



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**ECCLESIASTES &
SONG OF SONGS**

Week 2

Appreciate What You Have Today

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

OPENING
up to the Word

According to this chapter, life passes by rapidly, “like a shadow” (v. 12). The lesson is that we should appreciate what we have today—rather than living in the future or the past. Read the second chapter of Colossians to see another “shadow” contained within the Old Testament.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. The writer sees “another evil under the sun.” What is it?
2. Make a list of problems, complaints and other negatives the writer identifies in this chapter.
3. Based on this section, what is the writer’s philosophy of life, and what is his view of God?
4. What is the result of living a miserly life? What is as foolish as “chasing after the wind”?

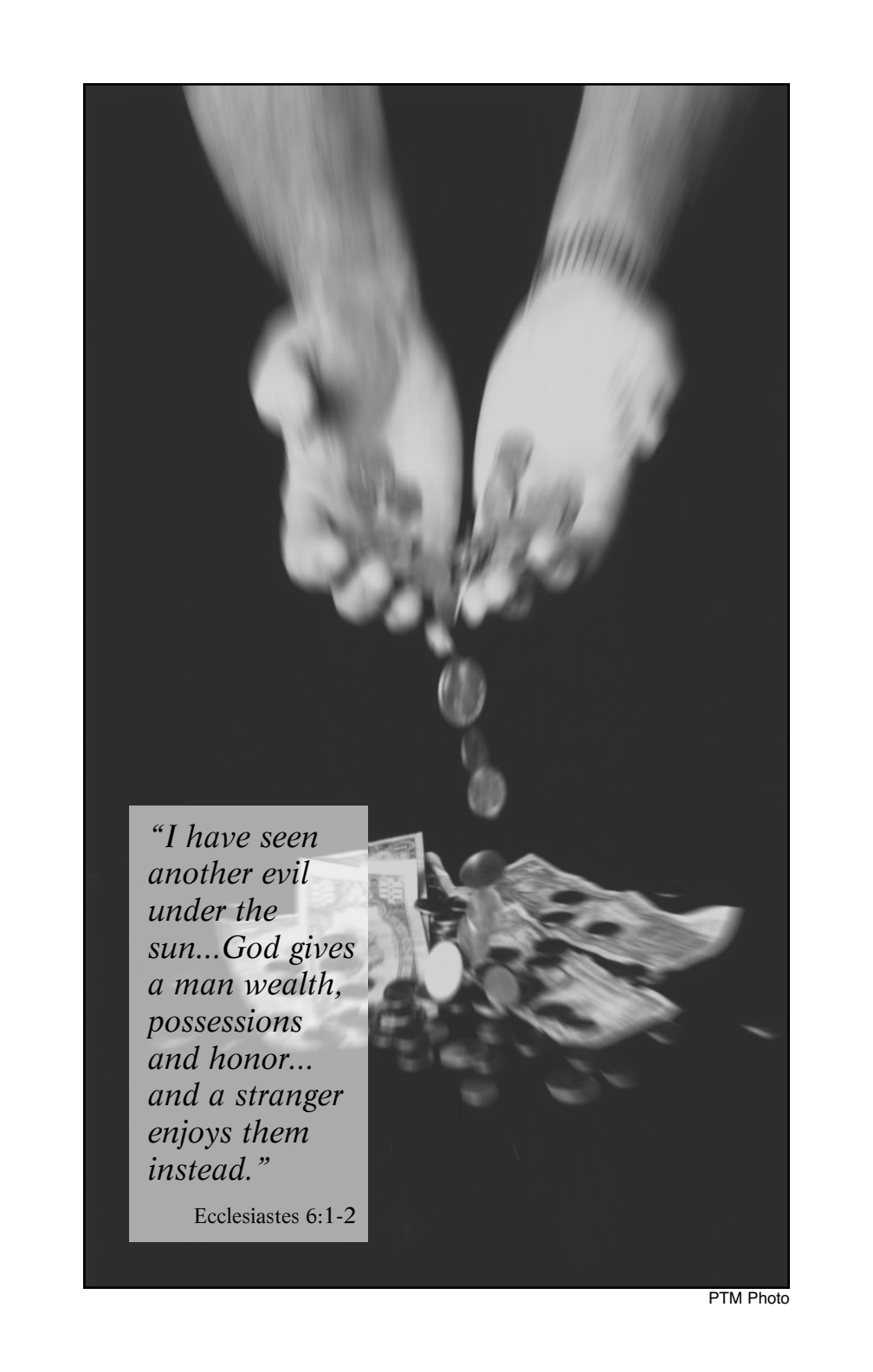
LIVING
out the Word

1. The Israelites regarded children and long life as signs of God’s blessings. Today, what would most people view as marks of God’s blessings?
2. Verses 7-9 address a common problem: an insatiable appetite for more. Who is the most content person you know? What makes him or her that way?
3. Edith Wharton once wrote: “Life is the saddest thing there is, next to death.” Would the writer of Ecclesiastes agree with her? Does her statement resonate with you? How does a life lived by faith in Jesus Christ compare to that statement?

WINDOW
on the Word

*In ancient times a **proper burial** (v. 3) was important because it not only brought respectable closure to life but it signified that the one who died was blessed with some prosperity. On the other hand, bodies of the poor and criminals were often left to rot in the open countryside.*

Striving for a

