

1. Introduction to Ecclesiastes, 1:1-2

Ecclesiastes is Solomon's journal, recorded near the end of a life that should have been lived to God's glory, but was instead squandered on wine, women, and song. Ecclesiastes starts with the most fundamental of questions: is life worth living? Its answer is a resounding "yes," filled with much practical wisdom along the way.

There are two ways of looking at life: "Every day, in every way, we're getting better and better." "Whenever God closes a door, somewhere he opens a window." "Things never are as bad as they seem, so dream, dream, dream."

OR

"Life is a blister on top of a tumor on top of a boil." (Sholom Aleichem) "We are born wet, naked, and hungry. Then things get worse." "You fall out of your mother's womb, crawl across open country under fire, and drop into your grave." (Quentin Crisp)

Cheery, huh? But which point of view is the more biblical? If you're talking about life without God, it's the second view. And that's what Ecclesiastes is all about.

Ecclesiastes has been described as gloomy, melancholy, despairing, skeptical, cynical, fatalistic, nihilistic, and pessimistic. It's been called the "white elephant of Scripture," the Sphinx of Christian literature. For many it is an enigma, often misunderstood, ignored by Christians, because, they say, it is merely worldly wisdom, a way of looking at life that leaves God out of the picture. They say it is inspired in the sense that it accurately records its author's observations, but his observations are wrong, and incompatible with the rest of Scripture.

Wrong. God didn't need to put bad advice in the Bible, we can get it for free in a million different places.

But what do you do with verses like 1:2, "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The Hebrew way of expressing a superlative is repetition. Jesus is the greatest king of all because he's King of kings and Lord of lords. Ecclesiastes says life is the greatest vanity of all: vanity of vanities (twice!)

Or how about 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."

What do you do with statements like that? What the author of Ecclesiastes is doing is showing us life without God. Francis Schaeffer said if he had an hour to talk to someone about Christ, he'd spend the first 45 minutes on man's hopelessness. Only then would he share the answer: Christ. That's Ecclesiastes.

In the Hebrew text, the title is all of v1, "*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*" The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, completed in the 3rd century BC, gave it the name "*ekklasiastes*," which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *qohelet*, "Preacher." It's a title, not a name. A *qohelet* is one who speaks before an assembly (Greek, *ekklesia*). The NIV's "Teacher" gets the idea across well.

Ecclesiastes is one of the *Megilloth*, the 5 books read at festivals: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, and Ecclesiastes. Incidentally, sitting thru the reading of the *megilloth* during a service was long and tedious, and is the origin of the phrase, "the whole megillah."

Authorship

Who is this "Preacher?" From ancient times, it was understood to be Solomon. Only in the last 200 years have scholars rejected him as the author, mainly on vocabulary and syntax. They say he uses language that belongs to a later age, 450-250 BC. Solomon died in 931 BC.

But it's hard to be sure of the niceties of language 3,000 years ago. Without going into detail, none of the linguistic arguments stands much scrutiny. More importantly, nothing in Scripture tells us Solomon didn't write the book, and there is much biblical evidence that he did.

The author is never explicitly named, but he is described as "son of David, King in Jerusalem," 1:1, 12. There is no Hebrew for "grandson," so he could be a later descendant, but let's see how else he describes himself.

The author was a man devoted to wisdom, 1:16; pleasure, 2:1; building, 2:4-6; and wealth, 2:7-8.

Solomon was a man of wisdom. As a young king, God offered him anything he asked for, and he asked only for wisdom, 1 Kings 3:6-9. God answers his request in 1 Kings 3:10-14, but not with just wisdom. He also gives him what he didn't ask for, riches and fame. Solomon was always the smartest person in the room, 1 Kings 4:30-34. He contributed 2 other books to Scripture, Song of Solomon and Proverbs.

Solomon was a man of pleasure, 1 Kings 11:3. He was a builder: of his own palace (13 years, 1 Kings 7:1-12), the Temple (7 years, 1 Kings 6:37-38), and other structures and cities as well.

Solomon was a man of extreme wealth. 1 Kings 10:14 says he received 23 tons (666 talents) of gold annually, not including revenue from merchants and rulers, v15. That's \$310 million per year at \$420/ounce (2004 market value). He had so much gold, silver was relatively worthless, 1 Kings 10:21, 27. He was not only the smartest man in the room, he was the richest, 1 Kings 10:23.

If anyone was successful at getting what the world values, it was Solomon. But his treasure was in earth, not heaven. The young king who started so well, asking for wisdom, had his heart turned from the Lord, 1 Kings 11:3.

Who was the source of Solomon's success? God, promised at very beginning, 1 Kings 3:13. But somewhere along the way, Solomon lost connection with the source.

I don't think it was just the women, but they had a particularly cruel effect on him. We see the depth of his apostasy in 1 Kings 3:4-8. Ashtoreth, Milcom, and Chemosh are idols, things made by hand of stone or wood, made by man to be worshipped as God, and therefore detestable. Milcom worship was especially evil. He is also known as Molech, and he was worshipped by sacrificing children to him, Jeremiah 32:35.

Did Solomon sacrifice his own children? Scripture doesn't say, but why build the altar if he wasn't going to worship? Even if he only provided the altar for his wives to worship the idol, I'm not sure there's much difference between enabling such a thing and actually doing it. Besides, 1,000 women? How many children did he have? Did he value them?

So why is Solomon one of the good guys? Why is he a Sunday school example? There is no firm record that he repented, but there are 2 indications: the first is 2 Chronicles 11:17, describes the early rule of Solomon's son Rehoboam and priests, "*they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years.*"

That tells us that after his death, Solomon was viewed in the same light as David in relationship to the Lord. The second bit of evidence is this book. The point of this book is: "I've not only seen it all, I've done it all, and can tell you, all of it is vanity without the Lord." It was written by someone who knows.

Solomon reigned from 971-931 BC. I believe he wrote Ecclesiastes in his old age, at the very end of his life, having returned to God after many years of apostasy.

Chuck Swindoll calls Ecclesiastes Solomon's journal, his reflection on what he learned when he walked away from the Lord and embraced the world. It records his personal, futile quest for happiness apart from God.

Key Words

Vanity, *hevel*, 39 times. We are perhaps more used to the definition that means pride, self-importance. That's why a small table in the bathroom placed right in front of the mirror is called a "vanity." Ecclesiastes uses the 2nd definition, which means emptiness, futility. Whatever disappears quickly, does not satisfy, leaves nothing behind. Soap bubbles and cotton candy, just not as sweet.

Under the sun, 29 times. Life from human perspective, concerned only with what happens here, "under the sun," not above the sun, in heaven. Only part of life, and the fallen part at that.

Wisdom, Ecclesiastes is a wisdom book, so you kind of expect this. Fools & folly, 32 times, wisdom, 54. Sol applied his God-given wisdom to understand purpose of life "under the sun."

Labor, 23 times. Hebrew, *amal*, not just work, but toil, to the point of exhaustion, yet with little or no fulfillment. When we lived in Los Angeles we had a neighbor, Alex, a Cuban immigrant when Castro took over Havana in 1959, and even as late as 1989, had learned no English. But we communicated, often around 3 words: *caliente* (hot); *trabajo* (work); and Alex's personal favorite, *cerveza* (beer). He was a pleasant, hard-working man, but his end was futile. His wife came out to the backyard one day to find that Alex had hung himself. No one ever knew why.

Outline

A simple outline of the book, with thanks to Warren Wiersbe, goes like this:

- Solomon's Problem, chapters 1-2. touches on 4 topics: futility of life, wisdom, wealth, certainty of death.
- Solomon's Answer, chapters 3-10. takes each of 4 topics, goes deeper.
- Solomon's Conclusion, chapters 11-12. draws conclusions: live by faith, 11:1-6; enjoy life, 11:7-12:8, fear God, 12:9-14.

Ecclesiastes and You

So, how is the journal of a backslidden king who died 3,000 years ago relevant to us today? Several reasons.

Ecclesiastes speaks to our time. Listen to Solomon describe his world:

- *Injustice to poor, 4:1*, "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."
- *Crooked politicians, 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."
- *Incompetent leaders, 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."
- *The guilty go free, 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."
- *Pervasive materialism, 5:10*, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity."
- *Desire for the "good old days" is as old as the hills, 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."

Ecclesiastes encourages joy. 17 times, "gladness", "mirth," "pleasure", "be glad," "rejoice."

- 2:24,26, "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...For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy..."

- 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."
- 9:7,9; "Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works...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."

I said before that Ecclesiastes was read at Tabernacles, which was the most joyous of Israel's festivals, celebrated Israel's nomadic lifestyle in the wilderness, Dt. 16:14,15; Neh. 8:14-17. Rabbis say the book was read because it praises joy.

Ecclesiastes is the polar opposite of the monastic ascetics who taught that you achieved holiness by withdrawing as far as possible from the world around them.

Ecclesiastes establishes a Biblical worldview. You might wonder the verses above square with 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world."

Solomon would have agreed with John's next verse, *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

And that's not a bad summary of Ecclesiastes. Life under the sun has significance only when man remembers his Creator, 12:1, 13. Why is anything that is not done in the light of eternity futile? *Because it only lasts the blink of an eye, because it will be judged, and because this life is not the whole story.*

That's a sharp contrast to the secular worldview, with its claim of human self-sufficiency and elevation of human reason and desire to the level of absolute truth.

Ecclesiastes emphasizes this world's fallen-ness and limitations. It describes the search for the meaning of life thru 1) knowledge, 2) pleasure, 3) labor, 4) wealth. Says it is all "striving after wind."

So back to my opening quotes: Is it true that whenever God closes a door, somewhere he opens a window? Nope. Sometimes all the doors are closed, the windows are shut, and life is falling apart. The myth is that as Christians, we have all the answers. No, we don't. We understand what is happening in regards to eternal things, but sometimes, what happens "under the sun" is a mystery.

Solomon wants us to know 2 things: first, that life without God is "vanity of vanities," truly futile. The second thing he tells us at the very end, 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.”

In worldly terms, Solomon was an astounding success, yet he knew it was nothing. If it did not work for Solomon who achieved so much, it will not work for us. Ecclesiastes was written so we can know that fame, wealth, sex, and power do not make life complete.

And we have an even greater teacher than Solomon. For him, the future was unclear. He knew Messiah would come, but he didn't know the particulars. As Christians, we have Solomon's wisdom, as true today as it was 3,000 years ago, but we also have the reality of Messiah's sacrifice, the glorious hope of being in his presence (2 Cor. 5:6, Phil. 1.23), and the abundant life that only Jesus provides (John 10:10).

2. The Circle of Life, 1:3-18

We use circular terms to describe life all the time: Life cycle, wheel of fortune, come full circle and of course, the Circle of Life.

From the day we arrive on the planet and blinking, step into the sun there's more to be seen than can ever be seen more to do than can ever be done.

There's far too much to take in here, More to find than can ever be found, But the sun rolling high through the sapphire sky, Keeps great and small on the endless round.

In the circle of life, It's the wheel of fortune, It's the leap of faith, It's the band of hope, Till we find our place, On the path unwinding, In the circle, the circle of life

To Disney, the “circle of life” may be charming, inspiring, and wonderful. Not to Solomon. To him it is a burden of endless repetition, a treadmill of motion without progress. We work to make money to buy food to maintain strength so we can work.

Thoreau said most men live lives of quiet desperation. H. L. Mencken said “The basic fact about human experience is not that it is a tragedy, but that it is a bore. It is not that it is predominantly painful, but that it is lacking in any sense.”

Solomon might agree. He examined life and wrote Ecclesiastes, which has been called a “hymn to futility.” In 1:3-18 we will see 3 conclusions: 1) nothing changes, v3-7; 2) nothing is new, v8-11; nothing is understood, v12-18.

Nothing Changes, v3-7

“What advantage does man have in all his work?” Solomon is asking a rhetorical question, “What advantage is there?” implying none. The Hebrew translated “advantage,” is literally profit, something that remains. No matter what short-term gains employment yields, nothing is truly lasting.

And he illustrates his point in v4-7. Remember, Solomon was a naturalist, a scientist, a trained observer. His observations told him there is an inescapable sameness to this world. Generations come and go, there is seemingly constant change, but only on the surface. The reality is, nothing changes, and he gives us 4 examples.

Example 1: the Earth, v4. We say it all the time: “as old as the hills,” “as sure as the world.” So dependable, so sure, so predictable that we talk about the laws of nature.

Earth seems permanent, man doesn't. We experience a cycle of birth, death, the life of man is the merest breath. Sets & costumes change, but the actors and script remain the same.

Example 2: the Sun, v5. Cycle of day and night. He pictures a daily race, with the sun literally panting to get from east to west. “As sure as night follows day.”

Example 3: the Wind, v6. Constant movement, invisible, remorseless, wears down mountains. John 3:8, “wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going”

Example 4: the Sea, v7. Water never stops moving, from snow and rain to earth, flowing to rivers and lakes, eventually to the ocean, where it evaporates from liquid to gas, goes back into the atmosphere, forms clouds, and starts all over again.

