



World Christian Fellowship

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Ecclesiastes- 01

Searching for Meaning in a World That Has Lost Its Way

The Search that Never Ends

Overview of Ecclesiastes — The Most Relevant Book of Our Age

Introduction: The Billion-Dollar Question.

◆ The Billionaire Who Had Everything and Found Nothing

In **February 2023, Andrew Tate** — the most searched man on the internet, with hundreds of millions of followers gave a candid interview from house arrest. Despite his boasted wealth, his private jets, his network of women, his fighting championships, he said something that silenced the interviewer: 'Every night I go to bed and ask myself: **is this it? Is this everything? I have built exactly what I said I would build. And I am not satisfied. I am never satisfied.**'

Three thousand years earlier, a king with a hundred times Tate's resources sat down with a scroll and asked the same question — and was honest enough to write the answer down. His name was Qoheleth. His book is Ecclesiastes. And what makes it the most relevant book in the Bible today is not merely that it asks the question. It is that it has the courage to follow the question all the way to its true answer.

I. The hidden revelation in the Title.

Most people hear 'Ecclesiastes' and think: an old, difficult, somewhat depressing book about vanity.

But the Hebrew title Qohelet (קֹהֵלֶת) contains a revelation that most translations obscure.

The root **qahal** means to assemble, to convene specifically to call an assembly for a purpose.

Qohelet is the one who gathers the people to hear something of supreme importance.

This is not a man muttering to himself about life's futility.

This is a king calling his nation together for the most important lecture they will ever hear.

The urgency is built into the title. What the Preacher is about to say matters for every person in the room — and every person who ever reads these words.

God placed Ecclesiastes in the canon of Scripture means that the emptiness it describes — the hebel, the vanity — is not a human mistake to be ashamed of.

It is a divinely designed feature of human existence. God built the void into the human soul deliberately, so that nothing less than Himself can fill it.

*Saint Augustine understood this: '**Our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.**'*

Romans 8:20, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope."

Paul's use of the same word-concept futility establishes that the 'vanity' Ecclesiastes describes is not a bug in creation but a feature.

God subjected creation to futility deliberately and notice the final word: in hope.

The emptiness is not the destination. It is the design that points to the destination. The Preacher is not announcing despair. He is announcing a direction.

II. The Author — More than History.

The identification of the author as Solomon is more than a historical footnote it is the exegetical key to the entire book.

Consider what this means.

The richest man in the ancient world.

1 Kings 10:23, *So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.*

The wisest man in the ancient world.

1 Kings 4:29–31, *And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. ³⁰ Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ For he was wiser than all men—than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.*

The most militarily secure.

1 Kings 4:20–25, *Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. ²¹ So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines,*

as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. ²² Now Solomon's provision for one day was thirty kors of fine flour, sixty kors of meal, ²³ ten fattened oxen, twenty oxen from the pastures, and one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl. ²⁴ For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphseh even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. ²⁵ And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

The most admired man in the History.

1 Kings 10:1–9, *Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions.*

⁶ Then she said to the king: "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. ⁷ However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. ⁸ Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! ⁹ Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness."

Man with the most wives.

1 Kings 11:3, *And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.*

Man with the most servants, the most building projects.

1 Kings 7,

The greatest treasury.

This man conducted the most comprehensively resourced experiment in human history and wrote up the results.

No one can read Ecclesiastes and say: 'Well, he didn't have enough resources. If only he had had more money, more wisdom, more pleasure.'

He had more of everything than any person who has ever lived. And his conclusion stands: apart from God, it is all vapour.

But here is the extraordinary and humbling revelation.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived apart from Jesus, still lost his way.

By **1 Kings 11**, his foreign wives had turned his heart after other gods. The very man who wrote 'Fear God and keep His commandments' ended his life in spiritual compromise.

Ecclesiastes is therefore not merely the testament of a wise man it is the confession of a brilliant man who discovered wisdom too late to apply it fully.

He is writing from experience, and it includes the experience of failure.

1 Kings 11:4, *"For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David."*

This is the revelatory paradox at the heart of the book: the man who tells you that wisdom alone cannot save you is the wisest man in history.

The man who tells you that pleasure cannot satisfy the soul is the man who had access to every pleasure available.

And the man who says 'Fear God and keep His commandments' is the man who failed to do exactly that — and is warning you from the wreckage.

III. Hebel — Key Word

The word translated 'vanity' throughout Ecclesiastes is the Hebrew hebel (הֶבֶל).

It **appears 38 times** in this single book — more than in any other book of the Bible. To understand Ecclesiastes, you must understand **hebel**.

Hebel literally means breath. Specifically, the brief, visible puff of breath on a cold morning.

You breathe out. You see it for a moment substantial, white, real. You reach for it. It is gone. You breathe again. It appears again. It disappears again. That is **hebel**.

