



ECCLSIASTES

— CHASING AFTER THE WIND —



GROWTH GROUP BOOKLET
KENMORE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Introduction

Have you ever tried to capture the wind?

My guess—of course not! It's an impossible task, isn't it? Why even try? No matter how hard we chase it, we can't grasp it. But that's how the book of Ecclesiastes describes life in God's good but fallen world.

“I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 1:14)

Ecclesiastes takes us into the tensions of life under the sun. It exposes the human search for purpose and profit—and shows how elusive both really are. We chase meaning through good things: pleasure, work, time, wisdom, politics, wealth. But in the end, we come up empty-handed. The purpose can't be grasped. The profit doesn't last. It's like chasing after the wind, just when we think we have it—we don't.

Ecclesiastes is raw, honest, and unsettling about all this. It names what our world feels but rarely says: life is fleeting, unpredictable, and often doesn't make sense. We chase careers that promise significance, we chase comforts that promise rest, we chase control that promises security—and yet it always slips through our fingers. Ecclesiastes is confronting.

But the book doesn't leave us in despair.

Ecclesiastes redirects us—from human wisdom to heavenly wisdom. From chasing meaning to fearing the LORD. When we fear God as the one who is above the sun, we begin to live wisely even when life feels like an enigma. As we remember our divine Creator who is above us, we learn to receive life as a gift, instead of trying to control it as a project for gain.

But more than that, Ecclesiastes points us forward. It points us to the one who is not subject to the wind, but rules over it: the Lord Jesus Christ. In union with Christ, we have hope beyond the sun because of His resurrection, reign, and return. A day is coming when the chasing will end—when all things are made new under the Son.

This term it is our prayer that God would use Ecclesiastes to help us see life clearly, live wisely, and hope deeply in Christ together.

How to use this booklet

This booklet offers an overview of Ecclesiastes from a specific perspective. While you may not agree with every point, it aims to help you understand the book. Each study includes various types of questions.

1. **Get Warm:** Warm-up questions to get you thinking about the topic/passage.
2. General comprehension questions to understand the passage.
3. **Go Deeper:** Higher-level questions to make you think more about a topic/passage.
4. **Gospel Glimpse:** Questions which make you reflect on God's big story of the gospel.
5. **Get Personal:** Application questions to help you consider your own life.

Ecclesiastes Overview

No matter how many times you've read Ecclesiastes, it's worth getting a refresher before you jump back in. Here's some basic but vital information on the characters, structure, and genre of the book to get you started.

The Characters

The book of Ecclesiastes has three main voices/characters within the book.

1. **The Narrator:** The unnamed narrator frames the whole book. He introduces and concludes the Teacher's words (Eccl. 1:1-11; 12:8-14), presenting them to his "son". He is a wise guide, helping us interpret what we hear.
2. **The Teacher:** The main voice of the book. Whilst his identity is unknown, he is described as a gatherer (the literal meaning of "qoheleth"/"teacher"), a royal figure (the "king in Jerusalem"), and an Israelite (a "son of David") (Eccl. 1:1). Many conclude that the Teacher is King Solomon, but we can't say that for sure. Either way, the Teacher pretends he's a pagan—he goes on a quest for life's purpose and profit using human wisdom (which he calls "wisdom"). His conclusion? Just fear God.
3. **The Son:** The silent listener. He is a hidden and speechless voice in Ecclesiastes who represents the learner—the one being shaped by wisdom (Eccl. 12:12). The son could be an individual or a collective figure representing God's people. In many ways, we are like the son being called to fear God in His good but fallen world.

The Structure

The book of Ecclesiastes unfolds in three parts, structured around the Narrator's frame voice.

1. The Narrator's Introduction (Eccl. 1:1-11)
2. The Teacher's Quest (Eccl. 1:12-12:7)
3. The Narrator's Conclusion (Eccl. 12:8-14)

The Genre

The book of Ecclesiastes belongs to the wisdom literature in the Old Testament, alongside Proverbs and Job. But it plays a unique role:

- Proverbs: shows how life generally works (order)
- Ecclesiastes: shows how life often doesn't (disorder)

Proverbs begins with the fear of the LORD (Prov. 1:7), but Ecclesiastes ends there (Eccl. 12:13). Why? Ecclesiastes takes the long road. It starts with life "under the sun"—what can be observed and experienced by human wisdom (a.k.a. knowledge). But this perspective isn't enough! Human wisdom is good, but it has limits. True wisdom is found in fearing the LORD. It's an oversimplification—but Proverbs shows us how life works because God created all things good (Gen. 1-2). Ecclesiastes shows us how life doesn't work because of the Fall (Gen 3-4). The truly wise person is the one who responds appropriately in this dual reality.

