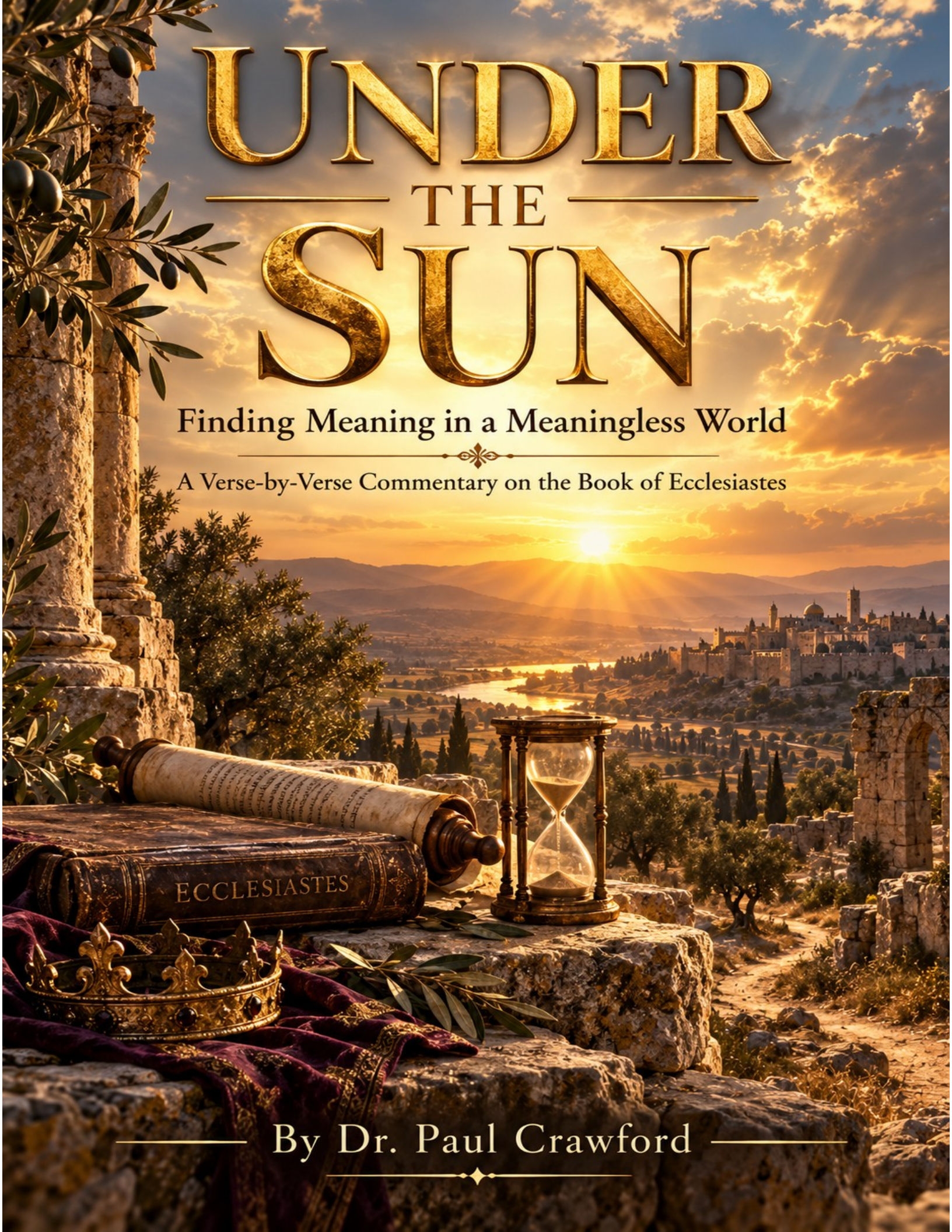




UNDER THE SUN

Finding Meaning in a Meaningless World

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes

By Dr. Paul Crawford

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Under the Sun

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes

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Preface

There are few books in the Bible as honest, searching, and deeply human as the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes asks the questions people have been asking for thousands of years. Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Why does success so often leave people empty? Why do wealth, pleasure, achievement, and knowledge fail to satisfy the deepest needs of the human heart? Why do the righteous sometimes suffer while the wicked prosper? Why does life move so quickly? And what remains when everything we have worked for is finally left behind?

These are not shallow questions. They are the questions of the human soul.

Ecclesiastes looks directly at the realities of life “under the sun.” It does not ignore pain. It does not pretend that every mystery has an easy explanation. It speaks openly about disappointment, injustice, aging, death, work, pleasure, wealth, wisdom, foolishness, and the passing nature of human life.

At first glance, Ecclesiastes can seem dark and pessimistic. The repeated declaration that life is “vanity” can sound hopeless. But the message of Ecclesiastes is not that life has no meaning. Its message is that life cannot find its ultimate meaning apart from God.

That distinction is essential.

The Preacher examines the things people commonly pursue in the hope of finding satisfaction. He considers pleasure, possessions, accomplishments, education, reputation, labor, and wealth. Again and again, he reaches the same conclusion: none of these things can carry the weight of eternity.

Everything under the sun eventually passes away.

Generations come and go.

Fortunes rise and fall.

Youth fades.

Strength weakens.

Possessions change hands.

Human applause is forgotten.

Even the greatest achievements of a lifetime eventually belong to someone else.

Yet Ecclesiastes does not leave us in despair.

Behind its repeated warnings about vanity stands a greater truth: God is eternal, God is sovereign, and God gives meaning to life.

That is why the book ultimately leads us to one of the clearest conclusions found anywhere in Scripture:

Fear God and keep His commandments.

This is the foundation upon which meaningful life must be built.

The purpose of this commentary is to walk carefully through Ecclesiastes verse by verse. My goal is not merely to explain difficult phrases or provide historical information. I want the reader to hear the spiritual message of the text and understand how these ancient words speak directly to modern life.

The world has changed greatly since Ecclesiastes was written, but the human heart has not.

People still chase possessions.

People still search for significance.

People still compare themselves with others.

People still worry about the future.

People still struggle with disappointment.

People still ask why life seems unfair.

People still fear aging and death.

And people still discover that the things they thought would satisfy them often leave them wanting something more.

Ecclesiastes speaks directly into that struggle.

Throughout this commentary, we will examine the text in its context, consider important words and themes, explore relevant cross references, and draw practical lessons for Christian living. Particular attention will be given to the recurring themes of vanity, wisdom, work, time, mortality, judgment, contentment, and the fear of God.

My desire is that this book will help readers see Ecclesiastes not merely as an ancient philosophical reflection, but as a powerful biblical message about how to live wisely in a temporary world.

Life is brief.

Time moves quickly.

Opportunities pass.

The things of this world cannot last forever.

But God remains.

His truth remains.

His purposes remain.

And the person who builds life around Him has something this world can never provide and can never take away.

As you read these pages, I encourage you not simply to study Ecclesiastes intellectually. Allow its questions to search your own heart.

What are you living for?

What are you pursuing?

What do you believe will make your life meaningful?

What are you building that will outlast you?

Are you living only for what can be seen under the sun, or are you living in light of eternity?

Ecclesiastes reminds us that the greatest tragedy is not that life is short. The greatest tragedy is to spend a short life pursuing things that cannot ultimately satisfy.

May this study help us number our days, walk in wisdom, receive God's daily gifts with gratitude, and remember our Creator while we still have the opportunity.

And when all the arguments have been heard and all the pursuits of this world have been examined, may we come to the same conclusion as the Preacher:

Fear God. Obey Him. Live with eternity in view.

That is where true meaning is found.

Dr. Paul Crawford

Prologue

The sun rises.

The sun sets.

Another day begins, and another day ends.

People wake, work, build, plan, strive, celebrate, grieve, and eventually sleep. Cities grow. Nations rise. Families change. Fortunes are made and lost. Generations come and go.

And still the sun rises.

This is the world Ecclesiastes asks us to examine.

It is a world of motion, ambition, beauty, sorrow, achievement, disappointment, laughter, injustice, wisdom, foolishness, birth, and death. It is a world that offers much to enjoy, yet nothing that can finally defeat the passing of time.

Ecclesiastes confronts us with a difficult reality: much of what appears permanent is temporary.

What looks impressive today may be forgotten tomorrow.

What seems essential in one season may become meaningless in another.

What people spend decades pursuing may eventually be left behind in a single moment.

The book does not begin by flattering us. It begins by unsettling us.

“Vanity of vanities.”

Those words force the reader to stop and consider what life really is when viewed only “under the sun.”

If all we have is this present world, what finally remains?

If wealth can be lost, what is its ultimate value?

If pleasure fades, can it satisfy the soul?

If wisdom cannot prevent death, how far can wisdom take us?

If labor eventually passes into someone else's hands, what does work ultimately accomplish?

If everyone dies, what makes one life truly meaningful?

Ecclesiastes is not afraid of these questions.

The Preacher does not avoid them, soften them, or bury them beneath shallow optimism. He examines life honestly. He follows the human search for meaning into places most people already know well: work, money, education, pleasure, success, relationships, reputation, and achievement.

He searches all of them.

He tests all of them.

And he finds that none of them can provide what only God can give.

This is why Ecclesiastes is so relevant to every generation.

Modern life is filled with activity. People are busier than ever, connected more than ever, entertained more than ever, and surrounded by more choices than previous generations could have imagined.

Yet the ancient questions remain.

Why am I here?

What is my life accomplishing?

What will remain when I am gone?

Why do I have so much and still feel unsatisfied?

Why does success sometimes feel empty?

Why does suffering come?

Why is life unfair?

Why does time move so quickly?

What happens when everything I have built is eventually left behind?

Ecclesiastes speaks into that tension.

It teaches us that life is not meaningless because it is temporary. Rather, life becomes meaningless when we try to make temporary things carry eternal significance.

That is the problem.

The created world was never meant to replace the Creator.

Work was never meant to become God.

Money was never meant to become God.

Pleasure was never meant to become God.

Knowledge was never meant to become God.

Success was never meant to become God.

When good things are asked to provide ultimate meaning, they eventually disappoint us.

Ecclesiastes strips away these illusions.

It tells us to enjoy God's gifts, but not worship them.

It tells us to work faithfully, but not build our identity entirely upon our work.

It tells us to value wisdom, but not imagine that wisdom makes us sovereign.

It tells us to rejoice in life, while remembering that life is short.

It tells us to live fully, while living responsibly before God.

Above all, it tells us to remember that judgment is real and that God must remain at the center of human existence.

That is why the final message of Ecclesiastes is not despair.

It is clarity.

The emptiness exposed throughout the book is meant to drive us toward the One who gives life its true meaning.

The Preacher takes us through the temporary so that we might understand the eternal.

He shows us the limits of human ambition so that we might recognize the greatness of divine purpose.

He reminds us of death so that we might learn how to live.

He reminds us of judgment so that we might learn wisdom.

And he reminds us of God so that we might finally understand what life is for.

As you begin this journey through Ecclesiastes, resist the temptation to rush past its difficult questions.

Let them speak.

Let them challenge you.

Let them expose the things you may be trusting too deeply.

Let them remind you how quickly life moves.

Let them turn your attention away from what cannot last and toward what cannot be shaken.

For beneath all the searching, all the questioning, and all the declarations of vanity stands one enduring truth:

Life finds its meaning when it is lived before God.

Everything else is temporary.

Everything else passes.

Everything else remains under the sun.

But God is above it all.

And that changes everything.

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.

Psalms 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

Psalms 104:5

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

Psalms 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.

Psalm 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.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 — The Search for Pleasure, Work, and Wisdom

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 continues the Preacher's search for the meaning of life.

In Chapter 1, he examined:

Human labor.

The cycles of creation.

The repetition of history.

The limits of wisdom.

The fleeting nature of human life.

Now he turns toward some of the things people most commonly pursue in the hope of finding satisfaction.

He examines:

Pleasure.

Laughter.

Wine.

Great building projects.

Gardens.

Possessions.

Wealth.

Music.

Achievement.

Wisdom.

Work.

Legacy.

The Preacher does not merely imagine what these things might be like.

He experiences them.

He possesses the resources to test them thoroughly.

He denies himself very little.

He builds.

He accumulates.

He enjoys.

He studies.

He accomplishes.

Yet after examining everything, he reaches the same conclusion:

None of these things can provide lasting satisfaction by themselves.

Pleasure fades.

Achievement cannot defeat death.

Wisdom cannot prevent mortality.

Wealth must eventually be left to someone else.

Labor can become exhausting.

Possessions can become burdens.

But near the end of the chapter, the Preacher discovers an important truth.

Food.

Work.

Enjoyment.

Wisdom.

Knowledge.

Joy.

All these things can be good when they are received as gifts from God.

The problem is not necessarily the gift.

The problem is trying to enjoy the gift apart from the Giver.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 2 is:

Pleasure, achievement, wisdom, and wealth cannot give lasting meaning to life, but ordinary blessings become sources of genuine joy when they are received from the hand of God.

I. THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

Ecclesiastes 2:1 — “I Will Test You with Pleasure”

“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself!’ But behold, this too was meaningless.”

The Preacher deliberately begins an experiment.

He asks:

Can pleasure satisfy the human heart?

He does not merely taste pleasure occasionally.

He makes it a major part of his search.

He tells himself:

Enjoy yourself.

Experience what life has to offer.

Yet afterward he reaches the same conclusion:

Pleasure alone cannot give lasting meaning.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:11

Then I looked carefully at everything my hands had accomplished and all the work I had done. I realized that it was all temporary and like chasing the wind. Nothing I had gained under the sun could provide lasting profit.

Luke 12:19

The rich man said to himself, “You have stored up plenty of good things for many years. Relax now. Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.”

1 Peter 4:3

You have already spent enough of your past life doing what people who do not know God desire to do, living in uncontrolled desires, drunkenness, wild parties, drinking, and sinful forms of worship.

Spiritual Principle

Pleasure can entertain the heart without satisfying the soul.

Key Truth

Enjoyment is not wrong.

But enjoyment becomes empty when it is expected to provide the meaning only God can give.

II. LAUGHTER CANNOT SOLVE LIFE’S DEEPEST QUESTIONS

Ecclesiastes 2:2 — “What Good Does It Bring?”

“I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What good does it bring?’”

Laughter can be good.

Joy can be healthy.

But constant entertainment cannot remove:

Death.

Loss.

Sin.

Loneliness.

Injustice.

Fear.

The Preacher discovers that amusement is unable to answer the deepest questions of life.

Cross References

Proverbs 14:13

Even while a person is laughing, the heart may still be hurting, and when the laughter ends, sadness may remain.

Ecclesiastes 7:6

The laughter of fools is like dry thorns crackling quickly under a cooking pot. It makes a lot of noise but does not last. This too is empty.

James 4:9

Take your sin seriously. Grieve and mourn over it. Let careless laughter turn into sorrow and shallow joy into serious repentance.

Spiritual Principle

Laughter can temporarily cover pain without healing it.

Application

There is a time for laughter.

But there are problems that entertainment cannot fix.

III. THE EXPERIMENT WITH WINE AND FOOLISHNESS

Ecclesiastes 2:3 — Searching for What Is Worthwhile

“I tried cheering myself with wine, while still guiding myself with wisdom. I wanted to experience foolishness, to see what was worthwhile for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.”

The Preacher continues his experiment.

He explores pleasure through wine while attempting to maintain enough self-control to observe the results.

He is asking:

What is actually worth doing during a short human life?

The experiment itself reveals his desperation.

He is searching everywhere for something lasting.

Cross References

Proverbs 20:1

Wine can mock a person, and strong drink can lead to loud and foolish behavior. Anyone controlled by it is not acting wisely.

Ecclesiastes 9:7

Go and enjoy your food with gratitude, and drink with a glad heart, because God has already allowed you to receive and enjoy His gifts.

Isaiah 5:11

How tragic it is for those who rise early to chase strong drink and continue late into the evening until wine controls and inflames them.

Spiritual Principle

A substance can change a person's mood without changing the condition of the heart.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Anything used to escape reality eventually becomes a poor substitute for facing reality with God.

IV. THE PREACHER BUILDS GREAT PROJECTS

Ecclesiastes 2:4 — Houses and Vineyards

“I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.”

When pleasure does not satisfy, the Preacher turns to achievement.

He builds.

He creates.

He expands.

He surrounds himself with visible evidence of success.

Large projects can produce a strong sense of accomplishment.

But even achievement has limits.

Cross References

1 Kings 9:1

After Solomon finished building the house of the Lord, the royal palace, and everything else he had desired to build, the Lord appeared to him again.

2 Chronicles 8:1

At the end of twenty years, Solomon had completed the construction of the Lord's house and his own palace.

Deuteronomy 8:12

Be careful that after you have eaten and are satisfied, built fine houses, and settled comfortably in them, you do not forget the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

Achievement can fill a schedule while leaving the heart empty.

V. GARDENS, PARKS, AND BEAUTY

Ecclesiastes 2:5 — Creating Beautiful Places

“I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.”

The Preacher surrounds himself with beauty.

He creates cultivated spaces.

Gardens.

Trees.

Parks.

Fruit.

These things could provide real enjoyment.

But even beauty cannot provide eternal satisfaction.

Cross References

Genesis 2:8

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there He placed the man He had formed.

1 Kings 4:33

Solomon spoke with knowledge about plants, from the great cedar trees of Lebanon down to the small plants growing from walls. He also spoke about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish.

2 Chronicles 26:10

King Uzziah built towers in the wilderness and dug many wells because he owned much livestock. He also had farmers and vineyard workers because he loved working the land.

Spiritual Principle

Beauty is a gift.

But created beauty should lead us toward the Creator.

VI. POOLS FOR IRRIGATION

Ecclesiastes 2:6 — Controlling Water for Growth

“I made pools of water to irrigate a forest of growing trees.”

The Preacher continues expanding his projects.

He develops water systems.

He creates infrastructure.

He makes the land productive.

This is not laziness.

It is enormous activity.

But activity alone does not guarantee meaning.

Cross References

Nehemiah 2:14

Nehemiah continued toward the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, but there was so much rubble that the animal he was riding could not pass through.

Nehemiah 3:15

Shallum repaired the Fountain Gate, rebuilt it, covered it, installed its doors, bolts, and bars, and also repaired the wall near the Pool of Shelah by the king's garden.

Isaiah 22:11

You made a reservoir between the walls to collect water from the old pool, but you did not look to the God who made these things or recognize the One who planned them long ago.

Spiritual Principle

Human planning can accomplish much.

But success becomes dangerous when we forget the God who made accomplishment possible.

VII. SERVANTS, HERDS, AND FLOCKS

Ecclesiastes 2:7 — Growing Possessions

“I bought male and female servants and had others born in my house. I also owned herds and flocks more than anyone in Jerusalem before me.”

The Preacher's household expands.

His possessions multiply.

His livestock exceeds that of those who came before him.

By ancient standards, this represents enormous wealth.

Yet quantity does not create contentment.

Cross References

Genesis 12:16

Pharaoh treated Abram well because of Sarai, and Abram received sheep, cattle, donkeys, servants, female donkeys, and camels.

Genesis 26:14

Isaac possessed many flocks, herds, and servants, and his prosperity became so great that the Philistines became jealous of him.

1 Kings 4:23

Solomon's daily provisions included cattle, sheep, and other animals in great abundance to supply his household and royal court.

Spiritual Principle

Having more does not guarantee wanting less.

VIII. SILVER, GOLD, AND ENTERTAINMENT

Ecclesiastes 2:8 — Wealth and Music

“I amassed silver and gold for myself, the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men—musical instruments of all kinds.”

The Preacher gathers wealth.

Gold.

Silver.

Royal treasure.

Entertainment.

Music.

He surrounds himself with everything designed to make life enjoyable.

He had access to what many people spend their lives pursuing.

Yet these things could not satisfy him permanently.

Cross References

1 Kings 10:14

The amount of gold Solomon received in a single year weighed about six hundred sixty-six talents.

2 Chronicles 9:20

All of King Solomon’s drinking cups were made of gold, and everything in the House of the Forest of Lebanon was made of pure gold. Silver was considered of little value during Solomon’s reign.

1 Chronicles 25:1

David and the leaders set apart musicians from the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to serve through music with harps, lyres, and cymbals.

Spiritual Principle

Luxury can improve comfort without producing spiritual contentment.

IX. SOLOMON BECOMES GREAT

Ecclesiastes 2:9 — Greater Than Those Before Him

“I became greater and wealthier than all who were before me in Jerusalem, yet my wisdom stayed with me.”

The Preacher reaches the top.

He possesses:

Wealth.

Power.

Influence.

Wisdom.

Success.

By ordinary human standards, he has won.

Yet reaching the top does not answer the question:

What now?

Cross References

1 Kings 10:23

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

2 Chronicles 1:1

Solomon, the son of David, became firmly established as king, and the Lord his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.

2 Chronicles 9:22

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

Spiritual Principle

Success can bring a person to the top without telling him what the top is for.

X. HE DENIED HIMSELF NOTHING

Ecclesiastes 2:10 — Whatever My Eyes Desired

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not deny them. I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart found delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.”

The Preacher practices almost unrestricted self-gratification.

If he wants something:

He gets it.

If something looks attractive:

He pursues it.

If it promises pleasure:

He experiences it.

For a time, there is enjoyment.

That is important.

Sin and self-indulgence can provide temporary pleasure.

The problem is that temporary pleasure is not lasting fulfillment.

Cross References

Job 31:1

Job said, “I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not look lustfully at a young woman.”

Numbers 15:39

When you see the tassels on your clothing, remember all the Lord’s commands and obey them. Do not follow the desires of your own heart and eyes, which can lead you away from God.

1 John 2:16

Everything connected with this fallen world—the desires of the flesh, the desire for what the eyes see, and pride in possessions and achievements—does not come from the Father but from the world.

Spiritual Principle

Desire is a poor master.

Application

Not everything you want should be obtained.

Not everything you can experience should be pursued.

XI. THE FINAL VERDICT ON ACHIEVEMENT

Ecclesiastes 2:11 — Chasing the Wind

“Yet when I looked at all I had achieved and the work I had done, behold, everything was meaningless—a chasing after the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”

The experiment reaches its conclusion.

Solomon looks at:

The houses.

The gardens.

The wealth.

The music.

The servants.

The projects.

The pleasure.

And asks:

What permanent gain did any of it produce?

His answer:

None.

Not in the ultimate sense.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I examined all the activities people perform under the sun, and I saw that everything was temporary and like trying to catch the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:17

So I became deeply discouraged with life because everything done under the sun seemed grievous to me. It all appeared temporary and like chasing the wind.

Romans 8:20

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

Spiritual Principle

Accomplishment without eternal purpose eventually feels empty.

XII. THE PREACHER TURNS TO WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 2:12 — Wisdom, Madness, and Folly

“Then I turned to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. For what can anyone do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.”

Having tested pleasure, the Preacher now compares wisdom and foolishness.

Can wisdom succeed where pleasure failed?

Wisdom clearly has advantages.

But will it provide ultimate meaning?

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.

1 Kings 3:12

God told Solomon, “I have given you what you asked for—a wise and understanding heart unlike anyone before you, and no one after you will have wisdom exactly like yours.”

Ecclesiastes 2:19

Who knows whether the person who receives everything I worked for will be wise or foolish? Yet that person will control everything I produced through my wisdom and labor under the sun.

Spiritual Principle

Human wisdom has value, but even the wisest person cannot escape every limitation of human life.

XIII. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN FOOLISHNESS

Ecclesiastes 2:13 — Light Is Better Than Darkness

“I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.”

The Preacher does not say wisdom and foolishness are equal.

Wisdom is clearly better.

Wisdom helps a person:

Make better decisions.

Recognize danger.

Understand consequences.

Live with greater discernment.

Wisdom is like light.

Foolishness is like darkness.

Cross References

Proverbs 4:18

The path of righteous people is like the first light of morning, growing brighter and brighter until the day reaches full light.

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to overcome it.

Ephesians 5:8

You once lived in spiritual darkness, but now you belong to the Lord and live in His light. Therefore, live like people whose lives reflect that light.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom is genuinely better than foolishness, even if wisdom cannot solve every problem.

XIV. WISDOM SEES; FOOLISHNESS WALKS IN DARKNESS

Ecclesiastes 2:14 — Yet Both Die

“The wise have eyes in their heads, but fools walk in darkness. Yet I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.”

The wise person sees where he is going.

The fool stumbles blindly.

But death eventually comes to both.

Wisdom can improve the journey.

It cannot eliminate the grave.

Cross References

Proverbs 17:24

A person with understanding keeps wisdom clearly in view, but the eyes of a fool wander everywhere without direction.

Ecclesiastes 9:2

The same earthly destiny eventually comes to everyone—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who does not.

Hebrews 9:27

Every person is appointed to die once, and after death comes judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom can change how we live.

It cannot remove the reality of death.

XV. IF BOTH DIE, WHAT HAS WISDOM GAINED?

Ecclesiastes 2:15 — The Preacher Questions Wisdom

“Then I said in my heart, ‘If the fool’s end will be my end also, what have I gained by being wise?’ This too is meaningless.”

The Preacher is not saying wisdom has no value.

He has already said wisdom is better than folly.

His frustration comes from realizing:

Both the wise person and the fool eventually die.

If death is the final horizon, even wisdom seems unable to provide ultimate advantage.

Cross References

Psalms 49:10

Everyone can see that wise people die, and foolish and senseless people also perish, leaving their wealth to others.

Job 21:23

One person dies while still strong and prosperous, living with comfort and security.

Ecclesiastes 2:16

Neither the wise person nor the fool will be remembered forever. In future days both will eventually be forgotten, and both will die.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom needs an eternal perspective or death eventually overshadows its achievements.

XVI. BOTH THE WISE AND THE FOOL ARE FORGOTTEN

Ecclesiastes 2:16 — Human Memory Fades

“For the wise, like the fool, will not be remembered forever. In the days to come, both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise must also die.”

Wisdom cannot guarantee lasting fame.

Human memory is short.

Generations forget.

Names disappear.

Achievements become footnotes.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:11

People do not remember most of those who lived before them, and future generations will also forget much of what happens now.

Ecclesiastes 9:5

The living know that they will die, but those who have died no longer participate in earthly life, and the earthly reward connected with their labor is gone as their memory fades.

Job 3:19

In death, the small and the great are together, and the servant is finally free from the demands of his master.

Spiritual Principle

Being remembered by people is temporary.

Being known by God is eternal.

XVII. THE PREACHER BECOMES WEARY OF LIFE

Ecclesiastes 2:17 — Everything Felt Grievous

“So I hated life, because the work done under the sun was grievous to me. Everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

The Preacher reaches a low point.

His disappointment becomes emotional.

What looked impressive from the outside now feels empty from the inside.

This reveals how dangerous it is to build one’s entire identity around temporary achievements.

Cross References

Job 7:16

Job said, “I despise my life. I do not want to live forever. Leave me alone, because my days pass quickly like a breath.”

Job 10:1

Job said, “I am weary of my life, so I will freely express my complaint and speak from the bitterness I feel inside.”

Philippians 1:21

Paul said, “For me, living means serving Christ, and dying means entering something even better.”

Spiritual Principle

Life becomes unbearable when temporary things are forced to carry eternal expectations.

XVIII. EVERYTHING MUST BE LEFT BEHIND

Ecclesiastes 2:18 — Someone Else Will Receive It

“I hated all the things I had worked for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.”

This realization troubles the Preacher deeply.

He worked.

Planned.

Built.

Accumulated.

Yet eventually everything must be handed to someone else.

Ownership is temporary.

Cross References

Psalms 39:6

People move through life like passing shadows. They work anxiously to gather possessions, yet they do not know who will eventually receive what they have collected.

Ecclesiastes 6:2

God may give a person wealth, possessions, and honor so that he lacks nothing he desires, yet if God does not allow him to enjoy those things, someone else may benefit from them.

Luke 12:20

God said to the rich man, “You foolish man! Tonight your life will be required from you. Then who will receive everything you have stored up?”

Spiritual Principle

You may manage possessions for a time.

You do not keep them forever.

XIX. WHO KNOWS WHAT THE NEXT PERSON WILL DO?

Ecclesiastes 2:19 — Wise or Foolish?

“And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor into which I poured my wisdom under the sun. This too is meaningless.”

The Preacher’s frustration deepens.

It is not merely that someone else will receive his work.

That person may misuse it.

Everything Solomon built could eventually fall into the hands of someone foolish.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:21

A person may work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, only to leave everything he earned to someone who never worked for it. This too is deeply frustrating.

Job 27:17

A wicked person may collect clothing, but a righteous person may eventually wear it, and the silver he gathered may be divided among others.

Psalms 49:10

Wise people die just as fools and senseless people die, and they leave their wealth behind for someone else.

Spiritual Principle

Legacy is uncertain when it depends only upon possessions.

Application

A spiritual legacy is more valuable than merely leaving material wealth.

XX. DESPAIR OVER LABOR

Ecclesiastes 2:20 — The Heart Begins to Despair

“So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.”

The Preacher realizes he cannot control what happens to his work after he is gone.

The result is despair.

His achievement has become a burden because he expected it to produce lasting meaning.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:11

When I examined everything I had accomplished and all the work I had done, I realized it was temporary and like chasing the wind. Nothing under the sun gave lasting profit.

Job 7:3

I have been given months filled with emptiness, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.

2 Corinthians 4:8

We are pressured from every direction, but we are not crushed. We are sometimes confused and uncertain, but we do not give up in despair.

Spiritual Principle

Despair grows when identity is attached to things we cannot control.

XXI. SOMEONE ELSE MAY RECEIVE WHAT YOU BUILT

Ecclesiastes 2:21 — Labor Without Permanent Control

“For a man may labor with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then leave it all to someone who has not worked for it. This also is meaningless and a great evil.”

A person may spend decades building something.

Then another person receives it without sharing in the work.

The Preacher sees this as deeply frustrating when life is viewed only under the sun.

Cross References

Proverbs 13:22

A good person leaves an inheritance for his children and grandchildren, while the wealth of sinners is eventually stored up for those who live rightly.

Job 27:16

A wicked person may pile up silver like dust and collect fine clothing in great amounts.

Ecclesiastes 5:14

Wealth can disappear through some unfortunate event, leaving a person with nothing to pass on to his children.

Spiritual Principle

The value of your life cannot be measured only by what you leave behind materially.

XXII. WHAT DOES WORK REALLY GAIN?

Ecclesiastes 2:22 — Toil and Anxiety

“What does a man gain from all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?”

This echoes the major question from Ecclesiastes 1:3.

The Preacher asks again:

What permanent profit comes from all this labor?

Work can provide income.

Achievement.

Service.

Dignity.

But it cannot defeat mortality.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:3

What lasting profit does a person really gain from all the hard work he performs under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 3:9

What lasting gain does the worker receive from all his labor?

Mark 8:36

What good would it do for a person to gain the entire world and yet lose his own soul?

Spiritual Principle

The greatest possible earthly gain is worthless if the soul is neglected.

XXIII. WORK CAN FOLLOW A PERSON INTO THE NIGHT

Ecclesiastes 2:23 — No Rest for the Heart

“All his days are filled with pain, and grief occupies his work. Even at night his heart finds no rest. This too is meaningless.”

Work can become so consuming that the body leaves the workplace but the mind does not.

Anxiety continues.

Problems replay.

The heart cannot rest.

The Preacher understands that work becomes destructive when it becomes the center of life.

Cross References

Job 5:7

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

Job 14:1

A person born into this world has only a short life, and those days are filled with trouble.

Psalms 90:10

Our lives may reach seventy years, or eighty if we are strong, yet even our best years contain labor and sorrow. Life passes quickly, and soon we are gone.

Spiritual Principle

Work should serve life.

Life should not become enslaved to work.

XXIV. ENJOYMENT IS A GIFT FROM GOD

Ecclesiastes 2:24 — Food, Drink, and Satisfaction

“There is nothing better for a man than to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I saw, comes from the hand of God.”

This verse marks an important turning point.

The Preacher does not say:

Stop working.

Stop eating.

Stop enjoying life.

Instead, he says true enjoyment comes when these things are received:

From the hand of God.

The difference is enormous.

Possessions cannot create meaning.

But God can give meaning to the ordinary gifts of life.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Every person should eat, drink, and enjoy the good that comes from his work, because the ability to enjoy these things is a gift from God.

Ecclesiastes 5:18

I have seen that it is good and fitting for a person to eat, drink, and enjoy the results of his work during the short life God has given him, because this is his portion.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Whether you eat, drink, or do anything else, do everything in a way that brings glory to God.

Spiritual Principle

Enjoyment becomes healthy when it produces gratitude rather than idolatry.

Key Truth

The secret is not merely possessing more.

The secret is receiving what God gives with gratitude.

XXV. TRUE ENJOYMENT CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM GOD

Ecclesiastes 2:25 — “Apart from Him”

“For who can eat, or who can find enjoyment, apart from Him?”

The Preacher has finally discovered something his experiment could not manufacture.

Joy itself is a gift.

A person may possess:

Food.

Money.

Time.

Resources.

Opportunity.

And still lack the ability to enjoy them.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:10

I did not hold back anything my eyes wanted, and I did not refuse my heart any pleasure. I found temporary enjoyment in my work, and that enjoyment was my immediate reward.

1 Kings 3:13

God told Solomon, “I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and honor—so that during your lifetime no other king will compare with you.”

Philippians 4:12

I know how to live with very little, and I also know how to live with plenty. In every circumstance I have learned the secret of being content, whether well fed or hungry, whether having much or having little.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment depends less upon what you possess than upon your relationship with God.

XXVI. GOD GIVES WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, AND JOY

Ecclesiastes 2:26 — The Final Contrast

“To the one who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But to the sinner He gives the burden of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

The chapter ends with God.

That is important.

The Preacher began by experimenting with pleasure.

He ends by recognizing that true enjoyment cannot be manufactured.

God gives:

Wisdom.

Knowledge.

Joy.

Without God, gathering wealth becomes another exhausting cycle.

Cross References

Proverbs 28:8

A person who increases wealth by charging unfair interest may eventually be collecting it for someone who will use it with kindness toward the poor.

Daniel 2:21

God changes times and seasons. He removes kings and raises others up. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who understand.

James 4:14

You do not know what tomorrow will bring. Your life is like a mist that appears for a short time and then disappears.

Spiritual Principle

God does not merely give possessions.

He gives the capacity to use and enjoy life rightly.

XXVII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 2

1. Pleasure Without God Is Empty

The Preacher explored:

Laughter.

Wine.

Entertainment.

Desire.

None gave him lasting satisfaction.

Principle:

Pleasure can refresh the emotions temporarily, but it cannot give eternal purpose.

2. Achievement Cannot Satisfy the Soul

Solomon built:

Houses.

Vineyards.

Gardens.

Pools.

Great estates.

Yet afterward he still said:

“Chasing after the wind.”

Principle:

What you build cannot become the foundation of who you are.

3. Wealth Cannot Guarantee Contentment

Solomon possessed extraordinary riches.

Yet wealth could not give him lasting peace.

Principle:

The ability to buy something does not guarantee the ability to enjoy it.

4. Wisdom Is Better Than Folly

Wisdom is compared to light.

Foolishness is compared to darkness.

Wisdom matters.

But wisdom cannot defeat death.

Principle:

Wisdom improves life, but only God gives life eternal meaning.

5. Work Can Become an Idol

The Preacher became so consumed with the meaning of his labor that it eventually produced despair.

Principle:

Work is a gift when it serves God; it becomes a burden when it replaces God.

6. Earthly Possessions Must Eventually Be Left Behind

Someone else receives:

The money.

The property.

The business.

The possessions.

Principle:

Stewardship is temporary. Eternity is permanent.

7. True Enjoyment Comes from God

The Preacher finally recognizes:

Food is a gift.

Work is a gift.

Joy is a gift.

Contentment is a gift.

Principle:

The good life is not found merely in having gifts but in receiving them gratefully from the Giver.

XXVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT PLEASURE

Pleasure is not presented as inherently sinful.

The problem is expecting pleasure to do something it cannot do.

Pleasure can:

Refresh.

Entertain.

Comfort.

Delight.

But pleasure cannot:

Forgive sin.

Defeat death.

Give eternal life.

Provide permanent identity.

Guarantee contentment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Enjoy God's gifts.

But never ask pleasure to become your god.

XXIX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT WORK

Work can be:

Productive.

Rewarding.

Creative.

Useful.

Honorable.

But work becomes dangerous when it defines the entire person.

The Preacher learned:

You can build something impressive.

Someone else may inherit it.

You can work wisely.

Someone else may misuse the results.

You can become successful.

Death still comes.

Key Truth

Work has value when it is received as a calling and gift from God rather than treated as the source of ultimate meaning.

XXX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT WEALTH

Solomon had almost unlimited resources.

He possessed:

Gold.

Silver.

Livestock.

Servants.

Houses.

Land.

Entertainment.

Yet wealth did not give him what he was truly searching for.

Spiritual Principle

Money is useful.

But money is a poor savior.

It can purchase:

Food.

Shelter.

Transportation.

Comfort.

Entertainment.

But it cannot purchase:

Peace with God.

Eternal life.

A clear conscience.

True spiritual joy.

XXXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 2 TEACHES ABOUT CONTENTMENT

The great discovery comes near the end of the chapter.

Contentment does not come simply by increasing possessions.

The Preacher had more than almost everyone.

Still, he struggled.

True contentment comes from learning to recognize life as a gift from God.

Food becomes meaningful.

Work becomes meaningful.

Rest becomes meaningful.

Relationships become meaningful.

Ordinary life becomes meaningful.

Not because those things become eternal.

But because they are received from the eternal God.

XXXII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did the Preacher pursue pleasure?

He was testing whether pleasure could provide lasting meaning and satisfaction.

He wanted to determine what was truly worthwhile during the short span of human life.

Question 2

Did pleasure satisfy him?

No.

It produced temporary enjoyment but not lasting fulfillment.

He ultimately described it as meaningless when treated as the purpose of life.

Question 3

Why did he build so many projects?

The Preacher tested whether achievement could provide the meaning pleasure failed to give.

He built:

Houses.

Vineyards.

Gardens.

Parks.

Pools.

Large estates.

But achievement also failed to satisfy him permanently.

Question 4

Why is Ecclesiastes 2:10 important?

It shows that Solomon did not merely theorize about pleasure.

He denied himself very little.

He experienced what his eyes desired.

Therefore, his conclusion came from experience rather than speculation.

Question 5

What did Solomon conclude after examining everything he accomplished?

He concluded that it was like:

“Chasing after the wind.”

His accomplishments gave temporary satisfaction but no lasting gain under the sun.

Question 6

Is wisdom better than foolishness?

Yes.

The Preacher clearly says wisdom is better than folly just as light is better than darkness.

Wisdom helps people navigate life more effectively.

But wisdom cannot remove mortality.

Question 7

Why did death trouble the Preacher so much?

Because both the wise and foolish eventually die.

If life is viewed only under the sun, death appears to erase many of the advantages gained through wisdom and achievement.

Question 8

Why did Solomon become frustrated with his possessions?

He realized he would have to leave them to another person.

Even worse, he had no guarantee that the next person would use them wisely.

Question 9

What does Ecclesiastes 2 teach about work?

Work is good when received as a gift from God.

But work becomes empty and exhausting when it becomes the ultimate meaning of life.

Question 10

What does verse 23 teach about anxiety?

Work can become so consuming that the mind continues working even when the body is trying to rest.

This can produce sleeplessness, grief, and mental exhaustion.

Question 11

What is the turning point of the chapter?

The turning point comes when the Preacher recognizes that ordinary enjoyment comes:

“From the hand of God.”

The issue is not merely what we possess.

The issue is whether we receive it with gratitude toward God.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 2 change about our lives?

It should teach us to stop expecting:

Pleasure.

Work.

Money.

Achievement.

Wisdom.

Possessions.

To provide what only God can provide.

We should enjoy these things without worshiping them.

XXXIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 2 asks us several important questions.

Am I Trying to Find Meaning Through Pleasure?

What do I run toward when I feel empty?

Is My Work Becoming My Identity?

