

Ecclesiastes 12:13 NIV - 13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

Mark 12:30-31 NLT - And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' 31 The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

Isaiah 43:7 NLT - 7 Bring all who claim me as their God, for I have made them for my glory. It was I who created them.

Solomon's final conclusion is to fear God and keep his commandments, and Jesus said the greatest commandments were to love God and love others. List some ways we can redirect our focus from the temporal to the eternal so that we live out these commandments? How does doing so bring glory to God?

WRAP-UP

In Ecclesiastes Solomon is asking, "What gives our lives meaning?" He tried everything he could to find satisfaction and significance, but ultimately concluded that, apart from God, it had no real value. We can get caught in the same trap, trying to seek fame and fortune to give our lives meaning. Apart from God it all is meaningless. But there is good news. God created us as His image bearers, to have fellowship with Him and bring Him glory. When we love God and love others we bring the focus back on God, who is worthy, and who gives our lives meaning.

MEMORY VERSE

That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty.

- Ecclesiastes 12:13 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

Challenge – Take a quick inventory of what you are pursuing and why. Are there ways you can redirect your time and resources from the temporal to the eternal to bring your focus back to loving God and others?

Everything is Meaningless

Living Life Backwards #1

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is filled with God's wisdom. In fact, three of the Old Testament books are referred to as the wisdom literature. One of these, Ecclesiastes, was written by Solomon, who was known for his God-given wisdom. You might think being the wisest man on earth would make you happy. But when we read Ecclesiastes that is not the picture we see. In fact, Solomon found that much of what we strive for in life is insignificant. Or as he calls it, completely meaningless. Thankfully his conclusion was that there is one thing that gives meaning to our lives, and that is God.

Ice Breaker

What is one thing in your life that has continually eluded your grasp?

Key Passage

Ecclesiastes 1:2 NLT - 2 "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Meaningless

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 NLT - 1 These are the words of the Teacher, King David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem. 2 "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!"

I bet that at times, you've felt the way Solomon felt. It sounds like this wise king was very frustrated and discouraged despite his wealth and wisdom.

What is one thing that you find frustrating? Have you pursued something that disappointed you once you attained it?

Solomon begins Ecclesiastes (which means the preacher) declaring who he is, and then summarizes his conclusion that everything in life is meaningless. For the next 12 chapters we find the portrait of a man who had great wealth and wisdom, but still found that life disappointed him.

His father, King David drew a similar conclusion in Psalm 39.

Psalm 39:5-7 NLT - 5 You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath." 6 We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing. We heap up wealth, not knowing who will spend it. 7 And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you

How was Solomon's conclusion the same as David's and what distinguishes David's conclusion from Solomon's?

The word Solomon chooses to describe life is meaningless (הֶבֶל hebel, or hevel) and refers to a breath, smoke, or vapor. Something with little substance which vanishes quickly. In this book of wisdom Solomon recounts the futility and injustices of life. It's a bit depressing.

If you had all the resources in the world, what would you pursue if you were looking for significance and satisfaction in life? What gives those things importance?

In addition to wine, women and song, Solomon dabbled in horticulture, architecture, philosophy, and pretty much anything else you can name. In fact, he said, "Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors." But in the end, it was all meaningless. He said, "So I gave up in despair, questioning the value of all my hard work in this world."

2. Never Satisfied

Many have come to believe a popular religious myth that says, if you accept Jesus, and follow Him, then God will give you whatever you want. Unfortunately, that's not true. And as Solomon discovered, getting everything that we want really doesn't satisfy. When Solomon reflected on our work done "under the Sun" he refers to our lifetime. But eventually, the work we've done won't be remembered. Apart from God we are insignificant. This realization can either plunge us into despair or cause us to long for God who is the key to our significance

Ecclesiastes 1:3-11 NLT - 3 What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? 4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. 6 The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles. 7 Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea. 8 Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. 9 History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. 10 Sometimes people say, "Here is something new!" But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. 11 We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

What do people currently use to evaluate their significance? Solomon viewed his insignificance relative to the forces of nature. If Solomon had compared the impact he had on his culture and surroundings to the impact of other rulers of his time, do you think he would have seen himself as more significant? If comparing ourselves to others seems to increase our significance, why are people still dissatisfied with life?

1 Timothy 6:6-7 NLT - 6 Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. 7 After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. Philippians 4:11, 13 NLT - 11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ... 13 For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Paul has an entirely different perspective on contentment. Upon what did Paul's contentment depend?

3. Live for the Eternal

One truth clearly highlighted in Ecclesiastes is that we all will die. Society tends to pretend we can ignore death. But accepting our own mortality allows us to shift our perspective and live with eternity in mind. We shouldn't live to merely pursue pleasure or make a name for ourselves, or even to leave a legacy. On our own we are insignificant, but God transforms us and gives us a purpose whose impact goes beyond this life.