

Ecclesiastes

An Old Testament Study

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Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Fes-to Kivengere, an leading African Christian, told of his experience as follows: My life was like a spinning top. I worked, I played, I worked. The cycle went around, and the more humdrum it became, the speedier it got - spinning like atop. You know the problem of a spinning top - it has a very big head and a very thin base. It can't stand up unless it's spinning. And a top just spins around itself - that's all, it goes no where. My life was exactly like that. I was just running faster and faster, thinking that the faster I ran the more lively life would become. How wrong! Then something wonderful happened to that African leader. A friend who was a new Christian told him the story of salvation and how his sins could be forgiven. Kivengere said, That day God smashed my heart open and introduced me to the living reality of Jesus Christ. My top stopped spinning, and He gave me direction that lasts through eternity. A spinning top has no direction.

We are going to begin a study of the OT book of Ecclesiastes. It is book that defies human authorship alone. It is unusual and unique. It is

not the kind of book man would write if he could or could write if he would. It tells the story of Solomon, a spinning top.

The uniqueness of this book is found in the parallel tracks upon which the story unfolds.

The first track is that of wisdom and both secular wisdom is dealt with along with God's divine wisdom. At time the passages almost seem to contradict one another as they develop these two spheres of wisdom.

The second track is that of man's utter despair and man's tremendous hope in God his creator. The book looks at life and declared despair. It seems to shout out Is this all there is? And yet there is also a faith filled perspective that tells us that life is a gift of God and can be lived with Joy.

Why these contradictions, why this approach? Well, the answered is found in the author, Solomon.

Solomon writes this book towards the end of his life looking back about fifteen to twenty years, from the time he was 40 to a time near his death at 60. He evaluates what he went through as he strayed from the truth of God.

So while at one time we read of the hopelessness he sensed at other times we read of the hope he now knows he could have had.

THE SAD COMMENTARY THAT ENDS THIS BOOK IS THAT all the hopelessness was unnecessary. And so this book comes to us and teaches us that we do not have to join in the chorus of those who would say Vanity of vanities, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

NOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BOOK AND SENSE THE full weight of its arguments we need to understand the writer.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON.

The reign of Solomon sees Israel in its golden age. All the tribes of Israel were united. Peace and prosperity were the rule rather than the exception in the land. But, nothing ever remains the same, it would not last.

Solomon reigned for forty years (from 970 to 930 BC). He was the hand picked and divinely picked successor to his father David. He began his reign

at the age of 20 and ended it at the age of 60. At the end of his 40 year reign the nation divided, and remained divided until its destruction. The world will not know a united Israel again until the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

Discussion of 1 Kings 3

1 Kings 3 begins the reign of Solomon.

1 Kings 3:1 Then Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem.

After which time he built a palace for her (I Kings 7:8)

Solomon is going to end up with a lot of wives, but this particular marriage is legitimate.

Genesis 24:3 prohibited Israelites from marry Canaanites, but there was no prohibition in marrying Egyptians.

Joseph was married to an Egyptian, the daughter of a priest of the sun worship (Genesis 46:20)

When Israel came out of bondage in Egypt, many Egyptians came with them also. Many men had married Egyptian women. So there is no problem in this marriage.

We do see that there is going to be a very different approach during the reign of Solomon. David conquered his adversaries by force and war, Solomon used romance and marriage.

1 Kings 3:2. The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days.

Since the days of the Judges, Israel had adopted the Canaanite custom of offering sacrifices on high hills or plateaus. Although this was prohibited in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 17:3-4), it was common practiced by the time of Solomon.

1 Kings 3:3 Now Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

As Solomon begins his reign he is said to walk in the statutes of his father. This was, for the most part, true for twenty years of his 40 year reign.

But here we see one of the small problem: He, along with the people sacrificed and burned incense of the high places.

1 Kings 3:4. The most important of these High places was at Gibeon, about five miles north of Jerusalem.

It is here that Solomon chose to offer the 1000 burnt offerings.

And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

1 Kings 3:5. It was also at Gibeon that the Lord revealed himself to Solomon in a dream at night.

While there appears to be a cause-effect relationship between the sacrifices and God appearing to Solomon, there need not be.

REMEMBER: God is not impressed with the offering, he is only impressed by the attitude.

1 Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said (to Saul), Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

Psalm 51:16-17 For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

Because of Solomon's heart God came to him at night as said, ask what you will, and I will do it.

1 Kings 3:6. Solomon's first thoughts are about his father.

Then Solomon said, Thou hast shown great lovingkindness to Thy servant David my father, according as he walked before Thee in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward Thee; and Thou hast reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that Thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

1 Kings 3:7-9

The request for wisdom. [Compare 2 Chronicles 1:7-13]

And understanding heart to judge the people, to discern between good and evil.

Solomon already proved that he was very wise.

Refer to the scheme of Adonijah in 1 Kings 2:13-25. Although Bathsheba did not see the evil plot developing, Solomon did. Bathsheba may have been blinded by jealousy over Abishag who cared for David in his dying days.

This was wisdom acquired from the teaching of the Word by his father and mother and by observation of his father as King of Israel.

But while Solomon showed that he was wise, he asks for even more wisdom.

Solomon put the good of the people above his own personal interests.

Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

I Kings 3:10-15

The promise of God to fulfill the request and more.

I Kings 3:10. God was pleased with the request. We can please God with our prayers

I Kings 3:11. The things he could have asked for and did not.

I Kings 3:12. His wisdom was unique, no one before or after. He was the wisest man who ever lived. We can only see the Lord himself being superior in wisdom.

I Kings 3:13. But God is going to do more. Riches and Honor

I Kings 3:14. A promise of long life, that was not realized. Solomon died at sixty years of age. Ten years short of a full age.

I Kings 3:15. As is often the case, a blessing from God now draws the one being blessed into a closer relationship with God.

Solomon goes from the high place to the right place, the Tabernacle.

Then Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and made peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

Solomon was not a priest so this means he stood in the fore court of the Tabernacle.

A burnt offering was an offering of dedication.

The feast made for the servants looks at blessing by association.

So we see that Solomon started off great...but let's jump ahead 20 years.

I Kings 11:9-10 Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded.

Something went wrong. The one who started out so well, now finds himself at the wrong end of God's anger. What happened in these twenty years to cause such a change. To go from success to failure?

Four things happened.

1. He loved God but worshipped God in the wrong way.

I Kings 3:3 Now Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

2. He took wives of the Caananites, a practice prohibited by God.

I Kings 11:1-4

Deuteronomy 17:15-17 You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, You shall never again return that way. Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

Notice the Prohibitions.

- 1) Not multiply horses
- 2) Not go back to Egypt to multiply horses
- 3) Not multiply wives (is 700 wives and 300 concubines multiplication or what?)
- 4) Not increase in gold and silver for himself

3. He also had a fatal flaw of setting aside the work of God in order to complete his own agenda. His priorities were misplaced.

II Chronicles 3:1-2 Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And he began to build on the second

day in the second month of the fourth year of his reign.

Also compare that he took seven years to build the Temple but took thirteen years to build his own palace.

I Kings 6:38 compare I Kings 7:1 compare I Kings 9:10

I Kings 6:38 And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished throughout all its parts and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it.

I Kings 7:1 Now Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.

I Kings 9:10 And it came about at the end of twenty years in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the Lord and the king's house.

So he started the Temple in the 4th year of his reign and it took seven years to complete.

His own palace took thirteen years and both were finished in the twentieth year of his reign.

Hence, from year seven to year eleven (four years) he took workers away from the Temple project to build his own house. This was a distraction which slowed down the building of the Temple.

4. And then we have the fatal flaw of greed:

Solomon was the wealthiest man in the world. He did not have to get into the business of being a chariot dealer and these chariots would eventually be used against Israel.

Read 2 Chronicles 1:14-17

And Solomon amassed chariots and horsemen. He had 1,400 chariots, and 12,000 horsemen, and he stationed them in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem. And the king made silver and gold as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamores in the lowland. And Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue; the king's traders procured them from Kue for a price. And they imported chariots from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver apiece, and horses for 150 apiece, and by the same means they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

Let's see some of Solomon's other forms of greed.

I Kings 9:11-14. Solomon cheated Hiram yet Hiram was gracious to Solomon.

I Kings 9:26-28. That is 16 tons of gold

I Kings 10:1-10. The gift of the Queen of Sheba was 4.5 tons of gold, just a little trinket.

I Kings 10:14. In one year alone, 25.5 tons of Gold

I Kings 10:16. Shields of gold are very impractical in battle

I Kings 10:22. He had so much gold that silver was devalued

I Kings 10:18. An ivory throne but covered the ivory with gold

I Kings 10:22. More gold, silver, ivory and apes and peacocks (nasty animals, nothing like a loyal dog).

I Kings 10:28-29. Horses and chariots from Egypt

Deuteronomy 17:15-17 You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, You shall never again return that way. Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

This is what went wrong. Solomon carried with himself four fatal flaws that he would not abandon for the greater promises of the plan of God.

He did many things God's way but there was some leaven in the loaf of his service as King. And eventually this leaven brought him down.

Remember the added promise of I Kings 3, the thing that Solomon did not ask for but that God promised him?

I Kings 3:14 And if you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.

Psalm 90:10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years. away.

Now it doesn't take a lot of math to take Solomon's age at the beginning of his reign, age

twenty, add it to a 40 year reign, and come up with 60 years, at the time of his death.

And he was promised a prolonging of days, but that did not occur did it? And the last twenty years of his reign, the major portion of the last twenty of his life are lived out in the contradictions of the book of Ecclesiastes..

Ecclesiastes, Chapter One

Ecclesiastes 1:1

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Sounds impressive. A communicator of the Word (QO-HE-LET)

Refers to the one who brings the assembly together; which the communicator does. It is a fem. participle which looks at the actions being a response, in this case to God's leading.

In the Hiphil stem it means to assemble and I think we can apply that to the work that will follow. The communicator assembles information and comes to a conclusion.

He is the son of David, and king in Jerusalem.

With those credentials you might expect to hear a glowing testimony of a man's walk with God, but then there is verse two.

Ecclesiastes 1:2

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

The word VANITY is the Hebrew HE-BEL and in its simplest form looks at breath, wind, that which is empty and worthless. It is used three ways in the OT

1. For the false gods worshipped by the people. They were nothing, empty.
2. For the vain labor of man, working hard, ending up with nothing
3. As with its 36 uses in Ecclesiastes it views the shortness of life and those things that man so earnestly seeks after, yet are like trying to catch the wind.

This verse is blunt, it is intended to shock the reader out of complacency. It is designed to rock the boat, shake the tree, and it pull the chain. To stir us up in our often secular humanistic view point of the value of life.

And it does just that...

Now what has caused Solomon, the wealthiest most powerful ruler of his time and the times of others to come to such a miserable conclusion of life.

I read these words and get a picture of a middle aged man sitting on a bar stool, crying in his beer, and uttering over and over again...emptiness, emptiness, all is emptiness.

Now considering who said this, and considering who he was and that he is just about 40 years old, we have to ask what has brought Solomon to this point.

Principles.

1. Solomon lived life doing things his own way
2. He knew what God wanted but thought he had better and more realistic ideas
3. He failed to deal with his disobedience and sin
4. Yet during the first 20 years of his reign God was gracious, full of mercy, and patient
5. But then, as mid life approached, something happened that became a catalyst that would bring Solomon to the edge of revisionism and despair.
6. This perhaps was the first time he could not do what he wanted to do, he could not have what he wanted to have, he could not, by wealth or force or position, have his hearts desires...for the first time, he failed.
7. And the one thing he wanted that he could not have is the subject of the Song of Solomon, the Shulamite woman. Who chose her shepherd over the king.

Listen to the shepherd's words to his beloved.

Song 1:15 How beautiful you are, my darling,
How beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves.

And her words to him.

Song 1:16 How handsome you are, my beloved,
And so pleasant! Indeed, our couch is luxuriant!
The beams of our houses are cedars, Our
rafters, cyresses.

Then listen to Solomon's dismal conclusion.

Song 8:6-7 For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy is as severe as Sheol...Many waters
cannot quench love, Nor will rivers overflow it; If

a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, It would be utterly despised.

He would have given all his wealth for her, but she said no. And that was the catalyst, that was what pushed him over the edge and finds him sitting in despair writing Emptiness of emptiness, all is emptiness.

Principles.

1. God loves us and wants us to see the value of dependence upon Him and Him alone
2. God is long suffering and patient with us. His mercy is great in that at times it holds back even the discipline we deserve.
3. God will allow us to fail, allow us to lose, allow us to not get what we want in order to bring us to Him.
4. Often our drive and determination, our youthful ambition, our ability and self resolve will allow us to obtain even what is not in God's best interests or our best interests.
5. But then comes a time in God's mercy and love and grace, where He says NO. And we fail.
6. If a man's significance in life is built around his ability and achievements, this failure will result in a crisis.
7. And this is where Solomon is, at mid life, 40 years old, having faced failure, and instead of turning to God he turns to a pursuit of significance in the secular.

But now, at the end of his life he looks back on that pursuit for significance and proclaims, emptiness...all is emptiness.

As Solomon examines wisdom he does so on both the track of the secular and the track of the Spiritual.

Solomon takes a look at life around him, at his own life a part from fellowship with God, and sees three elements at work. These elements of life intrude upon man's secular wisdom. These three elements assume that God is irrelevant, that God is out of picture. And with that secular approach to life these three things will encompass man.

1. The first is death: Death is a rather serious problem for the human race. The person who puts all his eggs in life's earthly basket will soon discover that life is going to end. In our youth we may think we will live forever but

then, maybe around 40 or so, we recognize that are days are numbered.

Eccl. 2:16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as it also is with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!

2. The second intrusion upon secular wisdom is evil: Evil is present in the world. It can be found anywhere. We see injustice where we should see justice, we oppression when we see compassion, we observe greed and exploitation rather than benevolence. Social systems that are intended to help, end up hurting.

Eccl. 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

3. The third element is chance: Solomon explodes the myth that man can master their own welfare much less their own fate. Time and chance will eventually get to everyone. A part from God every decision is a roll of the dice which will at times make the player the loser.

Eccl. 9:12 Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

Too many other forces, greater than man's resolve and determination, are at work in the world for man to not experience the intrusion of chance, what some might call just plain bad luck, into his secular wisdom.

So Solomon meets man on man's level. He assumes God is not in the picture and from his wisdom, but perhaps more from his experience, he sees that life even at its best is open to the intrusions of death, evil, and chance.

It is no wonder that he proclaims even at the end of the story: Vanity or vanities, emptiness of emptiness, all is vanity, all is empty.

Eccl. 1:2 and Eccl. 12:8 is the somber declaration of the meaningless of life. These are the bookends of despair.

BUT THAT IS NOT ALL THERE IS. Solomon also explores the track of divine or spiritual wisdom

and in that he declares that life has meaning, it is worth living, and can be lived with Joy. In his faith filled perspective, Solomon is going to see life in light of five attributes of God.

1. God is the creator and there is meaning to His creative power.

Eccl. 11:5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

God creates, we cannot change it, but we can enjoy it.

2. God is the Sovereign: He is in charge, not us. He is the one who determines what we shall both endure and enjoy. And His determination is perfect.

Eccl. 2:26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

God is in charge and so He can also protect those who love Him.

Eccl. 9:1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God.

3. God is Wisdom: He is unsearchable by man.

Eccl. 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

The wisest person in the world (and that was Solomon) will not be able to understand the works and wisdom of God.

Eccl. 8:17 I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, I know, he cannot discover.

4. God is the righteous One: And his righteousness means that He will judge the wicked.

Eccl. 3:17 I said to myself, God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.

We are to live knowing that there is an absolute standard of righteousness and that standard is God himself. If we want to be righteous we must be rightly related to Him.

Eccl. 9:1 For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God.

5. And God is Love: And because He is perfect love he can be perfectly trusted.

Solomon explains the love of God like no one else in the Bible. He looks at life, its suffering, its hardships, its evil, its death, all the things we see in life that would make us think God is not a God of love but then he makes the point. That in spite of what we see we have amore sure promise, a more sure fact, and that is that God loves us, that is just the kind of God He is. And His love is greater than all the hate and hurt we face in the world.

The conclusion is these two tracks of wisdom is a question: How do you want to live? Do you want to live separated from God and His power, might, wisdom, and love and in doing so live at the hands of death, evil, and chance? Or do you want to live in God's plan.

Eccl. 12:13-14 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this {applies to} every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

That is where this book will bring us but not before it pulls out from under us all the props we might use to seek security and significance in the world and through secular wisdom.

Introduction to Ecclesiastes 1:3-8

If Life is supposed to be so great, why does my life seem so pointless?

After the shock of verse 2 begins to wear off, Solomon explains why he made such a blunt statement.

When man, using secular wisdom which leaves out God, tries to find significance to life, he will eventually end up echoing the haunting chorus of this book, emptiness...And now Solomon shows us why in four areas of life:

Work, nature, the senses, and history.

Ecclesiastes 1:3-4

Some people, especially men in the growth-productive years of life (late 20s to 40s) see their work, their profession, vocation, as their significance in life. They define their life around what they do rather than what they are.

What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever.

Illustration: How often do we hear of someone who has worked for company only to end up having the company close their door. Or people who have great plans only to end up with nothing.

Every year thousands of small business begin and end. And every business is started with high hopes of success and profit. No one begins a business planing on failure. Yet they do fail, by the thousands.

Solomon observed this and noted that no one can build their significance on something as unstable as their job . . .

The word ADVANTAGE is the Hebrew YITH- RON and is a word taken from the ancient business world. It means money gained from work rendered.

He asks: When I have done my work, what is left?

I think we can all relate that that question. The money run out before the end of the month, the dollar doesn't go as far as it used to.

So it is a fair question and forces us to see that there is no stable security or lasting significance in the money we make or the jobs we hold.

The word for WORK is the Hebrew 'AMAL and looks at hard work. No easy job is being described here but the hard toil that has been the lot of man since the fall.

Genesis 3:17-19 Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you shall eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.

Then in v 4 the solemn reminder is given: A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever.

Our generation, with all its achievements, will pass, and another one will come, and yet the earth, the dirt in which man is cursed to toil, outlasts him.

So we go to our jobs, we earn our wage, we pay taxes, social security, health insurance, we fight inflation, and what do we have left? Maybe something, maybe a little, maybe not enough.

In Ecclesiastes 2:11 Solomon has more to say of work: Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

Job had it right when he said naked came I into the world and naked will I leave it.

So what is the point...why even bother.

But remember what Solomon is doing. he is meeting the secular man on the secular level and apart from significance in God there is no point in all this.

And apart from significance in God there will be great disappointment waiting for the man or woman who tries to find their significance, their identity, their meaning for existence in what they do.

But lets step away from this secular wisdom for a moment and consider what work, our jobs, can be in Christ.

Four Objectives For our Work.

1. We work to bring glory to God.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

I Corinthians 10:31 speaks of whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

God can use us in the work place to bring glory to himself, through us.

2. Secondly, perhaps the most obvious, we work to gain a livelihood.

Man, under the curse, is destined to work. And work we will. Paul even told these who refused to work that they would not have a livelihood.

II Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.

3. Thirdly, we work to have the resources to share with others.

Ephesians 4:28 Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.

To fulfill that objective we must first set aside greed. We live in society that uses man's greed as a motive to sell and to prosper.

We have to fight greed, it is all around us. And one way to fight it is to give, not letting your right hand know what the left hand is doing. I know one man who is rather successful and confided in me that he had a problem with greed, it was an easy trap of sin for him to fall into. He fought it by anonymously giving twenty, thirty buck to people who he sensed had a need.

There is nothing wrong with wealth, there is everything wrong with greed.