Constant movement, but how much change? *None, under the sun, v3.* Nothing changes, yet this is our Father's world. God can step in anytime he wants:

- the Earth: he made it, Genesis 1:9-10; he will unmake it as well, Revelation 21:1.
- the Sun: he held it, Joshua 10:6-14; and he moved it, Isaiah 38:1-8.
- the Wind: he calmed the storm, Mark 4:35-41.
- the Sea: he parted the Red Sea, Ex. 14; and the Jordan, Josh 3-4. He stopped the rain and started it again, 1 Kings 17-18

God can do with his creation what he wishes. If life is only what we see under the sun, we are in big trouble. But Solomon is not alone: the message of the entire OT is that life under the sun is vanity, futile. Ps. 90:3-6, *"You turn man back into dust And say, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away."*

Psalms 103:15-16, “As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer.”

Is. 40:6-7, “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass.”

The New Testament has the same message: Romans 1:21-22, “even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became *futile* in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Ephesians 4:17, “this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the *futility* of their mind.”

1 Peter 1:18, “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your *futile* way of life inherited from your forefathers.”

Nothing is New, v8-11

If v3-7 shows Solomon as the naturalist, v8-11 is Solomon as a historian. Again, he shows constant movement on the surface, but no real change.

Same ol’, same ol’, v8. Everything is wearisome, tedious. “Not able to tell,” more than can say.

The eye is not satisfied, the ear is not filled. Like Paul on Mars Hill, Acts 17:21, “all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.”

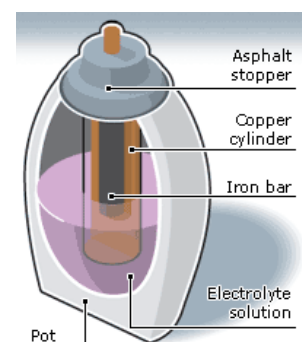
We are always looking out for something new, some form of escape. Why is that? Why do we look for something different? The answer is in Ecclesiastes 3:11. God has set eternity in our hearts – we can sense something is missing around us.

But wait a minute, we are surrounded by technological change. It comes so fast we have a name for our inability to assimilate it, “future shock.”

Future shock is what prevents my father-in-law, a man who marched half-way across Europe fighting Nazis, who ran his own ranch, who left a secure job at 50 to go back to college to get a teaching degree, who can fix anything mechanical, from being able to program his VCR.

So how can we accept what Solomon is telling us here? Listen carefully, v9-10. There is nothing new, just different combinations of old. Our technology is not new, its just the same physics applied differently.

When was the first electrical battery made? 200 BC. In 1938, outside Baghdad, a German archaeologist unearthed a five-inch-long clay jar containing a copper cylinder that encased an iron rod. Tests revealed an acidic agent, like vinegar or wine. Replicas built generate 1 to 2 volts of electricity.



When was the first steam engine? Sorry Fulton, it was 100 BC, by Hero of Alexandria, who mounted a sphere on top of a water kettle. A fire below the kettle

turned the water into steam, the gas traveled through pipes to the sphere, where two L-shaped tubes on opposite sides of the sphere allowed the gas to escape, and created thrust.

How about the first flush toilets? 2500 BC. In Egypt, bathrooms and latrines were flushed by hand with buckets of water. The latrines emptied into earthenware sewage system. They are still functional today.

Finally, the earliest computer, non-electric, is the abacus, dating to [500 BC](#). [But in 87 BC](#), an [analog computer](#) was designed and built in [Rhodes](#), employing the first known [differential gear](#), capable of tracking relative positions of the [Earth](#), [Moon](#), and the [Sun](#). In [1500AD](#), Leonardo da Vinci drew a device with interlocking cog wheels, a [mechanical calculator](#) capable of [addition](#) and [subtraction](#).

Edison said that he and other inventors were just bringing out the secrets of nature and applying them. They were just figuring out what's always been.

The problem is, we forget that, v11. Our memory is faulty, "out of sight, out of mind." Someone said, "The ancients have stolen all our best ideas." But novelty does not equal originality.

Nothing is understood, v12-18

So, nothing changes, nothing is new, so what? In v12-19, Solomon as philosopher looks for an answer to this perpetual cycle. We see his investigation, v12-15 and his evaluation in v16-18.

Investigation, v12-15. How wise was Solomon? He was the wisest of all, 1 Kings 4:30-31.

So when wisest of all men devotes his mind to understand something, we can be confident he'll find the answer. He set his mind to seek, to explore, v13. In other words, to get to the root of matter, to explore every facet, nook, and cranny of the thing.

Here's what he came to understand: **Life is tough, v13.** We talked last time about how sometimes there are no easy answers. God doesn't always open a window when he closes a door.

Work doesn't satisfy, v14. Alcoholics and workaholics alike are running from life, seeking escape in the bottle or the office. There are 40,000 suicides per year in the US alone, while an estimated 400,000 make the attempt.

Can you find escape in work, or sex, or drink? Nope, just numbness. Solomon says real change is impossible, v15, by man's puny efforts.

No effort under the sun will produce anything lasting or permanently satisfying. Some things, maybe most things, we simply can't change. We may spend our whole life trying, but all these things, under the sun, are insoluble.

Evaluation, v16-18, read. So here's Solomon's conclusion: **human wisdom isn't enough.** It only goes so far. If anyone could figure that out – Solomon could.

He magnified and increased wisdom, v16. Both extremes, wisdom, madness, every faculty applied to this study, v17, and he still didn't get any answers.

In fact, if anything, study only seemed to make the problem of futility worse, v18. Increasing knowledge resulted in increasing pain. Human wisdom isn't enough.

TS Eliot said "all our knowledge brings us closer to our ignorance." Adam and Eve had their eyes opened. Were they happy about it?

Brilliant as Solomon was, when he viewed life under the sun, he saw it as monotonous, meaningless. Science is a closed system, nothing changes. History is a closed book, nothing is new. Philosophy says life is one big problem, nothing is understood.

Thinking it Through

So here's the big question: If we can't change anything, create anything, or understand anything, if human wisdom isn't enough, what is? Or better, WHO is enough?

"With God, nothing is impossible," Luke 1:37. Jesus straightens what is bent: woman bent double 18 years, Lk 13:11-17; the man with the withered hand, Mt 12:10-13.

Solomon says we are born with the need to satisfy our spiritual hunger, to find our purpose and value. If we born with a need, there must be way to satisfy it. If there is no hope under sun, then the only hope must be above it.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

The frustration and emptiness Solomon and most others feel was meant to turn our eyes from earth to heaven, man to God, self to Christ. Solomon, the man who had everything, found nothing of value.

Does that mean there is nothing of value? No, just that what is valuable must be invisible – the physical world isn't where you find it. If we see the world as it really is, as Solomon sees it, it will direct us to one able to provide the only true satisfaction there is.

John 4:13-14, Jesus to woman at the well, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

3. The "Good" Life, 2:1-26

We saw in chapter 1 that Solomon examined life under the sun and found it wanting. Nothing changes, nothing is new, nothing is understood. Life is a burden of endless repetition, a treadmill of motion without progress.

So Solomon began exploring ways to make life meaningful. He had ample resources – wisdom, wealth, power. So he walked away from God into a life-laboratory, experimenting with one thing after another. Pleasure, v1-3; work, v4-11; and wisdom, v12-23.

Tested Life, v1-17

Pleasure, v1-3. The problem with the word “pleasure” is, it has overtones of forbidden stuff. Which, in Solomon’s case, isn’t a bad connotation, but its not what the word means.

Good, clean fun, v1-2. Literally, the Hebrew for pleasure means joy, or gladness. Psalm 4:7, “You have put *gladness* in my heart,” Psalm 16:11, “In Your presence is fullness of *joy*...” in both cases, that's the same word translated "pleasure" in Ecclesiastes 2:1-2.

God wants his children to be joyful: Psalm 104:33-34, “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the Lord.”

Simple pleasure in God’s goodness in this world is part of God’s plan for your life. 1 Timothy 6:17 tells us to fix our hope “on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”

So the daily joy of life is something that Solomon explored. The innocent kind, v2, light-hearted happiness that can flow from all kinds of things. Sitting around the dinner table with family, friends. Telling old stories. Standing at edge of Grand Canyon at beautiful sunset.

And the not so innocent kind, v3, “wine.” Note, wine of itself not an evil, but how it’s used. Solomon took “hold of folly,” like 1:17, grabbed hold of it to possess it, make it his own. I picture Solomon in a clinical study of folly, as he seeks to understand it.

Solomon used wine to embrace that folly. He drank to “stimulate” his body, a word that generally means to cause movement, to draw, pull along, or carry. In other words, he drank to the point of physical effect and examined his state to see what is worthwhile about wine-induced happiness.

He was walking one path with his body while taking another with his mind. Intoxicated, experiencing the full depths of folly in order to get some discernment about it. No conclusions here, but any doubt of the outcome?

Wine, v3, v8, women and song. 1000 wives, concubines, 1 Kings 11:3. Solomon sounds like a modern man, making a life out of seeking pleasure. Gladness is good and it is God’s desire for us, but not as an end in itself, but as the outcome of a right relationship with God. Build life around a party, even good, clean fun, and you’ll be disappointed.

3 problems, 1) Self-centeredness. Even if what pleases isn’t bad, making it the center of your life is all about you. 2) Never enough. What satisfies today doesn’t satisfy tomorrow. 3) Primarily physical, and we are more than that.

We tend to look for fulfillment in 2 places: the first is fun, the second is work. And that's the next phase of Solomon's exploration.

Work, v4-11. "Enlarged my works," v4. The word "enlarged" means promoted, expanded, or magnified, as in Psalm 34:3, "O magnify the Lord with me..." Same word. Solomon turned from full-bore pursuit of pleasure to full-bore glorification of work.

Projects, v4-6. Not only private, such as houses, vineyards, v4, gardens, parks, v5; forests, and a water utility to irrigate them, v6. But also public works; cities, 2 Ch. 8:4-6; citadel, wall around Jerusalem, 1 Kings 9:15; and his greatest work of all, the Temple, 1 Kings 5.

Wealth, v7-11. He didn't accomplish all that with just the household staff, v7. Besides the slaves born into his household, he bought many slaves. 1 Kings 5:13-18, read. 30,000 forced laborers, on top of 80,000 to cut the rock, and 70,000 to carry it.

How'd he treat his workers? 1 Kings 12 tells us he imposed a "heavy burden," v4; and whipped them, v11. Rebellion at his death, and Israel split because his son promised more of the same.

Solomon's catalog of possessions is in Ecclesiastes 2:7-8: flocks, herds, gold, silver, treasure, male, female singers, evidently lover of music, finally, women.

Ladies, how would you feel if your husband included you as a possession along with the livestock and bank account? Does that say something about how Solomon viewed his wives and concubines? You bet it does.

He was wealthy beyond dreams, and his wisdom, God's original gift to Solomon, "stood by" him," v9. He knew exactly what he was doing, calculating the steps to find happiness in pleasure and work.

At an earlier time of his life Solomon wrote, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." But he lost his moorings, now wisdom is devoted to purely earthly things which are of no lasting value.

He had it all and loved it all, v10. He took stock, v11, and concluded...nothing. A big, fat zero. Vanity, striving after wind, of no profit.

That younger Solomon could have told the older one that without going thru all that effort. Like entertainment, work alone can't satisfy. Isaiah 55:2-3, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me."

Trying to find satisfaction in booze or work is like what Churchill said about golf, "it is a game played with implements singularly ill-designed for the purpose." In the proper place, work, entertainment, and even wine has a place. Out of its proper place, as an end in itself, it's just striving after the wind.

Wisdom, v12-17. Solomon has examined pleasure and work. Here, he turns to consider wisdom itself from all angles, wisdom, madness, folly. And he looks at wisdom in the light of eternity and the certainty of death.

Wisdom vs folly, v12-14a. v12 is a difficult sentence. Our best understanding is that Solomon is saying that the king's successor could do no more than Solomon has done. He's made a thorough search, and no one is better equipped to understand things, so there are not going to be any new answers.

So Solomon considered wisdom and madness, and found...wisdom is better, as light is better than darkness. A wise man uses his eyes, v14a: he watches where he's going, can see what's ahead. The fool, on the other hand, may as well be blind.

Scripture pictures the fool as one who loves darkness, which is a euphemism for evil:

- Prov. 2:13, describes evil men as “those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness;”
- 1 John 2:11, “the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”
- John 12:35, 46, “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes...I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.”

In other words, the fool is not merely stupid, he's lost. So the wise man knows where he's going, the fool is lost, but, v14b-17, **the same fate awaits both of them.** If so, what's the benefit of being wise? That's Solomon's question. If you still die, why seek wisdom? What does wisdom buy you beyond the grave? So why is it better to be wise?

How would you answer that question?

After you're gone, wise or foolish, you are forgotten, v16. Who remembers wise men from previous generations unless they achieved celebrity? Who can name one past president of Harvard? Oxford? May as well be dunces for all we remember them.

The wisdom of ages must be learned over and over. George Santayana famously said that those who will not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

So the result to Solomon, v17, is that he hated life. There was no advantage to pleasure, to work, or to wisdom. Life seems irrational, futile.

Hated Life, v18-23

Solomon says he hated life because after he poured all his wealth and wisdom into it, what he achieved would simply be turned over to his son.

