

PREFACE

The search for meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in life can easily consume one's life as each person seems to have the natural inclination to seek ultimate satisfaction of one's own needs and desires. The longer one lives the more readily one recognizes that ultimate, enduring satisfaction is not possible to achieve in these physical bodies without a proper understanding of who God is and who we are in relation to God. The most satisfying life is not one that fulfills all the desires of the body, but one that is lived according to God's will for our lives. I assume that all of us have tested whether or not we can achieve satisfaction in these bodies on our own in one or more aspects of our lives. When we have tested it, we are left wondering, "If we were to have just pursued our chosen course of action a little further would we have achieved the fulfillment we are seeking?" God, in His infinite wisdom, has allowed us access to the answers to this question and many more on the subject of how to live a satisfying life. King Solomon was endowed with wisdom from God exceeding that of all other men (1 Kings 4:31), and unsurpassed riches, wealth, and honor (2 Chronicles 1:12). These blessings bestowed directly from God provided Solomon with the unique position to personally test the capabilities of mankind to pursue ultimate satisfaction in ways that you and I could never pursue to the degree or with the wisdom that Solomon did. We need only to read and study from the book of Ecclesiastes to find the answers to questions we all have on this subject. The wisdom revealed in Solomon's conclusions is life-changing, but difficult to put into practice. We must lay aside what the world has taught us about fulfillment and use the wisdom provided by God to truly live the good life! Let us explore together, and more importantly, let us each individually apply what we learn to ourselves and the decisions we make each day.

-Steven Estes

CONTENTS

LESSON	TITLE
---------------	--------------

Preface

Avoiding the Interpretation Pitfalls

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Eccl. 1: All Is Vanity - Human Wisdom |
| 2 | Eccl. 2: Vanity of Pleasure |
| 3 | Eccl. 3: Vanity of Human Effort |
| 4 | Eccl. 4: Vanity of Toiling for Riches |
| 5 | Eccl. 5: Vanity of Wealth & Honor |
| 6 | Eccl. 6: Chasing After the Wind |
| 7 | Eccl. 7: Vanity of Wisdom Alone |
| 8 | Eccl. 8: Wisdom's Limitations |
| 9 | Eccl. 9: Death Happens to Them All |
| 10 | Eccl. 10: Wisdom Better Than Folly |
| 11 | Eccl. 11: Value of Diligence in Joyful Living |
| 12 | Eccl. 12: Conclusion of the Whole Matter |

AVOIDING INTERPRETATION PITFALLS

When studying Ecclesiastes there are a few guiding principles that will assist us:

- Much of the book, especially the first several chapters, are focused on the conclusions Solomon is reaching as he conducts experiments in his own life. Solomon attempts to find satisfaction in life without a view towards God while living “under the sun”.
- God is not condoning Solomon’s choice to pursue this experimentation with activities that may have been motivated by sinful pride or fulfillment of lusts in inappropriate ways. God has allowed this to be recorded for our good as He has other things (i.e., failures of men such as Adam, David, Rehoboam, etc.) that provide us with valuable information we can use to prevent making the same mistakes others have made.
- Themes are repeated and vetted out several times, so the organization of the book does not follow a closely scripted outline at times.
- There are valuable proverbs inserted into the text as Solomon transitions from his experimentation phase to more application and reaching conclusions.
- Solomon, was a human just like you and I, so he was capable of making mistakes, sinning against God, and is not perfect. Jesus was the only perfect Man to walk the earth.
- Some of the conclusions reached are contextually limited to the scope of the experiment conducted by Solomon in that particular aspect of life. For example, when Solomon writes in **Ecclesiastes 8:15**, “So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor [all] the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.” he is drawing this conclusion as if all of man’s existence will occur on the earth without a view towards God’s planned

AVOIDING INTERPRETATION PITFALLS

eternal destination for the soul of man. Jesus uses the same terminology when sharing the words of the man who stored up much for himself in Luke 12:19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, [and] be merry." This man's life was required of him that very night and he was left with a barn full of goods he could never use. Jesus gives us the proper perspective without experimentation, rather from His wisdom as deity in Luke 12:21-23 "So [is] he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. "Life is more than food, and the body [is more] than clothing."

