

A black and white photograph of an open book resting on a wooden surface, possibly a table or desk. The book is open to a page with text, and the pages are slightly aged. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light gray, suggesting a bright, airy environment. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

**ECCLESIASTES
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

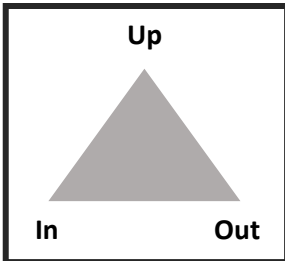
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES

Written some 3,000 years ago, this book tells much of the dilemma of life. Sometimes I wonder how it got into the pages of holy writ, but here it is. The tone of the whole book is pretty pessimistic. If it wasn't for the last chapter where all his conclusions are gathered, it would be quite depressive. However, it is full of wisdom both spiritual and practical. Solomon's searching can lead us to the same conclusion he comes to in chapter 12 verse 1 – remember your Creator now.

You will remember that Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, asked God for wisdom and he got just that, becoming renowned as the wisest man in all the world. And yet, it amazes me how we can be so wise in some areas and completely dumb in other areas. The end of Solomon's life spiralled downwards and went very pear shaped. He writes about his folly and lack of wisdom. That, for me, makes this an important life lesson book. I hope you enjoy and take stock as you read.

Bible, journal, pen and a brew, and off we go again.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Read

Ecclesiastes 1

Live

The book of Ecclesiastes is one of the most unusual and difficult to understand in the Bible. It has a spirit of hopeless despair. It has no praise or peace. It seems to promote questionable conduct. Yet the words of the Preacher show us the futility of a life lived without an eternal perspective. Jesus expressed a similar thought in Mark 8:36: *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”* Look to Jesus today, for it is only in Him we find life and fulfilment. From his royal standing, Solomon had the wisdom, freedom, resources, and standing to write this work. If anyone had a license to write these words it was the wisest man, Solomon.

Solomon refers to himself in verse 1 as *“the Teacher”*, letting people know that he knew what he was talking about. The *“Teacher”* (or *“Preacher”* as some versions say) reminds us that all of life is futile if lived outside God’s remit for us. Let’s face it, at times our theology outstrips our experience and our doctrine is more certain than our delight. We ought to long for the Spirit to convince us afresh that as God looks upon us right now, it’s mercy He feels. How often we feel harassed and helpless and need reminded of God’s tender compassion in our current story of confusion, loss, and disconnect. We can be sure that God will never leave us or forsake us.

Even though Israel in Solomon’s reign was in its golden age of peace and prosperity, Solomon is letting us know that even that season has its challenges. This man had everything – power, wealth, wisdom, honour, God’s favour – and yet, he says that they are all futile if our confidence relies only on these and self. The highlight of this chapter comes in the final two verses where he poses the folly of having only earthly wisdom, even in excessive abundance. We will note as we go through the book that this is the theme: earthly wisdom versus wisdom that comes from God.

Pray

Father, no one understands like You. No one is closer and kinder. You sent Jesus who suffered for me, once and for all, bearing all my shame, sorrow, grief and sin – past, present, and future. You are the God who does all things well, and for that I am so very, very thankful. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Solomon tested a life lived for laughter, pleasure, and fun. Like a modern celebrity he ran from party to party, entertainment to entertainment. He bought slaves and herds, and it seemed as if everything he touched turned to gold. I'm sure some of these endeavours were worthy causes, although it seems many weren't. At the end of it all, he judged it to be "*madness*" and without accomplishment. If building, improving, and amassing great riches could give true meaning to life, the Preacher would have found it. Adam Clarke's commentary puts it like this: "*Alas! Solomon, the wisest of all men, made the worst use of his wisdom, had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and yet left but one son behind him, to possess his estates and his throne, and that one was the silliest of fools!*"

I am stirred today to turn from the voices of self and deception that claim a right to happiness and fulfilment. It's on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. To have the Lord Jesus plus nothing makes us as rich as anybody in the history of the universe, and to have Him plus everything wouldn't make us any richer than the one who has Him alone. After all is said and done, Jesus is the true treasure; all other currencies but mimic and counterfeit.

