

ECCLESIASTES

“What is your life?”

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "Ecclesiastes," F.C. Jennings. Loizeaux Brothers, New York
- "Ecclesiastes," Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Moody Press, Chicago
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan

The book of Ecclesiastes (The Preacher), is the book of the natural man. God is not referred to in this book as the Lord, but the God of creation. That is because of the conclusion Solomon reached regarding a life lived apart from fellowship with God. There is no intimacy, no meaningful service or reason for life than what we get out of it at the moment, if it is not without a larger purpose for God and His kingdom. A life like that ends up a weary disappointment. Solomon personally learned what it was like to get away from God. For a believer such a life is empty, hollow and purposeless. To be dissatisfied with life must seem so fruitless and hopeless, compared to the blessing and profitableness of a person like the apostle Paul. Solomon knew some of that blessing earlier in his life when he accomplished what God directed him to do in building the temple. As time passed, he got away from acting in wisdom and the fear of the Lord, and God became distant to him.

The point of the book of Ecclesiastes is to reveal, particularly to young people [11:7-12:14], the glory of the Lord against the dark background of the futility of a life lived only by human wisdom. So, Solomon took a hard look at his life as he had lived it in his middle years, and sees mainly “vanity and vexation” of his spirit in everything he did “under the sun.” With human wisdom he looked for satisfaction in science [1:1-11], and found only sameness. Then he considered human wisdom and philosophy [1:12-18], and found it purposeless. All kinds of pleasure were tried, from comedy and drinking, to money and music, and he came up empty. Then he tried living for only the present with materialism as his false god, and it failed to meet any real expectation.

From the vain efforts under the sun, he became a fatalist, and then went into deism and found nothing lasting. He tried religion without God, and then accumulation of wealth, and there was no satisfaction anywhere he tried. He went on to the higher plain of morality, and even there was not satisfied. He took a long hard look at human efforts in which he had fully participated. He found that human effort cannot master the world, or discover all its secrets that God had formed by His wisdom. Even though he was the wisest of men, he could not get past the bounds of human limitations. There is no lasting happiness when people have an unrealistic view of human powers and intellect. People who pursue unreachable hopes and aspirations are bound to be disappointed. Human life lived in this way is futile and will have no lasting meaning to anyone. He tried everything, and finally came out of the futility of all of those lost years, as a penitent believer whose whole understanding of the goal and purpose of life can be summed up in the last twenty-seven verses of the book.

Reading through the book of Ecclesiastes one might think this is a very pessimistic view of life, and in one way it is. But the point of the book seems to be that young people apply themselves early in life to practical wisdom with eternal values, and stay out of the trouble that a life lived without God will leave you. The preacher wanted to direct the hopes of those to whom he was speaking toward God, not to destroy their hopes. By nature, people are moral and spiritual beings that sets them apart from the rest of creation. Our lives are made to be lived in an ethical way in fellowship with our Creator. That makes sense of our being created in the image of God and being alive in the place we are and in the generation in which we have been born. Things may not always work out as we had thought or even hoped. But that is no reason to not live by faith in God. We should live for Him and not try to get an explanation for everything. We can enjoy the life we have been given to the extent that we know the sovereign God has everything “under the sun” under His control.

In this reflective journey of a very wise man, we can learn that in ourselves, our striving won't produce anything of lasting or ultimate significance. Wisdom from God is always better than the limitations of human wisdom and experience. Many of our experiences in life cannot be understood unless we can see them through the eyes of God. We may even be a disappointment to ourselves. It is impossible for us to control all that happens to us, but we do know that God has defined our limitations to keep us from doing what those who built the tower of Babel tried to do. God has an order for everything. He created all things with order and purpose. All the confusion and irrational thinking and actions of people, come from our sinful nature. Atheists find this book a favorite source of support, they think, for their anti-God opinions. Religious cults use isolated verses out of context in Ecclesiastes to challenge biblical Christianity in order to suit their claims.

At the conclusion of this book, Solomon sums things up well by putting God right in the center of everything we do in life. With respect for Him and faith in Him, we commit ourselves to obey Him. Then we will have real meaning to our lives and the true satisfaction that comes from knowing we are fulfilling God's purpose for us. In that way we will "draw near unto God, and He will draw near to us."

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

CAN LIFE BE PROFITABLE?

Solomon introduces himself as the Preacher first, then the son of David, and last as the king. These three positions are in declining order of importance. As the Preacher, he knows he is teaching things that are of greater and longer lasting importance than the other two descriptions. A preacher speaks for God and the things he has to say have an effect of eternal consequence on those who listen to him. As a son, that is a very personal position and is emotionally important to the individual who should conduct life in a way that will honor parents and the family heritage from generations past. The king is basically one's occupation that affects a lot of people for a short time.

As the Preacher-Teacher, he sees the accomplishment of human life lived apart from God, as no more than a puff of air, a "hebel." This word has the idea of that which has no real meaning. It is real but useless and valueless. The writing of this book seems to have, at first reading, the point of view of a skeptic or a serious pessimist. But by reading through it again, as the reading progresses through all of the aspects of "hebel," we see that he is eliminating all that humans look for by nature, and strive for in life. People hope against hope that in some way satisfaction in life can be found. The aim the preacher had as one who has "been there, done that," was to bring people to God.

Solomon had led God's earthly people Israel, through their most prosperous years. Yet his conclusion of that golden age was that everything that happened was utterly meaningless. Pride and self-sufficiency are only temporary at the best. There is no lasting substance to anything, let alone life without God. The lesson for us is plain. We need to begin with God by coming to Him by faith. When repentance toward Him is real, and faith in Christ alone for salvation is personal, then we can start living a meaningful life. The earlier in life a person comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, the better we will understand and practice through our lives what He meant when He said, "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

What is the point of endless labor if there is no lasting objective to our labor? Nothing "under the sun" is lasting. That which is left over after all the expenses are paid is what we call profit, or as in verse three, "gain." To labor endlessly for those things that do not last is a waste of labor. There is no "gain" to it. Believers in Christ in their labor, do what they do "for the Lord's sake," and "as unto the Lord and not unto men." That is when the saying, "In all labor there is profit," takes on real meaning.

In poetic forms that relate to the different cycles in life and nature, the next eight verses make examples of things we all can observe that do not last but go endlessly round and round. These things are always in motion but there is nothing in them that lasts. So, in the long scheme of things, they are meaningless in themselves. Generations of people follow each other in endless succession. Few people remember anything about their family back beyond the great grandparents, and even that is quite obscure and only a few things about them is even known by the new generation. If there were a few things that were notable as far as the public is concerned, they might know about them. Even national leaders are forgotten after two or three elections, and hardly anything is known about what they did that was of significance. So human life that comes and goes seems less purposeful and certainly less permanent than the earth.

The sun rises and sets, and does the same thing every twenty-four hours over and over, day after day and year after year. The Preacher used the same terminology as astronomers do today following the same principles of relative motion. That indicates the understanding of the Preacher in ancient times relating to motion, was as scientifically pragmatic as it is today. The great wind circuits in the atmosphere were known to Solomon long before modern scientists "discovered" the principle of global circulation of air, and announced it as if it were something previously unknown. "Scientists" in the recent past believed that rain water had to come from fresh water lakes and streams because there is no taste of salt in rain water. Now meteorologists who have done upper-air research know that rain water comes from the oceans and seas of the world, just as the Preacher wrote when describing the endless cycles of nature that illustrated the futility of life to him.

After looking at all that follows this tedious cycle that human investigation brought, there was still no lasting meaning that made life valuable. It simply makes a person feel unfulfilled because there is no purpose to that knowledge apart from temporary curiosity, and it ultimately makes a person intellectually tired of the search for meaning to these

endless cycles. Nothing of value comes from all the effort. What do I really have to show for all the labor expended? What has been done already is just going to be done again. Nothing has changed. Everything that seemed to be new after investigation is just the “same old, same old,” with a new cover on it.

Even the people who were so famous when they were alive, are quickly forgotten. Names of great world leaders, famous artists, scientists who made great discoveries are forgotten. Students have to memorize names of great people in order to pass exams, but the things that were so important to those forgotten people of the past and those who so honored them – nobody even thinks about now.

So, we need to look at ourselves and figure out why we are here and what we should be doing with our lives – and why. Life in itself is only a vapor, a dream, a tale that is told, an ancient story that is soon forgotten. It is like grass that springs up and looks so good, and in two or three months has dried up and died. If that is what we have normally lived for, or what we are living for now, we will have wasted our lives. On the other hand, when we “seek first the kingdom of God,” those things we do will have a purpose because the kingdom of God lasts forever. When we look into eternity ahead of us, and live eternal life now, then we will find the satisfaction and meaning in life the apostle Paul had. “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

NO NEW WISDOM

There are many things we call “new” that have been around for a long time. There is the new year, the new moon, a new generation and such like. When it comes to moral things and fundamental standards, these are things that are not new. People talk about the “new morality,” that allows legislatures of government to pass the will of fallen sinful man into laws. But the new morality is the same as the old immorality. Or “new truth” is similar to the old deception. All the new things that have been “discovered” were always there, but have been uncovered by the inquiring minds of smart people. Old things have been found and arranged in new ways to produce “new things.”

The Preacher, the king over Israel, applied his “heart” to find the answers he sought. He was a wise man it is true, but human wisdom apart from divine wisdom will find that the wisdom of man leads to vanity and vexation of spirit. It is unfulfilling and leaves us with more questions than answers. The Preacher’s high position in society, and human wisdom were directed to an earnest, serious and unrelenting inquiry into trying to straighten out things that were twisted. This was a real burden to him. He wanted to be able to explain things that happen to people, and why they happen. But instead he ended up with a burdensome load on his heart as a result of trying to grasp what cannot be grasped by human intellect. To him it was like trying to capture and control the wind. That is impossible, as are those things that people try to explain when they leave God out of their lives, minds and hearts.

Problems in the world are more than we can count, let alone try to sort out and straighten out. Things that are crooked will remain twisted. Even if it seems like one thing has been done that worked out okay, there are hundreds more waiting. Without God, there are no solutions to the twisted webs of man’s making because of sin. Human goals and hopes have to take account of the fact that there will always be unsolved matters in life. We have to accept reality for what it is. Human problems and aspirations that are not dealt with in harmony with the sovereign will of God, will never be achieved.

Solomon was no novice when it came to the experiences of life. He had been given human wisdom from God. He was an able leader. He had great wealth and could make wise decisions when he chose to. He was no insignificant person and he knew that. He was intrigued with learning and carefully investigated everything he could think of. But at the end of it all he concluded he was trying to catch the wind. So why was this such a disappointment? He thought he could find the answers on his own with his own self-opinionated human wisdom. He had expended all that effort without God. He did it with his “heart,” but without the Lord revealing truth to him.

A lot of study without the right motives leads to frustration and is wasted effort. The opposite of wisdom is “madness and folly,” and so-called wise people are as susceptible to those two things as are those who are far more limited intellectually. The more you understand, the more difficulty you are faced with, and the less able you are to explain the inexplicable with which you are confronted. Also, the more you know and see, the more evil all around us will become evident. There is a high price to pay for wisdom and understanding. In themselves they do not make a person happy or satisfied. The wisdom that comes from God does bring peace to our minds because it allows us to see things from God’s perspective, and anticipate God’s solution. Human reasoning, philosophy and wisdom is burdensome, and usually brings frustration, anger and sorrow.

Ecclesiastes 1:1. *“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”*

ROLES WE FILL.

