

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 1 — Life's Fleeting Nature Under the Sun

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Ecclesiastes begins with one of the most sobering examinations of human life found anywhere in Scripture.

The writer identifies himself as:

“The Preacher.”

He is:

The son of David.

A king in Jerusalem.

A man who possesses unusual wisdom.

A man who has experienced wealth, power, learning, achievement, pleasure, responsibility, and influence.

Yet after examining life from every human angle, he repeatedly comes back to one troubling conclusion:

Life lived only “under the sun” cannot provide lasting satisfaction.

The phrase:

“Under the sun”

is one of the keys to understanding Ecclesiastes.

It describes life viewed from the earthly perspective.

It is life considered apart from its eternal relationship to God.

From that perspective, human existence appears repetitive.

Generations come and go.

The sun rises and sets.

The wind blows in circles.

The rivers continually run into the sea.

Human beings work.

They gain knowledge.

They accumulate possessions.

They make discoveries.

They build reputations.

Then they die.

Eventually much of what they accomplished is forgotten.

Ecclesiastes is not teaching that life itself has no value.

Rather, it exposes the emptiness of trying to find ultimate meaning in temporary things.

The Preacher examines:

Work.

Nature.

Knowledge.

Achievement.

Human history.

Wisdom.

And he discovers that none of these things can satisfy the deepest needs of the human heart when God is left out.

The chapter opens with the famous declaration:

“Vanity of vanities... everything is meaningless.”

The word translated “vanity” carries the idea of:

Breath.

Mist.

Vapor.

Something temporary.

Something impossible to hold onto.

Life is real.

But it passes quickly.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 1 is:

Everything earthly is temporary and unable to provide lasting meaning apart from God.

I. THE WORDS OF THE PREACHER

Ecclesiastes 1:1 — The Son of David

“These are the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”

The book begins by introducing its speaker.

He calls himself:

“The Preacher.”

The idea is that of someone who gathers people together to teach them.

This is not merely private meditation.

These are lessons intended to be heard.

The description:

“The son of David, king in Jerusalem”

strongly connects the book with Solomon.

Solomon possessed extraordinary:

Wisdom.

Wealth.

Power.

Influence.

Opportunity.

Yet all of those advantages gave him a unique ability to examine whether earthly success could truly satisfy the human heart.

Cross References

1 Kings 4:32

Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs, and he also composed one thousand and five songs.

Proverbs 1:1

These are the proverbs of Solomon, the son of David and king of Israel.

2 Chronicles 9:22

King Solomon became greater than all the other kings of the earth in both riches and wisdom.

Spiritual Principle

Great accomplishment does not automatically produce great satisfaction.

A person can possess extraordinary knowledge, opportunity, and success and still struggle with the deepest questions of life.

Key Truth

The Preacher speaks from experience.

He had much of what people spend their lives trying to obtain.

II. “VANITY OF VANITIES”

Ecclesiastes 1:2 — Everything Is Fleeting

“‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher. ‘Utterly meaningless—everything is meaningless.’”

This statement sets the tone for the entire book.

“Vanity” does not necessarily mean that nothing matters.

The word pictures something like:

A breath.

A mist.

A vapor.

Something that appears briefly and disappears.

The Preacher looks at human life and says:

Everything we try to hold onto eventually slips away.

Youth fades.

Possessions change hands.

Reputations disappear.

Generations die.

Human accomplishments are eventually forgotten.

If earthly things are treated as the ultimate source of meaning, disappointment is unavoidable.

Cross References

Psalms 39:5

You have made my lifetime very short, and the length of my days is almost nothing before You. Every person, even when standing strong, is only a passing breath.

Psalm 144:4

A human being is like a breath; his days pass away like a shadow moving across the ground.

James 4:14

You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. Your life is like a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears.

Spiritual Principle

Life is temporary.

Application

Do not build your entire life around things that cannot last.

Ask:

What am I pursuing that will still matter when my earthly life is over?