You can't take it with you, v18. Not very generous, eh? Someone has said there are no pockets in burial shrouds. That's the nature of wealth without a soul: there is never enough, it all has to be mine, mine, mine.

You can't protect it, v19-20. Hard-earned wealth goes to another. Who knows how he will handle it? Yet, merely by Solomon's death he will gain control on his lifetime's investment of wisdom, work, and wealth. Result: despair, v20.

You can't take your mind off it, v21-23. total focus on wealth equals misery. And he would have been right, if work, fun all there is.

Let's be clear: this is not God's preferred method of thinking about things, this is Solomon describing life under the sun, without God.

Turn to Luke 12:15-21. Prompted by a request to mediate a family quarrel over an inheritance, Jesus tells this parable.

"Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. '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 God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'"

V15 is the basic truth that Solomon deplors. The parable to illustrate that truth is in v16-21. Jesus may as well have been telling Solomon's struggle.

Now hear how Jesus applies that parable, v22-27:

"And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. "For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! "And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these."

Do you suppose it was an accident that Jesus used Solomon as his example? No way - God can and will provide for you, as Jesus goes on to say in v28-34. Life was not meant to be a treasure hunt, focused on pleasure, work, or wealth. Instead, it is to be a God-hunt. Our responsibility is not to seek wealth, but to seek *him*.

Where was Solomon's treasure? On earth, in vaults. Where was his heart? Same place. No wonder he despaired of life.

1 Tim. 6:7-10, "For we have brought nothing into world, so cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food, covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

By the time Solomon sat down to write Ecclesiastes, he knew that truth as well. Of course, most don't pursue pleasure, wealth, or work all the way to the bitter end. Somewhere along the line, unrecorded in Scripture, God's grace penetrated Solomon's consciousness, and brought him back to his Lord.

Having tested life, hated life, comes to point where he accepts it for what it is, v24-26.

Accepted Life, v24-26

This is the first of 6 similar conclusions in Ecclesiastes. See also 3:12-15, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10.

Note that v24-26 is not saying "eat, drink, and be merry, for then you die." Instead, it is saying, "thank God for what he provides." In other words, don't spend your life pursuing things. Instead, pursue their source.

Instead of seeking escape, pleasure, work, money, seek to please him, v26. What is the result? Wisdom, knowledge, and joy. That's what really satisfies. We have an embroidery in our home, the gift of a good friend to my wife. that reads, "The best things in life...aren't things."

Sounds like Luke 12:29-31, "And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

Not brilliance, not worldly wealth, not illicit pleasure, but all you need. Real pleasure, not numbness. Otherwise, life of futility, working, gathering, worrying, all to go to the one God chooses. Enjoyment? Satisfaction? None.

That's the problem

Solomon has addressed the 4 problems that bedevil man:

- First, 1:3-11, monotonous circle of life.
- Second, all the wisdom in the world isn't enough to deal with life under the sun, 1:12-18.
- Third, all money in the world isn't enough to make life under the sun meaningful, 2:1-11
- Finally, death is an absolute certainty, 2:12-23.

Remember the caveat? “Under the sun.” Having stated the problems in chapters 1-2, Solomon will address each in turn in chapters 3-10.

The conclusion in each case will be the same, so if it sounds like a broken record, understand that’s because God’s truth is simple: enjoy life and be thankful, satisfied with what he provides.

4. Time After Time, 3:1-22

Turn, Turn, Turn

Ecclesiastes 3 is the most familiar part of the book, all because in 1965 a group called "The Byrds" recorded a Pete Seeger setting of v1-8.

It's a fairly faithful rendition. Some of the pairs are reversed, a couple are left out, one is repeated, but at the very end of the song, they add “a time for peace, I swear it's not too late.” The effect of adding that phrase is to turn the whole passage into a plea for peace. A laudable goal, but it wasn't Solomon's point. Otherwise, a great tune!

What is time? The dictionary says time is “a nonspatial continuum in which events occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future.”

Time and our universe were created simultaneously, and time is as much a part of God’s creation as the ocean. God is outside time, and he can reach in and intervene as he wills, just as with any other aspect of creation.

Why is it so important to us? Because we only have so much of it. It is a finite resource, once gone, we can never get it back.

With chapter 3, Solomon is addressing the first problem from chapter 1, the monotonous circle of life. He says there is something above man which controls his time and experience, v1-8; there is something within man that links him to what is above, v9-14, and there is something ahead of man for which he must prepare, v15-22.

In other words, we need to look up, look in, and look ahead.

Look Up, v1-8

A time for everything, v1. Solomon recognizes there is something above man which controls his time and experience. This is a song in 14 pairs, which together represent the whole of life. Through the seasons of our lives, **God is accomplishing his purposes, v2-8.**

Born, die, v2 – not human accident, but divine appointments. Psalm 139:13-16, “*For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the*

earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them."

God gave us a genetic structure which is perfect for our appointed work. We might hasten death thru abortion, murder, or suicide, but we can't prevent it when our time comes. Our days are ordained.

Plant, uproot, v2. Solomon's was an agricultural world. You sow seed and reap the harvest. Who gives the increase? Ps. 65:9, *"You visit the earth and cause it to overflow; You greatly enrich it; The stream of God is full of water; You prepare their grain, for thus You prepare the earth."*

Kill, heal, v3. Is there ever a time to kill? Actually, yes - consider the needs of a just war, self-defense, or capital punishment. Gen. 9:6, *"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man."*

Throw stones, gather, v5. This is neither good nor bad, it all depends on what your going to do with those rocks. Maybe to clear a field or build a wall.

Embrace, shun, v5. There's a time to affirm, encourage, and thank. And theres also a time to confront sin. 1 Cor. 11:2, 17.

Search, give up, v6. Keep, throw out. Others have called this the "garage sale" verse.

Tear apart, sew, v7. Perhaps Solomon has in view the rending of garments out of grief? 2 Sam. 13:31, Ez 9:5. Christians, sorrow, but not despair, 1 Th. 4:13-18.

Silent, speak, Job and his buddies. Job 40:4, finally knew to shut his mouth.

Love, hate, v8. Is there ever a time to hate? Yes, evil: Ps. 97:10, *"Hate evil, you who love the Lord, Who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked."*

Prov. 6:16-19, *"There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers."*

War AND peace, v8, Pete Seeger and the Byrds notwithstanding. Time for peace, certainly. Between men, between nations, and most of all spiritual, peace with God, Rom. 5:1.

But we all too often overlook the fact that there is a time for war as well. Joshua, Judges, David, are all examples of God's warriors. 2 Sam. 22:35, *"He trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze."*

Q: If you were in charge of time, what would you eliminate from the list? Just the negative stuff, right? Time to die, etc.

But God is in control, and he says there is a time for everything. And that's for our good, Rom. 8:28.

Look in, v9-14

Solomon's question, v9, "What profit is there...?" is the same question as 1:3. There, the implied answer was "none." Now there's a new answer. Solomon is raising our sights, not just looking under sun anymore. He gives us 3 answers which show that there is something above us which brings a new perspective.

Answer 1: Life is a gift from God, v10. Not always a gift we want, as Solomon would probably attest. But it is still God's gift, and he intended that we live it out with him in view.

Answer 2: We are bound to eternity, v11. This is true of every man and woman, not just believers, part of God's image in us. There are 3 results of having eternity set in our hearts: a) there is more to life than meets the eye, and we know it. And that makes us want to know what it is, who we are, who God is, and what is our purpose here.

b) Eternity in our hearts means we can't find satisfaction to those desires under the sun. If we keep our focus here, in this temporal world, we will only find distraction, not satisfaction.

c) Only in eternity will we understand God's purposes fully, "yet so that...", v11. Only God knows the end from the beginning. We can't figure it out with the little bit we do see on our own, so we have to lift our eyes above the sun to discover that God makes all beautiful.

If we cooperate with God and his timing, life is not meaningless, but, v11, beautiful in its time, even when it is the hardest.

Heb. 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

The word translated "appropriate" in v 11 is literally "beautiful." It occurs 42 times in the OT, and 40 of those uses relate to physical appearance.

What is physical beauty? Something that looks right, the way we imagine it should look, the way it should be, and so stirs the heart and attracts the eye. So too, everything is right, as it should be, beautiful, in its time. Solomon is capping off the 14 statements of v2-8 by saying there is a perfect time for everything. The good, the bad, and everything in between.

And finally, his 3rd answer, we can enjoy life now, v12-14. This was stated this in briefer form in 2:24. Enjoy God's gifts, no matter how hard life is. Chuck Swindoll gives us this list of what God has given us for life:

- Makes everything beautiful in its time
- Gives ability to rejoice
- Capacity to do good

- Ability to appreciate food, drink
- Perspective of seeing good in labor
- Performs works that are permanent, thorough, complete
- Patiently repeats lessons until we learn them

God is good, just, and trustworthy. Moreover, you are part of his eternal plan. Life is NOT monotonous or meaningless. You are a child of God being prepared for an eternal home.

*"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. "And you know the way where I am going." Thomas *said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:1-6*

In other words, Jesus and Solomon agree. If you fear the Lord, you need fear nothing else. Look up, look in, and finally, look ahead, v15-22.

Look ahead, v15-22

There is an old Bach chorale whose German title is translated, "All men must die." That title comes from Ecclesiastes 9:12, "man knows not his time." We may have eternity in our hearts, but the third thing we must realize is that our time here is limited. Death awaits us all.

Life may be a circle, but God is in control of it, v15. He "seeks what passed," lit "what hurries along." In this context, what is it that hurries along? Our lives, our time. Time gets away from us, tempus fugit, faster as we age, but God keeps track of it and what we've done with it.

I would also read that phrase as saying that God keeps bringing his lessons back to us, again and again, until we learn them.

Things aren't as should be in this world, but God will straighten everything out, v16-17. There is wickedness where there should be justice and righteousness. But God will judge both, and as Psalm 19:9 says, "the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether."

If v17 points to time of future judgment, v18-22 talks about the fact that God is judging now, testing man, showing him what he's really like, and injustice in this world shows that without God, man is like animal.

The rest of Scripture agrees:

- Psalm 32:9, "Do not be as horse or as mule which have no understanding, Whose trappings include bit & bridle to hold them in check, Otherwise they will not come near to you."

- Proverbs 7:22, "Suddenly he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,"
- Psalm 49:20, "Man in his pomp, yet without understanding, Is like the beasts that perish."
- Titus 1:12, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

So man without God is like an animal. But look at v19-20. Is there really no difference between man and beast? No, but we do share the same fate, don't we? Both die, turn to dust.

We are made in God's image, v11, but we are still dust at death. The question is, do both remain dust? Solomon seems to leave that question open in v21, "Who knows?" Note, he doesn't really leave it open. All you have to do is look back to v11-14, God has set eternity in our hearts.

The rest of Scripture also clearly answers that question. Just for a sampling, check out 1 Cor. 15:50-57, 1 Th 4:13-17, Rev. 20:11-21:8. 2 Cor. 5:8.

In the meantime, we live life here, so remember that rest and rejoice in what you do, v22. Accept and enjoy what God gives. You don't know what your future in this world holds and you couldn't redo anything if you did.

We live by promises, not explanations. That's the nature of faith. We can't always explain life, but we must always live it and experience it. Philippians 4:11, "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

We have a choice: enjoy what is given, seek the giver, and find meaning. Or endure life, ignore the giver, and live in futility. Not really a tough choice, is it?

5. The Rat Race, 4:1-5:9

Review

In the first 2 chapters, Solomon stated 4 problems that bedevil man: 1) life is a monotonous circle, in which nothing ever changes; 2) human wisdom isn't enough to deal with life under the sun; 3) money doesn't make life under the sun meaningful; and 4) death is an absolute certainty.

He addresses each problem in turn in chapters 3-10. I say "addresses" them, because, as will see this morning, he doesn't necessarily provide the neat, tidy answers we might want or expect.

He addressed the first problem, the circle of life, in chapter 3 by pointing out 1) there is something above man which controls his time and experience, v1-8; 2) there is something within man, which links him to what is above, v9-14; 3) and there is something ahead of man, for which he must prepare, death, v15-22.

In this study we will look at 4:1-5:9. These are real situations, real life, and a realistic appraisal of a hurting world - a rat race! Along the way, Solomon will offer some nuggets of prescriptive advice for those who are NOT living life under the sun.

Oppression, v1-3

Israel had a long history of justice even by Solomon's time. It began with Moses, Ex. 18:13ff, and Jethro's advice to establish judges during the Exodus.

It continued in the Levitical law, Lev. 19:15, "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly."

But when Solomon looked at his world, he saw oppression, pain, sorrow, and apathy about it all.

His conclusion, in v2-3, is that we are better off dead, or never born. This is good advice? In a world of oppression, seek not to be born?

No, this is not advice, Solomon is not seeking to fix anything, he's just observing. In a world of oppression and misery, with no one to comfort or protect you, the dead are better off than the living, v2, because at least they've attained rest. Note, there is no inference here of saved or unsaved, just dead.

Better still, those who never experienced it at all, v3. Must be pretty bad if never being born is better. And it is.

