



CWR/PTM

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**ECCLESIASTES &
SONG OF SONGS**

Week 1

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Before You Begin Your Journey...

The book of Ecclesiastes often baffles Christians, and the more carefully they read it the more baffled they sometimes become. While this ancient text is full of practical advice and gems of pragmatic wisdom, it seems to lack the eternal perspective we see in other parts of the Bible.

Is life really “meaningless” and “a chasing after the wind”? Is our sole purpose really to “eat and drink” and “labor under the sun”? Is it really true that “money is the answer for everything”? Do the righteous and the wicked really “all share a common destiny”? Given these and other statements from Ecclesiastes, some have questioned why this book was included in the Bible.

But when Ecclesiastes is read in its proper context, it takes its place in the rest of the Scripture as a commentary about the emptiness and futility of a life apart from God. In this volume you will discover the the context needed to understand the book of Ecclesiastes.

In the last volume, we learned how Solomon (generally regarded as the author of Ecclesiastes) neglected his relationship with God later in his life. In Ecclesiastes, we see the results of his spiritual decline. In spite of years of accumulated practical wisdom, the diminishing role of God in Solomon’s life had left him with a cynical worldview. In this book we are able to see how empty life is without without the hope of eternal life that God offers. Because many passages in Ecclesiastes reflect this worldview, we will frequently ask you if you agree or disagree with the writer.

In short, Ecclesiastic shows life, not as it should be, but as it is. It's not a book from which we can draw Christ-centered doctrinal conclusions, but is certainly one from which we can learn.

In this volume we also explore another book attributed to King Solomon—Song of Songs. Christians often wonder about the meaning of this book as well. It has had a long history of strange interpretations. Some have read it as an allegory of Christ's love for his universal body, the church. Others have insisted that it is an enigmatic and mysterious book of prophecy.

In actuality, it is a magnificent romantic poem about the love between a man and woman. It is similar to love poetry found in other ancient near eastern writings. It is about love, faithfulness, beauty and romance in marriage. Though it uses the colorful and exotic imagery of an ancient agrarian culture that may seem unfamiliar to us, yet its inspired celebration of marital love and intimacy comes through clearly.

We hope you will be inspired and moved as you discover the rich meaning in these often misunderstood books of the Bible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Greg Albrecht". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Greg Albrecht
President, Plain Truth Ministries

How to Use the CWR Bible Survey...

1—Read and study at your own pace. This is a devotional. It is designed to help you consider and ponder the great truths of God's written revelation. It is designed to help you worship and come to know God. We plan to cover the entire Bible in 43 volumes, and while that sounds like a long time, don't be in a hurry. Take your time! Even though each volume is divided into bite-size daily lessons, you may want to take two days on each "daily" lesson.

2—We suggest you set aside a special time for the *CWR Bible Survey* every day. We recommend allowing 30-45 minutes, but even if you can only spare 15 minutes, try to make it part of your regular schedule. You will find that the *CWR Bible Survey* will be an invaluable resource for facing your daily challenges.

3—You will need a good Bible. This might be an excellent time for you to consider purchasing a study Bible. Plain Truth Ministries has reviewed many of the study Bibles that are available, and in cooperation with Thomas Nelson and Zondervan, we are pleased to be able to offer two superb study Bibles that will be an excellent resource and help to you. Please see the back pages of this book for more details.

4—Always read the assigned passage of the daily lesson in your Bible first. Each daily lesson builds upon the portion of the Bible being covered that day. You may want to begin by praying about what God has in store for you as you read, and then look at the questions and background information.

5—Consider the format of each daily lesson. Almost every daily lesson will include:

- **Opening Up to the Word** —a section designed to help you open your mind to the teaching God has inspired.
- **Digging Into the Word**—this section will encourage you to get your nose into the Bible and think deeply about what it says.
- **Living Out the Word**—here you will be challenged to consider the practical implications for your life. How does this passage help you live?

•**Window On the Word**—will offer key insights to help you more clearly understand the daily Bible passage.

6—After you finish the daily lesson, take some quiet time. You may simply think, look out the window, take a walk, or even get down on your knees. But use this time to let this daily lesson sink in. Ask God to show you what he wants you to understand from your reading and study.