A black and white photograph showing two hands at the top, palms facing each other, holding a stream of coins that are falling. The coins are captured in mid-air, creating a vertical line of motion. Below the falling coins, there is a pile of money on a dark, reflective surface. The pile includes several banknotes, including a 100 Euro note, and various coins. The background is dark, making the hands and the falling coins stand out.

*“I have seen
another evil
under the
sun...God gives
a man wealth,
possessions
and honor...
and a stranger
enjoys them
instead.”*

Ecclesiastes 6:1-2

Long Eulogy

Ecclesiastes 7:1-18

OPENING
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WINDOW
on the Word

A good name is a precious commodity. What elements establish a good name?

1. In this section the writer cites some things that are “better.” Identify the “better” elements in this passage.
2. What is “good for the heart”? Does the statement make sense to you? What does the Teacher say about believing in the “good old days” (v. 10)?
3. Based on this chapter, what conclusions could you draw about the writer’s belief in God?
4. What is said about wisdom in this section? How can one be “over righteous”?

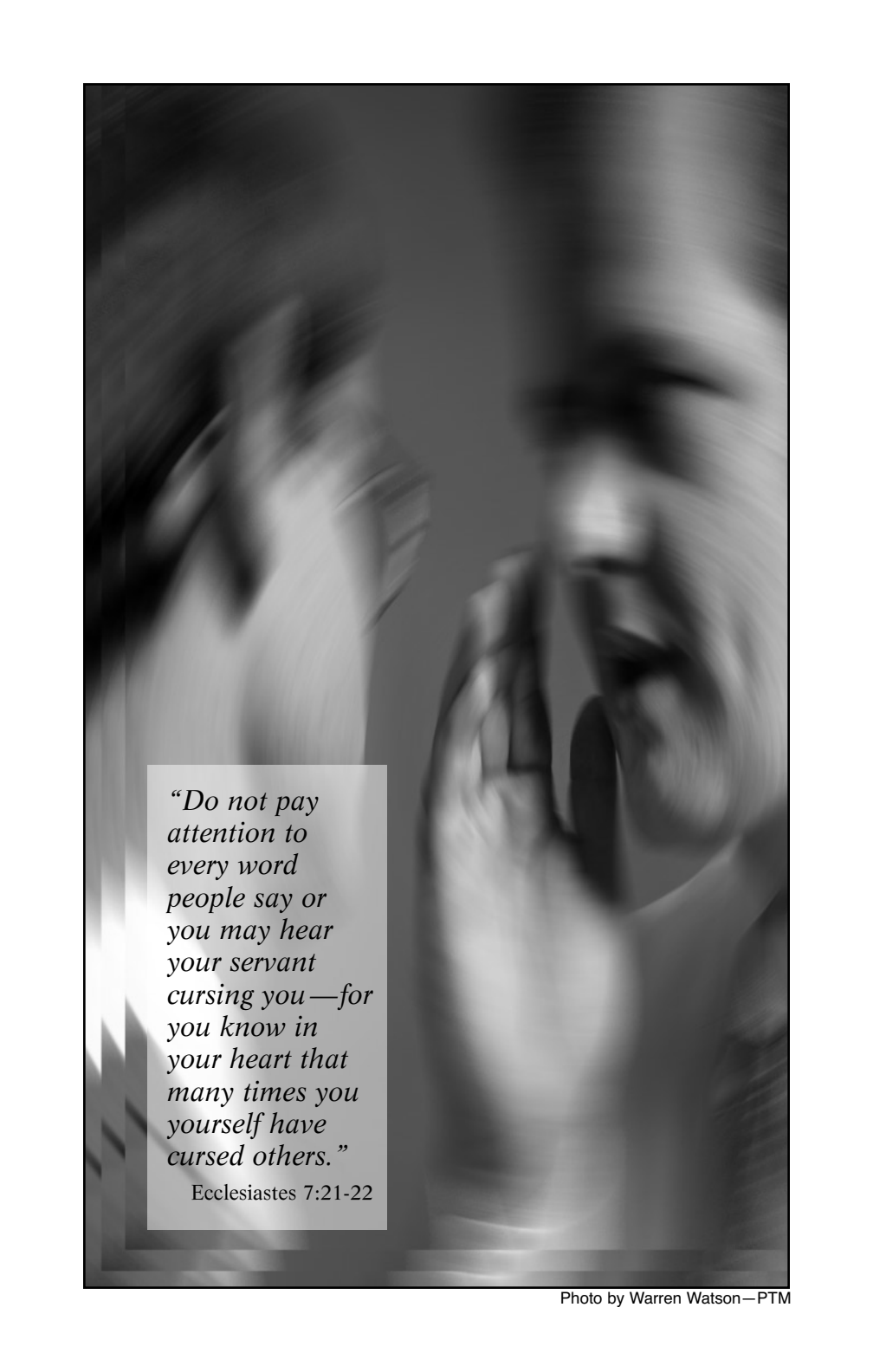
1. Who is one of the finest people you currently know? What makes him or her that way? Even though that person is not deceased, write a brief eulogy about him or her.
2. A Japanese proverb states: “The reputation of a thousand years may be determined by the conduct of one hour.” How is that statement true and what does it imply for our conduct?
3. How has constructive criticism provided you with useful instruction and correction (v. 5)?
4. Verse 14 suggests that good and bad times are in God’s hands. Ask yourself: Can I be content through both good and bad times? Is it a sign of spiritual maturity to be content in all circumstances? Was Jesus always content?