III. WHAT DOES HUMAN LABOR REALLY GAIN?

Ecclesiastes 1:3 — Working Under the Sun

“What does a person gain from all the work they do under the sun?”

This is one of the great questions of Ecclesiastes.

The Preacher is not saying work is useless.

Scripture repeatedly presents honest work as good.

His question is deeper.

What lasting gain does work produce if this earthly life is all there is?

People work.

Build.

Save.

Accumulate.

Expand.

Improve.

Then eventually they leave everything behind.

So what remains permanently?

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:22

What does a person really gain from all the work and anxious effort he pours into everything he does under the sun?

Job 7:1

Isn't human life on earth like hard service? Aren't our days like those of a hired worker waiting for the day's labor to end?

1 Timothy 6:7

We brought nothing into this world when we were born, and we cannot take anything out of it when we leave.

Spiritual Principle

Work has value, but work cannot become the meaning of life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A career can provide income.

It cannot provide eternity.

IV. GENERATIONS COME AND GO

Ecclesiastes 1:4 — The Earth Remains

“One generation passes away, and another comes, but the earth remains forever.”

Human beings often live as though the world revolves around their generation.

But history continues.

One generation enters life.

Another leaves.

Children become adults.

Adults grow old.

Another generation takes their place.

The earth continues while human lives remain brief.

Cross References

Psalm 104:5

God established the earth on its foundations so that it remains firmly set according to His purpose.

Psalm 102:26

The heavens and the earth will eventually pass away, but You will remain. They will wear out like clothing, and You will change them as someone changes a garment.

1 Peter 1:24

All people are like grass, and all human glory is like the flower of the field. The grass dries up, and the flower falls away.

Spiritual Principle

Every generation is temporary.

Application

Live so that your generation leaves behind something spiritually worthwhile.

V. THE SUN CONTINUES ITS COURSE

Ecclesiastes 1:5 — Rising and Setting

“The sun rises, the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises again.”

Day after day:

Sunrise.

Sunset.

Then another sunrise.

The regularity of creation emphasizes the repetitive nature of earthly life.

Human beings wake.

Work.

Eat.

Sleep.

Then repeat the process.

Without eternal purpose, even life's regular routines can begin to feel empty.

Cross References

Psalm 19:5

The sun comes out like a bridegroom leaving his room and moves across the sky with the joy and strength of a runner beginning a race.

Psalm 113:3

From the place where the sun rises to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord deserves to be praised.

Malachi 4:2

But for those who honor My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His rays, and you will go out with joy like young calves released from their stalls.

Spiritual Principle

Creation repeats its cycles, but every new day remains an opportunity to honor God.

VI. THE WIND MOVES IN CIRCLES

Ecclesiastes 1:6 — Ever Returning

“The wind blows south, then turns north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.”

The wind seems to move freely.

Yet it repeatedly follows familiar patterns.

The Preacher uses this image to emphasize the cycles of creation.

Human life can feel much the same.

People often repeat:

The same desires.

The same mistakes.

The same ambitions.

The same conflicts.

The same frustrations.

Cross References

John 3:8

The wind blows wherever it chooses. You hear its sound, but you do not know exactly where it comes from or where it is going. It is the same with everyone born of the Spirit.

Amos 4:13

God is the One who forms the mountains, creates the wind, reveals His thoughts to humanity, turns morning into darkness, and walks upon the heights of the earth. The Lord God of hosts is His name.

Ecclesiastes 11:5

Just as you do not fully understand the path of the wind or how bones develop inside a mother's womb, you cannot completely understand the work of God, who makes everything.

Spiritual Principle

Creation reminds us how limited human understanding truly is.

VII. THE RIVERS CONTINUE TO FLOW

Ecclesiastes 1:7 — The Sea Is Never Full

“All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. The waters return again to the rivers' source.”

Rivers constantly pour water into the sea.

Yet the sea does not overflow.

Water continues through its cycle.

Again the Preacher sees repetition.