7—Consider the *CWR Bible Survey* for small groups in which you may be involved. Tell your friends about it. If you are involved in a small group that meets for prayer and Bible study, introduce your group to it. Many are seeking an easy-to-read guide to help them understand the Bible and to help them know God. The *CWR Bible Survey* can do that!

•**Abbreviations Used in the *CWR Bible Survey***—

Genesis	Ge	Nahum	Na
Exodus	Ex	Habakkuk	Hab
Leviticus	Lev	Zephaniah	Zep
Numbers	Nu	Haggai	Hag
Deuteronomy	Dt	Zechariah	Zec
Joshua	Jos	Malachi	Mal
Judges	Jdg	Matthew	Mt
Ruth	Ru	Mark	Mk
1 Samuel	1Sa	Luke	Lk
2 Samuel	2Sa	John	Jn
1 Kings	1Ki	Acts	Ac
2 Kings	2Ki	Romans	Ro
1 Chronicles	1Ch	1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Chronicles	2Ch	2 Corinthians	2Co
Ezra	Ezr	Galatians	Gal
Nehemiah	Ne	Ephesians	Eph
Esther	Est	Philippians	Php
Job	Job	Colossians	Col
Psalms	Ps	1 Thessalonians	1Th
Proverbs	Pr	2 Thessalonians	2Th
Ecclesiastes	Ecc	1 Timothy	1Ti
Song of Songs	SS	2 Timothy	2Ti
Isaiah	Isa	Titus	Tit
Jeremiah	Jer	Philemon	Phm
Lamentations	La	Hebrews	Heb
Ezekiel	Eze	James	Jas
Daniel	Da	1 Peter	1Pe
Hosea	Hos	2 Peter	2Pe
Joel	Joel	1 John	1Jn
Amos	Am	2 John	2Jn
Obadiah	Ob	3 John	3Jn
Jonah	Jnh	Jude	Jude
Micah	Mic	Revelation	Rev

ECCLESIASTES

SONG OF SONGS

Inspired
Poetry of
Wisdom and Love

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Authorship: This book is ascribed to King Solomon, sometimes referred to as the Israelite “patron saint” of wisdom. Ancient Jewish Rabbis taught that Solomon wrote three books: Song of Songs first, Proverbs second and Ecclesiastes last because “When a man is young he sings songs. When he becomes an adult he utters practical proverbs. When he becomes old he voices the vanity of things.” Although tradition identifies Solomon as the author, some scholars suggest the author could have been an anonymous teacher. Others believe the book could have been authored by someone who compiled the teachings and sayings of others.

Date: If the author is King Solomon, the date would be in the 10th century BC. Some scholars believe the book was compiled later.

Setting and purpose: Unlike most other books of the Bible where the setting, purpose and themes are easy to identify, Ecclesiastes lends itself to a wide range of views. For example, in the fourth century the great Christian scholar Jerome used the book to encourage a wealthy Roman woman to renounce the material things of this world. He directed her to the book of Ecclesiastes which, he said, was written “to show the utter vanity of every earthly enjoyment and hence the necessity of betaking oneself to an ascetic life, devoted entirely to the service of God.” Perhaps Jerome’s view was shaped by these words from Ecclesiastes 2:17: “So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

