

ECCLESIASTES

The Search for Meaning Beyond Trivial Pursuits



MEANING

Bible Search

I'm Feeling Lucky

1	Introducing God training	Psalm 46	19 October
2	Food for thought dinner	Psalm 47	26 October
3	The search for meaning	Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; 2:12-16	2 November
4	The meaning of pleasure	Ecclesiastes 2:1-11	9 November
5	The meaning of work	Ecclesiastes 2:17-26	16 November
6	The meaning of time	Ecclesiastes 3:1-22	23 November
7	The meaning of wealth	Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9	30 November
8	The meaning of death	Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8; 7:1-6	7 December
9	The meaning of life	Ecclesiastes 9:1-12; 12:9-14	14 December

Guide to this study booklet

Where are the questions?

As you look through this study booklet you will find that it's mostly blank. That's because this term we want you and your Bible group leader to be generating most of the questions. In the first few pages of this booklet a number of generic Bible reading tools are outlined, followed by the pre-prepared method. You will notice that all the tools are relatively similar, however each will have a slightly different emphasis and feel. In your groups you may try a few different tools in order to generate lots of good questions of the Bible.



Reviewing the previous Bible study and talk

This term we will be studying the Bible passages before the talk. To maximise the impact of the Bible on our lives spend a good amount of time reviewing the previous Bible study and talk. The most important aspect to review is how to apply last week's passage.



Sermon notes

A place has been made in these booklets to include sermon notes. You could either bring this booklet to church, or paste in your notes from the handout each week.

Bible verses taken from: THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
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Ecclesiastes at a glance

Authorship:

Traditionally Solomon has been accepted as the author of Ecclesiastes, but ultimately the book states that wisdom comes from the “one Shepherd” (12:11), i.e., from God.

Overall theme

“Fear God in order to turn a vain, empty life into a meaningful life which will enjoy God’s gifts”¹

Key Themes

Each week the Bible study will pick up one of the key themes in Ecclesiastes: pleasure, work, time, wealth, death, and life.



The Significance of Jesus:

“The core of New Testament wisdom is Jesus Christ, who not only personified ‘wisdom of God’ (1 Cor 1:24, 30) but who taught people wisdom ‘as one having authority’ (Matt 7:29). Jesus said to the Jews, ‘You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have *life*’ (John 5:39-40). We should not just preach the Old Testament scriptures but link them to Christ so that people can have life.”²

We know that the Old Testament should point us to Jesus, but if you were to read Ecclesiastes you may soon discover that this is a book that has absolutely no references to Jesus. This does not mean that our studies will be Jesus-less. Jesus may enter into our studies a number of ways by:

1. joining the dots along the storyline of the Bible,
2. people foreshadowing the role or function of Jesus Eg. Eccl. 12:11 – the “one shepherd”.
3. parallels between the Old Testament teachings and Jesus’ teachings
4. investigating themes
5. contrasting how we view life now with the knowledge and hope brought about by Jesus.

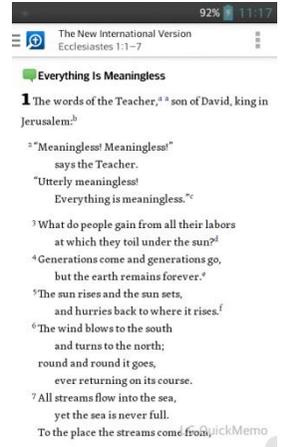
¹ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for expository sermons*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2010, p. 22

² Greidanus, p. 24

Using an online collaborative tool

As Dave has been preaching through the Bible in 10, he noticed that whenever he spoke about something nerdy, many people in our church looked up and paid more attention. Well, this might be something for the nerds, or maybe it's for the cool kids on the block.

These days, not only do we have Bibles apps on our phone, but many of them have a feature to share common notes with others. The easiest of these to use is faithlife.com. Faithlife also interacts with biblia and logos. The downside of using Faithlife is that the NIV will cost around \$10, but the ESV, Holman and Faithlife study Bible are all free. Having a variety of versions in our Bible studies often makes our studies richer, so even if you don't pay for the NIV it still makes a great Bible study tool.



Whenever someone writes a comment on a verse in a community note, a little green tag appears in the text of your Bible app on your phone, on Biblia online or in your Logos Bible software. When you click on the green tag you will see the comment, and have the chance to reply or add your own comment.

