



STUDY GUIDE

April 27
-
July 27

A hand holding a smartphone displaying a map application with green areas and red location pins. The background is a blurred outdoor scene.

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES

NAVIGATING WORLDVIEWS

A STUDY

on the Book of Ecclesiastes:

April 27 - July 27

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Beijing, China

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Written by TJ Johnson

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STUDY GUIDE

April 27

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11



THE SEARCH FOR
SIGNIFICANCE

Sermon Series Overview

This coming Sunday, we begin a new series on the book of Ecclesiastes. To prepare our hearts for this journey together, I'd like to share some exegetical insights.

TYPE OF LITERATURE

The Old Testament is divided into three categories: Law (Torah), Writings (Ketuvim), and Prophets (Nevi'im). As my Old Testament professor often reminded us, the Law is the foundation of the Old Testament, revealing God's nature, character, and commands. The Writings exalt the Law (think Psalm 1) and call us to delight in it. The Prophets summon sinners to return to the Law and obey it.

Ecclesiastes belongs to the Writings (Ketuvim)—not the Law. This distinction is crucial. Just as you wouldn't read a poem the same way you'd read a scientific journal; we must approach Ecclesiastes with sensitivity to its literary diversity:

- Prose (Ecclesiastes 4:1–3)
- Poetry (A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.)
- Proverbs (Better is a handful with quietness than two handfuls with toil and a striving after wind.)
- Reflections (I said to myself...)
- Instruction (Guard your steps...)
- Anecdotes (I have seen this example of wisdom...)
- Metaphors (Life is a vapor)
- Allegory (Ecclesiastes 12:3–4)

We must be very careful to first note what type of literature the particular passage belongs to and then rightly interpret it according to its genre. Hopefully, this will become more apparent as the elders preach through the book.

THE END OF THE MATTER

Ecclesiastes is a book best interpreted backwards. Its climactic conclusion—"Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13)—answers the recurring refrain, "All is vanity." Without this lens, the book's message can easily be misunderstood.

I encourage you to read Ecclesiastes in one sitting (it takes less than an hour). Resist the urge to pause and analyze; instead, focus on the big picture and how the themes

interconnect. This will enrich your engagement with each weekly passage.

THE CENTRAL FIGURE

God—and ultimately Christ—is central to Ecclesiastes.

- God is the Creator (12:1) who ordains all things (3:11, 11:5).
- He gives life (12:7), wisdom (2:26), and joy (5:19),
- God made "the day of prosperity" as well as "the day of adversity" (7:14).
- God gives us "wealth and possessions," and the ability "to enjoy them" and to "find enjoyment [even] in toil" (5:19; 6:2).
- God tests people (3:18), "has no pleasure in fools" (5:4), and can become angry (5:6).
- God holds people accountable for their actions and "will judge the righteous and the wicked" (3:16; 11:9; 12:14).
- God is to be remembered (12:1), feared (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12), and obeyed (12:13).

According to Luke 24, Ecclesiastes is a book about Jesus. Only in Christ do we find meaning in life's paradoxes—pleasure and pain, wisdom and sorrow, life and death. He is the interpretive key to Ecclesiastes, the one who makes our "toil under the sun" "new" (Rev. 21:5).

KEY WORDS

Vanity:

The Hebrew word **הֶבֶל** (hevel), often translated as "vanity," "meaninglessness," or "futility," is central to Ecclesiastes. Hevel literally means "vapor" or "breath," something that is fleeting, insubstantial, and impossible to grasp. The writer of Ecclesiastes uses hevel to describe the transient, elusive nature of human life and efforts, declaring that "all is hevel" (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

Ecclesiastes begins and ends (1:2; 12:8) with "vanities of vanities" (hevel havelim). Hebrew words are intensified by repeating the word rather than using an adverb of degree (such as very). It is a reminder that without Christ, human striving is hevel; in Him, even toil gains eternal significance (1 Cor. 15:58).

Preacher:

The Hebrew word **קֹהֵלֶת** (Qoheleth) is the title given to the author of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes.

"The words of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (Eccl. 1:1).

The root word means "to assemble, gather, or call together" It specifically speaks of assembling a PEOPLE. This is why the book is titled "Ecclesiastes," from the Greek word *ekklēsia*, "church". Perhaps an appropriate translation would be "pastor." Ecclesiastes is Pastor Solomon gathering the Assembly of God's people (which he literally did during the dedication of the temple) to shepherd them on how to properly live life. For us today, it is a pastoral book gently navigating the congregation through deadly worldviews and ways of living and ultimately pointing us to Christ. It is precisely for this reason that I am excited to read through this book with you.

Assembling with You,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Sermon Series Overview

April 27, 2025	Ecclesiastes 1:1-11	The Search for Significance
May 4, 2025	Ecclesiastes 1:12-18; 2:12-17	Education
May 11, 2025	Ecclesiastes 2:1-11	Pleasure
May 18, 2025	Ecclesiastes 2:4-11, 18-26	Career
May 25, 2025	Ecclesiastes 3:1-4:6	Utilitarianism
June 1, 2025	Ecclesiastes 4:7-16	Self :Believe in Yourself
June 8, 2025	Ecclesiastes 5-6	Affluence
June 15, 2025	Ecclesiastes 7	Pragmatism
June 22, 2025	Ecclesiastes 8	Government
June 29, 2025	Ecclesiastes 9	Dealing with Death
July 13, 2025	Ecclesiastes 10	Anarchy/Apathy
July 20, 2025	Ecclesiastes 11	Perfectionism
July 27, 2025	Ecclesiastes 12	The Fear of God

The Search for Significance

This Sunday, in homes across the City, City Church will gather to pray, praise, and respond to the preaching of the Word. It just so happens that our first Sunday in homes rather than at the 10th floor of GM Hotel, coincides with a new sermon series in the book of Ecclesiastes.

