

Ecclesiastes Wisdom for Life 'Under the Sun'



Ecclesiastes

Wisdom for Life Under the Sun

- Author traditionally identified as Solomon, ~78
- Written 970-931 BC
- Part of Israel's Wisdom Literature (Chrono order; Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes)
- Explores meaning, purpose, work, pleasure, suffering, aging, and death
- Written from the perspective of life observed 'under the sun' (viewed through human experience)
- Compared to march of time, death awaits, life is random.
- Concludes that true meaning is found in fearing God and living righteously (12:13-14)



Introduction and Overview

- Ecclesiastes is one of the most realistic and intellectually challenging books in Scripture.
- Hebrew title: Qoheleth ('Teacher' or 'Preacher').
- Greek title: Ekklesiastes ('one who addresses an assembly').
- Explores suffering, prosperity, death, and meaning.
- Key theme: Life pursued apart from God ultimately

Understanding 'Vanity'

- Hebrew word: hebel (Strong's 1892)
- Means vapor, breath, mist, smoke, or something elusive.
- James 4:14 “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”
- Often describes life's fleeting and uncontrollable nature.
- Not necessarily meaningless, but temporary and difficult to grasp.



The Perspective of 'Under the Sun'

- Occurs nearly 30 times.
- Describes life from an earthly perspective.
- Observations made within human experience.
- Often records appearances rather than final theological conclusions.
- Helps explain many seemingly

Solomon's Revelation

Written near the end of Solomon's life:

- Compare with 1 Kings 11
 - Solomon pursued:
 - Wealth
 - Foreign wives
 - Pleasure
 - Building projects
 - Political power
- In Ecclesiastes 2 he essentially says:
 - I tried all of that.
 - It was 'hebel'.

Written by a man who actually possessed the wealth, power, pleasure, knowledge, and opportunity

Solomon Tests his own Teachings



In Proverbs, young Solomon says:

- Pursue wisdom.
- Avoid folly.
- Fear the Lord.

In Ecclesiastes, old Solomon says:

- I pursued wisdom.
- I experimented with pleasure.
- I accumulated wealth.
- I achieved greatness.
- None of these provided ultimate satisfaction.

Major Themes

Human achievement cannot satisfy.

Death equalizes everyone.

God remains sovereign over time and outcomes.

Joy is a gift from God.

Life's blessings are to be received gratefully.

Ecclesiastes and the Rest of Scripture

Proverbs: wisdom generally leads to blessing.

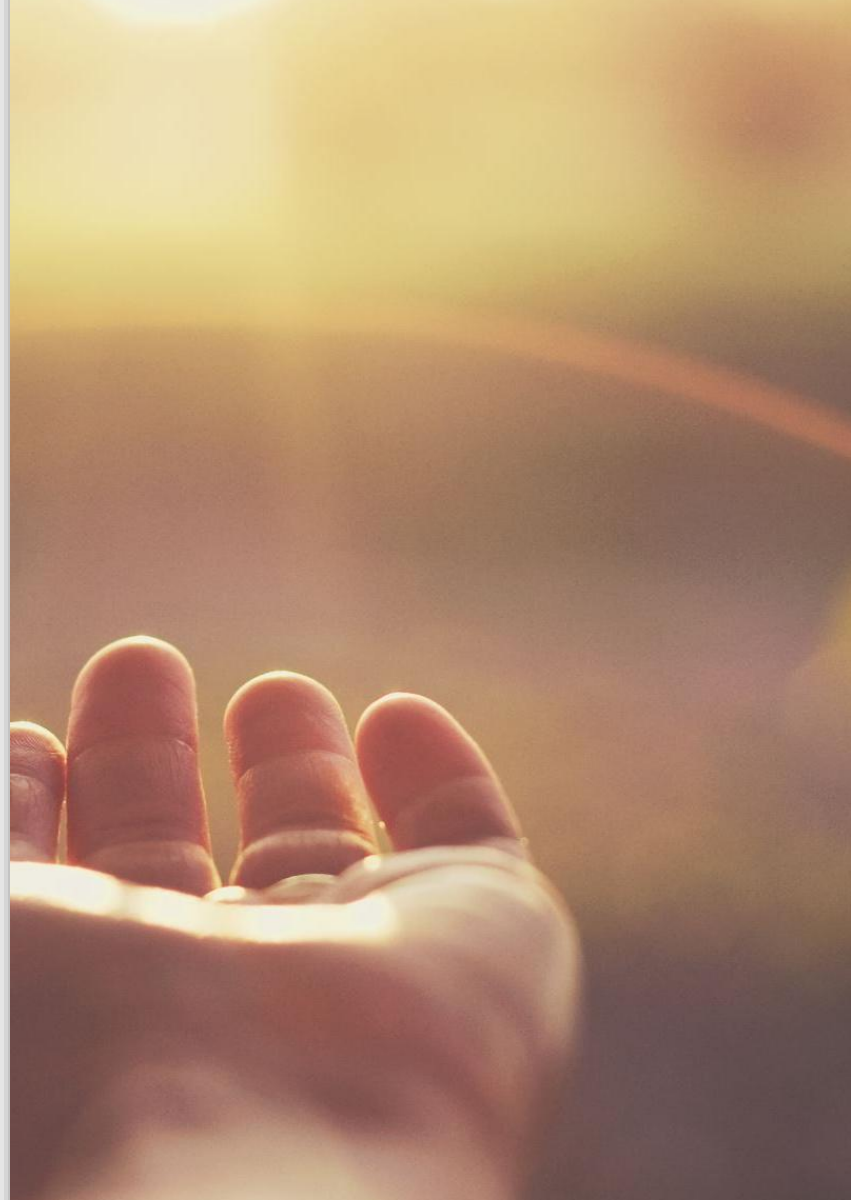
Ecclesiastes: life does not always appear to work that way.

Job: why do righteous people suffer?

Together they provide a fuller wisdom theology.

Ecclesiastes and the Gospel

- Ecclesiastes exposes the limits of human effort.
- Christ answers the problem of death through resurrection.
- Believers receive an eternal inheritance.
- Ultimate meaning is found in union with Christ.
- Earthly joys point beyond themselves to God.



Structure of the Book

- Teacher's Prologue (1:1-11)
- Solomon's Investigation (1:12-6:12)
- Wisdom for Living (7:1-11:6)
- Teacher's Final Exhortation (11:7-12:14)



Key Verse:
Ecclesiastes
12:13-14

Fear God and keep His
commandments.

Meaning comes through
relationship with God.

Life is accountable before
divine judgment.

God's justice gives
significance to life.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter One

Solomon introduces the central theme:
"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

- Human labor and achievement fail to produce lasting gain.
- Nature operates in repetitive cycles that continue unchanged.
- Human history quickly fades from memory.
- Solomon begins his search for meaning through wisdom and knowledge.

Key Verse

- "What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? (1:3)



Chapter 1:1–3

The Thesis

- The Teacher introduces his investigation
- 'Vanity of vanities' frames the book
- Hebel = vapor, mist, fleeting
- Central question: What lasting profit exists?
- Focus is on what survives death



Chapter 1:4–11

Cycles of Creation

- Generations come and go
- Sun, wind, and rivers repeat their courses
- Human experience feels repetitive
- Nothing truly new under the sun
- Human achievements are soon forgotten





Chapter 1:12–15

Limits of Human Effort

- Solomon applies wisdom to life
- The search proves burdensome
- Some things cannot be 'straightened'
- Creation bears effects of the Fall
- Human ability has clear limits



1:16–18

Limits of Wisdom

- Solomon surpasses others in wisdom
- Knowledge exposes life's problems
- Wisdom is better than folly
- Yet wisdom cannot overcome death
- Greater insight often brings sorrow

Key Insights

Hebel means fleeting, not necessarily meaningless

'Under the sun' describes an earthly perspective

Paul in Romans 8 echoes creation's frustration

The chapter exposes secular answers as inadequate

Christ ultimately addresses the problem of death

Chapter One - Key Reminders

To understand the tension in Ecclesiastes, we as believers should (temporarily) forget the concept of living a righteous life that leads to reunion/eternity with God the Creator.

“Under the Sun” - Describes life from an earthly perspective. Think “we will live various ways, but we will die and that is the end.”

“Vanity” – Vapor, mere breath, not necessarily meaningless, but like chasing the wind ie temporary and difficult to grasp.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Two

Solomon tests life's greatest promises of fulfillment.

Pleasure, achievement, wealth, and wisdom are examined.

Death exposes the limitations of every earthly pursuit.

Lasting meaning cannot be found in created things.

True enjoyment is received as a gift from God.

Chapter Two

Overview

- Solomon tests pleasure, wisdom, and work as a source of fulfillment.
- He accumulates wealth, projects, and possessions.
- Wisdom proves better than folly.
- Death ultimately equalizes everyone.
- True enjoyment comes only from God.
- Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 2:24 - “A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from





Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

The Experiment of *Pleasure*

- Solomon tests pleasure as life's purpose.
- He pursues laughter, wine, and entertainment.
- He undertakes impressive building projects.
- He accumulates wealth and possessions.
- None provide lasting



Ecclesiastes 2:12-17

Wisdom Meets *Mortality*

- Wisdom is better than foolishness.
- Wise people navigate life more effectively.
- Wisdom provides practical advantages.
- Death comes to both wise and foolish.
- Mortality limits human wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23

The Problem of *Legacy*

- Solomon questions the value of his labor.
- Wealth must eventually be left to others.
- A fool may inherit a wise person's work (one son!)
- Labor often produces worry and frustration.
- Achievement cannot



Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

Receiving Life as *God's Gift*

- Food and labor are gifts from God.
- Enjoyment comes from God's hand.
- Contentment cannot be manufactured.
- Gratitude is wiser than endless striving.
- Joy is received, not achieved



Pleasure is ... good?