*For more biblical references to the value of a **good name** read Proverbs 22:1; Acts 6:3; 10:22, 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:18 and 3 John 12.*

“It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.”

Ecclesiastes 7:2





*“Do not pay
attention to
every word
people say or
you may hear
your servant
cursing you—for
you know in
your heart that
many times you
yourself have
cursed others.”*

Ecclesiastes 7:21-22

Social Sewage

DAY 10

Ecclesiastes 7:19-29

The writer George Meredith (1829-1909) succinctly said: “Gossip: social sewage.” Look at verse 21 and consider what’s wrong with listening to hearsay and gossip.

- 1.** What is stated about the righteous? About wisdom? About gossip? What is more “bitter than death”?
 - 2.** How would you describe the writer’s attitude toward his fellow human beings based on this passage?
 - 3.** Is verse 20 a judgment, a confession or an observation?
 - 4.** What kind of women are described in verses 26 and 28? Do you think the Teacher was a male chauvinist, or simply reflecting the culture of his time? Assuming Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes, do you think 1 Kings 11:3 provides us with background for his observation?
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- 1.** Think about a time when you discovered others were gossiping about you. How did it make you feel about yourself and about them?
- 2.** How can a healthy sense of our own imperfection help us take criticism in stride?
- 3.** Verses 27-28 appear to express the Teacher’s bitter disappointment with fellow human beings. How have others both inspired and disappointed you?

OPENING
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Growing Successful Relationships

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

OPENING
up to the Word

What relationships are most important and vital to you? Those with your parents, spouse, children, grandparents, grandchildren and friends? How do you cultivate strong relationships with people you value and who are important to you?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What are the instructions concerning duties to a king? What are the benefits of wise service?
2. List the injustices or complaints cited in this chapter.
3. Rewrite in your own words the philosophy of life found in verses 14 and 15.

LIVING
out the Word

1. Whose name could you substitute for “king” in verses 2, 3 and 4? Does that shed a different, more helpful light on these verses? How?
2. Look closely at verse 14. If the writer were living today, what or whom could he give as classic examples of his philosophy in verse 14?
3. How does the writer’s philosophy to “eat and drink and be glad” strike you? Is this a sound way of life?