For more, see the Appendix at the back of the booklet.

Study 1: Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

The Narrator's Introduction

Get Warm: What are your impressions of the book of Ecclesiastes?

Get Warmer: Where do you find life repetitive or unfruitful/unprofitable?

1. In verse 1, the Narrator introduces us to the Teacher. How does the Narrator describe him throughout the book of Ecclesiastes?
 - a. Eccl. 1:1
 - b. Eccl. 1:12
 - c. Eccl. 1:16
 - d. Eccl. 12:9-12

2. How would you describe the Teacher? Who might you compare the Teacher to in our modern era?

3. In verses 2-3, the Narrator introduces the Teacher's thesis and guiding question for the entire book. In your own words, write out the Teacher's:
 - a. Thesis (v2):

 - b. Question (v3):

Go Deeper: Why might the NIV's translation of 'Hevel' as 'Meaningless' be an appropriate or inappropriate translation of the Teacher's thesis? How might the translation 'mist' 'vapour' or 'breath' be more helpful?

4. In verses 4-11, the Narrator provides us with one of the Teacher's poems on life under the sun. This poem answers or affirms the thesis and guiding question.
 - a. What themes and patterns emerge in the poem?
 - b. How does the poem describe life and answer the Teacher's guiding question from earlier in verse 3?

Go Deeper: If our society had to write out a poem to describe life in our world, what do you think they would say? Would it be similar or different?

Gospel Glimpse: In the New Testament, the book of James uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hevel' from earlier in verse 2. In James 4:13-16, James speaks about the 'Hevel' of life being like a mist. Consider the following:

- a. Why do you think James would write this to Christians who live after Jesus' death and resurrection?

- b. What does the resurrection of Christ solve and not solve in the human experience of this crooked and bent life?

Gospel Glimpse: In Ecclesiastes 1:4-11, the Teacher's poem makes a bold claim about the trajectory of this life. Life is basically circular, going round and round. In the gospel, this all changes—the trajectory of life changes. What is the "divine novelty" that changes the trajectory of this life?¹

- a. Romans 6:4-10
- b. Revelation 21:1-5

Get Personal: When or how have you experienced the Teacher's poem in your own life or seen it in the life of others? What's something about the 'new work' of God in the gospel that you're waiting/hoping for/already enjoying?

Pray

¹ Gibson, *Ecclesiastes: Living Life Backwards*, Chapter 1.

Study 2: Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:11

Chasing Pleasure

Get Warm: What's an everyday thing that made you happy this past week?

Get Warmer: What do the lives of people you know reveal about what they think will make them happy?

1. From verse 12, the Teacher begins to speak about his quest. Until the conclusion, the Teacher will narrate his own explorations and findings about life's significance. In your own words, from verses 12-13, write out the Teacher's:
 - a. Method of exploration:
 - b. Initial feelings about the quest:

2. In verses 14-18, the Teacher explains why his quest/task is "a heavy burden" [literally: evil/bad]. He uses different words/imagery to make his point—(1) "Meaningless" [literally "Mist/Vapour"]; (2) a person chasing after wind; (3) a crooked stick; and (4) a person counting. What is his point?

Go Deeper: Throughout verses 12-18, and Ecclesiastes more broadly, the Teacher states that he uses "wisdom" to explore the significance of life. What do you think he means by "wisdom" (cf. Eccl. 1:13)? And how might it be different to Biblical wisdom?

3. From chapter 2 verse 1, the Teacher begins his exploration for life's significance. In verses 1-9, the Teacher starts with the concept of 'pleasure' [literally: 'delight' or 'joy']. List out all the ways that the Teacher attempts to get pleasure?

Get Personal: In these verses, the Teacher does a lot! In many ways, he lives a similar life to our own—he listens to comedy, drinks good wine, and works on some great projects. In what areas of life do you experience pleasure/delight/joy like the Teacher?