If my career disappeared tomorrow, would I still know who I am?

Do I Believe More Possessions Will Finally Satisfy Me?

How much is enough?

Am I Living According to Whatever My Eyes Desire?

Do I practice self-control?

Do I Confuse Success with Spiritual health?

A person can be successful and spiritually empty.

Am I Building a Legacy That Is Only Material?

What spiritual inheritance am I leaving?

Can I Enjoy Ordinary Blessings?

Food.

Work.

Rest.

Family.

Friendship.

Daily provision.

Do I receive them with gratitude?

Is My Contentment Connected to God?

Or must circumstances always improve before I can be thankful?

XXXIV. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gift Cannot Replace the Giver”

Solomon tested nearly every major path people still pursue today.

Pleasure.

Money.

Success.

Achievement.

Knowledge.

Entertainment.

Possessions.

None of these things were automatically evil.

The problem came when they were asked to provide:

Identity.

Meaning.

Security.

Fulfillment.

Eternal significance.

They could not carry that weight.

A house can shelter you.

It cannot save you.

Money can provide comfort.

It cannot forgive you.

Entertainment can distract you.

It cannot heal the soul.

Work can give you accomplishment.

It cannot defeat death.

Knowledge can inform you.

It cannot reconcile you to God.

Principle:

God's gifts become burdens when we ask them to do what only God can do.

XXXV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING AND ENJOYING

One of the most important truths in Ecclesiastes 2 is the difference between:

Having something.

And:

Enjoying something.

Solomon had much.

But possession did not guarantee contentment.

A person can have:

Money.

And worry constantly about losing it.

Food.

And lack gratitude.

A home.

And live without peace.

A career.

And resent every day of work.

Relationships.

And fail to value them.

The ability to enjoy life is itself a gift.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You do not need to own everything to enjoy life.

You need to recognize what God has already placed in your hands.

XXXVI. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 takes us through one of the most extensive experiments in human satisfaction ever described.

The Preacher tried:

Pleasure.

Laughter.

Wine.

Great projects.

Beautiful gardens.

Wealth.

Servants.

Livestock.

Music.

Entertainment.

Achievement.

Wisdom.

Work.

He had the resources to pursue nearly anything he wanted.

And for a time:

He enjoyed it.

That is important.

Ecclesiastes is not pretending that earthly pleasures never feel good.

They often do.

The problem is that the feeling does not last.

Eventually the question returns:

Is this all there is?

The Preacher stood among everything he had created and realized:

I cannot keep it forever.

I cannot guarantee what happens to it after I die.

I cannot prevent death through wisdom.

I cannot make pleasure permanent.

I cannot make possessions eternal.

Then the chapter turns.

The Preacher recognizes:

Life itself is a gift.

Food is a gift.

Work is a gift.

Enjoyment is a gift.

Wisdom is a gift.

Joy is a gift.

And these gifts become meaningful when they are received:

From the hand of God.

That changes everything.

The Christian does not need to reject every earthly blessing.

We should instead learn to receive blessings rightly.

Eat with gratitude.

Work with purpose.

Enjoy what God gives.

Share generously.

Hold possessions loosely.

Live wisely.

Remember eternity.

The question is not merely:

“What do I have?”

The greater question is:

“Who gave it to me, and am I using it for His glory?”

Do not spend your life chasing pleasure.

Do not spend your life trying to prove your worth through achievement.

Do not assume wealth will quiet the heart.

Do not allow work to steal your soul.

Do not postpone gratitude until you finally have enough.

Receive today as a gift.

Receive your work as a gift.

Receive your food as a gift.

Receive your opportunities as gifts.

Receive joy as a gift.

And above every gift:

Seek the Giver.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom You give us through Ecclesiastes.

Thank You for showing us the limitations of pleasure, wealth, achievement, and human wisdom.

Protect us from spending our lives chasing things that cannot satisfy us.

When we are tempted to believe that pleasure will make us complete, remind us that temporary enjoyment cannot fill an eternal soul.

When we are tempted to measure ourselves by our accomplishments, remind us that our value does not come from what we build.

When we become consumed with possessions, teach us to hold them loosely.

When our eyes desire more, give us self-control.

When success comes, keep us humble.

When disappointment comes, keep us faithful.

Father, protect us from making work our identity.

Help us work diligently without allowing work to become our god.

Give us wisdom to know when to labor.

Give us wisdom to know when to rest.

Give us hearts that trust You with what happens after our work is finished.

Teach us to build a spiritual legacy, not merely a material one.

Help us remember that we cannot take earthly possessions with us when this life ends.

Give us an eternal perspective.

Thank You for the ordinary blessings of life.

Thank You for food.

Thank You for work.

Thank You for rest.

Thank You for relationships.

Thank You for opportunities.

Thank You for moments of joy.

Teach us to receive these blessings from Your hand.

Give us the ability to enjoy what You provide without making Your gifts into idols.

Teach us contentment.

Teach us gratitude.

Teach us generosity.

Teach us wisdom.

Teach us joy.

Help us remember that the gift can never replace the Giver.

May everything we have lead us closer to You rather than farther away.

May our work honor You.

May our possessions serve Your purposes.

May our wisdom remain humble.

May our enjoyment produce thanksgiving.

And when this earthly life is finished, may we be able to say that we did not spend our days chasing the wind.

We received Your gifts.

We served Your purposes.

And above all:

We sought You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“There is nothing better for a man than to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I saw, comes from the hand of God.” — Ecclesiastes 2:24

Central Truth

Pleasure, wealth, wisdom, achievement, and labor cannot provide lasting fulfillment by themselves; true enjoyment comes when life and its ordinary blessings are received gratefully from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 2 in One Sentence

The Preacher tests pleasure, wealth, achievement, wisdom, and work and discovers that none can overcome mortality or satisfy the soul, but food, labor, wisdom, and joy become meaningful gifts when they are received from God with gratitude.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 — A Time for Everything Under Heaven

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 is one of the most familiar chapters in the entire book.

It opens with the declaration:

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.”

The Preacher now turns from the search for meaning in pleasure, work, and wisdom to the mystery of time.

Human beings live inside time.

We experience:

Beginnings.

Endings.

Joy.

Sorrow.

Gain.

Loss.

Building.

Breaking.

Speaking.

Silence.

War.

Peace.

Yet behind all these changing seasons stands the sovereign hand of God.

The Preacher teaches that life is not made up of one permanent condition.

No season lasts forever.

There is:

A time to be born.

A time to die.

A time to weep.

A time to laugh.

A time to mourn.

A time to dance.

A time to speak.

A time to remain silent.

This chapter also introduces one of the deepest statements in Ecclesiastes:

“He has also set eternity in the human heart.”

Human beings know that there is something beyond the moment.

We sense that life should have meaning larger than:

Work.

Possessions.

Pleasure.

Success.

Survival.

Yet we cannot fully understand everything God is doing.

That tension runs throughout the chapter.

We desire to understand the whole plan.

God often gives us only the present season.

The chapter also confronts injustice.

The Preacher sees wickedness where judgment should exist.

He sees corruption where righteousness should be found.

Yet he concludes that injustice will not have the final word.

God will judge both:

The righteous.

And:

The wicked.

Ecclesiastes 3 therefore combines:

Time.

Providence.

Mystery.

Joy.

Judgment.

Mortality.

And trust.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 3 is:

God appoints the seasons of life, gives meaning to each moment, places eternity within the human heart, and will ultimately judge every work according to His perfect time.

I. A TIME FOR EVERY PURPOSE

Ecclesiastes 3:1 — Every Season Has Its Time

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.”

This verse introduces the entire section.

Life is seasonal.

Nothing stays exactly the same forever.

There are seasons when God opens doors.

There are seasons when doors close.

There are seasons of:

Growth.

Waiting.

Joy.

Grief.

Activity.

Rest.

Beginnings.

Endings.

The challenge is learning how to live faithfully in the season God has allowed.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 8:6

Every matter has an appropriate time and proper way to be handled, even though the troubles of life can weigh heavily upon a person.

Galatians 4:4

But when the exact time appointed by God had fully arrived, God sent His Son into the world, born of a woman and born under the law.

Acts 1:7

Jesus told them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has placed under His own authority.”

Spiritual Principle

God works according to His timing, not ours.

Key Truth

A difficult season is not necessarily a permanent season.

II. A TIME TO BE BORN AND A TIME TO DIE

Ecclesiastes 3:2 — The Boundaries of Human Life

“A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.”

Human life has a beginning.

Human life also has an ending.

We do not control either one completely.

Birth reminds us that life is a gift.

Death reminds us that life is temporary.

The same principle applies to planting.

There is a proper time to put something into the ground.

There is also a time to remove what has been planted.

Cross References

Job 14:5

A person's days are determined by You. You know how many months he will live, and You have established limits that he cannot move beyond.

Psalms 90:10

The length of our lives may be seventy years, or eighty if we are especially strong, yet even those years are filled with labor and sorrow. They pass quickly, and soon we are gone.

Jeremiah 1:10

God said, “Today I have appointed you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, and also to build and to plant.”

Spiritual Principle

Life has boundaries that remind us we are not God.

Application

Because our days are limited, they should be used wisely.

III. A TIME TO KILL AND A TIME TO HEAL

Ecclesiastes 3:3 — Destruction and Restoration

“A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build up.”

The Preacher describes opposite realities.

There are times of judgment.

There are times of healing.

There are times when something must be removed.

There are times when something must be rebuilt.

This does not glorify violence.

It recognizes the reality of life in a fallen world.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 32:39

God says, “Understand that I alone am God. There is no other god beside Me. I give life, and I bring death. I wound, and I heal, and no one can rescue from My hand.”

Hosea 6:1

Come, let us return to the Lord. He has allowed us to be torn, but He will heal us. He has wounded us, but He will bind up our injuries.

2 Kings 20:5

The Lord said, “I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you, and you will go up to the house of the Lord.”

Spiritual Principle

The God who allows seasons of breaking is also the God who brings seasons of healing.

IV. A TIME TO WEEP AND A TIME TO LAUGH

Ecclesiastes 3:4 — Sorrow and Joy

“A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.”

The Bible does not teach that faithful believers must always appear cheerful.

There is a time to cry.

A time to grieve.

A time to mourn.

But sorrow is not the only season.

There is also:

Laughter.

Celebration.

Joy.

Dancing.

Faith does not eliminate emotion.

Faith learns to bring every emotion before God.

Cross References

Romans 12:15

Celebrate with those who are rejoicing, and share the sorrow of those who are weeping.

Luke 6:21

Blessed are you who weep now, because a day will come when you will laugh.

Psalms 30:11

You turned my mourning into dancing. You removed my clothing of sorrow and wrapped me in joy.

Spiritual Principle

God is present in both tears and laughter.

Application

Do not rush people through grief.

And do not feel guilty when God brings joy after sorrow.

V. A TIME TO SCATTER AND A TIME TO GATHER

Ecclesiastes 3:5 — Separation and Embrace

“A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.”

Some seasons bring people together.

Other seasons require distance.

There are times to gather.

There are times to separate.

There are times for affection.

There are times for restraint.

Wisdom recognizes the difference.

Cross References

2 Kings 3:25

The soldiers destroyed the cities, filled the good fields with stones, stopped the springs, and cut down the good trees until only the fortified city remained.

Genesis 33:4

Esau ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and both men wept.

1 Corinthians 7:5

Do not deprive one another except by mutual agreement for a short time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that temptation does not gain an advantage over you.

Spiritual Principle

Love sometimes draws near.

Wisdom sometimes steps back.

VI. A TIME TO SEEK AND A TIME TO LOSE

Ecclesiastes 3:6 — Holding and Releasing

“A time to seek and a time to lose, a time to keep and a time to throw away.”

Not everything should be pursued forever.

Not everything should be kept forever.

Some things are worth searching for.

Other things must be released.

Maturity requires knowing when to hold on and when to let go.

Cross References

Matthew 16:25

Whoever tries to preserve his life at all costs will ultimately lose it, but whoever gives up his life for My sake will truly find it.

Philippians 3:8

I consider everything else a loss compared with the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have let go of all other things and count them as worthless so that I may gain Christ.

Job 1:21

Job said, “I came into this world with nothing, and I will leave it with nothing. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.”

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness sometimes means keeping.

Faithfulness sometimes means releasing.

VII. A TIME TO BE SILENT AND A TIME TO SPEAK

Ecclesiastes 3:7 — Wisdom in Words

“A time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak.”

Words matter.

Silence can be wise.

Speech can also be necessary.

The challenge is discerning which one the moment requires.

Some people speak when they should remain silent.

Others remain silent when truth needs to be spoken.

Wisdom knows the difference.

Cross References

Joel 2:13

Do not merely tear your clothing as an outward sign of sorrow. Let your heart be broken before God instead. Return to the Lord your God, because He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, full of faithful love, and willing to show mercy.

Proverbs 17:28

Even a fool may appear wise when he remains silent, and keeping his mouth closed can make him appear understanding.

Ecclesiastes 5:2

Do not be quick with your mouth or careless with your words before God. God is in heaven, and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

Spiritual Principle

Knowing when not to speak is part of wisdom.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Not every thought needs to become a sentence.

Not every silence should remain silent.

VIII. A TIME TO LOVE AND A TIME TO HATE

Ecclesiastes 3:8 — War and Peace

“A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”

Love is central to God’s character.

But Scripture also recognizes righteous opposition to evil.

To love what is good requires rejecting what is evil.

The verse also acknowledges the realities of war and peace in human history.

Cross References

1 John 4:8

The person who does not love does not truly know God, because God is love.

Psalms 120:7

I am a person who desires peace, but when I speak for peace, others are ready for war.

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are those who work for peace, because they will be called children of God.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical love does not mean approving everything.

It means loving what God loves and opposing what destroys.

IX. WHAT DOES HUMAN LABOR GAIN?

Ecclesiastes 3:9 — The Question Returns

“What do workers gain from their toil?”

The Preacher returns to one of the major questions of Ecclesiastes.

What is the lasting profit of labor?

People work.

Build.

Achieve.

Acquire.

Then time moves on.

If work is disconnected from God, it cannot provide lasting meaning.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:3

What lasting profit does a person really gain from all the work he performs under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 5:16

This too is a painful reality: just as a person came into this world, so he will leave it. What lasting advantage does he gain from working so hard for things he cannot carry away?

Mark 8:36

What benefit would it bring a person to gain the entire world but lose his own soul?

Spiritual Principle

Labor is meaningful only when placed inside a larger eternal purpose.

X. THE BURDEN PLACED UPON HUMANITY

Ecclesiastes 3:10 — Life's Difficult Assignment

“I have seen the burden God has placed on mankind.”

Life includes responsibility.

Work.

Pain.

Questions.

Limits.

The human condition after the fall includes difficulty.

The Preacher recognizes that life itself can feel burdensome.

Cross References

Genesis 3:19

You will eat your food through hard labor and sweat until you return to the ground from which you were taken. You came from dust, and to dust you will return.

Ecclesiastes 1:13

I devoted myself to studying and examining with wisdom everything done under heaven. I saw that God has allowed humanity to carry a difficult burden in this life.

Job 5:7

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

Spiritual Principle

The difficulty of life should remind us that this world is not yet fully restored.

XI. GOD MAKES EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME

Ecclesiastes 3:11 — Eternity in the Human Heart

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fully grasp what God has done from beginning to end.”

This is one of the deepest verses in Ecclesiastes.

God sees the whole picture.

We see pieces.

He understands:

The beginning.

The middle.

The end.

We usually understand only the present moment.

The verse also says:

God has placed eternity in the human heart.

Human beings sense that life should be larger than the moment.

We long for permanence.

Meaning.

Justice.

Eternal significance.

Yet we cannot fully understand the complete plan of God.

Cross References

Romans 8:28

We know that God works through all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Habakkuk 2:3

The vision is waiting for its appointed time. It is moving toward its fulfillment and will not prove false. Even if it seems delayed, continue waiting, because it will certainly come at the right time.

Romans 11:33

How deep are the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge! His decisions are beyond our ability to fully trace, and His ways are greater than human understanding.

Spiritual Principle

God's timing may be mysterious.

It is never careless.

Key Truth

What looks unfinished to us may still be beautiful in God's appointed time.

XII. REJOICE AND DO GOOD

Ecclesiastes 3:12 — Living Faithfully in the Present

"I know that there is nothing better for people than to rejoice and do good while they live."

Since we cannot control every season, the Preacher gives practical wisdom.

Rejoice.

Do good.

Live faithfully today.

Do not spend life waiting for the perfect season.

Serve God in the season you have.

Cross References

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice.

Deuteronomy 12:7

There before the Lord your God, you and your households will eat and rejoice in everything you have worked for, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

Nehemiah 8:10

Nehemiah told the people, “Go and enjoy good food and sweet drink, and share with those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not remain in sorrow, because the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Spiritual Principle

Joy and goodness are proper responses to God’s gifts.

XIII. THE ABILITY TO ENJOY WORK IS GOD’S GIFT

Ecclesiastes 3:13 — Satisfaction in Labor

“That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their labor—this is the gift of God.”

The Preacher repeats an important theme.

Enjoyment is not merely produced by possessions.

It is a gift from God.

Two people can possess the same amount.

One may live gratefully.

The other may live miserably.

The difference is not always the possession.

Sometimes it is the heart.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better than for a person to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. I saw that the ability to enjoy these things comes from the hand of God.

1 Timothy 6:17

Tell those who are rich in this present world not to become proud or place their hope in uncertain riches, but to trust God, who generously gives us everything we need to enjoy.

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father, who created the heavenly lights and does not change like shifting shadows.

Spiritual Principle

Gratitude turns ordinary life into worship.

XIV. GOD’S WORK ENDURES FOREVER

Ecclesiastes 3:14 — Nothing Can Be Added or Removed

“I know that everything God does will endure forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does this so that people will fear Him.”

Human work fades.

God’s work endures.

Human plans change.

God’s purpose stands.

This contrast should create reverence.

We are temporary.

God is eternal.

We are limited.

God is sovereign.

Cross References**Numbers 23:19**

God is not a man who lies, nor a human being who changes His mind like sinful people do. When He speaks, He acts. When He promises, He fulfills it.

Psalms 33:11

The plans of the Lord stand forever, and the purposes of His heart continue through every generation.

Psalms 33:8

Let the whole earth fear the Lord, and let everyone who lives in the world stand in reverence before Him.

Spiritual Principle

God's sovereignty should produce worship, not arrogance.

XV. GOD RULES OVER HISTORY

Ecclesiastes 3:15 — Past, Present, and Future

“Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past into account.”

Human history contains repeated patterns.

But God is not trapped inside those patterns.

He sees all time.

Nothing disappears from His knowledge.

He remembers what humanity forgets.

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.

Ecclesiastes 6:10

Whatever exists has already been named, and what human beings are has already been made known. No person can successfully argue with One who is greater than he is.

Isaiah 46:9

Remember what happened long ago. I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is no one like Me.

Spiritual Principle

History may repeat itself, but history is never outside God's knowledge.

XVI. WICKEDNESS IN THE PLACE OF JUSTICE

Ecclesiastes 3:16 — Corruption Under the Sun

“Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.”

The Preacher is realistic.

Courts can become corrupt.

Leaders can become unjust.

Institutions created to protect righteousness can become places of wickedness.

Ecclesiastes does not pretend that earthly justice always works.

Cross References

Isaiah 5:7

The Lord expected justice from His people, but instead He saw bloodshed. He looked for righteousness, but instead He heard the cries of people who were suffering.

Amos 5:7

You turn justice into bitterness and throw righteousness down to the ground.

Micah 3:9

Listen to this, leaders of Jacob and rulers of Israel: you hate justice and twist everything that should be straight.

Spiritual Principle

Human injustice does not mean divine justice has failed.

XVII. GOD WILL JUDGE BOTH RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED

Ecclesiastes 3:17 — An Appointed Time for Judgment

“I said in my heart, ‘God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time appointed for every purpose and every work.’”

This is the answer to verse 16.

Earthly courts may fail.

God's judgment will not.

The righteous and wicked will both stand before Him.

No injustice is permanently hidden.

Cross References

Psalm 96:13

The Lord is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with perfect faithfulness.

Acts 17:31

God has appointed a day when He will judge the world with justice through the Man He has chosen, and He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead.

Romans 2:16

This judgment will take place on the day when God, through Jesus Christ, judges the hidden things in human hearts, just as the gospel declares.

Spiritual Principle

The final court is not on earth.

It is before God.

XVIII. HUMAN PRIDE MUST BE HUMBLLED

Ecclesiastes 3:18 — Like the Beasts

“I also said in my heart, ‘God tests the hearts of men so that they may see they are but like the beasts.’”

The Preacher is emphasizing mortality.

Human beings can become proud.

We build.

Rule.

Accumulate.

Plan.

But physically, death comes to humanity just as it comes to animals.

This should humble us.

Cross References

Psalm 49:12

A person may live with honor and wealth, but he cannot remain on earth forever. In death he is like the animals that perish.

Psalm 73:22

When I failed to understand Your ways, I was foolish and ignorant before You, behaving like an animal without understanding.

2 Peter 2:12

Some people behave like animals acting only by natural instinct, speaking against things they do not understand. Their corrupt way of life will eventually bring destruction upon them.

Spiritual Principle

Mortality destroys human arrogance.

XIX. PEOPLE AND ANIMALS BOTH DIE

Ecclesiastes 3:19 — The Same Breath

**“For what happens to people also happens to animals—one dies just like the other.
They all have the same breath; so man has no advantage over the beast. All is vanity.”**

From the earthly viewpoint, both human and animal bodies die.

Both breathe.

Both stop breathing.

The Preacher is not saying human beings have no spiritual distinction.

He is emphasizing physical mortality.

Cross References

Psalm 49:20

A person who possesses honor but lacks spiritual understanding is like the animals that perish.

Psalm 39:5

You have made my days very short, and my lifetime is almost nothing compared with You. Every person, no matter how strong he appears, is only a passing breath.

Ecclesiastes 2:14

The wise person sees where he is going, while the fool walks in darkness. Yet I realized that the same earthly end comes to both of them.

Spiritual Principle

Physical life is temporary for every creature.

XX. ALL RETURN TO DUST

Ecclesiastes 3:20 — The Common Destination of the Body

“All go to the same place; all come from the dust, and to dust all return.”

Death returns the body to the earth.

This echoes Genesis.

Human beings were formed from dust.

The body eventually returns to dust.

Cross References

Genesis 3:19

You will eat your food by the sweat of your face until you return to the ground, because you were taken from it. You are dust, and to dust you will return.

Job 34:15

If God withdrew His life-giving breath, all humanity would die together and every person would return to dust.

Psalms 104:29

When You hide Your face, creatures are terrified. When You take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

Spiritual Principle

Death reminds us that the body is temporary.

XXI. THE QUESTION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Ecclesiastes 3:21 — What Happens Beyond Death?

“Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?”

The Preacher is speaking from the limited viewpoint of observation under the sun.

He raises the question that physical observation alone cannot answer.

What happens after death?

Later biblical revelation provides greater clarity.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 12:7

Then the body returns to the earth from which it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Job 34:14

If God decided to withdraw His Spirit and gather back the breath He gave,

Zechariah 12:1

This is the message of the Lord, the One who stretched out the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and formed the human spirit within each person.

Spiritual Principle

Human observation cannot answer every question about eternity.

We need revelation from God.

XXII. REJOICE IN THE WORK GOD HAS GIVEN

Ecclesiastes 3:22 — Receive the Present Portion

“So I concluded that there is nothing better for a man than to rejoice in his work, for that is his portion. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?”

The Preacher returns to practical wisdom.

We cannot see everything that will happen after us.

We cannot control every future event.

Therefore:

Receive the present faithfully.

Work.

Rejoice.

Give thanks.

Trust God with what comes next.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better than for a person to eat, drink, and enjoy the good that comes from his labor. I saw that this ability to enjoy life comes from God's hand.

Ecclesiastes 5:18

I have seen that it is good and proper for a person to eat, drink, and enjoy the results of all his work during the short life God has given him, because this is his portion.

Ecclesiastes 6:12

Who truly knows what is best for a person during the few and fleeting days of his life that pass like a shadow? And who can tell him what will happen on earth after he is gone?

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness means living well today while trusting God with tomorrow.

XXIII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 3

1. Life Is Seasonal

No earthly condition lasts forever.

There is:

A time to begin.

A time to end.

A time to laugh.

A time to cry.

Principle:

Do not treat one season as though it defines your entire life.

2. God Controls the Larger Timetable

Human beings live inside time.

God rules over time.

Principle:

God is never early, never late, and never surprised.

3. Eternity Is Written into the Human Heart

People sense that life should mean more than survival.

We long for:

Permanence.

Justice.

Meaning.

Eternity.

Principle:

The desire for eternity points beyond this temporary world.

4. We Cannot Understand Everything God Is Doing

God sees the whole story.

We usually see one page.

Principle:

Faith trusts God where understanding reaches its limit.

5. Ordinary Joy Is a Gift

Food.

Work.

Friendship.

Daily provision.

These become meaningful when received with gratitude.

Principle:

Enjoyment is not merely found in having more but in receiving what God gives.

6. God Will Judge Injustice

Earthly systems may fail.

God's judgment will not.

Principle:

No evil escapes the final justice of God.

7. Mortality Should Produce Humility

We came from dust.

Our bodies return to dust.

Principle:

Remembering death can teach us how to live wisely.

XXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 3 TEACHES ABOUT TIME

Time belongs to God.

Human beings try to control:

Schedules.

Deadlines.

Plans.

Seasons.

Outcomes.

But many parts of life remain outside our control.

Birth.

Death.

Loss.

Unexpected change.

The actions of others.

The future.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faith is not controlling every season.

Faith is trusting God through every season.

XXV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 3 TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S PROVIDENCE

God is not presented as distant from human history.

He is active.

He appoints times.

He gives gifts.

He judges.

He works beyond human understanding.

He brings purpose through changing seasons.

Key Truth

Providence means that the events of life are never outside God's ultimate rule.

XXVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 3 TEACHES ABOUT ETERNITY

Human beings are different from creatures who live only by instinct.

We ask:

Why?

What happens after death?

What lasts?

What is the purpose?

Why should justice matter?

Why does the human heart long for permanence?

Ecclesiastes says:

God has placed eternity in the human heart.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

We long for forever because we were made by the eternal God.

XXVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 3 TEACHES ABOUT JUSTICE

The Preacher does not ignore injustice.

He sees corruption.

He sees wickedness in places where righteousness should exist.

But he refuses to conclude that evil has won.

He says:

God will judge.

Spiritual Principle

Delayed justice is not the same thing as absent justice.

XXVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does it mean that there is a season for everything?

It means human life contains different periods and circumstances.

No one season describes the whole of life.

God permits different times for different purposes.

Question 2

Does Ecclesiastes 3 teach fatalism?

No.

The chapter teaches divine sovereignty, not meaningless fate.

God rules over times and seasons with purpose.

Question 3

Why does the chapter mention so many opposites?

The opposites show the full range of human experience.

Life includes:

Birth and death.

Joy and sorrow.

Gain and loss.

Speech and silence.

War and peace.

Question 4

What does “eternity in the human heart” mean?

It means human beings possess an awareness that life reaches beyond temporary earthly experience.

We long for lasting meaning and permanence.

Question 5

Why can't we fully understand what God is doing?

Because human knowledge is limited.

God sees all of history at once.

We see only a small part.

Question 6

What does verse 13 teach about ordinary life?

It teaches that eating, drinking, working, and enjoying life are gifts from God.

Ordinary blessings should be received with gratitude.

Question 7

Why does God's work produce fear or reverence?

Because His work is permanent and cannot be improved or overturned by human beings.

This should humble us before Him.

Question 8

What does verse 16 teach about human institutions?

It teaches that even places designed for justice can become corrupt.

Human institutions are not perfect.

Question 9

What hope does verse 17 provide?

God will judge.

Human injustice will not have the final word.

Question 10

Why does the Preacher compare humans to animals?

He is emphasizing physical mortality.

Both humans and animals eventually die and return to the earth.

Question 11

Does Ecclesiastes 3 deny life after death?

No.

Verse 21 raises the question from the viewpoint of observation.

Later in Ecclesiastes, the Preacher states that the human spirit returns to God who gave it.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 3 change about the way we live?

It should teach us to:

Trust God's timing.

Receive each season faithfully.

Enjoy His gifts.

Do good.

Remember eternity.

Fear God.

Trust His judgment.

Live humbly.

XXIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 3 asks several searching questions.

Am I Fighting a Season God Has Allowed?

What would faithfulness look like in this season?

Do I Believe God's Timing Is Better Than Mine?

Can I wait without becoming bitter?

Am I Trying to Understand Everything Before I Trust God?

Faith often begins before full understanding arrives.

Am I Enjoying the Gifts God Has Already Given Me?

Or am I constantly waiting for the next season?

Do I Live with Eternity in Mind?

Are my priorities shaped only by this life?

Do I Trust God When Justice Seems Delayed?

Do I believe He will ultimately judge rightly?

Am I Living Humbly?

Do I remember that my days are limited?

XXX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Judge the Whole Story by One Season”

A season of grief is not the whole story.

A season of waiting is not the whole story.

A season of loss is not the whole story.

A season of joy is not the whole story either.

Every earthly season changes.

Only God remains constant.

We often make the mistake of saying:

“This is my life.”

When what we really mean is:

“This is my present season.”

There is a difference.

Principle:

Never confuse a temporary season with God’s permanent purpose.

XXXI. GOD’S TIMING AND HUMAN IMPATIENCE

Human beings often want:

Immediate answers.

Immediate healing.

Immediate justice.

Immediate success.

Immediate clarity.

But Scripture repeatedly reveals that God works through appointed times.

The Messiah came:

At the appointed time.

Judgment comes:

At the appointed time.

Promises are fulfilled:

At the appointed time.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Waiting does not mean God has forgotten.

Delay does not mean denial.

XXXII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 teaches us to see life differently.

Life is not one unchanging condition.

It moves through seasons.

Some seasons are welcomed.

Others are painful.

There is:

A time to laugh.

A time to weep.

A time to gain.

A time to lose.

A time to speak.

A time to remain silent.

A time to build.

A time to tear down.

If we demand that every season feel the same, we will constantly fight reality.

The better question is not:

“Why can’t this season be different?”

The better question is:

“Lord, how should I live faithfully in this season?”

Ecclesiastes also reminds us:

We do not see the entire picture.

God does.

We often judge a situation from the middle.

God sees:

The beginning.

The middle.

The end.

Something that seems painful today may eventually become part of something beautiful in God's appointed time.

That does not make pain unreal.

It means pain is not necessarily purposeless.

God has also placed eternity in our hearts.

That is why temporary things never completely satisfy us.

We were made for more than:

Money.

Work.

Success.

Pleasure.

Possessions.

We were made to know the eternal God.

The chapter also teaches us to enjoy the present.

Eat.

Drink.

Work.

Do good.

Rejoice.

Receive the ordinary gifts of God.

Do not miss today because you are obsessed with tomorrow.

Do not miss this season because you are waiting for the next one.

And when injustice troubles you:

Remember God will judge.

When death humbles you:

Remember your life is in God's hands.

When the future confuses you:

Remember God already sees it.

When your season changes:

Remember God has not changed.

Therefore:

Trust Him in the beginning.

Trust Him in the ending.

Trust Him when you laugh.

Trust Him when you weep.

Trust Him when you gain.

Trust Him when you lose.

Trust Him when you understand.

Trust Him when you do not.

There is a time for everything.

And God is Lord over every time.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that our lives are in Your hands.

Thank You that You are Lord over every time and every season.

Teach us not to fear the changing seasons of life.

When a season begins, help us receive it faithfully.

When a season ends, help us release it without bitterness.

When we rejoice, keep us grateful.

When we weep, remain near to us.

When we gain, keep us humble.

When we lose, keep us trusting.

When we need to speak, give us courage and wisdom.

When we need to remain silent, give us restraint.

When we are called to build, give us strength.

When something must be torn down, give us discernment.

Father, thank You that You make everything beautiful in its proper time.

We confess that we do not always understand Your timing.

We often want immediate answers.

Immediate healing.

Immediate change.

Immediate justice.

Immediate direction.

Teach us to wait.

Teach us to trust.

Remind us that delay does not mean You have forgotten us.

Thank You for placing eternity in our hearts.

Keep us from living as though this temporary life is all that exists.

Help us see everything through the perspective of eternity.

Thank You for the ordinary gifts of life.

Thank You for food.

Thank You for work.

Thank You for rest.

Thank You for family.

Thank You for friendship.

Thank You for moments of laughter.

Thank You even for the lessons learned through sorrow.

Teach us to enjoy what You give without worshiping the gift.

Father, we see injustice in this world.

Sometimes wickedness appears where righteousness should exist.

Remind us that You see everything.

Remind us that You will judge rightly.

Keep us from becoming bitter while we wait for Your justice.

Help us live humbly.

Our lives are short.

Our bodies return to dust.

Teach us to number our days wisely.

Help us use the time You give us for Your glory.

And in every season:

Keep us faithful.

In every change:

Keep us grounded.

In every mystery:

Keep us trusting.

In every blessing:

Keep us thankful.

In every trial:

Keep us near to You.

You are God over every season.

And we place our times in Your hands.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

**“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fully grasp what God has done from beginning to end.” —
Ecclesiastes 3:11**

Central Truth

God sovereignly appoints the seasons of life, gives meaning to ordinary blessings, places eternity within the human heart, and will bring every purpose and every work into His perfect judgment at the proper time.

Ecclesiastes 3 in One Sentence

The Preacher teaches that every part of life has its appointed season under God's sovereign rule, that human beings long for eternity without fully understanding God's entire plan, and that wisdom means receiving His gifts gratefully, trusting His timing, and living in view of His final judgment.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4 — The Vanity of Oppression, Toil, and Loneliness

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4 turns from the seasons of life to the painful realities of human society.

The Preacher looks around and sees:

Oppression.

Tears.

Power abused.

Envy.

Exhausting labor.

Loneliness.

Isolation.

Political instability.

Fading popularity.

This chapter is deeply realistic.

It does not describe life as we wish it were.

It describes life as it often is.

The Preacher sees people suffering under those who possess power.

He sees workers driven by rivalry and comparison.

He sees one person working endlessly with no family and no one to share life with.

He sees leaders rise to power and eventually lose the support of the people.

Yet in the middle of this sobering chapter, one of the most encouraging truths in Ecclesiastes appears:

“Two are better than one.”

Companionship brings:

Help.

Strength.

Warmth.

Protection.

Encouragement.

The chapter therefore places two great realities side by side.

Human beings can make life miserable through oppression, envy, selfish ambition, and isolation.

But relationships built on mutual support can make life stronger.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 4 is:

Life becomes empty when power, work, wealth, and fame are pursued selfishly, but God has designed human beings for justice, contentment, companionship, and mutual support.

I. THE OPPRESSION OF THE POWERLESS

Ecclesiastes 4:1 — Tears Without a Comforter

“Again I looked and saw all the oppression done under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, but they had no comforter. On the side of their oppressors there was power—but still they had no comforter.”

The Preacher looks at human society and sees injustice.

The problem is not merely suffering.

The problem is that the suffering is caused by people who possess power.

The oppressed cry.

The oppressors control.

And no one steps forward to comfort those who are hurting.

This is one of the darkest pictures in Ecclesiastes.

Cross References

Psalm 12:5

The Lord says, “Because the poor are being mistreated and the needy are crying out in pain, I will now rise up and give them the safety they have been longing for.”

Psalm 72:4

May the king defend the poor among the people, rescue the children of the needy, and crush those who oppress them.

James 5:4

Look! The wages you held back from the workers who harvested your fields are crying out against you, and the cries of those workers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Spiritual Principle

God sees suffering that powerful people ignore.

Application

Never use:

Position.

Money.

Authority.

Influence.

Power.

To take advantage of someone weaker.

II. THE PREACHER SEES DEATH AS RELIEF FROM OPPRESSION

Ecclesiastes 4:2 — Better Than the Living

“So I declared that the dead, who are already gone, are better off than the living, who are still alive.”

The Preacher is not praising death as something desirable in itself.

He is describing how unbearable oppression can become.

From the viewpoint of life under the sun, death appears to bring an end to earthly suffering.

This verse shows the emotional weight of injustice.

Cross References

Job 3:17

In death, wicked people stop causing trouble, and those who are exhausted finally find rest.

Job 3:21

Some people long for death, but it does not come. They search for it more eagerly than people search for hidden treasure.

Revelation 14:13

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this down: Blessed from now on are those who die belonging to the Lord.” The Spirit says, “Yes, they will rest from their labor, and their faithful works will follow them.”

Spiritual Principle

Suffering can become so severe that a person longs for relief more than continued earthly life.

III. BETTER NOT TO HAVE SEEN THE EVIL

Ecclesiastes 4:3 — The Horror of Human Wickedness

“But better than both is the one who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil done under the sun.”

The Preacher continues describing the horror of oppression.

He says that from the limited viewpoint of life under the sun, the person who has never entered this broken world has not had to witness its evil.

Again, this expresses grief over human wickedness.

Cross References

Job 3:16

Why was I not like a child who was never born, hidden away and never brought into the light?

Jeremiah 20:18

Why did I ever come out of the womb only to see trouble and sorrow and spend my days in shame?

Matthew 26:24

The Son of Man will go just as Scripture has said about Him, but terrible judgment awaits the man who betrays Him. It would have been better for that man if he had never been born.

Spiritual Principle

Sin does not merely affect the sinner.

It creates suffering that spreads into the lives of others.

IV. ENVY CAN DRIVE HARD WORK

Ecclesiastes 4:4 — Rivalry Behind Achievement

“Then I observed that all hard work and skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless—a chasing after the wind.”

The Preacher examines motivation.

Why do people work so hard?

Sometimes the answer is:

Envy.

Comparison.

Competition.

One person sees what another has and says:

“I want more.”

“I want to be better.”

“I want what they have.”

Hard work can be good.

But good work driven by envy becomes spiritually unhealthy.

Cross References

Genesis 26:14

Isaac became very wealthy, owning many flocks, herds, and servants, and the Philistines became jealous of him.

Genesis 37:11

Joseph’s brothers became jealous of him, but his father continued thinking carefully about the things Joseph had said.

James 3:16

Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, confusion and every kind of evil behavior soon follow.

Spiritual Principle

Success becomes empty when its main purpose is to defeat someone else.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Comparison can turn productive work into restless striving.

V. LAZINESS DESTROYS THE FOOL

Ecclesiastes 4:5 — Folded Hands

“The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.”

The Preacher does not recommend laziness as the solution to competitive work.

There are two extremes.

One is:

Working endlessly from envy.

The other is:

Refusing to work at all.

The fool folds his hands.

His inactivity eventually destroys him.

Cross References

Proverbs 6:10

“A little sleep, a little more rest, a little folding of the hands to relax”—

Proverbs 24:33

“A little sleep, a little more rest, a little folding of the hands to relax”—

Proverbs 19:15

Laziness can put a person into a deep sleep, and an idle person will eventually suffer hunger.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment is not laziness.

Peace does not mean refusing responsibility.

VI. ONE HANDFUL WITH PEACE

Ecclesiastes 4:6 — Contentment Over Restless Striving

“Better is one handful with peace than two handfuls with toil and chasing the wind.”

This verse gives balance.

It is better to possess less with peace than to possess more with constant exhaustion.

More is not always better.

More money can bring:

More responsibility.

More worry.

More competition.

More pressure.

The Preacher says:

One handful with rest is better.

Cross References

Proverbs 15:16

It is better to have little while fearing the Lord than to have great wealth along with trouble and anxiety.

Proverbs 17:1

A dry piece of bread eaten in peace is better than a house full of feasting where there is constant conflict.

1 Timothy 6:6

Godliness combined with contentment is a great kind of wealth.

Spiritual Principle

Peace is worth more than possessions purchased with constant anxiety.

Key Truth

Enough with contentment is better than abundance without peace.

