

Focus

Clarifying Life's Meaning

ECCLESIASTES



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STRONG[®]

curriculum

A world weak on truth needs a strong, trustworthy message. STRONG Curriculum builds stronger churches by teaching all Scripture to produce spiritually mature believers who measure up to the stature of Christ.

A Plan You Can Trust

The Bible has the answers to what students need most. No other book or philosophy contains God's power to save and transform lives. Because of this, we've made it our unwavering commitment to build Strong Students upon the sure foundation of God's Word. With this curriculum, your church can develop teens who will be strong defenders of the faith.

The Strong Students scope and sequence is designed around the seven teaching aims Jesus modeled in His ministry. Since these are Jesus' aims, teachers can be confident in the aims' effectiveness and purpose. Every lesson in the Strong Students scope and sequence addresses at least one of Jesus' teaching aims.

Every lesson also focuses on students' needs. We understand the challenge of teaching the Bible to today's teens because of four barriers culture has pushed on them:

- Struggles with identity
- Subjective view of truth
- Hope in a social utopia
- Belief that a career and wealth guarantee happiness

Strong Students takes care of the tough part for you by striking at the foundation of these barriers and providing a Biblical response to each one. With Strong Students, you can concentrate on communicating to your teens and helping them grow into strong believers in Christ without worrying whether you are effectively addressing the philosophies competing for their minds.

Look for the **BuildUP** icons in the table of contents and on the first page of each lesson.

JESUS' TEACHING AIMS



BELIEVE THE GOSPEL. Jesus taught His students to trust in Him alone for salvation and to share the gospel with others. This aim is obviously fundamental to all the rest



UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL ETHICS. Jesus instructed His students to live according to moral values. These values provided them with the tools to make wise decisions.



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS. Jesus taught His followers to be godly on the inside. He warned them not to become like the Pharisees, with a mere outward appearance of godliness.



LEARN DOCTRINE. Jesus knew the importance of teaching His students the truth and identified doctrine as one of the means for spiritual growth. Wishy-washy doctrine leads to faulty practice.



DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS. Jesus taught His followers to meet life's challenges in a way that honored and glorified God. He gave them the skills to navigate those challenges successfully.



UPLIFT OTHERS. Jesus' life was all about others. Leading by example, He taught His followers to be all about others too.

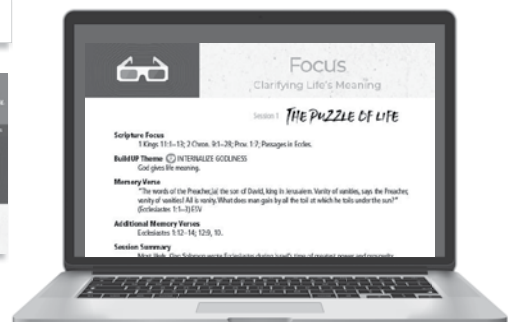
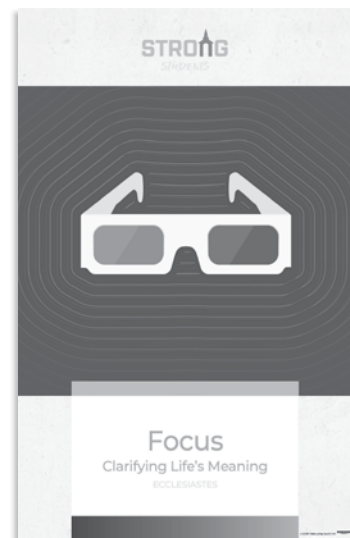
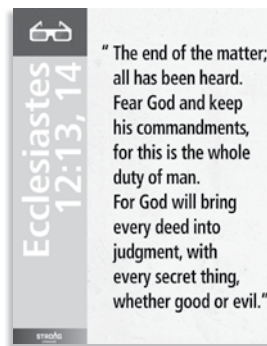
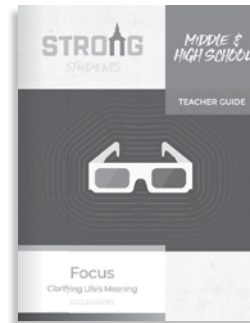


PREPARE TO SERVE. Jesus prepared His followers to serve in the context of local churches that were established soon after His ascension. He emphasized sacrifice and dedication.