Creation keeps moving.

But human beings struggle to find permanent satisfaction.

Cross References

Job 38:8

Who shut in the sea behind doors when it burst out as though it were coming from the womb?

Psalms 104:25

There is the great and wide sea, filled with creatures beyond number, both small and great.

Psalms 33:7

God gathers the waters of the sea together as though placing them in a container, and He stores the great depths according to His command.

Spiritual Principle

The God who controls the waters also controls the boundaries of human life.

VIII. LIFE CAN BECOME WEARISOME

Ecclesiastes 1:8 — Never Completely Satisfied

“Everything is wearisome, more than words can express. The eye is never satisfied with seeing, and the ear is never filled with hearing.”

The human appetite is difficult to satisfy.

We see something.

Then want to see something else.

We hear something.

Then want to hear something new.

We obtain something.

Then desire something more.

The problem is not merely outside us.

It is inside us.

The human heart naturally keeps reaching.

Cross References

Proverbs 27:20

Death and destruction are never satisfied, and in the same way, human eyes are never completely satisfied with what they see.

1 John 2:16

Everything that belongs to this fallen world—the desires of the flesh, the desire for what the eyes see, and pride in possessions and achievement—does not come from the Father but from the world.

Ecclesiastes 6:7

People work so they can satisfy their physical needs, yet their appetite is never completely filled.

Spiritual Principle

The human heart possesses desires that earthly things cannot permanently satisfy.

Application

More is not always the answer.

More money.

More possessions.

More entertainment.

More experiences.

More information.

More recognition.

None of these can fill the place created for God.

IX. NOTHING TRULY NEW UNDER THE SUN

Ecclesiastes 1:9 — History Repeats Itself

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing truly new under the sun.”

Technology changes.

Transportation changes.

Communication changes.

Governments change.

Cultures change.

But human nature remains remarkably similar.

People still struggle with:

Pride.

Greed.

Jealousy.

Fear.

Lust.

Power.

Conflict.

Love.

Loss.

Ambition.

The circumstances may change.

The human heart remains much the same.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 3:15

What exists now has existed before, and what will happen has already happened in similar ways. God brings past things back into view.

Isaiah 43:19

Look, I am doing something new. It is already beginning to appear. Do you not recognize it? I will make a road through the wilderness and streams through the desert.

Revelation 21:5

The One sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new.” Then He said, “Write these words down, because they are trustworthy and true.”

Spiritual Principle

Human nature repeats itself, but God is able to bring genuine renewal.

Key Truth

There may be nothing new under the sun, but God is not limited to what exists under the sun.

X. HUMAN NOVELTY IS OFTEN AN ILLUSION

Ecclesiastes 1:10 — “Look, This Is New”

“Is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look, this is new’? It has already existed in ages past.”

People often believe their generation has discovered completely new problems.

Yet beneath the surface, many of the same desires and struggles existed long ago.

Pride has existed before.

False religion has existed before.

Political corruption has existed before.

Sexual temptation has existed before.

Greed has existed before.

War has existed before.

Human rebellion has existed before.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:9

What has happened before will happen again, and what people have done before will be done again. There is nothing completely new under the sun.

Lamentations 3:23

God's mercies are new every morning; His faithfulness is great.

2 Corinthians 5:17

If anyone belongs to Christ, that person has become a new creation. The old life has passed away, and a new life has begun.

Spiritual Principle

The world may struggle to produce true newness.

Christ produces genuine spiritual transformation.

XI. HUMAN MEMORY QUICKLY FADES

Ecclesiastes 1:11 — Forgotten Generations

“People don't remember what happened before, and future generations will not remember what happens after them.”

Human beings often crave:

Recognition.

Legacy.

Fame.

A remembered name.

Yet history forgets most people.

Even individuals once considered important eventually disappear from public memory.

The Preacher confronts human pride.