Worldview

View of Pleasure

Hedonism

Pleasure is life's highest goal.

Asceticism

Pleasure is spiritually suspect and should be minimized.

Ecclesiastes

Pleasure is a good gift from God to be received with gratitude, but it is not life's ultimate purpose.

Recognize that contentment comes not from the gifts themselves

Key Insights & Application

**Pleasure is a gift but
not a savior.**

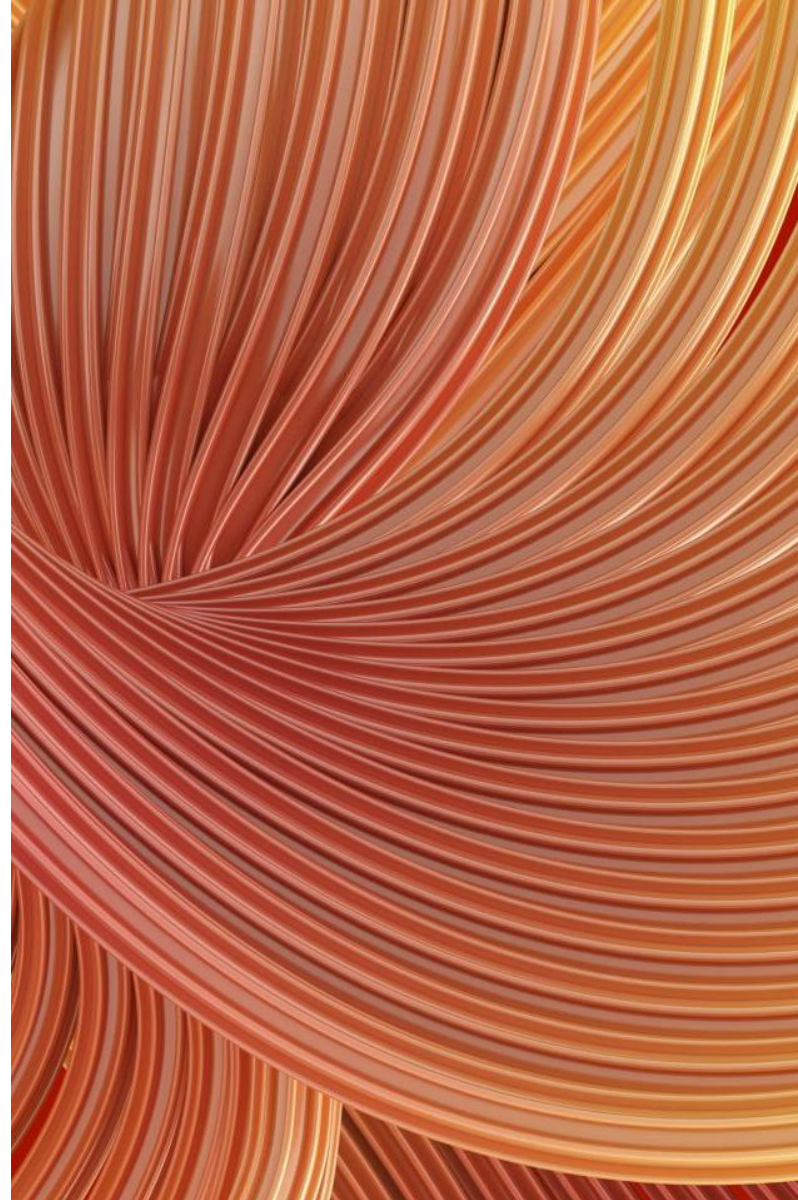
**Achievement
cannot overcome
death.**

**Wealth cannot
guarantee
significance.**

**Contentment
ultimately comes
from God.**

**Christ provides
lasting life and
inheritance.**

**Receive with
gratitude what
God graciously
gives.**



Ecclesiastes 3

God's Times and Seasons

God appoints every season of life.

Humans experience time but cannot control it.

God's purposes exceed human understanding.

Injustice does not escape God's notice.

Meaning is found in trusting God.

3:1-8

A Time for Every Purpose

- Life unfolds in God-appointed seasons.
- Opposite experiences are part of life.
- No season lasts forever.
- God governs joy and sorrow.
- The passage emphasizes divine order.

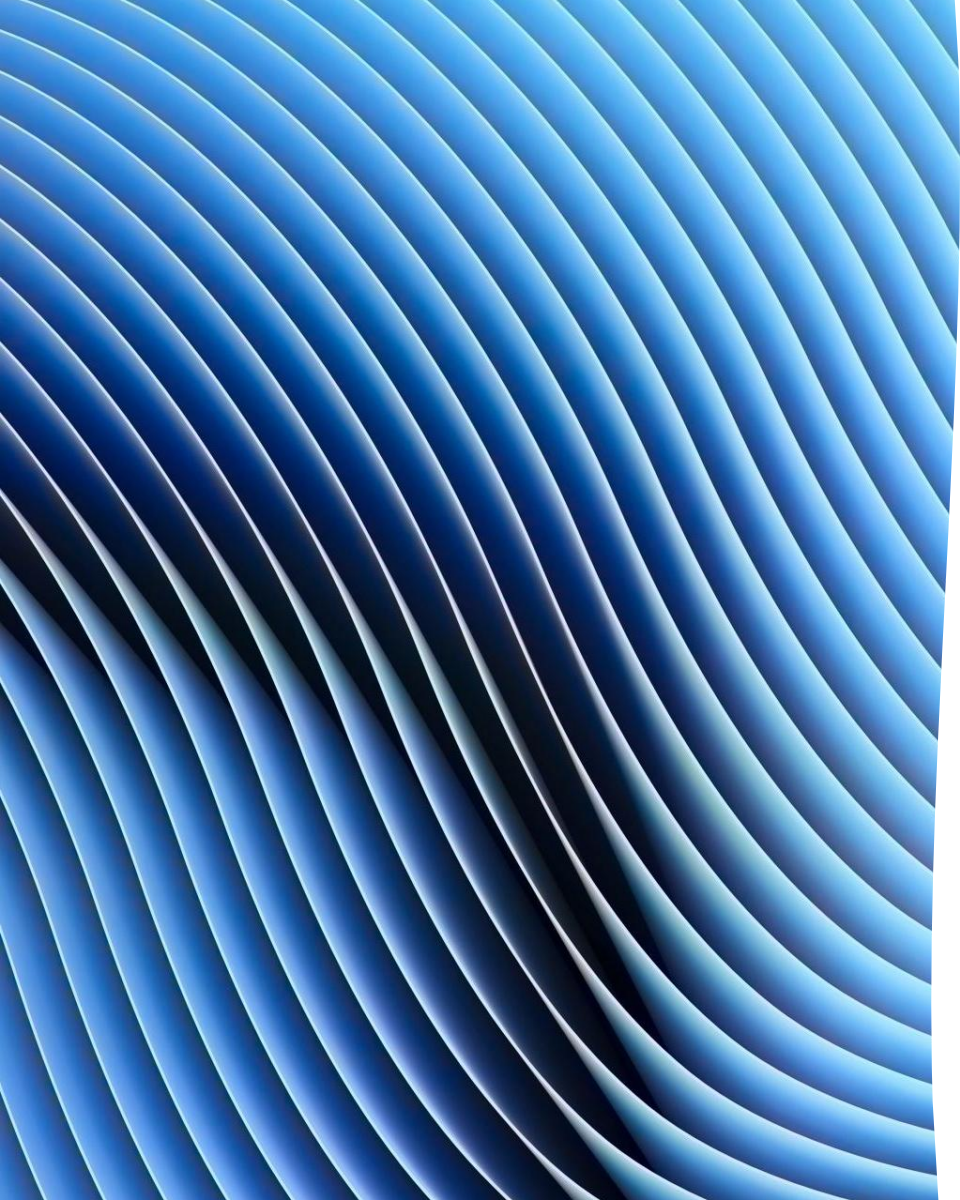




3:9-11

Eternity in the Heart

- Human labor has limits.
- People long for lasting meaning.
- God places eternity in the human heart.
- We sense realities beyond this life.
- Yet, his plans exceed our understanding.

An abstract background on the left side of the slide featuring a series of concentric, wavy lines in various shades of blue, creating a sense of depth and movement.

3:12-15

Enjoy God's Gifts

Joy is a gift from God.

Work has value when received gratefully.

God's purposes endure forever.

Nothing can be added to His work.

Fear/reverence is the proper response.

3:16-17

Injustice and Judgment



- Injustice exists in human courts.
- Wrongdoing often appears to prosper.
- God sees every action and judgment will come in His time.

