



# **Ecclesiastes**

***The Meaning(less) Life***

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Acts 8:30b- 31a

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## Intro to Ecclesiastes | Bad Dates & Dead Monkeys

Hello friends, welcome to Through the Word - and the book of Ecclesiastes. Today - an introduction. Now I'm gonna be honest with you - the first time I saw the title *Ecclesiastes* - the name alone was enough to make me fall asleep in my church pew. But it's actually an amazing book! So I came up with my own title for it: *Bad Dates, Dead Monkeys, and the Epic Search for the Meaning of Life*. I'll explain the dates and monkeys later. It's the search that really matters.

Actually, title aside - this is one of *the* great philosophical works of all time. Plus it's super relatable. It just gets real about life on this little planet of ours. Which I appreciate. I *want* something real - especially considering the subject. So what *is* the meaning of life anyway?

Well, you might be surprised to find out that the answer is found right here in Ecclesiastes. In fact, Solomon opens with the answer. At verse 1:

**“The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:**

**“Meaningless! Meaningless!”**

**says the Teacher.**

**“Utterly meaningless!**

**Everything is meaningless.”” Ecclesiastes 1:1- 2).**

Wait, hold up. Rewind the tape. That can't be the answer. That can't be in the *Bible*. But there it is, “Everything is *meaningless*.” Other translations say *vanity* or *futility*. The Hebrew word is *hebel*. It is used to describe something that's *like a vapor* or *breath* - something fleeting - here today and gone in a blink. Like soap bubbles.

And that's the word that Solomon uses - to describe life. Well, at least the answer wasn't 42. Now before you rip the page out of your Bible - give the man a chance to explain. We read the answer first, but the question comes in verse 3. The *key* is in the question:

**“What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?”** (Ecclesiastes 1:3).

Two phrases here are *essential* to making sense of this whole book - and to making sense of life:

*“What do people gain”* and *“under the sun.”*

The question at its core is simple: *what do you gain from life?* What do you get? When it's over - what do you keep that you didn't start with?

Remember that word - gain - it's gonna be important.

The second phrase, however, is the real key to unlocking Ecclesiastes.

“What is gained... under the sun?” Solomon repeats that phrase throughout the book. He is *not* looking at life in the eternal sense. Heaven and Hell do not enter into his calculations here. Now, Solomon does not say here - that there is no Heaven or Hell, but for the sake of his ponderings - and for our sakes, so that we might see life for what it is - Ecclesiastes examines life *under the sun*. As if - hypothetically speaking - this earth and this life - is all there is. You might say Solomon is asking the classic question, *“What if this is as good as it gets?”*

Now understanding that - we also see that Ecclesiastes does not deliver a complete message on its own. We need the *rest* of the Bible to give us the eternal perspective on life. But this is an essential *what if*. For those who have lost that eternal perspective - caught up with the here and now of everything under the sun - Ecclesiastes delivers a sobering reality check about life here on earth.

After all, Solomon is the perfect example of a man who knew God but lost sight of Him. His eyes got fixed on this side of eternity. Solomon was the king of Israel at the height of its power. God granted him wisdom beyond anything man had known before him. But take heed - there is no man so foolish as the one who has wisdom - but fails to live by it. And that was

Solomon. Solomon knew God - but he let wine and women - pleasure and power - distract him. He didn't so much walk away from God - he just drifted. His eyes and his heart got caught up in other things - and he allowed them to take the lead.

Have you ever talked to someone - who seems to know a lot about God - even knows more Bible than you do - but something is missing? They can quote verses and talk about church - but none of it seems... personal. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon refers to God, but it is *never* personal. Not once does he use God's *name* or call God *Father*. At this point, Solomon is stuck - under the sun - and God is just that Creator somewhere out there. Hey - I get it. I remember when that was my perspective - and sometimes I can feel myself drifting back that way.

Solomon is the ultimate case- study of Jesus' words in Matthew 16:

**“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it... .”** (Matthew 16:25).

In other words, try to give your own life meaning - and you'll come up empty. *Meaningless*.

So where does Jesus fit into all this? Well, there's a second half to that verse:

**“...whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever *loses* their life for (Jesus) will find it.”** (Matthew 16:25).

Jesus also said,

**“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have *life*, and have it to the *ful*l”** (John 10:10).

Jesus showed up - to give you a life *with meaning* - with real weight and substance.

See the Bible has an antonym for the word *hebel*. Remember - meaningless, vanity... soap bubbles. The opposite word is *glory*. The Hebrew word for glory is *chabad*. It literally means heavy or *weighty*, having substance that lasts. So vanity and glory are opposites. Jesus invites us to life with purpose – “from glory to greater glory.” But sometimes we lose sight of that - and we drift - get caught up in all the stuff that seems so important in this life. That’s what Solomon did. Got caught up in all that the world has to offer - all the stuff - that in the moment - seemed so... glorious. But those glory days - they’ll pass you by. And pretty soon, you’ll find yourself sittin’ around - talking bout the old times...” - or just... singing old Springsteen songs.

But Solomon’s glory days - were pretty good! I mean - the guy had it all. So - did it satisfy? Was it enough? Solomon says - it may feel like glory for a moment, but in the end it’s all chasing the wind.

So why does he try so hard? What is it that drives *us* to want more? In chapter 3, Solomon says this:

**“What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”** (Ecclesiastes 3:9-11).

So there is something that drives us - a longing in our hearts - for something eternal - for *glory*. We are wired to desire meaning - to want something that lasts. You and I - are stuck with a God- shaped hole, and nothing under the sun - will fill the void.

So if Ecclesiastes *doesn’t* have the answers, why read it? Why is it even in the Bible? Bad dates... dead monkeys. They’re not in the book - it’s an analogy. Do you remember the scene in Indiana Jones where Dr. Jones and Sallah are talking - and Indiana is tossing a piece of fruit in his hand. When he tosses it up to eat it - Sallah grabs the fruit out of the air - and

points to a *dead monkey* next to the fruit bowl. And he says... "*Bad dates.*" My point is - you are surrounded by dead monkeys. Not literal monkeys - people who are living for all the fruit the world has to offer - and it's all empty. Look around. Look at the people who *have* what you're chasing. Are the rich people happy? Are the famous content? And when the game is over and everything goes back in the box - what was gained? So join me won't you. Let Solomon expose the world - to see it as it is - in all it's beauty - and vanity. Along the way, we'll also get some profound and practical insights on life. Just great wisdom. You can read ahead today, and I'll meet you back here in chapter 1.

# Ecclesiastes 1 | Chasing the Wind

Welcome back to Ecclesiastes. Today, we dig in. Chapter 1, verse 1:

**“The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:**

**“Meaningless! Meaningless!”**

**says the Teacher.**

**“Utterly meaningless!**

**Everything is meaningless.”**

**What do people gain from all their labors**

**at which they toil under the sun?”** (Ecclesiastes 1:1- 3).

Solomon wants to know - when it's all said and done, what do we have to show for it? What did we *gain*?

My dad told me the story - of when I was 8 years old. Late one night, I laid awake in bed - as always - thinking. I crawled out of bed, and followed the light coming from my Dad's office. I peaked in, spotted my Dad, then climbed up in his lap and asked him, plain and simple, “*Dad. Why are we here?*” I wasn't the first to ask, and I won't be the last.

Now remember from our intro study that all of Ecclesiastes focuses on life - *under the sun*. That is, heaven and hell are hypothetically out of the picture. Also remember that God enters the perspective here only as a distant Creator - not as a the personal savior and lover of my soul. Not that God *is* distant - but Solomon has drifted away - his eyes caught up with earthly things. And with that perspective, Solomon's answer to it all:  
“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

Now look again at the question in verse 3: “What do people *gain*...” That's a key word in all this. In accounting, gain represents a return on investment. Life is a lot of work - so what do we gain from all our labors? Solomon is looking for something that truly lasts.



After the question, Solomon steps back to see the big picture of life on our little planet. Beginning at verse 4:

**“Generations come and generations go,  
but the earth remains forever.  
The sun rises and the sun sets,  
and hurries back to where it rises.  
The wind blows to the south  
and turns to the north;  
round and round it goes,  
ever returning on its course.  
All streams flow into the sea,  
yet the sea is never full.  
To the place the streams come from,  
there they return again”** (Ecclesiastes 1:4- 7).

Solomon observes - the cycles of life on earth. Sunrise, sunset - and all over again. And the question remains - if everything keeps repeating - what is gained?

Now a little side note here. Hiding in these Bible verses is an accurate description of both wind circuits and the water cycle. They're not full scientific descriptions of course, but they are accurate. Impressive for 1000 BC - considering that no other scientists identified such wind cycles - until Columbus discovered trade winds in 1492, and later George Hadley and then Gustave Coriolis finally described the wind circuits - in the 1800s.

The water cycle is also described here:  
“To the place the streams come from,  
there they return again.”

Again - not a full description - but accurate. And so are other water references in Job and Psalms. The water cycle was not understood until the late 1500s, so in 1000 BC this is pretty impressive.

Okay - back to Solomon's point here. Basically - you and I - come and go - but the world keeps spinning - and the seasons keep coming back around. In verse 8:

**“All things are wearisome,  
more than one can say.  
The eye never has enough of seeing,  
nor the ear its fill of hearing”** (Ecclesiastes 1:8).

Interesting insight there. Just like the sea never fills up, our eyes and ears never seem to get their fill. It's sort of a - metaphor - for life - where nothing satisfies - and nothing is ever enough. One moment you have something - the next moment you want more. Verse 9:

**“What has been will be again,  
what has been done will be done again;  
there is nothing new under the sun.”** (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

And there's that phrase again: under the sun. There's nothing new down here. Now you have to read this one philosophically rather than scientifically. “Look - cell phones are new! Space flight is new. See!” The point is not literal - it's an observation on *life*. Everyone chases the new thing - and suddenly the new is old. I remember when email on my cell phones was the big new thing - *what a time saver!* That got old fast. In the end, the new gets old, the young add years, and life just keeps going through all its cycles. Sunrise, sunset. Verse 11:

**“No one remembers the former generations,  
and even those yet to come  
will not be remembered  
by those who follow them.”** (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

Death plays a prominent role in Solomon's thinking. Under the sun - we all die - and who will remember us? They'll die too. Oh they can tell stories and read history books - but will they truly remember *you*?

So on that happy note, Solomon decides to conduct a test. Verse 12:

**“I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 1:12- 13).

In chapter 2, he will explain:

**“I wanted to see what was good for people to *do* under the heavens during the few days of their lives.”** (Ecclesiastes 2:3).

So this is the test that will span the entire book of Ecclesiastes. It's like a massive high school science project for philosophy class. Imagine proposing this hypothesis to your teacher:

*“Life is meaningless apart from God, and I intend to prove it Professor Pickwick.”*

“Okay then, how will you conduct your test?”

*“I will personally try out all of the things that people chase after in life and I'll write a report on what's good.”*

And Solomon does just that. He begins with his conclusion in verse 13:

**“What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.**

**What is crooked cannot be straightened;  
what is lacking cannot be counted.”** (Ecclesiastes 1:13- 15).

And then the test procedure begins. Now this will come in three parts - only the first is here in chapter 1. Solomon will test out the big three: living for wisdom, living for pleasure, and living for success and stuff. Wisdom, pleasure, stuff - intellectualism, hedonism, and materialism. Which one will satisfy?

First test - wisdom. *Life is a college - so live to learn!* Solomon tries it - in verse 16:

**“I said to myself, “Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.”** (Ecclesiastes 1:16- 17).

Strike one. Solomon dug in - and came up empty. He'll come back to wisdom later for more insight, but here at the front is the executive summary. And Solomon describes his pursuit of knowledge - as *chasing the wind*. We'll find that phrase throughout the book. The wind can fill your sails for a moment - but when it's gone it's gone. And the moment you close your fist to catch it - it slips right through your grasp. Nothing *gained*. Now - that's not to say that wisdom and knowledge are *bad*. They are essential to life! But the pursuit of knowledge for it's own sake - as a means to *fulfillment* - will never satisfy. *That* - is idolatry. Knowledge cannot replace God. Though many have tried.

Stephen Hawking, the famed scientist, wrote in his conclusion to *A Brief History of Time* of his desire to discover a “complete theory” - that one unified theory that brings all of science and philosophy together. Hawking said,

*“If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason - for then we would know the mind of God.”*

Hawking was an atheist by the way. He later explained that he used *God* in the figurative sense. But he was a man of science and reason - and his ultimate goal was to reason his way to answer *everything*. I get it. Human reason is amazing. But like most created things - it makes for a wonderful tool, but a terrible god.

Solomon gave it a try - pursued knowledge for its own sake - and it was chasing the wind. In verse 18:

**“For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”** (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

Now remember that Ecclesiastes is an incomplete message. Apart from God - it's true - wisdom and knowledge come up empty, and nothing is gained. But consider what Paul said in Philippians:

**“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is *gain*”** (Philippians 1:21).

When Jesus enters the picture of life under the sun - suddenly *gain* is possible. Jesus breaks the endless cycles of vanity - and puts the eternal back into life. He overcame the meaninglessness of this world. And so, Paul says,

**“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.”** (Philippians 3:8).

And he says,

**“in *Him* are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”**  
(Colossians 2:3).

Solomon, however, missed it. And so he moves on to the next big thing. Read Ecclesiastes 1, and we'll come back to test out pleasure and success - next time.

## Ecclesiastes 2 | The Pursuit: Wisdom, Pleasure, Success

Ecclesiastes 2 on Through the Word. Back to the lab! We dive back in to Solomon's grand experiment - to answer the question:

"What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?"

We are on step two of Solomon's little science project. Step one was the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Solomon came up empty - chasing the wind. Step two begins in chapter 2, verse 1:

**"I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.'" (Ecclesiastes 2:1).**

So we move from knowledge to pleasure - intellectualism to hedonism. Live for the feeling baby. Like the promising college student who drops out of school - because *what's the point anyway, let's party*.

Solomon's conclusion is back in verse 1:

**"But that also proved to be meaningless. 'Laughter,' I said, 'is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?'" (Ecclesiastes 2:1- 2).**

Strike two. Remember, Solomon is looking for *gain* - something with substance that lasts. And while laughter is fun, when pursued for its own sake - it doesn't satisfy. So Solomon digs in - adding some wine to the mix to spice it up, and he says,

**"Embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom." (Ecclesiastes 2:3).**

But the big party leaves him feeling emptier still.

There's another variable in this mix - that makes Solomon's test all the more pressing: *time*. Back in verse 3:

**"I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives."** (Ecclesiastes 2:3).

Solomon is keenly aware that time is his one resource that never gets replenished, and he wants to use it well.

But with pleasure offering no gain, it's time to move on to test number three: success. Our college drop out picks up - leaves the party - and heads to work. From enjoyment - to employment, from hedonism - to materialism.

Verse 4:

**"I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me."** (Ecclesiastes 2:4- 9).

Wow. Solomon went for the gold ring - and grabbed it. Wealth and success - is an understatement. Solomon's treasure is legendary, his works and accomplishments astounding. He had power, success, wealth, women. Now mind you - God *warned* Solomon against many of these things. But Solomon's word choice here reveals the callous state of his heart:

**"I *acquired* singers, and a harem - the delights of a man's heart."** (Ecclesiastes 2:8).

Solomon shows no human feeling for the women of his harem - just things to be acquired - to delight his own heart. The road to riches is a self-seeking one, where people become pawns - and servants become slaves. To be clear, God does not endorse any of this.

But Solomon is pursuing the world for all it's got. Verse 10:

**“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.”** (Ecclesiastes 2:10).

That's the heart of it. He denied himself nothing - never said no to his flesh. Livin' the dream.

So - did it work?