Go Deeper: Throughout verses 1-9, the Teacher uses language that is reminiscent of Genesis 1-2 (e.g. “good” “plant” “garden” “all kinds of fruit trees”). Some have suggested that the Teacher is “recreating Eden”.² How might this interpretation inform our understanding of ‘creating’ and ‘working’ in this life?

4. In verses 10-11, the Teacher concludes his quest for ‘pleasure’. What are his findings? Are they positive/negative/or both?

Get Personal: In his conclusion, the Teacher finds that pleasure can be found, but it’s not lasting—it’s elusive. This maps onto our culture—we look for eternal pleasure through ‘consumerism’—amassing possessions and experiences. Where do you see this most or feel this most in your own life?

Gospel Glimpse: In the New Testament, the God of the gospel saves sinners with distorted pleasures, people who make good things their ‘god’/‘idol’. God doesn’t merely condemn such people: he saves, renews, and teaches them to live differently. Read the following passages—what has God done for us and is doing in us?

- Romans 1:21-25
- Ephesians 2:1-5
- 2 Timothy 3:4
- Titus 3:3-8
- 1 Corinthians 10:31-32
- 1 Timothy 6:17

Get Personal: In considering what God has done/is doing, share with the group what you might find hardest—either:

- (1) Seeing pleasure as an idol?
 - (2) Escaping pleasure as a master?
- or (3) Receiving pleasure rightly as God’s gift?

Pray

² Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 134.

Study 3: Ecclesiastes 2:12-26

Chasing Work

Get Warm: What was/is your dream job either growing up or today?

Get Warmer: When have you found your work/toil/effort frustrating, insignificant, or confusing? Alternatively, when have you found it joyful and purposeful?

1. From verse 12, the Teacher changes focus and starts a new section. He begins to observe “wisdom” and “folly/madness” in connection to his work and legacy. In verses 12-14a, the Teacher tells us that wisdom is more advantageous than folly. What is the advantage?
2. In verses 14b-16, the Teacher deconstructs his previous argument about wisdom and folly. How does the reality of fate/death contribute to his view of work/toil?

Go Deeper: Throughout verses 12-16 the story of Genesis 2-3 intrudes into the Teacher’s experience of life. How is Genesis 3, particularly verses 17-19, echoed in the Teacher’s experience of work?

3. In verse 17-23, the Teacher offers a conclusion to his previous statements about work, wisdom/folly, and death. The outlook is grim and heartbreaking! Describe what the Teacher experiences:
 - a. In his head
 - b. In his heart
 - c. In his body

Get Personal: The Teacher feels tremendous agony over the enigma and futility of his work and legacy. It impacts his whole personhood! Where are you feeling the pain of work/toil/effort right now in your head, heart, or body? And is this frustration possibly revealing anything deeper in you—what you trust, fear, or long for most?

4. In verses 24-26, the tone shifts. The Teacher gives the first of five *carpe diem* “seize the day” “enjoy the moment” reflections in Ecclesiastes. What simple things are commended to be enjoyed? And why do you think these are highlighted?

Go Deeper: In verses 24-26, the Teacher gives the first of five *carpe diem* “seize the day” “enjoy the moment” reflections in Ecclesiastes. Over the years, there has been a lot of debate about how these reflections are functioning in Ecclesiastes—the main views are summarised below.³ Which do you think is going on here?

View	Despair Texts	Carpe Diem Texts	The Message
Joy-First (Optimistic Reading)	Give the main problem in life.	Give the main solution and message for life.	Life is hard, so just enjoy God’s gifts!
Despair-First (Pessimistic Reading)	Give the main problem and message in life.	Offer a very small comfort in a very hard life.	Life is tragic and fallen with minimal joy.
Both/And (Tension Reading)	Show the real pain and limits of life.	Show the real joy that can come from God.	Despair is real. Joy is real. They’re in tension—life is an enigma.

5. In verse 24, the Teacher speaks about “the hand of God”. What do you think this phrase is meant to teach us? How is this different to the Teacher’s earlier search for pleasure through his toil (cf. Eccl. 2:11).

