

Ecclesiastes /  
Song of  
Solomon /  
Isaiah

IELOHIM



**Monday:** Ecclesiastes 5-12

**Tuesday:** Song of Solomon 1-8

**Wednesday:** Isaiah 1-6

**Thursday:** Isaiah 7-12

**Friday:** Isaiah 13-19

## Introduction

Each time you read through the Bible, God uses different pieces of it to jump out at you and grab hold of your heart. In this week's reading we will spend time in 3 different books, each having drastically differing perspectives, styles, and purposes. It would be impossible to pay equal attention to each book and each section when we are reading through the Bible at such a quick pace. In light of this, we focus our attention almost exclusively on the book of Ecclesiastes in this week's devotions. Four out of the five days of devotionals will be from Ecclesiastes. Friday will dip briefly into the Song of Songs. Even though half of the week will be spent reading from the book of Isaiah, the devotional will not deal with it at all. That is because next week we will move away from Wisdom literature and fully engage with the Old Testament prophets. For now let us focus our attention on one of the most unique books in Scripture...Ecclesiastes.

## Introduction to Ecclesiastes

"Whatever!" This one word phrase has been the motto of the last decade in our popular culture. It's what a teenager says to her parents when they ask her to clean up her room for the 12<sup>th</sup> time that day. It's what the employee says when his employer treats him unfairly in the workplace. It's what the

citizen says when the politician renigs on campaign promises...again. "Whatever!"

What does this statement represent? What are we really saying with this word? Underneath the seemingly cool detachment and slight sarcasm in which this word is uttered lies a deep sense of hopelessness. Over and over we have seen the injustices of the world being perpetrated by people who seem to care nothing about our feelings and who seem to never be called to justice for their flagrant acts of bullying and manipulation. The wicked seem to be flourishing while the people who are working hard and just trying to make it in the world are trampled on or overlooked. The people who claim to be righteous or hold the keys to the mysteries of God turn out to be fakes, charlatans, and worse sinners than the people at whom they are wagging their self-righteous finger. People tell us there is supposed to be meaning in the world, but the world itself shouts out, "meaningless!! There is no order to things. It's all a big crap shoot and a game of survival of the fittest!" So we respond, "Whatever!" put our heads down, and carry on with our lives that seem pointless and devoid of real joy.

Perhaps this seems like a bleak picture of the state of affairs in our culture. If you cannot relate to this and are finding yourself skipping through life having a genuinely great time, that's wonderful; God bless you; you can take a week off from the daily devotionals. For the rest of us who have entertained these thoughts of hopelessness and meaninglessness, and have felt ashamed to admit it because we are Christians and are supposed to always be happy, then this week's study is for us.

The book of Ecclesiastes has been called the Gospel of Generation X, or the Postmodern Gospel. The

“Teacher,” the author of this book, is an intelligent man who is not afraid to deal with the difficult questions of life. He is not afraid to acknowledge the fact that sometimes life truly doesn’t make any sense. Sometimes bad people actually win and good people get the raw end of the stick. Sometimes babies die; good couples never have children; people are born with serious deformities; bad people terrorize innocent citizens. The “Teacher” is bold enough to look at these difficulties in life and not gloss over them with trite and cliché Christianisms. He is willing to enter into the world of the skeptical philosopher/cynic and meet him there.

There is where the journey begins. The “Teacher” steps into the chaotic world of uncertainty that plagues the mind of every critical thinker that has ever walked the planet. At this point we can learn a great deal from this ancient Teacher about how to be the light of God in the world. Many of us feel that if we are going to be good ambassadors for the good news of Jesus we must always have on our “happy face” and present a perfect image of life in God’s Kingdom. The “Teacher” helps us realize that this approach, if it is not authentic, is not necessarily the best approach. If people are going to be open to hear the good news of the Gospel, they need us to enter into their world and acknowledge that their pain and perspective is valid and very real. The “Teacher” is a master at doing just this.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is like a conversation between two worldviews: the Naturalist and the Biblical. The Naturalist observes the world for what it is – for what can be observed; what is “under the sun.” The “Teacher”, who is ultimately speaking from a God-centered perspective, meets the Naturalist in his perspective and articulates his arguments with an authentic empathy. Then, patiently and

intelligently presents a perspective from “above the sun,” in which the supremacy of God and the finitude of man is embraced and held in tension. In other words, the Teacher says to the naturalist, “You are absolutely right. When the world is observed from under the sun there really is no rhyme or reason to it. If this is all there is, then we should just eat, drink, and be merry, because tomorrow we vanish.” Then adding to this perspective, and most likely surprising the naturalist who has prejudged the God-lover as narrow, trite, and superstitious, continues, “under the sun EVERYTHING is meaningless. Even religion and moral behavior is meaningless.” “What?” replies the Naturalist, “How can you, being a man of religion, say that religion and moral behavior are meaningless? Isn’t that what your worldview is built upon?”

