

I can remember reading through the book of Ecclesiastes as a teenager. I was in a Bible study led by Jerry Daley, the founding pastor of Grace Church, and when I told him I was reading the book, he smiled and in his own somber way, joked, “That’ll cheer you up!”

It is true that Ecclesiastes is not the book that our “positive and encouraging” Christianity often enjoys. But since that study in my teen years I have returned to it to glean wisdom from its words. Its cynicism creates a mystery that invites you to dig beneath the surface, and when that wisdom is discovered and understood, it has a powerful impact on the way we view our existence.

In a time when bad news is raging on every broadcast, when experts are certain we are struggling like never before, and when Americans are fickle because prosperity is being redefined, Ecclesiastes can serve to both remind us not to take things too seriously, and warn us against wasting our lives on the temporal things. Its final verses stand as the key to the whole book: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing whether good or evil.” (Eccl. 12:13-14)

The following is a simple introduction to a complex book. I hope you find it and the devotional enjoyable, but most of all may it encourage us to think with Godly wisdom on how we are not to waste our lives!

Title, Author and Date

Title: So what on earth does “Ecclesiastes” mean? Well, we actually get the word from an English transliteration of a Greek transliteration of the original Hebrew title. As most of you know, the New Testament was originally written in Greek and the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. The Hebrew title for the book is “Qohelet” which is commonly translated in English as “the teacher” or “the preacher.” Qohelet comes from the Hebrew root for “Qohal” which means “assembly” or “gathering.” Qohal is almost exclusively used in the Old Testament as a gathering of the people of God.

The thinking is that the “preacher” of Ecclesiastes is a title taken by the author as a symbolic gesture – someone who is passing on wisdom and observations about life to the people of God. It is not an official office or position as we might think of a preacher in today’s church context.

So how did we get from Qohelet to Ecclesiastes? When the Greek version of the Old Testament was translated from the Hebrew, they translated Qohelet using the Greek root *Ekklasia* (which is the Greek word for community or church). Because the early church read the Greek version of the Old Testament more than the Hebrew version, the title eventually became popular in the Greek and Roman churches of the Middle Ages and stuck as Ecclesiastes in our English translations.

Author and Date: The date depends on the author and vice versa, so we’ll look at these two together. Traditionally, the author of Ecclesiastes has been believed to be Solomon. He was, after all, the “son of David, king in Jerusalem” and many of the circumstances described in

Ecclesiastes fit the reign and wisdom of Solomon. If this is true, then the book would have been written in the tenth century B.C.

However, over the last few hundred years, there have been doubts raised by conservative and liberal Bible scholars alike that Solomon could not have written the book. The arguments are complicated and varied, but generally fall on three primary points. First, Solomon would have written the book using primitive Hebrew (12th-8th century), yet Ecclesiastes as we have it has a lot of Aramaic influence (7th-1st century), which is a sign of later Hebrew. Second, the literary style seems to be influenced by other literary forms not found in Hebrew literature, but from literature of a later period. Third, some of the things said in Ecclesiastes are not fitting for Solomon. For example in 1:16 he says he was wiser than all who ruled Jerusalem before him; yet, prior to Solomon, only David ruled Jerusalem. Later in Ecclesiastes the author talks of the misrule of kings over their subjects, yet, say scholars, why did Solomon speak poorly of his rulership, or why did he not change his oppression of his subjects?

The brilliant scholar and apologist, Gleason Archer, is unconvinced by these claims. He rightly points out several explanations to each objection. First in regards to Aramaic in the book, the results are inconclusive. Aramaic and Hebrew are close linguistic cousins so one scholar may find 100 Aramaic terms, another only 7. Besides, Aramaic was the business language of much of the Middle East for a long time so it is conceivable that Solomon was familiar with it. As for the unique literary genre, it simply proves nothing. Solomon, and indeed any author, has the liberty to be creative in his writing. Besides, the reverse is true, there are no literary pieces from other eras and cultures that are exactly like Ecclesiastes.

Finally, there are also explanations for the non-Solomonic statements in the book. First, David took over Jerusalem from the Jebusites who had ruled there for hundreds of years, so there were many rulers to oversee Jerusalem prior to David and Solomon. Secondly, it is always possible for a person to make observations about wisdom and not heed his own advice. Benjamin Franklin coined the term, “early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,” yet he was known to keep long hours and sleep in. Solomon could have seen the evil results of his reign, noted it, but still done nothing about it.

Finally, Archer makes one observation that seems to be the kingpin for dating the book. “[It] is noteworthy [that the language of Ecclesiastes is similar to Song of Solomon] – a fact that furnishes greatest embarrassment to those who... place [Song of Solomon] back in the tenth century and Ecclesiastes in the fifth century. If in this stylistic peculiarity there is such a close resemblance between the two, it is only reasonable to attribute them to the same period, if not indeed the same author. Hence, if the Song of Solomon is tenth century and composed by Solomon, it is hard to resist the conclusion that Ecclesiastes is of the same period and origin.”

So both the evidence and tradition supports the notion that Solomon, probably near the end of his reign, wrote Ecclesiastes sometime in the tenth century B.C.

Literary Style

Ecclesiastes is one of four or five books of the Bible – along with Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and maybe Lamentations – that are known as “wisdom literature.” This literary style is based more on the content of their message than the style of their message. For example, Psalm, Proverbs and Job are all mostly poetry. Yet Ecclesiastes, and parts of Job, are mostly

narratives. However, they all have in common a wisdom that is based in the fear of the Lord.

When it comes to interpreting wisdom literature, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, it is important to realize that the authors are talking in large generalities and principles. They are not talking in commands and promises.

For example, Ecclesiastes can make a statement like, “there is no remembrance of the former things” (1:11) and it seems odd to us. After all, we all know who Columbus is, we all know about George Washington, we can recall the horrors of Pearl Harbor and the glories of D-Day even though most of us weren’t alive for those people and events. Ecclesiastes is not saying that everything is forgotten, but rather that most things are not remembered. So the lesson to learn is that the vast majority of things we think are important, or change the world’s destiny, in reality won’t last past our lifetime. While the statement is not true in every case, the principle does hold true.

The Tone of Ecclesiastes

The tone of Ecclesiastes can be said to be cynical or skeptical, but it would probably be a mistake to label it as purely pessimistic. Solomon, after all, does discuss the joys and rewards of life; he talks about the good, he talks about justice. He is very much in tune with the different seasons of life.

