Ecclesiastes

When Adam and Eve first sinned, God placed the world under a curse. In Rom. 8 it describes this curse as God subjecting the world to futility. Ever since the first sin, people think they can find meaning and purpose in life without God. But the futility that God placed on the world says otherwise. It says that life “under the sun” without God is totally meaningless. Someone who lives a purely secular life without God, who takes an honest look at life in this world, will come to the same conclusion – and many have. And so **that is the theme of Ecclesiastes (Eccl) – life in this world is meaningless**.

Eccl probes the meaning of life from the point of view of a secularist. Solomon looks for meaning in life outside of God. He looks at everything “under the sun.” Amongst other things, he looks for meaning in wisdom, folly, pleasure, wealth, youthfulness, and knowledge. He finds that all of these fall short.

It might be surprising to Christians that this is in the Bible. But what Eccl is doing is showing the true reality of life in a fallen world. Many who have a progressive worldview think that we as a human race are improving and progressing toward a life where all is fair and just and right. Eccl pours cold water on this idea. It shows that all of our pursuits to achieve these things end up in the long run as meaningless. All of our achievements in life end up as vapor that dissipates until there is nothing left. To show that life is meaningless, Eccl goes through our lives and all of our pursuits and shoots them down one by one.

Eccl only hints at a resolution to the meaningless fate that awaits us. What it does is prepare us for the resolution of our problem, which is found in the NT. If one does not understand the predicament one is in, then one will not understand and look for an answer to one’s problem. So what Eccl is doing then is almost entirely Law. It is the main purpose of the Law to prepare us for the Gospel. The Law reveals the bad situation we are in and that no solutions for it can be found here on earth. The answer will have to come from outside of us and our world. And that is why God broke in to our world and became a flesh and blood human being. He did it so that he could provide us with the meaning and purpose that we are looking for and crave. He did it in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. It is only in Christ that meaning can be found. He is the Logos, the Word or Meaning made flesh. So it is the purpose of Eccl to prepare us for Christ who alone can provide meaning to our vain lives. (The answer, which is Christ, will be highlighted in a blue colored font throughout this study.)

About This Study

This Bible study is what I call a meditative Bible Study. The intent is to take a tiny portion of Scripture each day and meditate on it. Read it and reread it. Think about it. Look at individual words. Think about its main point. The type of writing that Solomon employs in Eccl is not easy to understand. Many times you have to chew on it for a long while before you get the gist of it. Since it is difficult to chew on, only small bites are given at a time. Some days there will only be a single verse. Other days there might be two or three verses. So don’t be in a hurry to get through it. Take your time and wrestle with the text.

Lesson 1 – Eccl 7:23-25 – The Scheme of Life is Deep and Beyond Wisdom

1. Read Eccl 7:23-25

**23All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me.  24That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? 25I turned my heart to know and** **to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness**.

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, which was lesson 24 in Part 2, we looked at three nuggets of truth about living. Today we look once again at wisdom. The verses we look at today go with the verses in the next lesson.
2. Verse 23 begins with “All this I have tested by wisdom.” The question is, what does he mean by “this”? Is he looking backwards at previous verses or is he looking forwards? He is probably thinking forward. He is probably thinking about the next section or sections in Eccl. That is how we will treat it.

What was Solomon known for (1 Kings 3:12)?

> Solomon was known for his wisdom. He asked God for wisdom, God was pleased with his request, and God gave him so much wisdom that there was no one before him or after him who was wiser than Solomon.

So what did he use that wisdom for?

> 7:24a: He used it to probe “That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep.”

> 7:25a: Solomon used his wisdom “to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things”.”

Restate these in your own words.

> Solomon used his wisdom to try and figure how this world operates, how and why things happen the way they do. He found that these things were “far off, and deep, very deep.”

How successful was he (7:23b, 24b)?

> He says, “It was far from me” and “who can find it out?” Not even he who was the wisest person to ever live could figure it out.

If Solomon couldn’t figure it out, what does that say about the rest of us?

> It says we are impotent in our understanding of the deep things of life. God is so far above us that the knowledge we’ve gathered as a human race is tiny compared to reality.
3. What else did Solomon use his wisdom to know (7:25b)?

> Solomon wanted “to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.”

In Scripture, to know something is to experience it firsthand. So on the one hand Solomon will use wisdom to try and figure out the scheme of life and on the other hand he will know wickedness and foolishness. And like everything else under the sun, he will find that, as he has previously stated, wisdom and folly are both vanity.

In the next verses (vv. 26-29), Solomon will tell us about one of the worst cases where he experienced “the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.”
4. Each of us have different levels of wisdom. Perhaps you are extremely wise. If so, have you ever contemplated the complexities of how the universe operates? Even the most wise people on earth really have no idea. They like to make us think they do and they might think so themselves, but if they really think that, they are only fooling themselves and us. If Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, cannot understand the scheme of things and find it to be very deep, neither will the rest of us begin to understand them. **Man cannot know these things because God has hidden it from him.**

Most of us are not so wise and we are more likely to know (experience) wickedness and foolishness than wisdom. That is because we are all by nature sinful and unclean. That is the default position that we are born into. We don’t have to purposely search out wickedness to experience it. We experience it on a daily basis.

As you go about your day, it is ok to marvel at the complexities of life, just don’t think you will ever solve them. As you go about your day, you will know (experience) wickedness and foolishness. Pray to God that he might deliver you from such evil.

Lesson 2 – Eccl 7:26-29 – Wisdom on Earth is Very Limited and Hard to Find

1. Read Eccl 7:26-29

**26And I find something more bitter than death:****the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.  27Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— 28which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. 29See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we looked at using wisdom to try and figure out the scheme of things and now in this lesson Solomon sets out to experience wickedness and foolishness. He experienced this through, what is sometimes called, the treacherous woman.
2. These verses seem to be autobiographical, as Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines. Dealing with all of these woman was Solomon’s pursuit of wickedness, folly, and madness (see 7:25). How does Solomon describe his encounter with “the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters” (7:26a)?

> He said this encounter was “more bitter than death.”

Given his description of her, what is it that she wants to do to him?

> She wants to trap him and imprison him. She wants to control him.
3. Is it a common thing for a woman to want to control her husband? To answer this, turn to and read Gen. 3:16. This describes the curse God placed on women as a result of the first woman heeding Satan’s word instead of God’s word. Let’s hone in on the last part of the verse: “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” And specifically, we want to focus on the word “desire.” What is her desire concerning her husband? To understand this better, we take a look at the next time the word “desire” is used in Genesis. In Gen. 4:7 it says: “… sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” What does sin desire to do to Cain?

> Sin desires to enslave Cain and rule over him.

And so as part of the curse, it is Eve’s desire to enslave and rule over her husband. But Adam, her husband, will fight her tooth and nail and because he is even more pig headed than she is, and as a result he will rule over her. And not only Eve but this will be the default position of all women. The fact is that the battle of the sexes is part of the curse. And Solomon experiences this firsthand many times over and he finds it “more bitter than death.” Only those who have God’s grace will escape her “snares and nets.” Satisfied sinners will fall into her trap.
4. Solomon used his wisdom to try and sort out the scheme of how the relationship of husbands and wives work (7:27). He sought to figure this out repeatedly but **even with all his wisdom he says he could never figure it out** (7:28a). He says he never figured out women.

Now if you broaden this a little, I think he is saying something even more profound. It is like the idea of the more you know, the more you realize what you don’t know. Wisdom itself is illusive and deceptive and comes with an almost vacuous and unfulfilling character. The more wisdom you get, the more you realize how unwise you are. The more you find out, the more questions pop up. That is the nature of wisdom. What God has hidden from us cannot be found out, so that even the depths of wisdom can’t reveal it.
5. In 7:28b-29 Solomon tells about his experience in searching for a wise man or wise woman. How many wise men did he find and how many wise women did he find (7:28b)?

> He found only one wise man in a thousand and he did not find any wise women.

**Wisdom is a gift from God that is very hard to find**. “God made man upright” so in the beginning man was wise, but because of sin, “they have sought out many schemes” (7:29b). Humanity’s first scheme was to defy God’s word in the Garden and it ended in a curse. Since then, man’s schemes against God have only multiplied. That’s not wise and that is why it is so difficult to find a wise person.
6. Because it is a part of the curse for mankind’s scheme against God, each of us has experienced the battle of the sexes. Wives want to rule over their husbands and husbands want to rule over their wives. Think about your experience with this in your life. In what ways does it show itself in your life? What kind of trouble has it caused you and your spouse? We don’t tend to deal with the opposite sex very wisely. It’s been that way ever since the first sin and it will remain that way until Christ comes again.

In all of his wisdom Solomon could not figure out women. Solomon was one of the few whom God gifted with wisdom. How wise are you? Do you deal wisely with other people? What does not dealing wisely with people give you? Heartache? For the most part God has hidden wisdom from us, but in the person of Jesus Christ he has sent Wisdom in human flesh. The wisest thing you can do is cling to Jesus in faith. Doing so gains you eternal life. Your life on earth will last but a moment, but spending eternity with Jesus brings with it never-ending joy and peace.

Lesson 3 – Eccl 8:1-3 – While Limited, Wisdom is Valuable (Most of the Time)

1. Read Eccl 8:1-3

**8 Who is like the wise?
    And who knows the interpretation [or significance] of a thing?
A man's wisdom makes his face shine,
    and the hardness of his face is changed.

2I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him.** **3Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we looked at how wisdom is limited and hard to find. Today we continue to look at wisdom and how it is applied in our dealings with government.
2. In 8:1a, the two questions are rhetorical. Who alone is truly wise? Who alone is the only one who truly knows the significance of a thing?

> God.

Sometimes when something happens, we think it is a very significant event in our lives but then it comes to nothing. Or something seemingly insignificant happens and it turns out to be very important. **This shows that ultimately wisdom is unattainable for us.** We can’t even understand the significance of things. Why? Because **God has set the boundaries and the borders that we cannot get beyond.**The second half of 8:1 tells us that **wisdom has some positive aspects to it**. If a person is wise and is known by others to be wise, then others look forward to seeing him (his face shines). If you are wise and understand things, it changes your demeanor. You won’t walk around with a scowl on your face. So even though our wisdom is limited, it is useful in this life under the sun.
3. Next in 8:2-9 comes the application of wisdom if one happens to work in government or around a king. Read 8:2. Now Read Rom. 13:1-7. What is the topic in Rom. 13:1-7? And how would summarize what it says?

> The topic in Rom. 13 is willingly subjecting yourself to the governing authorities. These authorities have been placed there by God for our good. Therefore “Keep the king's (governments) command, because of God's oath to him.” Eccl 8:2 could be a one sentence summary of Rom. 13.

Government is a necessity in this fallen world. When this world is made new, there won’t be a need for government. All will be just and fair and right. But until that day comes, w**e are to have a general posture towards obeying government in so far as you can obey it, that is, to obey government as long as it does not cause you to disobey God’s word is wise.**
4. 8:3 talks about being in the presence of the king or government official who has power. There are two ideas expressed in this verse and both convey the idea of having respect for the governing authorities. The first is “be not hasty to go from his presence.” You have an audience with an official. What should you not do and why?