Cheating your neighbor, abusing power, using violence and bloodshed to get your way, often against the very people who most need protecting. What fuels this kind of stuff? *Money*.

Unbalanced Lives, v4-6

He continues his observation in the world of work. If you are expecting good news, industrious men and women ala 3:22, "nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities..." you will be sadly disappointed.

Competitive Life, v4. Labor and skill have been put to use, not for beauty, utility, or help, but rivalry and envy. It is an unhealthy competition for cold, hard cash.

Not by God's design, but man's fallen nature. We covet what others have, James 4:1-2, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask."

Who do we compete against? Our neighbor, who we are supposed to love, Lev. 19:18, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord."

We are consumed by rivalry and envy, we want what others have, Prov. 14:30, "envy is rottenness to the bones."

Is competition sinful? Scripture doesn't say much about it. Is there healthy competition? What characterizes it? Driving to excel. That's something Scripture supports. But competition out of envy, or as driving factor in life, or played as zero sum game is not what God intended.

Idle Life, v5. From one extreme to the other. Solomon has no sympathy for the lazy:

He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys. (Proverbs 18:9)

Laziness casts into a deep sleep, And an idle man will suffer hunger. (Proverbs 19:15)

I passed by the field of the sluggard and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense [aka "fool"], and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction. "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest," Then your poverty will come as a robber And your want like an armed man." (Pro. 24:30-34)

He isn't saying rest is sinful, he is talking about extremes. If cutthroat competition is vanity, the life of ease is a slow, comfortable path to destruction. Sleep late, sleep often, avoid work, and you will wind up consuming your own flesh, eating away at yourself. Perhaps its just as well, because you won't have anything else to eat.

We've said before, work was not the curse, but an important part of godly life. 2 Th 3:6-12 says that making the choice NOT to work is undisciplined, unruly. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 makes this point, "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either."

So Solomon has pictured two types of workers. For one life is competition, a rat race. To the other, life is rest, work is to be avoided at all costs, and he ends up destroying himself.

Instead, we should live a **Balanced Life, v6.** One hand for rest, the other for work, neither dominates.

Balance is something we've lost in our working lives. Juliet Schor, 1990, in a study titled "The Overworked American," showed we are working more hours now than any time since the '20's. Not true of Western Europe. The average US manufacturing employee works 320 hours more per year, than his European counterpart, a full 2 months more.

Why? Lower productivity? No, more spending. America is a consumer's paradise. As of 1990, the average American owned and consumed more than twice what he did in 1948. But we have no time to enjoy it. After job and family responsibilities, we have an average of 16.5 hours per week of leisure.

Solomon's observation: better one hand for gain, one for quietness, than both for one or other.

Prov 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 served with hatred."

Prov 16.8, Better is a little with righteousness than great income with injustice."

1 Timothy 6:6, But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

Like Mr. Miyagi said, "first find balance, then wax car."

Isolated Lives, v7-16

Next, Solomon looks at our **isolated, independent lives**, v7-8. Someone with no family, no partners, who lives to work, and for whom no amount of profit is enough. Never stops to think, "for whom am I laboring?" Socrates, the unexamined life is not worth living.

Like a black hole, always taking in, giving nothing back. Like the servant of Mt. 25, who took what his master entrusted to him and buried it in ground. Not doing anything with his life, with his work, with his profit. Vanity.

Made for fellowship, v9-12. We were created to have relationships. Look back at 3:11. All of us have eternity in our hearts, and have the same yearning, the same need. All are made in God's image. We were not created for isolation, but for fellowship, partnership. A Jewish proverb says a friendless man is like a left hand without the right.

Imagine Solomon watching two at work, v9. 2 get more done, can tackle bigger, harder tasks. They can help one another if they fall, v10, and provide warmth when sleeping in the fields at harvest time, v11. They can watch over one another, v12.

If 2 is good, 3 is better. Picture of unity, 3 cords woven together, tight, strong.

Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17)

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1-2)

Solomon's observation: better 2 than 1, 3 is better still. He illustrates in v13-16, with a bit of a story. This is the 4th "better" in these verses. 1) 4:3, better to not be born than to suffer oppression w/o hope; 2) v6, better one hand for quiet, one for gain than both for either, 3) v9, better two than one.

Finally, better poverty with wisdom than riches with folly. Could this be a picture of the relationship between Saul and David? The old king is foolish and won't listen to instruction. The young man is poor but wise.

King was rich and powerful, but isolated and foolish, and lost his throne thru stupidity. The young man was poor and in prison, yet won the throne by his wisdom.

But the real point of the story is v16. What happened to the young man after he became king? I read v16 to be saying he went down the same road as the king before him. He became foolish, wouldn't listen to others, lived in isolation, and eventually lost his popularity and his throne.

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37)

Solomon has seen and condemned rivalry, laziness, living in isolation. These are all forms of false worship – worship of self or of money. Instead, Solomon says, we should offer God true worship, 5:1-7.

True Worship, 5:1-7

"Guard your steps," be careful about how you come to worship, because insincere worship is NOT neutral. If you come offering insincere or hypocritical worship, you may just leave worse than you came. Especially when you participate in worship while harboring sin. You are just begging God to rebuke you:

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. "When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. "I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. "So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood." (Isaiah 1:11-15)

Listen well, v1. The sacrifice of fools is coming to worship to talk instead of listen. Talk about your righteousness rather than letting your life speak for itself. Talk about yourself rather than hear what God is communicating via music, prayer, or the Word. Instead, we should come to worship with a closed mouth, open ears, ready to obey God's word. Only a fool would think he can deceive God with words.

Pray carefully, v2-3. Hasty, impulsive words, lit. "hurry your heart." Prov. 20:25, "It is a trap for a man to say rashly, "It is holy!" And after the vows to make inquiry." Don't promise God something you can't or won't keep. More in v4.

Beware of using prayer to show your eloquence. "*For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.*"

Mt. 6:7, "when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."

Instead, come to God with a prepared heart, Ps. 141:1-4, "O Lord, I call upon You; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to You! May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering. Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice deeds of wickedness With men who do iniquity; And do not let me eat of their delicacies."

John Bunyan said, "In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart." Romans 8:26, "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;"

Take care with your vows, v4-7. Two key problems: 1) making a vow with no intent to keep it; 2) making a vow, then delaying fulfillment of it.

Solomon is talking about a person whose religion is all talk and no action. One who believes that spiritual sentiment and intent equals deeds. James 2:15-16, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" Saving faith acts, it doesn't just talk.

Otherwise, its just lip service, Is. 29:13, "this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lips, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote."

Instead, v7, fear God. Solomon's observation is that it is better to fear God than to talk big about him. Promising doesn't make you mature. Jesus, "make no oath... let your yes be yes and your no, no." God isn't impressed by our vows, he wants our worship, Jn 4:23, "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

Back to Oppression, v8-9

Finally, Solomon brings us back where we started, 4:1-3. The poor are still oppressed, The government is still corrupt. There's lots of watching, v8, but no concern for the poor. The world is still a rat race.

What's his point? The Hebrew of v9 is very difficult, and there is no consensus among commentators of its true meaning. It probably either means 1) even though government is corrupt its still good to have it; 2) even the king milks the land for his own profit; or 3) the only thing thing a king leaves behind is the land he cultivated.

Solomon's observations start and end with oppression. I believe he's saying, "don't be shocked at it." Mark 14:7, "You'll always have the poor with you." Corruption and oppression are an integral part of a fallen world. As long as we live here, it will be with us. But that doesn't mean we have to live by its principles.

Solomon answers the monotonous "circle of life," but not in the way we'd expect. 3:13, life is God's gift. True, but that doesn't make it easy. It is complex, full of trials and burdens.

But we can live it knowing that balance is better than extremes, that 2 are better than 1, that poverty with wisdom is better than riches with folly, and that the fear of God is better than empty talk about him.

If you are just living life under the sun, that advice makes little sense and no difference. But if you are living with an understanding that you are linked to eternity, it will ease the burden here while waiting for the fullness of life there.

6. Money Trouble, 5:10-6:9

The topic of this study is one of great personal interest to just about everybody, because everybody likes money. How could you not? Without money you don't eat, have a roof over your head or clothing. Liking money is fine. The problem comes when you LOVE money.

Now, we live in a materialistic world and a materialistic community. I love Signal Mountain, but let's face it, this is a community that puts a very high premium on your earning power.

So I can't help but wonder, in a fairly materialistic community in a very materialistic society, how many of you reading this don't just like money, but love it?

Maybe you're like Donald Trump, who said "Whoever says money can't buy happiness doesn't know where to shop." Or like the bumper sticker, "He who dies with the most toys wins."

I would submit to you that these attitudes are all about loving & trusting...God? No, money. And that's the trouble with money. Because if we aren't very careful, it will take the place of God in our lives.

In this study in Ecclesiastes, Solomon looks at the problem he detailed in 2:1-11. He tried every pleasure he could, wine, v3, women, song, v8. He invested his life in building, v4-6. We know from 1 Kings his wealth was legendary.

Solomon had everything his eyes desired, 2:7-10. He didn't hold himself back from anything. But v11 records how much it meant, "I considered all my activities which my hands had done & the labor which I had exerted, & behold all was vanity & striving after wind & there was no profit under the sun."

Solomon had as much money as any man living, and what did it get him? Vanity, futility, emptiness. "Striving after wind," a great word picture. If you run as far and as fast as you can, grab the wind with all your strength, how much wind are you going to catch? *None*.

Money doesn't make life in this world meaningful. So what does? That's his focus in 5:10-6:12. Note, this is not an attack on the rich, but words of wisdom for those who love money, no matter how much, or how little, they have of it. Along the way, he explodes some common myths about money.

Money doesn't satisfy, 5:10-12

Solomon, the richest man of his world, after a life focused on wealth and its use, knew the common myth that wealth = happiness was a lie. "He who **loves money** will not be satisfied with money"

What does it mean to love money? Its really the same as any other kind of love. There is both an emotional and a physical component. To love something or someone is to feel 1) a strong emotional attachment, and 2) a desire to possess or be in the presence of the one who is loved.

Bonnie & I celebrate 27 years of married bliss this year. I remember 2 weeks before our wedding, she left LA for her parent's home in desert to finish the preparations. And I thought about her all the time.

One evening I called her up, and when she came on the line I didn't say a word, I just dropped the needle on Barry Manilow's "Weekend in New England" (*When will our eyes meet? When can I touch you? When will this strong yearnin' end? And when will I hold you again?*). And we just sat there, 100's of miles apart, listening wistfully. [deep breath]

In other words, when you love someone, you think about them a lot, you fill your mind up with them, and you **EARNESTLY** desire to be in their presence. Which is great when its your sweetheart. It's not so good when its money. *Because money won't satisfy your longing.*

Want to test your love for money? Answer honestly, how much of it do you give away? George Barna, in a 2003 study of professing Christians, showed that only 7% of professing Christians give away 10% of their income. And that's up from the previous year.

What do you think is the average percentage of income given among all professing Christians? 3.8%. To top that off, previous studies have shown that half of all charitable giving comes from households with income under \$30K. Those with less tend to give more than those with more.

Why do we love money, why do we desire it, focus on it? Because we think it will buy **security**. We think money will free us from worry about losing our job, going broke, etc. Or we think it will buy **power**. The ability to direct our life or the lives of others, to be a big shot. Or we love money because it will buy us **stuff**, nice stuff.

Security, power, and stuff are not ends in themselves. They are the things that we think will make us happy, give us meaning, and satisfy the restlessness in our hearts. As one of our guys likes to see, it will “medicate the pain.”

All the money in all the banks of the world will not satisfy the human heart, because we were made to be satisfied by one thing only, eternity, 3:11. If we have eternity in our hearts, its going to take something eternal to satisfy them.

The problem with money is that **consumption always increases with income, v11**. When Bonnie and I were first married we had an average income of \$400 per month. Total. We didn't have much left over at the end of every month, but we made it, every single month. \$400 isn't much now, and it wasn't much in 1973.

The funny thing was, as our income grew, little by little, so did our “needs.” With a little more money, we started “needing” to eat out more often. We started “needing” new clothes, a nicer car, a washer/dryer, a home of our own...

That's the way money works. Not only does it not satisfy, it makes you dissatisfied. In a 1991 study of young families (18 to 25): The average after-tax income was \$19,783. The average annual spending was \$21,401. (8% more; USA Today, May 20, 1991, p. D1.)

If the average is 8% more than they make, some are spending a whole lot more. How are they doing that? Plastic. The well-known quote from John D. Rockefeller, the richest man of **his** world, is, “How much money is enough?” “A little bit more.”

Not only do “needs” increase with income, but friends and family appear out of nowhere. And many that aren't friends, con men, the IRS, etc. And as you look on, you watch your wealth being consumed.

Money won't buy a good night's sleep, v12. The common laborer sleeps better than the rich, first because he's tired from physical labor, but also because he probably didn't overeat. If you make every meal an event, you're bound to suffer for it. Another reason the rich might not sleep so well, the more money you have, the more anxiety.

It is a myth that money solves problems. Some, sure – food, clothing, shelter. Maybe some extras that are nice to have, like vacation, retirement, etc. That's about it. Wealth usually brings problems we never knew existed. Not that I speak from experience, but I've been told these things by some who know.