**“My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.”** (Ecclesiastes 2:10).

Pause there. There was a reward. It felt good - his heart delighted. Success and riches - yeah, they'll fill your sails. But hold on - verse 11:

**“Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”** (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

Strike three. All that wealth - all that success - filled the sails for a moment - then nothing. Chase the wind all you want, you'll never keep it.

Now remember - bad dates and dead monkeys. That's what this is. Sallah is pointing at the monkey for you and telling you, *don't eat the same dates!* Just look around - we're surrounded by dead monkeys. The whole world chases fame and fortune - and we all follow the stories of the rich and famous as they crash and burn again and again. How many *Behind the Music* tragedies do we need to watch to convince us that the fable doesn't work? How many child stars will spiral into addiction and destruction before



we want something better for our own kids? Why on earth do we still want what they have? How many dead monkeys do we need to see? But we fool ourselves, *"I can eat those dates. If I was rich and famous - I'd enjoy it."* When will we learn?

Back in the 60's, youth rejected their parent's work ethic - and pursued new ideas and new philosophy. But as the drug- fueled philosophizing fizzled out, the 70's turned to pure hedonism - disco, drugs, and all the flesh could ask for. Left empty again, the yuppies took hold of the 80's to pursue wealth and success, privilege and power. And the beat goes on, and the cycle goes round and round.

1<sup>st</sup> John sums up the temptations of sin with these three: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - or you could say - pleasure, success, knowledge. And none will ever satisfy.

So with three strikes, Solomon goes back to the first option - and turns his thoughts again to consider wisdom. In verse 13:

**"I saw that wisdom is better than folly,  
just as light is better than darkness."** (Ecclesiastes 2:13).

So wisdom *is* good. Live wisely - it helps! Fourteen:

**"The wise have eyes in their heads,  
while the fool walks in the darkness;  
but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both."**  
(Ecclesiastes 2:14).

In other words - the wise man lives a better life to be sure - but in the *end*...Verse fifteen:

**"Then I said to myself,  
"The fate of the fool will overtake *me* also. What then do I *gain* by  
being wise?"**

**I said to myself, “This too is meaningless.”**

**For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!” (Ecclesiastes 2:15- 16).**

And here - the final variable enters the equation: Death. It all ends. When the game of life is over - all the money and accomplishments - go back in the box. Nothing gained.

Verse 17:

**“So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.” (Ecclesiastes 2:17- 23).**

After his lament, Solomon steps back - and comes up with the best idea left to him. Verse 24:

**“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, for without *him*, who can eat or find enjoyment?” (Ecclesiastes 2:24- 25).**

And with that - Solomon finally scratches the surface of the real answer. Stop grasping the wind to catch it - and just enjoy it as it passes. Leave the pursuit of all that is never enough - and live *contented*.

And notice - when all else comes up empty - Solomon finally turns to the hand of God. "Without *him*" - it's all empty. This world was not created to fill the void, but God's creation is good - and life was meant to be enjoyed. Listen - bad dates are killing the people around you. And I don't mean dinner and a movie. Whatever is tempting you - pleasure, success, lust, power, whatever - just look down the road a piece. Does it work out? Do the monkeys survive?

Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it. Or as Paul said, "To live is Christ, to die is *gain*."

Jim Elliot left his life in America and all that he knew - to reach the Auca Indians in Ecuador with the gospel. He and four companions were killed in the effort. Yet he left us these words:

*"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."*

However, I don't think Solomon gets that just yet, and chapter two ends again - *chasing the wind*.

## Ecclesiastes 3 | Eternity in Our Hearts

Welcome back my friends. Ecclesiastes 3 today - one of my all time favorites. Solomon takes a break from his grand experiment - and stops to reflect. Chapter three is like - well... have you ever tried to clean out a closet - and got lost in a box of old photos? Reelin' in the years over old friends and forgotten dreams. Chapter 3 is like that.

Time just keeps moving forward, and not even 1.21 gigawatts can send you back. I'll admit - I'm an 80s kid, and I love my music. But now it's on the oldies station.

And every once in a while I get nostalgic - caught up in the old pictures. Not so much missing the glory days - as wondering... life moves so fast and so slow all at once - but how does it all fit together?

That's pretty much where Solomon's at - starting in verse 1:

**“There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born - and a time to die,  
a time to plant - and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build”** (Ecclesiastes 3:1- 3).

Solomon goes on - looking again and again - at the *times* of life. It's amazing the variety that comes in one lifetime - and the contrast. The word time here means more than just days and hours - it denotes an *appointed* time. Solomon sees that God designated the times of life - in all their variety. In verse 4:

**“a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance.”** (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

The contrasts of life are so striking: weeping and laughter, mourning and dancing, scattering and gathering, embrace - and refrain, search - and give up, keep - and throw away, tear - and mend, silence - and speaking - everything has its time. Finally in verse 8:

**“a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.”** (Ecclesiastes 3:8).

But then, it's as though Solomon sets down the shoebox of memories - and tries to piece it all together. Sometimes life feels like a puzzle without a boxtop - some pieces go together beautifully, some just don't fit. So with the pictures of life all laid out - verse 9:

**“What do workers *gain* from their toil?”** (Ecclesiastes 3:9).

We're back to the big question. When you've done you're all and look back on everything - what is gained? Verse 10:

**“I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet *no one* can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”** (Ecclesiastes 3:10- 11).

Looking through your box of memories, there is a beauty to every stage - even in the hard times, there is a wonder to life. God made it beautiful - in its time. But then - its time is done. Through all the memories and pictures, we long to give them lasting meaning, but they all fade. But the heart - the heart longs for something that lasts.

But *why*? Why can't our stubborn hearts just be satisfied with the now? I'll tell you why. Verse 11. God - set eternity - in our *hearts*. That longing for glory comes from our Maker. There is a hole in every heart the size of eternity, and nothing on earth - can fill it.

Now Solomon's solution - is *good* - but not quite complete. Remember - the view is limited. But the lesson from it is essential. Verse 12:

**"I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him."**  
(Ecclesiastes 3:12- 14).

And once again wisdom brings us back - to the fear of God. Fear as in respect. Awe. All of our works have a beauty in their time - but only God's work is eternal.

So - there is eternity in our heart - but mortality in our flesh, and that tension - can be frustrating. And why did God do it to us? I found some insight - in Romans 8:

**"For the creation was subjected to frustration..."** (Romans 8:20).

That word frustration is actually the Greek version of vanity - or *meaningless*. So it says - creation was subjected to vanity...

**"...not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it..."** (Romans 8:20).

That means God did it - on purpose - at the curse. Remember Genesis 3? Work by the sweat of your brow - and *toil*? So *why* did God do it? Back in Romans:

**"...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God."**  
(Romans 8:21).

In other words, God cursed mankind - and frustrated our work with toil and vanity - *so that* - we would revere Him - so that we couldn't be satisfied until we seek Him out and find the "freedom and *glory*" of being His child. Catch that? Glory. The opposite of vanity. The only thing that can satisfy the eternity in our hearts. And it happens when we accept God's invitation to be adopted as His child. *And* as we get to work for him - suddenly our work has purpose - because now it's God's work through us. That's why 1st Corinthians says, "your labor in the Lord - is *not in vain*."

But again - Solomon doesn't get all that. He is - far from God. But as he considers God - Solomon thinks through another dilemma of life here on earth: justice.

Back in the box of old photos, as you look over all the pictures - the works of mankind on earth - some are good - but many are evil. So in verse 15:

**"God will call the past to account."** (Romans 3:15).

To make sense of the big picture, there must be a *time* - for judgment - for God to call the past - to *account*. That's good - but what about justice here and now? Verse 16:

**"And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there."** (Romans 3:17).

Justice here on earth - is oftentimes far from just. So Solomon looks forward:

**"I said to myself,  
"God will bring into judgment  
both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a *time* for every  
activity, a time to judge every deed."** (Ecclesiastes 3:17).

God has his own picture box of your life - and every deed will have its time in court.

Then verse 18.

**“I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other.” (Ecclesiastes 3:18- 19).**

Now don't misread this. The Bible clearly tells us that mankind is different from animal - uniquely made in God's image. But here - God tests us - puts us through trial - so we will see - that we still die - same as the animals. And what happens *after* death?

Well - Ecclesiastes doesn't go that far. Remember, the viewpoint is stuck here on Earth. It seems that God wanted to use this book - to let us consider. On those days when we toy with that idea - that maybe this life really is the whole story. Maybe I should just live for this moment and forget eternity.

Look back at all the pictures - something in here's gotta be enough to satisfy. Oh - but the heart longs for more.



## Ecclesiastes 4 | Two Are Better Than One

Hello my Through the Word friends. Ecclesiastes 4 today, and chapter 4 is about people, and their relationship - with each other. Solomon continues his quest to find what's worthwhile in life - but his perspective is still stuck - under the sun. Yet now Solomon changes - from testing - to observation. People- watching, you might say. See if anyone else has this figured out. And with that, Solomon finally considers life - in relation to *others*.

A little observation of my own here to begin - if you're trying to find meaning in your life - only you don't want to include other people in your equations - I'm sorry, but it's not gonna work. We're just not designed that way.

However, thinking of others - does make the equations complicated, and Solomon's observations - are rather sobering. Ecclesiastes 4, verse 1:

**“Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun:**

**I saw the tears of the oppressed— and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors— and they have no comforter.”** (Ecclesiastes 4:1).

Solomon's first observation of mankind's relationship with each other - is oppression. People are cruel. And too often the oppressors have the power.

Even in school I felt that way - like “Who on earth decided that the jerks and mean kids are the cool ones? And why do the rest of us go along with it?” Solomon of course is talking about slavery and oppression - but the principals are similar.

And Solomon sees - no comforter - no one to come alongside and help. Now remember - this is *not* the heart of a believer. This is the observation of someone separated from God - but it is genuine. Oppression is real! But

something changes when the Holy Spirit fills your heart. Suddenly you feel compelled to *do* something about it. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians is all about the God of all comfort - who comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort others with the comfort we received. *That's* the heart of a believer - we make a difference - we help others because God helped us.

Back here in Ecclesiastes - Solomon is just observing - not helping. A little tip from experience - the suffering of the world looks totally different when you actually help. Nonetheless - the oppression still bothers you. And then verse 4:

**“And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”** (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

So now Solomon looks at work, and the whole rat race of striving to get ahead - everyone trying so hard to get one more than the next guy. It's all envy. And as with the rest, it is meaningless, chasing the wind.

So what do you *do* about it? Solomon responds with two proverbs. Verse 5:

**“Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves.”** (Ecclesiastes 4:5).

In other words, it's a fool who gets fed up with the rat race and just drops out. We need work.

He offers another option in verse 6:

**“Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.”** (Ecclesiastes 4:6).

That means - live content. Don't stop working - just stop striving. Stop looking at others with an eye of envy - and look instead to help. Stop wanting what others have - and start sharing what you have.

Then another observation. Verse 7:

**“Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:  
There was a man all alone;  
he had neither son nor brother.  
There was no end to his toil,  
yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I  
toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?”  
This too is meaningless—  
a miserable business!”** (Ecclesiastes 4:7- 8).

Solomon makes the same observation that God did at creation - it is not good for man to be *alone*. The man that Solomon sees is working hard - but alone. So what's it all for? What's the point of toil and sacrifice if it's not for someone else? Sacrifice is an expression of love - and love is only fulfilling when it is directed at *others*. Work finds meaning in friendship and family.

So what does it all add up to? Oppression, envy, loneliness - all three are *self* centered: pushing others down to lift *myself* up; striving out of envy until *I* have more than you; or toiling alone - sacrificing *myself* - with no one else to sacrifice for. It's all *meaningless*. Life lived for *self* is empty.

So Solomon makes a decision. Verse 9:

**“Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their labor:  
If either of them falls down,  
one can help the other up.  
But pity anyone who falls  
and has no one to help them up.  
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.  
But how can one keep warm alone?  
Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord  
of three strands is not quickly broken.”** (Ecclesiastes 9- 12).

Solomon says - I got this much figured out. Life is meant to be lived in community and fellowship - with friends - real friends who help you up, keep you warm, and guard your back. Life for self is cold and lonely - but together - things are different. He uses the picture of a cord - or rope. It's a simple engineering design principle. If you use a single strand of cord to hold a weight - it will break easily. But when you weave several strands together into a rope, the strands actually strengthen each other - the harder you pull, the more they strengthen one another.

The cord of three strands in this verse is sometimes referenced at weddings: husband, wife, and God make three strands in one strong rope. That's awesome - but I think that Solomon had more than just marriage in mind. This is about fellowship - it's about *others*.

One more observation from Solomon here in chapter 4 - this one on politics and the passing on of leadership. Verse 13:

**“Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 4:13).

What Solomon sees - is the cycle of political change - as everyone under the sun “followed the youth, the king’s successor.”  
But in verse 16:

**“...those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”** (Ecclesiastes 4:16).

So the new hope - slowly becomes the old guard. Funny, everyone votes for *change* - until the next election - and a new change - or they miss the good old days. Or a freedom- fighter promises power to the people - but they give him power, he rarely gives it back. So many idealistic promises, so seldom are they kept.

Again - the root of the problem - is self. And again we find that Ecclesiastes needs the rest of the Bible to complete the message.

Right in the midst of our self- centered, rat race, fight- for- power living - Jesus showed up. And he devoted His entire life - to others. And when we catch on, and we pay it forward, life transforms. Philippians is a beautiful book, full of the camaraderie and fulfillment that are found on mission and even in trials - together for God. Philippians 2 says this:

**“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”** (Philippians 2:3- 4).

When I first read that verse, it was like a revolution. What a way to live! That profoundly simple notion - of humility and unity - of life *for* others - changes everything - in friendship, at work, in marriage and family. Parents - imagine if you could get your kids to look at their siblings this way - genuinely putting others above self - life at home would *transform*. Everything. I think that maybe God looks at his kids the same way. That's why He gives us gifts that are not *to* us - they're *through* us. And that's why Philippians reminds us to

**“...have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant”** (Philippians 2:5- 7).

And when we do that - when we serve like Jesus - the world looks a lot different.

A century ago, William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, wanted to send a telegraph to *all* of their precious missionaries around the world. When he arrived at the telegraph office, the cost per letter was simply too high to send even a full sentence to *so many* missionaries. So he thought carefully, and he summed up his entire message in a simple, concise telegram. And every missionary received just one word: *Others*.

## Ecclesiastes 4 | B-Side: Intro to Modern Philosophy

Hello Through the Word. Welcome to Ecclesiastes 4 - the *B-side*. We're gonna do something a little different on this one. Today, I want to give you an introduction - to philosophy - and help you connect the dots between Biblical thinking - and the great philosophies of the world - mostly the stuff you would study in Philosophy 101 anywhere in the West. You know - Socrates, Nietzsche, Existentialism, Postmodernism. All those big names and words that make some people sound smart while the rest of us nod and pretend to follow.

*"Ah yes, the existentialists. Brilliant thinkers. Didn't I see them open for Coldplay?"*

Well, Ecclesiastes is in fact the Bible's philosophy book. This one is for thinkers. And thinking - matters. And here in Ecclesiastes we will find the basic elements of deism, existentialism, nihilism, scientism, and even postmodernism. Seriously. Now you might not know what those mean, but I guarantee they affect your world - and especially the way you see it - and the way that people treat you.

**See, philosophy is the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence.** Sounds deep right? But philosophy isn't so much about deep thoughts as it is about how you see the world - your ideas about why things are the way they are, or how they should be, and how you approach it all.

But it's also very practical. Whether we think about it or not, we all have philosophies about life, family, work, games, fun, people, sports, music, shopping, driving - it's basically how we decide what's important and how to go about it all. My philosophy on parking my car - I'd rather park farther away and walk then circle around and wait. My philosophy on elevators - I take stairs if it's one or two flights, any more and it's vator- time. It's just how I see it.

