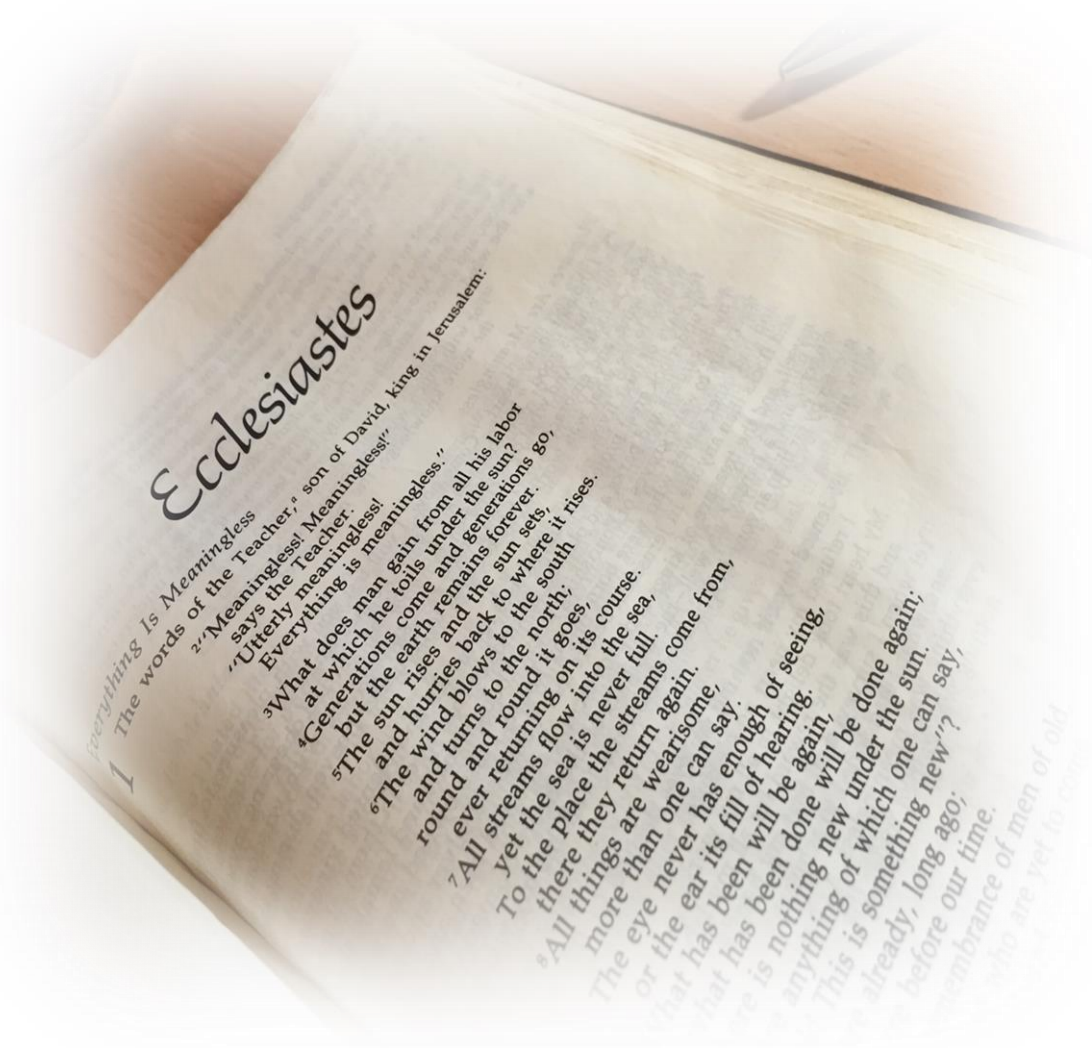


Studies from the book of:

Ecclesiastes



“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Is this true? Welcome to this series of study in the book of Ecclesiastes. This is one of the books in the bible that is sometimes quoted but often misunderstood or not even read by many. One of the first questions that you may ask is “Why are we studying this book?”

Why are we studying this book?

The main reason for this is because this book deals with what may be the key issue of mankind: What is the meaning of life? Many philosophers and deep thinkers have wrestled with this question for centuries and have been unable to answer it. Even today, put this question to the internet and see how many conflicting answers you will get! Once again, God’s word gives answers that no other source can match.

What are we going to do?

First, we will consider the author of this book, who I believe to be Solomon, the most prosperous king of Israel. We will briefly consider why we believe him to be the author. Next we will look at his introduction, where he tells us a bit about himself and his journey. After this we are going to look at the issues raised by Solomon and then see how they relate to our circumstances today. Over and over he will tell us of something that he “saw” or observed during his life. He would then consider the matter in his heart and share with us his conclusion, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

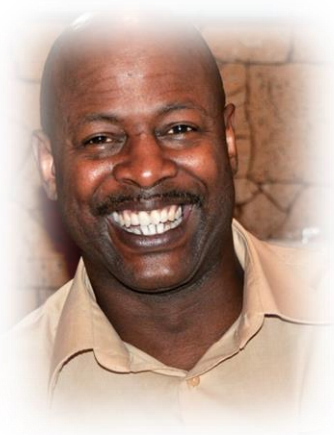
The issues that he deals with are as relevant to us today as they were then. You will see that he set his heart to seek and search out “all that is done under heaven”, which includes wisdom, madness, folly, pleasure, building works, gardens, great possessions, wealth, entertainment, and simply anything his eyes desired. The subjects that he deals with include Wisdom vs. Folly, The Problems With Toil, A Time for Everything, Oppression, The Value of Companionship, The Value of Integrity, Wealth, Wisdom, Authority and Death.

Solomon is very honest and open about his observations, so be prepared to think, encouraged and challenged all at the same time!

Enjoy the journey,

Freddie

Freddie C Roberson Jr.
Pastor C.I.A. Church



Solomon's Introduction (part 1)

As we begin our study in the book of Ecclesiastes I am aware that many are unfamiliar with this book. Some Christians have never read it and many do not understand it at all. It has been quoted out of context, and one passage of the book became the lyrics of a very famous song by a group called the Byrds 1965! Do you know the name of the song?

Who wrote the book?

We will begin this series by answering two basic questions: Who wrote the book and why was it written? Most scholars believe that the book was written by Solomon, King of Israel.

Q - How much do you know about Solomon? Discuss this in your group before reading the next section.

Some believe that he did not write the book, but these six things point to him:

1. His title (1:12)
 - a. King of Israel in Jerusalem
 - b. Preacher (Hebrew means one who addresses an Assembly, like a Headmaster.
2. HIS HOME - King of Israel in Jerusalem; 1:1, 12,16; 2:7,9
3. HIS AGE – Vs. 11:9 – 12:7 suggests that he is an old man. Jewish tradition suggests that Songs of Solomon were written in his youth, Proverbs at middle age, and Ecclesiastes in his old age.
4. HIS MARITAL EXPERIENCE 7:26 – 28 Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, 1 Kings 11:3
5. HIS WISDOM 1:13, 16; 12:9; 1Kings 4:29 – 34 - His wisdom was greater than all the men of the East. (Vs 30).
6. HIS WEALTH 2:4 – 9

Q - What do you find to be most amazing thing about this man? Why is it important to know this much about Solomon, the author of this book?

Why was it written?

Solomon has an answer to the question “Is life worth living?” This is the question that many are asking today. What would you say that some give as an answer to this question? Make a list of the responses that you may have heard to this question?

The first reason for writing the book was to show that all earthly pursuits are vain, meaningless, empty. In other words, if you are looking for joy and fulfilment through money, power, pleasure or anything else that this world has to offer, you are wasting your time. All is vanity.



You will see the word vanity a lot in this book. This word (Hebrew “Hebel”) means emptiness, something transitory, unsatisfactory, meaningless. Translated vapour, breath, nothingness. Here are a few examples of this:

- Ps. 144:3, 4 Man is like a “breath” (NIV) Man is like to vanity (KJV)
- Prov. 31:30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting (NIV) Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain (KJV).
- James 4:14 “Your life....is even a vapour....”
- The phrase, “All is vanity” is used 7 times: 1:2, 14; 2:11,17; 3:19; 11:18; 12:8
- The phrase “grasping for the wind” is used 9 times: 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9

These phrases are applied to everything “under the sun”. The basic question is “is life worth living?” Solomon’s answer is: “if only to make money, power, pleasure, **if only for this life**, No!” Here are six reason why life apart from God is meaningless, found in chapter 1 from verse 4 to verse 18.

Can you follow Solomon’s reasoning? Read the following passages and discuss.

1. Because what you do does not last forever (1:4) the earth will remain, but you will be gone
2. Because what you do does not satisfy (1:5 – 8)
 - a. The sun, up and down (v.5)
 - b. The wind – round and around (v.6)
 - c. The rivers – always running (v.7)
 - d. The eye is never satisfied, the ear never full (v.8)
3. Because what you do is not new (vs. -9, 10) what about aeroplanes, nuclear bombs, etc.? The same properties were always there. Birds could fly, great energy has already been used (Sodom). Man reproduces what God creates!
4. Because what you do is not remembered like you think (v -11) Are our athletes and entertainers really remembered forever?
5. Because what you learn cannot change facts (vs. -14, 15) Death, Earthquakes.
6. Because what you learn brings much grief (v 18) Ignorance is bliss. The less you know about crime, the less fear you have.

Here is a brief mention of the other two reasons why the book was written:

- He wants us to realise that God is the source of all we enjoy in life. (2:24 – 26; 5:18 – 20)
- He wants to remind us that we are ultimately accountable to God. (12:13,14)

Summary:

Solomon wrote this book:

1. To show that earthly pursuits are vain
2. To show that God is the source of all we enjoy in life
3. To remind us that we are ultimately accountable to God

Finding Satisfaction in Life (part 1)

What does it mean to be “satisfied?” The word is defined this way:

- Fulfillment of one's wishes, expectations, or needs, or the pleasure derived from this. (Oxford Dictionaries)
- A pleasant feeling that you get when you receive something you wanted, or when you have done something you wanted to do (Cambridge Dictionary)
- Is satisfaction and contentment the same? Can you be satisfied but not content? Can you be content but not satisfied? Discuss



In Chapter 2 Solomon mentions 3 problems in three little paragraphs.

Problem #1 - Worldly pursuits (the things which most consider to be worth going after) do not bring satisfaction – Chapter 2: 1-11. Consider what he says here:

1. “I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”.
2. Laughter is mad – because although it can make us feel good, it can't satisfy (*Prov. 14:13 – even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief*).
3. Drinking (v. 3) - he drank, but held to his wisdom.
4. Folly (v. 3) – silliness, foolishness, something stupid – he will say more about this later.
5. Projects (Works, vs. 4, 5)
 - a. Building
 - b. Farming
 - c. Gardening
6. Possessions (vs. 7, 8)
 - a. Slaves
 - b. Herds and
 - c. Money, wealth
7. Entertainment (vs. 8 - we spend more here than ever in history)
 - a. Singers
 - b. Musical instruments of all kinds
8. Notice the words “I”, “Me”, “Myself” not considering God.
9. He became great and excelled (v. 9)
10. He explored everything possible (v. 10)
11. He actually enjoyed what he had achieved (v. 10)

But was he satisfied? (v. 11)

We will consider problems 2 & 3 in our next section.

