

READ The BIBLE Together



Ecclesiastes

1st December 2013 – 25th January 2014

**SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)**

Day 1 Read **Introductory Notes – ECCLESIASTES** below.

ECCLESIASTES is Scripture – God’s Word. As with all Old Testament Scripture, it is written for our learning (**ROMANS 15:4**) and admonition (**1 CORINTHIANS 10:11**). It is therefore profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (**2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17**).

ECCLESIASTES has special relevance today in our materialistic society, for it helps us see the vanity of many earthly pursuits. It contains lessons for all, especially the young who have so much to lose should they make the wrong choices early in life.

Wisdom Literature

There is a kind of literature (genre) in the Bible called **WISDOM**. They would include books of the Old Testament like **JOB, ECCLESIASTES, PROVERBS** and psalms like **PSALM 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127 and 128**.

These **WISDOM** materials can be subdivided into two categories:

(i) Those that emphasized the theological problems of life, such as the suffering of the innocent (**JOB**) and the meaning of life (**ECCLESIASTES**). They are sometimes called ‘*reflective wisdom*’. **PSALM 37, 49 and 73** would also belong here.

(ii) Those that are much more practical (**PROVERBS**), and dealt with the issues that touch the individual's life, such as personal industry, integrity, sexual purity, and family relations. They would be called ‘*practical wisdom*’. We would put **PSALM 1, 112, 127 and 128** here.

WISDOM simplifies religion by describing faith as born out of decisions that are either wise or foolish. There are two ways a person may take, and the choices one makes determine one's direction. In **PROVERBS**, wisdom personified stands in public places and calls to those who will listen to follow her precepts (**1:20-33; 8:1-31**). The disposition that characterizes the wise person is summed up in the phrase “*the fear of the Lord*.” It is this disposition that is the beginning of wisdom, and it also designates the process by which wisdom matures the individual. We note that **ECCLESIASTES** ends by calling us to ‘*fear the Lord and keep His commandments*’.

In the New Testament, **LUKE** took note that Jesus “*grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*” (**2:52**). The apostle Paul compared the wisdom of man with the wisdom of God. The ultimate manifestation of wisdom is Jesus Christ. Ultimately God revealed His wisdom in the person of his own Son, Jesus Christ (**1 CORINTHIANS 1:24,30**).

Title

1:1 begins with these words “*The words of the Preacher . . .*” In Hebrew, the word ‘preacher’ is ‘*qoheleth*’, meaning the official speaker to an assembly of people. This word ‘*qoheleth*’ was used a total of 7 times in **ECCLESIASTES**. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, ‘*qoheleth*’ was rendered ‘*ecclesiastes*’. Since then, this Old Testament book is known as **ECCLESIASTES** in our English Bible. The Chinese Bible chose to do a direct translation of the Hebrew word, and so it is called ‘*The Preacher*’ (传道书).

So in **ECCLESIASTES**, the author comes to us as the preacher. He wants us to see ourselves as members of the assembly and he is coming to preach to us. *Will we listen to what he has to say?*

Author

Jewish and early Christian traditions attribute the book to *Solomon*. The author identifies himself as ‘*the son of David, king in Jerusalem (1:1)*’. He also refers to himself as “*the Preacher*” (**1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10**). Internal evidences point to *Solomon*:

- His wisdom – **1:16** cf. **1 KINGS 3:12**
- His building activities – **2:4-6** cf. **1 KINGS 7:1-12**
- His wealth – **2:7-9** cf. **2 CHRONICLES 9:13-28**
- His activities after writing this book – **12:9-10** cf. **1 KINGS 4:30-34**

Structure

Following the lead of Pastor Stuart Olyott, we shall see **ECCLESIASTES** as containing four sermons by the Preacher. We can therefore give a structural outline to **ECCLESIASTES** as follows:

1:1-11	Prologue
1:12-3:15	First sermon
3:16-5:20	Second sermon
6:1-8:1	Third sermon
8:2-12:7	Fourth sermon
12:8-14	Epilogue

Key Words

- ❖ Vanity (39 times). The Hebrew is ‘*hebel*’, meaning ‘*something without substance, which quickly passes away.*’ A better rendering of ‘*hebel*’ in our modern language would be ‘*futility*’.
- ❖ Under the sun (29 times). This phrase describes the earth-bound and temporal perspective that sees all of life as pointless. You will often find the word ‘*vanity/futility*’ near this phrase in **ECCLESIASTES**.

- ❖ God (40 times). Whenever you meet this word in **ECCLESIASTES**, know that you are now standing on the opposite perspective from ‘*under the sun*’. Here, you are seeing the world through the eyes of a man of faith.
- ❖ Heart (40 times). This directs our attention to the fact that the turmoil described or the joy held out goes beyond the externals. It touches the very heart of man. It is precisely the place where the man of faith sense peace, purpose and fulfillment.

Message

There are two main messages in **ECCLESIASTES**. The first is stated in the prologue: “*Vanity of vanities,*” says the Preacher, “*vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*” (1:2). The second is found in the Epilogue: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.* (12:13).

After reading **Introductory Notes - ECCLESIASTES**, ponder and answer these questions:

1. **Wisdom Literature** is concerned about ‘*the fear of the Lord*’. What, do you think, is ‘*the fear of the Lord*’?
2. Would you consider yourself as a wise person? Why?
3. **ECCLESIASTES** talks about ‘*vanity (futility)*’ when living our lives under the sun. Have you ever felt a sense of ‘*futility*’ in your life? Share it with your RTBT group members.

Day 2 Read **ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11**

These 11 verses are normally viewed as the prologue of the book.

1. How does the author describe himself? (**Verse 1**)

2. What is the theme of this book, as stated in **verse 2**?

3. What is the key question that this book seeks to address? (**Verse 3**)

4. What cycles of life are used to illustrate the futility of life (**verses 4-7**)?

5. What is never satisfied? (**Verse 8**)

6. Why is there nothing new under the sun? (**Verse 9**)

7. Why do we think something is new? (**Verses 10-11**)

Day 3 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11**

Review your answers in Day 2 above, then use your own words to write a summary of these 11 verses below:

After writing the summary, think of one way you can apply the message of these 11 verses in your life:

In **LUKE 24:44**, we read these words:

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."

As New Testament Christians, our challenge in reading Old Testament Scripture is two-fold:

- [i] We must see Christ in the Old Testament passage we read
- [ii] We must see Christ (or move from the passage to Christ) in the right way

We have just spent the last two days reading **ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11**. How can we see Christ in these 11 verses? In the following three ways:

- [A] "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!*" says **verse 2**, and it is true! This is a true and fair description of life lived under the sun. What has led to this vain/futile situation?

ROMANS 8:20-22 say this: "*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*"

Our vain/futile situation today is the result of our rebellion against God (**GENESIS 3**). This vain/futile situation will only be reversed the children of God experienced the glorious liberty that **ROMANS 8:21** talked about, and this is achieved only in Jesus Christ!

- [B] **Verse 3** laments: *What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?* In truth, the answer is "*No profit, none whatsoever!*"

Our Lord would affirm this in the New Testament. For example, in **Matthew 16:26**, He asked, "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*" To live your life with God out of the picture, you will ultimately find **ECCLESIASTES 1:3** to be true!

