

WHAT'S THE POINT?



Searching for Meaning in Ecclesiastes

Growth Groups

Fall 2021

Good Shepherd Church

ECCLESIASTES :

What's the Point?

Session Outline
Fall 2021

- September 21.....20 Year Celebration &
Intro to Ecclesiastes
- September 28.....Who, What and How?
Ecclesiastes 1
- October 5.....Two Tests and Two Responses
Ecclesiastes 2
- October 12.....Trying to Get the Big Perspective
Ecclesiastes 3
- October 19.....Holding Onto the Big Perspective
Ecclesiastes 4-5
- October 26.....What is Good in Life?
Ecclesiastes 6:1-8:9
- November 2.....Conclusions Coming Into View
Ecclesiastes 8:10-9:6
- November 9.....How Then Shall We Live?
Ecclesiastes 9:7-10:20
- November 16.....Reality Proclaimed
Ecclesiastes 11-12

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For September 28: Who, What, and How — Ecclesiastes 1

1. Reflect on the Hebrew word “hevel” (vapor/meaningless/vanity) by looking up the following verses where it’s also used:

- Job 7:16
- Psalm 39:5
- James 4:14
- Now reflect on Romans 8:20-21. How does this verse relate to what is being expressed?

2. What legitimate answers come to mind for the question the Preacher poses in 1:3?

3. According to Genesis 3:17-19, when and why was creation subjected to futility in this way?

4. According to the same verses, to what is Adam made subject at this point?

5. How do the following verses enlarge our understanding of wisdom?

- Proverbs 9:10
- Jeremiah 8:9
- Daniel 2:27-28
- Corinthians 1:18-25

6. Wind is poetic imagery and it is used at least 7 times in Ecclesiastes. What do the repeated pictures of the wind in Ecclesiastes 1 make you see, feel and understand?

7. We've seen that Ecclesiastes points our thoughts back to Genesis and the stark reality of a fallen world cut off from God. Take a peek ahead to the very end of the biblical narrative: Revelation 21:1-5. What perspective do these verses bring to Eccl. 1?

8. Compare the message of Eccl. 1:4-8 with what you find in Psalm 19. Recognizing the sense in which nature (and all life) can seem so transient, repetitive, aimless, even futile, how have you sensed this in your own life? How do you respond to it?

9. Within your own perspective on truth and human existence, what is your best answer to the question posed in the first half of 1:10?

10. Reflect on the statements made in Eccl. 1:11. In your own observation, how well does humanity remember the people and events of the past? To what degree do you see this as a shortcoming or weakness of humanity?

11. To what extent have you also done what the author said he did in Eccl. 1:13, or something similar to it? What were the results? How healthy do you think it is for human beings to actively search out the meaning of human existence? What is the value of this? What, if any, are the drawbacks? Is it possible to be *too* curious about these things (v. 18)?

12. How would you compare the perspective on wisdom in Eccl. 1:16-18 with the Christian perspective in Colossians 2:2-3?

LARGE GROUP NOTES

September 28: Who, What, and How — Ecclesiastes 1

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For October 5: Two Tests and Two Responses — Ecclesiastes 2

1. The first test is *doing*. What three things does the Preacher try? Consider some pleasures or projects or possessions that you've sought. What has been satisfying or unsatisfying about them?
2. How does the teaching in Eccl 2:10-11 compare with the teaching in 1 John 2:15-17?
3. What contrast to 2:11 do you see in the life of another Old Testament character, as recorded in Hebrews 11:24-26?
4. The greatness mentioned in 2:9 is clearly judged according to the accomplishments of the previous verses. List all the first-person pronouns and verbs in Ecclesiastes 2:4-9 ("I made," "I built," etc)
5. The Preacher turns to his second test, which is thinking. As he compares wisdom to folly in Eccl. 2:13-14a, what is his short-term judgement? But in Eccl 2:14b-16, what is his long-term judgement?
6. How would you compare the activities described in 2:12-16 with what we learn about Solomon in 1 Kings 3:9-12 and 1 Kings 4:29-34?
7. How would you describe the "wisdom" that's in view in 2:12-17? What is good about it? What is deficient about it?

8. This passage brings us to the first of many confrontations with death, which brings the Preacher's search to a sudden stop. What is the one particular aspect of his mortality that really bothers the Preacher in Eccl 2:18-19, 21?

9. What does 2:24-26 imply about God and his nature? (see also Eccl. 3:13)

10. In the final verse of Eccl. 2, what different sorts of things do we see God giving to people who please him? What is the other category of people mentioned here?

11. Who are sinners, according to the following verses:

- Eccl 7:20
- Proverbs 20:9
- Isaiah 53:6
- Romans 3:23

12. Cut off as every person is from God by our sin, what is our only hope of moving into the category of those who please God? Before answering, read and consider Hebrews 11:6 and 13:20-21.