Finding Satisfaction in Life (part 2)

In our last section we considered one of the three problems that Solomon faced in his search for satisfaction:

Problem #1 - Worldly pursuits (the things which most consider to be worth going after) do not bring satisfaction

Let's now look at the other two that he wrote about:

Problem #2 – Because of one event, wisdom is as unsatisfactory as folly – Chapter 2: 12-16.

- He states that wisdom is better than folly. Is it true that even without God, a wise person is better than a foolish person?
- He realises that the same event happens to them all. What is that event? Why does this trouble him so much?
- He also tells us that *"...there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come."* Is this true? If so, why is this a problem?

Problem #3 – Others will inherit what you have done (Chapter 2:17-23)

- Why did Solomon say that he hated his labour? Identify his two reasons and then discuss them.
- Was Solomon speaking based on his own circumstances? (2 Chronicles 12:13,14)

Based on the three problems mentioned, what are Solomon's conclusions?

- Only through God can we find satisfaction and enjoy the good of our labour (vs. 24)
- God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness to those who have a relationship with him (vs. 26).
- Those who don't know him are just gathering wealth for those who do (vs. 26).



Time (part 1)

Time is the raw material of life. It is immensely valuable and utterly irretrievable. Each of us is allotted the same amount of time – 1,444 minutes per day, 168 hours each week and 52 weeks a year. Here are some characteristics of time:

- It dominates everything
- Time is non-elastic (We cannot shorten or lengthen it).
- It is unique.
- It is expensive and precious.
- It is irreversible. (We can turn our watches back, but not time).
- It is measurable.
- It is irreplaceable. (There is no substitute for time).
- Time means different things at different times to different people. (For example, it goes slower for the patient than for the dentist).
- It is the dimension in which change occurs.



In the first 8 verses of chapter 3, Solomon mentions 28 things that have to do with time in our lives. 14 are positive and 14 are negative. Have a look at each one of them.

Q - Do any of these stand out to you, or do you find some particularly interesting?

Solomon is showing us 4 things about time:

1. God has a **reason** for all that happens in our lives. This is the whole point of the first 8 verses.
 - a. God is not mentioned, but He is implied. For example:
 - i. A time to be born – only God knows the exact time when a child is to be born.
 - ii. A time to die – only God knows exactly when you are going to die.
 - iii. Notice the difference between an exact time (time to be born) and something that is seasonal (a time to plant).
 - b. These verses tell us that God is in control. For example:
 - i. A time to weep as well as laugh – there will be negative times in your life as well as good. When things go well, men often credit themselves, but when things go bad men often blame God.

Q - Do you find this to be true? Have a look at Psalm 115:3; 135:5,6.

- c. They tell us that God has a specific purpose in all that happens to us. In other words, there is something specific that He wants to accomplish in your difficulties as well as in your successes.
 - i. Consider what Joseph told his brothers in Genesis 50:20.
 - ii. In Acts 16:6, Paul and Silas were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach. How do we react when God closes a door?

Time (part 2)

In our previous lesson we saw that Solomon wanted to show 5 things about time. We considered his first point, that **God has a reason for all that happens in our lives**. In these verses (1-8) we looked at two things:

- God is in control
- God has a purpose in all that happens to us

Now we are going to consider 3 more things about time:

2. We must **accept** God's purpose and control over all that happens. We can see this in verses 9 – 11.
 - a. The question asked in verse 9 is: "What profit has the worker from that in which he labours?"
 - b. Solomon's response: when God is at the centre of what we do, we are able to experience the beauty of all things at their proper time. Compare this with Romans 8:28.
 - c. God has put eternity in our hearts – someone said that there is a God-shaped vacuum in every person. Is this true? Consider Romans 1:18-21
 - d. None of us really know all that God is doing – because He is in control, not us! Job eventually discovered this. (Job 42:1-6)
 - e. Is this easy to do?
3. We must **appreciate** the time that we have as a gift from God. According to Solomon, these 4 things are the gift of God:
 - a. "...rejoice..." (Philippians 4:4; Romans 12:12)
 - b. "...do good in their lives..." (Galatians 6:9,10)
 - c. "...eat and drink..." (Acts 2:46)
 - d. "...enjoy the good of his labour..." (1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Timothy 2:2)
 - e. What can prevent us from appreciating the time that we have?
4. We must answer to God for how we have use the time given to us.
 - a. There are some things that you can do nothing about (losing, death, etc.)
 - b. God does it so that men should fear before Him.
 - c. God requires an account of what is past (Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10)



What conclusions does he come to concerning time?

1. God has a reason for all that happens in our lives
2. We must accept God's purpose and control over all that happens
3. We must appreciate the time that we have as a gift from God
4. We must answer to God for how we have used the time given to us

A Time for Judgment (part 1)

In these next verses Solomon continues on the subject of time, but his vast experiences take him in a slightly different direction. These verses can be best divided by four little phrases which Solomon uses:

- Vs.16 "...I saw something"
- Vs.17 "I thought in my heart"
- Vs.18 "I also thought..."
- Vs. 19 "So I saw..."

Read verses 16-22

1. **"...I saw something..."** - What was the problem that Solomon saw?
 - a. Corruption in judgment (Vs.16) – in other words, in the place where there should be proper judgment (Law courts, Police, etc.) there was wickedness.

Q - Is this a new problem? Can you give current examples of corruption in government in our modern society? Discuss
 - b. Corruption in the place of the right (Hebrew Tsedeq) or the righteous, or justice.
 - i. He's referring to wickedness even among the religious. Ps. 37: 1, 2, 7, 23-27.
 - ii. Because the wicked are not judged, we are encouraged to sin. Psalm 73:1-14, 16-20
 - c. Does this happen in the place of the righteous today? Discuss
2. **"I thought in my heart..."** – What is it that he began to understand?
 - a. God will judge the righteous and the wicked (Vs.17). There is a **time** for judgment! Even though there is not always justice in this life, God has an appointed time for judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15; Malachi 3:16,17)
 - i. To a believer, the emphasis is on reward (II Corinthians 5:10 – "We must all appear..."
 - a. – Corinthians 3: 9-15, we (Apostles) are builders, you (believers) are buildings, all works are to be tested. Vs. 14, Reward, Vs. 15 Loss Rom.14:12).
 - ii. To the unbeliever the emphasis is on punishment.
 - a. John 3:16–21 - "already condemned"
 - b. Revelation 20:15 – "...cast into the lake of fire..."
 - c. Romans 6:23 – "the wages of sin..." We will receive our wages on payday

So far, Solomon saw that there was corruption in the place where there should have been righteousness. He saw this both in government and in religious leadership as well. He then thought in his heart that sooner or later God will judge the righteous and wicked. In our next section we will see his other observations and learn from his conclusion.

A Time for Judgment (part2)

Last week we looked at two of the four phrases that Solomon used:

1. **"...I saw something..."** - he saw corruption in the place where there should be righteous judgments. This included civil corruption and religious corruption
2. **"I thought in my heart..."** - he understood that God would eventually judge the righteous and the wicked.

Now we will continue with his last two observations:

3. **"I also thought..."** - What was the other principle which he understood?
 - a. God tests us, to show that we have no advantage over animals when faced with death (vs.18). Is this true? In what way are we like animals? Discuss.
 - b. What if God told you that today, you were going to die. How would you react?
 - c. God wants us to wake up to what is really important: Our accountability to God.
 - d. Look at the places we go (Vs.20 – the dust) Solomon is not expressing uncertainty about life after death. Vs.21 implies "who knows what happens after that (c.f. Ecclesiastes 12:7) Psalm 73:21-28; Psalm 16:8-11). Do we really think that Solomon did not know these verses?
4. **"So I saw (perceived)..."** - What was Solomon's conclusion?
 - a. We should enjoy what we do now because that is what God has put us here to do.
 - i. Look again at Ecclesiastes 2:24, 3:12, 3:22.
 - ii. There is nothing better than to enjoy doing what God intended me to do, knowing that He is going to reward me.
 - b. "Who can bring him to see what will happen after him? Who knows the future?"
 - i. No One. We do not know what will happen tomorrow – James 14:4

What can we learn from this?

1. There is corruption and unfairness in this life.
2. But God will judge the righteous and the wicked.
3. When it comes to death, we have no advantage over animals (we will die like them), so we had better re-think our priorities.
4. God wants us to enjoy what we do, knowing that we are to be held accountable.
5. There is a time for Judgment



Oppression

It's not fair! Don't we hear this so often? Yet, it seems to be true, that life is simply not fair sometimes. This is sometimes true when dealing with those who have power – court officials, governors, dictators and so forth. In this chapter Solomon considers something that so many of us have seen time and time again; oppression! Let's begin by reading Ecclesiastes 4:1-6.

What is oppression?

- Oppress – to press against or upon:
to crush: to smother: to overwhelm: to take by surprise: to distress: to lie heavy upon: to treat with tyrannical cruelty or injustice: to load with heavy burdens: to ravish.
- Oppression – act of oppressing: tyranny: feeling of distress or being weighted down: dullness of spirits: pressure.



Q - Have you ever been oppressed by anyone? If so, you know what it feels like. Can you discuss this with the group?

Here are a few examples of oppression:

- Bullies at school or in the neighbourhood
- Employers –some employers make life difficult for their employees.
- Rulers who oppress the poor – Exodus 1:11
- The devil – Acts 10:38 “...Jesus of Nazareth...who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil...”.
- We often bring oppression upon ourselves through sin, disobedience, and the fear of man –
 - Prov. 29:25 “The fear of man brings a snare...”.
 - Hebrews 12:1 “...Let us lay aside every weight, and sin that doth so easily ensnares us...”.
- Fathers can oppress their children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21)

Solomon said “**...I returned...**” he looked again at the problem he saw in chapter 3, verse 16 – wickedness in the place where there should be righteous judgment. Those who should have stood up for the weak were oppressing them! This is what he experienced:

- He saw the tears of the oppressed and saw that there was no help for them (4:1)
- The oppressors had power, which is why there was no help for them
- This made him very depressed! (see Job 3:17-22)
- He felt that the dead were better off because their toil was finished (just like Job).
- He also felt that the one that was never born was even better, because he never experienced the evil works that are done in this life (similar to Job – Job 3:1, 11)

There was another problem that he saw – Envy (vs. 4-6)

What is envy?