Gospel Glimpse: In the New Testament, there is a lot of mention about work, food, and joy. The gospel changes some things, but doesn’t change everything. Read the following passages—what is different/the same to the message of the Teacher?

- Romans 8:18-25; Colossians 3:23-24
- 1 Timothy 4:4; 1 Corinthians 10:31-32
- 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; Ephesians 4:28;

Get Personal: In our culture, the cocktail of success, reputation, and excess is intoxicating. But things are different for those who please God—the gospel doesn’t change work but it changes the worker!⁴ How can we think/speak/act differently in toil?

Pray

³ This study guide will typically follow the “both/and” (tension reading) of Ecclesiastes.

⁴ Cameron, *Joined-up Life: A Christian Account of How Ethics Work*, 270.

Study 4: Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Chasing Time

Get Warm: Are you the kind of person who prefers to be early, exactly on time, or running late? Why do you think that is?

Get Warmer: What is one thing you wish you had more time for right now, and one thing you wish took less time in your week?

1. In verses 1-8, the Teacher offers a short poem on time. The poem begins with a heading in verse 1 which explains the general message/principle of the poem. What do you think the message is?
2. Throughout verses 2-8, the Teacher neatly orders the poem into 14 pairs of opposites. How might you summarise the sections?

v2-3

v4-5

v6-7

v8

3. Having zoomed into the poem, zoom back out. What do you think verses 1-8 teach us about life & time?
4. In verses 1-8, the Teacher's poem shows us that life moves through many seasons—good and bad. But the poetry is setting up a problem! In verses 9-11, the Teacher unearths the problem. What does the Teacher find problematic about living/working in God's timed world?

Go Deeper: In verse 11, the Teacher says that God has given humanity a heart for "eternity". What do you think the Teacher means by this verse, and the word "eternity"? Could it be:

- a. A desire for eternity/eternal life (eternity = life beyond)
- b. A desire to know the whole—from beginning to end (eternity =
- c. A desire to know beyond the present moment
- d. Other

Get Personal: God has made people want to understand time, but we can't—it's unclear. We can't simply zoom out, see life's big picture, and work/toil/live in the wisest way possible. Seasons can change suddenly, and we need to adapt as wisely as we can. Reflect on the following questions:

- Where do you most feel the frustration of wanting the full picture but only seeing one small part?
5. In verses 1-11, the Teacher says time is ordered by God but not fully understood by us. This can be frustrating (cf. Eccl. 3:10), yet he also sees something good. In verses 12-14, what does the Teacher say is good for people to do?

Get Personal: How do verses 12-14 help us live well in a season we may not fully understand or would not have chosen?

6. In verses 16-22, the Teacher reflects on the fact that God has a time for judgement. How does time and judgement shape the Teacher's view of life?

Gospel Glimpse: In the New Testament, the concept of time becomes central because of God's saving work in Christ. Put simply, time is used in three major ways: to speak of salvation-time, ethical-time, and judgement-time.

- Romans 5:6; Galatians 4:4
- 2 Corinthians 8:14; Hebrews 1:1-2
- Romans 13:11; James 5:7-8
- 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Peter 4:3
- 1 Corinthians 15:32; James 4:13-16

Get Personal: How should the gospel give you a wiser perspective on your time? Where do you need to stop trying to control things or embrace the moment you're in?

Pray

Study 5: Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:12

Chasing Wealth

Get Warm: What's one small thing that has become noticeably more expensive lately?

Get Warmer: Why do you think money can create so much stress and anxiety for people?

1. In verses 8-9, the Teacher observes the problem of oppression. What do these verses teach about wealth, power, and injustice in society?

Gospel Glimpse: As we read about the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, we see that he is not like the kings/elites of this age. He drew near to the poor, the overlooked, and the burdened (cf. Luke 4:18; 14:13-14; 2 Corinthians 8:9). How does the way Jesus treated the poor challenge the way you view money, status, power, and or people who have less than you?

2. In verses 10-17, the Teacher discusses several reasons why the love of wealth is not the answer to the quest for meaning. What problems does the love of wealth bring?

Gospel Glimpse: In 1 Timothy 6:6-10, the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy about the grief that comes from loving wealth. How is this passage similar/different to the Teacher's instruction? Why is the love of wealth even more problematic for Christians?