VII. ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF MEANINGLESS LIVING

Ecclesiastes 4:7 — Emptiness Under the Sun

“Again I saw something meaningless under the sun.”

The Preacher introduces another example.

This time the problem is not oppression.

It is isolation.

A person can work endlessly and still have no one with whom to share the results.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I examined all the things people do under the sun, and I saw that everything was temporary and like trying to catch the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:11

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

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.

Spiritual Principle

A full schedule can still hide an empty life.

VIII. THE MAN WHO WORKS ALONE

Ecclesiastes 4:8 — Rich but Never Satisfied

“There was a man all alone—he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his labor, yet his eyes were never satisfied with riches. He never asked, ‘For whom am I working, and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?’ This too is vanity—a miserable task.”

This is one of the saddest pictures in the chapter.

The man has:

No son.

No brother.

No companion.

Yet he works constantly.

He accumulates wealth.

But never asks the obvious question:

Who is all this for?

He sacrifices enjoyment for accumulation.

His eyes are never satisfied.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 5:10

The person who loves money will never be satisfied with money, and the person who loves wealth will never be satisfied with increased income. This too is empty.

Luke 12:15

Jesus warned them, “Be careful and guard yourselves against every kind of greed, because a person’s life does not consist in how many possessions he owns.”

1 Timothy 6:9

Those who are determined to become rich fall into temptation and traps and into many foolish and harmful desires that pull people toward ruin and destruction.

Spiritual Principle

Wealth is especially empty when there is no one to love, serve, or share it with.

Application

Ask:

Am I building a life?

Or merely building an account?

IX. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Ecclesiastes 4:9 — The Value of Partnership

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor.”

The chapter now moves from isolation to companionship.

Two people working together can often accomplish more than one person alone.

Partnership brings:

Strength.

Encouragement.

Shared responsibility.

Accountability.

Support.

Cross References

Genesis 2:18

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable helper and companion for him.”

Proverbs 27:17

Just as iron sharpens iron, one person can sharpen and strengthen another person.

Matthew 18:20

Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them.”

Spiritual Principle

God did not design human beings for unnecessary isolation.

X. A COMPANION HELPS YOU RISE

Ecclesiastes 4:10 — Help When You Fall

“If one falls, the other can lift him up. But pity the one who falls and has no one to help him up.”

Everyone falls at some point.

Sometimes physically.

Sometimes emotionally.

Sometimes spiritually.

Sometimes through disappointment.

A faithful companion helps lift the fallen person.

Cross References

Galatians 6:2

Help carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 10:24

Let us carefully consider how we can encourage one another toward love and good works.

Isaiah 41:6

Each person helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong and take courage."

Spiritual Principle

Strong relationships are revealed most clearly when someone falls.

Application

Do not merely ask:

"Who will help me?"

Also ask:

"Whom can I help stand again?"

XI. COMPANIONSHIP PROVIDES WARMTH

Ecclesiastes 4:11 — Warmth Together

"Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm. But how can one be warm alone?"

In the ancient world, travelers often depended on one another for warmth during cold nights.

The principle is broader than physical warmth.

Companionship provides emotional and spiritual warmth as well.

Cross References

Proverbs 5:19

May you find delight and affection in the wife God has given you, and may her love bring you continuing joy.

1 Kings 1:2

The king's servants said, "Let us find a young woman to care for the king. She can attend him and lie beside him so that our lord the king may stay warm."

Ecclesiastes 4:9

Two are better than one because working together gives them a better result for their labor.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy companionship provides comfort that isolation cannot reproduce.

XII. TOGETHER THEY CAN RESIST ATTACK

Ecclesiastes 4:12 — The Threefold Cord

"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. And a cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

One person can be vulnerable.

Two can stand together.

Three strands woven together produce even greater strength.

The verse teaches the value of unity.

It should be noted that the verse itself does not explicitly say that the third strand is God.

However, the principle certainly fits the broader biblical truth that relationships are strongest when lived under God's direction.

Cross References

Matthew 18:20

Jesus said, "Where two or three gather together in My name, I am there among them."

Ecclesiastes 4:9

Two are better than one because together they receive a better reward for their work.

Amos 3:3

Can two people truly walk together unless they have agreed to go in the same direction?

Spiritual Principle

Unity creates strength.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Two are stronger than one, and relationships become strongest when they are shaped by faithfulness to God.

XIII. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN POSITION

Ecclesiastes 4:13 — The Poor Wise Youth and Foolish King

“Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer listens to advice.”

Age does not automatically produce wisdom.

Position does not automatically produce wisdom.

A king can become foolish.

A poor young person can possess wisdom.

The real danger comes when a leader refuses correction.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 9:15

A poor but wise man lived in the city, and through his wisdom he could have delivered it, yet afterward no one remembered that poor man.

1 Samuel 16:7

The Lord told Samuel, “Do not judge by his outward appearance or physical size, because I have rejected him. People look at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Proverbs 28:16

A ruler who lacks understanding becomes a cruel oppressor, but the person who hates dishonest gain will prolong his days.

Spiritual Principle

A teachable person is wiser than a powerful person who refuses correction.

Application

Never become too old, too experienced, or too important to listen.

XIV. FORTUNES CAN CHANGE QUICKLY

Ecclesiastes 4:14 — From Prison to Palace

“For he may come out of prison to reign, while one born in royalty may become poor.”

Status can change.

A prisoner can become king.

A king can become poor.

Human circumstances are unstable.

No earthly position is permanently secure.

Cross References

Genesis 41:14

Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought out of prison. After shaving and changing his clothes, Joseph came before Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:40

Pharaoh told Joseph, “You will be in charge of my household, and all my people will follow your instructions. Only in the throne itself will I be greater than you.”

Luke 1:52

God brings powerful rulers down from their thrones and lifts up those who are humble.

Spiritual Principle

God can reverse human circumstances suddenly.

XV. PEOPLE FOLLOW THE NEW LEADER

Ecclesiastes 4:15 — The Next King Becomes Popular

“I saw all the people who lived under the sun following the next king who succeeded him.”

Public loyalty can shift quickly.

One leader is celebrated today.

Another replaces him tomorrow.

Crowds often follow whoever currently holds influence.

Cross References

1 Kings 1:39

Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. They blew the trumpet, and all the people shouted, “Long live King Solomon!”

2 Kings 11:12

Jehoiada brought out the king’s son, placed the crown on him, gave him the testimony, and proclaimed him king. They anointed him, clapped their hands, and shouted, “Long live the king!”

1 Samuel 10:24

Samuel said to the people, “Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one else like him among all the people.” Then everyone shouted, “Long live the king!”

Spiritual Principle

Popularity is unstable because crowds change.

XVI. FAME EVENTUALLY FADES

Ecclesiastes 4:16 — Later Generations Lose Interest

“There was no end to all the people who came before him, but those who come later will not rejoice in him. This too is meaningless—a chasing after the wind.”

A leader can have enormous support.

Crowds may follow.

People may celebrate.

But later generations move on.

Fame fades.

Public enthusiasm changes.

The Preacher concludes:

Even political popularity is like chasing the wind.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:11

Past generations are eventually forgotten, and future generations will also forget many of those who come after us.

Ecclesiastes 2:16

Neither the wise person nor the fool will be remembered forever. As time passes, both are forgotten, and both eventually die.

Psalms 144:4

A human being is like a breath, and his days pass away like a shadow.

Spiritual Principle

Human applause has an expiration date.

Key Truth

Do not build your identity on people remembering your name.

Build your life on faithfulness to God.

XVII. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 4

1. Oppression Is Real and Grievous

The Preacher sees tears.

He sees people with power abusing those without it.

Principle:

God's people should never become indifferent to suffering caused by injustice.

2. Envy Can Corrupt Work

Hard work is good.

But work driven by jealousy becomes exhausting.

Principle:

Do not measure your life by someone else's possessions, position, or success.

3. Laziness Is Not the Answer

The fool refuses to work and eventually destroys himself.

Principle:

The answer to overwork is not irresponsibility but balanced faithfulness.

4. Contentment Is Better Than Constant Striving

One handful with peace is better than two handfuls with anxiety.

Principle:

Having less with peace can be richer than having more with turmoil.

5. Companionship Is Valuable

Two can:

Work.

Help.

Warm.

Defend.

Encourage.

Principle:

Life becomes stronger when burdens and blessings are shared.

6. Fame and Power Fade

Kings rise.

Kings fall.

Crowds cheer.

Crowds move on.

Principle:

Human popularity is temporary; faithfulness to God has eternal value.

XVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 4 TEACHES ABOUT OPPRESSION

Oppression occurs when power is used selfishly against the weak.

The Preacher notices something especially painful:

The oppressed have no comforter.

This creates a responsibility for God's people.

We should become people who:

Notice suffering.

Comfort the hurting.

Defend the vulnerable.

Speak truth.

Refuse exploitation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If God gives you influence, use it to lift people rather than crush them.

XIX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 4 TEACHES ABOUT ENVY

Envy says:

“Why do they have that?”

“Why are they more successful?”

“Why am I behind?”

Comparison can turn healthy ambition into misery.

A person may become successful and still remain unhappy because someone else always appears to have more.

Spiritual Principle

Envy does not merely want something good.

It resents someone else for having it.

XX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 4 TEACHES ABOUT CONTENTMENT

The Preacher gives one of the clearest pictures of contentment:

“One handful with peace.”

Contentment does not necessarily mean having nothing.

It means refusing to sacrifice peace merely for more.

Key Truth

More possessions do not automatically produce more life.

Sometimes:

Less money.

Less pressure.

Less competition.

Less ambition.

Can produce:

More peace.

More time.

More relationships.

More gratitude.

XXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 4 TEACHES ABOUT LONELINESS

The lonely worker has wealth.

But he has nobody.

He never asks:

“Who am I doing this for?”

This exposes the danger of building a successful life that contains no meaningful relationships.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

It is possible to become rich in possessions and poor in relationships.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 4 TEACHES ABOUT COMPANIONSHIP

Companionship provides four benefits in this passage.

1. Productivity

Two receive a better return for their work.

2. Recovery

When one falls, another helps him up.

3. Comfort

Two can provide warmth.

4. Protection

Two can resist an attack more effectively than one.

Spiritual Principle

Relationships are not merely emotional luxuries.

They are part of God’s design for strength.

XXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 4 TEACHES ABOUT LEADERSHIP

The chapter contrasts:

A poor wise youth.

And:

An old foolish king.

The issue is not age.

The issue is teachability.

The king has stopped listening.

That makes him foolish.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A leader who can no longer receive correction has already begun to decline.

XXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 4 TEACHES ABOUT POPULARITY

Political popularity is unstable.

The crowd celebrates one king.

Then another.

Eventually later generations do not care about either one.

Spiritual Principle

If your identity rises and falls with public approval, your heart will never be stable.

XXV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does Ecclesiastes 4 teach about oppression?

It teaches that oppression is real and deeply painful.

The oppressed often suffer while powerful people seem to control the situation.

God, however, sees their tears.

Question 2

Why does the Preacher speak so negatively about life in verses 2–3?

He is describing how terrible unchecked oppression can become.

From the viewpoint of life under the sun, death can appear preferable to continued suffering.

Question 3

What is wrong with hard work motivated by envy?

The work itself may be productive.

The problem is the motive.

Envy turns labor into competition and keeps the heart from becoming satisfied.

Question 4

Does verse 5 teach that we should stop working?

No.

The fool refuses to work and destroys himself through laziness.

The chapter teaches balance.

Question 5

What does “one handful with peace” mean?

It means having enough with contentment is better than having abundance while living in constant pressure and anxiety.

Question 6

What is wrong with the lonely man in verse 8?

His entire life revolves around work and wealth.

He has no close family member with whom to share what he gains.

He also never stops to ask why he is sacrificing enjoyment for endless accumulation.

Question 7

Why are two better than one?

Because companionship provides:

Greater productivity.

Help after falling.

Warmth.

Protection.

Encouragement.

Question 8

Does the “threefold cord” specifically mean God, husband, and wife?

The verse itself does not explicitly identify the three strands that way.

Its direct point is that combined strength is greater than isolation.

However, Scripture certainly supports the broader principle that relationships are strongest when God is honored within them.

Question 9

Why is the poor wise youth better than the old king?

Because wisdom and teachability are more valuable than position and age.

The king became foolish because he refused advice.

Question 10

What do verses 14–16 teach about power?

They teach that power is unstable.

A prisoner can become king.

Someone born into privilege can lose everything.

Question 11

What do verses 15–16 teach about popularity?

Public enthusiasm changes quickly.

Crowds may strongly support one leader and later move on to someone else.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 4 change about the way we live?

It should encourage us to:

Reject oppression.

Stop comparing ourselves with others.

Work responsibly.

Choose contentment.

Value relationships.

Remain teachable.

Stop living for applause.

XXVI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 4 asks several searching questions.

Am I Using My Power to Help or Hurt?

How do I treat people who cannot benefit me?

Am I Driven by Envy?

Would I still want what I am pursuing if nobody else had it?

Am I Working Too Much?

Has my work stolen:

My peace?

My relationships?

My worship?

My joy?

Am I Becoming Lazy?

Have I confused rest with irresponsibility?

Do I Know What “Enough” Looks Like?

Can I live with one handful and peace?

Am I Building Relationships?

Who helps me when I fall?

Whom am I helping?

Am I Becoming Isolated?

Am I surrounded by possessions but disconnected from people?

Am I Teachable?

Can someone correct me?

Am I Living for Popularity?

Would I remain faithful if people stopped applauding?

XXVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Gain the World and Lose the People God Gave You”

The lonely man in Ecclesiastes 4 worked endlessly.

He gained wealth.

But lost enjoyment.

He had possessions.

But no one with whom to share them.

He succeeded financially.

But his life became miserable.

This is a warning.

Do not become so busy building:

A career.

A business.

A ministry.

A reputation.

A bank account.

That you neglect:

Family.

Friendship.

Fellowship.

Rest.

Worship.

Love.

Principle:

Success that destroys meaningful relationships is too expensive.

XXVIII. THE POWER OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Ecclesiastes does not romanticize relationships.

People can hurt one another.

People can oppress one another.

People can become jealous.

But isolation is not the solution.

Healthy companionship allows people to share:

Work.

Burden.

Pain.

Joy.

Risk.

Responsibility.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God often strengthens us through other people rather than removing our need for other people.

XXIX. THE THREEFOLD CORD AND GOD-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says:

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

The direct image is one of strength through multiple strands.

A single strand is easier to break.

Multiple strands woven together become stronger.

This applies broadly to:

Marriage.

Friendship.

Ministry teams.

Families.

Church fellowship.

Though the verse does not directly identify God as the third strand, the wider teaching of Scripture shows that relationships are strongest when both people submit their lives to Him.

Principle:

Human unity is strong; unity shaped by faithfulness to God is stronger.

XXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4 reveals some of the deepest problems in human society.

People use power to oppress.

People work because they envy.

Some refuse to work.

Others work too much.

Some possess wealth but have no meaningful relationships.

Leaders become foolish when they stop listening.

Crowds celebrate one person and quickly move on to another.

The chapter exposes a culture built on:

Comparison.

Competition.

Isolation.

Power.

Popularity.

And then it gives us another way.

Choose justice over oppression.

Choose contentment over envy.

Choose responsible work over laziness.

Choose peace over endless striving.

Choose companionship over unnecessary isolation.

Choose wisdom over position.

Choose teachability over pride.

Choose faithfulness over popularity.

The world says:

Get ahead.

Ecclesiastes asks:

At what cost?

The world says:

Have more.

Ecclesiastes asks:

Will it satisfy you?

The world says:

Become important.

Ecclesiastes asks:

How long will people remember?

The world says:

You can do everything alone.

Ecclesiastes says:

Two are better than one.

You need people.

People need you.

When someone falls:

Help them stand.

When someone is discouraged:

Strengthen them.

When someone is burdened:

Help carry the load.

When someone suffers:

Do not become another person who offers no comfort.

And remember:

Popularity fades.

Power changes hands.

Wealth changes owners.

Human praise disappears.

But faithfulness matters.

Therefore:

Work.

But do not worship work.

Achieve.

But do not envy.

Earn.

But do not become consumed by wealth.

Rest.

But do not become lazy.

Lead.

But remain teachable.

Build relationships.

Carry burdens.

Help people rise.

And use whatever power God places in your hands to comfort rather than crush.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom You give us through Ecclesiastes.

Open our eyes to the suffering of people around us.

Keep us from becoming indifferent to oppression.

When we have power, help us use it with justice and compassion.

When we see someone hurting, make us comforters.

Protect our hearts from envy.

Keep us from comparing our lives constantly with others.

Teach us to work faithfully without turning work into competition.

Protect us from laziness.

Give us diligence.

But also protect us from endless striving.

Teach us the blessing of:

One handful with peace.

Give us contentment.

Help us recognize when enough is enough.

Father, protect us from building successful lives that are empty of relationships.

Teach us to value people more than possessions.

Teach us to make time for:

Family.

Friends.

Fellow believers.

Those who need encouragement.

Thank You for the people who help us when we fall.

Help us become people who lift others.

Thank You for those who strengthen us.

Help us strengthen others.

Thank You for companionship.

Keep us from unnecessary isolation.

Father, make our relationships strong.

Give us unity.

Give us loyalty.

Give us forgiveness.

Give us patience.

Give us humility.

And above all, help us honor You in the way we relate to one another.

Protect leaders from becoming proud and unteachable.

Give us hearts willing to receive correction.

Keep us from believing that age, experience, title, or position makes us incapable of being wrong.

Teach us to listen.

Teach us to learn.

Teach us to remain humble.

And Father, keep us from living for popularity.

Crowds change.

Opinions change.

Human praise disappears.

Help us seek Your approval above all.

May our lives not be spent chasing the wind.

May we pursue justice.

May we choose contentment.

May we value companionship.

May we remain teachable.

May we be faithful.

And may everything we do bring honor to You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

**“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor.” —
Ecclesiastes 4:9**

Central Truth

Oppression, envy, restless labor, isolation, power, and popularity all reveal the emptiness of life under the sun, while contentment, wisdom, companionship, and mutual support show the value of living in right relationship with God and others.

Ecclesiastes 4 in One Sentence

The Preacher exposes the misery created by oppression, envy, overwork, loneliness, and fading political popularity while showing that contentment, teachability, and faithful companionship provide strength and meaning in a broken world.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5 — Reverence Before God and the Vanity of Riches

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5 turns attention toward two major areas of life:

Worship.

And:

Wealth.

The Preacher begins by warning people about approaching God carelessly.

He says:

Guard your steps.

Listen.

Do not rush into foolish speech.

Do not make promises to God that you have no intention of keeping.

Do not confuse many words with true spirituality.

This section teaches that worship is not casual.

God is in heaven.

We are on earth.

That distinction should produce:

Humility.

Reverence.

Carefulness.

Obedience.

The chapter then turns toward:

Injustice.

Oppression.

Money.

Possessions.

The restless desire for more.

The Preacher observes something humanity continues to discover:

The person who loves money never reaches a point where money finally says:

“You have enough.”

The appetite grows as the possessions grow.

More wealth often brings:

More responsibility.

More consumers.

More anxiety.

More fear of loss.

Sometimes more sleeplessness.

Then the Preacher reminds us of one of life’s unavoidable truths:

We entered this world with nothing.

We will leave it with nothing.

No amount of earthly wealth can be carried beyond death.

But the chapter does not condemn every possession.

Instead, it ends with a positive message.

Wealth can be received as a gift.

Work can be enjoyed as a gift.

Food can be enjoyed as a gift.

Life itself can be enjoyed as a gift.

The problem is not possessing something.

The problem is loving the possession more than the Giver.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 5 is:

God must be approached with reverence and integrity, while wealth must be received as a temporary gift rather than loved as the source of security, satisfaction, or meaning.

I. APPROACH GOD CAREFULLY

Ecclesiastes 5:1 — Guard Your Steps

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not realize they are doing wrong.”

The Preacher begins with worship.

He does not say:

Avoid the house of God.

He says:

Approach carefully.

The phrase:

“Guard your steps”

means worship should never become careless or thoughtless.

The foolish person may perform religious actions without truly listening to God.

But God desires obedience more than empty ceremony.

Cross References

1 Samuel 15:22

Samuel said, “Does the Lord take greater pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices than in obedience to His voice? Listen carefully: obeying God is better than offering sacrifice, and paying attention to Him is better than giving the richest offering.”

Psalms 119:101

I have kept my feet away from every evil path so that I may faithfully obey Your Word.

Amos 5:21

God says, “I hate and reject your religious festivals, and I take no pleasure in your gatherings when your worship is empty and your lives are disobedient.”

Spiritual Principle

True worship begins with listening.

Key Truth

Religious activity without obedience can become the sacrifice of fools.

II. DO NOT BE HASTY BEFORE GOD

Ecclesiastes 5:2 — Let Your Words Be Few

“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”

The Preacher warns against careless speech before God.

Prayer is not meaningless talking.

Worship is not impressive vocabulary.

God is not impressed by wordiness.

The contrast is clear:

God is in heaven.

You are on earth.

Therefore:

Speak humbly.

Speak truthfully.

Speak thoughtfully.

Cross References

Proverbs 10:19

When words are multiplied, sin is difficult to avoid, but the person who controls his speech shows wisdom.

Matthew 6:7

When you pray, do not keep repeating empty words as people who do not know God often do. They think they will be heard simply because they use many words.

James 1:19

My dear brothers and sisters, remember this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Spiritual Principle

Reverence produces careful speech.

Application

Prayer should not be rushed words thrown toward heaven.

Prayer should come from a heart that knows who God is.

III. MANY WORDS CAN REVEAL FOOLISHNESS

Ecclesiastes 5:3 — Restless Dreams and Foolish Speech

“As many cares bring restless dreams, so the speech of a fool comes with many words.”

The Preacher compares two things.

An anxious mind can produce restless dreams.

In the same way, a foolish heart can produce endless words.

Speech often reveals what is inside us.

The fool does not know when to stop talking.

Cross References

Proverbs 10:19

When people keep talking without restraint, sin is likely to follow, but the person who knows when to stop speaking acts wisely.

Proverbs 29:11

A foolish person pours out every feeling immediately, but a wise person controls himself and does not release everything at once.

Ecclesiastes 5:7

Many dreams and many words can amount to emptiness. Therefore, the most important response is to fear God.

Spiritual Principle

A person does not become wiser by saying more.

IV. KEEP WHAT YOU PROMISE TO GOD

Ecclesiastes 5:4 — Fulfill Your Vow

“When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He takes no pleasure in fools—pay what you have promised.”

A vow is serious.

The Preacher warns against making promises to God lightly.

People sometimes make promises during emotional moments.

They say:

“God, if You do this, I will do that.”

But when the crisis passes, the promise is forgotten.

God takes our words seriously.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 23:21

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not delay in fulfilling it, because the Lord will certainly hold you responsible for what you promised.

Numbers 30:2

When a man makes a vow to the Lord or gives his word under oath, he must not break what he has said. He must do everything he promised.

Psalms 76:11

Make your promises to the Lord your God and keep them. Let all who are around Him bring gifts to the One who deserves reverence.

Spiritual Principle

Integrity before God means doing what you said you would do.

V. BETTER NOT TO VOW THAN TO BREAK A VOW

Ecclesiastes 5:5 — Take Your Words Seriously

“It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.”

The Preacher makes the point stronger.

God does not require reckless promises.

Better silence than dishonesty.

Better not to vow than to promise something you will not do.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 23:22

If you choose not to make a vow, you are not guilty of sin simply because you did not make one.

Proverbs 20:25

It is dangerous to make a promise to God without thinking carefully and only afterward consider what that promise truly requires.

Matthew 5:37

Let your “Yes” truly mean yes, and let your “No” truly mean no. Anything beyond honest speech can lead into evil.

Spiritual Principle

Simple honesty is better than dramatic promises.

VI. DO NOT LET YOUR MOUTH LEAD YOU INTO SIN

Ecclesiastes 5:6 — Words Have Consequences

“Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. Do not say before God’s messenger, ‘My vow was a mistake.’ Why should God be angry at your words and destroy the work of your hands?”

Words can create obligations.

The Preacher warns against making a promise and later pretending:

“I did not really mean it.”

Careless words can become sinful words.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 23:23

Whatever you have freely promised with your lips, be careful to do it, because you made that promise voluntarily to the Lord your God.

Matthew 5:34

Jesus said, “I tell you not to make careless oaths at all. Do not swear by heaven, because heaven is God’s throne.”

Malachi 3:8

God asks, “Should a person rob God? Yet you are robbing Me.” The people asked, “How have we robbed You?” God answered, “In the tithes and offerings you have withheld.”

Spiritual Principle

Your mouth should never make commitments your character refuses to keep.

VII. FEAR GOD

Ecclesiastes 5:7 — The Proper Response

“Many dreams and many words are meaningless. Therefore, fear God.”

After discussing:

Words.

Dreams.

Vows.

Speech.

The Preacher brings everything down to one simple command:

Fear God.

Reverence matters more than religious performance.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Now that everything has been heard, here is the conclusion: fear God and obey His commands, because this is the responsibility of every person.

Job 28:28

God said to humanity, “The fear of the Lord—that is true wisdom, and turning away from evil is real understanding.”

Deuteronomy 6:2

Fear the Lord your God, obey His commands and instructions throughout your life, and teach them to your children and grandchildren so that your days may be prolonged.

Spiritual Principle

True worship begins with reverence for God.

VIII. DO NOT BE SURPRISED BY HUMAN CORRUPTION

Ecclesiastes 5:8 — Oppression and Bureaucracy

“If you see the poor oppressed in a province, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at the matter; for one official is watched by a higher one, and there are higher still over them.”

The Preacher turns from worship to government and society.

He observes systems of power.

Officials answer to higher officials.

Layers of authority exist.

Yet corruption can still operate throughout the system.

The poor can be denied justice.

Cross References

Psalms 12:5

The Lord says, “Because the poor are being oppressed and the needy are groaning, I will rise up and place them in the safety they long for.”

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do what is good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Defend the orphan, and plead the cause of the widow.

Psalms 82:3

Defend the poor and the fatherless. Give justice to those who are weak, suffering, and oppressed.

Spiritual Principle

Complicated systems do not remove God's concern for justice.

IX. EVERYONE DEPENDS UPON THE LAND

Ecclesiastes 5:9 — Even the King Benefits

“The increase from the land is taken by all; even the king profits from the fields.”

Despite human hierarchies, everyone ultimately depends upon basic provisions.

Even kings need food.

The highest ruler still depends upon the productivity of the earth God created.

Cross References**Genesis 1:29**

God said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant across the earth and every tree that produces fruit with seed in it. These will provide food for you.”

Psalms 104:14

God causes grass to grow for livestock and plants for people to cultivate, bringing food out of the earth.

Deuteronomy 8:7

The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams, springs, and deep waters flowing through valleys and hills.

Spiritual Principle

Even the powerful remain dependent upon God's provision.

X. THE LOVE OF MONEY IS NEVER SATISFIED

Ecclesiastes 5:10 — Never Enough

“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is vanity.”

The problem here is not money.

The problem is:

Love of money.

Money promises:

Security.

Freedom.

Comfort.

Importance.

Control.

But the person who loves money always wants more.

Cross References

1 Timothy 6:10

The love of money is a root from which many kinds of evil grow. Some people, because they were determined to become rich, wandered away from the faith and brought many painful sorrows upon themselves.

Proverbs 27:20

Death and destruction are never completely satisfied, and in the same way, human eyes never stop wanting more.

Isaiah 55:2

Why spend your money on what cannot truly feed you, and why work for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, receive what is truly good, and let your soul delight in what really nourishes.

Spiritual Principle

Money can satisfy a bill.

It cannot satisfy the soul.

XI. MORE WEALTH BRINGS MORE CONSUMERS

Ecclesiastes 5:11 — Increased Goods, Increased Demands

“As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?”

More possessions can bring more expenses.

More workers.

More responsibilities.

More people depending upon the owner.

The wealthy person may eventually do little more than look at what he owns.

Cross References

Psalm 39:6

People move through life like passing shadows. They rush around gathering possessions, yet they do not know who will eventually receive what they collected.

Luke 12:16

Jesus told them a story: “The land of a certain rich man produced an unusually large harvest.”

Job 20:22

Even while the wicked person is surrounded by abundance, distress can suddenly come upon him, and trouble can close in from every direction.

Spiritual Principle

More ownership often means more responsibility.

XII. THE LABORER SLEEPS SWEETLY

Ecclesiastes 5:12 — Wealth Can Steal Rest

“The sleep of the laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich keeps them from sleeping.”

The ordinary worker finishes the day tired.

He sleeps.

The wealthy person may lie awake thinking about:

Investments.

Losses.

Security.

Competitors.

Property.

Responsibility.

More can sometimes produce less peace.

Cross References

Psalms 127:2

It is useless to rise early, stay up late, and wear yourself out anxiously working for food, because God gives rest to those He loves.

Proverbs 3:24

When you lie down, you will not need to be afraid. You will rest, and your sleep will be pleasant.

1 Timothy 6:9

Those who are determined to become rich fall into temptation, traps, and many foolish and harmful desires that drag people toward ruin and destruction.

Spiritual Principle

A peaceful night may be worth more than a larger account.

XIII. WEALTH CAN HARM ITS OWNER

Ecclesiastes 5:13 — Hoarded Riches

“I have seen a terrible evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner.”

Wealth can become destructive when hoarded.

The owner may become:

Fearful.

Greedy.

Suspicious.

Controlling.

Obsessed.

Instead of owning the wealth:

The wealth begins owning him.

Cross References

James 5:3

Your gold and silver have become corroded, and their corrosion will testify against you. It will expose the judgment coming upon your greed. You stored up wealth selfishly while the last days were moving forward.

Proverbs 11:28

The person who trusts in riches will eventually fall, but righteous people will flourish like healthy leaves.

Luke 12:21

Jesus said, “This is what happens to the person who stores up treasures for himself but is not rich toward God.”

Spiritual Principle

Wealth becomes dangerous when it replaces trust in God.

XIV. RICHES CAN DISAPPEAR

Ecclesiastes 5:14 — Wealth Lost Through Misfortune

“Or wealth lost through misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left to give him.”

Money is uncertain.

A person may work for decades.

Then:

A disaster.

A business failure.

A bad decision.

An unexpected event.

And wealth disappears.

This is why wealth cannot become our ultimate security.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:26

God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to the person who pleases Him, but the sinner may spend his life gathering wealth only for it eventually to pass into someone else's hands.

Proverbs 23:5

The moment you look toward riches, they can disappear. Wealth seems to grow wings and fly away into the sky like an eagle.

Job 20:20

Because the wicked person never knew contentment and was never satisfied inside, nothing he greedily desired will ultimately save him.

Spiritual Principle

If your peace depends on possessions remaining stable, your peace will always be fragile.

XV. WE LEAVE THE WORLD WITH NOTHING

Ecclesiastes 5:15 — Naked We Depart

“Everyone comes naked from their mother’s womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands.”

This is one of the clearest truths in Ecclesiastes.

We arrive with nothing.

We leave with nothing.

No person carries:

Money.

Property.

Jewelry.

Titles.

Businesses.

Possessions.

Into death.

Cross References

Job 1:21

Job said, “I came naked from my mother’s womb, and I will leave this life with nothing. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.”

1 Timothy 6:7

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we cannot carry anything out of it.

Psalms 49:17

When a rich person dies, he cannot take his wealth with him, and his earthly glory cannot follow him into the grave.

Spiritual Principle

Everything you possess is temporary stewardship.

Key Truth

You never truly own earthly possessions permanently.

You manage them for a season.

XVI. TOILING FOR THE WIND

Ecclesiastes 5:16 — What Has Been Gained?

“This too is a grievous evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind?”

The Preacher repeats the picture of:

Chasing the wind.

Human beings may spend an entire lifetime accumulating what death immediately removes from their hands.

That is tragic if accumulation itself became the purpose.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I examined everything people do under the sun, and I saw that it was temporary and like trying to chase and hold the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:11

When I examined all my accomplishments and everything I had worked to achieve, I saw that it was temporary and like chasing the wind. Nothing under the sun produced lasting profit.

Hosea 12:1

Ephraim feeds on emptiness and chases the east wind. Day after day he increases falsehood and destruction, making alliances that cannot ultimately save him.

Spiritual Principle

A life devoted only to accumulation eventually discovers that it accumulated what could not be kept.

XVII. WEALTH WITHOUT JOY PRODUCES DARKNESS

Ecclesiastes 5:17 — Frustration and Anger

“All their days they eat in darkness, with great frustration, affliction, and anger.”

The person described here has possessions but no peace.

His inner world is dark.

He lives with:

Frustration.

Pain.

Anger.

This is the opposite of true enjoyment.

Cross References

Job 5:7

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

Job 3:20

Why is light given to those who suffer deeply, and why is life continued for those whose souls are bitter?

Psalm 90:9

All our days pass beneath the reality of Your judgment, and our years disappear quickly like a sigh.

Spiritual Principle

Wealth cannot brighten a heart that has lost peace with God.

XVIII. ENJOY THE PORTION GOD HAS GIVEN

Ecclesiastes 5:18 — This Is Good

“This is what I have seen to be good: It is fitting for people to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in their toil under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their portion.”

The Preacher again gives a positive conclusion.

Life is brief.

Therefore:

Receive today.

Eat.

Drink.

Work.

Give thanks.

Enjoy what God allows you to enjoy.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better than for a person to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. I saw that the ability to enjoy these things comes from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Everyone should eat, drink, and enjoy the good that comes from his labor, because the ability to do this is a gift from God.

1 Timothy 6:17

Tell those who are rich in this present world not to become proud or place their hope in uncertain wealth, but to trust in God, who generously gives us everything for our enjoyment.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment allows us to enjoy today instead of spending today longing for more.

XIX. THE ABILITY TO ENJOY WEALTH IS ALSO A GIFT

Ecclesiastes 5:19 — Wealth, Possessions, and Joy

“Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their work—this is the gift of God.”

The Preacher makes an important distinction.

God may give:

Wealth.

Possessions.

Work.

But there is another gift:

The ability to enjoy them.

Possession and enjoyment are not the same thing.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 8:18

Remember the Lord your God, because He is the One who gives you the ability to produce wealth, confirming the covenant He promised to your ancestors.

1 Chronicles 29:12

Riches and honor come from You. You rule over everything. Power and strength are in Your hand, and You are able to make people great and give strength to all.

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift comes from above, coming from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Spiritual Principle

Possessions become blessings when they are received with gratitude instead of worshiped as gods.

XX. GOD CAN FILL THE HEART WITH JOY

Ecclesiastes 5:20 — Joy in the Present

“They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with joy in their hearts.”

The contented person does not spend every day anxiously counting what is missing.

God gives joy.

That joy allows the person to receive life rather than constantly analyze its disappointments.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:10

I did not deny my eyes what they desired, and I did not withhold ordinary enjoyment from my heart. I experienced temporary pleasure from my work, and that was the immediate reward from my labor.

Nehemiah 8:10

Nehemiah told the people, “Go and enjoy good food and sweet drink, and share with those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not remain in sorrow, because the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Philippians 4:11

I am not saying this because I am in need, because I have learned how to be content in whatever circumstances I am in.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment shortens the distance between what you have and what you think you need.

XXI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 5

1. Approach God with Reverence

Worship is not careless.

God deserves:

Attention.

Humility.

Listening.

Obedience.

Principle:

The first responsibility in worship is not speaking but listening.

2. Words Before God Matter

Promises are serious.

Vows are serious.

Speech is serious.

Principle:

Never make spiritual promises you do not intend to keep.

3. Fear God More Than You Trust Religious Activity

Many words do not equal true spirituality.

Principle:

Reverence matters more than religious performance.

4. Wealth Cannot Satisfy the Person Who Loves Wealth

More money creates the desire for:

More money.

Principle:

Greed has no finish line.

5. Riches Are Uncertain

They can:

Increase.

Decrease.

Disappear.

Change hands.

Principle:

Never place eternal trust in temporary wealth.

6. Death Removes Earthly Ownership

We arrive with nothing.

We leave with nothing.

Principle:

Everything we possess is temporary stewardship.

7. Enjoyment Is a Gift from God

Life becomes richer when ordinary blessings are received gratefully.

Principle:

The ability to enjoy what God gives may be a greater gift than the possession itself.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 5 TEACHES ABOUT WORSHIP

Worship begins with:

Reverence.

Listening.

Humility.

Careful speech.

Integrity.

The Preacher warns us against treating the presence of God casually.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not enter worship asking only:

“What can I say to God?”

Also ask:

“What does God want me to hear?”

XXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 5 TEACHES ABOUT PRAYER

Prayer does not need:

Performance.

Repetition.

Impressive language.

Many words.

God already knows who we are.

Spiritual Principle

The strength of prayer is not measured by the number of words but by the sincerity of the heart.

XXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 5 TEACHES ABOUT PROMISES

Words spoken to God are serious.

This applies to:

Vows.

Commitments.

Public declarations.

Private promises.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never use spiritual language to impress people while ignoring the responsibility those words create before God.

XXV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 5 TEACHES ABOUT MONEY

Money itself is not condemned.

The chapter condemns:

Love of money.

Trust in money.

Hoarding money.

Finding identity in money.

Believing money can satisfy the soul.

Key Truth

Money is useful as a servant.

It becomes dangerous as a master.

XXVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 5 TEACHES ABOUT CONTENTMENT

Contentment says:

“I can receive what God has given me today.”

Greed says:

“I cannot be happy until I have more.”

Contentment can enjoy:

Food.

Work.

Family.

Rest.

Provision.

Ordinary life.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment does not require perfect circumstances.

It requires a heart that recognizes God’s gifts.

XXVII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does “guard your steps” mean?

It means approaching God thoughtfully and reverently.

Worship should not be careless.

Question 2

Why does the Preacher emphasize listening?

Because obedience matters more than empty religious activity.

Listening to God should come before speaking many words to Him.

Question 3

What is wrong with many words in worship?

Many words are not automatically wrong.

The problem is careless, empty, or foolish speech.

Question 4

Why are vows serious?

Because promises made to God are not meaningless statements.

God expects integrity.

Question 5

Is it wrong not to make a vow?

No.

The Preacher says it is better not to make one than to promise and then refuse to fulfill it.

Question 6

What does “fear God” mean?

It means to approach God with:

Reverence.

Awe.

Respect.

Obedience.

Recognition of His holiness and authority.

Question 7

What does verse 10 teach about money?

The person who loves money never reaches permanent satisfaction.

More wealth creates a desire for still more.

Question 8

Why can wealth create sleeplessness?

Wealth may create concerns about:

Loss.

Investment.

Security.

Responsibility.

Competition.

Management.

Question 9

Why is hoarding wealth dangerous?

Wealth may begin to control the person who possesses it.

Fear and greed can replace generosity and trust.

Question 10

What does verse 15 teach about death?

We leave the world just as we entered it materially:

With nothing in our hands.

Question 11

Does Ecclesiastes condemn enjoying possessions?

No.

The chapter says the ability to enjoy possessions is itself a gift from God.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 5 change about our lives?

It should teach us to:

Worship reverently.

Speak carefully.

Keep our promises.

Fear God.

Reject greed.

Hold wealth loosely.

Practice contentment.

Enjoy God's gifts gratefully.

XXVIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 5 asks several searching questions.

Do I Approach Worship Reverently?

Am I listening?

Or merely going through religious motions?

Are My Words Before God Careless?

Do I make emotional promises I do not keep?

Is My "Yes" Dependable?

Can God and others trust my word?

Do I Love Money?

How much would be enough?

Is My Wealth Helping Me Serve God or Distracting Me from Him?

Who owns whom?

Am I Hoarding What God has Given?

Could some of what I possess become a blessing to someone else?

Is Anxiety Stealing My Rest?

Am I carrying concerns God never asked me to carry alone?

Am I Content?

Can I enjoy what God has already placed in my hands?

XXIX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Listen More, Promise Less, Obey More”

Ecclesiastes 5 begins with worship.

And the lesson is powerful.