LARGE GROUP NOTES

October 5: Two Tests and Two Responses — Ecclesiastes 2

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For October 12: Trying to Get the Big Perspective — Ecclesiastes 3

1. These verses discuss the rhythm of God's time. Rhythms that we all know – of life and death, weeping and laughing, etc. all the extremes of human experience are covered in these pairs of opposites. Comment on some ways you have experienced this in your life? Which one are you experiencing in this particular season of your life?
2. In our own life, what things on this list are you most likely to try to rush (rather than waiting for the proper time)? And what can help you be more patient in this area of life?
3. What is the role of God in Ecclesiastes 3:10-13?
4. And yet, what creates the tension in the last part of Eccl. 3:11? Do you know this tension? Why do you think the element of "time" is included in this statement? What does this verse teach us about both human capacity and human limitation?
5. Eccl. 3:12-13 brings a refrain we heard before and will hear again. How does this refrain begin to resolve the tension in Eccl 3:10?
6. The Preacher indeed cannot grasp the whole of God, but what specific statements can he make at this point, with certainty, about what God does? (Eccl 3:14).
7. How does Eccl 3:16 raise the tension again? How does the issue raised here persist today, in your experience?

8. In what ways does Eccl 3:17 use the wisdom of the previous verses to answer the question raised in 3:16?

9. The Preacher has come far enough in his thinking to understand that human life makes no sense apart from the God who made it and rules it and will judge it. What light does Hebrews 11:1-6 shed on his spiritual journey?

10. Read and meditate on the following verses, and then write down some thoughts on what it means to you that God is God over all time, eternally Lord over every moment of the past, present, and future.

- Psalm 31:14-15
- Acts 1:7
- Galatians 4:4

LARGE GROUP NOTES

October 12: Trying to Get the Big Perspective — Ecclesiastes 3

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For October 19: Holding Onto the Big Perspective— Ecclesiastes 4-5

1. The Preacher says that people are motivated by envy (Eccl. 4:4). He believes that people work hard primarily to get ahead of their neighbors. According to your experience, how accurate do you find his judgement to be?

2. In Eccl 4:5 the Preacher agrees with the proverb that laziness is self-destructive (Proverbs 6:10-11), but he goes on to make what counterpoint in vs. 6?

3. Observe and jot down the ways in which people are cut off from other people:
 - Eccl 4:1-3
 - Eccl 4:4-6
 - Eccl 4:7-8

4. In the midst of these dark pictures of alienated people, a ray of hope shines through. Read Eccl. 4:9-12 and summarize the main idea of these verses.

5. Express in your own words the main things that we're counseled against in Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 in regard to our relationship with God. Also read and consider the following passages:
 - 1 Samuel 15:22
 - Isaiah 1:11-20
 - Matthew 6:7
 - Proverbs 10:19

6. Read Eccl 5:10-12. In your own words, what's wrong with buying things? And why would abundance make you lose sleep?

7. List the words that tell what God is doing in each of the four times he is mentioned in Eccl. 5: 18-20.

8. In that same section, list what it says a person should do.

9. Eccl. 5:18 tells us that our "lot" in life includes "toilsome labor." Why do you think it's necessary – from God's perspective – that our lives include hard work?

LARGE GROUP NOTES

October 19: Holding Onto the Big Perspective— Ecclesiastes 4-5

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For October 26: What is Good in Life? — Ecclesiastes 6:1-8:9

1. In your experience, is it possible to have all that the heart desires and yet find no joy in it? (Eccl. 6:2) What do you see as the keys to being able to truly enjoy wealth, possession, and honor in a God-pleasing way?

2. How does the situation in Eccl. 6:1-2 compare with the parable in Luke 12:15-21?

3. With Eccl. 7:9 in mind regarding the foolishness of anger, what confirmation of that do you find in the following verses:

- Proverbs 14:17, 16:32
- Matthew 5:22
- Ephesians 4:31
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25
- James 1:19-20

4. Reflect on Ecclesiastes 7:10. Why do you think it is unwise to think that the “old days” were any better than the present?

5. Explain in your own words the benefit of wisdom as expressed in Eccl 7:11-12. How do you see this further taught in the following verses:

- Proverbs 2:7-11
- Proverbs 3:21-23
- Proverbs 9:10-11
- Proverbs 13:20
- Isaiah 33:6

6. Reflect on Eccl. 7:16. Is it possible to be too righteous?

7. Eccl. 7:26-28 offers one man's experience, not a general principle. How do you think he came to that conclusion? Read 1 Kings 11:1-6 to find out.

8. What is the truth offered in Eccl. 7:29? How does this verse well describe Genesis 3:1-7?

9. The second half of Eccl. 7:18 offers a hint of the resolution that has been building. Look at the second half of this verse, along with Eccl 3:14 and 5:7. What solution is offered?

10. Considering what the Preacher has said about God so far, in Eccl. 8:2-4, in what ways might he be drawing a parallel here between the earthly king and the heavenly King?