With the coming of Christ, we can say something more and something better. Hear what Christ says in **John 6:27** ~ *Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.* And what He said through His apostle in **1 Corinthians 15:58** ~ *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

[C] **Verse 9** says that there is nothing new under the sun. It underlines the pessimism and gloom of living life '*under the sun*' (with God out of the picture).

However, in Christ, things are very different! In Christ, we have *new birth* (**JOHN 3:7**), *new creation* (**2 CORINTHIANS 5:17**), *new covenant* (**LUKE 22:20**) and at His return, *a new heaven and new earth* (**REVELATION 21:1**). The answer to **ECCLESIASTES 1:9** is **REVELATION 21:5** where Jesus Christ the Son of God says, "*Behold, I make all things new!*"

Note: In [A], we start with a situation depicted in the passage, then go to the New Testament to explain why we have such a situation, and finally proceed to ask how the Gospel can change the situation.

In [B], we note a situation depicted in the passage, then go to the New Testament where the situation is affirmed, and finally ask how the situation can be transformed now that Jesus has come.

In [C], we focus a situation depicted in the passage and contrast it with the New Testament depiction of life in Christ.

Day 5 Read **ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18**

ECCLESIASTES 1:12-3:15 contain the first sermon by the Preacher. In it, he sought to contrast two kinds of life:

Life under the sun (**1:12-2:23**)

Life with God in the picture (**2:24-3:15**)

In his '*life under the sun*' (**1:12-2:23**), the Preacher has four main points to convey:

(i) **1:12-18**

(ii) **2:1-11**

(iii) **2:12-17**

(iv) **2:18-23**

Today, we shall look at his first main point in **1:12-18**.

1. (a) What is the first thing the Preacher set his heart to do? (**Verse 13**)

(b) What conclusions did he draw? Why? (**Verses 14-15**)

2. What did he acknowledge he had attained? (**Verse 16**)

3. (a) What is the second thing the Preacher set his heart to do? (**Verse 17**)

(b) What conclusions did he draw? Why? (**Verses 17-18**)

Day 6 Read **ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11**

Recall that in the Preacher's first sermon (**ECCLESIASTES 1:12-3:15**), he sought to contrast life under the sun (**1:12-2:23**) against life with God in the picture (**2:24-3:15**).

Yesterday, we've looked at his first main point of *life under the sun* in **1:12-18**. Today, we shall look at his second main point in **2:1-11**

1. In his search, what sort of things did the Preacher explore? (**Verses 1-3**)

2. What guided his heart during the course of his search? (**Verse 3**)

3. What things did he accumulate during his search? (**Verses 4-8**)

4. Did he attain some level of satisfaction via this search? (**Verse 9-10**)

5. What was his final conclusion regarding this path that he has taken? (**Verse 11**)

Day 7 Read **ECCLESIASTES 2:12-17**

We continue with the Preacher's third main point of *life under the sun* (2:12-17) today.

1. In **verse 12**, the Preacher said that he would turn to consider wisdom and madness and folly. What did he learn?

(a) **Verses 13-14a:**

(b) **Verses 14b-16:**

2. What was his final conclusion? (**Verse 17**)

Week 2

[8th – 14th December 2013]

Day 1 Read **ECCLESIASTES 2:18-23**

Today, we will look at the Preacher's fourth main point of *life under the sun* (2:18-23).

1. What caused the Preacher to hate and despair of all his labor?

Verse 18:

Verses 20-21:

2. What further thought intensify this pain in him? (**Verse 19**)

3. What was his final conclusion? (**Verses 22-23**)

Day 2 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 1:12-2:23**

Review your answers in Week 1 Days 5-7 and Week 2 Day 1, then give a title for each of the four main points of the Preacher's sermon of *life under the sun*:

Point 1: ***We cannot find meaning in life through human wisdom*** (1:12-18)

Point 2: _____ (12:1-11)

Point 3: _____ (2:12-17)

Point 4: _____ (2:18-23)

What area(s) of your life must change, in light of what you have learnt from **1:12-2:23**?

Day 3 Read **ECCLESIASTES 2:24-26**

Remember that **ECCLESIASTES 1:12-3:15** contain the first sermon by the Preacher. In it, he sought to contrast two kinds of life:

Life under the sun (**1:12-2:23**)

Life with God in the picture (**2:24-3:15**)

In *life under the sun* (**1:12-2:23**), the Preacher highlighted four things that people would normally pursue to gain satisfaction in life. Yet the truth is that these things would never yield us *lasting* satisfaction. In the long term, none of them would turn out to be worthwhile. So is there such a thing as a life with *point* and *purpose*?

This is what the Preacher would be addressing as we turn our attention to *life with God in the picture* (**2:24-3:15**). Here the Preacher has three main points to convey:

(i) **2:24-26**

(ii) **3:1-8**

(iii) **3:9-15**

Today, we shall look at his first main point in **2:24-26**.

1. According to **verse 24**, what was the best that any person could achieve?

2. According to **verse 26a**, who can achieve this (*the best* as outlined in **verse 24**)?

3. In contrast to the person mentioned in **verse 26a**, what would be the lot of the sinner? (**Verse 26b**)

4. Review your answers to Questions 1-3 above.
 - (a) What is the main point of the Preacher in these 3 verses?

 - (b) Think of one way you can apply the message of these 3 verses in your life:

Day 4 Read **ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8**

Today, we will look at the Preacher's second main point of *life with God in the picture (3:1-8)*.

1. What does the Preacher say about everything under heaven? (**Verse 1**)

2. To illustrate "*a time for every purpose*"(**verse 1**), the Preacher proceeds to list down pairs of contrast found in human life, beginning with the first pair: *a time to be born and a time to die*.
 - (a) All the rest of the contrasts (**verses 2a-8**) take place between birth and death. List down five of them that has some meaning or purpose for you:
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- (b) In the original language, 'a time' refers to an occurrence that is predetermined. From **verses 2-8**, 'a time' is used 28 times, meaning the concept of all things being predetermined is repeated 28 times!

Who, do you think, predetermines all things? (Hint: Refer back to **2:24-26**)

Do you think all things are predetermined according to a plan, or haphazardly? Elaborate.

- (c) In view of **3:1-8**, name one area of your life that must be changed today:

Day 5 Read **ECCLESIASTES 3:9-15**

In his second main point of *life with God in the picture (3:1-8)*, the Preacher sought to underline the truth that everything is part of a plan. Now in his third main point (**3:9-15**), he will emphasize that everything is full of purpose.

1. How many times did you meet with the word "God" in these 7 verses, and where?

Note: The reason why God is occupying centre stage in these 7 verses is this: *Everything is part of a plan and everything is full of purpose, because standing behind everything is God – the God of purpose and the God who works all things according to His plan!*

2. In these 7 verses, the Preacher gives us a glimpse into the work of God (its characteristics and purpose). What did he say?

Verse 11a:

Verse 11b:

Verse 11c:

Verse 14a-d:

Verse 14e:

So what?

3. In contrast to God's work, the Preacher also has something to say about man's labor and the right attitude to it. What did he say?

Verse 9:

Verse 10:

Verses 12-13:

Verse 15:

So what?