This study of Ecclesiastes presents King Solomon's struggle to identify life's purpose. The course will help students understand Solomon's quest so they might avoid the disappointments that came with his pursuits and instead focus on living wisely by fearing and obeying God.

Kit Contents

- ☐ Teacher Guide
- ☐ Student Book
Order one book for each student
- ☐ Card with online download code
Includes videos, PowerPoint, resources, Home Connection Tool, and additional teacher resources
- ☐ Verse Poster
- ☐ Posters



Ordering Information

All materials are available from Regular Baptist Press.

- Web: www.StrongCurriculum.com
- E-mail: orders@rbpstore.org
- Toll-free orders in the United States: 1-800-727-4440
- Fax: 1-847-843-3757
- Canada: Contact your distributor.

The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

How to Teach **STRONG STUDENTS** Lessons

Leading a Student to Christ

STRONG STUDENTS has been designed to help you clearly present God's Word to your students. Each lesson will guide students through the Bible, encouraging them to interact with the material and apply it to their lives.

Familiarize yourself with the resources included in the kit and on the download pages so you can maximize your effectiveness in the classroom. The key resources you need are Student Books, the PowerPoint (download), and the Home Connection Tool (download).

Encourage students to use their Student Books during each lesson so they can follow the PowerPoint presentation by taking notes. The words to fill in the blanks are either part of the outline or highlighted in orange in the sentences in the PowerPoint.

Some of the PowerPoint presentations contain additional slides that obviously tie into the teacher guide lessons. Make sure you review the PowerPoint presentations before teaching.

The student books include a daily devotional. Encourage your students to complete them after coming to class.

The Home Connection Tool gives the parents of your students an idea of what you are teaching in class. Consider emailing those to each family represented in your class. You can find them on the downloads page using the code on the download card.

Before Each Lesson

- Read the Scripture Focus passage several times.
- Do the Time with God section of the Student Book to know what your students are studying.
- Memorize the key verses.
- Prepare the materials you will need for each activity.
- Work through the Bible Study section and carefully plan the lesson.
- Plan how you will apply the Bible lesson to your students' lives. Make sure what you say is clear and shows students how they can use the lesson.
- Pray for yourself, your students, and your lesson.

AS A TEACHER, your most important concern is the personal salvation of your students. Find out whether your students know Jesus Christ as their Savior in a way that doesn't introduce doubt in their minds. An easy and gentle way to find this out is to give your students several minutes to write out an answer to a question like, How can a person get to Heaven? Collect their answers and read them during the following week. If any of your students seem confused about salvation, you can present the gospel to them and provide the opportunity for them to receive Christ. If possible, deal with students individually.

The Plan of Salvation

- Everyone is a sinner. No one can live up to God's perfect standard (Romans 3:23).
- Sin's penalty is death (Romans 6:23).
- God loves us and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay for our sin. Christ died in our place (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).
- When a person places his trust in Jesus' payment for sins, Christ becomes his Savior. His sins are forgiven, and he receives God's gift of eternal life (John 1:12; 5:24).
- Everlasting life begins the moment we trust in Jesus (John 3:36).
- After that, nothing we ever do will take us out of God's hand; we are secure (John 10:27–29).
- The experience of the new birth (being born into God's family) is not based on a feeling, but on confidence in God's Word (1 John 5:11, 12).

Encourage students to pray, but explain that prayer does not save a person. Prayer is how we communicate our inward thoughts to God. Ask new believers to explain what they have done and what has happened to them.

Discipleship

Encourage new believers to read the Bible, and explain the importance of prayer. Also explain 1 John 1:9 to them so they can deal with sin in their new Christian life. Make it a priority to follow up with new believers.

Knowing Your Students

Description of Physical, Social, and Emotional Development

- I MAY feel developmentally out of step with my peers—behind or ahead in physical changes—as I experience puberty.
- I MAY be sensitive about my weight and body shape and worry about whether I am normal.
- I AM developing my own sense of identity.
- I AM more interested in and influenced by my peer group than by the adults in my life.
- I MAY be moody, depressed, or anxious about academic or social issues in my life.
- I AM very focused on myself and may feel both high expectations and lack of confidence.
- I AM better able to express feelings through talking, but I tend to respond dramatically, feeling that no one else has ever experienced the same feelings and emotions.
- I DO NOT always exhibit the emotional maturity that matches my more adult-like appearance. I have trouble thinking before acting; sometimes I seem silly and unfocused on the task at hand.