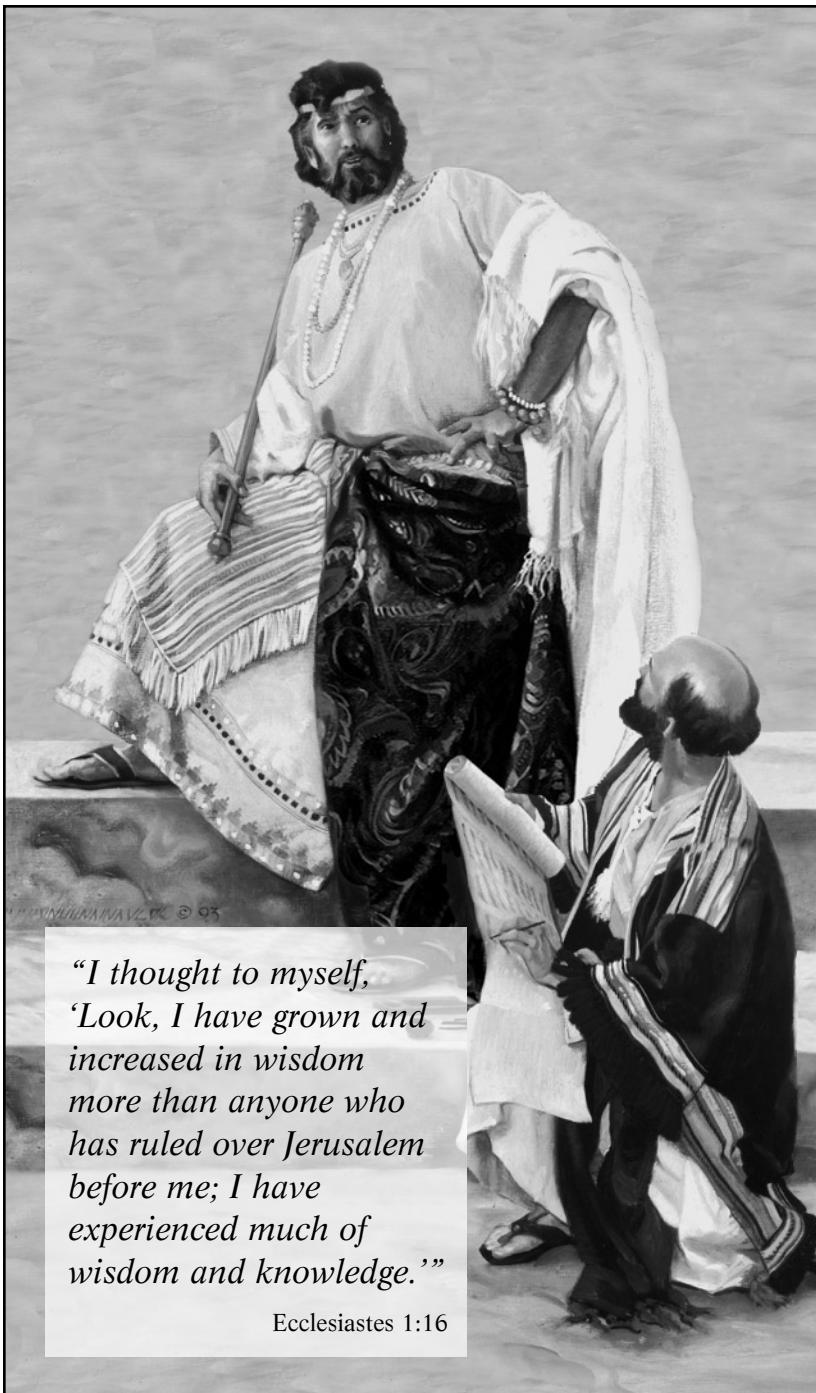
Yet, in the sixteenth century, the reformer Martin Luther cited the book as one that affirmed life. “The design of the book,” he wrote, “is to teach us to use, with grateful hearts, the things present and the creatures which are bountifully bestowed upon us by God, without anxiety about future temporal blessings.” Perhaps the basis of Luther’s claim was Ecclesiastes 2:24: “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and

find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see is from the hand of God....”

Distinctive features: Perhaps more than some other biblical books, this one challenges readers to think philosophically and theologically about life, its purpose and ways of finding meaning and satisfaction in living. Look for these elements as you read. Also, beware of some isolated statements that appear to challenge some basic Christian teachings. Isolated statements must always be understood within the context of the book as well as the entire thrust of Scripture.

Reading outline:

Day	Text	Theme
1	Ecclesiastes 1:1-18	What Is the Theme Song of Your Life?
2	Ecclesiastes 2: 1-16	Grasping a Shadow
3	Ecclesiastes 2:17-26	Optimist or Pessimist?
4	Ecclesiastes 3:1-8	The Cycles of Life
5	Ecclesiastes 3:9-22	The Injustices of Life
6	Ecclesiastes 4:1-16	A Handful of Tranquility
7	Ecclesiastes 5:1-20	Preparing to Worship
8	Ecclesiastes 6:1-12	Appreciate What You Have Today
9	Ecclesiastes 7:1-18	Striving for a Long Eulogy
10	Ecclesiastes 7:19-29	Social Sewage
11	Ecclesiastes 8:1-17	Growing Successful Relationships
12	Ecclesiastes 9:1-10	Staring Death in the Face
13	Ecclesiastes 9:11-18	Coincidence or Providence?
14	Ecclesiastes 10:1-14	Don't Become a Dead Fly
15	Ecclesiastes 10:15-20	Power and Responsibility
16	Ecclesiastes 11:1-6	The Good You Do Comes Back to You
17	Ecclesiastes 11:7-10	Celebrating Life
18	Ecclesiastes 12:1-14	Aging Gracefully