> You should not leave his presence hastily because it could be perceived as rude, that he is not important. Also, he may have something important to say to you but because you leave so hastily you miss out on what he says.

The second is “do not take your stand in an evil cause.” And the reason why you shouldn’t is: “for he does whatever he pleases.” If you take your stand for something evil, that makes you evil. If the king agrees with you, that makes him evil too. But what if he disagrees with you? He is on the side of right and you are on the side of wrong. If he “does whatever he pleases,” what could he do with you?

> He could punish you for standing up for evil.

Given the fact that the king/government has the power and he can do whatever he pleases, what does this mean concerning wisdom? It means that wisdom has its limits. If the king does whatever he pleases, acting or speaking wisely may not matter. Now generally speaking, knowing when to come and when to go, when to speak up and when to shut up is wise and very valuable. But there are times when wisdom doesn’t help.
5. For us this can have some application with our dealings with the government and with our bosses (people who have authority over us). Normally it is best to follow the laws and rules and to show respect for those who have authority over us. And it is best to stay away from evil. But if those who are over us can do whatever they please, that puts us in a tough spot. In some situations acting wisely doesn’t matter. This describes what we teach our children: life is not fair.
6. We all deal with the government in some way. We all pay taxes. We have to follow the laws when driving. If you own property it is filed with the local government. Most of the time we don’t have any major problems with the government. But sometimes we do. Have you ever had a problem with your local, state, or federal government? At some point did you feel like acting belligerent toward them? If you acted that way and they held all the power, I would guess that didn’t go too well for you. Or maybe you kept your cool and did everything they asked, but they still did you wrong because they could do whatever they pleased; they held all the power. Things like this show us the meaninglessness of life.

Or you have a boss that is hard to please. It takes real wisdom to know when to speak up and when to keep your mouth shut. And there are times when for no reason at all your boss harasses you. You may have or currently have a boss who makes your job a real pain. You show him respect but at times it doesn’t matter, he does as he pleases.

This is all part of living in a sin-filled world. This causes us to look forward to the life to come when everyone respects each other and everyone looks out for other people before they look out for themselves. That will be a time when government is no longer needed.

Lesson 3 – Eccl 8:4-9 – Wisdom is Good But It Doesn’t Give Us Control

1. Read Eccl 8:4-9

**4For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, “What are you doing?” 5Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. 6For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. 7For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? 8No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. 9All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we looked at how, even though in the end it is meaningless like everything else under the sun, wisdom can be valuable but other times it doesn’t matter. Today we continue to look at wisdom, how it is good but does not give us control of our lives.
2. If you are wise, you see life with eyes wide open. And what does wisdom tell you about who has power and who is in control (8:4)>

> The king or whoever the ruler is is the one who is in control.

Wisdom tells you not to question what he is doing. Wisdom says, Don’t say a word. Just do what you are told so that you don’t get punished (8:4-5a). Wisdom is aware of the situation and knows what to do and when to do it (8:5b). Wisdom knows what is right and when and how to do what is right, but that doesn’t always come easy. Sometimes you have to fight through troubles to do what is right (8:6).
3. Wisdom can help you navigate life (8:4-6), but what does wisdom not know (8:7)?

> Wisdom does not know the future. It does not know what is going to happen.

You can say and do the right thing at the right time in the right way but you still can’t predict what is going to happen. **The wise person thinks before he does, but even then, he doesn’t know what will happen as a result. God has still set a boundary for man.** The answer to the question: “who can tell him how it will be?” is, no one. So even if you are wise, there is an unpredictable nature to life.
4. What else does wisdom not have control over (8:8a)?

> Wisdom does not control over the day of your death.

So **If God decides this is your last day on earth, you have no power to change that.** You don’t have power over keeping your soul alive. The word translated as “spirit” could also be translated as “wind.” It is similar to Jesus using the wind to make a point to Nicodemus in John 3. Does anyone have control over wind? Does anyone know where the wind is coming from and where it is going?

> No, we have no control over the wind.

So just as you have no control over the wind or where it is going, neither do you have control over the day you will die.
5. If your country is at war and you have been drafted to serve, you can’t get out of it (8:8b). And just as you are bound to serve your country, so you are bound to wickedness and life. You can’t get out of it. **Toiling after wickedness will not deliver you from death or the problems of this world. The curse God has put on earth applies to all people, righteous or wicked**.
6. These are all things that Solomon observed that happens in life under the sun, where a man is not in control, where other people have power over him (8:9). In review of these verses, what are the things in life that man has no control over?

> 8:4-5: He doesn’t control the people who are his rulers. Whoever it is, It usually best to do what they tell you to do.

> 8:6: He doesn’t control the troubles that he subjected to.

> 8:7: He doesn’t control what will happen in the future.

> 8:8a: He doesn’t control the future of his soul, the day of his death.

> 8:8b: He is bound to wickedness and problems because all people are under the curse.

Remember that wisdom in Eccl is seeing with your eyes wide open and calling a thing what it is. To be wise then is to recognize the lies we tell ourselves and to uproot them. And instead **recognize the uncomfortable truth that we can’t control every aspect of our lives and the day of our death. And that is precisely where God wants to bring us, so that it leaves us no alternative besides looking to him for help.** When we see this clearly, then his word to us about Christ has meaning. Jesus has won the victory over sin and death and he promises to set this world right. That means we can live our lives now trusting in Jesus. He will take care of us now and in the future.
7. Thinks about all of the things in your life that you do not have control over. Do you have a say in who your boss is or how he acts towards you? Have you done the right thing, only to take flack for it? Have you planned your future all out, only to have it take an unexpected turn? Do you know anyone who by all accounts lived a healthy life, only to suddenly die? If you are looking at your life with eyes wide open, it should be obviously clear that you are not in control. So every day pray “thy will be done” to the One who is in control. Trust in him.

Lesson 4 – Eccl 8:10-11 – Wickedness is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 8:10-11

**10Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. 11Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we looked at how wisdom is good and needed for navigating life, but it does not give us control over our lives. Today we look at wickedness and evil.
2. Solomon witnessed a wicked person being buried (8:10a). This is supposed to be a good thing, right? But what two things did Solomon observe about this wicked person (8:10b)?

> “They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things.”

In terms that we might use today, how might we say, “They used to go in and out of the holy place”?

> We would say, They used to go church each Sunday.

Why would someone who is wicked do this?

> To give the appearance that they were good when they were really evil.

Because of actions like this, how did the people of the city view him? How do you know this (8:10)?

> They had a favorable view of him as evidenced by their praise of him.

What is Solomon’s conclusion about the trickery of the wicked (8:10c)?

> He said, “This also is vanity.
3. Verse 11 is a lament. The picture is this. A wicked person does an evil deed and they are caught. But how quickly does the trial and sentencing take place (8:11a)?

> “The sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily.”

So Solomon is lamenting that even though the wicked get caught in their evil deeds, their punishment for their evil is not handled speedily. What does this lead to (8:11b)?

> This leads to others setting their hearts to do evil.

Punishing someone for a crime they commit has a two-fold purpose. First, it has to do with justice. And second, it is supposed to act as a deterrent. If the punishment for the crime is not handed out speedily, it loses its value as a deterrent. Why is that? Because even though a person does evil, he is able to go about life unaffected until later. People see the wicked going to church and being praised by men. The connection between the crime and the punishment is lost**. It seems beneficial to commit the crime, therefore others follow in their footsteps and do evil too**. This doesn’t sit well with Solomon. It is all vanity to him.
4. There are plenty of people doing wicked things all around us today. One example is this. Right now there is a phenomenon where people go into a store, grab as much merchandise as they can, and walk out with it without paying for it. In many cases no one stops them and they are not arrested. In other cases, they are caught and arrested, but they are immediately let go. It seems like there is no downside to committing these crimes. What is the result of this? Other people see this and decide they are going to do it too. What is the worst that can happen to them? Get caught and be released and never prosecuted. Because of this, it has become pretty common. It does not surprise us anymore.

I am sure you have seen an example of the above scenario on TV. Maybe you’ve even been in a store and witnessed it yourself. The order that God has built into this world, which is for the benefit of all of us, is purposely being broken down and the void is filled with chaos. That leads many to live life in fear not sure of what will happen next.
5. Do you know someone personally who is wicked but who fools people by publicly acting like a good person? Is it you? The truth is, this probably describes most of us, at least to some small extent. What is the answer to this? Repent of our evil ways. The Old Man in us is wicked and wants to do evil. He must be killed off every day so that the Holy Spirit can raise up a new man who has a new and faithful heart. This is the baptismal life.

Lesson 5 – Eccl 8:12-15 – Wickedness Rewarded and Goodness Punished is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 8:12-15

**12Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 13But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

14There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

 15And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we looked at wickedness and how the lack of timely punishment leads to more wickedness. Today we look at the fact that ultimately wickedness does not pay off and will be dealt with.
2. What does a law-abiding citizen call it when wicked people are praised (8:10), the sentence for doing evil is not executed speedily (8:11), and “a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life” (8:12a)?

> He calls it injustice or it’s not fair and it’s not right.

What does Solomon assert will be the final fate of those who do evil versus those who fear God (8:12b-8:13)?

> He says even though the sinner does evil and seems to prosper from it, in the end it will not go well for him. But for those who fear God it will go well. So even though the law and justice are not carried out as they should, know that God is watching and will take care of it.

What are two aspects of fearing God?

> On the one hand, to fear God is to be afraid of his wrath. God hates and punishes sin. Being afraid deters us from committing sin.

> On the other hand, to fear God is to have a reverent respect for God. Because we honor and respect God so much, it is our desire to please him and not sin against him.

The wicked do not fear God. They are not afraid of his wrath and they do not love and honor God. But those who do fear God are the opposite. They abhor the sin they and others do and hold God up, reverently honoring him.

**Those who are wicked and do evil deeds might think that they are getting away with it but Solomon says that is not the case. In the end, God will bring about justice**.
3. In observing the righteous and the wicked, what else does Solomon see as vanity (8:14))?

> Solomon sees the righteous being treated like they are wicked and the wicked being treated like they are righteous.

Solomon has just said that in the end it won’t go well for the wicked and it will go well for those who fear God (8:12b-13). But what he sees is the opposite (8:14). That means that God’s justice is an article of faith. So with his eyes, the believer sees injustice. He sees the wicked being blessed and the righteous being cursed. This is vanity. Yet he knows that God is the Judge and that he will bring about justice. The wicked will pay a penalty for the evil they commit.
4. We live in an unjust, upside-down world. Because of this, the question we always ask and have no answer for is: how can a loving and all-powerful God allow unjust suffering to happen? This question is not really answered anywhere in the Bible. That’s because God doesn’t want to be found in that way. This is the hiddenness of God. **He hides himself in the cloak of suffering.** When we see suffering and try and figure out who God is in suffering, we come up drawing a blank.

Why would God hide himself in this way? Because God wants to reveal himself and make himself known in the person of his Son. So ultimately when we look at God without Christ, we see a God that is fickle, a God that we cannot understand, a God that brings blessings and curses with no apparent rhyme or reason. So when my experiences of God are contrary to the love we expect from God, the place to turn is not inward but to the cross. Despite all the suffering that I experience, I know by looking at the cross that he loves me and is for me. Jesus is with us in our suffering. By the cross we are assured of God’s love in the midst of suffering.