- Envy – A feeling of annoyance at the good looks, qualities, fortune, etc. of another
- a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck. (*Oxford Dictionaries*)
- Proverbs 14:30 - “A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.”

Q - Have you ever been a victim of envy? Discuss

What do Solomon mean when he says: “The fool folds his hands, and consumes his own flesh” in verse 5? See also Proverbs 24:30-34; Proverbs 6:9-11

Solomon describes the best way as “...a handful with quietness...” (v. 6)

- In this verse he begins to explain the principle of godliness with contentment (1 Timothy 6:3-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:11)
- Balance is the key – (Proverbs 15:16-17; 16:8; 17:1)

As Solomon studied and explored all that is under heaven.

- He saw that men are oppressed often to the point of wanting to die, and yet are not comforted.
- He saw that their oppression was driven by envy, and discovered that this is chasing the wind.
- In this section he has just begun to explain that God’s way, the way of contentment in Him, is the better way.



The Value of Companionship

In the first part of chapter 4, Solomon wrote of two problems that he saw and considered. He observed that there were people in power who oppressed those who worked hard, and then he saw that some were envious of those who were skilful in their work. He then identifies a problem that comes as a result of oppression. Read chapter 4, verses 7 to 16.

He saw a man who was alone and had enough to live comfortably. He had no one to support, yet he was not content with his wealth. He works and works and keeps himself from enjoyment for nothing.

Q - Is this something that is common today? If so, why? Do “oppressors” usually end up alone? If so, why?



He says this is vain and a grave misfortune. Psalm 39:6 - *“Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; He heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it”*.

His evaluation: two are better than one (vs. 9-16). What is he really saying?

1. Friendship is better than selfish pursuits. Why?
 - a. Because with a friend there is better success (v. 9) Is there a tendency these days to “go it alone?”
 - b. Because with a friend there is support and encouragement, especially when we fall (vs. 10,11)
 - i. A true friend will tell you the truth from the heart, even when it hurts (Proverbs 27:5,6,9)
 - ii. A true friend has the right attitude and knows that he/she could also fall (v. 10 – “...if one falls...” suggests that either could fall; see also Galatians 6:1,2)
 - c. With a friend there is strength (v. 12)
 - i. Some think that they can resist the devil and handle temptation on their own, but it is much better to handle difficulties with a friend.
 - ii. There is something special when praying with a friend (Matthew 18:19)
2. Friendship is better than being popular
 - a. Those in leadership (Kings, Presidents, etc.) often face popularity, yet seldom find true friends (vs. 13-16)
 - b. His example is a poor youth who is wise and becomes King – he was the people’s choice (v. 15)



- c. Because of his common background people seem to relate to him (Vs.14)
- d. Although he became popular and had many “friends” (Vs.16a) yet after a while people were not pleased with him.

Q - Does this happen today?

- e. His popularity was vain, empty (Proverbs 18:24; Ecclesiastes 4:16; Matthew 26:49,50)
- Solomon saw that men often try to go it alone and overwork themselves.
 - He determined that it’s better to have a true friend than to pursue your own desires or than to just be popular.
 - Jesus is our true friend (John 15:13; Luke 7:34)

The Value of Integrity

Let's review what we have considered so far. Solomon introduced the book by telling us that life "under the sun" is vain (empty, meaningless, unsatisfactory, and transitory). He illustrates this by telling us of several things which he explored (pleasure, laughter, drinking, folly, building projects, possessions, entertainment, fame, wisdom and work).

He gives a balanced view by showing that there is a time for everything and reminds us that we will be held accountable to God for everything we do. Then he observed the problems and oppressions which exist in this life and the foolishness of man as he tries to do it alone. After all he has said so far, he begins in chapter 5 to make his first real exhortations. To sum it up: he is encouraging us to walk in integrity regardless of the oppression of this world.

What is integrity? Here are a few definitions:

- The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness (Oxford Dictionaries)
- Firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values: incorruptibility (Merriam-Webster)
- The practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values. (Wikipedia)



Solomon is encouraging us to have a careful response toward God. It's doing what we say we'll do. It's keeping our promises. It's thinking before we speak. Solomon seems to be saying that no matter how much we see oppression in others, we must have integrity toward God. In this chapter he gives us 5 exhortations. Here are the first 3:

#1 - Walk prudently (v. 1a) - other translations word it this way:

- Keep thy foot... (KJV)
- Put your feet down with care... (BBE)
- Be careful what you do... (CEV)
- Guard your steps... (ESV)
- As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut. (NLT)

An example of this idea is found in Exodus 3:1-5:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground."

Exodus 3: 1-5

Q - Why did God tell Moses to take off his shoes? What made the ground holy?

- Integrity toward God is a careful attitude towards God, recognizing who He is. Because of relational thinking, we are often too "chummy" with God. We forget who God is and therefore can sometimes consider Him less than who He is.
- Integrity toward God recognizes our need of worship ("when you go to the house of God...") it assumes that you will go!

#2 - Draw near to hear... (v.1b)

- Integrity toward God recognises the importance of how we worship (James 1:19-21)

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James 1: 19-21

Q - What is he mean by the "sacrifice of fools"?

#3 - Do not be rash with your mouth (v. 2)

- This means that we recognise the importance of a controlled tongue. In other words, we are careful with the words that we use, and in particular with vows that we make toward God.



Have a look at these verses and discuss them:

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head,

because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Matthew 5:33-37

Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

Matthew 8:19,20

Q - Is it true that we sometimes make statements before God without thinking? What do you think he means by the statement: "For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words"?

Solomon's first 3 exhortations:

- **Walk prudently** – be careful as you go to God's house. Remember where you are when you are in His presence.
- **Draw near to hear** – listen to God instead of talking too much.
- **Do not be rash with your mouth** – think before you make a vow or commitment to God.

The Value of Integrity (part 2)

In our last session we looked at chapter 5 and considered 3 of Solomon's exhortations:

- **Walk prudently** – be careful as you go to God's house. Remember where you are when you are in His presence.
- **Draw near to hear** – listen to God instead of talking too much.
- **Do not be rash with your mouth** – think before you speak.

Let's have a look at his final 2 exhortations:

#4 – Pay what you have vowed (vs. 4, 5)

It seems that we live in a society which has very little regard for vows. For example:

- Marriage vows are stated with no intention of keeping them.
- Oaths are taken in court with no intention of telling the truth.
- Promises are regularly made with no intention of keeping them.



Q - Do you find this to be true? Do you find that even Christians are often tempted to do the same thing?

Solomon states that it is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay. Here are other places in scripture that stress the same principle:

- Numbers 30:2 "...he must not break his word but must do everything he said"
- Deuteronomy 23:21 "...the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin"
- Matthew 5:33-37 "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one".
- Matthew 12:36, 37 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."
- Acts 5:1-5 "You have not lied to men but to God."

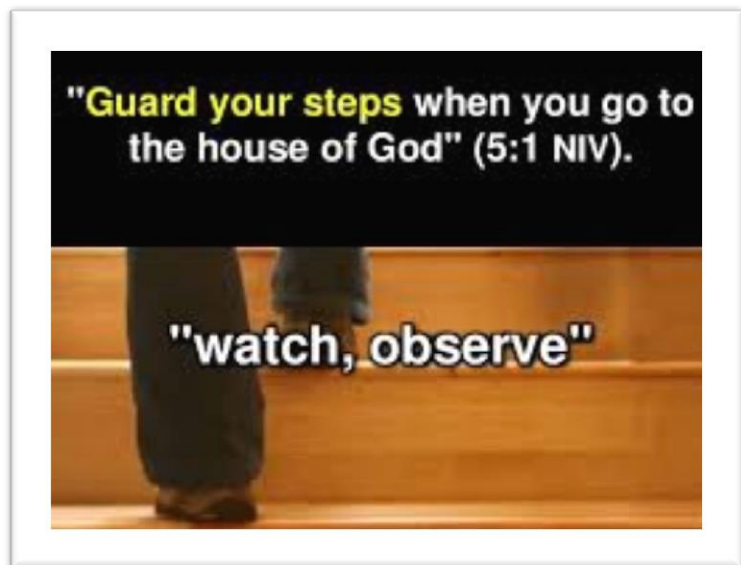
#5 - Don't let your mouth cause your flesh to sin (vs. 6,7)

In a moment of trial or passion, be careful. Don't make a vow to God's messenger (spiritual leader) and later complain that it was a mistake.

- It happened to Jephthah (Judges 11:29-40)
 - Vs. 30 – He makes a hasty vow
 - Vs. 34, 35 – He pays for it.
- It happened to Herod (Matthew 14:1 – 12)
 - Vs. 7 – He made a foolish oath
 - Vs. 9, 10 – This led him to murder John the Baptist
- If you act quickly, you may be able to deliver yourself (Proverbs 6:1-5)

Here's a recap of Solomon's exhortations:

- Walk prudently – be careful as you go to God's house. Remember where you are when you are in His presence.
- Draw near to hear – listen to God instead of talking too much.
- Do not be rash with your mouth – think before you speak.
- Pay what you have vowed – better not to vow than to vow and not pay.
- Don't let your mouth cause you to sin – think before you commit.



The Problem with Wealth

There are many people today who are striving to be rich. It is obvious that there are advantages to having wealth, but are there disadvantages?

Q - What would you do if you suddenly gained an enormous amount of money? Is it a good thing to be rich? Is it a good thing to be poor?

The bible has a lot to say about wealth and riches:

1. The bible teaches that wealth, when gained properly, is a gift from God.
 - a. *Deuteronomy 8:17, 18 "...it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth..."*
 - b. *1 Chronicles 29:12*
*"Both riches and honour come from You,
And You reign over all.
In Your hand is power and might;
In Your hand it is to make great
And to give strength to all."*
2. Wealth in itself is not necessarily destructive; many good people have possessed wealth.
 - a. ABRAHAM – Genesis 13:2
 - b. DAVID – 1 Chronicles 29:26-28
 - c. DANIEL – Daniel 2:48
 - d. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA – Matthew 27:57
 - e. PHILEMON – Philemon 10-12,16: Colossians 4:1
3. However, wealth can hinder spiritual growth
 - a. *Matthew 19:23 – "... hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom..."* Why is this so?
 - b. *Mark 4:19 – choke..."*
 - c. *James 5:1-6*

Solomon mentioned 3 observations concerning wealth and then comes to a realization at the end of the chapter.

1. **Riches often cause greed and injustice (and eventually oppression) among government officials (vs. 8,9)**
 - a. *"...one official is eyed by another higher one..."* refers to taxation. Because officials are greedy, they will often oppress and deny justice.
 - b. *James 5:1-6*



Q - Is true in our society today?