This week we will consider "The Search for Significance." What is life about? How is success determined? What should I anchor all my hope in? What a relevant question for us to consider this week. In the end, we will find that success isn't found in church licenses, non-transient meeting places, or even large congregational gatherings. Significance, success, LIFE is found in Fearing God and Keeping His commandment. Everything else... EVERYTHING ELSE...while good is not primary, nor necessary.

Ecclesiastes 1:10 reminds us,
Is there a thing of which it is said,
"See, this is new"?
It has been already
in the ages before us.

Meeting in a home this Sunday may feel NEW for you, but it isn't new. The early church met in homes. Being told we couldn't gather for worship this past week may have felt NEW for you, but it isn't new. The church under Diocletian were told the same thing. This may feel like a NEW era for BICF, but if we step back and think about the long line of church history, there is nothing new under the sun and our sovereign God is ruling over all and working all things out for His glory and His church's good.

I look forward to worshipping with you in Spirit this week.

In Him,
Pastor TJ Johnson

Colossians 2:5

"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ."

The Search for Significance

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

All Is Vanity

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

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

3 What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?

4 A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.

5 The sun rises, and the sun goes down,
and hastens to the place where it rises.

6 The wind blows to the south
and goes around to the north;
around and around goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.

7 All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they flow again.

8 All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.

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

10 Is there a thing of which it is said,
“See, this is new”?

It has been already
in the ages before us.

11 There is no remembrance of former things,
nor will there be any remembrance
of later things yet to be
among those who come after.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. "The Preacher" asks about life's purpose (1:1-4, 8). What answers do people today typically give? How would you answer, and why?
2. Many believe Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes. If this is true, how is he uniquely qualified to test life's pursuits for meaning?
3. Solomon calls life "hevel" (vanity/meaningless/chasing after the wind). Where do you see this emptiness in modern culture? How have you felt it personally? How does Jesus redeem life's "hevel"? (See Romans 8:20–21; 1 Peter 1:18; 1 Corinthians 15:17 where futility = hevel)
4. Nature's cycles (sun, wind, streams) mirror our unfulfilling/unproductive routines. What repetitive parts of life do you struggle with and why? How might God repurpose them?
5. The phrase "under the sun" occurs 29 times in this book. What does it mean? How does that compare to Revelation 21:23–24; 22:5?
6. How do Matthew 6:19–20 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 reframe Ecclesiastes' hopelessness about our deeds and life being forgotten?
7. Solomon's despair about labor points to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:58). Where do you need to shift from "This is meaningless" to "This matters to God"?
8. How do you see non-Christians expressing despair or misplaced purpose? How can you offer them hope through the gospel?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

May 4

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18;
2:12-17

EDUCATION

Education

We live in a city that deeply values education. Beijing has over 90 universities, some of which are among the best in the world. In these universities, students pursue all kinds of degrees, and many spend sleepless nights in labs, working tirelessly on research to solve the world's biggest problems. For many, their worldview is built on the belief that success in education defines life. But here's the question:

Is education enough to define our lives?

This week, we'll learn from Solomon, the wisest person to ever live. He pursued education and wisdom in his search for life's meaning, but his conclusion was,

"All is vanity and a striving after wind."

We'll explore how education is a valuable gift from God—but it also has its limits. Education can't solve every problem in the world. It can't save us from death. And it can't be the foundation of our identity.

Most importantly, we'll see that as believers, we've been given a wisdom greater than any degree—the wisdom to know Christ, our salvation. Only when Christ is the Lord of our lives can we have the right view of education.

Elder Bemnet W. Mersha

Education

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18; 2:12-17

The Vanity of Wisdom

12 I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted.

16 I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."
17 And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.

18 For in much wisdom is much vexation,
and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18; 2:12-17

The Vanity of Living Wisely

12 So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. 13 Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. 14 The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. 15 Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. 16 For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! 17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

1. Education is a good gift.
2. Education has limitations:
 - Education can not solve every problem of the world.
 - Education can not stop death.
 - Education can not be the foundation of your identity.
3. The Greater wisdom of all time.
4. Right view of Education.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. Where have you seen education/knowledge fail to deliver the satisfaction you (or someone you know) expected?
2. In Beijing (and the Expat community), how does society idolize education? What are the most common ways Christians overemphasize education/knowledge?
3. What sources of knowledge and wisdom speak into your daily life the most (BE HONEST)? In what ways do they regularly shape how you think and live? Are there any changes you need to make in your life?
4. What problems in your field (academia, work, etc.) feel 'crooked' or unsolvable (Ecclesiastes 1:15)? How does the gospel speak to these?
5. How can you use your education this week to serve others and glorify God?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

May 11

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11



PLEASURE

Pleasure

As we continue our journey through Ecclesiastes, this week we'll examine a widely embraced worldview: Hedonism. Hedonism teaches that pleasure is the highest good—that happiness is humanity's ultimate purpose, and life should be spent maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.

Solomon bookends this section with his resounding verdict on Hedonism: "Vanity!" Yet we must not overreact to his conclusion, for later he affirms that pleasure itself is a good gift from God. In Ecclesiastes, we discover that Hedonism is half-true—as the Westminster Shorter Catechism declares: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and ENJOY Him forever."

But here's the distinction: Happiness is not the chief end—God is. Happiness is the fruit (the reward) for those who come to Christ to taste and see that He is good (Psalm 34:8). To chase happiness apart from God is futile—vanity, a chasing after the wind. Augustine compares the worship of happiness rather than the giver of happiness to A hungry man who licks a picture of bread, rather than asking for real bread from someone who has it.