Solomon built many great buildings, palaces, and a magnificent temple, and yet I find it interesting that he writes in Psalm 127:1, "*Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.*" I also find it interesting that in verse 16 he says, "*like a fool, the wise man must die too*". This is the man who penned the proverbs reminding us of the value of wisdom, and yet here he is telling us that wisdom will not secure one's eternal destiny. However, he will remind us later in this book that what we do here on earth has eternal consequences.

Pray

Father, nothing compares to the excellency of being loved by You and knowing You. You inhabit my weakness. You get all the attention and honour, and I get the supreme privilege of simply being used of You. Just as it should be. And just as I want it to be. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Ecclesiastes 3

Live

I really like this chapter. I like all the different times. If you read them carefully, they cover a pretty broad spectrum of life. The commentator G. Campbell Morgan puts this chapter into perspective: "His ceaseless reiteration of the words, 'A time ... a time ... a time' are intended to indicate his sense of the monotony of all things, rather than of their variety."

The phrase "*under the sun*" or "*under heaven*" is key. It appears 37 times in this small book. It means a world without God in the picture. The author is seeing a world where there is nothing above the sun, and, of course, he finds that meaningless!

One of the verses I quote most often is in this chapter... "*He has made everything beautiful in its time.*" God's timing is perfect in all ways and things. Solomon thought of the good and bad and understood that God has "*made everything beautiful in its time.*" I love how he then reminds us that God has set eternity in the hearts of men and women, even though they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. If man does not have to reckon with eternity, if this life is all there is, then many wicked and evil people win and many good and righteous people lose. I am here to thankfully proclaim to you that Solomon's "*under the sun*" theology is wrong. I think Solomon knew this as well; we live under the eternal hand of our God.

It would seem that Solomon is referring to one's attitude in verses 9-13. Years ago, when doing a lot of youth work, I would ask the boys to list all they desired in their dream girl, and vice versa. We would write these on a chalk board and then go down them one by one and ask, 'Is this an attitude or a skill?' The huge percentage, of course, was attitude. It was a great lesson!

Pray

Father, oh how I love Your eternal eye that never misses a detail or jot in this life of mine. I thank You today that I do not live only for this life; that would be sad indeed. But I am a citizen of a new kingdom, one not made with hands but eternal in its origin and design. That's where I call my home, my eternal abode. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Ecclesiastes 4

Live

Today's passage makes me think of Micah 6:8 "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" Solomon is thinking a lot about the actions of the unjust. He thinks of the painful and tear-filled lives of the oppressed. Again, he uses his "under the sun" analogy, as if this is all there is in this old world – a place where men and women give no account for their lives in a world to come, a place where the tears of the oppressed are especially bitter and they have no comforter. There is nothing sadder in the whole book than Solomon's glance at the dead and the unborn who are spared the sight of so much anguish (verses 2,3).

In verses 9-12, we see that living and working together has a great advantage over living and working alone. It adds four things to life:

- Productivity (they have a good reward for their labour).
- Help in need (if they fall, one will lift up his companion).
- Comfort in life (they will keep warm).
- Safety and security (two can withstand).

What an amazing analogy the Preacher uses: "A *threefold cord* is not quickly broken." We might have expected him to praise the strength of a *twofold cord*, but he notes that a *threefold* is not quickly broken. It is possible that, in the context of marriage and family, Solomon had children in mind, but it is commonly understood that the third cord is speaking of the Lord, and that a relationship intertwined with Father God is a threefold cord that is not quickly broken. The strength of the three-ply cord was proverbial in the ancient world. This is commonly, and I think well, applied to the idea of recognising and embracing God in the marriage relationship.

Pray

Father, thank You for the great example of co-labouring alongside other people, reminding us that You designed life for companionship not isolation, for intimacy not loneliness. May I be an example in word and deed to those around me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Ecclesiastes 5

Live

Solomon knew that a man could have all the outward signs of a good life but still not be satisfied with goodness. We can explain Solomon's lack of knowledge of the afterlife by understanding the principle of 2 Timothy 1:10, that Jesus Christ *"brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."* The understanding of immortality was, at best, cloudy in the Old Testament but is much clearer in the New Testament.