2. The love of money brings dissatisfaction (vs. 10-12)

- a. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 "Now Godliness with contentment is great gain..."
- b. Ecclesiastes 5:15 – you can't take it with you

3. Riches can actually hurt those who pursue them (vs. 13-17)

- a. Proverbs 11:4 –
*Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
But righteousness delivers from death.*
- b. Proverbs 13:7 –
*There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing;
And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches.*
- c. Proverbs 22:16 –
*He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches,
And he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty.*
- d. Proverbs 28:20-22 –
*A faithful man will abound with blessings,
But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.
To show partiality is not good,
Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.
A man with an evil eye hastens after riches,
And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.*

What did Solomon conclude?

- 1. Be satisfied in the food, work, and life which God has given you. Be content! (Verse 18)
- 2. When God does give wealth and enables you to enjoy it, accept it as a gift from Him. (Verse 19)
- 3. Use it for His glory! (1 Timothy 6:17-19)



Is Everything You Want Enough?

Q - What would you do if you had gained enough wealth to buy anything that you wanted? What would you buy? How much would you give away? Discuss.

In our last lesson, we talked about the problems with riches and wealth. We saw that wealth gained properly is a gift from God, and that there were many people in the bible who had gained substantial wealth. However, wealth can hinder spiritual growth. Here are three things that Solomon observed, that we looked in our last lesson:

- Riches often cause greed and injustice (and even oppression) among government officials
- The love of money brings dissatisfaction
- Riches can hurt those who pursue them

In chapter 6, Solomon tells us of something he observed which he calls "...an evil which I have seen under the sun..." What is it? It is the frustration of having everything you want, yet not being able to enjoy it:

Ecc 6:1 - *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:*

Ecc 6:2 - *A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.*



Q - Notice that three things are mentioned: riches, wealth and honour. How are they different?

In these verses, notices that God is the one that gives riches, and wealth and honour, yet it is also God that does not allow them to be enjoyed. Perhaps this is because we often fail to recognize that God is in control of these things:

1Ch 29:10 - *Therefore David blessed the LORD before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.*

1Ch 29:11 - *Yours, O LORD, is the greatness,
The power and the glory,
The victory and the majesty;
For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours;
Yours is the kingdom, O LORD,
And You are exalted as head over all.*

1Ch 29:12 - *Both riches and honor come from You,*

*And You reign over all.
In Your hand is power and might;
In Your hand it is to make great
And to give strength to all..."*

Rom 1:21 - *because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Solomon's evaluation:

#1 - Even if you have long life and a big family, if God does not allow you to enjoy your prosperity, a still-born child is better off than you.



If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he— for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man, even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?

Ecclesiastes 6:3-6

Why does he say this? Because it has more rest. It never goes through the pain and frustration than that man (v. 5). Solomon again reminds us of death (v. 6)

#2 – Man strives to fulfil his fleshly desires and yet is never satisfied.

*All the labor of man is for his mouth,
And yet the soul is not satisfied.
For what more has the wise man than the fool?
What does the poor man have?
Who knows how to walk before the living?
Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire.
This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.
Ecclesiastes 6:7-9*

- The “mouth” in verse 7 represents selfish pursuits (similar to the “belly” in Philippians 3:18,19).
- Some men are like the leaches (Proverbs 30:15,16); never satisfied.
- It doesn't matter whether we are wise or foolish; rich or poor (Verse 8). If we're living for our mouth, we're in the same boat.
- It's better to be content with what you have than to miserably strive with your mouth.

#3 – God is in control and you can't change it!

*Whatever one is, he has been named already,
For it is known that he is man;
And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.
Since there are many things that increase vanity,
How is man the better?*

For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 6:10-12

You can't change who you are (v.6). Sometimes we may not like what we are (intelligence, looks, personality, social position, etc.) Are we really striving with God, who created us? (v.10) We really cannot fight with God. Is it true that we (mortal men) do not really know what is good for us? (v. 12). We really don't know what will happen in the future.



Concluding summary:

- Don't think that wealth or possessions or honour will bring you happiness. (Luke 12: 15)
- Don't become a "leech" – be content with what God has given you (1Tim. 6:6)
- Are you striving against God? Let Him have control. (Matthew 11:28)

The Value of Wisdom (part 1)

Here is a quick recap as to what we have seen so far. In chapter 5, he gave us his first exhortations – guard your steps, don't be quick with your mouth, fulfil your vows, etc. After this he mentioned some other things which he observed under the sun – the problems with wealth and the problems with having everything you want without the God-given ability to enjoy it. All of these we have discussed leading up to now. Here in chapter 7, he gives his second bit of advise.

If I were to sum up Solomon's message in Chapter 7, it would be "My advice to you is to get God's wisdom, because you will be better off in this life if you do". Notice the usage of the word better (verses 1, 2, 3, 5, 8).

Q - What is wisdom? What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Is one better than the other?

Solomon's three main observations:

1. **Wisdom helps us to see the circumstances of our life from God's perspective**

It helps us understand what is really important:

A good name *is* better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of one's birth;

Ecclesiastes 7:1

Q - What do you think this verse means? Why does he compare reputation with odor? How important is your name?

It helps us understand the value of sorrow and death:



Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that *is* the end of all men;
And the living will take *it* to heart.
Sorrow *is* better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning,
But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

Ecclesiastes 7:2-4

Q - Do we learn more from sorrow than from laughter?

It helps us understand who we should listen to:

*It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
Than for a man to hear the song of fools.
For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
So is the laughter of the fool.
This also is vanity.
Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason,
And a bribe debases the heart.*

Ecclesiastes 7: 5-7

Q - Is it true that we often do not listen to those who speak the truth, but instead only listen to what we want to hear?

It helps us understand our need for self-control

*The end of a thing is better than its beginning;
The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,
For anger rests in the bosom of fools.
Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.*

Ecclesiastes 7:8-10

2. Wisdom has more advantage than money

*Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
And profitable to those who see the sun.
For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense,
But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to
those who have it.*



Ecclesiastes 7:11,12

There are similarities between wisdom and money. Both can be good, and both can bring shelter and success. But the main difference between the two is that Wisdom brings life!

*Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you;
Love her, and she will keep you.
Wisdom is the principal thing;
Therefore get wisdom.
And in all your getting, get understanding.
Exalt her, and she will promote you;
She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.
She will place on your head an ornament of grace;
A crown of glory she will deliver to you."*

Proverbs 4: 5-9

3. Wisdom makes us consider the work of God

Consider the work of God;
For who can make straight what He has made crooked?
In the day of prosperity be joyful,
But in the day of adversity consider:
Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other,
So that man can find out nothing *that will come* after him.

Ecclesiastes 7:13,14

He is in control of the good and the bad.

Conclusion

- A. Wisdom helps us to see our circumstances from God's point of view.
- B. Wisdom has more advantages than money.
- C. Wisdom makes us consider the work of God.



*Wisdom calls aloud outside;
She raises her voice in the open squares.
She cries out in the chief concourses,
At the openings of the gates in the city
She speaks her words:
"How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?
For scorners delight in their scorning,
And fools hate knowledge.
Turn at my rebuke;
Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
Because I have called and you refused,
I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,
Because you disdained all my counsel,
And would have none of my rebuke,
I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your terror comes,
When your terror comes like a storm,
And your destruction comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you.
"Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.
Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the LORD,
They would have none of my counsel
And despised my every rebuke.
Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way,
And be filled to the full with their own fancies.
For the turning away of the simple will slay them,
And the complacency of fools will destroy them;
But whoever listens to me will dwell safely,
And will be secure, without fear of evil."*

Proverbs 1: 20-33

The Value of Wisdom (part 2)

You may have heard the expression “You are so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good”.

Q - Is this true? If a person is really “heavenly minded”, will he be of no use to anyone on earth?

In our last lesson we considered 3 things about God’s wisdom:

- It helps us to see the circumstances of our lives from God’s perspective
- It has more advantage than money
- It makes us consider the works of God

Now we are going to consider some other advantages of wisdom:

Wisdom teaches us to avoid extremes -

Ecclesiastes 7:15-18

I have seen everything in my days of vanity:
There is a just *man* who perishes in his righteousness,
And there is a wicked *man* who prolongs *life* in his wickedness.
Do not be overly righteous,
Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?
Do not be overly wicked,
Nor be foolish:
Why should you die before your time?
It is good that you grasp this,
And also not remove your hand from the other;
For he who fears God will escape them all.

Q – What does it mean to be “overly righteous”? Should we just be a bit righteous, but not too much?

A. The pride of the self-righteous (v. 16)

1. “Do not be overly righteous...”
2. He is not speaking of God’s righteousness. We could never have enough of that. He is referring to self-righteousness.
3. Examples –

Romans 12:3

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to one a measure of faith.

Luke 18:9-14



Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.



I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

4. Self-righteous or legalism causes you to destroy yourself. Outward legalism can cause you to have an unloving spirit

Proverbs 3:7,8

Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.
It will be health to your flesh,
And strength to your bones.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride *goes* before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.

1 Timothy 4:1-3

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Q – What does it mean to be “overly wicked”? Is it ok to sin a little, as long as it is not hurting anybody?

- B. The presumption of the wicked (v. 17)

1. *Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?*
2. This is when I assume that I can sin and get away with it. This can shorten your life!
3. Don't presume that you can do what you want without giving an account to God -

Psalm 52:1-7

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of David When Doeg the Edomite Went and Told Saul, and Said to Him, "David Has Gone to the House of Ahimelech."

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God *endures* continually.

Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

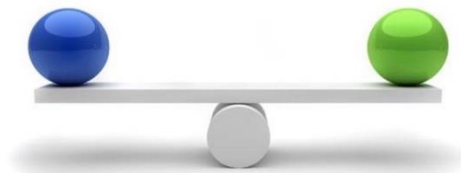
You love evil more than good,
Lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah

You love all devouring words,
You deceitful tongue.

God shall likewise destroy you forever;
He shall take you away, and pluck you out of *your* dwelling place,
And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

The righteous also shall see and fear
And shall laugh at him, *saying*,
"Here is the man *who* did not make God his strength,
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,
And strengthened himself in his wickedness."

4. Have you ever heard of the term "**cheap grace**?" – this is when some think that "God sees Jesus, not my sin" and therefore believe that sin is overlooked (I can get away with it, because I am saved by grace)
5. Once a person decides that something is not that important, he/she becomes free, under the right circumstances, to do it. This is known as **moral indifference**. This is why even Christians can become oppressors. African slavery was one example of this type of behaviour.



- C. Balance is the way to go – "...he who fears God will escape them all."
1. I need wisdom to avoid the extreme of being legalistic and self-righteous
 2. I must fear God!

Wisdom teaches us to avoid extremes!

The Value of Wisdom (part 3)

In our western culture, we are encouraged to seek counsel and advise as much as possible. There are many television talk shows that offer advise as a form of entertainment, and, if you have a question about almost anything, all you have to do is go to your computer and ask, or “google it!” There are so many social media platforms giving guidance for everything from cooking to cleaning, from health to hygiene, and if you want to know the meaning of life there is someone who claims to know the answer to that question as well!