But all of those daily life philosophies are grounded in a foundation of how we see the essential nature of life and existence. What matters? What role do I play? Who's more important - me or you? What is life and why am I in it? You know - big stuff.

And why do we care about big stuff? What makes us think about it? Ecclesiastes has the answer. Back in chapter 3:

**“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet *no one* can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”** (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

*That's* why we think about it. Eternity is in our hearts. We long for something more.

Still, most of us haven't actually bothered to think through it all - or put it all together. But it still affects us.

The way people see the world - affects how they act - and how they treat you. It affects politics, education, work, relationships, *science*.

And although you might not know the big words in modern philosophy - the ideas come through loud and clear in the media we watch. Postmodern might not mean much to you, but I guarantee you've heard plenty of it in music and movies. And if you don't guard your heart - what goes in you mind, comes out your life.

So - what does it all mean? And what does the Bible say about it? I'm here to help - with a quick review. We're gonna spread this out over five B-sides here in Ecclesiastes, so that you have time to think through and process. I'll explain the basics of theism, deism, existentialism, nihilism, scientism, and postmodernism.

Now - this is neither comprehensive nor authoritative. It's just a simple explanation so that you get the basics and understand why it matters, and

what the Bible says about it all. We'll cover the basics of *western* philosophy - but still leaving a lot out. You're welcome.

And you're gonna feel a little smarter when you're done. Actually I find that philosophy has a strange way of making me feel smarter and dumber all at once. - Or maybe it just makes me think that smart people sure can be dumb.

Speaking of dumb, I want to emphasize here that I am not an expert on any of this philosophy stuff. I don't have a degree in it or anything. As usual, I just have a gift for explaining complicated stuff in a way that those of us without degrees can understand. I was always the kid in class who translated all the big words into plain English for the kid next to me. So - that said, let's dive into some philosophy.

Today we'll do a very quick overview, then we'll come back to dive in a little further over the next few B-sides. We begin with ***theism***.

Theism is essentially belief in a god or gods, but theistic philosophy places that god or gods at the center of all things. All your philosophies of life, meaning, work, and people, are centered on the God who created it all and gives it purpose. The philosophy of the Bible is theistic. Specifically, monotheistic.

But here in Ecclesiastes, we get a tour of other philosophies. As chapter 1 reminds us, ***"There is nothing new under the sun"*** and Solomon thought through much of modern philosophy long before Sartre or Kierkegaard. So here's a quick overview of what we'll see:

**Theism** - God is the center of everything. Meaning comes from God.

**Deism** - God created the world, but is hands off now. We figure it out from here.



**Existentialism** - Since God is hands off, we have to figure out life and meaning from what *exists* in front of us - here and now.

**Nihilism** - There is no god, there is no meaning. Life is pointless, everything will be annihilated. Deal with it.

**Scientism** - We will use logic, reason, and the scientific method to *find* meaning for it all.

And **Postmodernism** - Okay, so life may be pointless to you, and there may or may not be a god, but *I* still exist, so I can create meaning for myself. And you can too - if you like science, or pleasure or stuff or god or whatever works - if it's meaningful to you, *that's* the point.

And that's my super fast philosophy summary. Okay, so maybe it was too fast - and way oversimplified. So let's unpack them over the next few days, and find what the Bible says about it all.

If you're curious - chapter 4 is really a commentary on materialism - living for stuff - and isolationism - living for self.

I know - too many isms. Don't worry - we won't cover all of them. But we will start out on tomorrow's B-side with theism and deism. Remember to read chapter 4, and I'll see you back - in chapter 5.

## **Ecclesiastes 5 | The Secret of Contentment**

Welcome back to Ecclesiastes - chapter 5 today, as Solomon continues his observation of life under the sun. He is once again people- watching - still on his great quest to find what is worthwhile in life - and what is gained by all our toil. In chapter 5, his observation moves - first to the house of God, and then back to work - and especially at wealth and poverty.

We begin at verse 1:

**“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

The first observation at God’s house - is the sacrifice of fools. Empty promises. Too much talking, not enough hearing. So what’s your priority when you step into God’s house? Solomon says, “Go near to listen.” Verse 2:

**“Do not be quick with your mouth,  
do not be hasty in your heart  
to utter anything before God.  
God is in heaven  
and you are on earth,  
so let your words be few.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

In other words, if you sing out “Lord I give you my heart” - then walk out of church and back to selfish living - that’s the sacrifice of fools. And when we treat church like it’s a bargain hunt for God’s blessings, we missed the point. Verse 4:

**“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. 5It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:4).

Then verse 7:

**“Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:7).

That means stand in awe, and that is where wisdom begins.

Now remember that Solomon is far from God - there's no intimacy here as we see in David's Psalms. And for us - in Christ - we are invited by God Himself to come boldly before the throne of grace, and to call Him Abba - Father. Yet that is not an invitation to impress him with your eloquence or fervor, nor is it a call to multiply words or sing without thinking.

Psalm 51 describes the sacrifices that God accepts: a broken spirit and a contrite heart. These things, God will not despise. So come boldly before God - not to make empty vows - but to offer him the pieces of your broken heart. If your life is His, it is His. So wait - and listen - and heal.

Now in verse 8, Solomon walks out of God's house and back into the world. And he sees again - injustice. Verse 8:

**“If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:8- 9).

Solomon says - don't be surprised at poverty - because there are so many *takers*. In a self- centered world where everyone takes - and those on top don't care who pays as long as they get their cut - most of us end up poor. Now keep in mind, that God's law provided the Israelites with a system that was people centered - without endless levels of hierarchy to tax and *take*. But the people demanded a king - and God warned them - kings come with taxes.

But Solomon digs deeper - it's not just taxes and takers - the root issue is money love. Verse 10:

**“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.**

**This too is meaningless.”**

**“As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?”**

(Ecclesiastes 5:10- 11).

There's some powerful insight here. And studies bear it out. A study here in America a few years back showed that among affluent Americans, 85% worry about money - and 40% worry *all* the time. That's people who have plenty of money. Only 20% actually consider themselves affluent.

Somewhere along the way, the American dream became the American deception. The study's conclusion: the more money people have, the more they think it takes to be “rich.” My conclusion: Mo' money, mo' problems. But notice - money itself is not the problem. The *love* of money never satisfies, never brings contentment, and Jesus tells us - it's the root of all kinds of evil.

But Solomon sees another option. In verse 12:

**“The sleep of a laborer is sweet,  
whether they eat little or much,  
but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.”**

(Ecclesiastes 5:12).

I love that verse. *The sleep of the laborer*. Work hard - sleep well - be content. Then verse 13:

**“I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children**

**there is nothing left for them to inherit.” (Ecclesiastes 5:13).**

Wow - wealth - *harming* it's owners. It's a reality. Did you know that *most* lottery winners confess that they *lose* many friendships to greed and envy, and in just three to five years, lottery winners are *more* likely to declare bankruptcy - than the rest of us. Seriously. They're also more likely to struggle with depression, divorce, and suicide. Bad dates - dead monkeys. Or how about professional athletes? Those guys are living the dream, right? A 2009 Sports Illustrated article revealed that 78% of NFL players are either bankrupt or under serious financial stress *within two years* of retirement. That's it - two years. In the NBA, 60% go bankrupt in five years, and baseball isn't far behind. And yet - we fill our kids' heads with dreams of the big time. Bad dates - dead monkeys. Like the Switchfoot song has it, "When success is equated with excess, the ambition for excess *wrecks* us." Switchfoot, by the way - one of my favorite bands - and the perfect musical embodiment of Ecclesiastes. Love 'em. Verse 15:

**“Everyone comes naked from their mother’s womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart.**

**They take nothing from their toil  
that they can carry in their hands.**

**This too is a grievous evil:**

**As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain,  
since they toil for the wind?**

**All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction  
and anger.” (Ecclesiastes 5:15- 17).**

And in verse 18, Solomon again sees a better way:

**“This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to *find satisfaction* in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the**

**days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:18- 20).

I love that phrase. They don't have time for worry - because God *keeps them occupied with gladness of heart*.

At the heart of Solomon's conclusion – is the goodness – of contentment. *Find satisfaction* in your work. That's a gift from God. Life is a gift – and gifts are meant to be enjoyed. Do you know what it feels like when you give someone a gift – and they *appreciate* it, but they just don't bother to... *enjoy* it. I wonder if God feels that way toward us.

And it can happen in church too. 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy warns against those who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. It's a lie. But, Paul says, godliness with *contentment* - is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). Did you catch that? Great *gain*. Exactly what Solomon is searching for - Paul found it - in Christ. In Philippians 4, Paul says that he has learned...

**“the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”** (Philippians 4:12).

Imagine that. Content - always. If you could put that in a jar and sell it, you could make billions. Actually, I have it in a jar - my memory verse jar for my kids. You want it? Look it up - Philippians 4. Man, when I learned it, everything changed. I remember - early days in ministry – scraping by – driving a beat up, faded out '89 Toyota Pickup. One day, I looked in the lane next to me - gorgeous new Corvette – the car of my boyhood dreams. And I looked at the guy – and realized how far that God had brought me. I thought about the driver – and it struck me, “*What I have, he can't buy. What he has, I don't even want.*” Jesus did that to me. Read Ecclesiastes 5, draw near to God - to listen - and He just might tell you the secret of contentment.

## Ecclesiastes 5 | B-Side: Philosophy Part 2: Theism & Deism

Hello and welcome back to Ecclesiastes 5 – the *B-side*. Now we started this B-side series yesterday - with an introduction to philosophy, why it matters, and what the Bible says about it. Today we start in on two philosophies – theism and deism.

A reminder first – that I will be *over- simplifying* here. Philosophies are far more complex, but it does help to get the big picture. And I am going to present this as one progression of logical thought – rather than a full historical explanation. So please keep in mind that there is much more depth and history to each of these.

Okay, let's start in with **theism**. Theos is the greek root for *god*, so theism is essentially a foundational belief in god or gods. Most cultures around the world have some strong roots in some form of theism. While polytheism is belief in many gods, and pantheism holds a belief in the god- nature in all things, *monotheism* is the belief in *one* god. Christians believe in one God – in three persons – the triune God. And this particular theism has been deeply foundational to all of western history and thought – which is why we still study the Bible in school – whether or not kids believe it.

Now to be clear, theism is a belief in god or gods, not necessarily a philosophy in the proper sense. However, *if* you believe in God, it thoroughly affects your philosophy on everything else. So I'm going to explain theism as a philosophy grounded in theistic faith.

Faith is foundational, and what we're going to see moving forward - is that every philosophy is profoundly affected by it's view of who God is or isn't. Here in Ecclesiastes 5, verse 1 begins:

**“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.”**

**“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”** (Ecclesiastes 5:1- 2).

This is at the core of theistic thinking – God is god, and you are not. He creates, He gives truth, He gives meaning. And the fear of God – or respect for God, is at the very core of theistic philosophy. Three times the Bible tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

Essential elements of theism in the Bible: God exists, God loves us, and God is the point. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And we are created for His good pleasure. Theism. Now when I use the word ***point***, what I mean is the thing that gives meaning and purpose in life. For the theist, it is God who gives life purpose and meaning.

Okay, next up: **deism**. Now we’re going to step away from Biblical teaching, but deism was around way back in Jesus’ time, and it has had several resurgences throughout history – rather notably in American revolutionary times – among *some* – though not all – of America’s founding fathers.

The deists still believe in God – often the Christian God – but they believe in a hands- off version of God. In this view, God created everything - but doesn’t get actively involved. God sort of wound up the clock of the universe, then let it unwind – come what may. So in this view, God *exists*, God *might* love us – but doesn’t *do* anything about it. It’s up to *us* to act. And God is still the point, but you have to ask - if that’s fair.

This God is different today than at the beginning, and we were created for His... well, we don’t know exactly. Again, I’m simplifying.



Here in Ecclesiastes, you can see the the *roots* of deism in Solomon's way of thinking. Solomon believes in God, but there is no active exchange between them. He has a fear of God, but no love for God, and never acknowledges any love from God.

So where do we see theism and deism in modern thinking? Well, here in the Western Hemisphere, the vast majority of people still hold onto a belief in god – mostly monotheism. There are some very loud atheists out there, of course, but polls consistently show faith is the norm.

However, only a small percentage of those God- believers live as if God is actually involved in daily life. Our collective mentality – much like Solomon's – treats God as an out there Creator – got this rock moving but left us to figure out the details. We might not use the term, but in a lot of ways, it's basically deism.

I remember when I first became a Christian, and one of my cousins asked me, *"So you actually think that God cares what we do?"* He didn't deny God's existence, he just didn't see God involved.

Back here in Ecclesiastes, Solomon's line of reason might follow along a deistic path, and we will learn a lot from it - but he always comes back to God as both the Creator and the source of meaning.

Back in chapter 3,

**"I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him."** (Ecclesiastes 3: 14).

And Solomon is fully convinced that God will judge – he does care what we do and He will respond.

And at the end of the book, in chapter 12, Solomon says this:

**“The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails given by one shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:11- 12).

That warning always gets me. Be warned – my son. This is personal. Wise words will guide you through this life, and keep you anchored - but which words are the truly wise?

With so many philosophies, who do I listen to? Solomon reminds us here – that the wise words given by *one shepherd* are true and right. In other words, God’s truth. And he warns us – to be careful of anything in addition to them.

Now, I do *not* believe that means that the Bible is the *only* place to find wisdom. I believe that it’s quite likely that Solomon himself collected wisdom and proverbs from many cultures - but ultimately, the stuff that proves true in the long run - came from God - the *One Shepherd*.

Now discerning which really comes from Him – is tricky. And that’s what the Bible is for. It is when we lose our bearings – and let loose our anchor – that we are truly in trouble. And the last part of that verse:

**“Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

I love that verse. Every time I get lost in a bookstore or library - it comes back. I remember wandering the local Barnes & Noble to discover a section marked “*Discount Religion and Spirituality*.” And I thought – isn’t that the picture of modern faith? Clearance- rack religion – and right next to Starbucks. Perfect.

**“Of making many books there is no end.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

And that's what makes Ecclesiastes so useful to us. It sort of walks us through the bookstore religion and philosophy aisles - helps us understand the logic and thinking behind it - and see where it leads - but all the while keeping us grounded in God's truth.

Good reminder on this journey. Thanks for joining me on the b-side. Tomorrow's b-side brings us to existentialism and nihilism. The big words. Remember to read chapter 5, and I'll see you there.

## Ecclesiastes 6 | Having Everything, Enjoying Nothing

Hey friends, we're back in Ecclesiastes - at chapter 6 today. And let's start with a question: *What do you do – when you get exactly what your heart desires - and it still feels... empty?* You followed your heart, got what you wanted, but something's still... missing. Or what if you find yourself living the "*If I just had that one thing I'd be happy*" life. But you never get – that one thing .

Here in chapter 6, Solomon sees a lot of it. Everyone's after what they can't have – and the few that do have- don't seem to enjoy it. Let's pick up at verse 1:

**“I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.”** (Ecclesiastes 6:1- 2).

Now remember, Solomon is still on his quest – observing life to see what's good and worthwhile for mankind to do in our short days - *under the sun*. That phrase appears again here, and it continues to be key to our understanding. Solomon's perspective is stuck - here in this world. He finished out chapter 5 with a beautiful call to enjoy life and find satisfaction in our work. But the very next thing Solomon sees – is some poor souls who have it all and enjoy none of it. They lack *nothing their hearts desire* – but the truth is - they lack everything that counts.

Notice the problem there – is with the heart. Apparently the heart desired things that didn't satisfy. Sometimes I think we put too much faith in our heart's ability to lead wisely. Sometimes our heart's desire is really just our flesh's desire renamed for better marketing. So in verse 3:

**“A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man— even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?”** (Ecclesiastes 6:3- 6).