However, he is skeptical and cynical precisely because he understands that all that is joyful, rewarding, good and just in this life is ultimately not where meaning is found. Why? Because this life is passing, brief, fleeting; it is “grasping at the wind.” In Solomon’s mind, for a thing to have genuine value it has to have an element of permanence. Therefore, the book is cynical toward taking things to mean more than they should, or as more joyous than they are, or more meaningful than they will be. The book is skeptical that things are as evil as we say, as hard as is declared or as difficult as we imagine. The book can actually shock us into a state of reality where we can step back, look at life and realize “there has got to be more than this alone.”

So the skepticism and cynicism are not there to discourage us. Rather, they are there to inspire us to see life in the eyes of eternity, and evaluate ourselves in the presence of the fear of God. After all, it is eternity and our life in (or out of) the presence of God that is permanent.

Key Words and Phrases

No two languages are exactly alike, even when they have similar words. This sometimes means that a translated language has difficulty catching the exact nuance for the original language. This is even true as a language develops. For example, did you every wonder how we got the phrase “the patience of Job?” After all, while Job did endure, patience isn’t the first word we think about when we come to that story. Well, three or four hundred years ago, “patience” in English meant suffering. But over time, it has developed to mean something more akin to “waiting” than suffering. This is how language can develop even when it isn’t being translated.

The vast majority of the time these types of issues do not come into play when you are reading an English Bible. Sure, it has been translated from another language, but there have been more than four centuries worth of work, hundreds of translations, done by many competent scholars. So our Bible is reliable, authoritative, and, quite frankly, enjoyable to read. But occasionally there are a few phrases where the English misses the nuance and the book of Ecclesiastes has one or two of these phrases. Below are just a couple of brief explanations of these phrases that you will read in the coming weeks.

Vanity: (“Hevel” in Hebrew): If you were to look up “vain” in a dictionary you would likely get one of the following definitions: “not yielding the desired outcome...lacking worth...excessively proud or conceited.” In our culture, the latter two definitions are probably the most popular. Unfortunately, the first definition is closest to the Hebrew idea in Ecclesiastes, and even it is a bit lacking.

The Hebrew word for “vanity” is “Hevel” and it is used more in Ecclesiastes than in the rest of the Old Testament combined. It comes from a root word that means “breath” or “vapor.” Obviously, neither breath nor vapor is proud, nor does it lack meaning (after all, we get life from breath). But what is common among vapor, breath and vanity is that they all lack permanence. For example, Proverbs 31:30 calls beauty “vain,” but in the context it is saying that beauty passes with age, not that beauty is without meaning.

This is the idea of “vanity” in Ecclesiastes. It means that life is transient, passing, temporal and not permanent. Therefore, meaning can’t last because life itself does not last. Therefore, what is meaningful must be found in what is permanent, and the only permanent thing is God Himself. Ultimately for Solomon, life can have meaning, but not without a connection to the Eternal.

Good and Evil: It might not be an overstatement to say that the most important passage for Ecclesiastes (outside the book itself) is Genesis 3:1-8. When Adam and Eve fall into sin they take of the tree of the knowledge of “good and evil.” What is ironic in the story is that prior to them eating of the fruit, they lived in a creation that was “very good.” So, by eating of the tree, all life (the “very good”) was now tainted with “evil.”

These two words by themselves are very common in the Old Testament. However, when they are used in close proximity it is rare, and usually meaningful. Ecclesiastes has one of the highest concentrations of both words individually (“good” is used 52 times; “evil” is used 32 times) and jointly (7 times: verses 4:3, 4:8, 6:2-3, 7:14, 8:12, 9:2-3, 12:14). There are two locations where the play on these words are particularly intriguing: in Chapter 2 and Chapter 12. A brief explanation is below:

Chapter 2 of Ecclesiastes: Ecclesiastes opens with some general observations about life with the Preacher (Solomon) concluding in verse 13 that it is “an unhappy (evil) business that God has given the children of men.” So, as a response, Solomon tries to correct this state, and discusses this attempt in chapter 2, beginning by saying: “I said in my heart... ‘I will test you with pleasure (good); enjoy yourself.’” He then goes on to try to give himself all types of pleasure and wisdom (including building a garden, oddly enough) but finds that it is not meaningful. What is his conclusion? Verse 17: “So I hated life, because what is done under the sun is grievous (evil) to me.” In essence, what Solomon has tried to do is to recreate Eden, a place where only good can thrive. However, in his efforts he constantly runs into the effects of evil because all of life has been tainted by sin. This will constantly lead him to what

seems like a contradiction but makes a lot of sense in the end. Life does have joy, pleasure, even meaning because it was originally created to be “very good.” However, because of the evil that has invaded this existence, because of the effect of sin, and the passing of life required by its consequences, that is, death, you cannot find lasting goodness. Thus all life is transient or vain without a taste of the permanence of God.

Chapter 12:14: Chapter 12:13-14 is Solomon’s final conclusions on the meaning of life:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Here we see “good and evil” again. Solomon has tried and failed to separate one from the other; in this life that can’t happen. What is the solution? Fear God. Knowing the eternal helps dictate how we live in the temporal. And it is only in the eternal where lasting meaning can be found.

Children of Men: This is a very odd phrase and it is used only three times in Ecclesiastes (1:13, 2:3, 3:10), but each time it has a poignant meaning. Each time the phrase is connected with the striving of this life. In 1:13 it is in reference to an “evil” assignment, in 2:3 it is in reference to “good” things, and in 3:10 it is in reference to work and labor. All are things that characterize this life as temporal and potentially vain.

What is fascinating about this phrase is that it is only used one other time in the entire Old Testament, and that is in Psalm 145. Notice the contrast in contexts with Ecclesiastes.

*10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your saints shall bless you!
11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power,
12 to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations. – Psalms 145:10-13*

In Ecclesiastes the task of the children of men is locked in the temporal realm. The solution in Psalm 145 is the everlasting Kingdom of God. Living our life in the pursuit of God and His Kingdom is what gives our life lasting meaning and what makes all that we do enjoyable, rewarding and worthwhile.

