



Ecclesiastes

A philosophical exploration of the meaning of life—with a blunt, humanistic tone.

Author: Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. Great King. Built the first temple. He was a writer, poet, scientist writing over 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs according to 1 Kings 4:32.

In Ecclesiastes – Jesus is the Meaning of Life

Ecclesiastes 5:7

"Stand in awe of God."



TEACHER: 12 CHAPTERS

Written somewhere in-between 940-931 B.C. Ecclesiastes is included in the Masoretic text as one of the “wisdom books.” In Christian circles the wisdom books are often referred to as the poetry books. With the inclusion of Job, I feel the title wisdom books, is the more appropriate category. The Hebrew name for this book is “Qohelet” whose meaning indicates strongly that this book is a Preacher talking to an assembly. Jerome, who was a minister, and early church father around 400 A.D., titled the book of Ecclesiastes “Preacher” when he translated the Septuagint into Latin. The site bible scripture.net wisely states that this small book “is a reality check for the modern world.” The search for pleasure, as a path towards fulfillment, is futile and empty. Only in Christ, and in Him crucified and raised on the third day, can we find fulfillment. The end result of the pursuit of pleasure is boredom at best, and a wasted life most often.

“Life is frustrating when you know you are not living up to your God given potential.

And you CANNOT live up to your God given potential without God.” DH.

Solomon shows the frustration of living under a Law no man has ever obeyed. And no man but Jesus ever will. Jesus Christ came to die for us, and end the curse of the law, so we might be free from the law of sin, to serve Him in His abundant grace.

CH. 1

STUDENT:

These are the words from the Teacher, a son of David and king of Jerusalem.

² Everything is so meaningless. The Teacher says that it is all a waste of time! ³ Do people really gain anything from all the hard work they do in this life? ⁴ People live and people die, but the earth continues forever. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun goes down, and then it hurries to rise again in the same place. ⁶ The wind blows to the south, and the wind blows to the north. The wind blows around and around. Then it turns and blows back to the place it began. (ERV)

STUDENT:

⁷ All rivers flow again and again to the same place. They all flow to the sea, but the sea never becomes full. ⁸ Words cannot fully explain things, but people continue speaking. Words come again and again to our ears, but our ears don't become full. And our eyes don't become full of what we see. (ERV)

TEACHER:

I'm going to throw out something as a wild guess. Solomon is having a rough day. Maybe some would call it a "mid-life crisis." He feels as if even as king, he has no control over his destiny, "what's the point" he asks.

STUDENT:

⁹ All things continue the way they have been since the beginning. The same things will be done that have always been done. There is nothing new in this life.

¹⁰ Someone might say, "Look, this is new," but that thing has always been here. It was here before we were.

¹¹ People don't remember what happened long ago. In the future, they will not remember what is happening now. And later, other people will not remember what the people before them did. (ERV)

TEACHER:

It is ironic to me as I read a book written almost 3,000 years ago, that I agree with the sentiment he is writing about, that everything we do will be forgotten. In my human way of thinking, I can relate to what he wrote 3,000 years later. It is futile to attempt legacy. His mindset, and ours on occasion, leaves out the redemptive and eternal effect of the life we live in Christ. It is not until the resurrection of Jesus that this truth stops in its tracks for the believer. Here we are learning from his lament.

"What you do for God matters, and it lasts." DH

STUDENT:

¹² I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I decided to study and to use my wisdom to learn about everything that is done in this life. I learned that it is a very hard thing that God has given us to do. ¹⁴ I looked at everything done on earth, and I saw that it is all a waste of time. It is like trying to catch the wind..... ¹⁶ I said to myself, "I am very wise. I am wiser than all the kings who ruled Jerusalem before me. I know what wisdom and knowledge really are."

¹⁷ I decided to learn how wisdom and knowledge are better than thinking foolish thoughts. But I learned that trying to become wise is like trying to catch the wind. ¹⁸ With much wisdom comes frustration. The one who gains more wisdom also gains more sorrow. (ERV)

TEACHER:

So if the relentless pursuit of intellect is futile when it comes to self-satisfaction, how about the relentless pursuit of pleasure?