4. Fourth, an objective of working is to witness for Christ.

Every Christian is in full time service for Jesus Christ. Wherever we are, whatever we do as we do it unto the Lord, with an attitude of thanksgiving, we can be witness for him.

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said As you are going, make disciples of men...going where, to work, to your job, to the office, the factory.

We have men in this congregation who meet with others for prayer during lunch times, for Bible study during breaks, they are fulfilling this objective and their work means something.

And when our work means something according to these objectives, it means something now and forever.

So how can we avoid the despair of these verses.

Principles.

1. If your job means everything to you, it means too much to you.
2. You cannot define yourself by what you do, but rather by who your are.
3. Who you are is determined by your relationship to the Lord not by your relationship to your job or profession.

4. Our vocation is that of being a believer, a servant of the most high God, a child of the king.
5. Our avocation is the work we do to earn money so we can sustain our lives.
6. We can not build our significance upon our jobs, they are unsure and unstable.
7. The house of our significance must be built upon the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, not the shifting sands of human endeavor.

Ecclesiastes 1:5-7

Solomon turns from the unstableness of the workplace to the stability and consistency of nature.

Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there again. Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns. All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again.

Armed only with secular wisdom man would see the cycles of nature and as pointless repetition.

There is a real HO HUM in these words...the sun goes up and it goes down, again and again, and on and on with his observations of nature.

And that is the secular view of nature, it just keeps going and going.

But the believer, the one who lives by faith in God, sees this as the very handiwork of God.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

Some today find significance in trying to save the world. They are out hugging trees and communing with nature, worried about global warming and holes in the ozone. Both which have been going on for millennia.

And what is it all for. The cycles of nature continue and while we conserve what God has given us, life on this earth will not end even one second prior to God's perfect time.

So for the believer, there is no significance or security in nature. But there is an appreciation of God through nature.

Ecclesiastes 1:8

As Solomon continues to probe the ground of secular wisdom he comes upon the senses. We enjoy having our senses stimulated. We enjoy hearing a favorite song or seeing a beautiful sight. Seeing and hearing, two very important senses...but look at what Solomon observed about seeing and hearing.

All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing.

That is the problem with our senses, we never can really fill them up, we always come up short. There is always something lacking.

A few years ago there was a Country Song in which the vocalist sang of the events of life. young love, pleasure, marriage, children, even life and death.

At the end of each stanza she would lament her hopelessness...if that is all there is let's just get drunk and have a good time.

Principle: You will never be able to fill yourself up through the senses. Feed them all you want, see everything and hear everything, and you will still end up with a god shaped whole in your soul.

God never intended man to live without him.

Illustration: Picture of a piece of chocolate pie. It was not the real thing.

Man will try to fill up that god shaped whole with something, anything. But it is trying to fill the stomach with a picture.

Man says: If I can feel secure and significant in what I do, in my accomplishments, in what I perceive, in my place in the world, everything will be fine.

But it will not be fine...all things are wearisome.

The Hebrew word for WEARY is YA-GEA and it means to get physically worn out from labor.

Here the LABOR is trying to understand through the senses, and that will make anyone very tired.

But God cannot be perceived through the senses, it takes FAITH. And then what is faith?

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is

seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Ecclesiastes 1:9-11

That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages which were before us. There is no remembrance of earlier things; And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later {still.}

Work is not stable, nature is boring, the senses cannot be filled, okay, how about history. The living past, the reality that has already occurred.

Solomon uses that phrase "under the sun" thirty times in Ecclesiastes to refer to things that are earthbound, the observable world that discounts the sovereignty of God.

He talks of things that are important to man who believes that what is here is all there is.

That is what Solomon is saying. We invent, we discover, we develop. But most often we are just figuring out how to build a better mouse trap.

The French have a proverb that goes: The more things change the more things stay the same.

And more than one historian has observed that we learn from history that we learn nothing from history.

Perhaps because of our secular arrogance, we think that we can change things and that what happened in the past need not happen now. But history proves that when we learn nothing from history, we are doomed to repeat it.

But when we get out from under the sun and begin to find God we see that there is a great deal that is new.

II Corinthians 5:17, at salvation we are a new creation: Therefore if any man is in Christ, {he is} a new creature.

Ephesians 4:24, by faith as believers we put on the new man: Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

In Hebrews 12:24 we are told that we have a new covenant with God: And it is Jesus who is the mediator of a new covenant.

And we look ahead we do so anticipating a new creation: II Peter 3:13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

WHAT A CONTRAST: The gloomy outlook of man as he sets his sights no higher than that which under the Sun and the infinite glory of God.

Solomon in these opening verses makes a quick review of what secular man has in the secular world. But that is not going to satisfy him. As has been his pattern for all of his life, especially the last twenty years, he figures he can outdo mankind.

Note the parallel: If he thinks his ideas are better than God's (the place to worship, increasing in wives and wealth); if he thinks the law of God applies to everyone but himself; then it stands to reason that the observations of the secular world he has just made need not apply to him.

He can, in his thinking, be the one person who can find significance for life under the Sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:12

I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

Notice also he doesn't bring his father into the picture as he did in verse 1. David knew better and David taught Solomon better. That is the essence of Proverbs.

Proverbs 3:5-7 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

So Solomon is going to ask a question and seek an answer. and it is this question that is asked by everyone when they come up short depending upon and trusting in that which is under the sun.

Where am I to find happiness and satisfaction?

Ecclesiastes 1:13-15

And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. {It} is a grievous task {which} God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

This statement is packed with information.

He is seeking. There is something he wants. All of us have restless hearts. We are never really content. Until we find God in a personal and intimate way. We will constantly be lacking and wanting and then wanting more.

He is on a quest. He has already determined that what he is seeking can be found in secular wisdom and understanding. We do not seek that which cannot be found or doesn't exist.

In London they had so many people asking where Sherlock Holmes lived that they finally invented a place that they could point to. But the wise detective was only a figment of a writer's imagination.

People do a lot of silly things as they search for that which does not exist. But they go on their quest because they are convinced what they search for can be found.

Self initiates the search. We can see who is leading who. Solomon is leading Solomon. He is doing this for self. And so self will do it. And in this he thinks he can pull it off.

Notice: "I set my mind..."

His search is limited by his mind. He begins his search with a liability, his mind. And as a result he will never get beyond his own mental ability.

His search will be limited by his own experiments. The word EXPLORE means to investigate by experimentation, to try this, test it, see if it is valid, cast it away if it doesn't work. But it is limited to what he can come up with as a possible source of significance.

Solomon draws a conclusion from his initial observation of life:

What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

I want you to see what is the very first thing Solomon comes up with. You have heard it before, maybe even said it once or twice yourself, you will hear it again.

IT IS ALL GOD'S FAULT !!!!

It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men...

What task? Trying to figure out by secular wisdom what God is doing and how He is doing it.

But wait a minute. That is not something God has given to man as a task. That is an incorrect evaluation. Yet that is exactly how man without a relationship with God thinks.

The Lord has put it quite another way.

I Corinthians 2:9-10 Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

We need not rely upon human understanding or secular wisdom to understand God and what He is doing. We have the Holy Spirit.

But in HUMAN WISDOM all is like chasing after the wind. It cannot be captured or found.

There will always be things in this fallen world that are crooked. And try as man will he cannot make them straight.

There will always be the problems and annoyances that come with living in a fallen world with fallen men.

What is lacking is anything when there is never enough. And there never is. Again, man always wants MORE AND MORE.

Ecclesiastes 1:16-18

I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge." And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge {results in} increasing pain.

The First Experiment: WISDOM

Solomon, as declared by God, was the wisest man who has ever lived. Not only was he given a gift of wisdom but he was wise even a part from that gift. He had been taught well as a child and as a young man the value of wisdom.

But now, seeking significance in his life and for his life, he turns to wisdom and gains even more.

He called in the best teachers, the finest tutors, the most gifted scholars. After all, who could refuse the King?

He gained a wealth of wisdom and knowledge, he would have been a five time champ on jeopardy.

But notice his conclusions after all this learning.

I realized that this also is striving after wind.

Let's consider what you learn when you learn.

1. The more he learned the more reason he had for grief and sorrow. Ignorance, is bliss. But knowledge can be a heavy burden.

(Remember, we speak as Solomon did, on the level of the secular not the spiritual).

2. The more he learned the clearer he could think, and the clearer he could think the more he saw madness and folly.
3. The more he learned the more clearly he saw how easily the things of life could go wrong.
4. The more he learned the more he saw that nothing is permanent.
5. The more he learned the more he learned how little he knew.

We often discover whole areas of thought to which we have not even given a single thought. We know nothing of these things and may never will.

6. The more he learned the more he realized that knowledge is limited.
7. The more he learned the more he saw his inability to control the future.
8. The more he learned the more he saw how easily we can make mistake after mistake.

More knowledge does not lead to more enlightenment! We live in a time of knowledge explosion, and yet mankind is still involved in evil, and murder, and genocide, and holocaust.

One rather cynical critic of our times has stated: "Modern technology has only served to make us more efficient in our cruelty."

As believer we need to be careful as we examine Solomon's experiments. Further education may be tight in the center of God's plan for you. Only the secularist need come to the conclusion that all this is empty.

We can pursue knowledge, but we can do it as unto the Lord and realize that all of man's wisdom can never bring us to peace, satisfaction, security, and significance that can only be found in Jesus Christ and then . . .

Only in a personal and intimate relationship with Him.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Two

As Solomon discovers that education is not the panacea for significance, he turns to pleasure. This is on the other extreme.

Principle: When we are seeking significance in human effort we will find ourselves living a life out of balance and a life of extremes.

APPLICATION: That is why mild mannered middle age me sometimes go crazy. They quit their jobs, leave their families, and go nuts.

Listen to how Solomon came to that point.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-3

I said to myself, Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself. And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, It is madness, and of pleasure, What does it accomplish? I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.

Eat, live, and be merry...for tomorrow we die.

"This is all there is so do it up to the limit." "We only go around once in life so make the most of it." "Do deny yourself any pleasure; if it feels good just do it."

All the platitudes we hear today were spoken by Solomon.

In his quest for significance and his seeking of knowledge and wisdom, he got burned out on the books. Too many tutors, he got tired of the teachers. So...let's party till we drop.

Pleasure: but soon he discovered that, too, was folly.

Notice verse 3: He took an academic approach to getting drunk. Which drink effects me the fastest, the slowest?

Pleasure: After all the study, Solomon was ready to have some fun so he seeks happiness in pleasure. Mirth (KJV) is the lightness of life, laughter, glee.

Conclusion: It is madness!

Principle: The greatest fun you will ever have is as a believer, in fellowship, looking right down the barrel of life.

Solomon tried to become an alcoholic, but it didn't work and it did not bring any happiness.

PLEASURE is not wrong, God wants us to enjoy life.

John 10:10 speaks of "an abundant life..."

It is hard to visit Israel and spend anytime with the Jews and not see that these people have a zest for life.

Pleasure is great but it has two problems: First, it can become a distraction to what is really important in life, growing in Christ. Second, it can become a false foundation for life itself. By having temporal pleasure in life you can fool yourself into thinking everything is okay, but pleasure is only temporary and may have consequences.

The HEDONIST seeks pleasure and never looks at the consequences.

Ecclesiastes 2:4-6

I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.

ENGINEERING OR CONSTRUCTION: Solomon built the Temple that was planned and designed by his father David. He was happy building the Temple.

Sounds like he is trying to build the garden of Eden

Now that he is on a frantic search for significance, he decides that he will try a few building projects.

I Kings 9:10 tells us his building activity lasted for twenty-two years.

He built a great palace, many official buildings in Jerusalem, even a five mile long covered riding path.

The closest thing we have to this today in our culture is probably the Hearst Castle in San Simeon, California.

Conclusion of building career is given in Eccl 2:17-18

"So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind. Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me."

NOTE: BITTERNESS COMES in life when we see these things we seek after not bringing us the anticipated significance or security.

Why do we find older people who are bitter? Because they went through middle age and saw the things that ones brought then significance slip away. They continue to try to find significance but they don't so bitterness sets in.

Ecclesiastes 2:7-9

I bought male and female slaves, and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men-- many concubines. Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.

Solomon had the wealth to get anything he wanted, and he did. Also notice that his wisdom when it came to making right decisions for others and for the nation was still there.

God was protecting Israel through out all of Solomon's frantic search for happiness.

As he begins to list what he had by way of possessions he knows that could take up many chapters, so in verse 10 he summarizes.

Ecclesiastes 2:10

And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.

But note his conclusion in verse 11.

Ecclesiastes 2:11-17

Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly, for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done?

And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.

Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."

For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!

So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

Principle: The things of life, the details of life cannot bring happiness. If you chase happiness in things, you are going to become a slave to the details of life. Instead, be a master over the things, the details of life.

Have your happiness in something that is eternal.

Ecclesiastes 2:18

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

Solomon, as an extension of possessions, decided that happiness could be found in having many children. Since he had 700 wives and 300 concubines, he had the potential for having many children.

The Bible does not record how many children Solomon had but we do see his conclusion of attitude towards his frantic search for happiness in children.

Ecclesiastes 2:19-23

And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.

Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.

When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.

For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?

Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

Will the children be wise men or fools, hence, the idea of happiness through children is vanity.

CHILDREN are never a source of happiness and children are not a problem solvers. Children can bring happiness into an already happy home. But they will bring misery into an already miserable home.

Eccl. 6:3, If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.

Solomon's heir to the throne was Rehoboam and Rehoboam turned out to be a fool.

Read I Kings 12: The foolishness of Rehoboam

Solomon draws a conclusion that set the stage for the next section. He states this now, that he is again in fellowship, coming a conclusion he should have come to many years before, but did not.

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.

The EATING AND DRINKING here is daily activity. Doing the things that sustain physical life.

Then he tells himself his labor is good. This is the recognition that what we do is significant so long as it is part of God's plan for us.

REGARDLESS OF THE MEDIOCRITY of the tasks we do we can do them as unto the Lord...because He has given us that task at that time.

Ecclesiastes 2:25

For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?

Get that? No true enjoyment without God!!!

We must hold in mind that all the distractions, all the seeking of significance that we might do is senseless apart from Him.

In Revelation Jesus is called the Alpha and the Omega. Can we apply that to ourselves? Is He the beginning and the end, the first and the last of all we do, whatever we do?

Or have we elevated our happiness to that of being the goal of our existence. And if we have, we see we are on a quest, just like Solomon. A quest

that will have no end until we exhaust all that we can do and begin to depend upon God.

Colossians 2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.

And we did not become children of God as a result of a quest, we did not search according to our mind or our limited ability...but by faith.

Ecclesiastes 2:26

For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

Two people, Solomon had a choice of being approved as good in God's sight or being a sinner, that is one who disobeys God. It took him fifteen years to decide what he wanted to be.

As one approved in God's sight, by faith, he would have three things unobtainable anywhere, any way else.

1. Wisdom
2. Knowledge
3. Joy

Now here is the wisest and wealthiest man in the world telling us there are certain things in life that we will never have apart from a relationship with God.

Notice the phrase: Good in His sight: The word SIGHT in the Hebrew is PAN-IM and can be simply translated FACE, but it means so much more.

It is the identity of a person, their attitudes, their true being, their real self. It was more than physiological, it revealed the emotions, moods, character of a person.

To be good in GOD'S SIGHT is to know Him, to have a relationship with Him, to be intimate, to walk with Him as a friend.

This is not some STANDARD, it is not some MECHANIC, it is a RELATIONSHIP that Solomon sees as being all important in life.

Illustration: Who are we going to spend eternity with? Someone we know well, and anticipate being with them, or someone who is a stranger to us? For too many believers the God of eternity will be someone they do not really know.

Solomon makes a very interesting point here. You see, he has prospered even during his years of being out of fellowship. Why? So others could be blessed.

Jeremiah need to know what Solomon had learned.

Jeremiah 12:1 Righteous art Thou, O Lord, that I would plead my case with Thee; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with Thee: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?

Do the wicked prosper? Of course, and maybe it is to bless the nation, the believers who know God.

Don't ever complain about the prosperity of the wicked, the unbeliever, the carnal believer. First, that is they have, and Secondly, their prosperity can bless you.

But notice also what he says of their prosperity, it is all like chasing after the wind

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Three

INTRODUCTION.

Ecclesiastes chapter three, especially the first eight verses, is very well known having been memorialized in song and poetry. But so often the point of the passage is missed.

Solomon, as he now is in fellowship with God and looking back relating to us his quest of seeking significance in the cellar of the secular takes a break...and talks about the relationship we can have with God.

As he considers the spiritual rather than the secular, he makes FOUR observations.

1. God's perfect timing
2. God's absolute control
3. God's magnificent grace
4. God's eternal glory

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.

A time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.

A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to tear down, and a time to build up.

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance.

A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing.

A time to search, and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep, and a time to throw away.

A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; A time to be silent, and a time to speak.

A time to love, and a time to hate; A time for war, and a time for peace.

This list must have driven Solomon crazy as he search for significance in the cellar of the secular.

Two things become very apparent in light of the realities mentioned here.

First, if everything is a part of God's plan and has its right time, I must not be as free as I thought.

Someone much larger than me is really calling the shots. The things that will cause me to laugh or to cry, to go to war or to stay home at peace are in the final analysis beyond my controllable circumstances.

Some of these and to some degree we can control these things, but remember the three intrusions upon secular wisdom that we examined earlier...death, evil, chance.

And everyone of these is susceptible to these intrusions.

The second equally devastating thought is that this list implies that nothing I do is permanent.

The wrong conclusion would be that we should not build up because everything in its time will be torn down. Why strive for peace when the next war is just around the corner. Why be born if we will only die?

But that depressing conclusion need not be drawn by the child of God . . .

LOOK AHEAD TO VERSE 11: God has made everything appropriate in its time..

AND THAT IS THE KEY: God is in charge and in control and he loves you and is good.

When we look at these eight verse we see some interesting contrasts.

1. God's plan includes our birth and death, both which are out of our control.
2. We are told there is a time to build and a time to tear down what has been built, reminding us that nothing is permanent.

3. We are reminded that mourning is proper in its proper time but then that time ends and then comes a time to dance or celebrate.

I Thessalonians 4:13 That you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.

In verse 7 we are told there is a time to tear clothing which was part of the Jewish ritual of mourning but then there is a time to sew together that which was torn.

4. God's plan includes times of happiness as well as sorrow so do not be surprised by circumstances in life that allow for these emotions.
5. In verse 6 we are told that God's plan includes profit and loss. Which is an interesting contrast to the secular wisdom of Eccl 1:3 which said What advantage (profit) does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?

This shows us that any profit is going to come because of our dependence upon God and our part in His plan.

6. There is a proper time to speak as a part of God's plan and a proper time for silence.
7. And there are times for war and times for peace.

When these words were made a part of the song Turn, Turn, Turn, the writer did as what the secular world so often does, it TURNED the meaning all around and ended with the question I hope we are not to late to stop the war?

But we find in the Bible that there is a time for war, and Jesus observed that there would be wars and rumors of war until He returns at the second advent.

However, we must chose our conflicts carefully. Knowing that living in a fallen world means that there will be times of war and times of peace.

ALL THESE THINGS SHOW US that we are not as in control as we might think and that we have a choice, depend upon the one who is in control and try to be the captains of our own destiny in a sea of uncertainty and doubt.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11

What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?

I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

Here we see what is permanent and what is not.

Remember back in chapter 1, verse 13 when Solomon accused God of giving man an unfair and grievous task.

Well here he has the task right.

The task is given by God to man: The only things of value in life is what God gives to us. Even the material things of life, the enjoyable things of life, the relationships we have the jobs we do are only of value when given by God.

The things that are given by God are given according to His appropriate timing,

The Hebrew word APPROPRIATE is YA-PA and looks at that which is beautiful. Now beauty is in the eye of the beholder and this requires capacity on our part.