THE PREACHER WHO SPEAKS FOR GOD

*His message is not his own. His warnings cannot be ignored.
His words have to be understood. He can't speak so listeners are bored.
His words are to be clear and plain. He must take time to think what he says.
His heart should be touched in advance. He speaks from his heart, not his head.
His warnings must be based on true facts; his entreaties from the God that he serves.
His talk must be supported by acts; his warmth sensed by the people he loves.
His labor goes on day by day. His field is the whole living world.
His ears hear what others may say; his answers are from God's living Word.
His prayers go up in the night. His sleep comes when the work is all done.
His concern is, did he give the truth right. His longing is for souls to be won.
His trust is in the Spirit of God; his assurance – the Word will prevail.
His song is "Power in the blood." His faith is that God cannot fail.
His grace is seen by compassion; his love seen by earnest desire.
His spare time is for intercession; his voice reflects Holy Ghost fire.
His joy is when God blesses His word. His hope is in his God alone.
His eye is looking up for his Lord. His reward when he hears, "Well done."*

THE SON WHO REFLECTS HIS FATHER

*My father was a man of his word: I wonder if I'm like that too?
My father was a man who worked hard: is it "like father like son" that I show?
My father was a man who loved God: is my love for God on display?
My father read his Bible for food: am I wanting to hear what God says?
My father prayed in the morning: are my mornings with God showing through?
My father never stopped his learning: am I learning from God how to grow?
My father was a good, kindly leader: I wonder how folks perceive me?
My father was a real soul winner: is my love for souls there to see?
My father really loved my mother: does my wife know I love her so much?
My father cared for his children: do my children and grandchildren know such?
My father was not known as a gossip: do I guard each day what I say?
My father was gracious with others: am I known as a man who has grace?
My father loved God's people intently: do they know that I care for each one?
My father knew God intimately: does God see my love for His Son?
My father to me spoke of heaven: what message do my loved hear from me?
My father is now in the glory: can others, now through me, father see?*

THE KING WHO LEADS OTHERS

*The leader himself must take time to know; before to others the way he can show.
The leader cannot just make his self-centered plans; then on others lay out his many demands.
The leader himself must be the true model; of what he intends for those who come after to follow.
The leader of men is a shepherd of sheep; and of his love for them they will gladly speak.
The leader is one who really cares; the followers then will know what to share.
The leader knows God has trusted him; the followers will trust such true-hearted men.
The leader is a man of true compassion: those who follow his lead know who loves them.
The leader attends to other's needs; those who follow behind gladly go where he leads.
The leader will spend much time in prayer; followers sense he's already been there.
The leader won't make snap judgments too fast; followers then know who they can trust.
The leader who knows he can't do it all; followers will come to him when he calls.
The leader who faithfully encourages each one; followers will respond to him like a son.
The leader who feels the others' pain: will from those who follow deep respect gain.
The leader who makes quite reasonable demands: will find by him many willing hands.
The leader who has a vision that's real: will find followers moved by his gracious appeal.
The leader who knows when the time comes to quit: will find others ready whom God has made quite fit.*

"O God who has made us each what You want us to be: please give me the ability to fill the role I am in at the moment with grace and dignity. I need to respond to each calling with assurance and respect. Whether a preacher or a son or a leader – help me to understand the worth of each calling: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

FUTILITY

The Preacher had considered when he began writing that everything was vanity – meaningless. Wisdom and study of all that he could think of ended with frustration and sorrow. So, he began to search in other areas of life to find rest to his troubled soul. He set about with his "heart," full commitment, to find what was missing. This was not just a casual stroll through a life of pleasure. He pulled out all the stops and dove right into the "eat, drink and be merry" culture to try to find what people today are still looking for in pleasure.

What is there in pleasure that satisfies? Moses "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Pleasure by its very nature is extremely temporary. That why there are so many different movies, so many different kinds of sports events, so many different attractions at an amusement park. None of them satisfies for more than a few moments. A child will finish one ride at a carnival and runs as fast as possible to get in line for another kind of ride or game to play. Children grow up getting used to short-term pleasure. Even expensive gifts given by parents and other loved ones, no matter what they are gives them pleasure for more than a very short time, and then they are bored and want something else.

Adults spend hours playing computer games or working at hobbies to pass the time away. Then they go back to the same things again to try to get a sense of fulfillment. Grown up people will lose their voices shouting at major league ball games, or sports events when their sons or daughters are playing. When the game is finished, they will go to a club or bar to try some different alcoholic beverage to loosen their tongue, and themselves, from their God-given inhibitions. Comedy shows and every kind of entertainment can be tried and experienced, but when a person comes back to reality after getting over a hang-over, there is still no satisfaction. Those things are all made to leave people dissatisfied so they will come back over and over again, and spend their money, but it is all empty and meaningless when it is over.

To give one's self to the search for satisfaction by accomplishing some great task would surely give a sense of fulfillment. Solomon then threw himself whole-heartedly into great work projects instead of going after new pleasures. He built an amazing house for himself and another for his wife. He built the temple for the Lord. He designed and made beautiful gardens and then went into farming in a big way. As a successful farmer he hired good help to keep everything he made in order and productive. He was able to live a lavish lifestyle that he hoped would be fulfilling or at least, distracting from that empty void inside of him, but it didn't work.

In our lives there are problems to be solved, and we find satisfaction when they are done. There are benefits to education and we celebrate when the learning time is past and it is time to go to work. There are injustices to be faced and rectified and when that happens, we are gratified. Wisdom encourages us to do this and these are good things to do. But there are limits within which we have to live. It is impossible to straighten everything out, so much of our lives have to be lived with no real solution to things that are beyond our capability to deal with. Looking back over life, how much change does a person really make in the end. The only things that last is what is done for our Lord and the glory of God. "Only one live, 'twill soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last."

Solomon accumulated so much wealth that people like the queen of Sheba, were left speechless and breathless at the visible splendor that surrounded this king. Music of every kind possible at that time was there for him to listen to if he wanted it quietly in the background as he ate his meals or when he went to bed. On any occasion he wanted personally or for state business, he could have all the music he wanted at his slightest whim. In fact, all of his material possessions, and all of his attainments were beyond comparison to those who were before him. He was the epitome of success and attainment. Even in all of that profligacy, he was able to retain and maintain his human wisdom. He found delight and reward in all he did. He had access to all the resources he wanted, and had opportunity to use them all. But in the end, nothing was gained because nothing was lasting.

We can have lofty goals and attain them. We can use our time, energy and talents for good purposes. We can work hard and use our money to accomplish what we set out to do. But what is the real point of it all? God has put truth in all that is real and lasting. It is our responsibility to take that truth and that reality, and use it wisely. That means with a sense of responsibility toward mankind and society around us, we can do profitable things, but only if God is in it. When we do what we do for the glory of God, it will bring blessing to people and honor to our Lord. The results of furthering the Gospel by whatever possible and scriptural means, will be lasting in its benefits, because "Christ is preached." When truth is practiced and taught, the faith of God's people will be strengthened and they will be encouraged to live for the Lord and glorify Him in their "body and spirit which is God's."

Ecclesiastes 2:12-26

FOR WHAT PURPOSE

The Preacher continued his search for ultimate meaning in his life but nothing worked. He applied himself to wisdom, seeking out every kind of pleasure, but nothing satisfied him. Then he went to work, hard work, in great building projects and the accumulating of wealth, but all gave no real satisfaction or meaning to him because they were all temporary and like a puff of wind. He had to face the fact that death takes away everything we gained in a lifetime of living, so what is the point. Even so, wisdom is much better than foolishness like day is better than night. However, death takes away any advantage, because no one survives and nothing is taken to the grave. The best a person can expect is to get what God allows and use it while you have it.

Those who came after Solomon won't find any more than he found as far as questions about the meaning of life. Those questions remain today in spite of all the advances made in medicine, technology, travel and scientific thought. None of them gives meaning unless God is in one's life. There is as much or more turmoil in the world as there ever was. Nothing really has changed. Wisdom does have an advantage over folly because wisdom gives order to life, and an understanding of what we can see. There is a brief personal gratification in being aware of the intricacies of life and created things. Observation can give temporary pleasure to thinking people.

The wise man has some knowledge, discretion and understanding from God which keeps him from floundering in the ways of darkness. That perception is a real advantage to living, but the reality as far as the meaning for being alive is that both the wise and foolish have to die. So, what is "the big deal? It ends up being the same for the wise and the fool. There is nothing lasting or meaningful when both are gone. The only thing left is a name on a tombstone, or a book that is read once and then forgotten. A new generation will hardly know anything about a genius, or a fool, unless forced to read about them in a schoolbook, and then it is soon forgotten.

It will be difficult to find anything about both the wise and foolish in a short passage of time. The only value we can get from what we have done in life is the impact it has left on eternal things. What we teach our children about God will last. How we lived for the Lord may have some lasting effect. What influence we may have had on the thoughts and spirits of those with whom we have had fellowship with in life, may have been able to leave some good after we have gone.

Why would a wise man like Solomon hate life? It was because in his life he had pursued all the "things" he could for personal gratification and it didn't work. Personal satisfaction is very self-centered by its nature, and any real enjoyment in life is that which is shared with God and with others. When God is in one's life, and like Paul said, "For me to live is Christ," then we have the best possible Person with whom to share life. Added to that is the fact that there are more of God's people around with whom we can share our life and its experiences. Poor Solomon had all he labored for, and realized it would all be left for someone else to use or abuse.

We have no control over how those behind us will use what we leave as far as physical and tangible things. A wise person may use it well for a time, or a fool may squander what we labored for in a very short time. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, ruined Israel as a united nation in a very short time. It is not wrong to work hard to provide the necessities of life for our families and/or for others, but to labor for self-satisfaction or self-glory is wasted effort. All we ever work for during our lives as far as possessions are concerned, will be left for others to enjoy, waste or lose.

What does life lived for self mean when all is said and done? Nothing! Like Solomon wrote, his work, his pain, his restless nights or worry were all meaningless. However, in a life lived for God and recognizing all our benefits come from Him, we can take joy. In recognizing the fact that God has allowed us to have so much, and to use them right, even for satisfaction and pleasure, brings us joy.

Ecclesiastes 2:1. *"I said in mine heart, 'Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, Therefore, enjoy pleasure:' And behold, this also is vanity."*

A LAUGH.

A word is said with abandoned unconcern – a name, an insinuation: don't worry – it is only for laughs.

A phrase is repeated with tones of voice that suggest a difference – it's only a joke – really?

A sentence is spoken with a hand held before the face so no one sees – then raucous laughter – suspicion arises.

A paragraph is repeated – embellished a little – nothing serious, only a few small changes to make it better.

An incident is recounted – names and places to "protect the innocent" are changed – but can't you figure it out?

A story is told in full, living color – the whole room dissolves in helpless laughter at the expense of one who is not there.

VANITY!

*The comedian is worth paying money for because he can make a monkey laugh (and you buy his product).
The joke book is full to overflowing with all kinds of stories to be retold if you can remember them all (you practice memorizing).
The cartoon is drawn in such a way that you can't miss the point (you think why don't I try that?).
The family is together and reminiscing over the past – it's okay until they look at you and say, "Remember when. . .?"
The point wasn't to embarrass anyone or make them blush too much – it was all in fun – until they get up and leave.
What's the matter? Can't they take a joke? It's only for a laugh!*

VANITY!

*"Did you see that face? Only a mother could love that!" And everyone laughs. (He was burned as a baby)
"What a size! Watch out you are not stepped on!" And everyone laughs! (She has a serious genetic disorder)
"What rock did he come out from under! He can't have washed in a year!" And everyone laughs!
(His family broke up and he sleeps wherever he can)
"Those clothes look like they're from the 60's! They clash at every joint!" And everyone laughs!
(That family is poor and they buy at Goodwill)
"Did you ever hear such a terrible singing voice? Her tail was stepped on!" And everyone laughs! (She just wants to praise the Lord)
"He's so lazy he can't scratch an itch!" And everyone laughs! (He has had arthritis since he was a child)*

VANITY!

Laughter at its best is for only a moment, and at its worst can bring pain and hurt. It is only vanity. Humor can bring relief from tension, can break barriers between people, can comfort for a time – but when all is said and done, "It is vanity."