Q – Is this a good thing, or a bad thing? Have you ever received good information from a television talk show or social media platform? Have you ever received news or information that was not so good?

Solomon tells us that wisdom is better than the counsel of the ungodly -

Ecclesiastes 7:19-22
Wisdom strengthens the wise
More than ten rulers of the city.
For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good
And does not sin.
Also do not take to heart everything people say,
Lest you hear your servant cursing you.
For many times, also, your own heart has known
That even you have cursed others.

The scriptures teach that we should seek counsel from others –

Proverbs 11:14
Where *there is* no counsel, the people fall;
But in the multitude of counselors *there is* safety.

Proverbs 24:5,6
A wise man *is* strong,
Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;
For by wise counsel you will wage your own war,
And in a multitude of counselors *there is* safety.

But sometimes we end up taking the counsel of the unwise -

Psalm 1:1
Blessed *is* the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

Wisdom strengthens the wise more than the 10
smartest people in town (v. 19) – why?
Because we are all affected by sin (v. 20)
Even Christians make mistakes.



Q - What was the mistake that the brethren made and how did Paul deal with it?

Acts 21:8-13

- 8 - On the next *day* we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was *one* of the seven, and stayed with him.
- 9 - Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.
- 10 - And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.
- 11 - When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.' "
- 12 - Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.
- 13 - Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."
- 14 - So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

Did you figure it out? When the brethren heard that Paul would be bound and imprisoned, they allowed their feelings for Paul to determine their response, but they did not seek God. The prophecy was to prepare Paul for what he would soon face, not to deter him from going. Even good people can be mistaken when the counsel of God is not sought after.

If we are swayed by what people say, we will not listen to what God says:

Proverbs 29:25
The fear of man brings a snare,
But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

Q - How do we know when God is speaking, compared to our own sentiment, feelings or our own sinful nature?

Here are a few biblical principles to determine God's will:

Willingness – we must be willing to do whatever God wants us to do (for real)!

Psalm 32:8,9

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you
should go;

I will guide you with My eye.

Do not be like the horse *or* like the mule,

Which have no understanding,

Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle,

Else they will not come near you.



Inner Impression – God will impress something upon our spirit.

Acts 10:19,20

19 - While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.

20 - Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

Outward Circumstances – If it is truly God, then He will confirm it.

Acts 10:21,22

21 - Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius,

22 - And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you."

Scripture – it must not be something contrary to God's word.

Psalm 119:11

Your word I have hidden in my heart,

That I might not sin against You.

Multitude of Counsellors – It will almost always be confirmed by spiritual leaders or godly counsellors.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes,

But he who heeds counsel *is* wise.

Peace – God will give you and others peace in the matter.

Philippians 4:7

...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Wisdom is better than ungodly counsel!

The Value of Wisdom (part 4)

In chapter 7 Solomon has been encouraging us to seek wisdom, especially in a world where there is oppression and injustice. So far he has highlighted 5 reasons why wisdom is so important:

1. It helps us to see the circumstances of our life from God's perspective (vs. 1-10)
2. It has more advantage than money (vs. 11,12)
3. It makes us consider the work of God (vs. 13,14)
4. It teaches us to avoid extremes (vs. 15-18)
5. It is better than the counsel of the ungodly (vs. 19-22)

Here are a few more things that Solomon wrote about wisdom:

Wisdom makes you realise your own limitations:

Ecclesiastes 7:23,24

All this I have proved by wisdom.

I said, "I will be wise";

But it *was* far from me.

As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep,

Who can find it out?

He realised that the more he sought, the more he realized how ignorant he was. Paul felt the same way:

Romans 11:33-35

33 - Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 - "FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? OR WHO HAS BECOME HIS COUNSELOR?"

35 - "OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM AND IT SHALL BE REPAID TO HIM?"

David also felt the same:

Psalms 8:3,4

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,

The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

What is man that You are mindful of him,

And the son of man that You visit him?

Wisdom protects you from the trap of sin:

Ecclesiastes 7:25,26

I applied my heart to know,

To search and seek out
wisdom and the reason of

things,

To know the wickedness of

folly,

Even of

foolishness *and* madness.

And I find more bitter than

death



The woman whose heart *is* snares and nets,
Whose hands *are* fetters.
He who pleases God shall escape from her,
But the sinner shall be trapped by her.

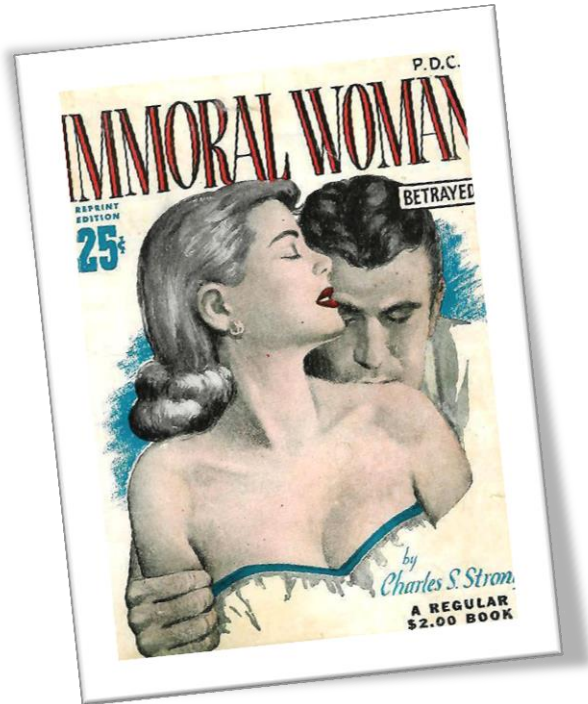
I wonder if Solomon made a mistake by exploring “wickedness, foolishness and madness”?

Q – Some suggest that it is important to “keep up with what is happening in the world” in the name of being “informed”. Do you think this is right?

He also speaks of a woman whose heart is a trap. He says something similar, yet much more specific in Proverbs 5:

Proverbs 5:1-6

My son, pay attention to my wisdom;
Lend your ear to my understanding,
That you may preserve discretion,
And your lips may keep knowledge.
For the lips of an immoral woman drip
honey,
And her mouth *is* smoother than oil;
But in the end she is bitter as
wormwood,
Sharp as a two-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death,
Her steps lay hold of hell.
Lest you ponder *her* path of life—
Her ways are unstable;
You do not know *them*.



Wisdom is hard to find among men:

Ecclesiastes 7:27-29

"Here is what I have found," says the Preacher,
"Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason,
Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find:
One man among a thousand I have found,
But a woman among all these I have not found.
Truly, this only I have found:
That God made man upright,
But they have sought out many schemes."

Q – What do you think he means by: “One man among a thousand...”? And what about the other phrase: “But a woman among a thousand...”? Is he hinting at something?

Wisdom brightens your face:

Ecclesiastes 8:1

Who *is* like a wise *man*?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom makes his face shine,
And the sternness of his face is changed.

David Pawson (Christian speaker/author) once said: up to the age of 40 you have the face that you were born with; after the age of 40 you have the face that you have made.

Q - Does this seem to be true?

Something definitely happened to Moses:

Exodus 34:29

Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony *were* in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.

Something also happened to Stephen:

Acts 6:10

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

Acts 6:15

And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

Here is a quote from Adam Clarke:

Every state of the heart shines through the countenance; but there is such an evidence of the contented, happy, pure, benevolent state of the soul in the face of a truly pious man, that it must be observed, and cannot be mistaken.

Conclusion: What has Solomon told us about God's wisdom?

- It helps us to see the circumstances of our life from God's perspective (vs. 1-10)
- It has more advantage than money (vs. 11,12)
- It makes us consider the work of God (vs. 13,14)
- It teaches us to avoid extremes (vs. 15-18)
- It is better than the counsel of the ungodly (vs. 19-22)
- It makes you realise your own limitations (vs. 23,24)
- It protects you from the trap of sin (vs. 25,26)
- It is hard to find among men (27-29)
- It brightens your face (Ch. 8:1)

The Problem of Authority (part 1)

Solomon wrote earlier about the fact that there is corruption in government and even among the righteous. He has told us that because of self-seeking, those in power often oppress the weak, and therefore encouraged us to have integrity and to walk in wisdom. In chapter 8, he encourages us to “Keep the king’s commandment...”, or in other words, obey those in authority:



Ecclesiastes 8:2-13

2 - I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God.

3 - Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

4 - Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power;

And who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

5 - He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful;

And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,

6 - Because for every matter there is a time and judgment,

Though the misery of man increases greatly.

7 - For he does not know what will happen;

So who can tell him when it will occur?

8 - No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit,

And no one has power in the day of death. *There is* no release from that war,

And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

9 - All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: *There is* a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

10 - Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also *is* vanity.

11 - Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

12 - Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times*, and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.

13 - But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

In this lesson we will consider verses 2 to 4, and in the next section we will look at verses 5 to 13.

What do we mean by authority? Definition:

- The moral or legal right or ability to control (The United Nations has used/exerted/exercised its authority to restore peace in the area.)
- A group of people with official responsibility for a particular area of activity (health authority)
- The group of people with official legal power to make decisions or make people obey the laws in a particular area, such as the police or a local government department: (I'm going to report these potholes to the authorities.)

Q - What are the problems that some people have with those who are in authority?

Solomon's counsel – keep the king's command (obey those in authority). Why?



#1 - Because of our oath to God (vs. 2) –

if you profess to be a Christian your actions must glorify God. This is something worthy of careful consideration. Let's look at what the Apostle Peter wrote concerning this very subject:

1 Peter 2:9-25

9 - But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

10 - who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

11 - Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

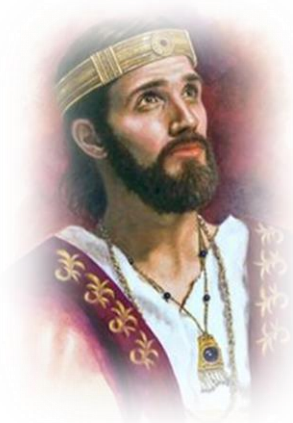
12 - having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 - Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,
 14 - or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good.
 15 - For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—
 16 - as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.
 17 - Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.
 18 - Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.
 19 - For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.
 20 - For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.
 21 - For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:
 22 - "WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH";
 23 - who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;
 24 - who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.
 25 - For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Here are a few things to consider in this passage:

- Q - He mentions the problem of fleshly lusts (v. 11, strong desire). How can this be a problem when dealing with authority?
- Q - He speaks of our conduct and good works (v. 12). What does this have to do with authority?
- Q – What is an ordinance (v. 13,)

#2 – Because of the power of the king. (v. 3) – With authority comes power. Solomon mentioned 2 things that are sometimes forgotten in our society:



- We should show respect to those in authority – “Do not be hasty to go from his presence.”