STUDENT:

I said to myself, "I should have fun—I should enjoy everything as much as I can." But I learned that this is also useless. ² It is foolish to laugh all the time. Having fun does not do any good. (ERV)

TEACHER:

Perhaps booze? Or going to college and getting drunk maybe?

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STUDENT:

³ So I decided to fill my body with wine while I filled my mind with wisdom. I tried this foolishness because I wanted to find a way to be happy. I wanted to see what was good for people to do during their few days of life. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Well Solomon isn't out of ideas yet, if learning and pleasure aren't the ticket, it must be hard work.

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STUDENT:

⁴ Then I began doing great things. I built houses, and I planted vineyards for myself. ⁵ I planted gardens, and I made parks. I planted all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶ I made pools of water for myself, and I used them to water my growing trees. ⁷ I bought men and women slaves, and there were slaves born in my house. I owned many great things. I had herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. I owned more things than any other person in Jerusalem did.... ⁹ I became very rich and famous. I was greater than anyone who lived in Jerusalem before me..... ¹¹ But then I looked at everything I had done and the wealth I had gained. I decided it was all a waste of time! It was like trying to catch the wind. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Rather than intellect, pleasure, or work and career, maybe the pure pursuit of logic. Like Spock. I'll be a Vulcan.

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STUDENT:

¹² Then I decided to think about what it means to be wise or to be foolish or to do crazy things. And I thought about the one who will be the next king. The new king will do the same as the kings before him. ¹³ I saw that wisdom is better than foolishness in the same way that light is better than darkness. ¹⁴ Wise people use their minds like eyes to see where they are going. But for fools, it is as if they are walking in the dark. I also saw that fools and wise people both end the same way. ¹⁵ I thought to myself, "The same thing that happens to a fool will also happen to me. So why have I tried so hard to become wise?" I said to myself, "Being wise is also useless." (ERV)

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TEACHER:

In chapter 2 Solomon finally sees a ray of hope. The problem is not the pursuit of knowledge, pleasure, or career. It is the *motivation* for the pursuit. If we live to please ourselves, we are wasting our lives. If we pursue God's pleasure, our joy will last. As Paul said, "I have run my race, I have finished my course."

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STUDENT:

¹⁷ This made me hate life..... ¹⁸ I began to hate all the hard work I had done, because I saw that the people who live after me would get the things that I worked for. I will not be able to take them with me. ¹⁹ Some other person will control everything I worked and studied for. And I don't know if that person will be wise or foolish. This is also senseless..... (ERV)

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STUDENT:

²² What do people really have after all their work and struggling in this life... ²⁴⁻²⁵ There is no one who has tried to enjoy life more than I have. And this is what I learned: The best thing people can do is eat, drink, and enjoy the work they must do. I also saw that this comes from God. ²⁶ If people do good and please God, he will give them wisdom, knowledge, and joy..... God takes from the bad person and gives to the good person. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Chapter 3 owns a familiar refrain repeated by Pete Seeger, and the Byrd's in 1965. Turn, Turn, Turn, Turn. The conclusion is that God is in control. Work with Him or against Him. But He is God. Everything we have here on earth is a gift from God. Enjoy it, with respect for Him who gave it.

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CH. 3

STUDENT:

There is a time to be born
and a time to die.
There is a time to plant
and a time to pull up plants.
³ There is a time to kill
and a time to heal.
There is a time to destroy
and a time to build.
⁴ There is a time to cry
and a time to laugh.
There is a time to be sad
and a time to dance with joy. (ERV)

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STUDENT:

⁵ There is a time to throw weapons down
and a time to pick them up.
There is a time to hug someone
and a time to stop holding so tightly.
⁶ There is a time to look for something
and a time to consider it lost.
There is a time to keep things
and a time to throw things away.
⁷ There is a time to tear cloth
and a time to sew it.
There is a time to be silent
and a time to speak.
⁸ There is a time to love
and a time to hate.
There is a time for war and a time for peace. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

That is the song, here next we have the conclusion that pleasing God is the end that gives lasting joy.