The Message of Ecclesiastes and “Don’t Waste Your Life”

It has already been said in the words above, but in the mind of Solomon meaning is connected to permanence. And the only true permanence is in the presence of the Almighty God. So how is that connected to living life now? A few short observations:

First, we should enjoy life and live wisely. Originally, God did create this world to be “very good” and Ecclesiastes upholds that view. There is much good to be enjoyed, to do, to strive for. So even though we live in a temporal reality, there is much in this life to take pleasure in.

Second, we should not take life too seriously. This goes both ways. While we should have joy in the good times in life, those good times should not dictate our joy. While we should take sorrow in the bad times in life, those sorrows should not dictate our reality. There is time for both. But generally speaking our highs are too high and our lows are too low. We can enjoy God in all things.

Third, this life is not all that there is. Therefore, fear God. As it has been said before, in the end it doesn't matter how much property we own, what our resume looks like, what kind of fame we achieved, what our score on World of War Craft is - and the one with the most stuff doesn't actually win. What matters is if we faithfully lived for the eternal King and Kingdom in this life. All our life should be lived with this in mind! What I do now in worship and honor to Jesus Christ does indeed last for all eternity. So a life lived in pursuit of Him, in enjoyment of Him, and in the advancement of His Kingdom is a life not wasted.

Resource List

Resources used for this introduction include:

A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Gleason L. Archer, Moody Press, 1994
Ecclesiastes, The Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 5, J. Stafford Write, Zondervan, 1991
Ecclesiastes, New International Biblical Commentary, Vol. 12, Elizabeth Huwiler, Hendrickson, 1999
Ecclesiastes, Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 6, Hendrickson, 2006
The American Heritage Dictionary, 3rd ed., Hough Mifflin Company, 1993
The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Hendrickson Publishers, 1997
The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament, by George V. Wigramn, Hendrickson Publishers, 2006

Lectures notes from Dr. Robert Cole, professor of Old Testament studies and Hebrew at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forrest, N.C.

English Standard Version of the Bible
Accordance Bible Software
www.biblegateway.com

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 – The Futility of Life

Verse of the Day: “Vanities of vanity, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities. All is vanity!”

Comments:

OK! Don't get depressed on our first day of devotions in Ecclesiastes. Hear what the preacher is saying and reflect on what his point is in such a statement. His opening statements are intense because he wants us to catch where he is taking us through this book. The word “vanity” (or as other translations use, “meaningless”) should be thought of not as an issue of pride, but of the futility of this life without God. Another word picture would be to see life as a vapor (James 4:14), a shadow of true substance. Nothing is new or original, nothing is unique in itself, and nothing by itself has meaning or purpose. This first section is a declaration of a central truth of all Scripture, namely that all things exist by God and for God and His purposes. Without this view of all of life and history (both personal and corporately), everything is empty, void of real meaning.

Questions for Reflection:

So what about you, have you experienced this sense of futility about life? If so, what effect did it have on you?

What would God want you to gain from seeing the futility of your own and others' lives and history?

How can you use this understanding in your walk with God and other people?

Prayer Points for Today:

For prayer I encourage you to read Psalm 90:12 and James 4:13-15. Then pray for God to help you see life through His eternal lens and perspective. Ask Him to arm you each day with this knowledge so you rightly assess your days.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 – The Futility of Wisdom

Verse of the Day: “For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

Comments:

Solomon extols the virtues of wisdom in the book of Proverbs. So, is he contradicting himself here? No, not at all. He is explaining the full extent of the Fall, the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Where does that take us? Believing that we, apart from God, can have knowledge and use it wisely is futile, nor does it really change anything. This really hits home in me and in our culture. We believe knowledge, by itself, is power. Solomon who was the wisest man of his age came to a different conclusion, we were not made to handle knowledge on our own, and we need the eternal to give us true knowledge of the temporal. Solomon reminds us of what he wrote in Proverbs 1:7 - the beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord!

Think about where you have trusted in your own knowledge and wisdom and it failed you. Also, think about where you trusted in them and you succeeded. Do you see the vexation and sorrow Solomon is speaking of? We fall or rise on our knowledge working for us. It never works successfully all the time and the more we rely on it the more sorrow it causes.

Questions for Reflection:

Repentance is agreeing with God about anything He says and then changing our mind and what we do. As you think about your life choices and decisions, what do you need to repent of today?

Where do you have sorrow from following your own “wisdom”? Have you turned to Christ for forgiveness and healing? If not, go to Him now and receive from His fountain of mercy.

Where do you need wisdom? James 1 tells us to ask of God and He will give it liberally.

Prayer Points for Today:

Ask God to be your wisdom in life. Pray Proverbs 3:5-8

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 – The Futility of Pleasure

Verse of the Day: “I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’ And behold, it too was futility.”

Comments:

While we don't explore the pursuits of pleasure to the same measure stated here, all of us have an insatiable thirst to please ourselves. Solomon, in his pursuit of pleasure, held nothing from himself to enjoy, yet comes up empty. There was no quenching his thirst, just like pouring into a bucket with a hole in the bottom. It is a fascinating testimony of a fantasy we probably all dream of: attempting to satisfy our cravings in the fullest extent with food, drink, sex or other bodily stimulations. We all look for something to fill us with pleasure, but end up in the same place - still thirsty. We need to discover what is most pleasurable and satisfying, God himself. There is a place to satisfy the longings, desires and pleasures we each have, in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the well of living water, and when we drink of Him, our thirsts are satisfied. (John 4:13-14) And the more we drink of Him the more satisfied we are. Solomon's wisdom leads us to one place that his father David describes in Psalm 16:11, “In your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures evermore.” An amazing thing happens: when we find our first pleasure is God, we actually enjoy all the secondary pleasures He has graciously given us.

Questions for Reflection:

Every day is a pursuit to find our pleasure in something. Where do you go to try to quench that thirst?

What keeps you from going to Jesus to meet that desire?

Can you see that lesser things become idols when we don't go to God to be our first desire?

Prayer Points for Today:

Read all of Psalm 16 and meditate on verse 11. Now pray it out loud for yourself. Do it several times and then pray for Jesus to satisfy you with His love. Learn to drink in the soul-satisfying life of Jesus everyday, ask Him to help you do it.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 – The Futility of Possessions

Verse of the Day: “Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.”