Now, to you the reader, comes the heart and soul of the message of Ecclesiastes. Religion and moral behavior ARE meaningless. Our lives, as followers of Jesus, are not built upon following rules, building and growing churches, being “right” when everyone else is wrong, or doing good deeds. The truth is that most of us get caught up in those kinds of activities for the wrong reasons. We do most of our “good” out of the motivation to be noticed by others and to gain a reputation for being righteous. We may couch it in false humility, but deep down we are all needy people looking for kudos from either God or from others. The “Teacher” points out to us that these activities done under those deep-seated motivations are as pointless and sinful as the fool who chases after wine, women, and work. God is bigger than all of that. God is ultimate. God is infinite. God is not defined or confined by anything, even His own rules. God has a plan and a purpose, but there is no way that we will EVER know what it is or make sense out of all the pieces that comprise its complexity. It is not

our place to understand God, it is our place to know Him and serve Him.

When we can come to grips with the reality that everything in life is a chasing after the wind unless the activity is completely and utterly surrendered to God, then we can know freedom. Then we can agree with the apostle Paul when he said in Philippians 4:12

*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."*

We can read between the lines, "because, apart from God, none of it really matters anyway." The challenge before us this week is to determine where our focus is. Are we still trying to make sense out of the "stuff" in life, and trying to be filled by our activities or reputation? Or, have we realized that all of it is empty unless our focus is an eternal one that looks beyond and "above" the sun, into the eternal love and reality of God Himself. Let's look to Him to be filled so that we can overflow into the meaning-less world who desperately needs to drink from a well full of meaning.

## Monday -- Four "P's" in a Pod

Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

Make a list of the different ways through which the author tried to find happiness and meaning in life?

In what ways have you pursued these avenues to find happiness and meaning in life?

In v. 11, what was the final conclusion about the endeavor to use these things to find fulfillment. Do you agree with this conclusion? Why or why not?

## Food for thought:

The “Teacher” searched for happiness through the four “P’s”: Pleasure, Projects, Profit, and Power. Depending upon our personality type, each of us will pursue one or more of these P’s in life. Pleasure seekers view life as a frothy cup of wine, begging to be savored and drained to the last drop. They chase after the next fun fix or thrill that will pump their adrenaline or appease their delicacies. Project managers are goal oriented, task-driven individuals who are not happy unless they are pushing the plan through to its completion; until they build something that will make a lasting impact on the world. The Profit crowd sees money as the ticket to freedom. They follow the golden rule...whoever has the gold makes the rules. They look at the bottom line, and if they are in the black then their future is secure and they can do as they please. Finally, the Power brokers are the politicians and the networkers. They know that it is not about what you know, but about who you know. If they are well connected then they will have the leverage they need to get done the things that need to get done.

Here’s the rub; in the end, all four pursuits end up in the same place -- the grave. Today’s pleasure is tomorrow’s hangover. A project that goes up will eventually come down. A profit today will be spent tomorrow. Power corrupts and new power will overthrow it.

None of these things will bring about happiness. Are they bad? No. God created all four P’s. What’s missing is the fifth P -- Purpose. Without out the proper Purpose the first four P’s are empty and futile; they tempt us and lead us at 100mph into a brick wall. But with proper purpose, which is the glory of God, these P’s will become tools in God’s hand to expand

His kingdom and bring honor and glory to Himself.  
The question for us is, "Have I given these things to God? Do I chase after them because I think they will make me happy, or do I pursue them because God has called me to use them for Him?"

## Tuesday- What Time is it?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

In vv. 1-8 the Teacher creates a list of contrasting activities, claiming that there are times when each opposite is appropriate. First, underline the sets of activities that most relate to your experience. Next, look at the sets that you underlined and reflect on a time when you can see that both activities were appropriate for you at different times of your life.

What did you learn from this reflection?

Reflect on v. 11. Try to rephrase this verse in your own words.

## Food for thought:

Verse 11 is one of the glimmering jewels of hope in the middle of this dark and brooding book. The key phrase is "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men." There is one simple reason why the vast majority of people in the world chase after "stuff" to make them happy and come up dry and thirsty time and time again. The one reason is that deep down inside they know better. Every human being knows that there is more to life than life itself. We all have a sense that there is something beyond. In our modern world we have been told not to listen to that inner yearning, because it is just the cultural programming we have received from our superstitious and uneducated forefathers. The modern world says that the only meaning in life is to live for now and make the most of it. So, millions of people buy into that line of thinking and SLAM! They plow right into the brick wall of meaninglessness. So what do they do? They look to the stars and search for Extraterrestrial Life. They open their minds up to the world of the occult, spiritism, self-healing, only to be eaten alive by the evil one.