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STUDENT:

⁹ Do people really gain anything from their hard work? ¹⁰ I saw all the hard work God gave us to do. ¹¹ God gave us the ability to think about his world, but we can never completely understand everything he does. And yet, he does everything at just the right time.

¹² I learned that the best thing for people to do is to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live. ¹³ God wants everyone to eat, drink, and enjoy their work. These are gifts from God. (ERV)

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STUDENT:

¹⁴ I learned that anything God does will continue forever. People cannot add anything to the work of God, and they cannot take anything away from it. God did this so that people would respect him. ¹⁵ What happened in the past has happened, and what will happen in the future will happen. But God wants to help those who have been treated badly. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Verse 13 of chapter 3 stated “to eat, drink and enjoy our work, these are gifts from God.” 1 Timothy 6 relates, “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” Then verse 22.

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STUDENT:

²² So I saw that the best thing people can do is to enjoy what they do, because that is all they have. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Chapter 4 shows that the futility of work, and that the accompanying frustrations, can be lessened if we work together. ^{1st} the futility.

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CH. 4

STUDENT:

⁴ Then I thought, “Why do people work so hard?” I saw people try to succeed and be better than other people. They do this because they are jealous. They don’t want other people to have more than they have. This is senseless..... ⁵ Some people say, “It is foolish to fold your hands and do nothing. If you don’t work, you will starve to death.” ⁶ Maybe that is true. But I say it is better to be satisfied with the few things you have than to always be struggling to get more..... ⁸ I saw a man who has no family, not a son or even a brother. But he continues to work very hard. He is never satisfied with what he has. And he works so hard that he never stops and asks himself, “Why am I working so hard? (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Then comes the value of team work.

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STUDENT:

⁹ Two people are better than one. When two people work together, they get more work done.

¹⁰ If one person falls, the other person can reach out to help. But those who are alone when they fall have no one to help them. ¹¹ If two people sleep together, they will be warm. But a person sleeping alone will not be warm.

¹² An enemy might be able to defeat one person, but two people can stand back-to-back to defend each other. And three people are even stronger. They are like a rope that has three parts wrapped together—it is very hard to break. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

As we get closer to the middle of Ecclesiastes King Solomon turns his attention to God. Specifically the promises we make to God. I am sure he was thinking of the promises he himself made to God when he was 1st made king, as well as the promises he made King David his father.

STUDENT:

Be very careful when you go to worship God. It is better to listen to God than to give sacrifices like fools. Fools often do bad things, and they don't even know it. ² Be careful when you make promises to God. Be careful about what you say to him. Don't let your feelings cause you to speak too soon. God is in heaven, and you are on the earth. So you need to say only a few things to him. This saying is true:

³ Bad dreams come from too many worries, and too many words come from the mouth of a fool. (ERV)

TEACHER:

Further exhortation to keep your word.

"If your promises don't matter to you, why should they matter to anyone else?" DH

STUDENT:

⁴ If you make a promise to God, keep your promise. Don't be slow to do what you promised. God is not happy with fools. Give God what you promised to give him. ⁵ It is better to promise nothing than to promise something and not be able to do it. ⁶ So don't let your words cause you to sin. Don't say to the priest, "I didn't mean what I said." If you do this, God might become angry with your words and destroy everything you have worked for. ⁷ You should not let your useless dreams and bragging bring you trouble. You should respect God. (ERV)

TEACHER:

As we go deeper into chapter 5, Solomon, who is the wealthiest man alive or at least close to the richest man alive, tells us money can't buy happiness. John D. Rockefeller answered the question when he became the wealthiest man alive "How much money is enough?" He answered "just a little bit more."

STUDENT:

¹⁰ Those who love money will never be satisfied with the money they have. Those who love wealth will not be satisfied when they get more and more. This is also senseless. ¹¹ The more wealth people have, the more "friends" they have to help spend it. So the rich really gain nothing. They can only look at their wealth.