*“I thought to myself,
‘Look, I have grown and
increased in wisdom
more than anyone who
has ruled over Jerusalem
before me; I have
experienced much of
wisdom and knowledge.’”*

Ecclesiastes 1:16

What Is the Theme Song of Your Life?

DAY 1

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

This book begins with a startling personal declaration—“Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Everything is meaningless.” What poem, proverb, song, hymn, statement or biblical verse would be the theme of your life right now?

1. Do you agree or disagree with verse 2? Get into the mind of the writer. Why does he make that statement?
2. What is the writer’s view of history (v. 9)?
3. Where is the only reference to God in this chapter? Do you agree with the role assigned to God in that verse?
4. Can verse 9 be reconciled with Isaiah 43:19 and 2 Corinthians 5:17?
5. What is the writer conveying in verse 11?

1. What kinds of life experiences could lead Solomon to say “Everything is meaningless”? Has there been a time when you felt that way?
2. Can you relate to the futility, meaninglessness and emptiness that characterized the life of Solomon? If so, what steps could you take to change that?
3. Based on your life experience and understanding of history, how is verse 9 true and in what ways is it false?
4. If you had a friend who spoke and thought the way the writer does in chapter one, what spiritual advice would you offer him or her?

***Teacher**, a term used several times in this chapter (vs. 1, 12) is a translation of the Hebrew word qoheleth. There is no English word that precisely conveys its meaning. The word is connected to the Hebrew word qahal meaning a “gathering” or “assembly” of people who meet for worship and instruction. Thus, the word can also be translated “preacher,” “philosopher,” “speaker,” even “president of the assembly.”*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Grasping a Shadow

Ecclesiastes 2:1-16

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you had the experience of pursuing a goal—graduation from college, earning a post-graduate degree, completing a professional program of study, gaining a promotion—only to find that the destination did not bring you the satisfaction and meaning you had hoped?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Writer Joseph Epstein observed: “Scratch a cynic and underneath, as often as not, you will find a dead idealist.” What verses in this section could be used to verify the truth of Epstein’s observation?