Here is the mistake we make as 21st century American Christians. We have taken God away from suffering. We say God has nothing to do with it. This separates God from suffering. But when you realize that God is the One who causes suffering, then to the Christian suffering is God driving us to Christ. So what Solomon is doing is hacking down all of our attempts of figuring out God apart from Christ. That means when you suffer, you know that this suffering is not God’s condemnation. Rather it is Christ drawing near to you.
5. How do we live in such an unjust world where mankind is completely wicked (8:15)?

> You shouldn’t cry about it. Instead get a nice drink and some good food and think about all the blessings God has given you and be joyful.

A key word in v. 15 is joy. Even in the midst of unjust suffering there can be joy. Many times happiness is superficial, but the joy in life is much deeper. Christ calls us as his own so he can share his joy with us. So **we live a life of joy contrary to and in the face of the injustice we face in this life.**
6. Have you had times in your life where you’ve done the right thing, someone else did a wicked thing, and you ended up suffering and he ended up better off? That is infuriating, isn’t it? We say, Life is not fair. It really isn’t! The wicked prosper and for those who do good we say, No good deed goes unpunished. But since you are a Christian, you know this isn’t the end of the matter. Justice will be served! Maybe not as soon as you wish, but at the End the Judge will make things right. So you shouldn’t be surprised when wickedness wins out, but you also know that it will go well for you because you fear God.

Lesson 6 – Eccl 8:16 – 9:3 Trying to Figure Out God’s Disposition Toward You by Looking at Life’s Circumstances is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 8:16-9:3

**16When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep,** **17then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

9 But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.** **2It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.** **3This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we looked at how life is not fair, how the wicked don’t seem to get their just rewards and how the righteous are punished for doing good. Today we look at trying to figure out what God is doing.
2. Next Solomon directs his attention towards and exerts effort “to know wisdom” (8:16a). We’ve said that wisdom is seeing life as it really is. He wants to look at “the business that is done on earth” (8:16b) and see exactly what is going on and why. When does he think about “the business that is done on earth” (8:16c)?

> He thinks about how life on this earth works day and night. He goes all out in his endeavor to know wisdom, to see how the world works.

Who is it that is in control of the world and all that happens in it (8:17a)?

> It is all “the work of God.”

So his quest to learn about what is done on earth is a quest to learn about the work of God. What does he find out about what “is done under the sun” (8:17b)?

> He discovers “that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.” He cannot figure out the work of God.

But what if man toils at figuring out what God is doing and uses all of the wisdom of mankind? Can he figure it out then (8:17c)?

> “He will not find it out.” “He cannot find it out.”

**Man is constantly busy trying to figure out why things work the way they do. But God has set the bounds so that our wisdom and hard work fail to find out how it all works and why it works the way it does.** This is another picture of futility.
3. In “examining it all,” Solomon next looks at God’s disposition towards “the righteous and the wise and their deeds” (9:1a). By looking at the circumstances of their lives, can we tell if God loves or hates a righteous, wise person (9:1b)?

> No, you can’t tell how God feels towards them. The righteous, wise person may have good things happen to him or bad things happen to him.

Sometimes what happens to a person as a result of their deeds is what you might expect and other times it’s not. What happens in the lives of people that makes it unclear how God feels towards them (9:2)?

> The same thing happens to everyone, whether you are righteous or wicked, whether you are good or evil, whether you go to church or not, whether constantly swear or never swear.

What does Solomon conclude about “the same event happens to all” (9:3a)?

> He concludes that “this is an evil in all that is done under the sun.”

Also what does he conclude about the hearts of people (9:3b)?

> He concludes that “the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts.”

That is the natural disposition of people. And then what happens to all of them (9:3b)?

> “They go to the dead.” All people die. That is the curse God has placed on people. Man was created from dust and will return to dust.
4. Solomon worked tirelessly and with great wisdom to figure out the work of God on this earth, but he found out he couldn’t figure it out. **By looking at life’s circumstances, he couldn’t determine whether God love or hates a person. Because the same results happen whether you act righteously or wickedly, it just doesn’t make sense.**

Maybe you yourself have taken a hard look at life and tried to figure out what God is doing. If you have, then you’ve come to the same conclusion that Solomon did. Just when you think you’ve figured it out, God throws you a curve ball and everything you thought you had figured out is all wrong. You now know that you can’t figure out what God is doing. Maybe you’ve lived life trying to do good while others you know do evil and yet you are no better off than they are. You may have asked yourself, Does God love me or hate me? The answer to all of this cannot be found in looking at anything “under the sun.” The answer is found by looking outside this world, to someone who comes and invades this world with the intent of straightening out all that has gone wrong. The only way to figure out if God loves you or hates you is to look at the cross. Would God send his only Son to take your sins and the punishment you deserve to die upon the cross if he didn’t love you? Of course not. In spite of the circumstances of your life, you know that God loves you.

Lesson 6 – Eccl 9:4-6 Once You Die That’s It; There is No Hope

1. Read Eccl 9:4-6

**4But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.  5For 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.  6Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we looked at no matter how much we toil and use wisdom we can’t figure out how God feels toward us by looking at life’s circumstances. Today we study the difference in the living and the dead in terms of life on this earth.
2. In our verses for today (9:4-6), the living and the dead are compared. What do the living have that the dead don’t have (9:4a)?

> The living have hope.

Remember we are talking about life “under the sun,” life on this earth, from an earthly point of view. If you are alive and the circumstances of your life are not good, there is at least a chance they will get better. There is some hope. But if you are dead, your circumstances will not change. If you are dead, you will stay dead.

At the end of verse 4, Solomon gives two alternatives concerning life and death. What are they? Which is better?

> You can be either a living dog or a dead lion. Being a living dog is better than being a dead lion.

In terms of the animal kingdom, the dog is pretty low on the totem pole as compared to the mighty lion, the “king of the jungle.” And yet it is better to be a dog if one is alive than to be the mighty lion if one is dead. In terms of life on earth, death is final. Once you are dead, no matter if you hold an important and powerful position in life, you no longer have any hope.
3. Again in v. 5 there is a contrast. This one revolves around the word “know.” What is contrasted in v. 5a?

> What the living know and what the dead know is contrasted.

What is it that they know and don’t know (9:5a)?

> The living know they are going to die and the dead know nothing.

**In terms of life “under the sun,” the dead “know nothing,” “have no reward,” and “the memory of them is forgotten.” The cut off point is death. After death there is nothing left for us on earth**. Along with our bodies, what else dies when we die (9:6a)>

> “Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished.”

How permanent is this (9:6b)?

> “forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.”
4. God has placed limits on us. While living on earth we are limited in what we know and can do. When we die, we have no more say on anything that happens on this earth. Someone might say: What about heaven? Remember, Solomon is doing theology “under the sun” and not “under the SON.” From the secular point of view, there is no heaven. All there is, is what you can see and experience.

Once you know the truth that life on this earth is vanity, then the reality of heaven becomes very important. Without knowing about Jesus, life “under the sun” is meaningless. But knowing and believing in Jesus changes everything! He brings with him peace and joy and hope. Knowing Jesus means knowing that death is not the end. We look forward to the resurrection of the body and eternal life. Apart from the revelation of Christ, what do we have? Death and a God that we can never figure out. But knowing Christ means we know that he conquered death, that death no longer has a hold on him or his people. And knowing Christ means knowing that God loves us dearly. He loves us enough to send his Son to live a perfect life for us, to suffer the suffering we deserve, to die the death we deserve, and to rise from the dead, giving us the hope of eternal life.
5. Right now you are alive but you live in a world filled with meaninglessness. Have you thought about your life’s meaning and purpose. If you think about it from the world’s perspective, it is pretty discouraging, isn’t it? Have you thought about dying from a non-Christian point of view? There are some who believe that when you die that’s it. You no longer exist. They have nothing to look forward to. Others who don’t believe in Jesus see the meaninglessness of life and want to think there must be more beyond the grave. How often do we see on the news where someone has been shot and they die. And the survivors say, So and so is now an angel in heaven, or I can feel so and so’s presence with me. These people want there to be more. They know that life in this world is chaotic and meaningless. But sadly they don’t know Christ. They don’t know the Truth. They create for themselves false hope. But if you are believer, you have true hope, a hope that is real. You have much to look forward to. You can look forward to eternal life in God’s presence. And that is why we say, Amen, come Lord Jesus! Come quickly!

Lesson 7 – Eccl 9:7-10 Advice on How to Live Your Worthless Life

1. Read Eccl 9:7-10

**7Go,****eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.
8Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.
9Enjoy life with the wife whom you love,** **all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.** **10Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we saw that the living have an advantage over the dead. They have hope. From a worldly point of view, once you are dead, that’s it. Today Solomon gives us some advice about how to live “your vain life.”
2. Solomon has just told us that all people have evil in their hearts while they live and then they all die. And once you are dead you have no hope (9:3-6). So how should we live our lives in this evil, vain, and unjust world? Solomon answers this question in today’s verses (9:7-10).

First he addresses eating and drinking. How should it be done (9:7a)?

> “eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart.” Eat with joy and drink merrily.

God approves of such eating and drinking (9:7b). Even though life is unfair and vain, it is not to be lived in a depressed, miserable way. Despite the evil that surrounds us and that is within us, there are times we can enjoy life. Eating and drinking is one area of life that can be enjoyed.
3. In ancient culture, garments of white and oil on the head (9:8) are associated with joy and feasting. As opposed to black robes of mourning, white robes were worn at feasts. And at such feasts it was common to pour oil on heads of guests to provide refreshment, pleasure, and a sweet odor. **Life should not be all doom and gloom but was meant to be enjoyed as much as possible.**
4. What else is to bring joy in life (9:9a)?

> You should enjoy your married life.

Here Solomon recognizes that there is a calm peacefulness in the life of a happy home. The love of a man and his wife can bring joy to their lives. But before we get too carried away with joy and feasting and enjoying married life, there is a quick reminder that all of this takes place within a bigger context. Within what kind of life are you to find these joys (9:9b)?

> Find these joys within “all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun.”

Never lose sight of the fact that life under the sun is meaningless. It doesn’t have to be all drudgery. There can be some joys but you cannot escape the vanity of life. Why is that (9:9c)?

> That is “because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.”

This is portion God has allotted to you. You are not in control. You toil to make life better but everything you toil at, in the end, will be worthless.
5. What is his final advice in these verses (9:10a)?

> “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.”

What reason does he give for it (9:10b)?

