

A SERMON SERIES ON ECCLESIASTES

*you'll be
dead soon*

SO WHAT MATTERS MOST?

Overview Letter

We live in a world that constantly tells us to chase more, achieve more, and worry more. But what if there is a better way to live? What if God has something more for us than toiling after things 'under the sun'? Together as a church, we will explore these questions as we journey through the book of Ecclesiastes, where the ancient Teacher offers us the radical perspective that most of what we're chasing is meaningless, like grasping at the wind.

But here's the good news--there is something that matters!

When we shift our focus from life 'under the sun' to what's 'above the sun,' everything changes. This series isn't about adding more to your already full plate; it's about helping you take a deep breath, enjoy the life God has given you right now, and discover what truly matters.

Over these four weeks, we'll confront the reality of our mortality not to depress us, but to liberate us. We'll explore how to navigate life's seasons with wisdom rather than chasing an impossible balance. We'll learn that happiness isn't found in perfect circumstances but in the daily habits of gratitude and presence. And we'll discover the beautiful simplicity of the conclusion: **obey God and enjoy your life.**

As we go on this journey as a church, we created this resource to help you engage on a personal level. Gather with a few friends and process the Discussion Questions. Follow the Reading Plan and talk to God about what He is teaching you. Print this resource and bring it with you to church each week to write notes.

If you've been feeling like you're running on a treadmill, exhausted by the pursuit of things that don't satisfy, this series is for you. Come discover what your story will be and learn to live for what truly lasts.

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

-- Ecclesiastes 7:2

Who Was Solomon?

Solomon is known as the wisest and wealthiest man who ever lived. A son of King David, Solomon was the third king of Israel. Early in his reign, God came to Solomon in a dream and said to him, *'Ask for whatever you want me to give you'* (1 Kings 3:5). Rather than ask for power or wealth, Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the kingdom well. God was so pleased with him that, along with wisdom, He granted Solomon wealth and honor.

However, this gift of wisdom from God did not mean Solomon did not make mistakes. While becoming famous as the builder of the temple and the palace, he became infamous as a leader who excessively taxed and worked his people. Visitors from foreign lands came to admire the wise king, while his own people were gradually alienated from him.

The book of Ecclesiastes likely records his last reflections on life--his learnings from a life spent in vain pursuit of meaning apart from God. In the end, he concludes that fulfillment is only found in relationship with and obedience to God and finding joy in the life He has given us. *(Learn more about Solomon in this article from the Bible Project.)*

What Is Wisdom Literature?

Ecclesiastes is Wisdom Literature, which means it was written to help readers cope with the practical and philosophical issues of life. Books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are, in essence, the biblical answer to the search for truths to live by. *(Learn more about Wisdom Literature in the Bible: Bible Project Wisdom Series)*

Key Themes in Ecclesiastes

THEME	EXPLANATION
Searching	Solomon went searching for happiness in everything the world had to offer. By the world's standard, he had achieved every measure of success--yet found himself always yearning for more. Life without God is futile; fulfillment comes only from the God who gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy.
Emptiness	Nothing the world offers can satisfy the deepest longings of our souls. Solomon pursued wealth, pleasure, and success, and still felt empty. Only a relationship with the eternal God can fill that void. Fear God, serve others--this is the cure.
Work	What if our work was never intended to make us successful, but simply to make us faithful and generous? Work done with the wrong attitude leaves us empty; work accepted as an assignment from God can be seen as a gift.

Death	What if it is death that shows us how we are meant to live? Our mortality is inevitable, and human works are ultimately futile--but God and His Word last forever. If we live for God and obey His Word, we experience a Hope that goes beyond death.
Wisdom	Knowledge and education have their limits, but true wisdom comes from God. To increase in wisdom means growing in the knowledge, fear, and love of God, resting in the truth and promises of His Word.

Watch The Bible Project overview of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Gratitude Practice

The book of Ecclesiastes teaches us that those who really know how to enjoy life are the ones who take life each day as a gift from God, thanking him for it and serving Him in it (2:24-26). God wants us to enjoy life. When we have the proper view of God, we discover that real pleasure is found not in what we accumulate, but in enjoying whatever we have as gifts from God.

As we study Ecclesiastes together, let's establish a daily habit of expressing gratitude to God, through prayer or through journaling. Begin a daily practice of gratitude and watch how God transforms your life!

DAILY PROMPTS

One thing I'm looking forward to today is...

A comfort I have access to this morning...

Something I saw this morning that made me pause or smile...

A person I'm thankful to wake up knowing...

One thing I didn't have a year ago that I have now...

A small task I'm grateful I get to do today...

A truth I want to carry with me into the day...

Something I'm choosing to let go of this morning...

A reason I'm proud of myself for getting up today...

Bible Reading Plan

The Bible is a complete work in which many writings combine to tell one unified story. As we read through the book of Ecclesiastes, we will alternate with other passages of Scripture that will help you discover how the whole Bible works together. As you read, take notice of how the themes of the other passages correlate to what you are learning in Ecclesiastes.

WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
Day 1 Ecclesiastes 1	Day 1 Ecclesiastes 4	Day 1 Ecclesiastes 7	Day 1 Ecclesiastes 10; Proverbs 26:27
Day 2 Psalm 39; Matthew 11:28-30	Day 2 Proverbs 27:17; 1 Corinthians 12:18-21	Day 2 Matthew 9:13; James 1:19-21	Day 2 Ecclesiastes 11
Day 3 Ecclesiastes 2	Day 3 Ecclesiastes 5	Day 3 Ecclesiastes 8	Day 3 Psalm 94:17-19; Colossians 3:21-25
Day 4 John 15:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58	Day 4 Ecclesiastes 6	Day 4 Proverbs 10:7; 2 Corinthians 13:4	Day 4 Ecclesiastes 12
Day 5 Ecclesiastes 3; 1 Corinthians 2:9-19	Day 5 Luke 12:22-34; 1 Timothy 6:6-7	Day 5 Ecclesiastes 9	Day 5 Proverbs 22:17-21; John 11:25-26

WEEK
1

What Will Your Story Be?

REFLECTION

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

-- Ecclesiastes 7:2

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

1. The Reality Check

Read Ecclesiastes 2:16

- How might regularly remembering that 'you'll be dead soon' actually be freeing rather than depressing?
- What 'perishable pursuits' (career success, social media following, material possessions) are you tempted to build your life on?

2. The Gift Perspective

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

- What's the difference between viewing life as a 'gift' versus viewing it as something to 'gain' or achieve?
- What would change in your daily routine if you truly believed each day is a gift from God?

3. Writing Your Story

Read Ecclesiastes 3:14

- If you were to die tomorrow, what would people say your life was about? Is that the story you want to tell?
- What's one decision you need to make differently this week if you're living with the end in mind?

PRAYER

God, thank You for the gift of this day and the gift of life itself. Help us to number our days and gain hearts of wisdom. Free us from the tyranny of chasing things that don't matter. Teach us to live with the end in mind so that we might truly live well today. Give us the courage to build our lives on You alone--the only foundation that will last. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Additional Resource: Bible Project: Eternal Life

WEEK
2

What Time Is It?

REFLECTION

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

-- Ecclesiastes 3:1

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

1. Recognizing Your Season

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

- Which of the 'times' in this passage resonates most with where you are right now?
- Why do we resist the natural rhythm of seasons instead of embracing them?

2. Wisdom Over Balance

Read Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

- What's the difference between asking 'How do I find balance?' versus 'What does wisdom require of me in this season?'
- What might you need to let go of (or pick up) to be wise in your current season?

3. What Does This Season Require?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:14-15

- If you could honestly assess your current season, what is it requiring of you that you've been resisting?
- How can you be faithful in your current season, rather than wishing you were in a different one?

PRAYER

Father, help us stop fighting the season we're in and instead ask for wisdom to live it well. Give us courage to release what doesn't belong to this time and faith to embrace what does. Teach us to trust Your timing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Additional Resource: Bible Project: Justice

WEEK
3

Good Living

REFLECTION

"A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God."

-- Ecclesiastes 2:24

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

1. Mystery, Not Problem

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11

- What's the difference between treating life as 'a problem to be solved' versus 'a mystery to be lived'?
- How does trying to control and solve everything rob us of joy? What would change if you embraced the mystery instead of demanding answers?

2. Habits Over Happenings

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

- Happiness is less about the happenings in your life and more about the habits you build in your mind. What mental habits (worry, comparison, regret) are stealing your joy?
- How could practicing gratitude and living in the moment change your experience of your current circumstances?

3. Life Is Now

Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

- Where is your mind spending most of its time--replaying the past, worrying about the future, or experiencing the present?
- What simple gift or joy is right in front of you today that you've been missing because you're mentally somewhere else?
- What's one practice that could help you live more fully in the now?

PRAYER

Father, forgive us for treating life as a problem to solve instead of a gift to receive. Help us build habits of gratitude and presence. Teach us to stop living in the regrets of yesterday or the anxieties of tomorrow. Open our eyes to see Your goodness right here, right now. Give us the grace to enjoy the life You've given us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Additional Resource: Bible Project: The Good Life -- Psalm 1

WEEK
4

The Conclusion

REFLECTION

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

-- Ecclesiastes 12:13

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

1. The Simple Answer

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

- After twelve chapters exploring the meaninglessness of life 'under the sun,' the Teacher's conclusion is surprisingly simple: obey God and enjoy your life. Why do we make living well so much more complicated than this?
- What would change in your life if you truly believed faithfulness to God is enough?

2. Obedience and Enjoyment

Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-19

- How do obedience and enjoyment go together? Why do we often see them as opposites (duty vs. pleasure)?
- What does it look like practically to both 'do what God says' AND 'enjoy your life' in your current circumstances?

3. Living Above the Sun

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

- Faithfulness is the key to living for what's 'above the sun.' What 'under the sun' pursuit (career achievement, comfort, control, approval) do you need to stop chasing?
- What does faithfulness to God look like for you in this next season, and what is He asking you to do?

PRAYER

God, thank You for the clarity of Your Word. After all our questions and wrestling, You give us a simple answer: fear You and keep Your commands. Help us stop overcomplicating what You've made clear. Give us the faith to obey You and the freedom to enjoy the life You've given us. Teach us to live for what's above the sun. May our lives be marked by simple faithfulness and deep joy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Additional Resource: Bible Project: The Book of Job