3. In verses 18-20, the Teacher observes something good amidst the pessimism of verses 8-17. What does the Teacher now say is "good" and "appropriate"?

Go Deeper: What similarities and differences do you notice between this passage and the earlier "enjoy life" sections (cf. Eccl. 2:24-26; 3:12-13)? What repeated message is the Teacher giving, and what new emphasis does he add here?

Get Personal: Throughout this section, the Teacher affirms that not only is wealth a gift from God but also the ability to enjoy it. Why can we sometimes struggle to affirm these truths? What ordinary good gift can I consciously receive with gratitude instead of guilt this week?

4. In verses 1-2 of chapter 6, the Teacher sees another “evil” or bad thing. What does the Teacher see? And how does it contrast with verses 18-19 of the previous chapter? What tension exists?

5. In verses 3-7, the Teacher uses graphic imagery to make his point. It’s confronting! Why does the Teacher compare a wealthy person without enjoyment to a stillborn child? What point do you think he is trying to make?

6. In verses 8-12, the Teacher offers a conclusion to his observations on wealth. What is his conclusion?

Gospel Glimpse: Take a look at Hebrews 13:5-6 or Matthew 6:19-34. How does God’s saving work in the gospel reshape our hearts when it comes to money? And what might it look like to be someone who relates to wealth as a gift from God instead of something gained by our own effort?

Gospel Glimpse: Take a look at James 2:1-9. Wealth can create divisions—it does in society and it can in the church. How can we intentionally treat one another with equal honour, warmth, and love in the church—regardless of income, job status, housing, education, power, or lifestyle?

Get Personal: Using wealth is different to loving wealth. In our culture, love of wealth is a constant temptation. We often believe that increased wealth = increased happiness or more stuff = more life. What questions could we ask ourselves before we purchase more stuff?

Pray

Study 6: Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

Chasing Wisdom

Get Warm: What's a memorable piece of wisdom that someone gave you?

Get Warmer: Where do people usually look for wisdom today? Which source do people trust most?

1. In verses 1-13, the Teacher lists a bunch of proverbs. Many of the proverbs are structured with an A > B format. In the following verses, consider how 'A' is better than 'B':

v1:

v2:

v5:

v8:

2. In verses 11-12, the Teacher speaks positively about wisdom. He compares wisdom to protection (an "inheritance"/"shelter"). How is wisdom like protection?

Get Personal: Many of these proverbs are connect to hard moments. What hard experience has taught you something valuable? How has it protected you or helped you for the future?

Gospel Glimpse: In the New Testament, there is often a connection between trials, wisdom, and God's goodness. Read James 1:2-5; 12-17. How does this passage deepen or reshape what we've read in Ecclesiastes 7 so far?

3. So far we've seen that wisdom has value. But in verse 13, the Teacher comes to a conclusion about wisdom. What can wisdom not do in verse 13?

Go Deeper: Throughout Ecclesiastes, the Teacher repeatedly brings God into view when describing the frustrations and burdens of life (cf. Eccl. 1:13; 3:10; 7:13, 7:14). Why do you think he does this? What do verses 13-14 teach us about God and life?

Gospel Glimpse: Read Romans 8:18-39. How does the good news of the gospel help us trust God when life feels crooked and painful? Where do you want life to be “straightened” or “ironed out” right now? What might trusting God look like there?

4. After considering the state of the world in verse 13, the Teacher gives us advice on living in it. In verses 14-22, what advice does the Teacher give when it comes to living with wisdom and folly?

5. In verses 23-25, the Teacher comes to a major conclusion in his quest for life’s significance. He concludes that wisdom (i.e. human reason, intellect, knowledge) has weaknesses. What does the Teacher admit about his search for wisdom? What remains beyond his grasp?

Go Deeper: Since the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher repeatedly uses the word “wisdom” as he searches for meaning and significance (cf. Eccl. 1:13; 1:16-17; 7:23; 7:25). Yet this is deeply ironic: his use of wisdom (i.e. human reason, intellect, knowledge) does not lead to true wisdom. It can identify life’s problems and help us navigate them, but it cannot fix the problem itself.