If our purpose depends upon being remembered by future generations, disappointment is inevitable.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:16

The wise person and the foolish person will both eventually be forgotten. As time passes, future generations will forget them both, and both will die.

Ecclesiastes 9:5

The living know that they will die, but the dead no longer participate in earthly life, and the earthly reward connected with their work is gone because their memory eventually fades.

Psalms 103:15

A person's days are like grass; he flourishes for a little while like a flower growing in a field.

Spiritual Principle

Being remembered by people is less important than being known by God.

XII. THE PREACHER WAS KING IN JERUSALEM

Ecclesiastes 1:12 — A Man with Unusual Opportunity

“I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.”

The Preacher possessed something few people ever experience:

Enormous power.

As king, he had the resources to pursue nearly anything his heart desired.

That makes his conclusions especially significant.

He did not criticize worldly success because he never experienced it.

He examined it from the inside.

Cross References

1 Kings 4:1

King Solomon ruled as king over all Israel.

1 Kings 11:42

Solomon ruled over all Israel from Jerusalem for forty years.

Nehemiah 13:26

Nehemiah reminded the people that Solomon, king of Israel, sinned in this very area. Even though there had been no king like him among many nations, and God loved him and made him king over Israel, foreign women led him into sin.

Spiritual Principle

Position does not protect a person from spiritual emptiness.

XIII. THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 1:13 — Investigating Life

**“I applied myself fully to seek and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven.
It is a heavy burden God has laid on mankind to keep them occupied.”**

The Preacher becomes an investigator.

He decides to study human existence.

He asks:

Why are we here?

What does work accomplish?

What produces happiness?

Can knowledge satisfy?

Can wisdom solve life's deepest problems?

His search is serious.

He does not examine life casually.

Cross References

1 Kings 3:9

Solomon prayed, “Give Your servant an understanding heart so I can lead Your people well and recognize the difference between good and evil. Without Your help, who could properly govern this great people?”

1 Kings 4:29

God gave Solomon extraordinary wisdom, understanding, and an enormous breadth of knowledge.

Proverbs 2:3

Call out for understanding and raise your voice to God asking for wisdom and insight.

Spiritual Principle

Questions are not wrong.

But human wisdom alone cannot answer every question.

XIV. CHASING AFTER THE WIND

Ecclesiastes 1:14 — The Frustration of Earthly Achievement

“I have seen all the works done under the sun; and behold, everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

Imagine trying to catch the wind.

You can feel it.

You can see its effects.

But you cannot grab it and hold it in your hand.

That is the Preacher's picture of trying to find ultimate fulfillment in earthly accomplishment.

You chase.

You reach.

You gain something.

Then satisfaction slips away.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:11

When I looked at everything my hands had accomplished and all the work I had done, I realized it was all temporary and like chasing the wind. Nothing under the sun provided lasting gain.

Romans 8:20

Creation was subjected to frustration and emptiness, not because it chose this condition, but because God allowed it as part of His larger purpose and hope.

Psalms 78:33

So God allowed their days to disappear like a breath and their years to end in trouble because they refused to trust Him.

Spiritual Principle

Life without eternal purpose becomes an endless pursuit of things that cannot be held.

XV. HUMAN BEINGS CANNOT FIX EVERYTHING

Ecclesiastes 1:15 — What Is Crooked

“What is crooked cannot be made straight; what is lacking cannot be counted.”

This verse emphasizes human limitation.

Some situations cannot be repaired by human effort alone.

Some losses cannot be reversed.

Some problems cannot be solved merely through:

Education.

Money.

Politics.

Science.

Technology.

Human wisdom.

This does not mean we should never try to improve things.

It means we must recognize that humanity cannot repair everything broken by sin.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 7:13

Consider what God has done. Who can straighten something that He has allowed to remain crooked?

Job 12:14

When God tears something down, no human being can rebuild it. When He shuts someone in, no one can force the door open.

Isaiah 40:4

Every valley will be raised, every mountain and hill will be brought low, the crooked places will be made straight, and the rough places will become level.