People sometimes think spiritual maturity means:

Talking more.

Promising more.

Appearing more religious.

But the Preacher says:

Guard your steps.

Listen.

Let your words be few.

Keep what you promise.

Fear God.

Principle:

God values obedience more than impressive religious language.

XXX. THE DANGER OF LOVING MONEY

Money makes promises it cannot keep.

It says:

“I will make you secure.”

But wealth can disappear.

It says:

“I will give you peace.”

But wealth can steal sleep.

It says:

“I will satisfy you.”

But the person who loves money always wants more.

It says:

“I will stay with you.”

But death takes everything from your hands.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The problem with money is not that it is worthless.

The problem is expecting temporary wealth to provide eternal security.

XXXI. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POSSESSING AND ENJOYING

A person can possess wealth without enjoying life.

Another person may possess far less and live with:

Gratitude.

Peace.

Rest.

Joy.

The difference is not always income.

The difference may be contentment.

Spiritual Principle

Having more and enjoying more are not the same thing.

XXXII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5 brings worship and wealth together because both reveal what controls the heart.

How you approach God reveals what you believe about God.

How you handle money reveals what you trust.

The careless worshiper speaks without listening.

The greedy person accumulates without enjoying.

Both have a heart problem.

The answer is:

Reverence.

Integrity.

Contentment.

Trust.

Approach God carefully.

Listen before speaking.

Do not make promises simply because the moment feels emotional.

If you give your word:

Keep it.

Fear God.

Then look at your possessions.

Do you own them?

Or do they own you?

Can you give?

Can you rest?

Can you enjoy what God provides?

Can you say:

“This is enough”?

Remember:

You entered life with empty hands.

You will leave life with empty hands.

Therefore:

Hold wealth loosely.

Use it wisely.

Share it generously.

Receive it gratefully.

But never worship it.

Money cannot follow you into eternity.

Only what is done in relationship with God has lasting significance.

Do not spend your life accumulating what death will remove.

Spend your life becoming rich toward God.

And enjoy the ordinary gifts He places before you.

Food.

Work.

Rest.

Relationships.

Provision.

Joy.

These may seem simple.

But received from the hand of God, they become sacred gifts.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Teach us to approach You with reverence.

Keep us from careless worship.

Help us guard our steps when we come before You.

Give us hearts that listen.

Teach us to value obedience more than religious performance.

Keep our words honest.

Keep us from making promises we do not intend to fulfill.

Give us integrity before You and before others.

Let our “Yes” truly mean yes.

Let our “No” truly mean no.

Teach us to fear You with holy reverence.

Father, open our eyes to injustice.

Help us defend the weak.

Help us care for the poor.

Help us use influence in ways that honor You.

Protect us from the love of money.

When we begin believing that more wealth will finally satisfy us, remind us that greed has no finish line.

Teach us contentment.

Protect us from anxiety over possessions.

Protect us from hoarding.

Protect us from trusting what can disappear.

Remind us that we entered this world with nothing.

Remind us that we will leave with nothing.

Give us wisdom to manage what You place in our hands.

Teach us to give generously.

Teach us to enjoy gratefully.

Teach us to rest peacefully.

Thank You for food.

Thank You for work.

Thank You for provision.

Thank You for every good gift.

Give us the ability to enjoy what You provide.

Help us accept our portion without constant comparison.

Fill our hearts with joy that money cannot produce.

May our worship be sincere.

May our words be truthful.

May our promises be dependable.

May our possessions remain servants rather than masters.

May our lives show that our true treasure is in You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is vanity.” — Ecclesiastes 5:10

Central Truth

True worship requires reverence, listening, and integrity before God, while true contentment comes not from loving wealth but from receiving life, work, possessions, and joy as temporary gifts from His hand.

Ecclesiastes 5 in One Sentence

The Preacher warns against careless worship, rash promises, oppression, greed, and hoarded wealth while teaching that reverence, integrity, contentment, and grateful enjoyment of God's gifts provide the wiser path through a brief and temporary life.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 6 — The Vanity of Wealth and the Limits of Human Desire

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 6 continues the Preacher's examination of wealth, enjoyment, desire, and the limits of human life.

In Chapter 5, he explained that:

Wealth can increase.

Wealth can disappear.

Possessions cannot be carried beyond death.

And the ability to enjoy what we have is itself a gift from God.

Chapter 6 develops that truth even further.

The Preacher describes a man who possesses:

Riches.

Wealth.

Honor.

Everything his heart desires.

Yet something is missing.

He cannot enjoy any of it.

That is one of the great tragedies of this chapter.

A person may possess much and enjoy little.

Another may possess little and live with deep contentment.

The chapter also examines the endless nature of human desire.

A person works to satisfy his appetite.

But the appetite returns.

He eats.

Then becomes hungry again.

He earns.

Then wants more.

He achieves.

Then seeks another accomplishment.

The eyes continually wander toward what is still missing.

The Preacher therefore gives a powerful principle:

“Better what the eyes see than the roving of desire.”

In other words:

It is better to appreciate what is already in your hands than to spend your entire life longing for something else.

The chapter closes by emphasizing human limitation.

We do not control everything.

We cannot contend successfully with God.

We do not know completely what is best for us.

We do not know everything that will happen after us.

Our lives are brief.

Like a shadow.

Like a vapor.

Ecclesiastes 6 therefore confronts the illusion that:

More wealth.

More years.

More possessions.

More achievement.

Will automatically produce more happiness.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 6 is:

Wealth, long life, and endless desire cannot satisfy the human heart apart from God, and true wisdom begins when we accept our limits and receive life with gratitude and contentment.

I. AN EVIL COMMON AMONG HUMANITY

Ecclesiastes 6:1 — A Tragedy Under the Sun

“There is an evil I have seen under the sun, and it is common among mankind.”

The Preacher introduces another painful reality.

This is not a rare problem.

He says it is:

Common.

People frequently possess things they cannot truly enjoy.

They have what others envy.

But they do not have contentment.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 5:13

I have seen a painful evil under the sun: wealth that a person stores up can actually bring harm to the person who owns it.

Job 21:7

Why do wicked people sometimes continue living, grow old, and become increasingly powerful and prosperous?

Psalms 73:12

Look at the wicked. They often seem free from trouble while their wealth continues to increase.

Spiritual Principle

Visible prosperity does not prove inward satisfaction.

Key Truth

You can possess what others want and still lack what your own soul needs.

II. WEALTH WITHOUT THE POWER TO ENJOY IT

Ecclesiastes 6:2 — A Stranger Enjoys the Wealth

“A man may have riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, yet God does not give him the power to enjoy it—a stranger enjoys them instead. This is vanity, a grievous evil.”

This person appears to have everything.

Riches.

Wealth.

Honor.

Nothing materially seems missing.

Yet he lacks one crucial gift:

The ability to enjoy what he possesses.

The Preacher shows us that possession and enjoyment are not the same thing.

Cross References

Luke 12:20

God said to the rich man, “You foolish man! Tonight your life will be required from you. Then who will receive everything you have prepared and stored up?”

Job 27:17

The wicked person may collect clothing, but someone righteous may eventually wear it, and the silver he gathered may be divided among others.

Psalms 39:6

People hurry through life like passing shadows, gathering possessions anxiously, yet they do not know who will finally receive what they have accumulated.

Spiritual Principle

The ability to enjoy a blessing is itself a blessing.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not merely ask:

“What do I own?”

Also ask:

“Can I receive it with gratitude and peace?”

III. LONG LIFE WITHOUT SATISFACTION

Ecclesiastes 6:3 — Many Children, Many Years, No Joy

“A man may have a hundred children and live many years, but if he finds no satisfaction in life, and does not even receive an honorable burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.”

The Preacher uses deliberately shocking language.

In the ancient world:

Many children.

Long life.

An honorable burial.

Were all regarded as signs of great blessing.

But the Preacher says even these things do not guarantee a meaningful life.

If a person lives for many years and never enjoys the life God gave him, the length of his life alone does not make that life satisfying.

Cross References

Job 3:16

Why was I not like a child who never came to full birth, hidden away and never brought into the light?

Job 3:11

Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not pass away as soon as I came from my mother's womb?

Psalms 17:14

Some people receive their entire portion from this present life. Their stomachs are filled with earthly treasure, their children are many, and they leave their possessions to the next generation.

Spiritual Principle

A long life is not automatically a fulfilled life.

Application

Do not merely ask God for more years.

Ask Him for wisdom to live the years He gives you well.

IV. A LIFE THAT PASSES INTO OBSCURITY

Ecclesiastes 6:4 — Futility and Darkness

“For it comes in futility and departs in darkness, and its name is shrouded in obscurity.”

The Preacher continues his comparison with the stillborn child.

Its life never develops into earthly experience.

Its name fades into obscurity.

The language is somber because the Preacher is emphasizing rest from the frustration experienced by the unsatisfied person.

Cross References

Job 10:21

Before I go to the place from which I will not return, to the land of deep darkness and shadow,

Job 18:17

The memory of the wicked person disappears from the earth, and his name is no longer remembered in the land.

Psalms 109:13

May his descendants be cut off, and may his family name disappear from memory in the next generation.

Spiritual Principle

Human fame is temporary.

Obscurity eventually comes to nearly every earthly name.

V. REST WITHOUT EARTHLY STRIVING

Ecclesiastes 6:5 — More Rest Than the Unsatisfied Man

“It never sees the sun or knows anything, yet it finds more rest than that man.”

The Preacher contrasts earthly striving with rest.

The unsatisfied man may live for years.

Yet he is restless.

The stillborn child never enters the struggles of life under the sun.

The point is not that life has no value.

The point is that life without contentment can become deeply miserable.

Cross References

Job 10:18

Why did You bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before anyone ever saw me.

Job 10:19

Then I would have been as though I had never existed, carried directly from the womb to the grave.

Psalms 58:8

May the wicked disappear like a child who never reaches birth and never sees the light of the sun.

Spiritual Principle

Length of life cannot replace peace of heart.

VI. EVEN TWO THOUSAND YEARS CANNOT DEFEAT DEATH

Ecclesiastes 6:6 — The Same Destination

“Even if he lives a thousand years twice over, but does not enjoy life, do not all go to the same place?”

The Preacher exaggerates the length of life to make his point.

Imagine someone living:

Two thousand years.

If those years contain no true enjoyment, what has extraordinary longevity accomplished?

Death still comes.

Cross References

Psalm 49:10

Everyone can see that wise people die. Foolish and senseless people also perish, leaving their wealth behind to others.

Ecclesiastes 2:16

Neither the wise person nor the fool will be remembered forever. Eventually both will be forgotten, and both must die.

Job 21:23

One person dies while still strong, prosperous, comfortable, and secure.

Spiritual Principle

More years do not automatically create more meaning.

Key Truth

It is better to live wisely than merely to live long.

VII. THE APPETITE IS NEVER FINALLY SATISFIED

Ecclesiastes 6:7 — Labor for the Mouth

“All a man’s labor is for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.”

People work in order to meet needs.

Food.

Shelter.

Clothing.

Comfort.

But many desires continually renew themselves.

You eat today.

Tomorrow you are hungry again.

You buy something.

Later you desire something else.

You achieve a goal.

Soon another goal appears.

Cross References

Proverbs 16:26

A worker's hunger motivates him to keep working, because his own appetite pushes him onward.

Isaiah 55:2

Why spend your money on what cannot truly satisfy you, and why labor for what does not nourish your soul? Listen carefully to Me and receive what is truly good.

Ecclesiastes 1:8

Everything can become wearisome beyond words. The eye never reaches complete satisfaction from seeing, and the ear is never completely filled by hearing.

Spiritual Principle

Human desire renews itself faster than earthly possessions can satisfy it.

VIII. WHAT ADVANTAGE DOES WISDOM PROVIDE?

Ecclesiastes 6:8 — Wise, Foolish, Rich, and Poor

“What advantage has the wise over the fool? What does the poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?”

The Preacher again asks about lasting advantage.

Wisdom certainly has value.

But from the limited viewpoint of life under the sun, both wise and foolish people remain mortal.

The poor person may behave wisely and skillfully among others, yet he still faces human limitations.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:15

Then I said to myself, “If the fool’s end will also become my end, what lasting advantage have I gained from becoming so wise?” I concluded that this too was frustrating when viewed only under the sun.

Proverbs 19:1

It is better to be poor and live with integrity than to speak dishonestly and behave foolishly.

Ecclesiastes 4:13

A poor but wise young person is better than an old and foolish king who has become unwilling to listen to correction.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom improves how we live, but it does not remove every limitation of life.

IX. ENJOY WHAT IS PRESENT

Ecclesiastes 6:9 — Better What the Eyes See

“Better what the eyes see than the roving of desire. This too is vanity and chasing after the wind.”

This is one of the most practical verses in Ecclesiastes.

The Preacher says:

Enjoy what is actually before you.

Instead of constantly allowing desire to wander toward:

What you do not own.

Where you have not gone.

What you have not achieved.

Who you wish you were.

The wandering desire is never satisfied.

Cross References

Proverbs 27:20

Death and destruction are never satisfied, and human eyes are never completely satisfied either.

1 John 2:16

Everything associated with 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.

Matthew 6:22

The eye is like a lamp for the body. If your eye is healthy and focused properly, your whole life will be filled with light.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment begins when we stop living mentally somewhere else.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Enjoy what God has placed in your hand instead of exhausting yourself over what remains beyond your reach.

X. HUMANITY CANNOT CONTEND WITH GOD

Ecclesiastes 6:10 — One Stronger Than Man

“Whatever exists has already been named; and what man is has been known. He cannot contend with one who is stronger than he.”

The Preacher emphasizes human limitation.

Human beings do not define reality.

God does.

We are:

Created.

Limited.

Mortal.

Dependent.

We cannot argue God out of being God.

Cross References

Genesis 2:19

The Lord God formed the animals and birds from the ground and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them, and whatever Adam called each living creature became its name.

Job 9:32

God is not merely another man like me, so I cannot answer Him as though we were equals standing together in court.

Isaiah 45:9

How terrible for the person who argues with the One who made him. A piece of pottery cannot reasonably fight with the potter. Can the clay say to the one shaping it, “What are you making?”

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom begins when humanity recognizes that God is God and we are not.

XI. MORE WORDS DO NOT CREATE MORE MEANING

Ecclesiastes 6:11 — Multiplying Words and Vanity

“The more words, the more vanity—and what profit is there to man?”

Human beings can talk endlessly about life.

Debate.

Speculate.

Argue.

Explain.

But many words do not give us control over reality.

The Preacher has already warned against multiplying speech carelessly.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:2

“Utterly temporary and fleeting,” says the Preacher. “Everything under the sun becomes empty when treated as the final meaning of life.”

Ecclesiastes 12:12

My son, be warned about endlessly adding to words and writings. There is no end to making many books, and excessive study can exhaust the body.

Psalms 39:6

People pass through life like shadows. They become anxious over temporary things, gathering possessions without knowing who will finally receive them.

Spiritual Principle

More discussion does not necessarily produce more wisdom.

XII. HUMAN LIFE PASSES LIKE A SHADOW

Ecclesiastes 6:12 — Who Knows What Is Best?

“For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few days of his vain life which pass like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?”

The chapter ends with two questions.

Who truly knows what is best?

Who knows what happens after us?

Human understanding is limited.

We often assume:

“I know what I need.”

“I know what would make me happy.”

“I know what should happen.”

But God sees farther than we do.

Cross References

Job 8:9

We were born only yesterday and know very little, because our days on earth pass quickly like a shadow.

Psalms 144:4

A human being is like a breath, and his days pass away like a moving shadow.

James 4:14

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

Spiritual Principle

Human limitation should lead to humility and dependence upon God.

Key Truth

Because life is brief and the future is hidden, we should trust the One who sees both.

XIII. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 6

1. Wealth Without Enjoyment Is Empty

A person may have everything materially.

Yet he may still lack joy.

Principle:

Possession is not the same thing as satisfaction.

2. Long Life Without Contentment Is Still Empty

Many years do not automatically make a meaningful life.

Principle:

The quality of a life lived with God matters more than simply adding years.

3. Human Desire Is Difficult to Satisfy

The appetite keeps returning.

The eyes continue wandering.

Principle:

Unchecked desire always creates another reason to feel dissatisfied.

4. Contentment Values What Is Present

It is better to appreciate what is already before you than to live continually longing for something else.

Principle:

Gratitude looks at what God has given; envy looks at what God has given someone else.

5. Humanity Has Limits

We cannot control:

Death.

The future.

Every circumstance.

God.

Principle:

Peace grows when we stop trying to control what belongs to God.

6. Life Is Brief

Our days pass like:

A shadow.

A mist.

A breath.

Principle:

Because life is short, do not spend it endlessly wanting another life.

XIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 6 TEACHES ABOUT WEALTH

Wealth may provide:

Comfort.

Options.

Opportunity.

Security in certain earthly matters.

But wealth cannot guarantee:

Joy.

Peace.

Contentment.

Health.

Long life.

Eternal meaning.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The greatest tragedy is not having little.

It is having much and still being unable to enjoy anything.

XV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 6 TEACHES ABOUT CONTENTMENT

Contentment looks at what the eyes presently see and says:

“This is what God has placed before me today.”

Discontent continually wanders.

It says:

“If only.”

If only I had:

More money.

A different house.

A different job.

More recognition.

More possessions.

A different situation.

Then I would be happy.

But when one desire is fulfilled, another often appears.

Spiritual Principle

Contentment is learning to stop moving the finish line.

XVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 6 TEACHES ABOUT DESIRE

Desire itself is not always sinful.

We may rightly desire:

Wisdom.

Righteousness.

Service.

Growth.

Better circumstances.

But unchecked desire becomes:

Restless.

Greedy.

Comparative.

Impossible to satisfy.

Key Truth

The problem is not simply wanting something.

The problem is believing:

“I cannot have joy until I get it.”

XVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 6 TEACHES ABOUT LIFE’S LENGTH

The Preacher imagines someone living:

A thousand years.

Then another thousand.

Even two thousand years would not provide meaning if the person never learned to enjoy life rightly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

More time cannot repair a heart that refuses gratitude.

XVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 6 TEACHES ABOUT HUMAN LIMITATION

People want control.

We want to control:

Outcomes.

Possessions.

Time.

Health.

The future.

Other people.

But life repeatedly reminds us:

We are limited.

God is not.

Spiritual Principle

Humility is not weakness.

It is recognizing reality.

XIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What evil does the Preacher describe in verses 1–2?

He describes a person who has:

Riches.

Wealth.

Honor.

Everything he desires.

Yet he cannot enjoy any of it.

Question 2

Why is the ability to enjoy wealth important?

Because possession alone cannot create satisfaction.

Enjoyment requires a grateful and contented heart.

Question 3

Why does the Preacher mention someone with a hundred children?

He is using an extreme example of what ancient society considered great blessing and success.

Yet even enormous family prosperity cannot replace contentment.

Question 4

Why does he compare the unsatisfied person to a stillborn child?

He is emphasizing the tragedy of living many years without ever finding rest or satisfaction.

The comparison is intentionally severe.

Question 5

What does verse 6 teach about long life?

Even extraordinary longevity cannot provide lasting meaning if a person never learns to enjoy life rightly.

Question 6

What does verse 7 teach about appetite?

Human needs and desires continually return.

Satisfying one appetite today does not permanently satisfy it.

Question 7

What does “the roving of desire” mean?

It describes the heart constantly wandering toward what it does not have.

Instead of enjoying present blessings, it continually searches for something else.

Question 8

What does verse 9 teach about contentment?

It teaches that appreciating what is already before us is better than constantly desiring what we do not possess.

Question 9

What does verse 10 teach about God?

God is greater than humanity.

Human beings cannot successfully contend with their Creator as though they were His equal.

Question 10

Why does the Preacher say more words can increase vanity?

Because endless talking, reasoning, and speculation do not remove human limitations or give us control over life.

Question 11

Why is life compared with a shadow?

Because life passes quickly.

A shadow appears.

Moves.

And disappears.

Human life is similarly brief.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 6 change about the way we live?

It should teach us to:

Reject greed.

Practice contentment.

Enjoy present blessings.

Accept human limitations.

Stop living through endless “if only” thinking.

Trust God with the future.

Use our brief lives wisely.

XX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 6 asks several searching questions.

Am I Able to Enjoy What I Already Have?

Or am I always waiting for something more?

Have My Desires Become Endless?

When one desire is fulfilled, do I immediately replace it with another?

Do I Believe Wealth Will Make Me Content?

How much would actually be enough?

Am I Missing Present Blessings?

What has God already given me that I have stopped noticing?

Am I Constantly Comparing My Life with Another Person's Life?

Has comparison stolen gratitude?

Am I Trying to Control What Belongs to God?

Can I trust Him with the future?

Am I Living as Though My Life Were Permanent?

Do my priorities reflect how brief life actually is?

XXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Spend Today Wanting Tomorrow's Life”

One of the greatest dangers of discontentment is that it steals the present.

A person says:

I will be happy:

When I have more money.

When I reach another goal.

When my circumstances change.

When I own something different.

When someone finally recognizes me.

But life keeps moving.

Today disappears while we wait for tomorrow to make us happy.

Principle:

Do not sacrifice the blessings already in your hands while reaching endlessly for blessings you do not yet possess.

XXII. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEED AND DESIRE

Human beings have legitimate needs.

Food.

Shelter.

Rest.

Relationships.

But desire can continually expand beyond need.

What began as:

“I need enough.”

Can become:

“I need more than someone else.”

Then:

“I need more than I had yesterday.”

Then:

“I still do not have enough.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The heart that never defines “enough” can never experience contentment.

XXIII. WEALTH, JOY, AND GOD’S GIFT

Ecclesiastes 6 should be read alongside the end of Ecclesiastes 5.

Chapter 5 teaches that God gives:

Wealth.

Possessions.

And:

The ability to enjoy them.

Chapter 6 describes what happens when a person has the first two but not the third.

The lesson is profound.

Joy cannot be manufactured merely by increasing possessions.

Key Truth

Sometimes the greater blessing is not receiving more.

It is receiving the grace to enjoy what you already have.

XXIV. THE LIMITS OF HUMAN CONTROL

The chapter closes by confronting human pride.

We do not know:

Everything that is good for us.

Everything that will happen tomorrow.

Everything that will happen after we die.

We cannot:

Control every outcome.

Guarantee every plan.

Preserve every possession.

Extend life indefinitely.

Spiritual Principle

Life becomes less exhausting when we stop trying to perform God's job.

XXV. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 6 gives us a direct warning about the danger of living with an unsatisfied heart.

A person may have:

Money.

Honor.

Family.

Long life.

Achievement.

Possessions.

And still say:

“It is not enough.”

That is the tragedy of endless desire.

There will always be:

Something else to buy.

Somewhere else to go.

Another accomplishment.

Another comparison.

Another reason to delay contentment.

But the Preacher says:

“Better what the eyes see than the roving of desire.”

Look at what God has already placed before you.

Do not overlook:

Today.

Your present work.

Your present relationships.

Your present provision.

Your present opportunities.

Your present blessings.

Because life is passing.

Like a shadow.

Like a mist.

Like a breath.

That does not mean we should never pursue improvement.

It means improvement cannot become the condition for gratitude.

You can desire growth and still be thankful now.

You can pursue goals and still enjoy today.

You can work toward tomorrow without despising the present.

Ecclesiastes 6 also reminds us of our limits.

We are not God.

We cannot control everything.

We cannot determine every outcome.

We cannot guarantee the future.

But we can trust the One who does know the future.

Therefore:

Hold wealth loosely.

Hold plans humbly.

Hold desires carefully.

Receive blessings gratefully.

Stop comparing constantly.

Stop chasing an imaginary life that always exists somewhere else.

Do not wait until you have more before you begin thanking God.

Look around.

Recognize His provision.

Use what He has given.

Enjoy what He allows.

Serve faithfully.

And remember:

The richest person is not always the one who owns the most.

Sometimes the richest person is the one who has learned to say:

“What God has given me today is enough for me to be grateful.”

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom of Your Word.

Teach us to recognize the emptiness of wealth without contentment.

Protect us from believing that possessions alone can make us happy.

When we begin to think that more money will solve every problem, remind us that the human heart needs more than money.

Give us the ability to enjoy what You have already provided.

Protect us from restless desire.

Keep our eyes from constantly wandering toward what others possess.

Help us appreciate what is already before us.

Teach us to recognize:

Enough.

Give us contentment.

Give us gratitude.

Give us peace.

Father, help us use the days You give us wisely.

Whether our lives are long or short, may they be filled with faithfulness to You.

Keep us from wasting our years chasing what cannot satisfy.

When our desires begin controlling us, bring our hearts back to You.

When comparison steals our joy, remind us of Your personal care for us.

When we want someone else's life, teach us to receive the life You have given us.

Father, remind us that we are limited.

We do not know everything.

We cannot control everything.

We cannot see the whole future.

But You can.

Help us trust You with what we cannot know.

Help us trust You with what we cannot change.

Help us trust You with tomorrow.

Our lives pass quickly.

Teach us not to waste them.

May we live with gratitude.

May we work with purpose.

May we enjoy Your blessings.

May we hold possessions lightly.

May we seek Your wisdom.

May we be satisfied in You.

And when our earthly lives have passed like a shadow, may we have spent them pursuing what truly matters.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“Better what the eyes see than the roving of desire. This too is vanity and chasing after the wind.” — Ecclesiastes 6:9

Central Truth

Wealth, long life, achievement, and endless desire cannot satisfy the human heart apart from God; true contentment comes when we gratefully receive what He provides, accept our limitations, and trust Him with the future.

Ecclesiastes 6 in One Sentence

The Preacher shows that riches without enjoyment, long life without contentment, and endless desire all lead to emptiness, while wisdom teaches us to appreciate present blessings, accept human limits, and entrust our brief future to God.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 7 — Wisdom, Mortality, and the Limits of Man

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 7 turns toward practical wisdom.

The Preacher has already examined:

Pleasure.

Wealth.

Work.

Time.

Companionship.

Contentment.

Human desire.

Now he asks:

What kind of wisdom helps a person live well in a temporary and uncertain world?

The answers are often surprising.

He says:

A funeral can teach more than a feast.

Sorrow can teach more than laughter.

Correction can help more than flattery.

Patience is better than pride.

Wisdom is better than money because wisdom can preserve life.

But this chapter also teaches that even wisdom has limits.

The righteous may suffer.

The wicked may prosper.

Human beings cannot fully understand everything God is doing.

No one on earth lives without sin.

The search for complete understanding eventually reaches a boundary.

That boundary should lead us toward:

Humility.

Reverence.

Patience.

Fear of God.

The chapter also warns against two dangerous extremes.

One is self-righteousness.

The other is reckless wickedness.

The answer is not moral compromise.

The answer is humble dependence upon God.

The Preacher ends the chapter with one of the clearest statements about the human condition:

“God made mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.”

The problem with humanity is not that God created people evil.

The problem is that human beings departed from the uprightness God intended.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 7 is:

Wisdom grows through humility, correction, patience, mortality, and the fear of God, while human sinfulness and limited understanding remind us that only God possesses perfect wisdom.

I. A GOOD NAME IS BETTER THAN PERFUME

Ecclesiastes 7:1 — Character Outlasts Fragrance

“A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.”

In the ancient world, expensive perfume represented:

Luxury.

Honor.

Beauty.

Celebration.

But the Preacher says:

A good name is better.

Character is more valuable than appearance.

Reputation built through integrity carries greater value than outward luxury.

The second statement is more difficult.

How can the day of death be better than the day of birth?

At birth, the course of a life is still unknown.

At death, a faithful life has been completed.

The value of a life can then be seen more clearly.

Cross References

Proverbs 22:1

A good reputation should be chosen over great riches, and being respected is more valuable than possessing large amounts of silver and gold.

Philippians 1:21

For me, living means serving Christ, and dying means entering something even better because I will be with Him.

Psalms 116:15

The death of those who belong faithfully to the Lord is precious and deeply significant in His sight.

Spiritual Principle

Character is more valuable than appearance, wealth, or status.

Key Truth

A life should be measured not only by how it begins, but by how faithfully it ends.

II. THE HOUSE OF MOURNING CAN TEACH WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 7:2 — Death Should Be Taken to Heart

“It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.”

Most people prefer celebrations over funerals.

But the Preacher says a funeral can teach something a feast often cannot.

A funeral reminds us:

Life is brief.

Death is certain.

Time is limited.

Priorities matter.

The wise person does not avoid thinking about mortality.

He allows mortality to teach him how to live.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 7:4

The heart of a wise person seriously considers sorrow and death, while foolish people continually search only for places of amusement and pleasure.

Luke 6:25

How serious it is for those who laugh carelessly now while ignoring God, because a time will come when sorrow and mourning will overtake them.

James 4:9

Take sin seriously. Grieve over what is wrong. Let careless laughter turn into mourning and shallow celebration into humility before God.

Spiritual Principle

Remembering death can produce wiser living.

Application

Do not live as though your earthly life will never end.

Let mortality clarify what truly matters.

III. SORROW CAN IMPROVE THE HEART

Ecclesiastes 7:3 — A Sad Face Can Produce Wisdom

“Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad face the heart is made better.”

The Preacher is not condemning joy.

He is saying sorrow can accomplish spiritual work that constant amusement cannot.

Sorrow can produce:

Reflection.

Humility.

Repentance.

Compassion.

Dependence upon God.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 7:10

Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow produces only despair and death.

Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, because God will comfort them.

Proverbs 14:13

Even while a person laughs, the heart may still be hurting, and when the laughter ends, sadness may remain.

Spiritual Principle

Pain can teach lessons pleasure often avoids.

IV. THE WISE THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT LIFE

Ecclesiastes 7:4 — Mourning Versus Pleasure

“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.”

The wise person does not spend life trying to escape every serious thought.

He is willing to think about:

Mortality.

Sin.

Responsibility.

Eternity.

The fool wants only distraction.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 7:2

It is better to enter a place of mourning than a place of celebration, because death eventually comes to every person, and the living should think seriously about that truth.

Proverbs 14:13

A person may laugh while still carrying pain inside, and joy can end with sorrow.

Luke 6:25

How serious it is for those who live only for present laughter, because a time of mourning can come when earthly pleasures disappear.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom faces reality instead of constantly escaping from it.

V. WISE CORRECTION IS BETTER THAN FOOLISH PRAISE

Ecclesiastes 7:5 — Hear the Rebuke of the Wise

“It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than to listen to the song of fools.”

Correction is rarely pleasant.

But wise correction can protect a person from:

Pride.

Sin.

Failure.

Self-deception.

Foolish praise feels good.

Wise rebuke does good.

Cross References

Proverbs 13:1

A wise son listens to his father’s correction, but a proud person who mocks others refuses to listen when he is rebuked.

Proverbs 15:31

The person who listens to life-giving correction will remain among those who are wise.

Psalms 141:5

Let a righteous person correct me with kindness. Let him rebuke me, because such correction is like healing oil and should not be rejected.

Spiritual Principle

The person who can receive correction can continue growing.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A friend who tells you the truth may help you more than a crowd that only applauds.

VI. THE LAUGHTER OF FOOLS IS SHORT-LIVED

Ecclesiastes 7:6 — Crackling Thorns

“Like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless.”

Dry thorns burn loudly.

They crackle.

They flare up.

Then disappear quickly.

That is the Preacher’s picture of foolish laughter.

It may be:

Loud.

Exciting.

Entertaining.

But temporary.

Cross References

Psalm 118:12

My enemies surrounded me like bees, but they disappeared quickly like dry thorns burning in a fire, because in the Lord’s name I overcame them.

Proverbs 14:13

Even in laughter the heart may still hurt, and when the entertainment ends, grief may remain.

Isaiah 33:12

The nations will become like thorns cut down and thrown into a fire, burning rapidly and disappearing.

Spiritual Principle

Noise should never be mistaken for meaning.

VII. OPPRESSION AND BRIBERY CORRUPT

Ecclesiastes 7:7 — Pressure Can Distort Wisdom

“Oppression can drive the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.”

Even a wise person can become distorted under prolonged oppression.

Pressure can:

Exhaust.

Confuse.

Discourage.

Provoke.

Bribery creates another danger.

It corrupts judgment.

A person who accepts a bribe begins seeing decisions through the value of personal gain rather than truth.

Cross References

Exodus 23:8

Do not accept a bribe, because a bribe blinds people who should see clearly and twists the words and judgment of honest people.

Deuteronomy 16:19

Do not pervert justice or show favoritism. Do not accept a bribe, because bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and distorts the words of righteous people.

Proverbs 15:27

The greedy person brings trouble upon his own household, but the person who refuses bribes will preserve his life.

Spiritual Principle

Integrity becomes especially important when pressure or personal gain tries to influence judgment.

VIII. THE END CAN BE BETTER THAN THE BEGINNING

Ecclesiastes 7:8 — Patience Over Pride

“The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.”

Beginnings can be exciting.

But beginnings do not prove faithfulness.

The real question is:

How does it end?

A person may start:

A ministry.

A marriage.

A project.

A calling.

A commitment.

But perseverance matters.

Patience is better than pride because patience is willing to endure the process.

Cross References

Proverbs 16:32

The person who controls his temper is stronger than a mighty warrior, and the person who rules his own spirit is greater than someone who conquers a city.

James 5:11

We call those blessed who continued faithfully through suffering. You have heard about Job’s endurance and have seen how the Lord finally worked in his life, showing that the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Philippians 1:6

I am confident that the God who began a good work in you will continue carrying it forward until it is completed in the day of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

Finishing faithfully is more important than beginning impressively.

IX. DO NOT BECOME QUICKLY ANGRY

Ecclesiastes 7:9 — Anger and Foolishness

“Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger rests in the lap of fools.”

The Preacher warns against a short temper.

Quick anger often produces:

Words later regretted.

Broken relationships.

Poor decisions.

Unnecessary conflict.

The fool carries anger like something resting comfortably in his lap.

Cross References

Proverbs 14:29

A patient person shows great understanding, but the person with a quick temper displays foolishness openly.

James 1:19

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Ephesians 4:26

If you become angry, do not allow that anger to lead you into sin, and do not let the day end while you are still holding onto it.

Spiritual Principle

Anger is dangerous when it becomes a residence rather than a temporary emotion.

X. DO NOT ROMANTICIZE THE PAST

Ecclesiastes 7:10 — “Why Were the Old Days Better?”

“Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ It is not wise to ask such questions.”

People often remember the past selectively.

We remember:

The pleasant parts.

The familiar parts.

The comfortable parts.

And forget:

The problems.

The pain.

The conflicts.

The difficulties.

Nostalgia can distort reality.

Cross References

Isaiah 43:18

Do not keep living in the past or constantly dwelling on former things.

Philippians 3:13

Brothers and sisters, I do not claim that I have already reached the goal, but I do this one thing: I leave what is behind and reach forward toward what is ahead.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

What has happened before will happen again, and many patterns of human life continue repeating under the sun.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom learns from the past without trying to live there.

XI. WISDOM IS A GOOD INHERITANCE

Ecclesiastes 7:11 — Wisdom Benefits the Living

“Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.”

An inheritance can provide:

Resources.

Opportunity.

Security.

Wisdom provides similar benefits.

But unlike money, wisdom can guide how resources are used.

Cross References

Proverbs 3:14

The profit gained from wisdom is better than the profit gained from silver, and what wisdom produces is more valuable than gold.

Proverbs 8:11

Wisdom is better than precious jewels, and nothing a person could desire should be compared with it.

Job 28:18

Coral and crystal cannot compare with wisdom, and wisdom is worth far more than precious jewels.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom is one of the greatest inheritances a person can receive or leave behind.

XII. WISDOM OFFERS PROTECTION

Ecclesiastes 7:12 — Wisdom Preserves Life

“For wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: wisdom preserves the life of the one who has it.”

Money can protect in certain situations.

Wisdom can also protect.

But wisdom has an advantage.

Wisdom helps a person:

Recognize danger.

Avoid foolish choices.

Understand consequences.

Choose better paths.

Cross References

Proverbs 2:7

God stores up sound wisdom for upright people and becomes a shield for those who walk with integrity.

Proverbs 4:7

Wisdom is the most important thing, so pursue wisdom. Whatever else you gain, make sure you gain understanding.

Proverbs 3:16

Wisdom holds long life in one hand and riches and honor in the other.

Spiritual Principle

Money may protect circumstances.

Wisdom protects decisions.

XIII. CONSIDER THE WORK OF GOD

Ecclesiastes 7:13 — What God Has Made Crooked

“Consider the work of God: Who can straighten what He has made crooked?”

Some circumstances cannot be changed by human effort.

The Preacher reminds us that God remains sovereign.

There are situations we must:

Accept.

Endure.

Learn from.

Trust God through.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:15

What has become crooked cannot always be straightened by human effort, and what is missing cannot always be counted or replaced.

Job 12:14

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

Romans 9:20

But who are you, as a human being, to argue against God? Can something that has been made say to its Maker, “Why did You make me this way?”

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom recognizes the difference between what we can change and what we must trust God with.

XIV. TRUST GOD IN GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

Ecclesiastes 7:14 — Prosperity and Adversity

“When times are good, be joyful; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that no man can discover what comes after him.”

Life contains:

Prosperity.

Adversity.

The wise response to prosperity is:

Joy.

The wise response to adversity is:

Reflection.

Both seasons can teach us.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 8:2

Remember the entire journey the Lord your God led you through in the wilderness. He used those years to humble you, test you, and reveal what was truly in your heart.

Philippians 4:12

I know how to live with little, and I know how to live with plenty. In every circumstance I have learned how to be content, whether well fed or hungry, whether having much or having little.

Job 2:10

Job said, “Should we receive only good things from God and refuse to accept hardship?” In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

Spiritual Principle

Prosperity and adversity both belong in the classroom of faith.

XV. THE RIGHTEOUS MAY SUFFER WHILE THE WICKED PROSPER

Ecclesiastes 7:15 — Life Does Not Always Appear Fair

“In this meaningless life of mine I have seen it all: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.”

The Preacher observes something troubling.

Sometimes righteous people suffer.

Sometimes wicked people prosper.

Life under the sun does not always show immediate justice.

Cross References

Psalms 73:3

I became jealous when I looked at arrogant people and saw how well the wicked seemed to prosper.

Job 21:7

Why do wicked people sometimes continue living, become old, and grow increasingly powerful?

Habakkuk 1:13

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, so why do You allow treacherous people to continue? Why do You remain silent when wicked people swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

Spiritual Principle

Temporary circumstances are not the final measurement of God’s justice.

XVI. DO NOT BECOME SELF-RIGHTEOUS

Ecclesiastes 7:16 — The Danger of Proud Righteousness

“Do not be overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise—why destroy yourself?”

This verse does not teach:

“Do not become too holy.”

Scripture never warns against genuine righteousness.

The warning is against:

Self-righteousness.

Religious pride.

Pretending to possess perfect wisdom.

Trying to establish superiority over others.

Cross References

Romans 12:3

Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, think with sober judgment according to the measure God has given you.

Isaiah 65:5

Some people say, “Stay away from me. Do not come near me, because I am holier than you.” God says such self-righteous pride is offensive before Him.

Galatians 6:3

If anyone thinks he is something important when he is really nothing, he deceives himself.

Spiritual Principle

True righteousness produces humility.

Self-righteousness produces pride.

XVII. DO NOT PRACTICE RECKLESS WICKEDNESS

Ecclesiastes 7:17 — Sin Has Consequences

“Do not be overly wicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time?”

The Preacher now warns against the opposite extreme.

Some may reason:

“If righteousness does not always bring immediate reward, why not live wickedly?”

The answer is:

Sin destroys.

Foolishness has consequences.

Cross References

Romans 6:1

What should we say then? Should we continue living in sin so that grace can increase? Certainly not.

Proverbs 10:27

Reverence for the Lord tends to lengthen life, but wicked living can shorten a person’s days.

Galatians 6:7

Do not deceive yourself: God cannot be mocked. A person will eventually harvest the same kind of seed he has chosen to plant.

Spiritual Principle

Grace is never permission to live foolishly.