- a. Why can wisdom help us see the brokenness of life, yet still leave us unable to fix it?
 - b. Where do you see that tension in life or society today?
 - c. Where are you tempted to believe that more knowledge, better planning, or greater wisdom would solve everything for you?
6. In verses 26-29, the Teacher uses confronting and difficult images to make his point. As he reflects on his failed search for wisdom, he uses parables and images involving women. What do these images reveal about the dangers, frustrations, and limitations of human wisdom?

Gospel Glimpse: Read Colossians 2:2-3. If all the treasures of wisdom are found in Jesus Christ, how does knowing him make a difference to life? How does Jesus Christ provide what the Teacher’s wisdom could never achieve?

Pray

Study 7: Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

Chasing Politics

Get Warm: Do you tend to follow politics closely, avoid it, or get frustrated by it? Why?

Get Warmer: Why do political leaders create both hope and disappointment so easily?

1. In verses 1-2, the Teacher speaks positively about wisdom. How does wisdom positively shape the person who has it?
2. From verse 3-4, the Teacher relates wisdom to being in the presence of the king. To what extent does wisdom really work when it comes to dealing with authority and power?
3. In verses 5-8, the Teacher continues to commend wisdom. What benefits does wisdom bring in uncertain or difficult times—even at the hands of those in political power?
4. In verses 8-9, the Teacher highlights the limits to human power and authority. What realities show that even kings are not in ultimate control?
5. In verse 9, the Teacher gives a conclusion. What is the problem that results from the unaccountable and absolute rule of those with authority and power?

Get Personal: Where do you see people placing too much hope in leaders, governments, and political systems today? What do you think that looks like?

Get Personal: Are you tempted toward political obsession, fear, or apathy? What might wisdom look like for you?

Gospel Glimpse: Read Romans 13:1-7. How does this passage help us respect authority without treating it as ultimate?

Gospel Glimpse: Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4. Why is prayer for leaders a wise response in a broken political world?

Gospel Glimpse: Throughout the New Testament, we're reminded that Jesus Christ is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. What do you think faithful citizenship looks like while remembering that no earthly ruler is ultimate King?

6. The previous section (verses 1-9) focused on corrupt government. In verses 10-17, the Teacher introduces a new but related topic: delayed judgement and justice. What problem does the Teacher see in verses 10-11? How is this the same/different to the situation in verse 14?
7. In verse 12-13, the Teacher expresses confidence despite judgement being delayed. What conviction does he hold onto?
8. In verse 15, the Teacher again calls for enjoyment. Why might receiving ordinary joys be a wise response in a world of political frustration and uncertainty?

Go Deeper: So far in Ecclesiastes, we have seen several *Carpe Diem* (Call to joy) passages where the Teacher commends joy and the enjoyment of life. Some commentators even suggest that he grows more confident in these calls as the book progresses. But how do these encouragements make you feel when they are placed next to verse 14? As one writer asks: "How can the Teacher recommend joy when the righteous are treated as the wicked, and the wicked as righteous?"⁵

Get Personal: When life is unjust or morally confusing, even at the hands of rulers and authorities, does the Teacher's call to joy feel comforting, unrealistic, defiant, or something else? Why?

Get Personal: Why do we often think joy and sorrow cannot exist together? What might Ecclesiastes be teaching us about holding onto both at once?

Get Personal: How should Christians respond when leaders or systems act unjustly? What wisdom have we learnt from Ecclesiastes 8?

Gospel Glimpse: Read Revelation 21:1-8. How does God's promise to make all things new shape the way we endure injustice or unfairness now?

Pray

⁵ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 292.

Study 8: Ecclesiastes 9:1-10:20

Chasing Destiny

Get Warm: Do you think most people believe their life has a destiny or purpose?

Get Warmer: Why do people fear death or try not to think about it?

1. From verse 1, the Teacher begins a new section but connected section. In verse 1-6, what is the Teacher's conclusion for humanity—whether wise or foolish?

Gospel Glimpse: How does knowing the risen Christ transform the idea of destiny? How should this reshape our hearts as we live now? What will be the same/different to the Teacher's pessimism?

2. In verses 4-6, the Teacher compares the living and the dead. Which does he suggest has an advantage? And why?
3. In verses 7-9, the Teacher depicts an alternative vision to life under the sun. He shows us how to live now! What stands out to you in this vision? How is it the same/different to previous passages (cf. Eccl. 2:24-26; 3:12-12; 3:22; 5:18-20; 8:15)?