Well that's pretty bleak. Solomon says that a *stillborn* child is better off than a rich, successful, man who never *enjoys* it. A couple thoughts here. First off, *remember the perspective*. Solomon *only* sees this life. The love of God is out of the picture. Heaven is out of view. When Solomon says, “*Do not all go to the same place*” - he means everyone dies and gets buried. And yes – in that view – we all go the same place – back in the earth. But what happens after that – *well...* Solomon doesn't see.

And here's the thing. We *should* see what happens after that. The eternal perspective is necessary to make sense of life. In fact, it changes everything. The glimpse of life that we get through Solomon's eyes - is meant to thoroughly convince us - that life without the eternal - isn't enough. You can have *all* of it, and still have *nothing* gained. Bad dates. Dead monkeys. Do you see them?

And yet, there are also some great lessons that we should take from Solomon's observations. **Life *is* meant to be enjoyed**. God gave you a gift - enjoy it. And here's what I've found: **The more we try to find our heart's fulfillment in the temporary things of this world, the less we enjoy them. But the more we set our hearts on things above, and find our purpose and fulfillment in Christ, the easier it is to enjoy the little things. And life is fun again.**

Have you ever seen stories of olympians - best in the world at their sport - yet they lost the joy of the game - because they start to believe that *life isn't complete* without that gold medal. What's the point of that? And some of us

go through *life* that way. And did you know that many olympic medalists go through serious depression *after* they get the gold. Because what's left to live for? They sacrificed all the joy of sport - entertained everyone *else* - and then it's over.

But Jesus offers a better plan. Store up your treasures in heaven. Why? Because moth and rust cannot destroy – and thieves can't break in and steal. In other words, I can't lose it. And when my treasure can't be lost, then everything I have is *gain*. And all the temporary stuff in *this* life – you know – money, success, medals, whatever – if I don't have it, no big loss, if I do have it, I can enjoy it. Because God made it beautiful in it's time – so I'll appreciate its beauty. Win or lose – I can still enjoy the game. But it's no longer my heart's desire. Because setting your heart on things down here – is idolatry. It's stuff worship.

Okay – back here in Ecclesiastes – Solomon still doesn't get all that. Perspective still limited, he goes on in verse 7:

**“Everyone's toil is for their mouth,  
yet their appetite is never satisfied.”** (Ecclesiastes 6:7).

At the heart of this lament, is people just living for their appetite. Basically it's a metaphor – your mouth never stops eating - and people never stop wanting *more*. In verse 9:

**“Better what the eye sees  
than the roving of the appetite.”** (Ecclesiastes 6:9).

That means be content with what you have now – rather than let your *appetite* just keep *roving*. Enjoy life as it is, not as you dream it to be. In Philippians, Paul warns us about Christians whose “minds are on early things.” He's talking about the Christian teachers who encourage you to pursue health and wealth in earthly terms, and treat almighty God like an almighty genie. Paul says, “Their god is their *stomachs*.” Basically - they make sacrifice to their own desires and appetites. And they call it *Christian!*

Back here in Ecclesiastes, Solomon says,

**“This too is meaningless,  
a chasing after the wind.”** (Ecclesiastes 6:9).

And there's that phrase again. Reminds me of the first time I taught through this book. I was the high school pastor at church, trying to teach some teenagers to look past the temporary. My daughter Daisy was just three years old - but she came to youth group with us every week . I remember driving home in that old beat up Toyota Pickup - Daisy always wanted the window down - because she'd stick her hand out the window – to catch the wind. I tried to explain that you can't catch the wind, but she'd close up here little fist and tell me, *“Sure I can. It's right here in my hand.”* I also tried to give her a Bible lesson in Ecclesiastes and the emptiness of worldly pursuits – but she just looked at me and smiled.

But it did make me think of Proverbs 30, verse 4:

***“Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists?”*** (Proverbs 30:4).

That verse – is about a man finally seeking God – seeking the One who connects heaven and earth - the One who holds the wind in the hollow his hands. We can chase the wind all we want - we'll never catch it. But chase God - and you'll find - He's got everything you've been chasing after all along.

So back to the question we opened with: what *do* you do - when you get your heart's desire - and still feel empty? The real problem - is the heart. The world says *follow your heart* - but Jeremiah 9 says that the heart is deceptively wicked. That means it lies and wants bad things. Apart from God, following you heart is really just following your flesh. But there is hope. Follow Christ - and He offers a new heart - and he will write His law on your heart.

See following your heart comes naturally, no training required. The real trick is directing your heart to the *real* good stuff. How? Jesus gave us the answer.

**“Store up treasures in heaven.”** (Matthew 6:20).

After all, you can’t take it with you, but you can send it ahead. And Jesus explains, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In other words, *your heart follows your treasure*.

That’s the key. Solomon’s vision is fixed under the sun – where his treasure never satisfies, and it can all be taken away. But for the believer in Christ, our treasure is *beyond* the sun – secure and safe. And when we *know* that – when we learn to treasure the eternal – faith, hope, love, our relationship with God - then our hearts will long for Heaven – and push us to press on toward the upward call – of Christ. And ironically, all the temporary stuff – is suddenly so much easier to just enjoy - and let go.



## Ecclesiastes 6 | B-Side: Existentialism & Nihilism

Welcome once again to Ecclesiastes 6. This is – the b-side! We're continuing our b-side series in modern philosophy and what the Bible says about it. This is part 3, so you might want to check out the last two B-sides if you haven't yet. Either way - I'll give you a quick review of what we've covered so far.

First was theism – the Christian version:

God is. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God is the point, He gives meaning, and we were created for His good pleasure.

Next up – deism: God created everything - but now He is hands off. God is not actively involved, so we must figure things out on our own. We find the point. And God is not the same today as he was yesterday.

Now the next logical step after deism is **existentialism**. The key word there is *exist*. Existentialism doesn't necessarily take a strong stance on God, sort of agnostic on that count, but in practical terms: if God won't help, then God doesn't care. So I don't care about God. And God is no longer the point. God may have been yesterday – but *I* am today. *I exist*. So I'll live for my pleasure, and live for the material things that I *know* exist. Materialism and hedonism are closely linked – Live for stuff, live for pleasure. In the philosophy world, existentialism was big in the 18 and 1900's – Kierkegaard, Sartre, and many others all had related views - with some significant variation in their ideas. But it's outside the halls of higher learning where we really see the impact. Movies, music, and just the general worldview of millions of western peoples – are all heavily impacted by it. It's just part of our way of thinking. Seize the day. Follow your heart. Live now. This stuff is particularly strong in American thought - and in Hollywood. Most Americans *believe* in God to some extent – they just live for the here and now.

And here in Ecclesiastes, you'll find that existentialist thinking all throughout. Enjoy life - enjoy work - whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your heart. You exist now - but tomorrow isn't promised. And there is good logical sense to it. The big difference here - is that Solomon still remembers *God*, and remembers judgment. In chapter 11, he says follow your heart - but remember judgement. And the rest of the Bible keeps us further in check - reminding us that what we see is *not* all there is - that the things seen are temporary, but the things unseen are eternal. So we walk by faith.

That's existalism, and the next logical step - in our philosophical devolution - is **nihilism**.

It's similar to the word annihilate - as in destroy everything - and that sums up nihilism pretty well. Everything will be destroyed, and nothing ever had a point anyway. For you science fans, nihilism is sort of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics as a total summation of life. The nihilists let go of those silly roots of mythological gods - whether greek or Christian or whatever - and focus *entirely* on this life. This is all there is. There is no God, and there is no point. All values and morals are baseless and nothing can really be known. God never was, never is, and never will be. Pleasure is pointless, and I am pointless. Nihilism.

It is - a rather depressing philosophy. Friedrich Neitzsche is the most famous of the nihilists, with his famous proclamation that god is dead. Nihilist thinking still has strong impact in college classrooms, though most Americans just can't stomach that level of pessimism or atheism. Yet nihilism does still creep into popular culture and media. A Series of Unfortunate Events is not just a clever title - it's the basic worldview about life and existence as exactly that - a series of unfortunate events. Bad stuff happens, you thought it would get better and have a point. You were wrong, and that's life.

*The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* is a very comedic view of life through a very nihilistic lens. Both are brilliantly written, but both center on the utter pointlessness of life and existence. Still, most of us just laugh it off.

You can also find glimmers of nihilism here in Ecclesiastes - *everything is meaningless* - is the basic book summary after all. And his continual focus on death as the common destiny of all mankind - in chapters 3, 7, and 9 - that borders on nihilism. In chapter six, Solomon declares that “a stillborn child is better off than” a man who “cannot enjoy his prosperity.”

**“It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded.”** (Ecclesiastes 6:4).

Rather dark - and Solomon’s consistent reminders that you will die are nearly nihilistic. But Solomon starkly sets himself apart from the emptiness of nihilism, when he adds another reminder. Yes, remember you will die - but also remember your Creator! Remember that both good days *and* bad days come from *Him*. So, Solomon concludes in chapter 12, “*fear God and keep his commandments.*” That thinking is distinctly *theistic*.

So what do we learn from all this? Well, for one, we see that there is some sensible and logical thinking behind both existentialism and nihilism. Solomon arrives at some of the same conclusions. That’s important. I believe it’s a mistake to toss out all of modern philosophy outright. But we disagree in two key areas - the foundations - and the conclusions.

Foundationally, I believe in God - they don’t. And although I see sound logic in their reasoning, I disagree with their conclusions - because they’re built on faulty foundations. That’s the key. Don’t just fall for good logic - check the foundations. I might read a quote on life or politics and say, “That makes good sense,” but if the unspoken foundation is godless, I don’t trust the conclusion. That goes for science too. Bad assumptions plus good logic still equals bad conclusion.

Back in human philosophy, where do you go from there? Nihilism is sort of a dead end of thought, punny as that may be. When you claim that all thought is pointless, why bother with the next thought?

But seeing as how humans don't much like dead ends, we backtracked - in two distinct directions: scientism and postmodernism. And we'll cover those - on tomorrow's B-side. And I'll see you there.

## Ecclesiastes 7 | To Search Out Wisdom

Welcome back to Through the Word. Kris Langham here with Ecclesiastes 7, as our focus changes. Solomon continues his quest to find what is worthwhile in life, but moves now from work and toil - to wisdom - and folly. In verse 25 he says:

**“So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out *wisdom* and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:25).

I love it. Wickedness - is stupid. Folly - is madness. So why do people do it? Solomon sets out to investigate wisdom and the scheme of things, and he puts his answers into sayings. So let's dig in at verse 1:

**“A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

I like this one. A good name - that's your reputation. When people hear *your* name - what comes to mind? A good name - is better than fine perfume. That means it's better to be known for *being* good than smelling good. And “the day of death better than the day of birth.” See on the day of birth - a person's life and character is all wishful thinking - like that fine perfume. But on the day of death - character has been established. Your works tell your story. Verse 2:

**“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).

In our great search for wisdom, Solomon says there is more to be learned at a funeral than a birthday party. Because death is our destiny. Nobody escapes - and the living should take it to heart.

The sobering reality of death will shape much of Solomon's thinking here in Ecclesiastes - but *our* response to it will depend very much on our perspective of what happens *after* death. And yet the first step to wisdom - is to face the simple truth - that we will die. Verse 3:

**“Frustration is better than laughter,  
because a sad face is good for the heart.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:3).

The word *frustration* there also means grief, or sorrow. And it's good for us. Remember the Pixar movie Inside Out? There are lessons that only sadness can teach. It's a necessary emotion for balanced mental health. In verse 4:

**“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,  
but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:4).

Allow yourself to mourn. Go to the funeral, spend time at the cemetery, and let God teach you the lessons of life *and* death. Foolish is the heart that refuses to experience grief.

Verse 5:

**“It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the  
song of fools.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:5).

Solomon is clearly unimpressed by fools. But what makes fools so foolish? He finds three causes - beginning in verse 7:

**“Extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the  
heart.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:7).

So greed is cause number one. Then verse 8:

**“The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is  
better than pride.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:8).

So pride and impatience also make you foolish. The wise man is patient - and waits to see how things work out before judging. Then verse 9:

**“Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

So number 3 - is *anger*. Your temper makes you do dumb things - hurting you and the ones you love most.

Then in verse 10, Solomon reflects:

**“Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?””**  
(Ecclesiastes 7:10).

For it is not wise to ask such questions. It is foolish to live in the past or resent the present. God has a purpose for *today* - whatever season of life it might be.

One of the greatest decisions of my own life came when I was just a teenager. I noticed that everyone my age wanted to be older, but everyone older wanted to be younger. What good is that? So I decided - every season of life must have a purpose - and a beauty all its own - so I'm gonna live today and find the beauty of *this* season. That philosophy has served me well.

And wisdom does that. It improves life. Look at verse 11:

**“Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:11).

So wisdom is good for you. Solomon calls it a *shelter* - it protects you from harm. And he admits - money is also a shelter - but wisdom has an advantage: it “...preserves those who have it.”

So while money protects from outside harm, wisdom preserves the person inside. And I love verse 13:

**“Consider what God has done:  
Who can straighten  
what he has made crooked?”** (Ecclesiastes 7:13).

Wow. God made some things - crooked. That doesn't mean evil, and it doesn't mean bent in shape - it just means that some things aren't all neat and linear the way we might think they should be. And God *made* them that way. And Solomon says *consider*. Take it to heart. Maybe God's plan *isn't* an easy road and straight path to success. Verse 14:

**“When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

That reality is crucial to wisdom. The good times are a gift - enjoy God's goodness. But in the bad times, recognize that *God* is unchanged. He is still good, and He has a purpose for every time.

Next Solomon moves on to the righteous and the wicked. He laments that sometimes - the righteous die - while the wicked live long. Tough truth. So Solomon suggests some balance. Verse 16:

**“Do not be overrighteous,  
neither be overwise—  
why destroy yourself?”** (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

There is danger in extremes. Righteousness is *good*, but *overrighteous* is usually someone *self-* righteous - *adding* to God's rules and judgmental of others. And *wisdom* is good, but *overwise* is usually arrogant. Godly wisdom is humble.

Of course - don't go the *opposite* direction. In verse 17:



**“Do not be overwicked,  
and do not be a fool—  
why die before your time?  
It is good to grasp the one  
and not let go of the other.  
Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:17- 18).

So legalism and liberalism are *both* bad. Balance is the key - and the fear of God will keep you there.

And then in verse 20, a crucial observation:

**“Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

A reality check here. Apart from God’s help, you and I - are not - righteous. Righteous means *right with God* - living right and having a right standing before Him. And we don’t. Not on our own. That truth is foundational to the gospel. That’s why “overrighteous” - doesn’t work - it’s not in you. So what do we do?

Well first, Solomon says - don’t pay attention when people say bad stuff about you. Because you’ve done it to others. We’re all sinners - let it go. But then Solomon doubles down in verse 23:

**““I am determined to be wise”—  
but this was beyond me.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:23).

Watch that. Righteousness and wisdom - are *good* - but they’re beyond me. *I can’t do it.*

And it’s not God’s fault. In verse 29, Solomon says:

**“This only have I found:  
God created mankind upright,  
but they have gone in search of many schemes.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

And once again, we need the rest of the Bible to solve this problem. Solomon is stuck *here* - under the sun. And here - left to our own devices - we're hopeless. Try all you want - overdo it even - but your self-made wisdom and righteousness will either leave you feeling arrogant when you succeed - or guilty when you fail.

So God offers a better plan. Rather than let us climb our way to God, He came down to us. Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth, and lived *righteous*. I think there may be a hint of that here in verse 28, as Solomon mentions "one upright man among a thousand."