In v. 11 we find great peace. The Teacher reminds us that life is good and that God created us to live it to the fullest. There is a time for everything. Enjoy life. But, remember that the only reason you can enjoy life is because there is something beyond life for which you were ultimately created. Eternity is in your heart. You were created for eternal fellowship with God. You can endure, no, even more; you can enjoy the ebb and flow, the ups and downs of this life -- come good or bad, rain or shine -- because you are so beyond this life. You have your eyes fixed on the only thing that can bring peace and happiness, and that is the eternal presence of God. What time is it? It's time to live life

with God at the center of your focus. If you do this you will love life, now and forever!

## Wednesday -- A Strong Cord

Ecclesiastes 4:4-12

According to v. 4, what is the motivation behind people's striving for achievement and advancement in the workplace or in life? Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

In what ways have you seen this at play in your own realm of experience?

Describe, in your own words, the kind of person discussed in vv. 7-8. Have you ever known anyone like this?

What is the alternative to this kind of person given in vv. 9-12?

In what ways have you seen the principle of the "cord of three strands" work out in your own life?

Evaluate your church community right now. Are you connected to at least two other people that know you intimately, that share your core value system, and that have come up alongside of you to challenge you and encourage you? If you have not, seriously consider and ask God to reveal to you how you could connect to these kind of people. Remember, this is the purpose for which we create the space called "the church community." If you are in need of becoming a strong cord, then make your cry heard in the church and begin taking the steps to build intimate relationships.

## Thursday -- The End of the Matter

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

According to v. 13, what is the whole duty of man?

According to v. 14, why is this the whole duty of man?

When you stop and realize that God will bring everything, including the hidden thoughts of your mind -- you know, the dark ones that only you know about -- into judgment, how does this make you feel? If you took this seriously, how would it impact your thoughts and actions?

## Food for thought:

Now we come to the punch line of Ecclesiastes. We've been hinting at it all week, but now we get to blurt it out. Everything is meaningless unless it is done for the sole purpose of honoring God. Even good things are meaningless if they are done with selfish ambition. There is only one litmus test to determine whether your life is meaning-full or meaning-less: FOCUS. If your vessel is pointed to God and being filled with His presence, for His glory, according to His purpose, in His timing, then you will be filled with meaning and will overflow with purposeful activity, no matter what that activity may be. If your vessel is pointed at ANYTHING "good" or "evil" other than God Himself, then you will be chasing after the wind and will be a hollow, dry, empty vessel full of nothing but hot air and broken dreams.

As the old hymn says,  
    Only one life, twill soon be past  
    Only what's done for Christ will last.

Read Matthew 6:33 and see if there are any correlations to this passage in Ecclesiastes.

How is your focus this week?

## Friday-- His Banner Over Me

Song of Solomon 2:3-4

What is this woman's attitude toward her lover?

We can look at this passage (and the entire book of Song of Solomon) through two lenses.

**The first** is the practical, horizontal lens.

If you are married, when was the last time you expressed your love to your spouse? What kinds of words do you use when you express your love?

What kinds of actions do you take when you express your love?

How do you know that your spouse feels loved when you express your love?

Take some time to go out on a date (it is Friday night) and ask your spouse if they feel loved by you. Ask them how you could do better at expressing your love.

**The second** way we can look at Song of Solomon is through a vertical perspective, seeing our love relationship with God.

When was the last time you expressed love to God like this passage expresses love?

Are you able to feel the love of God in your life? If not, what do you think is keeping you from feeling God's love?

Read Romans 8:35-39. According to these verses, what is God's attitude toward you?

## Food for thought:

Verse 4 says, “He has taken me to the banquet hall.” Try to visualize a special banquet that is being held for some very important people. This is a very exclusive, gala event, only the most important people will be there. Now imagine that the guest of honor personally called you and invited you to be at the banquet because he values you so much. How would you feel? That is what God has done for us. He has invited us to sit in eternity with Him, His banquet, because He loves us. If we could live with the full magnitude of that love present on our mind every moment, how different our world would be.

In John 17 Jesus prayed that we would love each other and live in unity. If we did this then the world would see that the Father sent Jesus and that His message was true. Another way to say this would be, “if we love one another then it will be like running a flag up the pole that says ‘God lives here’ for the world to see.” When we evaluate our church community, what does the banner say? If we are filled with the love of God and spill it over into each other, then we will be able to say, “His banner over us is love.”