Gospel Glimpse: How is the vision in verses 7-9 a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven to come? What passages in the New Testament share this vision?

Get Personal: How might the gospel turn ordinary joys (like eating, drinking, bright clothes, or oil on the head) into occasions for gratitude, worship, and hope for the future? What in your life could become a reminder of the heavenly joy still to come?

4. In verses 11-12, the Teacher focuses on a related theme to destiny: time and chance. What do the seven images/examples teach us about life?
5. In verses 13-18, the Teacher tells a story of a city. What is he trying to illustrate about wisdom?

Get Personal: Wisdom isn't always valued like it should. Where might God be calling you to pursue wisdom even without visible reward or recognition?

6. In chapter 10 verses 1-20, the Teacher presents both wisdom and folly side by side. From the Teacher's observations, which appears to gain the upper hand? Does wisdom seem to prevail, or does folly seem to do more damage? Why?

Go Deeper: Throughout the wisdom literature of the Bible, we often expect a pattern: good character leads to wise choices, and wise choices lead to good outcomes. But in Ecclesiastes, folly often disrupts that pattern. What does the Teacher's point about folly reveal about life in a fallen and frustrating world?

Get Personal: Why is it dangerous to assume that good choices will always lead to good outcomes? Have you ever tried to do the wise and faithful thing, yet the outcome was painful or not what you hoped for?

Get Personal: What strategies do you and people around you use to try to control the uncertainties of life?

Gospel Glimpse: Throughout Ecclesiastes 9-10, the Teacher shows the limits of human destiny, even when we're wise. Death comes to all, outcomes are unpredictable, wisdom is ignored, and folly can do real damage. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. How does the cross of Christ challenge the kind of wisdom people usually trust and admire?

Pray

Study 9: Ecclesiastes 12:8-14

The Narrator's Conclusion

Get Warm: What is something you began with one impression of, but understood very differently by the end?

Get Warmer: What are your overall impressions of the book of Ecclesiastes?

1. Ever since Ecclesiastes 1:12, the Teacher has been detailing his explorations and findings about life's meaning & significance. But here in verse 8, the Narrator concludes the book by restating the theme (cf. Eccl. 1:2), bringing us full circle.

How has your understanding of this opening and concluding verse changed since you first heard it? What do you think the Teacher has been trying to show us all along? Has it altered now that you have reached the end?

2. In verse 9-10, the Narrator reflects on the Teacher himself. What qualities of the Teacher are listed here? Why do these verses matter after all the wrestling and tension of the book?
3. In verse 11, the Narrator describes the impact of wise words through the image of a shepherd's goad and firmly embedded nails. What do these images suggest about how wise words should affect our lives?

Gospel Glimpse: Throughout the Old Testament, the idea of the shepherd is used in a variety of ways—from literal shepherds, to human leaders, and ultimately to God himself. How does knowing Jesus Christ as our Shepherd reshape where we look for guidance, meaning, and wisdom today?

4. In verse 12, the Narrator speaks like a sage addressing his "son" (cf. Proverbs 1:8). What warning does he give, and what danger is he trying to protect his son from?
5. In verse 13-14, the Narrator gives the final conclusion of the whole matter. What do you think the Narrator means by "fearing God"? Why should human beings do this?

Go Deeper: Throughout Ecclesiastes, the call to fear God appears again and again (cf. Eccl. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). What is fearing God? What is it not? Why is fearing God the repeated answer to life's frustration, mystery, and brevity?

Gospel Glimpse: Like Ecclesiastes, the New Testament repeatedly calls us to fear God in light of future judgement.

- 2 Corinthians 5:10-11
- Matthew 10:28
- Revelation 14:7
- Philippians 2:12-13
- 1 John 4:17-18
- 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Peter 2:17

Yet that judgement has been entrusted to Jesus Christ, who also bore judgement for all who trust in him. How does the certainty of future judgement—and the safety found in Christ—shape the way you think about fearing God today?

Get Personal: Where have you been chasing meaning, security, or satisfaction in something “under the sun”? How has Ecclesiastes challenged the way you think about this?

Get Personal: What is one area of your life where you need to fear God more and trust yourself less?

