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coming of the Son, there is finally true purpose and meaning to be found, for man can be reconciled with God!

### Life Under the *Sun*

“What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (1:3)

“...there is nothing new under the sun” (1:6)

“...everything done under the sun...all is vanity” (1:14)

Man’s few days pass like a shadow under the sun (6:12)

“...I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.” (8:17)

### Life Under the *Son*

“...he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Php. 1:6)

“...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” (2 Cor. 5:17)

“...knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

“...God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” (1 Jn. 5:11)

“that you...may comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...” (Eph. 3:17-19)

### The Conclusion of the Matter...



Many struggle with the book of Ecclesiastes because it seems to be a dark and depressing book. Further, there are even times that it says things which appear to contradict the teaching of other Scriptures. One of the keys to understanding and appreciating Ecclesiastes is to look at the entire book. Without the final chapter (and a few segments sprinkled throughout) it certainly would be a depressing book! The point of the book, though, is that without God life really is futile,

pointless, and vain. And even when one follows God, they must do so in a fully trusting manner, for even the righteous will face adversity, sorrow, and physical death. Man simply is not in control, and thus all his efforts to grasp control will be fruitless and discouraging. When we accept this and simply humble ourselves to God’s will, however, then we can find true purpose and happiness, no matter our lot and circumstances. The preacher of Ecclesiastes learned this lesson after years of toil and disappointment. He hopes others will learn from his experience, instead of traversing the hard way of futility themselves. He especially calls on the youthful to remember God and follow Him early in life. This will lead to a fruitful life, and one that can be enjoyed more fully as a faithful child of God. In the end, the main lesson for all to learn is this: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.”

# “That You May Grow Thereby...”

A weekly Bible reading plan



## Ecclesiastes 1-12

### Finding Purpose In a World of Vanity

#### Overview

What is the meaning and purpose of life? At some point, all people are confronted with this question, and they do their best to make their life meaningful in some way. Ecclesiastes is the story of a man who sought this very answer, and the final conclusion he arrived at. The man is simply called “the preacher,” and traditionally this man has been viewed to be Solomon. The preacher provides his thesis from the very outset; “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!*” That doesn’t sound too optimistic, and it isn’t. From there, the preacher discusses his myriad attempts to find meaning and purpose to life “under the sun.” He seeks fulfillment in work and accomplishments; pleasure; fame; power; wisdom; and everything imaginable. The result? All earthly roads to fulfillment lead to the same place: vanity or meaninglessness. While the preacher knows wisdom and righteousness are the right way to live, he ponders perplexities of injustice and chaos in the world. Why do some who are righteous die young while others who are evil live long, prosperous lives? All told, the preacher asks many of the questions we’ve probably pondered ourselves. Thankfully, the book is not just the depressed musings of a disgruntled man—it is the wise teaching of a man who’s come to understand the one essential key to meaning: obedience to God. The world and all of its workings is beyond even the wisest man’s ability to comprehend. Thankfully, we don’t have to comprehend and understand all things in order to find meaning. If we will “*fear God and keep His commandments*” then we can live meaningful lives.

#### Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Ecclesiastes 1-2  
 Tuesday: Ecclesiastes 3-4  
 Wednesday: Ecclesiastes 5-7  
 Thursday: Ecclesiastes 8-9  
 Friday: Ecclesiastes 10-12

#### What is *Hebel*?



The famous second verse of Ecclesiastes is, “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!*” The word translated as “vanity” in most translations is the Hebrew word *hebel* (pronounced “hevel”). Some translations render the word as “meaningless,” “useless,” or “absolutely futile.” The word is found 38 times in the book of Ecclesiastes. The word has a wide range of meaning. It can refer to vanity, pride, and worthlessness. Literally the word means breath, or vapor. Perhaps all meanings congeal in this book. The preacher isn’t talking about vain pride—he speaking of the futility of finding meaning in life apart from God. Trying to grab hold of smoke will be easier than finding true purpose apart from trusting and obeying God!

#### Outline

Introduction & Theme (1:1-3)  
 First Catalog of Vanities (1:4—2:26)  
 God’s Sovereignty (3:1-15)  
 Second Catalog of Vanities (3:16—4:16)  
 Fear the Holy & Righteous God (5:1-7)  
 Life “Under the Sun” (5:8—7:24; 8:1—12:7)  
 The Heart of the Problem: Sin (7:25-29)  
 The Conclusion: (12:8-14)

\*Adapted from The ESV Study Bible



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