Listen to what Solomon says about worshipping God in verse 1. *"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God."* This is the core of what he's going to tell us in this passage. He is issuing a warning, and it's one we need to hear. His warning isn't for people who never go to church. It's for those of us who are well-meaning and show up for church, who like good worship and hear a good sermon but sometimes find it hard to pay attention. It's for those of us whose thoughts wander, who are full of good intentions but never quite follow through. The Teacher is warning us against sleepwalking through church. You don't come to worship God half-awake, stumble your way in and then stumble out. I think of the video of the lady who, while walking through a shopping centre, was texting on her phone. She kept walking and walked headlong into a fountain. The incident was caught on a security camera and posted on YouTube. She's an illustration of how many of us spend our lives half-present, not aware of what's going on around us, stumbling into a pit!

These writings make me thankful that God has redeemed us from the ultimate pit of death and judgment. He also rescues us out of other kinds of pits – pits we naively fall into, pits we get pushed into, and pits into which we foolishly jump; waterless pits like self-pity and self-righteousness; pits of seething bitterness and soul-sucking resentment, toxic shame and vain regrets; the deep hole of hopelessness and the dark dry prison of unbelief and unforgiveness. Wow, where would we be if only for the Saviour!

Pray

Father, thank You a thousand times over that You are a great and gracious Redeemer. Please continue Your rescue mission in my life and in the lives of those I love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Ecclesiastes 6

Live

Solomon saw the tragedy of those who are given great gifts from God yet do not have the opportunity to enjoy what God gives. A pendulum often swings in our thoughts from God's sovereignty to man's responsibility. We can be assured that God does not override the will of man; we are what we are through choices we make.

When Jewish psychiatrist Viktor Frankl was arrested by the Nazis and put in Auschwitz, the infamous death camp, he was stripped of everything: property, family, possessions, and a manuscript that had been sewn into the lining of his coat. He had spent years researching and writing this manuscript on finding meaning in life. *"Now it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me; neither a physical nor a spiritual child of my own,"* Frankl wrote. *"I found myself confronted with the question of whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of any meaning."* A few days later, the Nazis forced prisoners to give up what little clothing they still wore. *"I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn-out rags of an inmate who had been sent to the gas chamber,"* said Frankl. *"Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in the pocket of the newly acquired coat a single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, which contained the Jewish prayer 'Shema Yisrael' (Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.) How should I have interpreted such a 'coincidence' other than as a challenge to 'live' my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?"* Frankl later reflected on his ordeal in 'Man's Search for Meaning', saying, *"There is nothing in the world that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is meaning in one's life ... He who has a 'why' to live for can bear almost any 'how'."*

Pray

Father, I am reminded that You are the sovereign God who inhabits eternity. I am a mere human being, Your prized creation. How wonderful it is that You made me with a will power, the ability to choose the One who originally chose me. You are my first-love, my joy and light. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Reading this chapter gives mixed feelings about the Preacher's outburst, *"The day of death is better than the day of one's birth."* But actually, from a New Testament perspective, *"the day of death"* is glorious for the believer. The battle is over, the sorrow is over, the uncertainty is over, and all things are new. I love how Spurgeon puts it: *"Death is the end of dying. On the day of the believer's death dying is for ever done with. The saints who are with God shall never die any more. Life is wrestling, struggling; but death is the end of conflict: it is rest-victory."* I had an old mentor who used to say, "Everyone talks about the good old days. They weren't that good. I was there." Solomon understood our tendency to romanticise the past, thinking it was better than our current time. He was warning against getting into this mode of thinking. Yesterday is past; tomorrow is future; today is a gift, that's why they call it 'the present'.

Solomon pauses in this chapter which begins the second half of the book. He seems to reflect on the wisdom he has shared in the previous six chapters. The key word in this section is *"better"*. Some medicine that tastes the worst has the best cure. Solomon goads us into thinking outside the box. I love his take on patience in verse 8: *"a patient spirit is better than a proud spirit."* The first way our pride can prevent us from being patient is by making us impatient. To finish something takes patience, and we don't have lots of patience. We live in an instant gratification world. If the hamburger at McDonald's takes longer than two minutes, we get impatient. If the person in front of us in the queue doesn't move on in a couple of seconds, we get impatient. If the bill for our meal doesn't arrive before we are finished and we have to wait, we get impatient. The same is true with the Christian life; we can easily get impatient.