3:18-22

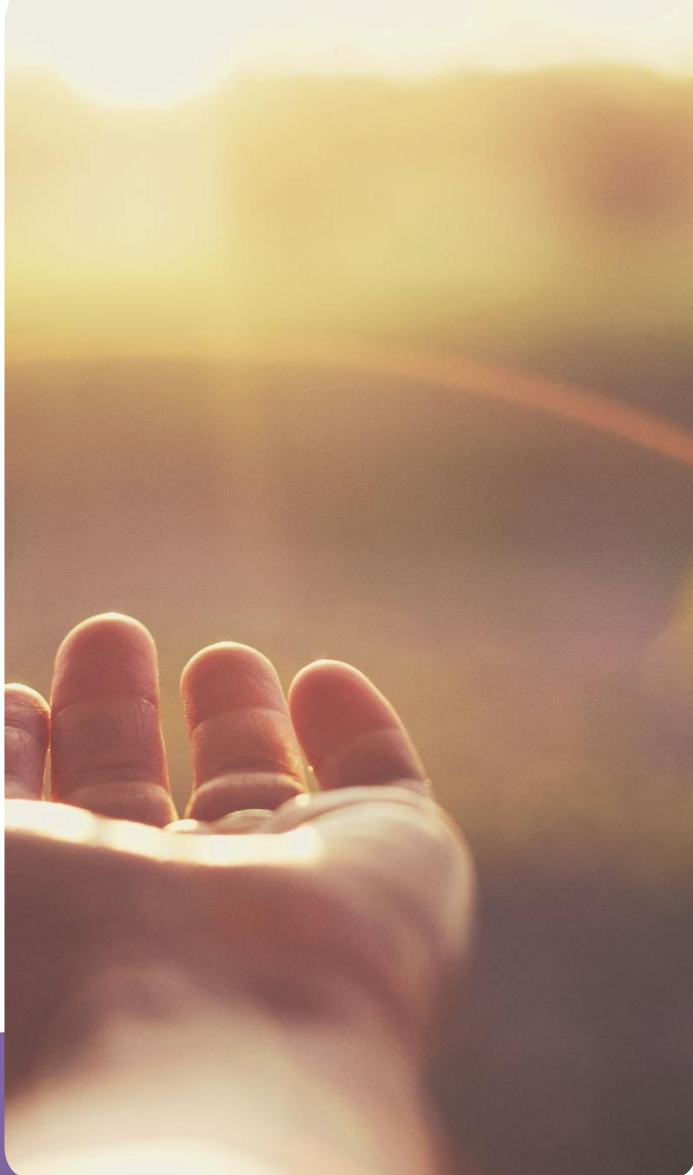
Mortality and Humility

- Life under the sun is temporary for both man and beast.
- Death humbles human pride and spirits may never rise.
- People cannot control the future.
- Work should be enjoyed as life ends in mortality.



1 Corinthians 15:58

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”



“Under the Sun”

- All roads, paths, lives, lead to...death
- All achievement, accumulation, wealth, influence, fame, accomplishment, ends in death.
- There is no purpose, justice, accountability for



“Under the Son”

- Death is not the end.
- Our works lay up eternal treasures in heaven.
- We are ultimately accountable to God - all injustices will be punished.
- Life never, ever ends, believers will eternally reflect God's Glory, unrepentant endure God's wrath.



Ecclesiastes 4

The Loneliness of Life Under the Sun

- Oppression burdens many lives.
- Competition often drives achievement and jealousy.
- Isolation magnifies hardship.
- Relationships (personal & marital) strengthen people.



4:1-3 — The Reality of Oppression

The oppressed lack comfort.

Power is often abused.

Human suffering is real.

Solomon laments injustice.

The world is deeply broken.

4:4-6
Rivalry and
Envy

Competition motivates many pursuits.

Envy drives endless striving.

More is never enough.

Contentment is preferable.

Rest has value.

4:7-8

The Lonely Achiever

- Some labor without companionship.
- Wealth cannot satisfy loneliness.
- Achievement can become an idol.
- Relationships are neglected.
- Isolation impoverishes life

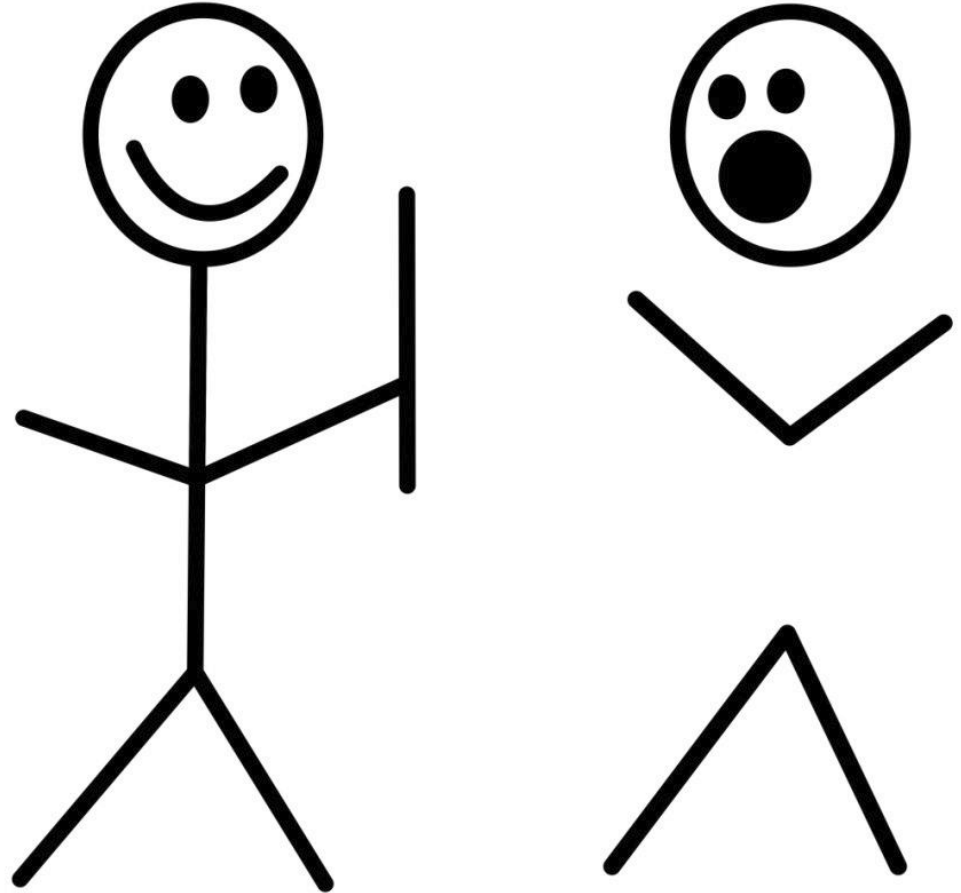


4:9-12

Strength in Companionship

- Two are better than one.
- Partnership increases effectiveness.
- Friends provide support.
- Community offers protection.
- God designed people for relationship.

I'VE GOT YOUR BACK!





4:13-16

The Instability of Power



Leaders rise and fall.



Public approval
changes quickly.



Success is temporary.



Popularity cannot
satisfy.



Earthly kingdoms fade.

Ecclesiastes 5 Worship, Wealth, and Contentment

- God deserves reverence.
- Words should be measured.
- Money cannot satisfy.
- Contentment is God's gift.
- Gratitude surpasses accumulation.



5:1-3

Approach God Carefully

Worship requires humility.

Listen before speaking.

Avoid empty religion.

God is holy.

Reverence matters.



5:4-7

The Seriousness of Vows

Keep commitments to God.

Avoid rash promises.

Integrity matters.

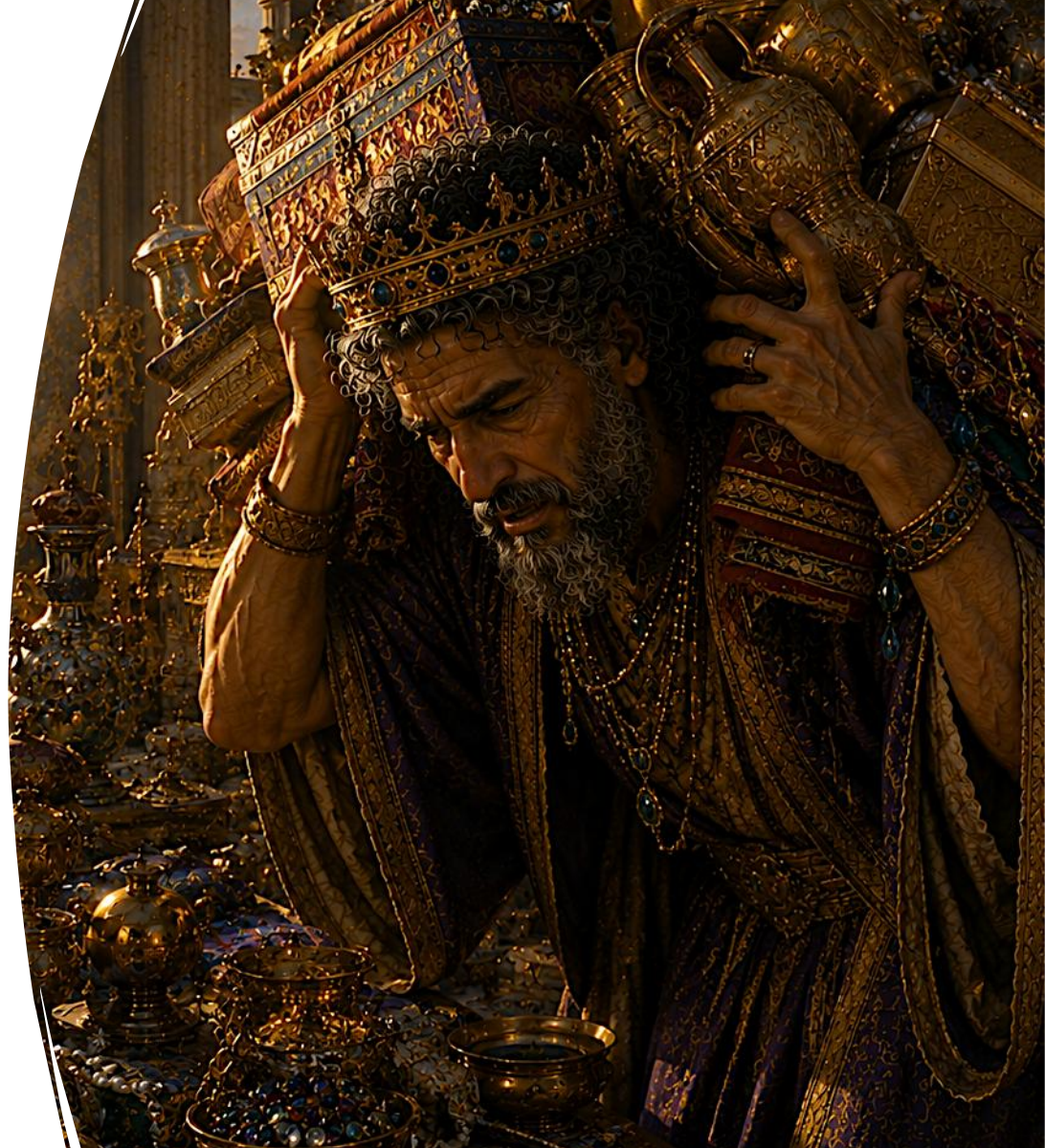
Fear God.