May we never be found "licking pictures of bread" when we could instead taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Enjoying God with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Pleasure

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

The Vanity of Self-Indulgence

2 I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. 2 I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” 3 I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. 4 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. 11 Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

1. The Folly of Pleasure: Why Pleasure Can't Satisfy.
 - A. Pleasure isn't always possible.
 - B. Pleasure isn't always permanent.
 - C. Pleasure isn't always beneficial
2. The Misuse of Pleasure: How We Misunderstand Pleasure.
 - A. Deny all pleasure.
 - B. Overindulge pleasure.
3. The Pursuit of Pleasure: How We Experiment with Pleasure.
 - A. Entertainment.
 - B. Stimulants.
 - C. Accomplishments.
 - D. Arts.
 - E. Sensuality.
 - F. Fill in the Blank.

Sermon Notes



All Is Vanity

While pleasure is a good gift from God, it is not ultimate, therefore we must look past the objects of pleasure to find the source of pleasure, Jesus Himself.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define hedonism, and what are some examples of it in today's culture?
2. The sermon lists three reasons why Solomon concludes that hedonism is vanity. What were they? Do you find them convincing, or do you think he missed something?
3. When have you experienced the emptiness of worldly pleasures firsthand?
4. Why do some Christians feel guilty when experiencing pleasure, and how does Scripture teach against ascetism?
5. When have you (or someone you know) experienced a good gift from God that started to control you instead of pointing you to Him, and how do we overcome the overindulgence of pleasure?
6. List the various ways Solomon attempted to experience pleasure and share with the group which one tempts you the most and why.
7. Share a time when an ordinary pleasure (a meal, a sunset, a moment of laughter) unexpectedly reminded you of God's goodness?
8. What practical steps can help us receive and enjoy God's gifts with proper thankfulness? (1 Timothy 4:4-5; 6:17)



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

May 18

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 2:4-11,
18-26



CAREER

Career

Ecclesiastes 2:4-11

4 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. 11 Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-26

The Vanity of Toil

18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, 19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. 20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? 26 For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. Biblically speaking, what does our current culture get wrong about work?
2. In what ways do you struggle to balance God's call to work diligently with His command to rest? What does your struggle reveal about what you truly value?
3. What does it mean and what might it look like to 'work unto the Lord' this week (Col. 3:23)?
4. What frustrations (vanity) are you currently feeling in your work and how might the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:56-58 (not in vain) speak into your current frustrations?
5. What is one simple way you can "find enjoyment in your toil" this week (Ecc. 2:24-26)?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