2. List the various activities the writer engaged in over the course of his life.

3. The Teacher had everything. Why then was he so unhappy?

4. What is the problem in this section? Is the problem the activity, or is the problem the Teacher?

LIVING
out the Word

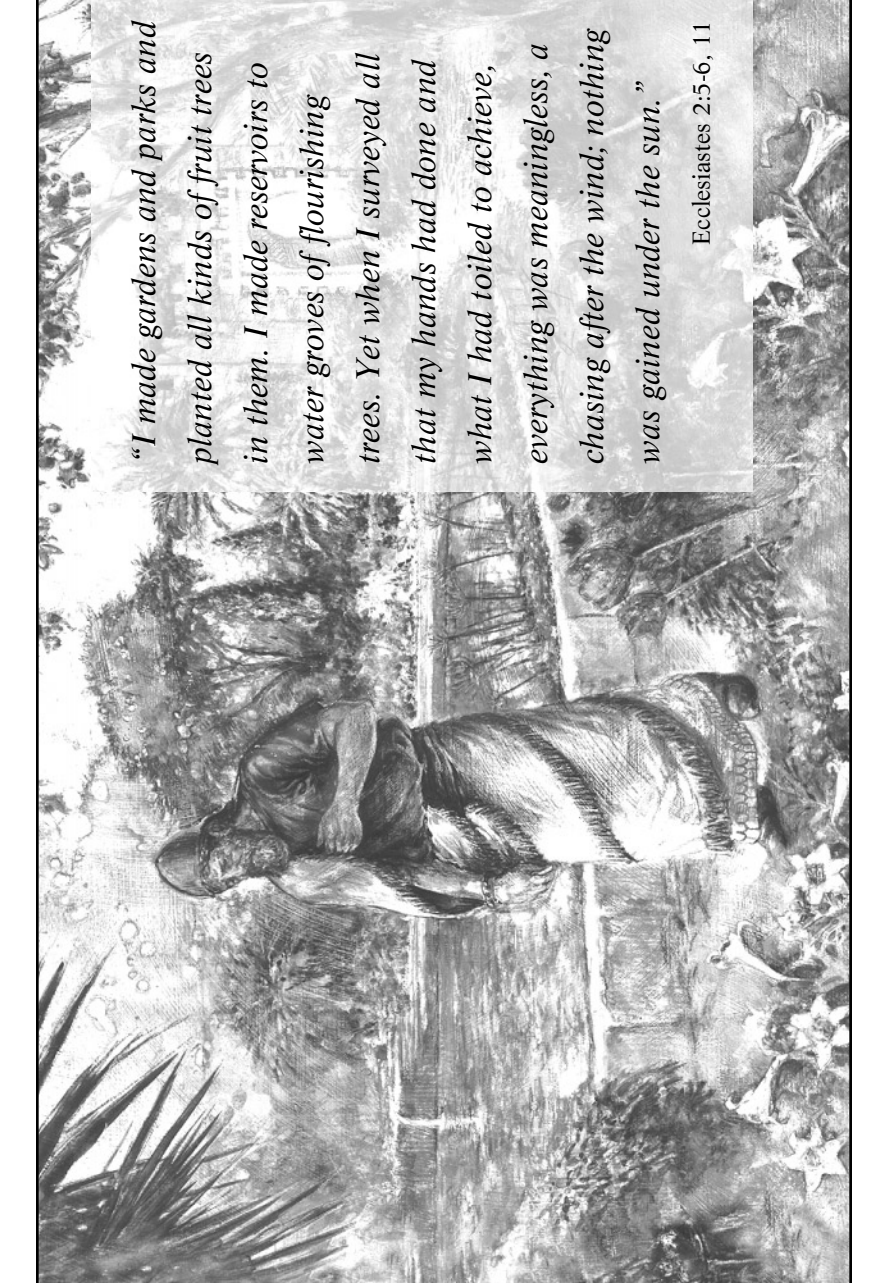
1. Read this chapter again. This time let it help you focus on what is really important in life. What are the most important things to you?

2. Reflect on this question: Is my goal in life to search for meaning, or to pursue God, who gives meaning?

3. Look back over your life. Was there a time when you could describe yourself as “chasing after the wind” (v. 11)?

WINDOW
on the Word

*If the Teacher was **Solomon**, he certainly had the resources to experiment with life. Note these background texts concerning Solomon: 1 Kings 10:28-29; 1 Kings 3:1; 9:16; 1 Kings 5:1-12; 9:10-14; 1 Kings 6:38; 1 Kings 10:26.*



*“I made gardens and parks and
planted all kinds of fruit trees
in them. I made reservoirs to
water groves of flourishing
trees. Yet when I surveyed all
that my hands had done and
what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a
chasing after the wind; nothing
was gained under the sun.”*

Ecclesiastes 2:5-6, 11

DAY 3

Optimist or Pessimist?

Ecclesiastes 2:17-26

OPENING
up to the Word

We can view life either through the lens of an optimist or that of a pessimist. Which lens do you use? How can faith in God sharpen our focus and view of life?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What words, phrases and themes are repeated in these verses?
 2. Make a list of all the complaints mentioned by the writer.
 3. What is the writer's philosophy, based on these verses? What is his theology? How does the writer view God and God's role in life? Do you share his opinions?
-

LIVING
out the Word

1. Consider this modern proverb: *Nothing bad ever goes away; nothing good ever stays*. Is it true? Why would some people agree with this statement? Do you think the statement reflects the view of Ecclesiastes 2:17-26? Is the opposite statement more correct: *Nothing good ever goes away; nothing bad ever stays*?
 2. How do you view your work? Is it a blessing or a burden; a gift from God or an obligation? Drudgery or delight? Why do you work?
 3. Have you prepared a will? If you did, was it a pleasant activity or did it make you anxious? How do you feel about leaving your material goods behind? Do you worry about how your beneficiaries will use your gifts? Are they worthy beneficiaries?
-

WINDOW
on the Word

According to verse 26, a task associated with sinners is **gathering and storing up wealth**. This goal, when it becomes a priority in life, can lead to futility: note Proverbs 11:4, 7; 13:9, 21-22 and Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:24-27.