> “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

Sheol is the place where the dead go. In the previous verses Solomon said the living have great advantages over the dead. Once they are dead, they have no say in life under the sun. He further confirms that in v. 10. Life under the sun may be meaningless but at least you can work and think and act wisely, because once you die you can’t.
6. **In these verses Solomon says even though we live in a meaningless, unjust world, live it with joy. Get married. Love your spouse. Work hard. But keep in mind, one day you are going to die. Just as there are limits to wisdom, there are limits to living a joyful life. It too ends in vanity and meaninglessness. So don’t try and make that your fulfillment in life.** If life were a game, it is a game that no one can win. Play it and have as much fun as you can but realize you and no one else will ever win the game. That is what Eccl tells us.
7. Think about your life. Do you find any joys in life? Do you ever enjoy feasting? Is your life only about joy and feasting? If it is, you are going to find out the hard way that all of the fun will come to an end. Sickness and pain and ultimately death will put an end to all of it. You will end up in the same place as everyone else – in the grave.

With that in the back of your mind to give you the right perspective, it is good to find joy in life where ever you can. It is good to feast with your family and friends. It is good to love your spouse and family. It is good to find satisfaction in your work. Just don’t look to these things to find meaning and purpose in life. That cannot be found in anything “under the sun.” That can only be found in the Meaning who became flesh and dwelt for a time among us. Jesus turns everything upside down.

Lesson 8 – Eccl 9:11-12 The Fact that We Do Not Control Much in Our Life is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 9:11-12

**11Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.  12For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, Solomon gave us advice on how to live a joyful life in an unjust world. Today we learn more about how we are not in control of our lives.
2. If life went according to logic, who would win the race (9:11a)?

> The swift would win the race over the slow.

If life were logical, who would win the battle (9:11b)?

> The strong would win the battle over the weak.

If life would work the way we think it should work, who would live comfortably with the necessities of life (9:11c)?

> Those who live wisely would have what they need to live comfortably.

In a logical world who would become rich (9:11d)?

> Those who were very intelligent would be able to accumulate riches.

And finally, if life made sense, who would curry favor with others (9:11e)?

> Those who were very knowledgeable would use that knowledge to win other people’s favor.

But is this the way that life always works? Why not (9:11f)?

> No. Life doesn’t always make sense. Life doesn’t always go in a way that most people would think that it should, even when you do everything right. What happens to throw life off course is “time and chance.”
3. So what is Solomon saying in v. 11? The world is not right. Life is not fair. Why is that? **Time and chance determine as much in your life as who you are, what you do, and what you know.** Some Americans might not agree with this. Some people think that if you work hard enough, you can do anything you want. It is well meaning but it is not true. It might work sometimes but not always. It is common for people to say, I work and work and work, but I can’t get ahead. That is true reality. The Holy Spirit uses the words of Solomon here in 9:11 to scrape these false narratives away.
4. Continuing on the theme that we are not in control, what is something we don’t know about our life (9:12a)?

> We don’t know when our time in this world is up. We don’t know if we will live one more day or one more year or one more decade or more.

We plan for things just in case they happen. How many people plan for retirement but end up dying before they retire? If we knew that our time would be cut short before our retirement, we wouldn’t waste our time preparing for it. But we don’t know and we are not in control of time and chance.
5. In describing how we are not in control, Solomon says people are like what two kinds of animals? What happens to them (9:”12b)?

> We are like fish caught in a net and birds caught in a snare.

We think we are in control. We have life all planned out. But time and chance have different ideas and we get swept up in their net and we are powerless to stop them.
6. When we are caught in life’s snares, many times bad things happen to us. What does Solomon call these times (9:12c)?

> He calls them “an evil time.”

That leads to the question, why do bad things happen to people? One answer might be that we live in an imperfect, sin-filled world. This is true and may apply in a general sense, but when you get down to specific people in specific situations, you can’t always say this happened to them because of some sin they did. Two people are in a tsunami standing side by side. One lives and the other is swept away and dies. Why did that person die? Was he a great sinner? No, it seems like just random chance.

One day Jesus was asked why some Galileans were killed at the temple (Lk. 13:1-5). Some thought this happened to them because they were worse sinners than others. What was Jesus’ response? He said, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Jesus did not judge who was the worst sinner. And he did not try and exonerate God for letting this happen. He does not explain the problem of evil at all. When we see bad things happen to others, Jesus says we should repent. Repentance here means cling to Jesus. It means turn away from any self-righteousness. When Jesus says repent, he is saying, Stop trying to figure out God and the scheme of God so you can make yourselves righteous in that scheme. Repent of all attempts to make yourself righteous because I am your righteousness. God’s righteousness comes to us as a gift apart from the Law and any works that we do. It is an act of mercy by God based on the atonement that Jesus made for us.
7. If you think about your life, I am sure you can think of things that happened to you that were not logical, that were not fair, that you did not anticipate. Sometimes “an evil time” “falls upon us.” How do you react? Do you repent? Not necessarily because of some evil you’ve done, but because you are not in control you cling more tightly to Jesus. God can use the evil that befalls us to work good for us. (See the story of Joseph in Genesis.) When things happen to you where you are not in control or that are evil, don’t ask, why? Don’t try and figure out what God is doing. Don’t try and exonerate God of the situation. Simply cling to Jesus. He will walk with you through it all.

Lesson 9 – Eccl 9:13-15 Wisdom Can Accomplish Great Things but It is Still Vanity

1. Read Eccl 9:13-15

**13I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. 14There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. 15But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we saw that we are not in control of our lives, that time and chance have as much to say about what happens to us as we do. Today we learn that wisdom is better than might.
2. In these verses we are back on the wisdom theme. The wise man here is like the wise man in 4:13-16 (see lesson #9 in Part 2 of the Eccl Study). In chpt. 4 a poor youth used his wisdom to get him from prison to be king. As king, the people loved him and willingly followed him. Yet, after a single generation he was forgotten. Wisdom gave him worldly success but in the end being successful was vanity like everything else.

Now in these verses Solomon says he saw another great example of wisdom applied to life on earth (9:13). What kind of city did Solomon observe (9:14a)?

> He saw “a little city with few men in it.” It was a small city with few people living in it.

What happened to this city (9:14b)?

> “a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. “ This little city was besieged by a mighty king.

From this description, it doesn’t sound like the little city stands a chance against the mighty king.
3. But against all odds someone saved the little city. Who was it that delivered the city and how did he do it (9:15a)?

> A poor, wise man used his wisdom to deliver the city.

So the poor, wise man somehow used his wisdom to overcome the great army that besieged his city. Wisdom is a wonderful gift from God. Wisdom can do great things.

This man was a hero! He used his wisdom to save the city! But what happened to this poor, wise man who delivered the city (9:15b)?

> “No one remembered that poor man.” His fame was short lived. They simply forgot about the poor man who saved the city.

This is the world we live in. If it can forget the poor man who successfully saved the little city by using his wisdom, how much more quickly will the world forget the average person who doesn’t have any great accomplishment? We are here one day, gone the next, and quickly forgotten. **Wisdom helps us live life on this earth, but beyond that it too is vanity**.
4. The man who delivered the city using his wisdom was described as being poor. James 2:1-7 talks about a poor man. In it, James says we should not favor the rich over the poor. And in Matt. 25:31-46, Jesus talks about feeding the hungry and clothing the poor, etc. To those who helped the poor, in the final judgement what will Jesus say to them (Matt. 25:40b)?

> ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

What do we conclude then about who the poor man is?

> Jesus is the poor man.

When we help the poor, we are helping the poor man, Jesus. How was Jesus poor? Jesus was the one who had no place to lay his head. At the cross Jesus had everything taken from him, including his clothes and his life.

Jesus too is the poor, wise man in our reading from Eccl today. In great wisdom, Jesus came to this world to deliver it. Through his death and resurrection, he was successful. And even though he delivered the world from certain death, how does the world react to this great deliverance? “No one remembered the poor man.” Therefore it is the task of Christians to spread the word and remind people about The Poor, Wise Man, Jesus Christ and his deliverance of mankind from the “great king,” the prince of this world, who besieged this world.
5. Maybe God has gifted you with wisdom or you know of someone in your life that has displayed and accomplished some great things using wisdom. Earthly wisdom is a gift from God to be used in life under the sun. But have you noticed that even when you do the wise thing, sometimes it doesn’t work out. And when it does work out, it is quickly forgotten as the troubles of life bombard you. So all you can do is live wisely but cling to the One who is the wisdom of God.

Lesson 10 – Eccl 9:16-17 Wisdom Cannot Help in Life If It is Not Heard

1. Read Eccl 9:16-17

**16But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.**

**17The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we saw that wisdom is good and can solve many problems. Yet our successes because of it are quickly forgotten Today we continue to learn about wisdom.
2. In the previous lesson we learned “that wisdom is better than might” (9:16a) when a poor, wise man, through his wisdom, delivered a little city from a great king. So in Solomon’s observation of this poor, wise man, his wisdom was not despised and his words were heard to great effect.

But that is not normally the case. Normally if words of wisdom come from a poor man, his wisdom “is despised and his words are not heard” (9:16b). Why do you think this might be the case?

> It is inferred that no one listens to the poor man because he is poor. He is looked down at because of his financial condition.

We make judgments about people all the time without really knowing them. We make assumptions about people based on superficial things like outward appearance. Generally speaking, **a poor man can speak words of wisdom, but because of his appearance his words are dismissed and not even considered**. The poor man in the previous lesson was an exception to the rule. Because they listened to him the city was saved.
3. In v. 17 we have a contrast between who is speaking and how they speaks. Who are the two people speaking?

> A wise man and a ruler among fools.

How do each of them speak?

> The wise man speaks quietly and the ruler of fools shouts.

The picture is this. Two people express their ideas about a subject. The first is a wise person. His words are wise and he speaks quietly, calmly, and deliberately. The second is one who is the leader of fools. He speaks loudly and pompously with much bluster in an attempt to convince his fellow fools that his way is the right way. **The wise man depends on the power of his words, whereas, the leader of fools has to resort to histrionics to get people to pay attention to his foolish words.**
4. Consider your own life. Have you observed a poor person who is wise and makes a strong point about a subject be completely ignored just because of who he is? Maybe you’ve seen others do this or maybe you are the one who did it. Or maybe you’ve never really paid attention. In the future, purposely pay attention for a situation like this. If you come upon a poor person speaking wise words, watch and see if anyone pays attention to him and truly considers his words. And not just others, but yourself too. Do you take heed or just dismiss them because of who he is?

Have you ever come upon a situation where there is an issue and there are two people offering a solution? Where one person quietly speaks words of wisdom and the other person shouts with great bluster to try and get people to accept his foolish words? How about in politics? Don’t most of our politicians fall into the category of shouting foolish words in order to try and get votes?

What about you? Do you dismiss someone’s wise words because they are of a lower economic status than you? Are you the one who sometimes shouts out foolish words to try and convince others to do what you want? If we are truthful, we must all admit that at times we do these things. So going forward, keep your eyes open for these situations and for your reaction to them. If you find yourself dismissing people or spouting off foolish words to convince people you are right, take a step back and reevaluate yourself. Is this really how you want to live? Is this how God wants you to live? God gives us wisdom as a gift. Let’s use this gift to make our lives better.

Lesson 11 – Eccl 9:18 It is Great Vanity that One Sinner Destroys Much Good

1. Read Eccl 9:18

**18Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but****one sinner destroys much good.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that wisdom is a gift from God that is meant to help us in life, but it does no good if it is not heard or paid attention to. Today we continue to learn about wisdom.
2. Wisdom has such power that it can do more than the destructive weapons of war (9:18a). Similarly, what else has great power? And what does it have the power to do (9:18b)?