4. Ponder: *Why did the Preacher put what he has to say about man's labor alongside what he has to say about God's work? What does he want us to see?*

[Your answer will help you do your summary tomorrow]

Day 6 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 2:24-3:15**

Review your answers in Days 3-5 of Week 2, then give a 3-line summary for each of the three main points of the Preacher's sermon of *life with God in the picture*:

- Point 1 (**2:24-26**):

- Point 2 (**3:1-8**):

- Point 3 (**3:9-15**):

What area(s) of your life must change, in light of what you have learnt from **2:24-3:15**?

Day 7 Moving from **ECCLESIASTES 1:12-3:15** to the New Testament

Recall that **ECCLESIASTES 1:12-3:15** is the first sermon of the Preacher, made up of two parts:

- Life under the sun (**1:12-2:23**) -- see Day 2 for a review of the four points.

- Life with God in the picture (**2:24-3:15**) -- see Day 6 for a review of the three points.

The aim of the sermon, no doubt, is to convince his hearers of the folly of living life under the sun, and to urge them to bow their knees to God instead.

Our challenge, as New Testament Christians, is to see Christ in this sermon, or to put it in a different way, to ask how can we move from this Old Testament passage to New Testament truths.

Here's an example of how this can be done:

ECCLESIASTES 2:26 is supposed to give us a glimmer of hope when it says, "*For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*"

The one who is good in God's sight gets God's blessings. But who is this person? Who is good in God's sight? While God is good, all men are sinners and as **ROMANS**

3:10-12 say, “*there is none righteous . . . there is none who does good, no not one*”. So is our hope crushed, and we are backed to the darkness of *life under the sun*?

The Gospel tells us that our answer and hope is in the Son – our Lord Jesus Christ! By His death on the cross, sinners who believed in Christ have their sins paid for. And Christ’s perfect life is imputed to the sinner who believed in Him. In this way, this believing sinner can be seen as one who is good in God’s sight – good not by his own merits, but because of Jesus Christ!

In short, it is only the sinner who turned to Christ in faith who will truly and fully experience the blessings of **ECCLESIASTES 2:26**!

Note that in the example above, we considered a situation that appeared hopeful but turned out to be ultimately hopeless. Then we turned to the Gospel and ask how the Gospel will transform the situation, so that it becomes truly hopeful.

Can you think of another way whereby we can see Christ from **ECCLESIASTES 1:12-3:15**? (Use the above example, as well as those given in Week 1 Day 4 to guide you. Make a real attempt to do this, but don’t be too discouraged if you find it hard)

Week 3

[15th – 21st December 2013]

Day 1 Introduction to ECCLESIASTES 3:16-5:20

This is the Preacher’s second sermon. Let Pastor Stuart Olyott introduce us this sermon:

“Solomon’s second sermon is basically the same as his first. In the first sermon he occupied each viewpoint only once. If we quickly scan the section before us, and notice the paragraphs where God’s name is entirely absent and the paragraphs where his name occurs in clusters, we shall see that this time he occupies each viewpoint twice. His starting point is the same as before, and so is his finish, but he also alternates between the two viewpoints in between.

The lessons are the same as before, also. To the person with an earth-bound view, life is futile. There is no other word for it. There is frankly no meaning to life unless one has a personal relationship with God. All that is really new about this sermon is the way in which these now familiar truths are illustrated and applied.”

We can divide the Preacher's second sermon into four sections:

- **3:16-4:16**
- **5:1-7**
- **5:8-17**
- **5:18-20**

We will start studying the first section (**3:16-4:16**) tomorrow. For today, please do a speed-read of the entire sermon from **3:16-5:20**.

Day 2 Read **ECCLESIASTES 3:16-22**

1. As the Preacher looked in places where there should have been judgment and righteousness . . .

(a) What did he see? (**Verse 16**)

(b) What was his response to what he saw? (**Verse 17**)

2. In **verse 18**, the Preacher said something that is very depressing -- *that all people are like animals!* (Remember that he is saying this as a man under the sun, without God in the picture)

In **verses 19-21**, we discover the reasons why he made that statement in **verse 18**.

(a) The first reason is found in **verses 19-20**. What is it?

(b) The second reason is found in **verse 21**. What is it?

3. In the light of all that he said in **verses 18-21**, what did the Preacher perceive was best for man to do? Why? (**Verse 22**)

Day 3 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 3:16-22**

Review your answers in Day 1 above, then write a summary of these 7 verses below:

Does your summary above convey the message that life under the sun (without God in the picture) is pessimistic and hopeless? It should, because it is!

Now, think of one personal application:

Day 4 Read **ECCLESIASTES 4:1-6**

We are still in section 1 (**3:16-4:16**) of the Preacher's second sermon (**3:16-5:20**). Having made a gloomy observation of life under the sun (**3:16-22**), the Preacher returns to make two further observations of life under the sun – **4:1-3** and **4:4-6**

1. Focusing on **4:1-3** . . .

(a) What did the Preacher observe? (**Verse 1**)

(b) What did this observation prompt the Preacher to do? (**Verses 2-3**)

2. Focusing on **4:4-6** . . .

(a) What did the Preacher observe? (**Verse 4**)

(b) **Verse 5** depicts an extreme response to work. What is it?

(c) **Verse 6b** depicts another extreme response to work. What is it?

Day 5 Read **ECCLESIASTES 4:7-16**

Continuing with the Preacher's second sermon (**3:16-5:20**), we follow him as he made another two observations of life under the sun in **4:7-16**.

1. What did the Preacher describe as vanity and a grave misfortune? (**Verses 7-8**)
2. How does the Preacher illustrate the value of friendship? (**Verses 9-12**)
3. How does the Preacher illustrate the vanity of popularity? (**Verse 13-16**)

Day 6 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 4:1-16**

In these 16 verses, we have the Preacher's four observations of life under the sun. Review your answers in Days 4 & 5, then give a 3-line summary for each of the four observations made by the Preacher:

- Observation 1 (**4:1-3**):

- Observation 2 (**4:4-6**):

- Observation 3 (**4:7-12**):

- Observation 4 (**4:13-16**):

Now, write down two lessons you've learnt from these 16 verses:

(a)

(b)

Day 7 Read **ECCLESIASTES 5:1-7**

ECCLESIASTES 3:16-5:20 is the Preacher's second sermon. The first section of the sermon is from **3:16-4:16**, which we have already studied from Week 3 Day 1 – Day 6. Standing at his earth-bound perspective (life under the sun), the Preacher showed that nothing in life is ultimately worthwhile. Whatever you put your mind to is, in fact, a waste of time. It is pointless.

Now in the second section of his sermon (**5:1-7**), the Preacher switches his position to life with God in the picture. It is clear that these 7 verses speak about the worship of God. Careful students of the Bible have always wondered why the Preacher should talk about the worship of God here. More fundamentally, how is this passage in **5:1-7** linked to the previous one in **3:16-4:16** where the Preacher was painting how life under the sun looked like?

Two possibilities:

[A] When you live your life under the sun, all that occupies your mind are the things of this world – work and money and success. But when you live your life with God in the picture, your mind is occupied with entirely different things. You will be thinking about the worship of God. Hence, the Preacher fixed his attention on the worship of God, as he switched his perspective.