Comments:

Solomon was the Bill Gates of his day. He had immense wealth and could literally have anything he wanted. No expense was too great for him, and he could possess whatever his heart desired. Here we see he actually indulged himself whole-heartedly! As he did with pleasure Solomon is going through a kind of clinical testing – what will satisfy my heart; what will make me happy? He is the guinea pig for us all and his test results are conclusive. Possessions, no matter how many or how great they are won't make us happy or satisfy us. Oh, they offer momentary enjoyment, but we tire of them easily and look for some new thing to fill our hearts again. “How futile” says the preacher!

You and I enjoy conveniences and products that kings of long ago would have paid vast sums to enjoy. Yet, we can be unhappy with them or take them for granted. We live in a “possession fixated” society and are encouraged to let things make us happy. And when we tire of one there is always a new one to choose from. Perhaps we are more like Solomon than we know!

Questions for Reflection:

Do you recognize your own struggle with trying to make things satisfy your heart?

What can you do to change that in your heart?

What do you think are true riches and do you have any?

Are you thankful for what God has so richly provided for you already?

Prayer Points for Today:

Today, cultivate a grateful heart for all that God has blessed you with. Thank Him out loud for the daily provisions, the roof over your head, more than two outfits to adorn yourself with, and on and on...we're rich! Thank Him! Then ask God to de-fang the serpent of envy and greed that seeks to strike your heart with discontentment. Let Him be your portion. Remember to love people and use things, not the other way around.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 2:18-26 – The Futility of Work

Today's Verse: “Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.”

Comments:

We think being a workaholic is a recent problem. Apparently it has been around for a long time. Solomon had an unquenchable thirst to produce. He describes it as wanting to leave something that marks his life, his accomplishments; in a word lasting fame. Then he realizes a central truth on the Bible and life, once you are dead someone else takes over what you worked for. Now Solomon's mansion is owned and lived in by another. His great enterprises are owned and managed by others. Now all his labors seem worthless, with no lasting value. A simple reality is spoken in verses 24-25 that will be repeated several times in this book. God's gift is to enjoy your labor and its fruit each day you are given. Don't try to be great or make a name for yourself or have lasting fame. Go to work, do a great job, then come home, enjoy your wife and family, eat a good dinner and thank God! Wow, that is revolutionary thinking. Sounds like it could reduce the stress level most live with and bring a deeper satisfaction for simple living with each other. Think about it.

Questions for Reflection:

What do you work for?

What do you want to be remembered for?

How satisfied are you at the end of each day?

How burned out are you from trying to produce?

Prayer Points for Today:

Read Matthew 11:28-30 slowly. Repeat as needed to let it soak into your heart. Then pray it over your life.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Verse of the Day: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven."

Comments:

God is the author of life. There is an appointed time for everything under the sun. Every day is not fun, easy, and leisurely. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh. (3:4) Living life with God means cooperating with "the time" that has been appointed by God.

There's a time to tear down and a time to build up. (3:3) This is true for work, family life, and our personal schedule. The ability to understand the appropriate time appointed by God is wisdom. You need to receive God's wisdom or you may keep when it's time to throw away. (3:6)

Every season is beautiful as we flow with God's plan and purpose. One thing is for sure: you don't get to choose the seasons of life. The times are appointed by God. Your role is to recognize the season and respond – flow with it.

Recognize and enjoy the season God has appointed for you. Don't be envious of the time someone else is in. Don't be too anxious to get to the next season. Even if it's tough, experience God and His purpose for the season He appointed for you.

Questions for Reflection:

What are some times/seasons that God has for you now? They may be very different for different aspects of your life.

Are there any ways that you could better cooperate with what God has appointed for you?

Prayer Points for Today:

Take a few minutes to wait on God listening and talking to Him about the appointed times/seasons that He has for you.

Ask God to give you wisdom to discern what He's given to you.

Ask God if there are any specific steps you could take to flow with His appointed times for you?

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 3:12-22

Verse of the day: "I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live."

Comments:

I always take note when the Scripture mentions superlatives. There's an issue of priority. Solomon uses a superlative in 3:12 when he says that "there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and do good in one's lifetime."

Amidst all the mention of the vanity of life and the insignificance of what we do, Solomon concludes that there's nothing better than rejoicing and doing good. What does he mean?

Verse 13 explains more about the first part: rejoicing. It's a gift of God to work hard and then enjoy oneself eating and drinking. It's a gift when God empowers the heart to enjoy the fruit of our labor. There is a satisfaction with oneself and life - a rest in your spirit. A sense of well done.

The second thing Solomon mentions is to "do good in one's lifetime." After all the talk about how futile it is to do anything, you'd think he's changing his message. Not really. Let's read verse 14 again: "I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing take from it, for God so worked that men should fear Him."

What we do is temporal and meaningless – if it's simply our own work. What God does remains forever. It has eternal lasting significance. When we align ourselves with His will – His plan – His work, then we're "doing good in one's lifetime." Thus, we need to fear or be in awe of God, as the end of verse 14 says. We need to humble ourselves to find out what He's doing and what He's has planned for us.

Questions for Reflection:

In what ways are you at rest in working hard and enjoying the fruit of your labor?

Do you cram too much into a day or week ever? Maybe the busyness is revealing a lack of deep satisfaction in simply doing what God has called you to do.

What is on your to-do list from God? What is on your "not to-do list" from God?

Prayer Points for Today:

Talk to God about your satisfaction and rest in Him. Are you working hard and then enjoying the fruit of your labor? Are you hearing "well done" over your life?

Pray about doing good in your lifetime. Ask God to bless your to-do list from Him. Ask Him for courage to jettison those things on your "not to-do list."

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 4:1-8

Verse of the Day: “And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

Comments:

There is a great weight, sadness, and truth to Solomon's observation of the oppression that happens on earth in verses one to three. The atrocities committed by one human violating and oppressing another is inconceivable: sex trafficking, physical abuse, rape, genocide, war, abortion, and many others. The experience of oppressions on earth is only softened by the fact there is a Comforter. There will be a judgment when righteousness and justice prevail.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary writes about verse four, “This verse gives a profound diagnosis when it says that all achievement comes through a drive toward superiority. This was the basic idea of the psychologist Adler, who propounded the concept of the inferiority complex.” Our God-given drive to be great goes awry when we compare ourselves with others. We end up motivated by competition and jealousy.