Effective Responses

- Provide emotional and spiritual support and encourage students to develop a strong sense of self as a valuable person created by God.
- Accept students as they are and avoid comparing them to others. Resist stereotyping. Not every tall boy is a basketball player.
- Generate an atmosphere of acceptance and love for all, demonstrating interest and care for each student.
- Create an atmosphere of mutual respect so youth feel they are part of a community.
- Help build genuine relationships by honestly sharing mistakes and life experiences.
- Help students talk through the ramifications of their choices without asking, How could you? What were you thinking?

- Avoid arguments by remaining calm and not engaging in banter over an issue.
- Be patient with the tendency of some youth toward constant personal grooming.

Cognitive (Learning) Development

- I MAY be hesitant to try new things for fear of embarrassing myself in front of my peer group.
- I AM developing new thinking skills and am able to think about multiple options and possibilities.
- I CAN think more deeply and significantly about abstract ideas such as faith.
- I AM developing a stronger sense of right and wrong.
- I MAY be ready to take significant steps in areas of faith and Christian growth.

Effective Instructional Methods

- Create an open and stress-free environment where youth can learn and share concerns in a confidence-building atmosphere.
- Provide background information, a purpose to the lesson, and understanding of the text.
- Combine love, high energy, enthusiasm, and seriousness with engaging ways to present the lesson.
- Use personal stories that illustrate Biblical principles to keep students engaged in learning.
- Provide honest answers to questions.
- Stimulate thinking in areas of salvation and Christian growth.
- Help Christians work through issues of assurance of salvation and to begin studying the Bible for daily decision making.
- Encourage students to articulate Biblical principles of right and wrong that they are learning from God's Word.
- Invite volunteers to look up and read aloud Bible passages. But don't put students on the spot or ask them to do things that make them feel foolish.

SESSION 1

THE PUZZLE OF LIFE

Scripture Focus

1 Kings 11:1–13; 2 Chron. 9:1–28; Prov. 1:7; Passages in Eccles.

BuildUP Theme



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God gives life meaning.

Measurable Response

Students will consider appropriate responses to life's pain and disappointments.

Memory Verse

"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?"

(Ecclesiastes 1:1–3). NKJV

"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:1–3). ESV

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Read Ecclesiastes 1:1–3; 1 Kings 11:1–13; and 2 Chronicles 9:13–28. King Solomon had it all—wealth, wisdom, influence, power, and women. And yet he still found himself searching for true meaning as he contemplated life's problems. What problems in your life frustrate you and cause you to doubt God's wisdom?
- ☐ This session begins an overview of Ecclesiastes to aid the study of this often misunderstood book. Looking at the book first as a whole helps us interpret it properly and understand its message. The book reveals that even in the middle of a puzzling and sometimes frustrating life, people can find meaning and fulfillment when they learn to fear and obey God. This session covers the author, setting, and structure of Ecclesiastes.
- ☐ As students search for meaning in life, they can relate to Solomon's search, his restlessness, and his desire to find true satisfaction in life. Lead students along the path with Solomon. Encourage them to express their own frustrations with pain and disappointments. Help them see life from an eternal, godly perspective. Guide them to Solomon's conclusion so they can begin to focus on the true meaning of life.

Cultural Barrier

This session addresses the false belief that career and wealth guarantee happiness. Just because a person is successful in the world's eyes, doesn't mean that person is happy. Solomon's life makes this truth clear. This session begins the study of Ecclesiastes, which it seems Solomon wrote during a time of great inner struggle. Despite being the wealthiest and most successful man in the world at the time, Solomon felt empty. Money and success did not satisfy his spiritual hunger. His search for life's meaning is very relevant to students in today's culture, which often encourages the pursuit of wealth above all else.

Session Starters

Option 1—The Whole Picture

Gather

- Resource 93-R1
- Scissors.
- Paper and pencils.
- Small prizes (optional).

Steps

1. Cut along the lines on resource 93-R1 to form five pieces of the picture. Set aside the piece with the number five on it.
2. Display the first part of the scene. Students write a quick description of the scene based only on the first piece. Students compare their descriptions.
3. Add the second piece to the scene. Students amend their descriptions and compare. Do the same with the third and fourth piece.
4. Students guess what they think the fifth piece will show.
5. Add the fifth piece to complete the scene. Students compare their guesses. Award a small prize to any student who guessed correctly or to the student who made the most accurate guess.