[B] Having 'convinced' the man living his life under the sun that such a life is vanity, it is possible that such a person may be prepared to 'consider' God. The Preacher, while happy with such 'progress', yet wants to ensure that this person does not have any wrong ideas about God. God cannot be manipulated! Instead, we must remember who He is and where He is, as we approach Him.

At this point of our understanding of the Bible, we cannot be exactly sure which of the above possibilities is right. This, however, does not and should not stop us from taking time to understand the message of these 7 verses.

1. How should people conduct themselves when they seek to worship God? (**Verse 1**)

2. In **verses 2-7**, the Preacher talked about 'words' and 'dreams' and 'vows'. What is the relationship between them?

3. What two principles concerning vows are given by the Preacher (**Verses 4-5**)

4. (a) What command did the Preacher give in **verse 7**?

(b) What does it mean?

Week 4

[22nd – 28th December 2013]

Day 1 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 5:1-7**

Review your answers in Day 7 of Week 3 above, then write a summary of these 7 verses below:

After writing the summary, think of one way you can apply the message of these 7 verses in your life:

Day 2 Read **ECCLESIASTES 5:8-17**

We are now in the third section of the Preacher's second sermon. In this third section, the Preacher returns to the '*life under the sun*' perspective.

1. Explanation of **verses 8-9**

The Preacher lived in an agricultural society. Hence, his words: *the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field*. The picture is of someone working on the field having someone over him as supervisor. That supervisor in turn has somebody over him, and so it goes on, all the way up to the king.

Each person on the ladder uses the person beneath him to his own advantage. He could not enjoy what he enjoys if that person is not there. Hence, his personal interest is best served by keeping the hierarchical ladder intact, no matter what means were employed to achieve that.

This being so, you should not marvel (be surprised) when you see men oppressing and exploiting others. Self-interest and greed rules! That's the world; that's life under the sun!!

2. (a) Why is it vanity (no profit) to love riches?

Verse 10:

Verse 11:

(b) What is a common consequence of having an abundance of wealth? (**Verse 12**)

3. In **verses 13-17**, the Preacher mentioned two severe evils. What are they?

Verses 13-15:

Verses 16-17:

Day 3 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 5:8-17**

1. Review your answers to Question 2 of Day 2 above.
 - (a) Write a 3-line summary of these 3 verses below:

 - (b) Think of one application:

2. Review your answers to Question 3 of Day 2 above.
 - (a) Write a 3-line summary of these 5 verses below:

 - (b) Think of one application:

Day 4 Read **ECCLESIASTES 5:18-20**

We come finally to the fourth section of the Preacher's second sermon, returning to the perspective of *'life with God in the picture'*.

1. What does the Preacher see as good and fitting for one to do? (**Verse 18**)

2. (a) What does the Preacher see as the gift of God?

Verse 18:

Verse 19:

- (b) In contrast, the man who lives his life ‘*under the sun*’ will NOT see these things as God’s gift.

How does ‘*seeing these things as God’s gift*’ impact the way one lives his/her life on earth? (Maybe **verse 20** can help you answer this question)

- (c) Do you personally see these things (mentioned in Question 2 (a) above) as God’s gifts to you? (Give more than just a “Yes/No” answer)

Day 5 **ECCLESIASTES 3:16-5:20** and *Jesus Christ*

ECCLESIASTES 3:16-5:20 is the Preacher’s second sermon. How can we see Christ in this sermon, as **LUKE 24:44** would challenge us to do?

One way is to zero in on words like “*profit*” and “*vanity/futility*” that the Preacher used the two sections depicting *life under the sun*. The message in those two sections is clear: *living your life under the sun is indeed without profit, always resulting in vanity/futility*. The New Testament confirms and expands on this theme in this way:

- Parable of the Rich Fool (**LUKE 12:13-21**). The man was rich, but at the end of the day, it brings him no real profit at all! The concluding words of Jesus in that parable were: *So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*
- Parable of the Four Kind of Soils (**MATTHEW 13:3-9, 18-23**), focusing especially on the third kind of soil: *Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful (verse 22)*. Not only does the love of riches brings no real profit, but it also result is actual loss spiritually!

In sharp contrast to unbelievers who are troubled by, and who strive strenuously after riches and the things of this world, Jesus promised His people that, “*your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (**MATTHEW 6:31-33**).

How would God be our Heavenly Father? The answer is clear from **JOHN 1:12** ~ *But as many as received Him (Jesus Christ), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*

Can you think of another way whereby we can move from **ECCLESIASTES 3:16-5:20** to Christ? (Use the previous examples given to guide you. Make a real attempt to do this, but don't be too discouraged if you find it hard)

Day 6 Introduction to **ECCLESIASTES 6:1-8:1**

This is the Preacher's third sermon. It follows the same pattern as the previous two sermons.

First of all, the Preacher will speak to us from the position of one living '*under the sun*', from **6:1-12**. At the end of this section, he will ask, "*For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?*"

Next, he will move to the position of life '*with God in the picture*' (**7:1-8:1**). Here, he will make use of the formula of '***A is better than B***'. His aim is to woo us to move to this second position from the first.

We shall start with the first section of the sermon (**6:1-12**) tomorrow. For today, please do a speed-read of this entire sermon from **6:1-8:1**.

Day 7 Read **ECCLESIASTES 6:1-12**

This is the first section of the Preacher's third sermon. In this section, he will speak to us from the position of one living '*under the sun*'.

1. According to **verses 1-2**, what is a common evil that the Preacher has seen among men?

2. (a) To whom is a stillborn baby compared? (**Verse 3**)

(b) Who is better off? (**Verses 3-4**)

(c) Why, do you think, the Preacher made that conclusion? (**Verse 6**)

3. (a) What cannot be satisfied by all the labor of man? (**Verse 7**)

(b) What is better than the wandering of desire? (**Verse 9**)

(c) What, do you think, is the Preacher seeing to convey in **verses 7-9**?

Week 5

[29th December 2013 – 4th January 2014]

Day 1 Summary of ECCLESIASTES 6:1-12

1. Review Question 1 of Week 4 Day 7 above, then give a title for these 2 verses (**6:1-2**):

2. Review Questions 2 & 3 of Week 4 Day 7 above, then write a summary of these 6 verses (**6:3-9**):

3. Explanation of **6:10-12**:

*“Whatever one is, he has been named already, for it is known that he is man, and he cannot contend with him who is mightier than he (**Verse 10**). Name speaks of character. When Adam names the animals, he is describing their character. The*

same idea is found here. Man is man -- that is his name. And as man, there are limitations placed on him. He cannot escape these limitations, he cannot ultimately change the world he lives in, nor can he unravel all the mysteries in life.

Whatever brave words we may multiply about men, or against God, **verse 10** reminds us that we shall not be able to alter the way which we and the world are today. We have been *named* and *known*.

We may argue and quarrel with God as to why He gives us *wealth*, and not the power to eat of it; but at the end of the day, it is all in vain. We can never *contend with God who is mightier than us*, and hope to win. And every effort put in, outside of God, will ultimately end in vanity, says **verse 11**. *There are many things that increase vanity, how is man the better?*

Now, for that crowning statement in **verse 12**: *Who knows that is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?* Leave God out of the picture, and go your own way, and this is the inevitable conclusion. 'Who knows' points to the fact that you do not know! 'Who can tell' points to the fact that others around you are equally ignorant! You do not know, and others around you cannot help you to know. You are shut up in darkness and ignorance. You are like a blind man in a dark room searching for a needle! Not only will you fail to find the needle, but you will definitely hurt yourselves in the process.