Spiritual Principle

What human beings cannot straighten, God can.

Key Truth

Human limitation should lead us toward dependence upon God.

XVI. SOLOMON'S GREAT WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 1:16 — Greater Wisdom and Knowledge

“I said to myself, ‘Look, I have grown great and gained more wisdom than all who ruled Jerusalem before me; my mind has experienced much wisdom and knowledge.’”

Solomon's claim was not empty boasting.

Scripture describes his wisdom as extraordinary.

He had intellectual resources unavailable to most people.

If wisdom alone could provide complete fulfillment, Solomon should have found it.

But he did not.

Cross References

1 Kings 3:12

God said to Solomon, “I have granted what you asked for. I have given you a wise and understanding heart unlike anyone before you, and no one after you will be exactly like you.”

1 Kings 10:23

King Solomon became greater than every other king of the earth in wealth and wisdom.

2 Chronicles 1:12

God told Solomon, “Wisdom and knowledge are given to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor greater than those of the kings who came before you, and greater than those who will come after you.”

Spiritual Principle

Intelligence can explain many things.

It cannot replace God.

XVII. WISDOM, MADNESS, AND FOLLY

Ecclesiastes 1:17 — Studying Every Side of Human Life

“Then I applied myself to know wisdom, as well as madness and folly. But I realized that this too is like chasing the wind.”

Solomon does not examine only wisdom.

He also studies its opposite.

He looks at:

Wisdom.

Madness.

Foolishness.

He attempts to understand the full range of human behavior.

Yet even this great intellectual pursuit does not satisfy him.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:12

Then I turned my attention to study wisdom, madness, and foolishness. After all, what can the person who comes after the king do except repeat what has already been done?

Ecclesiastes 7:25

I turned my heart toward understanding, investigating, and searching out wisdom and the reasons behind things. I also wanted to understand the foolishness of wickedness and the madness of folly.

Proverbs 1:2

These proverbs were written so people may learn wisdom and discipline and understand words that give true insight.

Spiritual Principle

Knowing about foolishness does not satisfy the soul any more than possessing human wisdom does.

XVIII. KNOWLEDGE CAN BRING SORROW

Ecclesiastes 1:18 — The Burden of Understanding

“For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”

Wisdom has value.

But greater understanding also makes a person more aware of what is wrong.

The wiser Solomon became, the more clearly he saw:

Injustice.

Mortality.

Foolishness.

Human failure.

Brokenness.

Corruption.

Death.

Ignorance may hide some problems.

Wisdom sees them.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:23

A person's work may bring pain and frustration throughout the day, and even at night his mind may refuse to rest. This also shows the emptiness of life when work becomes everything.

Job 5:7

Human beings are born into trouble as surely as sparks from a fire rise upward.

1 Corinthians 8:1

Now concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess some knowledge. But knowledge by itself can make a person proud, while love builds people up.

Spiritual Principle

Knowledge without God cannot produce peace.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Knowing more about the world's problems is not the same as knowing the One who gives meaning in the middle of those problems.

XIX. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 1

1. Life Without God Is Empty

The Preacher repeatedly describes earthly life as:

Vanity.

Meaningless.

Chasing after the wind.

This does not mean existence has no meaning.

It means earthly things cannot become ultimate meaning.

Principle:

Anything placed in the position that belongs to God will eventually disappoint us.

2. Human Life Is Brief

Generations come.

Generations go.

Human life passes like:

Grass.

A flower.

A mist.

A breath.

Principle:

Because life is short, it should be lived deliberately.

3. Earthly Desire Is Difficult to Satisfy

The eye keeps wanting to see.

The ear keeps wanting to hear.

The appetite keeps reaching for more.

Principle:

The human heart cannot be permanently satisfied by temporary things.

4. Human Wisdom Has Limits

Solomon possessed extraordinary knowledge.

Yet even he could not understand or repair everything.

Principle:

Wisdom is valuable, but wisdom is not God.