> One sinner has great power to destroy much good.

Just as a wise person can use his wisdom to do good and help many people, as shown above where a poor, wise man delivered a little city from a great army (9:14), so a sinner has the power to destroy much that is good.

So for instance, parents work hard to give their daughter every advantage in life so that she can be successful. And the daughter takes it seriously and she too works hard in school and looks forward to college. Then on graduation night she caves in to peer pressure and tries cocaine. And she dies from it. That’s it. Years and years of work are gone in one instant. Much good is destroyed by one sin. This might be called the fragility of good. Much planning and effort go into making good things happen, but then one sinful act destroys it all.

Another example of this might be the Penn St. scandal. They had a coach whose name was Joe Paterno. He built a life-long reputation as a good coach and caring person. He pursued greatness and built a great football program. But at the very end of his tenure at Penn St., the evil of a sexual scandal came out. The program was quickly toppled. And within weeks Joe died and his reputation was forever tarnished. That is how fragile good is, how fragile the work of our hands is. One speck of evil can destroy the good work achieved by wisdom.
3. This applies to the Gospel itself. All you have to do to ruin the Gospel is put one little condition on it. God has done everything for you. And then we add, All you have to do is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. You’ve probably heard this terrible analogy: God has written the check out for you for a billion dollars. All you have to do is sign your name. That one little condition destroys grace. If you do anything at all, then it is no longer grace. If God makes a promise but it is conditioned on your response, what good is the promise? Obviously, it is of no value at all. If your sins are atoned for and forgiven and all you need to do is try hard or do the best you can as if you had to add in your 1%, the whole Gospel is destroyed because now it has become uncertain. One little bit of evil can ruin the Gospel. You will be asking yourself, do I believe enough? Did I really try hard enough? Did I live a good enough life?
4. The fact that we can work hard and work smart to accomplish some good things that help people and then one sinner or one sin comes along and destroys it all is what I am calling **the fragility of good.** **It is part of the great vanity we experience in life. In the big picture it is an aspect of the curse God has placed on us**. In Romans 8, it says God has subjected the world to futility, harkening back to the beginning of Genesis where God placed a curse on the world. We experience many vanities because of this and one is that good is fragile. Hard work is fragile and evil has the upper hand. And this is just one of many vanities that we have seen and studied about in Eccl.
5. When a sinner destroys the good we’ve worked for, it results in affliction and suffering. When this happens, we often try and figure out God. Why did God allow this to happen? Why does he bless those he blesses and curse those he curses? Why does it appear that he often blesses wicked people and curses good people? Why? The simple fact is, no matter how hard we try, we cannot figure God out. You cannot figure out who God is and what his intentions are toward you through your existential existence. God gives every person good and yet he also afflicts every person. Based on what happens to us, we cannot figure out whether God loves us or hates us. The only way we know is by the fact that God sent his only begotten Son, who makes all things new. And in the midst of suffering and affliction, we turn to Jesus. He goes through it with us and assures us that there is a purpose in suffering. The endless cycles that go nowhere are transformed and become straightened paths that move us towards the new heavens and new earth. Jesus is the ultimate answer to the vanities. But realize you won’t get that from Eccl. Eccl eliminates all of the possible answers so that Jesus is all that remains.
6. You have seen it in your own life. Wisdom is powerful. Wise people can do some amazingly good things. But you’ve also seen how quickly evil can undo good. It is one of the great vanities of life. I am sure this has happened to you. Try and think of a specific time when you had accomplished something very good but then it all came crashing down on you. How did you react? Were you sad or angry? Did you question God? Did you try and figure out what God’s intentions were in allowing this to happen? This will undoubtedly happen again. Next time it happens, don’t try and figure God out. You can’t do it. God has intentionally made it so. Instead turn to God’s word. Focus on Jesus. Jesus came to undo the powers of evil. Jesus’ death and resurrection reveal God’s intentions toward you.

Lesson 12 – Eccl 10:1-3 Foolishness is the Opposite of Wisdom and is Easily Detected

1. Read Eccl 10:1-3

**10 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench;
    so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
2A wise man's heart inclines him to the right,
    but a fool's heart to the left.
3Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense,
    and he says to everyone that he is a fool.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that one act of evil can undo much good. Today we continue to contrast wisdom and foolishness.
2. 10:1 continues the theme of the last verse of ch. 9, where it says “one sinner destroys much good.” And it does so with a colorful example. In the example, what ruins what (10:1a)?

> Dead flies ruin a perfumer’s ointment.

How does it ruin it (10:1a)?

> It causes the “ointment to give off a stench.”

“Dead flies” is sometimes translated as “deadly flies.” Either way, they get into the ointment and the reaction between the ointment and the flies is “a stench.” The purpose of a perfume is to give off a good smell, but the result here is the opposite – a stench. So everything the perfumer did, all the work he did, was for nothing. The entire batch of ointment is ruined by a couple of dead flies.
3. The first half of v. 1 illustrates the second half of the verse. In the first half, dead flies ruin a whole batch of a perfumer’s ointment. In the second half of the verse, what is ruined by what (10:1b)?

> A life of wisdom and honor is ruined by a little folly.

The verb used here is “outweighs.” To picture this, think of a giant container of feathers being outweighed by a little piece of lead. **So the point being made is clear. You conduct yourself wisely and honorably over a long period of time. You build up a strong reputation. And then you mess up one time and suddenly when anyone sees you, what immediately comes to mind is the one mess up and not all the good you’ve done.** This is another reason why life is meaningless.
4. In 10:2a, where is a wise man’s heart inclined to go?

> The wise man is inclined to go to the right.

And where is the foolish man’s heart inclined to go (10:2a)?

> The foolish man is inclined to go to the left.

The two men go in opposite directions. In Hebrew thought, the right is associated with good and the left is associated with evil. That means that when two men are presented with the same situation, **for the most part the wise man is inclined to go the way of wisdom and honor and the foolish man is inclined to go the way of evil and dishonor**. Therefore, even though wisdom is limited and can be thwarted by a little bit of evil (10:1), it is still better to go to the right, being and acting wisely, than to go to the left, being and acting foolishly.
5. At first 10:3 seems rather puzzling. What is he getting at? A fool lacks common sense. Common people generally know what the right thing to do is, but a fool lacks that common sense. Even in simple, everyday things, like walking on a road, “he says to everyone that he is a fool.” His words and actions are so foolish that they tell everyone, I am a fool.

What is behind this is the fact that foolishness cannot detect itself. So **someone who is foolish thinks that he is very smart, but his words and actions say otherwise.** On the other hand, a wise person is someone who can detect the foolishness of his own ways. So paradoxically, what makes one wise is that he can detect his own foolishness.
6. Does the fly in the ointment describe you or someone you know? Meaning you live a life of wisdom and honor, but there was one time when you did something foolish and now when people see you all they think about is that one foolish incident. It is true that one act of foolishness can ruin your reputation.

Generally speaking, do you live life inclined to go to the right, living wisely and honorably or to the left, living foolishly? None of us are perfect and act wisely all the time. And even if we could, we live in a corrupt world. While wisdom won’t solve all your problems, it is still better to live wisely.

If you take an honest look at yourself, do you lack sense? If you do, you have to know that it is probably more apparent to others than it is to you. Try and be more self-aware of what you say and do and how it comes across to others.

Lesson 13 – Eccl 10:4-7 Wisdom Can Be Rewarded, But Sometimes It is the Opposite

1. Read Eccl 10:4-7

**4If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place,
    for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.
5There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were****an error proceeding from the ruler: 6folly is set in many high places, and** **the rich sit in a low place. 7I have** **seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that wisdom and foolishness are opposites and that foolishness is easily detected. Today we continue to contrast wisdom and foolishness.
2. A ruler is one who is in a position of authority. In the situation described in v. 4, you are standing before the ruler and he is angry with you. Your position might be a normal citizen or you may work for the ruler. Either way he is angry with you. So that means you and he are on opposite sides. When his anger is kindled against you, what is one reaction that Solomon counsels against (10:4a)?

> He counsels, “do not leave your place.” Don’t simply just walk away.

If you do this, it implies guilt. The implication then is that it would be wiser for you to stand your ground. But in doing so, how should you do it (104b)?

> Present your argument with calmness.

What is the purpose of going about your defense in this manner (10:4b)?

> The purpose is to “lay great offenses to rest.” The purpose is to dissipate his anger by giving a calm and logical defense of your position.

**To abruptly walk away from the ruler or to meet his wrath with your own wrath will only escalate the situation bringing about more anger from the ruler**. And since he is in the position of power, that means it will not go well for you. Reacting this way would be foolish. **Rather, the wise course of action would be to calmly state your case.**
3. Next Solomon tells us about another evil he has observed in this life under the sun (10:5a). This evil has to do with “an error proceeding from the ruler” (10:5b). A ruler is one who is to take the lead and do what is right for his people. Why might a ruler lead in the wrong direction or do what is wrong (10:6a)?

> This might happen because someone who is foolish is in high places. If someone who is foolish is in the position of a ruler, he will make foolish errors.

Along with fools sitting in high places (10:6a), Solomon has seen “the rich sit in a low place.” (10:6b). The rich here means someone who has worked hard and smart. His hard work has made him rich. But has wound up “in a low place.” If things were the way they were supposed to be, those who use their wisdom to become rich would sit in high places and those who do foolish things would end up in low places. **But in this vain world, people are treated the opposite way they should be.**
4. What example does Solomon give of people being treated the opposite way they should be (10:7)?

> He has seen “seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.”

In our day and age we might say, I’ve seen fools driving Porsches and wise men driving old beaters. Acting wisely is not always rewarded and sometimes acting foolish is. Life is not only unfair, but the world is really a screwed up place. People who should be honored aren’t. And foolish people end up in high places governing us. It was this way 3000 years ago in Solomon’s time and it is the same today.
5. At one time or another you have probably been in a position where someone who had authority over you was angry with you. How did you handle the situation? Did you get angry back at him or storm off? Or did you calmly stand your ground?

Have you witnessed a ruler making an error because he was foolish? Have you seen a wise person disrespected and put down? Have you seen someone who is poor and lives pay check to pay check go out and buy something that he obviously could not afford? Have you seen an honorable person dismissed as if he knew nothing?

We’ve all witnessed unfair things in life. When we raise our children we tell, life is not fair. But it is more than that. Sometimes life is the opposite of the way it should be. It is just another way that we see that life under the sun is vanity.

Lesson 14 – Eccl 10:8-11 Daily Vocations Can be Dangerous – Using Wisdom can Reduce the Risk

1. Read Eccl 10:8-11

**8He who digs a pit will fall into it,
    and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.
9He who quarries stones is hurt by them,
    and he who splits logs is endangered by them.
10If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge,
    he must use more strength,
    but** **wisdom helps one to succeed.
11If the serpent bites before it is charmed,
    there is no advantage to the charmer.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that things are not the way they should be in life. Today we see that our vocations can be dangerous.
2. As a result of sin, God has subjected this world “under the sun” to futility. This includes our daily vocations. In our verses for today, Solomon gives several examples of daily vocations. The first example is of someone who needs to dig a pit. In doing so, what would you need to be careful of (10:8a)?