As we study Ecclesiastes I'm wondering if tools such as Faithlife will enable us to keep on interacting with each other during the week as we grapple with Ecclesiastes. This extra interaction may also be helpful for Bible group leaders as they prepare for studies.

There's no pressure to join the group, but if you are interested in this extra interaction with the Bible and others you can sign up at: <http://faithlife.com/stromlo>



Swedish Method

More information can be found in at::

<http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2009/01/the-swedish-method/>



A light bulb: This should be something that ‘shines’ from the passage— whatever impacts most, or draws attention.



A question mark: Anything that is difficult to understand in the text, or a question the reader would like to ask the writer of the passage or the Lord.



An arrow: A personal application for the reader’s life



Pray

IONA Method

The IONA method from the book “Leading Better Bible Studies” (p98-99).

“This method is for groups with up to ten members who have already developed good skills at observation. It is similar to the Swedish method, but does not provide a framework for observation. The leader must be properly prepared to ensure the passage is fully understood. The passage to be studied is reproduced on sheets of paper to allow notes to be made and questions to be recorded.

The leader distributes the text to members of the group and asks them to read silently for up to ten minutes, considering what significance the passage appears to have. People can also be invited to note any unclear or perplexing parts of the passage.

After the time for reading, the leader invites each member in succession to share, briefly, items of significance arising from the passage. Each person is given opportunity to speak or not to speak as desired and there should be an encouraging climate to promote this. The whole group could keep a brief record of comments or questions to facilitate later discussion (keeping track of verse numbers). It is important that all members have an opportunity to comment on the passage before general discussion begins.

After these individual contributions have been received, general discussion can proceed, guided by the comments and questions raised. At the conclusion of the study time, it is helpful for the leader or another group member to sum up the passage, checking that the three basic questions have been answered:

1. What does the text say?
2. What does the text mean?
3. How do we respond to the text?

COMA method

1. Read the passage aloud
2. Ask the **Context** questions of the text:
 - a. What sort of writing is this? (A letter, a narrative, a poem?)
 - b. Are there any clues about the circumstances under which it is written?
 - c. What has happened so far?
3. Ask some **Observation** questions of the text:
 - a. Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text?
 - b. What is the main point or points?
 - c. What surprises are there?
 - d. What are the key words? What words or ideas are repeated?
4. Ask some **Meaning** questions of the text:
 - a. How does this text relate to other parts of the book?
 - b. How does this passage relate to Jesus?
 - c. What does this teach us about God?
 - d. How could we sum up the meaning of this passage in our own words?
5. Ask some **Application** questions of the text:
 - a. How does this passage challenge (or confirm) my understanding?
 - b. Is there some attitude I need to change?
 - c. How does this passage call on me to change the way I live?
6. Pray together about what you have learned

You can download COMA templates at:

<http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/Samples/otobr/OTOBR-Sheets-for-copying-A4.pdf>



STICK Method

What is **Surprising**

Comprehension

What does it say?

What are the key points in the passage?

What is **Thought provoking**

Understanding

What is it talking about?

What do some of the difficult words mean?

How do key ideas link together?

Integration

How does this fit with:

- What we know already?
- Our understanding of Christianity?

How does it **Inspire** and **Challenge** us

Application

What does it mean for me?

How does this affect our view on:

- Life?
- Work?
- Church?
- Ministry?

K – rhymes with Pray

“Spice it up”, by Fighting Words Defence Christian Network (p13, 59).

Pre-prepared Method

Mostly taken from Growth Groups by Colin Marshall

Step 1: Understanding the passage

As you endeavor to write a study you may find using one or a combination of the generic bible study tools a great starting point in understanding the passage. Alternatively, Colin Marshall has written a series of questions on Pages 33-35 in Growth groups which are listed below:

Overview of the book

- What are the main themes?
- What words or phrases are repeated?
- What do I learn about the author and recipients?
- What appears to be the author's purpose writing this book?