"Father God, there are times when I can't seem to help myself from saying something funny. I fear those times lest they hurt some person without any intention to on my part. I need discernment to use its power properly. I ask for that help now; in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 3

GOD'S TIMING

People experience life but cannot control it. That frustration is one way in which God draws people to Himself. God, in His sovereign will has set patterns in life and so has established His own timetable for our lives. We cannot do anything about the cycles of life He has set in order. To get upset about them or strain against those limitations is futile. Rather, if we so choose, we can find appreciation and acceptance – even joy in them. We know that God in His own arranging of things, sees the whole plan of our lives as one big present picture, and is going to do what is best. His timing is right, and when we rest in Him, instead of frustration, we can find rest and contentment when "our mind is stayed on Thee [God]."

God's appointed times are predetermined by Him. Nothing He does is accidental. In His wisdom He has arranged a starting time and a stopping time. In between those times, we are able to live in harmony with His sovereign will when we live by faith in Him. This chapter begins with a comprehensive picture of life. It is lived between these opposites. The twenty-eight opposites cover every aspect of the life of faith of a believer. It involves what people do, rather than what they want to do.

So, what can bring lasting gain from human effort when our lives are under divine control? Faith in God is its own reward. We live, learn and love in our lives before Him who knows every thought and intent of our hearts. Finite man living in a fallen world is very limited and cannot function properly without serving our infinite sovereign God. We can't control or manipulate things, and this becomes a burden to us if we refuse to accept our limitations. If we try to live as if we are capable of doing anything we put our mind to, we are deceiving ourselves. I have heard people say to young people, "You can do anything you want if you just put your mind to it." We can enjoy life as God intends when we realize what He has given us to do, and enables us to do it.

Everything God created was made to fit together and appropriately function according to His sovereign plan. Such patterns and order mean there is an objective the Lord God has in His mind. What that goal is, is beyond our ability to fathom. Even though we are limited in understanding, we do have a sense of "eternity" in our hearts that He placed there. That makes us conscious of the fact that what we do now needs a long-term reason to give us the satisfaction in living. We have been created in God's image and have a spiritual thirst. Because we have eternal values in us, it takes eternal things to satisfy us.

Beginning at verse twelve there is a different line of consideration in the words of the Preacher. We can be happy and fruitful in life if we have goals that are consistent with living for God by faith. An appropriate view of God and His grace brings pleasure in living for Him. There is an order and balance in a life lived for God that is like a gift from Him

to give us joy. We are limited by our humanity, but when we live in fellowship with our infinite God, we find ourselves with a sense of eternal purpose in what we do. We don't add to or take away from anything God does, but in reverence and respect to Him, we give Him first place in life and we find a real purpose for living. The past of our lives will be set in the big picture along with the present and future to form the whole panorama of divine grace and purpose being fulfilled in us by our sovereign God. What a blessing! What a joy! There is much we don't understand, but we can be glad in what we do understand!

Solomon the Preacher, then considers that there seems to be some contradictions to God's sovereign control of things happening on earth. Why is there dishonesty and cruelty? Why does God allow envy and inconsistency? There is wickedness in the legal system. Instead of wise decisions and justice, there is evil in those who sit in the place of judges. God's true judgment will be passed on the judges themselves. There will be justice carried out at the judgment seat of Christ for believers; at the great white throne for unbelievers; and when Christ reigns, there will be judgment on the nations.

In our physical life, humans are animals because our bodies die like animals die. But humans are more than mere bodies because we have "eternity in our hearts." We have a consciousness of God. We understand time, space and matter. We know what righteousness, truth and love are, and are affected by them. We make moral decisions and our choices affect our life and our lifestyle – the way we live. If we are only body and life, then life is meaningless. Physical death is universal to every living thing. Humans suffer the wages of sin which brings death to the body but also to the soul and spirit. There are only glimpses of what happens to humans after death in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, life and immortality have been brought to light through the Gospel. Work for work's sake is vanity, but when we recognize work as a blessing from God, that gives joy, meaning and value in work as of an enduring worth when we do it as unto the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 3:1. *"To every thing there is a season. And a time to every purpose under the heaven."*

SEASONS AND TIMES.

- A time to be born – and the necessity to be born again.*
- A time to die – and to depart to be with Christ which is far better.*
- A time to plant – the evangelist plants the good seed of the word of God.*
- A time to pluck up that which is planted – the harvest is plenteous and the laborers few.*
- A time to kill – mortify therefore the deeds of the flesh and reckon yourself dead to sin.*
- A time to heal – forgive seventy times seven; even as Christ forgave you.*
- A time to break down – the middle wall of partition is gone and we are one in Christ.*
- A time to build up – build up yourselves in your most holy faith; rooted and grounded in love.*
- A time to weep – Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, "Behold how he loved him."*
- A time to laugh – rejoice with them that do rejoice; shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*
- A time to mourn – bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.*
- A time to cast away stones – there shall not be one stone upon another which shall not be thrown down.*
- A time to gather stones together – ye also, as living stones are built up a spiritual house.*
- A time to embrace – the father ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*
- A time to refrain from embracing – abstain from all appearance of evil.*
- A time to get – they rose up in the morning before daybreak and gathered manna.*
- A time to lose – give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.*
- A time to keep – that good thing which has been given unto you – keep (the body of truth).*
- A time to cast away – and when he (the beggar) had cast away his garment, he came to Jesus.*
- A time to rend – ye put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.*
- A time to sew – ye that are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.*
- A time to keep silence – it is better to close your mouth and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.*
- A time to speak – and they spake the word of the Lord with all boldness.*
- A time to love – husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.*
- A time to hate – hating even the garments spotted by the flesh.*
- A time of war – be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about; put on the whole armor of God.*
- A time of peace – My peace I give unto you; let not your heart be troubled.*

"I am confident, O Father God, that in every time and season, Thou art able to make my reaction to the situation completely appropriate. Help me to be willing to act in the way of Thy choosing. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 4

OPPRESSION

From the beginning of Genesis right through the Bible, God warns us of believers accepting or assimilating the values of the world. Even though we live in the world and are not of the world, the world view can be attractive and quite subtle. It is often difficult to identify it for what it really is. There is in every one who is in fellowship with God, a sense of what is right and appropriate, but we find it hard to analyze what is wrong with the worldview when we are questioned. So we need to consider ourselves and our attitude to avoid succumbing to those unbiblical values. This chapter gives warnings: success makes a person an object of envy; idleness brings ruin on one's self; Accumulation of possession brings care and disappointment.

Our life is designed for companionship. If we become obsessed with money and accomplishments to the neglecting of relationships, we will be miserable and life will be futile. The real purpose of life is to glorify God. Life is to be lived in a balanced way so that beside work and business, there is tranquility and quietness of spirit. In those times we mature and understand practical godliness. Christian thinking is far different than corporate thinking. The goals of the first last forever. The unfortunate results of corporate commitment are temporary here and valueless after death.

The focus of those who believe in God, know God and our Lord Jesus Christ personally by faith is: "What is God's will? What pleases Him? How does what I do further the purposes of His everlasting kingdom?" The perspective of one who lives eternal life now with an eternal objective, is far higher and more satisfying in every way than life lived only for these few short years.

The Preacher raised the question as to why oppression is allowed. He raised skepticism about how moral order governed by God allows such cruelty. Oppressors often have so much power it is impossible to break free from the oppression, malice and heartlessness that is so hurtful. He wonders if it is not better to be dead rather than suffer the heavy hand of oppression. He considered that it would have been better to not have been born than to suffer oppression under which some people live. Those who live by faith are often concerned by the contrast of what we believe and what we see around us. So, we have to take time to consider the events of the past and the promises of the future, in the light of the present. The worldview of a believer is larger than the limits of our experience. That is one of the major differences between a Christian worldview and a secular worldview. God's redemption is working in the context of the sinfulness around us, in contrast to the perfection of grace that shines in the darkness of human need. We actually become participants of grace when our need is acknowledged and our inability to change ourselves is unmistakable.

How is moral order and balance achieved and maintained? Rivalry in the workplace is a strong motivation to produce results. However, rivalry can soon bring injustice and oppression because of greed and envy. It is possible to be better than all rivals and gain over all competition, but at the end, what meaning is there to that? What gains and what loses? The contrast is those who won't do anything. Fools refuse to work and end up with nothing – not even food to eat. We are to work hard, but with moderation so that we can enjoy meaningful work, and still be able to enjoy other things around us, and the friendships of other people. For believers we can be content when we are full and abound, or when we recognize our Gracious Father has allowed us to be abased. Quietness of spirit can be experienced when we realize whether we have much or little depends on God who gives or restrains from giving. The point is to enjoy the little or the great that He chooses to give, and be thankful. The Preacher sums up all that went before verse seven, and what comes after as meaningless – vanity.

For some reason this man is lonely with no relatives to share his life with. It is likely he was too busy doing his own thing to cultivate friendships and establish meaningful relationships. He doesn't stop working like a man obsessed, and is not satisfied with what he has. That kind of person is not usually considerate of other people and isn't inclined to share what he has with others. So, he ends up a joyless, miserable person people avoid. Relationships and friendships are important and needed to live a normal life. Cooperation with others has all kinds of advantages. When one is in trouble and can't help himself, he has help available to him. When loneliness and despair threaten to overwhelm us, companions are there to lift our spirits and give us the comfort we need. If there are serious difficulties, we will need help from others. How much better is the "three-fold" cord that includes the Lord who gives unbreakable strength to keep people together and strong. Believers need each other – and we need God.

To gain power and popularity – even prestige, is only temporary at best. They have no lasting meaning as far as goals in life are concerned. A poor young man just out of prison can possibly go all the way to the top and replace an old king. It won't be long and the people who followed the old king will quickly change and follow the young leader. An attitude of gratitude is not easy to find among a valueless population. All they want is what is best for themselves. How sad it is when one reaches the top without God. There is no place else to go, and no other reason for existing. It is all total vanity.

Ecclesiastes 4:1. *"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter."*

OPPRESSION.

Millions are dead under the heat of the southern sun, and there is little done to alleviate the suffering living ones. Water, food – all necessities of life are missing for those who wander and wonder at the disaster. Covetous men take the food from the children. Help given is sold for arms. People come to assist and are placed under scrutiny and pressure and restrictions. Nation after nation comes under the gun of Islam's bloody hand. Saint after saint falls because to "depart and be with Christ is far better." Yet the love for souls is still there. Millions are being deceived into a lustful false faith without a foundation or a standard of conduct. The sun as it shines on Africa, exposes the darkness of religious oppression – and as yet – "They have no comforter."

The desert sands reflect the flash of guns being fired and marching armies. It has been that way for centuries. Across the desert are the remains of tanks and armies and men who died trying to eliminate God's chosen nation. They came from the south and the north. They moved from the east to try to dislodge a small group of people God put in the place of His choosing. They are still there – oppressed by many oppressors; despised by most of the world; the object of dark, implacable hatred. But they are still there – with no comforter. As the sun shines on the Middle East underneath its burning rays – oppression remains – they will not be satisfied until every Jew is in the Mediterranean Sea. Woe to such nations! They have power. They can produce from every home, tears. Where is the comforter?

The northern sun shines its long hours across the top of the world. A few believers gather here and there to remember the Lord and tell the good news of the Gospel. And then – down the street – clothed in religious garb – a man tells another man in a uniform, "Stop them! Do not let them talk about Jesus to others!" And the young man in the garment of an oppressor has to, even though he may not want to, stop a simple conversation of life and joy. It happens right around the circle on the top of the world and on both sides of it, the pressure is laid on, by the oppressor, to stop, with the hand of power, the Gospel of the blessed God – "And they had no comforter."

Around the bands of earth, as the sun shines down to bless the sons of men: in the name of atheism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Shintoism, naturalism, materialism, capitalism, existentialism, Islam, and communism - the oppressors work their power on those who long for the peace of heart that only God can give. In the South American countries, in Central and North America, the pressure is on to keep it quiet for the greater good.

"Stop speaking in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Make your messages suitable to what everyone wants to hear. We are all part of the global family, there is one God for us all and your God and my god are the same only with different names."