ASK: Why is it pointless to describe a scene with missing images? *We will make assumptions that aren't true.*

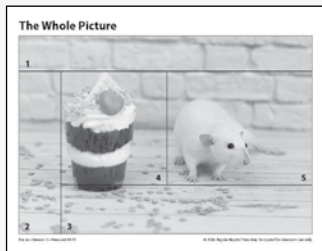
6. Transition to the Bible study.

We are beginning a study of Ecclesiastes, a book that people sometimes misunderstand because they fail to look at the whole picture first. If we look at the book as a whole first, we can properly interpret its pieces. And when interpreted properly, Ecclesiastes reveals the true meaning of life.

Option 2—Anonymous Questions

Gather

- Index cards.
- Pencils or pens.
- Large bowl or basket.



93-R1

Steps

1. Give each student an index card and pencil. Students write honest questions or comments about life they find difficult to understand (e.g., "Why does God allow senseless violence or natural disasters?"). Instruct students not to write their names on the cards.
2. Pass a bowl or basket. Students fold their cards and place them in the container.
3. Pull out each card and read the question or comment. Invite the class to respond briefly if they wish. As you read the cards, note any recurring themes or questions. Don't try to answer any of the questions, but do acknowledge humans' inability to understand life's difficulties.
4. Transition to the Bible study.

Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, struggled with finding answers to life's puzzling questions. During this course, we'll follow his journey in searching for answers. He reached a satisfying conclusion in the end. His answer helps us find meaning in life, even in the middle of life's puzzling circumstances. This week and next, we'll get an overview of the book so we can better understand its message. Today we'll look at the author, setting, and structure of Ecclesiastes.

Bible Study

Gather

- Resource 93-R2.

I. Authorship of Ecclesiastes

A. Evidence against Solomon as author

The authorship of Ecclesiastes is a little more difficult to determine than most of the other Bible books. The book has been traditionally attributed to Solomon, but some scholars today think the book's language points to authors other than Solomon.

READ: Ecclesiastes 1:1.

The first verse of Ecclesiastes is the title for the entire book. The word translated "preacher" means "one who assembles." The term could refer to either a person who summons people or one who collects proverbs.

The fact that the book never directly refers to Solomon is perplexing. In addition, the book records complaints about corrupt political officials, which is surprising because the king who appointed the officials

authored the book. Furthermore, Solomon's reign was a golden age in Israel's history. Ecclesiastes presents a time when life was out of joint. Finally, the epilogue in 12:9–14 seems to be about the Preacher rather than by him. For these and other reasons, some Bible scholars say that the author could not have been Solomon.

B. Evidence for Solomon as author

There is substantial evidence that points to Solomon's authorship. The writer of Ecclesiastes had unparalleled wisdom (1:16), unequaled wealth (2:8), many opportunities for pleasure (2:3, 10), and extensive building activities (2:4–6).

READ: 2 Chronicles 9:13–28. **ASK:** What about Solomon's life matches the descriptions of the writer of Ecclesiastes? *Solomon was the wisest person in the world, the richest person in the world, the most influential person in the world, and the person with the greatest access to resources in the world.*

The writer of Ecclesiastes must be Solomon. He was the wisest and richest man in the world at the time of Ecclesiastes. And he was known for his skillful writing.

Other pieces of evidence support Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes, for example, has striking similarities to the portions of Proverbs that Solomon wrote. Both books have memorable maxims that summarize a large volume of experience in concise statements. And both books emphasize wisdom and the fear of the Lord.

READ: Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 10:8–18.

The identification of the writer as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” does not demand Solomon as the author, but it strongly suggests it. The verse could refer to another son of David, with “king” then referring to David. But in the light of the other evidence, we can conclude it refers to Solomon.

Determining the kind of man who authored the book is easy. He possessed keen observation and penetrating understanding. He looked at life carefully and analyzed it critically. He had a restless spirit, for he wanted to find true, lasting satisfaction in life. He wanted to discover eternal significance that transcended material possessions and human achievements. He was not content with superficial pleasures in life; he insisted on finding true fulfillment and meaning.