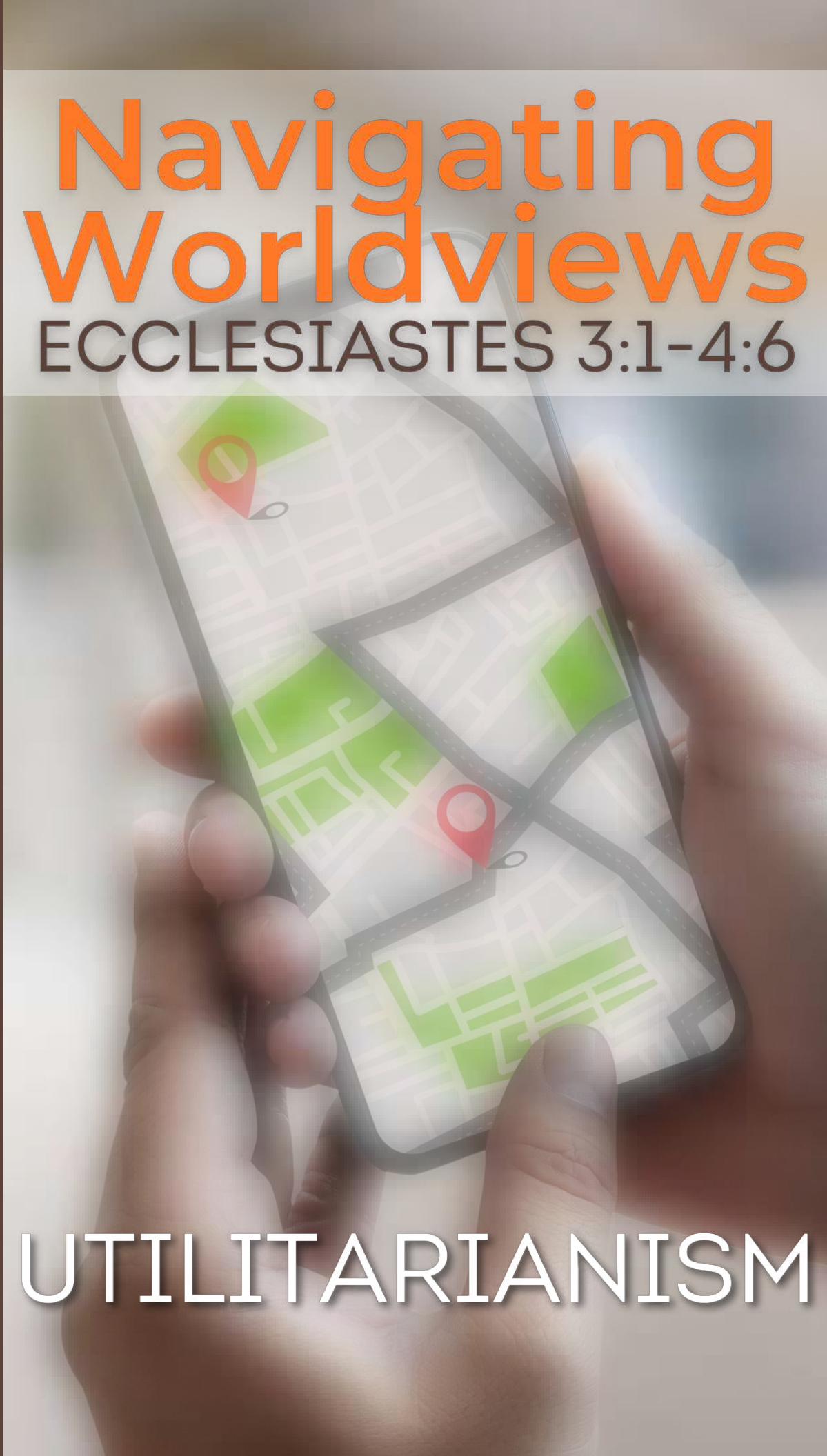
STUDY GUIDE

May 25

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-4:6

UTILITARIANISM



Utilitarianism

In a world driven by sensory pleasure, instant gratification, and the constant pursuit of material gain, how do we as Christians measure what truly matters?

This week's sermon explores the secular theory of utilitarianism, the belief that the best action is the one that produces the greatest good for the greatest number and places it in conflict with the timeless wisdom of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3 and 6. Together, we'll examine Solomon's reflections on time, purpose, life's ups and downs, and the limits of human understanding. When chasing happiness falls short, what does it truly mean to live well within God's divine timing and order for our lives?

Elder Raphael Moffett

Pastoral Reflections on Ecclesiastes 3

In The Lord of the Rings, when Frodo learns that Sauron, the Dark Lord, is rising again—and that the burden of destroying the Ring has fallen to him—he laments to Gandalf:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time."

"So do I," Gandalf replies, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

This exchange echoes the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 3. We don't control when we live, only how we live. We don't control what we face, only how we face it. Life "under heaven" unfolds according to God's sovereign design. He ordains every season: times for laughter and weeping, war and peace, seeking and losing.

If given the choice, most of us would pick birth over death, dancing over mourning, gathering over scattering. Yet the Preacher of Ecclesiastes reminds us that both joy and sorrow are necessary. Life is a tapestry of seasons—each to be embraced, each an opportunity to "do good" (Ecclesiastes 3:12) as we walk with God.

I wonder if you see how practical this is to us as a church. Is this a season to "cast away stones" (scattering into home gatherings) or to "gather stones" (pursuing everyone meeting in the ballroom by any means necessary)? In this season of not being able to meet on the tenth floor, what are the things we are called to plant, and what are the things we are called to pluck? Which ministries or routines is it time to break down, and which ministries or routines is it time to build up? Do we as a church believe that there is a season and a time for EVERY MATTER (including our present disruption) under heaven?

May He grant us discernment as we seek His will, trusting that He reigns over every season and that through Christ's death and resurrection, He makes "everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Let's remember the words of Gandalf, The times are not for us to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

Redeeming the time with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Utilitarianism

Ecclesiastes 3

A Time for Everything

1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

2 a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

6 a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

7 a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

8 a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

The God-Given Task

9 What gain has the worker from his toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. 12 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.

14 I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. 15 That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.

Utilitarianism

From Dust to Dust

16 Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. 17 I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. 18 I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. 19 For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. 21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? 22 So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

Ecclesiastes 4:1-6

Evil Under the Sun

1 Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. 2 And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. 3 But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

4 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity[a] and a striving after wind.

5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. Reflecting on Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, which ‘time’ or season in your life has been most difficult to accept (e.g., waiting, loss, change)? Why was it hard, and how did you see God at work in it?"
2. The poem in verses 1–8 lists contrasting seasons (e.g., weeping/laughing, tearing down/building up). Pick a few pairs and share how both experiences can be ‘beautiful in their time’ (v. 11)? Where have you seen this paradox in your own life?"
3. Verse 11 says God ‘set eternity in our hearts,’ and verse 17 reminds us He will judge all things. How does this eternal perspective (see also Romans 8:18) reshape how we face temporary seasons of pain or injustice?
4. How is God’s sovereignty revealed in this chapter and how does that help you trust His timing—even when your ‘lot in life’ (Ecclesiastes 3:22) feels uncertain or unfair?
5. What are some ways you have found to be joyful and do good even in hard seasons of life (v. 12, Ephesians 5:16)?
6. In what ways did Jesus fully embrace “a time for everything under heaven”? For example:
 - a. A time to be born (Galatians 4:4-5), a time to die (John 13:1)
 - b. A time to plant (John 12:24), a time to pluck up (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) (see also Matthew 13:24–30)
 - c. ETC



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

June 1

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 4:1-16

SELF: BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF

Self: Believe in Yourself

In a world that tells us to "believe in yourself," Ecclesiastes 4 reveals the vanity of self-sufficient isolation. True meaning is found not in individualism but in Christ-centered community—where we find comfort, companionship, and strength. Yet even the best human relationships have limits, pointing us to our ultimate need for the ultimate friend who never fails.