With out capacity, which is developed with God in our relationship with Him as we grow, we may not see the things of God as being beautiful.

With Him, we can look back over the list of contrasts and see that what is giving by God according to His proper timing, is beautiful, YA-PA.

It is also God who has set eternity in our hearts without which (corrected translation) man will not find out the works which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

It is God who, at salvation, gives us something eternal and that is the ministries of the Holy Spirit. In our dispensation this is the Spirit indwelling us so that we can understand who God is and what He is doing.

A part from what God gives we cannot know God nor can we understand what is going on in the world nor in our own lives.

Solomon has shown and will show the emptiness of man trying to figure God out a part from what God gives to the believer.

Paul, in I Corinthians 2:9-10 and 12 echoes the principle: But just as it is written, Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God

has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God.

Principle: The God shaped whole in man will never be filled by anything a part from what God gives.

Man tried to fill the void that is sensed in his soul with anything and everything but there is still emptiness.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-15

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;

Moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor -- it is the gift of God.

I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

That which is has been already, and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

Understanding the grace of God allows us to understand that all we have is from him.

1. The capacity to rejoice
2. The ability to do good
3. To have good labor is a gift from God
4. That what God does remains forever, no one can ever take from you what God does in you
5. The privilege of fearing, serving God
6. And God in His grace seeks us to return to Him

Understanding what we have seen thus far in Eccl chapter three allows us to see that even though life is comprised of opposites, God is in control and God is gracious and good.

Even things that seem to contradict, birth and death, profit and loss, mourning and rejoicing, war and peace, work together for our good and God's glory.

In these last verses in chapter three, Solomon begins to take what he knows of God back into the secular world.

He makes observations.

3:16 I have seen . . .

3:17 I said to myself . . .

3:18 I said to myself . . .

3:22 I have seen . . .

4:1 Then I looked . . .

4:4 I have seen . . .

4:7 I looked again . . .

In making these observations he concludes the futility of a life that sees God's as irrelevant.

The best man can come up with a part from God still must deal with injustice, death, and oppression.

And when these things hit, nothing will make sense apart from knowing that God's eternal glory is ours through faith.

Ecclesiastes 3:16,17

Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.

I said to myself, God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.

Secular wisdom might also see injustice and try to correct it. However, man is ill equipped to correct the problems of the sin nature and the resulting problem of injustice.

Because we live in a fallen world with fallen men, injustice will be, has forever been, a reality.

That is not to say that man should not strive for justice. God has given to man the delegated authority to administer laws and regulate society. But man will never achieve perfection...so injustice will always be a problem

Often, secular man, in trying to correct one problem of injustice opens up other problems of injustice. This is especially true on the federal level in our country.

It is an injustice that children die from diseases that can be easily cure or vaccinated against? Of course it is. But a federally regulated and mandated health care system is not the answer. It just creates more injustice.

We used to talk about the bleeding heart liberal, who wants to correct all of societies ills with more regulations and laws...won't work.

REMEMBER: Solomon was a king, his word was law. But he could not correct the injustices he saw within his own nation.

Many Christians have fallen into lock step with this secular concept. They think that if they could just bring back the OT law in its entirety (a part from the sacrifices), all would be well. But that would create chaos and chaos always brings about injustice.

So what are we to do?

We put the matter into God's hands. We do not further injustice and we even try to correct it when we can, but the final judge is God.

Psalm 37:12-13 The wicked plots against the righteous, And gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him; For He sees his day is coming.

Ecclesiastes 3:18-22, Death as a Principle of the Eternal Glory of God.

Now death is the ultimate harsh reality for the person whose sole orientation is to this life. Even for the believer death suggests pain and sorrow.

But if we go back to Solomon's statement in v 11 we see that even this is appropriate in its time.

Psalm 116:15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

Death is as much of God's provision as is life.

Ecclesiastes 3:18-20

I said to myself concerning the sons of men, God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts.

For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.

All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.

If we are to limit our view of death to what the secular man has available to him by way of wisdom we come up with one disturbing principle...both man and animals end up as the dust of the earth.

So who can make that any different. Oh we know there are those who try to cheat death by freezing their bodies or their heads but that is nothing more than the foolishness of secular man.

Ecclesiastes 3:21

Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?

Now man certainly does not know. We need only look at what man comes up with when it comes to death and any possibility of life after death to see that. We have everything from reincarnation to death being nothing but an eternal void.

Whether man or beast, death, from our secular side, is death. Bodies decompose, they go back to the dust.

So who knows? GOD KNOWS...So the question then becomes do you know the one who knows?

Ecclesiastes 3:22

And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

All the worry people do as they ponder death is really not necessary. Man can never figure it out but the child of God who knows God and trusts God puts his life and his death in God's hands.

Who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

Only God...and it will be art of his eternal glory for Him and for us.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Four

In Chapter four Solomon goes back into the secular world and considers how man can find meaning to life in the midst of struggle.

As he did at the end of chapter four, he looks at life and makes observations and conclusions. Previously he has looked at the futility of secular efforts in any attempt to find significance. Here, in chapter four, he looks at life's struggles and the things of life that plague us all. And all this, he concludes in empty and like chasing after the wind.

The conclusion of chapter four is rather dismal a part from a relationship with God. But that is where Solomon was for many years, dismal, depressed, unable to find meaning to life or significance for self. Lacking security, lacking joy.

But we already know from chapter three that this need not be the experience of the child of God who knows God and walks with God.

In this chapter he observes OPPRESSION, SUCCESS, MATERIALISM, AND POSITION.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

Oppression is one of the dark facts of life *under the sun*. We can see it politically, corporately, individually. We cannot escape it. We turn on the news, read the paper, and find story after story of the suffering of the innocent.

Solomon observes two parties in oppression, the oppressed and the oppressors.

1. The oppressed shed tears
2. The oppressors grasp for power
3. There is no one to comforter either

The tears shed are actually weeping. The oppressed weep in order to find someone to comfort them.

This is a crying for attention. They are oppressed, no one seems to care. They weep trying to attract the attention of someone who will care and correct the oppression.

But Solomon says there is no one to give comfort.

COMFORT is NA-HAM like the name of the OT Prophet. It was used for the comfort and encouragement that could be given that would encourage one to press on.

Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

But for the oppressed there is no one to comfort. Man may feel sorry for the oppressed, they may even be able to eliminate temporarily some oppression, but then it crops up someplace else.

So on the secular plain, there is no true comforter.

Now the parallel is drawn next to the oppressors.

They grasp for power and do so through oppression.

The reason they grasp for power is the same reason the oppressed weep, they seek comfort.

This may surprise us at first but as we examine those who grasp for power by oppressing others we will

begin to see there is a reason they do what they do. And it is not merely to see the innocent suffer.

They seek meaning to their miserable existence, they seek significance...in their terms, at any cost.

The reality and horror of their oppression is never really considered, only what it will accomplish.

Adolph Eichmann described his role in the murder of six million Jews in German death camps a part of his job description, he was just doing his job and being commended for it...he was significant, he was comforted knowing that others thought he was doing well. but he was doing evil.

Eccl. 5:8 If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.

But Solomon says there is no comfort in this. So a cycle of oppression is developed. More power is sought, more and more innocent suffer. More power corrupts.

BUT NOTICE THAT SOLOMON does not dwell on this at length. He observes it as a fact of life in a fallen world.

v 2-3 Solomon now looks at this cycle of oppression and sees the lack of answers the secular world has for this continuing problem.

So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

Solomon is speaking of oppression in its most evil and cruel forms and he employs a hyperbole to shock us into facing the fact that man cannot come up with a solution to oppression. There are no answers under the sun . . .

BUT GOD DOES HAVE AN ANSWER: His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, our Savior, our example, our precedent, suffered the brutal realities of oppression.

Isaiah 53:7-8 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?

AND YET IN THE FACE OF THIS OPPRESSION, Jesus held to the joy that was before Him, enduring the Cross while at all times anticipated the Crown.

Does this mean that we are to ignore oppression, just let it go on without any recourse. That was not Jesus' policy. In the sermon on the mount he challenged his disciples to be peacemakers. We are to feed the hungry, help those who are truly poor, visit widows and orphans, perform acts of mercy.

We are to, as did Jesus, take a stand that oppressed oppression. But that stand is one taken with TRUTH.

Even during His trials we see Jesus armed with truth and giving out that truth to any who would listen.

AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE TO do, take a stand with Christ and in Truth. Sometimes evil will be corrected, injustice and oppression may be banished, but when it is not we must realize that these evils will continue in some intensity until God intervenes in history and His kingdom is established.

In the meantime we live in the tension of the harsh realities of a fallen world but the even greater reality of the kingdom and eternal glory of God.

Ecclesiastes 4:4-6

And I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

When I first meet Jim I was impressed with his Christian testimony and his focus in business. Here was a young man who had some great ideas. His motive, however, was success and to Jim success was spelled M-O-N-E-Y. It did not take long for his life to fall a part. He lost his business, his home, even his wife and children and ended up bankrupt.

His desire for success destroyed every thing of value in his life.

Solomon saw some people just like Jim.

v 4 can have, in the Hebrew, two interpretations. We can see it referring to a person who pursue success because they are envious of those who have succeeded. Or we can see it referring to a person who felt he had succeeded because he is envied by others.

Either getting ahead of others or trying to keep ahead of others.

Both are true. Both serve as motives for the person who is driven to succeed in order to stand above others.

NOW SOLOMON USES a wide brush when he pens the word *ALL*.

So as Solomon looks at the secular world where he had spent so much time he says that he sees people working themselves to death because they want to out shine their neighbors. They want more than others, they are envious or jealous. Or they are fearful that someone will have more than they.

Now Solomon is not saying that we should not work hard when called upon to do so. We are to work, we are to provide for others, we are to do whatever we do as unto the Lord.

The error of the secular world would be to go to the extreme of being lazy.

The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

The folding of the hands is the not doing of any work and the consuming of one's own flesh means to eat what is in store without adding to it.

Luke 12:19 The rich farmer who decided to live off what he had in store: And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.

But eventually time runs out and there is no longer anything in store.

SO SOLOMON HAS CONSIDERED EACH: The workaholic who strives after success and the lazy fool who lives off what is in store.

His conclusion is that neither are adequate models for life.

v 6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

Solomon concluded that it is better to have less and enjoy it more.

Our problem today is not so much the high cost of living but the cost of high living.

We want more and more and more and soon more becomes too much.

We need to keep our lives in balance. One hand full of tranquillity is far better than two fists full of dollars.

In Proverbs Solomon put it another way:

Proverbs 15:16-17 Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, Than great treasure and turmoil with it. Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, Than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

Ecclesiastes 4:7,8

Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. There was a certain man without a dependent,

having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure? This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

Very few movies do I ever enjoy watching even a second time. But one classic I have seen many times is *Citizen Kane*. Charles Foster Kane had wealth beyond compare but he died alone in his Xanadu uttering the words *Rosebud*. Reminding himself of the last time he was truly happy.

Solomon must have known a few Kanes himself. And here he describes the foolishness of amassing wealth. In order to make this even more of a fools task he eliminates the possibility of anyone saying he was amassing wealth for his heirs...he has none.

And yet he deprives himself of pleasure and labor for wealth.

In Matthew 6:21 Jesus said that a man's heart is where his treasure is. And this man's heart is in his bank account.

Solomon concludes that this is meaningless, pointless, empty, and a heavy task that is placed upon one's self for no purpose.

Solomon moves from the subject of success and wealth at any cost, a manner of live that leads to isolation and loneliness, to the subject of companionship.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

THE VALUE OF COMPANIONSHIP.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

Solomon gives four rewards of companionship.

1. Companions can get more done: v 9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.

2. Companions know one another well enough to know each other's faults.

v 10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

It is good to have those who know our faults and our weaknesses. They can help us through the times when we fall and when we fail.

It is strange that we so often become defensive when those close to us are critical of us. We think that because we fail that person suddenly does not like us.

But we are told in Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

It will be our companions, our friends, who know us and know our weaknesses that will be there with honesty and love and doctrine for us and will stick with us to the end.

3. Companionship provides warmth: v 11
Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?

While there is an obvious physical side to this there is also an emotional side. The context is the rich who seek wealth over relationships. And the rich can always buy more blankets to keep warm.

The so often the person who has oppressed others in exchange for wealth, who has made success his idol will be isolated and alone. And when the problems come life alone will provide only more bitter cold.

We live basically in a very cold world. And the warmth of a friend who knows us is something we all need.

4. The fourth reward of companionship is strength: v 12
And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

While this has an obvious physical side, I also see in this a spiritual side.

The one who would want to overpower us is Satan. But we can resist him even more when we stand in companionship, with other believers.

It will be our friends who will warn us, encourage us, help us shoulder the load when the load begins to wear us down. Two are stronger than one.

And that should be true of the L.C. We are stronger because of relationships one with another.

THEN AN ANALOGY: A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

We have an interesting numerical change in the analogy. Up to this point it has always been two. But now it is three strands. Why not just two, why not more, four or five?

This analogy is showing how the relationship of two can be held together. What, or should we say WHO is the third strand?

It is GOD. In any relationship, marriage, friendship, business partnership, any relationship, it is God whose presence in the relationship will make it work, make it strong.

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16

LEADERSHIP AND POSITION.

The last four verses of this chapter relates a hypothetical situation and principle. But in doing so it also gives a prophecy. Let me read it to you . . .

A poor, yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction. For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. I have seen all the living under the sun throned to the side of the second lad who replaces him. There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.

Here we have two men, a poor wise lad and an old foolish king. The king is a fool because he no longer knows how to receive instruction.

The poor lad has come out of prison to become king. The idea of prison can also be the idea of exile. The poor lad who becomes king has all the people flock to him.

But then there are those who are dissatisfied with that king. So there is a cycle, kings come into power, they are popular, but then they fall into disfavor with the people...and on and on.

There are some definite principles Solomon is teaching.

1. Nothing is permanent
2. Popular leaders come and go
3. Popular acclaim does not last
4. Time and familiarity have a way of eroding popularity
5. Even at its highest levels, life is insecure
6. Even our highest dreams (to be a king) can turn out to be nightmares a part from God's plan
7. One cannot depend upon position, we can only depend upon the One who gives these gifts. He will never fail.

While this story illustrates these principles, it also is predictive of what happened to Solomon's kingdom.

Turn to I Kings 11.

v 9 God was angry with Solomon

v 10 Reason for the anger

v 11 The chastisement that will come

v 26 Jeroboam, and Ephraimite, rebelled against Solomon

He was from the household of a servant, a poor man's son

v 29-37 The prediction of Ahijah the prophet

v 40 Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, so Jeroboam went into exile in Egypt (came out of prison)

Turn now to I Kings 12.

v 2-3 Jeroboam comes out of exile and the people flock to him.

v 15 Because of Rehoboam's foolish arrogance, Jeroboam ends up ruling over the northern tribes, Israel.

NOW HERE IS THE THING I WANT YOU TO SEE, Solomon knew before his death what his discipline was going to be.

He accepted it and even used it to teach us a principle back in Ecclesiastes 4...the glory of man is fleeting.

Can significance be found in positions of power? Or do the powerful face the same tests as all of us? Solomon tells how even kings have to deal with rejection.

Principles REGARDING REJECTION.

1. Your significance as a believer is not in other people nor is it in the person or persons rejecting you.
2. The fact that you are rejected does not change you
3. Rejection and the behavior of another person does not define our self worth, the Lord does that
4. Rejection is the problem of the person rejecting us not our problem. We do have to take rejection personally.
5. When we are rejected do not react to the rejection. Just move into greater dependency upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

WE CAN LEARN FROM REJECTION.

Mark 6:1-6 and 7 and 11

v 1 And He went out from there, and He came into His home town; and His disciples followed Him.

v 2 And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?

v 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us? And they took offense at Him.

v 4 And Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor except in his home town and among his own relatives and in his own household.

v 7 And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits

v 11 And any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake off the dust from the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.

Jesus used his rejection in Nazareth to prepare the ones he loved, his disciples, for the rejection they would face.

Solomon used the rejection he faced and even the prophecy of rejection of Jeroboam to teach us that even the mightiest of men, in high positions, face the test of rejection.

Principle: Our significance in life cannot be built upon our popularity or our acceptance or rejection by others.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Five

Introduction

J. Vernon McGee, in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, makes the following statement regarding chapter 5, verses 1-7.

Religion has damned the world more than any other thing. Look what the pagan religions did for people in the past. Look at India, China, and the Moslem world. Look at the Roman Catholic world. Look at liberal Protestantism. Multitudes have joined churches since WW II that allow them to get away from God and to avoid a personal relationship with Jesus Christ .

Solomon examines religion. Having repeatedly come to the conclusion that secular life holds no meaning, it is understandable that man would turn to religion. But so often that is it. They turn to a system rather than to the Savior. To good feeling rather than God, to some legalism rather than the Lord, to justification of self rather than to Jesus.

So Solomon will tell us what is wrong with our worship.

In these verses Solomon observes how man worships God. While he sees Worship as good he

knows that man often takes a good thing and makes it of no effect.

READ verses 1 to 7.

Solomon looks at worship in three chronological stages.

1. Before Worship, v 1a
2. During Worship, v 1b-3
3. After Worship, v 4-7

BEFORE WE WORSHIP we must check our Mental Attitude and Motive.

Ecclesiastes 5:1

Guard your steps as you go to the house of God.

The Hebrew word GUARD is SHA-MAR which has three implications.

1. To exercise great care over something: This meaning shows us the importance of preparation prior to worship.
2. To give careful attention to the paying of an obligation or the obeying of a law: This meaning shows us that worship is to be according to God's mandates and rules not our. And that we must take care to worship God as He desires.
3. To guard against intruders: This meaning shows us that there is a potential of intrusion and distraction that we must defend against as we prepare to worship.

The SHA-MAR is distinct from other verbs translated GUARD in that it sets the responsibility upon the subject. Hence, it is our decision and our discipline that will allow us to guard our steps as we approach the worship of God.

The decision is one faith in that we are recognizing that God is God and is to be worshipped and praised and that our worship must conform to Him, not expecting Him to conform to our worship.

The discipline comes from faith dependence upon the Holy Spirit who provides the ability, power, and means by which we can guard our steps.

Solomon had in mind the Temple in Jerusalem over which he administrated the building.

Yet he was not hung up with the building. Although it was a magnificent structure, Solomon

saw a greater importance in the MENTAL ATTITUDE of the one who came to worship

Often we forget this when we are in the OT

1 Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said (to Saul), Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

Psalms 51:16-17 For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

Principle: Even in the OT when God's people had a system of worship that included specific place and practice, the MENTAL ATTITUDE was more important than anything else.

What are some of the things that we can do to guard our steps as we prepare to Worship God?

Anticipating the Time of Worship: We need to cultivate an attitude that looks forward to our time of Worship.

If we are developing a personal intimate relationship with God then times of Worship should mean more to us than anything else.

It is during times of worship that we take the Word that we have in our souls and direct it, in adoration and appreciation, to God.

While worship, the word comes from an old English word meaning to express the worthiness of God, includes certain mechanics, it more than just ritual.

Worship is a time in which we can intimately fellowship with God, we can express emotions in a structure that God has provided, we can be free in the Spirit as guided by the Word to adore God.

In anticipating the time of Worship we should pray regarding our Worship: Believers ought always to pray and should specifically pray regarding those times of worship.

Prayer prior to worship should include confession of sins, asking God to give us the concentration of the Spirit in us, praying that we can be edified and admonished during our Worship.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

We should also pray for and be prepared for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit during our times of Worship.

Many times it has been during the worship of God that the Holy Spirit will strongly come against our flesh and convict us of sin and unfaithfulness.