ALL IS VANITY

HUMAN WISDOM IS VANITY

LESSON 1

“Ecclesiastes opens with a prologue in which the author identifies himself, declares his theme, and introduces the question addressed in this book. He describes himself as “the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (cf. **1:12**). As he begins his “sermon”, he does so in way that certainly grabs your attention: declaring all to be vanity (useless). Having our attention, he asks the question that will be answered in the course of his sermon: what profit does a man have from all his labor in which he toils under the sun (**1-3**)? It is a question that is prompted by what he sees in the cycles of life. Generations of people come and go. The sun rises and sets, only to do the same day after day. Wind currents and water cycles are constantly repeated, and man is never satisfied with what he sees or hears. While we think new things are being done, it is only because we don’t remember the past. In reality there is nothing new under the sun (**4-11**). With the question introduced, the Preacher describes his own search. As king over Israel in Jerusalem, he wanted to know what everyone one wants to know - what profit is there for all the labor done under the sun? Right up front he tells us what he found: all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Having been blessed with greatness and wisdom (from God, cf. **1 Kin 3:12-13**), he began his search exploring wisdom, madness and folly. He found that much wisdom and knowledge (i.e., human wisdom) was only the source of much grief and sorrow (**12-18**).” (Mark Copeland, Book of Ecclesiastes, Page 6)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. From what perspective could Solomon say, “All is Vanity”? What does this mean that “All is Vanity”?
2. How did Solomon reach the conclusion that toil, seeing, hearing, discovery, and famed accomplishments are vanity?

VANITY OF PLEASURE

LESSON 2

“In this chapter the Preacher describes the extent of his search for the meaning of life “under the sun.” He explored mirth and pleasure, finding them to be vanity. He experimented with wine and folly, while guiding himself with his wisdom. Not withholding anything his eyes desired, he used his great wealth to build and accumulate everything his heart wanted. He certainly enjoyed himself while doing it (1-10). Yet when the Preacher looked back on all he had done, he found it to be vanity and grasping for the wind. Reflecting upon the comparative value of wisdom and folly, he did find wisdom to excel folly. But he also observed that death came to both the wise and the fool, and both soon forgotten. This prompted him to hate life. Even his accumulated wealth provided little respite, for he must leave it to one who may prove to be a fool. Thus he found such efforts to be grievous, leading one to sorrowful days and restless nights (11-23). He concludes it is best to eat and drink, enjoying what good there is in one’s labor. He realized, however, that the ability to truly enjoy life is a gift from God. He saw that God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to a man who is good in His sight. To the sinner, God might give the ability to gather and collect great wealth, but it eventually winds up in the hands of him who is good before God. Thus much labor without God’s blessing is truly vanity and grasping for the wind (24-26).”
(Mark Copeland, Book of Ecclesiastes, Page 9)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What types of pleasures did Solomon explore as recorded in Ecclesiastes Chapter 2?
2. How could Solomon have attempted to find satisfaction through wine, “while guiding my heart with wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 2:3)? Is that contradictory?

VANITY OF HUMAN EFFORT

LESSON 3

“It is obvious that this chapter marks the beginning of a new literary unit. The style changes from prose to poetry and the topic changes from God giving wisdom and joy to God setting the times and the seasons of life. The Preacher also turns from his own experiences with life and the lessons learned (1:12-2:26) to what God has done and is doing, and the reason for the baffling mystery of events which hide His providence from human understanding. God does indeed give wisdom, knowledge and joy to the good, but that does not mean that His gift comes without puzzling events that seem to challenge God’s benevolence toward those who seek to know and do His will. It should also be noted that there is a connection between this poem and the one which begins the book (1:4-11). They seem to address the same question from different directions. The earlier poem speaks of the inexorable cycles of nature which God has ordained and seem in their endless repetitions to be going nowhere (1:9-10). They are unchanging. In the same way the divinely set times and seasons of life seem also to reveal no consistent evidence of God’s purpose for the creatures He has made in His own image (3:11). Both poems seem to be concerned with the same rhetorical question which pervades the book, “What profit has a man for all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (1:3) and “What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?” (3:9). Where, in other words, does one find in all this world’s endless revolution and radically alternating events the labor that will bring lasting benefit? Then each poem is followed by a prose commentary (1:10-11; 3:10-15).

(Paul Earnhart, *Searching for the Meaning of Life*, Page 20-21)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What should our response be to Solomon’s observation that “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven”? (Eccl. 3:1-12)
2. How much control do we have over those seasons and times? How much control do we have over our response? (Eccl. 3:1-12)

VANITY OF HUMAN EFFORT

LESSON 3

3. Why has God prevented us from knowing everything from beginning to end? (Ecclesiastes 3:11-15)?

4. How is the statement in verse 15 true: “That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been”?

5. What inconsistency did Solomon observe with regard to justice under the sun? (Eccl. 3:16-17) How have you see this for yourself?