LARGE GROUP NOTES

October 26: What is Good in Life? — Ecclesiastes 6:1-8:9

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For November 2: Conclusions Coming Into View— Eccl. 8:10-9:6

1. What is the key human response mentioned repeatedly in Ecclesiastes 8:12-14? By now, we see this crucial theme developing clearly in the book. What two different ends are promised for the one who fears God and the one who does not?
2. The glimpse into eternal life is not very clear here, but what hints can you find, even in the paradox and difficulty of these verses, that the Preacher is not talking just about earthly life?
3. In light of other Old Testament passages, to what do these different ends ultimately refer? (See, for example, Psalm 23:6; 49:13-15; 73:23-28)
4. These verses should make us think ahead to the Son of God, who straightened out for us what was bent and twisted by the Fall. In light of Ecclesiastes' struggles and seeking, read and ponder John 3:16-18.
5. After so many passages introduced with "I saw," what words in Eccl 8:12 stand out?
6. Consider how the larger framework of the overarching story, with its subtle pointing to eternity, makes all the difference in grappling with the tensions of this life. How could remembering (or knowing) that "it will be well" with us in the end change your life in the present?

7. Chapter 8 ends as the Preacher brings his eyes back to earth. Why is Eccl. 8:14 especially depressing after vv. 12-13? How does v. 14 sound to you at this point in the book?

8. But we don't land there! Why is Eccl. 8:15 especially encouraging after v. 14? How is God acknowledged in this prescription?

9. In our modern civilization, in what ways and by what means have we tried to separate ourselves from the stark reality and universality of death? What are some of the results?

10. To what kind of hope does Ecclesiastes 9:4 refer?

LARGE GROUP NOTES

November 2: Conclusions Coming Into View— Ecclesiastes 8:10-9:6

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For November 9: How Then Shall We Live? Ecclesiastes 9:7-10:20

1. After that dark passage in Eccl. 9:1-6, what is the effect of Eccl. 9:7? List all the general commands you find in Eccl 9:7-10. What is the general effect and point of these verses?
2. How does the reality of death relate to our work? Before answering, read Eccl 9:10, John 9:4 and Colossians 3:23-24.
3. The proverbs in Eccl. 10:2-3 offer general truths about wisdom and folly. What do the pictures in these verses communicate?
4. Why should we not be surprised by the “evil” laid out here, according to all we’ve read so far in this book?
5. Consider what all this advice about wisdom and foolishness has to do with the persistent theme of fearing God. What have we learned about God in this book?
6. The proverbs point the way toward wisdom as opposed to folly. Certain themes regularly emerge. For example, what wise observations concerning our *words* do you find in Eccl. 10:12-14 and 10:20? Have you had any personal experience with the weighty consequences of words described in these verses?

7. Look back over Ecclesiastes 10. How would you offer a summary or “nutshell” of the Preacher’s words concerning the fool and the wise person?

8. Reflect on the comparison of this section to Ephesians 5:15-21.

LARGE GROUP NOTES

November 9: How Then Shall We Live? Ecclesiastes 9:7-10:20

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For November 16: Reality Proclaimed— Ecclesiastes 11-12

1. How would you generally describe the life of someone who lives out the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 11:1-6?
2. Some risks are unwise and foolish to take, some are not. How would these verses (and the whole biblical context) help us to discern the difference?
3. Eccl. 11:8 and 9 both offer a call to rejoice, but both qualify that call with a “but.” What is the tension that challenges joy in these verses?
4. The final verse of this passage certainly has a dark side that tempers the whole call to joy. What are the positive and the negative sides of the two commands in Eccl. 11:10? (Note: the second phrase could be translated, “put away evil from your flesh.”)
5. Eccl 12:1 tells us to “Remember your Creator.” What is involved in *remembering* God? See also Deuteronomy 8:11-18.
6. List the six different ways death is described in Eccl 2:6-7, what does each make you think of? What is the cumulative effect of this piling on of pictures?
7. How does Eccl. 12:8, the matching bookend of Eccl. 1:2, complete the shape of the book? How has your understanding of this cry evolved through the book?

8. In Eccl. 12:9-10, what do we learn about the Preacher, his method, and the substance of the book?

9. The final command in Eccl. 12:13 is the culmination of a fundamental and persistent theme of the book. [See Eccl 3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12-13] Considering the content and struggle of Ecclesiastes, how is the fear of God its necessary resolution – the inevitable “end of the matter” in this book?

10. Considering that all of Scripture ultimately testifies of Christ, where does Jesus come most in focus for you in this book?

11. When you get to heaven, if you ask God, “Why did you include this book in the Bible?” how do you think he might answer?

LARGE GROUP NOTES

November 16: Reality Proclaimed — Ecclesiastes 11-12

RESOURCES

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastes

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ecclesiastes/>

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