1 Tim. 6:9-10, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

It's a familiar truth, but look at it again. Paul gives Timothy quite a list: temptation, a snare, foolish & harmful desires, ruin, destruction, all sorts of evil, apostasy, and many griefs. All for the love of money.

Let's be clear about this: you don't have to have any money to love it. Your mind can still be set on it, you can still desire it, think about it, and sacrifice for it, even when you don't have any of it. You can see that at the Favorite Market every time the lottery jackpot gets interesting.

You can't satisfy an eternal need with money. At most you might dull it, but the need is still there.

Money doesn't guarantee your future, 5:13-17

Another common myth about money is that wealth = security. The word translated "hoarded," v13, means to watch, guard, or keep. This guy kept his money only for himself instead of using it or giving it away. If you put your energy, focus, and hope on wealth, you will only wind up disappointed.

Because money doesn't last, v14. The New American Standard's "bad investment," is literally "misfortune." Not just a bad investment, but if your future is bound up in your money, any misfortune, illness, or theft can wipe out the work and wealth of a lifetime. That's just money's nature, its transitory, fleeting, it doesn't last.

Jesus, in Mark 4:19, talks about the "deceitfulness" of riches. We think there's more there than there really is. We are fooling ourselves.

Because wealth doesn't change your nature or your fate, v15-17. Rich and poor are born alike, will die alike, and suffer life's difficulties alike.

Jesus illustrated this truth in the parable of the rich fool, in Luke 12:16-21, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 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 God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

In the end, what does money buy you? Nothing, because you can't take it with you.

It may seem like Solomon is advocating poverty, but he's not. Neither being rich or poor is anything before God. Job 34:19, [God] "shows no partiality to princes Nor regards the rich above the poor, For they all are the work of His hands."

Instead, Solomon is just warning us, as someone who knows, not to trust in riches. Being poor has plenty of disadvantages of its own.

He's also not saying you shouldn't save, or plan for the future. What he is saying is "don't love money, don't expect it to protect you, don't invest your life in financial gain. Instead, what is good & fitting is to 1) rejoice in what God has given you and 2) be content with it.

If not money, what? 5:18-6:9

Rejoice in God's provision, v18-20. What is God's provision? Honest work and its fruit, v18-19. "Enjoy oneself in all one's labor," accept it as God's gift, along with what he provides as a result of work. Rich or poor, your life & your work is God's gift to you.

Even if its really, really hard? Yup. "Toils," v18, labor to the point of exhaustion. Can you make a 6-figure income for part-time work? Especially if you are answering an ad tacked to a telephone pole? If God can part the Red Sea and raise the dead, he can make that happen as well. But I'd expect it with about the same frequency.

Take note of v19, "*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.*" Your work just might produce wealth.

Solomon isn't criticizing the rich, but those who love money, whether they are rich, poor, or somewhere in between. His point is enjoy the work, let God take care of the fruit. He may bring wealth. He may bring just enough to get by.

Our prayer should be Proverbs 30:8-9, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That I not be full and deny You and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God."

The problem with wealth is that it can lead to arrogance. The problem with poverty is that it can lead to compromise. Instead, rejoice in what you have. If you do, v20 says you won't need to look back on your life with regret, nor look ahead with worry about what's coming next.

Remember Matthew 6:25-34? Jesus ties 2 things together: money, anxiety. "do not be anxious for what you eat, drink, wear. Instead, what? Seek first his kingdom, his righteousness, then what?"

So, rejoice, and finally, **be content, 6:1-9.** Chapter 6 is a commentary on 5:18-20. It is a common trap of life under the sun, an "evil prevalent." The NIV is good here, it "weighs heavily," like a weight on your shoulders.

Riches without satisfaction, v1-7. Here is someone who has everything the world values: riches, wealth, honor. Yet he doesn't enjoy any of it because of a "foreigner." Don't think merely in terms of a personal enemy. It could be illness, theft, whatever.

The person pictured in chapter 6 has the ancient world's 2 measurements of prosperity, lots of kids, v3, and long life, v6. Yet, he lives a frustrated life and suffers a lonely death. If you don't enjoy God's gift of life and work, you are worse off than a stillborn, v4, because contentment

doesn't come from good living, it comes from making a good life. It has less to do with how MUCH money you have, than with how you THINK about the money you have.

Luke 12:15, "be on guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

An important aspect of contentment is to avoid living for the future. 6:8 asks, "What does the poor but wise know that the foolish rich doesn't?" v9 answers, "he knows that it's better to rest content in what you have than spend your life desiring what you don't have."

You're living for the future when you are orienting your present life around a coming day. That day when you can take that comfortable retirement, hit the lottery, buy that vacation home, or whatever else you might dream about.

Let me close by telling you about one of my college professors, George Grant. Dr. Grant taught freshman music theory, the basic building blocks of music. He had taught at my college for 40 years. He was an institution.

My freshman year, 1973-74, was his last year before retirement. He was a nice old guy, very slow and gentle, kind of boring. But a nice guy. And he was looking forward to his retirement. He would joke about how much he was looking forward to it when we were more than usually dense.

Finally, the last day of the semester came. Dr. Grant packed up his office, his wife picked him up at the campus and drove him home. He came in, sat down in his easy chair, and died on the spot.

Now, that's a sad story, even tragic, but it is true. I only knew Dr. Grant as an instructor. I don't know if he knew the Lord or not, but I do know this. If you are living for a comfortable retirement, or a bigger house, or a nicer car, you need to wake up, because you are living for the future. Solomon would say you are striving after the wind.

We can't get away from money, so how do we keep from loving it? Solomon says, be content. Jesus says, be content. What do you think the Apostle Paul would say?

Philippians 4:11-13, "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, & I also know how to live in prosperity; in any & every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled & going hungry, both of having abundance & suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Paul knew the secret of contentment. Want to know what it is? Simple, 2 parts: First, choose to be content. Nothing magic, no program, simply make the choice to be happy in what you have.

Second, how does he close that passage? "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Let me ask you, can God provide your needs? Has he promised to provide them? Will he keep that promise?

If you can just know deep down inside you that the answer to all 3 of those questions is yes, you will be well on the way to contentment! Trust in God's strength and provision, knowing he will provide your needs.

Billy Graham said, "If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life."

What are you living for? If money, you'll find wealth is more of an obstacle to joy than a path to it.

Are you content with what God has given you? Do you rejoice in your work and what it provides for you and your family? If so, you are right on target. If not, consider these words again:

"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.

"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.

"I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am...I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

7. Wisdom's Advantage, 6:10-7:29

Having addressed the first and third problems he has raised, Solomon turns to the second problem, from 1:12-18, the fact that wisdom doesn't explain life.

Talking about wisdom is right up Solomon's alley. Wisdom was God's great gift to Solomon. It stayed with him throughout his spiritual wandering. Maybe that's why he presents the answer to the problem of wisdom in same way he presented the book of Proverbs, as a series of couplets, some comparative, some contrasting, showing the positive and negative aspects of life.

The word "better" shows up 11 times in these verses. What's better, laughter or sorrow? (7:1-4) Rebuke or praise? (7:7-10) Prosperity or adversity? (7:15-22).

Solomon will show us the paradox of these truths is that we learn more from adversity than from prosperity. That's chapter 7 in a nutshell, wisdom teaches us throughout adverse circumstances. In fact, wisdom can find good stuff amidst the bad.

He actually starts before chapter 7. 6:10-12 is actually intended to set up the thought of chapters 7-8. Remember, there is nothing inspired about the chapter/verse divisions, just a faithful scribe somewhere doing his best to figure out where to divide what is in some cases very difficult to figure.

Where Not to Go for all the Answers, 6:10-12

Read 6:10-12. It seems clear that money is no longer Solomon's focus. What is he saying? V10, it is known what man is. His name and character are understood. What's more, he can't dispute with him who is stronger. Who's stronger than man? *God alone.*

We can't dispute with God. So, v11, what do words accomplish? *Nothing.* Most believe that is true, but few of us live consistent with that belief. That's the problem. We know, but can't help ourselves. Like Stephen Curtis Chapman sang, "words fall like drops of rain, our lips are like clouds."

Who knows what is good, v12? Who knows what will come after him on this world. *God alone.*

Man's character is well known, and he can't argue with God, no matter how much or how often tries. We don't know what's coming, life is like a shadow. But that's only half Solomon's point. The other half is that the wise know God. He is stronger, indisputable, inarguable, above words, and he knows what is coming next.

The theme in these verses is that God alone knows. Also found in 7:27-29, 8:16-17.

Proverbs 25:2, it is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings to search out a matter.

When adversity comes, where do you turn? If you get no answers to your questions, you're asking the wrong person.

Wisdom Learns from Adversity, v1-14

Solomon said in 1:12-18 that wisdom doesn't explain life. Just as he answered the monotonous circle by showing that life is anything but monotonous, but has purpose and direction; Just as he answered the futility of money by showing that money isn't supposed to satisfy or protect us; so Solomon will show that wisdom is supposed to be limited, that it only goes so far, but where it goes it beats the alternative. Wisdom may not explain life, but it does improve it.

Sorrow, laughter, life, death, v1-4. The second half of v1 sounds incredibly cynical. It's better to die than be born? Well, not so fast. We can't divorce the two halves of the verse. In the first half, a "good name" is tied to the "day of death." What does he say about having a good name? 1) it's better than ointment, and 2) the day of your death is a good day.

Ointment refers to a perfumed oil, particularly olive oil mixed with spices. In a world without A/C, it was the common way of covering odor, as well as being a cosmetic. The use of oil was also a sign of wealth and was used to soothe wounds and bruises, and to anoint the dead before burial.

When Scripture speaks of our "name," it doesn't mean what we are called, but our character, our reputation. How much is a good name worth? *a lot*

Proverbs 10:7, The memory of the righteous is blessed, But the name of the wicked will rot.

Pr 22:1, A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, favor is better than silver and gold.

Two good examples of name rot: Judas and Benedict. So why, v2, is it better to go to a house of mourning? To learn from it, to “take to heart” the lessons it can teach: Life is not fun and games all the time, we need a healthy appreciation for our limited time here. Don’t think, v3, that Solomon is advocating no laughter. He's just saying we learn more from adversity than prosperity.

Rebuke, flattery, v5-6. The praise of fools is like burning thorns: lots of noise, not much heat. On the other hand, a wise rebuke that is heard will accomplish much. Much more than flattery.

Psalms 141:5, Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head.

Pro 17:10, A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.

Proverbs 27:17, Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another.

Iron does sharpen iron, but if iron had feelings, do you think it might hurt a bit, having those blunt, rough edges honed and sharpened?

“Flattery is the bellows blows up sin; The thing the which is flattered, but a spark to which that blast [flattery] gives heat and stronger glowing; Whereas reproof, obedient and in order, Fits kings as they are men, for they may err.” Shakespeare, *Pericles Prince of Tyre* (Helicanus at I, ii)

“Flattery is like chewing gum. Enjoy it but don't swallow it.” Hank Ketcham.

Patience, hurry, v7-10. Beware the quick, easy road. The easy way to make a buck, get ahead, being “hasty in spirit,” v9. Bribery is a shortcut, but corrupts the heart, leads to oppression, maddening even the wise.

“End better than beginning,” v8. As in v1, where a good end is better than beginning. There's a sense of completion and satisfaction with a job well done. Anytime you can bring a matter to a successful conclusion, it's a good thing. Think of Solomon's building projects.

Now, look at 2nd half of v8, what is contrasted there? Patience and haughtiness. How do the two relate? Haughtiness means to be proud, conceited, to think you should have what you want when you want it. The haughty demand, expect, and stand on their rights. Solomon says its much better to be patient, right? Why?

Patience, Rom. 5:3-4, “tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.” Perseverance, patience, brings proven character, ultimately hope.

Pride, on other hand, “goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before stumbling.” Pro 16:18.

What emotion always accompanies pride? *Anger*. If you have a pride problem, I can bet you will also have an anger problem, and vice versa. Anger is properly the behavior of fools. It accomplishes nothing, James 1:19-20, “be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger;” Why? Because the “anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

Be careful of those who make Eph. 4:26 their life’s verse, “be angry, yet do not sin.” The emphasis there, like here, is not on being angry, but on avoiding sin. Note, Solomon says don’t be eager to be angry. The context is haughtiness, impatience. Neither is a reason for anger.

If you are impatient, if you long for change, if you dream about the “good old days,” v10, that’s a combination of a bad memory and a good imagination. We can’t get a single yesterday back, and we can’t live in the future, Matthew 6:34, so live patiently, for today.

Prosperity, adversity, v11-14. What happens to an inheritance without wisdom? *Gone in a flash*

So wisdom with inheritance is good, an advantage to those who live under the sun, where money comes in handy. But remember what we saw about money in chapter 6? We said there that it doesn’t satisfy, doesn’t protect. Instead of loving money, rejoice in God’s provision, and be content with what he’s given you.

So, v12, how much “protection” is money? Interesting translation choice in the NAS. Same word translated "protection" in 7:12 is translated "shadow" in 6:12.