Befriending with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Self: Believe in Yourself

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

Evil Under the Sun

1 Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. 2 And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. 3 But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

4 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind

7 Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 8 one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

13 Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. 14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. 15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. 16 There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

1. Reasons for Isolation

- A. The World is Selfish. Ecclesiastes 4:1
- B. Humans are Envious. Ecclesiastes 4:1
- C. Life is Busy. Ecclesiastes 4:7-8
- D. Humans are Arrogant. Ecclesiastes 4:10
- E. Unfriendliness Intentionally Isolates. Ecclesiastes 4:13

2. Rewards of Community

- A. Comfort in Sad Times. Ecclesiastes 4:1
- B. Companionship in Good Times. Ecclesiastes 4:7-8
- C. Capital Gain in Working Times. Ecclesiastes 4:9
- D. Assistance in Hard Times. Ecclesiastes 4:10-11
- E. Safety in Dangerous Times. Ecclesiastes 4:12

3. Conclusion: Limits of Community. Ecclesiastes 4:16

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Life under the sun is meaningful in community not isolation, so seek out Godly friendships.

Discussion Questions

1. As a group, brainstorm modern causes of isolation (e.g., busyness, technology, cultural barriers). Which ones do you personally struggle with the most? Share practical ways to overcome these obstacles in your own life.
2. How does the New Testament model and encourage deep friendships? (Think of examples like Jesus and His disciples, Paul and Timothy, or the “one another” commands.) Which biblical example of friendship stands out to you, and why?
3. From Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, what are the key rewards of friendship? When have you personally experienced these benefits in your own relationships?
4. What are the most common “attacks” Christians should be on the look out for and how can deep Christ-centered friendships practically “prevail against” those attacks?
5. In what ways have you found Jesus to be the ultimate friend and how should His friendship shape the way we pursue relationships with others?
6. What is one practical step you can take this week to deepen a friendship or strengthen fellowship within the church?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

June 8

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 5-6



AFFLUENCE

Affluence

In Ecclesiastes 5–6, we see that the endless pursuit of more only leads to emptiness. Materialistic greed promises much but never delivers. And yet, so often we believe the lie that “a little more” will make me happy. A bigger apartment in a better district, a bit more disposable income, that new iPhone or laptop or camera, nicer clothes, more steak dinners, more holidays, more travels, faster internet, better VPNs, a better school, a more prestigious university—fill in the blank!

The Billionaire Andrew Carnegie was once asked, “How much is enough?” He replied, “A little more.” If you find yourself saying, “If only I had a little more...”—let me remind you of Solomon’s conclusion on the matter: Ecclesiastes 5:10 “Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!”

Solomon’s solution to greed was contentment. Contentment is trusting that God, not gold, is my greatest good. The good life isn’t found in more stuff—it’s found in more God. The point of these two chapters isn’t that money and possessions are bad... but that they aren’t ultimate.

A key verse for keeping a right perspective on money and possessions is Ecclesiastes 5:18–19:

"Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God."

Accept (be content) and enjoy what God has given you, rather than striving for what He has not given you. The New Testament teaches this same truth in Philippians 4:11–13 (which we often misapply to achieving personal success):

"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Learning contentment with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Affluence

Ecclesiastes 5

Fear God

1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. 2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. 3 For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

4 When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

The Vanity of Wealth and Honor

8 If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. 9 But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. 11 When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? 12 Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

13 There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, 14 and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. 15 As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. 16 This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? 17 Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

Affluence

18 Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. 19 Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. 20 For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

Ecclesiastes 6

1 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: 2 a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil. 3 If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. 4 For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. 5 Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. 6 Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

7 All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. 8 For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

10 Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. 11 The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? 12 For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

1. Greed brings Oppression, Contentment brings Generosity (Ecclesiastes 5:8-9; 6:10).
2. Greed brings Emptiness, Contentment brings Enjoyment (Ecclesiastes 5:10; 6:7-9).
3. Greed brings Problems, Contentment brings Peace (Ecclesiastes 5:11-12; 6:1-3).
4. Greed is Temporal, Contentment is Eternal (Ecclesiastes 5:13-17; 6:5-6).

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

The good life doesn't come from "a little more" but rather from a heart that has learned to trust God and contentedly enjoy the gifts we have been given.

Discussion Questions

1. Where do you feel the most pressure from culture to chase 'a little more'? How can we actively reject that mindset as followers of Christ?
2. Where are you most tempted to oppress others in order to maximize your wealth (time, money, status, possessions, etc) and in what ways are you seeking to be generous with what God has given you?
3. Give some examples of how materialism cannot fully satisfy us (maybe from your life or a celebrity or from scripture, etc) and then compare that to the promise that God can satisfy us (Psalm 107:9, John 6:35, Revelation 7:16-17).
4. Share a time when chasing 'more' created problems (stress, anxiety, worry, busyness, etc) rather than joy. How might contentment have changed the outcome?"
5. Give some examples of how money and possessions don't last, and then discuss how one can "store up treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6)
6. What's one financial habit you sense God asking you to change (e.g., giving more, saving more, spending less on xyz, etc) to reflect contentment in Him?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