Q – why is this important?

- We should not “...stand for an evil thing...”

Q – What is meant by this and why is it important?

We must also consider what the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 13:1-7

- 1 - Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.
- 2 - Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.
- 3 - For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.
- 4 - For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil.
- 5 - Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.
- 6 - For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.
- 7 - Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Q – Is there ever a time to disobey authorities?



The Problem of Authority (part 2)

Earlier in chapter 8, Solomon encouraged us to obey those in power (Keep the king's command) and gave us two reasons why we should do so:

- Because of our oath to God
- Because of the power of the king

But what happens when those who are in authority abuse their power?

Q – Can you think of an example of someone in civil government or high position misusing their authority? Does abuse of authority happen only in government?



Let's hear what Solomon has to say about this:

5 - He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful;
And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,
6 - Because for every matter there is a time and judgment,
Though the misery of man increases greatly.
7 - For he does not know what will happen;
So who can tell him when it will occur?
8 - No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit,
And no one has power in the day of death.
There is no release from that war,
And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.
9 - All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: *There is* a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.
10 - Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also *is* vanity.
11 - Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.
12 - Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times*, and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.
13 - But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

To those who submit to authority he says:

- He will experience nothing harmful (v. 5)
- He must discern both time and judgment (v.5)

Q – What is meant by these two statements?

What else does Solomon want us to know?

- For every matter there is a time and judgment (v. 6)
- No one knows what will happen or when it will occur (v. 7).

Q – What is he talking about in verse 6 and 7?

- No one can escape death, and therefore Judgment (v. 8)
- Sometimes people in authority hurt those they rule over (v. 9)
- They may not be remembered the way that they should be (v. 10)
- Often justice is not served quickly (11)
- Sometimes they seem to get away with it (his days are prolonged, v. 12)
- But, it will go well with those who fear God (v. 12)
- And it will not go well with the wicked in the long run (v. 13)

Conclusion:

- It is important obey those in authority, because of our commitment to God and because of the power that they possess
- We must walk in wisdom toward those in authority, knowing that for every matter there is both time and judgment
- There may be ungodly leaders who oppress others and seem to get away with it
- But God will eventually judge the wicked and reward the righteous

Death (part 1)

In 1906, Dr Hubert Eaton changed the funeral business with the development of Forest Lawn Memorial-Park. His vision was to transform his cemetery into a place for the living. The park was turned into a beautiful setting for services, weddings, baptisms and family excursions. It seemed that the idea was to make death as “palatable” as possible. Yet, no matter what our attempts to soften it, death is still cruel and painful for most people. Some avoid funerals altogether, because they really don’t want to face this issue. The bible tells us that it is our last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26).



From the end of chapter 8, Solomon begins to talk about this subject. He begins by identifying something that in his opinion makes no sense on the earth:

Ecc 8:14 - There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also *is* vanity.

Q - What happens to just men that should happen to the wicked?

Q – What happens to wicked men that should happen to the righteous?

Listen to Solomon’s response:

Ecc 8:15 - So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor *all* the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

He is telling us that as long as we are in this life, we should enjoy living! Now he is going to develop his response by sharing with us three things: **his quest** (what he applied his heart to know), **his observation** (what he saw), and **his declaration** (what he concluded).

His quest:

Ecc 8:16 - When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night,

Q – What did he want to know?

His observation:

Ecc 8:17 - then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover *it*, yet he will not find *it*; moreover, though a wise *man* attempts to know *it*, he will not be able to find *it*.

Q – What did he see?

His declaration:

What he declares to us can be divided into three parts:

1. Our lives are in the hand of God -

Ecc 9:1 - For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works *are* in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred *by* anything *they see* before them.

Q – How much do we really know about our future?

2. Death is inevitable -

Ecc 9:2 - All things *come* alike to all:
One event *happens* to the righteous and the wicked;
To the good, the clean, and the unclean;
To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.
As is the good, so *is* the sinner;
He who takes an oath as *he* who fears an oath.

Ecc 9:3 - This *is* an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing *happens* to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness *is* in their hearts while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead.

Q – It is true that death comes to all, but when do we think about it?

3. Hope only exists while you are alive -

Ecc 9:4 - But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Ecc 9:5 - For the living know that they will die;
But the dead know nothing,
And they have no more reward,
For the memory of them is forgotten.

Ecc 9:6 - Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished;
Nevermore will they have a share
In anything done under the sun.

Q – What does he mean by “a living dog is better than a dead lion?”

Q – Is he suggesting that there is no afterlife when he says that the dead know nothing?

How should death influence me? We will consider this question in our next session.

Death (part 2)

We all know that at some point we will die, but how does that influence the way we live? It seems to me that most people do not think about this until some crisis occurs, and then it is often too late to do something about it. Funerals are usually very difficult for the loved ones who remain, especially when there are unresolved issues among relatives and friends. Often there are serious squabbles concerning money, possessions and inheritance.

Q - What would you do if you knew that you were going to die in 6 months?

Beginning at the end of chapter 8, Solomon shared with us three things:

- His quest – he applied himself to know wisdom and to understand the affairs of men
- His observation – in this life, men cannot understand the works of God
- His declaration, which had three parts:
 - Our lives are in the hands of God
 - Death is inevitable
 - Hope only exists while we are alive

But what does Solomon conclude, based on these things? What affect should death have on me?

1. It should make me appreciate the simple things in life (v. 7,8)

*Go, eat your bread with joy,
And drink your wine with a merry heart;
For God has already accepted your works.
Let your garments always be white,
And let your head lack no oil.*



Q – What is meant by “white garments” and “oil on the head”? (See also Isaiah 61:3)

2. It should cause you to consider your relationships (v. 9)

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

Q – Why did he mention the wife – is he suggesting that all should marry? (See also Proverbs 5:18,19; Proverbs 18:22)

3. It should affect your service toward God (v. 10)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

Q – You may have heard of the phrase “bucket list”. Does our bucket list include something for God? Do we often procrastinate when it comes to doing something for the kingdom? (See also Ephesians 6:8)

4. It should affect your response to God (vs. 11,12)

*I returned and saw under the sun that—
The race is not to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor bread to the wise,
Nor riches to men of understanding,
Nor favor to men of skill;
But time and chance happen to them all.
For man also does not know his time:
Like fish taken in a cruel net,
Like birds caught in a snare,
So the sons of men are snared in an evil time,
When it falls suddenly upon them.*



Q – What does Solomon mean by “time and chance”. Is he suggesting luck?

Q – What does the bird and the fish have in common? What warning is he giving here?

Conclusion

As Solomon searched for wisdom and to understand the works of God, he discovered a few things:

- Men cannot understand the works of God – we will never fully know all that God does
- Our lives are in God’s hands
- Death is inevitable
- Hope only exists while we are alive
- Death should teach us how to live

Folly (part 1)

When we began this series, I mentioned that Solomon had 3 reasons for writing this book:

- To show that all earthly pursuits are vain.
- To show that God is the source of all that we enjoy.
- To show that we are ultimately accountable to God.

Earlier in the book, Solomon told us "...I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven..." (1:3). He also mentioned that part of the "all" which he sought and searched out was "madness" and "folly" (2:12). In this section Solomon wants to show us in this next section that it is better to have God's wisdom than to be a "fool."

In order to appreciate what Solomon is teaching us we must understand what a fool is:

Definition:

- A person who acts unwisely or imprudently; a silly person. (Google)
- 1 - Someone who lacks common sense or intelligence. 2 - someone made to appear ridiculous. (Chambers Dictionary)
- A person who behaves in a silly way without thinking (Cambridge Dictionary)



The bible suggests that a fool is a person without God in their thinking. Here are a few examples:



Psalm 14:1

The fool has said in his heart,
"There is no God."

They are corrupt,
They have done abominable works,
There is none who does good.

Psalm 92:5,6

LORD, how great are Your works!
Your thoughts are very deep.
senseless man does not know,
Nor does a fool understand this.

Here are several examples from Proverbs 10:

- A prating fool will fall – vs. 8,10
- The mouth of the foolish is near destruction – vs.14
- Fools hide hatred, have lying lips and spread slander – vs.18

- Fools die for lack of wisdom – vs.21
- Evil is like sport to a fool – vs.23

And a few more from Proverbs 18:

- He doesn't like understanding – vs. 2
- His lips bring trouble – vs. 6
- His mouth causes destruction – vs. 8

Solomon begins this subject by telling of something that he had seen which shows the power of wisdom:

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

13 - This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it *seemed* great to me:

14 - *There was* a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it.

15 - Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

16 - Then I said:

"Wisdom *is* better than strength.

Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom *is* despised,

And his words are not heard.

17 - Words of the wise, *spoken* quietly, *should be* heard

Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.

18 - Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war;

But one sinner destroys much good."

Here is the scenario: there is a great king who attacks a small city (v. 14). A poor but wise man uses wisdom to save the city (v. 15). Yet, the poor man is not remembered (v. 15). What is Solomon's evaluation?

- Wisdom is better than strength (vs. 11 – The battle is not to the strong)
Q – what makes wisdom better than strength? Can you give any examples of this?
- The poor man's wisdom is not appreciated (see v. 11 – Nor bread to the wise). Man looks to the outward appearance, to his hurt.
Q – why is it that a poor man's wisdom is despised?
- It's better to listen to quiet wisdom than loud foolishness. Today the wisdom of God is not being heard!
 - James 1:19-25
 - 1 Kings 19:12
 - Psalm 4:4; 46:10
- Wisdom is better than weapons of war.
 - Zechariah 4:6
 - Psalm 20:6-8; 33:16-19

So far, we have seen that God's wisdom is better than strength and weapons, and yet it is often not appreciated or listened to. In our next section, we will see that a bit of folly can destroy much good.



Folly (part 2)

One of the things that Solomon wants us to understand is that it is better to have God's wisdom than to be foolish. In our last lesson we looked at the definition of a fool from God's perspective and then saw an example of the power of wisdom over a "ruler of fools". Today we are going to look at 4 other problems with folly:

1. Folly can destroy you (v. 1)

Ecclesiastes 10:1

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment,
And cause it to give off a foul odor;
*So does a little folly to one respected for
wisdom and honor.*

How can folly destroy you?

- a. By ruining your reputation. Solomon uses the example of dead flies causing the odour of the perfumer to stink.

Q. – why does he use the perfumer's ointment as an example here?



- b. Folly shows in your actions and your appearance (vs. 2,3)

Ecclesiastes 10:2,3

A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand,
But a fool's heart at his left.
Even when a fool walks along the way,
He lacks wisdom,
And he shows everyone *that* he is a fool.

Q – do you know what is meant to be the difference here between the right hand and the left?