5. True Meaning Must Come from Beyond “Under the Sun”

If everything is viewed only from the earthly perspective, life eventually appears repetitive and frustrating.

Meaning must come from beyond:

Possessions.

Careers.

Pleasure.

Recognition.

Human knowledge.

Principle:

Life makes ultimate sense only when it is connected to the eternal God.

XX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 1 TEACHES ABOUT HUMAN LIFE

Ecclesiastes 1 presents life as:

Brief

One generation passes and another appears.

Repetitive

The sun rises.

The sun sets.

The wind circles.

The rivers flow.

Restless

The eye is not satisfied.

The ear is not filled.

Forgetful

Past generations are eventually forgotten.

Limited

Human beings cannot straighten everything crooked.

Burdened

Wisdom reveals sorrow as well as knowledge.

Key Truth

Human existence needs an eternal reference point.

Without God, earthly life cannot carry the weight of ultimate meaning.

XXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 1 TEACHES ABOUT HUMAN DESIRE

Human beings constantly seek satisfaction.

We think:

If I could earn more.

If I could own more.

If I could know more.

If I could experience more.

If I could accomplish more.

If more people recognized me.

Then perhaps I would finally be satisfied.

But Ecclesiastes challenges that assumption.

The eye sees.

And wants to see more.

The ear hears.

And wants to hear more.

Achievement leads to another achievement.

Knowledge leads to another question.

Possession leads to another desire.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The human heart has eternal hunger.

Temporary things cannot permanently satisfy eternal hunger.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 1 TEACHES ABOUT WISDOM

Wisdom is better than foolishness.

Ecclesiastes will make that clear.

But wisdom itself has limitations.

Wisdom can:

Identify a problem.

It cannot always solve the problem.

Wisdom can:

Recognize mortality.

It cannot prevent death.

Wisdom can:

Understand injustice.

It cannot eliminate every injustice.

Wisdom can:

Recognize emptiness.

It cannot by itself fill the empty heart.

Key Truth

Wisdom is a gift.

But wisdom becomes dangerous when it is treated as a substitute for God.

XXIII. WHAT DOES “UNDER THE SUN” MEAN?

The expression:

“Under the sun”

appears repeatedly throughout Ecclesiastes.

It describes life considered from the human earthly perspective.

The Preacher asks:

What does life look like when we examine only what happens here?

Birth.

Work.

Pleasure.

Success.

Failure.

Aging.

Death.

From that viewpoint alone, everything eventually disappears.

But Scripture gives another perspective.

There is something:

Above the sun.

There is God.

There is eternity.

There is resurrection.

There is judgment.

There is redemption.

There is everlasting life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Ecclesiastes shows the emptiness of life under the sun so that we will learn to look beyond the sun to the God who created it.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does the word “vanity” communicate in Ecclesiastes 1?

It communicates the idea of something temporary, fleeting, and difficult to hold onto.

Human life resembles:

A breath.

A vapor.

A mist.

The Preacher is emphasizing how quickly earthly things pass away.

Question 2

Does Ecclesiastes teach that absolutely nothing matters?

No.

The book demonstrates that earthly things cannot provide ultimate meaning when separated from God.

Life has meaning because God gives it meaning.

Question 3

What does the phrase “under the sun” mean?

It refers to human life viewed primarily from the earthly perspective.

The Preacher examines what people experience in this world:

Work.

Pleasure.

Wisdom.

Achievement.

Time.

Death.

He shows that none of them provides lasting fulfillment apart from God.

Question 4

What does Ecclesiastes 1 teach about work?

Work itself is not condemned.

The question is whether work can provide permanent meaning.

A person can work his entire life and still eventually leave everything behind.

Work therefore cannot become the ultimate purpose of human existence.

Question 5

Why does the Preacher describe nature's cycles?

He mentions:

The sun.

The wind.

The rivers.

These repeated cycles illustrate how earthly life continues in recurring patterns.