XVIII. FEAR GOD AND AVOID THE EXTREMES

Ecclesiastes 7:18 — Hold to Wisdom

“It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The one who fears God will avoid all extremes.”

The Preacher’s solution is:

Fear God.

The fear of God protects a person from:

Proud self-righteousness.

Reckless wickedness.

Human arrogance.

Moral carelessness.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 12:13

After everything has been considered, here is the final conclusion: fear God and keep His commands, because this is the responsibility of every person.

Proverbs 3:7

Do not think you are wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

Psalms 34:11

Come, children, listen to me, and I will teach you what it means to fear the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

The fear of God produces balance, humility, and obedience.

XIX. WISDOM IS STRONGER THAN MANY RULERS

Ecclesiastes 7:19 — The Power of Wisdom

“Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city.”

Wisdom provides strength that position alone cannot give.

Ten leaders without wisdom may accomplish less than one truly wise person.

Cross References

Proverbs 21:22

A wise person can overcome a city defended by mighty warriors and bring down the strong defenses in which they trusted.

Proverbs 24:5

A wise person is strong, and a person with knowledge continually increases in strength.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

I concluded that wisdom is better than strength, even though the wisdom of a poor person may sometimes be ignored and his words forgotten.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom can accomplish what raw power cannot.

XX. EVERY HUMAN BEING SINS

Ecclesiastes 7:20 — No One Is Sinless

“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”

This verse destroys self-righteousness.

No one lives a completely sinless life.

Every person needs:

Grace.

Mercy.

Forgiveness.

Cross References

Romans 3:10

As Scripture says, there is no one who is completely righteous on his own—not even one.

1 Kings 8:46

If Your people sin against You—and there is no human being who never sins—and You become angry with them and allow consequences to come,

1 John 1:8

If we claim that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not operating honestly within us.

Spiritual Principle

Humility grows when we remember our own need for grace.

XXI. DO NOT LISTEN TO EVERY COMMENT

Ecclesiastes 7:21 — Guard Your Heart from Every Word

“Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you.”

Not every comment deserves attention.

If you listen to every opinion about yourself, you will live in constant frustration.

People say things.

Sometimes carelessly.

Sometimes emotionally.

Sometimes unfairly.

Wisdom knows when to let words pass.

Cross References

Proverbs 30:10

Do not falsely accuse or slander a servant before his master, or he may curse you and you may be found guilty.

Ecclesiastes 10:20

Do not curse the king even in your thoughts, and do not curse the rich even in your private room, because words can travel in unexpected ways.

Matthew 7:1

Do not judge others with a self-righteous spirit, or you will place yourself under the same standard of judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Not every criticism deserves a response.

XXII. REMEMBER YOUR OWN WORDS

Ecclesiastes 7:22 — You Have Done the Same

“For you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.”

The Preacher immediately gives the reason for patience.

Before becoming angry about what someone said about you, remember:

You have also spoken wrongly.

This produces humility.

Cross References

Matthew 7:3

Why do you focus on the small speck in your brother’s eye while ignoring the much larger problem in your own?

James 3:9

With the tongue we bless the Lord and Father, and with that same tongue we sometimes speak evil about people who were made in God’s likeness.

Romans 2:1

You have no excuse when you condemn someone else while practicing similar things yourself. By judging another person, you expose your own guilt.

Spiritual Principle

Remembering our own failures makes us less eager to condemn others.

XXIII. WISDOM REMAINS BEYOND COMPLETE HUMAN REACH

Ecclesiastes 7:23 — “It Was Beyond Me”

“I tested all this with wisdom and said, ‘I am determined to be wise’—but it was beyond me.”

The Preacher pursued wisdom intensely.

Yet he finally admitted:

There are limits.

Human intelligence cannot fully understand everything.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:19

God says, “I will bring the wisdom of the worldly wise to nothing, and I will expose the limits of human intelligence.”

Job 28:12

But where can true wisdom be found? Where is the place where genuine understanding lives?

Romans 11:33

How deep are the riches of God’s wisdom and knowledge! His judgments are beyond our complete understanding, and His ways cannot be fully traced by human minds.

Spiritual Principle

True wisdom includes knowing where human wisdom ends.

XXIV. GOD’S WAYS ARE DEEP

Ecclesiastes 7:24 — Who Can Discover It?

“Whatever exists is far off and most profound—who can discover it?”

Some truths are deeper than human investigation can reach.

God has revealed much.

But God has not revealed everything.

Cross References

Job 11:7

Can you fully discover the depths of God? Can you reach the complete limits of the Almighty’s knowledge and power?

Romans 11:33

How deep are the riches of God’s wisdom and knowledge! His decisions are beyond our complete understanding, and His ways cannot be fully traced.

Isaiah 55:9

Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts.

Spiritual Principle

Mystery should produce humility rather than arrogance.

XXV. THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM CONTINUES

Ecclesiastes 7:25 — Investigating Wisdom and Folly

“So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things, and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.”

Although wisdom has limits, the Preacher does not stop pursuing it.

Humility does not mean abandoning learning.

It means learning without pretending to know everything.

Cross References

Proverbs 2:4

Search for wisdom as eagerly as people search for silver, and pursue understanding as though you were searching for hidden treasure.

Ecclesiastes 1:17

I devoted myself to understanding wisdom, madness, and foolishness, but I discovered that even this pursuit could become like chasing the wind.

1 Kings 4:29

God gave Solomon extraordinary wisdom, understanding, and a breadth of knowledge greater than ordinary human ability.

Spiritual Principle

The limits of wisdom should make us humble, not intellectually lazy.

XXVI. THE SNARE OF IMMORAL SEDUCTION

Ecclesiastes 7:26 — A Trap More Bitter Than Death

“I found more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap, and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner will be ensnared.”

The Preacher warns about destructive seduction.

This is not a condemnation of women in general.

The picture is of an immoral seducer whose influence traps a person in sin.

Similar warnings appear throughout Proverbs.

Cross References

Proverbs 5:3

The words of an immoral woman may sound sweet like honey, and her speech may seem smooth like oil.

Proverbs 22:14

The mouth of an immoral woman is like a deep pit. A person who rejects God’s wisdom may fall into it.

Proverbs 2:16

Wisdom will rescue you from the immoral woman and from the seductive words of someone who is unfaithful.

Spiritual Principle

Temptation often appears attractive before its chains become visible.

Application

Do not ask only:

“Does this feel good?”

Ask:

“Where will this lead?”

XXVII. THE PREACHER ADDS ONE DISCOVERY TO ANOTHER

Ecclesiastes 7:27 — Searching for the Pattern

“‘Look,’ says the Preacher, ‘this is what I have discovered, adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things—’”

The Preacher describes his method.

He studies.

Compares.

Observes.

Adds one conclusion to another.

He is attempting to understand the larger pattern of human life.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:2

The Preacher says, “Everything under the sun is fleeting and temporary when treated as the ultimate meaning of life.”

Ecclesiastes 12:9

Because the Preacher was wise, he continued teaching the people knowledge. He carefully examined, arranged, and set in order many proverbs.

1 Kings 4:32

Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and composed one thousand and five songs.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom grows through careful observation, comparison, and reflection.

XXVIII. UPRIGHTNESS IS RARE

Ecclesiastes 7:28 — The Search Continues

“Which my soul still seeks but has not found. One upright man among a thousand I have found, but not one upright woman among them all.”

This verse reflects the Preacher's own observation and experience.

It should not be read as a universal declaration that men are morally superior to women.

The wider biblical teaching is clear:

All humanity is sinful.

Both men and women need grace.

The verse emphasizes how difficult genuine uprightness was for the Preacher to find.

Cross References

Psalms 12:1

Help us, Lord, because godly people seem to be disappearing, and faithfulness has become rare among humanity.

Job 33:23

If there is a messenger among a thousand who can explain to a person what is right,

Romans 3:10

As Scripture declares, no human being is completely righteous on his own—not even one.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful character is rare enough that it should never be taken for granted.

XXIX. GOD MADE HUMANITY UPRIGHT

Ecclesiastes 7:29 — Humanity Chose Many Schemes

“This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.”

The chapter ends by identifying the real human problem.

God is not responsible for human corruption.

God made humanity upright.

Human beings departed from that condition.

We created:

Schemes.

Rebellion.

Selfish plans.

Sinful alternatives to God's design.

Cross References

Genesis 1:27

God created humanity in His own image. In the image of God He created them; He created male and female.

Genesis 3:6

When the woman saw that the fruit looked good for food, was attractive to the eyes, and seemed desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Romans 3:23

Every person has sinned and falls short of the glory and holy standard of God.

Spiritual Principle

Human sin is not the result of defective creation.

It is the result of human rebellion.

Key Truth

God made humanity upright.

Humanity chose crooked paths.

XXX. EIGHT GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 7

1. Character Is Better Than Appearance

A good name is better than expensive perfume.

Principle:

Who you are matters more than how impressive you appear.

2. Mortality Can Teach Wisdom

A funeral reminds us:

Life is short.

Time matters.

Eternity is real.

Principle:

Remembering death can improve how we live.

3. Correction Is Better Than Flattery

Wise rebuke may hurt.

But it can help.

Principle:

Truth that corrects you is more valuable than praise that deceives you.

4. Patience Is Better Than Pride

Beginnings are easy.

Endurance is harder.

Principle:

Finishing well requires patience.

5. Anger Must Be Controlled

Quick anger reveals foolishness.

Principle:

Do not allow emotion to govern judgment.

6. Wisdom Has Great Value but Real Limits

Wisdom protects.

Wisdom guides.

But wisdom cannot explain everything.

Principle:

The wisest human being still needs God.

7. No Human Being Is Sinless

Everyone fails.

Everyone needs grace.

Principle:

Remembering your own sin should make you both humble and merciful.

8. Humanity's Problem Is Sin

God made humanity upright.

Human beings pursued their own schemes.

Principle:

The deepest human problem is not ignorance alone but rebellion against God.

XXXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 7 TEACHES ABOUT DEATH

Death is not presented merely as something frightening.

It can become a teacher.

It reminds us that:

Time is limited.

Pride is foolish.

Possessions are temporary.

Relationships matter.

Character matters.

God matters.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A wise person thinks about death not because he hates life, but because he wants to live life correctly.

XXXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 7 TEACHES ABOUT CORRECTION

Most people naturally prefer praise.

But praise can hide faults.

Correction exposes them.

A wise person asks:

Is this criticism true?

Is there something I need to change?

Spiritual Principle

Defensiveness prevents growth.

Teachability creates it.

XXXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 7 TEACHES ABOUT PATIENCE

Patience waits for the end of the matter.

Pride demands immediate results.

Patience says:

“God is still working.”

Pride says:

“This should already be finished.”

Key Truth

Some things can only be understood after enough time has passed.

XXXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 7 TEACHES ABOUT ANGER

Anger itself is not always sinful.

But quick, uncontrolled anger is dangerous.

It can distort:

Speech.

Judgment.

Relationships.

Decision-making.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never make a permanent decision while controlled by a temporary emotion.

XXXV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 7 TEACHES ABOUT THE PAST

The past contains lessons.

But the past should not become a prison.

Saying:

“Everything used to be better”

often ignores the difficulties of former times.

Spiritual Principle

Learn from yesterday.

Live in today.

Trust God with tomorrow.

XXXVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 7 TEACHES ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS

The warning against being “overly righteous” is not a warning against holiness.

It warns against:

Self-righteousness.

Legalistic pride.

Spiritual superiority.

Pretending to know everything.

Key Truth

Genuine righteousness makes a person humble because genuine righteousness recognizes dependence upon God.

XXXVII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why is a good name better than expensive perfume?

Because character and reputation have greater lasting value than outward appearance or luxury.

Question 2

How can the day of death be better than the day of birth?

At birth, the direction of a life is unknown.

At death, a faithful life has been completed, and its character can be evaluated.

Question 3

Why can mourning teach more than feasting?

Mourning forces us to face:

Mortality.

Priorities.

The brevity of life.

Feasting can easily distract us from these realities.

Question 4

Why is wise rebuke valuable?

Because correction can expose problems we may not recognize in ourselves.

Question 5

What does the crackling of thorns illustrate?

It pictures foolish laughter that is:

Loud.

Brief.

Shallow.

Temporary.

Question 6

Why is patience better than pride?

Patience is willing to wait for the completion of a matter.

Pride demands control and immediate results.

Question 7

Why is anger dangerous?

Quick anger can produce:

Foolish speech.

Wrong decisions.

Broken relationships.

Sinful reactions.

Question 8

Is it wrong to remember the past?

No.

The warning is against romanticizing the past and assuming everything was automatically better before.

Question 9

What does it mean not to be “overly righteous”?

It warns against self-righteousness and religious pride, not genuine obedience to God.

Question 10

Why does verse 20 matter so much?

It reminds us that no human being lives completely without sin.

Therefore, no one has grounds for spiritual pride.

Question 11

Why should we not pay attention to every criticism?

Because people sometimes speak carelessly, and because we ourselves have also spoken wrongly about others.

Question 12

What does the final verse teach about humanity?

God created humanity upright.

Human beings departed from God’s design and pursued sinful schemes.

XXXVIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 7 asks several searching questions.

What Kind of Name Am I Building?

Will people associate my life with:

Integrity?

Faithfulness?

Kindness?

Truth?

Am I Willing to Think About Mortality?

Does the reality of death shape my priorities?

Can I Receive Correction?

Or do I immediately become defensive?

Am I Patient?

Can I wait for God to finish what He has begun?

Am I Quick to Become Angry?

Does anger control my words?

Am I Romanticizing the Past?

Am I missing what God is doing now because I keep wishing for yesterday?

Am I Self-Righteous?

Do I compare my righteousness with other people instead of recognizing my dependence upon grace?

Do I Listen to Every Opinion About Me?

Have I allowed criticism to control my peace?

Do I Recognize My Own Sinfulness?

Does that recognition make me humble?

XXXIX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Wise Person Learns from What a Fool Tries to Avoid”

The fool wants:

Constant laughter.

Constant comfort.

Constant praise.

Constant entertainment.

The wise person is willing to face:

Correction.

Sorrow.

Mortality.

Adversity.

Hard truth.

Why?

Because difficult things often teach the deepest lessons.

Principle:

Do not ask God only to make life easy. Ask Him to make you wise.

XL. THE SCHOOL OF MORTALITY

A funeral has a way of making questions clearer.

What mattered?

What did not?

What survives?

What disappears?

Money gets left behind.

Possessions change hands.

Titles disappear.

But:

Character matters.

Faith matters.

Relationships matter.

Truth matters.

God matters.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Death is a terrible master but a powerful teacher.

XLI. THE BALANCE OF GODLY WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 7 refuses two false paths.

One path says:

“I am better than everyone.”

That is self-righteousness.

The other says:

“Nothing matters, so I will live however I want.”

That is wickedness.

The wise path says:

“I fear God.”

Fear of God produces:

Humility.

Obedience.

Balance.

Discernment.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom avoids both prideful religion and reckless rebellion.

XLII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 7 teaches us that wisdom often grows in places we would not naturally choose.

We would choose:

The feast.

The chapter says:

Consider the funeral.

We would choose:

Laughter.

The chapter says:

Sorrow can teach.

We would choose:

Praise.

The chapter says:

Listen to correction.

We would choose:

Immediate results.

The chapter says:

Be patient.

We would choose:

Control.

The chapter says:

Consider the work of God.

We would choose:

Perfect explanations.

The chapter says:

Some things are too deep for us.

Wisdom therefore begins with humility.

You do not know everything.

You cannot control everything.

You are not sinless.

You need correction.

You need patience.

You need grace.

You need God.

Do not waste your life pretending otherwise.

Build a good name.

Receive wise rebuke.

Control anger.

Stop worshiping the past.

Be patient through difficult seasons.

Accept that some questions may remain unanswered.

Do not become self-righteous.

Do not become morally careless.

Fear God.

Remember:

Everyone sins.

Therefore:

Show grace.

Remember:

People will say things about you.

Do not allow every word to become a wound.

Remember your own failures before condemning someone else.

And above all:

Recognize the condition of humanity.

God made mankind upright.

Human beings pursued many schemes.

That explains much of the brokenness we see.

The answer is not greater human pride.

The answer is returning humbly to God.

Therefore:

Seek wisdom.

But do not worship your own intelligence.

Pursue righteousness.

But reject self-righteousness.

Receive correction.

Control anger.

Endure patiently.

Remember mortality.

Fear God.

And allow every difficult lesson of life to make you:

Wiser.

Humbler.

More faithful.

More dependent upon Him.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom found in Your Word.

Teach us to value character more than appearance.

Help us build a good name through lives of integrity.

Remind us that our earthly lives are brief.

Give us courage to think seriously about mortality so that we may live wisely.

When sorrow enters our lives, do not allow us to waste the lesson it can teach.

Use difficult seasons to make our hearts:

Softer.

Wiser.

More compassionate.

More dependent upon You.

Give us teachable hearts.

Help us receive correction without pride.

When someone speaks truth we need to hear, give us humility to listen.

Protect us from foolish anger.

Teach us to be:

Quick to listen.

Slow to speak.

Slow to become angry.

Keep us from romanticizing the past.

Help us learn from yesterday without trying to live there.

Give us wisdom for today.

Father, teach us to trust Your sovereignty.

When circumstances cannot be changed, give us grace to trust You.

When days are good, help us rejoice.

When days are difficult, help us reflect and remain faithful.

Protect us from self-righteousness.

Keep us from thinking we are spiritually superior to others.

Remind us that no one lives without sin.

Keep us close to Your grace.

Protect us also from reckless wickedness.

Do not let us misuse grace as an excuse for sin.

Teach us to fear You.

Father, help us not to become controlled by the opinions of others.

Give us wisdom to know which words deserve attention and which words should be released.

When others fail, remind us of our own failures.

Make us merciful.

Make us humble.

Give us wisdom.

But also remind us that our wisdom has limits.

When we reach questions we cannot answer, help us trust Your infinite understanding.

You see what we cannot see.

You know what we cannot know.

You understand what we cannot understand.

Thank You that You created humanity upright.

Forgive us for the sinful schemes we pursue.

Lead us away from crooked paths.

Bring our hearts back to You.

Make us wise.

Make us patient.

Make us humble.

Make us faithful.

And may every season of life draw us closer to You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

**“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.” —
Ecclesiastes 7:20**

Central Truth

True wisdom grows through mortality, correction, patience, humility, and the fear of God, while the limits of human understanding and the universal reality of sin remind us that perfect wisdom and righteousness belong to God alone.

Ecclesiastes 7 in One Sentence

The Preacher teaches that character, mortality, correction, patience, humility, and godly wisdom are more valuable than shallow pleasure, pride, anger, and self-righteousness, while reminding us that humanity is sinful, human understanding is limited, and the fear of God is the path of wisdom.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8 — Wisdom, Authority, and the Mystery of God's Work

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8 brings together several major themes that have appeared throughout the book:

Wisdom.

Authority.

Human limitation.

Justice.

Death.

Joy.

The mystery of God's work.

The chapter begins by praising wisdom.

Wisdom changes the way a person thinks.

It affects:

Judgment.

Speech.

Conduct.

Even the expression on a person's face.

The Preacher then turns to the subject of authority.

Human rulers possess real power.

Their commands matter.

Their decisions can affect the lives of many people.

Yet no earthly ruler possesses absolute authority.

Kings rule for a time.

God rules forever.

Human authority therefore must always be understood beneath the sovereignty of God.

The chapter also reminds us that human power has strict limits.

No ruler can stop death.

No wealthy person can escape mortality.

No wicked person can use sin itself as a means of final deliverance.

The Preacher then wrestles with another difficult question:

Why does judgment sometimes seem delayed?

Why do wicked people sometimes appear to prosper?

Why do righteous people sometimes suffer consequences that seem more appropriate for the wicked?

Ecclesiastes does not deny these realities.

It faces them honestly.

Yet the Preacher still says:

“Surely I know that it will go well with those who fear God.”

Delayed justice is not absent justice.

God sees.

God knows.

God will judge.

The chapter ends with another reminder of human limitation.

A person may devote:

Day.

Night.

Study.

Observation.

Wisdom.

To trying to understand everything God is doing.

Yet some mysteries remain beyond human comprehension.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 8 is:

Wisdom teaches us to live carefully under authority, recognize the limits of human power, trust God's ultimate justice, enjoy His daily gifts, and humbly accept that His complete work is beyond human understanding.

I. WISDOM CHANGES A PERSON

Ecclesiastes 8:1 — The Radiance of Wisdom

“Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of a matter? Wisdom brightens a man's face, and softens the hardness of his countenance.”

The Preacher begins with the power of wisdom.

Wisdom is more than information.

It changes a person.

Wisdom gives:

Discernment.

Perspective.

Understanding.

Calmness.

Grace.

A hardened face can be softened by a wiser spirit.

Cross References

Proverbs 4:9

Wisdom will place a beautiful crown of honor upon your head and will give you a gracious and honorable life.

Exodus 34:29

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai carrying the two tablets of God's testimony, he did not realize that his face was shining because he had been speaking with the Lord.

James 3:17

The wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.

Spiritual Principle

True wisdom affects both attitude and appearance because it changes the heart.

Key Truth

Wisdom does not merely make a person smarter.

It makes a person steadier.

II. RESPECT AUTHORITY

Ecclesiastes 8:2 — Obey the King's Command

“I say: Obey the king's command, because of the oath before God.”

The Preacher teaches respect for legitimate authority.

Government and civil order matter.

Believers are not called to unnecessary rebellion.

Respect for authority is connected ultimately to accountability before God.

Cross References

Romans 13:1

Every person should submit to governing authorities, because no authority exists apart from God's permission, and the authorities that exist have been allowed by Him.

1 Peter 2:17

Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the king.

Titus 3:1

Remind believers to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey them, and to be ready to do what is good.

Spiritual Principle

Respect for authority is part of orderly and responsible living.

Application

Obey legitimate authority unless obedience to human authority would require disobedience to God.

III. DO NOT ACT RECKLESSLY BEFORE A RULER

Ecclesiastes 8:3 — Do Not Stand in an Evil Cause

“Do not be hasty to leave his presence, and do not stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever pleases him.”

The Preacher warns against impulsive behavior before powerful rulers.

Wisdom does not act recklessly.

It evaluates consequences.

It refuses to join an evil cause.

Cross References

Proverbs 24:21

My son, fear the Lord and respect the king, and do not join people who are constantly rebelling against proper authority.

Romans 13:2

Whoever rebels against rightful authority is resisting the order God has allowed, and those who persist in such rebellion bring judgment upon themselves.

1 Peter 2:13

For the Lord’s sake, submit yourselves to legitimate human authorities, whether to the king as the highest ruler,

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom knows when to speak, when to wait, and when not to become involved in wrongdoing.

IV. A KING’S WORD CARRIES POWER

Ecclesiastes 8:4 — Earthly Authority Is Real

“Since a king’s word is supreme, who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’”

In the ancient world, royal authority could be enormous.

A king’s command could determine:

Policy.

Punishment.

Property.

Freedom.

Even life and death.

The verse does not mean a king is morally above questioning.

It emphasizes the practical power rulers possess.

Cross References

Proverbs 16:14

A king's anger can become a messenger of death, but a wise person knows how to calm that anger.

Daniel 4:35

All the people of the earth are like nothing before God. He does according to His will among the armies of heaven and the people of earth. No one can stop His hand or demand, "What are You doing?"

Romans 9:20

But who are you, as a human being, to argue with God? Can something that was made say to its Maker, "Why did You make me this way?"

Spiritual Principle

Human rulers may exercise great authority, but only God possesses unquestionable sovereignty.

V. WISDOM DISCERNS THE PROPER TIME

Ecclesiastes 8:5 — Time and Judgment

"Whoever keeps the command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart knows the proper time and judgment."

Wisdom involves timing.

Something may be:

True.

Necessary.

Right.

But still spoken or done at the wrong time.

The wise person considers both:

What should be done.

And:

When it should be done.

Cross References

Proverbs 19:16

The person who obeys God's commands guards his own life, but the one who lives carelessly brings harm upon himself.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

There is an appointed season for everything and a proper time for every purpose under heaven.

Proverbs 4:7

Wisdom should be your highest pursuit. Therefore, get wisdom, and whatever else you gain, make sure you gain understanding.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom is not only knowing the right thing.

It is knowing the right time.

VI. EVERY MATTER HAS AN APPOINTED TIME

Ecclesiastes 8:6 — Human Misery and God's Timing

“For every matter has its proper time and judgment, though the misery of man lies heavy upon him.”

Life contains difficulty.

Human beings often suffer while waiting for answers.

But the Preacher again reminds us:

There is a time.

There is judgment.

There is order beyond what we presently see.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Everything has its season, and every purpose under heaven has an appointed time.

Ecclesiastes 3:17

I said in my heart, “God will judge both the righteous and the wicked, because there is an appointed time for every purpose and every work.”

Job 14:1

A person born into this world has only a short life, and those days are filled with trouble.

Spiritual Principle

Pain may be immediate.

God’s full answer may come later.

VII. HUMAN BEINGS DO NOT KNOW THE FUTURE

Ecclesiastes 8:7 — Who Can Tell What Is Coming?

“Since no one knows what will happen, who can tell him what is to come?”

Human beings make plans.

But none of us sees tomorrow perfectly.

We do not know:

Every event.

Every loss.

Every opportunity.

Every change.

Every outcome.

Cross References

James 4:14

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

Proverbs 27:1

Do not boast about tomorrow, because you do not know what even one day may bring.

Ecclesiastes 6:12

Who truly knows what is best for a person during the few fleeting days of life that pass like a shadow? And who can tell what will happen on earth after that person is gone?

Spiritual Principle

Uncertainty about tomorrow should produce humility today.

VIII. HUMAN POWER CANNOT STOP DEATH

Ecclesiastes 8:8 — No One Can Retain the Spirit

“No one has power over the spirit to retain it, nor does anyone have power over the day of death. There is no discharge from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who practice it.”

This is one of the strongest statements in the chapter about human limitation.

No king can command death to leave.

No rich person can buy permanent exemption.

No wicked person can sin his way out of mortality.

Death is a battle from which earthly power gives no exemption.

Cross References

Psalms 89:48

What person can live and never see death? Who can rescue his own life from the power of the grave?

Hebrews 9:27

Every person is appointed to die once, and after death comes judgment.

Ezekiel 18:20

The person who sins will be responsible for his own sin. A child will not bear the guilt of a parent, and a parent will not bear the guilt of a child. The righteous person will answer for righteousness, and the wicked person will answer for wickedness.

Spiritual Principle

Death is the great reminder that human authority has limits.

Key Truth

No one outranks mortality.

IX. POWER CAN HURT BOTH OPPRESSOR AND OPPRESSED

Ecclesiastes 8:9 — One Man Rules Another to His Hurt

“All this I observed, as I applied my heart to everything done under the sun—a time when one man lords it over another to his own hurt.”

Power can be abused.

One person dominates another.

Yet abuse of power eventually harms everyone involved.

It harms the oppressed immediately.

It corrupts the oppressor spiritually.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 4:1

Again I looked at all the oppression taking place under the sun. I saw the tears of oppressed people with no one to comfort them, while power remained in the hands of those mistreating them.

Romans 13:4

A ruler is intended to serve as God’s servant for good. But if you practice evil, you should take authority seriously because government has power to punish wrongdoing.

Proverbs 28:15

A wicked ruler over helpless people is like a roaring lion or a charging bear.

Spiritual Principle

Authority becomes destructive when service becomes domination.

X. THE WICKED MAY RECEIVE HONOR

Ecclesiastes 8:10 — Praised After Wicked Lives

“Then 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 too is vanity.”

The Preacher witnesses something disturbing.

Wicked people may receive respectable funerals.

They may even have been connected with religious activity.

Their city may remember them favorably.

Public praise does not always reflect moral truth.

Cross References

Psalms 49:16

Do not be afraid when someone becomes rich or when the glory of his household increases.

Luke 16:22

The poor man died and was carried by angels to a place of comfort with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

Job 21:32

Even a wicked person may be carried to the grave with ceremony, and people may stand watch over his tomb.

Spiritual Principle

Human praise cannot erase divine accountability.

XI. DELAYED JUDGMENT ENCOURAGES SIN

Ecclesiastes 8:11 — Evil Grows When Consequences Seem Slow

“Because the sentence against an evil deed is not carried out quickly, the hearts of men are filled with schemes to do wrong.”

When consequences are delayed, people often assume:

“There will be no consequences.”

That is a dangerous mistake.

God’s patience may be misinterpreted as approval.

Cross References

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow concerning His promise as some people think of slowness. He is patient, not wanting people to perish but wanting them to come to repentance.

Romans 2:4

Do you treat God’s kindness, patience, and restraint lightly? Do you not understand that His kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Psalms 50:21

God says, “You did these things, and because I remained silent for a time, you wrongly assumed that I was like you. But I will correct you and place the truth clearly before you.”

Spiritual Principle

God’s patience is an opportunity to repent, not permission to continue sinning.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Delayed consequences should never be mistaken for cancelled consequences.

XII. IT WILL GO WELL WITH THOSE WHO FEAR GOD

Ecclesiastes 8:12 — The Security of Reverence

“Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and lives long, yet surely I know that it will go well with those who fear God, who stand in awe before Him.”

The Preacher acknowledges the apparent contradiction.

A sinner may:

Sin repeatedly.

Live long.

Appear prosperous.

Yet the Preacher says:

“I know.”

Those who fear God are ultimately secure.

Cross References

Psalm 37:1

Do not become angry or envious because of people who do evil, and do not envy those who practice wrongdoing.

Malachi 3:16

Those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord listened and heard them. A book of remembrance was written before Him concerning those who feared Him and honored His name.

Psalm 73:17

I did not understand the prosperity of the wicked until I entered the presence of God; then I understood where their path ultimately leads.

Spiritual Principle

The prosperity of the wicked is temporary.

The security of those who fear God is deeper than temporary circumstances.

XIII. IT WILL NOT GO WELL WITH THE WICKED

Ecclesiastes 8:13 — Life Like a Shadow

“But it will not go well with the wicked, nor will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not fear before God.”

The wicked may appear secure.

But their security is temporary.

Their days pass like:

A shadow.

Their lack of reverence for God eventually matters.

Cross References

Psalm 37:20

The wicked will ultimately perish, and the enemies of the Lord will disappear like the beauty of fields that quickly fades. They will vanish like smoke.

Proverbs 10:27

The fear of the Lord tends to lengthen life, but wicked living can shorten a person’s days.

Job 15:20

The wicked person lives with inward trouble throughout his days, and the violent person never truly knows how long security will last.

Spiritual Principle

A long life without God is still temporary.

XIV. LIFE SOMETIMES APPEARS UNJUST

Ecclesiastes 8:14 — The Righteous Suffer; the Wicked Prosper

“There is a vanity that occurs on the earth: righteous men who receive what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who receive what the righteous deserve. I said, this too is meaningless.”

The Preacher speaks honestly.

Sometimes life seems completely backwards.

The righteous suffer.

The wicked prosper.

Good people may experience:

Loss.

Pain.

Injustice.

While evil people may experience:

Comfort.

Success.

Honor.

This does not mean God approves of wickedness.

It means present circumstances do not always reveal final justice.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 9:2

The same earthly events can happen to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the bad, to the clean and the unclean, to the one who worships and the one who does not.

Job 21:7

Why do wicked people sometimes continue living, become old, and grow increasingly powerful?

Habakkuk 1:13

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, so why do You tolerate treacherous people? Why do You seem silent when wicked people destroy those more righteous than themselves?

Spiritual Principle

Do not measure God's justice only by what happens today.

XV. JOY REMAINS A GIFT IN A BROKEN WORLD

Ecclesiastes 8:15 — Eat, Drink, and Be Glad

“So I commend joy, for there is nothing better under the sun for a man than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his toil all the days of life that God has given him under the sun.”

This is not careless pleasure.

It is grateful enjoyment.

The Preacher says:

Life is mysterious.

Injustice exists.

Death is certain.

Therefore:

Receive God’s ordinary gifts.

Eat.

Drink.

Work.

Give thanks.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better than for a person to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. I saw that this ability to enjoy life comes from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Everyone should eat, drink, and enjoy the good that comes from his labor, because the ability to enjoy these things is a gift from God.

Ecclesiastes 5:18

I have seen that it is good and fitting for a person to eat, drink, and enjoy the results of his labor during the few days of life God gives him, because this is his portion.

Spiritual Principle

Joy does not require a perfect world.

It requires a grateful heart.

XVI. THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM CAN BECOME EXHAUSTING

Ecclesiastes 8:16 — Day and Night Without Sleep

“When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to observe the tasks men are busy with on earth—day and night their eyes see no sleep—”

The Preacher has studied life intensely.

He sees people working endlessly.

He also spends great effort trying to understand what everything means.

Human beings can wear themselves out trying to solve every mystery.

Cross References

1 Kings 3:9

Solomon prayed, “Give Your servant an understanding heart so I can lead Your people wisely and recognize the difference between good and evil.”

Ecclesiastes 2:23

A person’s work may fill his days with pain and frustration, and even at night his mind may refuse to rest. This too can become empty.

Proverbs 2:2

Train your ear to listen for wisdom and direct your heart toward understanding.

Spiritual Principle

The pursuit of wisdom is good.

The demand to understand everything is exhausting.

XVII. GOD’S WORK CANNOT BE FULLY COMPREHENDED

Ecclesiastes 8:17 — The Mystery of God

“I saw all the work of God: No man can comprehend what is done under the sun. Though he may labor to search it out, he cannot find it; and even if a wise man claims to know, he cannot truly comprehend it.”

The chapter ends with humility.

The Preacher has studied.

Observed.

Reasoned.

Investigated.

Yet his final conclusion is:

God’s complete work exceeds human understanding.

This does not mean we can understand nothing.

It means we cannot understand everything.

Cross References

Job 5:9

God does great things beyond our ability to search out completely, and He performs wonders beyond number.

Job 37:5

God’s voice thunders in wonderful ways. He does great things that we cannot fully understand.

Romans 11:33

How deep are the riches of God’s wisdom and knowledge! His judgments are beyond our complete understanding, and His ways cannot be fully traced.

Spiritual Principle

Faith does not require knowing everything God knows.

Faith requires trusting the God who knows everything.

Key Truth

Mystery is not proof that God is absent.

Sometimes mystery is evidence that God is greater than us.

XVIII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 8

1. Wisdom Changes Perspective

Wisdom affects:

Thought.

Judgment.

Speech.

Attitude.

Principle:

True wisdom changes how a person responds to life.

2. Respect Authority

Human authority has real importance.

Principle:

Respect rightful authority while remembering that God remains the highest authority.

3. Human Power Has Limits

No ruler can:

Control tomorrow.

Prevent death.

Escape accountability.

Principle:

Earthly authority is always temporary.

4. Delayed Judgment Is Not Cancelled Judgment

God's patience may allow sinners time to repent.

Principle:

Never interpret God's delay as God's approval.

5. The Fear of God Is the Safe Path

The wicked may appear successful.

But those who fear God possess a deeper security.

Principle:

Judge life by its final outcome, not merely by its present appearance.

6. Joy Is Still Possible in a Broken World

Injustice exists.

Mystery exists.

Yet God still gives:

Food.

Work.

Daily provision.

Joy.

Principle:

Gratitude is not denial of pain; it is recognition of God's goodness in the middle of pain.

7. God's Work Exceeds Human Understanding

Wisdom can investigate much.

But it cannot explain everything.

Principle:

Humility is part of genuine wisdom.

XIX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 8 TEACHES ABOUT WISDOM

Wisdom is practical.

It helps a person:

Understand situations.

Respond carefully.

Control reactions.

Respect timing.

Navigate authority.

Wisdom does not eliminate difficulty.

It helps us walk through difficulty more carefully.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Wisdom does not always change the circumstance.

Sometimes wisdom changes the person facing the circumstance.

XX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 8 TEACHES ABOUT AUTHORITY

Human rulers are real.

Their decisions matter.

Government has legitimate functions.

But human authority is never ultimate.

God remains above every ruler.

Key Truth

Respect authority.

Never worship authority.

XXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 8 TEACHES ABOUT DEATH

Death demonstrates the limits of human power.

No person can:

Command the spirit to remain forever.

Dismiss death from duty.

Exempt himself from mortality.

Spiritual Principle

The grave is unimpressed by titles.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 8 TEACHES ABOUT JUDGMENT

Judgment may appear delayed.

But God's patience has a purpose.

It gives opportunity for repentance.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may delay judgment because He is merciful.

That delay should produce repentance, not greater rebellion.

XXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 8 TEACHES ABOUT INJUSTICE

The righteous may suffer.

The wicked may prosper.

This is one of the great mysteries of life under the sun.

Ecclesiastes does not pretend otherwise.

But present circumstances are not final judgment.

Spiritual Principle

A temporary reversal of justice does not overturn God's eternal justice.

XXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 8 TEACHES ABOUT JOY

Joy appears repeatedly in Ecclesiastes.

Why?

Because the Preacher is teaching us not to postpone all enjoyment until every mystery is solved.

You may never understand everything.

Still:

Give thanks.

Eat.

Work.

Love.

Serve.

Enjoy God's gifts.

Key Truth

You do not need every question answered before you begin thanking God.

XXV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 8 TEACHES ABOUT MYSTERY

People naturally want explanations.

Why did this happen?

Why did God allow that?

Why does one person suffer?

Why does another prosper?

Why does justice seem delayed?

Some answers may come.

Others may not come in this life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not allow unanswered questions to make you forget the truths God has already revealed.

XXVI. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does wisdom do according to verse 1?

Wisdom gives:

Understanding.

Discernment.

A calmer spirit.

A softer response to life.

Question 2

Why should authority be respected?

Because orderly authority has an important role in human society and ultimately exists beneath God's sovereignty.

Question 3

Does respecting authority mean obeying every possible command?

No.

Scripture teaches respect for authority, but God remains the highest authority.

Human commands cannot rightfully require disobedience to God.

Question 4

What does verse 5 teach about wisdom?

Wisdom understands not only what should be done but also the proper timing and judgment for doing it.

Question 5

Why should we be humble about the future?

Because no human being knows everything that tomorrow will bring.

Question 6

What does verse 8 teach about human power?

No person possesses complete control over:

Life.

Death.

The human spirit.

The future.

Question 7

Why can delayed judgment encourage sin?

People may wrongly assume that because consequences have not come quickly, consequences will never come.

Question 8

What is the proper response to God's patience?

Repentance.

God's patience should lead people to turn from sin rather than become more comfortable in it.

Question 9

Why does the Preacher still say it will go well with those who fear God?

Because present circumstances do not reveal the final outcome.

God sees and will ultimately judge rightly.

Question 10

How should we respond when life appears unfair?

We should remain faithful, trust God's final justice, and refuse to judge everything merely by present appearances.

Question 11

Why does the Preacher commend joy?

Because ordinary blessings remain gifts from God even in a world filled with uncertainty and injustice.

Question 12

Can human wisdom fully understand God's work?

No.

Human wisdom can understand much, but God's complete purpose remains beyond our full comprehension.

XXVII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 8 asks several searching questions.

Am I Growing in Wisdom?

Does wisdom make me calmer, kinder, and more discerning?

Do I Respect Legitimate Authority?

Or do I rebel simply because I dislike being told what to do?

Do I Remember That God Is Above Every Human Ruler?

Where does my ultimate allegiance belong?

Am I Pretending I Know the Future?

Do I make plans with humility?

Have I Forgotten My Mortality?

Am I living as though death applies only to others?

Am I Misinterpreting God's Patience?

Have I treated delayed consequences as permission to continue sinning?

Am I Troubled by the Prosperity of the Wicked?

Can I trust God with final justice?

Can I Still Enjoy God's Gifts?

Or have unanswered questions stolen all gratitude?

Do I Need to Understand Everything Before I Trust God?

Can I say:

"I do not know why, but I know God is faithful"?

XXVIII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

"Delayed Judgment Is Not Denied Judgment"

One of the most dangerous mistakes a person can make is believing:

"Nothing happened, so God must not care."