2. Folly demands your patience (vs. 4-7)

Ecclesiastes 10:4-7

If the spirit of the ruler rises against you,
Do not leave your post;
For conciliation pacifies great offenses.
There is an evil I have seen under the sun,
As an error proceeding from the ruler:
Folly is set in great dignity,
While the rich sit in a lowly place.
I have seen servants on horses,
While princes walk on the ground like servants.



Q - When someone in authority is against you, do you lose patience? Do we quit?

Proverbs 20:2,3

The wrath of a king *is* like the roaring of a lion;

Whoever provokes him to anger
sins *against* his own life.

It is honorable for a man to stop striving,
Since any fool can start a quarrel.



Ecclesiastes 7:9

Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,
For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

Here is a definition of the word conciliation – to gain, or win over: to reconcile: to make friends.

Proverbs 15:1

A soft answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.

When a fool loses his temper, you will know about it!

Proverbs 27:3

A stone *is* heavy and sand *is* weighty,
But a fool's wrath *is* heavier than both of them.

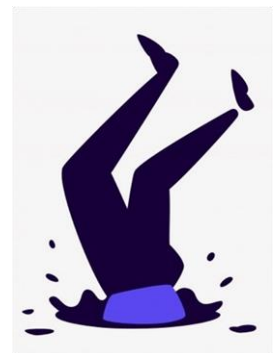
- Sometimes a ruler's decisions make no sense at all. He mentions two things that he calls an error proceeding from the ruler. In other words, this is something that is caused by the ruler:
- "...folly set in great dignity..." – in other words, someone placed in position that should not be there.
- "...the rich sit in a lowly place." – this is when those who are rich "in wisdom or skill" are not in the position that they should be.

Q – what do you do when a ruler does something like this? (Romans 12:21)

3. Folly brings negative consequences (vs. 8,9)

Ecclesiastes 10:8,9

He who digs a pit will fall into it,
And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.
He who quarries stones may be hurt by them,
And he who splits wood may be endangered by it.



Q - what is the main idea in these verses?

4. Folly makes your work more difficult (v. 10)

Ecclesiastes 10:10

If the ax is dull,

And one does not sharpen the edge,
Then he must use more strength;
But wisdom brings success.

The dull axe symbolizes the fool. If you don't correct him or remove him, then it will be much harder to achieve your objective.

Summary of this section:

Wisdom is better than folly because:

- Folly can destroy you
- Folly demands your patience
- Folly brings negative consequences
- Folly makes your work more difficult

Folly (part3)

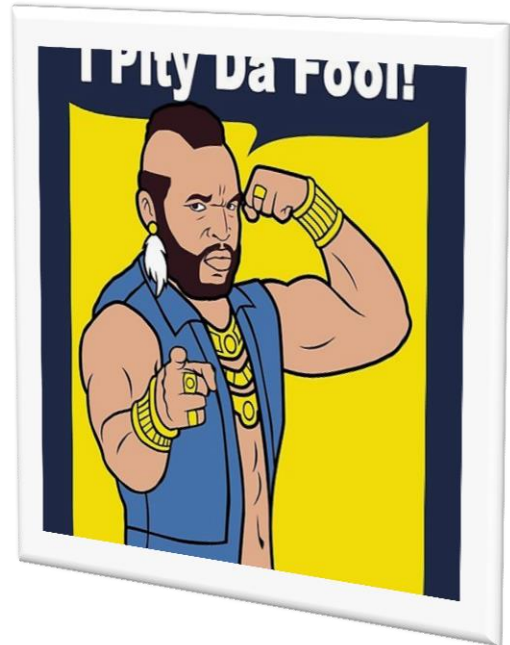
Solomon has spent a considerable amount of energy warning us of the pitfalls of folly and encouraging us to seek the wisdom that comes from God. So far he mentioned 4 things about folly:

- It can destroy you, by ruining your reputation and shows in your actions and appearance
- It demands your patience
- It brings negative consequences
- It makes your work more difficult

Q – how can you identify a fool? Discuss

There are two reasons why identifying a fool is important:

- Because you need to know what company you are keeping
- Because you need to know when **you** are acting as a fool



According to Solomon a fool can be identified:

1. By What He Says –

Ecclesiastes 10:11-14

11 - A serpent may bite when *it is* not charmed;
The babbler is no different.

12 - The words of a wise man's mouth *are* gracious,
But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;

13 - The words of his mouth begin with foolishness,
And the end of his talk *is* raving madness.

14 - A fool also multiplies words.

No man knows what is to be;
Who can tell him what will be after him?

Q – what is a babbler?

- a. v. 11 – like a serpent, a babbler can bite you without being provoked. This can be seen in a person who does not know God:

Romans 3:12 - 14

THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE; THEY HAVE TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE." "THEIR **THROAT** IS AN OPEN TOMB; WITH THEIR **TONGUES** THEY HAVE PRACTICED DECEIT"; "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR **LIPS**"; "WHOSE **MOUTH** IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS."

This can also be seen in a believer who is acting foolishly:

James 3:8-10

But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

- b. v. 12 – a fool’s lips are not gracious, but instead they “swallow him up” or, in other words, bring him to ruin. This is opposite to what the righteous should be:



Colossians 4:6

Let your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Ephesians 4:29-32

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, **that it may impart grace to the hearers.** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,

by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

- c. v. 13 – a fool’s words begin with foolishness and get worse:

James 3:5

Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. **See how great a forest a little fire kindles!**

Proverbs 26:4,5

Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest you also be like him.
Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Q – should we respond to foolishness, or not?

- d. Vs. 14, 15 – a fool “multiplies words” – which usually leads to trouble:

Proverbs 10:19

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking,
But he who restrains his lips *is* wise.

Ecclesiastes 5:2,3
 Do not be rash with your mouth,
 And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.
 For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth;
 Therefore let your words be few.
 For a dream comes through much activity,
 And **a fool's voice is known by his many words.**

2. By Immaturity and Irresponsibility -

Ecclesiastes 10:16-19

16 - Woe to you, O land, when your king *is* a
 child,
 And your princes feast in the morning!
 17 - Blessed *are* you, O land, when your
 king *is* the son of nobles,
 And your princes feast at the proper time—
 For strength and not for drunkenness!
 18 - Because of laziness the building decays,
 And through idleness of hands the house
 leaks.
 19 - A feast is made for laughter,
 And wine makes merry;
 But money answers everything.



- a. v. 16 – the words “your king is a child...” suggest an immature leader, and
 “...princes feast in the morning!” show indulgence and a lack of restraint:

Proverbs 31:4,5
It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
It is not for kings to drink wine,
 Nor for princes intoxicating drink;
 Lest they drink and forget the law,
 And pervert the justice of all the afflicted.

- b. v. 18 – speaks of laziness and idleness, which shows irresponsibility:

Proverbs 24:30-34
 I went by the field of the lazy *man*,
 And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding;
 And there it was, all overgrown with thorns;
 Its surface was covered with nettles;
 Its stone wall was broken down.
 When I saw *it*, I considered *it* well;
 I looked on *it and* received instruction:
 A little sleep, a little slumber,
 A little folding of the hands to rest;
 So shall your poverty come *like* a prowler,

And your need like an armed man.

Q – what is Solomon suggesting to be the attitude of a fool in verse 19? Consider this passage in the New Testament:

1 Timothy 6:9

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

3. By His Careless Mouth –

Ecclesiastes 10:20

Do not curse the king, even in your
thought;
Do not curse the rich, even in your
bedroom;
For a bird of the air may carry your voice,
And a bird in flight may tell the matter.



- a. This verse is about our attitude to those in authority. Whenever leaders do not live up to our expectations, there is a tendency to speak badly about them and sometimes gossip about them. Here we are told not to curse them even in our thoughts. We have a great example of this when David was being chased by Saul, even though he had done nothing wrong. When there was an opportunity to kill Saul, this is what David said:

2 Samuel 26:9-11

But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless? David said furthermore, "As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that *are* by his head, and let us go."

- b. Remember that our words come from what is in our heart, and we will give an account of everything idle (thoughtless, useless) word that we use:

Matthew 12:34-37

Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Summary: how do we know a fool?

- By what he/she says
- Bi his/her immaturity and irresponsibility
- By his/her careless mouth



What We Don't Know

Where do you go for answers? After all, there are many sources of information these days and many people who claim to have an answer for just about anything and everything. Right now, if I have a question on just about any topic all I have to do is “Google it” and I will receive a whole lot of information. In fact, when I typed in “Where can I go for answers?” here are a few responses that came up:



- **Ask an Expert Online - Ask an Expert Online Now**
 - An Expert Will Answer in Minutes!Questions Answered Every 9 Seconds.
- **13 Best Sites to Get Your Questions Answered! – The Next Web**
 - When your question gets answered, you will get an email notification so that you can easily go through the answers
- **Have A Legal Question? - Get Answers From Lawyers 24/7**
 - Advicus.co.uk Allows You To Speak With Legal Experts Anytime To Help With Your Legal Issue
- **Ask Questions Get Answers - Free Instant Download**
 - Free & Secure Downloader by myformsfinder Latest Version

But how much do we really know?

Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much.

1 Corinthians 8:2 (NLT)

Q - what are some of the things that we do not know?

Solomon begins this section by encouraging us to act based on what we don't know:

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

- 1 - Cast your bread upon the waters,
For you will find it after many days.
- 2 - Give a serving to seven, and also to eight,
For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.
- 3 - If the clouds are full of rain,
They empty *themselves* upon the earth;
And if a tree falls to the south or the north,
In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.
- 4 - He who observes the wind will not sow,
And he who regards the clouds will not reap.
- 5 - As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind,
Or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child,
So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.
- 6 - In the morning sow your seed,

And in the evening do not withhold your hand;
For you do not know which will prosper,
Either this or that,
Or whether both alike *will be* good.

Q – what are the 5 things that Solomon says that we don't know?

According to Solomon, what we don't know should motivate us to do several things:

What we don't know should cause us to trust God to reward us for our labour:

Ecclesiastes 11:1,2

- 1 - Cast your bread upon the waters,
For you will find it after many days.
- 2 - Give a serving to seven, and also to eight,
For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.



“Casting your bread...” what does he mean?

- Cast – this means that you have to make a decision to do something.
- Bread – represents something valuable and something that sustains. It also suggests that you give your best effort; your all; your labour. Remember that it is your bread, not someone else's.
- Waters – represents uncertainty, as the waters of a river make take your valuable bread somewhere that you do not know. Here are a couple of examples:
 - Joshua 3:13 “...as soon as the souls of the feet of the priests rest in the waters...” Joshua would not know that it would happen until he obeyed God. Nothing happened until he got his feet wet.
 - II Kings 2:13-14 – Elisha: Nothing happened until he “...struck the water.”

With the “casting of the bread” there is reward.