Generations come and go while creation continues.

Question 6

What does verse 8 teach about human desire?

The eye is never completely satisfied with seeing.

The ear is never completely satisfied with hearing.

This shows that people naturally keep reaching for something more.

Earthly experience alone cannot permanently satisfy the heart.

Question 7

What does “nothing new under the sun” mean?

It does not mean there are never new inventions or discoveries.

It means the fundamental patterns of human nature continually repeat.

People still struggle with the same basic sins, desires, ambitions, fears, and conflicts.

Question 8

Why does verse 11 emphasize forgotten generations?

It reminds us how quickly human fame fades.

Most people are eventually forgotten by later generations.

Therefore, living merely to be remembered by people cannot provide lasting meaning.

Question 9

Why was Solomon especially qualified to investigate these questions?

He had:

Great wisdom.

Great wealth.

Great power.

Great opportunity.

Great influence.

He was able to experience many of the things people believe will make them happy.

Yet he still found them inadequate as ultimate sources of fulfillment.

Question 10

What does “chasing after the wind” mean?

It pictures an impossible pursuit.

A person may chase the wind.

He may feel it.

But he cannot capture and hold it.

In the same way, earthly satisfaction continually slips away when we try to make temporary things permanent.

Question 11

Why can greater wisdom produce greater sorrow?

Wisdom allows a person to recognize more clearly:

Human suffering.

Sin.

Injustice.

Mortality.

Failure.

Greater understanding often means greater awareness of what is wrong with the world.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 1 change about the way we live?

It should encourage us to stop treating temporary things as though they were eternal.

We should enjoy God's gifts.

Work faithfully.

Learn.

Build.

Serve.

But we should never expect earthly things to do what only God can do.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 1 asks us several searching questions.

What Am I Chasing?

Am I chasing something that can never truly satisfy me?

Is My Identity Built Around My Work?

Who am I if my career changes?

Who am I when I can no longer work?

Am I Living as Though This Life Will Last Forever?

My days are limited.

Am I using them wisely?

Am I Constantly Searching for “More”?

More possessions?

More entertainment?

More recognition?

More information?

More experiences?

Am I Trying to Find Permanent Satisfaction in Temporary Things?

Everything under the sun eventually changes.

Am I Trusting Human Wisdom More Than God?

Knowledge is valuable.

But knowledge is limited.

Am I Living Only “Under the Sun”?

Or am I viewing my life through the reality of eternity?

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Ask Temporary Things to Give You Eternal Satisfaction”

People continually ask temporary things to perform a task they cannot accomplish.

We ask money to give security.

We ask careers to give identity.

We ask pleasure to give fulfillment.

We ask relationships to make us complete.

We ask possessions to make us content.

We ask achievements to make us significant.

We ask knowledge to give us control.

But all these things exist:

Under the sun.

They change.

They fade.

They disappear.

God alone is eternal.

Therefore:

Enjoy God's gifts.

But do not worship them.

Use possessions.

But do not make them your identity.

Work faithfully.

But do not make work your god.

Learn.

But remain humble.

Build.

But remember that earthly structures eventually disappear.

Principle:

Temporary blessings are wonderful servants but terrible gods.

XXVII. ECCLESIASTES 1 AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Every generation asks essentially the same questions.

Why am I here?

What is the purpose of life?

What makes life worthwhile?

What remains when life is over?

The modern world often responds:

Success.

Money.

Experience.

Pleasure.

Education.

Relationships.

Influence.

Recognition.

The Preacher had access to nearly all of these.

Yet he discovered something important.

None of them could carry the full weight of the human soul.

They may provide temporary happiness.

They may be legitimate gifts.

They may make life more enjoyable.

But they cannot answer the deepest question:

What gives eternal meaning to human existence?

Ecclesiastes begins by tearing down false answers.

Before the book shows us where meaning is found, it shows us where ultimate meaning cannot be found.

Not merely in work.

Not merely in pleasure.

Not merely in wisdom.