Verse five talks about how one person responds to a competitive jealous environment by folding his hands and not working. Foolish. Another gives both hands to working hard and strives to make it to the top. Ahhh...to have a balance of work and rest – with the right motivation. One hand of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after the wind.

It's a meaningless pursuit to work endlessly, pile up riches and not enjoy them (to deny oneself the pleasure of relationships and a healthy rhythm of living) – as verse eight tells us.

Questions for Reflection:

How are you doing in having a healthy balance between not burying your head in the sand regarding the atrocities of the world and not becoming hopeless and depressed?

Make an honest assessment of your motivations for your labor. When do you fall into competition and envy with others? How can you move toward freedom and purity in motives?

Is your tendency to withdraw and avoid competition/conflict or is it to press hard to get on top? Are there any changes that God would have for you?

Prayer Points for Today:

Pray for a human atrocity that burdens your heart. Care deeply, pray, and give it to God. Only His work will change human hearts and comfort the oppressed.

Pray about your motivation for the work that God has given you.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 4:9-16

Verse of the Day: "Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning."

Comments:

In verses nine to twelve, Solomon contrasts the vanity of rivalry and competition with the power of unity and working together. Paul talks about sharing with one another in our abundance, so that we'll have the ability to help another in our lack. (2 Cor. 8:12-15) In our pride and independence we can think we can or should make it alone. Yet we need each other. If you think you stand, take heed lest you fall. How much better to have others with you as you go through life!

Verses thirteen to sixteen are classic Ecclesiastes verses of wise observations of life. A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction. Proverbs emphasizes over and over the virtue of being able to receive instruction (wisdom). Foolishness doesn't receive instruction. The scary thing is that it's always a blind spot. You don't think you need instruction. The old and foolish king lost his ability to receive instruction – meaning he previously was wise and received instruction. That challenges me: I could be a person who started well (receive instruction and wisdom) and yet over time I could start thinking I got it down pretty well. I could develop a blind spot and not receive correction.

Questions for Reflection:

Is your reflex to share with others when you have an abundance? When have you done that lately?

Are you humble enough to receive from others when you have a need? When?

When did you recently receive instruction or correction from someone? Who knows your personal life well enough to pastor you and oversee your life? Who do you go to for input and counsel?

Prayer Points for Today:

Pray for open doors to share with others. Be ready!

Talk to God about your ability to receive instruction. How's it going?

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Verse of the Day: "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."

Comments:

This section of Ecclesiastes addresses a common theme of Solomon's writings in Proverbs: our words. He says that as you go to the house of the Lord, "draw near to listen rather than offer the sacrifice of fools." He clearly defines the sacrifice of fools in the following verses: speaking hastily to God – consumed with self.

What a great model and inspiration for our time with God. Rather than coming to talk at God and hurry on your way, slow down...relax...yes share your heart with God but then listen. Wait on God. Let your words be few. Be open to receive.

Don't be quick to vow to God the great things you'll do for Him. One of my axioms is "under promise and over produce." It is better to that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

It's not being afraid of commitment, but rather it's a strong commitment to be a person of your word. If you say it, then you'll do it. People will grow in confidence that they can trust your words. Your leadership equity and influence will grow.

So in your talking with God and others: let your words be few. Be a good listener. Be a person of your word.

Questions for Reflection:

Think about your time with God. What percent is spent talking to God or reading His Word verses quietly listening and waiting on Him? All three are important.

How could you incorporate time listening to God into your daily routine? Decision making?

Have you made a vow to God you haven't kept? If you're carrying a sense of guilt or failure, then take some time to seek forgiveness. Ask God what to do from this point. His mercies are new every morning.

Prayer Points for Today:

Spend extra time waiting on God. He knows your heart. Share it with Him, but then really slow down and listen. Receive from God. Let Him comfort, strengthen, and encourage you.

Pray about being a person of your word. If you've broken your word, maybe you need to go make things right with someone. Commit in your heart to let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no."

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

Verse of the Day: “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”

Comments:

Today's section of Scripture addresses the issues of greed and contentment. The Scriptures have much to say in regard to money and how prone we are to allow money to become the focus of our lives.

Jesus made it clear that, in light of the idolatrous tendencies of our own hearts, money has the power to gain mastery over our lives. Money is something we can easily be tempted to “love,” “be devoted to” and “serve” – to the exclusion of God. (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13) Paul tells us that “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires” – desires that plunge a man into “ruin and destruction” and “pierce” his heart with grief. (1 Tim 6:9, 10) Because “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim 6:10), Scripture reminds us repeatedly: “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have.” (Hebrews 13:5, see Phil 4:11)

The New Testament passages quoted above reveal that the love of money and the pursuit to gain wealth can have very serious eternal consequences: wandering from the faith and the destruction of your life. The vanity of vanities in all this is that the insatiable desire for money and wealth contributes nothing to the heart's capacity for true joy in this present life. As John Piper has written, and this section of Scripture affirms, “the deepest, most satisfying delights God gives us through creation are free gifts from nature and loving relationships with people. After your basic needs are met, money begins to diminish your capacity for these pleasures rather than increase them.” Ultimately, Jesus Christ is the One who satisfies the deepest longings of the human heart.

Questions for Reflection:

Are you aware that there is a fundamental connection between your spiritual life and how you think about and handle money? We are often tempted to separate our faith from our finances; yet, God sees them as inseparable.

Do you have a biblical understanding of wealth; that is, wealth's dangers and its potential for great good in advancing God's purposes?

Contentment is presented in this section of Scripture as a key characteristic of a godly life. Are you content? What does Paul say is the key to contentment in Philippians 4:11-13?

Prayer Points for Today:

Thank God today that the deepest and most satisfying delights we can enjoy are found in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

As God's Word reminds you of the fleeting character of riches, pray that you will more fully invest in God's kingdom and store up treasures in heaven. (Matthew 6:19-21)

Pray that you will be a faithful steward of all the riches God has entrusted to you.

Pray that your life would be marked by contentment.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Verse of the Day: "There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil."

Comments:

Chapter six continues the theme of greed and contentment introduced in chapter five. Ecclesiastes 5:19 says that when God gives an individual wealth and possessions, along with the power to enjoy them, this is a gift from God. The mere fact that one has wealth and possessions does not automatically mean he can enjoy them. In fact, this blessing is spoken of one who humbly acknowledges the "life that God has given him." (5:18) There is recognition that God is the source of all things.