“A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?”

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

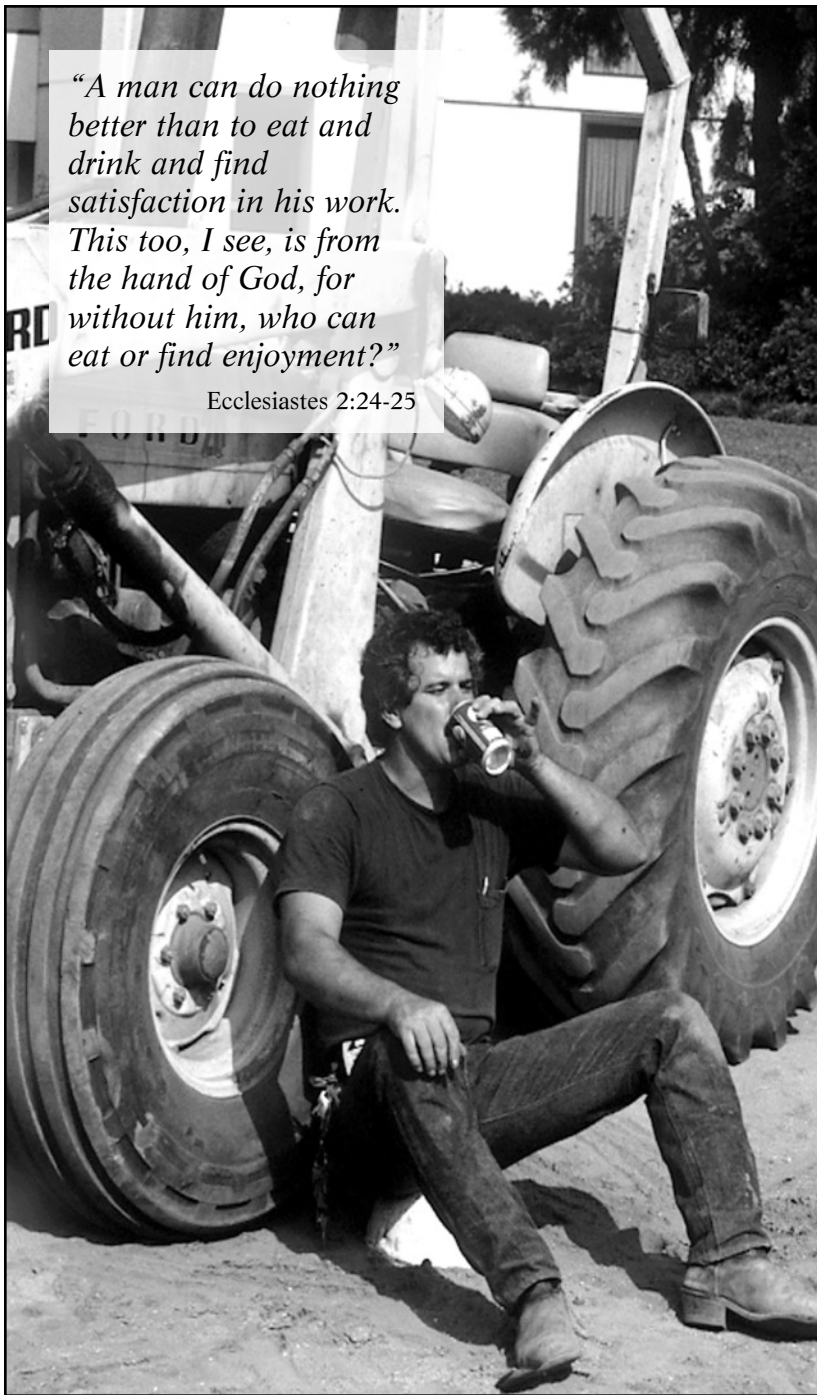


Photo by Hal Finch

DAY 4

The Cycles of Life

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

OPENING
up to the Word

Based on the first eight verses, identify some cycles of life you have experienced—such as a birth or death—searching or giving up.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Go through verses 1-8. Identify which statements are positive and which are negative.
 2. Christian living also has its negative and positive sides. Compare the words of verses 1-8 to those of Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and Galatians 2:18.
 3. How can these verses help you live with a peaceful and calm attitude regardless of what is happening in your life?
-