Wherever the sun shines its bright rays of life and light, the tears are flowing from the oppressed. Some are oppressed by their own family. Some are oppressed by those they are working beside. Some are oppressed by their government. Some are oppressed by their religious leaders. Is there no comforter?

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter; that He may abide with you forever." Jn.14:16

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me:" Jn.15:26

"If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." Jn.16:7

Yes! There is a Comforter! He has come! He is here! His power is felt in every place where there is a true believer in Christ! We do have a Comforter in every situation, all the time, and He still is working through His people!

"O Heavenly Father: what a blessing it is to have the Holy Spirit in me and in the world in these days of departure and darkness. Thank You, O Holy Spirit, for the divine power You give to the suffer saints of earth, and the comfort You give to those who are so in need of comfort. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 5

APPROACHING GOD

When we approach God in worship, we must show reverence for Him because of who He is as the Supreme One in the universe. Worship of God is to be done in full awareness as to who God is and what is appropriate and real on my part. Superficial religion is meaningless from people who are simply creatures of His making. Respect and honor for God are always right. We are not able in any way to manipulate God by making vows that sound sincere. Wisdom in making any commitment to the Lord is very important, rather than being a fool by making a rash vow on the spur of the moment. Motivation and manipulation are not too distant cousins. God intends His people to honor Him in their lives by demonstrating His truth and His integrity. I must be careful when I go before the Lord that I have no hidden agenda, but an open attitude and heart as I approach Him. In humility, this will put us in a condition in which we are ready to listen to Him rather than have a lot to say ourselves.

Our actions and attitude when we go to the house of God should be to hear His word, pay attention to what He is teaching us, and not make long thoughtless prayers with a lot of words. When we are open to divine instruction, we realize we are on holy ground both as worshippers and learners. When we recognize God for who He is and listen to

Him, then we will obey Him. To listen to instruction is one thing. To obey it is another. The “sacrifice of fools” is to make promises but not keep them. To make vows and not fulfill them. Spur-of-the-moment promises really are foolish acts made by foolish people who really don’t know what they are doing. Avoid making rash statements before thinking about what you are saying. To make promises without keeping them indicates a person does not realize the great difference between God and humans. The knowledge of God produces reverence and godly fear.

What a person intends to do and what they actually do, are often very different. Words without substance are characteristics of a fool. Verbosity without reality is common to fools. Vows without serious consideration before making them doesn’t make them less serious. Vows are not necessary, but when they are made, they are unbreakable. Partial fulfillment is not accepting the terms of the vows. To say one made a mistake in making a vow does not take away the responsibility to fulfill it. If I have vowed to give something or do something at a particular time, then that is when it is due. Mortgages, loans etc. are also legal vows that must be paid on the due date. That is one reason why the scriptures say, “Owe no man anything.” Superficial religiosity is of no value, because God is neither pleased nor satisfied with empty ritual and empty words. Sincerity of heart will be evident in sincere obedience to our Lord.

This section of the chapter begins with saying in essence, “Don’t be surprised by high government officials who are unjust and corrupt.” The Preacher knew people and he had no illusions as to the oppression imposed on the poor by those who abuse their position. Political corruption is as rampant today as it was in ancient Israel. Everyone in the country takes a cut off everything produced in one way or another. If a leader is concerned about what is as basic as the production of food, and the beginning of the food chain, then everyone will benefit from his wisdom. The transient nature of wealth will never satisfy a person, has no lasting profit, leaves a person unsettled in mind and can claim your soul because it is so temporary.

The preacher teaches from verse ten on that riches are meaningless and that greed is relentless. No matter how much a person accumulates, the thirst for more is unquenchable. There are benefits to wealth, but there are also significant downsides to it if a person does not use wisdom in the gathering and use of riches. Anxiety increase. Dissatisfaction does not go away. Even though warnings are given from many people against loving money, they go unheeded. Writings by ancient and modern writers are read and ignored. People still pursue more. A person may be brought out of poverty by the use of wealth and for a while there is happiness, but it is short-lived. As the years pass even though wealth continues to increase for that person, happiness and satisfaction doesn’t.

There are disadvantages that come to the wealthy in that other people will want to get much of what you have worked for, without working themselves. Phony investors promise great interest rates. Religious hucksters will keep asking you for money to support a project in which they are involved, but much of that money is used for “administration purposes.” Thieves of one kind or another will mark you. Distant relatives you never heard of will show up. A lot of other people will come around with desires and demands. Besides that, there is only so much time you will spend looking at an expensive painting or piece of art work. After a while it is just there but hardly thought about or looked at with more than a casual glance. All the expensive things you get to look at or use, will soon lose their attraction.

Another disadvantage from the accumulation of wealth is the fear that you will lose it. Being content with what one has is of far more value than what you think you might want or what you accumulate. Having treasure in heaven is a wonderful way to sleep good at night. Worrying about keeping what you have so your children won’t have to work as hard as you did, is a disservice to both parents and children. What you keep can be lost by some misfortune, and neither parent or child will have any benefit from the hoarding of wealth and possessions.

We came into this world with nothing and we will die with nothing to take with us. But if one has planned for eternity while here on earth in this lifetime, then we have all the riches of God’s grace that we have been given now as well at the “exceeding riches of His grace” in the future. What has been done for Christ while here is what is going to last. There is no way to transfer that wealth into eternity to claim later and enjoy. The sin polluted work of human endeavor has no place in the kingdom of God. The only things of value that we will have when we go is what has been implanted in us by the new, divine nature. That is unseen, but lasting. The awful thirst for wealth consumes a person so they live in darkness without joy, frustration without relief, and cynicism without true friends.

There is satisfaction and pleasure in our present lot in life if we choose to apply ourselves to wisdom, and seek the Lord while He may be found. The choices we make may be to a certain extent, affected by the circumstances in which we were born, our natural abilities and educational opportunities. Social status and wealth also can enter into our contentment to a little degree, but basically the fact is that if we have God in our life, we can be happy wherever we are and in whatever our case in life is. What we have are gifts from God which we can enjoy. Such things make us “rich” with what counts, and “adds no sorrow with it.” “Gladness of heart” is real when we acknowledge God as the Giver of every “good and perfect gift.” Our delight is in our Lord, not in affluence.

Ecclesiastes 5:1. *“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.”*

THE SACRIFICE OF FOOLS.

*What is all this noise I hear?
It sounds so discordant on my ear.
What in the world is going on there?
All I can get is great big blare.
“Come on in, you too can share.”
And you step through the door in trepidation and fear –
To the SACRIFICE OF FOOLS.*

*People are standing to the left and the right.
Others are falling like rain in the night.
There are those rolling on the floor right out in plain sight.
The music is loud and the flashes of light,
And the dry ice smokes, mixed with darkness and bright –
“We’re all doing it, so it has got to be right!”
It is THE SACRIFICE OF FOOLS.*

*The book may have songs and even some hymns.
The Bible is there and they read some psalms.
The folks are filling the pews and are waving their arms.
The swaying goes on like the wind in the palms.
The sign says, “Church”, so they’re giving their alms.
The collection goes around while the songs go on -
At the SACRIFICE OF FOOLS.*

*Watch your foot, it is easy to slip.
All kinds of things make it easy to trip.
An arm on your shoulder or a kiss on the lip.
Any little thing can happen so quick,
And before you realize, you’re hooked on it.
And the evil seems good because you seem to click –
With THE SACRIFICE OF FOOLS.*

*Your friends are there with their hands held out.
Some people you know see you, and start to shout.
Your name is whispered; then tossed about.
The truths you taught and the life so loud,
Goes down the drain when at the fools’ crowd,
The pressure’s on and you fail your Lord,
At THE SACRIFICE OF FOOLS.*

“O Almighty God: keep, by Thy great power, the feet of the young believers in this place. They are being attracted by a Christianized entertainment that they seem to think is holy. They want the noise and the friends and the excitement, but they are missing the whole point of gathering to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please help me to help them. Amen.”

Ecclesiastes 6

UNCERTAINTY

In our lives we will find real meaning in the relationships we have with God and other people. Our souls are made for that. If we have been blessed with money and material things, use them to bless God and other people. A responsibility comes with those who have much. “To whom much is given, much is required.” We are able to honor God with that which He has given us, and entrusted us to use for His glory and the furtherance of His kingdom.

Wealth can have the tendency to undermine our faith. Instead of living by faith in God and for God, we are in danger of thinking we are self-sufficient. It is possible for our trust in God’s sovereign will for us to be undermined as well. It can break up relationships we have with people that has been built on trust. At the end of our life, “Only what’s done

for Christ will last.” To delight and honor God with our substance as well as with our bodies and spirits which are His, gives meaning and significance to our daily life and our life-goals.

The circumstances in which a person is born does affect the kind of life they will have as far as most people in the world. In the sovereign purposes of God there are those who live in places of poverty which changes very little because of the geography of the area, the politics of the nations, and the opportunities or lack of them where they are. Other places there are all kinds of opportunities for those who are willing to apply themselves to work and study. But basically, the common lot of all humanity is that all live and die under the overall sovereignty of God’s purposes.

So, the Preacher observes a man who has more wealth and opportunities than he can use in his lifetime. Yet he does not enjoy the benefits he has and doesn’t seem to appreciate all that sovereign grace has given him. Life “under the sun” is life that is vanity without God in it. Such disparity among the people of the world is not an issue we can solve. We may be able to make a little difference in a few lives, but basically, life and the enjoyment of it or lack of enjoyment depends on one’s relationship with God – or lack of it.

True Christianity is growing numerically in Asian and African countries, as well as in Latin America. But cultural Christianity is declining and rapidly dying in countries where existentialism, materialism and atheism is increasing. The percentage of people who have “No particular belief” as far as religion is concerned, has taken over mainstream “Christianity.” People now are picking and choosing bits and pieces of philosophy from all kinds of sources as well as various world religions in order to make “my truth, my truth.” You have yours they say, and I have mine. It is to such a mindset the Preacher addresses himself here.

In his bitter indictment of life, the Preacher is saying what good is life if we have everything and don’t have satisfaction and honor. All he had was valueless if he didn’t live to enjoy what he had. If a person dies without heirs, strangers will get all he worked for. It is a sinful waste of life to gather for one’s self everything he could hope for in view of retirement. If “eat, drink and be merry” is the plan, and to not live long enough to enjoy it, what is the point. When sickness comes in and you can’t eat what you want, or walk where you want, or do anything you want, and can only count the days until you die, what has really been accomplished in life?

The Preacher says it would be better to die a stillborn baby than to live a meaningless life. Such a child never knew what it was to live in the light because it died in darkness. That child was never exposed to the good and bad of living outside the womb, so doesn’t know what it has missed. Because the stillborn child experiences death the same way as the wealthy old man, they both have the same end as far as things “under the sun,” but the child passes through death sooner without the complications, frustrations and pain of living “under the sun.” His conclusion is the stillborn child is better off.

So, when the Preacher confronts the complacency of some of those who are living, he makes some observations regarding those things that cause him concern. “What can satisfy the soul? For those of us who know the Lord, to “Seek first the kingdom of God,” makes life worth living. That is added to our sure hope of eternal life now and forever. A wise man is the focus of verse eight, not the wealthy man. A rich wish man has no advantage over a poor man in that they can only be in one place at a time doing one thing. Even a fool shares that with the wise. We are better to enjoy what we have than fret over what we don’t have. A poor man may not have all the things he wants or needs, but both rich and poor need to know how to be satisfied with what they have at the moment. They need how to live before other people with respect and integrity for themselves and others.

The fantasy some have is that things would be better somewhere else. “The grass is greener on the other side of the fence.” The needs of our soul being met, are what brings satisfaction, not all that a person can get or achieve. God has already predetermined what has been made and the purpose for it. This is in contrast to the limitations we have as human beings. It is foolish for us to try to manipulate God’s order of things to suit our desires. We can’t even understand all He has made and done. The more we talk and complain about things, the less it will mean to us. We won’t change anything just by shouting about it or talking incessantly with long speeches about what we would do if we were in control of things. Less is better when it comes to vain talk.