"Shadow" can be used two different ways, 1) to indicate a covering, protection, in the sense of being “under the wing” of God’s protection. 2) it can mean something ephemeral, fleeting, immaterial, insubstantial. Both choices are linguistically valid. NAS translators chose first. I would submit to you, humbly, that they made the wrong choice. I think the second meaning is more likely, given Solomon’s opinion of money in chapter 6.

Wisdom, in and of itself, man’s wisdom especially, is no more a protection than money is. Both are fleeting, shadowy things. But wisdom has one distinct advantage – it preserves or gives life. Proverbs 8:35, he who finds wisdom “finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.”

Wisdom yields to God’s will, v13. If God has bent something, are you going to straighten it out? Wisdom accepts this. Wisdom understands, v14, that God made both the day of prosperity and adversity. Wisdom gives us perspective for both. Adversity is a better teacher than prosperity – when accompanied by wisdom.

We need to be balanced here, don’t we? I don’t believe it would be good application to say we can never seek to change matters, to improve our life, that we have to accept anything and everything without question. But when it is clear what God’s road for you is, you’d be foolish to try a different route. Just ask Jonah.

Why can't we have prosperity all the time? Would that be so bad? *Yes*. Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh? 2 Cor. 12:7, given to keep him humble. And Solomon has just shown us how bad humility's opposite is.

Another reason comes from Job 40: He is God, we aren't.

Finally, we need to have something to look forward to. If life here was perfect, why look forward to life there? Wisdom knows the truth of 3:11, the central verse of Ecclesiastes, he's made all things beautiful in their time, *including* the day of adversity.

What Wisdom Provides, v15-28

Wisdom provides us with three things: healthy fear, insight, and strength. **Fear of God, v15-18.** Solomon has seen it all, the good die young, v15, the evil are apparently blessed. Only in this life (see Psalm 73 for details), but it still happens.

Therefore, don't assume that by being righteous you can escape adversity, v16. Doesn't v16 sound weird? Don't be too good, too wise? Whatever happened to "be holy as I am holy?"

Is Solomon advocating moderation in righteousness? No, v18. He's contrasting one who is focused on his own righteousness and wisdom instead of...fearing God. Some point out "reflexive action," subject acting on self. IOW, one making claim to righteousness, wisdom. Self-righteousness. Check out v20, none righteous.

Read in that light, v16-17 condemn false righteousness and proud evil. Wisdom understands that though the wicked may prosper, that's not the way to live. Instead, v18, hold to true righteousness, true wisdom, walk in fear of God. Pro. 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

We are to seek righteousness and wisdom, but not our own. 1 Corinthians 1:30, "by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, & righteousness & sanctification, & redemption."

Strength, v19-22. Other than God, whom do wise need to fear? Nobody, Psalm 112:7, the one who fears the Lord "will not fear evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord."

We can draw a particular kind of strength, v19, from the realization that all sin, v20, and that we don't need to put much stock in mere words, v21, giving grace to those who offend you because grace was given to you, v22.

That kind of strength withholds judgment, realizing that the speck in his brother's eye may be log in his own, Mt. 7:1-3. Wisdom applies grace to other's sin.

Wisdom, power in combination are God attributes. The two go hand in hand, and are emblematic of God. If you would have God's strength, you need God's wisdom.

Insight, v23-28. Solomon closes with acknowledgement that wisdom is limited, v23-24. As much as he knew, there was more he didn't. He realized wisdom could only go so far, one can never know it all.

But, v25-26, wisdom does understand sinfulness of humanity. He pictures a prostitute, v26, and the man drawn to her. Could this be a self portrait? How do you escape, v26? By being pleasing to God. How do you do that? Refer back to v18, fear him.

Solomon's conclusion in his search for meaning in life is in v27-28. Putting one and one together, it all comes down to this: wisdom is rare under the sun, one man in 1,000 has it, how many women?

Is Solomon a misogynist? Is this a Scriptural basis for chauvinism? Not really. Remember how many wives and concubines he had? Total: 1,000. Think he's saying something about the wisdom of his harem.

His point: in the search for satisfaction, 1 man in 1000 either had it or could help Solomon answer his questions. Is it possible that the reason no women could is because Solomon was only interested in one thing from them?

Because all he wanted was sex, he denied himself the pleasure of a life companion. Think there might be application here? There's a dual tragedy here: when men are focused only on meat, they miss the nourishment. Men will imitate love to get sex, women will give sex to get imitation of love.

That's not how God intended it. He made Adam upright, v29, but he fell. "Devices," we invent ways to do evil. The person with godly wisdom will know this much: Wisdom makes life better, provides balance, strength, and insight. Sure, wisdom alone doesn't make life meaningful, but it wasn't supposed to. Wisdom won't answer all questions, but it will teach us enough to know the essential truth, v18, fear God.

8. Applying Wisdom, 8:1-17

We have seen that the problem of wisdom, in chapter 1, is that it doesn't explain life. Solomon, in chapter 7, says "exactly right." Wisdom doesn't explain life, it isn't supposed to. Instead, he showed that wisdom improves life: it learns from adversity, sorrow, rebuke, and circumstances; wisdom leads us to fear God, gives us strength, insight to our sin, the human condition, and God's grace.

How important is wisdom? Critically important: 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.*"

Proverbs 4:5-9, "Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get

understanding. Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty.”

Proverbs might make us think that wisdom provides all the answers to life. I wonder if Solomon thought that, back in 1 Kings 3, when he asked for wisdom from God? If so, he learned differently, 7:23, "*I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.*"

Chapter 8 is still about wisdom. It starts with a statement of its value in v1 and ends in v16-17, reiterating wisdom's limitations. Wisdom may be limited, but it is still highly valued. **“Who is like the wise man?, v1”** *Nobody*. Only the wise can interpret events, size up a situation, and act accordingly. He is illumined, he has understanding. Solomon says his face beams.

How does wisdom make the wise man's face beam? Look back to 7:18, wisdom leads to the fear of God; 7:19-22, wisdom provides spiritual strength, grace; 7:25-26, wisdom gives insight into the sinfulness of man.

Chapter 7 was all about wisdom & adversity. Chapter 8 gives examples: life and death authority, v2-9, and the inequities of life, v10-17.

We will find it is not easy to pin down. There are seeming contradictions and impossible situations in this chapter. The reason for that is, it mirrors reality. Solomon is showing us our inability to call the shots, to master our affairs.

Wisdom and Authority, v2-10

Have you ever had a situation where you were under someone's authority with whom you absolutely disagreed? How did you handle it?

The king's power is the background to this application. He had the power of life and death, there was virtually no legal check on his power: he *was* the law. That's too much authority for anyone, and so it was imperative to avoid his wrath.

How does wisdom deal with authority, especially when it is absolute and possibly corrupt? Solomon says wisdom diverts our natural tendencies, our anger at injustice, the “end justifies the means” thinking, fighting evil with evil.

Instead, he says to **remember your oath, v2-4**. How serious is an oath? “Cross my heart, hope to die?” No, an oath is a solemn vow, sworn before God. Jesus said “make no oath,” dealing with our ordinary conversation. Believers shouldn't require an oath to be trusted, every word should be decisive, trustworthy. Governments usually require something more.

Here is the oath of a US Cabinet officer: “I... do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic, that I will bear the true faith and allegiance to the same, that I take this obligation freely, without any mental

reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.”

Like a Cabinet officer, the individual pictured in v2 is someone who has pledged, before God, his support to the king. He is probably a high level government official, who serves in the king's presence. How much does his oath mean if he only keeps it when he agrees with the king?

The first thing wisdom teaches is obedience. He has taken an oath, and so he must stick by it, keeping the king's command. And if you don't agree with it, v3, don't storm out of the room in anger and join in an “evil matter,” a plot against him. Ecc. 10:4, "If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses."

It's good to keep calm, to stand firm. First because of your oath, but second, because of his power. Don't cross the King, because he can do whatever he wants. Whenever the king speaks, his word is backed with power, v4. There is no higher authority on earth that can question him. In Solomon's day, the king was an absolute monarch, power of life, death, no legal check, because he was the Law. Beyond question.

Is that right? Is it fair, is it just? Maybe not, but who is actually in control? *God*. Though Solomon doesn't make that point, it's understood, and certainly, the wise man understands that.

Instead, wisdom will use caution in dealing with a difficult command. Satan loves to disrupt authority, the more chaos he can cause, the better. Not only for the church, but for nations. Wisdom can deal with authority because it understands God's sovereignty. God sets rulers up and brings them down according to his plan, not ours. He is King of kings, Lord of lords, “*He removes kings and establishes kings;*” Daniel 2:21

So if you oppose a ruler with illegal action, a revolt in violence, who are you fighting against? If you fight evil with evil, you are saying that God is not in control. Instead, wisdom keeps its oath of allegiance, even under difficult circumstances? What kind of loyalty is it otherwise?

- Proverbs 24:21-22, "My son, fear the Lord and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change, For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?"
- Rom. 13:1, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."
- Titus 3:1, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,"

What if you are asked to do evil? That's a different principle. In that case, you are called to a higher obedience, Acts 4:19, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;” 5:29, “We must obey God rather than men.”

In that case, what do you do, start a revolution? No, v3, you don't join in an evil matter. How might you deal with it then? *Civil disobedience*. How many examples of Christians involved in civil disobedience can you think of in the last 20 years or so?

How can we know when we need to disregard a human law because of God's higher authority? The answer to that is in the next verses. **Trust God's Timing, v5-10**, read. **Time for Judgment, v5-6**. The wise know "proper time, procedure" for a given situation. Therefore, we need fear no evil or trouble. That's why, in v1, the wise man's face beams. Obedience is its own reward.

"Procedure," NAS, NIV. "Justice" or "judgment" is the uniform meaning of this word:

- 3:16, place of *justice*. Where is that? Court, judgments are handed down.
- 5:8, denial of *justice*
- 11:9, Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to *judgment*.
- 12:14, God will bring every deed into *judgment*...whether it is good or evil.

Literally, the wise know that judgment is coming. What relevance does that truth have in this context? 2 points: 1) The King is the law. The common man can't judge him, but God can; and 2) an evil King will get what is coming to him.

Wisdom keeps you from shooting your mouth off, reacting impulsively to a bad situation. Wisdom also gives you perspective for a bad king, v6. "Delight," desire. Desire for justice, right, weighs heavily on godly counselor. Knows, 3:1, there is a time for everything, including God's judgment.

There is an implied truth here: there is a time to keep quiet and obey, therefore, there is also a time to give an opinion, to disagree.

- Proverbs 11:14, Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.
- Proverbs 12:20, Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy.
- Proverbs 15:22, without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.

There's a right and wrong way to counsel, and a right and wrong time as well. Even when trouble is heavy, v6, when you want to run and hide, strike out, wisdom helps us discern the proper course and hold to it.

No one knows the future, v7-10, read. Don't know what's going to happen next, or when, v7.

Sometimes, knowing what we don't know is more important than knowing what we know. We make bad assumptions, we think we know what's going to happen, or what someone is thinking, and act accordingly. What are the odds your words and deeds will be appropriate?

There are 4 things you can't do, v8: 1) hold back the wind, 2) change day of your death, 3) be discharged from the army during a war, and 4) be delivered from evil by evil.

The last one is his real point, the rest just build to it. You can't fight evil with evil. If you serve a wicked or foolish king, don't think his violent overthrow will accomplish any good. God can make good from bad, but it won't be good for you. No one escapes the consequence of their sin, unless they have a Savior.

Here is comfort to the wise: these truths apply to the wicked king as well. He may be all powerful here on earth, but that's a temporary condition. Remember 4:13-16, where the old, foolish king was supplanted by the young, popular man, who in turn becomes foolish, and is turned out? Let God's timing work.

That's life under sun, v9, where one man exercises authority and crushes another under his heel, to his hurt. Whose hurt? Both. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Even the wicked king, v10a, who had only a façade of religion, winds up dead, buried, and forgotten.

Wisdom helps us deal with authority, but what about the inequities of life? Does wisdom help us understand fully why God deals with people as He does?

Wisdom and Injustice, v11-18

The last half of v10 fits better with v11-13, like v14. What is futility? What drove Solomon right up the wall? **The wicked triumph, v11-14.** Where is judgment, justice? Endless delays encourage lawlessness, contempt for justice, v11.

We go beyond ensuring a fair trial, overprotecting the criminal at the expense of the victim. As if fair, impartial justice can't be served out promptly. When the wicked have little to fear from the courts, they get worse, not better. Worse still, others who might otherwise be restrained by justice are tempted to follow in their footsteps.

That's a pretty contemporary verse. Today, the average wait from death sentence to execution is *9.5 years*. In 1993, there were 21,600 murders in the US. Today, 10 years later, guess how many executions? *65*.

Is capital punishment deterrent? Not the way we carry it out. As years go by, a crime's heinousness fades. Sometimes, as we saw last week, the wicked appear to win. Verse 12 pictures someone sinning massively, 100 times over, yet living long. If God is good, just, and governs the universe, how can this be right?

It's all about trust. Solomon is clear, the time for judgment is coming. He affirms that those who fear God openly, without shame or pretense, will prevail. How does he know? He's wise. He

knows that even if some wicked do live long on earth, v13, for most of them, life is self-inflicted pain and misery. Their days are like a shadow, or will not lengthen like a shadow does in the late afternoon. Even if he lives long on this earth, that's pretty short in comparison to eternity.