Overview of the passage

- What stands out?
- What do I find difficult to understand?
- What key words are repeated?
- What ideas are repeated?
- Are there specific commands to be obeyed?
- Are there warnings to heed?
- What did I learn about the writer or recipients?
- Who are the main characters?
- When and where does this take place?
- From my first impressions, what are the main ideas in this passage?
- What ideas are hard to understand?
- What words are unfamiliar?
- Why has the author written in this way?
- What other difficulties may the group have understanding this passage?

Background

- Am I given any historical details in the passage?
- Does the passage seem to refer to customs which we may not understand today?
- Do any of these background details seem essential to understanding the passage?

Flow of the passage

- How does this passage contribute to the overall message and purpose of the book?
- What is its immediate context?
- What is the flow of the passage?
- Does the author use repeated words or ideas?
- How are conjunctions used? Eg. but, then, therefore, though, as, because, in order, so that, and, however, if... then, that, when, so, since, yet, while, for, etc. HINT: The ESV is good at translating conjunctions from the original languages as compared to other versions.³

The passage in biblical context

- Is the passage quoted elsewhere in the Bible, or does it quote another Bible passage?
- What major biblical themes are dealt with in this passage?
- Does the passage contain fulfilment of promises or contain promises which are fulfilled later?
- Where does the passage fit into God's saving work in history:

Central truth and supporting truths

- Central truth - What is the main point of the passage?
- Supporting truths - How does the writer establish this main point? (use verse references to support this)

Step 2: Applying the passage

The primary reason why we read the Bible is to apply it to ourselves. Karen and Rod Morris in their book "Leading Better Bible Studies" have a number of hints in applying the passage.

They suggest a number of simple questions to help think through the application:

- Is there a command for me to obey?
- Is there a reason for thanksgiving, worship or praise?
- What does this passage teach me about God?
- What does this passage teach me about Jesus?
- How does this passage fit with what I already know?
- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a sin to avoid or confess?

³ This point has been modified from Growth Groups.

- What does this passage teach me about myself?
- What does this passage teach me about others?

The really important question to ask is:

- What will you do in response to this passage?
- How and when will you do it?
- What will help you do it?
- What will hinder you?

The Morris' also draw our attention to a horizontal and vertical dimension to our application.

“Jesus said the great commandment is ‘you shall love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31a). The goal of Bible study is to grow in our relationship with God the Father, with our Lord Jesus Christ, and with those around us.” (p63-64)

Step 3: Working out Teaching Goals

From Growth groups pp. 37-38.

- Write down the central truth in a clear simple sentence
- Write down the supporting truths you want to focus on
- Write down the applications that most relate to the central truth and are most relevant to your group.

Step 4: packaging the study

Generally most Bible studies follow a set format of:

1. Launching question
2. Observation questions
3. Interpretation questions
4. Correlation questions
5. Summary questions
6. Application questions

Not all studies will contain each of these types of questions. More information about question types can be found in Growth Groups pp. 38-39.

Week 3 – The Search for Meaning

Ecclesiastes 1:1–18 (NIV)

Everything Is Meaningless

1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

² “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.

“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

³ What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?

⁴ Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

⁷ All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

⁸ All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

⁹ What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

¹¹ No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

Wisdom Is Meaningless

¹² I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

¹⁶ I said to myself, “Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

Ecclesiastes 2:12–16 (NIV)

Wisdom and Folly Are Meaningless

¹² Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly.

What more can the king’s successor do than what has already been done?

¹³ I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.

¹⁴ The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.

¹⁵ Then I said to myself, “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said to myself, “This too is meaningless.”

¹⁶ For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!



Study on Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; 2:12-16



Viewing Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; 2:12-16 in light of the resurrection

1 Corinthians 1:18–31 (NIV)

Christ Crucified Is God's Power and Wisdom

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

²⁶ Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Matthew 12:42 (NIV)

⁴² The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

Study notes:



Sermon notes on Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; 2:12-16

Week 4 – The Meaning of Pleasure



Q1. Review last week's study and talk

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 (NIV)

Pleasures Are Meaningless

I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. ²“Laughter,” I said, “is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?” ³I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.

⁴I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. ⁵I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁶I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. ⁷I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. ⁸I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart. ⁹I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

¹⁰I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;

I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my labor,

and this was the reward for all my toil.

¹¹Yet 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.