And Jesus - the only good man - gave His righteous life - and took the punishment for our sinful one - so that *we* could be *made righteous* - *by faith*. Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus is our wisdom. By His power, we live right and we *are* right with God.

And going back to the house of mourning and grief, Jesus gives us a new perspective. Solomon would say - life is short, seize the day! Squeeze every drop out of life while you have it! But in Christ we have hope for life beyond. This life is still short, and we still seize the day, but for a very different purpose. Not to spend it - but to invest it.

Read Ecclesiastes 7, and I'll meet you back here next time.

## Ecclesiastes 7 | B-Side: Scientism

Welcome back to Ecclesiastes 7 - this is the b-side. I love the b-side. It always feels like a secret hide out for me and my friends. *“Don’t worry. They’ll never find us in here. Hey wait a second, who’s at the door? Oh no - A-siders! Everybody scram!”*

Something like that. Anyway.

This is part four in our b-side series on modern philosophy, and what the Bible has to say about it. Ecclesiastes is, after all, the Bible’s philosophy book. And amazingly, there’s a whole lot of modern philosophy referenced in this very ancient book. Still nothing new under the sun.

Today - we look at scientism. But first a quick look back at how we got here. Let’s review:

**First was Theism** - God is the center of everything. Meaning comes from God.

**Deism** - God created the world, but is hands off now. We figure it out from here.

**Existentialism** - Since God is hands off, we have to figure out life and meaning from what *exists* in front of us - here and now.

**Nihilism** - There is no god, there is no meaning. Life is pointless, everything will be annihilated. Deal with it.

And that’s where ended up. Which really seems like a dead end. But we can’t end there! We just can’t live in a world without meaning! So goes the philosophical argument whenever nihilism comes up. And for good reason. Remember, chapter 3 told us that God put eternity in the hearts of mankind. That longing for meaning - was placed there by God.

So - you would think - that mankind would maybe turn around and go back - back to God, the giver of meaning. But for those who don't want god, but still want meaning, another option arises. Two in fact.

The first one - is **scientism** - or intellectualism. Scientism is not simply a belief in science, but a faith in science as our greatest source of truth. Since all this god stuff failed us, we create a new god. Human reason replaces god. The scientific method is my golden rule now. The old theistic god may or may not exist, but he or she is not scientifically provable, and so I will leave him or her out of my equations. If there is a point, I will discover it - scientifically, logically, apart from god. Science will tell us morality, origin, purpose, and meaning.

Scientism is quite popular today - though the term itself is actually used primarily by outsiders as a critique. Somebody who follows this philosophy doesn't generally say, "I believe in scientism." But the ideology is pushed along by well publicized popular scientists like Richard Dawkins, Neil deGrasse Tyson, and Stephen Hawking.

We talked about Stephen Haking back in chapter 1, but his quote is worth repeating. Hawking wrote in *A Brief History of Time* of his desire to discover a "complete theory" - that one unified theory that brings all of science and philosophy together. Hawking said,

*"If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason - for then we would know the mind of God."*

Hawking was an atheist by the way. He later explained that he only used the word god in a figurative sense - which is fitting for one who has replaced god with science and reason. And his ultimate goal was to reason his way to answer *everything*. I get it. Human reason is amazing. But like most created things - it makes for a wonderful tool, but a terrible god. Consider this quote from Neil deGrasse Tyson: "The good thing about Science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it."

Sounds intelligent right? But think about it a second. You could say that about anything - if it's true. The good thing about History is that it's true whether or not you believe it. The good thing about math, or art, or God. True things are true. I think he should have said, *the good thing about truth - is that it's true whether or not you believe it.*

Science itself is not a truth - it is a method of finding truth. And a good one at that - but the distinction is crucial.

Is science *always* true? What if scientists don't agree - or if the textbooks change their answers? Both happen all the time. Do we then put truth up for vote? Among scientists only? And what if your scientist has a hidden bias, or made bad assumptions? Also happens. Even if your scientific method is true, your conclusions will still be wrong.

Now to be clear - I am not anti-science. At all. I, myself, happen to be an engineer and scientist. I love science, I just don't worship it. My first job out of college was working on rockets, launching satellites. Turns out, most of my department - were Christians - we had weekly lunchtime Bible study. And no, the rockets did not run on faith. Solomon was also a scientist. And many of history's greatest scientists have been ardent believers in God - as well as the scientific method. They just - put God first.

But we do have to acknowledge that the church does have a history of rejecting science and even some of its own great scientists. However, the philosophy of scientism plays on that history and works hard to paint *all* Christians and even all religious people as anti-science. And too often we play into it. When we reject evolution or climate change outright without any scientific or even Biblical consideration - their narrative about us looks right. The reality is that only some scientists are anti- religion, and only some religious people are anti-science. But faith and science should *not* be pressed as an either- or question. Either one without the other will lead to foolishness. Science needs faith and faith needs science. Balance is key. Simple example. The origin of the universe. Skip past the evolution argument - to the beginning. Can science explain - how the universe -

came from nothing? The known scientific laws - conservation of mass, conservation of energy - tell us plainly that the universe cannot come from nothing. And yet simple logic tells us that the universe also cannot be infinitely old (start an infinite calendar and you'll never arrive at today). So how did it get here? It broke all the laws of science, that's how. Whether God did it - or the Big Bang did it - either way - it breaks them. And what about entropy? All systems decrease in order - scientific law - so where did all the order come from? The Big Bang shoves all the scientific law-breaking into one blip of a millisecond - but it still doesn't answer the plane-faced fundamental question - where did the mass, energy, space, and order - come from? Science - still needs faith - to find answers. But faith without science, that's another mess entirely - for another episode. So where is the influence of scientism today? Well, it has its strongest hold on popular thought in countries that have become secularized - in post-Christian countries in Europe and especially in some communist countries where scientism is very nearly the state backed religion.

In America, it holds a very strong influence - especially in universities, but most Americans are too spiritually minded to really give in to a fully atheistic mindset. Nonetheless, its influence among college professors is *strong* - especially in cosmology and evolutionary thought. Which is a shame - for both faith *and* science. Students are pressed to choose between the two, and biology is forced to squeeze its theories into a system without purpose or design. The most phenomenal and complex machines in the universe are attributed to *randomness* and time. The word random almost replaces god in evolutionary thought. Fun fact, did you know that it is scientifically impossible to prove that an event is *random*? Seriously. Random is not provable. That doesn't mean it isn't true, it just means you can't prove that any one thing is random. So if we can't teach God in school because God is not scientifically provable, then we should, for the same reason, also not teach *random* evolution - because *random* evolution is not scientifically provable. And if you ask me, the theory of evolution would be much more robust and useful if scientists would stop forcing random chance to fill all the gaps where *purpose* and *design* clearly belong. If you're curious, I myself believe in *parts* of the evolution theory -

all the parts that have good scientific evidence, and not the parts that are built on random chance. Which is a lot. Adaptation - is an amazing process - and does not appear to me to be random at all.

But I digress. The point is, scientism in its extreme is bad for both faith *and* science.

Here in Ecclesiastes, we see a touch of scientism at the end of chapter 1 when Solomon pursues knowledge for its own sake. But, Solomon decides that it is chasing the wind, and “much wisdom brings much sorrow, the more knowledge the more grief.” We also see a touch of evolutionary thought in chapter 9 when Solomon declares that “time and chance happen to” everyone. Of course, random chance does happen - but Solomon does not use it to explain the entire cosmos.

Yet when it’s all said and done in chapter 12, Solomon comes back with a strong reminder - to *remember your Creator in your youth*. And I would put it - allow God back into your cosmology early on - or you will end up with foolishness. Without God, you’ll never discover a point.

So now what? If most people don’t quite fall into the *science- is- all- there- is* philosophy, and they don’t quite buy into the atheistic pessimism of the nihilist, what do they believe? The final philosophy on our little tour is ***postmodernism***. And we’ll come back to that, in our next B-side.

## Ecclesiastes 8 | The Stupidity of Wickedness

Welcome back friends. Ecclesiastes 8 today, and Kris Langham here again, as Solomon continues the investigation that he began back in chapter 7:

**“So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out *wisdom* and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:25).

I still love that. The stupidity of wickedness. Thank you Solomon for blunt truth. How is it that so many of us are *dumb* enough to think that doing wrong will work out right in the end? Then again - look around. Looks like it's working out for some people - *so far*.

So Solomon continues his investigation. Let's dive in at verse 1:

**“Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things? A person's wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

Great verse. There's something different about a person with *wisdom*. Their face is brighter, their appearance is changed - because they understand things.

Next Solomon offers observations from his unique vantage point. He was - after all - the king. And as king, he was often called upon to pass judgment, to provide justice, to stop the wicked and their schemes. So he offers us some kingly advice in verse 2:

**“Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:2).

That may sound a bit self-serving, but understand that Solomon is trying to establish justice and order - and that requires cooperation. The context



here appears to be a court setting - where the king is asked to judge a case and provide justice. So when the king passes judgment - work with him. And in verse 3:

**“Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king’s word is supreme, who can say to him, “What are you doing?” Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:3- 5).

In other words, respect authority and respect the system. The wise heart knows that procedure and protocol are necessary, so be patient. Look to Bible heroes - like Joseph before Pharaoh, Daniel and friends before Nebuchadnezzar, and *Jesus* before Pilate - they all showed respect and trusted in God’s justice - even before corrupt leaders.

Now *this* passage doesn’t really address a *corrupt* system - but it does recognize the challenges of any man- made justice system. It’s not perfect, but you’ve got to work with it to get results. Verse 6:

**“For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:6).

Basically - injustice is rough - but be patient, justice will come.

And that simple truth carries Solomon out of the courtroom - and back into life. And he makes some philosophical observations. In verse 7:

**“Since no one knows the future,  
who can tell someone else what is to come?  
As no one has power over the wind to contain it,  
so no one has power over the time of their death.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:7- 8).

The point here - is that we are not in control. We don't know the future, we can't control the wind - and we don't control death. That should humble us. And should also put wickedness into a different perspective. Back in verse 8:

**“As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:8).

That one is deep. Wickedness will not let you go. Sin is like a war - you can start it - but it will finish you. Numbers 32 reminds us that “your sin *will find you out*.”

Now it doesn't always look like that right away. Solomon has already observed - that sometimes the wicked live long in their wickedness. But in verse 10:

**“Then too, I saw the wicked buried—those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:10).

So the wicked thrived for a time - but they too were buried. Some of them even went to church - showed up, received praise - living wicked all along. But that was fleeting, and now they're buried. Again Solomon's view of life is limited, but he knows that there *must* be a further judgement. Verse 11:

**“When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Basic cause and effect. When law breakers don't see consequences, they get bold. Yet here we see again - the stupidity of wickedness. It is phenomenally shortsighted. It's stupid to believe - that just because I didn't pay the price today - that I got away with it. Verse 12:

**“Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who**

**are reverent before him. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:12- 13).

Sometimes justice is slow here on earth - sometimes it's downright backwards. Yet Solomon *knows* that God *will* set it right. God *is just*. For us, the crucial element - is the fear of God. Respect the ultimate judge. And yet, in verse fourteen:

**“There is something else meaningless that occurs *on earth* (notice the perspective - *on earth*): the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:14).

And so - Solomon laments - justice just isn't complete on earth. Even he - as king, with all his power - couldn't set it right. And he offers some advice. Verse 15:

**“So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:15).

Now some Bible scholars read Solomon's conclusion here and say that he got it all wrong - *because* his view was limited and he was far from God. But I believe there's some good wisdom here for us. I *don't* think that Solomon is encouraging us to go live it up and sin all you want. This is not epicurean hedonism. He already laid that out as empty and worthless. What he is saying - is enjoy life - as it is. Enjoy work, enjoy family, enjoy the beauty of this world. Yes, fight for justice - yes, live righteous and do good. Make a difference. Isaiah 58 sets our calling out clearly. But there's also a reality - that you and I will not be the ones to right every wrong and heal every wound. Work at it - but don't forget to *enjoy* the work. Paul fought for justice - *and* he said, “Rejoice in the Lord *always*.” He also called Timothy to serve God and make difference - while also reminding him that God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” That doesn't mean

we should abuse God's gifts - it just means we should *enjoy* them. Live - joyfully!

Back in verse 15:

**“Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:15).

And finally Solomon reflects in verse 16:

**“When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night— then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.”** (Ecclesiastes 8:16- 17).

No matter how wise we are, even if we read the Bible front to back - again and again, search out every mystery of science and examine every philosophy - full comprehension is still beyond us.

But that's okay. Even as we get a much fuller understanding of God's plan through Jesus and in the New Testament - there is still so much mystery. Listen to Paul in Romans 11:

**“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”** (Romans 11:33).

So do we just give up on knowing? Of course not. Deuteronomy 29:29

**“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”** (Deuteronomy 29:29).

See - God keeps His secrets - and I'm okay with that. But He has revealed enough for me - to walk in wisdom and live in righteousness, to fight the fight of faith and enjoy life as it is, and when it's all done, to trust *Him* to work out the details.

## Ecclesiastes 8 | B-Side: Postmodernism (Aka Philosophy & the Bible Review Part 5)

Welcome to Through the Word, I'm Kris Langham, and this is Ecclesiastes chapter 8 - the b-side. Our *final* b-side in our review of modern philosophies in light of Ecclesiastes, to help us understand the way people think and what the Bible says about it.

Well we've worked our way from ancient thinkers all the way into modern philosophy - and what comes after modern - but postmodern! Which I must admit - is a funny name. It means - after the modern. Basically, in the 17 and 1800s, there were lots of philosophers who published lots of thoughts - that they considered new and enlightened and... *modern*. You know - today - not stuck in the past. Only today - passed by - and became yesterday.

And in the 1900s, what they used to call modern - wasn't modern anymore. So the new stuff - was called *postmodern*. And the word caught on in art, design, politics, and of course philosophy. We're gonna focus on the philosophy.

It's sort of like the story at the end of chapter 4 about the kingdom where everyone under the sun followed after the young new king - all excited to kick out the old guy. But then a few years went by, and the new guy became the old guy, and everyone moved on to the next big thing. So what is - postmodern?

First, let's do a quick review of the road so far.

**First was theism** - God is, God loves us, and God is the point. Meaning comes from God.

**Then deism** - God created the world, but is hands off now. We figure it out from here. God still gives meaning, but he's not involved.

**Existentialism** - Since God isn't helping, we'll figure out life and meaning from what *exists* in front of us - here and now. I exist, so I will live for what's here.

**Nihilism** - There is no god, there is no point. Life is meaningless, everything will be annihilated. Deal with it.

Now I realize that I'm oversimplifying, but I hope you see one simple relationship - **the further that we take God out of our worldview, the less we find purpose and meaning in life.**

But we are wired to want meaning. Chapter 3 - He set eternity in our hearts. So we backed up - in two primary directions. One was scientism. Science has led to so much great discovery, so let's use it - to find the point. Replace god with human reason and the scientific method, and logically work our way to the meaning of life.

Option number 2 - is postmodernism. Where scientism appeals to the logical mind, postmodernism appeals more to the emotional heart.

Postmodern thinking has been described as an "incredulity towards meta narratives." In other words, they reject *all previous points* - and reject any system that claims to explain the whole scheme of things. And it is also the logical end of our long philosophical path.

But postmodernism also rejects the *total* pointlessness of nihilistic thinking. The postmodern still desires meaning in life, so... *I'll make my own point! Everything in the past failed, but I will find what works for me. If I believe in something strongly enough - that's the point.*

Back in chapter 3, Solomon observed that

**"Everything is beautiful *in its time*."** (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The postmodern grabs ahold of that temporary beauty and finds meaning in it.