The first twelve verses of chapter six highlight that even those things that are recognized as earthly blessings – wealth, abundant possessions, honor, many children, a long life – are all vain if they cannot be enjoyed.

The verses for today present a man to whom God gives "wealth, possessions, and honor" (for nothing happens apart from God); however, "God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them." We are told this is a man who "lacks nothing of all that he desires." Unfortunately, there seems to be no desire for God.

How tragic when one makes the acquisition of wealth, possessions, or honor his sole purpose in life. It is a sad irony to achieve the desire of your heart, only to realize you are unable to truly delight in any of it. I am reminded of Jesus' parable of the rich fool, "This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Luke 12:20)

How blessed we are to know the One who gives us true joy and contentment to our lives and satisfies the deepest desire of our hearts. It is the gift of God to enjoy the good things that He has brought into our lives.

Questions for Reflection:

Are you convinced that wealth, possessions, and honor alone are no guarantee of genuine happiness? What examples can you list that testify to the reality of this truth?

Jesus warned us that "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word" (Mark 4:19) What precautions are you taking to make sure wealth and possessions do not assume an inappropriate place in your life?

Are you thankful to God for the things He has enabled you to enjoy?

Prayer Points for Today:

Praise God that He has revealed Jesus Christ to you and called you to "turn from these vain things to a living God." (Acts 14:15)

Thank God for the ability to enjoy the good things He has graciously given to you.

Personalize First Corinthians 7:30-31 as a prayer to God (I like the NIV translation).

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 7:1-10

Verse of the Day: "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools."

Comments:

The beginning of this section of Scripture (7:1) is reminiscent of Proverbs 22:1, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches..." and communicates a truth that we would all affirm: godly character is to be valued over great wealth. However, as we continue reading these verses, we may find ourselves challenged by the words of the Preacher. Is the day of death *better* than the day of birth? Is the house of mourning *better* than the house of feasting? Is sorrow *better* than laughter? I am reminded of James 1:2, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds..." "Joy" and "trials" are two experiences my mind has a difficult time putting together. Of course, this only serves to reveal my need for a renewed mind – a mind able to view things from a biblical, eternal perspective. According to this section of Scripture, death, mourning, and sorrow – the hard and painful seasons of our lives – are ever-present realities. However, when we respond with faith in God, He uses the hard times to develop in us genuine spiritual maturity.

In Ecclesiastes 7:9, we are commanded, "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry." If we do not have a biblical understanding of suffering, we can often respond in anger when hardship or adversity comes our way. In the book, *Gilead*, the narrator makes a profound statement as he comes to the end of his life: "A little too much anger, too often or at the wrong time, can destroy more than you would ever imagine." James writes, "See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire." (James 3:5)

Warnings against giving place to anger are repeated throughout Scripture. Proverbs 16:32 says, "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." In Proverbs 19:11 we are told, "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." In the New Testament, "fits of anger" are listed among the works of the flesh. (Gal 5:20) Believers are commanded to "put away... all bitterness and wrath and anger." (Ephesians 4:31) James reminds us that "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires." (James 1:20)

Here, we are told that anger is at home in the hearts of fools. In Scripture, the fool is one who lives contrary to God's wisdom in his moral life and follows the inclinations of his obstinate heart. The fool wastes his life, because he ignorantly prefers the fleeting and temporary pleasures of this life to the eternal happiness of the life to come.

Questions for Reflection:

What is your view of suffering? Is it biblical?

When have you experienced the greatest spiritual growth: during times of ease or times of hardship?

Do you find that you are "quick in your spirit to become angry"? What "exchange" is God calling you to make (see Ephesians 4:22-24)?

Prayer Points for Today:

Consider the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) together with Paul's definition of love. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) Pray that you would be conformed to the image of Christ.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 7:11-18

Verse of the Day: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other...."

Comments:

"In the day of prosperity be joyful...." As I read those words, my initial thought might be, "That is not a difficult imperative to obey – who isn't joyful during times of prosperity?" But then I am reminded of those verses in Ecclesiastes that say there are those to whom God gives wealth and possessions and honor – who are experiencing prosperity – and, yet, they are unable to enjoy it. I believe there is also a type of joy that is focused more on the things associated with prosperity – the wealth or the possessions in and of themselves – rather than joy in the God "who richly provides us with everything to enjoy." (1 Tim 6:17)

As I read Ecclesiastes 7:14, I cannot help but be reminded of Job. In the Scripture, Job is introduced to us as a man "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." (Job 1:1) He was blessed with great prosperity, both in his family and his possessions. Then, in one fateful day, Job lost his ten children and all his wealth. In one afternoon, all his prosperity was gone. As he processes the loss of all he had, we see the character of Job...and the focus of his life. We are told that Job "fell on the ground and worshiped," declaring, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Later, after he had been afflicted with "loathsome sores" (2:7), he still expressed confidence in the sovereignty of God: "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10) Scripture teaches that comfort and calamity, prosperity and adversity, come from the hand of God. "Consider: God has made the one as well as the other."

For us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, who are loved by God, we know that "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." (Rom 8:28) As William Cowper wrote:

*God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform...
Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will...
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace.
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face...
Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain.
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.*

Questions for Reflection:

Is your joy in the things God has blessed you with a joy that finds its ultimate satisfaction in God Himself, as the Giver of all things?

Do you realize that nothing comes into our life that does not first pass through the hands of our loving heavenly Father?

Prayer Points for Today:

Thank God today for His love, mercy, grace, and faithfulness towards you.

Pray that in times of adversity that your faith in God would remain strong. (Rom 4:20)

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 7:19-29

Verse of the Day: "...this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes."

Comments:

As the Preacher has observed life "under the sun," he has commented repeatedly concerning the injustice, oppression, and wickedness that he has witnessed all around him. He has seen evil practiced even in those places that should be marked by justice and righteousness. (Eccl. 3:16) High officials, who are charged to maintain good order and protect the poor, instead oppress the poor and abuse the power of their office. This behavior is so common, those who experience it should "not be amazed" when it occurs (Eccl. 5:8) Solomon affirms the universality of human depravity when he declares, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." (Eccl. 7:20) Although there is much that the Preacher has not been able to understand concerning the human condition, he has come to one firm conclusion: "God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." (Eccl. 7:29)

The first chapters of Genesis record the creation and fall of man. Although created in the image of God and enjoying a true knowledge of God in righteousness and holiness, Adam chose to rebel against Him. He directly disobeyed God, and by his transgression, he brought condemnation upon himself and all mankind. As Paul writes, Adam's disobedience "led to condemnation for all men." (Rom. 5:18) The guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to all mankind and is the root of all the sinfulness that defiles the life of man.