Not evil. Not worthless. Just incapable of being held. Incapable of lasting.

What is devastating about the Preacher's use of this word is what he attaches it to: not trivial pursuits but the greatest human aspirations.

- **Wisdom** is hebel (2:15).
- **Pleasure** is hebel (2:1).
- **Hard work** is hebel (2:11).
- **Wealth** is hebel (6:2).
- **Even life itself** is hebel (6:12 — 'all the days of his vain life').

Everything that civilization values, everything that culture promises will satisfy. The Preacher has tried it and attaches the same word: breath on a winter morning.

Psalm 39:5–6, "Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah ⁶ Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them."

The Psalmist David, Solomon's father, used the same word and the same image.

What David poetically expressed, Solomon systematically proved.

This is the Bible's continuous witness: human life, measured by eternity, is brief as breath.

- Purposeful, yes.
- Significant, yes.

But only when it is lived with reference to the eternal God who breathes it into existence.

Job 7:7, "Oh, remember that my life is a breath! My eye will never again see good."

Job, in his deepest suffering, arrives at the same word. Breath.

But notice: Job does not conclude from his brevity that life is meaningless.

He concludes that it is precious, precisely because it is brief.

The brevity of *hebel* is not an argument against living fully. It is an argument for living wisely, urgently, and in full recognition of the One who gave you the breath in the first place.

IV. Three Phases that unlocking everything.

A. 'Under the Sun' — The Horizon That Kills

The phrase '*under the sun*' appears **29 times** in Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Old Testament.

It is the Preacher's signature phrase, and it is the key to understanding why his experiment always ends in *hebel*.

'Under the sun' means life viewed entirely from a horizontal perspective as though this world, this time, this physical existence, and this human reason were the only reference points available.

It is the philosophical posture of secular materialism: no God, no eternity, no transcendent meaning. Just what you can see, touch, measure, achieve, and experience before the sun goes down permanently.

When life is lived 'under the sun,'

- **wisdom produces grief (1:18),**
- **work produces nothing lasting (2:11),**
- **justice is corrupted (3:16), and**
- **death equalises everyone (9:2–3).**

The phrase is not a geographic description, but it is an epistemological prison. The Preacher is describing what life looks like when you remove the only dimension that gives it ultimate meaning.

Isaiah 55:8–9, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'"*

Isaiah gives us the antidote to the 'under the sun' posture: there is a perspective above the sun, above the earth, above all human reasoning the perspective of the God whose thoughts exceed ours as the heavens exceed the earth.

The Preacher writes to show you what life looks like from ground level. So that you will lift your eyes and seek the altitude of God's perspective.

B. 'Fear God' — The Vertical Corrective

Scattered through Ecclesiastes like lighthouses in a fog are **six references to fearing God (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12–13; 12:13)**.

Every time the Preacher has shown one more avenue of life 'under the sun' leading to *hebel*, he inserts this phrase as the corrective: **fear God**.

The fear of God is the defining orientation of the Old Testament saint.

It is not terror of an arbitrary deity.

It is the awe-filled recognition that God is real, that He is holy, that He sees everything, that He will judge everything, and that His purposes transcend the limits of 'under the sun.'

To fear God is to live with both eyes open that the horizontal eye that sees this world clearly, and the vertical eye that sees it in the light of eternity.

Proverbs 9:10, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are in precise theological alignment: wisdom begins with the fear of God — not with philosophy, not with education, not with experience.

The Preacher has discovered that all those things, pursued without the fear of God, produce either grief or emptiness.

The fear of God is not the end of the journey to meaning, but it is the beginning.

You cannot find your way in the forest until you are standing on the right road.

C. 'There is nothing better' — The gift disguised as ordinary.

Six times in Ecclesiastes, after exposing one more *hebel*, the Preacher inserts a quiet, extraordinary positive.

Ecclesiastes 2:24, *'there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labour'*

The phrase appears at **2:24, 3:12–13, 3:22, 5:18–19, 8:15, and 9:7–9**.

This is perhaps the most counter-intuitive revelation in the entire book.

After dismissing wisdom, pleasure, work, and wealth as *hebel*, the Preacher commends

- Food,
- Drink,
- Honest work, and
- Love.

These ordinary pleasures are not the consolation prizes for those who failed to achieve something great. They are the actual goods that God gives, and the person who can receive them with gratitude has discovered the secret to genuine contentment.

1 Timothy 4:4–5, *"For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."*

Paul echoes the Preacher across the millennia.

The goods of ordinary life are sanctified made holy and meaningful not by their inherent greatness but by the thanksgiving with which they are received.

The Preacher is not saying that a good meal is the meaning of life. He is saying that a good meal, received as a gift from the hand of God, is a daily encounter with the God who gives all good things.