II. Setting of Ecclesiastes

A. The author's outward success

If Ecclesiastes came from Solomon, then he wrote it during the time of

Israel's greatest power and prosperity. Solomon expanded his kingdom to the Euphrates River in the north and his trade to modern Spain in the western Mediterranean and to modern Somalia and India in the east. No wonder the Queen of Sheba came from the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula to visit Solomon and admire his wisdom and wealth.

READ: 2 Chronicles 9:1–12. **ASK:** What did the Queen of Sheba conclude about Solomon and his people (v. 7)? *That they must be happy all the time because of their great wealth.*

B. The author's inner struggles

Though on the surface everything seemed fine and happy in Israel, underneath there were deep problems that eventually caused the kingdom to split apart after Solomon's death (1 Kings 12). In addition, Solomon himself experienced deep and serious spiritual struggles in his final years (1 Kings 11:1–13). Ecclesiastes may well be the written record of his internal turmoil. It reveals the inner struggle of a man who seemed happy based on his station, but who felt empty inside.

READ: 1 Kings 11:1–13.

It is ironic but true to life that prosperity prompted Solomon's painful examination of life. Those who have enjoyed wealth and pleasure quickly learn that those things can't satisfy the deep hunger of the human heart. Getting more usually just makes a person's heart more aware of its emptiness and pain.

ASK: What do people usually conclude about the inner satisfaction and well-being of those who are "doing well" in life? *That they are happy, content people without a care in the world.*

The type of people who frequent red carpets and experience the media's fawning seem to have reached life's pinnacle. They appear problem free and abundantly happy.

ASK: Does the smile on a person's face always mean that there is a smile in the person's heart? Explain. *No. Smiling faces can be facades that hide empty, sad hearts.*

ASK: Why can times of prosperity also be times of soul hunger? *Things can't fill the void in one's heart that only God can fill. The more a person has, the more the person is aware of the unfulfilled void.*

Solomon shared his inner struggles with disappointment by what he thought would bring him satisfaction. We will examine his experiences throughout this study so we might avoid his heartache and disappointment and focus on finding true meaning and value in life instead. To think that we could somehow find meaning and contentment apart from fearing and obeying God is foolishness.

III. Structure of Ecclesiastes

A. The book's cyclical nature

ACTIVITY: Mark a series of points horizontally on the whiteboard. Then ask a volunteer to connect the points by drawing a straight horizontal line.

When we read a book, we expect the author to take us directly from one point to the next. For example, a novel does not skip around from one date to another in a haphazard way. A logical discussion moves from a cause to the effects produced by the cause.

The historical books of the Bible follow this kind of linear progression. They tell the unfolding story of God's interaction with people and nations. Ecclesiastes, however, takes a much different approach.

ACTIVITY: Mark a point on the whiteboard. Then ask four volunteers to draw circles, all connected to the point at some place in each circle. See resource 93-R2 for an example.

Instead of moving in a straight line, Ecclesiastes is more like a set of circles that keep returning to the same point. Eventually, the book gets to its main point, but on the way, Solomon takes the reader along the journey that he took in trying to find meaning in life.

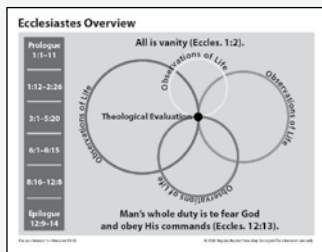
ASK: What might be the reason Solomon didn't just give his conclusion in a logical, straightforward way? *Solomon wanted to communicate the struggle he had in coming to his conclusion.*

Solomon's method for writing Ecclesiastes is both creative and powerful. His approach reproduces in the reader the feelings of futility that Solomon had. By the end of the book, the reader not only knows the answer but feels the pain of the problem and appreciates the significance of the solution.

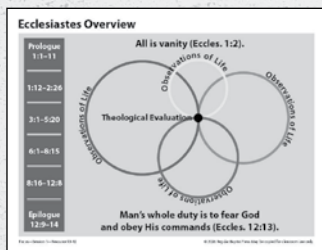
B. The book's major sections

DISPLAY: Resource 93-R2. Use the resource as you explain the major sections in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes begins with a prologue (1:1–11), in which Solomon gave his initial assessment of life, "All is vanity under the sun." "Under the sun" refers to the human perspective on life that happens on earth. It is an earth-bound point of view of life. This raises the question that drives the entire search, "What profit does a man have from all his labor under the sun?" (1:3). Solomon's question reappears in 2:22; 3:9; 5:16; and 6:11. Solomon wanted to know what a person gains from a human perspective over the course of his or her life? When we subtract our pain from our pleasure, what profit do we have left?