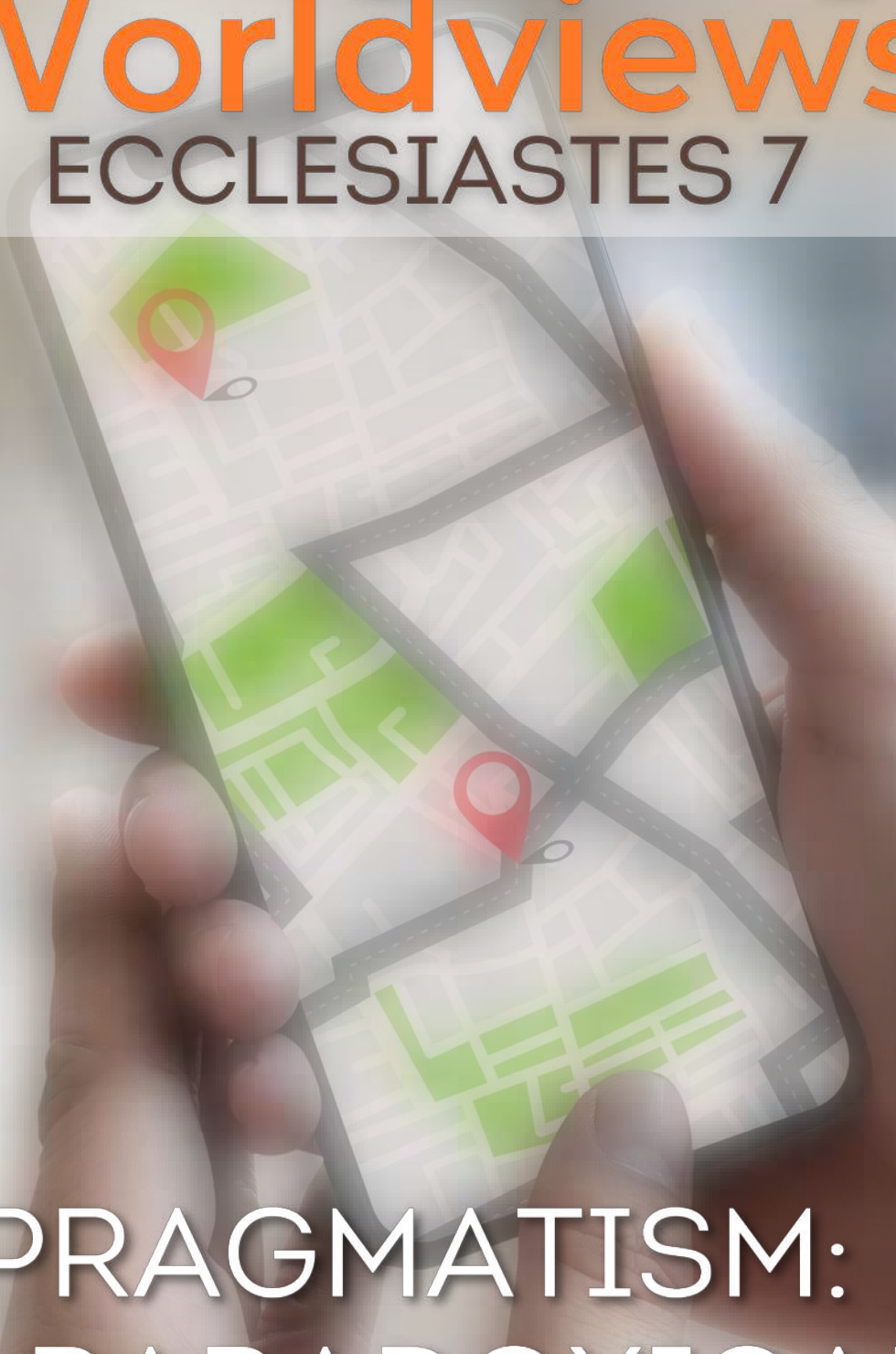


STUDY GUIDE

June 15

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 7



PRAGMATISM:
A PARADOXICAL
WORLDVIEW

Pragmatism: A Paradoxical Worldview

In Ecclesiastes 7, the Teacher continues to wrestle with the tension of how to understand who we are and how to relate to the world around us. As each of his reflections yields an unsatisfactory result, he realizes that God made humans in righteousness, but we all have sinned and gone after schemes (Eccl. 7:20, 29). Humans have effectively opted for the pragmatic way of life that “works best” for them instead of the righteous life intended by God.

Pragmatism rules the day. It masquerades as wisdom, often even for the Christian. Since true wisdom is so elusive (Eccl. 7:23), we often settle for that which works, the schemes of man that might prolong our life or effectuate the outcome we desire. It seems like a reasonable alternative. How are we to assess the options before us and choose wisely rather than simply pragmatically? Ecclesiastes 7 and the rest of God’s revelation in Scripture helps us answer this question one step at a time. Join us on Sunday as we take one of those steps together.

Pastor Zach Mazrim

Pragmatism: A Paradoxical Worldview

Ecclesiastes 7

The Contrast of Wisdom and Folly

- 1 A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth.
- 2 It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for this is the end of all mankind,
and the living will lay it to heart.
- 3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.
- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
- 5 It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.
- 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of the fools;
this also is vanity.
- 7 Surely oppression drives the wise into madness,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- 8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,
and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
- 9 Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,
for anger lodges in the heart of fools.
- 10 Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.
- 11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
an advantage to those who see the sun.
- 12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.
- 13 Consider the work of God:
54 who can make straight what he has made crooked?

Pragmatism: A Paradoxical Worldview

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

15 In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. 16 Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

19 Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

21 Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. 22 Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

23 All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. 24 That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

25 I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness. 26 And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. 27 Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— 28 which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. 29 See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Sermon Outline:

1. Wisdom and pragmatism overlap (v. 5, 8, 9, 14, 17, 21-22).
2. Wisdom and pragmatism are not the same (v. 1-4, 6, 8, 10).
3. Wisdom is preferable to pragmatism when they diverge (v. 7, 11-12, 15-19).
4. The pragmatic/wise paradox is self-inflicted and inescapable (v. 13, 20, 23-25, 29).

Considerations:

1. Incentives of Pleasure and Pain.
2. Return on Investment.
3. Function over Form.

Personal Reflection Questions Included in the Sermon

- What am I continuing mainly because it has brought pleasure?
- What have I ceased mainly because it has brought pain?

- What results motivate my investment of time and resources?
- Does my pros & cons list include Godly considerations or mainly selfish ones?

