

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

As we read Ecclesiastes it seems 'The Teacher' has it all: riches, wisdom, women, and an expansive kingdom. Yet when he looked at his life, he was compelled to rethink his purpose and direction, to reevaluate his goals and objectives. He struggled to find meaning in his everyday pursuits.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

What would you say is the purpose of life?

What sweeping statement did 'The Teacher' make about life? (1:2)

What images does this sort of description conjure up in your mind?

What question does 'The Teacher' ask 1:3?

Why was 'The Teacher' so dissatisfied with life?

Discuss the areas of life that 'The Teacher' sees as being meaningless?(1:3-11)

In what ways can you relate to what he is saying?

When have you felt as if you were, 'just chasing after the wind?'

To what sort of meaningless activities do people commit their life?

What about life do you find meaningless?

If all is meaningless, what hope do we see for life? What is the use in being here and living as we do?

Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

'The Teacher' looked for meaning in wisdom and hard work, as well as in laughter and fun. He found the same vanity in recreation as in hard labour. He grappled with what benefit either had for people, who were only destined for death anyway.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

What priority do you think a person should give to leisure and fun?

In what areas did 'The Teacher' go searching for meaning in his life? (1:13)

What conclusion did he reach in regard to wisdom? (1:17-18)

What did 'The Teacher' say about his pursuit of pleasure? (2:1-2)

How did he try to cheer himself? (2:3)

What projects did 'The Teacher' undertake? (2:4-8)

In what way did He indulge himself? What was the overall result of this? (2:10-11)

When can pleasure be a good thing? When does pleasure become meaningless or even harmful?

What sorts of distractions do you tend towards to give your life meaning or significance?

Why did 'The Teacher' conclude that a person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his or her work? (2:24-25)

How might you prioritise your commitment to pleasure, in light of its insignificance?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

In weighing the balance of life, 'The Teacher's' bottom line was that God had a time for everything. 'The Teacher' saw wickedness, but it only lasted for a time. He saw injustice, but it only lasted for a time. Human beings are accountable, not just to themselves and their own satisfaction, but to God and his time clock.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

What example of God's timing stands out in your memory?

What does it mean that God has set eternity in the hearts of men? (3:11)

Why do you believe or reject the idea that, deep down inside, most people believe in God?

What does 'The Teacher' say about everything God does? (3:14) How do we see the out working of this?

What will God seek or call into account? (3:15)

What did 'The Teacher' see in the place of judgment and in the place of justice? (3:16)

Whom will God bring to judgment? (3:17)

When is it hard to be sensitive to the appropriateness of the timing of our activities?

How is the fact that, 'God has placed eternity in our hearts' manifested in our society?

How should the fact that God will bring judgment to both the righteous and the wicked affect the way we live?

In what way are the fate of animals and people similar and different?

Where do we find the answer to 'The Teacher's' question in v22?

Ecclesiastes 4:1-6:12

Having much and wanting more is a combination of attitudes that keeps people from enjoying what they have. 'The Teacher' addressed the evil of loving wealth and spending all one's time getting and protecting it. But he also recognised that God had enabled a few people to be content with what they had and the work they did.

Read 4:1-5:20

How would you describe 'The Teacher's' mood? (4:1-16)

Whom did 'The Teacher' declare to be happiest of all? (4:2-3)

What do people work to achieve? (4:4) What did 'The Teacher' say about toil? (4:4-6)

What unflattering truths hold for the person who loves money? (5:10-12)

What grievous evil did 'The Teacher' notice? (5:13-17)

What happens to the person who has wealth and possessions, but is also content? (5:20)

How does evil make life seem meaningless?

In what way do achievements spring from envy?

What can we do to be content and not envious?

In what way is advancement meaningless?

Why, then, do so many people strive hard to achieve it?

Why is money unable to bring happiness or contentment?

If we cannot take anything with us when we die, why do we work so hard to acquire things?

How should we go about finding satisfaction in our work?

Ecclesiastes 7:1-9:18

In the long run, the righteous are better off than the wicked. Even if the righteous must suffer in this life, they would be rewarded in the afterlife. But until that time, 'The Teacher' concluded that enjoying the good in life was the best way to spend one's days.

Read Ecclesiastes 8:2-17

Why do you find it easy or difficult to take time out for fun or leisure?

What conclusions did 'The Teacher' reach about...

People who are God-fearing? (8:12)

People who do not fear God? (8:13)

What is meaningless? (8:14)

What did 'The Teacher' commend? Why? (8:15)

Why are people who fear God better off than people who do not?

In what respect is it impossible to fully understand this life and the ways of God?

How does 1 Corinthians 15:32 help to give this idea a context?

How can we enjoy life as a gift from God? (1 Cor. 15:58 may help)

What sort of hope do we have concerning life after death?

How should we enjoy our life in light of the seeming transience of this life?

What impact should the fact that we do not know when we will die have on the way we live our life?

Ecclesiastes 10:1-12:14

'The Teacher' advised his son to seek out the wise words of great teachers, to use them as guides for life. But on the other hand, he warned his son not to waste a lot of time studying many books, for there are many who write books filled with knowledge but devoid of wisdom. In the end, simply honouring God and obeying him was the best way to live one's life.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

When should we take pains to remember our Creator? (12:1)

How did 'The Teacher' describe old age? (12:2-5)

What did 'The Teacher' do with his knowledge? (12:9)

How did 'The Teacher' describe the words of the wise? (12:11)

Why did 'The Teacher' tell his readers to fear God and keep his commandments? (12:14)

Why is it important to establish a relationship with God when we are young?

In what way is it easy to forget our Creator?

What can we do to keep our accountability to God in mind?

Why do you think 'The Teacher' says it is easier to enjoy life when we are young than when we become old?

What is the relationship between fearing God and keeping his commandments?

Why does 'The Teacher' encourage us to learn off wiser and older people?

In what ways can you gain from others' wisdom and insight?

What does wisdom have to do with judgment?

How can we be sure to grow in our knowledge and understanding of God? Why is it important?