Pray

Father, thank You that the gospel is true and things are not as they appear. You are in control and everything is going to be more than okay. You are the Author and the Finisher always completing what You start. I love this about You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Obedying God and the government can be a tension or can work in tandem. Jesus shared this same idea in the New Testament in Mark 12:17, *“Then Jesus told them, ‘Give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they were amazed at Him.”* Jesus and the writer of Ecclesiastes both recognise that God’s authority and the government’s authority must co-exist. Solomon goes one step further and states that someone obeys the government because of a loyalty to God. Every Christian is called to be a law-abiding citizen and to respond to any godly request the government makes for help. This includes everything from paying our full taxes to obeying the rules and regulations of the land. People sometimes wonder if this obedience has any limits. Must we always submit to the governing authorities? Or are there times when it is my duty as a Christian to disobey? The simple answer is the one that Peter gave when the rulers of Jerusalem told him to stop preaching the gospel, *“We must obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29). When it comes to a conflict between God and man, we must obey the higher authority.

Solomon knew that wisdom makes a man happier. The shining face generally speaks of favour; here, it speaks of the wise man who is visibly gracious in his demeanour, and (as the next phrase says), whose gentleness is obvious in his facial expression. Then Solomon asks the age-old question in verse 14, ‘Why do the bad have it good and the good have it bad?’ Job batted this one around too. With the meaninglessness of life so plain to the Preacher, all he could counsel was to make the best of a bad situation and enjoy life in the best way possible. Sometimes his answers exclude eternity, which isn’t actually that wise. You and I know we can only look at these questions through an eternal lens.

Pray

Father, wisdom is to see life from Your perspective. Thank You for the truth of Your complete Word as a guide to life and wholeness. Even when life’s big questions lie unanswered, I can declare that I will trust You at all times and Your praise shall continually be in my mouth. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We should not measure God's love by what happens in life but by what Jesus did at the cross. Scripture reminds us in Romans 5, *"God demonstrated His love to us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."* Looking through the lens of life can leave one thinking like the Preacher in this chapter, disillusioned and disappointed. Thank God for scriptures that remind us that our present suffering is nothing to be compared with the glory that He will reveal in us (Romans 8:18). Death is not an accident, it's an appointment, a destiny that nobody but God can cancel or change. If you are going to enjoy life, you have to accept that death is unavoidable.

Solomon's little section in verses 4-6 allows us to see, *"Where there's life, there's hope!"* That motto goes as far back as the third century BC. It is part of a conversation between two farmers featured in a poem by the Greek poet Theokritos. *"Console yourself, dear Battos,"* says Korydon. *"Things may be better tomorrow. While there's life there's hope. Only the dead have none."* Solomon was emphasising the importance of seizing opportunities while we live, rather than blindly hoping for something better in the future because death will end our opportunities on this earth. God gives us means to enjoy things like each meal He gives us. The Bible encourages us to enjoy life together with friends, and one of the purposes of marriage is to live life together. Life is meant to be shared. I have officiated at an average of ten weddings per year for twenty-five years; you can do the maths! I have led couples in making a covenant vow, promising in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer that they would stay together until only death would part them. Yes, there will be difficult times but as the Preacher has already reminded us, *"Two are better than one"*. Friends are a God idea!

Pray

Father, I am reminded of Paul writing to the church in Corinth, saying, *"for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."* What an amazing perspective we have as believers. Thank You for revealing Yourself in Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Solomon has spent the previous nine chapters telling us what wisdom is. He has shared loads of examples of wisdom in the eyes of the natural and secular person. Basically, he is saying that when we observe the world, we can see wisdom. In this chapter, he turns to folly or foolishness. If wisdom brings about what is right, then the contrary is true; foolishness results in what is wrong. A “fool” in the Biblical sense is not necessarily someone with below-average intelligence. Folly does not always show up on the low end of the IQ scale. Rather, the term refers to someone who lacks the proper fear of God and is therefore prone to go the wrong direction in life. Even as dead flies which are quite small in proportion spoil a fine ointment, just a ‘little’ folly spoils the reputation of someone regarded as wise and honourable. The fool will continue to use a dull axe, instead of sharpening the edge. The fool doesn’t wisely consider the future and how a wise use of one’s time in the present can make for a much better future.