6. How are humans like animals? What should this realization cause us to conclude about how we should approach life and our legacy?

VANITY OF TOILING FOR RICHES

LESSON 4

“If it is a grave mistake to build your life on the thought that there will always be justice in this life, it is an equally grave error to presume that you can work your way to happiness. Work and what it can achieve is severely limited. Instead of admiration and appreciation for what one has gained from his labor Solomon warns that the race to achieve will lead only to an envy driven strife in a dog-eat-dog world. It is a world in which there are no ‘neighbors,’ only rivals. The secret does not lie in indolence (4:5), but in a contentment borne of a realization of the limitations of work as well as its value. ‘Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.’ (4:6). Ray Pritchard tells the story of a conversation between a hard-driving corporate attorney and a professional fisherman friend whom he found teaching his two young sons to catch crabs. ‘Why aren’t you out fishing,’ he asked. ‘Because I’ve caught enough fish for today,’ his friend replied. ‘But why don’t you catch more fish than you need?’ ‘What would I do with them?’ responded the fisherman. ‘You could earn more money and buy a better boat so you could catch more fish. Then you could buy a fleet of boats and soon be rich like me.’ ‘What would I do then’ ‘You could sit down and enjoy life.’ ‘What do you think I’m doing now?’ the fisherman replied. Simply put, a job is not the meaning of life nor what it earns you a measure of your worth. There are far more important things that all that industry cannot buy. Immensely more important is how all our activity serves to produce a godly character and to build a solid relationship with God and others.”
(Paul Earnhart, Searching for the Meaning of Life, Page 31-32)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. How would it be better for someone to be dead than alive, and even better for someone to have never existed? (Eccl. 4:1-3)
2. In what way are the following vanity: a) Skillful work, b) Both Hands Full, c) Working with no companion and no end in sight, d) constantly pursuing riches? (Eccl. 4:4-8)

VANITY OF TOILING FOR RICHES

LESSON 4

3. Why are two better than one? (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)?
4. How is a poor and wise youth better than an old and foolish king?
5. What do we learn about popularity from Ecclesiastes 4:13-16?
6. What wisdom is found in this chapter that will help us maintain a proper perspective on our daily work?

VANITY OF WEALTH & HONOR

LESSON 5

“Having observed much folly during his search for the purpose of life, the Preacher offers counsel on such things as worshipping God, making promises, injustice in high places, and properly using riches. He urges caution when one goes to the house of God. It is better to draw near to hear than to offer the sacrifices of fools. Therefore be careful what you say (cf. Ja 1:26). When you do make a vow or promise, don’t delay to pay it. It is better not to vow, than to vow and not keep it. Do not let your mouth get you into trouble, thinking you can simply excuse your way out of promises you have made. The righteous anger of God is to be feared (1-7). Returning to an earlier theme (cf. 3:16-17; 4:1-3), he says not to marvel when you see the oppression of the poor, or the perversion of justice and righteousness. Remember that every one answers to someone higher. Even the king is dependent upon those who serve him, implying that he too will be held accountable (8-9). Another theme throughout the Preacher’s observations is the proper use of riches. Here he discusses the vanity of loving riches, and the evil of hoarding riches to one’s hurt. Riches in of themselves do not satisfy, they can be the source of much anxiety, and can easily perish through misfortune (10-17). It is fitting to enjoy the good in one’s labor, but the ability to enjoy is a gift from God. God will keep one who is so blessed busy with the joy of his heart (18-20). (Mark Copeland, Book of Ecclesiastes, Page 20)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. How should one conduct themselves when they seek to worship God? (Eccl. 5:1)

2. What are some ways our mouths can get us in trouble? (Eccl. 5:2-7)

VANITY OF WEALTH & HONOR

LESSON 5

3. List at least three illustrations that are provided that help us understand the vanity of gain and honor? (Eccl. 5:8-17)