LIVING
out the Word

1. The only familiarity many people have with the book of Ecclesiastes is verses 1-8. Why do these words have such a universal appeal? Which verses in this section speak most to you? Why?
 2. Do verses 1-8 describe life as it *is* or life as it *should be*? How can there be a time of hating?
 3. How have you experienced a time of embracing and refraining? A time of tearing and mending?
 4. Describe an experience when you felt it was wise to remain silent. Likewise, recall a time when you just had to speak up.
-

WINDOW
on the Word

The words **a time to kill** (v. 3) do not imply there is a time when killing is desirable, rather, the intent is a simple statement of fact: killing happens. Under Mosaic law, death was the penalty for numerous crimes.

*“There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity
under heaven: . . .”*

Ecclesiastes 3:1



The Injustices of Life

Ecclesiastes 3:9-22

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever been unjustly accused of doing something wrong? Did you have to pay a penalty you didn't owe?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What does a worker gain from his toil? What is the burden God has laid on people? What has God placed in the heart of every person?
 2. What is the gift of God? Do you agree with the writer's answer?
 3. According to the writer, why does God test humans?
 4. Which verse in this section is most disturbing to you and why?
 5. Where does the Teacher see great injustice?
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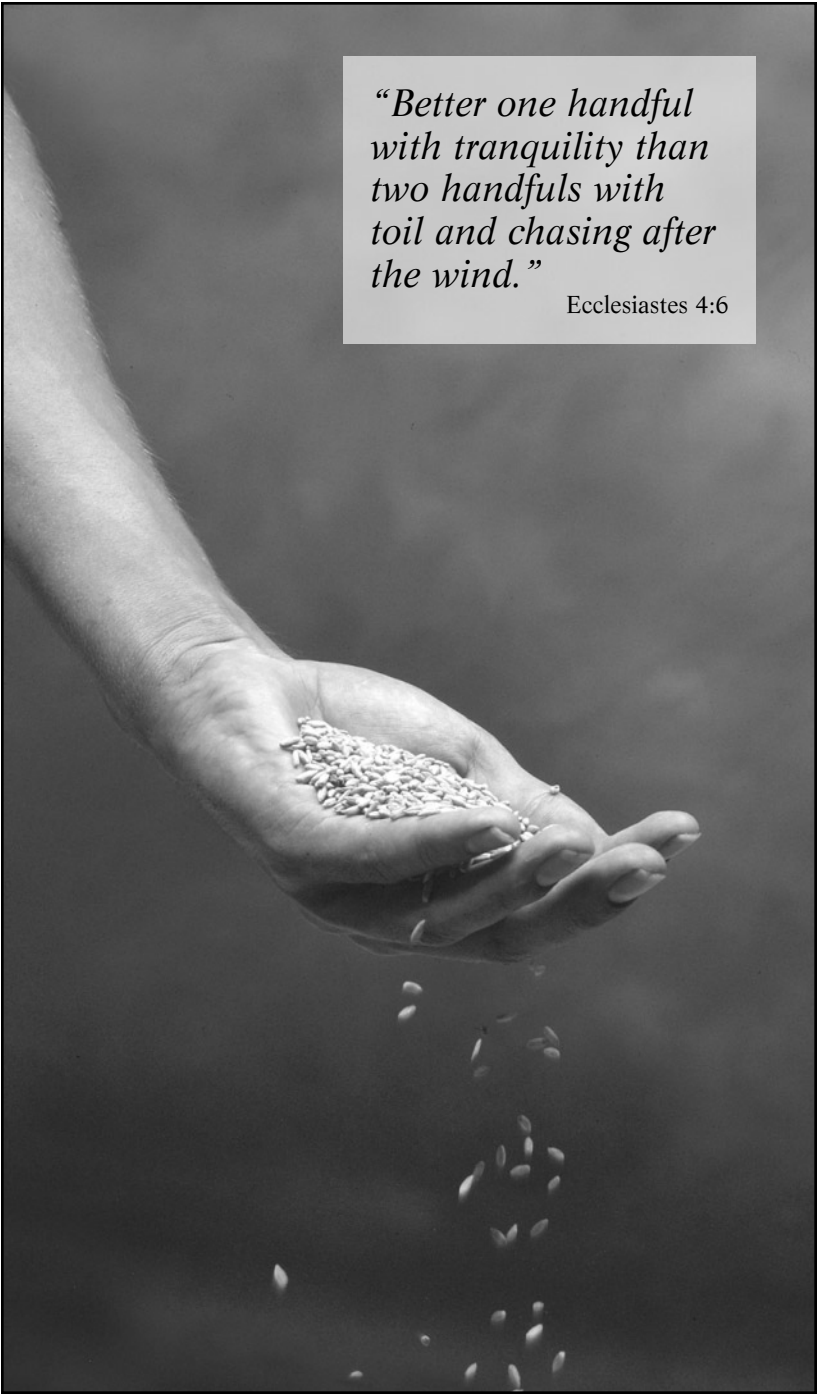
LIVING
out the Word