- You will find it – when you take a risk to do the God's will, there is a reward.
- After many days – patience is required. It does not always happen when you want. Sometimes now, sometimes later.
- Give a serving to seven - what we do (works) should be done generously
- Evil on the earth – you don't know when disaster or calamity may strike. You may lose the opportunity or you may later need help yourself!
- What we don't know should cause us to trust God.

What we don't know should prevent us from doing nothing due to fear of failure:

Ecclesiastes 11:3,4

- 3 - If the clouds are full of rain,
They empty *themselves* upon the earth;
And if a tree falls to the south or the north,

In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

4 - He who observes the wind will not sow,
And he who regards the clouds will not reap.



Clouds full of rain, or a falling tree – these
are things that we can do nothing about.

Q – is it true that sometimes we do
nothing with what we have because of
what we are afraid may happen?
Discuss.

If you are afraid of what might happen,
you will never do anything (v. 4). Look at
this parable that Jesus told:

Matthew 25:14-30

- 14 - "For *the kingdom of heaven* is like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.
15 - And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.
16 - Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.
17 - And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also.
18 - But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.
19 - After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.
20 - "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.'
21 - His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'
22 - He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'
23 - His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'
24 - "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.
25 - And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is* yours.'
26 - "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.'

27 - So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.
 28 - So take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.
 29 - 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.
 30 - And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Notice that one servant said "...I was afraid...". His master's called him "...wicked and lazy...", and Jesus' concluded that God would give or take away depending on what was done.

What we don't know should cause us to be diligent:

Ecclesiastes 11:5,6

5 - As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind,
 Or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with
 child,

So you do not know the works of God who makes
 everything.

6 - In the morning sow your seed,
 And in the evening do not withhold your hand;
 For you do not know which will prosper,
 Either this or that,
 Or whether both alike *will be* good.



Q - He uses an illustration of the wind and the pregnant mother. Can you explain what he meant by these?

Since we really don't know what God is doing, we should be diligent. By mentioning the morning, he is encouraging us to get going as soon as possible. He tells us not to "...withhold your hand...". In other words, don't slack up. Don't quit early. Don't get discouraged. You never know which seed sown will be blessed with a harvest!

What have we heard so far?

1. Get up and do it! Cast your bread and trust God to reward your labour.
2. Don't be afraid of what might happen.
3. Be diligent. Do it as soon as possible and don't be discouraged.

But how can we be sure to get it right? Haven't we made mistakes in the past? How can we avoid doing our own thing and getting it badly wrong? We will consider this in the next lesson.

What We Don't Know (part 2)

In our last lesson we considered 5 things that Solomon mentioned in chapter 11 that we do not know:

- We don't know what evil (disaster, misfortune, calamity) will be on the earth (vs.2)
- We don't know the way of the wind (v.5)
- We don't know how the bones grow in the womb (v.5)
- We don't know the works of God; that is, how God works or what God is doing (vs.5)
- We don't know what God will prosper (vs.6)



These illustrations should motivate us to do three things:

1. It should cause us to trust God to reward us for our labour (vs. 1, 2) – he gave us an example of “casting bread on the waters”, which involves risk and we were also encouraged to be generous
2. It should prevent us from doing nothing due to fear of failure (vs.3, 4) – he reminded us that if we worry about what might happen we will never do anything, using the example of a fallen tree and of clouds full of rain
3. It should encourage us to be diligent (v. 6) – he told us to sow in from morning until evening, since we do not now which of our efforts will prosper

All of this involves taking risk and trusting God, but how do you get it right? How can we avoid simply doing our own thing and getting it badly wrong?

Q – have you ever tried something or even prayed about something and afterwards still made a mistake?

There are 6 exhortations in the next few verses that will help us to get it right. Let's look at them one at a time:

Ecclesiastes 11:7,8
7 - Truly the light is sweet,
And *it is* pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;
8 - But if a man lives many years
And rejoices in them all,
Yet let him remember the days of darkness,
For they will be many.
All that is coming *is* vanity.
9 - Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,
And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth;
Walk in the ways of your heart,
And in the sight of your eyes;
But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

10 - Therefore remove sorrow from your heart,
And put away evil from your flesh,
For childhood and youth *are* vanity.

1. **Remember the days of darkness** – though the years of your life will be good (if you fear God), yet there will be some tough days as well. Jesus said:

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

2. **Rejoice in your youth** – in other words, enjoy life while you can, particularly while you are still young. God is not against joy!

Q – Is Solomon suggesting that young people should engage in revelry or, as some have put it, sow their wild oats? (Compare with 1 John 2:14)

3. **Walk in the ways (impulses) of your heart** – which can only be done when our heart is in line with the heart of God:

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself also in the LORD,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Philippians 2:13

...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

4. **Know that God will bring you into judgment** – we are being reminded here that everything that we do will be judged.

2 Corinthians 3:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Q – how can accountability (giving an account before God) keep your heart pure? Is judgment always a negative thing?

5. **Remove sorrow from your heart** – this is a very important concept. The word sorrow here means vexation, anxiety; anything that causes us emotional hurt. Have you been hurt or disappointed in the past? Don't dwell on it! Get rid of it, because it can distort your ability to make right decisions or to hear from God. If you have some hurt that is troubling you, then you will make decisions out of your pain and get it wrong!

Psalm 13:1,2

1 - **To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.**

How long, O LORD?

Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

2 - How long shall I take counsel in my soul,

Having sorrow in my heart daily?

How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

Proverbs 15:13

A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance,

But by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

Hebrews 12:11-15

11 - Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

12 - Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

13 - and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed.

14 - Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

15 – looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

James 3:13-16

13 - Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom.

14 - But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

15 - This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.

16 - For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.

6. **Put away evil from your flesh** – this is also a very important principle, simply because sin will distort your judgment. If you have sinful desires, then when you walk in the desires of your heart you will do your own thing and get it wrong!

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Summary:

Since we do not know what will happen or what God is doing, therefore Solomon encourages us not to be afraid to do good towards others, even to the point of risk taking. Don't be afraid to fail, walk in the way of your heart, but make sure that our heart is right

before making those risky decisions. Be sure to rid ourselves of anything that causes our heart to be troubled and put away anything sinful, so that we will be able to make right decisions and correct judgments.

Remember Your Creator

Since this is the last chapter of the book, let's remind ourselves what Solomon has said so far:

1. He began by showing us that life apart from God is meaningless, vain, empty (1:2;2:1-11)
2. Yet, he kept reminding us that God is the source of all we enjoy in life and through Him we can enjoy all that He gives us (2:26; 5:19,20; 9:7-10; 11:9a)
3. He also told us that whatever we do, we are ultimately accountable to God (3:15,17; 11:9)

Now we shall consider his final exhortations:

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

1 - Remember now your Creator in the
days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you
say,

"I have no pleasure in them":

2 - While the sun and the light,
The moon and the stars,
Are not darkened,
And the clouds do not return after
the rain;

3 - In the day when the keepers of
the house tremble,
And the strong men bow down;
When the grinders cease because
they are few,
And those that look through the
windows grow dim;

4 - When the doors are shut in the
streets,
And the sound of grinding is low;
When one rises up at the sound of a
bird,

And all the daughters of music are
brought low.

5 - Also they are afraid of height,
And of terrors in the way;
When the almond tree blossoms,
The grasshopper is a burden,
And desire fails.

For man goes to his eternal home,
And the mourners go about the streets.

6 - *Remember your Creator* before the silver



cord is loosed,
Or the golden bowl is broken,
Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain,

Or the wheel broken at the well.

7 - Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

8 –

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,
"All *is* vanity."

Solomon concludes with a very important exhortation: Remember your creator! (v. 1)

Q – is there a tendency in our generation to forget God? If so, what is it about Him that we forget?

When the Old Testament uses the word remember, it does not simply mean “don’t forget”. Here are a few examples of how it is used:

- a. Samson asked God to “remember” him by giving him his strength back:
 - i. Judges 16:28 - Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!"
- b. Jonah “remembered” the Lord. He didn’t just recognize God’s presence, but he determined to get right and obey Him.
 - i. Jonah 2:7 - "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD;
And my prayer went *up* to You, Into Your holy temple.
- c. Psalm 103:17,18 – “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to such as keep his covenant and to those who remember His commandments to do them”

So we see by the use of the word remember, Solomon is not just saying “don’t forget God”. To remember involves commitment.

Q – what should we remember to do toward God?

Solomon also gives us 3 reasons why we should remember our Creator:

1. Because He is our creator! Notice he didn’t just say remember our God, but “remember our Creator. He created us and deserves to be praised and worshipped:

Psalm 95:6

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

Psalm 100:3,4

3 - Know that the LORD, He *is* God;
It is He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

4 - Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name.

Psalm 148:1-5

1 - Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
Praise Him in the heights!
2 - Praise Him, all His angels;
Praise Him, all His hosts!
3 - Praise Him, sun and moon;
Praise Him, all you stars of light!
4 - Praise Him, you heavens of heavens,
And you waters above the heavens!
5 - Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For He commanded and they were created.

Revelation 4:10,11

10 - the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

11 - "You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created."

2. Because difficult days are coming! God deserves the best years of our life. If we don't give Him our life now, our latter years will be miserable. Verses 2 – 5 are poetic descriptions of old age –
- They are called "the difficult days" and he calls them years of no pleasure in verse
 - Verse 2 speaks of the sun, light, moon & stars being darkened, clouds returning after the rain –

Q – what do you think that he is describing in verse 2?

*Someday the light of the sun and the moon and the stars will all seem dim to you.
Rain clouds will remain over your head. (Contemporary English Version)*

Q – can you figure out what Solomon is hinting at in verses 3 to 5 by using poetic language? Look at the verses before reading

- Keepers of the house tremble -
- strong men -
- grinders –
- windows –
- doors –

- sound of grinding –
- sound of a bird –
- daughters of music –
- afraid of height and terrors –
- almond tree –
- grasshopper is a burden –
- desire fails

Here are what most scholars believe to be that which Solomon was alluding to:

- Keepers of the house tremble - hands
- strong men – legs
- grinders – teeth
- windows – eyes
- doors – the lips or mouth
- sound of grinding – chewing diminished
- sound of a bird – sleep impaired
- daughters of music – voice
- afraid of height and terrors – no strength as before, therefore fears
- almond tree – grey hair that eventually falls out
- grasshopper is a burden – light things are now heavy
- desire fails - literally “the caper-berry shall fail” - was a stimulant for arousing physical or sexual appetite.



3. Because death is coming ! (vs. 6, 7)

- Silver cord – the nervous system, spinal cord; paralysis, stroke
- Golden bowl – the brain
- Pitcher shattered at the fountain – aneurism of the heart
- Wheel broken at the well – heart attack

Ecclesiastes 12:7, 8

7 - Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

8 - "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,
"All is vanity."

Q - Are you going to remember your creator? What are you going to do before the difficult days come?