But God's delay may be mercy.

He may be giving time for:

Repentance.

Change.

Confession.

Restoration.

Principle:

God's patience should soften the heart, not harden it.

XXIX. HUMAN AUTHORITY AND DIVINE AUTHORITY

Ecclesiastes 8 recognizes human rulers.

But it also exposes their limits.

A king can issue commands.

But he cannot command death to stay away.

A ruler can govern people.

But he cannot govern eternity.

A government can enforce laws.

But it cannot overturn God's final judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Every human throne exists beneath the throne of God.

XXX. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WORK

The Preacher studies:

History.

Labor.

Authority.

Justice.

Human behavior.

Still he concludes:

God's complete work cannot be fully comprehended.

That statement should not frustrate faith.

It should deepen humility.

We are creatures.

God is Creator.

We see:

A moment.

God sees:

The whole.

We see:

The present.

God sees:

Beginning to end.

We see:

A piece.

God sees:

The entire design.

Spiritual Principle

God does not owe human beings complete explanations before He deserves their trust.

XXXI. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8 teaches us how to live when we do not understand everything happening around us.

Use wisdom.

Respect legitimate authority.

Remember that God rules above every authority.

Recognize your limits.

You do not know the future.

You cannot stop death.

You cannot control every outcome.

Do not envy wicked people simply because judgment seems delayed.

Their present circumstances are not their final verdict.

Do not assume God's silence means God's approval.

His patience may be giving time for repentance.

Fear God.

Stand in awe before Him.

Trust His justice.

When life seems unfair:

Remain faithful.

When the wicked appear to prosper:

Remain faithful.

When authority seems powerful:

Remember God is greater.

When the future seems uncertain:

Remember God already sees it.

When questions remain unanswered:

Do not stop trusting.

And while you live in this mysterious world:

Receive joy.

Eat with gratitude.

Work with purpose.

Enjoy the blessings God places in your hands.

Do not wait until every problem is solved before you give thanks.

You may never understand everything God is doing.

But you can understand enough to know:

He is God.

You are not.

He sees farther than you.

He knows more than you.

His judgment is wiser than yours.

His timing is better than yours.

His work is greater than your understanding.

Therefore:

Seek wisdom.

Respect authority.

Fear God.

Reject wickedness.

Practice gratitude.

Trust divine justice.

Accept mystery.

And remain faithful even when you cannot explain everything.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom of Your Word.

Give us wisdom that changes the way we think, speak, and live.

Make our hearts softer.

Make our responses calmer.

Make our judgment clearer.

Teach us to respect legitimate authority while always remembering that You are the highest authority.

Help us obey what is right.

Give us courage to refuse what is evil.

Give us wisdom to know:

When to speak.

When to wait.

When to act.

When to remain silent.

Father, remind us of our limitations.

We do not know tomorrow.

We do not control the future.

We cannot escape mortality.

Teach us humility.

Protect us from the abuse of power.

If You give us authority, help us use it to serve rather than dominate.

If we suffer under unjust authority, give us wisdom and courage.

Father, keep us from misunderstanding Your patience.

When judgment seems delayed, remind us that You have not forgotten.

Let Your patience lead us toward repentance.

Protect us from envying wicked people who appear to prosper.

Help us see life from an eternal perspective.

Thank You that it will ultimately go well with those who fear You.

Thank You that injustice will not have the final word.

Thank You that You see everything hidden.

Teach us to enjoy Your daily gifts.

Give us grateful hearts.

Thank You for:

Food.

Work.

Rest.

Relationships.

Provision.

Moments of joy.

Do not allow unanswered questions to steal every blessing from the present.

Father, we confess that we cannot fully understand Your work.

Your wisdom is deeper than ours.

Your ways are higher than ours.

Your judgments are greater than ours.

When we cannot understand, teach us to trust.

When we cannot explain, teach us to remain faithful.

When we cannot see what comes next, remind us that You already know.

May our lives be marked by:

Wisdom.

Humility.

Reverence.

Joy.

Trust.

And faithfulness.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“I saw all the work of God: No man can comprehend what is done under the sun. Though he may labor to search it out, he cannot find it; and even if a wise man claims to know, he cannot truly comprehend it.” — Ecclesiastes 8:17

Central Truth

Wisdom teaches us to live carefully under human authority, recognize the limits of earthly power, trust God's justice when judgment appears delayed, enjoy His daily gifts, and humbly acknowledge that His complete work is beyond human understanding.

Ecclesiastes 8 in One Sentence

The Preacher teaches that wisdom guides our response to authority, mortality exposes the limits of human power, delayed judgment does not cancel God's justice, joy remains a gift in an unfair world, and the full work of God is greater than human wisdom can comprehend.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 9 — The Same Fate for All and the Value of Wisdom

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 9 continues the Preacher's sober examination of life under the sun.

The chapter brings together several major truths:

God's sovereignty.

The certainty of death.

The value of the present life.

The importance of diligent work.

The unpredictability of earthly outcomes.

The superiority of wisdom over strength.

The destructive power of sin.

The Preacher begins with a profound statement:

“The righteous, the wise, and their deeds are in the hand of God.”

That truth gives stability in a world where circumstances often appear uncertain.

We may not know:

What tomorrow will bring.

Whether people will love us or oppose us.

Whether our plans will succeed.

How long our lives will continue.

But God knows.

The chapter then reminds us that death is the shared earthly destiny of all people.

The righteous die.

The wicked die.

The wise die.

The foolish die.

The rich die.

The poor die.

That reality could lead to despair.

But the Preacher reaches a different conclusion.

Because life is brief:

Live it.

Receive God's gifts.

Eat with joy.

Enjoy marriage.

Work diligently.

Use the opportunities you have while they remain available.

Verse 10 gives one of the most practical commands in Ecclesiastes:

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength.”

The chapter also warns us against assuming that ability guarantees success.

The fastest runner does not always win.

The strongest army does not always prevail.

The wisest person does not always become wealthy.

The most skillful person does not always receive recognition.

Unexpected events affect human life.

Finally, the Preacher tells the story of a poor wise man whose wisdom saved an entire city.

Yet afterward:

No one remembered him.

That story proves two things.

Wisdom is powerful.

Human recognition is unreliable.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 9 is:

Because death is certain and earthly outcomes are unpredictable, we should live faithfully, enjoy God's present gifts, work diligently while opportunity remains, and value wisdom more than strength, status, or human recognition.

I. THE RIGHTEOUS AND WISE ARE IN GOD'S HAND

Ecclesiastes 9:1 — God Holds What We Cannot See

“So I reflected on all this and declared: the righteous, the wise, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Yet no one knows whether love or hatred awaits them; all lies ahead unseen.”

The Preacher has been studying:

Justice.

Wisdom.

Righteousness.

Human suffering.

God's work.

His conclusion begins with security:

The righteous and wise are in God's hand.

That does not mean they will understand everything that happens.

It means their lives are not outside God's knowledge and rule.

Human beings cannot see everything ahead.

God can.

Cross References

Job 21:22

Can anyone teach God knowledge, since He is the One who judges even those who hold the highest positions?

Proverbs 16:9

A person may make plans in his heart, but the Lord ultimately directs the course of his steps.

Isaiah 55:8

The Lord says, “My thoughts are not the same as your thoughts, and your ways are not the same as My ways.”

Spiritual Principle

The future may be hidden from us, but it is never hidden from God.

Key Truth

We do not have to know everything ahead when we know whose hand holds us.

II. THE SAME EARTHLY FATE COMES TO ALL

Ecclesiastes 9:2 — Death Does Not Show Favoritism

“Everything happens alike to all: the same fate comes to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the clean and the unclean, to him who offers sacrifices and to him who does not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as with the one who takes oaths, so with the one who fears them.”

The Preacher is speaking about the common earthly reality of death.

Death comes to:

The righteous.

The wicked.

The religious.

The irreligious.

The careful.

The careless.

This does not mean their eternal destinies are identical.

The point is that earthly mortality comes to everyone.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:14

The wise person sees where he is going, while the fool walks in darkness. Yet I realized that the same earthly end eventually comes to both.

Matthew 5:45

God causes the sun to rise on both evil and good people, and He sends rain upon both the righteous and the unrighteous.

Job 9:22

From the limited viewpoint of earthly suffering, Job said, “One thing seems to happen to everyone: both the blameless and the wicked eventually face death.”

Spiritual Principle

Earthly circumstances do not always reveal a person’s standing before God.

III. THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH EXPOSES HUMAN EVIL

Ecclesiastes 9:3 — Then They Join the Dead

“This is the great evil under the sun: the same event happens to all. The hearts of men are full of evil, and madness fills them while they live; then afterward they join the dead.”

The Preacher combines two realities.

Human beings know death is coming.

Yet many still spend life pursuing evil.

That is one of the great tragedies of human rebellion.

Sin creates spiritual madness.

People live as though death will never arrive.

Then suddenly:

Life ends.

Cross References

Psalms 49:12

A person may live with honor and wealth, but he cannot remain on earth forever. In death he becomes like the animals that perish.

Hebrews 9:27

Every person is appointed to die once, and after death comes judgment.

Ecclesiastes 2:16

Neither the wise person nor the fool will be remembered forever. Eventually both are forgotten, and both must die.

Spiritual Principle

Knowing that life is short should lead us away from sin rather than deeper into it.

IV. WHILE THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE

Ecclesiastes 9:4 — A Living Dog Is Better Than a Dead Lion

“But anyone who is among the living has hope—for a living dog is better than a dead lion.”

In that culture:

The lion represented strength and honor.

The dog was often regarded as lowly.

Yet the Preacher says:

A living dog is better than a dead lion.

Why?

Because life means opportunity.

While a person lives, there is still time to:

Repent.

Believe.

Change.

Serve.

Reconcile.

Learn.

Obey God.

Cross References

Isaiah 38:19

The living person is the one who can praise You today, just as I am doing. A father can teach his children about Your faithfulness.

John 11:25

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in Me will live even though physical death comes.”

Job 14:7

Even a tree has hope. If it is cut down, it may sprout again and produce new growth.

Spiritual Principle

As long as God gives you another day, another opportunity remains.

Application

Do not waste the opportunities that belong to the living.

V. THE LIVING KNOW DEATH IS COMING

Ecclesiastes 9:5 — Earthly Opportunity Ends

“For the living know they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and their memory is forgotten.”

The Preacher is describing earthly participation under the sun.

The living know:

Death is coming.

That knowledge can produce wisdom.

Once death comes, earthly work and earthly reward come to an end.

The verse is not denying conscious existence beyond death.

It is describing the dead person’s separation from ongoing earthly activity.

Cross References**Psalms 6:5**

In death a person no longer participates in remembering and praising You among the living on earth; in the grave, earthly opportunities for worship and testimony have ended.

Psalms 146:4

When a person’s breath leaves, his body returns to the earth, and on that very day his earthly plans come to an end.

Hebrews 9:27

Every person is appointed to die once, and after death comes judgment.

Spiritual Principle

The knowledge that death is coming should make present opportunities more valuable.

VI. EARTHLY INVOLVEMENT ENDS AT DEATH

Ecclesiastes 9:6 — No Longer Sharing in Life Under the Sun

“Their love, their hatred, their envy have vanished; never again will they share in anything done under the sun.”

Death ends earthly participation.

The deceased person no longer:

Works.

Competes.

Builds.

Owns.

Argues.

Plans.

Participates in earthly affairs.

The Preacher wants the living to understand:

Your opportunity is now.

Cross References

Job 14:21

A man's children may receive honor or fall into disgrace, but after his death he no longer participates in those earthly developments.

Psalms 49:17

When a wealthy person dies, he takes nothing with him, and his earthly glory does not follow him into the grave.

Ecclesiastes 2:18

I became frustrated with everything I had worked for under the sun because I knew I would have to leave it to the person who came after me.

Spiritual Principle

Do not postpone indefinitely what God has given you opportunity to do today.

VII. EAT YOUR BREAD WITH JOY

Ecclesiastes 9:7 — Receive Life Gratefully

“Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a glad heart, for God has already approved your works.”

The certainty of death does not lead the Preacher to hopelessness.

It leads him toward gratitude.

Eat.

Drink.

Be thankful.

Receive the ordinary blessings of life as gifts.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better than for a person to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his work. I saw that this ability to enjoy life comes from God’s hand.

Ecclesiastes 3:13

Everyone should eat, drink, and enjoy the good that comes from his labor, because this enjoyment is a gift from God.

Deuteronomy 12:7

There before the Lord your God, you and your households will eat and rejoice in everything you have worked for, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

Spiritual Principle

Gratitude turns ordinary provision into meaningful enjoyment.

VIII. LIVE WITH GLADNESS

Ecclesiastes 9:8 — White Garments and Oil

“Let your garments always be white; and do not let oil be lacking on your head.”

White clothing and oil represented:

Joy.

Celebration.

Well-being.

The Preacher is encouraging a life that receives God’s blessings rather than remaining consumed by despair.

Cross References

Revelation 3:5

The person who overcomes will be dressed in white clothing, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge him before My Father and His angels.

Psalms 23:5

You prepare a table for me even while enemies are around me. You honor me by pouring oil upon my head, and my cup overflows with Your goodness.

Revelation 19:8

The bride was given clean, bright, fine linen to wear, and that linen represents the righteous deeds of God’s people.

Spiritual Principle

Recognizing life’s brevity should not remove joy.

It should make godly joy more intentional.

IX. ENJOY LIFE WITH YOUR WIFE

Ecclesiastes 9:9 — Marriage as God’s Gift

“Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of this fleeting life that God has given you under the sun—for this is your portion in life and in the toil you labor under the sun.”

Marriage is presented as one of God's gifts within a brief life.

The Preacher says:

Enjoy the relationship.

Love your wife.

Share life.

Do not become so consumed with work that you fail to enjoy the person God has placed beside you.

Cross References

Proverbs 5:18

Let your marriage be blessed, and rejoice continually in the wife you married in your youth.

Proverbs 18:22

The man who finds a good wife finds something truly good and receives favor from the Lord.

Genesis 2:24

For this reason a man leaves his father and mother, joins himself faithfully to his wife, and the two become one.

Spiritual Principle

Relationships should not be sacrificed on the altar of endless labor.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not become so busy making a living that you forget to enjoy the life God has given you.

X. DO YOUR WORK WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH

Ecclesiastes 9:10 — Work While Opportunity Remains

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength, for in the grave, where you are going, there is no work or planning, no knowledge or wisdom.”

This is one of the great practical statements of Ecclesiastes.

Do what is before you.

Do it diligently.

Do it wholeheartedly.

Why?

Because earthly opportunities are temporary.

A day comes when your earthly work is finished.

Cross References

Colossians 3:23

Whatever work you do, do it wholeheartedly as though you are serving the Lord rather than merely working for people.

John 9:4

We must do the work of the One who sent Me while there is still opportunity. The night is coming when earthly work can no longer be done.

Galatians 6:9

Let us not become tired of doing what is good, because at the proper time we will harvest the result if we do not give up.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness uses present opportunities rather than assuming tomorrow is guaranteed.

Key Truth

Do today's work while today's opportunity still exists.

XI. THE FASTEST DOES NOT ALWAYS WIN

Ecclesiastes 9:11 — Time and Unexpected Circumstances

“Again I saw under the sun: the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to the skilled—but time and chance happen to them all.”

Human ability does not guarantee outcomes.

The fastest runner can lose.

The strongest army can be defeated.

A wise person can remain poor.

A skilled person can be overlooked.

Unexpected circumstances affect life.

The phrase “time and chance” describes events from the human viewpoint that arrive beyond our planning or control.

It does not deny God’s sovereignty.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:24

You know that in a race everyone runs, but only one receives the prize. Therefore, run with disciplined purpose so that you may finish well.

Psalms 33:16

A king is not saved simply because he has a great army, and a mighty warrior is not rescued merely because he possesses great strength.

Proverbs 21:31

The horse may be prepared carefully for the day of battle, but final victory belongs to the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

Ability matters.

Preparation matters.

But outcomes are never completely under human control.

XII. NO ONE KNOWS WHEN TROUBLE MAY COME

Ecclesiastes 9:12 — Suddenly Caught

“Moreover, no one knows his time. Like fish caught in a net, or birds trapped in a snare, so men are ensnared when evil times fall suddenly upon them.”

Trouble can arrive unexpectedly.

A fish does not know when the net is coming.

A bird does not know when the trap has been set.

Human beings likewise do not know every future crisis.

Cross References

Luke 21:34

Be careful that your hearts are not weighed down by sinful living, drunkenness, and the worries of life so that the coming day does not suddenly catch you like a trap.

Proverbs 29:6

An evil person becomes trapped by his own sin, but a righteous person can rejoice and live with confidence.

1 Thessalonians 5:2

You know very well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief arriving during the night.

Spiritual Principle

Because life can change suddenly, readiness is wiser than presumption.

XIII. THE PREACHER SEES A GREAT EXAMPLE OF WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 9:13 — Wisdom Worth Remembering

“I also saw this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.”

The Preacher now gives an illustration.

He has already taught that wisdom is better than folly.

Now he shows wisdom accomplishing what strength could not.

Cross References

1 Kings 4:30

Solomon’s wisdom became greater than the wisdom of the people of the East and greater than the wisdom of Egypt.

Proverbs 24:5

A wise person possesses real strength, and a person with knowledge continually increases his ability.

James 3:17

The wisdom that comes from above is pure, peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.

Spiritual Principle

True wisdom often proves its value most clearly in a crisis.

XIV. A GREAT KING ATTACKS A SMALL CITY

Ecclesiastes 9:14 — Strength Against Weakness

“There was a small city with few men in it, and a great king came against it, surrounded it, and built great siegeworks against it.”

The situation appears hopeless.

A small city.

Few defenders.

A powerful king.

A great army.

Siegeworks.

By ordinary human standards, the outcome appears obvious.

Cross References

2 Samuel 20:15

Joab’s forces came and surrounded the city of Abel Beth Maacah. They built a siege ramp against the city wall and began battering the wall to bring it down.

Judges 7:2

The Lord told Gideon, “You have too many soldiers for Me to give Midian into your hands, because Israel might boast and say that their own strength saved them.”

1 Samuel 17:47

David declared that everyone would know the Lord does not save merely by sword or spear, because the battle belongs to the Lord and He determines the outcome.

Spiritual Principle

Circumstances that appear impossible can still be changed through wisdom and God’s providence.

XV. A POOR WISE MAN SAVES THE CITY

Ecclesiastes 9:15 — Wisdom Without Recognition

“In it was found a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom saved the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.”

This is a remarkable picture.

The man is:

Poor.

Unimportant by social standards.

Yet wise.

His wisdom saves an entire city.

Then:

He is forgotten.

Human recognition does not always match true contribution.

Cross References

2 Samuel 20:22

The wise woman spoke to all the people, and they followed her counsel. They ended the rebellion, and Joab withdrew his army from the city.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

Then I concluded that wisdom is better than strength, even though the wisdom of a poor person is often despised and his words may be ignored.

Matthew 13:57

The people took offense at Jesus, but He said, “A prophet is usually honored except among his own people and in his own home.”

Spiritual Principle

The value of your contribution is not determined by how long people remember your name.

Application

Be faithful even when recognition never comes.

XVI. WISDOM IS BETTER THAN STRENGTH

Ecclesiastes 9:16 — The Poor Man's Wisdom

“Then I said: Wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of the poor is despised, and his words are not heard.”

The poor man proved:

Wisdom can accomplish what military power cannot.

Yet society often judges ideas by the status of the speaker.

That is foolish.

Truth does not become less true because it comes from someone poor.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 9:15

A poor but wise man lived in the city, and through his wisdom he delivered the city, even though afterward no one remembered him.

1 Corinthians 1:27

God chose what the world considers foolish to shame those who think themselves wise, and He chose what the world considers weak to expose the limitations of the strong.

James 2:5

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: has God not chosen many who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom He promised to those who love Him?

Spiritual Principle

Never dismiss wisdom because of the social position of the person speaking.

XVII. QUIET WISDOM IS BETTER THAN LOUD FOOLISHNESS

Ecclesiastes 9:17 — Quiet Words Matter

“The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.”

Volume is not authority.

Loudness is not wisdom.

The loudest voice in the room is not necessarily the wisest.

Wisdom often speaks calmly.

Foolishness often shouts.

Cross References

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer can turn away anger, but harsh words stir up greater conflict.

Ecclesiastes 10:12

The words spoken by a wise person bring favor and grace, but the lips of a fool eventually destroy him.

1 Kings 19:12

After the earthquake and fire came a gentle, quiet sound, and there Elijah recognized the presence and voice of the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

Truth does not need to shout in order to be true.

XVIII. WISDOM BUILDS, BUT ONE SINNER CAN DESTROY MUCH

Ecclesiastes 9:18 — One Person Can Undo Great Good

“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”

The chapter ends with contrast.

Wisdom can save a city.

Sin can destroy much good.

One person’s sinful action can affect:

A family.

A church.

A community.

A nation.

A ministry.

Cross References

Proverbs 21:22

A wise person can overcome a city defended by strong warriors and bring down the defenses in which they trusted.

Joshua 7:1

Israel acted unfaithfully concerning what God had commanded to be set apart, because Achan took what was forbidden, and his sin brought consequences upon the larger community.

1 Corinthians 5:6

Your boasting is not good. Do you not understand that a small amount of yeast spreads through the entire batch of dough?

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom can build slowly.

Sin can destroy quickly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never underestimate either the constructive power of wisdom or the destructive reach of one sinful choice.

XIX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 9

1. Life Is in God's Hand

The righteous.

The wise.

Their deeds.

All remain under God's knowledge and authority.

Principle:

An unseen future is still held by a known God.

2. Death Is Certain

Every person faces earthly mortality.

Principle:

The certainty of death should create urgency about how we live.

3. Hope Belongs to the Living

While life remains, opportunity remains.

Principle:

As long as God gives breath, use the opportunity He gives.

4. Enjoy God's Present Gifts

Food.

Marriage.

Work.

Daily provision.

These should be received gratefully.

Principle:

Do not allow fear of death to prevent you from enjoying the life God has given.

5. Work Diligently

Whatever your hand finds to do:

Do it wholeheartedly.

Principle:

Opportunity has an expiration date.

6. Ability Does Not Guarantee Success

Speed.

Strength.

Wisdom.

Skill.

Do not completely control outcomes.

Principle:

Prepare faithfully, but trust God with results.

7. Wisdom Is Better Than Power

A poor wise man saved a city.

Principle:

One wise voice can accomplish more than great outward strength.

XX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT DEATH

Death appears repeatedly throughout this chapter.

The Preacher is not trying to create despair.

He is creating urgency.

Because death comes:

Use life wisely.

Love people now.

Serve now.

Work now.

Reconcile now.

Give thanks now.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The certainty of death should make us more serious about living, not less interested in life.

XXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT HOPE

Verse 4 says:

“Anyone who is among the living has hope.”

While there is life, there is opportunity.

A person can:

Repent.

Turn to God.

Ask forgiveness.

Repair relationships.

Change direction.

Serve faithfully.

Spiritual Principle

Never treat another day as worthless.

It is another opportunity.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT ENJOYMENT

The Preacher repeatedly commands the reader to enjoy God’s gifts.

Enjoy:

Bread.

Drink.

Marriage.

Work.

This enjoyment is not sinful indulgence.

It is gratitude.

Key Truth

A brief life should not become a joyless life.

XXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT MARRIAGE

The chapter specifically says:

“Enjoy life with the wife whom you love.”

Marriage should not become merely:

Bills.

Schedules.

Responsibilities.

Work.

Marriage is also companionship.

Joy.

Shared life.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not give everyone else your best energy and leave only exhaustion for the person you promised to love.

XXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT WORK

Work should be done:

Fully.

Diligently.

Faithfully.

Why?

Because opportunities do not last forever.

Spiritual Principle

Do not give halfhearted effort to responsibilities God has placed in your hands.

XXV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT SUCCESS

The chapter destroys the assumption:

“The best person always wins.”

Not necessarily.

Life contains:

Unexpected circumstances.

Human decisions.

Changing conditions.

Events beyond our control.

Key Truth

Faithfulness is our responsibility.

Results ultimately remain beyond complete human control.

XXVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT WISDOM

Wisdom can save an entire city.

Yet wisdom may still be:

Ignored.

Despised.

Forgotten.

That does not decrease its value.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Truth is not measured by applause.

Wisdom is not measured by popularity.

XXVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 9 TEACHES ABOUT RECOGNITION

The poor wise man saved the city.

Then everyone forgot him.

This is a powerful warning against living for recognition.

If the value of your service depends upon people remembering your name, you will eventually be disappointed.

Spiritual Principle

God sees faithful work even when people forget who performed it.

XXVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does verse 1 teach about God's sovereignty?

It teaches that the righteous, the wise, and their deeds are in God's hand.

Even when the future is unclear, God remains in control.

Question 2

What is the "same fate" described in verse 2?

It refers to physical death.

Both righteous and wicked people eventually die.

Question 3

Does this mean righteous and wicked people have the same eternal destiny?

No.

The chapter is discussing their common earthly mortality, not saying their final judgment before God is identical.

Question 4

Why is a living dog better than a dead lion?

Because life still provides opportunity.

The lowliest living person still has opportunities that a dead earthly hero no longer possesses.

Question 5

What does verse 5 mean when it says the dead “know nothing”?

It is describing their lack of participation in earthly affairs under the sun.

Their earthly work and earthly opportunities have ended.

Question 6

Why does the Preacher encourage enjoyment?

Because life is brief, and ordinary blessings should be received gratefully rather than ignored.

Question 7

What does verse 9 teach about marriage?

Marriage should include enjoyment, affection, companionship, and gratitude for the spouse God has given.

Question 8

What does verse 10 teach about work?

We should perform present responsibilities wholeheartedly because earthly opportunities are limited.

Question 9

What does “time and chance” mean?

It describes unexpected events and changing circumstances from the human perspective that affect earthly outcomes.

It does not deny God’s sovereignty.

Question 10

Why is the poor wise man important?

His wisdom saved an entire city, showing that wisdom can be more powerful than military strength.

Question 11

Why was the poor wise man forgotten?

The Preacher is showing how unreliable human recognition can be.

People often benefit from wisdom without remembering the person who provided it.

Question 12

What does the final verse teach?

Wisdom is stronger than weapons, but one sinful person or decision can destroy a great amount of good.

XXIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 9 asks several searching questions.

Do I Trust That My Life Is in God’s Hand?

Or am I consumed by fear over what I cannot see?

Am I Living with the Certainty of Death in Mind?

Does mortality affect my priorities?

Am I Using the Opportunities I Have Today?

What have I been postponing?

Am I Enjoying God's Gifts?

Or am I so worried about tomorrow that I cannot enjoy today?

Am I Investing in My Marriage?

Do I intentionally enjoy life with the person I love?

Am I Doing My Work Wholeheartedly?

Or am I giving God and others careless effort?

Do I Assume Ability Guarantees Results?

Can I work faithfully while trusting God with outcomes?

Do I Need Recognition?

Would I still serve faithfully if nobody remembered my contribution?

Am I Listening for Quiet Wisdom?

Or am I impressed only by loud voices and powerful people?

XXX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Today's Work While Today's Opportunity Remains”

One day:

The opportunity will be gone.

The phone call can no longer be made.

The apology can no longer be offered.

The sermon can no longer be preached.

The person can no longer be encouraged.

The work can no longer be completed.

Ecclesiastes says:

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength.”

Principle:

Do not live carelessly with opportunities that have an expiration date.

XXXI. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAITHFULNESS

The race is not always won by the fastest runner.

The strongest army does not always win.

The most intelligent person does not always become wealthy.

The most skilled person does not always become famous.

Therefore:

Do not make success your god.

Faithfulness belongs to you.

Final results belong to God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You are responsible for obedience.

You are not responsible for controlling every outcome.

XXXII. THE FORGOTTEN WISE MAN

The poor wise man saved the city.

Imagine that.

An entire population benefited from his wisdom.

Yet afterward:

Nobody remembered him.

Human beings often remember:

Kings.

Generals.

Celebrities.

Powerful people.

But forget:

Teachers.

Counselors.

Prayer warriors.

Faithful servants.

Quiet people whose wisdom changed everything.

Spiritual Principle

Being forgotten by people does not mean your work was meaningless.

XXXIII. QUIET WISDOM IN A LOUD WORLD

The Preacher says:

“The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.”

The world often rewards:

Volume.

Confidence.

Visibility.

Performance.

But wisdom may arrive quietly.

Do not confuse:

Loudness with truth.

Popularity with wisdom.

Power with righteousness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Some of the wisest voices in your life may also be the quietest.

Learn to listen.

XXXIV. ONE SINNER CAN DESTROY MUCH GOOD

The final warning is serious.

One sinful decision can damage:

Years of trust.

A family.

A testimony.

A ministry.

A church.

A business.

A friendship.

A community.

Joshua 7 demonstrates that one person's hidden disobedience created consequences for many others.

Spiritual Principle

Sin always promises less damage than it eventually causes.

XXXV. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 9 brings us face to face with death.

But its message is not:

“Give up.”

Its message is:

Live faithfully while you can.

Your life is in God's hand.

You cannot see every event ahead.

But God can.

Death is certain.

Therefore:

Do not waste life.

Eat your bread with joy.

Receive daily provision with gratitude.

Enjoy your relationships.

Invest in your marriage.

Do your work wholeheartedly.

Do not continually postpone life until some imaginary perfect future arrives.

Today matters.

Your opportunities today matter.

The people around you today matter.

The work before you today matters.

And when success does not come exactly as expected:

Do not assume your faithfulness was wasted.

The fastest person does not always win.

The strongest does not always triumph.

The wisest does not always become wealthy.

The skilled are not always recognized.

But faithfulness remains valuable.

The poor wise man saved the city.

Then people forgot him.

Perhaps that is one of this chapter's greatest lessons.

You do not need everyone to remember you.

You need to be faithful.

People may forget your name.

God does not forget faithfulness.

People may overlook your contribution.

God sees.

People may praise louder voices.

Keep speaking wisdom.

People may reward power.

Choose righteousness.

And remember the final warning:

One sinner can destroy much good.

Therefore:

Guard your life.

Guard your testimony.

Guard your decisions.

Choose wisdom.

Reject sin.

Live diligently.

Love deeply.

Enjoy gratefully.

Work wholeheartedly.

Serve faithfully.

And use the life God has placed in your hands while you still have it.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that our lives are in Your hands.

The future may be hidden from us, but nothing is hidden from You.

Teach us to trust You when we cannot see what is coming.

Remind us that our earthly lives are brief.

Help us live with eternity in view.

Do not allow the certainty of death to make us hopeless.

Let it make us wise.

Thank You for every day of life You give us.

Help us use each day faithfully.

When we have opportunities to:

Serve.

Love.

Forgive.

Encourage.

Teach.

Work.

Pray.

Witness.

Help us not to postpone them carelessly.

Father, teach us to enjoy Your gifts.

Thank You for daily bread.

Thank You for work.

Thank You for relationships.

Thank You for marriage.

Thank You for moments of joy.

Keep us from being so worried about tomorrow that we fail to receive today.

Help husbands and wives enjoy the lives You have given them together.

Protect marriages from neglect.

Help us value people more than endless work.

Father, teach us to work with all our strength.

Whatever You place before us, help us do it faithfully.

Keep us from laziness.

Keep us from halfhearted service.

Give us diligence while opportunity remains.

When our plans do not produce the results we expected, remind us that outcomes are not fully in our control.

Help us prepare wisely.

Work faithfully.

And trust You with the results.

Give us wisdom greater than strength.

Help us listen for quiet wisdom.

Do not let us be deceived by loud voices simply because they are loud.

Teach us to recognize truth.

Father, protect us from the desire for recognition.

If people remember us, keep us humble.

If people forget us, keep us faithful.

Remind us that You see every act of obedience.

Protect us from sin.

Do not allow one foolish decision to destroy years of good.

Give us wisdom before temptation becomes action.

Give us courage to walk away from sin.

May our lives build rather than destroy.

May our words help rather than harm.

May our work serve Your purposes.

May our relationships reflect Your love.

And when our earthly opportunities finally end, may we have used them faithfully for Your glory.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength, for in the grave, where you are going, there is no work or planning, no knowledge or wisdom.” — Ecclesiastes 9:10

Central Truth

Because earthly life is brief and death is certain, we should trust ourselves to God's hand, enjoy His present gifts, work diligently while opportunity remains, value wisdom above outward power, and remain faithful even when human recognition never comes.

Ecclesiastes 9 in One Sentence

The Preacher teaches that death is the common earthly destiny of all, yet life remains a precious opportunity to enjoy God's gifts, love faithfully, work diligently, trust Him with uncertain outcomes, and choose the quiet power of wisdom over strength, status, and sin.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10 — The Folly of Man and the Value of Wisdom

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10 focuses on the contrast between:

Wisdom.

And:

Folly.

The chapter shows that foolishness does not always need to be great in order to be destructive.

Sometimes:

One careless decision.

One foolish statement.

One moment of anger.

One neglected responsibility.

One sinful action.

Can damage years of good work and reputation.

The Preacher opens with the picture of dead flies ruining expensive perfume.

The amount of corruption may be small.

But the effect is noticeable.

The lesson is clear:

A little folly can outweigh much wisdom and honor.

The chapter also examines:

Leadership.

Work.

Speech.

Anger.

Carelessness.

Laziness.

Self-control.

Human authority.

The proper use of resources.

One of the repeated lessons is that wisdom helps a person act with:

Calmness.

Preparation.

Restraint.

Diligence.

Discernment.

The fool, by contrast, repeatedly exposes himself.

His:

Actions reveal him.

Speech reveals him.

Laziness reveals him.

Lack of judgment reveals him.

Ecclesiastes 10 also gives significant attention to leadership.

A nation suffers when leaders are:

Immature.

Self-indulgent.

Undisciplined.

Lazy.

But a nation benefits when leaders exercise:

Wisdom.

Self-control.

Responsibility.

Proper timing.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 10 is:

Wisdom produces stability, restraint, diligence, and sound judgment, while even a small amount of folly can corrupt reputation, leadership, work, speech, and the good that has been built over many years.

I. A LITTLE FOLLY CAN RUIN MUCH GOOD

Ecclesiastes 10:1 — Dead Flies in the Perfume

“Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a foul stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.”

The Preacher begins with a vivid picture.

A perfumer carefully prepares something:

Expensive.

Pleasant.

Fragrant.

Valuable.

Then a few dead flies fall into it.

The perfume becomes contaminated.

The fragrance becomes offensive.

The point is not about flies.

It is about reputation.

A person may spend years developing:

Wisdom.

Character.

Trust.

Honor.

Then one foolish action can damage much of what was built.

Cross References

James 3:5

The tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can boast about great things. Consider how a very small flame can set an enormous forest on fire.

1 Corinthians 5:6

Your boasting is not good. Do you not realize that a small amount of yeast spreads throughout the entire batch of dough?

Ecclesiastes 9:18

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinful person can destroy a great amount of good.

Spiritual Principle

A small act of foolishness can create consequences much larger than the act itself.

Key Truth

Guard carefully what took years to build.

II. THE WISE AND FOOLISH HEART MOVE IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS

Ecclesiastes 10:2 — Right Hand and Left Hand

“A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left.”

In biblical imagery, the right hand often represented:

Strength.

Honor.

Skill.

The Preacher is describing direction.

The wise person is oriented toward:

Discernment.

Good judgment.

Proper action.

The fool repeatedly moves toward poor decisions.

Cross References

Matthew 25:33

The Son of Man will place the sheep at His right hand and the goats at His left, separating them according to their true condition.

Ecclesiastes 2:14

The wise person has eyes to see where he is going, while the fool walks in darkness, even though both eventually face death.

Proverbs 4:27

Do not turn away toward the right or left into evil. Keep your feet away from wrongdoing.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom provides moral direction.

III. FOOLISHNESS EVENTUALLY REVEALS ITSELF

Ecclesiastes 10:3 — The Fool Announces Himself

“Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he tells everyone that he is a fool.”

Foolishness cannot remain hidden forever.

The fool reveals himself by:

Speech.

Conduct.

Decisions.

Attitudes.

He may never say:

“I am foolish.”

But his behavior says it for him.

Cross References

Proverbs 13:16

A prudent person acts with knowledge, but a fool openly displays his foolishness.

Proverbs 12:23

A wise person does not feel the need to display everything he knows, but foolish people openly reveal their lack of understanding.

Proverbs 18:2

A fool has little interest in understanding. He is mainly interested in expressing his own opinions.

Spiritual Principle

Character eventually becomes visible through conduct.

IV. CALMNESS CAN QUIET ANGRY AUTHORITY

Ecclesiastes 10:4 — Do Not Abandon Your Place

“If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.”

The Preacher gives practical advice for dealing with anger.

When someone in authority becomes angry, the natural response may be:

Anger.

Defensiveness.

Walking away.

Retaliation.

But wisdom often responds with calmness.

Cross References

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer can turn away anger, but harsh words stir up greater conflict.

Proverbs 25:15

Through patience a ruler may be persuaded, and gentle speech can break through even strong resistance.

Romans 12:18

As far as it depends upon you, do everything you reasonably can to live peacefully with everyone.

Spiritual Principle

Calmness can accomplish what confrontation sometimes cannot.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not allow someone else's anger to choose your response for you.

V. RULERS CAN MAKE SERIOUS MISTAKES

Ecclesiastes 10:5 — Error from Those in Authority

“There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from a ruler.”

Leadership does not guarantee wisdom.

A ruler can make mistakes.

Position does not make someone:

Infallible.

Wise.

Moral.

Competent.

The decisions of leaders can affect entire communities.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 5:8

If you see poor people oppressed and justice denied, do not be shocked. One official may answer to another, and there are still higher authorities above them.

Isaiah 3:12

When immature and irresponsible people rule, the nation suffers, and those who should guide the people may instead lead them in the wrong direction.

Micah 3:1

Micah called to the leaders and rulers of Israel and said, “You should understand justice and know what is right.”

Spiritual Principle

Authority increases responsibility.

It does not eliminate the possibility of foolishness.

VI. FOOLISHNESS CAN BE ELEVATED

Ecclesiastes 10:6 — The Wrong People in High Places

“Folly is set in many high places, while the rich sit in a low place.”

The Preacher observes situations where:

Foolish people receive authority.

Qualified people are overlooked.

Social positions do not always reflect wisdom or ability.

Cross References

Proverbs 19:10

Luxury does not fit a fool, and it is even less appropriate for a servant to rule arrogantly over princes.

Proverbs 30:22

The earth is disturbed when a servant suddenly rules as king without the wisdom or character needed for that position.

James 2:2

Suppose a wealthy man wearing expensive clothing enters your meeting, and a poor man wearing worn clothing enters as well.

Spiritual Principle

Position should never be confused with character.

VII. STATUS CAN BE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Ecclesiastes 10:7 — Servants on Horses

“I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking on the ground like servants.”

The image is one of social reversal.

Those expected to lead are walking.

Those expected to serve are riding.

The Preacher is not attacking servants.

He is illustrating disorder and reversal.

Cross References

Proverbs 19:10

Luxury is not fitting for a fool, and neither is it fitting for an unprepared servant to rule arrogantly over princes.

Proverbs 30:22

Certain conditions disturb the natural order, including when an unprepared servant suddenly becomes king.

1 Samuel 2:7

The Lord can make a person poor or rich. He can bring one person low and raise another person up.

Spiritual Principle

Human position can change quickly.

Wisdom matters more than title.

VIII. CARELESS ACTIONS CAN RETURN UPON THE PERSON

Ecclesiastes 10:8 — The Pit and the Serpent

“He who digs a pit may fall into it, and he who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a serpent.”

Actions have consequences.

A person digging a dangerous pit may fall into it.

A person breaking through a wall may disturb a hidden snake.

The broader lesson is:

Think before acting.

Cross References

Proverbs 26:27

The person who digs a pit to harm someone else may fall into that same pit, and the person who rolls a stone against another may have it roll back upon himself.