Verse 18 pictures the fall of a nation with leaders who are foolish, selfish, and concerned only for their own pleasure. Lazy rulers bring down the great house of the nation as a lazy householder lets the beams of his house collapse so that the roof sags and lets in the rain. It would seem that the Preacher is beginning to see life with more of a destiny in mind, rather than his old “*under the sun*” philosophy. I like it. It’s good that we know there is a destiny ahead. I also love how, as dead as we were in our sin, we are much more alive in Jesus’ forgiveness and righteousness. Let’s thank our Abba today that He is most definitely for us because our folly and fallenness condemned us. Praise God for Romans 8:32 which reminds us, “*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*”

Pray

Father, You justified me, and there is now no condemnation. You’re sanctifying me, and will continue to do so until there’s no sin left in me. You will glorify me, and on that Day, I’ll be as lovely and as loving as Jesus. Nothing will ever separate me from Your love. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In these final two chapters, Solomon summarises the answer to the question 'Is life really worth living?' After looking through the lens of the world and trying to discover how to live life, Solomon concludes that life is meaningless. He uses many metaphors to describe the vanity of life: chasing the breeze, a puff of smoke, dust in the wind, the laughter of fools, a forgotten memory. Life without God is utterly meaningless. Now, towards the end, Solomon resolves all the questions he has raised and gives us his ultimate conclusion. Life is not just about our five senses. Life is more than what we see.

The first few verses have caused controversy over the years. Some commentators think they speak of generosity. "*Cast your bread upon the waters*" is to them a way of saying, "Give your material things to the needy in a way that might seem as wasteful as throwing bread upon water and you will be rewarded." The point is much the same, do something now for a reward that cannot be immediately seen. Solomon is making us think that if we keep on observing circumstances instead of trusting God, we shall be guilty of disobedience. I love how Spurgeon puts this, "*God bids me sow: I do not sow, because the wind would blow some of my seed away. God bids me reap: I do not reap, because there is a black cloud there, and before I can house the harvest, some of it may be spoiled. I may say what I like; but I am guilty of disobedience.*" The idea is to continually trust God even when you haven't a clue what He is up to. Sometimes we give greater audience to our fears, worries, and anxieties than to God's nearness, sovereignty, and grace. We could very well be exhausted from life's challenges, bouts of illness, and the price of loving well. We are just flat out tired. To every one of these scenarios, the answer is the same: more of Him – a fresh sighting and heart connection with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Pray

Father, You have given me the Lord Jesus as my full forgiveness and perfect righteousness, my sovereign King, and most loving Bridegroom. Renew, refresh, and restore my heart in the wonders of Your love and sufficiency of Your grace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The word “*vain*” or “*vanity*” or “*meaningless*”, depending on your translation, appears some 35 times in this book. It doesn’t mean that everything is worthless, but rather that it is all temporary and passing. This is the main message of Ecclesiastes, and it’s an important one for us to hear. But Solomon doesn’t leave us hopeless. The book would have little meaning if not for the Teacher’s conclusions. There is hope. Verse 13, “*Here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man.*” What he is saying is that those who lack purpose and direction should put these two things into practice. What a way to finish. After all the wranglings, despondency and even negativity, Solomon says, “*Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.*” Perhaps Solomon looked back to the days of his youth before he got old and tangled up in his thought patterns.

Living in light of eternity and the eternal God gives us hope not only for this life but also for the life to come. The Apostle Paul knew this eternal perspective banished sorrow from the heart and wrote, “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Without this premise of eternity and the eternal God, life is vain and meaningless. I remember a little saying my Mum taught me, “Only one life, twill soon be past, only what’s done for Jesus will last.”

Two questions to finish this book. First, are you taking any of the dead ends that the Teacher talks about? There’s nothing wrong with work or pleasure or money or accomplishment, but they make terrible idols. Don’t take the dead ends. And second, are you demonstrating your love for God by obeying Him? Better yet, have you discovered the One who loved God perfectly and obeyed His commandments on your behalf? Jesus is the only One who has obeyed verses 13 and 14 perfectly. He came and offered His life for us.

Pray

Father, You go ahead of me into the fray, uphold me when I can’t hold on to anything, and guarantee the fulfillment of a hope that seems unlikely, if not outright impossible. You are the Author and Finisher. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

