2: 2 CHRONICLES 1-3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Fezzan Bedouins in Libya / Konjo Pegunungan in Indonesia

Have you ever heard two different people tell you about the

same event? It can be so strange that two people see the same thing happening and yet they offer a different sequence of events and wildly different details. They saw the same thing, but they told two different stories about it. This happens because while watching the same event, these two people had different priorities and interests. They noticed different details and decided to include them because each person has a different angle on the story.

You'll notice that 2 Chronicles and 1 Kings are telling the same story, but the events and the details of this story have different priorities in each book. 1 Kings focuses on the human element. In many ways the unfaithfulness of Solomon is the catalyst of corruption that eventually ends in exile. The human part of this story is a love of self and sin that outweighs humanity's love for God. Both books of Chronicles follow a different thread. 2 Chronicles is showing the reader that God was faithful even when the people were failing and rebelling.

Yes, the life of Solomon is a tragic warning, but God also gave great blessing to Israel as long as the king and the people were faithful. God granted Solomon great wisdom, it was the king who turned his back on it. Before Solomon chose polygamy and idolatry there was a time when Israel was doing exactly what they were called to do; showing the glory of their God to the world. Ecclesiastes is the personal perspective of a man who loses hope. 1 Kings is the story of what happened to that man. 2 Chronicles is the story of how God was faithful to His

promises the whole time. We need all 3 perspectives, because they are all the truth.

DAY 3: 2 CHRONICLES 4-6

UUPG Prayer Focus: Are Katika in India / Sagara in Tanzania

Once again, today is the same story from 1 Kings, just from a different angle. The same building materials, and temple dedication in a condensed form. The same vows and promises that Solomon will eventually break. So instead of revisiting this, I want us to ask ourselves an important question: What would happen to me if I got everything I wanted?

We established early on that Solomon had more wealth, power, and influence than anyone who had come before him. He was given the ability and the resources to achieve anything he put his mind to, but he couldn't find fulfillment. He ended up finding pleasure instead. He got everything he wanted and he just wanted more. Romantic love and marriage are great gifts from God, but having a thousand wives and concubines is a selfish excess that should disturb all of us. God gave Solomon everything, and Solomon decided he didn't need God anymore.

So what would happen to us if we got everything we wanted? We all have goals and desires. We all have aspirations in this life that we work towards everyday. It's no sin to be motivated,

or have ambition, but it is outright rebellion to prioritize those ideas above our need for God. In many ways it is our incompleteness, our needs, and our weaknesses that remind us to be humble and depend on God. If we got everything we ever wanted we'd run the danger of thinking we didn't need God anymore. Like Solomon, if we got everything we would just want more. I'm not telling you to abandon your goals, run that marathon, go on vacation, get that promotion. Just make sure you're willing to submit all of it to God and His desires for your life. Use your achievements as a platform to share the Gospel. Use your hobbies to build new relationships. Thank God for that promotion and be generous with the resources He gives you. The weirdest thing of all? Let's thank God for the places we fall short, don't have enough, and need to depend on Him. It seems strange to say but those few difficulties may be the biggest blessing He gives you.

DAY 4: 2 CHRONICLES 7-9

UUPG Prayer Focus: Bosniaks in Austria / Mankar in India

Today we finish the story of Solomon... again. We hear of his wealth, his achievements, and his building projects. We've now seen it from all the different angles. I would however like us to go back and read chapter 8, verse 12-16 again. This is really important. In the time where he was being faithful, Solomon taught the priests to follow the law and be consistent with exactly what God had asked His people to do. Verse 15

says that they did not turn aside from any of these commands. The leader may have fallen away, but it seems that for a time, those he taught remained faithful.

We live in a world where the internet is constantly exposing the poor moral decisions of leaders everywhere. Sadly, many of these leaders who have such drastic moral failures claim to be Christians. Even worse, a good number of the scandals we've seen have been from inside the church. Just like Solomon, these leaders chose their own desires over faithfulness to God and eventually it came back to haunt them. Now many people who have watched these failures came to the conclusion that it invalidates Christianity.