Worship should be sincere.

5:8-12

Wealth and Society

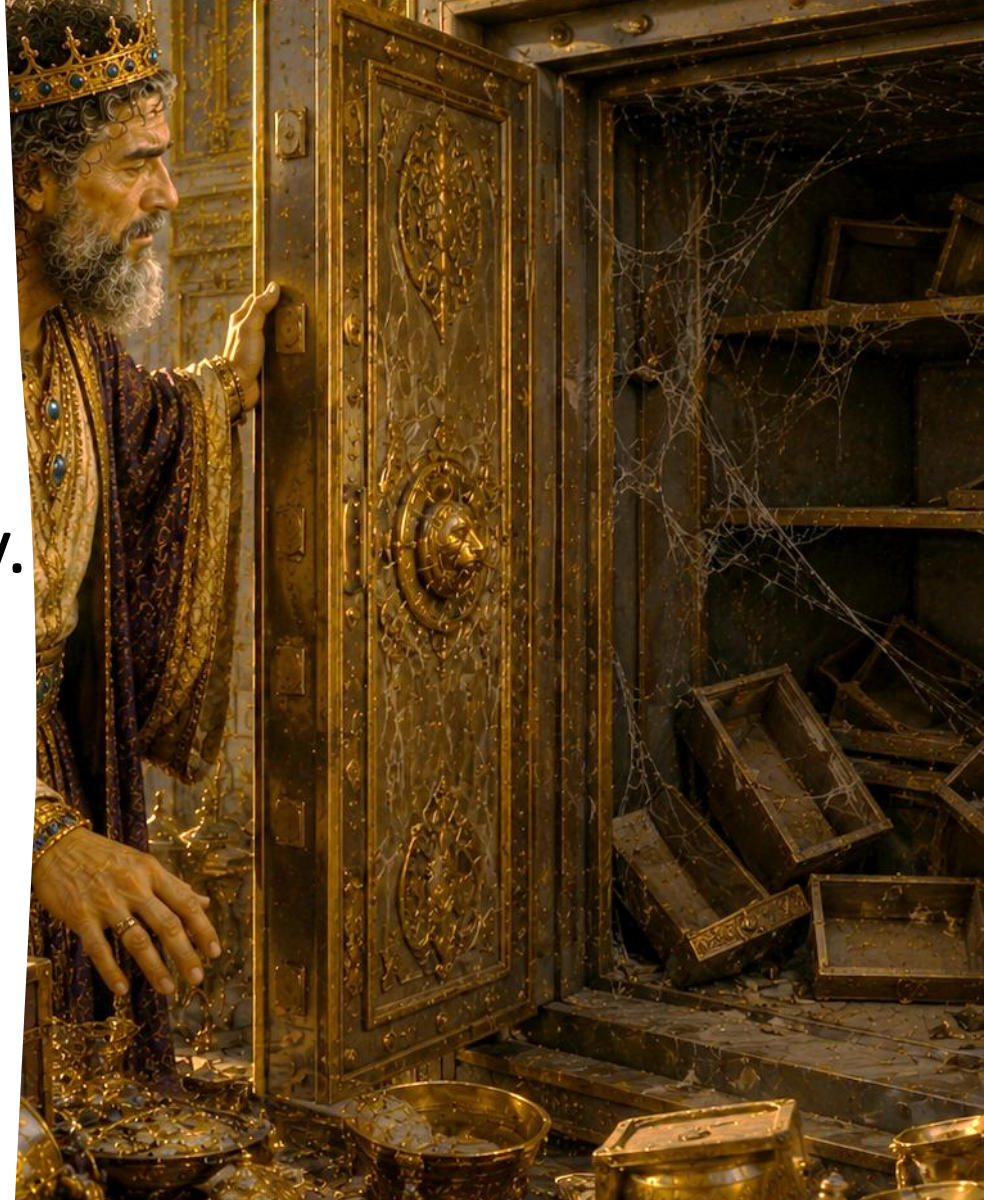
- Corruption exists.
- Power structures disappoint.
- Money never fully satisfies.
- Work can bring rest.
- Possessions create



5:13-17

Riches Can Vanish

- Wealth is uncertain.
- Loss can come suddenly.
- Death ends accumulation.
- Earthly gain is temporary.
- Security is fragile.



5:18-20

Contentment as a Gift

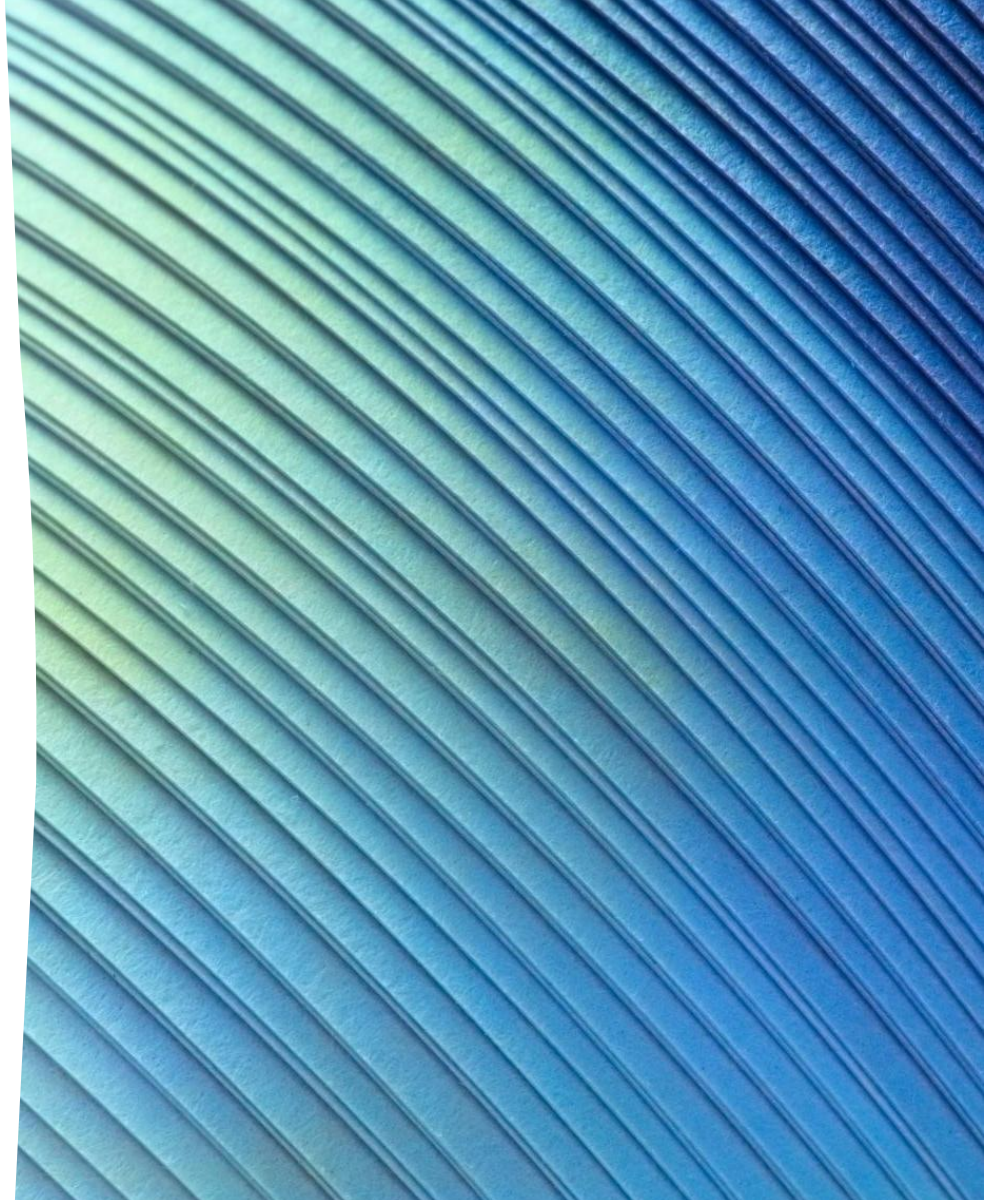
Enjoy God's blessings.