> If you dig a pit, you would need to be careful that you don’t fall into the pit that you dug.

This might be a simple daily task but there can be danger in those simple tasks. Another example mentioned along with digging a pit in v. 8 is the fixing or demolition of a wall on your property. Picture here a stone wall that has holes or crevices in it. It is a perfect place for snakes to hide. So even though fixing or demolishing the wall is a fairly mundane task, it can be dangerous if a snake bites you.
3. Two more examples of vocations in life are given in v. 9. What are they (10:9)?

> Quarrying stones and splitting logs.

Even though it might be something you do every day, there are inherent dangers in doing so. One should not let your guard down in working with stones or logs or other daily tasks because it takes just one unexpected event to occur to get seriously hurt.

So even in our daily vocations, which we may be well trained at and do frequently, one must approach doing them with wisdom and caution. And it doesn’t have to be physical dangers. You may do some tasks that could pose psychological or emotional threats. In our day and age these might be the most common dangers that we face.
4. V. 10 addresses another aspect of our vocations. It has to do with using wisdom in our vocations. If you have multiple trees to cut down with an ax and the blade on the ax is blunt, what is the smart thing to do? Why?

> Sharpen the blade. It may take a little extra time to sharpen it, but you will more than make up for the lost time by the efficiency gained in cutting down the trees. Not doing so, will cause you to work much harder than you need to and accomplish less.

**Using wisdom in your vocations pays off, making your job easier and safer**. V. 11 reiterates the point made in v. 10. If you are a snake charmer but you have not trained your snake, what kind of outcome would you expect?

> You would expect the snake to bite you. Plus, who would want to see a snake charmer who has no control over his snake?

Using wisdom ahead of time in a premeditated way can be very helpful in performing the tasks of life. **If you don’t think ahead, you can waste a lot of time and energy and even get sick and die.** Wisdom won’t solve all your problems, but it can make life better and “wisdom helps one to succeed.”
5. What about your daily vocations? What kind of dangers do you face? Do you face physical dangers? Or maybe you face psychological or emotional dangers. Think about them and name them to yourself.

Going about everyday life can be dangerous. Taking your time to think about what you are going to do and planning it out can save time and provide safety. Many of the dangers we face are predictable and can be remedied with some forethought. Using wisdom can head off some of life’s problems before they come or at least make them easier to face.

Lesson 15 – Eccl 10:12-15 The Words and Toils of a Fool End Up in Madness and Weariness

1. Read Eccl 10:12-15

**12The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor,[**[**l**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+8-13&version=ESV#fen-ESV-17506l)**]
    but the lips of a fool consume him.
13The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness,
    and the end of his talk is evil madness.
14A fool multiplies words,
    though no man knows what is to be,
    and who can tell him what will be after him?
15The toil of a fool wearies him,
    for he does not know the way to the city.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that the vocations of life are dangerous but wisdom can help us avoid and mitigate some of those dangers. Today we see that the words we use matter and the words and toils of a fool are madness and wearisome.
2. The way you use your words can make a big difference in life. What does a wise man use his words for (10:12a)? What does this mean?

> A wise man uses his words to win him favor. If you use the right words at the right time in the right way, they can make other people favorably disposed toward you and give you better outcomes. They can make life better and easier.

But what do the words of a fool do (10:12b)?

> **The words of a fool get him into trouble. His words devour him. His words cause him to receive the opposite of wise words – unfavorable treatment from others. They make life harder than it has to be and already is.**
3. 10:13 continues to tell us about the words of a fool. They start out as foolishness (10:13a). When you start out going in the wrong direction, it is inevitable that you will end up where you don’t want to be. His words start out as foolish and they end up as evil madness.

10:14 continues telling us about the words of a fool. How does it describe the number of words a fool uses (10:14a)?

> It says, “A fool multiplies words.” Words flow out of his mouth in a continuous stream.

Now part of being wise is being humble. A wise person willingly admits that he doesn’t know everything and can’t know everything. In fact, what can no man know (10:14b, c)?

> No one can know the future. No one knows what will happen 5 minutes from now, let alone 5 days or 5 years from now.

A wise person, knowing that he doesn’t know the future, will hold his tongue when giving advice about the future. **The fool on the other hand starts spouting off non-stop words as if he knows exactly what is going to happen. The wise man knows his limitations. The fool doesn’t**.

All of this hints at that the wise fear God, knowing that God has set boundaries for us that we cannot go beyond. The wise know that God is God and we are not. This should cause us to be in awe and fear of God and to be silent before him.
4. Verse 15 switches from the words of a fool to the toils of a fool. What does the toil of a fool do to him (10:15a)?

> His toil wearies him.

Speculate as to why that is.

> Being a fool, when he toils he does it in a way that causes him extra, unneeded work. He doesn’t do it the easy way. He does it the hard way causing him to work extra-long and hard.

The fool “does not know the way to the city” (10:15b). He doesn’t know the way home or to the store or to work even though he goes there every day. He lacks the common sense that the average person has. **If you find yourself constantly wearied by your toil, you might just be a fool. If you take something that should be easy and you make it hard and it wearies you, you are being foolish.**Another way of looking at is this, because of sin we all do foolish things and become weary from our toils. To us Jesus says, Come unto me all you who are weary and I will give you rest. The wise person goes to Jesus and receives the rest he offers.
5. Stop and consider the words that you use. Do you use wise words to gain you favor or do your words end up devouring you? Do the words you use send you in the right direction or throw you off course? Do your words flood out of your mouth or are they measured and well thought out? Are you weary from all your toils? Do your toils never seem to stop? Since we all sin, we are all foolish, which means we all say and do foolish things. Thanks be to God that he sent Jesus to take away our weariness and give us rest from all our toils.

Lesson 16 – Eccl 10:16-17 Our Lack of Control Over Who Our Political Leaders is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 10:16-17

**16Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child,
    and your princes feast in the morning!
17Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility,
    and your princes feast at the proper time,
    for strength, and not for drunkenness!**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that the words of a fool make life harder than it needs to be and make him look bad. Today we see that we have little say in who our political leaders are.
2. In v. 16 a woe is pronounced. Solomon says, “Woe to you, O land, when your king is” what (10:16a)?

> A child.

Why would that be bad for a country?

> A child doesn’t have a lot of knowledge or experience running his own life let alone a country. Lacking this will cause him to make a lot of decisions that are bad for his people.

The woe continues in the second half of the verse. He says, “Woe to you” when “your princes” do what (10:16b)?

> It is bad news for you if “your princes feast in the morning.”

Why is that bad for a country?

> Princes are supposed to defend their country, but if they begin partying in the morning, that means they are drinking. Drinking alcohol dulls the senses. Under the influence of alcohol, they will not be alert and will not be able to make good decisions.
3. 10:17 gives a completely different picture of the king and princes. Instead of a woe, it says, “Happy are you, O land.” The land will be happy when the king is what (10:17a)?

> “when your king is the son of the nobility.”

Why would that be good?

> If the “king is the son of nobility,” he would have grown up learning how to govern and lead. It is more likely than not that the country is in good hands than if he didn’t.

And in what way are the princes described that would make the land happy (10:17b)?

> These princes “feast at the proper time.” They are more concerned about doing their job than they are partying.
4. There is a strong contrast made in the king and princes of vv. 16 and 17. The first situation is not good and the second is good. But what is the problem for the people if they wind up in the first situation? If you have a king, you normally don’t get to pick your king. If you have a bad king, you are stuck with him. Sometimes in life we are just stuck with bad leaders and there is nothing we can do about it.

We might think we have figured out an answer to this problem with democracy. We actually allow the people to elect their leaders. This does allow us to have more say but what if the majority of people elect a bad leader? Then we are still stuck with a bad leader. There is only so much that we can control in life. **Life can be treacherous and unpredictable and we have little control over it.**

As Christians we belong to two kingdoms. We’ve just seen the problems we have in the earthly kingdoms that we are a part of. But we are also a part of a heavenly kingdom and that kingdom has the best king possible. He is wise and strong and cares for his people. He wore a strange crown – a crown of thorns. He had a strange coronation. When he was coronated, he was spit on, slapped, beaten, mocked and crucified. Yet our king rules with love and mercy and grace.
5. Think about some of the political leaders you’ve had during your lifetime. They could be at the local, state, or federal level. Have they all been good leaders? Since we live in a democracy, you at least have some say in who is elected. Yet you have only one vote, so it’s not much of a say. There are some countries where the people have no say in who their leaders will be. For the most part, no matter what political system exists where you are, if have bad leaders you are basically stuck with them. This is yet another way in which life lived under the sun is vanity.

Lesson 17 – Eccl 10:18-20 The Vanity of Government Officials

1. Read Eccl 10:18-20

**18Through sloth the roof sinks in,
    and through indolence the house leaks.
19Bread is made for laughter,
    and wine gladdens life,
    and money answers everything.
20Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king,
    nor in your bedroom curse the rich,
for a bird of the air will carry your voice,
    or some winged creature tell the matter.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that we have little say in who are political leaders are. Today we see that Government is there for the good of the people but it is no good if it refuses to do its job.
2. In vv. 16 and 17 (see previous lesson), Solomon contrasts a good king and princes with a bad king and princes. V. 20 in our lesson today also mentions the king. Therefore all of vv. 16-20 have the king and princes in view.

How good a country functions is dependent upon the character of its rulers. If our verses today are speaking about rulers, what two bad character traits are spoken of in v. 18?

> Slothfulness and indolence.

What do these words mean?

> Slothfulness means not easily arouse to activity, slow to move, disinclined to work, lazy. Indolence means avoidance of work or exertion, the love of ease and aversion to toil.

What is the example given that shows the results of having these character traits (10:18)?

> If a person knows he has a problem with his roof but does nothing about it, he can expect leaks in the roof and eventually for the roof to cave in.

Similarly if government officials are slothful and indolent, the same thing can be expected in public affairs. If there is a problem in the land and the government officials won’t lift a finger to fix it, you can expect society to spring leaks and to eventually cave in on itself. **Government is there for the good of the people but it is no good if it refuses to do its job**.
3. The maxim in v. 19 has a cynical ring to it. Here it says, “money answers everything,” but in 5:10 it says, “he who loves money will not be satisfied with money.” You could say that “wine gladdens life” as it does in v. 19 but you could also say that too much wine brings tragedy.

If the princes start the morning feasting (10:16), then their concern is not with protecting the kingdom but with feasting, with eating and drinking and having a good time. Their motto is “money answers everything.” Money can be very helpful in getting through life, but we can’t place too high of an importance on it because Jesus says you can’t serve both God and mammon.
4. In v. 20 who does Solomon say you should not curse?

> the king and the rich.

Why shouldn’t you curse them?

> Because some “bird” or “winged creature” will “carry your voice” or “tell the matter” to them.

What does this mean?

> It means that what you say in private has a way of getting out. What you say to someone you trust, may come out because that trust is betrayed. So, you are better off not cursing anyone who is over you and has the power to harm you, even if they are a fool.