¹² Those who work hard all day come home and sleep in peace. It is not important if they have little or much to eat. But the rich worry about their wealth and are not able to sleep. ¹³ There is a very sad thing that I have seen happen in this life. People save their money for the future. ¹⁴ Then something bad happens and they lose everything. So they have nothing to give to their children. (ERV)

TEACHER:

Next he explains the obvious reason why this is true.

STUDENT:

¹⁵ People come into the world with nothing. And when they die, they leave with nothing. They might work hard to get things, but they cannot take anything with them when they die. ¹⁶ It is very sad that people leave the world just as they came. So what does a person gain from "trying to catch the wind"? ¹⁷ They only get days that are filled with sadness and sorrow. In the end, they are troubled, sick, and angry. (NIV)

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TEACHER:

Solomon then repeats his admonition from earlier. What is best?

Our mind set, has more power over our satisfaction in life, than our wealth. Attitude matters.

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STUDENT:

¹⁸ I have seen what is best for people to do on earth: They should eat, drink, and enjoy the work they have during their short time here. God has given them these few days, and that is all they have.

¹⁹ If God gives some people wealth, property, and the power to enjoy those things, they should enjoy them. They should accept the things they have and enjoy their work—that is a gift from God. ²⁰ People don't have many years to live, so they must remember these things all their life. God will keep them busy with the work they love to do. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

In chapter 6 the imaginary wealth gap. Note, the gap is not caused by government, as some suppose. But rather by God.

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CH. 6

STUDENT:

I have seen another thing in this life that is not fair and is very hard to understand. ² God gives some people great wealth, riches, and honor. They have everything they need and everything they could ever want. But then God does not let them enjoy those things. Some stranger comes and takes everything. This is a very bad and senseless thing.

³ A man might live a long time and have 100 children. But if he is not satisfied with those good things, and if no one remembers him after his death, I say that a baby who dies at birth is better off than that man. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Here Solomon shows us that contentment is the key to enjoying life, not desires quenched, or goals realized.

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STUDENT

⁷ People work and work to feed themselves, but they are never satisfied. ⁸ In the same way a wise person is no better than a fool is. It is better to be a poor person who knows how to accept life as it is. ⁹ It is better to be happy with what you have than to always want more and more. Always wanting more and more is useless. It is like trying to catch the wind. ¹⁰⁻¹¹ You are only what you were created to be—a human, and it is useless to argue about it. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Chapter 7 starts with a list of wise sayings. We will read some here. READ THESE SLOW AND DELIBERATELY.

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CH. 7

STUDENT:

A good reputation is better than expensive pleasures. ³ Sorrow is even better than laughter, because when our face is sad, our heart becomes good...⁴ A wise person thinks about death, but a fool thinks only about having a good time. ⁵ It is better to be criticized by the wise than praised by the foolish.....

⁷ Even the wise will forget their wisdom, if someone pays them enough. That money destroys their understanding. (ERV)

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STUDENT:

⁸ It is better to finish something than to start it. It is better to be gentle and patient than to be proud and impatient. ⁹ Don't become angry quickly, because anger is foolish. ¹⁰ Don't say, "Life was better in the 'good old days.' What happened?" Wisdom does not lead us to ask that question. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

The conclusion of those proverbs, or wise sayings is "to enjoy life." En-joy at its compositional definition means to make delight in, or take delight in. To make J.O.Y. How do you do that? Put Jesus 1st, Others 2nd, Yourself 3rd.

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STUDENT:

¹³ Look at what God has made. You cannot change a thing, even if you think it is wrong. ¹⁴ When life is good, enjoy it. But when life is hard, remember that God gives us good times and hard times. And no one knows what will happen in the future. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

Next we are admonished not to listen to all the "noise" in the world. Life has its distractions.

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STUDENT:

Even God's followers will do some good things and some bad things. ¹⁹⁻²⁰ Surely there is no one on earth who always does good and never sins. But wisdom can make one person stronger than ten leaders in a city. ²¹ Don't listen to everything people say. You might hear your own servant saying bad things about you. ²² And you know that many times you too have said bad things about other people. (ERV)

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TEACHER:

The next sentence or 2 may contain the most revealing insight into Solomon's views on women. Remember he had 700 wives, and 300 concubines. When we ignore God's law towards marriage, it skews our view of women.