4. How is that the one who lacks abundance as a laborer sleeps so well?

5. What is the “gift of God” mentioned in Ecclesiastes 5:19?

6. How does what we learn from this chapter change the decisions that we make with regard to earthly gain?

CHASING AFTER THE WIND

LESSON 6

“The Preacher has shown that enjoyment as a gift from God is far preferable to accumulating many possessions or attempting to be wise enough to explain every mystery and master every eventuality (which he says is “chasing the wind”). The satisfaction and enjoyment of which he speaks in 5:18-20 is not in the abundance of things or the lack of them which one receives but in accepting it gratefully and trustingly as the lot which God has granted,.....In chapter six Solomon returns to his warning about the emptiness of wealth when seen as life’s meaning and purpose. He has already pressed home three brutal facts about wealth: 1) It will never satisfy the human spirit (5:10) and, even if it could, 2) it is fleeting and uncertain (5:13-14); and at last death will inevitably steal it all away (5:16-17). Now, having spoken of one to whom God has granted both wealth and the ability to enjoy it, the Preacher introduces an opposing ‘evil’ (misfortune). And God is involved in this, too. God gives a man riches in such abundances as to fulfill all his desires, but then deprives him of the ability to enjoy it. That privilege falls to others, to strangers rather than his own children. No explanation is given for the man’s grievous loss. Perhaps he squandered the opportunity to enjoy it while he had it because he was busy trying to get more. Or perhaps it was due to no fault of his own. Time and chance happen to all (9:11). Why does God let such things happen? God’s providence is often quite impenetrable for those of us ‘under the un’. Do they actually occur? Yes. Job comes quickly to mind. He was a righteous man and rich yet God allowed him to lose all his wealth his children and his health. It was an agonizing experience for Job and God never explained to him the reason why. His wealth and health were restored but only after he had learned to trust God whatever his material situation. Perhaps at times such “grievous evils” are a painful remind that from God’s perspective none of those things are the measure of a life enjoyed and well-lived. As Jesus’ parable of the Rich Farmer reminds us it is a dangerous thing to put your confidence in riches (Luke 12:13-21).

(Paul Earnhart, Searching for the Meaning of Life, Page 48-49)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. How would this situation occur where a foreigner consumes what you have earned? (Eccl. 6:1-2)

CHASING AFTER THE WIND

LESSON 6

2. How is a stillborn child better than one who suffers affliction? (Eccl. 6:3-6)

3. What is better than “the wandering of desire”? (Eccl. 6:9)

4. When someone fights against divine Providence what is the outcome?

5. How important is the phrase “under the sun” in Eccl. 6:12? Why does it matter in this context?

VANITY OF WISDOM ALONE

LESSON 7

“In the first six chapters the Preacher has shared with us his search for meaning (1:1-2:24) and observations gleaned during the course of his search (3:1-6:12). He has repeated his conclusions time and again...Life "under the sun" is vanity - 1:2,14; 2:11; Yet there is good that one can do, provided one is blessed by God - 2:24-26; 5:18-20. In the remaining six chapters the Preacher shares his counsel through a mixture of proverbs and narration. He imparts wisdom designed to make the most of life "under the sun". In other words, while life under the sun is "vanity", how then should we live? The first half of chapter seven offers "counsel for better living" with a series of comparisons. For example, honor is better than luxury, your day of death is better than your day of birth, a funeral is better than a party, etc. His estimation of what is better may often sound strange, but it comes from who has learned from both experience as well as inspiration (1-14). The second half of the chapter offers "counsel for balanced living." There are challenging and difficult statements which should be understood in their context, and in the context of the Bible as a whole. It appears the Preacher is mainly warning against extremism, and against the presumption that one can find the answer to every question in life (15-29).

(Mark Copeland, Book of Ecclesiastes, Page 25)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. According to Eccl. 7:1-12, what are better than these? How so?
Precious ointment? _____
Your birthday? _____
Going to house of feasting? _____
Laughter? _____
Hearing the song of fools? _____
End of a thing _____
The proud in spirit _____
2. How is wisdom compared to money in Eccl. 7:11-12? Which one will give life to its possessor? How?