In this thinking, there may or may not be an inherent purpose designed into the scheme of things, and there may or may not be a god who put it there, but the real point is - *my experience*, and how *I* feel about it all. *God is, God was - who cares? If believing in God floats your boat today - go for it. Whatever works.*

Relativism is central to postmodern thinking: *your truth is relative to your experience and your point of view.*

So where do we see postmodern philosophy today? The answer - is everywhere. Relativism has become so pervasive in media, education, and morality - that we hardly even notice it anymore. It's like asking a fish where the water is. We don't see it - because we're just *in it*.

And it's strong in religious circles too - and yes, the Christian church - especially in seminaries. The higher criticism of the last century was a thorough reexamination of Biblical texts in a very postmodern effort to *rethink* (and to a great extent *reject*) previous assumptions or beliefs about the Bible. More recently, the so called Jesus Seminar conducted a great search for what they called the "historical Jesus" by rejecting the accepted authority of scripture and relying on modern scientific methods of historical research. They wanted to figure out who Jesus "really" was and what he "really" said. But if you ask me, the method was *far* from scientific. They rejected anything supernatural as unscientific - which immediately removes all of Jesus' miracles, *and* his resurrection. The final result was a Jesus who was *not* god, not miraculous, and not a savior.

But in postmodern thinking - that's all good - if it works for you. The whole thing was twisted intellectual confusion that pushed its way into seminaries and into college classrooms using big words and flashing impressive credentials of the thinkers behind it. But the conclusions were nonsense - because the presuppositions were wrong. **They rejected the basic tenets**



**of the Bible - then tried to make sense of the same Bible.** That's like rejecting the periodic table, then trying to make sense of your Chemistry book. In the end, it becomes circular reasoning - the conclusions just come back to support the presuppositions of the scholars who started the whole thing.

The process goes something like this: At the outset, they don't believe that Jesus is God. They approach the Bible with that assumption, then reject the many verses that say that Jesus is God as inaccurate. Then with what's left of their tattered Bible, they publicly proclaim that Jesus *never* claimed to be God. See - it's right here in my own Bible.

As foolish as that methodology sounds - it's basically how postmodern thought often works out. Reject previous assumptions while hiding the fact that I still have my own assumptions - approach some ancient document claiming to be unbiased - reject what I don't like - and keep whatever matches my own worldview. In the end, I believe whatever I wanted to in the first place.

2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4 warns that:

**“The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”** (2nd Timothy 4:3- 4).

That's postmodernism.

But here's the thing - most people know nothing about the higher criticism or the Jesus Seminar - but their view of the Bible and of Jesus is still strongly influenced by their way of thinking. It just seeps in from college professors and pop culture. Or people read some random article about the Gospel of Thomas or the Gospel of Mary with a new and different version of Jesus - and in postmodern thought - that Jesus is just as valid as Bible

Jesus. So they pick the one they like best - which is usually the one that says I can do whatever I wanted to do in the first place.

So people end up believing it - without ever really thinking it through or examining the evidence. But hey - that's postmodern too. If it works - who cares if it's true or logical?

As for Ecclesiastes, Solomon opens the book with the bold declaration that everything is meaningless. That's pretty close to the postmodern - rejecting all previous points. Not quite the same though. We also see postmodern thought from Ecclesiastes 8:17 when he says,

**“No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 8:17).

So once again - the Bible agrees - *in part*. The difference for Solomon is - he still holds on to faith in God. His very next statement is this:

**“So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are *in God's hands*...”** (Ecclesiastes 9:1).

So Solomon would *not* agree with the postmodern attempt to create your own point in life. When it's all done, Solomon is still convinced that whatever God does lasts forever - nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away. We cannot create our own purpose. In chapter 12, Solomon reminds us that the words of the wise - are “given by one Shepherd.” God is the source of all true wisdom. Which is why he concludes that we ought to “fear God and keep *his* commandments.”

Where postmodern morality is built on our experience of now, Solomon reminds us that “*God* will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

And in that light, I hope this review was more than a history lesson. The same progression of thought in popular philosophy - can happen in your own mind. Ecclesiastes gives us a peak into that mindset, into what happens when you remove God from the center of your own little universe. The further you move God out, the more you have to fill that void with temporary things. In the end, it's simple idolatry - replacing God.

But Solomon closes out the book by calling us back: Remember your Creator - in the days of your youth. Do it now, before the devolution of thought begins.

Thanks for joining me on the flip side. I'll see you - in the next chapter.

## Ecclesiastes 9 | Enjoy Life!

Welcome back to the book of Ecclesiastes. Chapter 9 is about death - and everything that happens before it.

I know - sounds a little funny when I put it that way. Of course, what happens before death - is life. But life looks a little different when you see it from the end looking back. I subscribe to a weekly news magazine - helps me keep up with the world, and I appreciate the balanced perspective in this one - you know, left and right, conservative and liberal. But every week, without fail, there is one page in particular - that really gets my view in proper balance. The obituaries. After reading all the stress and strife and madness going on in the world, the obituaries always reset my point of view. A single life - one person's story - summed up in half a page - good and bad, love and hate - all over now - and suddenly all the world's madness - well, it looks different.

Here in Ecclesiastes 9, Solomon is walking through some similar reflections. In the last half of the book, he turned his focus to investigate and

**“search out *wisdom* and the scheme of things - and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.”** (Ecclesiastes 7:25).

Every one of us lives this life with choices - between good and bad, right and wrong, wisdom and folly. Solomon looks down the road to see how it all works out. Surely things must go better for those who choose good and walk in wisdom. And that's true - to an extent. Solomon is convinced that it will go better for those who fear God - but sometimes life *isn't* fair, and justice *isn't* served.

Now remember - as before - Solomon's viewpoint in Ecclesiastes is *limited*. He only sees what is *under the sun*. Now the rest of the Bible reveals much

more - but there are lessons for us here in Solomon's observations. And today - he observes from a new vantage point - the end of the road. Beginning at verse 1:

**“So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them.”** (Ecclesiastes 9:1).

The righteous and wise - those who do *right* by God - are *in God’s hands*. God *will* take care of them. And yet - that doesn’t guarantee what life will bring you - whether love or hate. And in verse 2:

**“All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.**

**As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.**

**This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all.”** (Ecclesiastes 9:2- 3).

In short, everyone dies. Look down every path - and every road in life - leads to a grave. Doesn’t matter if you’re good or bad, clean or dirty, religious or not - the same destiny overtakes all. You - will - die.

Now - essential clarification. Solomon does *not* say that the same destiny awaits us in eternity. He only states that here - under the sun - everyone dies. As Christians, we like to skip past that part and talk about eternity. But I think there’s a good humbling here for us - reminding us that we’re still just as human as the next guy.

For Solomon though - who cannot see beyond - this is even more sobering. Back in verse 3:

**“The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.**

**4Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!**

**For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten.**

**Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 9:3- 6).**

There’s that phrase again. And from that viewpoint - under the sun - he’s right. The dead are gone - and as generations pass - forgotten. Did they love - did they hate - it’s all past now.

So what do we do with that? The statistics on death are solid. One out of every one person dies. So Solomon says *live*. Verse 7:

**“Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.” (Ecclesiastes 9:7- 8).**

Now Solomon is *not* telling us to go get drunk and party it up. He already said that’s worthless. Solomon is saying - live life - regular life - like it’s a celebration. “Clothed in white” and “anointed with oil” were things people only did on special occasions - occasions of great joy. He doesn’t mean throw a party every day - or actually wear white every day. That’s not practical. He means - carry that attitude. Be that version of you - the one that comes out on your best days.

Back in verse 9:

**“Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this (fleeting) life that God has given you under the sun—all your (fleeting) days.” (Ecclesiastes 9:9).**

Now if you’re reading the NIV, I replaced the word meaningless with *fleeting*. Same word in Hebrew - but *fleeting* is the better sense in context.

Actually, the Hebrew word *Hebel* is the same - as Adam and Eve's son, *Abel*. A little odd, to name your son *vanity* - or *meaningless* - but my guess is that his name came first, and the meaning later - *after* he died.

Remember, Abel was the first person - who *ever* died. Adam and Eve - lost a son. And suddenly, life looked a lot different. And looking back - I think the name Abel took on new meaning. Fleeting, vanity, meaningless.

But we're here now - we're alive - so Solomon says - enjoy life *with your wife*. That means - with the family God has provided now, whatever that is for you. Don't wait for your dream life to arrive. Enjoy it now, as God has given it. Yes, you should work to improve life - or find marriage - or pursue dreams - but don't forget to live *now*. The real now, with the real people around you. Because it will pass you by in a hurry.

Verse 10:

**“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”** (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

And this is where Solomon's perspective hits its limit. He can't see past the grave. And that makes this life *frustrating*. Verse 11 reminds us that

**“time and chance happen to everyone.”** (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

As Christians, we love to remind each other that God works all things for good, but we should also remember - that God is *also* the one who worked time and chance into the system. And he uses those too. And in verse 12:

**“Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come:  
As fish are caught in a cruel net,  
or birds are taken in a snare,  
so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 9:12).

And what about that? Why is it that no one is guaranteed tomorrow? Why does God let the good die young?

Solomon's view is still limited, so let's go to Jesus for that one. In Luke 13, people came to Jesus to get some understanding after a tragedy struck. Pilate had killed a number of Jews at the Temple - and there was no justice. Was it because those people were worse sinners that they died? And another story where a tower fell and killed 18 people. Were they more wicked or foolish? Jesus says *no*.

**“But unless you *repent*, you too will all perish”** (Luke 13:5).

In other words - it's not for you to know why one dies and another lives. But you're alive - for now - and while you're alive you have a chance - to repent of sin, ask Jesus to forgive, and get right with God.

It is true, there is a grave at the end of every road. And yours might come today. So get right with God *now*. Jesus also told us that He is the resurrection and the life, and anyone who believes in Him will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Jesus will never die. And when I *know* that, when I know God's grace - that Jesus gave his *life* for *me*, suddenly it's so much easier - to enjoy life. Because everything I have is a gift - to be enjoyed - and shared. So how about you? When was the last time you danced around the kitchen with friends, or laughed until you cried? When was the last time you started a water fight with your kids - or with your parents? Read Ecclesiastes 9. Consider life from death's perspective. Look forward - and find eternal life in Jesus - and look back, and enjoy this life while you still have it.

Only one life - it soon shall pass. Only what's done for Christ will last.



## Ecclesiastes 9 | B-side: Time & Chance

Hello Through the Word. Pastor Kris here - with Ecclesiastes 9 - the *b-side*.

I have to tell you, I have so been enjoying this walk *back* through Ecclesiastes. This is actually a re- write and re- record of a series I did way back when TTW had just launched as a short little radio spot on one little radio station. We've come a long way in nine years, and I had to go back and rewrite the guide for this book - one of my absolute favorites.

And I gotta tell you, the lessons here - I've heard them before - I've *taught* them before - but wow, it hits a little deeper as you get older. Life really does move fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it. And Ferris Bueller said that more than three decades ago! *Man* - I'm getting old.

I think Ferris would tell me, "You're not dying. You just can't think of anything good to do."

Ferris Bueller aside, life does move fast. As I record this, this very morning I dropped my son off at the airport - boarding a plane for college life. Eighteen years of life together. And in one morning - it's all different. By the end of this year, my oldest daughter will be married. Life just keeps moving. So this chapter - chapter 9 - it's always been a favorite, but today it really spoke to me. Especially verse 9:

**"Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this (fleeting) life that God has given you under the sun—all your (fleeting) days." (Ecclesiastes 9:9).**

Once again - I replaced the word meaningless with *fleeting*, as I believe that's the better translation in context. Our days are short, enjoy them while they're here.

Warren Weirsbe put it this way, "It's not by searching for special things that we find joy, but by making everyday things special." I like that.

And I have to admit, this stuff has been convicting me. I realized recently - that there is a version of me - the best me - that comes out on certain occasions - vacation, the beach, weddings. Best me is awesome. He's fun, witty, encouraging, generous, patient. I love best me. Now the everyday me is a decent guy. A little stressed, maybe, but decent. But when I think about that obituary - and I wonder which me my kids will remember most - all the work stuff and bills that I stress about - and all the world's madness in the news - they just don't seem quite so important. I can't fix the whole world, and I can't make all my problems go away, but I can love.

Some people say *live like there's no tomorrow*. I think that's a little shortsighted. There will very likely be a tomorrow for most of us. I say live like today matters, and love like tomorrow isn't guaranteed. Because it isn't.

Back in verse 9:

**"For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun."**  
(Ecclesiastes 9:9).

The phrase *lot in life* can have a connotation of dreariness - but I don't think that's Solomon's intent. God has given you a *lot* - a life granted to you. If your lot includes family - enjoy it. If it is friendship, or work, or trials, or whatever - work at it, and enjoy it - and live it *well*.

And look at verse 11:

**"I have seen something else under the sun:  
The race is not to the swift  
or the battle to the strong,  
nor does food come to the wise  
or wealth to the brilliant  
or favor to the learned;  
but *time and chance* happen to them all."** (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

Listen, skill and strength and wisdom will improve your odds in life - but there are *no* guarantees. Sometimes Christians act like our faith gives us a golden ticket for things to work out our way - but we face life on the same planet as everyone else, and life happens. Ecclesiastes is a good reminder of that. And that helps me. I think it keeps us real - so outsiders don't think we're living in some sort of fantasy land. No - we understand the realities of life. We get that life isn't fair - but we also see more. That's why we walk by faith, *not* by sight. Ecclesiastes is a glimpse at life - walking by *sight*. We don't live there - but it is good to remember what that's like for the rest of the world.

Well, Solomon closes chapter 9 with a story. Verse 13:

**“I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.”** (Ecclesiastes 9:13- 16).

I love this story. A short vignette - a little observation of life. Something amazing happened. A poor but wise man - saved his entire city. Wisdom prevailed over might. Incredible. But then - they forgot him. Solomon declares that wisdom is better than strength - but the man's wisdom - was forgotten. The people don't listen any more. What's the point of that? What are words for - when no one listens any more? (And do I quote the eighties too much? Don't answer that - I already know).

But seriously - look at our own past. How many times has one generation learned a hard lesson - only for the next to forget it?

So Solomon makes two conclusions to close out the chapter. In verse 17:

**“The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.”** (Ecclesiastes 9:17).

That’s a good word. Who are you listening to - the fool that shouts the loudest - or to the wise - who speak quietly - and humbly?

And in verse 18:

**“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”** (Ecclesiastes 9:18).

That verse holds some difficult truth. The *first part* - is popular. I found it quoted on several pacifist websites. And it’s true, *wisdom is better than weapons of war*. I agree whole-heartedly. Sadly though, most nations spend far more on weapons of war than we do on diplomacy. Fifty years ago in my own country, weapons received twice the budget. Today, it’s more than ten times the diplomacy budget.

But there is a balance here - to keep idealism in check. And it’s interesting to note that *none* of those pacifist websites quoted the second half of the verse, “Wisdom is better than weapons of war, *but one sinner destroys much good.*” In other words, wisdom and peace are way better - but sin always makes a mess of it all. One sinner can do so much damage - can destroy the work of so much wisdom and effort. That doesn’t mean we give up - and it doesn’t mean we should go to war to fight every wicked sinner out there. We’d all be destroyed. But if there is wisdom - if there is a way to avoid the war and save the city - then take it. But understand - it’s not an easy road. There are a whole lot of sinners out there that will destroy a whole lot of good. Corruption, greed, lust - they’ll mess up both sides of the political aisle. But when it’s all said and done, wisdom is the better road, and righteousness will be rewarded. And God will not forget the good we’ve done. God works all things for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. We just might not see it - until we see the eternal perspective.

And that's it for side- B. Hope you're enjoying Ecclesiastes as much as I am. And I'll see you back here in chapter 10.