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STUDENT:

I did learn that it is foolish to be evil, and it is crazy to act like a fool. ²⁶ I also found that some women are dangerous like traps. Their hearts are like nets, and their arms are like chains. It is worse than death to be caught by these women... The Teacher says, "I added all this together to see what answer I could find. I am still looking for answers, but I did find this: I found one good man in a thousand. But I did not find even one good woman. ²⁹ "There is one other thing I have learned. God made people good, but they have found many ways to be bad." (ERV)

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TEACHER:

We are encouraged in chapter 8 to think before we act, and make wise decisions.

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CH. 8

STUDENT:

⁶ There is a right time and a right way to do everything. You must decide what you should do, even when it might cause problems ⁷ and you are not sure what will happen. No one can tell you what will happen in the future... ⁹ I saw all this. I thought very hard about the things that happen in this world. (ERV)

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STUDENT:

I saw that people always struggle for the power to rule others, and this is bad for them.

¹⁰ I also saw great and beautiful funerals for evil people. While the people were going home after the funeral services, they said good things about the evil people who had died. This happened even in the same towns where the evil people had done many bad things. This is senseless. (ERV)

TEACHER:

How many times have you thought the same thing? Everybody that talked ill of someone, gives the eulogy. He continues talking about the injustices we see every day.

STUDENT:

Bad things should happen to bad people, and good things should happen to good people. But sometimes bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. This is not fair. ¹⁵ So I decided it was more important to enjoy life because the best thing people can do in this life is to eat, drink, and enjoy life. At least that will help people enjoy the hard work God gave them to do during their life on earth. (ERV)

TEACHER:

Solomon points out that nobody, knows everything.

STUDENT:

¹⁶ I carefully studied the things people do in this life. I saw how busy people are. They work day and night, and they almost never sleep. ¹⁷ I also saw that no one can understand all that God does... No one can understand it all. (ERV)

TEACHER:

After all that has been said. Solomon comes to 1 conclusion. We will all die. In this way we are all equal.

CH. 9

STUDENT:

² But, there is one thing that happens to everyone—we all die! Death comes to good people and bad people. Death comes to those who are pure and to those who are not pure. Death comes to those who give sacrifices and to those who don't give sacrifices. Good people will die just as sinners do. Those who make promises to God will die just as those who are afraid to make those promises..... There is hope for those who are still alive—it does not matter who they are. But this saying is true: "A living dog is better than a dead lion." (ERV)

TEACHER:

Solomon continues his theme, with "enjoy life" don't apologize for being happy. Be the best person you can be.

STUDENT:

⁷ So go and eat your food now and enjoy it. Drink your wine and be happy. It is all right with God if you do these things. ⁸ Wear nice clothes and make yourself look good. ⁹ Enjoy life with the wife you love. Enjoy every day of your short life. God has given you this short life on earth—and it is all you have. So enjoy the work you have to do in this life. ¹⁰ Every time you find work to do, do it the best you can. (ERV)

TEACHER:

"Enjoy it the best you can, do it the best you can." Good advice. He gives this advice because life isn't fair.

STUDENT:

I also saw other things in this life that were not fair. The fastest runner does not always win the race; the strongest soldier does not always win the battle; wise people don't always get the food; smart people don't always get the wealth; educated people don't always get the praise they deserve. When the time comes, bad things can happen to anyone! (ERV)

TEACHER:

He closes chapter 9 with this sentence, "one fool can destroy much good." With 3 chapters to go in Ecclesiastes my thought is Solomon was going to the wrong church! After having built the Temple and his palace. His kingdom was firmly established, and we know he lived for some 20 years at least after all the construction was completed. He had enjoyed all the pleasures that wealth, power and fame had to offer. And his conclusion was, "it was empty." We can assume that some of this must have been from the path's his children were taking. The kingdom, we know, would be divided under his son. Solomon must have seen the signs of Rehoboam's hardness toward God, evidenced in 1 Kings 12. God had told Solomon that He was going to divide the kingdom after he died, and the frustration of his crumbling legacy must have been a hard pill to swallow.