- What have I been personally compromising in the process?
- Who have I been affecting by valuing the outcome higher than the procedure?
- What character shaping elements of the process might I be missing out on?
- Can I, in good conscience, ask God to bless what I am doing and the way I am doing it?



All Is Vanity

Pragmatism proves to be an inadequate guide for life because humans have gone in search of ungodly schemes.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is the wisest person you know and what is it about them that conveys wisdom?
2. Pragmatism, often seen as the same as wisdom, is a worldview that evaluates theories or beliefs based on their practical utility. Where and how do you most often see pragmatism celebrated in the world today?
3. Ecclesiastes 7 makes clear that in many cases, the wise and Godly response to something is also the pragmatic one. Give two examples of this from your own experiences.
4. On the other hand, there are statements in the text that seem to contradict “conventional wisdom,” like mourning and frustration being better than feasting and laughter. What other Christian teachings conflict with what the world expects or values and what does this teach us about how we should live our lives?
5. In what situations are you tempted to choose the most pragmatic solution in your life, work, or family while potentially neglecting more God-honoring options? What is the next step to reassess some of your instinctive responses and habits?
6. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:10. Discuss Paul’s commentary on God’s wisdom and how it does not always align with our valuation of pragmatism. For example:
 - 1:20 - How has God made foolish the wisdom of the world (pragmatism)?
 - 1:27 - In what ways has God chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise?
 - 2:1-5 - Why did Paul choose weakness and humility instead of the more pragmatic and effective method of persuasive argumentation?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

June 22

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 8

GOVERNMENT

Government

Living in Beijing daily reminds us of the hope that people sometimes place on government. As a Christian expat, living in the capital of China, home to 178 foreign embassies, regularly reading differing opinions about different governmental systems, I am forced to reckon with Ecclesiastes 8 central truth, governments are good (v. 2 Keep the king's command) but they are not ultimate (v. 9 man had power over man to his hurt).

As Christians, when navigating visa policies, trade wars, immigration restrictions, and diplomatic tensions, we filter it all through a Biblical framework. One that says, God, not government is ultimate. No matter what passport we hold, what governmental system we live under, what policy gets passed, "I know (in the end) that it will be well with those who fear God. For God is the King of Kings who reigns forever and ever.

Submitting to His Lordship with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Government

Ecclesiastes 8

1 Who is like the wise?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom makes his face shine,
and the hardness of his face is changed.

2 I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. 3 Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. 4 For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" 5 Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. 6 For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. 7 For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? 8 No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. 9 All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

Those Who Fear God Will Do Well

10 Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. 11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

Man Cannot Know God's Ways

14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. 15 And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

Government

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. As expats in a country with different political structures, how do we balance respect for local laws without compromising our allegiance to Christ? (What specific areas are hardest to navigate)
2. Give examples when people put their hope in a governmental system and were disappointed. Has this ever happened to you?
3. Where do you see delayed justice in society today, and as Christians, how do we respond to these injustices?
4. How has God's sovereignty helped you in an unjust world?
5. Where have you been most disappointed with government and as expats, how can we cultivate joy and gratitude even when governments disappoint?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

June 29

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 9



DEALING
WITH DEATH

Dealing with Death

As Emily Dickinson once wrote, “Because I could not stop for Death, it kindly stopped for me.” This truth applies to all of us—our friends, coworkers, closest loved ones, and the billions we’ll never meet. It’s a bit overwhelming at times to consider that we are all marching toward one final destiny...death. It is the great equalizer in life—visiting presidents and paupers alike (Ecclesiastes 9:2).

In a city like Beijing, death is often pushed out of sight. Funeral homes sit beyond the city limits; graveyards are tucked away from public view. Funeral attendance is a surprisingly rare occurrence for a city of 20 million. This is why Ecclesiastes is so vital. The preacher refuses to let death stay hidden—out of sight, out of mind. The text shocks us awake and compels us to consider death and cling to the One who conquered the grave.

Dealing with death with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Dealing with Death

Ecclesiastes 9

Death Comes to All

1 But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. 2 It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. 4 But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

Enjoy Life with the One You Love

7 Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

8 Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Wisdom Better Than Folly

11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. 12 For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

Dealing with Death

13 I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. 14 There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. 15 But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

17 The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. What are the different beliefs of life after death, and how does that compare to the Bible's analysis of death?
2. What does death teach us about our own sin and God's righteousness?
3. How can Christians use death as a motivator for life now?
4. What questions or fears do you personally have about death?
5. How does the Bible use death as a motivation for salvation/evangelism, and how can we put that into practice this week?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

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Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

July 13

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 10



NIHILISM:
WHO CARES!

Nihilism: Who Cares!

Ecclesiastes 10 exposes the danger of "a little folly"—those small, thoughtless choices that slowly steer us toward a life of empty chaos. From reckless words to careless habits, this chapter warns: Everything matters. Whether in actions, relationships, or secret thoughts, we're called to live with purpose, not nihilistic drift. In the end we find, Christ redeems our folly, sharpens our dull axes, and turns our wandering into worship.

Making life matter with you,

Pastor TJ Johnson

Nihilism: Who Cares!

Ecclesiastes 10

- 1 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench;
so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
- 2 A wise man's heart inclines him to the right,
but a fool's heart to the left.
- 3 Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense,
and he says to everyone that he is a fool.
- 4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place,
for calmness[a] will lay great offenses to rest.
- 5 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler:
6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. 7 I have seen slaves on horses,
and princes walking on the ground like slaves.
- 8 He who digs a pit will fall into it,
and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.
- 9 He who quarries stones is hurt by them,
and he who splits logs is endangered by them.
- 10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge,
he must use more strength,
but wisdom helps one to succeed.
- 11 If the serpent bites before it is charmed,
there is no advantage to the charmer.
- 12 The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor,[c]
but the lips of a fool consume him.
- 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness,
and the end of his talk is evil madness.
- 14 A fool multiplies words,
though no man knows what is to be,
and who can tell him what will be after him?
- 15 The toil of a fool wearies him,
for he does not know the way to the city.