God knows what is good for us now and He knows what the future holds. No human can accurately predict tomorrow or the days yet to come in our lives. We need to live each day for the Lord and value the hours we have each day to lay up treasure in heaven. We don’t have the answers to all questions and problems. It is our best wisdom to look up to God for today, not only for the future. When all is said and done, the conclusion for daily life and all of life is, “The will of the Lord be done.”

Ecclesiastes 6:1. *“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:”*

COMMON AMONG MEN.

It shines with the brightness of all earth behind its burnished glow.
 It glitters and entices young and old alike – continually.
 It tempts and tempts again – day after day – it won't quit.
 It glows behind eyes that are hard shut because they have seen it before.
 No rest it gives.
 No satisfaction.
 No fulfillment.
 No life.
 No joy.
 No happiness.
 It starts when we are young.
 It claims the mind of the student and scholar.
 It manipulates the forces of business and commerce.
 It moves the powers of government and religions to war.
 It has no ability to give peace of any kind.
 It captures and controls the mind.
 It is ceaseless in its endeavors.
 Its restless power never sleeps.
 Everywhere,
 Everything,
 Everyone,
 Everyday,
 Is influenced by its power.
 Is challenged by its worth to get more.
 It makes all to be perpetually dissatisfied and reach out farther than they should.
 Homes break up over it, children are taken away from parents because of it.
 Families separate over it because of its insatiable power over the mind.
 No matter how much you get of it, you want more.
 It promises answers and creates more problems.
 It promises happiness and creates bitterness.
 It promises a bright future and leaves darkness.
 Whether poor or the rich – they want more.
 Whether young or old – most never have enough.
 Lottery, Bingo, Poker, Keno, and Casinos all give bright hopes.
 And they all fail, because the heart of man is never satisfied.
 Investments, stocks, inventions, robberies are all done for this.
 It is an evil that is common among men.
 It is an evil disease.
 It is vanity!

"O God of all needed provision and Supplier of every good and perfect gift. Preserve me from the terrible bonds of covetousness. Whether it is money or fulfillment or whatever possibilities might lie before me – 'Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust.' In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 7

SEVEN COMPARISONS

The Preacher in the last part of the book of Ecclesiastes beginning at chapter seven, is mainly concerned about giving advice for living in a world such as we live in today. The first part of this has to do with character being placed with a higher value than anything we might earn or do. He doesn't write as a bitter man wailing over lost opportunities and a wasted life, but is making a calm assessment of things as they are. Solomon uses his power of reason to look at life with common sense. Common sense is not too common these days. So he sets out seven comparisons: [1] A good name is better than precious ointment. [2] The day of death is better than the day of birth. [3] The house of mourning is better than the house of feasting. [4] Sorrow is better than laughter. [5] The rebuke of the wise is better than the song of fools. [6] The end of a thing is better than the beginning. [7] The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Faith rises above the circumstances of the moment and takes a careful and realistic look at what really counts. When that happens, we leave the assumptions we had and self-occupation with what we think we lost, and consider what we have gained. It is then we are comforted in our souls and can see behind all that has taken place, the hand and heart of God's love. It may seem like all that has claimed our hopes is far off in a vague distance that we hope to reach someday. But that isn't true. There is a full cup of satisfaction and fulfillment at our hand as we look and live by

faith in Him who has sovereign authority over everything. We will find, like the Thessalonian believers, that there is for us a work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope which we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We look beyond the fresh-filled graves in which we placed the forms of our loved ones, and walk forward in the Spirit toward the new day and new life we have, remembering we will meet our Lord in the air at any time. Then we will be with Him forever. Because of human limitations as they relate to things “under the sun,” from hindsight, things may turn out very different from what they seemed at the first. A rebuke may be the best thing that happened to us after time runs its course. To attend a funeral may be of far more importance in the long view of life, than a successful business transaction or a wonderful party. The Preacher gives advice by saying in different ways, that we should maintain a balance in life by focusing on how the experiences of the past, and the hopes for the future affect how we conduct life in the present.

Pleasure and wealth connected with wisdom can be beneficial, but we need to hold them with an open hand, not a tight fist. A good reputation, living with gratitude and humility, being open to instruction and correction, are of more importance than passing pleasure and success. A person of patience who controls anger and doesn't make rash decisions, is one who lives in conscious submission to divine authority. Faith is based on what things are, and what we know will actually be, rather than on what we think we know they should be.

A serious approach to life is of more value than the emotional changes of one who does not want to face life and death as they really are. One's name and reputation are of more value than sweet-smelling ointment that fades away. We need to prepare for death rather than live as if we are going to live forever here on earth. Our mortality is real. It is in Christ that we have eternal life that does not end at physical death. We don't have to go around with a long face to be serious. Some things that happen to us are not best dealt with by a laugh. A serious discerning person sees beyond the surface. Clear thinking about death is a reminder to consider how we are living today. When we take time to evaluate our lives, it gives us time to make whatever changes are needed in view of life after death. The direction of our lives today has a lasting effect on our future life, and likely on those who follow us. Plan ahead and seek the mercy of God now rather than His justice later.

Verses five through ten teach us that moderation is better than excess, which is like crackling of thorns burning under a pot that makes a lot of noise but gives little heat. Foolishness and loud laughing cover lack of wisdom and intellectual emptiness. Both oppression and bribery destroy wise and straight thinking. They corrupt people and victimize wisdom when one yields to them. To be patient and wait on the Lord for the solution of a matter is far better than to think one can solve a matter and then it becomes a source of pride. Don't jump too quickly.

Our perspective on things today is limited by our past experiences. For that reason, we who are older think everything today is of less value than “When I was young.” Generations are not the same and so we have to trust God to make all the pieces of life's puzzle fit together as it seems fit to Him. Patience and deliberate thought are needed to grasp the big picture. Put the past behind and move forward. We live in the present and don't need the discouragement of making comparisons. With a wise sense of balance, maintain the tried and proven wisdom and experience of the past, and learn how to adapt those into the need of the present and to prepare for the future.

Wisdom and wealth together have a great potential for good now to one's self and to others. Wisdom is the protection from potential ruin, and knowledge adapts wisdom to present practical circumstances and needs. However, neither provides eternal benefit without the knowledge of God. There is no point to try to figure out why everything happens as it does, or what we can do about it. God has sovereign plans already in place, and we should accept them with grateful thanks and faith. We will have good and bad times in life. God has arranged for both, so we need to accept what comes by taking advantage of the opportunities now. To wait for better ones is uncertain.

It is a general principle that wickedness shortens life, but that is not always the case. Righteousness of life is not a guarantee of long life or an easy life. No amount of human wisdom can guarantee the outcome of that which depends on divine sovereignty. It is futile to try to change the work and plans of God to suit what pleases us. We may want something to happen in life in a certain way now, but God's order of things and events, are far more comprehensive than ours. Balance and moderation will enable us to avoid the dangers of extremes. Faith keeps us from being overanxious about whether God is pleased with us, and it also keeps us from being careless and indifferent as to what is wrong. A righteous balanced life avoids those extremes because that person fears God and lives in the consciousness of His divine presence wherever we are and in whatever we do.

When we depend on the Lord and His guidance and power, He gives us the wisdom we need to deal with any task He gives us or any event He allows to come our way. Our Lord Jesus Christ was the only Perfect Man who ever lived on earth, and He did “always those things that pleased the Father.” It is a sobering thought that everyone else who has ever lived has “come short of the glory of God.” Every one of us is “guilty before God.” This is a warning to everyone that none of us has the right of access into the mind of another person to determine their motives for what

they do. Because of that fact, we should take care and caution as to how we deal with others, because we all have the same tendencies to do our own thing in our own way according to our own will.

In spite of what wisdom we might have, there is much more that we don't know than what we do. An older man said to a younger man, "If there were two books written, one about the things you know and one about the things you don't know; which one do you think will be the biggest? The young man replied, "The things I don't know." "You are right," said the older man, "And don't you forget it." The humbled soul knows there are things that are beyond knowing because they are "exceedingly deep." However, there are things normally beyond our capacity that the Holy Spirit reveals to those who love God. The Preacher made a serious search of all he could think of, and he concluded that wickedness is foolishness, and foolishness is like the madness of a person beyond reason.

Foolishness is like a seductive woman who leads a person into moral and spiritual disaster which is "more bitter than death." Adding anything we learn from wisdom and understanding may increase our perceived awareness of things, but is always limited and must yield to the revealed truth of God. It would seem consistent with the scriptures to consider an upright man as one among a thousand. The woman referred to is foolishness personified like the seductive woman, rather than a reference to gender differences. There is not a lot of righteousness among mankind as a whole, but there certainly is a lot of foolishness. God made man the way He wanted him, but mankind has corrupted itself, and each individual has chosen sin by nature rather than to accept God's salvation. But God offers salvation because of His grace, and it can be personally had when an individual accepts by faith, the Lord Jesus as their Savior.

Ecclesiastes 7:1. *"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth."*

A GOOD NAME #2.

The time of the handshake of trust and contract is gone. A man's name was as good as his word in the not too distant past. Labor done, jobs taken and promised, money borrowed and loaned, actions were taken because of a good name. The look in the eye of serious intent and the name of your father or your father's father was good enough to seal the deal. The name of one's forbearers was enough to give emphasis to good conduct and speech. You were expected to bear a good name with honor and dignity. The reputation of generations of people was on your shoulders and you bore the good name with pride. That name came from the dim and distant past. It is not necessary to go into the misty past because doubtless there will be skeletons in some closet back there. But go back as far as reasonable recollection and trace the path of those whose good name you carry. They were not perfect people, but they were known and spoken of with respect.

For nearly 200 years my family name has been associated with believers in Christ who gather in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. May God help me and my children to not sully that reputation that was carved out of a strong commitment to scriptural principles. There are differences in the practices now than way back then. People then had the flexibility of a new work. At times I am sure to us it would seem things were out of control because they were not so fashionable or orderly as we think things should be. A business or a church when young is flexible but difficult to control. As maturity comes controllability increases and flexibility decreases. But the good name was part of the pressure that attempted to keep the balance necessary to stability and growth. In the aging process of both a business and a church, they lose both flexibility and controllability and are in danger of annihilation. A good name to live up to, gives a strong incentive to continue on without having a whole lot to encourage.

The commitment of one with a good name to another person, whether it be in marriage or in business, challenges me to nurture, preserve, enhance, develop and dignify that person or work I am associated with. There are expectations that go along with a good name. The public knows what is expected of a person with that name. People I do not even know have an idea of what is expected from a person with that name. The generations of the past have poured the ointment of their character on that name. They have put the perfume of their faithful words to that name. They have staked their life and hopes on that name. The good name of a family of many known generations is worth the effort to preserve intact.

But the name that spreads its' scented perfume far and wide is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name with the soothing ointment to take care of the hurts and battle-scars of life is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name that is as ointment poured forth, "therefore do the virgins love Thee," is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name that moves the heart of God when it gives authority to prayers made is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name that remains unsullied amidst all the failures of men and nations is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name that gives power to the word of the Gospel is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name that saves lost souls is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The name that God esteems above every other name is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is better than precious ointment! It is as ointment poured out spreading its goodness everywhere!

"Heavenly Father, I can remember as a boy singing in Sunday School, "The name of Jesus is so sweet, I love its music to repeat..." I haven't forgotten the hymn, or the name, or the blessings that come when we ask in His name. I honor that name here in this room before Thee alone, the name which is above every name, Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 8

APPLYING WISDOM

We do not live in a godly world, and so we are under pressure to accept the practices of ungodly people as if they were normal. Unfortunately, those practices of depravity in some cases have been passed as laws which are supposed to govern our actions as well as our beliefs by corrupt governments. The few that walk in wisdom are far above the mass of humanity in general. So, what is a believer in Christ to do who knows the unchanging standards of God's law supersede the changing laws of men? When we see things from God's perspective, we need wisdom that comes from God. Wisdom lights up intelligence and takes away rudeness and pride. Wisdom tells us to watch and wait when the authority under which we live is different than the divine authority to which we owe our allegiance. Wisdom doesn't give itself to conspiracy because it is always conscious of the fear of God. He is the Creator and Sustainer. He is the Light and Love who permits what seems to us to be bad, to continue on to fulfill a higher purpose.