CH. 10

STUDENT:

A few dead flies will make even the best perfume stink. In the same way, a little foolishness can ruin much wisdom and honor. ² The thoughts of the wise lead them the right way, but the thoughts of the foolish lead them the wrong way. ³ Fools show how foolish they are, just walking down the road. Their minds are empty, and everyone knows it. ⁴ Don't quit your job simply because the boss is angry with you. If you remain calm and helpful, you can correct even great mistakes. (ERV)

TEACHER:

How many lives of the rich and famous have you seen destroyed for a few minutes of weakness? Guard yourselves. Your testimony matters. It matters to your wife, your husband, your kids, your church, employer/employees, and the world. Let your light shine.

STUDENT:

...it is very good for a country if the rulers control their eating and drinking. They eat and drink to become strong, not to become drunk. ¹⁸ If someone is too lazy to work, their house will begin to leak, and the roof will fall in. ¹⁹ People enjoy eating, and wine makes life happier. But money solves a lot of problems... And don't say bad things about rich people, even if you are alone in your home. (ERV)

TEACHER:

He continues by saying your good deeds will not be wasted, and to invest wisely in multiple income streams. Don't be afraid to take chances.

"If you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else?" DH

CH. 11

STUDENT:

Do good wherever you go. After a while, the good you do will come back to you.

² Invest what you have in several different things. You don't know what bad things might happen on earth... But there are some things that you cannot be sure of. You must take a chance. If you wait for perfect weather, you will never plant your seeds. If you are afraid that every cloud will bring rain, you will never harvest your crops.

⁵ You don't know where the wind blows. And you don't know how a baby grows in its mother's womb. In the same way, you don't know what God will do—and he makes everything happen. (ERV)

TEACHER:

Chapter 11 ends with work hard and enjoy life.

STUDENT:

⁶ So begin planting early in the morning, and don't stop working until evening. You don't know what might make you rich. Maybe everything you do will be successful.

⁷ It is good to be alive. It is nice to see the light from the sun. ⁸ You should enjoy every day of your life, no matter how long you live... ⁹ So young people, enjoy yourselves while you are young. Be happy. Do whatever your heart leads you to do. Do whatever you want, but remember that God will judge you for everything you do. ¹⁰ Don't let your anger control you, and don't let your body lead you to sin... (ERV)

TEACHER:

As we start the final chapter of Ecclesiastes we have an admonition to young people.

CH. 12

STUDENT:

Remember your Creator while you are young, before the bad times come—before the years come when you say, "I have wasted my life."

² Remember your Creator while you are young, before the time comes when the sun and the moon and the stars become dark to you—before problems come again and again like one storm after another. (ERV)

TEACHER:

The next repeated admonition is put in poetic form, like a song lyric.

STUDENT:

⁶ Remember your Creator while you are young,
Before the silver rope snaps and the golden bowl is crushed
like a jar broken at the well,
like a stone cover on a well that breaks and falls in.
⁷ Your body came from the earth.
And when you die, it will return to the earth.
But your spirit came from God, and when you die,
it will return to him. (ERV)

TEACHER:

Finally King Solomon closes with the purpose of the book we just studied, and its concluding advice.

STUDENT:

When these sayings are written down and saved, they can be used to guide people, just as a shepherd uses a sharp stick to make his sheep go the right way. ¹² So, son, study these sayings, but be careful about other teachings. People are always writing books, and too much study will make you very tired. ¹³⁻¹⁴ Now, what should we learn from everything that is written in this book? The most important thing a person can do is to respect God and obey his commands, because he knows about everything people do—even the secret things. He knows about all the good and all the bad, and he will judge people for everything they do. (ERV)

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NEXT LESSON SONG OF SOLOMON (ALSO CALLED SONG OF SONGS OR CANTICLES)

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*"....The most important thing
a person can do
is to respect God..."*

Ecclesiastes 4:14