Since times of worship are also times of concentration the Holy Spirit will use these times to convict the believer. We can pray that God will do this as He sees there is need.

The third area of preparation is physical: Perhaps it is because of my vantage point that I notice many who are ill prepared to worship because of physical exhaustion or emotional distraction.

If I have a date, and I often do with my bride, I make sure I am not worn out from the day so as to not be able to enjoy the night. Often I will take a nap, rest up, so that I will be attentive to my date .

Ecclesiastes 5:1b-3

Draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort, and the voice of a fool through many words.

DRAW NEAR TO LISTEN means to come with open and receptive hearts.

This shows us that worship includes something we need to listen to and learn.

It may be the words of a hymn, the reading of the Scriptures, the content of a prayer. We need to listen with attentive and open hearts.

The antithesis of this is to offer the sacrifice of fools.

Any sacrifice can only come from what is possessed by the individual.

In Eccl. 10:14 we are told what the fool has more than anything else: The fool is full of words...

Proverbs 10:8 and 10 echoes this same concept when it talks of the babbling fool full of words.

THEREFORE, the sacrifice of a fool is his empty words.

And rather than listen he talks, but his words are empty.

Job 35:16 Elihu's statement to Job: So Job opens his mouth empty; He multiplies words without knowledge.

In doing this the fool goes from mere foolishness to evil which is the Hebrew RA' and is associated with Satan's plan that at all times opposes God's plan of grace.

v 2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

In this verse Solomon describes the fool.

Hasty in words: Speaks without prior thought

Impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God.

Now God wants us to spend time with Him in prayer and to open our whole hearts to Him.

Here, however, we have the person who does not recognize who God is and that He is good and just. So He has impulsive thoughts and speaks quick words regarding God.

Not remembering that God is in heaven and the fool is on earth

Not letting his words be few

Proverbs 29:11 A fool lets his whole mind be known.

Have you ever spoken to someone who is not listening to you? You know their concentration is a million miles away. And then if they do respond to you it is often an inappropriate response to an issue that is not even related to what you are talking about.

This is what Solomon is talking about. The one who comes to worship God, present in body but not in spirit.

Solomon compares this to a dream filled night.

v 3 For the dream comes through much effort, and the voice of a fool through many words.

We have a comparison here. The dreams that come through much effort are the dreams of a restless person who has worked hard, hard effort.

It is very hard for me to go to sleep immediately after being out for the evening, see a good movie, or having attended some exciting sporting event.

I need time to wind down. If I have had a busy day, much effort, I cannot go to sleep and when I do I have a dreamed filled and restless night.

Just as much effort causes a dream filled night, the fool causes many words...but they have about as much substance to them as a dream

But FOOLS and MUCH WORDS go together. Where there is one there is the other. This thought is picked up again at verse 7.

For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness.

We must not play the fool in our worship of God.

ROMANS 15:8-11 The Link Between OT Worship and NT Worship

Verses 8 and 9 link the age of Israel to the Age of the Church as Jesus did in John 4.

Romans 15:8-11 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, Therefore I will give praise to Thee among the Gentiles, And I will sing to Thy name. And again he says, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people. And again, Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him.

Worship, as in the OT still exists, but it is no longer according to a prescribed place, personnel, or legal procedure. No longer in an mountain or in Jerusalem but in Spirit and Truth.

John 4:23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

God the Holy Spirit providing the power and the Truth (BD) providing the influence of procedure for the C.A., all that remains is your decision of faith to be led by the Spirit and depend upon the Spirit in worshipping God.

Romans 8:14-16 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

It is God the Holy Spirit who empowers our human spirits to be able to horsewhip God.

And now Paul quotes from Psalm 18:49, II Samuel 22:50, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1.

Romans 15:10-11 And again he says, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people. And again, Praise

the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise (laud) Him.

He describes five Old Testament aspects of worship that are appropriate for churches today.

1. Confess to God in the presence of the World:

Worship is primarily public in sight of the world. As the world looks at the believer it should see the attitude of worship expressed. Our gathering together for the worship of God is a public testimony of our faith.

2. Sing praise to God's name.

The word NAME which is ONAMA looks at one's reputation and what is known of that reputation. So we sing praise unto God based upon what we know of Him.

3. We are to rejoice or be glad:

This is the MENTAL ATTITUDE of sharing the very happiness of God which comes as we have an accurate understanding of Him.

4. Praise the Lord: This is AINEW. Also mentioned in Acts 2:47 as one of the seven main elements of the L.C.

Praise is the enthusiastic response to God's person and performance. It is the logical and vocal response to the character and work of God.

5. Laud Him (translated praise in NASV): EPAINEW

Can mean to commend, praise, and applaud as in putting your hands together which is a normal reflex of the emotions in expressing appreciation.

By quoting these OT verses Paul makes a link between the procedure of worship in the age of Israel and in the Church Age. The place is not the same, the personnel is no longer limited to a specialized priesthood, and the procedure is different but the worship of God, the praising of God, the honoring of God is the same.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-7

When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

These verses look at making and keeping vows.

The word VOW in the Hebrew is NA-DAR and in its simplest sense means to make a promise to take something you possess and give it to God.

But as we examine the word it becomes more involved.

1. The direction of NA-DAR is always to God. Other words are used to describe a promise to give something to another person.
2. The making of a vow was not a spiritual requirement of the OT Law. Hence it was something done purely out of one's freewill and desire.
3. It was verbally made. The one who made the vow would do so to God in words, out loud in prayer which was the common for prayer in the Ancient World.
4. The thing vowed or promised could be a sacrifice or something material as in an offering, but it could also be a promise of one's self to serve.
5. Whatever was promised had to be owed by the person making the vow. It had to be clean in that it was not something that was illegally or immorally gained (the wages of a prostitute could not be vowed).
6. The MA of the one making the vow was important, it was to be an attitude of devotion and joy. God did not demand vows and in Psalm 50:9-13 makes it clear that vows do not supply to God something He lacks.

Vows have been called supererogatory acts of love and devotion to God.

7. Once a vow was made, out of one's free will, there was a demand that it be paid.

Eccl. 5:4-5 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

We have already seen in v 1 that the sacrifice of fools is their empty and meaningless words.

Here the empty words comprise a vow, a promise made during worship that is not kept.

In the CA we do not have vows such as believers in the age of Israel.

We do, however, see in the NT Scriptures those who made vows.

In Acts 18:18 we have Paul at the end of his second missionary journey shaving his head as part of the keeping of a vow. This was the beginning of some bad decisions for Paul as he began to try to win over the Jews who had rejected him.

In Acts 21:23-24 we have four men who had shaved their heads as part of a vow made to God.

In both these cases we have an attempt to bring the Nazarite vow of the OT into the C.A. as a sign of devotion and dedication .

This was not proper and as a result these vows created great problem in the church.

In another place in Acts we have some people making a vow to give something to the church.

Turn to Acts 4:36-37 Barnabas had a piece of land, sold it, and gave the money to the Jerusalem church. This was at a time in which there was great need among the believers and Barnabas, of his own free will, chose to do this.

So he decided, or vowed to do this, and did it.

NEXT CHAPTER: Ananias and Sapphira.

Read Acts 5:1-11: The difference we see between the vow of Barnabas and the vow of Ananias and Sapphira is the difference that is made in Eccl. 5.

Ananias and Sapphira made a promise out of their free will but then decided to default on their vow. Added to this was the lies that they told.

Acts 5:33, Peter called this lying to the Holy Spirit.

So we can see that whether in the age of Israel or in the C.A., when we make a promise to God to give Him something we must follow through.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST VOW WE CAN MAKE TO GOD TODAY?

Romans 12:1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.

We are to give God ourselves.

1. We are to freely do this: Paul urges us, not commands us.
2. We are to be motivated by God's mercy: The principle of mercy, as well as grace, is God's justice satisfied at the cross and at confession

and our point of contact being God's love for us as believers.

3. The sacrifice is to be living and holy: In contrast to the slain sacrifices in the OT
4. The sacrifice is not to propitiate God: He is already satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. Therefore, this sacrifice will be acceptable or well-pleasing to Him.
5. It is our spiritual service to do this: Again, indicating our free will. The phrase used here can also be translated logical or reasonable service. This giving of ourselves to God who has saved us makes sense.
6. And how do we do this? We present ourselves to God.

PRESENT is the Greek word PARISTJMI and, in its simplest form, means to take a stand along side.

It its used, however, for a sacrifice or the giving of something by way of a vow.

Luke 2:22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they)Mary and Joseph) brought Him (Jesus) up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.

Even here we can see that we are never called upon to do that which Jesus has not done first. He was presented to the Lord as a baby by His earthly parents and continued to do so His entire life.

We see four decisions of presentation with Jesus Christ.

1. To be born, as we decide to be born again
2. To make God's business and Word His highest priority.

Luke 2:49 When Jesus was twelve He remained in Jerusalem at the Temple: And He said to them, Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?

Luke 2:52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

3. When He was thirty He presented Himself for Public ministry and was baptized by John: and God declared that This was His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.
4. Then in the garden He made the final decision to go to Cross. Setting His Father's will above His own.

Jesus Christ, in His humanity, lived Romans 12:1. He made the vows and He kept them by the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word.

We PRESENT ourselves to God.

In Romans, the word PARISTEIMI is most often translated YIELD.

Romans 6:13 Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Romans 6:16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

We have freewill and have a choice to whom or what we will yield or present ourselves.

As with the OT vow, the choice is ours, it is a supererogatory act on the part of our volition s. We are encouraged even motivated to do this but not commanded to do so.

In Romans 12:1 PARAISTEIMI is an infinitive that sees this vow on our part as being a result of other things in our souls.

As with the OT vow we should have an attitude of devotion and joy in presenting ourselves to God.

As with the OT vow, whatever is presented must be pure, clean. In Romans 12:1 we are to present ourselves as a holy sacrifice.

Hence, before we present ourselves we must confess our sins and look to the work of Christ by faith.

Comes after confession, not before, not during.

Once we present ourselves, just like with the OT vow, we are fools to not fulfill the vow.

And as fools, and we are fools because we do take our lives away from God, we are carnal, out of fellowship, and back in the flesh.

Let's consider what specifically we can offer to God when we present ourselves as living and holy sacrifices.

Hebrews 13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

We offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving

Hebrews 13:16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Our mutual helpfulness with other believers is a pleasing sacrifice to God.

Philippians 4:18 But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

Although the one receiving the gift was Paul, it was a sacrifice well pleasing to God.

Philippians 2:17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

The death of a believer in service to the faith is a sacrifice acceptable to God.

Romans 12:1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

We present ourselves, we make ourselves available to God for His use, this is well-pleasing to God.

Before we go back to Eccl. 5 let's briefly examine what it means to present of yield ourselves to God.

1. It means to take our stand along side of God. Not God conforming to us, but us to Him.
2. When we stand alongside someone we are identifying ourselves with Him, we are then not claiming any merit, any value of works as we present ourselves to God, but we are identifying ourselves with Him.
3. There was a military aspect to this term that look at a recruit presenting himself to his commander. To present one's self under orders.
4. Another military aspect of this word means to surrender. And when the defeated troop surrenders he does one thing, throws up his hands and gives up. That is what we do, we give up the flesh, putting up our hands in the presence of God.
5. It had a legal meaning as one stood before a judge and we do stand before God, the all

righteous judge, but His justice was satisfied by Jesus Christ.

6. It had a meaning within the court of a king for a minister or official who stood beside and waited to do the king's business. This required patience and we present ourselves to God and then wait upon Him and His perfect timing.
7. And it was also used for friends who stand along side each other. And God loves us and we can be friends of God and stand with Him in friendship.

Ecclesiastes 5:6,7

Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

While we may mentally vacillate on paying a vow to God, the believer here makes a decision not to pay it and expresses that to the messenger.

This decision and declaration locks the worshipper into sin. Prior to this point, he had an option. Now the option not to pay the vow is taken.

With that decision and declaration, there has to be some rationalizing.

It was a mistake, I didn't mean it, I was only kidding, I wasn't serious.

SO HERE WE HAVE AN ADDITIONAL PROBLEM. Not only has he decided not to pay what was promised, but he refuses to recognize this non-payment as sin. So it goes unconfessed and when sin goes unconfessed it becomes very easy to fall into that sin again.

1. When we confess are forgiven of sin, both known and unknown.
2. If we fail to confess a known sin, we remain carnal.
3. If we rationalize a sin as not being a sin and it goes unconfessed, we are still carnal
4. The more we rationalize and make excuses for sins the easier it becomes to sin those sins
5. This is the principle of sin lying at the door . . .

Genesis 4:6-8

v 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?

He was feeling sorry for self, and accusing God of being unfair. this was the way he was excusing what he had done.

v 7 If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.

To master it is not some system of self discipline. The Hebrew word RULE or MASTER here is MAS-HAL and means to set something as an all important feature.

The all important feature here is to recognize sin as sin and not rationalize a bunch of excuses.

v 8 And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

In I John 3:12 we read: Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

The word SLEW is SFAZW and is found only here and in Revelation. It is a technical word meaning to slay as a sacrifice, to make a blood offering.

Principle: In rationalizing and excusing his sin, Cain came to the point of evil and sacrificed his own brother.

The most dangerous thing we can do with sin is to rationalize it. Now we will sin, but when we do, confess it. Recognize sin for what it is, it is sin and must be confessed.

If we rationalize sin we will go from sin to evil which is right in the middle of Satan's plan for the believer.

Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

The potential for chastisement (divine discipline) is stated here also.

Why should God be angry with you on account of your declaration not to pay the vow? He will destroy the works of your hands.

The cost of not paying the vow may become much more costly than if we had paid it.

Ecclesiastes 5:8,9

Verses 8 and 9 serve as a transition from problem of Worship to problem of Wealth.

If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.

After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

Right after these two verses, Solomon will take nearly two chapter to examine wealth, what it can do and what it cannot do.

As a transition to his investigation of wealth he deals in verse 8-9 with three principles regarding authority.

FIRST: There is always an authority over you

SECOND: Authority is not always fair

THIRD: Authority benefits you

Although these last two principles seem to contradict each other, in God's system, in which He is the highest and unparalleled authority, they are compatible for the believer.

v 8 Do not be surprised at injustice even when it comes from people in places of authority.

Man is not perfect, man has authority, authority is not perfect.

If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight.

Man has a sin nature and as we saw in Eccl. 4:1-3 there are those who will oppress and there are those who will be oppressed.

Injustice will come because man is unjust.

INJUSTICE is the Hebrew 'AS-HAQ and concerns itself with the abuse of power or authority.

Authority, as we see in v 7, is good, but whenever you have something that is good, man's sinfulness can make it something bad.

1. God is the absolute authority.
2. Man's nature can be defined by the image of God
3. Therefore, man will naturally, by his nature, establish systems and structures of authority

4. While the system is patterned after the image of God the procedure is not
5. God is the authority over man but in the exercise of that authority He is gracious and forgiving
6. When man is the authority over man he may be gracious or he may be evil.
7. Solomon says: Do not be shocked at this.

Then he tells why.

For one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.

There is a chain of command and this means there is a chain of responsibility. In it we may have abusers of authority but they too are under authority and on and on up the chain of command...all the way up to the very throne room of God.

This verse also tells us that the greater the integrity of those in authority the more just the authority will be. Do not reject one authority watching over the lesser authority.

The tendency may be to throw out authority, but that would not be good. Look at the next verse.

Ecclesiastes 5:9

After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

When you have land that is owned by the state and the state cares for the land, it is a benefit to everyone.

Illustration: Our lakes in OK were not built by the Army Corps of Engineers so you could water ski. They were built for the purpose of conserving and controlling water. Flood control, but we benefit.

Principle: Don't reject authority just because a some abuse their authority.

In Eccl. 5:10 Solomon begins an extended examination of money. This continues through to the final verse of chapter six. He considers what the secular world thinks of money. What the world thinks money can do, how the tendency in man is to think that money is a panacea for all the problems of life. How the world thinks money can buy significance, meaning in life, security, and happiness. Solomon is going to examine that secular wisdom and find it lacking.

REMEMBER: Solomon was the wealthiest man of his day and perhaps the wealthiest man who ever

lived. He had so much gold that silver was devalued and became a common metal in Jerusalem.

One might think that someone who has all that wealth would not be a good person to talk about the desire that a man, who has no money, has for wealth.

They might say he knows nothing about being in need, who does he think he is to be talking about the need for money and the problems it can solve.

BUT HE IS JUST THE ONE TO DO IT. His wealth makes him objective when it comes to money.

Objectivity comes not in the midst of a problem, but when you are above the problem.

In our society today we have come to value subjective opinion. If someone has a particular problem we think they are an expert.

I do not want the opinion of someone who is having a problem, I want the opinion of someone who has avoided the problem or solved the problem.

When we seek wise counsel, it must be objective counsel.

Solomon, having wealth, is totally objective about it.

In these passages, Solomon examines wealth in four ways.

Eccl. 5:10-17 A Description of Wealth

Eccl. 5:18-20 God gives the Capacity to enjoy Money

Eccl. 6:1-9 Wealth without Capacity

Eccl. 6:10-12 Who knows if money will bring happiness or misery?

v 10-17 A Description of Wealth.

Solomon looks at the unsatisfactory nature of Wealth. Part of the irony of money is that it does not take a lot to love it. Some would think that the vanity of riches referees to rich people. That is most often not the case. Some of the most materialistic people you will ever meet do not have a dime. And some of the wealthiest people you will meet are very giving, and hold their money rather loosely.

Growing up in Scottsdale Arizona I could always tell those who had true wealth. They wore it well, faded jeans, boots, a pick-up. But then we were

invaded by what one newspaper man back in the 60s called the ten thousand dollar a year millionaires. Clothes bought on credit, cars that leased, and living day to day just to get more. Yet they had nothing.

So in this examination of money we are not talking about any specific people on any economic level. We are talking about those who value money more than their relationship and dependence upon God.

We need to be profited by understand that in money or even in great wealth, there is nothing can replace God in our lives. Solomon gives us five reasons for this.

The more we gain the more we want: To pursue wealth is an addiction. It feeds upon itself and will consume us if we are not careful.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.

Solomon sees what we can see today. When material things are the focus of life, our desires always outrun our ability to acquire or to enjoy.

Someone once asked John D. Rockefeller how much money he wanted, he answered Just a little bit more.

This is a problem for the whole human race. They get, they want more, they get more, they want more. I am sure that we do not have to look any farther that our own life experience to see that this principle is true.

BUT FOR THE BELIEVER, it is even more true.

Remember Eccl. 3:11 God has put eternity in our hearts.

That God shaped hole in every man is even more defined for the believer. We are aware of our need for God to fill our lives.

But then we try to fill it with material things, things that money can buy. And we get addicted to this gain, we want more and more. Never satisfied.

Principle: A life built upon the pursuit of wealth will never being satisfaction, no matter how much is gained. It is vanity, it is empty.

The more we have the more we spend: As wealth increases, so do the people who want a slice of our pie

Ecclesiastes 5:11

When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?

More earning, more taxes, more insurance to cover the things that money has bought. A bigger place to keep more stuff. More money means more people to manage our money and more who want it.

And then there are the hangers on. The ones who want some of what you have.

Illustration: When a person wins a lottery they usually find out they have more relatives than they ever dreamed of. And all their casual friends become best friends.

So Solomon asks: Is it all worth it?

Additional Wealth Brings Addition Worries: Wealth may lead to sleepless nights.

Ecclesiastes 5:12

The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much. But the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

The primary reason people in our culture cannot sleep is tension. And the primary cause for tension is worry over money.

The WORKING MAN is the laborer, his sleep is pleasant.

First: He has worked hard so he is tired.

Secondly: He has little cause to worry. He has a job, he does it, and he leaves it.