Mere human wisdom may make it plain as to what is right and wrong to us, but we need divine wisdom to know what is the prudent way to act towards human authority when it contradicts divine authority. Inappropriate response can result in damage to many other people beside ourselves. Real wisdom requires a focused deliberate effort to find and practice the way of life that fulfills our mandate, and yet keeps the servant of God "unspotted by the world."

There is a danger of acting on human wisdom and neglecting divine wisdom. Wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated. It is full of mercy and good fruits. It is without partiality and without hypocrisy. So that does not give us the option of retaliation, but rather indicates there is a way open to solve a problem that is superior to human wisdom. Human wisdom may think it knows what to do based on common sense and our reaction to a challenge.

Abuse of power by those who "have no fear of God before their eyes," is a fact of life in today's world. We have to live with that. We may wonder why God isn't doing something about all of this and what we are to do until He steps in and changes things. The Preacher says in essence: fear God, live a normal moral life of faith and testimony. Leave the governing to God's sovereign choice and to His wisdom and control. Trusting God leads to understanding and the confidence of faith in Him.

Real wisdom is not too common when it comes to dealing with hard situations in life. Usually though, you can see a calmness and brightness on the face of one who is wise, rather than the dark clouds of perplexity on a worried face. Don't jump too quickly when dealing with human authority. Bide your time and wait for God to open a door. Then the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say. Obey the king's command as long as it is not contradictory to God's command. "Fear God, honor the king," is a principle when it comes to dealing with the government. A bad cause could be anything that demeans, resists and opposes the leadership. We are to obey civil authority because of our loyalty to the Lord. There is a proper time and procedure to follow when dealing with civil authority. We usually don't know when that time is, so in that matter we need to wait on the Lord and he will direct our path. Only God knows the future and He coordinates the present and future by His sovereign will.

In the face of absolute power, we need to recognize our human limitations. We can't capture the wind and we can't prevent death. We can't avoid the consequences of war when it is imposed on us no matter what we believe about it and the reason for it. Evil may seem to be the winner, but it will recoil like a spring and claim those who promote it. Even that is in God's control, not ours. Solomon was the king of Israel and he recognize the danger of power that happens when a leader does not submit himself to his own rules. Power corrupts those who have it and misuse it. Absolute power victimizes others and corrupts those who have to live under it.

At funerals some of those who eulogize the dead who lived and died in sin, will say things like, "God picked a flower from His garden and took it to heaven." The evil such people have done is quickly forgotten even between the grave and the home. On the way home the dead may be praised in the very place they have committed their sin and evil deeds. When justice and judgment are not carried out quickly, people are inclined to think they have gotten away with sin, and so plan other evil schemes. God may not punish sin immediately, but that doesn't mean He does not know about or care about evil being done. There is a day of recompense for evil, but in grace God has provided a way to be just and the justifier.

The Preacher had lived long enough to have experienced the grace of God himself. He knew failure because of sin. He knew the fear of God grips the soul of a sinner and can bring repentance. He also knew repentance doesn't overlook sin nor does the justice of God. When repentance is real, there is forsaking of sin and then forgiveness can come because of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. As far as the repentant wicked person, justice will be served.

God has all the details in His divine will. We do not have the right, nor the need to answer all our own questions about things beyond our limited comprehension. The success of the wicked and the loss of the righteous sometimes happens. From our limited perspective of life “under the sun,” we may question divine justice, but this is not the end.

So what do we do with questions that are unanswered? Do we chew them over, meditate on them, become agitated because we can't find the answers we want? The Preacher says to go on with life and look for the positive things. Enjoy what God has given you to enjoy and leave the things “beyond your pay grade” to the Lord who knows all things. Live for God and experience what He has given to the fullest. That will give meaning to your work and worth.

Focus your attention on what you know and can comprehend. Don't allow those unknown things to negatively affect your faith, your work or your joy. Trust God to do what He does, and don't waste your time searching for what is impossible to find or understand. We live here and now, so find your contentment and joy in what God wants us to know and experience in our own sphere of life and service.

Ecclesiastes 8:1. *“Who is as the wise man? And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.”*

A MAN'S WISDOM.

*Where can I go for the wisdom I need;
What shall I do and to what shall I heed?
Shall I go to the college of those greatly learned;
And there to get from their minds things that I have not earned?
Shall I travel the world and try everything;
To see from far places a changed view of men?
Can I glean from inside of my mind wisdom true;
And find from my thoughts wisdom I thought I once knew?
Will the crowd in the streets, in the way, in the store;
Give me the wisdom that my soul does implore?
Are there things I must do yet, to give me the key;
To wisdom so needed that, so far, evades me?*

*No, the scriptures are clear, it is there plain to read;
The places and things for the wisdom I seek,
When my heart is with those who mourn the loss of a friend;
God gives His wisdom from the Spirit He sent.
When there is reverence and fear of the Lord that's not faked;
He gives the beginning of wisdom to take.
When pride is not there, nor dishonor with it;
God gives to the humble His wisdom to fit.
When a man's search for truth, is that God him will bless;
God adds to his wisdom because of his real “teachableness.”
Love in the search for the wisdom of God;
Such diligence will be rewarded from the Wisdom Above.*

*Uprightness of life gives wisdom a place;
Where the seeker of wisdom, meets God face to face
In His Word where He speaks to the seeker who is true;
And faith to grasp all that He wants you to do.
The wisdom of man does not go way back;
And say “those days were better,” for the things that we lack,
A man's wisdom will keep him from trying to say;
“I'll make myself wiser and wiser each day.”
The wisdom of life that a man close to God;
Has learned from his Master on the roads he has trod,
Will give his face strength, because he has been changed;
From the man he once was to the man God has made.*

*Man's wisdom from God, makes his face bright to shine;
He has learned by experience, “Not my will but Thine.”*

*He has learned what he cannot, and is unable to do;
So he gives himself wholly to the work he has proved.
He rejoices when things go his way for a while;
And when poverty comes, he greets all with a smile.
He is able to listen far more than he talks;
When words he must say, they match up with his walk;
When people come to him for advice that they need;
He gives it out plainly so the truth they will heed.
May the "wisdom of men" come to me "heaven sent;"
And may God in His mercy, let me for Him be spent.*

"O All-Wise, All-Knowing God, my Father: would I be able to, in some little way, show to my generation Thy wisdom? Can I be trusted with such a charge, as to answer discreetly some of the things that people want to ask? If so, please help me to pay the price of wisdom; in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 9

ONE EVENT

It is impossible for us mere mortals to understand all that God has done in creation, the eternal past, nor what He will do in the future. So, it is futile for us to think we can know all He is doing now, and the reasons behind all we can observe. For some people who depend on themselves, their good works or their own understanding, God is like their favorite vending machine. What they choose to put in will result in being able to decide what they get out. Hopefully, to their minds, it will be more than they put in.

The Preacher wisely came to understand that we cannot understand all that goes on "under the sun," let alone in the entire universe. Only God is eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. In spite of man's exalted opinion of himself, we are limited to this little space of time we call life. This is infinitesimal compared to God's work that covers eternity as an eternal "now" to Him. His work encompasses all of creation, all of His on-going activities now and forever. So how could we ever conceive of knowing more than a limited view of things except for the fact He has given us His word to let us know what He wants us to know. It is enough for us to know Him, "and Jesus Christ who Thou hast sent." He knows us and those two things are really all that we are capable of understanding at this present time of our existence. Other things are "yet to follow."

Presently what we know is we are alive, and like every living thing, one event happens to all. We die! Believers live in a "more sure hope," in regards to the future, even though the future also is out of our hands. It is under God's control and no one knows what the demands of our own life will hold, whether it will be good or bad. It is enough that we know God, and by faith, our trust is in Him to do with us as He sees fit.

This life and this universe are not the result of random events or circumstances. It is under God's control with order and purpose displayed wherever we look. Any and all work we have done is assessed and remembered by God as to what it is and why it was done. That is why it is important that believers in Christ live by "the faith of (in) the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." We can't judge by the circumstances of life whether we are the objects of divine favor or not. There is no distinction in the "one event" that happens to all. Death levels everyone by that one event. Beyond our powers of observation is the fact of God's omniscience, and the "Judge of all the earth (will) do right."

To some people it doesn't make any difference what you do, because as far as they are concerned, "When you're dead, you're dead." And to them that is the end of everything. So, they don't hesitate to continue in sin with "madness in their hearts." In contrast, hope is the confident expectation that God is as good as His word. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for. The evidence of things not seen." A contemptible living scavenging dog, is better than the body of an admired, but dead lion. The Preacher was not contrasting life now with afterlife in verse five, but is contrasting life and death. All the emotions that make a person who he or she is, leave the body at death. Those in Old Testament times did not have a clear understanding of life and immortality. That came to light through the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ – the Gospel. That makes the future understandable.

God doesn't approve of irresponsible living, but because He has given us so much to enjoy, the preacher recommended enjoying what you have while you can. The white clothes and oil on one's head, were for special joyous occasion when they wanted to look their best. Celebrations were enjoyed and to look your best indicated your spirit was uplifted, even though many questions remained unanswered regarding life and why things are the way they are. Some things are beyond our capacity to grasp, or else they are unnecessary for us to know. The enjoyment of married life, and the ability and privilege to love another person and share life together, gives joy and value to life. That is not available in the meaningless pursuits of wealth, fame and material possessions.

When we do what we do as to the Lord with enthusiasm and heart, we are able to maintain an appropriate perspective on life as we live it now, rather than be concerned with what might have been, or what will be. The world we live in is limited and imperfect, as are we. Sin has left its mark on all mankind does, making it imperfect no matter how hard we strive for perfection. Even creation suffers because of man's sin. The best and brightest do not always come out on top. Faith doesn't change the realities of life, but it does show there are more realities than what we might experience in life. The fastest don't always win every race because the unexpected happens, and success is unpredictable. We are not able to be dogmatic in our planning because there are other forces at work in our lives beside our own will. So, we are always right to say, "God willing."

That which is wise and overlooked is not offended because people don't recognize it. Wisdom has a higher motive than being put on a pedestal and being honored by people. Wisdom can see a problem bigger than can be dealt with in an ordinary way. Rather than go public to declare its own virtues, wisdom identifies the problem, finds a suitable answer to the problem, goes about to solve it, and then steps back out of the limelight – often never being acknowledged or appreciated. Human planning fails: wisdom succeeds, and benefits all. But like love, wisdom does not exalt itself. So, the poor wise man is not remembered. It may be because he was poor, or it may be because he didn't want credit to be given to him. It was enough that the city was saved as far as wisdom was concerned. That was the result of his wisdom and the objective he wanted. Wisdom is usually undervalued until needed, and often by then, it is too late.

The wise man whose quiet words have weight, can be undermined by the loud declarations of a leader of fools. Such people threaten and bluster about themselves and what they are going to do. Some even will declare war when some wise words of diplomacy could bring a solution that would be much better. Wisdom is not appreciated by most people who want to do things their way. Consequently, foolishness and irresponsible decisions are made that create chaos and meaningless living. Take time to think, plan, pray and prepare before taking action. Actions made on human emotion and intellect only, usually fail. Wisdom takes advantage of intellect and guide emotions. Wisdom is always there to be found but it doesn't come at the push of a button on a computer.

Ecclesiastes 9:1. *"For all this I considered in my heart even to declare this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them."*

SET TO MY HEART.

It is not to be ignored; the heart must be given – to God.

All of the issues that arise must find a place to focus – on God.

All that is said must have a point behind it – God.

All that is taught must lead each one to Someone – God.