I, for one, am thankful that our faith doesn't depend on the perfection of everyone associated with it. Human sin doesn't invalidate Christianity, it just proves how desperately we need a savior. Even when a leader fails morally and refuses to repent like we've seen so many times in the past few years, it doesn't disprove Christianity, it just proves they weren't willing to follow Jesus. Solomon may have abandoned God, but this chapter said that the priests did not turn away from their duties. Christianity isn't about the influence of a charismatic leader, it's about regular everyday people trusting in the God of the universe. Jesus was perfect. He didn't turn His back even in the moment He absorbed the punishment for every sin that was ever committed. Flashy successful leaders might abandon their principles, but Jesus is perfect now and forever.

Solomon's legacy turned out to be a tragic tale of warning. How much better to be a nameless priest whose legacy was "They never turned away." If we try to make a name for ourselves we'll find only vapor and futility. If we lose ourselves in following Jesus then we find fulfillment for all eternity.

DAY 5: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:47-57

UUPG Prayer Focus: Turkmen in Uzbekistan / Beja in Entrea

There's one final word we need to look at in this study of Ecclesiastes. We need to look at... dust. Genesis 2:7 tells us that God made the first humans out of dust. God just took some organic material, made a human and breathed life into him. Sadly, things go downhill the next chapter and because of his sin man is cursed to deteriorate, die, and fade back into the dust he was created from. This begins the ultimate cycle of futility. It doesn't matter how much we achieve or what we do. Time and death will eventually come for us, and we will dwell in the dust again.

This is the problem the teacher points out in Ecclesiastes. In chapter 3 verse 20 we're told that all come from dust and all return to dust. His conclusion is that we're all gonna die, and we won't remember or care about anything, so why does it matter? It doesn't, it's all pointless. It's not just the teacher who comes to this conclusion. This is the end point for most philosophers too.

Almost every world view, philosophy, or religion has to either descend into futility, or make contradictions not to recognize it. It's the problem that outweighs every other problem and looms over every moment of life. It will all be taken away, and there's nothing you can do about it,

While this is the end point for most philosophies and religions, it's just the first step of realization in Christianity. God sent a message through His prophets that this dust, this problem of sin, death, and futility, was going to be conquered. God Himself was going to send someone to do it. Isaiah 26:19 tells us that death will be conquered. "Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust." That's right. God's prophet said that even those who have been gone so long their bodies are just part of the dust can be resurrected and live again. The futility can be defeated, and death can be overcome. Who is gonna do this?

1 Corinthians 15 tells us that It's Jesus. When Adam sinned in Genesis 3 he became a man of the "dust." He passed on a life of sin, futility, and eventual death. He came from dust and the curse of sin sent him right back. Jesus, however, came from heaven, and was never subject to the futility of dust. The Bible says that when we put our faith in Him we become like Him. Yes, our bodies will still die, but because He has breathed life back into us, we no longer dwell in dust. We'll be remade and be part of His kingdom forever.

Ecclesiastes has lots of wisdom for life, but it's only part of the story of salvation. We need to recognize the futility of this world so we can cry out to Jesus. We need Jesus so we can experience more than vanity under the sun. We need to heed the warning of Solomon's life. Apart from faithfully trusting in Jesus, there is only dust, and it's all meaningless.

DISCUSSION GUIDE: MAY 3, 2026

WEEK FOUR: ECCLESIASTES 2:18–26

This week we learned about the tragic unfaithfulness and ultimate downfall of King Solomon. We learned how his rejection of God became the catalyst that sped Israel toward Exile. We also learned how God is faithful even though His leaders reject Him and His people fail. Today your campus pastor will tell you about the achievements of the teacher and how even the world's greatest resume just never seemed like enough.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 4

- What's your biggest achievement in life? Was it ultimately fulfilling in the long term? What are your biggest goals for life from here on out? How can our personal goals also be used to share the Gospel?
- Have you ever felt like you were stuck in a rut with all the tasks before you? The dishes still need washing, and the laundry still needs folding every day. How can living for Jesus break us out of the monotony of this life? How can living for Jesus make our everyday tasks more meaningful?
- The teacher in Ecclesiastes laments that his achievement and rewards will be inherited by someone else. In contrast Jesus created and owns everything that exists and chooses to share it with us. How can following Jesus help us break our selfish desire for credit and glory?
- The teacher brags about his achievements but finds them meaningless, Paul tells the Philippian church that he counts all his achievements as dung in comparison to Christ. These are similar statements with very different attitudes. How can we follow Jesus more like Paul, and less like the teacher.
- Our world is full of people who have made big achievements and still find despair in unfulfillment. How can you share Jesus with them to address their specific struggle? How can Jesus heal what our achievements don't fulfill?