VANITY OF WISDOM ALONE

LESSON 7

3. What truth is revealed about the work of God in Eccl. 7:13? How should we apply that Truth in whatever circumstance we find ourselves with regard to prosperity or adversity? (Eccl. 7:14)
4. Why does the situation described in Eccl. 7:15 cause us to be unsettled or feel like something is not fair? How does this verse setup the discourse to follow in Eccl. 7:16-26?
5. What conclusion does Solomon reach in this chapter as “this only I have found”? How does it help us understand what happens in this life? (Eccl. 7:29)

WISDOM'S LIMITATIONS

LESSON 8

“Ecclesiastes 8 seems to contain a clear unit of thought. Solomon begins by praising wisdom and ends by declaring its limitations in the face of life’s baffling contradictions. His fruitless efforts to rationalize the inequities of life beneath the sun (8:10-14) continue,...The question being posed as the chapter begins is ‘how shall we respond to the unjust crookedness that surrounds us in this present world?’ How are we to endure the constant oppression of weak by the strong, the wickedness that inhabits high places where rulers seem to operate by the mere whim of power? Solomon recognizes that one may be tempted to rise up in rebellion against rulers that not only allow evil, but often instigate it. It is only human to desire some immediate and substantive correction to all this egregious unfairness. To such impulses he counsels prudence in the face of power beyond us but no beyond the power of God. We have neither the ability nor the prerogative to take care of such matters. Sheer Philistine power does not work divine purposes. As James wisely observed long afterward, ‘...the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God’” (James 1:20)...There is no question in the Preacher’s mind that the grievous injustices under the sun have created great misery for its victims, but the wise will know that now is not the time for such matters to be adjudicated (8:5b-6). We know too little and have too little power to accomplish this. Our wisdom cannot penetrate the future and we have no power to control even the day of our death (8:7-8, 16-17). So, what then is the answer? Foremost is to fear and trust the righteous God who knows all things and has the power to bring all things to a righteous end.”
(Paul Earnhart, Searching for the Meaning of Life, Page 66-67)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What does Solomon recommend when dealing with governmental authorities? (Eccl. 8:2-8) Why?
2. How much power do you have to change the government? Why should we obey the governing authorities?

WISDOM'S LIMITATIONS

LESSON 8

3. How is vanity illustrated in various ways in Eccl. 8:10-14?
4. What does Solomon commend in Eccl. 8:15? How did Solomon reach this conclusion?
5. What is impossible for man to find (Eccl. 8:16-17)?

DEATH HAPPENS TO THEM ALL

LESSON 9

The Preacher continues to share counsel gleaned from observations on life made during his search for meaning. He noted that all things come alike to all, it matters not that you are righteous or wicked. On thing that certainly happens to all is death, after which one is soon forgotten and has no share in this life (things done "under the sun"). Should one therefore despair? No, the Preacher again encourages us to live joyfully, especially with the wife of our youth, and to work diligently in what time we have in this life. Once you die, you won't be able to continue your efforts in the grave. This is our portion in life, and God has already accepted our works (1-10). The Preacher also observed that time and chance happens to all, and that evil times come suddenly. The uncertainty of life can be softened with the aid of wisdom, which the Preacher praises as better than strength and the weapons of war. Thus the words of the wise should be heard, even when spoken softly, or coming from a poor man (11-18).
(Mark Copeland, Book of Ecclesiastes, Page 25)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What two observations did Solomon make regarding those who are righteous and those who are wicked? (Eccl. 9:2-3)
2. How is a living dog better than a dead lion? (Eccl. 9:4)
3. What is said of the dead? (Eccl. 9:5-6)

DEATH HAPPENS TO THEM ALL

LESSON 9

4. What does Solomon counsel the living to do? Why? (Eccl. 9:7-10)
5. Solomon says “Time and chance happen to them all”. How does this explain the following scenarios?
- The race is not to the swift _____
- The battle is not to the strong _____
- Bread is not to the wise _____
- Riches not to men of understanding _____
- Favor not to men of skill _____
6. What observations does Solomon make about the value of wisdom? (Eccl. 9:13-18)

WISDOM BETTER THAN FOLLY

LESSON 10

Objectives in Studying This Chapter:

- To compare the harm of folly and the value of wisdom
- To see the impact of folly on one's reputation, the government, and in business

The Preacher continues to share wisdom that can help endure the many vanities in life. This chapter is filled with proverbial statements, in which he first deplors folly and the affect it can have on one's reputation (1-3). The Preacher also describes how folly is often manifested in government, and in one's life and labors. The land suffers when governed by foolish men, and labor is made even more difficult. Yet wisdom can bring success to one's endeavors, and blessings to the land when found in the conduct of those who lead (4-20).