You will have doubts and questions, then more doubts and more questions. You will have plenty of questions, but no real answers! You will ride into the sunset with clouds of darkness, and confusions, and doubts, and questions, and uncertainties. You will ask, "*Who knows, who knows, who knows . . .*" You will ask, "*Who can tell, who can tell, who can tell . . .*" You will continue to ask these questions, with your tongue and in your heart, until you breathe your last. And there, you shall end your life.

4. Write down one application from **6:1-12**:

Day 2 Read **ECCLESIASTES 7:1-6**

Remember that we are looking at the Preacher's third sermon. We have completed his first section (**6:1-12**) and today, we begin with his second section (**7:1-8:1**). Here, he will tell us that '*A is better than B*'. His aim is to woo us to move to this second position from the first.

1. From **verses 1-6**, the Preacher gave us a list of three “betters”. Can you locate them?

(a) **Verse 1a:** A good name is better than precious ointment

(b) **Verse** ___ - ____: _____ is better than _____

(c) **Verse** ___ - ____: _____ is better than _____

2. In the second “betters”, the Preacher made two further points.

Firstly, he said that to go to the house of mourning (funeral) is better than to go the house of feasting (party).

(a) Why?

(b) Do you agree with him? (Give more than a “Yes/No” answer)

Secondly, he said that sorrow is better than laughter.

(a) Why?

(b) Do you agree with him? (Give more than a “Yes/No” answer)

3. The Preacher likens the laughter of the fool to the crackling of thorns under a pot.

(a) What does this mean?

(b) He calls it 'vanity/futility'. Do you agree with him? (Give more than a "Yes/No" answer)

4. Review your answers to Questions 1-3 above.

Think of one application for each of the "betters" listed.

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Day 3 Read **ECCLESIASTES 7:7-10**

We are still in the second section (**7:1-8:1**) of the Preacher's third sermon (**6:1-8:1**). Recall that in this second section, the Preacher is telling us that '*A is better than B*', with the aim of wooing us to move to this second position from the first. We have seen his first three "betters" yesterday. Today, we shall just look at his fourth "betters" in **7:7-10**.

1. What is **verse 7** saying? (Use your own words)

2. (a) Copy out **verse 8** in the space below:

_____ is better than _____;

_____ is better than _____.

(b) Think: How is the first line related to the second line?

- (c) So what do you think **verse 8** is saying? (Use your own words)
3. In **verse 9**, the Preacher gives a counsel and then his reason for giving that counsel.
- (a) What is his counsel?
- (b) What is his reason for giving this counsel?
- (c) Can you think of a situation whereby someone would need to hear this counsel?
4. (a) What is not a wise thing to say? (**Verse 10**)
- (b) What does this mean?
- (c) Can you think of a situation whereby someone would say such a thing?

Day 4 Summary Notes for **ECCLESIASTES 7:7-10**

On the surface, these 4 verses appeared to each deal with an entirely different subject, and therefore come across to us as having no connection between them whatsoever. However, on closer examination of these verses, it shall soon become clear that there is a common theme that runs through and unites these four verses.

These four verses assume the presence of a certain kind of situation that we will call “bad times”. These bad times may express themselves in the form of *severe oppressions*, or *severe trials and afflictions*.

Now, when times are bad, there will be pressures (tremendous and varied) that will be exerted upon you, pressures and temptations to do wrong, to murmur and complain, to take an unethical shortcut to get out of troubles. Against such a backdrop, the Preacher wants to tell us that in such times and under such circumstances, it is *better* to be patient in spirit, wait quietly and exercise self-control, than to be proud, quarrelsome and hasty in your words. In a word, *restraint* is better than *rashness*.

Think of **verse 7** ~ *Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, and a bribe debases the heart.* The bad times can come in the form of very **severe** oppressions. It may be so **severe** that even someone who is normally known to be wise and prudent may lose his head, and do or say something really foolish. He may succumb to certain temptations, lose control of himself and accept a bribe to pervert justice! A bribe debases the heart. This normally wise and prudent man will not be immune to the terrible effects of accepting a bribe. He will begin to behave like a fool and act like the wicked. And from then on, we shall no longer respect him, trust him nor view him as someone wise. He has corrupted himself, and brought great shame on himself. All the respect he used to command is lost, and he is now viewed and classified together with the wicked and with the fools. All these, because of his lack of self-control, because of a moment of rashness and folly! If only he could endure the hardship a bit longer, if only he could remain firm in rejecting evil for a moment longer, he would have spared himself of these pains and sorrows and shame!!

Look now at **verses 8-10** ~ *The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. Do not say, "Why are the former days better than these? For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.*

You may be undergoing a very **severe** trial at the moment. You cannot see what is the purpose of it all, you cannot see when it shall all end and how. And maybe, you see the wicked prospering, while you – the “*not-so-wicked*” – are suffering.

- You begin to be impatient. But the Preacher says, being *patient in spirit is better than being proud in spirit*.
- You begin to be angry and frustrated. But the Preacher says, being *slow to anger* and *slow to speak* is better than to be hasty and to speak in anger, to say words that you may afterwards regret. Moreover, once you develop this habit of being angry -- the word in the original here is *anger tinged with exasperation and indignation*, an anger leading to *resentment*; once that is tolerated and developed, it will make its permanent dwelling place in you. You will then be known as an angry man! Therefore, watch it, lest it becomes part of your personality.
- You might even begin to murmur and complain. To murmur and complain about your present circumstances, and to say that the former days are better, is evil and foolish. It is to behave like the Israelites in the wilderness, pining and groaning to have the fish and garlic of Egypt once more. It is actually rebellion against God

and His providence. It is actually saying that God is unkind, and doubting the goodness and wisdom of God.

In other words, under *severe trials and afflictions*, you might begin to lose control of your tongue, of your feelings, and of your thoughts. All these outbursts of anger and the loss of control are bad. It may bring you some temporary reliefs, but it will do you many permanent harms. Times may be bad and the pressure may be great, but it is *better* to be patient in spirit and to wait quietly and to exercise self-control, than to be proud and quarrelsome and hasty. Self-control is *better* than being out of control. Both restraint and rashness are found side by side in this world. But that is not to say that they are of equal worth. *Restraint* is better than *rashness*. Choose *restraint* -- the better path, which is the path of wisdom.

After reading the Summary Notes for **ECCLESIASTES 7:7-10**, write down three areas in your life that need to change, and how you will go about to effect the change:

(a)

(b)

(c)

Day 5 Read **ECCLESIASTES 7:11-14**

We continue with the Preacher's "betters", found in the second section of his third sermon.

1. The Preacher's fifth "betters" is found in **verses 11-12**.

(a) What is it?

(b) Think of one application of this fifth "betters":

2. The Preacher's sixth "betters" is found in **verses 13-14**.

(a) What is it?

(b) Think of one application of this sixth “betters”:

Day 6 Read **ECCLESIASTES 7:15-18**

We come to the Preacher’s seventh “betters” today.