Not merely in wealth.

Not merely in achievement.

Not merely in reputation.

The answer must ultimately lead beyond creation to the Creator.

XXVIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 1 forces us to confront reality.

Life moves quickly.

Generations disappear.

Days pass.

Years disappear.

People work.

People build.

People learn.

People achieve.

Then another generation comes.

The sun rises.

The sun sets.

The wind continues to blow.

The rivers continue to flow.

History continues.

But human beings eventually leave this world.

That realization can produce despair if life is viewed only:

“Under the sun.”

But Scripture does not end under the sun.

Above the sun is God.

The Creator existed before us.

He remains after us.

Our days may be short.

But He is eternal.

Our knowledge may be limited.

But His wisdom is perfect.

Our accomplishments may disappear.

But His purpose remains.

Our bodies may die.

But death does not have the final word.

Therefore, Ecclesiastes 1 should not lead us merely to say:

“Nothing matters.”

It should lead us to say:

“Only what is connected to God has lasting meaning.”

So work.

But work for God's glory.

Learn.

But let knowledge lead to humility.

Build.

But build something that serves God's purposes.

Love people.

Serve others.

Use your time wisely.

Enjoy God's blessings.

But never confuse the blessing with the Giver.

Your life is short.

Therefore:

Do not waste it chasing the wind.

Do not spend your entire life accumulating things you cannot keep.

Do not sacrifice eternal priorities for temporary success.

Do not wait until the end of life to ask what really mattered.

Look beyond the sun.

Look toward the Creator.

Live every day with eternity in view.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom You have given us through the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Teach us to recognize how brief our earthly lives truly are.

Help us remember that our days pass quickly.

Keep us from wasting the time You have given us.

Protect us from building our lives around things that cannot last.

Keep us from believing that money can satisfy our souls.

Keep us from believing that possessions can give us lasting peace.

Keep us from making our careers our identity.

Keep us from living for human applause.

Keep us from thinking that knowledge alone can answer every question.

Give us wisdom to enjoy the blessings You provide without turning those blessings into idols.

When our hearts constantly demand more, teach us contentment.

When our eyes are never satisfied, turn our attention toward You.

When our minds become overwhelmed by the brokenness of this world, remind us that human wisdom is limited but Your wisdom is perfect.

Teach us to understand the difference between temporary success and eternal significance.

Help us remember that generations come and go.

Our own generation will also pass.

Give us courage to live faithfully while we have opportunity.

Help us leave behind a testimony of faith.

Teach us to work with eternal purpose.

Teach us to love people.

Teach us to serve.

Teach us to worship.

Teach us to number our days wisely.

When life feels repetitive, remind us that every day can be lived for Your glory.

When our work feels empty, remind us that service offered to You is never meaningless.

When we become discouraged by the limits of human wisdom, draw us closer to the One whose understanding has no limit.

Keep us from chasing the wind.

Keep us from spending our lives trying to hold onto things that must eventually disappear.

Turn our hearts from what is merely:

Under the sun.

And teach us to look beyond the sun to You.

You are eternal.

You are faithful.

You are wise.

You are our Creator.

You alone can give lasting meaning to life.

May everything we do be shaped by eternity.

May our work honor You.

May our knowledge honor You.

May our possessions honor You.

May our relationships honor You.

May our days honor You.

And when our earthly lives are finished, may we be able to say that we did not merely chase the wind.

We lived for You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher. ‘Utterly meaningless—everything is meaningless.’” — Ecclesiastes 1:2

Central Truth

Life viewed only from the earthly perspective is temporary, repetitive, and unable to provide lasting fulfillment; true meaning must ultimately be found in the eternal God rather than in the passing things of this world.

Ecclesiastes 1 in One Sentence

The Preacher examines work, nature, history, human desire, achievement, and wisdom and concludes that everything pursued merely under the sun is fleeting like a vapor and impossible to hold like the wind, showing humanity's need to find lasting meaning in God.