Some days he may have more food, more abundance than other days, but even this does not prevent him from sleeping well.

However, the man who pursues wealth does not sleep so soundly. Even those who have a correct view of wealth, who see it as a details of life, have to concern themselves with so much more than the laborer.

What is the stock market doing, how is the economy effecting sales, how can I keep good people and get rid of those who I do not want? How about OSHA? the IRS? Government regulations?

My brother was developing Strawberry Reservoir in Utah and had been at it for two years. Then Jimmy Carter became president and remember one of his first decisions? Stop all the western water projects. A presidential decision is not something the laborer had to directly worry about. The rich do have to concern themselves with it.

The rich man is said to have a full stomach, but that fullness does not bring him a good nights sleep.

Principle: A good night's sleep comes from a relaxed mental attitude on the inside, not a fullness on the outside.

Our Wealth may Vanish, therefore, wealth does not guarantee security.

Ecclesiastes 5:13,14

There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him.

Solomon is looking at two problems.

FIRST: Wealth that is hoarded to the point of making the person miserable.

No enjoyment of wealth. Instead a fear that it is not enough, that it will be lost or stolen.

SECONDLY: Solomon is looking at business ventures that go bad.

The word MISFORTUNE in v 14 refers to misfortunes related to our work, our businesses or professions.

Solomon sees this business venture going so bad that the man ends up broke and has nothing to give to his heirs.

WE ALL KNOW THE STORIES of situations in which this was exactly what happened.

I heard of one guy who got into the silver buying frenzy when the Hunts of Texas were trying to corner the market. This guy saw silver go up, and up, and up, and took all his capital and bought silver, at \$49.00 an ounce. Remember how fast it fell? He was wiped out, totally.

The economy can change, money can be devalued. Inflation can destroy currency.

The best investment can end up being the worse investment.

We see this, Solomon saw it 3000 years ago. But do we learn from what we see?

Love may be blind but investing is blind and deaf.

Principle: There is not security in wealth. We cannot take our wealth with us, therefore we must trust in God not in Riches.

Ecclesiastes 5:15-17

As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. And this also is a grievous evil, exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So, what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

Here the wind analogy is used but in a different way. It is not chasing after the wind but working for wind.

We see also where materialism can lead:

He eats in darkness, no fellowship with others, after all, they may take you wealth.

Great Vexation, this is great sorrow

Sickness, this is anxiety, worry

Anger, as a life style. Anger settles down just under the surface of the life that want more and more.

WELL, ENOUGH BAD NEWS, NOW GOOD NEWS: There is a divine prescription for achieving satisfaction, security, significance in life.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

While this parallels what Solomon concluded in Eccl. 2:24-25 there is one added dimension . . .

God empowers us to enjoy the blessings He gives. The ability and capacity to enjoy whatever

amount of prosperity or lack there of is a gift from God.

BUT FIRST WE SEE the orientation we are to have towards material things.

Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.

While we toil, work hard in earthly things, our attitude is to be one that allows us to enjoy the food we eat and the beverage we drink.

We have only a few years in this life and we have already seen that we cannot take it with us.

So enjoy what God gives.

This is his reward: The reward is not in what is possessed but in the ability to enjoy whatever you have with a relaxed attitude.

REWARD is the Hebrew HA-LAQ and is a legal term for an allotment but not one that is based upon division of a set item to many people. Rather, it is a term that looks at what is granted by grace from a God whose grace can never run out.

NOW THEN, WE SEE WHAT WE are to do. We are to have a relaxed and trusting attitude towards what we have at any given time. This sets up the next verse.

Principle: You cannot receive what God what to give you if you are trapped into thinking that wealth and prosperity will solve your problems and will make you happy.

God wants to give you something but we too often are going to every other source to find the things that only He can provide.

Ecclesiastes 5:19

Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.

Here is the principle: If God has given the riches He has also given the gift of enjoyment of riches. If, on the other hand, man has hustled for wealth, then there is no divine gift of enjoyment.

Here the word GIFT is different than REWARD. It is the Hebrew NA-TAN and is a simple word for gift but can also be used for a gift that empowers or enables.

That is the way it is used here.

LET'S BROADEN THIS OUT WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS.

1. God is good and the giver of good gifts.
2. We want the good gifts God wants to give us.
3. However, we often seek the gift but do not seek the capacity to enjoy the gift
4. Job observed that in Job 1:21 that The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.
5. Job was able to say that because what God had given him as a gift of capacity was more important than the gift of prosperity itself.
6. When we ask God for blessing we should also ask Him for the gift of capacity so we can the blessings He gives.
7. Our recognition of God as the one who gives the capacity to enjoy His blessings allows us to relax and enjoy whatever He gives.

Principle: We must be more occupied with the giver than with the gifts.

Ecclesiastes 5:20

Provides a conclusion on the part of the one who is oriented to God as the giver of both the gifts and the capacity to enjoy the gifts.

For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

As this man looks at his life he is not consumed with the pain of the past. In the past times may have been better or may have been worse, but that is not what is important.

What is important is God keeping him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

One of the ways GLADNESS is used in its Hebrew root is for Joy that is a result. And here it is a result of the priority in life of knowing God and trusting Him.

We are glad because we know God and know of His goodness and thus, whatever He gives us is great and can be enjoyed.

QUESTION: What makes your heart glad. We have been saved to have a relationship with God. Our purpose in being is to come to know Him.

And we will never have true lasting gladness of heart until we get on with that over riding purpose of our lives.

SUMMARY.

1. Wealth and riches are not a panacea for the problems of life
2. Wealth and riches cannot make us happy, give us security, or add to our meaning in life or our significance in life
3. We can hustle for blessing or God can give us blessings. Only when God gives the increase can we be confident that we also have the capacity to enjoy it.
4. When we trust God we will be occupied with Him rather than with what He gives
5. This allows us to enjoy life at any moment and to know that whatever He has for us is His highest and best.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Six

Now for a contrast. In Eccl. 5:18-20 we saw that not only does God give good gifts to man but also the capacity to enjoy them. He gives the gift of empowering to enjoy.

That paragraph started with the word: Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting . . .

Now notice how Chapter six begins.

Ecclesiastes 6:1

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men . . .

He is the man who has managed to acquire wealth but lacks any capacity to enjoy it. He has one gift from God, the gift of prosperity, but not the other gift, the gift of empowering.

PREVALENT is the Hebrew RAB and means more common or a majority. This was the most common scenario in Solomon's day and today. More people who have wealth do not wear it well and the very wealth they worked so hard to acquire becomes a source of disillusion and disappointment.

Principle: The test of prosperity is more often failed than the test of adversity.

Prosperity Testing.

There are two categories of prosperity testing.

1. Individual prosperity testing, in which some form of success challenges the top priority of

doctrine and a personal relationship with God.

2. Collective prosperity testing, in which a city, state, nation, or group becomes very prosperous. The believer sharing in that prosperity becomes distracted from doctrine, lured away from his personal relationship with God.

The entire society usually becomes very hedonistic, making pleasure the chief function in life. Hedonism is self indulgence; the pursuit of pleasure to the exclusion of truth and doctrine. It contends that the purpose of life is fulfilled in the gratification of pleasure seeking.

The pursuit of pleasure excludes the priorities of integrity both in secular and Christian life. Collective prosperity testing challenges the society to choose between God' truth and man's truth.

Every believer must pass the prosperity test before he can achieve spiritual maturity and occupation with Christ.

Prosperity cannot bring happiness apart from the believer's dependence upon God, his function in the spiritual life, his reliance upon divine truth, and walking in the Spirit.

Prosperity is the most subtle distraction to our personal relationship with God. We leave God for the pursuit of prosperity. We leave a person for a thing.

Capacity must always precede prosperity. God gives us the capacity to enjoy whatever we have at the moment.

This is related to our relationship with him. Only when we know Him will we know that what ever He gives us is good.

The only protection you have to pass this test is spiritual confidence and a personal relationship with God which comes by faith. Prosperity cannot be accompanied by joy unless the believer has faith in God and God's perfect plan and in God's perfect gifts.

The world can offer you success, sex, fame, wealth, promotion, social and professional prosperity, but all these are without capacity and joy and can make your own misery.

Passing the prosperity test develops the believer's scale of values, making them consistent with God's values, resulting in stabilizing the right

priorities of life, and giving even more capacity to enjoy prosperity.

Passing this test means that the mature believer receives God's greatest prosperity, the greater blessings of time and eternity.

If you are unhappy in the midst of prosperity, it means that you do not have the empowering of God to enjoy the prosperity. You hustled for it yourself at the expense of learning, thinking, and applying doctrine. God gave it to you without the gift of capacity to teach you to know Him and depend upon Him

When you have the same joy in adversity as well as prosperity, it means you have passed the test, and are appreciating the giver rather than the gifts.

Now, here is what Solomon has not only seen but lived:

Ecclesiastes 6:2

A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction.

All the money in a man could want and yet he is not given the gift of God that will allow him to enjoy them.

The verb EMPOWER is SHAW-LAT and is a Hiphil stem, imperfect tense.

The word means to dominate, to master. The Hiphil stem is causative. Thus, God has not been caused to give this part of the gift. Imperfect sees something as being incomplete.

And wealth without capacity is incomplete. And the cause that would have effected the giving of the gift is the recognition that God alone prospers.

This person's mental attitude is one that says money will make me happy, secure, significant. Not a cause for God to give capacity.

Solomon now looks at the span of life of this type of man.

Ecclesiastes 6:3

If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, Better the miscarriage than he.

The word MISCARRIAGE is NA-FEL and can be used for a miscarriage, an abortion, a still born.

A man's heirs were responsible to give him a proper burial. But here all the heirs are interested in is what is left behind and how much of it they get.

Think of what it would be like to live a life void of any satisfaction. This would lead to the bitterness Solomon spoke of Eccl. 5:15-17.

Solomon says, better to not have been born.

Ecclesiastes 6:4,5

For it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity.

It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he.

NOW REMEMBER, THIS DEPRESSING statement is for the man under the sun, the person who sees God as irrelevant and is trying to live by secular wisdom.

In verse 6, Solomon draws a similar conclusion with death, one of the three intrusions upon secular wisdom (death, chance, evil).

Ecclesiastes 6:6

Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things-- do not all go to one place?

Solomon is not talking about places such as heaven or hell or paradise of torments or the Lake of Fire.

In dealing with the secular he is on their level and he states what all can observe. When a positive believer dies he goes into the grave. When a negative believer dies, he goes to the same place. When an unbeliever dies, he goes to the same place too.

Men can see this, it is observable. A man dying and going to heaven or hell is not observable.

Even the miscarriage, it is buried along side the one who may have lived a long life.

Ecclesiastes 6:7

All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.

Labor, and its rewards, are not able to satisfy the appetite. Man wants more and more. We saw that back in the last chapter.

Ecclesiastes 6:8

For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?

The word ADVANTAGE looks into the future. The results of being wise, being a fool, being poor, even a poor man who knows how to conduct himself among people.

What is the result? WE DO NOT KNOW...

We might hear the adage that a fool and his money are soon parted.

But have you ever stopped to consider that the fool being talked of had to have money in the first place in order to lose it.

Apart from a relationship with God and being dependent upon Him we have no way of knowing where are wisdom or our foolishness or our outstanding conduct may lead us.

Ecclesiastes 6:9

What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.

What does eye see when it looks at your life? Is it satisfied with what it sees...or is your life lived around what the soul desires. Always more, always what you do not have. Living for the future potential of filet mignon, and not enjoying the span burger you have on you plate today.

Solomon says that is futility and like chasing the wind.

Ecclesiastes 6:10

Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.

This verse reminds us who is in control. Not man but God.

We should not set our plans against God's plan. We need to fit into His plan, we cannot dispute with Him. We cannot win.

Ecclesiastes 6:11

For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?

All the words spoken, all the philosophies written, all the words, mean nothing.

We can take this very practically also. The words of boasting of what one will do, someday, are empty.

Raise some teenagers that are not yours and you will hear ear fuels of the future that rarely come to pass.

Ever know someone to whom this applies. Their identity gets wrapped up in what they will do and what they will be rather than enjoying the day God has given, today.

Ecclesiastes 6:12

For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

Life is short, we do not even know tomorrow. How do we even know if we will enjoy the outcome of the plans we make. We do not...Yet God is already there is our future knowing us now, knowing us then.

And His plan never fails . . .

Proverbs 16:9 The mind of man plans his way,
But the Lord directs his steps.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Seven

Solomon, in chapters five and six, has been talking about prosperity and wealth, what it can do, what it cannot do.

He is now going to summarize in Eccl. 7:1-14 by bringing Prosperity and Adversity into balance in the plan of God for man.

The KEY to this section in verse 14a: ECCL. 7:14 In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider.

The point is: Both prosperity and adversity can be mingled together by God to bring about His highest and best in our lives.

Some observations.

1. Neither prosperity or adversity are inherently good or evil. There can be ill effects from prosperity.
2. Eccl. 5:17 Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.
3. And there can be advantageous effects from adversity. We will see that in this section in verses 2-4

4. It is impossible for us to determine the results of adversity or prosperity in our lives.
5. What may seem good at the moment or bad at the moment can turn out to be the very opposite.
6. Since we cannot consider, determine, plan the outcome of either adversity or prosperity, the future is not in view. Not in our view, it is in God's view because He and He alone knows the outcome.
7. The issue then in either adversity or prosperity is how we are responding to what God has put on our plate...today.

Ecclesiastes 7:1

A good name is better than a good ointment,
And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

Ointment or Perfume is an analogy to HAPPINESS, PLEASURE, PROSPERITY.

Those things are good but there is something better.

A good name or reputation. When is a person's reputation most likely to be evaluated?

At DEATH: Hence, the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth...

Birth is a time of Happiness, the oil is applied to the new born baby, great predictions are made, father's show off their sons and daughters. But...who knows?

Hitler, Stalin, Charles Manson, were all once cute little babies who had parents who bragged about them.

But what really counts is what is said at your funeral or memorial service.

Principle: It is better to come to the end of life with a good reputation than to have a celebrated and joyful birth.

THAT Principle IS WOVEN THROUGHOUT THE NEXT 14 VERSES.

It sets the TONE as to how we are to respond to what we face in life, prosperity or adversity.

REMEMBER THE INTRUSIONS INTO HUMAN WISDOM: Death, chance, and evil. If man lives foolishly, chances are one of these will interrupt his life and then what?

Well, as a believer we know that death is in God's hands.

He has a plan for us so any luck or chance is eliminated.

And He alone can keep us from evil.

Ecclesiastes 7:2

It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart.

The word BETTER is TOWB and is found six times in this paragraph. It is a comparative term.

When we study the Bible we come into contact with the absolutes of God and His Word. But in the world we live in the midst of a lot of relativity.

Often, it is difficult to accept the relativity, the subjectivity, of our world.

We want the fallen world of fallen man to reflect the black and white absolutes of God. And it does not do it.

We need to see and to determine the things that are better. To realize that many of the decisions we must make come at the end of a string of wrongs and a string of failures and do not have some chapter and verse to make our decision for us. Hence, we need to see the things that are better.

The house of mourning is the also the house of death. We mourn the death of those we know. In doing so we do not mourn for them but for us.

Paul was very clear in telling believers that it is all right to mourn.

I Thessalonians 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.

The ones who have no hope are the UNBELIEVER who mourn for the one who has died because they see death as an end.

We as believers mourn or grieve because of our loss, not the loss of the one who has died. The one who has died in Christ has nothing but gain. We grieve the loss of a friend, a child, a parent, a loved one.

We will miss them, but they will not miss us.

When we go to the house of mourning, a funeral or a memorial service, or even an Irish wake, we are called to consider two things.

This is the end of every man: Someday, one day, we will be in the same place as the one who has died.

Death is a commonality for every man. It is as much a part of life as life itself. Death cannot be avoided, no one will ever figure out how to live forever.

You can fast freeze a body, put Disney on Ice, do this and do that, but you and I and everyone else will die. Life, as we know it under the sun, has an end.

it has been said that we live in a death denying society. Isn't it amazing that we are able to deny something that is all around us.

Second thing is that we are to "take it to heart."

Heart is the Hebrew LEB, the inner understanding, the seat of reflection, and the place of moral decisions resulting in actions.

So we are to take it to heart, IMPERFECT TENSE, curative action but incomplete. We will never stop learning our lessons in the House of mourning.

What should we consider, what should we learn?

LIFE IS SHORT...and we need to consider that in relationship to how we live.

Do we live in enjoyment of whatever God has put on our plates that day?

The person who lives only for the future may never live because they may not have a future.

There are times in life where reflection and evaluation are very much needed. We need to consider our ways, our attitude towards what God is doing with us.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.

That is why the middle step in the process we are involved in is to THINK...Learn, think, and apply, so that we may present to God, in our relationship with Him, a heart of wisdom.

Illustration: With you kids, ever have to tell them to stop and think. When they do not stop and think they do some pretty foolish things don't they. Well, believer, I wonder how often God looks at us and just says, would you stop and

think. And if we did we would have a heart of wisdom.

HINT: You want to know what keeps us from having all that God wants us to have with Him? Watch you kids, what they do is so often what we do with our heaven Father. We go through the spiritual life not thinking and acting foolish.

Ecclesiastes 7:3

It is because of that need to consider, to think, to reflect that Solomon says.

Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.

The word SORROW is KAH-AS and would be better translated in this context as GRIEF, the grief of going to a house of mourning.

This GRIEF is better than LAUGHTER: Why? Because of the previous statement. It causes us to consider, to think, to number our days.

Now Solomon is not advocating that we never laugh. Even God laughs (Psalm 2:4 He who sits in the heavens laughs). We are told in the beatitudes that weeping and mourning will give way to laughter.

Laughter, having a good time, occasional times of folly are great. But that is not our context. Solomon is saying that there are those who live foolishly and all they have is laughter. He deals with them in v 5-6 as he examines the vanity of foolishness.

But here, the somber serious heart is better because it is causing a person to reflect.

Principle OF APPLICATION: We need time to reflect on our lives. To consider what is really important and what is not. To consider that God is in charge of our lives and that He gives and He takes away, and what ever He gives is good.

For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.

The sad face is a reflection of a serious mood and the serious mood is the one that considers life in God's plan.

The statement THE HEART MAY BE HAPPY uses a comparative verb which is YAW-TAB as a Qal Imperfect.

The imperfect in this parsing is future. It looks ahead to what will come out of this serious reflection that one does.

Principle: Seriousness, somberness, a face that is deep into reflection is not bad, out it will come great good.

Ecclesiastes 7:4

Where is the mind going to be set?

The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.

The word WISE is CHA-CAM and when used of a class of men, as here, it refers to those who are learned and wise.

That is the class of men who attend the house of mourning.

The mind of the fool is in the house of pleasure.

I recently heard someone say that they do not attend funerals and memorial services because they make them sad. That is just the point, they are intended to do just that.

Our culture today places emphasis on pleasure, hedonism, and the result is a self-centered society.

We need reminders to number our days so that we might present to God a wise heart.

Ecclesiastes 7:5,6

It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man Than for one to listen to the song of fools.

For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool, And this too is futility.

Here we have a principle and an Illustration of the principle.

The principle is that there are times that a rebuke is better than a song.

The theme of this passage is that there are times when God gives us prosperity and there are times that God gives us adversity and since He is good whatever He gives us is good.

These can mingle together in His plan to bring about His highest and best in us.

The finite limited mind of man cannot understand this.

But here is something we can understand.

The rebuke of the wise is better than the song of the fool.

If a man does not understand that he is destined for difficulty in life.

Too often leaders surround themselves with YES men and listen to the song of fools and reject the rebuke of those who are wise.

In the NT rebuke is part of the communication of God's Word.

II Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Now Solomon illustrates this principle.

Ever have to start a fire in a camp fire or fireplace. You want to put in a big log and use a little match right. But that won't work. You have to put in kindling. But kindling alone won't work.

Oh it gives off a great blaze and crackles but then is consumed.

That is the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot. A lot of flare but very little fire and no heat.

The irony is that at first it appears to be a good fire, but soon it burns itself up.

The song of the fool is like the kindling, the rebuke of the wise man is the fire that burns well into the night.

v 7-10 THE TEMPTATIONS OF ADVERSITY AND PROSPERITY.

Now with either there are built in temptations to reject what God has given for that day and for that time. Both of these offer also the temptation to abandon wisdom which calls for us to live life wisely because life is short.

Ecclesiastes 7:7

For oppression makes a wise man mad, And a bribe corrupts the heart.

The desire to have prosperity might even tempt a wise man to take a bribe.

He may give in to the pressure of adversity-oppression and end up a fool or worse, a criminal who takes a bribe.

Why do we have this former CIA operative charged with treason. He was once a wise man, but gave into the temptation of some easy money and sold out his country.

Ecclesiastes 7:8

The end of a matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

We all suffer the temptation of impatience. When in adversity we are impatient for it to end, and with prosperity we are impatient in wanting more and more.

So many things begin with a bang and end with a whimper. The great hopes that kick off great plans and then die.

Kendall's White Castle idea . . .

Patience is better...Haughtiness is not.

This is GAW-BAWH which means pride that come from self promotion.

Too much of this, too little of patience.

Ecclesiastes 7:9

Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.

Another temptation is anger and bitterness. Anger can result from adversity but also in the midst of prosperity. Prosperous people get angry at not having enough or having to pay too much in taxes, insurance, etc.

This anger can settle in as a life style of bitterness. This word for anger can also include grief and frustration.

The FOOL is the one who has anger on the inside. Just there, always under the surface, a life that is ready to explode.

Ecclesiastes 7:10

Do not say, Why is it that the former days were better than these? For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.

This is the one that reminds me how relevant this book is. Nearly 3000 years ago Solomon encountered those who like today long for the good old days.

And they say the good old days were better . . .

But were they, and even if they were we cannot turn back the clock. We are here today. Yesterday is gone.

WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT THOSE WHO live in the future, who live for tomorrow, here are the ones who live for the past.

IN EITHER CASE YOU DO NOT LIVE for today.

Remember the apostle prayer...give us this day our daily bread.

Luke 9:23 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

We are to live for this day before the Lord, not tomorrow, and not yesterday.

Solomon adds it is not from wisdom that these things are said.

So we are forewarned, in the midst of prosperity or in the midst of adversity we will be tempted to abandon wisdom and live the life of a fool.

Ecclesiastes 7:11,12

PROSPERITY IS BENEFICIAL IF USED WISELY.

When accompanied by wisdom, prosperity can be a very good thing.

Wisdom along with an inheritance is good And an advantage to those who see the sun.

For wisdom is protection just as money is protection. But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

Money, prosperity, can protect us from certain categories of problem.

But only wisdom can preserve our lives in time.

THEREFORE TO HAVE ALL THE MONEY in the world with out wisdom is empty. Why do we know this? Because it is being stated by someone who lived that way for 15 years. Lots of money, no wisdom applied to self.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS IMMUTABLE AND BEYOND OUR FINITE MINDS

Ecclesiastes 7:13

Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent?

Can we straighten what God has bent? Of course not.

Ecclesiastes 7:14

In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other So that man may not discover anything that will be after him.

We do not know what will happen after our lives are over. God does . . .

God has made both adversity and prosperity and will mingle them together in our live to bring

about his perfect plan in our lives providing us with His highest and best.

The Sovereignty of God

God is the supreme being of the universe, the highest king. He is eternal, infinite, self-determining.

God has absolute Will and does whatsoever he pleases.

Some passage on God's sovereignty.

Psalm 66:7 He rules by his power forever.

I Chron 9:12 Thou reignest over all, in thine hand is power and might.

II Chron 20:6 Thou rulest over all the kingdoms of the nations.

Rev 19:16 King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In His sovereignty he was pleased to give man FREE WILL.

God's Sovereign will and man's free will meet at the Cross.

The believer God sovereignty is what determines the path he will provide for us in both adversity and prosperity to reach the goal of knowing Him.

Is there anything God is not free to do? YES, he is not free to ignore his own perfection or perfect essence.

Taken out of the context, these next few verses could really throw us. Especially verse 16.

Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?

But remember the immediate and the larger context. The immediate context is the sovereignty of God and the larger context is how He blesses us by mingling together both adversity and prosperity and not by us hustling for blessing.

The bottom line in all this is that He is in charge and whatever He gives is good. God for His plan, good for His plan in us, bringing us to be the people He saved us to be.

Ecclesiastes 7:15

I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

The futility of Solomon's life seemed to last a life time and did cut his life short.

1 Kings 3:14 And if you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.

But instead he reigned only 40 years and died at the age of 60.

Psalm 90:10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years.

His reversionism (backsliding) cost him about 20 years of life and cost the nation of Israel even more.

During his time he saw righteous men die young and wicked men live a long time.

First, we have to determine what he means by RIGHTEOUS.

This is not used in the NT sense of God's perfect righteousness. But rather for a man who is observably righteous, Solomon says I HAVE SEEN THIS.

We can only observe how a man lives so this righteousness is limited to actions and words.

Might it be legalism, certainly can be. We do not know but we know the good might die young and the wicked may live a long time.

The point is that righteous living is not a guarantee of long life nor is wicked living a guarantee of a short life.

There are no guarantees because it is God who is sovereign and He calls the shots on life and death.

Ecclesiastes 7:16

Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?

Being overly wise is put into context with excessive righteousness as a negative.

The question Why should you ruin yourself could better be translated Why should you surprised.

The verb RUIN is SA-MEM and usually means destroy or ruin but here it is a Hithpael imperfect and in that form which is reflexive is never means to destroy.

It means to be appalled or astonished or I would say surprised.

What is the SURPRISE? That God is not impressed with our righteousness and our wisdom. And it is

not going to earn any points with God and change His sovereign will as to how long we should live.

Principle: God is never impressed with the extreme of legalism.

Is some righteousness good, YES, we reap what we sow and we live among others. Righteous living is of value in any society.

But the person here is refereed to is self righteous and depending upon self wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 7:17

The danger of rejecting legalism is to live lawlessly, so Solomon adds a warning.

Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

This looks at a universal principle for man on earth. Excessive wickedness can result in a premature death.

YOUR TIME is the time God has established for you to exit this life.

But due to excessive wickedness this person's life is cut short.

This was true with Solomon's life. The 15 years of reversionism took their toll. He died at age 60, perhaps 20 years before his time according to God's promise to him of an extended life.

Today, people who are involved in evil, sin, a wicked life stand a much greater chance of dying then those who do not.

Drugs, alcohol abuses, venereal diseases, AIDS, violence...all these can effect a life and shorten it.

Today our law makers are very concerned with the effects of smoking and the fact that it can and does shorten life expectancy. Study shows it shortens life by anywhere from five to eight years.

But what if I told you there was a class of people whose life expectancy is shortened by fifteen to twenty years and yet this is a class that is being not only protected in their activity but promoted in their activity by the government? Know what that class is? Homosexuality...by class, homosexuals die on an average of 15 to 20 years earlier than heterosexuals. Yet our legislative body is going after Joe Camel and ignoring homosexuality as a problem.

Bottom line, wickedness can shorten life. This is not what God does directly but it is what He permits under the Sun.

GOD CAN DIRECTLY shorten life by the Sin Unto Death

WE CAN SHORTEN LIFE by wickedness, which is thus a type of self imposed sin unto death.

Ecclesiastes 7:18

It is good that you grasp one thing, and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.

The two things that are held is the self righteousness of verse 16 and the wickedness of verse 17.

Here man is told to hold onto both.

But it is not the excesses of these, but the moderation of these. Moderate righteousness and moderate wickedness.

The key is understanding what is meant by grasping and by not letting go.

Here the challenge to the believer is a challenge to reality.

The self righteous man lives divorced from the reality of the grace of God and his own sin.

The wicked man lives divorced from the reality of a God who is righteous and just.

We must hold onto both in the sense that we recognize that we are at times righteous and at times wicked.

AND THESE DO NOT COUNT IN GOD'S PLAN...His plan to bless us with his highest and best is based upon Him, not us.

SO HOW TO ADJUST TO GOD'S PLAN FOR US: verses 19-26

Ecclesiastes 7:19

Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

Wisdom, not from ourselves but from God, allows us to understand that our purpose in life is to know Him.

Human wisdom is sold cheaply on the market of the world. Satan's wisdom is available and presented as an alternative to the wisdom of God. Many believers will opt for wisdom that does not come from God.

BUT THE WISDOM OF GOD is scarce.

It has only one source and that is the Word of God and it is developed only one way, and that is by

learning, thinking, and applying the Word in the sphere of a personal relationship with God.

But God's Wisdom in us can do something even ten rulers in a city.

The RULERS is SHAL-LEET and referees to military commanders.

The word CITY refers to a city that is well protected and guarded by walls and a militia.

Ten rulers would lead to confusion, but ten military commanders and their troops would be considered very powerful, yet Wisdom from God is better.

Wisdom gives us greater strength.

This verse is telling us that man may seek what is visible, what is considered strong by human standards. But that God has something for us that goes beyond human thinking and ideas, His Wisdom.

And when we have that wisdom we will be strengthened:

STRENGTHEN is AW-ZAZ and is a Qal imperfect which means not only to be strong but to prevail. The imperfect tense tells us that this is a process, continue on the more and more strength because there are more and more battle to fight.

This word is first found in the book of Judges and then found often in the Psalms.

The use of this term for STRENGTH was very limited and seen only in those situation where the individual who had this strength had been called by God for a specific task, like the Judges, or in prayers, as in Psalms, where David is drawing near to the Lord in worship, praise, adoration, and prayer.

SO THE FACTORS THAT ALLOW FOR THIS type of strength are all factors that are found in a relationship with God.

Principle: The wisdom of the Word will develop strength in the believer only when that believer is also developing a relationship with God.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

Reminds us of Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God .

This verse links the value and scarcity of wisdom in verse 19 with the evaluation of righteousness in the previous verses.

EVEN THE RIGHTEOUS MAN sins. Therefore, the conclusion is that our righteousness cannot be the basis upon which God will bless us.

Here again we see the intrusions into man's systems of trying to gain significance in life. A man, and this is common for believers, may try to live a righteous life expecting God to bless him.

But then the INTRUSION of evil of which sin is a part, comes into the life.

Our sin separates us from God and should teach us that we cannot expect God to bless us just because we have been cranking out good deeds.

Ecclesiastes 7:21,22

Serves as a warning to us not to believe all of our critics nor all of our supporters.

It is set in the negative, the critics, because that is perhaps a bit easier for us to understand.

Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

No boss, employer, or master in the ancient world, ever believes all that is said about him by those he hires.

This looks at destructive and not constructive criticism. We need to listen to and consider the rebuke of the wise (Eccl. 7:5). But the words that are spoken in anger or in disgust, we let them go.

AND IN THE SAME WAY the words that endlessly praise, and pat us on the back too must be let go.

YOU SEE, GOD SAYS we are sinners, we are have in us some righteousness but also wickedness, if we know ourselves we are not going to let others define who we are.

That definition is in the hands of an objective, perfect, loving God. Not in the hands of critics or supporters.

Consider the times you have cursed others, did you ever have to eat your words, take back what was said. Conclude that you were really wrong in what was said?

It has happened to us all. And that should teach us not to listen to the numerated praises and the unwarranted criticisms.

LET GOD THE JUDGE OF WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU ARE.

Ecclesiastes 7:23-26 Looking for wisdom in all the wrong places.

Now Solomon valued wisdom. He had wisdom in two categories. A wisdom that was built into him as he was growing up being taught by his father David and his mother Bathsheba. He learned and he observed and eventually surpassed them in wisdom. And he also had a gift of wisdom from God that made him the wisest man who ever lived a part from the Lord Jesus.

And yet while he could apply this wisdom to others, he could not apply it to self.

For the sake of the nation, God allowed Solomon's wisdom to remain even while he was in reversionism.

Eccl. 2:9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.

But he failed in applying wisdom to his relationship with God. The primary purpose for wisdom went wanting.

Ecclesiastes 7:23

So here he tried to approach wisdom on a human level.

I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me.

A statement of inability...it was far from me.

Our inability must teach of God's greater ability.

Whenever we face our weakness we have an opportunity to seek and know God and His strength.

NOTICE: The self resolve of the decision and statement the he would be wise, means very little. The words were empty, the ability was not there.

Ecclesiastes 7:24

What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?

Why does this wisdom and its use seem so far away? Because Solomon is far away from God.

So even when he comes up with wisdom, even wisdom that is parallel to the wisdom of God,

common sense, divine view point, laws of divine establishment, they fail him because he is not first drawing near to God.

Let's consider some verses on drawing near to God.

Psalm 73:28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works.

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

John 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

To draw near to God is done in attitude not mere actions.

Isaiah 29:13 Then the Lord said, Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.

NOTE: They learn by only by rote, facts with no relationship with God

Jeremiah reveals this as a double problem.

Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.

AND THAT IS WHERE SOLOMON IS, in the middle of two problems.

And that is where many believers are today, in the middle of these two problems.

They have forsaken a personal relationship with God. They have forgotten what God desires, they have set aside any thought of being able to know God, they know about God, but they do not know Him.

They are religious, they may know doctrine, they may attend and be active in a local church, but the relationship is not there.

Illustration: Can two people be married for even a long time, live under the same roof, sleep in the

same bed, share the same toothpaste, and not have a relationship? Of course, we have heard of it happening many times.

And if that can happen with someone who is visible, how much more so with God who is invisible.

Second problem: They carve out cisterns for themselves and yet these cisterns break and cannot hold water.

A cistern was a hollow carved out of a rock to capture rain water and run off. It was designed as a reservoir to hold water for the dry season.

Took a lot of work to carve one out. Yet these are broken and hold no water, what a waste of time and effort.

THE ANALOGY is to the believer who forsakes God and tries to find refreshing water someplace else, it won't work.

That is what Solomon was doing and that so often is what we do. We work hard, chipping away at the rocks of life only to find that our effort is in vain.

Solomon sought wisdom but he had forsaken God, so he ended up with a cistern that was empty, vain, of no value.

Remember what Jesus said: John 7:37 If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

That is the only place to go for wisdom, to God and it begins with drawing near to Him.

Ecclesiastes 7:25

Solomon is stubborn, as are most of us, so he is going to try to figure these things out and come up with his own Wisdom Plan.

I directed my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.

NOTICE THE PROBLEMS HERE.

He is directing His own mind. We so often make decisions which seem good in our own eyes.

Proverbs 21:2 Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts.

Solomon had been taught better than to put much stock into his own decisions a part from what God wanted.

I Chronicles 28:9 David's challenge: As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.

He directed his mind to know, to seek, to understand.

Yet these are things that only God truly knows. Here is Solomon trying to figure out the meaning of life, figure out his own significance apart from God. It does not work.

Isaiah 55:8-9 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Ecclesiastes 7:26

He skips over his investigation and goes right to the conclusion.

And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

Talk about a let down. He starts off to seek, explore, find the meaning of life with his great wisdom and ends up in snares, nets, and chains.

Reminds me of the warning earlier in the chapter: The end of a matter is better than its beginning.

He uses a personification that he also employs in Proverbs. Wisdom as a woman and Evil as a woman.

[Illustrated in very graphic detail in Proverbs 7]

BUT SOLOMON GIVES US A FURTHER CONCLUSION: One he could only come up with once he is back in fellowship.

THERE IS A WAY OUT...Be one who is pleasing to God and you will escape this evil.

HOW CAN WE PLEASE GOD?

First, we have the job of learning what is pleasing to God.

Ephesians 5:10 Paul speaks of: Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Our ways are not God's ways so we must go to God's book and find out how we can please Him.

Pleasing God must never be attempted in our own strength.

Zechariah 4:6 This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

II Corinthians 12:10 For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Pleasing God begins with an attitude and not with actions.

Jeremiah 6:20 For what purpose does frankincense come to Me from Sheba, And the sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, And your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me.

When we spend time in the Word thinking, musing upon the Word and what it reveals of God, He is pleased.

Psalms 104:34 Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the Lord.

When we ask God for that which blesses other and furthers His cause on earth He is pleased.

I Kings 3:10 And it was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing.

We are to keep our way, our path in life set on God and His word, and this pleases Him.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

This has an effect of protecting us from our enemies and putting us at peace with them.

Our obedience to God is of primary importance in pleasing Him. The Lord Jesus pleased the Father by His obedience.

John 8:29 And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.

We are to keep God's commandments for this age and by these the result will be that we will please Him.

I John 3:22 Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

But none of our pleasing of God is independent of God. He is the one who works in us by the Holy Spirit that we can please Him.

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal

covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Ecclesiastes 7:27

Behold, I have discovered this, says the Preacher, adding one thing to another to find an explanation.

Solomon now adds some things up.

He adds his human wisdom and inability to figure out what God is doing to . . .

The character and essence of God verses the character of man.

These two things are amplified in the next two verses

Ecclesiastes 7:28

Which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.

With all his wisdom, position, power, he is still seeking.

But as he previously stated, he cannot find because he has not first return to spirituality and then drawn near to God.

The next two phrases are idiomatic.

TYPES OF POETRY: See the Handouts:

Hebrew Poetry is built around Parallelism: Putting one line in a poem into balance with another line. The number of lines that are balanced together determine whether it is a distich (2 line), tristich (3 lines) or whatever -stitch.

RHYME.

English would rhyme hill and will

Hebrew would rhyme hill and mountain

TYPES OF PARALLELISM.

I. Synonymous Parallel: Two lines that have almost the same meaning (See examples on handout)

II. Synthetic Parallel: The building or increasing of an idea. Takes a line then in the second line furthers the idea or thought (See Examples)

III. Antithetical: The second line is an opposite thought or contrast to the first line (See handout).

IV. Other Parallels include:

Emblematic: Uses an image or illustration

Climactic: Repetition of a portion of a line.

Alphabetical: Psalms Divided by the Hebrew Alphabet

SO HERE WE HAVE A SYNTHETIC PARALLEL: The second line advances the same concept found in the first line.

1. One man among a thousand means, as we might say, one in a million. Impossible odds, not really finding anyone.

2. Then not one woman, again, a statement of the impossibility of finding any who are wise enough in their human wisdom to understand God and His plan for man.

It is inconceivable that Solomon would in any way denigrate women. All we have to do is read Proverbs to see that Solomon recognized that women often had more spiritual sense than many men.

The account of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 may well have been a remembrance of his mother Bathsheba who is portrayed in I Kings as an extremely wise woman.

THE CONCLUSION THEN IS THAT Solomon found no one.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.

But this he has found.

God made unique among creation. He made him upright.

The word MADE is a Qal perfect and the word UPRIGHT is the Hebrew YAR-SHAWR which can mean upright, but also proper, fit, pleasing, correct.

God has made to be proper, fitting in his sight. To live unto Him and have His highest and best.

But just like Solomon, man chooses to try to figure life out on his own.

But they have sought out many devices .

So instead of drawing near to God man seeks his own methods, his own devices.

NOW DEVICES, is KISH-SHAW-BONE in the Hebrew. And if can also be translated INVENTIONS.

AND JUST LIKE AN INVENTION, THIS IS something man comes up with on his own a part from God's wisdom.

Man comes up with these, as did Solomon in verse 23, he tests life with his own wisdom, that is a device of man.

SOUGHT OUT is a Piel Perfect and this means that this is an intensive seeking out, an intense search.