Nihilism: Who Cares!

16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child,
and your princes feast in the morning!

17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility,
and your princes feast at the proper time,
for strength, and not for drunkenness!

18 Through sloth the roof sinks in,
and through indolence the house leaks.

19 Bread is made for laughter,
and wine gladdens life,
and money answers everything.

20 Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king,
nor in your bedroom curse the rich,
for a bird of the air will carry your voice,
or some winged creature tell the matter.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1.

2.

3.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. What "little follies" (habits, attitudes, or neglect) do you see in your own life or culture that subtly pull people away from wisdom?
2. Share a time when you or someone else faced unintended consequences because of careless actions. How could wisdom have changed the outcome?
3. Where do you see reckless speech causing harm in your workplace, friendships, or online? How can we speak with more intention?
4. In what areas of life (career, relationships, faith) do you feel tempted to drift without purpose? What practical steps can keep us anchored?
5. What sinful thought patterns (e.g., resentment, envy, complacency) do you need to confront and how?
6. What does this chapter/theme teach us about Christ?



All Is Vanity

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

July 20

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 11



CONTROL

Control

Church Family,

As we approach the end of Ecclesiastes the author begins to drive home a sobering reality: While here on this earth we are guaranteed life, death, and judgment. Each phase of that reality is clouded with uncertainties and things we cannot know.

Where should we focus our efforts and energies without knowing everything? Should we pursue what God's call us to, even though previous attempts have failed? So much of our daily lives are filled with the reminder that we don't have full control, we cannot predict the future, and we don't know all of God's purposes. And yet, the wisdom of and example of our Lord calls us to be diligent in our labors, to be generous, to look ahead, and to mortify our flesh.

You're called this Lord's Day to hear from God's Word in Ecclesiastes 11. I hope you will join.

Sincerely,

Grant Jones

Fear God

Ecclesiastes 11

Cast your bread upon the waters,

for you will find it after many days.

² Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,

for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.

³ If the clouds are full of rain,

they empty themselves on the earth,

and if a tree falls to the south or to the north,

in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow,

and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

⁵ As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

⁶ In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

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

⁸ So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

1. Perseverance through the _____. V. 1-6
2. Rejoicing in the _____ (Life, Death, and Judgement). V. 7-9
3. Putting Away _____ & _____. V. 10

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. Read v. 6: Are there any areas you've laid aside your duty, because you can't control the outcomes or because you think you "know" the outcome?
2. Read v. 1 - 5: How has your observation of nature, or lack thereof, influenced your faith and understanding of life?
3. Read v. 10: What are practical ways we can strive to put away evil from our flesh in a society that generally gives us more free-time and often idolizes entertainment?
4. Read v. 7 - 8 & v. 10): How can we push back against worldliness in how we raise our children? How can we gradually train them about not just Life, but also the other 2 less popular subjects of Death and Judgment?
5. Read v. 9-10: How should the command to enjoy life while remembering the coming judgment shape your mindset as you interact with your parents, teachers (Church & School), and your friends? How should the mindset of a Young Christian be different from many of your peers who may not believe in Christ as Savior and rather believe that all things end in death?



All Is Vanity

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Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



STUDY GUIDE

July 27

Navigating Worldviews

ECCLESIASTES 12



FEAR GOD

Fear God

For the past 12 weeks we have been poked, prodded, and goaded by the words of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. The things that we treasure in this life - education, career, creativity, affluence, power, pleasure, relationships, knowledge, etc. - he has systematically dismantled and pronounced as “Meaningless: a chasing after the wind.”

This leaves us with the question: is there anything meaningful in life? At the very end of the book we read these words:

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

The fear of God is the key to the book of Ecclesiastes. The fear of God allows us to excel in education, career and relationships without idolizing them. The fear of God allows us to enjoy affluence and pleasure without stumbling into sinful excess. The fear of God allows us to wisely steward our power and knowledge.

But what is the fear God? Doesn't the Bible also say that there is no fear in love? This week we will look not only at Ecclesiastes 12, but all of Scripture to get a picture of what the Fear of God is and how to cultivate it in our lives.

Walking in the fear of the Lord with you,

-Pastor Ben

Fear God

Ecclesiastes 12

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; ² before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, ³ in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, ⁴ and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— ⁵ they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— ⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, ⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸ Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

Fear God and Keep His Commandments

⁹ Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.



All Is Vanity

Sermon Outline

Fill out the points as you listen to the sermon.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Applications



All Is Vanity

Discussion Questions

1. How does chapter 12:9-11 describe Ecclesiastes, in what ways does that mirror the rest of the Bible (give verses), and how should such a view of scripture impact our relationship with it?
2. As a group, define the Fear of the Lord, using scripture to explain what it is and what it is not, then give some practical examples of what fearing God looks like in your own life.
3. Locate every reference to “fear of God” in Ecclesiastes. What patterns emerge? What unique insight does each passage offer?
4. According to Ecclesiastes, why should we fear God, and what blessings accompany it? What tangible marks distinguish genuine fear of God?
5. How would you counsel someone who believed the fear of the Lord is only an Old Testament concept?
6. How can we grow in our fear of God?

Series Conclusion:

7. How has your understanding of Ecclesiastes changed over the past 13 weeks?
8. What practical encouragements have you received from Ecclesiastes?
9. What further questions do you have about the book?



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