93-R2



93-R2

After the prologue, Solomon moved through his first observation of life. In 1:12—2:23, he carefully analyzed his experiences. Then he evaluated them in terms of God's oversight of life in 2:24–26. He tentatively concluded that although life seems hard to explain and understand, God gives the believer the capacity to enjoy life.

Solomon followed the same pattern three more times. He concluded each observation of life (3:1—5:20; 6:1—8:15; and 8:16—12:8) by evaluating it from a theological point of view. Each section demonstrates that there can be fulfillment in life, even though the details of life remain puzzling.

The key to the book is in the epilogue in 12:9–14, where Solomon stated the conclusion that his painful search produced. Without this final truth, the book would leave us going in circles. But verse 13 brings us to a fixed point on which to stand. God's wisdom surpasses the partial understanding of humans.

READ: Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14.

Humans can see only part of what is happening in life. What they can observe leaves them restless and frustrated. The eternal God, however, knows what He is doing, and He will evaluate what every person does in life (12:14). Solomon's conclusion forms the framework from which we must interpret the rest of the book.

ASK: What has happened in your life that leaves you frustrated?

ASK: How should the fact that God knows what He is doing affect your response to the frustrating circumstances?

Memory Builder

1. Write Ecclesiastes 1:1–3 on the board and review its meaning.

Solomon identified himself as the “preacher,” the author of Ecclesiastes. In the prologue, Solomon gave his initial assessment of life: All is vanity under the sun. From a merely human perspective, all of life on the earth is fleeting and temporary. What can we possibly gain from our efforts in life when it all eventually ends? This basic question drives Solomon's search for meaning. Despite Solomon's great outward success, he struggled inwardly and insisted on finding true satisfaction and meaning in life.

2. Invite students to restate the preacher's initial take on life in more succinct, modern language. Ask them to consider how today's students might express the same thought (e.g., “I give up! What's the point? What's the use of doing anything in this life?”).

3. Divide the passage into 8 to 10 sections. Assign one section to each pair or small group of students. If you have a small class, assign more than one section to each group.
4. Lead students in reciting their assigned sections in order a few times. Then reassign the verse sections and lead them to recite in order again. Repeat the process as time allows, then erase the board and challenge the students to recite the whole passage from memory.

Session Application

1. Review the lesson.

Most likely, King Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes during Israel's time of greatest power and prosperity. Despite his great outward success in life, however, Solomon struggled inwardly. His wealth and achievements did not fill the emptiness inside. The unusual structure of Ecclesiastes leads the reader along Solomon's journey as he searches for the meaning of life. Throughout the book, we feel his pain and frustration as Solomon declares the futility of life from a human viewpoint. But Solomon eventually reaches a satisfying conclusion: God's wisdom is beyond human understanding. When we trust Him, we can enjoy life and find fulfillment.

2. Write the following difficult circumstances on the board or on slips of paper before class. Consider incorporating some of students' responses during the class discussion as they shared frustrating personal experiences. If you did option 2 Starter Activity, you might also consider using some of those questions or comments.
 - A loved one dies unexpectedly.
 - A friend is seriously injured in a car accident.
 - A parent gets cancer.
 - Some missionaries supported by your church are killed.
 - Your family's car is stolen.
 - Your dad lost his job.
 - You've got a serious illness and will miss a whole semester of school.
 - Your best friend suddenly turns against you.
3. Students form small groups. Assign each group one or two circumstances. Groups discuss specific responses to the circumstances in light of Solomon's conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12:13. Emphasize that they don't need to attempt to answer the reason for the circumstance but should come up with a personal response to God and an approach to life in each situation.
4. If there's time, allow groups to share some of their responses.

5. Close in prayer, asking God to help your students trust Him in all the puzzling and troubling situations of life.

Session Takeaways

Before dismissing the students, draw their attention to the Time with God page in their student books. Instruct them to complete the study on their own. The activity reviews the lesson and guides students to consider their approach to life's puzzling circumstances.