All that is urgent must hasten men to the reason for urgency – the work of God.

All that claims the attention of the mind in leisure or in activity – the glory of God.

All that is learned that is of lasting value – comes from God.

My heart is set in all these – in THE HAND OF GOD.

The thoughts of the wise and all that implies – God knows.

The choices to make, good or bad, for us to live right – God knows.

The conduct of life that righteousness might prevail – God knows.

The things that I read and study and ponder with deep interest – God knows.

The vision for tomorrow or the memories of the past – God knows.

The classless interest that may be directed to people near or far – God knows.

The acts of love planned or unplanned, and those of hatred – God knows.

My life with all its activity is – in THE HAND OF GOD.

Age brings along with its shortening days and lengthening nights – wisdom from God.

Experience has its burdens and its strengths to pass on to others – for God.

Prayers answered and lessons learned in the hard school – are from God.

Works that have been accomplished that bring the face-lines – are to bless God.

Love that expresses itself without embarrassment has been learned – taught by God.

Humility that has been imposed on arrogant shoulders finally is real – thank God.

Grace on the lips, mercy in the hand and faith in the life – come from God.

My heart is given by experience, and is – in THE HAND OF GOD.

*The works that are done, no more to be repeated, are – for God.
The monuments of labor done in the dim and distant past, look small – bless them God.
The faces I knew and loved and are gone: leave big spaces – with God.
The hands that were strong and calloused and firm with work done – to please God.
The body once flexible and ready for labor, is now preparing to be – with God.
The muscles once used with ease and with pleasure and active – to show God.
The tally of work seems so small and insignificant, not – zealous for God.
I consider in my heart; and rest – in THE HAND OF GOD.*

“To rest in Thee my gracious Father, is such a deep contentment that I cannot express all it means to me. Failures, missed opportunities have haunted me in the past. But I know they are all known to Thee. So, I comfort myself by settling in this place of acceptance and assurance – Thy hand: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Ecclesiastes 10

FACE LIFE

The Preacher in the last chapters of Ecclesiastes takes the place of a Teacher who is calm, cool and collected. With measured tones and words, he points out the value of wisdom in everyday life. To apply truth to present-day events is really necessary, even though it may be only a little bit here and a little bit there that takes root. The principles of the Proverbs are the basis from which action is taken. There are and will be, all through life, reasons to be discouraged. To apply wisdom from the word of God to each situation, then to water it with prayer and nurture it with practical application to the issues of life, will bring the best possible results.

Such results will not always be good, because sin is never good. Homelife, business life and church life are all lived by imperfect people. Each person has personal preferences about almost everything, and are inclined to think that those should be accepted by others. Wisdom does not guarantee that there will not be unpleasant circumstance in life. But it does help us to face them, and if necessary, live with them. Somethings we will not be able to change. Others we might change a little or at least learn to adapt them to certain circumstances in life.

Fundamental to facing the facts of living in an ungodly world, are certain necessities to which we need to act upon. We need to learn to be more competent. Learned skills can help adapt to lasting difficulties. Character building needs to be a constant practice that takes effort on our part. Learning to speak in appropriate ways with wisdom of words is essential. Patience and willingness to wait are not common but are necessary to face life as it is. There are times to take risks, times to do the same things over and over, and times to make necessary changes. Developing and applying skills for effective living were what the Teacher was seeking to pass on to the young who were under his instruction.

One failure can destroy the influence and reputation of a lifetime lived with integrity, wisdom and honorable conduct. A wise person will usually be found going the opposite way than a fool goes. Their worldview and how they look at life are fundamentally different. The things each one does, and the way they speak will reflect the inward differences. What we are inwardly will show itself outwardly. Our personal reality, and the way one faces life, cannot be hidden.

Employers, leaders or any person who holds a high position to whom we are responsible to obey or support, may get angry at us from time to time. We can't do anything about their anger, but by a calm reasoned response, that anger maybe diffused. Other times we must just stand our post and take it. By a steady, consistent, quiet response, and at the same time not deviating from what is right nor shrinking from the boss, makes it so his anger can fade away and he can "save face." Such an attitude can bring a positive result.

There are a number of circumstances that seem unfair and are really senseless that we may have to face in life. A person in authority may create a problem accidentally, and even wisdom doesn't really make that error right. To put an incompetent person in a place for which he is not qualified, is wrong, especially if those who are capable are overlooked by partiality toward a favored fool. In those settings, wisdom is often ignored and the consequences will be bad in time to come. Some leaders put their family members, friends or favorite people in places of authority they should never have, while the competent ones are told to do menial tasks. It is important to take God into consideration and wait for His will to be known before making choices and decisions that will affect many people.

Society can quickly become chaotic if the wrong person has the place of authority for which he is not qualified. To act unadvisedly and/or make snap decisions can catch you in your own trap. Accidents in life do happen, but if I do not wisely consider what I do, I will fall into a hole I have made. A rash decision can come back to bite me. That happens if I break down the barriers of separation that keep good and evil apart. It is then I will be bitten by an unexpected

response that I never considered before-hand. If I plan to move what God has established, or change what the word of God says to suit myself, I will ultimately be the one who will be hurt by my willful actions.

To destroy or damage what God has established is bad enough. To divide what God wants to remain united is to be under the wrath and hatred of God and His justice. We need to apply the word of God to have the discernment for wise decisions. Keep the ax sharp. Training, study and practice are ways we can sharpen our spiritual and intellectual skills on order to be proficient in God's work. There are some damages from foolishness and ignorance that can never be undone. The words we speak can have helpful benefits or bad consequences. The words of a wise person are gracious words like our Lord Jesus spoke, and can bring blessing.

The fool will talk himself into a corner from which he cannot escape because of his lack of courtesy, decency and common sense. His talk may start out as merely a joke or silly comment, but as he continues talking evil nonsense, accusations will be made without thought and they are void of truth. Usually because of lack of consideration and forethought as to what he is going to say, he starts talking and says the first thing that comes into his mind. It may be totally irrelevant, then irreverent, then irresponsible and then irreversible. Talking too much is the result of thinking too little. Endless babble is wearing to the listeners and frustrating to the talker, to the extent that neither knows whether he is going or coming. Such a talker is usually one who refuses to listen to what God says, because God's word is plain, precise and cuts right to the heart of a matter.

Immature and unqualified leaders create havoc in a country, assembly or a home. They are more concerned about themselves and their pleasures, than meeting and fulfilling the responsibility of the role they have taken. A qualified leader will be neither lazy or selfish. He will understand his obligations and will put first things first. Any homeowner who has worked hard to get a house for his family to live in, knows the importance of upkeep. One leak in the roof can lead to rot somewhere else. Rot leads to structural breakdown and the ultimate ruin of property. Diligence is necessary to maintain a house, a family and an assembly, and to keep them from decay and disintegration. To neglect important spiritual practices is to open the way to the intrusion of the world into that which is sacred. Lack of discipline, of faithful concern and care will bring down the whole unit. The converse is true as well. To maintain consistency in spiritual matters will strengthen and maintain spiritual growth.

Money is useful but not fundamental to security, contentment and the accomplishing of goals in life. It is not the answer to everything. It can be a trap if we think it will solve our problems if we had just a little bit more. It does not solve all the problems "under the sun." If we trust money rather than God, we will end up spiritually bankrupt. Full joy is found in our Lord Jesus Christ. Careless talk has a way of getting out no matter how hard one tries to keep it covered. The person who guards their speech by controlling their mind and thoughts, will keep their tongue under lock and key. That will save them and many other people a lot of unpleasantness. When gossip gets out, it seems to have a mind of its own.

Ecclesiastes 10:1. *"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor."*

A LITTLE FOLLY.

*Life goes by, times change, so shall I changeless be?
How about those things that one time bothered me?
Will I forget the value of each day
Lived for God, in His true and changeless way?*

*How about the fact that other men
Seem able to get by and nothing bothers them?
Why should it make me so upset;
If I can't do or get what others get?*

*It really is only one act so small,
That no one else will notice, not at all.
It won't affect some other person's mind,
Especially if the fly they never find.*

*I know the fly is dead, so what's the case?
It's not going to take its smell some other place.
A fly or two is no big deal.
After all, I didn't really steal.*

*I just neglected to write down,
Some cash I made when I was in the town.
So no one else will ever be the wiser.
A few extra dollars doesn't make a man a miser.*

*The pictures printed in the book,
Or the computer scenes on which I look;
Are there for everyone to see;
So why are people picking now on me?*

*Dead flies are really not so big,
The problem is the pile from where they dig
Their dirt and disease are so easily spread,
Makes perfume to smell like it is something dead.*

*The maggots in the ointment they can breed;
Last longer than the eggs the fly once laid.
And nothing really looks quite so bad,
As maggots, flies and such when they are dead.*

*Reputation and honor ultimately come to those;
After many years of living above reproach.
They both can be quickly lost from me;
When I didn't even know folks were there to see.*

*For me to live for God and His name bear,
Can be lost in a moment if I don't take care;
Of how I live and talk and work, until then,
My reputation and honor have both been lost to sin.*

"O Father God: please keep me with a sensitive spirit to the little things that can come in and make a mess of my life and testimony. I fear lest all that has been done for a lifetime will be lost over some foolish dead flies. I remember Grandpa Scott prayed, 'Keep me from dying a wicked old man,' and I pray that too, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 11

GO AHEAD – WISELY

Life "under the sun" has many opportunities, and there are many risks. The fear of failure keeps many people from stepping out in faith into unknown paths and work, knowing that there are risks involved. Rather than being obsessed with the risks involved, we should think about the benefits that can come from trusting God and moving forward into unknown activities for the sake of the kingdom of God. To stand still and take time to consider the assets we have at our disposal and match them to the objectives before us, is wise. The outcome however, is not guaranteed. When the benefits are weighed against the risks, and a course of action is decided upon, don't wait. Go ahead in faith and trust God to bring the desired results you seek. One wrote, "Work as if it all depends on you. Trust God knowing it all depends on Him."

Life doesn't have guarantees, so be prepared. At the same time, don't despair. Just because there are uncertainties, doesn't mean we should sit still and do nothing. With faith in God and optimism directing us to the best possible outcome, go ahead and take action. Be realistic knowing that there will be obstacles between the start and finish of a project. Keep your eye on the goal and the reason for wanting to reach it.

We know, and have experienced, the goodness of God. He allows us to make choices with our free-will. Yet, He is the One who has the final say in any matter. So, in prayer, express openly before Him your scriptural objective and the reason for it. Let the word of God dwell in you richly. Let it be in your heart by faith and follow divine guidelines. Stay within the parameters of God's revealed wisdom – and go forward in faith. Know that you are hiding nothing from our Lord, nor are you holding back that trust in Him that makes life meaningful and successful.

To the farmer, "Casting bread on the waters" would be like going out and sowing seed at the right place at the right time. He sows in the most opportune time and in the most opportune way that is suited to the seed he is planting. If he sows rice on the water, it will settle into the place it should be and will bring what is intended from it. If it is sown in

moisture laden soil, the same will happen. He acts on the principles of sowing and reaping, trusting that the results will be what he seeks. A business man would go ahead and ship his products, in faith trusting that the risks taken in sending the product way across the water will bring the benefits and profits he seeks at a later time. The Gospel preacher and Sunday School teacher will make sure the good seed of the word of God is sown in such a way in the minds of the hearers, that in a future day it will bear fruit in salvation. We understanding the word of God and what He wants from them, so spiritual truth will enable them to grow. When you sow seed in the hearing of listeners, children or adults, it is not wasted effort.

Invest in more than one thing. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. There are a lot of things that can happen in this uncertain life, so diversity is valuable in the long run, even though some things may seem to be more profitable than others. Invest time and effort into more than one person in the spiritual work in which you are engaged. The response from a child or a teenager will be different from that of an adult. Accept the benefits from efforts put forth as returns on the investment you make in people. It may be a word of thanks, or a note of appreciation. Hopefully it will make good changes in a person's life.