WINDOW
on the Word

*The opening verses are a “manual” on **how to succeed as a member of the king’s inner circle**. It begins, “obey the king’s command . . . Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence.” While these instructions may sound foreign to us, it should be noted that in ancient societies, teachers often drew attention to attitudes and actions that resulted in a more successful career. There is an Egyptian document dated two thousand years earlier than Ecclesiastes titled, The Instructions of Vizier Ptah-hotep. This document is also an advice manual offering information on how to be a successful official of the state. Some advice offered includes how an official should behave when dining with a superior—no picking at the food placed before you, no rude stares, speak only when spoken to. It goes on to state: “Let your face be cast down until he addresses you. Speak only when he addresses you. Laugh after he laughs, and it will be pleasing to his heart, and what you do will be pleasing to his heart. No one can know what is in his heart.”*

Staring Death in the Face

DAY 12

Ecclesiastes 9:1-10

After you read this chapter, consider writing a paragraph that begins with this sentence: *Death is a reality of life....*

1. What is humanity's common destiny? Is this good or bad, fair or unjust?
2. How does the teacher judge people? Is his assessment valid?
3. What does the teacher advise about a spouse? Why is that advice offered?
4. Concerning work, what advice does the writer offer? Does that advice make sense to you? Is it advice you plan to follow?

1. Where in our society do you see mad and evil hearts? Can this be prevented, managed or shaped differently in our culture?
2. How would you sum up the writer's concept of life after death based on this chapter? How does that compare to New Testament teaching?
3. In what ways do you feel that God has favored you (v. 7)?

In verse 8 the writer instructs readers, "Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil." These traditional apparel and grooming practices of the ancient near east not only protected people from the heat (white clothing reflected the sun's rays and oil protected against dry skin), but this was the customary "business" attire of the day. By contrast, neglect of personal grooming and clothing signified withdrawal from society. Using the metaphor of grooming, the writer is encouraging readers to live a positive and productive life, fully involved with family, friends and society.

OPENING

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Coincidence or Providence?

Ecclesiastes 9:11-18

OPENING
up to the Word

Think back to a time when something good came your way and it was an unexpected surprise. Did you feel it was a “stroke of luck” or a case of being in the right place at the right time? Is it possible that it was less coincidence and more a gracious act of God’s providence?