## Ecclesiastes 10 | The Madness of Folly

Welcome back everyone to the book of Ecclesiastes. Pastor Kris with you once again, and Chapter 10 - as Solomon continues his quest to make sense of the world and understand life - under the sun. Remember - Solomon still doesn't have the whole picture. His view is limited - to this world. He believes in God - but he's *not* walking by faith. And yet, his observations are accurate, and his wisdom is sound. There is much for us to learn here, but keep in mind - that the *story* here is incomplete.

Now, in chapter 10, Solomon turns his focus to what he calls *the madness of folly*. He introduced it back in chapter 7, along with the stupidity of wickedness. I really love the adjective choice. Wickedness - is stupid. Folly - is madness. Now folly is the opposite of wisdom - it is the way of a fool. Have you ever done something so *dumb* - that you immediately call yourself an idiot? You know - carry too many coffee cups - or pick up a jar by the lid without making sure it's screwed on - or stand up quickly, right into the freezer door. Folly. Some of us live our lives that way. So Solomon investigates. Verse 1:

**“As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:1).

Great picture. What if I sold you a hundred dollar bottle of *fine* perfume - with just one little cockroach that snuck in the bottle and died? *Just one*. Suddenly the quality of the perfume doesn't matter much. And just one foolish mistake can destroy your good name, and just one bad idea can wreck years of planning. So don't open the lid - don't let folly get in. Not even a little.

Then verse 2:

**“The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:2).

In other words - if the wise goes one way, the fool goes the other - every time. It's like they avoid wisdom on purpose.

Verse 4 is a little different:

**“If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:4).

That's a good word. When your boss gets angry - stay calm. Anger leads to folly - so don't storm off, and don't respond in kind. Then verse 5:

**“There is an evil I have seen under the sun...”** (Ecclesiastes 10:5).

The word translated evil here in Ecclesiastes doesn't necessarily mean wicked or sinful - it just means *wrong*. Solomon says this wrong is

**“...the sort of error that arises from a ruler.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:5).

Verse 6:

**“Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:6).

Fools in charge. And they can do a *lot* of damage. Solomon's own son did it. Rehoboam - he put his young friends in high positions, and they abused their authority. Now when Solomon says the *rich* occupy low positions - the issue isn't money - it's their training and upbringing. Remember cultural context. When people who are *qualified* for the role are overlooked because of favoritism, *everyone* suffers.

Verse 7:

**“I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:7).

That verse threw me off at first. What's wrong with a slave getting opportunity to lead? Solomon already commended the poor but wise man who saved his city. So I think what Solomon means here - is that the guy on horseback - the guy they put in charge and called prince - that guy should *not* be in charge. He should be the slave because he's not fit to lead. And that guy walking on foot like a slave - he should be the prince. Foolish is foolish, whether rich or poor, and a fool should not be put in charge no matter what class he or she comes from.

In verse 8, Solomon moves from rulers - to workers. Folly and wisdom at *work*. These are proverbs, so listen and see if you can discern the meaning:

**“Whoever digs a pit may fall into it;  
whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.  
Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them;  
whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:8).

So what do you think it means? Whoever digs a pit - may fall in. Basically, I think it's a call for wisdom at work. Every job comes with risk, and every task has a wrong way and a right way. Workplace safety is serious stuff. But I also think there's a metaphor here - for life in general. Dig a pit - you could fall in. Break through a wall - you might get bit. In other words - when you start tearing things down, be careful. There may be a snake in there. It doesn't mean don't do it - just do it right. Safety first. I am amazed at how much safety is increased and productivity is improved when good procedures are set in place - and workers comply. Again, that goes for work - and *life*. Cutting corners always costs more in the long run - with injuries, lost work, and waste.

Look at verse 10:

**“If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed,  
but skill will bring success.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:10).



Have you ever tried to work with a dull knife or a cheap tool? You waste so much time and work. The same is true when you work without the right skills or schooling. Skill brings success. Don't just work harder - work smarter.

And if you're going to work smart - do it the first time. Verse 11:

**“If a snake bites before it is charmed, the charmer receives no fee.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 10:11).

Put that in modern terms - if the mechanic adds oil to the dry engine - *after* it blows a gasket - he's not getting paid. Timing makes all the difference. Get your life right - *before* it falls apart.

Now, as we talk about fools - it's very easy to use the third person here. Florida man is funny - as long as he's someone else. But watch yourself. I remember the first time I read Proverbs - and all the verses about fools were so *true* - about *them*. Until it hit me - I wasn't looking at a picture, I was looking at a *mirror*. The fool - was me - in so many of those proverbs. And it was my pride that kept me from seeing it for so long. As you read chapter 10, try putting your own name in for the fool - and the wise - and see which one is more accurate. And if you need to change, ask God to change you. The mirror does you no good if you don't do something about it.

Back in verse 12:

**“Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, but fools are consumed by their own lips.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:12).

Are your words *gracious*? Are they better than people deserve? Verse 13 describes the words of a fool - that go from folly - to madness.

**“And fools multiply words.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:13).

So make sure we practice a little subtraction. Or better yet, rightly *divide* the word of truth!

Verse 14 also warns us about fools who think they can tell the future. Next up, Solomon returns to foolish and lazy rulers and leaders. Verse 16:

**“Woe to the land whose king was a servant (that could be translated - whose *king is a child*) and whose princes feast in the morning.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 10:16).

The real issue here is leaders who *act* like children. Remember when you were a kid - and you thought that being in charge was about everyone else serving *you* for *your* enjoyment. Rulers like that feast in the morning - when they should be preparing for a day of *serving* the people. Seventeen:

**“Blessed is the land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 10:17).

Verse 19 confused me at first - because it just seemed... *wrong*. Unbiblical. Then I realized - this is Solomon quoting the foolish ruler. Instead of serving the people, the ruler says:

**“A feast is made for laughter,  
wine makes life merry,  
and money is the answer for everything.”** (Ecclesiastes 10:19).

See this leader thinks feasting and laughter are the *main* thing. Watch yourself too - when your life is built around the feast, when wine becomes the *highlight* of your day rather than the reward *after* work, *after* serving God and serving others - then you're in trouble.

And these rulers act like money is the answer for everything - like they can solve problems - not with wisdom, but just throwing money at them.

Hunger, homelessness, war, racism - just raise taxes and throw money at it. The problem is - money attracts greed - and scavengers show up fast when money's thrown around. And churches make the same mistake - especially in my country. Americans show up in a poor country with big money and easy solutions. Don't misunderstand. Money is necessary for most problems - but without wisdom, the problems just get worse. A little folly can wreck a lot of good intentions.

Read Ecclesiastes 10, confront the fool in the mirror, and we'll hit chapter 11 - next time.

## Ecclesiastes 11 | Do Something

Welcome back my friends. Kris Langham here again for Ecclesiastes 11. Have you ever felt stuck, unable to make a decision or choose a direction, because you just don't know how things will work out?

Solomon has been sharing his quest to find what is worthwhile in life. And here in chapter 11, he comes to the realization - that sometimes you just don't know what will happen - but you gotta do something! So *what* do you choose? Let's dig in at verse 1:

**“Ship your grain across the sea;  
after many days you may receive a return.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

In Biblical times, sending cargo out to sea for trade was a risky venture. Who knows what storms await at sea? Solomon says - go for it anyway. You gotta try. And though it may take time - returns will come back. In verse 2:

**“Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what  
disaster may come upon the land.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:2).

The wisdom here - is to diversify. This one has hit home with me recently. Sometimes I get so caught up in wanting everything to succeed - that I paralyze my decision making. Sometimes - you just gotta take your wins and take your losses and keep moving forward. Failure is part of life. And frankly - it's an essential part. We all need that humbling. And we'll handle the success so much better *after* the humbling. So invest yourself in several ventures - some will fail, some will succeed.

Good advice here when you're applying for a job - and when you're sharing the gospel. Keep at it, and it will work.

Three times, Solomon repeats the phrase: “you do not know.” That’s part of life under the sun. God doesn’t tell you everything. You don’t get guaranteed results. But you have to move forward, so you do your best, and you trust God with all the uncertainties. That doesn’t mean you’ll succeed - it just means He’s got you covered - come success or failure. Verse 4:

**“Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

The picture here is waiting for perfect conditions. Watching the wind until it’s just right before you plant. Staring at the clouds concerned about rain - when you should be out reaping the harvest. Sometimes you just gotta go for it. Verse 5:

**“As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

Lesson one - you are not God. And there’s that phrase again - *you do not know* - the path of the wind, the formation of a baby, or the *work - of God*. You don’t know! You don’t have all the answers, you don’t get the whole plan. It’s part of life. And we all have to work with it. And that’s where *trust* comes in. But what do you *do*?

Verse 6:

**“Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

That’s it. Plant seeds. Plant more than enough. Plant in the morning, plant in the evening. You don’t know *which* will bear fruit - but some of them will. Or maybe *all* will. So act. Go for it. Do *something*. Not *foolish* ventures.

He's not saying buy more lottery tickets or bet against the odds. Planting seeds means wise investment - of your time, skill, money, whatever.

My work - is ministry. I plant the seed of God's Word. And I have had my fair share of failures. It is foolish to imagine that just because I work for God, everything will succeed on my terms. But it is right to trust God - and believe that *He* will work all things for good, and that in due season we will reap a harvest if we do not lose heart. So I keep at it. And if any succeed - it's *all* worth it.

Next, Solomon sets in on the conclusion of the book, and it's as if he looks outside - at a beautiful sunny day, and reflects on life.

Beginning in verse 7:

**“Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:7).

I love sunshine. I love blue skies and puffy white clouds. What a gift from God. Free - for all of us. Solomon says - enjoy it. *However many years you may live* - basically means - you don't know how long you have, but you have today - so enjoy it. Enjoy *this* day - and *this* year. Again - enjoy doesn't mean go party. Enjoy work, enjoy family, enjoy life as it is.

Back in verse 8:

**“But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Enjoy your sunny days, but remember the dark ones. God uses those too - and there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:8).

Again the better translation here is fleeting, like a breath. Everything ahead of you in life - will pass by. Those sunny days with puffy white clouds will give way to darker days - but they also have a purpose and beauty - in their time.

Then in verse 9, Solomon addresses the youth:

“You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.” (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

It's been said that youth is wasted on the young. I think rather that the young waste their youth wishing they were older. And the older generation doesn't help when we glorify our younger days with unrealistic memories of teenage life, or idealistic teen movies about lives that no one really lives. Better to enjoy the age you are - and life as it really is. There is beauty in every season of life. I remember when my son was five, and he came in from the park with his buddy. As they were deciding what to do next, I overheard one of them exclaim, “*I love to play!*” You go kid. Enjoy it. Now today he's off to college. Time to love studying, and enjoy some hard work. So if you're young - be young! Not irresponsible, not sowing wild oats or sacrificing your future at the altar of today. That's foolish. Live wisely today - and make the most of this season of life. And don't forget to enjoy it. Back in verse 9:

**“Follow the ways of your heart  
and whatever your eyes see,  
but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 11:9).

Now careful here - he says follow your heart - but he balances that with a reminder - of God's judgment. If your heart leads you into sin - you'll be judged for it. And here again we need the rest of the Bible to help us. Jeremiah tells us that the heart is deceitful and wicked, but Jeremiah *also* tells us that God offers us a *new* heart. So take that offer - *before* you follow your heart. And store up your treasures in Heaven so that your heart will lead you in the right direction.

Galatians offers the best insight here. The real key is knowing what is *leading* your heart - the flesh or the Spirit. The flesh follows after sin - greed, envy, pride, lust. If your flesh is leading your heart - don't follow. But the Holy Spirit will lead you heavenward, and the fruit is love, joy, peace,

goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self- control. When the Spirit controls your heart - follow whole- heartedly. Check out our Galatians 5 and Romans 8 guides for more insight there.

Back in Ecclesiastes - verse 10:

**“So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body,  
for youth and vigor are meaningless.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:10).

Again, fleeting is the better word. The vigor and energy of youth don't last forever, so stop wasting time with worry, and use that energy for something good. In my culture, we inflict so much anxiety on teenagers - about school, sports, fashion, college, SATs, popularity. The list never stops. Sorry kids. We should teach you responsibility and maturity - life runs better with those - but unending stress does *not* help. We should also teach you balance, and help you enjoy life - as it is.

Solomon has more advice for youth in chapter 12, but for now, read Ecclesiastes 11, plant your seeds, do your work, enjoy your day - and trust God with tomorrow.



## **Ecclesiastes 11 | B-side: Judgment Day(s)**

Welcome friends to Ecclesiastes 11 - *the B-side*. Both chapter 11 and chapter 12 end with a reminder of God's final judgment.

Here in chapter 11, verse 9:

**“You who are young, be happy while you are young,  
and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.  
Follow the ways of your heart  
and whatever your eyes see,  
but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”**  
(Ecclesiastes 11:9).

It's a fascinating contrast in directives there. Be happy - follow your heart - *but know - God will judge*.

Chapter 12 ends - and with it the entire book of Ecclesiastes - with these words:

**“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.  
For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden  
thing, whether it is good or evil.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:13- 14).

Judgment is a central theme here in the conclusion to Solomon's observations, and for good reason. It changes our perspective on everything that came before. As Solomon looks back on all the toil and frustration of life - and on everything done under the sun - and asks what was gained - he recognizes - that God is the final judge of all our works. And “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

And knowing that truth - can really change the way you look at life - and how you live. A great friend of mine at church shared her salvation story. Sarah spent much of her life living for today, following her heart, come what may. And that meant plenty of sin. One day, her twenty- something son came home with the shocking news. "Mom, I'm born again." He gave his heart to Jesus. He went to a event, heard the gospel, and he got right with God.

Sarah - was hung over in bed.

"Mom, do you know where you'll go when you die?"

She knew. "I'm going to Hell. I'm gonna party in hell with my friends."

Then her son surprised her. "No mom, it doesn't work that way."

And he described a scene that the preacher had laid out. Judgement day. "A big screen shows everything you've ever done for the whole world to see. Everything said, thought, or done - and all your friends see it." Sarah said no, that can't happen.

So he shared the gospel with his mom - Jesus died for your sins. If you put your faith in Jesus, they are washed away, cast into the depths of the ocean, as far as the east is from the west. Never to be seen on the big screen. And Sarah got started following Jesus - that very moment.

And I can attest - that Sarah is a different person. Her life is changed, faithful to friends and family and a real gift to our church.

The question is - does judgment day really happen that way? In the Bible - is that how it goes down?

So let's take a quick look at the Bible verses that describe judgment day. I can tell you, the Bible does not describe a big screen TV. I think that

preacher was coloring in the lines to paint a more vivid picture. But the basic principle is accurate:

**“God will bring every deed into judgment, including every *hidden thing*, whether it is good or evil.”** (Ecclesiastes 11:14).

Which means - that your choices matter. How you treat people - matters. What you do when no one's looking - matters. And none of your excuses or cover-ups will hold on that day.

Now, judgment day is real for everyone, but we need the rest of the Bible for the whole story here. God's final judgment is described several times in the Bible. We have certainty on several elements from the Bible texts, along with some debate among scholars as to exactly when and how it all happens.

I'll give you a quick overview - and you can write down the chapters so you can head there for a complete study when we're done.

Revelation 20 describes judgement at the Great White Throne. That's at the very end of the Bible, and it happens *after* the story of life on earth is done - even after the Millennium. The dead from all of history are gathered before the great white throne, and the books are opened. These books appear to be God's record of every life - including every hidden thing. And another book is opened - the Lamb's book of life.

**“And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”** (Revelation 20:12).

Now the book of life - is God's own record of all who put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation - and the names were written there from the foundation of the world. Amazing. All those whose names were in the book of life - receive eternal life. Those whose names are not found there - are judged for their deeds, and are thrown into the lake of fire.