The PERFECT TENSE indicates that man is more often than not completely satisfied with his own devices.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Eight

The understanding of this chapter comes when we see how the two parts are related.

This chapter begins with a statement of the value of wisdom and ends with the limitations of man's wisdom

While wisdom allows a wise man to live in peace under authority in life (vv 1-9), this wisdom does not allow him to understand to figure out God's plan.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

The Value of Wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 8:1

Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.

Solomon begins with two rhetorical questions.

Who is like the wise man? There is no substitute for wisdom, man needs wisdom in order to exist in life.

Who knows the interpretation of a matter? This Hebrew word is found only here, its Aramaic parallel is found in Daniel and referees to the interpretation of dreams.

Here it has a broader sense in that the wise man is the one who can size up a situation and act accordingly.

As a result, the wise man will act graciously and avoid rash behavior that could lead him to harm.

He is illumined, he has understanding, and his stern face beams, which means he is patient, tolerant, gracious.

Now all this is because he is wise, and Solomon is going to praise the value of wisdom in these first nine verses.

And one of the greatest expressions of wisdom, a part from anything spiritual, just human wisdom, is the wise man will function well under authority.

Ecclesiastes 8:2

I say, Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.

Citizenship in a nation demands an oath of allegiance to the authority of that nation.

We pledge our allegiance to the Flag and all it represents. If we are to receive the benefits of citizenship than we must abide by the mandates of that citizenship.

That oath is taken before God. New citizens stand and raise their hands before a judge and take an oath.

Ecclesiastes 8:3

Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases.

The idea here is of abandoning support for a leader just because he does not do what you wanted or expected him to do.

Remember Eccl. 4:13-16? How a king's popularity can quickly evaporate. Someone new comes along and the people throng to his side abandoning the present leader.

Solomon says that wisdom should slow this down and will use caution in leaving a leader.

When we do this in haste we join in an EVIL. Satan loves to disrupt authority knowing that the more chaos he can cause the riper nations will be for dictators.

The warning is backed up by the fact that a king can do whatever he pleases including bringing wrath upon revolutionaries.

Ecclesiastes 8:4

Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, What are you doing?

While leaders today have some built in systems of accountability, in Solomon's day the King was an absolute monarch.

No one could question him. And while we may argue that that is not right, that it is not fair and just . . .

Remember who is in control: GOD

God sets rulers up and brings them down according to his plan not ours. To oppose a ruler with illegal action, to revolt in violence is to say that God is not in control of the nations.

Verses 5-9 Goes back to concept introduced in v 1.

Ecclesiastes 8:5

He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.

The person who is obedient to authority is obedient out of his wisdom, the wise heart.

He knows the proper time and procedure or judgment. He thinks, he applies his wisdom, he knows there is a time to keep quite and obey and he also knows there is a time to give opinion, and disagree.

As a result, harm is averted as a result of his obedience.

Ecclesiastes 8:6

For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, when a man's trouble is heavy upon him.

The word delight is KHAY-FETS and would better be translated desire or purpose.

The word trouble is RA, the same word used in v 3 for the evil of revolution.

Here the desire to disobey, to rebel is there, but rather than engage in any improper action that would be evil the wise man knows there is a proper time and procedure in which to change things.

In our culture and our form of government this is by vote.

We may desire things to be different and different leaders to rule and a different part to be in control of the house and senate but do we stage an armed rebellion? NO, we wait for a proper time and a proper procedure. Get out and vote.

That is the conclusion of the wise man.

Ecclesiastes 8:7

If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?

We in our wisdom are limited in that we do not know the future, we do not know when things might change, it could be tomorrow.

So here we begin to get a glimpse of the limitation of our wisdom plan, as good and valuable as human wisdom may be for order in a nation, it cannot predict the future...only God knows what will be tomorrow.

Verses 8-9 The Legitimate Demands of Authority and Authority's Limitations.

Ecclesiastes 8:8

No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.

We have four parallel statements: The first and fourth are parallel and the second and third are parallel.

You cannot restrain the wind with the wind, and you cannot deliver people from evil with evil. There may be evil rulers but our evil will not deliver the nation from their evil.

Just as you do not have authority over the day or you death, neither do you have authority over military service in time of war. The King has the right of conscription and you have to go and in going you do not flee to Canada.

Ecclesiastes 8:9

All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.

Solomon observes with his mind what is done under the sun and he recognizes that men do exercise authority in a way that causes others to be hurt.

The grammar here, by the way, can go either way. He hurts others by the misuse of his authority or he himself is hurt by the misuse of his authority.

So that is the best man's wisdom can do, allow for proper orientation to authority...but what do you do when you wisdom is not 20/20?

Ecclesiastes 8:10-14 The Problem with our Vision.

Ecclesiastes 8:10

So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place,

and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.

Solomon had lived long enough to see wicked men die and here he comments on their passing.

1. They were wicked yet they had access to the Temple just like the righteous man.
2. Their deeds of wickedness, their hypocrisy, is soon forgotten. And we have even seen the wicked praised after their deaths.

Does this seem right in our eyes, of course not. The law of retribution seems to have broken down.

Ecclesiastes 8:11

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.

Evil systems delay legal retribution against the wicked and their evil deeds.

In other words, they are getting by with it.

The sentence is not executed quickly and others who see the wicked prosper and get by with it are tempted to follow in their evil footsteps.

Now do we have this problem today? No doubt about it.

When a convicted murderer is sentenced to death and the punishment is delayed and delayed by appeal after appeal, justice is seen as a joke in the eyes of evil men.

We often debate whether capital punishment is a deterrent to crime. Certainly not in the way it is executed today. Even when a capital offender is executed it is so often for crimes committed years ago that it does not have any impact upon society and no impact upon the criminal element of society.

Is this right, can we figure it out? No? Our vision does not allow us to figure out this kind of injustice.

Verses 12-14 The Confidence we must have in God's Plan over what we see in life.

Ecclesiastes 8:12

Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

We have already seen that one liability the wicked face is that they may die as a result of their wickedness (Eccl. 7:17)

Here that liability is taken away from the proposed situation. The sinner does evil, intense evil, a hundred times a day is the idiom, and his life is lengthened and yet . . .

Solomon says I KNOW that it will be well for those who fear God, the ones fearing Him openly.

At issue here is how does he know this? It cannot be by observation, if anything his observation would point to the opposite being true.

The only way this can be known is by depending upon God's wisdom rather than what is seen and observable by human wisdom.

KNOW is YAW-DAH in the Hebrew and is a Qal active participle, the Qal stem is declarative and the participle looks at an active process, in this case a process of learning the wisdom of God.

FEAR is a Qal imperfect indicating that what is expected is not perfection but a process of fearing or respecting God more and more as we grow.

TO DO THIS OPENLY is to do this not openly before men but before God Himself.

Ecclesiastes 8:13

The end of the evil man: But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

God will certainly not lengthen the life of the evil man and in reality his life may be cut short by his own involvement in evil.

The word LENGTHEN is a Hiphil stem which is causative active. The evil he does will not cause his life to be lengthened.

WHY: Because he does not fear God.

One Hebrew word that is not translated is PAW-NEEM and that word is similar to the word we had in v 12 for OPENLY, here the evil man does not respect God in the presence of God.

Ecclesiastes 8:14

There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.

This is saying that Solomon has seen the righteous get what the wicked deserve and the Wicked get what the righteous deserve.

This is a contradiction to the principle of retribution and in the eyes of man whose vision is not 20/20 seems like enigmatic or meaningless.

NOTICE: He both begins and ends this observation with HE-BEL, vanity, emptiness, meaningless.

Verses 15-17 His Conclusion.

Ecclesiastes 8:15

God wants us to have Joy: So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

The word PLEASURE is at times translated JOY, so Solomon is commending, recommending an attitude of JOY.

Under the Sun, as man is bound to earth he should eat, drink and be merry.

Paul uses this same phrase in I Corinthians 15:32 as a negative by adding the words for tomorrow we shall die.

There he is critical of the ones who do not believe in the resurrection to eternal life.

Also in Isaiah 22:13 the negative use of the phrase

But Solomon uses it in a very simplistic manner. He says we are here, on earth, often things do not make sense or seem very clear since our vision is not 20/20. There is injustice, there is inequality. But those things are in God's hands and under His care.

We need not seek revenge upon the wicked. We need not get upset about these things. God, in the end will triumph.

So what is left to us: Enjoy life as we place our lives under God's care.

EXAMPLE: James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.

If we take this thought in light of the first verse of this chapter we see that it is the wise man who can face the perplexities of life and still have a face that beams with joy.

Ecclesiastes 8:16

When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night),

And I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, I know, he cannot discover.

Solomon is coming to the end of the road with human wisdom. He is beginning to see that it cannot be a substitute for the wisdom that comes from God.

In Eccl. 9 he will give an example of wisdom and its value over human and military strength

Then in Eccl. 10 he concludes the dissertation on human wisdom in three verses that tell us that we cannot understand God and what God is doing by human wisdom.

Here, at the end of chapter 8, he begins, so to speak, to see the light.

The opening words of v 16 remind of where Solomon began this most recent quest back in Eccl. 7:25

Eccl. 7:25 I directed my mind...

Eccl. 8:16 I gave my heart...

The words MIND and HEART are the same word in the Hebrew.

Both phrases are Qal Perfects and yet here in verse 16 the perfect is incomplete in context. This quest, this search, did not arrive at its goal.

He even spent some sleepless nights trying to understand what was going on, on earth.

Ecclesiastes 8:17

And here is the problem, I saw every work of God.

The word WORK is MAH-AS-EH which can also mean needlework. Now needlework, of which I know almost nothing, but I do know that in the process it doesn't look like much and from the backside it looks like even less even when done.

So this is an excellent analogy of how we look at what God is doing, we see it in part, prior to completion, we see it from the wrong side.

It looks great to God, but it can be very perplexing to us.

How does man in his human wisdom attempt to have 20/20 vision.

1. By hard work, seeking laboriously, driving on to that point in which he thinks he will understand.
2. These are imperfect tenses that contrast sharply with the perfect tense used back in v 16.
3. By convincing himself he understands. This is the stroking of the beard, the nodding of the head, the distant look in the eyes, and the saying of I Know.

But he does not know. Even if he says he has God figured out, in human wisdom he cannot discover.

DISCOVER is a Qal infinitive indicating that the boast of man, man's words, do not result in discovering what God is doing.

This all adds up to the fact that man in human wisdom will face perplexities in life.

But as believers, with God's wisdom, we too will face perplexities in life.

In II Corinthians 4:8 Paul speaks of the fact that believers, even himself, get perplexed. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing. Despairing is a word that means to be at a loss, to be despondent, to be depressed. Paul admits to his perplexity yet says this should not slide over into depression.

The word PERPLEXED means to doubt, to hesitate, to not know what to do, to not know what to say or how to act. As the believer sees what God is doing in his life there will be times of perplexity. Times in which we will say we do not understand. At times this perplexity will come out of what others do as with Paul and the Galatian believers.

Galatians 4:20 But I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul was perplexed regarding how quickly they were embracing legalisms.

We can be perplexed by what is taught as were the disciples during the upper room discourse when Jesus told them one of them would betray Him.

John 13:22 The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking.

In Acts 25:20 we see an UNBELIEVER who is perplexed at the accusations being made against Paul.

Festus, the Roman Governor of Judea is speaking: And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters.

But believers too can be perplexed regarding the accusations of others and the conflicts that arise among men.

The Bible Doctrine we have will allow us to understand many of things in life that cause people to be perplexed. But we will never have the full counsel of God. And there are times we will not understand, and we will be perplexed and we will not know what to do or what to say.

I Corinthians 2:1-3 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

What do we do then? Look again to II Corinthians 4:8

First, we do not despair. We do not allow for depression to settle in and turn the adversity of perplexity to the stress of depression.

Look at verse 10: Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

The deaths of Christ, carried with us, allow for the continual adjustments to the justice of God when we sin. We look away from our weakness, our sin, our lack of understanding to His deaths.

The price paid for us...to have His life.

IN ORDER THAT the Life of Jesus might be manifested in our body.

How will this occur? By learning the Word, by Faith, and in the sphere of our relationship with Him.

If you know Him by way of the doctrine in your soul, and you trust Him by way of the faith you have in Him in the sphere of your personal relationship with him, when you are perplexed, you not despair.

After all, you know the one who knows all the answers and if He chooses to tell you, fine, if not, well that is fine also.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Nine

Ecclesiastes 9:1

For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.

While in Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 Solomon examined the fate that awaits the wicked man and the uncertainty of his life based upon his human wisdom, here he looks at the man who is righteous and wise.

Only once before in Ecclesiastes has Solomon linked these two concepts together and that was in Eccl. 7:16 where he warns of being legalistically righteous and extreme in human wisdom.

He notes that the deeds of righteous men and wise men are also in the hand of God.

For the believer who reads this there is a comfort in that statement. That God is Sovereign and he is in control and what happens to us is in His hands.

For the UNBELIEVER or the believer who stands in human righteousness and wisdom a part from God, this statement reminds him that he is not the captain of his own fate nor is he the master of his destiny.

The last statement could be expanded to read: Man (wicked, righteous, wise, positive believer, neg. believer, UNBELIEVER) does not know what awaits him, love or hate or anything else.

The negative self dependent believer can recognize God's sovereignty from natural revelation.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

Also Romans 1:18-32, specifically v 20, For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

However, neither the unbeliever nor the negative believer, both of whom are limited by human wisdom and what they can observe, will be able to know the grace and love of God.

Therefore, he will never know what kind of a God, God is. So will God meet him with hate? Love? Or anything else?

The positive believer depending upon God's wisdom will also not know what the future holds.

Back in chapter seven we saw that God can mingle together both adversity and prosperity to bring about His perfect plan in us.

We may hit times of trial, testing, even discipline from our God who loves us. We may be having a real bad time but out of this great good can come.

There are times when God wants to stretch us in order to grow us. He wants us to sink our roots deeper as a tree sinks its roots deeper in times of doubt.

The future may hold adversity, we do not know.

I Peter 4:13 But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

The positive believer then may not know what the future holds but by faith knows the one who holds the future.

7. So verse 1, like many of the verses in Ecclesiastes has one meaning for the believer and another for the unbeliever or negative believer.

Ecclesiastes 9:2,3

It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.

This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

These verses look only at what is observable by man. Whether good or bad, the fate of all men is to die.

Solomon also reminds us that the hearts of all men are full of evil.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

When man sees this with eyes of human understand it appears to be an EVIL. For the believer who is walking with God it is not an EVIL but a PROMOTION into eternity.

Ecclesiastes 9:4-6

For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.

For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.

Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

Pretty depressing isn't it? But it is true and . . .

It can also be challenging to the believer.

The living have the opportunity for fruitful labor, for fulfilling the destiny God has for them.

If we but take these depressing words and turn them just slightly we will see that we have life, make the most of it in the plan of God.

So under the sun a living dog (despicable to the Jews) is better off than a dead lion.

But to the child of God death is the entrance into heaven and eternal life and it can mean fantastic eternal blessings and rewards.

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

So What is One to Do? Enjoy life. Here again we see that we need to use the gift of the enjoyment of Life God gives us. But here more than in other passages we have much greater detail regarding the enjoyment of life.

Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.

The approval of our work is the approval of our labor to have the bread and the wine that we are to enjoy with a cheerful heart.

The NIV translates this God favors what you do. Which may better express the idea of the phrase.

Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.

When a person went to a party in the ancient near east they would wear white cool clothing. This is the attitude we are to have, that of being at a festive occasion which we are, every day with the Lord.

Oil on your head was a sign of being anointed for a mission and we are to have Joy and also be mission oriented. All of us are On a Mission.

Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

Part of the reward of life is the wife of your life. Enjoy your marriage, enjoy your relationship totally.

Life is fleeting. We too often put off the enjoyment we could have today, appreciating what we have today, for some elusive hope of a better tomorrow that will never come.

Ecclesiastes 9:10-12

Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

The next verse seems to contradict this verse but the confusion is cleared up when we see that Solomon is talking about the outcome of our labor.

I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

Too often in Israel's history God's people saw God's power change the odds of battle and the one's of less strength won the conflict.

NOTICE: Time and Chance overtake the best plans and abilities of man.

THEREFORE: Man's hopes must not be in his strength or his ability but in God's hands.

Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

Probably no one thinks the time of their death is the right time. Or at least very few. But we have no control over the time of our death.

In the same way we have no control over the outcome of our labor. Some have worked very hard and ended up with nothing, others have hardly worked and ended up with much.

Again the issue: Who is in control?

Eccl. 9:13-18 A Parable on the uncertain outcome of Wisdom.

Here and at the beginning of chapter ten, Solomon looks at three ways human wisdom can be nullified.

By the folly of fools: 9:13-10:1

By a rulers arrogance: 10:2-7

By Improper Timing and Chance: 10:8-11

Even wisdom in its raw form may have benefit to others without bringing benefit to the one who has wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-15

A parable based on a historical incident: 2 Samuel 20:15-22, Sheba the enemy at Abel Beth-Maccah.

Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me.

While Solomon is impressed by this human wisdom, others are not.

The word IMPRESSED is GAW-DOLE and means great, high, mighty.

And while Solomon saw the value, the greatness of this wisdom, others did not.

There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it, and constructed large siege works against it.

But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

Once the safety of the city was secure by what this man did he and his wisdom were forgotten.

II Samuel 20:15-22 In that historical case a wise woman delivered the city by having the men of the city cut off Sheba's head and throw it over the wall.

But even in the historical account, we are not given her name. And when we add this to what Solomon says we can assume that she was soon forgotten.

Eccl. 9:16 to 10:1 Solomon's commentary.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

So I said, Wisdom is better than strength. But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.

The only time the wisdom of the wise is heeded is when all else has failed.

The verb HEADED is a Niphal Participle which is passive, and sees the words of the wise as being ignored because something else is seen as being of more value...strength.

Ecclesiastes 9:17

The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

The words of the wise are ignored because of the shouting of the fool. Volume taking precedent over virtue.

Ecclesiastes 9:18

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Solomon could recognize the value of wisdom even being greater than mighty weapons of war.

Many times in the history of war the battle has gone to the wise rather than to the strong.

One sinner: Here equated with the fool and his folly, destroys the wisdom of the wise.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Ten

Ecclesiastes 10:1

Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.

It doesn't take a lot of foolishness to outweigh wisdom.

The Hebrew words for WEIGHTIER and HONOR are words that were used in social settings for a person's value and esteem as set by others.

Here the loud words of the fool carry the weight while the quiet words of the wise are ignored.

Solomon shows how wisdom can be nullified under the Sun.

Eccl. 10:2-7 A rulers arrogant and impulsive behavior can neutralize wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 10:2

A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.

Okay, take that one to your next political rally.

What Solomon is saying is that a wise man's heart directs him while a fool's heart does not.

Towards the right is an idiom for at the right hand which was always seen as the hand of justice and protection.

Wisdom allows us to see the course of a matter. And that course will provide protection and justice. While a fool deals so often in the moment and what is seen.

Ecclesiastes 10:3,4

Even when the fool walks along the road his sense is lacking, and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.

If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

We have a word play here, the words abandon you position are the same as deserting your post or resigning your commission in the military.

COMPOSURE looks at wise behavior, behavior that looks down the road, evaluating the outcome of a matter and thus provides protection and justice.

The great offenses are the reaction to the ruler's temper.

One thing that has happened to almost every man in the military is to get the blame and take the heat for something they did not do.

I remember the temper of my CC in boot camp, the officer of the Day aboard ship, many times. And the anger comes against the wrong person. So what do you do...wisdom says do not abandon your post.

In verses 5-7 Solomon looks at leadership, at rulers and recognizes a very simple fact, they are not perfect.