1. What kind of experience have you had with our court and criminal justice system? Has it been good or bad, positive or negative?
2. Read Romans 8:38-39. How do those words challenge some of the philosophy in this section of Ecclesiastes?
3. John Wesley prayed: "O Lord, let me not live to be useless." Do you feel Wesley could have had verse 13 in mind when he prayed?
4. What is the distinction between enjoying yourself in life and going too far?

*“I thought in
my heart, ‘God
will bring to
judgment both
the righteous
and the wicked,
for there will be
a time for every
activity, a time
for every
deed.’”*

Ecclesiastes 3:17





*“Better one handful
with tranquility than
two handfuls with
toil and chasing after
the wind.”*

Ecclesiastes 4:6

“A Handful With Tranquility...”

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

In verse 6 the author praises those who have “one handful with tranquility” rather than “two handfuls with toil.” Look up the word *tranquility* in a thesaurus to see the synonyms for this word. Is this peace and serenity present in your life? Why or why not?

1. As you read this chapter, mark the verses with which you as a Christian strongly disagree and those with which you strongly agree.
 2. What is the plight of those oppressed by the powerful? What does the writer identify as “meaningless” in this chapter?
 3. Verses 10-12 contain positive expressions of friendship. What are the benefits of friendship according to the writer? Why would the pessimistic writer of Ecclesiastes mention the value of friendship?
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1. Author William Graham Sumner wrote: “All history is one long story to this effect: men have struggled for power over their fellow-men in order that they might win the joys of earth at the expense of others, and might shift the burdens of life from their own shoulders upon those of others.” Explain how the writer of Ecclesiastes might agree with Sumner’s observation. Do you agree with his assessment?

2. Has there been a time in your life when you would have agreed that “the dead . . . are happier than the living” (v. 2)?
3. Have a close look at verse 4. In what ways is this statement true and in what ways can it be false?
4. Who has been a good friend for you? Recall a time when you experienced the truth of verse 10.

DAY 6

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.”

Ecclesiastes 5:1



Photo by Monte Wolverton

Preparing to Worship

DAY 7

Ecclesiastes 5:1-20

Reflect on this wisdom from Abraham J. Heschel: "Worship is a way of living, a way of seeing the world in the light of God . . . to rise to a higher level of existence, to see the world from the point of view of God."

1. What instructions are given for worship? What is the "sacrifice of fools"?
2. How should vows and commitments made to God be fulfilled? What is the writer's view of God?
3. Describe the writer's teaching about wealth. What is the reason for oppression?
4. Identify the "grievous evil" cited several times by the writer in this chapter.
5. What is "good and proper" for humans? According to the writer, what is one of God's unique blessings for people?

1. Describe a worship service that was especially memorable for you. What made it that way? Did you make special preparations for that service?
2. Have you ever made a vow to God? What was it, and have you been able to fulfill it? If you were unable to fulfill it, what prompted you to make the vow in the first place? Was it hasty and premature?
3. What priority does the pursuit of wealth have in your life?
4. Reflect on the phrase "gladness of heart" (v. 20). Is this something you have? What is it that makes your heart glad?

Grievous evil (vs. 13, 16) is a strong phrase describing a terrible injustice, something beyond unfair. Some scholars believe the term suggests "sickening," meaning that the writer was sick over what he saw.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word