But what really bugged Solomon, what he saw as ultimate futility, was when that truth was apparently contradicted, v14. Sometimes just men seem to be punished as if they were wicked, a la Job. Sometimes wicked men seem to be rewarded as if they were decent, righteous citizens.

What to do then? **Enjoy life, v15-17.** We can't resolve the puzzle of inequity, so we have to get on with life and leave the details to God, v15. "Pleasure," joy. We should receive each day's joys as God's good gift to us, and rejoice in it.

Don't drown in worry in pursuit of a truth that is ultimately beyond our grasp and can only be answered in glory. Here on earth, things don't always make sense, like injustice, inequity.

But those things are in God's hands and under His care. We need not seek revenge or get upset. God will triumph. So what is left to us? Enjoy life as we place our lives under God's care.

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials. Or, as Sol put it in v1, it is the wise man, woman who can face perplexities of life, still have face that beams with joy.

Not because God is not just, but because, v16-17, all the wisdom in the world won't give you all the answers. Solomon devoted himself to wisdom, to the understanding of life on earth. He studied it day and night.

And what he found, v17, is that we can't put all the parts of the puzzle together. No matter how hard he tries, no matter how brilliant he is, he will not be able to find answers to all the questions.

But we don't have to. We know the One who knows all the answers. Wisdom says, "if he chooses to tell me, fine, if not, that is fine also."

9. The Last Enemy, 9:1-12

We've seen Solomon address the circle of life, and the purpose of money and wisdom. Now, he comes to the last of 4 problems, the fact that death comes to us all.

If you take life seriously, you will think seriously about what comes after. The only way to be prepared to live is to be prepared to die.

Author William Saroyan, on his deathbed, said: "Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case." Woody Allen said, "I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

I was struck by watching President & Mrs. Ford interviewed about President Reagan's death this week. When asked if they were going to be buried together at their library as Reagan was, Mrs. Ford responded, "Yes, if anything happens, we'll be buried together.

"If anything happens?" Ford is 90, Mrs. Ford in her mid-80's. Is there any doubt that something will happen? It just points up a fact: we don't like to think about death. We have all kinds of euphemisms for it: "Went home," "passed on," "no longer with us."

Death is not something we think about much, or even want to think about. But death is an appointment you won't miss: Hebrews 9:27, "*inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.*"

Death is Unavoidable, v1-10

The first thing we need to know is, **we're in God's Hands, v1.** And God's hands alone. God alone knows the future and what it will bring, man doesn't know. That is a frequent theme in Ecclesiastes:

- 3:22, "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?"
- 6:12, "For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?"
- 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 will not discover anything that will be after him."
- 8:7. "If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?"

There's something peculiar about 9:1. Solomon says that the righteous and wise are in God's hands. What about the rest? Aren't the wicked in God's hands? Sure, but what is their perspective on that fact? *Denial, ignorance, fatalistic, fear, etc.*

Only believers can have the right perspective on God's sovereignty. We should understand that God will accomplish his good, perfect will, and as he does so he will cause all things to work together for good for those who have placed their faith in him.

Nothing happens to us that God does not allow. And that includes things good and things bad, prosperity, health, success, or the reverse.

What would Joseph say? He went thru an awful lot of bad: beaten, sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused by his employer's wife, and finally prison. For what? To deliver Israel. When did he know that? How long before he figured that purpose out?

I'll tell you: 22 years after he was sold into slavery. It's 22 years from that point to Genesis 45:7, when he told his brothers, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance... it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Genesis 50:20, “you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

But what if he had just gone thru a lot of bad, with no evident redeeming purpose at the end? Would God still be in control? Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.”

The reason Solomon started with this truth is that understanding you are in God’s hands is the key to facing death, because **death comes to all**, v2-3. Good, bad, righteous, wicked, religious, profane, all die.

So why live righteous if the end is only death? Because while good and evil men and women share a common destiny on earth, they do not in eternity. Scripture is clear, what happens when you die is determined by your choices in this life.

- Jeremiah 17:10, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.
- Ps 62:12, “lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, for You recompense a man according to his work.”
- Romans 2:5-8, But because of your stubbornness & unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath & revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory & honor & immortality, eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

While that is true, it isn’t Solomon’s focus. He’s talking about life under the sun. And under the sun, all of us will die. And until we do, life isn’t exactly a bowl full of cherries, v3b. Our hearts are full of evil and insanity, lit. “madness.” Just the wicked and unbelievers, right? Surely he’s not talking about you and me, is he?

How many have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory? *All*, Rom. 3:23. Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”

Isaiah 1:5-6, “The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint. ⁶ From the sole of the foot even to the head There is nothing sound in it, *Only* bruises, welts and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with oil.

Why give full vent to that? Is there a better way to live? That’s what Solomon is leading up to. **Time for hope, v4-6.** Are there any dog lovers out there? In Solomon’s day a dog was not a loveable pet but a diseased, scavenging mongrel. On the other hand, the lion was the symbol of royalty. Solomon is saying its better to be the lowest dog on the totem pole and alive than full of respect and dead. Why? Because when you are dead you have no more options, no 2nd chances, no more earthly pleasures, passions.

Sounds a bit like the gospel according to Schlitz, doesn't it? You only go around once, so go for all the gusto you can. That's actually half right, you only go around once. While there is life, there is hope. How is a Christian's hope different from a non-Christian's hope?

Christian's have a living hope, 1 Pet 1:3-5, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*"

Look how Peter describes hope in v4-5: an inheritance, imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, reserved for you, protected by the power of God. The last enemy has been defeated, believers can look at death with absolute confidence:

Romans 6:23, the wages of sin have been paid. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." John 11:25-26

1 Cor. 15:26, "The last enemy that will be abolished is death." Unless Jesus comes first, everyone in this room will die, but death doesn't have the last word.

"Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. " (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)

The result of knowing the confidence Paul is talking about is found in v58: steadfast, immovable, abounding in God's work, because it is not in vain.

Life isn't just here and now. We may only go around once, but when we do it has an eternal impact. Are you confident about that? You should be, if you know Christ. Now, how much confidence should unbelievers feel? Fear is appropriate.

Can death destroy your hope? No death is itself destroyed by it. 2 Timothy 1:10, Jesus "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

If death can destroy your hope, it is no hope at all. Which means *now* is the time to realize it, act upon it. So how does Solomon say we should face death? As he's done half dozen times before in Ecclesiastes, by living a full life.

Enjoy life, v7-10. God is in control, you ARE going to die, there is hope while you live, so...enjoy life now? Solomon is giving us a great contrast to the life of 9:3. This is not life in the fast lane, but life, plain and simple. It centers around enjoying the home God has provided, v7: eat in happiness, drink your wine cheerfully.

Is that common advice in conservative Christian circles? God provides our needs, he is pleased when he enjoy them appropriately. Is meal time happy at your house? What wine do you prefer?

Walk in purity and joy, v8. White clothes and oil either represent holiness or rejoicing, or both. Enjoy everything, Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Enjoy your marriage, v9. Definitely one of those "do as Solomon says, not as Solomon does" things. I can't help but imagine Solomon looking back with regret, wishing he'd followed his own advice. Proverbs 18:22, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD. Proverbs 19:14, "House & wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

Ditto husbands.

Enjoy your work, v10. Part of enjoying life is work, and Solomon says to go after it with all your might. Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

Simple, right? How are you doing at them? How can you do better? Don't wait to enjoy life. You won't always have that option, because,

Life is Unpredictable, v11-12

Abilities don't guarantee success, v11-12. Like 8:7, we can't predict the future. Being fast doesn't guarantee a racing win, as the hare found out. The best warrior doesn't always win the battle, as Goliath found out.

Racetrack tout Damon Runyan said "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but that's the way to bet." Still, all are victims of time and chance.

"Time and chance?" Is Solomon pushing luck here? What happened to God's sovereignty? To the Hebrew mind, chance, v11, is quite different from our understanding of it. To them, chance is not so much a haphazard occurrence as it is an unanticipated event, something unexpected. We live in a world where we can't calculate the future precisely.

Think about this: the Quarterly Review of 1825 asked, "what can be more palpably absurd than the prospect of locomotives traveling twice as fast as stagecoaches?"

In 1943, Thomas Watson, then chairman of IBM, predicted the worldwide computer market. He figured IBM would sell about 5 of them. In 1956, the British Astronomer Royal said, "space travel is utter bilge."

We are observant people, we watch the world around us and think we can see how things will go. We press a light switch and get light. The fast horse usually wins. It's a cause and effect world. No it isn't.

The heart of this is about control. We don't control much. Do we control anything? We certainly don't control the time of our death. Who does? God's sovereignty again.

Trust God's providence, and leave time and chance in his hands. Work hard for his best, v10. Humorist Stephen Leacock said, "I'm a great believer in luck. I find that the harder I work, the luckier I get."

Work hard for God's best, because trouble and death, can come anytime, v12. Fish and birds certainly have no clue when they're about to be caught. "Man does not know his time" is the title for the obituary column for World magazine.

"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:13-17)

It is certainly true that none of us know when God will take us. We'd better live like it could be the next 5 minutes. "We walk by faith, not sight," 2 Corinthians 5:7. We have nothing to fear from the last enemy. Because Christ has conquered death, we don't look at life and say "Vanity of vanities."

Instead, we echo Paul, *"but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."* (1 Corinthians 15:57-58)

10. Wisdom & Foolishness, 9:13-10:20

You could sum up the message of Ecclesiastes on life as "While you live, live wisely." Wisdom is not merely intellectual. It is the result of consistent thought patterns, decisions and habits, doing the right thing.

The man or woman who fears God and lives in accordance with what God expects is "wise" in that his or her life shows the fear of God. Like a craftsman skilled in a trade, the wise man is skilled in living.

Directly opposite him is the fool. Just like wisdom isn't merely intellectual, neither is folly merely the absence of intellect.

How to Be a Fool. There are several things that set the fool apart. Want to know what they are? First, disdain reverence. Ps. 14:1, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” A fool is one who is godless.

Second, refuse counsel. Proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.” A fool is one who knows it all, can’t tell him anything.

Finally, be self-important. Proverbs 14:16, “A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless.” Conceited, thoughtless, fool thinks more of himself than he ought.

J. I. Packer defines folly as the “short-term self-indulgence which marks the person who doesn’t think about long-term priorities and goals but lives on a day-to-day basis, asking, “What is the most fun thing to do now?” *Your Father Loves You*

Wisdom vs Folly, 9:13-10:1

Given that, you’d think wisdom would be way more popular than folly, but you’d be wrong. **Wisdom beats strength, except in the polls, v13-16, read.** This is an interesting example, perhaps drawn from Solomon’s own experience? It tells the story of a small city with few defenders against a powerful king, yet the small city won the battle.

How? Not by strength, but by a poor man’s wise plan. So, when all the shouting was over, who got the praise? Not the man who saved the city. He was easily forgotten, a nobody, just some lowly guy.

We are more impressed by Power than by Wisdom. We like to be in control, and the outward show of power is more easily seen the inward show of wisdom. Sometimes strength is appropriate, but wisdom generally beats brute force. Still doesn’t guarantee reward, v16, because...

A little folly is a dangerous thing, 9:17-10:1. It doesn’t take much foolishness to destroy or undo wisdom. A shouting ruler of fools, v17, or one sinner, v18, is enough to undo wisdom.

10:1, Ladies, how many bugs would you have to find in your face cream before you stop using it? How much foolishness ruins your reputation?

Remember 7:1, , where a good name is better than perfume? Here, a good perfume, or perhaps a good name, is ruined by a little foolishness. Foolishness carries more weight, we remember it better, longer.

It only takes a little foolishness to make your reputation stink. Politics aside, Bill Clinton will forever be remembered for Monica Lewinsky. Nixon, for Watergate. Their other achievements are minimized by their foolishness. That truth is elaborated in v2-20. Solomon uses fool, foolishness, or folly 9 times.

Foolish hearts, 10:2-3. Wise, foolish hearts go two different directions. The wise to the “right,” the foolish to the “left.” An obvious application presents itself, but I’ll refrain.

The right is actually the place of power, honor, and protection. Where does Jesus sit in heaven? At the right hand of God. Psalm 16:8, “I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

The wise see and are inclined toward what is right and good. All the time? Of course not, but it is the general inclination, unlike the foolish.

On the other hand, the left is the place of danger, rejection, and judgment. Jesus pictures the last judgment in Matthew 25:33ff. The sheep are on the right, who is on the left? The goats (the wicked).

In the ancient world, left handedness was considered unnatural, wrong. The Latin word we translate as “sinister” is literally “left handed.” Do you know what’s Latin for right handed? Dextrous. Sorry, south paws.

The fool is drawn to wrong like a moth to a flame. Foolishness is obvious to all, v3, even in the most mundane tasks. It could be that the “road” of v3 is not a literal highway but the fool's metaphorical way of life.

The fool doesn’t have to do a lot to demonstrate his foolishness. Mark Twain said it's better to keep your mouth shut and let everyone think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt. Solomon says a fool doesn’t even have to open his mouth, you can see that he is a fool by the way he lives.