The good news is that God, "being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us" (Eph. 2:4), sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sin and restore us to a right relationship with God.

As believers, Jesus Christ has paid the penalty of our sin by bearing the wrath of God. Jesus has broken the dominion of sin that once held us in bondage. We still battle indwelling sin in our hearts. Even as those who have placed faith in Christ, we are prone to walk in our own strength and trust in our own understanding. How quickly we can be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." (Eph. 4:14) "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24-25)

Questions for Reflection:

According to Ecclesiastes 7:25-29, what lies at the heart of all the wickedness, oppression, suffering, and evil that is observed in the world?

How familiar are you with the doctrine of original sin? Would you be able to explain this teaching to an unbeliever?

Do you have a biblical understanding of indwelling sin? *Sin and Temptation* by John Owen is an excellent resource.

Prayer Points for Today:

Thank God for His great salvation and consider afresh how amazing His grace truly is!

Pray to be freed from legalism (performance righteousness), subjectivism (living by your feelings and emotions), and condemnation (more focused on your sin than on God's grace)

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 8:1-4

Today's Verse: "Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance."

Comments:

Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective and then to know the best course of action to take. Most people would agree that wisdom is a valuable asset, but how can we acquire it? Proverbs 9:10 teaches that the fear of the Lord (respect and honor) is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom comes from fearing, knowing, and trusting God. James 1:5 also tells us that if any of us lacks wisdom, we can ask God, and He will give it to us generously. I wonder how much time and energy we waste by trying to figure things out with our own wisdom without stopping to ask God for His perfect wisdom. I believe that often times our faces that have had a "hard" appearance could be brightened if we made a habit of seeking God daily for His wisdom in all of our situations.

Questions for Reflection:

When you come across a difficult situation in life, what is your first response? Do you panic, worry, call a friend, or do you stop and pray?

Is there a situation you are facing right now that requires wisdom? If so, have you asked God to give you wisdom?

Do you think you could get rid of some of the stress in your life if you made a habit of seeking God for wisdom every day?

Prayer Points for Today:

Pray that God would fill you with wisdom for every situation in your life.

Pray that God would help you to fear Him each day.

Pray that God would help you to develop a habit of seeking His wisdom and not your own.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 8:11-13

Verse of the Day: "Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God."

Comments:

Oftentimes we are tempted to think that there is no difference with respect to reward between those who do evil and those who do right. We all know of people who are evil that don't fear God and yet seem to have wonderfully blessed lives here on this earth - better lives than ours in fact. They have more money and fun and everything they do seems to prosper. We wonder why they live such a great life while we, who are doing what is right, seem to face so much hardship. Is there really a benefit to doing right? This verse confirms that indeed there is. We must have an eternal perspective and not merely an earthly temporal view. We are living for God with our hearts set on eternity. We will be rewarded then for every good deed, none will go unnoticed. These others are living for earthly and temporary gain, and their reward will be earthly and their punishment eternal. Don't waste time comparing yourself to someone else who doesn't fear God yet seems to be walking in more blessing than you. God has promised a treasure in heaven that will not fade for all of eternity. Fear God and live righteously; He will take care of the rest.

Questions for Reflection:

Do you know someone who does not fear God, yet seems to have it better off than you?

In frustration, have you ever wondered why this is?

Would you say that you are a person with an eternal perspective or do you spend most of your time focused on how things look here on earth?

Prayer Points for Today:

Ask God to give you an eternal perspective of your life and what you are doing.

Ask God to encourage you by helping you see that your obedience to Him is producing fruit that will last for eternity.

Pray that God will give you strength to continue to live righteously knowing that you are not living for earthly things.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 8:14-15

Verse of the Day: "So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun."

Comments:

I love this passage of scripture. It is such a simple, but much needed reminder. How often do we waste our time and energy being frustrated or stressed out about life? We complain, worry, and become anxious. Solomon tells us to take a step back and relax. He recommends joy and contentment as encouragement for us along this crazy adventure that we call life. Life will have its share of problems, but if we only focus on the problems, we miss out on the daily joy that God wants us to have. God loves us and He is with us. He has ordained every step of our lives. We need to grab hold of that and live it. When we realize God is in control and He has given us each day as a gift, it changes our perspective. So enjoy your life today, no matter what comes your way. It is a gift from God.

Questions for Reflection:

When it comes to life, are you more of an optimist or a pessimist? Do you find the joy each day or do you focus on the problems?

What are some practical things you could implement in your daily life to help you be thankful and find joy in the routine things you do?

Prayer Points for Today:

Ask God to help you find joy in Him each day.

Ask God to help you find joy in the routine things of this life.

Ask God to help you to have fresh vision and passion for what he is doing in your life today.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

Verse of the Day: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."

Comments:

God has given each one of us specific gifts and talents that are unique to us. He has a destiny for our lives. We are made to glorify Him and spread His fame throughout the earth. We all may have different occupations, but we share this common destiny. Whatever we find ourselves doing, we need to do it with all of our hearts as someone who has a purpose behind what we do. God has placed you where you are with the talents you have to advance His Kingdom in the earth. So whether you are in school, working, staying at home, whatever you are doing, do it with all your might and strength. Don't waste time thinking that what your doing now is not that important or not your ultimate goal in life. Put your whole heart into whatever your doing.

Questions for Reflection

Have you been putting your whole heart into everything that you do in life, including those things you don't enjoy?

Do you see each day as an opportunity to glorify God in whatever your hand finds to do?
Are you doing it whole-heartedly as worship to Him?

Is there anything in your life where you know you have purposefully not put your whole heart into it?

Prayer Points for Today:

Repent if there has been anything you have done half-heartedly.

Pray that God would give you strength and vision to do whatever your hand finds to do with all of your heart as an act of worship.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

Verse of the day: "The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools."