Psalms 7:15

The wicked person digs a pit and makes it deep, but he falls into the very hole he prepared for someone else.

Galatians 6:7

Do not deceive yourself: God cannot be mocked. A person will eventually harvest the same kind of seed he has planted.

Spiritual Principle

Foolish actions often create the very danger they intended for others.

IX. EVEN LEGITIMATE WORK REQUIRES CAUTION

Ecclesiastes 10:9 — Stones and Logs

“He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.”

Work involves risk.

The Preacher is not teaching people to avoid work.

He is teaching:

Be careful.

Prepare.

Think ahead.

Respect danger.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 19:5

Suppose a man goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and while swinging his axe the iron head accidentally flies off the handle and kills his neighbor. Such an event was to be treated as accidental rather than intentional murder.

Proverbs 27:12

A prudent person sees danger coming and takes shelter, but the inexperienced keep going and suffer the consequences.

Ecclesiastes 10:8

The person who digs a pit may fall into it, and the one who breaks through a wall may encounter hidden danger.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom does not eliminate risk.

Wisdom prepares for it.

X. SHARPEN THE AXE

Ecclesiastes 10:10 — Wisdom Makes Work Effective

“If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.”

This is one of the most practical pictures in Ecclesiastes.

A dull axe still works.

But it requires much more effort.

The wise worker stops long enough to sharpen the blade.

This teaches preparation.

Sometimes the answer is not:

Work harder.

Sometimes the answer is:

Work wiser.

Cross References

Proverbs 27:17

Just as iron sharpens iron, one person can sharpen and strengthen another person.

Proverbs 24:5

A wise person possesses great strength, and a person with knowledge continually increases his ability.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

The Preacher concluded that wisdom is better than strength, even though the wisdom of a poor person is sometimes despised.

Spiritual Principle

Preparation often saves unnecessary effort.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Before demanding more strength, ask whether greater wisdom would accomplish the task better.

XI. SKILL USED TOO LATE HAS LITTLE VALUE

Ecclesiastes 10:11 — The Serpent Bites First

“If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.”

Timing matters.

A person may have great skill.

But if the skill is used too late, its usefulness is greatly reduced.

Wisdom acts before preventable damage occurs.

Cross References

James 3:8

No human being can completely tame the tongue by his own strength. It is restless and dangerous, capable of spreading deadly harm.

Psalm 58:4

The wicked carry destructive poison in their speech and behavior like the venom of a serpent, acting as though they refuse every warning.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who use it continually will experience the fruit produced by their words.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom used too late cannot always undo damage already done.

XII. WISE WORDS BRING FAVOR

Ecclesiastes 10:12 — Speech Reveals Wisdom

“The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.”

Words reveal character.

The wise person uses words with:

Grace.

Restraint.

Purpose.

The fool’s own words become destructive.

Cross References

Proverbs 10:32

Righteous people know how to speak what is fitting and helpful, but wicked speech twists and damages what should be good.

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech always be gracious and wise, as though seasoned properly, so you will know how to answer each person.

Proverbs 18:7

A fool's mouth becomes his own destruction, and his lips become a trap that catches him.

Spiritual Principle

Words can either build reputation or destroy it.

XIII. FOOLISH TALK GETS WORSE

Ecclesiastes 10:13 — From Foolishness to Madness

“The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.”

Foolish speech often grows.

It begins badly.

Then worsens.

One careless statement leads to another.

One lie requires another lie.

One angry sentence produces another.

Cross References**Proverbs 29:11**

A fool pours out every thought and emotion without restraint, but a wise person knows how to control himself.

Proverbs 15:2

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge correctly, but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness.

James 3:6

The tongue can act like a fire, spreading wrongdoing through the whole course of life and causing enormous destruction.

Spiritual Principle

Uncontrolled speech tends to become more destructive the longer it continues.

XIV. THE FOOL SPEAKS CONFIDENTLY ABOUT WHAT HE CANNOT KNOW

Ecclesiastes 10:14 — Multiplying Words About the Future

“A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?”

The fool speaks as though he knows:

Everything.

Tomorrow.

The future.

The final outcome.

The wise person recognizes uncertainty.

Cross References

Matthew 6:34

Do not become consumed with worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will bring its own concerns. Today already has enough trouble of its own.

James 4:13

Some of you say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to a certain city, stay there for a year, conduct business, and make money,” speaking as though the future were completely under your control.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not brag about tomorrow, because you do not know what even one day may bring.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom speaks about the future with humility.

XV. FOOLISH LABOR BECOMES EXHAUSTING

Ecclesiastes 10:15 — Unable to Find the Way

“The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not even know the way to the city.”

The fool works.

But without direction.

His labor becomes exhausting because he lacks basic wisdom.

This is another reminder that effort alone is not enough.

Cross References

Isaiah 55:2

Why spend your money on what cannot truly satisfy you, and why work for what does not nourish your soul? Listen carefully to God and receive what is truly good.

Proverbs 21:16

The person who wanders away from the path of wisdom will eventually find himself among those who have chosen the way of death.

Jeremiah 10:23

Lord, I know that a person's way is not completely under his own control. Human beings cannot successfully direct every step of their lives by themselves.

Spiritual Principle

Activity without direction produces exhaustion.

XVI. A LAND SUFFERS UNDER IMMATURE LEADERSHIP

Ecclesiastes 10:16 — Childish Kings and Morning Feasts

“Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!”

The issue is not merely chronological age.

The picture is of immature, self-indulgent leadership.

Leaders are feasting when they should be working.

Their priority is pleasure rather than responsibility.

The result is:

Woe to the land.

Cross References

Isaiah 3:4

God warned that immature rulers would govern the people, and leadership without maturity would bring disorder.

Isaiah 3:12

The people suffer when immature leadership dominates them and those responsible for guidance lead them down confused paths.

Proverbs 31:4

Kings and rulers should not give themselves to uncontrolled drinking, because leadership requires clear judgment.

Spiritual Principle

When leaders live for personal pleasure, the people they lead eventually suffer.

XVII. DISCIPLINED LEADERSHIP BLESSES A LAND

Ecclesiastes 10:17 — Feasting at the Proper Time

“Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of the noble, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!”

The contrast is clear.

Wise rulers know:

When to work.

When to eat.

Why to eat.

They use resources for strength rather than indulgence.

Self-control is essential to leadership.

Cross References

Proverbs 31:4

It is not fitting for kings to become controlled by wine or for rulers to become consumed with strong drink.

Isaiah 32:1

A king will reign with righteousness, and rulers will govern with justice.

Proverbs 20:1

Wine can mock a person, and strong drink can make him loud and foolish. Anyone controlled by it is not wise.

Spiritual Principle

Good leadership requires self-discipline.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The person who cannot govern himself will eventually struggle to govern others wisely.

XVIII. LAZINESS CAUSES DECAY

Ecclesiastes 10:18 — The House Begins to Leak

“Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through idleness the house leaks.”

Neglect causes deterioration.

A house does not usually collapse in one moment.

It often deteriorates gradually because maintenance is ignored.

The same is true of:

Relationships.

Finances.

Health.

Character.

Churches.

Organizations.

Nations.

Cross References**Proverbs 24:30**

I passed by the field of a lazy person and by the vineyard of someone who lacked good judgment.

Proverbs 18:9

The person who is careless and lazy in his work is closely related to someone who intentionally destroys.

Proverbs 6:10

“A little sleep, a little more rest, a little folding of the hands to relax” can eventually lead to serious need.

Spiritual Principle

Neglect creates damage slowly but surely.

Key Truth

What you repeatedly refuse to maintain will eventually deteriorate.

XIX. RESOURCES HAVE PRACTICAL USE

Ecclesiastes 10:19 — Bread, Wine, and Money

“Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.”

The Preacher is speaking practically about life under the sun.

Food supports celebration.

Wine was associated with festivity.

Money provides answers to many practical material needs.

But the wider book has already made clear:

Money cannot answer everything spiritually.

It cannot provide:

Salvation.

Eternal life.

True contentment.

Perfect wisdom.

Cross References

Proverbs 15:15

All the days of a deeply troubled person may feel miserable, but a cheerful heart experiences something like a continual feast.

1 Timothy 6:10

The love of money is a root from which many kinds of evil grow, and some people have wandered away from faith because of their determination to become rich.

Proverbs 31:6

Strong drink was sometimes given in ancient society to those suffering severe distress or facing great pain.

Spiritual Principle

Money can solve many material problems.

It cannot solve the deepest problems of the soul.

XX. GUARD EVEN YOUR PRIVATE SPEECH

Ecclesiastes 10:20 — Words Travel

“Even 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, and some winged creature will tell the matter.”

The Preacher warns about secret speech.

People often assume:

“Nobody will know.”

But private words have a way of becoming public.

The expression about a bird carrying the message is a vivid picture of how quickly information can travel.

Cross References

Exodus 22:28

Do not speak contemptuously against God, and do not curse or dishonor the ruler of your people.

Luke 12:3

What you have spoken in darkness may eventually be heard in the light, and what you whispered privately may be publicly announced.

Habakkuk 2:11

Even the stones in the wall seem ready to cry out against hidden wrongdoing, and the beams of the house seem prepared to answer them.

Spiritual Principle

Speak privately in a way that you would not be ashamed to hear repeated publicly.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If the truth becoming public would destroy you, reconsider what you are saying in private.

XXI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 10

1. A Little Folly Can Ruin Much Good

One foolish decision can damage:

Years of reputation.

Years of trust.

Years of faithful work.

Principle:

Never underestimate the cost of one careless choice.

2. Wisdom Produces Stability

The wise person responds with:

Calmness.

Discernment.

Restraint.

Principle:

A calm spirit can sometimes solve what anger would make worse.

3. Wisdom Makes Work More Effective

The dull axe requires unnecessary force.

Principle:

Preparation can accomplish what raw effort cannot.

4. Words Reveal Character

The wise speak graciously.

The fool destroys himself with his own mouth.

Principle:

Your words eventually tell people what kind of heart you have.

5. Leadership Matters

Immature leadership harms a nation.

Disciplined leadership strengthens it.

Principle:

Leadership is stewardship, not an excuse for self-indulgence.

6. Laziness Causes Decay

Neglected things deteriorate.

Principle:

Small responsibilities ignored repeatedly become large problems later.

7. Private Words Have Consequences

Secret speech may eventually become public.

Principle:

Integrity means being the same person when nobody seems to be listening.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT FOLLY

Folly does not always appear dramatic.

Sometimes it appears as:

Careless speech.

Quick anger.

Neglect.

Poor preparation.

Bad timing.

Immaturity.

One foolish choice.

That is what makes folly dangerous.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The size of the foolish act does not always determine the size of the damage.

XXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT ANGER

Verse 4 teaches us how to respond when anger rises against us.

The answer is not always:

Run.

Shout.

Retaliate.

Fight.

Sometimes the wise response is:

Remain calm.

Stay steady.

Respond gently.

Spiritual Principle

You cannot always control another person's temper.

You can control whether their anger becomes yours.

XXIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT WORK

Work requires more than effort.

It requires:

Skill.

Preparation.

Attention.

Safety.

Wisdom.

A dull axe illustrates wasted energy.

Key Truth

Hard work matters.

Wise work matters too.

XXV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT SPEECH

The chapter gives several warnings about words.

A fool:

Talks too much.

Talks foolishly.

Talks destructively.

Talks confidently about things he cannot know.

The wise person:

Speaks carefully.

Speaks graciously.

Speaks with restraint.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Before speaking, ask:

Is it true?

Is it wise?

Is it necessary?

Is this the right time?

XXVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Leadership requires:

Maturity.

Discipline.

Clear judgment.

Responsibility.

Self-control.

The nation suffers when rulers use leadership mainly for personal pleasure.

Spiritual Principle

Leadership magnifies character.

If character is wise, leadership can bless.

If character is foolish, leadership can multiply damage.

XXVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT LAZINESS

Laziness often does not destroy immediately.

It destroys gradually.

One neglected repair.

Then another.

One ignored responsibility.

Then another.

Finally:

The roof leaks.

The structure weakens.

Key Truth

Neglect is destruction in slow motion.

XXVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 10 TEACHES ABOUT MONEY

Money has practical usefulness.

It can provide:

Food.

Housing.

Transportation.

Tools.

Resources.

Opportunities.

But money is not God.

Spiritual Principle

Money can answer financial needs.

It cannot answer eternal needs.

XXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What do the dead flies in verse 1 represent?

They illustrate how a relatively small amount of folly can ruin something valuable.

One foolish decision can damage years of wisdom and honor.

Question 2

What does verse 2 mean about the right and left hand?

It describes the different directions of wisdom and folly.

Wisdom guides toward sound judgment.

Foolishness repeatedly leads toward wrong decisions.

Question 3

How does a fool reveal himself?

Through:

Speech.

Conduct.

Choices.

Lack of judgment.

Foolishness eventually becomes visible.

Question 4

What should we do when someone in authority becomes angry with us?

We should avoid impulsive reactions.

Calmness, patience, and wise speech may help settle the situation.

Question 5

Can leaders make foolish decisions?

Yes.

Authority does not guarantee wisdom.

That is why leadership requires humility and good counsel.

Question 6

What do verses 8–9 teach?

They teach that actions have consequences and that even legitimate work should be done carefully.

Question 7

What does the dull axe represent?

It represents ineffective effort caused by lack of preparation.

Sometimes greater wisdom is more useful than greater strength.

Question 8

What does verse 11 teach about timing?

Skill used after the damage has already occurred may be useless.

Wisdom recognizes when action is needed.

Question 9

How does foolish speech destroy a person?

Foolish speech can:

Damage reputation.

Create conflict.

Spread sin.

Expose ignorance.

Bring consequences.

Question 10

What kind of leadership harms a nation?

Leadership marked by:

Immaturity.

Self-indulgence.

Drunkenness.

Lack of discipline.

Neglect.

Question 11

What does the leaking roof teach?

Neglected responsibilities eventually create visible damage.

Question 12

Why should private speech be guarded?

Because private words may eventually become public, and because God is aware of what people say even when others are not listening.

XXX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 10 asks several searching questions.

Is There a “Little Folly” I Am Ignoring?

Could one small compromise damage something valuable?

How Do I Respond to Anger?

Do I become angry simply because another person is angry?

Am I Prepared for My Responsibilities?

Am I swinging a dull axe harder instead of stopping to sharpen it?

What Do My Words Reveal?

Do my words show:

Wisdom?

Grace?

Self-control?

Or:

Pride?

Anger?

Foolishness?

Am I Diligent?

What have I neglected that is beginning to deteriorate?

How Do I Handle Leadership?

If I have authority, do I use it responsibly?

Am I Self-Controlled?

Do I know when enough is enough?

Would I Be Comfortable If My Private Words Became Public?

Is my private speech consistent with my public character?

XXXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Protect a Lifetime of Wisdom from a Moment of Folly”

A person may spend:

Twenty years.

Thirty years.

Forty years.

Building:

Trust.

Character.

Ministry.

Reputation.

Relationships.

Then one foolish decision can damage what took decades to build.

That is the lesson of:

Dead flies in the perfume.

Principle:

Do not trade long-term honor for short-term foolishness.

XXXII. SHARPEN THE AXE

One of the greatest lessons in this chapter is:

“If the iron is blunt ... he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.”

Many people assume every problem requires:

More work.

More hours.

More effort.

More pressure.

Sometimes what is needed is:

Better preparation.

Better tools.

Better counsel.

Better planning.

Better skill.

More wisdom.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Before working harder, make sure you are not simply working duller.

XXXIII. THE POWER OF CALMNESS

Ecclesiastes 10:4 teaches that calmness can settle great offenses.

That is a valuable principle for:

Marriage.

Leadership.

Churches.

Workplaces.

Families.

Conflict.

When someone raises the temperature:

Wisdom does not always raise it higher.

Sometimes wisdom lowers it.

Spiritual Principle

Calmness is not weakness.

It is strength under control.

XXXIV. LEADERSHIP AND SELF-CONTROL

The difference between verses 16 and 17 is largely the difference between:

Indulgence.

And:

Discipline.

Bad leaders feast at the wrong time.

Good leaders know:

When to work.

When to rest.

When to celebrate.

When to exercise restraint.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The person who leads others must first learn to lead himself.

XXXV. NEGLIGENCE IS SLOW DESTRUCTION

A leaking roof usually did not begin leaking yesterday.

The damage developed.

Maintenance was delayed.

The problem grew.

This applies far beyond houses.

Neglect can damage:

A marriage.

A family.

A ministry.

A church.

A career.

Finances.

Health.

Spiritual life.

Principle:

Deal with small problems before they become large ones.

XXXVI. WORDS THAT TRAVEL

The chapter closes with a warning.

Do not assume:

“This is private.”

Words have a way of traveling.

Today that principle is even easier to understand.

A private statement can be:

Repeated.

Forwarded.

Recorded.

Shared.

Misquoted.

Publicized.

Wisdom therefore says:

Do not merely manage where you speak.

Manage what kind of person speaks.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Character is safest when there is nothing in private that requires a different public version of you.

XXXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10 teaches that wisdom often appears in ordinary decisions.

Wisdom is not merely:

Knowing theology.

Knowing facts.

Having intelligence.

Wisdom is knowing how to live.

It knows:

When to remain calm.

When to prepare.

When to speak.

When to stop speaking.

When to work.

When to sharpen the axe.

When to exercise restraint.

When to deal with neglect.

The chapter warns us not to underestimate folly.

A small foolish decision can damage:

A good name.

A marriage.

A ministry.

A career.

A testimony.

A friendship.

Years of trust.

Therefore:

Guard the small decisions.

Guard your temper.

Guard your speech.

Guard your work habits.

Guard your private conversations.

Guard your responsibilities.

Do not become careless merely because something seems small.

Small flies ruined the perfume.

Small yeast affects the whole batch.

A small fire can burn a forest.

A little folly can outweigh much wisdom.

The chapter also reminds leaders:

Your leadership matters.

If God has given you responsibility over:

A family.

A church.

A business.

A ministry.

A community.

People are affected by your character.

Lead with:

Wisdom.

Discipline.

Restraint.

Humility.

And do not neglect the ordinary things.

A roof collapses because maintenance was ignored.

Likewise, lives often break down because small responsibilities were repeatedly postponed.

So:

Sharpen the axe.

Prepare wisely.

Work diligently.

Speak carefully.

Remain calm.

Lead responsibly.

Maintain what God has placed in your care.

And protect a lifetime of honor from a moment of foolishness.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the wisdom You give us through Your Word.

Protect us from the small foolish choices that can create great damage.

Help us understand that little compromises can produce serious consequences.

Guard our character.

Guard our reputation.

Guard our testimony.

Give us wisdom in the way we think.

Give us wisdom in the way we respond to anger.

When others become angry, help us remain calm.

Give us gentle words.

Give us patience.

Give us self-control.

Father, help us work wisely.

Show us when we need greater effort.

But also show us when we need to stop and sharpen the axe.

Give us wisdom to prepare.

Give us wisdom to plan.

Give us wisdom to learn.

Give us wisdom to use the right tools.

Protect us from careless actions.

Help us recognize danger before damage occurs.

Guard our mouths.

Let our words be gracious.

Keep us from foolish talking.

Keep us from endless talking.

Keep us from boasting about a future we cannot see.

Teach us to speak truth with humility.

Father, give wisdom to leaders.

Give them:

Maturity.

Discipline.

Integrity.

Self-control.

Good judgment.

Protect them from selfish indulgence.

And when You give us leadership responsibility, help us remember that authority is stewardship.

Protect us from laziness.

Show us anything we have neglected.

Help us repair what is beginning to break.

Help us strengthen relationships before they collapse.

Help us address problems while they are still small.

Guard even our private speech.

May our private words honor You as much as our public words.

Make us people of integrity.

Help us live in such a way that we do not need one character in public and another in private.

Above all, make us wise.

Help us protect what You have entrusted to us.

Let wisdom guide our:

Work.

Speech.

Leadership.

Relationships.

Choices.

And may our lives honor You in both the great decisions and the small ones.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a foul stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.” — Ecclesiastes 10:1

Central Truth

Wisdom produces calmness, preparation, diligence, disciplined leadership, and careful speech, while even a small amount of folly can damage reputation, waste effort, corrupt leadership, destroy relationships, and undo much that wisdom has built.

Ecclesiastes 10 in One Sentence

The Preacher warns that even small acts of folly can destroy great good while showing that wisdom brings calmness, careful preparation, effective work, gracious speech, disciplined leadership, diligence, and restraint in every area of life.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11 — The Uncertainty of Life and the Call to Joy

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11 deals with one of the great realities of human life:

We do not know everything that is going to happen.

The future is uncertain.

Weather changes.

Opportunities change.

Circumstances change.

Health changes.

Economies change.

People change.

Plans fail.

Unexpected events occur.

Yet the Preacher does not tell us to become paralyzed by uncertainty.

He tells us to act.

Give.

Sow.

Work.

Rejoice.

Use your opportunities.

Do not wait for perfect circumstances.

One of the strongest lessons in this chapter is found in verse 4:

“Whoever watches the wind will not sow, and whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.”

The person who waits for perfect conditions may never begin.

There will always be:

A reason to delay.

A possible problem.

An uncertain outcome.

A risk.

A cloud in the sky.

Faith does not mean knowing every outcome.

Faith means moving forward responsibly while trusting God with what cannot be known.

The chapter also reminds us of the mystery of God’s work.

We do not fully understand:

The wind.

Life in the womb.

Providence.

The future.

Yet God understands all of it.

The final part of the chapter turns directly to young people.

Youth is a gift.

Joy is appropriate.

Life should be enjoyed.

But joy must always be joined with responsibility.

The young person is told:

Rejoice.

Enjoy your youth.

But remember:

God will bring every choice into judgment.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 11 is:

Because life is uncertain and brief, we should live generously, work diligently, act faithfully without waiting for perfect conditions, enjoy the life God gives us, and remember that every choice is made under His ultimate judgment.

I. CAST YOUR BREAD UPON THE WATERS

Ecclesiastes 11:1 — Give Generously and Trust God

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.”

The Preacher begins with an image of releasing something valuable.

The point is generosity and investment in what cannot immediately be seen.

Giving often requires faith.

You release something today without controlling exactly how or when the result will return.

Generosity therefore requires trust.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 15:10

Give generously to the poor and do not give with a resentful heart, because the Lord your God will bless you in your work and in everything you put your hand to.

Galatians 6:9

Let us not become tired of doing what is good, because at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Luke 6:38

Give generously to others, and generosity will return to you in overflowing measure. The standard you use in giving will also be used in what comes back to you.

Spiritual Principle

Generosity often requires releasing what you can see while trusting God with what you cannot see.

Key Truth

Faithful giving is never wasted.

II. DIVERSIFY YOUR GENEROSITY AND PREPARATION

Ecclesiastes 11:2 — Give Portions to Seven or Eight

“Give portions to seven, yes, even to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.”

The Preacher teaches practical wisdom.

Because the future is uncertain:

Do not put everything into one place.

Share.

Prepare.

Spread resources wisely.

The principle includes both:

Generosity.

And:

Prudent preparation.

Cross References

Luke 6:30

Give to the person who asks from you, and do not continually demand back what you have freely given to someone in need.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not boast about tomorrow, because you do not know what even one day may bring.

2 Corinthians 9:6

Remember this principle: the person who sows only a little will reap only a little, while the person who sows generously will also reap generously.

Spiritual Principle

Uncertainty should make us wiser and more generous, not fearful and selfish.

III. SOME EVENTS WILL HAPPEN WHETHER WE CONTROL THEM OR NOT

Ecclesiastes 11:3 — Rain and the Fallen Tree

“If the clouds are full of rain, they pour it down upon the earth; and whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie.”

Some realities move beyond our control.

Full clouds eventually release rain.

A fallen tree remains where it falls.

The Preacher is teaching us to recognize reality.

We cannot control everything.

Some things happen.

Then we must respond to what has happened rather than endlessly wishing circumstances were different.

Cross References

Isaiah 55:10

Rain and snow come down from heaven and water the earth, causing it to produce growth and seed for the farmer and food for those who eat.

Matthew 5:45

God causes His sun to rise on both evil and good people, and He sends rain upon both the righteous and the unrighteous.

James 5:7

Be patient, brothers and sisters, as you wait for the Lord. Consider how a farmer patiently waits for the valuable crop from the earth and depends upon the seasonal rains.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom accepts realities that cannot be changed and acts faithfully within them.

IV. DO NOT WAIT FOR PERFECT CONDITIONS

Ecclesiastes 11:4 — Watching the Wind

“Whoever watches the wind will not sow, and whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.”

This verse is one of the clearest warnings against procrastination in Scripture.

The farmer who constantly analyzes the weather may never plant.

The person who waits for perfect conditions may never act.

There will always be uncertainty.

There will always be risk.

Cross References

Proverbs 20:4

The lazy person refuses to plow because the weather is uncomfortable, and when harvest arrives he searches for crops but finds nothing.

Luke 9:62

Jesus said, “Anyone who puts his hand to the plow and keeps looking backward is not properly focused on the kingdom of God.”

Galatians 6:9

Do not become weary in doing good, because at the proper time we will harvest the result if we continue faithfully.

Spiritual Principle

Perfect conditions rarely arrive.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not use uncertainty as an excuse for disobedience.

V. GOD'S WORK REMAINS MYSTERIOUS

Ecclesiastes 11:5 — The Wind and the Womb

“As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the bones are formed in the womb of a woman with child, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.”

Human knowledge has limits.

We observe life.

But we do not fully understand every process or every purpose.

The Preacher points to:

The wind.

Life in the womb.

God's providence.

All contain mystery.

Cross References

Psalm 139:13

You formed the deepest parts of my being and carefully shaped me within my mother's womb.

John 3:8

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

Job 9:10

God performs great things beyond our ability to fully search out and wonders beyond number.

Spiritual Principle

Not understanding everything God does does not mean He is not working.

Key Truth

Mystery should lead to humility, not unbelief.

VI. KEEP SOWING

Ecclesiastes 11:6 — Morning and Evening Diligence

“Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.”

The Preacher tells us to keep working.

Do not depend upon one effort alone.

Work in the morning.

Continue in the evening.

You do not know which effort will bear fruit.

Cross References

Psalms 126:5

Those who sow while weeping will one day reap with songs of joy.

Galatians 6:9

Let us not become tired of doing what is right, because at the proper time we will reap if we refuse to give up.

2 Corinthians 9:6

The person who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, while the person who sows generously will reap generously.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness keeps sowing even before the results are visible.

Application

Do not stop doing good simply because you cannot yet see what is working.

VII. LIFE ITSELF IS SWEET

Ecclesiastes 11:7 — The Blessing of Light

“Truly, the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.”

After discussing uncertainty, the Preacher reminds us:

Life is still a gift.

Seeing another sunrise is a blessing.

Light represents:

Life.

Opportunity.

Experience.

Joy.

Cross References

Psalms 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies display the work of His hands.

Psalms 97:11

Light is sown for righteous people, and joy is prepared for those whose hearts are upright before God.

John 8:12

Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not continue walking in spiritual darkness but will possess the light that gives life.”

Spiritual Principle

Another day of life is not something to treat casually.

VIII. REJOICE, BUT REMEMBER DARK DAYS WILL COME

Ecclesiastes 11:8 — Enjoy the Years God Gives

“However many years a man may live, let him rejoice in them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is vanity.”

The Preacher balances:

Joy.

And:

Reality.

Enjoy your days.

But remember:

Life changes.

Old age comes.

Difficulty comes.

Death comes.

Joy should therefore be intentional.

Cross References

Job 30:26

When I hoped for good, trouble came instead. When I waited for light, darkness arrived.

Psalms 90:10

Our years may reach seventy, or eighty if strength allows, yet even our strongest years contain labor and sorrow. They pass quickly, and soon we are gone.

Ecclesiastes 12:1

Remember your Creator while you are still young, before difficult days come and years arrive when you say, “I find little pleasure in them.”

Spiritual Principle

The reality of future darkness should make present light more precious.

IX. YOUTH SHOULD BE ENJOYED RESPONSIBLY

Ecclesiastes 11:9 — Joy with Accountability

“Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”

This verse contains both permission and warning.

Young people are told:

Rejoice.

Enjoy life.

Use your energy.

Experience the days of youth.

But:

Remember judgment.

Freedom is not the same as irresponsibility.

Cross References

Numbers 15:39

When you see the tassels on your clothing, remember all the Lord's commands and obey them. Do not follow the sinful desires of your own heart and eyes that would lead you away from Him.

2 Corinthians 5:10

Every one of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each person may receive what is appropriate for the things done while living in the body, whether good or bad.

1 John 2:16

Everything belonging to this fallen world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and pride in possessions and achievements—does not come from the Father but from the world.

Spiritual Principle

God permits joy, but He never separates joy from accountability.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Enjoy your freedom without forgetting the One before whom you will answer for how you used it.

X. PUT AWAY SORROW AND EVIL

Ecclesiastes 11:10 — Youth Does Not Last Forever

“So then, banish sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your body, for youth and the prime of life are vanity.”

Youth feels permanent while a person is young.

It is not.

Energy changes.

Strength changes.

Appearance changes.

Life moves quickly.

Therefore:

Do not waste youth in bitterness.

Do not waste youth in sin.

Cross References

Ephesians 4:22

Put away the old way of life that was shaped by sinful desires and was continually being corrupted by deception.

Psalms 25:7

Do not hold the sins and failures of my youth against me. Remember me according to Your mercy and faithful love because You are good, Lord.

1 Timothy 4:12

Do not allow anyone to despise you because you are young. Instead, become an example to believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Spiritual Principle

Youth is too brief to waste in sin, bitterness, or foolishness.

XI. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 11

1. Be Generous

Generosity requires faith.

We often give without seeing immediate results.

Principle:

Do good without demanding an immediate return.

2. Do Not Wait for Perfect Conditions

The person watching every wind never plants.

Principle:

Some opportunities disappear while we are waiting for certainty.

3. Accept That Life Is Unpredictable

You cannot know every future event.

Principle:

Prepare wisely, but do not pretend you can control tomorrow.

4. Keep Working Faithfully

Sow in the morning.

Keep working in the evening.

Principle:

Faithfulness often means continuing before results become visible.

5. Rejoice in Life

Light is sweet.

Life is a gift.

Principle:

The brevity of life should increase gratitude rather than destroy it.

6. Youth Is a Gift

Youth should be enjoyed.

But youth should not become an excuse for foolishness.

Principle:

Energy is a gift to steward, not permission to sin.

7. Judgment Makes Every Choice Significant

God will evaluate how life was lived.

Principle:

Enjoy life in a way you will not regret when you stand before God.

XII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT GENEROSITY

Generosity involves risk.

You release something from your hands.

You cannot always control:

How it is used.

When fruit appears.

What return comes.

But generosity reflects trust.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Open hands demonstrate greater faith than clenched fists.

XIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT UNCERTAINTY

The chapter repeatedly says:

You do not know.

You do not know what disaster may come.

You do not know the path of the wind.

You do not completely understand God's work.

You do not know which effort will succeed.

This should not produce paralysis.

It should produce:

Humility.

Preparation.

Diligence.

Faith.

Key Truth

You do not need certainty about every outcome before you can act faithfully.

XIV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT PROCRASTINATION

Verse 4 exposes a common excuse:

"I will begin when conditions improve."

But conditions are rarely perfect.

There is always:

Wind.

Clouds.

Risk.

Uncertainty.

Spiritual Principle

Procrastination often disguises fear as wisdom.

XV. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT DILIGENCE

Verse 6 says:

Sow in the morning.

Do not let your hands become idle in the evening.

That is diligence.

It means:

Keep working.

Keep serving.

Keep planting.

Keep learning.

Keep trying.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You cannot control which seed grows, but you can control whether you sow.

XVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S MYSTERY

Some of God's work cannot be completely explained.

That does not mean His work lacks order.

We simply lack complete understanding.

Spiritual Principle

The limit of human knowledge is not the limit of God's wisdom.

XVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT JOY

The Preacher tells people to:

Rejoice.

Enjoy the light.

Enjoy the years they are given.

Biblical wisdom is not joyless.

It knows life is temporary.

That is precisely why life should be gratefully received.

Key Truth

Joy becomes deeper when we recognize that every day is temporary and therefore precious.

XVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT YOUTH

Youth brings:

Energy.

Opportunity.

Strength.

Possibility.

But youth is temporary.

The wise young person does not assume:

“I have plenty of time.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Use your strength before your strength becomes only a memory.

XIX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 11 TEACHES ABOUT JUDGMENT

Ecclesiastes 11:9 says:

God will bring every choice into judgment.

This gives seriousness to freedom.

We make choices.

But choices have consequences.

Spiritual Principle

Accountability does not eliminate joy.

It teaches us how to enjoy life wisely.

XX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does “cast your bread upon the waters” mean?

It pictures generosity and faithful action without immediate visible return.

It encourages us to release what we have and trust God with the result.

Question 2

Why should portions be given to seven or eight?

Because the future is uncertain.

The verse encourages generosity and wise distribution rather than placing everything into one place.

Question 3

What do the rain clouds teach?

Some events develop and occur beyond our control.

Wisdom recognizes reality instead of pretending everything can be controlled.

Question 4

What does verse 4 teach about procrastination?

Waiting for perfect circumstances can prevent action altogether.

At some point, the farmer must sow despite uncertainty.

Question 5

Why does the Preacher compare God’s work with the wind and development in the womb?

Both demonstrate how limited human understanding is.

We can observe much without fully explaining every mystery.

Question 6

What does verse 6 teach about work?

It teaches diligence.

Continue working because you do not know which effort will succeed.

Question 7

What does verse 7 mean when it says light is sweet?

It means life itself is pleasant and should be received gratefully as a gift.

Question 8

Why should a person remember the days of darkness?

Because life includes aging, difficulty, and eventually death.

That reality should increase appreciation for present life.

Question 9

Does verse 9 give young people permission to sin?

No.

The verse encourages joy but immediately reminds the young person that God will judge every choice.

Question 10

What does it mean to follow the ways of the heart and eyes?

It acknowledges the desires and interests associated with youth, but the warning about judgment shows those desires must remain under God's authority.

Question 11

Why should sorrow be removed from the heart?

The Preacher warns against wasting the brief years of youth in unnecessary grief, bitterness, or anxiety.

Question 12

What should Ecclesiastes 11 change about our lives?

It should teach us to:

Give generously.

Stop waiting for perfect circumstances.

Work diligently.

Trust God with uncertain results.

Enjoy life gratefully.

Use youth wisely.

Remember judgment.

XXI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 11 asks several searching questions.

Am I Generous?

Do I give only when I can guarantee a return?

Am I Waiting for Perfect Conditions?

What have I delayed because I am afraid something may go wrong?

Am I Trying to Control the Future?

Can I prepare wisely without pretending I know tomorrow?

Am I Still Sowing?

Have I stopped doing good because I have not seen results yet?

Am I Grateful to Be Alive?

Do I treat another day as ordinary instead of recognizing it as a gift?

Am I Using My Present Strength Wisely?

Am I wasting opportunities I may not always have?

Am I Enjoying Life Responsibly?

Can I rejoice without forgetting accountability?

Am I Living With Judgment in View?

Would I make the same decisions if I remembered I must answer to God?

XXII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Wait for a Windless Day”

There will always be reasons not to begin.

Not enough money.

Not enough time.

Not enough certainty.

Not enough support.

Not enough confidence.

Too many clouds.

Too much wind.

The farmer who demands perfect weather may never plant anything.

Principle:

Faith does not wait until risk disappears; faith acts wisely while trusting God with what remains uncertain.

XXIII. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH AND PRESUMPTION

Faith does not mean:

Ignoring danger.

Refusing wisdom.

Rejecting preparation.

Faith means:

Preparing responsibly.

Acting obediently.

Trusting God with the outcome.

Presumption says:

“Nothing can go wrong.”

Fear says:

“Something might go wrong, so I will do nothing.”

Faith says:

“Something may go wrong, but I will still obey God wisely.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Wisdom prepares.

Faith acts.

God determines the outcome.

XXIV. KEEP SOWING

Some seeds grow quickly.

Others take time.

Some efforts succeed.

Others do not.

But Ecclesiastes says:

Sow in the morning.

Keep your hands active in the evening.

This applies to:

Ministry.

Parenting.

Teaching.

Work.

Witnessing.

Giving.

Encouragement.

Prayer.

Spiritual Principle

Do not stop planting good seed because yesterday's seed has not yet appeared above the ground.

XXV. LIFE IS A GIFT TO BE ENJOYED

The Preacher does not teach:

Life is brief, therefore despair.

He teaches:

Life is brief, therefore rejoice.

Light is sweet.

Seeing the sun is good.

Another day means:

Another opportunity.

Another conversation.

Another act of service.

Another prayer.

Another kindness.

Another chance to glorify God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not allow the certainty of death to make you stop living before life is over.

XXVI. YOUTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Young people often feel:

Strong.

Invincible.

Unhurried.

The Preacher says:

Enjoy youth.

But remember:

Youth ends.

Choices remain.

Judgment comes.

Therefore:

Use strength wisely.

Build good habits early.

Choose relationships wisely.

Guard your eyes.

Guard your heart.

Guard your body.

Principle:

The best time to begin living wisely is before foolish habits become deeply rooted.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11 teaches us how to live when the future is uncertain.

And the future is always uncertain.

You do not know:

What tomorrow will bring.

Which investment will succeed.

Which effort will produce fruit.

Which door will open.

Which problem will appear.

How long present opportunities will remain.

But you do know enough to act faithfully today.

Give.

Do good.

Sow.

Work.

Rejoice.

Do not spend life waiting for perfect conditions.

They may never arrive.

There will always be wind.

There will always be clouds.

There will always be uncertainty.

There will always be something you cannot control.

The question is not:

“Can I guarantee the outcome?”

The question is:

“Can I faithfully do what is right?”

The chapter also teaches us to continue sowing.

Maybe you have been:

Praying.

Teaching.

Serving.

Giving.

Working.

Encouraging.

And you have not seen the result you expected.

Keep sowing.

You do not know which seed will grow.

God does.

Ecclesiastes 11 also tells us:

Enjoy life.

See the sunlight.

Receive another day with gratitude.

Enjoy the years God gives you.

But remember:

They are temporary.

Young person:

Enjoy your youth.

But do not waste it.

Your strength will not remain forever.

Your opportunities will change.

Use them now.

And remember:

God will bring every choice into judgment.

Therefore:

Enjoy without rebellion.

Work without laziness.

Give without fear.

Plan without arrogance.

Act without demanding certainty.

Rejoice without forgetting eternity.

Live knowing that life is uncertain.

But God is not.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the gift of life.

Thank You for every day You place before us.

Teach us to live generously.

Open our hands.

Keep us from selfishness.

Help us give even when we cannot immediately see the result.

Teach us to trust You with every seed we plant.

Father, protect us from procrastination.

Show us where we have been waiting for perfect conditions that may never come.

Give us wisdom to prepare.

Give us courage to act.

Help us stop using uncertainty as an excuse for disobedience.

Teach us diligence.

Help us sow in the morning.

Help us remain faithful in the evening.

When we do not see results, keep us from becoming discouraged.

When one effort fails, give us wisdom to continue.

When another succeeds, keep us humble.

Father, we confess that we do not understand everything You are doing.

Your work is greater than our understanding.

Teach us humility.

Help us trust You when the path ahead is unclear.

Thank You for the light.

Thank You for the sun.

Thank You for another day.

Teach us to rejoice in the years You give us.

Keep us from wasting life in bitterness, fear, and unnecessary sorrow.

Father, speak especially to the young.
Help them understand that youth is a gift.
Give them joy.
Give them strength.
Give them purpose.
But also give them wisdom.
Help them remember that choices matter.
Guard their hearts.
Guard their eyes.
Guard their bodies.
Guard their futures.
Remind all of us that we will answer to You.
May that truth not destroy our joy.
May it purify our joy.
Help us enjoy what is good.
Reject what is evil.
Use every season wisely.
Give generously.
Work diligently.
Trust deeply.
Rejoice gratefully.
And live every day with eternity in view.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Key Verse

“Whoever watches the wind will not sow, and whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.” — Ecclesiastes 11:4

Central Truth

Because life is uncertain and brief, wisdom calls us to give generously, act without waiting for perfect conditions, work diligently, rejoice gratefully in the life God gives, and remember that every choice will ultimately come before Him in judgment.