1. What two things did the Preacher see in his days of vanity? (**Verse 15**)

2. Against what does the Preacher caution? (**Verses 16-17**)

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▪

Hint: You might need to find out the meaning of “*overly*” in these two verses, to be able to arrive at a correct understanding of the Preacher’s caution.

3. What is the counsel of the Preacher? (**Verse 18**)

4. Review your answers to Question 1-3 above, and then . . .

(a) Give a caption (title) to the Preacher’s seventh “betters”

(b) What is your response to this seventh “betters” of the Preacher?

Day 7 An Introduction to **ECCLESIASTES 7:19-8:1**

In **verse 18**, the Preacher recommends “*the fear of God.*” Now in **verse 19**, the Preacher moves on to speak of ‘*wisdom*’, and he will end with a question in **8:1** ~ ‘*who is like a wise man?*’ In doing so, he is linking ‘*the fear of the LORD*’ with ‘*wisdom*’.

This is something commonly done in the Old Testament Scriptures, especially in what is known as the *Wisdom Literature*.

For example, **Job 28:28** says, “*Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*” Then, we have the psalmist repeating this same tune in **Psalms 111:10** ~ “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.*” And of course, **Proverbs** say the same, in **Proverbs 9:10** ~ “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*”

So, *the fear of the LORD* is the beginning, the foundation and the controlling principle of wisdom. In some places, it is even equated with *wisdom* itself. The man who is truly wise is the man who truly fears the LORD. This would appear to be the equation made by the Preacher here in **Ecclesiastes 7**. He is using these two terms – ‘*wisdom*’ and ‘*the fear of the LORD*’ – as though they refer to the same thing.

So **verse 18** recommends *fear of the LORD*, and from **verse 19** onwards, the Preacher will elaborate on this recommendation, but will use the word ‘*wisdom*’ instead of the phrase ‘*the fear of the LORD*’. So from **7:19-8:1**, the Preacher will tell us the *excellence of wisdom* (**verse 19**), *our need of wisdom* (**verses 20-22**) and *our inability to obtain wisdom by ourselves* (**verses 23-29**).

Week 6

[5th – 11th January 2014]

Day 1 Read **ECCLESIASTES 7:19-8:1**

1. Imagine that you are the owner of a city and you want to protect your city from external threats.

(a) Is it good to have ten rulers (wise people) to help you guard the city?

(Take time to read **Proverbs 11:14** before you answer the question above)

(b) According to the Preacher here in **7:19**, what is even better?

(c) What, do you think, is the message of the Preacher here in **7:19**?

2. (a) The Preacher stated a universal truth in **verse 20**. What is it?

(b) What particular example did the Preacher give to illustrate this universal truth? (**Verse 21-22**)

Since “*the fear of the LORD is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding*” (**Job 28:28**), to do evil is thus to demonstrate a lack of wisdom. According to the three verses above, all of us belong to this category. Hence, all of us need wisdom!

Day 2 Read **ECCLESIASTES 7:19-8:1**

1. In his effort to obtain wisdom, what did the Preacher find? (**Verse 23-25**)

2. The reason for this fruitless endeavor is given in **verses 26-29**. Let’s first understand what each verse is saying (today), and then we will look at the overall message of these 4 verses (tomorrow).

(a) What did the Preacher find that is more bitter than death? (**Verse 26**)

(b) Who shall be able to escape from this “*more bitter than death*” trap?

Verse 26d:

Verse 28b:

Verse 28c:

What is the message here?

3. What is the message of **verse 29**? (Use your own words)

4. **8:1** contains a question and a statement of admiration.

(a) What is the question?

(b) What is it that the Preacher admires?

Day 3 Summary Notes of **ECCLESIASTES 7:23-8:1**

Although wisdom is so necessary, yet wisdom is so inaccessible (**verses 23-25**). The ultimate reason for this is the sinfulness of man! Man was created neither sinful nor neutral, but upright. Despite that, man has sinned and rebelled against God. *They have sought out many schemes*, says the Preacher with reference to mankind.

The word '*schemes*' conveys the idea of *perverseness*. The word '*sought*' conveys the idea of *persistence* and *being deliberate*. The word '*they*' reminds us that this problem is something *universal*. The word '*many*' points us to the *varied* manifestation of man's sins. Man's sin is *perverse*, is *deliberate*, is *universal*, and is *multi-form*.

It is because of sin, that man needs *wisdom*. And it is also precisely because of sin that man is unable to obtain *wisdom*. This is not just a problem that is outward and easily solved. Rather, it is one that is deeply rooted, and one unsolvable by man himself.

Man's sinfulness is given an instance in **verse 26**, speaking of *the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters*. Sin has affected our relationship with one another. Instead of love and honor and trust, here we have someone who is out to trap and harm another. Her hands are like fetters, that is to say, once she managed to lay her hands on you, you will be locked in, you will be chained, and you will not be able to get out.

She behaves in this way, because of her heart. The heart, as always in the Scripture, stands for the personality of the person, the inner and real person. Her heart is dominated by the instincts of the hunter. It is full of snares and nets – it is always

thinking on how to trap others, how to harm others, for her own selfish advantage. She sees herself as the huntress and the people around her as the prey to be hunted!

Now, it would be very naive of us to think that only the women folks are guilty of this. No, the Preacher is but conveying just one side of this human sinfulness, but the problem is of course two-sided. Just as there are women whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters, so also there are men whose heart and hands are similar. And they – these men and women – they are found everywhere, and therefore escape from them is almost impossible. *The sinner shall be trapped; only he who pleases God shall escape.* Only a very small proportion of the human race shall escape -- those who please God. The one who pleases God is yet another description for the one who *fears God.*

Knowing the universal sinfulness of man, he tries to find one person who is wise, someone who has escape the effects of sin. And this was his finding (**verse 28**): *One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found.*

The emphasis here is not on what the Preacher has found, but on what he has found to be lacking. Among a thousand men, he could find only one wise man. Among a thousand women, he could find no wise women. Therefore, man is only 0.001 times better than women! Now, 0.001 is negligible, almost not worth mentioning at all! In other words, what the Preacher is really saying is this: *there is no one who is wise, not even one!!*

So this is the overall message of **7:26-29**: *We need wisdom, but we can't get it, because we are sinners!* Or as **8:1** puts it, wisdom is such an admirable and desirable thing, but where is the wise man to be found?

1. After reading the Summary Notes above, what questions do you have?
2. In **8:1**, the Preacher takes the position of admiring the *excellence of wisdom*, and yet asking where on earth we can find *wisdom*. How would you answer his question?

Day 4 **ECCLESIASTES 6:1-8:1** and *Jesus Christ*

ECCLESIASTES 6:1-8:1 is the Preacher's third sermon. How can we see Christ in this sermon, as **LUKE 24:44** would challenge us to do? (Use the previous examples given to guide you)

Day 5 Introduction to **ECCLESIASTES 8:2-12:7**

This is the Preacher's fourth sermon (**8:2-12:7**). The problem of *futility* just refused to go away. The issue of *finding meaning in life* is here to stay.

So for the first part of his sermon (**8:2-10:20**), the Preacher would basically make some observations of life, analyze the issue at hand, and even give some worldly-wise advice on the matter. But, taking his position as the man *under the sun*, he had not real answer, to offer. At the end of all his observations, all his analysis and all his advices, he will finally come up against a concrete wall, a dead-end. And he will leave it as that, for all of us to see with our eyes, and feel in our hearts!