Study on Ecclesiastes 2:1-11



Viewing Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 in light of the resurrection

1 Timothy 4:1–5 (NIV)

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ²Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

Study notes:



Sermon notes on Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Week 5 – The Meaning of Work



Q1. Review last week's study and talk

Ecclesiastes 2:17–26 (NIV)

Toil Is Meaningless

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. ¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²² What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ²³ All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

²⁴ A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶ To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.



Study on Ecclesiastes 2:17-26



Viewing Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 in light of the resurrection

Luke 12:13–34 (NIV)

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.

¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

²¹ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”

²⁷ “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.

³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

John 6:27–29 (NIV)

²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

Study notes:



Sermon notes on Ecclesiastes 2:17-26

Week 6 – The Meaning of Time



Q1. Review last week's study and talk

Ecclesiastes 3:1–22 (NIV)

A Time for Everything

3 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

² a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
³ a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to
refrain from embracing,
⁶ a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
⁸ a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race.
¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no
one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better
for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink,
and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will
endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people
will fear him.

¹⁵ Whatever is has already been,
and what will be has been before;
and God will call the past to account.

¹⁶ And I saw something else under the sun:
In the place of judgment—wickedness was there,
in the place of justice—wickedness was there.

¹⁷ I said to myself,
“God will bring into judgment
both the righteous and the wicked,
for there will be a time for every activity,
a time to judge every deed.”

¹⁸ I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the
animals. ¹⁹ Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them
both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over
animals. Everything is meaningless. ²⁰ All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all
return. ²¹ Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into
the earth?”

²² So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their
lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?



Study on Ecclesiastes 3:1-22



Viewing Ecclesiastes 3:1-22 in light of the resurrection

Ephesians 1:3–14 (NIV)

Praise for Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

Matthew 16:1–4 (NIV)

The Demand for a Sign

16 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

² He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ ³ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.

Mark 1:14–15 (NIV)

Jesus Announces the Good News

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Study notes:



Sermon notes on Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Week 7 – The Meaning of Wealth



Q1. Review last week's study and talk

Ecclesiastes 5:8–6:9 (NIV)

⁸ If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. ⁹ The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.

¹⁰ Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.

¹¹ As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?

¹² The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.

¹³ I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners,

¹⁴ or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit.

¹⁵ Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands.

¹⁶ This too is a grievous evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind?

¹⁷ All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.

¹⁸ This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. ²⁰ They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

⁶ I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: ² God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

³ A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴ It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. ⁵ Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man—⁶ even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

⁷ Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.

⁸ What advantage have the wise over fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others?

⁹ Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Study on Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9





Viewing Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9 in light of the resurrection

Matthew 6:19–34 (NIV)

Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Do Not Worry

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

1 Timothy 6:6–10 (NIV)

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Philippians 4:12–13 (NIV)

¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Study notes:



Sermon notes on Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:9

Week 8 – The Meaning of Death



Q1. Review last week's study and talk

Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8 (NIV)

Remember Your Creator While Young

⁷ Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

⁸ However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.

⁹ You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

¹⁰ So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

12 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say,

“I find no pleasure in them” —

² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;

³ when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;

⁴ when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;

⁵ when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

⁶ Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well,

⁷ and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

⁸ “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”

Ecclesiastes 7:1–6 (NIV)

Wisdom

7 A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.

² It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.

³ Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.

⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

⁵ It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools.

⁶ Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless.



Study on Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8, 7:1–6



Viewing Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8, 7:1–6 in light of the resurrection

Romans 5:12–17 (NIV)

Death Through Adam, Life Through Christ

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NIV)

Awaiting the New Body

5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

Philippians 1:20–23 (NIV)

²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

Romans 8:22–23 (NIV)

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Study notes:



Sermon notes on Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8, 7:1–6

Week 9 – The Meaning of Life



Q1. Review last week's study and talk

Ecclesiastes 9:1–12 (NIV)

⁹ So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. ² All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.

³ This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. ⁴ Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

⁵ For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten.

⁶ Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

⁷ Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸ Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

Ecclesiastes 12:9–14 (NIV)

⁹ Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. ¹² Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body.

¹³ Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.



Study on Ecclesiastes 9:1-12; 12:9-14



Viewing Ecclesiastes 9:1-12; 12:9-14 in light of the resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12–26 (NIV)

The Resurrection of the Dead

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1 Corinthians 15:32b (NIV)

^{32b} If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Study notes:



Sermon notes on Ecclesiastes 9:1-12; 12:9-14