Comments:

There are voices all around us every day that cry out for attention. Friends, family members, co-workers, and strangers all have advice and something to say. With so much information and advice out there, sometimes it is hard to know who to listen to. We must tune our ears to listen to the whispers of the wise. They might not be the loudest, but they should be the most sought after. I believe it is important for us to have people in our lives with proven track records in their relationship with God. We need people who have demonstrated that they have the capacity to hear from and follow God. These people are easy to pick out, because the fruit of their lives speaks volumes. When we find people like this that we can look to, then we need to listen to what they have to say. Many claim to be wise, but are really foolish. They cry out for our attention, but in the end their wisdom leads to destruction. Don't waste your life listening to the shouts of the foolish. Listen for the whispers of the wise and apply what you hear

Questions for Reflection:

Do you have people in your life that you can count on for wise Godly input?

Do you have people in your life that you know are foolish who try to give you advice?

Prayer Points for Today:

Pray that God would help you to find wisdom and apply it.

Pray that God would expose the foolish voices that try and work there way into your mind.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 10:1-4

Verse of the Day: "A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left."

Comments:

Wisdom and foolishness will simply reveal themselves in one's behavior. That seems obvious. However what might not seem as obvious is the matter of the heart. This verse, if taken all by itself, might seem a bit unfair. Like there are only wise people and foolish people and their behavior will never change. It could get discouraging.

But be reminded that the clear command in wisdom literature has for the most part been: Acquire wisdom! Gain knowledge! Proverbs 8:5 says, "O simple ones learn prudence. O fools, learn sense!"

So there's hope for the fool who wants to change and grow wise! If you feel that your heart has lead you down pathways of foolishness don't get fatalistic and think you'll always be that way. This would certainly lead to a wasted life. Allow the heart of these wisdom writings to lead you to the heart of God and ask him for wisdom.

Questions for Reflection:

How is your bible intake? The renewing of our minds by God's word is vital for growing in true wisdom.

In your decision-making do you find your heart's inclinations are towards pleasing God?

Prayer Points for Today:

True wisdom starts with having the fear of the Lord. Ask God to fill you with knowledge of his nearness and a desire to please him in every decision you make.

Think of all the foolish things that God has forgiven you for in your past. Thank him for his mercy and ask that he would grant you increasing wisdom for this day.

Today's Reading Section: 10:8-11

Verse of the Day: "If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed."

Comments:

The old phrase "work smarter not harder" jumped out at me as I thought about this verse. Godly wisdom leads us from self-reliance to Christ-reliance. As we do ministry or work or anything in life, our "blades" will inevitably grow dull. And that's where the test is. Will we stop and be sharpened by the Lord or do what we so often do and try using more of our own strength while doing our God-given tasks?

We "must use more strength" when we rely on ourselves, so naturally self-reliance will lead to burnout. James says it so clearly in his epistle: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." (James 1:5)

Don't waste your access to God. Ask him for wisdom! It will help you succeed!

Questions for Reflection:

Of the areas in your life that you know you are called to, which do you find burdensome?

How do you "sharpen" yourself?

Prayer Points for Today:

After you've identified the areas where you tend to be self-reliant, go to the cross and take the burden of Christ on you. It is easy and light. Pray that God would give you his wisdom and help you not lean on yourself any more.

Ask God for fresh and creative ways to remain sharp and reliant on his wisdom.

Today's Reading Section: 11:1-6

Verse of the Day: "He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap."

Comments:

How many times has your excuse for procrastination been something to do with waiting on the perfect this or that? I've been very guilty of putting things off because I have to have things a certain way – only to find that getting things "just right" never happened. As a result I didn't do anything.

Too much time trying to "read the skies" will only distract us from the task God has given us. And those who wait for the perfect time will never sow and therefore they will never reap.

God calls us to obey him in faith trusting that the results of what we reap are in his hands. I'm reminded of the old song:

Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey....

Time is short! Don't waste it!

Questions for Reflection:

Are there any areas in your life where procrastination and fear have kept you from being obedient to God?

What has God given you to "sow and reap"?

Prayer Points for Today:

Ask the Holy Spirit to come and strengthen your trust in the Lord. Perfect love casts out fear.

Pray for a fresh vision of sowing and reaping no matter what the circumstances may be.

Today's Reading Section: Ecclesiastes 11:7-10

Verse of the Day: "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment."

Comments:

I wonder if a wrong way to react to this verse would be to put on a false humility and to not "rejoice" at all. I'm not sure that "The Preacher" meant that God would judge these young men on their rejoicing, but on what they were rejoicing in. If we see the sweet light of the sun on a beautiful day and rejoice that it has lifted our spirits, but God isn't thanked and he is far from our thoughts, then we've missed the whole point of the sweet light of sunshine.

I think of the Psalm 4:7, "You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound." The Psalmist here is definitely rejoicing! But so are these other people with abounding grain and wine and other possessions. The difference is God. And God will judge the hearts of men based on what or who was the ground of their rejoicing.

Don't waste your joy on the wrong thing....

Questions for Reflection:

Is there much rejoicing at all in your life? If not, that might be a sign that you're looking at your circumstances and not to Christ.

When are you at your happiest and what fills your heart with the most joy?

Prayer Points for Today:

Pray that God would restore to you the joy of your salvation if you feel that it has waned.

Ask God that all other joys would lead to a greater joy in Him.

Today's Reading Section: 12:1-14

Verse of the Day: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

Comments:

Verses 8-14 in chapter 12 are the conclusion and epilogue of Ecclesiastes. When it's all been said and done, true wisdom is fearing God and keeping his commandments. Every deed that we have done will be judged. Remember though, that those of us who are in Christ will not be judged and sent to Hell! Praise God! But what we did with God's blessings in our lives is going to be a big deal on that last day. Our life and all we possessed will have been either used for him and his glory or it will have been wasted on other things.

The key I believe to guarding us from wasting our lives is to pursue our highest joy in God himself. The warnings of this book are based on the truth that if God is not absolutely central, then all the joys of this world and pleasures of this life are meaningless, empty, and in the end, wasted.

Questions for Reflection:

Think of these two practical areas in your life: finances and time management. How is fearing God and keeping his commandments applicable in these areas?

Are there any areas in your life that God may be leading you to completely lay down?

Prayer Points for Today:

Pray for a deeper hunger to feed on biblical wisdom and apply it to your everyday life.

Ask God to give you a greater taste for the things of heaven and eternity. Pray through Colossians 3:1-4.