Receive work gratefully.

Joy comes from God.

Contentment is learned.

Life is best lived before Him.



Ecclesiastes 6

When Prosperity Is Not Enough

Possessions do not
guarantee joy.

Desire often exceeds
fulfillment.

Life is brief.

Human knowledge is
limited.

God alone satisfies.



6:1-2

Wealth Without Enjoyment

- A person may possess much.
- Enjoyment may still be absent.
- Prosperity is not fulfilling.
- Possession differs from satisfaction.



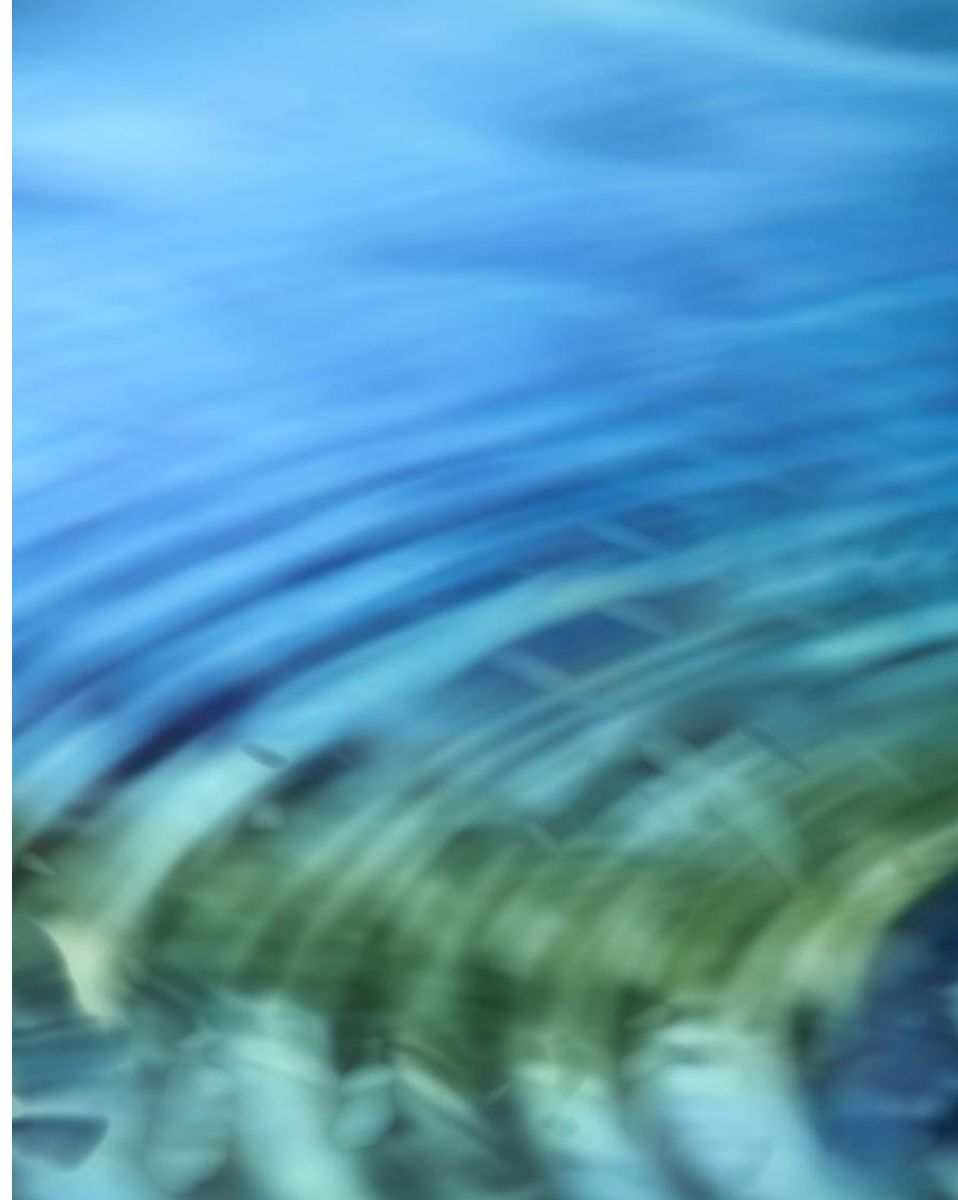
6:3-6

Long Life Is Not Enough

**Longevity alone does not
guarantee joy.**

**Unenjoyed prosperity is
tragic.**

**Since death is the end, it is
all meaningless.**





6:7-9

The Restless Appetite

- Desires continually expand.
- The soul remains hungry.
- Contentment is key.
- Simple blessings should be valued.
- Craving fuels more frustration.



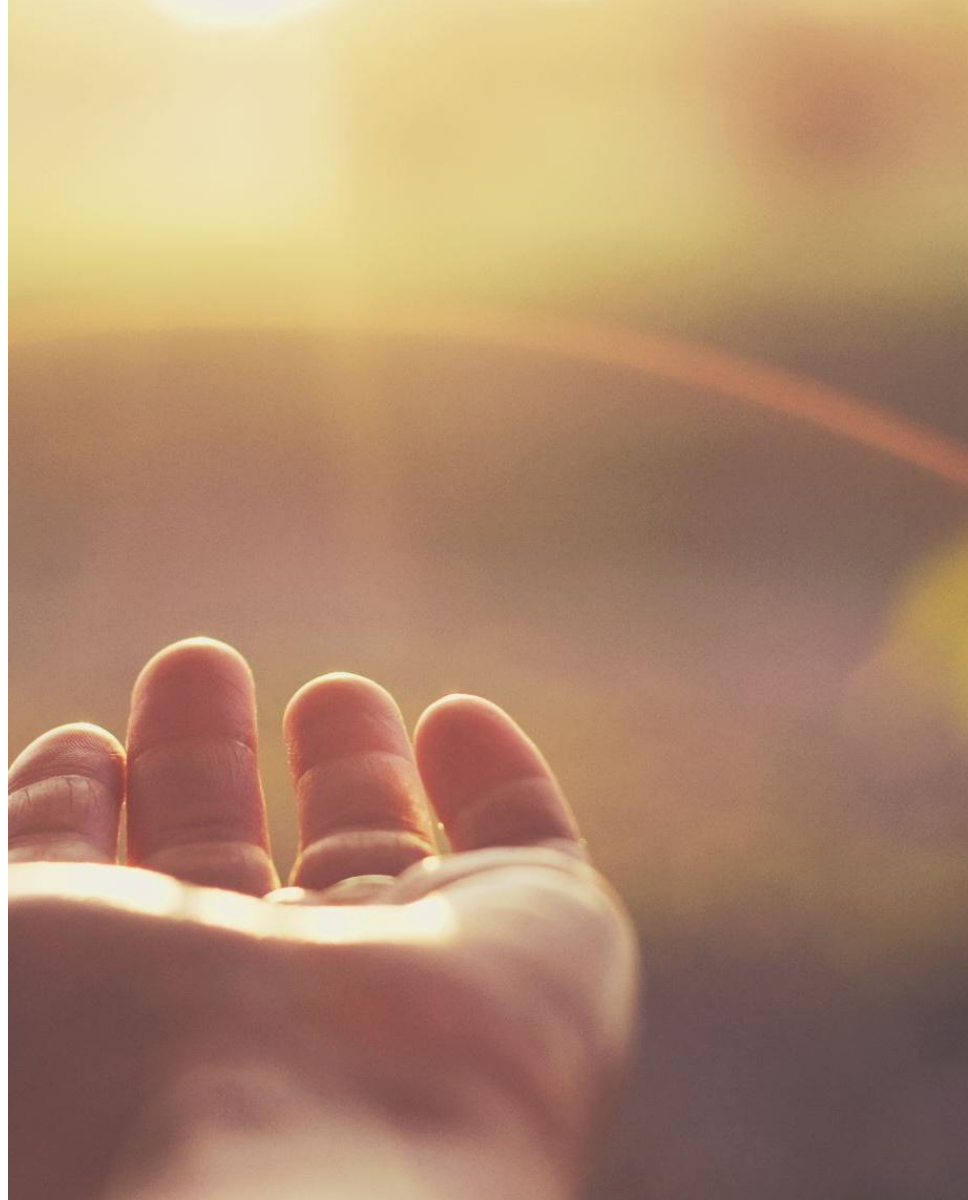
6:10-12 Human Limitations

- Life remains mysterious.
- People cannot control outcomes.
- Knowledge has limits.
- Many questions remain.

Hope during Trials (Eternal Life)

So, I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.

Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.



Ecclesiastes 7

The School of Wisdom

Wisdom often grows through adversity.