Ecclesiastes 10:5

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler--

While the word ERROR in verse 4 can refer to sins, here in verse 5 the word error looks at inadvertent mistakes.

Principle: Even the best of rulers make mistakes

Ecclesiastes 10:6,7

Folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places.

I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.

This type of social turmoil and reversal is, as Solomon puts it, an Evil.

In any revolution the slaves end up taking over what belonged to the princes yet with not capacity for its use of enjoyment.

SO THEN THE Principle: Wisdom, under the sun, can be neutralized by the foolish and arrogant decisions of rulers even to the point of social turmoil and reversal.

Ecclesiastes 10:8,9

Wisdom can also be neutralized by improper timing and chance.

He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.

He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them.

We could all add our own illustrations to show that time and chance can eliminate even the best and wisest plans of man.

Ecclesiastes 10:10

If the ax is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

Solomon does not want to leave us thinking that we should then not use wisdom nor take care in what we do.

A sharp ax is a better tool and gives an advantage of safety just like wisdom will give an advantage of success.

The word ADVANTAGE is YITH-RONE and means to be better, not perfect, not insuring success, but better than that which is done without wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 10:11

If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

Wisdom says to stay away from the serpent's bite until it is charmed.

Ecclesiastes 10:12-20

Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness.

Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?

The toil of a fool {so} wearies him that he does not {even} know how to go to a city.

Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning.

Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time-- for strength, and not for drunkenness.

Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.

{Men} prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.

Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound, and the winged creature will make the matter known.

The Sin of Gossip

1. Gossip is defined as: A person who chatters or repeats idle talk and rumors especially about the private affairs of others.
2. The content of gossip may be true or false, that has no bearing on whether or not it is gossip.
3. Gossip is then talking about another person revealing information that one has no right to pass on, whether true or false.
4. Gossip is violation of the privacy of another person.
5. There are three types of conversation: Talking about self which is arrogance and self-centeredness. Talking about people which is gossip. And talking about ideas which can enlighten others.
6. If you are not part of the problem or part of the solution you have no right to talk about others in the presence of a third person.
7. Consider everything you know about a person to be confidential.
8. Under the principle of Spiritual love found in John 13:34-35, anything said regarding another that does not build them up and enhance the opinion of another regarding them is wrong, it is gossip.

9. A person who gossips, demands second hand knowledge of others, runs others down, is bitter and miserable and in line for divine discipline and reaping what they sow.
10. When you encounter a gossip the best thing to do is shut them down right then and there. Do not share in their evil. And avoid the gossip like you would avoid a person involved in what you might consider the worse sin (child molesting).

CONCLUSION:

1. We have no right to invade another's privacy through gossip
2. We may not always like what others do but so what? Let someone who can do something about it hear your complaints, take it to God in Prayer.
3. A local church can be destroyed by gossip. If you cannot say that which is edifying and uplifting then do not say anything at all.
4. Do not allow others to dump the poison of gossip onto you. Avoid the gossip, shun them, do not give them an opportunity to gossip...remember, it takes two to gossip.
5. The best way to prevent gossip is by using two principles of doctrine.

Do not ever take from the Lord that which is his prerogative.

He is the only judge over His Saints. Not us.

Love one another, the Lord said, just as I have loved you . The application of unconditional spiritual love does not allow you to tear down another believer through gossip.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Eleven

Ecclesiastes 11:1

Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.

If we were to literally do this, we might change this to cast you bread upon the waters and after many days you will have soggy bread.

Well, we can be sure that is not the interpretation. This verse must be understood in the context of the next verse.

Ecclesiastes 11:2

Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.

The dividing of your portion is an investment strategy. Our portion is any money to be used in commerce. The wisdom here is to diversify investments to seven or even to eight different categories.

Since we do not know the future we do not know what will happen with our investments so the wise advise is to diversify. Prudent investments in a number of ventures.

Rather than, as we might say, putting all our eggs in one basket.

In light of that we then go back to verse one and see it as a statement regarding commerce. The wisdom is that we are to Send our grain across the sea and in time you will receive a return for you investment.

However, this same principle can be more broadly applied.

When you send grain that you own across the sea you are taking a risk. You may never see it or any return again. That activity, the activity of investing requires faith.

Ecclesiastes 11:3-6

If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.

He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.

Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones {are formed} in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.

In the same way, the activities of life are a risk.

1. We do not know what the future holds and therefore, anything we do will involve a certain amount of risk.
2. The level of risk taken is equal to our information regarding what we are doing and our trust in that information.

3. The level of trust we have for example in making an investment is not based upon some uncertain wish for the future but is based upon our objectivity in evaluating the information, past performance, history, experience. These facts become the basis of our trust.
4. In the same way as we approach the future in the Christian life, we have available to us certain facts as revealed by God through Bible Doctrine.
5. It is on the basis or foundation of what we know of God and how well we know God that we venture into the future by faith.
6. However, there is still a measure of risk. Every time we get away from that which is familiar, that which is comfortable, we become risk takers.
7. Whenever we take a risk we do so by faith in God, His Word, our experience with Him.
8. This is the application of faith, a looking back upon what we have by way of doctrine and relationship with Him, and a looking ahead with confidence not in ourselves or our circumstance, but in him.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Therefore, stepping out on faith is not a step into nothingness. But it is a step that takes a risk because we are stepping away from ourselves and onto the solid foundation God has set for us.

Illustration: Philippians 2:25-30

But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;

because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.

Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;

because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

When we chose to invest in the commerce of God's plan we so by faith and that faith overcomes the risk.

At verse 7 Solomon begins to move towards the conclusion of this examination of significance. He is no doubt older now, having gone through fifteen years out of the plan of God. Fifteen years and all he has to show for it is emptiness.

But the experiments in seeking significance have done one thing. They have driven him back to what is really important in life, dependence upon God. So he begins his conclusion by talking about light.

Ecclesiastes 11:7

The light is pleasant and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.

Solomon uses the figure of light as a contrast to the darkness he has experienced for the last many years.

Where there had been darkness the lights are now coming on.

Solomon uses the figure of light back in Eccl. 2:13 as a parallel to wisdom.

And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

We are to live in the light, enjoy the day, but keep an eye to the future, just as we are aware every day that the light will not last, darkness is coming.

Ecclesiastes 11:8

Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.

Solomon never looks beyond the grave. He is describing life on earth and the quality of life man can have when he is a part of the plan of God.

But remember that even the Lord said that He came to give life and give life an abundance.

That abundance for life is what Solomon comes to now.

HE HAS TRIED TO FIND IT IN MANY WAYS and he has failed, now he sees, as the darkness of his life draws near, what was really important all along. His relationship with God.

Ecclesiastes 11:9

Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.

Solomon has described the legitimate pleasures of life in many ways in this book, eating, drinking, enjoyment of marriage, finding satisfaction in one's work.

Now he expands that out to include doing what is pleasant to the heart even to following the impulses of the heart.

The word IMPULSES is the Hebrew DE-REK and is used for a road or highway but also for the manner of one's life

And then he says that the young man should seek his desires, the desires of his heart.

DESIRE is MAR-EH which is also used for vision, so follow you visions, you dreams.

NOW THIS MAY SOUND LIKE HE IS SAYING IF it is right to you do it...but notice the last phrase.

Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.

So what is the impulse of you heart, what is your dream? Have you looked at these in the light of what God says of them, how He would judge them?

SO MUCH OF LIFE IS MADE OF THINGS that are biblically gray. We do not have chapter and verse to tell us what to do in these areas of doubt.

So what are we to do...enjoy life. Follow your dreams but keep an eye to how God would judge.

REMEMBER: Solomon does not look beyond the grave. Any judgment he looks to is not in eternity but in time. God, he says, judges these things now.

And Solomon has experienced this, the judgment of God on his following of his impulses and desires that were nothing more than an attempt to find significance in life a part from God.

Ecclesiastes 11:10

So, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

Vexation of heart is ANXIETY, the psychological problems we wrestle with.

Pain of the body is the PHYSICAL problems we deal with.

This is the opposite side of the enjoyment of life he mentioned earlier. They contrast with the gloom and decline of physical vigor he will describe as a part of old age in the next chapter.

Cast of the anxiety, put away the pain, chances are the pain will go away and the anxiety will change to something else. After all nothing does remain the same.

In our youth we do not let these things get us down.

Yet such passages as Proverbs 5:7-14 tell us that we can avoid these effects by a wise lifestyle lived in the fear of the Lord.

And you say, How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof! And I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to my instructors! I was almost in utter ruin In the midst of the assembly and congregation.

NOW HERE IS SOLOMON'S ARGUMENT.

He is now old and he has wasted so much of his life pursuing significance a[art from God.

And he now looks back and sees so many years wasted.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter Twelve

The argument Solomon proposes for our dependence upon God and out seeking of significance in Him rather than in that which is under the sun is a very personal argument.

Old Age. And it here that we come back to my original intention in this study which was to head off the mid life crisis men face as they begin to recognize their limitations and inabilities.

Solomon describes growing older as a natural process. Limitations and inabilities will creep into our lives. That is normal in the course of life.

To fight it is to be distracted by it. We must take what God gives us today, appreciate it and enjoy it.

Solomon did not, he frantically searched for significance and in doing so forgot that man was created to have a relationship with God.

So now he is older and he has exhausted all the means by which man can find significance under the sun including wisdom, and now he is wiser in

knowing that he should have obeyed God all along.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 Solomon's Description of Old Age.

As Solomon returns from his years of reversionism he makes a number of observation.

1. The value of wisdom and wise men, but there is no wisdom under the sun that can allow man to understand God.

2. The folly of foolishness

3. The man who live peaceably, even the UNBELIEVER will enjoy much of life (Eccl. 11).

But the UNBELIEVER has to remember that life is short, so chapter 12 is going to give a eternal solution.

Eccl. 11:8 But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

4. So now at Eccl. 12 Solomon is old and he gives a poem about old age.

KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE: The hands

THE STRONG MEN: The legs

THE GRINDERS: The Teeth

THOSE WHO LOOK OUT THE WINDOWS: The eyes

THE DOORS: The ears

SOUND OF GRINDING LOW: Hard of hearing

RISE UP AT THE VOICE OF BIRDS: Rising up early as do the old, not able to sleep late.

DAUGHTERS OF MUSIC BROUGHT LOW: Hard of hearing

AFRAID OF THAT WHICH IS HIGH: Fear of falling

ALMOND TREE: White blossoms, the white hair

GRASSHOPPER A BURDEN: To weak to carry a burden

DESIRE SHALL FAIL.

LONG HOME: Eternity, there a long time

Ecclesiastes 12:6 [Remember Him] before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;

Two Pictures of Death.

1. A Silver Cord holding a Golden Bowl in a light burns. A lamp in the Ancient world. Some have supposed that this type of land was common in the opulence of Solomon's palace.

The cord breaks, the bowl is shattered, the light goes out. Death occurs.

2. The second picture is of water being unavailable.

The pitcher which holds the water is shattered, which can even have some physical parallel in death,

The wheel by which water is drawn is broken. This could refer to the heart pumping the blood through the body. It no longer works, it is broken, death occurs.

Solomon draws these pictures for us to motivate us to realize that we might spend our lifetimes trying to find something that will never be found and in doing so come to death's door realizing we could have had so much more if we had only depended upon God.

v 7 In the final picture of death Solomon goes back to creation.

Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

This is parallel to the creation of man account found in Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The body returns to the earth from which it was made and the spirit, here the life of man, returns to God who gave it.

v 8 Solomon's commentary on this in light of his reversionism is that this is empty.

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity!

To live to die and in between to find no satisfaction in life, to find no significance or meaning in life because we have held God at a distance is empty.

This verse also sets up the contrast he now makes as he gives us a specific conclusion of this matter.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-12 His Credentials.

Prior to giving his final verdict on the matter of significance in life, Solomon establishes why he can give this conclusion.

Now the entire book shows us why he can say these things by way of experience but his final appeal is not to experience.

So say experience is the best teacher, it is not.

1. The personal experience of failure can show us what is wrong but it cannot show us what is right.

2. Experience can show us what doesn't work but it cannot show us what does work.

3. Experience is limited to that which is under the sun, earth bound.

4. Experience may show one thing as being better but it cannot show us God's absolute best.

5. Experience is similar to natural revelation, it shows us our inability, our weakness, our smallness,

6. Experience can show us that there is a God who is far beyond man, the creator of man, an absolute sovereign. But experience can not lead us to God's love and God's wisdom.

7. Only the wisdom of God can bring us to the conclusion Solomon is about to make. Only doctrine and the wisdom that comes from it can allow us to live as God designed us.

v 9 In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs.

Solomon has used this title, the Preacher, one who, as we saw in chapter one who has a message and calls the assembly together to hear, three times in this book.

1. As a description of himself as he begins these experiments in significance

2. In Eccl. 7:27 as one who found that the experiments failed to find significance

3. Now in Eccl. 12 as he sets up his conclusion

It means an assembler, it is passive, so it is a response to truth. The preacher assembles truth and then assembles the people.

He was a wise man, as we have noted. And he taught the people knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE is the Hebrew word DAR-ATH and can mean more than knowledge, it can mean perception, skill, and even wisdom.

The issue here is that Solomon taught the people right but did not necessarily apply these principles of truth to self.

Principle: God honors His word in spite of the vessel into which it is deposited.

He then says he: PONDERED, SEARCHED OUT, and ARRANGED many proverbs.

Three piel perfect verbs:

The first means to weigh on a scales, to find the best truth. This he did.

Then he searched out: Means to search, to seek. Solomon tells us he is not the end to all wisdom, he went outside of himself to search for this conclusion. He did not rely upon his own human wisdom.

Then he arranged: Means to make things straight so they can be understood.

THIS COULD BE A GOOD OUTLINE for any teacher who prepares a lesson, weigh it, do not rely upon your human wisdom or even what you know, research, and then arrange it so it can easily be understood.

v 10 Solomon adds a fourth step.

The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.

TWO responsibilities: One is manward, the other Godward.

DELIGHTFUL WORDS: The KJV translates this ACCEPTABLE but that is not the idea, the words are made acceptable because they are delightful.

Solomon has made some pretty depressing points in this book, but even then he has always held out hope for his readers.

Even when he had no answers, there was hope in God who controls all things.

Principle: We communicate to persuade men and do so with carefully chosen words that are delightful so they will be acceptable.

Paul's balance in this: Galatians 1:10 For am I now seeking the favor of men to persuade men), or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Persuade...not please

WRITE WORDS OF TRUTH CORRECTLY: He is his responsibility to God. To take the truth revealed by God and correctly pass it on.

v 11 The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.

Talmud: Goads are movable stakes to keep furrows straight. Nails look at the secure aspect of doctrine.

So this looks at both the direction in which we go, straight towards our destiny. And the secure foundation we have, nails that fasten us to the Word.

THEY ARE GIVEN BY ONE SHEPHERD:

Many times Solomon had heard his father, David, talk of what it was like to be a shepherd and how the Lord is our Shepherd.

The vessels that used to communicate truth may be many, they may range from golden bowls to crack pots, but there is one shepherd who gives us truth, The Lord himself.

v 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.

NOTICE THAT THIS IS A WARNING, not a prohibition.

The warning is to the searching for answers in the wrong places.

Isn't it interesting that 3,000 years ago Solomon said the writing of many books is endless. Today we can multiply that statement many times over.

Some books are good, helpful, but only if they lead the reader back to God and His Word.

EXCESSIVE DEVOTION TO BOOKS: Devotion is LA-HAD, used only here in the OT from a rare root meaning to worship study.

This is not a mere love of reading, it is a devotion to or worship of reading and study.

It is used with a Hiphil Infinitive to show that this is a result of thinking that all answers to all questions can be found in what man writes.

Solomon states that this type of misplaced devotion can make you very tired.

Remember Eccl. 1:18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

THE REASON: Apart from what is revealed by God you will never get the answers you are seeking.

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

The word HEAR is SHAW-MAH and can mean to hear as in the reading of a judicial verdict and hence to obey the verdict.

It is a Qal Imperfect indicating that this is something we continue to do over and over again.

The word CONCLUSION means the END OF A MATTER. Nothing more needs to be said than this.

Then he gives two mandates and two motives.

Principle: Mandates are kept because we are motivated to do them.

Fear God: Including this reference, there are four times Solomon states in Ecclesiastes that we should fear God.

Eccl. 3:14 I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

Fear God because He alone is eternal and what He does will remain for ever. This looks at His attribute of eternal life and immutability.

Eccl. 5:7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

We are to fear God because even our dreams (thoughts) and our words come up empty when compared to His eternal truth. This looks at His attribute of Truth and Veracity.

Eccl. 8:12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

And then we are to fear God because it will be better for us than when we reject Him and sin. This looks at His attributes of +R and Justice.

So now, he states plainly, FEAR GOD.

FEAR is the Qal Imperative of YAW-RAY. While this word can refer to an emotional terror, when the object is God it looks at one who has an awe, reverence, and respect for an all powerful and all knowing God.

The God-fearer, as described in the OT is one who has a devotion to God and a willingness to obey God.

A more specific activity of the God fearer is found in the Psalms.

Psalm 22:23-24 You who fear the Lord, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Neither has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard. From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.

The ones who fear the Lord are parallel to the Sons of Jacob, descendant of Israel and then that is equated to the great assembly in verse 25.

These parallels suggest that one activity of the God fearer is to worship God and that this is a debt, a vow we owe to God and is to be repaid out of our free will choice to serve and worship Him.

All the intricacies of this word YAW-RAY indicate that this is the positive advancing believer who fears God but more importantly from that fear stands in awe of Him and worships Him.

Then Solomon adds: And keep his commandments.

This phrase is found over 60 times in the Bible. It urges the believer to keep God's law, to obey Him.

Even in John 15:10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

This was the responsibility of the humanity of Christ and is our responsibility also.

We can only keep God's commandments if we know His commandment.

Implied in this and the statements Solomon made in v 9-12, is the mandate to stick with the Word of God.

Know it and obey it, learn it, think it, and apply it.

TWO MOTIVATIONS FOR THIS.

1. It is a universal principle: For this applies to every person.

Even the UNBELIEVER is urged to do this and come to the point of faith in God and His Son Jesus Christ.

For every believer the mandate is the same. Whether a Jew living in Solomon's day, a disciple who followed the Lord during the incarnation, or you and me here today...the conclusion is the same.

Whether a man of wealth and wisdom, or a poor man of humble means...the conclusion is the same.

There is no exclusion nor exception, we all are to fear God and obey His Word.

2. The second motive reminds us that God is in control:

For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

The word SHALL BRING is a Hiphil Imperfect which argues against the idea of a final judgment in heaven. Solomon never has in view a final review of good and evil.

Rather he looks at right here on earth in time.

Every work is examined by God. Many of the things in which Solomon sought happiness are wonderful things and may be something you have in life. Many children, money, building great buildings, a great reputation, but are they the source of your happiness...if they are they will fail.

The results of what we do are in God's hands.

The HIDDEN THINGS are things like the things Solomon did to seek meaning and significance in life.

In time, in time, God will bring them to light. They will not be hidden.

Its value will be clearly seen, whether good or evil.

So Solomon ends this account, this search, this experiment in significance by recognizing something all of us must recognize...The only way to live life to the fullest, is to live our lives unto God and His Word.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED IN ECCLESIASTES.

Why does my life seem so pointless?

Where am I to find my significance in life?

How can I fit into God's plan?

How can I find meaning in the midst of struggle?

How can I be real when I worship God?

What is the real value of wealth and money?

Why do I have both adversity and prosperity in my life?

What are we to do when our vision is not 20/20?

How can I find joy in a world of death?

How should I approach my work and my job?

How can I get the most out of life?

What does God want me to do? Enjoy Life and Fear Him and keep His commandments .