Why? He seeks to paint life *under the sun* as it really is, so that we may see its **darkness, gloominess, and utter hopelessness**. He wants us *feel* the darkness *deeply*, to *feel* the utter hopelessness *deep down in our heart*. In short, he wants to slam every door on our face, so that we will knock at the door of faith finally!

We shall start with the first section of the sermon (**8:2-9**) tomorrow. For today, please do a speed-read of this entire sermon from **8:2-12:7**.

Day 6 Read **ECCLESIASTES 8:2-9**

Imagine yourself living under a king who is far from being a benevolent ruler (**verse 9**). It is possible that his laws have been harsh and policies affected the people negatively. Still, you are being advised to obey his commandment (**verse 2**).

1. Why should you obey the king?

Verse 2b:

Verse 3c:

Verse 4:

Verse 5a:

2. Would you accept this advice? Elaborate.

Notes on verse 3

“Do not be hasty to go from his presence, do not take your stand for an evil thing . . .” This statement has a background and an assumption. The assumption is that he is speaking to those who are court officials and servants of the king. The background is that in the Old Testament, when the king holds court, the court officials will stand before him, giving reports and answering questions.

Concerning this situation, the Preacher has this advice to give: *“Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence”*. To be in a rush to leave could be viewed as lacking respect for the king. The king leaves first, not you! Worse, it could even be interpreted as a sign of disloyalty to the king, maybe even that of plotting a rebellion!

In addition, don’t take a stand on something you know he abhors and views as evil. If you do so, you are asking for unnecessary trouble! So, *do not take your stand for an evil thing*. In short, respect to those in authority, and not to purposely and unnecessarily go against them.

Day 7 Read **ECCLESIASTES 8:2-9**

As a man living under the sun, the Preacher will now seek to give us further ‘reasons’ why we should not rebel against the king openly.

1. The first ‘reason’ is found in **verses 5b-7**. What is it? (Hint: It has something to do with time)

2. The second ‘reason’ has to do with human limitations.
 - *No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit (verse 8a)*

The word *“retain”* actually means *“lock-up”*, *“imprison”*. In other words, they can lock you up physically, but they cannot lock up your thoughts at all. You can still think what you want to think, feel how you feel, and they have absolutely no power to change or prevent it.

- *No one has power in the day of death (verse 8b)*

What do you think this means?

- There is no release from that war (**verse 8c**)

'War' here refers to death. What do you think this phrase means?

- *Wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it (verse 8d)*

Even the most wicked man or the most evil king (in your opinion) cannot deliver himself from death. At death, he and they shall find that all their power, whatever power they have, is absolutely powerless!

Review the list of human limitations given above. How are they 'reasons' not to rebel against the king openly?

3. Review the two 'reasons' given above (Question 1 & 2). Would you actually be persuaded by them not to rebel against the king? Elaborate.

Week 7

[12th – 18th January 2014]

Day 1 Read **ECCLESIASTES 8:10-17**

We could perhaps view **8:2-9** as a scenario depicting '*authorities in life*'. Now in **8:10-17**, we are given another scenario that perhaps we could call '*injustices in life*'.

1. What is the vanity/futility that the Preacher talked about in **verse 10**?

Note: “*Place of holiness*” probably means “*place of worship*”

2. What further evil has arisen as a result (**verse 11**)?
3. To these ‘*injustices in life*’, what was the response of the Preacher? (**Verse 12-13**)

Is the Preacher speaking in **verses 12-13** as a man living under the sun or as a man whose life has God in the picture? Elaborate.

Day 2 Read **ECCLESIASTES 8:10-17**

We’ve started looking at **8:10-17** yesterday at a scenario we called ‘*injustices in life*’. Today, we shall finish our study of this portion of Scripture by focusing on **verses 14-17**. We will view these 4 verses as a summary of this topic under discussion.

1. What did the Preacher describe as a vanity/futility that occurs on the earth? (**Verse 14**)
2. **Verses 16-17** can be seen as an attempt to try and solve the problem of ‘*injustices in life*’ (**verses 10-13**), and even the deeper problem of *vanity/futility* (**verse 14**).

In their quest, they may see “*no sleep day or night*” as **verse 16** reports it. But this is what they shall find – no amount of hard work (*labor*), no amount of persistent endeavor (*discover*), and no amount of skill and experience (*wisdom*) can finally unravel the mystery. *For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it* (**verse 17**).

(a) In view of such vanity/futility, what does the Preacher commend? Why? (**Verse 15**)

(b) Are you satisfied with such a recommendation? Elaborate.

Day 3 Read **ECCLESIASTES 9:1-18**

We are still in the first part (**8:2-10:20**) of the Preacher's fourth sermon (**8:2-12:7**). Like the previous three sermons, the first part will see the Preacher speaking to us from the position of one living '*under the sun*'. The message is always dark and gloomy.

The darkness continues in **9:1-18** where he will talk about '*enduring the inevitability of death*' (**9:1-10**) and '*enduring the uncertainty of life*' (**9:11-18**).

We will look at **9:1-10** today.

1. **Verse 1** reads: "*For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.*"

The phrase "*by anything they see before them*" simply means "*things which they can see with their naked eyes, things that are before them, before their eyes*". We can use our eyes to see and to know that there is a God, and we can even go so far as to see that this God controls this world, even our lives. **Psalm 19** and **Romans 1** would affirm this.

But using only our naked eyes, we cannot come to any conclusion as to "*love and hatred*". In other words, though we may know that there is a God and that we are in His hands, yet we do not know how He is disposed towards us. Does He love us, or does He hate us? Is He smiling at me, or is He frowning at me? The Preacher says, "*People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.*" By just looking at the things around us, the events that happened to us, we are unable to come to any conclusive conclusions on this matter.

This, of course, is the viewpoint of a man *under the sun*.

2. **Verses 2-3** describe another thing that the Preacher could see with his naked eyes. He calls it the one thing that happens to all, and says it is an evil.

(a) What is this one thing?

(b) Why does the Preacher call it 'an evil'?

3. **Verses 4-5** contain the Preacher's musings on the observations made in **verses 2-3**. In his musings, he made a comparison.

(a) What is the comparison that he made?

(b) According to him, who is better off? Why?

Note: Relatively speaking, it is true that one is better off compared to the other. However, since the one thing happened to both of them ultimately, then the "better-off" verdict is hollow!

4. In view of the above, what does the Preacher counsel the living to do?

Verse 7:

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Verse 10:

Note that these counsels are the best a man living *under the sun* can give!

Day 4 Read **ECCLESIASTES 9:1-18**

Yesterday, we've looked at '*enduring the inevitability of death*' (**9:1-10**). Today, we shall proceed to look at '*enduring the uncertainty of life*' (**9:11-18**).

1. What observations did the Preacher make about life? (**Verses 11-12**)
2. What observations did the Preacher make about the value of wisdom? (**Verses 13-18**)
3. Review your answers to Question 1 & 2 above. Using a paragraph of no more than five lines, write down what you think is the message of the Preacher in **verses 11-18**:

Day 5 Read **ECCLESIASTES 10:1-20**

As we come to **10:1-20**, we are about to leave the dark and gloomy portion (**8:2-10:20**) of the Preacher's fourth sermon (**8:2-12:7**).