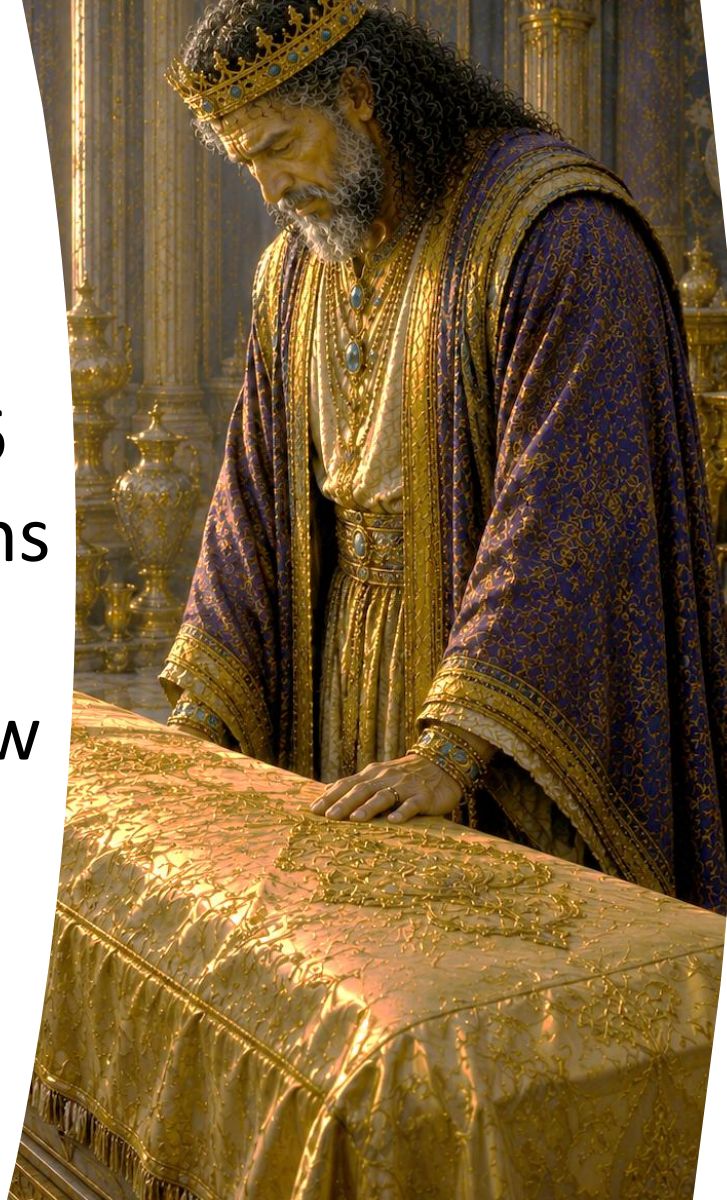
Humility is essential.

Life contains paradoxes.

Human righteousness is imperfect.

God remains sovereign.

7:1-6
Lessons
from
Sorrow



- Reputation is worth a lot
- Reflection deepens wisdom.
- Funerals teach perspective.
- Sorrow can mature character.
- Frivolity is waste.
- Wisdom values reality.

7:7-10
Patience and
Perspective

Corruption makes you
a fool.

Patience is better than
pride.

Don't allow yourself to
be provoked.

7:11-14

Prosperity and Adversity

- Wisdom is valuable and a shelter.
- God appoints both good and bad days.
- Prosperity is not permanent.
- Adversity has purpose.



7:15-22 Avoiding Extremes

- Self-righteousness is dangerous.
- Foolishness is destructive.
- No one is sinless.
- Be selective on what you hear.



7:23-29

The Limits of Understanding

Wisdom has limits.

Humanity is fallen.

God created mankind upright.

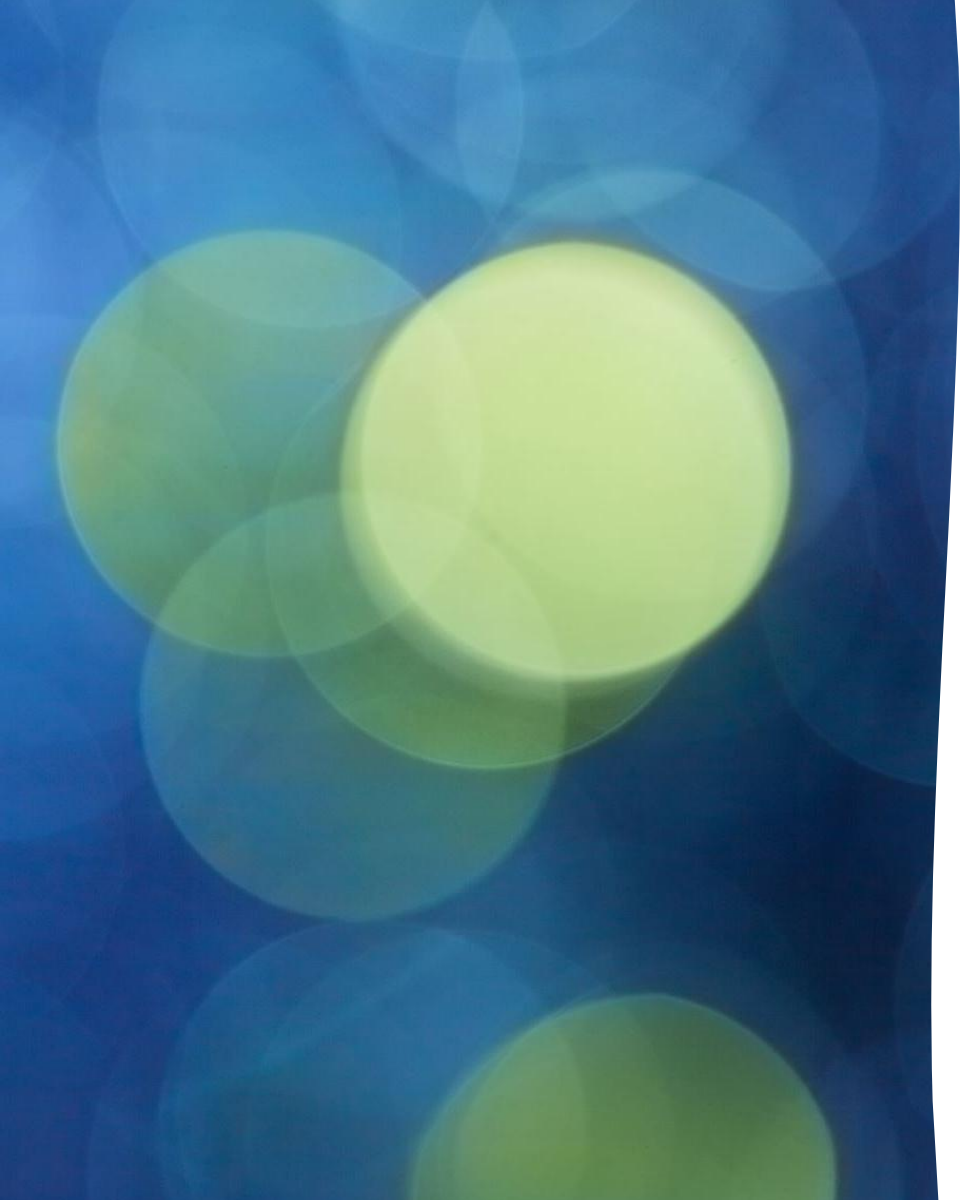
Yielding to the temptation of the flesh is sin.

People pursue sinful schemes.



Ecclesiastes 8 Trusting God Amid Injustice

- Authority should be respected.
- Life often appears unfair.
- Judgment may be delayed.
- God's wisdom exceeds ours.



8:1-9

Wisdom Before Authority

Wise people have pleasant faces.

Exercise discernment.

Right timing matters in all things.

**Like a private in the army, no one
has power over death.**

**We have power to effect people's
lives.**

Obey?

The Bible Commands

- “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Paul Romans 13:1
- “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority” 1 Peter 2:13

But God’s people refused kings

- Moses’ Midwives did not kill him
- Moses pushed to “Let my People Go”
- Joshua 2 – Rahab hid spies
- Daniel 3 – Bow before statue
- Acts 4-5 – Peter continued preaching
- Acts 10 – Peter entered gentile houses to dine

Biblical Guidance

Situation	Biblical Response
Pay taxes	Yes (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:6–7)
Obey laws	Yes (Romans 13:1–5; Titus 3:1)
Respect rulers	Yes (1 Peter 2:13–17)
Ordered to worship idols	No (Daniel 3)
Ordered to stop praying	No (Daniel 6)
Ordered to stop preaching Christ	No (Acts 5:29)
Ordered to kill innocent people	No (Exodus 1–2)

When human authority commands what God forbids,
or forbids what God commands, believers must obey
God rather than men.

The wicked sometimes prosper and enjoy wrongheaded admiration.

Slow judgment breeds contempt for the law.

8:10-13
Delayed
Justice

God sees all and is patient to render judgement.

Justice remains confusing – the evil prosper and the righteous suffer.

8:14-15

Enjoy
Life's
Gifts

Life contains mysteries.

Simple joys are best (4th time he makes this observation).

Receive blessings gratefully.

Do not despair but trust God amid uncertainty.

Eat, Drink, Be Merry?

Hedonism	Ecclesiastes
Pleasure is life's purpose.	God is life's purpose.
Enjoy because tomorrow you die.	Enjoy because today is God's gift.
Possessions create happiness.	God grants the ability to enjoy possessions.
The gift is ultimate.	The Giver is ultimate.

