



SESSION 1

THE PUZZLE OF LIFE

Theme: God gives life meaning.

I. _____ of Ecclesiastes

A. Evidence _____ Solomon as author

Some scholars today think the book's _____ points to authors other than Solomon.

B. Evidence _____ Solomon as author

Solomon was the _____ and _____ man in the _____ at the time of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes has similarities to the parts of _____ that Solomon wrote.

II. _____ of Ecclesiastes

A. The author's _____

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes during the time of Israel's _____ and _____.

B. The author's _____

Solomon experienced _____ and serious _____ struggles in his final years.

III. _____ of Ecclesiastes

A. The book's _____ nature

Instead of moving in a straight line, Ecclesiastes is more like a set of _____ that keep returning to the _____.

Solomon's approach reproduces in the reader the _____ of _____ that Solomon had.

B. The book's major _____

Each section of Ecclesiastes demonstrates that there can be _____ in life, even though the details of life remain _____.

Solomon's conclusion forms the _____ from which we must _____ the rest of the book.



Time with God

Read each passage and answer the questions to spend personal time with God.

MONDAY

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1–3.

Solomon struggled with understanding the pain and disappointments of life. What disappointments in life have you experienced? How do you usually respond to disappointing circumstances?

When have you experienced pain? What was your reaction toward God?

THURSDAY

Read 2 Chronicles 9:1–12.

What things in Solomon's life and in the life of Israel seemed to promise happiness but failed to bring true satisfaction?

What things in your life seem to promise happiness but fail to satisfy?

TUESDAY

*Read 2 Chronicles 9:13–28;
Ecclesiastes 1:16; 2:3–6, 8, 10, 11.*

Descriptions of the writer of Ecclesiastes point to Solomon as the author. What qualified Solomon to explore the vanities and true meaning of life?

Without seeking God, Solomon felt only temporary satisfaction from all his accomplishments (Eccles. 2:10, 11). What do you hope to accomplish in your life? Make sure you seek God first.

FRIDAY

Read 1 Kings 11:1–13.

What did Solomon's actions toward the end of his life show about his spiritual condition (11:4, 9)?

What do your everyday actions reveal about your spiritual condition?

WEDNESDAY

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

The similarities between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes support Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes. What two ways of life are compared in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Eccles. 10:10, 12, 13)?

What is the difference between a wise person and a fool? How might true wisdom make a difference during a painful or disappointing event?

SATURDAY

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9–14.

What is the key to finding true meaning and contentment in life?

How should the knowledge of God's future judgment affect your response to life's disappointments?

Tough Questions Answered



Is it sinful to feel frustrated or disappointed with God?



Sometimes life's events leave us feeling disappointed with God. We don't understand why God didn't answer our prayer the way we wanted Him to or why He's allowing us to experience difficult circumstances. We may search for meaning in the situation, just as Solomon found himself searching for the meaning of life. As believers, we know Solomon's conclusion is correct. He wrote that we find true meaning in life when we fear and obey God (Eccles. 12:13). But what if we're still frustrated by our unanswered questions? Are doubt and disappointment with God sinful?

Emotions in themselves are not sinful. We can't always control them.

Emotions in themselves are not sinful. We can't always control them. Asking why events happened, or feeling confused over them, is natural. God wants us to come to Him in our weakness, with all our doubts and disappointments (Heb. 4:15, 16). God knows our hearts anyway (Ps. 44:21; Rom. 8:27); it's pointless not to express our honest feelings to Him.

Our reactions to our emotions, however, can be sinful. You might get angry, for example, that a drunk driver killed your family member in a car accident. That's expected. But blaming God for allowing the accident to happen or deciding to "get back" at God by disobeying Him doesn't do any good. Getting so angry with God that we turn away from Him solves nothing. It doesn't benefit us to rebel against Him because, as Solomon discovered, we certainly won't find answers apart from God. We may lack understanding, but God is still our source of hope, comfort, and guidance. The world offers no real answers.

When we approach God humbly and trust Him, He promises to draw near and to lift us up (James 4:6–10). Remember, our existence on earth is temporary (Eccles. 1:2). God has an eternal plan, and He knows what He's doing. In all those frustrating and disappointing times of life, turn to Him. He might not answer all your questions, but He understands your feelings and will guide you through those times.

Perplexed but Not in Despair



In 1956, Jim Elliot and four other missionaries attempted to make personal contact with the savage Auca tribe in Ecuador. Despite the tribe's reputation for killing outsiders, Jim felt called to reach them with the gospel. The missionaries set up camp outside the Auca village. A friendly visit from three Aucas encouraged the missionaries, and they planned to enter the village soon after. Two days later, a group of warriors arrived at the missionaries' camp. As Jim ran to greet them, the men attacked and killed the missionaries with spears.



Years later, Jim's wife, Elisabeth, reflected on her husband's death. Like Paul, she felt perplexed at the time but not in despair (2 Cor. 4:8). She trusted God and lived among the very people who had killed her husband. As a result, many Aucas believed in Jesus and the tribe no longer lives by violence. When life perplexes you, consider Elisabeth's words: "The will of God is always far different from what we imagine, . . . far more difficult, but unspeakably more glorious."

Memory Verse Review



Memory Verse—Ecclesiastes 1:1–3

Solomon identified himself as the "preacher," the author of Ecclesiastes. In the prologue, Solomon gave his initial assessment of life. He wrote that 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.

1. How would you describe Solomon's initial view of life?
2. When have you experienced frustration with life? How did you respond?
3. Talk to God about a frustration in your life. Trust Him with the situation.

Additional Memory Verses— Ecclesiastes 1:12–14; 12:9, 10.

Measuring Growth



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. Solomon eventually concluded that though God's wisdom is beyond human understanding, we can enjoy life and find fulfillment when we trust Him.

Look for the following indicators that you understand only God can give life true meaning.

1. I don't depend on earthly accomplishments or wealth for true contentment.
2. I turn to the Lord in times of pain, disappointment, or confusion.
3. I know my viewpoint is limited and that I need to trust God's wisdom in all situations.