So the bottom line is don’t utter a word about anyone who is over you because if they hear about it, they may come and do something to you and make your life miserable.
5. Today’s lesson is all about **the vanity of government officials**. They are in their office so they can benefit us. Yet much of the time it doesn’t work out that way. Their slothfulness can negatively affect society. At times, rather than doing their job, they are more concerned about partying and blowing tax payer money. And if someone speaks out against them, they are more concerned about getting even than doing the right thing. There is a certain futility built in to government just like the rest of creation.
6. Like many of us, you probably complain about the government. From your perspective you might think they are lazy and waste tax payer money. You might think your taxes are too high. You might think that the government has too much power or not enough power to do what is right. In some respects, since we are democracy, our complaints are complaints against ourselves. We elect our government officials. And yet our control is very limited. Government works under the same futility as everyone else. Government positions are filled by sinners who are lazy and like to spend money. Be careful what you say about these officials because it may come back to bite you.

Lesson 18 – Eccl 11:1-4 Life is Risky

1. Read Eccl 11:1-4

**11 Cast your bread upon the waters,
    for you will find it after many days.
2Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,
    for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.
3If the clouds are full of rain,
    they empty themselves on the earth,
and if a tree falls to the south or to the north,
    in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.
4He who observes the wind will not sow,
    and he who regards the clouds will not reap.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned the vanity of government workers. Today we see that even though we are not in control, we need to take risks and live life.
2. 11:1 is a strange verse. Trading with other countries many times meant transporting goods via ship upon the water. So most commentators believe this verse is talking about trade. So “cast[ing] your bread upon waters,” probably refers to putting your bread or the goods that you are selling upon a boat so they can be sold in a foreign country. Transportation by boat is slow. So it will take many days for your goods to arrive at the destination and be sold.

In those ancient days, and even today, is there any risk in putting goods on boat to deliver them to another country? If so, what are a couple of those risks?

> Yes it could be very risky. Weather posed the biggest risk. Another risk might be robbers stealing your goods or unscrupulous sailors who take your goods.

So Solomon is saying, there is some risk in selling your goods abroad but it is worth the risk. When there is risk involved, you need to weigh the risk to see if it is worth it. You might think, if I don’t risk it then I won’t lose it. This might equate in life to loving someone. You know there is a risk, so you might say to yourself, if I don’t risk loving this person then I know I won’t suffer heart break. But **Solomon says, take the risk, live life, engage with others**. Even so, don’t think by doing so you will have a fully satisfied life. On the other hand, don’t be paralyzed into doing nothing.
3. 11:2 provides another way of looking at risk. If you horde what you have in one place and disaster comes, how much of it could you possibly lose?

> All of it.

We have a saying that speaks to this: Don’t put all your eggs into one basket. He says split it off to seven or eight places. If you lose one of these then the rest is still safe. This is wise because “you know not what disaster may happen on earth.” That is the limitation God has placed on man. God knows what man cannot know. You don’t know what is going to happen or what disaster is going to come. So what do you do? Become paralyzed in fear? No, you go out and live. Trade, risk, make friends.
4. Verses 3 and 4 form a chiastic structure that revolves around the clouds and the wind and they give us yet another perspective on risk. They add to the limitation of “you know not” with the limitation of “you control not.”

In some parts of life, you know what will happen but you have no control over it. It makes sense that a cloud full of rain will drop that rain upon the earth (11:3a). You can see what is going to happen, but more importantly, you have no way of stopping it. Similarly, if a tree falls, you have no control where it falls.

If you are a farmer, your observation of the clouds of rain and the wind that fells trees has an effect on your planting and reaping of your crops. It seems like good common sense to not try and sow your crops if the wind is blowing hard. And it seems wise not to try and harvest your crops if it looks like it will poor down rain. Yet Solomon is suggesting you do the opposite. Why does he do this? If you don’t sow your grain because of the wind, how much of a harvest will have?

> None.

If you don’t sow, you won’t reap. And if you don’t reap, you won’t eat. So the theme of risk continues in these verses. Seeing the risks we face in life can have the effect of paralyzing us into doing nothing. Solomon says, **You’ve got to live. You’ve got to trade. You’ve got to interact with others. You know disasters come, but you can’t let that paralyze you so that you don’t sow or reap or live**. **So the theme of this section is: Even though life is all meaningless, you have to engage it, you have to take risks, you can’t give up on it.**
5. Life is tricky and full of risks. On the one hand it is smart to see the risks that we face and to do your best to mitigate them. On the other hand, you can’t let your fear of those risks paralyze you into doing nothing. You have to live. Think about the risks you face in life. How do you approach them? It is good to approach them wisely, yet you can’t let them incapacitate you into doing nothing. You still have to live your life. It can be tough to balance two extremes.

As Christians, no matter what risks we face and no matter what decisions we make, we always know that Jesus is with us. We never go through life or its circumstances alone. It is Jesus who gives us meaning and purpose. It is Jesus who helps us get through life. It is Jesus who gives us a hope that is beyond this imperfect world. And so we keep our eyes on Jesus the author and perfector of our faith. Keeping our eyes on him keeps us from the short term distractions and risks that life throws at us.

Lesson 19 – Eccl 11:5-8 “All that comes is vanity”

1. Read Eccl 11:5-8

**5As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.
6In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.
7Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.
8So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that life is risky but we can’t let risk paralyze into not living our lives Today we see that we don’t understand God or how he works. We don’t know what will prosper or fail. All that comes our way in life is vanity.
2. What is something that mankind will never know the answer to (11:5a)?

> Man will never know how God joins the body and soul to make a living human being.

Great advances have been made in science and biology concerning life in the womb. And yet, no matter how much knowledge we gather, we will never figure out how God joins the body and the soul. That is something God has hidden from us. Similarly, even after death, we will never understand how God separates the body from the soul.

This is just one example of us of the limitations God has placed on humans. Because of this, what will we as humans never know (11:5b)?

> We will never “know the work of God who makes everything.”

Solomon is saying, Look, we don’t even understand how we ourselves are made. We don’t even understand the foundation of our own being. And there is a lot more we don’t understand. So our mouths are shut before God who knows these things and has hidden these things from us so that we cannot find them out. God is God and we are not. He has not filled us in on everything he does. **Yet, in spite of us not knowing how God works and not knowing even the fundamental things of our existence, we still have to exist and live life.**
3. Verse 6 covers all daylight hours, from morning to evening. It encourages us to do the work that we have to do throughout the whole day. It reminds me of the Parable of the Sower. In it, the Sower sows seed on all kinds of soil. He does so not knowing where the seed will take root and grow. In a similar way, we are to go about our work all day long not knowing which actions will take root and lead to prosperity. **Again, we face the limitations of life but we don’t let that shut us down. Rather we go about living life the best we can, knowing that some things we do will fail and others will prosper**.
4. Verses 7 and 8 go together with the light of v. 7 being contrasted with what in v.8?

> Days of darkness.

In life there will be days of light and days of darkness. There will be a mixture. Not all days will be “light” and not all days will be “darkness.” If a person “lives many years,” what should he do (11:8a)?

> He should “rejoice in them all.”

The days of light will be “sweet” and “pleasant” while the days of darkness will be bitter and unpleasant. This is the reality that we live in. It is the cycle of life that every human being goes through. And in this cycle, we go nowhere. Because of this, what do we conclude about life under the sun (11:8c)?

> “All that comes is vanity.”

**We cycle through life, spinning our wheels, going nowhere. This is God’s “no” to us individually and to mankind as a whole. On our own we are unable to break out of this cycle of vanity**. But God does give us a way to break out of this cycle. God speaks “yes” in Christ. The cycle of this world always ends in death, God’s ultimate “no.” But Jesus came and conquered death, which gives us a way to move beyond the cycle of death to eternal life. Because of this we have hope. The cycle will be broken. We look forward to living life in a world without sin and pain and trouble.
5. As we go through life, we don’t understand how God works. We don’t know which things we do or say or think will prosper or amount to nothing. We cycle through a life in which all comes to vanity.

Have you ever sat down and deeply considered how God is at work in this life? If you try and figure God out by observing what happens to you and what happens in the world, you will never understand how God works. He has hidden it from you. Each of us walks on the treadmill of life, exerting a lot of energy to go nowhere. Do you ever get tired of grinding away only to get no results? If so, this is normal. God builds a “no” into everything this world offers you. This causes us to look outside this vain world for God’s “yes.” You will find God’s “yes” in Christ. He is your way out of this meaningless cycle.

Lesson 20 – Eccl 11:9-10 Youth is Vanity and So is Old Age

1. Read Eccl 11:9-10

**9Rejoice, 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 the sight of your eyes.** **But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. 10Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we God places limitations on us so that all comes to vanity. Today we look at youth and old age.
2. How should young people live (11:9a)?

> While you are young you should rejoice in life and have a cheerful heart.

When you are young, you don’t have all the cares of life that older people have. You are more concerned about living today than what may come years and decades from now. Young people want to go out and conquer the world. They feel like they can do anything. When they feel this way, what should they do? How should they live (11:9b)?

> They should “Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.” They should follow their heart. Take on the big challenges that their eyes see. Live life with gusto.

But what warning is given (11:9c)?

> In your youth you can follow your heart and take on the big challenges you see, but realize that what you do will be judged by God as to whether it is good or bad.

In other words, you live life with the heart and eyes you have. You put great time and energy into conquering life and its problems, but always remember that the heart and eyes you have are corrupt. You will not always be able to see clearly or have appropriate feelings and attitudes or have the right motivations. So your heart and eyes will lead you astray. And all that we say and do and think will be judged by God. So **go at life with gusto but be careful about what you do and say**.
3. When we get older, what does v. 10a,b say we should do?

> “Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from the body.”

In the same vain, it could say, If you are depressed don’t be depressed. Or tell a man who has no legs to get up and walk. Is it possible to just not be depressed? Is it possible to just put away the pains of your body? Is it possible to remove the troubles from your heart?

> No.

Why does he tell us to do things that we cannot do? Isn’t that what God’s law does? **God tells us to do things that we can’t to point out to us the human condition.** Our sin condition is so bad that we are blind and yet we think we can see. We are lame and unable to walk, yet we think we can run. The law says love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. How hard is that? We can’t do it. Love your neighbor as yourself. We can’t do it.

Now there are some who believe that God would never give us a command to do something without the ability to do it. They then look within themselves for the power to do God’s law. This is the Theology of Glory. But the truth and reality is that we can’t do it. We do not have within us the power and motivation to do what God requires. Because of this, we have to look for someone outside ourselves to do it for us. We look to Christ to do what we are unable to do. This is the Theology of the Cross.
4. The end of v. 10 peals back the curtain and reveals reality. What does it say about our youth and early years where we have the most joy in life and are the most gung-ho in tackling the troubles of life?

> It says “for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.”