Hell - is a difficult subject. But understand clearly - that Hell is consistently described as people getting exactly what they deserve - for exactly what they've done. It is absolutely fair - and just - based on your deeds. You have two choices - get exactly what you deserve - or get forgiven. Justice - or grace. No one - gets worse than they deserve.

That puts the fear of God in me. Again, it's called the Great White Throne judgment. However, there are two other judgments spoken of in the Bible. Though scholars debate whether all three descriptions actually describe the same occasion - or if they happen altogether.

In Matthew 25, Jesus describes a judgment wherein He sits on his throne and separates ***the sheep from the goats***. The sheep are his true followers, and they are invited to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundations of the world, while the goats are cast out. Now, some scholars believe that this sheep and goats judgment - takes place before the millenium, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ - so that believers are welcomed into his Millennial Kingdom. Others believe it is yet another view of the White Throne judgment. Again, that's ***Matthew 25***.

And finally the **Bema Seat**. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5 and Romans 14 describe a judgment for believers *only* - called the Bema Seat. This one is different - it is *not* about salvation nor about sin - it is all about rewards for our works, not about justice for sins.

**“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”** (2 Corinthians 5:10- 11).

Bema Seat refers to a Roman judgment seat - something New Testament readers would have been familiar with. There at the Bema Seat, our works - as Christians - will be tested by fire, to see if they survive. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3 pictures it as a house built on the foundation stone of salvation. Jesus provides the foundation - you build the house. Your works are the building materials for the house. And at the judgment, it's all tested by fire.

Whatever survives the fire - means reward. Your salvation is safe - a gift from Jesus. But your works are tested - 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3:12 says:

**“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—”** (1st Corinthians 3:12-15).

So what makes some works gold and others wood or hay? It’s not clear - but I think it’s faithfulness. Were you genuine - was your faith and love for real? Did you do good deeds for applause or earthly reward, or out of love? God knows of course, and he will judge - and he will reward. Again, no punishments described here - your sin is gone, but several verses describe crowns that will be awarded. Many of these verses use imagery that we would liken most to the ancient olympics. Here Christ is not a courtroom judge but the judge of a race - your race - your life. And several verses describe crowns awarded for the race that was run.

And when God awards you - the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory, the crown of rejoicing, I don’t pretend to know exactly what that will look like - but I think it will be awesome! And I am convinced that God’s rewards will be well worth the struggle. So I am determined to fight the good fight, and finish the race *well*.

James 1 tells us:

**“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”** (James 1:12).

Now - exactly when and where the Bema Seat judgment will take place - is debated. Some say - it’s right after the rapture - first thing in heaven. Others

tie it together with the White Throne judgment. I think - it's separate from the White Throne, but I'm not sure when.

But you can dig in and research that yourself. Thanks for sticking around for this B-side. I hope it was informative and insightful. Again - find more detail in Matthew 25, Revelation 20, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5. And thanks for taking the journey with me. And if I don't catch you before - see you on judgment day.

I hope it's a good day for both of us. Seriously.

## Ecclesiastes 12 | Remember Your Creator

Hello friends, Pastor Kris with you again for the final chapter in Ecclesiastes. I hope you have enjoyed this book as much as I have. Alas, all things must have their end. But have you ever gotten to the end of something, and just felt like - something was missing? And without that *one* thing - everything else - was incomplete... empty... almost *meaningless*. Well, as we approach the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon reminds us that *life*, too, must end. Like the motto of Prufrock Academy in a Series of Unfortunate Events, *memento mori*, remember you will die.

It's rather a morbid reminder, but unlike Lemony Snicket, Solomon offers another reminder - and this one changes everything. This one - is that *one thing* - that gives everything else - meaning, even death.

Ecclesiastes 12, verse 1:

**“Remember your Creator  
in the days of your youth,  
before the days of trouble come  
and the years approach when you will say,  
“I find no pleasure in them”— (Ecclesiastes 12:1).**

The word *remember* is crucial here. And it means more than simply *thinking of or not forgetting*. *Remember* as in *do something about*. Remember your Creator. The Hebrew word means *act decisively*. And Solomon says - do it while you're young.

As Solomon stands in the looming shadow of death's certainty, he calls out - to the young, to those furthest from life's end. He began back in chapter 11 by telling the young - to *be happy*. Banish anxiety, follow your heart - but *remember* that dark days will come - and *know* that for all these things - God will bring judgment.

And now the great reminder - the one that changes *all* the days of your life, whether good or bad, light or dark - the one that calls for decisive action. Remember - your - Creator. Remember the One who *made* you - the only One whose works are glory, who gives meaning to this meaningless life. And Solomon speaks as one with the hardened wisdom of a man who failed to live his own advice - who knew God - and *forgot*. He failed to act decisively. He knew *of* God without actually *knowing* Him, acknowledged God's sovereignty without submitting to it.

So Solomon exhorts us to remember God...

**“before the sun and the light  
and the moon and the stars grow dark,  
and the clouds return after the rain”** (Ecclesiastes 12:2).

And here Solomon waxes poetic, and paints a dreary picture - of old age. And I believe Solomon's description here - is particularly fitting - for a life that failed to remember God. Pleasure is gone, lights dim, and where the rain once gave way to rainbows - now the dark clouds come right back.

Solomon spent his life searching for something - to find what was worthwhile - he tried study, but knowledge brought sorrow; he tried pleasure, but pleasure proved empty; he tried success, but it was all *chasing the wind*. And through it all - he forgot that one thing.

Now he's old. As Bette Davis quipped, “*Old age ain't no place for sissies.*” Solomon describes an aging body in symbolic language. In verse 3:

**“when the keepers of the house tremble,  
and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are  
few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;  
when the doors to the street are closed  
and the sound of grinding fades;  
when people rise up at the sound of birds,  
but all their songs grow faint;**



when people are afraid of heights  
and of dangers in the streets;  
when the almond tree blossoms  
and the grasshopper drags itself along  
and desire no longer is stirred.  
Then people go to their eternal home  
and mourners go about the streets.” (Ecclesiastes 12:3- 5).

The picture - is hands trembling, shoulders slump, legs weak, teeth gone,  
eyes dim. And passion - fades. The fire inside flickers out.  
And in verse 6:

**“Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,  
and the golden bowl is broken;  
before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,  
and the wheel broken at the well,  
and the dust returns to the ground it came from,  
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:6- 7).

Solomon harkens back to the curse -

**“for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”**

Yet he adds to that picture -

**“the spirit returns to God who gave it.”  
“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.  
“Everything is meaningless!”** (Ecclesiastes 12:7- 8).

Death will come. And looking back on life, all is fleeting, like a breath.  
Vanity, meaningless. *Hebel*. And so Solomon ends exactly where he began.  
But don't miss the key words of this chapter: *remember...before*. Four  
times Solomon emphasizes the word *before*. You still have time. Don't wait  
for a last second prayer. What are you waiting for? You - who put off God -  
spiritual procrastinators - waiting to the last moment - for what? A deathbed

Hail Mary so that you can arrive at judgement forgiven - with nothing to offer God but a wasted and selfish life? And for what benefit? The worthless vanities of pleasure and power?

There is a better option - if we remember - *before*. Remember your Creator - *now*.

Consider the life of Paul. When his life was spent he could look back and say,

**“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.”** (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:7- 8).

Now - does a life for God mean escape from the ravages of old age? Of course not. But consider 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:

**“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are *achieving* for us an *eternal glory* that far outweighs them all.”** (2 Corinthians 4:16- 17).

Did you catch that? *Eternal - glory*. Where Solomon searched this life for all it had - and found *temporary vanity* - Paul lived this life for the next one - he *did* remember God - and found *eternal glory*. *Substance - that lasts*. So, Paul says,

**“...we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”** (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Back in Ecclesiastes, a second voice closes the book with a short epilogue and conclusion. He refers to Solomon as *the Teacher*. Verse 9:

**“Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also *imparted* knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.**

**The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails...” (Ecclesiastes 12:9- 11).**

A goad is a prod that guides an animal - it moves you to *take action*. Wise words are intended to *move you*. And *firmly embedded nails* are designed to hold things in place - like an anchor - they provide a fixed reference point. And it says - these words of wisdom are...

“...given by one shepherd.”

In other words - wisdom may come through many sources, but the ultimate source of truth is God - our one good shepherd. And in verse 12:

**“Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.  
Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.” (Ecclesiastes 12:12).**

That verse reverberates through my mind every time I walk in a bookstore, every time I get lost in research or overwhelmed by endless opinions and philosophies.

Verse 13:

**“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).**

That's it. You can spend endless hours studying philosophy or theology - but the basic truths are simple:

*Fear God.* respect your Creator. Remember your Creator - and do something about it.

*Keep his commandments.* If God is God and God is good, then obey.

Verse 14:

**“For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Ecclesiastes' final words - and it's one peak into the afterlife - bring us to God's judgement.

So what will that be like for you? Every deed judged - every hidden thing revealed? Some say that all roads lead to God. Maybe so. But the reception you find there - depends entirely on *which* road you take to get there. Follow your heart - seize the day to squeeze every drop out of life under the sun - and God will bring every deed into judgement - whether good or evil. But follow Jesus - fix your eyes on things unseen this side of Heaven - and you will hear the words:

**“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!”** (Matthew 25:21).

As for me, there's still fire in me yet.

## Ecclesiastes 12 | B-Side: No Wasted Years

Hey there Through the Word friends. Welcome to Ecclesiastes 12 - the b-side. I sure hope you enjoyed our tour through this amazing little book of philosophical ponderings. I had - a great time. Here on the b-side, will dig a little deeper on some of the verses that we skimmed on side A, and share a couple thoughts and stories of my own - stuff that's been stirred up for me as we walk through Ecclesiastes.

The heart of chapter 12 begins with the clarion call from Solomon - to remember your Creator in the days of your youth. And if you are young today, please take that to heart. Don't wait. Act decisively *now*.

Remember him *before*. And the first bit that I wanted to dig in a little better on is in verses 3 through 6, and Solomon's dreary description of getting old. But let's start back at the beginning:

**“Remember your Creator  
in the days of your youth,  
before the days of trouble come  
and the years approach when you will say,  
“I find no pleasure in them”—  
before the sun and the light  
and the moon and the stars grow dark,  
and the clouds return after the rain”** (Ecclesiastes 12:1- 2).

And in verse 3:

**“when the keepers of the house tremble,  
and the strong men stoop”** (Ecclesiastes 12:3).

So let's unpack some of the symbolism here. The picture is of a great house, with many servants and keepers working and keeping it moving. The symbolic picture - is the human body - getting old. The keepers of the

house are the hands - trembling with old age. The strong men - are the legs that held you up and shoulders that once stood broad and strong - now slumped forward and stooped.

**“when the grinders cease because they are few,  
That’s the teeth going - a little side effect of aging.  
and those looking through the windows grow dim”** (Ecclesiastes 12:3).

Those are the eyes growing dim. Can’t seem to focus on the small print like you used to. Then it’s the big print.

Verse 4:

**“when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades;”** (Ecclesiastes 12:4).

That’s the ears closing - and sounds growing faint. At first, grandpa can never quite hear what you’re saying. Then he doesn’t even realize that you’re talking at all.

**“when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;**

**The bird noises wake you up way too early - but you can’t actually hear well enough to enjoy their birdsongs.**

**when people are afraid of heights**

**and of dangers in the streets;**

**when the almond tree blossoms”** (Ecclesiastes 12:4- 5).

That’s the hair greying - or in my case, just leaving. And courage is gone.

“...and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred.”

I think this is perhaps the most striking verse to me. It is one thing for the body to grow weak, but when *desire* is no longer stirred. Some commentaries say this is a loss of libido, but I believe Solomon has much more in mind here. No passion for life, no fire to live and love. When that’s gone, it’s done. Back in verse 5:

**“Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:5).

Now keep in mind - *all of this* - is pictured for us in the context of a strong call - to *remember your Creator* - before you get to that stage. You still have time!

And in verse 6:

**“Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,  
and the golden bowl is broken”** (Ecclesiastes 12:6).

Again it's symbolic - this time of death. The silver cord is the spinal cord, the golden bowl the brain. The phenomenal machinery of life that God worked into your body - will one day break down.

**“...before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,  
and the wheel broken at the well”** (Ecclesiastes 12:6).

That one is the heart - pictured as the wheel that pumps well water to the whole garden - broken at the well. Verse 7:

**“and the dust returns to the ground it came from,  
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.**

**“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”** (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

And that - is Solomon's rather vivid picture of aging - and dying. And I think that he gives *such* detail to drive the point home with the young person - you do *not* want to wait to the end to remember your creator - when you have nothing left to offer, and nothing to show for your wasted years.

My youngest daughter was baptized a couple years ago - just eleven years old. And as our friends prayed for her, one simple prayer stuck out to me. *No wasted years*. It was a good friend, a grandmother, and it was spoken with a voice of experience. No wasted years.

And that's my prayer for you as well.

As for me, from the day I knew God, I have been driven by that simple slogan in Ephesians 5: redeem the time. That means make the most of it. And it reminds me of a fantastic song by the Orange County Supertones. Side note - best band ever. Supertones - I miss you guys. The song is called 20/20. It's about looking back - from judgment day. I'll read you some lyrics.

"I felt so introspective tonight  
Thinkin' ahead about my final hindsight  
Did I make every moment count  
How much did I sit about  
Doin' not the good I know to do  
What will I say when I'm faced with his glory  
The saints and the angels as I tell my story  
Will the works I've accomplished be worthy of heaven  
What will I think lookin' back  
What was gold what was dross  
What was gain what was loss  
What will stand what was fleeting  
And what will I change while my hearts still beating?  
20/20

I love that song. Hindsight is indeed 20/20 - so what will life look like - from there? Now, speaking of songs - if any of you were wondering about the line that I closed the chapter 12 audio guide with - *there's still fire in me yet* - that's a line from a Switchfoot song. I told you in an earlier guide that Switchfoot - another fantastic band by the way - is - to me - the musical encapsulation of the book of Ecclesiastes. So good. They released an album in 2006 called *Oh Gravity!* - and I just happened to listen to that album for the first time - on a trip to Mississippi - visiting Hurricane Katrina relief. At the time, I was praying over the biggest move in my life - should I move my family out on mission field - to follow what I thought was God's



call to something either amazing or crazy? In the song, *Burn Out Bright*, the lyrics are just phenomenal. And these are the lines that caught me:

“If we've only got one try  
If we've only got one life  
If time was never on our side  
Then before I die I want to burn out bright  
So a spark ignites in time and space  
Limping through this human race  
You bite and claw your way back home  
But you're running the wrong way  
The future is a question mark  
Of kerosene and electric sparks  
There's still fire in you yet  
Yeah there's still fire in you.”

Anyway - I love the song. And for a guy who feels like *time* is *never* on my side, but with a determination to live this life well - that song hit home. That road trip - turned into five years on the mission field - and a whole lot of trials - and a whole lot of life hitting hard and wearing down the fight in me. And, ironically, right about the time I felt like I had nothing left to give, the spark for Through the Word began. One huge idea for a guy with no resources left. But that song would come back to now again, along with a lot of great Bible verses, and that one line: *there's still fire in you yet*.

Yeah, that one always brought me back to the lessons of Ecclesiastes. Remember your Creator - *before* the fire fades. And so I did. I remembered His faithfulness in the past and His promises for the future, and put my faith in his provision for today. Anyhoo - great song, great band. Check out Switchfoot if you get the itch. Burn Out Bright is a favorite of mine. Thank you Switchfoot for bringing my heart back to what matters.

That's it for the b-side. Also check out the chapter 11 b-side about judgement day. Thanks so much for joining me in Ecclesiastes. Love to all of you. And I'll see you - in the next book!