DIGGING
into the Word

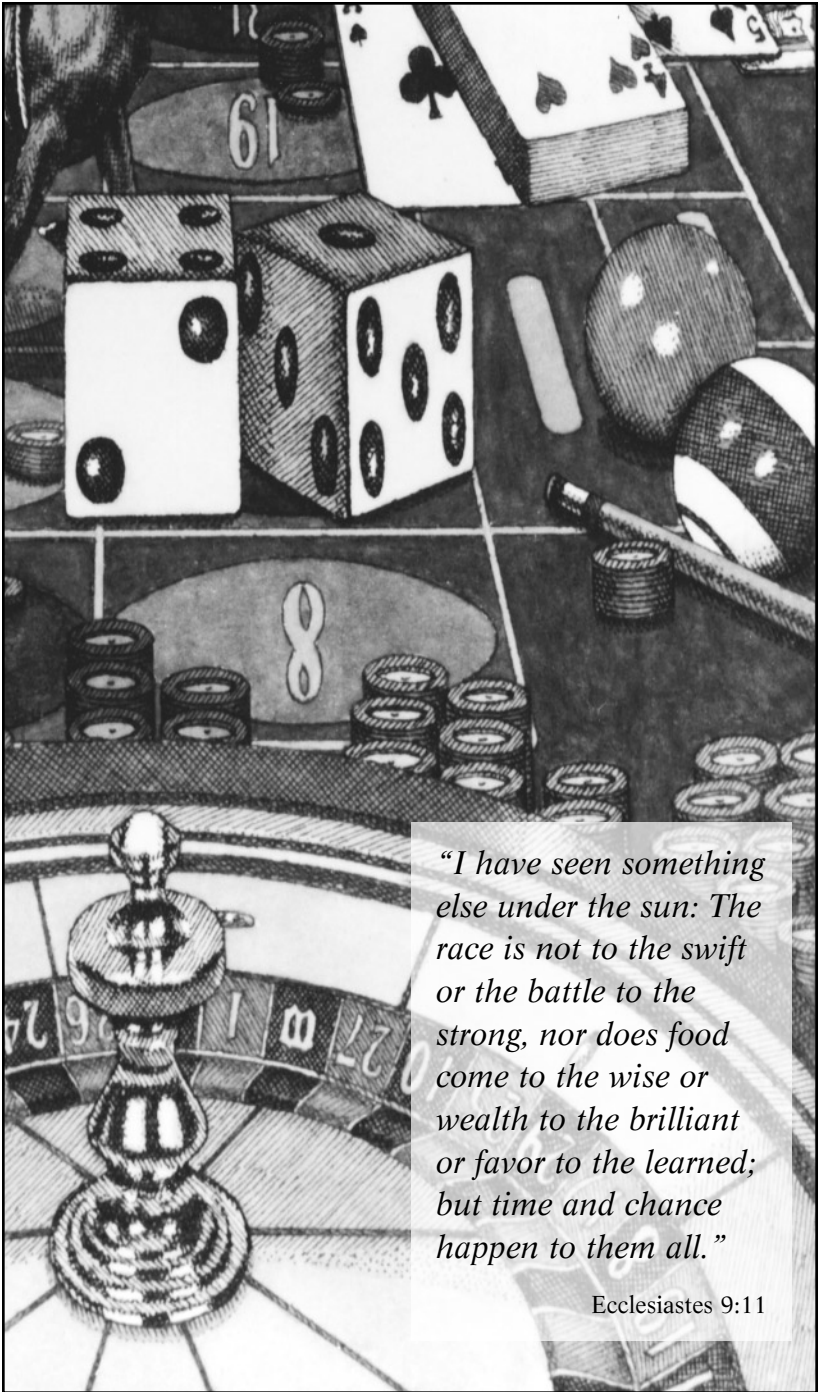
1. What else does the Teacher see under the sun?
2. What are some changes and chances of life that come to people?
3. Wisdom is highlighted in verses 13-16. What exactly is taught about wisdom here?
4. Based on this section, complete this sentence:
Wisdom is better than . . .

LIVING
out the Word

1. Look carefully at verses 11-12 and ask yourself: How do you explain some of the negative and positive things that have happened in your life? Do you believe they were coincidence or providence—or a combination of both?
2. What are some “cruel nets” which inadvertently trap and imprison people?
3. Do you know someone of whom it can be said, “men (or women) are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them” (v. 12)? Or, have you had such a catastrophic experience? What are some effective ways of helping people who are “trapped”?
4. Explain how “one sinner can destroy much good” (v. 18).

WINDOW
on the Word

*This section of Scripture has a powerful relevance to our own times, particularly verse 18: “**Wisdom is better than weapons of war....**” If this was obvious to the Teacher in his day, it must be even more obvious in our day when nations have arsenals capable of destroying life as we know it. Perhaps that verse should be our prayer and plea for our world leaders.*



“I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.”

Ecclesiastes 9:11

Don't Become a Dead Fly

Ecclesiastes 10:1-14

OPENING
up to the Word

A person can negate years of achievement, honesty and integrity by a single indiscretion or a few unwise words. Can you recall this happening to someone in your circle of friends, or in your neighborhood, church or club?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Describe the way those who are foolish and lazy are characterized in this chapter.
2. What advice is given concerning responses made to a ruler, a king and someone who is rich?
3. If this section were a newspaper column, what headline would be over it?

LIVING
out the Word

1. "Fools in high positions" (v. 6) will resonate with many people. Not everyone in a place of authority deserves to be there. What kind of experience have you had with such a situation? Why do "fools" sometimes get into high positions?
2. "Life is full of chances and changes, and the most prosperous of men may, in the evening of his days, meet with great misfortunes," observed the philosopher Aristotle. How does his statement shed light on verses 8-9? What risks are acceptable to you? What risks have you taken in the past? What were the results?
3. In verse 10 the writer says that it's better to cut wood with a sharp ax—the time spent in sharpening is more than compensated by the time and effort saved. What steps have you taken to better prepare (or sharpen) yourself for responsibilities?

*“Dead flies putrefy the
perfumer’s ointment, and cause
it to give off a foul odor; so does
a little folly to one respected for
wisdom and honor.”*

Ecclesiastes 10:1, NKJV



Photo by Omar Cova—PTM