(Mark Copeland, Book of Ecclesiastes, Page 36)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What comparison is used to illustrate how folly ruins the reputation of the wise? (Eccl. 10:1)

2. What evil had the Preacher seen under the sun pertaining to government? (Eccl. 10:5-7)

VALUE OF DILIGENCE IN JOYFUL LIVING

LESSON 11

“Solomon continues his admonitions to wise living, now in the face of life’s uncertainties. As he has frequently reminded us, we cannot know what will come after us (3:22; 6:12; 8:7; 10:14). God’s providence is shrouded and beyond human wisdom to fathom or predict. The race is not always to the swift or the battle to the strong (9:11). In the previous chapter he spoke of the risks that life’s ordinary activities hold (10:8-9). The uncertainty as to the outcome of one’s labors has caused some to avoid all risk by doing nothing. Life at its best is not risk free. All worthy efforts and investments do not always yield their intended results. But doing nothing is a guarantee of failure by default. To drive home the foolishness of such mindless caution, the Preacher gives an imperative call to bold action in spite of so many things being outside our control.” In the latter part of this chapter we see the two themes of wisdom and joy intertwined together. “There are those who see the godly life as one in which the joy has been sucked out in order to find it in the afterlife. Solomon says otherwise: ‘Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun. But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all. Yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.’ Life, when it is sweet and the sun is shining, should be enjoyed, but such good days must be received with the realization that they do not last forever and difficult days, ‘days of darkness’ are ahead (11:7-8). These dark days seem to speak of the debilities of old age and the death to which they lead. Such forces are no friend to life and joy and are seen in the New Testament as a curse and an enemy (Rom. 8:20; 1 Cor. 15:25-26), something which sin has caused God to unleash in the world (Gen. 3:17-19). They are not in the purest sense “natural” to the ultimate divine purpose but are, in and of themselves, vanity and emptiness (11:8b). They will at last be conquered in Christ who can make even the dark days meaningful (2 Cor. 4:16-17; Phil. 1:20-21). As his exhortations are concluding, the wise man addresses himself to the young “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sigh of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgement. (Eccl. 11:9)” (Paul Earnhart, Searching for the Meaning of Life, Page 83-91)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the meaning of “cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days”? (Eccl. 11:1)

VALUE OF DILIGENCE IN JOYFUL LIVING

LESSON 11

2. What two examples are given of things that are inevitable? (Eccl. 11:3)

3. What does the Preacher caution against? (Eccl. 11:4)

4. What two examples illustrate our limited ability to comprehend the ways of God? (Eccl. 11:5)

5. How does the Preacher encourage diligence and benevolence? (Eccl. 11:6)

6. If one is blessed to live many joyful years, what should he still bear in mind? (Eccl. 11:8) How will that affect how one treats others? How will that affect how he will spend his time?

7. What does the Preacher encourage the young man to do? Yet what does the Preacher also encourage him to remember? (Eccl. 11:9)

8. What else does the Preacher counsel the young man to do? Why? (Eccl. 11:10)

CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER

LESSON 12

“The final chapter begins with a continuation of advice directed to the young. They are told to remember God in their youth, before difficult days come in which there will be found little pleasure. Such days are described through a series of illustrations that depict the feebleness of old age and eventual death. When the inevitable happens, the body will decay back to dust, and the spirit will return to God who gave it (1-7). The Preacher brings his "sermon" to a close by restating his theme: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." An epilogue is added that informs the reader of the work the Preacher continued to do after concluding his search for the meaning of life. Because of his wisdom, he still taught the people and sought to set in order many proverbs. He sought to find acceptable and upright words, words of truth. Such words of the wise and scholarly are described as goads and well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. One is to be admonished by these words, yet be aware that there is no end to the making of many books, and much study is wearisome to the flesh (8-12). Finally, we are told the "grand conclusion" of the whole matter. The Preacher ends his search for meaning by concluding that the whole purpose for man's existence is to fear God and keep His commandments. That is because God will bring into judgment everything we have done (13-14).

(Mark Copeland, Book of Ecclesiastes, Page 42)

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. What advice does the Preacher give to the young person? (Eccl. 12:1)
2. What thirteen illustrations are used to depict one growing old and feeble? (Eccl. 12:3-5)

CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER

LESSON 12

3. What four illustrations are used to depict the decaying of the body?
(Eccl. 12:6)

4. What occurs at death as described in Eccl. 12:7?

5. What did the Preacher continue to do? (Eccl. 12:9-10)

6. What does the Preacher offer as the conclusion to his search for meaning and fulfillment in life? (Eccl. 12:13) How did he come to this conclusion?