Previously he praised youth, telling us to enjoy it because it was a lot better than old age. **And now he comes full circle and says even the years of our youth are vanity. So even our best years don’t last**. And what you do during those days, you will be judged for. Those days don’t last long. And you can’t stay young forever. And then you get old and are vexed in your heart and have pains in your body. And for the most part you are powerless to remove them.
5. At what stage of life are you at? If you are young, you have so much to look forward to. If you are young, rejoice and be cheerful for this is the time in your life that you have great energy and ambition to go out and make your mark in the world. It will be the best time of your life. But as you do make your mark, realize that while you have good intentions, you are a flawed human being. You will come to realize that life seldom goes the way you think it will or should. You will learn that God has placed limitations on us.

If you are older, that means you are probably wiser. You’ve made a bunch of mistakes in life and have had to learn the hard way. As you’ve grown older, you have probably had many troubles on your heart. And many of them you are powerless to overcome. In addition, as you get older your body starts to break down. You have many aches and pains. And you are powerless to make them go away.

Whether you are young or old, you will come to the conclusion that we are limited in our abilities, flawed in our character, and powerless to overcome many of life’s obstacles. So what do you do? You look outside yourself to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He will help you get through this vain life under the sun and lead you to a new, eternal life, where there is meaning and purpose. Our eyes and reason cannot comprehend this but in faith we cling to Jesus and have a hope that the world does not have.

Lesson 21 – Eccl 12:1-5 Old Age is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 12:1-5

**12 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;  2before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,  3in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and** **the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, 4and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— 5****they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned youth is vanity and so is old age. Today we look at why old age is vanity.
2. Our verses today tie back to the verses of the previous lesson (11:9-10). There he told the youth to live life with joy and cheer but to remember that as they attack life they will be held accountable for their actions. Who is it that will be the Judge (12:1a)?

> The Judge is our Creator.

So as you take on a life of your own in your youth, keep in mind your Creator and try and live and do as he would have you do. The days of your youth will go by quickly and lead into what kind of days (12:1b)?

> The days of youth quickly lead into “evil days” and days you have no pleasure in.

Because mankind rebelled against its Creator, God placed a judgment on them. Practically from the time we are born we begin a march toward death. The road is hard**. As we march on the way, our bodies are sentenced to deterioration.** In the verses that follow he describes the deterioration that come with old age.
3. In 12:2-8, he describes the “evil days” and why no pleasure is found in them and he does so in poetic form. We are told to remember your Creator “before” three times. The first was in v. 1. The second is in v.2 and the third will come in v. 6. In v. 2 we should remember our Creator before what?

> Before the light of your youth is darkened by old age or the gloomy clouds of infirmity come.
4. In the rest of our verses for today (vv. 3-5), Solomon uses graphic figures of speech to describe how the body declines and weakens in old age.
* V 3: “keepers of the house tremble” reminds us of the trembling arms and hands of the elderly.
* V. 3:“the strong men are bent” pictures a person who once stood tall now bent over as his health declines.
* V. 3: “the grinders cease because they are few” refer to teeth unable to chew food.
* V. 3: “those who look through the windows are dimmed” describe how eyesight gets worse as we age.
* V. 4: “the doors of the street are shut … sound of … sound of … daughters of song…” With the doors of the ears shut, because of hearing loss, the normal sounds of life are muffled or not heard.
* V. 5: “they are afraid also of what is high.” When we grow old, we become weak and lack the strength to ascend. Even small hills seem like giant mountains.
* V. 5: “terrors are in the way.” Even small obstacles that are in the way of the aged are terrifying to those who lack the means to remove them or go around them.
* V. 5: “the almond tree blossoms.” When an almond tree blossoms, it is at first pink but then it turns white. So it may be referring to hair turning white in old age.
* V. 5: “the grasshopper drags itself along” may refer to immobility that occurs in the elderly.
* V. 5: “desire fails” in old age. The zest for life is gone. It is more of a day-to-day survival.

**The decline of health and energy and desire steadily leads us toward death (“mourners”) and our “eternal home.”**

1. Whether you are currently young or middle age or old, life marches progressively on toward old age with its loss of health, and culminates in death. We do not look forward to the ailments that accompany getting old. But we are powerless to stop them. So the young should live life to its fullest while they can before the inevitable problems of old age set in. This is the path that is set out for us as we live under the curse. This is an honest look where we are going in life. It reawakens us to the fundamental problems we have in our existence. As our lives fade away into weariness and darkness, Jesus steps in to give us life.

Live every day to its fullest. When you have good days, thank God. Don’t take them for granted. When you have bad days, know that you don’t go through them alone. The Lord Jesus is with you every step of the way. And he offers the hope of eternal life. Life under the sun is temporary. Eternal life is life lived in the presence of God forever. All Christians look forward to this and pray, Come Lord Jesus! Come quickly!

Lesson 22 – Eccl 12:6-8 Death is Vanity – All is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 12:6-8

**6before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, 7and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. 8Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned why old age is vanity. Today we look at the damage death does.
2. In 12:1, Solomon said, “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth”
“**before** the evil days come …” (12:1)
“**before** the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened …” (12:2)
and now he adds one more “before” –
“**before** the silver cord is snapped …” (12:6)

In the “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened …,” (in our last lesson) Solomon used several intriguing similes which herald man’s steady progress through old age towards the grave (vv. 2-5). Now in vv. 6-7, he uses several striking comparisons to depict the irreparable damage which death inflicts.
3. In v. 6 death is compared to four things. What are they?

> 1. “the silver cord is snapped”

> 2. “the golden bowl is broken”

> 3. “the pitcher is shattered at the fountain”

> 4. “the wheel broken at the cistern”

Looking at the first one, what is a cord?

> A cord is a long slender flexible material usually consisting of several strands woven or twisted together.

One might think of an electrical cord or a bungee cord. What happens if these cords are snapped? Can they fulfill their purpose?

> Once snapped, a cord is no longer of any value. It will no longer do what it is supposed to do.

The same is true for the other three. A bowl is used to hold things. If it is broken, it can no longer do its job. It is worthless. A pitcher at a fountain is used to hold water, but if it is shattered, it can no longer fulfill its purpose. A wheel at a cistern is used to draw water. If the wheel is broken, there is no way to draw the water. Each of these illustrates what death does to man. **Death snaps, shatters, and breaks to pieces man’s life. He can no longer be or do what he was created to be and do.**
4. According to 12:7, what happens at death?

> “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and”

> “the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

At death, that which is perishable (the body) returns to the dust that God created him from. And the breath of life that God breathed into him (the soul) “returns to God who gave it.” At death, the body and soul are separated.
5. Solomon ends the book of Eccl (12:8) in the same that he began it: All is vanity. (The rest of chpt. 12 is an epilogue.) In the book, Solomon has explored every avenue of life and what he found was each street was a dead end. It led to nowhere. He found that nothing in life “under the sun” gives life meaning or purpose. The best that man can do or have or think in this life on earth has no more substance or stability than a puff of mist.

Because nothing under the sun can give meaning or purpose to life, we must look above the sun for that which can provide meaning and purpose. Jesus comes from outside the cosmos to live life under the sun, and when he does, he introduces us to eternal life. Eternal life will consist of no more pain or sorrow or death. Instead, it will be filled with great joy and peace.
6. As you go through life you will undoubtingly run into people who are down on life. They face situations that are depressing and hopeless. And they are ready to give up on life. Having studied Eccl, you know exactly what they mean. What they are going through or witnessing is the reality of living in a fallen world that is under a curse. They are acknowledging the truth. Most of the time we try and gloss over the truth and paint a better picture. But the picture Eccl paints is the true reality of our existence. If you meet someone like this, someone who is ready to give up, that may actually be a good thing. These are the people who are acknowledging the truth of life under the sun and are looking for even a glimmer of hope. To them we bring Christ. Christ is our hope. When they ask the question, Where can I find meaning and purpose in life? Your answer to them is Christ. Christians have the answer. It is Christ. But first we need to know the question. That is what Eccl gives us. Once we have the question and the answer, we can put the two together and spread the Good News.

Lesson 23 – Eccl 12:9-14 The One Shepherd has Given Us the Truth to Spur Us into Fearing God and Keeping His Commandments

1. Read Eccl 12:9-14

**9Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. 10The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.
11The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.  12My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.
13The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson, we learned that the end of life on earth is death. And death, like everything else, is vanity. Today we look at the epilogue to the book of Eccl.
2. Solomon is the one who has been doing the preaching in Eccl. He has been endowed with wisdom by God. Because he is wise, the knowledge he imparts in this book has been carefully weighed, studied, and arranged so that it will provide great benefits to his readers (12:9). After going through this rigorous process to discover these valuable truths, “the Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true” (12:10 NIV).
3. What are the words of the wise like (12:11a)?

> “The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed.”

Goads are sharpened sticks used to drive animals forward. And so, these carefully arranged proverbs in this book are pointed sayings that prod the careless to give serious thought to the meaning of life.

What Solomon has in mind with “nails firmly fixed” are pegs driven into the ground to hold a tent in place. Similarly, **the wise words of Eccl nail down the truth so firmly that no false opinions can blow it away**.

Who gave Solomon these wise words of truth (12:11b)?

> “They are given by one Shepherd.”

Jesus said, I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11a). Christ is also “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). So it is the Lord Jesus, the Word of God, the Wisdom of God, and the Good Shepherd who gave Solomon these words of wisdom.

What warning does Solomon give in 12:12a?

> “My son, beware of anything beyond these.” Be very wary of what others have to say about the meaning of life that go beyond what the one Shepherd has given.

“Much study” has been done on this topic and “many books” (12:12) have been written about it. But **any study of man and his life in this world that does not begin and end with his “Creator” (12:1) and with “words of truth” (12:10b) “given by one Shepherd” (12:11b) will bear out what Solomon has told us early on in Eccl 1:18: “For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” Such study will only produce “weariness of flesh” (12:12) because everywhere we look for meaning and purpose, we find only vanity**.
4. Solomon ends his book by saying, “The end of the matter; all has been heard” (12:13a). He has looked for meaning and purpose in every aspect in life “under the sun.” Everything “has been heard” and everything has fallen short.

Does that mean that life is meaningless, there is no point in it, and we should all just commit suicide? No! It is true that we live in a sin-darkened world, but the One who said, Let there be light, has sent his Son to be the Light of the world. He is the Word/Meaning made flesh. He alone can give meaning to an otherwise meaningless existence. While Solomon doesn’t give us this answer in his book, he does point us to the God who not only created this world but also redeems this world. Because our only hope can be found in him, Solomon says we should “fear God” (12:13). If we do fear God, it is only natural for us to want to “keep his commandments.” The word “keep” could better be translated as “treasure or guard” all of God’s words. It is the same thing that Jesus said when he said his disciples should “keep/guard/treasure everything I have taught you.”

As created beings, we should fear our Creator and we should treasure his word. This is “the whole duty of man” (12:13b), but it is a duty that we fail to do. And since “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:14), we find ourselves in what seems to be an impossible situation. We cannot do what our Creator expects and demands of us. And he will judge us for “every deed” and “every secret thing.” This should strike terror in our hearts.

**Those are the final words of the book, which prick us also. It says judgment is coming**. But it doesn’t tell you what the Gospel in the NT explicitly and repeatedly and in various ways says, that “there is … now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Every deed will be brought into judgment for either condemnation or for acquittal by grace in the blood of Jesus.