Foolish Rulers, v4-7. When fools are in charge of the country, it's really a problem. Perhaps the picture in v4 is of easy anger, one who has no control over his temper or emotion. The Hebrew for “temper rises” in v4 is literally, "rising, his spirit rises." Double use of "rising" intensifies the meaning. Picture the king standing in anger, getting madder all the time.

A fool has no control over his anger. Proverbs 25:28, “Like a city that is broken into and without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit.” Proverbs 29:11, “A fool always loses his temper, But a wise man holds it back.”

How do you handle another’s anger? The wise man keeps his cool, calm, composure. Doesn’t retaliate, doesn’t respond in anger. Proverbs 25:15, “By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.” Gain hearing, also protects from wrath of foolish king.

Folly is exalted, v5-7. Those who should be slaves are treated like kings, and vice versa. There are 5 pictures here: 1) Error: Goes forth from the ruler. 2) Folly: in exalted places. 3) Rich: in humble places. 4) Slaves: riding like princes. 5) Princes: walking like slaves.

Those who should be honored are not, those who are honored shouldn’t be. Do we see examples of this in our world? Everywhere!

Foolish Workers, v8-11. These are everyday tasks, digging a pit, renovating a wall, quarrying stone, foresting trees. Perhaps all show a lack of thought, preparation? The fool is shown using a dull ax, an un-charmed snake, in v10-11. What does it take to do the job right? Wisdom.

But wisdom only works if it's put to use. A snake charmer who lets the snake out without charming it is just plain dumb. Like locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen.

Foolish Words, v12-15. Perhaps Solomon is looking at those who talk even though they don't know what they're talking about. The wise speak graciously, their words give grace. Foolish words are consuming, destructive. Fools destroy themselves by the way they speak.

Foolish words are progressively more extreme, v13, from speaking foolishness to wicked insanity. Foolish words are endless. You'd think he'd stop, v14, but instead he multiplies words.

Proverbs 10:19, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise."

Proverbs 17:27, "He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding."

Maybe the picture of v15 is someone who is so busy talking, he can't follow the road? Doesn't know when to come in out of the rain?

Finally, Solomon offers a reprise on **Foolish Rulers, v16-20.** 10:4-7 focused on foolishness where it didn't belong, in the palace. Here, he describes what comes from unqualified, irresponsible leadership.

Like Isaiah 5:11-12, "Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, Who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! ¹² Their banquets are *accompanied* by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the LORD, Nor do they consider the work of His hands."

The fool spends more time on his appetites than on his responsibility or his relationship to God. As a result, v18, his kingdom sags like an old, ramshackle house. It won't stand long. His attitude toward life is seen in v19: live for food, drink, and money.

Sounds like Rehoboam, 1 Kings 12, who disdained wise counsel for advice from his buddies, who told him what he wanted to hear. Rehoboam wanted a life of ease, got big trouble instead.

What do you do when faced with such leadership? 10:20, use restraint, circumspection. King may be a jerk, but he's still the king. Respect authority because God says so. It also doesn't hurt that he hold the power of life and death over you.

Speak out, but be wise. Pick your battles, know what you'd die for. Otherwise, a little bird may tell the king. Things we say even in private have a way of becoming known as though some

winged creature were carrying them with the speed of flight. Never say anything you don't want repeated from the rooftops, because it probably will be.

How to Grow in Wisdom

I started this lesson by telling you how to be a fool. I'll close it by telling you how to grow in wisdom:

Cultivate Reverence: Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

Cultivate Humility: Proverbs 11:2, "When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom."

Cultivate a teachable spirit: Proverbs 9:9, "Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase *his* learning. Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days."

Seek it with Diligence: Proverbs 2:4-5, "If you seek [wisdom] as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God."

Walk Uprightly: Proverbs 2:7, "He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; a shield to those who walk in integrity"

Ask for it in Faith: James 1:5-8, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

11. Solomon's Conclusion, 11:1-12:14

As we come to the end of Ecclesiastes, it is good to review where we've been. Solomon postulated four problems in chapters 1-2: Life is a monotonous circle; wisdom doesn't explain it; money doesn't fulfill it; and in the end, we just wind up dead.

Solomon answers those problems in chapters 3-10:

- Life may be circular, but it is certainly *not* monotonous. Life is filled with challenge, and each life is filled with purpose in its own time.
- Money is not *supposed* to satisfy us, but it can be used to glorify God, when it is enjoyed responsibly, as his gift.

- Wisdom is not *supposed* to explain it all, but it does improve life, and certainly points to the One who can explain it all.
- Death *is* certain, so we should enjoy life while we can, living wisely and avoiding foolishness.

Finally, Solomon gives us his conclusion about the entire matter in chapters 11-12. He ties it all together with three applications regarding the truth about life.

- Life is an adventure, be bold, 11:1-6
- Life is a gift, rejoice in it, 11:7-12:8
- Life is a stewardship, fear God, 12:9-14

Life is an Adventure, Be Bold, v1-6

Cast Your Bread, Don't Hoard It, v1-2. This is a very obscure proverb. Some say it pictures a merchant sending out his ships, and advises him to invest wisely, to diversify. That is possible, but so specific and limited an application doesn't seem to fit the scope of Ecclesiastes. What is more likely is that it is encouragement to give, to share your good far and wide.

In other words, don't hoard your bread, spread it out. "Divide...7 or 8," v2, be as generous as you can to as many as you can. Why? Because, in v2, you never know when you are going to need help yourself.

I'm reminded of Ecclesiastes 5:13, "*There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt.*" Those who keep their wealth only for themselves instead of using it, hurt themselves. If you put your energy, focus, and hope on wealth, you will only wind up disappointed.

There is more return from sending out than there is from stockpiling. Proverbs 19:17, "One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, And He will repay him for his good deed." Proverbs 21:13, "He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered."

Work Hard, Don't Watch It, v3-6. Solomon pictures clouds and trees in v3, predictable activities, inevitable events. Clouds rain, trees eventually fall, and when they do, they don't move again on their own. What's his point? It's in v4, if you spend your life watching the weather, you'll never get anything done.

Don't waste your time and energy worrying about the obvious. Don't wait for a perfect circumstance. The farmer who refuses to sow until conditions were perfect might wait a long time. Why, v5? We don't know God's working – just like v2. Just as you can't predict the wind or understand a baby's development, we can't predict how God will work.

There are lots of common things we don't understand. In fact, I wonder just how much we really do understand about even the most common things in our world? Who can describe how just how a telephone works? Light? Photosynthesis?

If we waited until was everything perfect, until we understood all, how much would we get done? Sow in the morning, v6, work in the evening. Don't be idle. Redeem the time, Eph. 5:16, using each day wisely.

Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." Col. 3:23, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." Both points argue against the paralysis that results from not trusting God. We are freed to live a bold life, giving and working to the full extent of our ability, when we trust God. We live by faith, not sight.

Life is a Gift, Rejoice in It, v7-12:8

This is Solomon's sixth and final admonition to enjoy life. He does it with 2 commands, Rejoice, v7-10, Remember, 12:1-8.

Rejoice, v7-10. Remember the 1 word description for life under the sun? Vanity, means futility. Emptiness. Life lived as though there was nothing above the sun is pure emptiness.

Instead, life was meant to be enjoyed. It's good to see the sun, v7, because, v8, there will be dark days ahead. That pleasant light is going to dim and you will die. Therefore, "Remember," not what you've been through, but where you are headed – the grave. We touch more on remembrance in a moment.

Solomon's charge to you is to rejoice in all your years: youth youth, old age, and all the years in between. Don't let the fact that dark days are ahead keep you from rejoicing in your life here and now. In fact, rejoicing in the life God has given you is the best preparation for dark days, the best way to keep them from stealing your joy.

Do you enjoy your life or do you simply endure it? What are you waiting for before you can enjoy it? Someone has said that if happiness can be found in material things, America should be delirious. The truth is, if you know God, you will lack nothing that you need, Mt. 6:33.

There is a special emphasis on youth in v9. From child to young adult, rejoice. But what kind of advice is this: follow the heart's impulses, the eye's desires? Is Solomon saying "If it feels good, do it?" What about Mark 9:47, "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell." What about Jeremiah 17:9, "'The heart is more deceitful than all else & is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

There are two points: First, you have to read the whole verse. Solomon is not advocating life without restraint, "Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things." Temper your liberty with discretion. Judgment is coming, be careful how you use your days.

Second, "impulses" and "desires" sound more negative than they might really be. Literally, the Hebrew for "impulses" means ways, the Hebrew for "desires" means sights. Neither is necessarily evil. They are both more neutral than the NASB suggests.

Again, Solomon's point is, live life to the full. Enjoy it, step out while you're young and have the inclination, the strength, and the time to do it. But don't indulge in sin and wickedness. Don't engage in those things that will bring grief, anger, and evil.

Balance pleasure and responsibility. 1 Tim 6.17, God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." If you live life as he intended, you will have the joy he intended, Prov. 4:18, "the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day."

Remember, 12:1-8. Solomon uses the word "remember," 3 times in these verses. That's a pretty significant word in Scripture. It doesn't merely mean passive thought. It means thought that leads to action. Gen. 8:1, "God remembered Noah...caused a wind to pass over the earth, & the water subsided."

Gen. 9:15, "I will remember my covenant...and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh."

God remembered Abraham and acted. God remembered Rachel, and acted. God remembered Israel in Egypt and in Captivity, and acted. Solomon says, remember your Creator, and do what? Act on that remembrance.

Not just live, but live in relationship to God. If you invest your life in evil, thinking you can always obey later on, that's a very bad idea. Is there something keeping you from a satisfying relationship with God?

You don't have forever, you know. Is anybody reading this getting younger? Jill Briscoe, in an address to a bunch of pastors, said, "I used to have birthdays once a year, now they come every 3 months." Age and trials, will come. Prepare for them now.

Solomon gives us a picture of age in verses 2-8, as a house that is falling apart, turning to dust. It isn't just a house, but a metaphor for our bodies, 2 Cor. 5:1-2, Paul calls body "earthly tent," "house," "building," "dwelling." 2 Peter 1:13.

From sunny days, 11:7, to dark, dim, always cloudy days, 12:2. The watchmen and mighty men of 12:3 are our arms and hands. They tremble, and our knees and back stoop. The grinding ones stand idel, we lose our teeth, the windows, our sight, grows dim.

The doors are shut and the sound low, v4, we lose our hearing. One arises with the birds, can't sleep. What are the "daughters of song?" Maybe the voice rises in pitch, and quavers like a birds as we age?

We become afraid of heights, and terrors on road, v5. Our sense of anxiety and fear increases. The almond tree has white blossoms, our hair turns white. The grasshopper is dragging, not hopping. Finally, in v5, the caperberry, was an ancient aphrodisiac, our sexual desire will fail.

We end up, v6-7, broken, crushed, shattered. We finally turn to dust and our spirit returns to God. If that's all we are, v8, that is truly vanity. We were designed for a relationship with God, we will die, so now is the time to prepare for both. We prepare for our vacation, for our retirement, even for our day off! How many of us prepare for eternity?

C. S. Lewis, "There are only 2 kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened."

We are freed to live a joyful life when we remember God and act on that remembrance, laying the spiritual foundation for our life. We would know that if have been listening to the School of Solomon.

Life is a Stewardship, Fear God, v9-14

Learn from It, v9-12. Wisdom, as Solomon has said so many times, doesn't answer all the questions of life, but it sure is helpful. These verses may come from editor, or they could be Solomon going third person on us.

Solomon, the Preacher (the *Ecclesiastes*), has offered us his wisdom and knowledge. His thought and research was orderly: he pondered, searched, and arranged a wide range of truths.

Solomon took care to find delightful, truthful, words, and apply them correctly. Truth is truth, Solomon didn't dilute it, or tell us just what we wanted to hear. That's what makes *Ecclesiastes* a difficult book. But it offers truth with grace, and it doesn't leave us hanging in a futile void.

Solomon is a wise man who used wise words, and wise words in wise men's hands are goads and nails. A goad to motivate us to hear and learn. A nail to give us something to hang onto.

Acts 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?""

Ezra 9:8, "*grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.*"

Solomon's words are not merely his own. He says, at the end of v11, that they are inspired, they have been given by one Shepherd, unlike, v12, human wisdom in books. If there were many books in Solomon's day, before the printing press, when every book was written, copied, and bound by hand in cumbersome parchment scrolls, what would he say today?

If you rely on man's books, they will rob you of God's wisdom. Our textbook is the Bible, with the Holy Spirit as our teacher. He uses gifted men, and always teaches new lessons.

Fear God, v13-14. Ecclesiastes ends where Proverbs begins. What does it mean to fear God? Oswald Chambers said, "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else. If you don't fear God, you fear everything else."

Isaiah 8:13, "It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread."

Psalm 112: 1, "Praise the Lord! How blessed is the man who fears the Lord, Who greatly delights in His commandments."

Is there fear of God if there isn't obedience? This is the "whole of man." Life under the sun is fragmented, in and of itself it is vanity. However, if we understand God's point of view, it comes together into unified whole.

Is life worth living? Yes, if Christ is your Savior. 1 Jn 5.12, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."