Get Personal: What part of life feels frustrating, mysterious, or unfair right now? How does Ecclesiastes help you respond differently?

Pray

Appendix A: Key Themes

There are various themes in the book of Ecclesiastes which will really help ground your understanding of the book. Below is a brief outline of some of the most important themes.⁶

<p>'Hevel' — 'Meaningless'</p>	<p>The Hebrew term 'hevel' is commonly rendered as "meaningless," "futility" (CSB), "vanity" (ESV), or "vain" (KJV). In its original context, the word literally signifies "mist" or "vapour." Primarily, it refers to things that are temporary, fleeting, and transitory. Additionally, the metaphor implies that while life's events and experiences are tangible, they remain elusive and cannot be fully grasped. Thus, existence is not only transient but also enigmatic, inexplicable, and incomprehensible.</p>
<p>'Under the Sun'</p>	<p>This phrase is central to Ecclesiastes, as the teacher focuses on earthly life, especially its state after the Fall—marked by chaos, randomness, disorder, and death. The heavenly perspective is largely absent, resulting in a view of life that is true but limited and grounded mainly in earthly experience. It is an 'under the sun' perspective.</p>
<p>'Chasing after the Wind'</p>	<p>The expression 'chasing after the wind' reflects the paradoxical and enigmatic nature of life. While the term 'Hevel' conveys this notion implicitly, the metaphor of chasing after the wind makes it more explicit. The Hebrew wording is somewhat ambiguous; it could mean pursuing or shepherding the wind. Nevertheless, the underlying message remains consistent: whether one seeks to chase the wind or attempts to guide or control it, such efforts are inherently futile.</p>
<p>'Gain' vs 'Gift'</p>	<p>The idea of "gift" or "gain" recurs in Ecclesiastes. The Teacher's quest is largely about 'gain', 'profit', or 'advantage' in life. He sets out to gain through the work of his hands. But as the Teacher progresses in his journey, he begins to conclude that much of life is to be received as a gift from God. Whilst fearing God is central, the Teacher also suggests that life, though fleeting and elusive, can be accepted and enjoyed as God's gift. Since there is no lasting gain, embracing life as a gift prevents the despair of chasing unattainable meaning.</p>
<p>'Wisdom'</p>	<p>In Ecclesiastes, the Teacher often uses the term 'wisdom'. But it's not always what we might expect. For the Teacher, wisdom often means human insight, reason, and experience used to make sense of life under the sun. He uses his faculties—eyes, ears, mind—to investigate reality. It asks: what can we discover by observation and reflection? This is different to the wisdom of Proverbs, which begins with the fear of the Lord. It asks: how should we live in obedience to God?</p>

⁶ Adapted from: Green, *Ecclesiastes & Song of Songs Overview*, 2022; and Wales, *Introduction to Ecclesiastes*, 2024.

Appendix B: Gospel Glimpses

Whilst the book of Ecclesiastes has no explicit references to the Lord Jesus Christ, it does have many connects to the New Testament more broadly. Below are a few ways in which we can better think about the gospel in Ecclesiastes.⁷

Follow the Plan	This passage may be part of God's ongoing plan of redemption described from Genesis to Revelation. Therefore, continue tracing God's unfolding purpose as it reaches completion in Christ.
Expose the Problem	The passage may focus primarily on the issue of sin. Therefore, discuss the problem and explain how God's answer is revealed through Jesus.
Highlight the (Divine) Attribute	The passage may highlight attributes of God that are even more evident in the gospel.
Explain the Theme	A passage may present a central theme or category that you can trace throughout the Bible, including the New Testament.
Analogy	The passage may be cited, paraphrased, or shown in the New Testament—so address Christ directly.
Contrast	Contrast the passage with New Testament teachings, and highlight differences between the messages for Israel and the Church.
Point out the Consequences	The passage may focus on the outcomes of obedience versus disobedience. You might compare this to living like Jesus.
Describe the Ideal Human Character	The passage may refer to the ideal human character and illustrate how Jesus embodies these traits.
Satisfy the Longing	The passage expresses pain and longing for God's action, which are fulfilled through Jesus.

⁷ Adapted from: Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes*, 2020; and Millar, *Preach Christ from the Old Testament*, 2012.