Common Grace

God gives good gifts to His creatures:

- food,
- friendship,
- work,
- marriage,
- beauty,
- rest

*These gifts should neither be
idolized nor rejected.*

A man with a long, curly beard and a crown sits at a desk, looking out at a starry night sky. He is wearing ornate, patterned robes and has his hand on his chin in a thoughtful pose. A large, ornate golden clock is visible on the left. In the background, a city with lit-up buildings is visible under the starry sky.

8:16-17 Limits of Human Understanding

- God's ways exceed our understanding.
- Human investigation has limits.
- Mysteries (purpose of life) will always remain

Ecclesiastes
9
Living Well
in the Face
of Death

**Death comes
to all.**

**Life should be
embraced.**

**Joy is God's
gift.**

**Opportunities
are limited.**

**Wisdom
remains
valuable.**



9:1-6 Death's Universality

- Death affects everyone.
- Earthly distinctions fade.
- Life remains precious.
- The living still have opportunity to prepare for their death.
- Witnessing mortality teaches perspective



9:7-10

Enjoy Life Before God

- Receive blessings gratefully.
- Value relationships.
- Work diligently.
- Live purposefully.
- Act while opportunity (you are alive) remains.

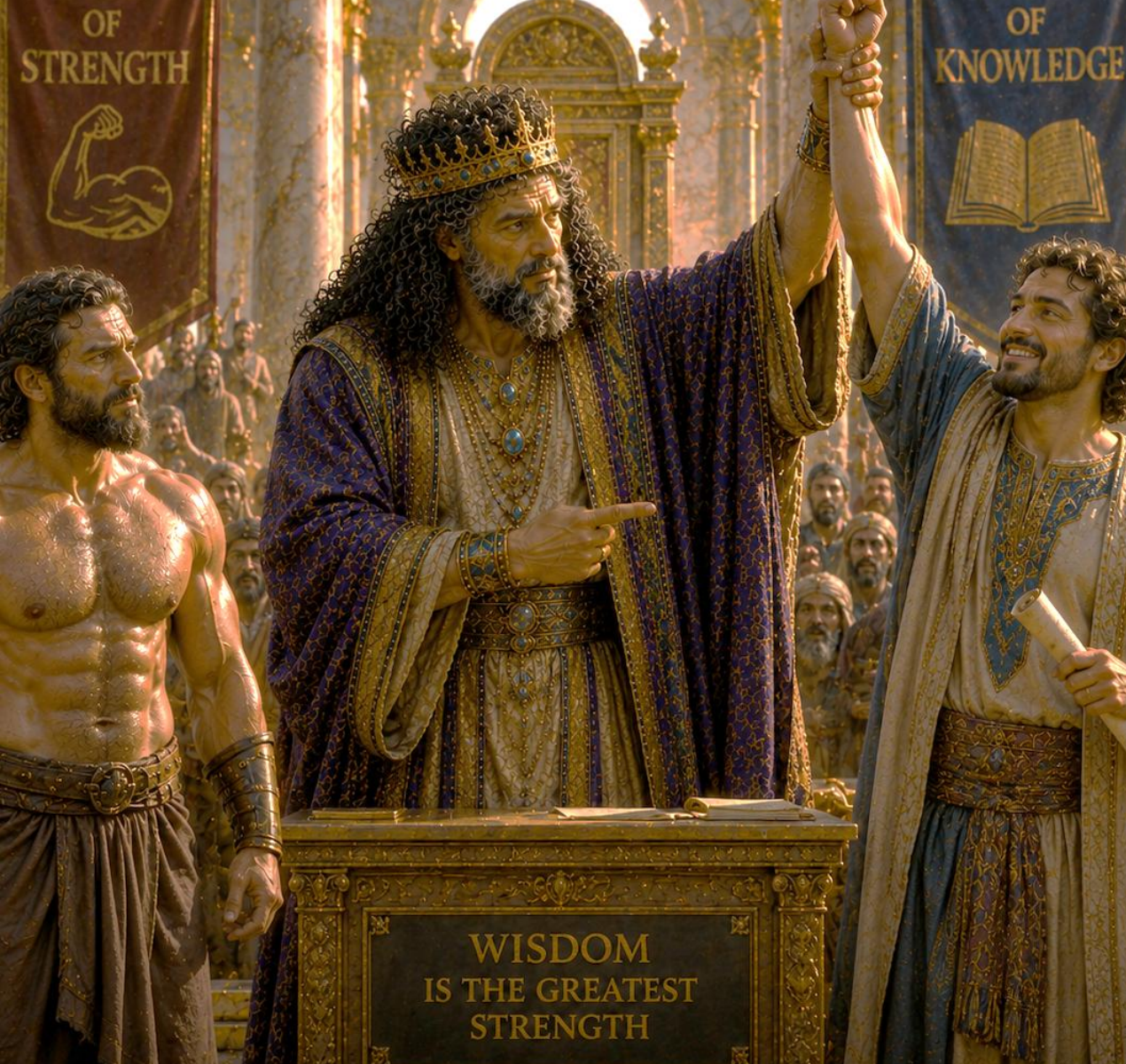
9:11-12
Life's
Uncertainties

even for the strong.

Circumstances surprise us
like a bird caught in a net.

Human control is limited.

Random timing affects
everyone.



9:13-18

The Value of Wisdom

- Wisdom can save a city.
- The wise are often ignored, their influence not always recognized.
- Wisdom exceeds strength.
- One act of folly can destroy much good.

Session Introduction

Ecclesiastes 10

The Danger of Folly

Small follies (fly) create large consequences (ruin ointment).

Wisdom and folly diverge sharply, as much as left is from right.

Leadership matters and impacts many.

Speech (words you say) reveals character.

Discernment protects life.



10:1-3

Small Errors, Large Effects

- A minor folly damages reputation.
- Character matters.
- Wisdom influences conduct.
- Foolishness is easily visible.
- Integrity should be

10:4-7

Wisdom in Leadership

- Stay calm under pressure.
- Avoid impulsive reactions.
- Leadership mistakes affect many.
- Positions do not equal wisdom.
- Discernment is needed.





10:8-15

Practical Consequences

- Actions carry consequences.
- Preparation matters.
- Skill increases effectiveness.
- Fools create needless trouble.
- Wisdom promotes



A KING WHO PRAYS
FOR HIS PEOPLE
BUILDS A KINGDOM
THAT ENDURES

10:16-20

Leadership and Speech

- Mature leaders bless others.
- Words have consequences.
- Careless speech is dangerous.
- Self-control is valuable.
- Character shapes influence.

Ecclesiastes 11

Faith in an Uncertain World

- Life contains uncertainty.
- Generosity requires faith.
- Outcomes cannot be controlled.
- Action is better than paralysis.
- Youth should remember God.



11:1-2

Generous Investment

- Give generously.
- Spread risk wisely.
- Bless others freely.
- Future outcomes are unknown.
- Generosity reflects trust in God to provide.



11:3-6

Act Despite Uncertainty

- Not everything can be predicted.
- Waiting for certainty hinders action.
- God controls outcomes.
- Faith acts responsibly.
- Trust replaces paralysis.



11:7-8 Rejoice in Life

Life itself is a gift.

Enjoy God's blessings.

Youth does not last and old age brings infirmity.

Gratitude is appropriate.

Expressing joy honors the Giver (God).

11:9-10

Responsible Joy

**Youth is a
blessing.**

**Enjoy life
wisely.**

**Choices have
consequences.**

**Remember
accountability.**

**Live before
God.**

Ecclesiastes 12

Remember Your Creator

- Life is brief.
- Aging is inevitable.
- God should be remembered early.
- Wisdom leads to reverence.
- Final judgment gives life its significance.



12:1-5

The Approach of Old Age

- Remember God while young.
- Strength fades with time.
- Life changes quickly.
- Aging is universal.
- The wise plan ahead.