Ecclesiastes 11 in One Sentence

The Preacher teaches that uncertainty should produce generosity, diligence, faith, and humility rather than paralysis, while calling both young and old to rejoice in God's gift of life and live responsibly in view of coming judgment.

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 — Remember Your Creator and Fear God

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

Introduction

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 brings the entire book to its final conclusion.

The Preacher has examined:

Pleasure.

Work.

Wealth.

Wisdom.

Time.

Oppression.

Loneliness.

Authority.

Mortality.

Human desire.

Joy.

The uncertainty of life.

Now he gives the final answer.

He does not conclude:

“Nothing matters.”

He concludes:

Remember God.

Fear God.

Keep His commandments.

The chapter begins with an urgent command:

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.”

Do not wait until:

Strength fades.

Opportunities disappear.

Health declines.

Old age advances.

Death approaches.

Remember God now.

Verses 2–7 then give one of the most powerful poetic descriptions of aging and death found anywhere in Scripture.

The human body is pictured as a house slowly weakening.

Hands tremble.

Legs bend.

Teeth become few.

Eyes grow dim.

Hearing fades.

Sleep becomes difficult.

Fear increases.

Strength diminishes.

Desire declines.

Then death comes.

The body returns to dust.

The spirit returns to God who gave it.

After this picture of mortality, the Preacher repeats the theme with which the book began:

“Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity.”

But Ecclesiastes does not end there.

The final verses explain what gives life meaning.

The Preacher taught wisdom.

He arranged truth carefully.

He wrote upright words.

He reminds us that wise words come ultimately from:

One Shepherd.

Then comes the conclusion of the entire book:

“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

And finally:

God will judge.

Every work.

Every hidden thing.

Everything good.

Everything evil.

The central truth of Ecclesiastes 12 is:

Life is brief, aging is inevitable, death is certain, and judgment is coming; therefore, remember your Creator while you have opportunity, fear God, obey His commands, and live every day in view of eternity.

I. REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR WHILE YOU ARE YOUNG

Ecclesiastes 12:1 — Do Not Wait Until Later

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’”

The chapter begins with one of the clearest commands in Ecclesiastes.

Remember your Creator.

Not merely:

Remember that God exists.

But:

Honor Him.

Serve Him.

Know Him.

Obey Him.

Live with Him in view.

And do it:

In your youth.

The Preacher warns against assuming:

“I will serve God later.”

Later may bring:

Less strength.

Less opportunity.

Less energy.

More difficulty.

Cross References

Psalm 71:5

Lord God, You have been my hope and confidence from the days of my youth.

Lamentations 3:27

It is good for a person to learn discipline and carry responsibility while still young.

Proverbs 22:6

Teach a child the right direction for life, and when he grows older the lessons planted early will continue influencing him.

Spiritual Principle

The best time to begin serving God is not someday.

It is now.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not give the world your strength and offer God only what remains.

II. THE BRIGHTNESS OF LIFE BEGINS TO DIM

Ecclesiastes 12:2 — Before the Darkness Comes

“Before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain.”

The Preacher begins his poetic description of old age.

The brightness of life begins to fade.

One difficulty follows another.

The clouds return after the rain.

In youth, a person may recover quickly.

In old age, one difficulty may be followed by another.

Cross References

Isaiah 13:10

The stars of heaven and their constellations will no longer give their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shine.

Joel 2:31

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord arrives.

Matthew 24:29

Jesus said that after great tribulation the sun will be darkened, the moon will no longer give its light, stars will fall, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Spiritual Principle

Earthly brightness does not remain forever.

III. THE BODY BEGINS TO WEAKEN

Ecclesiastes 12:3 — Trembling Keepers and Dim Windows

“In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, when the grinders are few and cease, and those who look through the windows grow dim.”

The imagery describes the aging body.

The “keepers of the house” likely picture the hands and arms.

They tremble.

The “strong men” picture the legs.

They begin to bend.

The “grinders” picture the teeth.

They become few.

The “windows” picture the eyes.

Vision becomes dim.

The Preacher is describing physical decline with poetic beauty.

Cross References

Psalm 90:10

Our lives may reach seventy years, or eighty if strength continues, yet even those years contain labor and sorrow. They pass quickly, and soon we are gone.

Genesis 27:1

When Isaac became old, his eyesight became so weak that he could no longer see clearly.

Psalm 71:9

Do not cast me away in the time of old age. Do not abandon me when my physical strength begins to fail.

Spiritual Principle

Physical strength is temporary.

Application

Use your strength while you have it.

IV. HEARING, SLEEP, AND MUSIC BEGIN TO FADE

Ecclesiastes 12:4 — The Sounds of Life Grow Quiet

“The doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low; one rises at the sound of a bird, yet all the daughters of music are brought low.”

The picture of aging continues.

Hearing weakens.

Ordinary sounds become faint.

Sleep becomes lighter.

The smallest sound can awaken a person.

Music itself may lose some of its former enjoyment because hearing declines.

Cross References

2 Samuel 19:35

Barzillai said, “I am now eighty years old. Can I still distinguish clearly between what is pleasant and what is not? Can I fully taste what I eat and drink? Can I still enjoy the voices of singers as I once did?”

Job 7:4

When I lie down, I wonder how long it will be before morning. The night seems to drag on, and I toss restlessly until daylight.

Psalms 71:18

Even when I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me until I have declared Your strength and power to the generation that follows.

Spiritual Principle

The abilities we often take for granted may not remain forever.

V. FEAR INCREASES AND STRENGTH DECLINES

Ecclesiastes 12:5 — Man Goes to His Eternal Home

“They are afraid of heights, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, and mourners go about the streets.”

The imagery becomes even clearer.

Fear increases.

Walking becomes more difficult.

The “almond tree blossoms” likely pictures white hair.

The grasshopper dragging itself along pictures reduced physical strength.

Desire diminishes.

Then comes the most important statement:

“Man goes to his eternal home.”

The mourners gather because death has arrived.

Cross References

Genesis 42:38

Jacob said that his gray hair would be brought down to the grave in sorrow if further tragedy came upon his family.

Isaiah 46:4

God says, “Even into your old age I am the same. Even when your hair becomes gray, I will carry you. I made you, and I will sustain and rescue you.”

Job 17:13

If the grave becomes the home I expect, then darkness becomes the place where my earthly body rests.

Spiritual Principle

Old age reminds us that earthly life is moving toward eternity.

Key Truth

Aging is not merely moving away from youth.

It is moving toward eternity.

VI. THE FINAL BREAKING OF EARTHLY LIFE

Ecclesiastes 12:6 — The Silver Cord and Golden Bowl

“Before the silver cord is snapped, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well.”

These pictures describe death.

A cord snaps.

A bowl breaks.

A pitcher shatters.

A wheel stops functioning.

The machinery of earthly life finally ceases.

The imagery emphasizes:

Fragility.

Finality.

The preciousness of life.

Cross References

Psalms 31:12

I am forgotten as though I were already dead, like something broken and discarded.

2 Corinthians 4:7

We carry this spiritual treasure in fragile human bodies like valuable treasure stored in ordinary clay jars, so that the extraordinary power may clearly belong to God and not to us.

Job 4:19

How much more fragile are human beings who live in bodies made from dust, whose earthly lives can be crushed as easily as something delicate?

Spiritual Principle

Human life is precious.

But human life is fragile.

VII. THE BODY RETURNS TO DUST AND THE SPIRIT RETURNS TO GOD

Ecclesiastes 12:7 — Death and the Creator

“Then the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

This verse brings us back to creation.

God formed humanity from the dust.

God gave the breath of life.

At death:

The body returns to earth.

The spirit returns to God.

Death separates earthly body from spirit.

Cross References

Genesis 3:19

You will eat your food through hard labor until you return to the ground from which you were taken. You are dust, and to dust you will return.

Genesis 2:7

The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him, and the man became a living being.

Psalms 146:4

When a person's breath leaves him, his body returns to the earth, and on that day his earthly plans come to an end.

Spiritual Principle

Life originates with God and ultimately returns to His authority.

Key Truth

Death is not the end of accountability.

The spirit returns to God.

VIII. EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN IS TEMPORARY

Ecclesiastes 12:8 — Vanity of Vanities

“‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher, ‘all is vanity.’”

The Preacher repeats the declaration from the beginning of the book.

Everything earthly is:

Temporary.

Fleeting.

Unable to bear the full weight of eternal meaning.

The word “vanity” does not mean absolutely nothing has value.

It means earthly things become empty when treated as ultimate things.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 1:2

“Utterly temporary and fleeting,” says the Preacher. “Everything under the sun becomes empty when treated as the ultimate purpose of life.”

Psalms 39:5

You have made my days very short, and my entire lifetime is almost nothing compared with You. Every person, even when standing strong, is only a passing breath.

Romans 8:20

Creation was subjected to frustration and futility, not because it willingly chose that condition, but because God allowed it as part of His larger redemptive purpose.

Spiritual Principle

Temporary things make poor eternal gods.

IX. THE PREACHER TAUGHT PEOPLE WISDOM

Ecclesiastes 12:9 — Teaching and Arranging Truth

“Because the Preacher was wise, he continued to teach the people knowledge. He weighed, explored, and set in order many proverbs.”

The Preacher was not merely collecting information for himself.

He taught others.

He:

Studied.

Considered.

Organized.

Communicated.

Wisdom should be passed on.

Cross References

1 Kings 4:32

Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and composed one thousand and five songs.

Proverbs 1:1

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

2 Timothy 4:2

Proclaim the Word faithfully. Be ready whether the opportunity seems convenient or inconvenient. Correct, warn, and encourage people with great patience and careful teaching.

Spiritual Principle

Wisdom becomes more valuable when it is faithfully passed to others.

X. TRUTH SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED CAREFULLY

Ecclesiastes 12:10 — Delightful Words and Words of Truth

“The Preacher sought to find delightful words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.”

The Preacher cared about:

What he said.

And:

How he said it.

Truth should not be distorted for the sake of style.

But truth should be communicated clearly and carefully.

Cross References

Psalms 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing before You, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

John 17:17

Jesus prayed, “Set them apart through Your truth. Your Word is truth.”

Proverbs 8:8

All the words wisdom speaks are righteous. Nothing in them is twisted, deceptive, or corrupt.

Spiritual Principle

Truth deserves both accuracy and careful expression.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never make truth attractive by making it less true.

XI. WISE WORDS CORRECT AND STABILIZE

Ecclesiastes 12:11 — Goads and Firmly Embedded Nails

“The words of the wise are like goads, like firmly embedded nails, given by one Shepherd.”

A goad was used to move an animal in the right direction.

Wise words can:

Correct.

Prod.

Convict.

Redirect.

A firmly embedded nail provides stability.

Wise words also:

Anchor.

Strengthen.

Secure.

And ultimately, the Preacher says these words are:

“given by one Shepherd.”

Truth ultimately comes from God.

Cross References

Acts 9:5

Saul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” The Lord answered that Saul was fighting against Jesus and that resisting divine correction was only harming himself.

John 10:11

Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd willingly gives His life for the sheep.”

Hebrews 4:12

God’s Word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates deeply and exposes the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Spiritual Principle

God's truth both corrects our direction and anchors our lives.

XII. HUMAN STUDY HAS LIMITS

Ecclesiastes 12:12 — Many Books and Much Study

“And further, my son, be warned: of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the flesh.”

The Preacher is not condemning:

Books.

Learning.

Study.

He has spent the whole book doing those things.

The warning is that knowledge by itself cannot give ultimate meaning.

Human study has limits.

There will always be:

Another book.

Another argument.

Another theory.

Another question.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 8:1

Knowledge by itself can produce pride, but love builds people up and strengthens them.

John 21:25

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were recorded in complete detail, the world itself could hardly contain all the books that could be written.

Ecclesiastes 1:18

With greater wisdom often comes greater awareness of life's sorrow, and increasing knowledge can increase the burden of what a person understands.

Spiritual Principle

Education is valuable.

But information cannot replace God.

XIII. THE CONCLUSION OF THE ENTIRE MATTER

Ecclesiastes 12:13 — Fear God and Keep His Commandments

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

Here is the answer to Ecclesiastes.

After:

Twelve chapters.

Experiments.

Questions.

Observations.

Pleasure.

Wealth.

Wisdom.

Work.

Suffering.

Mystery.

The conclusion is simple:

Fear God.

Keep His commandments.

The fear of God means:

Reverence.

Awe.

Submission.

Recognition of His authority.

Obedience demonstrates that reverence is genuine.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 10:12

What does the Lord your God require from you? Fear Him, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him with all your heart and soul,

Micah 6:8

God has shown you what is good. He requires you to practice justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

Matthew 22:37

Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

Spiritual Principle

The meaning of life is not found in possessing everything.

It is found in knowing and obeying God.

Key Truth

Ecclesiastes begins with vanity.

It ends with God.

XIV. EVERY WORK WILL COME INTO JUDGMENT

Ecclesiastes 12:14 — Nothing Is Hidden Forever

“For God will bring every work into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.”

The final verse of Ecclesiastes gives life eternal seriousness.

God sees:

Public actions.

Private actions.

Words.

Thoughts.

Motives.

Good works.

Evil works.

Nothing remains permanently hidden.

Cross References

Revelation 20:12

John saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. Books were opened, and the dead were judged according to what had been recorded about their works.

2 Corinthians 5:10

Every one of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each person receives what is appropriate for the things done while living in the body, whether good or bad.

Matthew 25:31

Jesus taught that when the Son of Man comes in His glory with His angels, He will sit upon His glorious throne to exercise judgment.

Spiritual Principle

What is hidden from people is never hidden from God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Live privately in a way you would not fear having examined publicly before God.

XV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES 12

1. Remember God Early

Do not postpone your relationship with God.

Principle:

Serve God while strength and opportunity remain.

2. Aging Is Part of Earthly Life

Strength fades.

Eyes weaken.

Hearing changes.

Bodies decline.

Principle:

Do not build your identity on abilities that cannot remain forever.

3. Death Is Certain

The body returns to dust.

The spirit returns to God.

Principle:

Live today knowing that earthly life has an ending.

4. Earthly Things Are Temporary

Everything under the sun eventually changes.

Principle:

Do not ask temporary things to provide eternal meaning.

5. Wisdom Should Be Shared

The Preacher taught what he learned.

Principle:

Truth should be received, organized, lived, and passed on.

6. Fear God and Obey Him

This is the final conclusion.

Principle:

Life makes sense only when God occupies His rightful place.

7. Judgment Is Coming

Every work will be evaluated.

Principle:

Every choice matters because every life ultimately answers to God.

XVI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT YOUTH

Youth is not merely a season for:

Entertainment.

Experimentation.

Self-discovery.

It is a season for:

Knowing God.

Serving God.

Building character.

Developing wisdom.

Establishing habits.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The patterns formed in youth often become the pathways walked in later life.

XVII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT AGING

Aging is described honestly.

The body changes.

Abilities diminish.

Strength fades.

But aging does not mean usefulness must end.

Psalm 71 reveals the prayer:

Even when old and gray:

Let me still declare God's power to another generation.

Spiritual Principle

Age may change what you can do.

It does not remove the possibility of faithfulness.

XVIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT DEATH

Death is described as:

The breaking of the silver cord.

The shattering of the bowl.

The breaking of the pitcher.

The stopping of the wheel.

Then:

The body returns to dust.

The spirit returns to God.

Key Truth

Death ends earthly opportunity.

It does not remove divine accountability.

XIX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD

Wise words are compared to:

Goads.

And:

Nails.

A goad moves.

A nail anchors.

God's truth does both.

It:

Convicts.

Corrects.

Directs.

Stabilizes.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes God's Word comforts you.

Sometimes God's Word confronts you.

You need both.

XX. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is valuable.

But knowledge has limitations.

You can read thousands of books and still fail to answer the most important question:

What will you do with God?

Spiritual Principle

Knowledge that does not lead toward truth, humility, and obedience has missed its highest purpose.

XXI. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT THE FEAR OF GOD

The fear of God is the conclusion of the entire book.

It means:

Recognizing His holiness.

Honoring His authority.

Submitting to His Word.

Taking His judgment seriously.

Loving what He loves.

Rejecting what He condemns.

Key Truth

The fear of God is not merely being afraid of punishment.

It is living with deep reverence for who God is.

XXII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT OBEDIENCE

The Preacher does not say:

Fear God and merely talk about His commandments.

He says:

Keep them.

Faith affects conduct.

True reverence produces obedience.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faith that never affects behavior has not yet shaped the whole life.

XXIII. WHAT ECCLESIASTES 12 TEACHES ABOUT JUDGMENT

The book closes with judgment.

That is important.

Ecclesiastes does not ultimately teach:

“Enjoy life because nothing matters.”

It teaches:

“Enjoy God’s gifts because life matters enormously.”

God will judge:

Open deeds.

Secret deeds.

Good.

Evil.

Spiritual Principle

The certainty of judgment gives eternal significance to temporary decisions.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What does it mean to “remember your Creator”?

It means more than simply remembering that God exists.

It means living consciously before Him with:

Faith.

Reverence.

Worship.

Obedience.

Question 2

Why should God be remembered in youth?

Because youth provides:

Strength.

Opportunity.

Energy.

Time to establish patterns that may influence the rest of life.

Question 3

What do verses 2–5 describe?

They poetically describe the gradual decline associated with aging.

Question 4

What do the “keepers of the house” likely represent?

They picture the hands and arms, which may begin to tremble with age.

Question 5

What do the “grinders” represent?

They picture the teeth, which may become fewer with age.

Question 6

What do the “windows” represent?

They picture the eyes and the decline of vision.

Question 7

What happens at death according to verse 7?

The body returns to the earth, while the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Question 8

Why does the Preacher again say “all is vanity”?

Because everything earthly is temporary and cannot provide ultimate meaning apart from God.

Question 9

Why are wise words compared with goads and nails?

Goads move a person in the right direction.

Nails provide stability.

God’s truth both corrects and anchors.

Question 10

Does verse 12 condemn books or education?

No.

It warns that endless human study cannot replace the ultimate truth of knowing and obeying God.

Question 11

What is the final conclusion of Ecclesiastes?

Fear God.

Keep His commandments.

Question 12

Why is judgment the final subject of the book?

Because every human choice has eternal significance before God.

Nothing is permanently hidden from Him.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes 12 asks the most important questions in the book.

Am I Remembering My Creator Now?

Or am I assuming I will become serious about God later?

Am I Using My Present Strength Wisely?

What can I do today that may become more difficult later?

Am I Preparing Spiritually for Old Age?

Am I building faith strong enough to carry me when physical strength declines?

Am I Living With Death in View?

Do my priorities make sense if earthly life is temporary?

Am I Passing Wisdom to Others?

Who is receiving spiritual truth from my life?

Am I Merely Studying Truth or Obeying It?

Has knowledge changed the way I live?

Do I Fear God?

Does reverence for Him guide my choices?

Am I Keeping His Commands?

Where does obedience need to become more complete?

Am I Living With Judgment in View?

Would I live differently if I remembered that even hidden things will be examined by God?

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Wait Until the End of Life to Discover What Life Was For”

Ecclesiastes has searched everywhere.

Pleasure could not answer.

Money could not answer.

Work could not answer.

Achievement could not answer.

Human wisdom could not answer completely.

Long life could not answer.

Possessions could not answer.

The answer was always above the sun:

God.

Principle:

Life cannot be understood correctly while the Creator is removed from it.

XXVII. REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR BEFORE THE DIFFICULT DAYS

The Preacher does not say:

Remember your Creator only when:

You are dying.

You are sick.

You are frightened.

You are old.

He says:

Remember Him before those days.

Build your relationship with God:

Before crisis.

Before weakness.

Before loss.

Before decline.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not wait until you need an anchor to discover you never secured one.

XXVIII. THE POETRY OF AGING

Ecclesiastes 12 gives dignity to aging by describing it poetically.

The body is like a house.

Its keepers tremble.

Its strong men bend.

Its grinders become few.

Its windows become dim.

Its doors close.

Its music quiets.

This is not written to mock old age.

It is written to remind younger people:

Strength is temporary.

Spiritual Principle

Respect the aged.

One day, if God gives you enough years, their experience may become yours.

XXIX. THE BODY RETURNS TO DUST

Human beings often invest enormous energy into the body.

We:

Feed it.

Dress it.

Exercise it.

Protect it.

Treat it.

Care for it.

And rightly so.

But eventually:

The body returns to dust.

That truth should keep physical appearance from becoming our ultimate identity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Care for the body God gave you, but prepare the soul for eternity.

XXX. THE SPIRIT RETURNS TO GOD

Ecclesiastes does not end human existence at the grave.

Verse 7 says:

“The spirit returns to God who gave it.”

This immediately prepares for the final truth:

Judgment.

Life comes from God.

Life returns before God.

Therefore, every life is accountable to God.

Spiritual Principle

You belong to the God who gave you life.

XXXI. THE PREACHER’S FINAL ANSWER

After twelve chapters, Solomon does not conclude:

Get more.

Experience more.

Earn more.

Know more.

Build more.

He says:

Fear God.

Obey God.

This is wonderfully simple.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The purpose of life is not finally discovered by looking farther under the sun.

It is discovered by looking to the God above it.

XXXII. THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Every hidden thing.

That phrase should make us think.

There are things:

Other people do not know.

Families do not know.

Friends do not know.

Churches do not know.

Governments do not know.

But God knows.

Spiritual Principle

Secrecy from people is never secrecy from God.

XXXIII. ECCLESIASTES FROM BEGINNING TO END

The book began:

“Vanity of vanities.”

It ends:

“Fear God and keep His commandments.”

That movement explains the book.

Life viewed only:

Under the sun.

Ends in frustration.

Life viewed:

Before God.

Finds purpose.

Key Truth

Without God:

Everything temporary eventually feels empty.

With God:

Even temporary things can be received with eternal perspective.

XXXIV. TWELVE GREAT TRUTHS FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

1. Life Is Brief

Our days move quickly.

2. Pleasure Cannot Satisfy the Soul

Enjoyment is a gift, not a god.

3. Work Has Limits

Achievement cannot defeat death.

4. There Is a Time for Everything

God rules over every season.

5. Relationships Matter

Two are better than one.

6. Wealth Cannot Provide Ultimate Security

We leave with nothing in our hands.

7. Contentment Is Greater Than Endless Desire

Better what the eyes see than wandering desire.

8. Wisdom Is Better Than Folly

But human wisdom still has limits.

9. Death Comes to Everyone

Therefore, live faithfully now.

10. Small Foolish Choices Can Destroy Much Good

Guard your life carefully.

11. Life Is Uncertain

Therefore, sow faithfully and trust God with results.

12. Fear God and Keep His Commandments

This is the final conclusion.

XXXV. FINAL APPLICATION

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 brings us to the end of the journey.

The Preacher has searched:

Everywhere.

He has asked:

What lasts?

What satisfies?

What gives meaning?

And now he tells us.

Remember your Creator.

Do not wait.

If you are young:

Remember Him now.

If you are older:

Remember Him now.

If you have wasted years:

Remember Him now.

If you have lived faithfully:

Continue remembering Him.

The chapter reminds us that life changes.

Strength does not remain.

Eyes grow dim.

Hearing weakens.

Bodies become frail.

One day:

The silver cord breaks.

The golden bowl is shattered.

The pitcher breaks.

The wheel stops.

Then:

The dust returns to the earth.

The spirit returns to God.

What matters then?

Not:

How much money you accumulated.

How many possessions you owned.

How popular you became.

How impressive you appeared.

What matters is:

Did you know God?

Did you fear Him?

Did you obey Him?

Did you live faithfully before Him?

The final answer of Ecclesiastes is not:

Life is meaningless.

The final answer is:

Life without God cannot carry the weight of ultimate meaning.

Therefore:

Remember Him.

Fear Him.

Obey Him.

Serve Him.

Walk with Him.

And remember:

Every hidden thing will come into judgment.

That makes every day important.

Every choice important.

Every word important.

Every act of obedience important.

So while you have:

Strength.

Time.

Opportunity.

Life.

Use them well.

Remember your Creator before the difficult days come.

Remember your Creator when the difficult days come.

Remember your Creator when strength fades.

Remember your Creator when death approaches.

And when earthly life finally ends:

Entrust yourself to the God who gave you life in the first place.

That is the final wisdom of Ecclesiastes.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for carrying us through the wisdom of Ecclesiastes.

Thank You for reminding us that life is brief.

Teach us to remember You while we have strength.

Teach young people to honor You before the difficult years come.

Give them:

Wisdom.

Purity.

Courage.

Faith.

Discipline.

Purpose.

Help those who are older to remain faithful.

When strength fades, be their strength.

When eyesight dims, help them continue seeing Your goodness.

When hearing weakens, keep their hearts attentive to Your voice.

When their bodies become frail, remind them that You remain faithful.

Father, teach all of us to live with death in view without living in fear.

We know our bodies will return to dust.

We know our spirits will return to You.

Prepare us for eternity.

Help us hold temporary things lightly.

Keep us from worshipping:

Money.

Pleasure.

Work.

Possessions.

Achievement.

Human wisdom.

Let us enjoy Your gifts without allowing them to replace You.

Thank You for Your Word.

Let it be a goad when we need correction.

Let it be a firmly planted nail when we need stability.

Help us receive truth.

Help us teach truth.

Help us live truth.

Protect us from knowledge without obedience.

Protect us from religion without reverence.

Protect us from hearing without doing.

Father, teach us to fear You.

Not with hopeless terror.

But with:

Reverence.

Awe.

Love.

Submission.

Obedience.

Help us keep Your commandments.

Remind us that every work will come into judgment.

Every public deed.

Every hidden deed.

Every good work.

Every evil work.

Cleanse what is sinful.

Strengthen what is weak.

Correct what is wrong.

And guide us into faithful living.

May we not reach the end of life only to discover that we spent our lives chasing the wind.

May we spend our days knowing You.

Serving You.

Loving You.

Obedying You.

And when our earthly lives are over, may we stand before You having lived with eternity in view.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” — Ecclesiastes 12:13

Central Truth

Life is temporary, aging is inevitable, death is certain, and judgment is coming; therefore, remember your Creator, fear God, keep His commandments, and live every day with eternity in view.

Ecclesiastes 12 in One Sentence

The Preacher closes Ecclesiastes by urging us to remember our Creator before strength fades, recognize the certainty of death and judgment, receive God's truth with humility, and embrace the final purpose of life: to fear God and keep His commandments.

Epilogue

The sun rises.

The sun sets.

Generations come and go.

Work is done, possessions are gathered, plans are made, dreams are pursued, and eventually every life reaches its final chapter.

That is the world Ecclesiastes has shown us.

It has taken us through the places people search for meaning. It has examined wisdom, pleasure, wealth, achievement, labor, reputation, companionship, time, injustice, aging, and death.

Again and again, the Preacher has forced us to ask the same question:

What truly lasts?

The answer is not found in money.

It is not found in status.

It is not found in pleasure.

It is not found in accomplishments.

It is not found in human wisdom alone.

All of these things have value in their proper place, but none of them can carry the weight of eternity.

They remain under the sun.

And everything under the sun is temporary.

That is the sobering truth of Ecclesiastes.

But it is not the final truth.

The book does not end in emptiness.

It ends with God.

It ends with reverence.

It ends with obedience.

It ends with judgment.

It ends by reminding us that although life is brief, life matters.

Although our days are numbered, our choices matter.

Although earthly possessions fade, faithfulness matters.

Although human applause is temporary, God's approval is not.

The final word of Ecclesiastes is not vanity.

The final word is responsibility before God.

The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

Ecclesiastes 12:13 gives us the conclusion:

“Fear God and keep His commandments.”

After all the searching, all the testing, all the observing, all the questioning, and all the frustration, the Preacher brings us here.

Fear God.

Not money.

Not people.

Not the future.

Not death.

Fear God.

Recognize His authority.

Stand in awe of His holiness.

Live with reverence.

Walk in obedience.

Remember that He is Creator and we are His creatures.

This is where wisdom begins.

This is where meaning is found.

This is where life comes into proper focus.

Live With Eternity in View

One of the great dangers of human life is living as though this world is all there is.

People can become so consumed with temporary concerns that they lose sight of eternal realities.

Ecclesiastes corrects that vision.

It reminds us that time is moving.

Youth will not last.

Health may not last.

Strength will not last.

Possessions will not last.

Reputation will not last.

Earthly opportunities will not last.

But eternity will.

That truth should change the way we live.

It should change our priorities.

It should change the way we use our time.

It should change the way we treat people.

It should change what we pursue.

It should change what we fear.

It should change what we value.

A person who lives with eternity in view sees this world differently.

Temporary things are enjoyed, but not worshiped.

Blessings are received, but not trusted as ultimate security.

Success is appreciated, but not allowed to define identity.

Suffering is painful, but not regarded as meaningless.

Death is serious, but not treated as the final word.

Receive God's Gifts With Gratitude

Ecclesiastes does not teach us to reject life.

It teaches us to receive life properly.

There is a difference.

The Preacher repeatedly tells us to enjoy the ordinary blessings God provides.

Eat with gratitude.

Drink with gratitude.

Work with gratitude.

Love your family.

Enjoy the days God gives you.

Receive the simple gifts of life without demanding that they provide what only God can give.

This is one of the beautiful balances of Ecclesiastes.

Life is temporary.

But temporary does not mean worthless.

A sunset is brief, but beautiful.

A meal ends, but can still be enjoyed.

A season passes, but can still be treasured.

A life is short, but can still be lived faithfully.

The problem is not that earthly gifts are temporary.

The problem is when we expect temporary gifts to provide eternal satisfaction.

They cannot.

Only God can do that.

Remember Your Creator

Ecclesiastes 12:1 says:

“Remember your Creator.”

Those words may be among the most important in the entire book.

Remember Him when you are young.

Remember Him when you are strong.

Remember Him when life is going well.

Remember Him before difficult days come.

Remember Him when your plans succeed.

Remember Him when they fail.

Remember Him when you understand.

Remember Him when you do not.

Remember Him before the body weakens and the years begin to move faster.

Do not wait until the end of life to begin thinking seriously about God.

Life is too uncertain.

Time moves too quickly.

The best time to live for God is now.

The Wisdom of Numbering Our Days

Ecclesiastes repeatedly reminds us of death, not because it wants us to become fearful, but because death gives urgency to life.

A person who believes he has endless time may waste it.

A person who understands that his days are limited begins to think differently.

We become more careful about what deserves our attention.

We become less impressed by things that cannot last.

We become quicker to forgive.

We become more grateful.

We become more serious about spiritual matters.

We become more intentional about the legacy we leave behind.

The question is not simply:

How many years will I live?

The greater question is:

How will I live the years God gives me?

What Will Remain?

One day everything we possess will belong to someone else.

Someone else will live in our house.

Someone else may own our belongings.

Someone else will occupy our position.

Someone else will complete the work we leave unfinished.

Eventually even our names may fade from public memory.

That can sound discouraging until we remember that our ultimate purpose was never to make ourselves permanent.

God is permanent.

His kingdom is permanent.

His truth is permanent.

His purposes are permanent.

Our calling is not to make our earthly lives last forever.

Our calling is to be faithful while we are here.

Faithfulness may not always receive applause.

It may not make headlines.

It may not produce wealth.

It may not make a person famous.

But heaven measures success differently than the world does.

Nothing Is Hidden From God

Ecclesiastes closes with judgment:

“For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing.”

That statement gives tremendous weight to human life.

Nothing is ultimately hidden.

God sees the public and the private.

He sees actions and motives.

He sees kindness that no one noticed.

He sees faithfulness that received no recognition.

He sees injustice that was never corrected.

He sees secret sin.

He sees quiet obedience.

No life is overlooked.

No act is forgotten.

The Judge of all the earth sees perfectly.

For the wicked, that is a warning.

For the faithful, it is also a comfort.

The world may misunderstand you.

People may forget what you did.

Your labor may seem unnoticed.

But God sees.

And God's judgment is greater than human opinion.

The Answer Beyond the Sun

The title of this book is *Under the Sun* because that phrase defines so much of Ecclesiastes.

But the message of the book ultimately points beyond the sun.

If we look only at this world, everything ends.

But Scripture does not ask us to look only at this world.

There is a Creator above creation.

There is an eternal purpose beyond temporary circumstances.

There is judgment beyond human injustice.

There is truth beyond human confusion.

There is God.

That is why life is not meaningless.

Life has meaning because God gives it meaning.

Work has meaning when it is done before God.

Relationships have meaning when they are received as gifts from God.

Wisdom has meaning when it leads us toward God.

Time has meaning because it is given by God.

Even mortality has meaning because it reminds us that we are not God.

Ecclesiastes dismantles false sources of meaning so that we can rediscover the true one.

When the Sun Finally Sets

There will come a day when each of us watches our final earthly sunset.

On that day, many of the things that once seemed so important will no longer matter.

The size of the house will not matter.

The amount in the bank account will not matter.

The applause of others will not matter.

The titles before or after our name will not matter.

What will matter is whether we knew God.

Whether we feared Him.

Whether we trusted Him.

Whether we obeyed Him.

Whether we lived the life He gave us with faithfulness.

The goal is not merely to reach the end of life having accumulated much.

The goal is to reach the end having lived well before God.

One Final Question

Ecclesiastes has asked many questions.

Let us end with one more.

If everything under the sun were taken away, would God still be enough?

That question reaches the heart of the book.

If our joy depends entirely upon circumstances, possessions, achievements, or recognition, then our joy is fragile.

But when our life is anchored in God, we possess something the passing world cannot take away.

That is the wisdom Ecclesiastes has been leading us toward from the beginning.

The world changes.

God does not.

Youth fades.

God remains.

Wealth disappears.

God remains.

Human wisdom reaches its limits.

God remains.

The body returns to dust.

God remains.

And so the message of Ecclesiastes is not hopelessness.

It is perspective.

Do not waste your life chasing the wind.

Do not worship what cannot last.

Do not build your identity upon what death can take away.

Remember your Creator.

Receive His gifts with gratitude.

Walk in wisdom.

Fear God.

Keep His commandments.

Live with eternity in view.

The sun rises.

The sun sets.

But above the sun, beyond the passing years, stands the eternal God.

And in Him, life finally finds its meaning.

Dr. Paul Crawford

Note from the Author

When I began working through the Book of Ecclesiastes, I was reminded once again how remarkably honest the Bible is about life.

Scripture does not pretend that life is always easy.

It does not ignore disappointment.

It does not hide the reality of aging, injustice, frustration, unanswered questions, or death.

Ecclesiastes looks directly at these things and asks the questions many people are sometimes afraid to ask.

What is the purpose of life?

Why do people work so hard for things they cannot keep?

Why does wealth fail to satisfy?

Why do good people sometimes suffer?

Why do wicked people sometimes prosper?

Why does life seem to move so quickly?

And what will really matter when our earthly journey is finished?

Those questions are not signs of weak faith.

They are questions that can lead us toward deeper wisdom when we bring them honestly before God.

That is one reason I wanted to write this commentary.

My purpose in *Under the Sun* is not simply to explain the words of Ecclesiastes. My desire is to help the reader understand its message, wrestle with its questions, and apply its wisdom to everyday life.

Ecclesiastes is more than an ancient book about the frustrations of life.

It is a warning against building our lives around things that cannot last.

Money cannot last.

Possessions cannot last.

Youth cannot last.

Success cannot last.

Human applause cannot last.

Even the strongest body eventually grows weak.

Everything we see around us is temporary.

But God is not.

That truth changes the way we understand the entire book.

Ecclesiastes repeatedly reminds us that life “under the sun” cannot provide everything the human heart seeks. We were never created to find our ultimate purpose in temporary things.

We were created for God.

Throughout these pages, I have tried to approach each verse carefully and respectfully. My goal has been to make the text understandable without removing its depth. Where Ecclesiastes raises difficult questions, I have tried not to rush past them. Where it gives practical wisdom, I have tried to show how that wisdom applies to us today.

Above all, I want this commentary to keep bringing the reader back to the central conclusion of Ecclesiastes:

Fear God and keep His commandments.

That statement is not merely the conclusion of an ancient philosophical discussion.

It is a call to live differently.

It is a call to recognize that God is Creator and we are His creatures.

It is a call to live with humility.

It is a call to obedience.

It is a call to gratitude.

It is a call to remember that our lives will ultimately be evaluated by God rather than by the standards of this world.

Ecclesiastes has also reminded me of the importance of enjoying the simple gifts God places before us.

A meal shared with family.

Meaningful work.

A quiet day.

A conversation with someone we love.

The opportunity to serve.

The privilege of opening the Scriptures.

Another morning.

Another sunset.

Another day of life.

We can spend so much time searching for something greater that we fail to recognize the blessings already placed in our hands.

The Preacher teaches us that we do not control tomorrow.

But we can faithfully live today.

We may not understand every season.

But we can trust the God who rules over every season.

We may not know how many days remain.

But we can choose how we will use the day before us.

My prayer is that this commentary will cause you to think deeply about your own life.

Perhaps Ecclesiastes will challenge some of your priorities.

Perhaps it will expose something you have been pursuing too strongly.

Perhaps it will help you release something you cannot control.

Perhaps it will remind you to appreciate the life God has already given you.

Perhaps it will cause you to think more seriously about eternity.

Whatever God chooses to do through these pages, I hope one truth remains with you long after you finish reading:

Do not spend your life chasing what cannot satisfy.

Live faithfully.

Love deeply.

Work honestly.

Receive God's blessings gratefully.

Remember that time is precious.

Remember that life is brief.

Remember that eternity is real.

And above everything else—

Remember your Creator.

Thank you for taking this journey through Ecclesiastes with me.

May God use His Word to give us wisdom for our days, perspective for our struggles, gratitude for our blessings, and hearts that are prepared for eternity.

Dr. Paul Crawford

A Closing Prayer

“Father, I thank You for every reader who has walked through these pages. For the one who does not yet know You, I pray they would hear Your voice and receive Your Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. For the one who already believes, I pray You would set their heart ablaze with urgency—to speak, to share, to love, and to never be silent. May we all live as faithful watchmen, sounding the trumpet until the day You call us home. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.”

THE BIBLE WAY TO HEAVEN

1. Admit you are a sinner.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

No one is good enough to go to Heaven on his own merit.

No matter how much good we do, we still come short.

2. Realize the penalty for sin.

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)

Just as there are wages for good, there is punishment for wrong.

The penalty for our sin is eternal death in a place called Hell.

3. Believe that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again for you.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)

4. Trust Christ alone as your Saviour.

"...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23b)

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Eternal life is a gift purchased by the blood of Jesus and offered freely to those who call upon Him by faith.

Anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved forever. Being saved is a one-time event.

Dr. Paul Crawford is more than just a Christian Author; His books are a source of inspiration and guidance on your spiritual journey. His books are created with a deep sense of faith and a desire to uplift and inspire all who read.

UNDER THE SUN

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon takes an honest look at life in a fallen world and asks the questions every heart eventually faces: What is the meaning of life? Why do wealth, pleasure, wisdom, and labor fail to satisfy? What remains when everything “under the sun” is exposed as temporary and passing away?

In this verse-by-verse commentary, Dr. Paul Crawford walks carefully through the Book of Ecclesiastes, opening its difficult sayings, uncovering its timeless wisdom, and showing how its message leads us beyond the emptiness of this world to the fear of God and the certainty of divine truth.

Thoughtful, pastoral, and deeply rooted in Scripture, this commentary is written to help readers understand the text clearly, apply it personally, and see how Ecclesiastes still speaks powerfully to modern life.

When the world seems empty, God's truth still stands.

Dr. Paul Crawford is a Bible teacher, author, and expositor with a passion for helping readers understand the Scriptures clearly and faithfully.

Crawford Bible Commentary