In these 20 verses, the Preacher wants to extol the value of *wisdom* over *folly*. However, remember that he is speaking as someone living his life "*under the sun*". Hence, the wisdom he commends is nothing other than worldly-wisdom. It can be helpful up to a certain point, but ultimately, it will leave us crying out "*vanity of vanities*" once more!

We will start with **10:1-3** today.

1. What comparison is used to illustrate how folly ruins the reputation of the wise? (**Verse 1**)
2. When does the fool display his folly to everyone? (**Verse 3**)
3. **Verse 2** says, "*A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart is at his left.*" What does this mean?

Folly is here traced to a fault in the heart (the result of inner deficiency). Eternity is set in our hearts, he says in **3:11**. But our heart is also full of evil, and it is also

defective (**8:11, 9:3, 10:2**). A wise man is a wise man because his heart is in the right place. A fool is a fool because his heart is in the wrong place.

The Preacher uses the word “right” and “left” in a common and popular way. Most people in this world are right-handed. Therefore, our right hand has far more strength, is far more skillful and agile than our left hand. Try using your left hand to handle the chopsticks as you eat your bowl of rice, and you know what will happen. Your food will be dropping all over the table, you might even drop your bowl, and you will certainly leave the table hungry and very frustrated. In a word, you will fumble and stumble all over.

Today, to describe someone who often fumble when handling things, we might say that his hands are like his legs.

So in **verse 2**, what the Preacher is saying is that because the fool’s heart is located in the wrong place and set in the wrong direction, hence it will show itself very soon in his life. He is a fool because his heart is in his left hand – the place of incompetence and a lack of skillfulness. The wise is wise because his heart is in his right hand – the place of skill and competence. So, it all had to do with the heart, with what is inside.

Day 6 Read **ECCLESIASTES 10:1-20**

The Preacher continues to extol the value of wisdom over folly. In **10:4-11**, we shall see him giving some examples of how this wisdom will guide one to handle various situations in life.

1. **Verses 4-7** paint a scenario of a ruler and a subject.
 - (a) What can we say about the ruler? (**Verses 5-7**)

 - (b) Assuming you are his subject. When he is upset with you (**verse 4a**), what should you do? (**Verse 4b-c**)

 - (c) What do you think of the Preacher’s counsel in **verse 4b-c**? Would you accept it? Why?

2. **Verses 8-9** give us four illustration of what may happen in our lives if we don't use wisdom.

Every activity in life has its inherent dangers.

You might be engaged in some evil works to harm others, like the two activities mentioned in **verse 8**. Well, the pit you dig for others, you could fall into it yourselves!

Or you might be engaged in more constructive activities, like those mentioned in **verse 9**. Well, you too could get yourselves into trouble.

In a word, life is full of troubles, and all activities in life have its inherent dangers. Now, whatever you might be engaged in, if you have wisdom, if you use wisdom, you are more likely to get success.

3. In contrast, **verses 10-11** point out the value of wisdom in our life.

(a) The *first* example is given in **verse 10**. What is it?

(b) The *second* example given in **verse 11** is about a snake charmer. One may have the skill to charm a snake. But what is the use, if all he does is talk (babblor) and not do it? He would be bitten, and perhaps lose his life as a result! So having the skill is not enough, but knowing when to use that skill! The snake charmer must perform his trick in time, before the snake strikes! Only then is he wise!

Remember that the wisdom extolled here (**verses 4-11**) is worldly wisdom.

Day 7 Read **ECCLESIASTES 10:1-20**

Yesterday, we've seen how the Preacher gave some examples of how wisdom will guide one to handle various situations in life (**verses 4-11**). Today, we shall see him contrasting the wise and the fool once more (**verses 12-15**), before returning to talk about the painful political situation of his day (**verses 16-20**).

1. "*The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious,*" says the Preacher in **verse 12a**. In contrast, what can we say about the words of a fool?

Verse 12b:

Verse 13:

Verse 14a:

Not just his words but also his labors are wearisome, both to himself and to others (**verse 15**)!

2. (a) When is a land blessed and when is it cursed? (**Verses 16-17**)

(b) What observations are made about feasting, wine and money? (**Verse 19**)

(c) What is the evidence of laziness and idleness? (**Verse 18**)

(d) Review your answers in (a)-(c) above. What do you think is the Preacher seeking to convey in these 4 verses?

3. (a) What is the counsel given in **verse 20**, and why was it given?

(b) It is very likely that the king in **verse 20** is the king envisaged in **verses 16-19**. Assuming that this is the case, how would the counsel given in **verse 20** demonstrate wisdom in action?

Week 8

[19th – 25th January 2014]

Day 1 Read **ECCLESIASTES 11:1-8**

We've finally left the dark and gloomy part of the Preacher's fourth sermon (**8:2-10:20**). **11:1-12:7** is the second part of his sermon, and here the Preacher will speak to us about *life with God in the picture*.

We will start with **11:1-8** today.

1. (a) Why does the Preacher encourage you to "*cast your bread upon the waters*"? (**Verse 1**)

(b) Why does the Preacher encourage you to "*give a serving to seven, even to eight*"? (**Verse 2**)

(c) What is the point of these two admonitions?
2. (a) What two examples are given of things that are inevitable? (**Verse 3**)

(b) What does the Preacher caution against? (**Verse 4**)
3. (a) What two examples illustrate our inability to comprehend God's ways? (**Verse 5**)

(b) What then should we do? Why? (**Verse 6**)
4. What, do you think, is the message of **verses 7-8**?

Day 2 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 11:1-8**

Review your answers in Day 1 above, then write a summary of these 8 verses below:

After writing the summary, think of one way you can apply the message of these 8 verses in your life:

Day 3 Read **ECCLESIASTES 11:9-12:7**

1. Look at **11:9-10**.

(a) What does the Preacher encourage the young person to do? (**Verse 9**)

(b) What does the Preacher encourage the young person to remember? (**Verse 9**)

(c) What else does the Preacher encourage the young person to do? Why? (**Verse 10**)

2. According to the Preacher in **12:1**, when should a person remember God?

3. What is the Preacher depicting in **verses 3-5**?

4. At the end of **verse 5**, death is described as '*man going to his eternal home*' while '*mourners go about the street*'.
 - (a) What four illustrations did the Preacher use to depict death in **verse 6**?

 - (b) According to the Preacher, what occurs at death? (**Verse 7**)

Day 4 Summary of **ECCLESIASTES 11:9-12:7**

Review your answers in Day 3 above, then write a summary of these 9 verses below:

After writing the summary, think of one way you can apply the message of these 9 verses in your life:

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17 say: “ *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*”

1. Write down the most important lesson you’ve learnt from **ECCLESIASTES** about
 - God:

 - Man:

 - Life:

2. What is the ONE most important change you’ve made in your life, as a result of **ECCLESIASTES’** reproof and correction?

Acknowledgement

Whatever the weaknesses of this Read-The-Bible-Together guide, they would have been far greater without the kind help of brother Paul PHUA in giving his time and energy to review the entire guide, asking questions all the way and giving many valuable suggestions.

Thank you, brother!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)