There are few things we can predict, but we know that when the time is right, rain will fall from the clouds. We can't know exactly which way a tree will fall on its own, but we can predict that when it falls, that's where it will stay. So, we shouldn't hold back because we are not sure of the exact outcome of a matter. Just be confident that when we sow, we will reap. When we work, there will be results. Accidents do happen and results are not guaranteed about most things, so in a way, we are at their mercy. We do not have to have the fear of accidents or circumstances rule our live and work. If we wait for everything to be perfect before going forward, we would never go forward. If we want the answers before the action, we will be totally inactive. If we want to be in a perfect assembly, we will never be in one. If we want everyone to be as perfect as we think we are, we would all be dead and buried before that happens. If we want everything to be perfectly in order before we step ahead for God, we will never be used by God. Perfect conditions don't exist in an imperfect world.

If we focus on things that might go wrong, we will fall into the trap of the "paralysis of analysis." Common sense and a commitment to work is what we can do. We can't predict or guarantee results. God knows how things work because He made them. He knows and controls the ways of the wind. He has arranged by His infinite wisdom how the bone structure of a baby forms with each one coordinated and in harmony whether the bone is large or small. The hip bone grows differently than the small bones in the ear, but each one forms in the way and time frame God has arranged. So, we are able to do what we can in the best way we can, and then we leave the results with God.

Our responsibility is to put our "hand to the plow" and not look back. By just going to work for the Lord in way He opens before us, is the best we can do. We are not out of place when we love life and light, and enjoy them to the fullest extent we can as children of God. But we can't presume to hold on to everything with a tight fist, because the days of darkness are coming. Our life span is not guaranteed as to its length. Take a long view, and look ahead into eternity. Look at life and light from God's perspective, and then go ahead and enjoy every day, or a whole lot of days, even though we are aging.

Take advantage of every opportunity while you are young, but keep a balance in your life. God is going to judge everything – good and bad. Use what God has given in whatever way you can use them best, and use them to fulfill the will of God for you during your life here. That will give direction to your life, and you will be able to see things as God sees them. Be a realistic person. Anything in your life that is evil, banish it. Don't focus on the negative and bad things. That will blind you to what is good and right. Live knowing that life is short, and at the same time remember we will live with our Lord and serve Him forever. Don't focus on death and old age. Commit yourself to living a godly life now and right through your adult years.

Ecclesiastes 11:1. *"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days."*

MY BREAD.

The bread is mine, it is in my hand to keep or to else to use.

The seed gives life when dead.

Do I want a lot or a little bread?

*The choice is mine, to throw it on waters widely spread,
Or eat it now – what to do with a handful of precious seed?*

The waters are there, not far but close at hand, within my reach.

The seed looks good,

I can make it food –

Now or later, the choice is mine to satisfy what I perceive a need –

Will I plant – or grind and eat the seed?

If I throw it now out upon the waters dark and moving away from me;

Will I see it again?

Will it sprout and make grain?

I know the answer to be from the Life-Source – great increase.

But will I cast it and wait for many days?

My hunger now is not so great that life flees away from me.

It's just the flavor,

The taste I savor.

If the seed I cast away on water to germinate and multiply its kind;

Am I ready and willing to give what's mine?

My hand holds tight, the feel of grain I like, it's smooth and full;

Its texture is pleasing;

Its scent is teasing

My palate; and taste buds bring water flowing on my waiting tongue.

Will I hold it or let it be gone?

Wisdom arises from where it was hidden behind want and avarice.

"Cast it..."

"Spread it..."

Upon the waters far and wide; that coming from the falling tide

The seed brings bread so multiplied that you'll be fed and full and others too.

And others too, from seed sown from the open hand of grace

Will taste and know,

And feed and grow,

From bread made theirs by life from God's own source but through my hand,

The seed has gone, and returned some thirty, sixty and one hundred -fold.

"O God of all grace, and Supplier of every good and perfect gift: this bread in my hand that I feed on each day. Must I; should I, pass it on to the waters of the souls of others or is this something from Thy great supply for my soul to pass back to Thee as an act of worship? I await a reply that is unmistakable: in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Ecclesiastes 12

REMEMBER NOW

Every child and all old people, plus everyone in between, needs God in their lives. There are the same possibilities in a believing child to be filled with love for God as there is for old people. When you are young, you have the advantage of time to mature in the right ways of the Lord if you choose to. Learn early in life how to bless, not destroy. Use your powers of intellect and strength, and ability to build up not tear down. When old age comes, there are limitations that hinder and slow us down. If we are not careful, we can spend much of our time and thoughts focusing on ourselves rather than on things that count for eternity. Wasted years can't be recovered, but it is also foolish for older people to think about what could have been rather than what is. Our comfort and satisfaction will come when we can help young people to "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Diminishing change comes to older people that is just the opposite of growth into maturity of the young.

The Teacher called upon those who are young to remember their Creator and think ahead as he wrote in poetic form a description of old age. It is likely that what he wrote about was the encroachment of old age on body parts that become weak and worn out as old age imposes itself on us. The patterns of life we set when we are young will be solid in old age. The beauty of life around us fades somewhat as our physical assets fail. So, we can't hear the beautiful sounds as well as we once did. We can't see the glories around us or participate in life's activities as we did in the past. Clouds come over our spirit as the joy of living is dulled and we sorrow when so many we knew pass on. Our enthusiasm for living slows down. Our hands (keepers) get weak and our knees (strong) get feeble and bent over. Our teeth (grinders) come out and don't do the work they once did to help our digestion. Eyes (watchers) have shades come over them and our ears (doors) don't hear very well. Our hair goes white and strength goes as we draw near to our "long home."

Even though our silver cord bends over more and the golden bowl of our brain isn't as sharp as it once was and the heart and blood-flow aren't as effective as when we were younger, what we found our joy in when we were young, increases. The years of loving God and experiencing His grace and mercy, all replay in our minds the goodness of God in the past. It is easy to remember well "all the way by which He led me." By contrast, things that just happened are quickly forgotten because they don't seem as important.

A life lived without God can result in a lonely, hopeless and bitter old age. When life is centered on God from youth, and has been fulfilling through the years because of our faith in Him, it is satisfying in old age. The "days of trouble" will not be overwhelming even if they bring sickness and body limitations and we are brought to a physical standstill. All the list of things that diminish will not cause grief to one who remembered their Creator in the days of their youth.

To start out life right with faith in God, and daily living to please Him through the years, makes old age a joy as we go back down "memory lane" and think about the "goodness and mercy" that has followed us all the days of our life. One can sit in a rocking chair right next to death's door and find joy in God because we have lived a lifetime in that joy. Old people can't serve God in the same way as they did in the past because their faculties don't work right. When our physical assets have broken down, we are still able to serve our Lord in our "bodies and spirits" what are His – particularly in our spirit. It is with that we spend our days in worship and remembrance.

When a person is young, life can be very exciting because there are so many new things opening up before us. But a potential problem for Christian young people is if they seek their excitement in pleasure instead of things that count for eternity. Strength that is used for things that really last, give the greatest pleasure and the kind of excitement that remains with us for a lifetime. Even old people get excited when they hear of souls being saved and young people committed to living for the Lord. The patterns of living we set up when we are young for good or bad, polarize as we get older and solidify when we get into old age. It is a matter of utmost importance for young people to "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Seek God now, and commit yourself to living for Him by faith through your whole life.

Poetry as in chapter eleven and the first eight verses of chapter twelve, create an impression that affects our emotions, more than giving precise information to establish doctrine in our minds. The teacher must have been older when he wrote this poem regarding the attitude and feelings of one coming to the end of life. He looked at the difficulties of aging as a storm that obscures the light. It was like a house that is deteriorating and getting beyond repair. He sensed a gradual decay and decline that couldn't be stopped. Normal physical faculties gradually fail, white hair, physical weakness and normal interest in the things of life around went away as he looked to his "long home."

We must put God first early in life or else we will have lived our whole life with nothing to show for it that will last beyond the grave. At death the body goes back to the dust from which it was created. The spirit that makes mankind aware of God returns to God. The decisions we make in life will not be changed after we die. The soul that has been saved goes to be with Christ when it is "absent from the body and present with the Lord." The soul that has rejected God's grace and is not saved, will be in hell. The summation of life if a person thinks the grave is the end of our existence is again repeated as, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." How sad a meaningless life is when it is summed up as, "Meaningless, meaningless, all is meaningless."

Much of life and all that it holds is beyond our understanding, but God does know it all. There is very little, if anything over which we have more than a very limited control. Much of what happened to us in the past remains a mystery when it comes to the "whys and wherefores" of life. But there is no reason for us to despair over the "what ifs" of life when we know the Lord personally. Payday hasn't come yet. The Shepherd of our life is God Himself. From Him comes the wisdom, the care and the direction of life for us. We just need to listen to and heed the words He gives that pricks us like a goad and points us in the right direction. By applying what we read and learn from the Bible, our lives and future are directed by Him. We don't dare add to them or take away from them. Nor should we pay a whole lot of attention to all the strange ideas people put in books.

We can enjoy life from youth to old age. We can have real meaning to our existence here when we fear God and do what He says. He knows everything I think and do. So, it is my wisdom to seek to be like my Lord here, and trust Him without question or demanding answers for my eternal future. I can confidently leave that to Him. Any effort to live a meaningful life without God is futile. God needs to come first when I am young, and all through life. He has provided all I need to live so I can please Him. He who knows and judges both good and bad in life will be the One who judges all of my life's activities, attitudes and motives.

Ecclesiastes 12:1. *"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;"*

REMEMBER NOW.

Everything is fresh and new, bright and exciting, seeming to glow awaiting discovery.

*The colors are brilliant, the sounds are clear as a bell, the contrasts are great.
Vibrant in living color, each living day is filled with anticipation and bright hopes.
Life pulses with a fullness ready to burst on inquiring minds.
Emotions jump from low to high in a moment and fill each one to the top.
The absolute splendor of an undiscovered day lies each moment beyond the covers.*

*The bloom of health and vigor undiminished by time and age and use is yours.
Use each sight of beauty, sound of life, vision of the unknown as an opportunity.
Advantages of fresh, fallow, fertilized soil of the mind awaits the seed of life.
Friends, family, fellowship of kindred spirits opens vistas before young eyes and minds.
Schools of learning inside and out of buildings give opportunities to discover things unknown.
The mind, emotions and the will of youth comes once and then is gone forever.*

*So learn from age and experience and God, things not able to be seen with eyes.
They can be heard and read in pages turned and studied with the mind uncluttered.
Truths from ages past - new and changeless and right that give foundation
To a life unfilled unless they are claimed by you, the young. And when they're yours;
The far and distant questions of the mind and soul are reached. Not just with the senses;
But now with the soul and spirit that flies unfettered to the farthest reaches of the universe.*

*These all together: body, soul and spirit will make the young one all complete;
When each one lives with vigor, joy and fullness of each everlasting part of you.
The Creator-God has made us to not settle with a part fulfilled and others left undone.
The body fits just what He wanted us to be on earth in preparation for eternal day.
The soul - our mind, emotions and our will when all combined to work for God;
Gives meaning to the life we live when our spirit soars, and we know Him as Lord.*

*Remember now, that you are no mistake or strange aberration that happened by mistake or mans' fickle choice.
You have been made by God, for Him and your joys and hopes and reasons are all complete in Him alone.
Remember now, Him – your God and Creator and gratitude to Him for life will flow.
Remember now, that you are His by choice – His choice; and all the questions yet;
Will be answered by Him alone, who knows the questions and answers before they are expressed.
"Remember now thy Creator," and be wise beyond your years and peers who still are wondering and waiting.*

"O God of the young, who knows each mood swing and each desire: I want to intercede for these young people who have been listening to me these past days. Give them a sense of who You are, so they will recognize how important they are. Some are not happy because they are different in life-style from others around. Some are confused with truth and the practices they see in other professing Christians. I don't know what else to say to them right now. Please keep them safe for Your own glory. Amen."