12:6-8

The Reality of Death

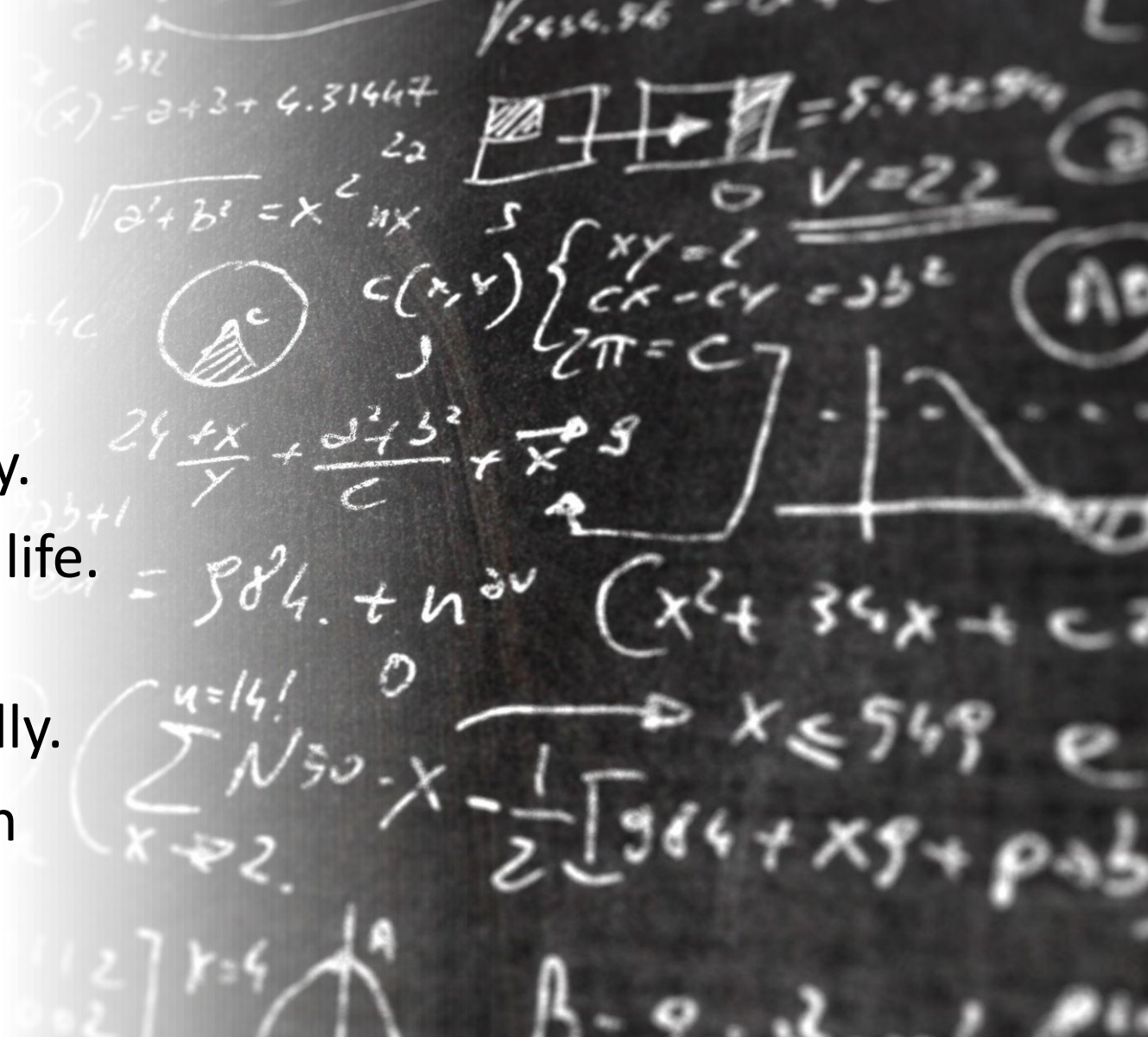
- Life is fragile.
- Death comes to all.
- Earthly existence is temporary.
- Vanity marks life under the sun.
- God alone endures.



12:9-12

The Teacher's Wisdom

- Truth should be sought diligently.
- Wisdom guides life.
- The Teacher instructs carefully.
- Many words can weary.
- God's truth is



12:13-14

The Final Conclusion

- Fear God.
- Keep His commandments.
- Every deed matters.
- Judgment is certain.
- This is humanity's duty.





Corroboration from New Testament

Ecclesiastes 12

Fear God

Keep His commandments

God will judge every deed

New Testament

Matthew 10:28; 1 Peter 2:17;
Revelation 14:7

John 14:15; 1 John 5:2–3

Romans 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10;
Revelation 20:12

The meaning of life...

Early Chapters

- Wisdom alone (1:16–18)
- Pleasure (2:1–3)
- Achievement (2:4–11)
- Wealth (2:8–11)
- Work (2:18–23)
- Reputation (4:13–16)
- Long life (6:3–6)

Chapter 12

- to live in reverent relationship with God,
- to order one's life according to God's will,
- to receive His gifts with gratitude,
- and to live with the certainty that every life has eternal significance because God will judge it and life does not end with death.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

Solomon's Final Realization



TO KNOW GOD

Life begins with knowing the One who made you.



TO FEAR HIM

Reverence and awe keep us on the right path.



TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM

Obedience is how we love and trust Him.



TO GRATEFULLY ENJOY HIS GIFTS

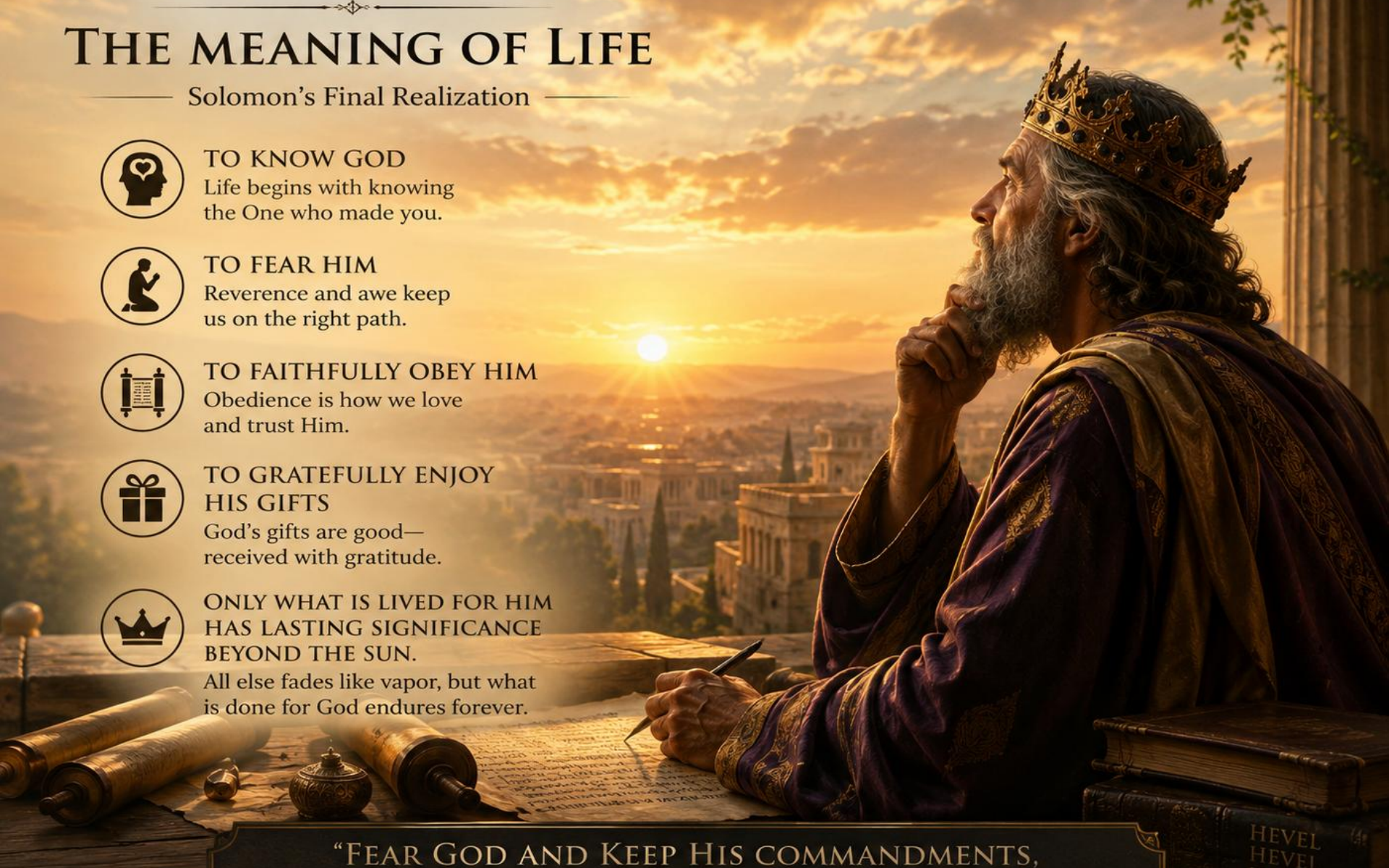
God's gifts are good—received with gratitude.



ONLY WHAT IS LIVED FOR HIM HAS LASTING SIGNIFICANCE BEYOND THE SUN.

All else fades like vapor, but what is done for God endures forever.

"FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS,



Introduction to Philippians

Next Week!



chapter-level thematic summaries

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>One-Sentence Summary</u>
Ecclesiastes 1	Solomon begins his search for lasting meaning and discovers that wisdom, labor, and human achievement cannot overcome life's futility.
Ecclesiastes 2	Pleasure, wealth, accomplishment, and possessions fail to provide enduring satisfaction because death eventually claims everything.
Ecclesiastes 3	God sovereignly appoints every season of life while humans struggle to comprehend His eternal purposes.
Ecclesiastes 4	Oppression, loneliness, rivalry, and political instability reveal humanity's deep need for relationships and justice.
Ecclesiastes 5	True worship requires reverence before God, while the pursuit of wealth often produces anxiety rather than contentment.
Ecclesiastes 6	Prosperity and long life are empty gifts when a person lacks the ability to enjoy what God has given.
Ecclesiastes 7	Wisdom grows through adversity, humility, and reflection more than through comfort and pleasure.
Ecclesiastes 8	Believers must trust God's wisdom and justice even when earthly rulers and circumstances seem unfair.
Ecclesiastes 9	Since death comes to all people, we should embrace God's gifts and faithfully pursue the opportunities before us.
Ecclesiastes 10	Small acts of folly can undermine great wisdom, requiring vigilance and discernment in daily life.
Ecclesiastes 11	Faith acts boldly despite uncertainty, trusting God with outcomes that remain beyond human control.
Ecclesiastes 12	Remember and serve your Creator before age and death arrive, for every life will ultimately answer to God.