V. The Structure — Why it matters?

Many readers open Ecclesiastes and find it confusing.

It seems to say one thing, then contradict it, then say something positive, then return to gloom. This is not incoherence. It is a deliberate rhetorical strategy.

The Preacher is doing what every great philosopher does.

He presents the evidence before the conclusion.

He shows you the problem from every angle before offering the solution.

He builds in you the same dissatisfaction he felt the same 'surely there must be more than this'.

So that when the conclusion comes in **12:13**, you are ready to receive it not as a religious platitude but as the hard-won verdict of a comprehensive investigation.

Movement	Chapters	The Rhetorical Purpose
The diagnosis	1–3	Name the problem. Create the dissatisfaction. Show that everything 'under the sun' fails.

Movement	Chapters	The Rhetorical Purpose
The Evidence	4–6	Deepen the case. Injustice, corruption, greed, religious formalism — all <i>hebel</i> .
The Wisdom	7–9	Even wisdom and human virtue are limited. But the fear of God changes everything.
The Prescription	10–12	Practical guidance for living wisely in an uncertain world. The final verdict.

VI. The Relevance — Six Philosophies answered.

Contemporary Philosophy		What It Promises	Ecclesiastes' Answer
Existentialism 'Create your own meaning'	—	Self-defined purpose that survives mortality	2:11 — self-created meaning is 'grasping for the wind.' Wind cannot be held.
Hedonism — 'Pleasure is the highest good'		Satisfaction through maximised experience	2:1–2 — 'I said of laughter: Madness! And of mirth: What does it accomplish?'

Contemporary Philosophy	What It Promises	Ecclesiastes' Answer
Stoicism — 'Accept and endure'	Peace through detachment from outcomes	3:14 — Yes, accept God's sovereignty. But this leads to fear of God, not mere equanimity.
Materialism — 'Wealth brings security'	Financial provision eliminates anxiety	5:10 — 'He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver.' Appetite grows with income.
Transhumanism — 'Technology transcends limits'	Science and innovation overcome human limitations	1:9 — 'There is nothing new under the sun.' Technology changes the tools; the heart remains unchanged.
Buddhism/Mindfulness — 'Be present'	Escape suffering through detachment	Ecclesiastes commends present joy (9:7–9) but grounded in the fear of God, not self-discipline.

Conclusion.

◆ The Search That Ends at the Beginning — Blaise Pascal

Blaise Pascal was arguably **the greatest mind of the seventeenth century**.

By **23**, he had invented the mechanical calculator.

By **31**, he had laid the foundations of probability theory and fluid mechanics.

He was also a committed Christian who thought more carefully about the human condition than almost any person in history.

In **1670**, his posthumously published *Pensées* contained these lines: 'What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are.'

Pascal called it '***the God-shaped vacuum***.' He was paraphrasing **Ecclesiastes 3:11** — 'He has put eternity in their hearts.'

The void in every human being is not a wound to be healed by philosophy, achievement, or pleasure. It is a window — shaped precisely like the God who created the one looking through it.

Over these twelve weeks, we are going to sit with the greatest wisdom literature in the Bible — the most honest, searching, intellectually rigorous book in the canon — and let it do to us what it was designed to do: clear away every false answer until only the true one remains.

The search always ends at the beginning. And the beginning is this: Fear God.

Application:

◆ The Engineer at the Crossroads

David is a **civil engineer**. He works 60-hour weeks, leads a major infrastructure project, tithes faithfully, attends his church home group on Thursdays, and reads his Bible every morning. By any measure, he is a **devoted Christian** and a **productive professional**.

But last year he sat across from his pastor and said: 'I feel like I am living two separate lives. Monday to Friday I am in a world that measures everything by deadlines, profit margins, and career advancement. Sunday I am in a world that says none of that ultimately matters. I don't know how to hold them together without either neglecting God or withdrawing from my work.'

David is asking the question that Ecclesiastes Session 1 **forces every working Christian to confront**.

The Preacher has just told us that everything under the sun is hebel — breath, vapour, insufficient for ultimate meaning.

He has told us that the wisest, most productive man in history found his achievements empty at the end.

Yet God has placed us in a world where real work must be done, real families must be fed, real responsibilities must be met.

How does a Christian live with full engagement in the present — working hard, building things, investing in relationships and career — while never forgetting that all of it is hebel unless it is held in the hand

of God? That is the question this application section is designed to answer.

I. TWO HORIZONS

The central insight of Ecclesiastes Session 1 is what the Preacher calls the difference between living 'under the sun' and living above it.

Every Christian occupies both dimensions simultaneously — and the failure to hold both clearly is the root of the tension David described.

A. The 'Under the Sun' Horizon — The Necessity of Full Engagement

Life under the sun is real.

Work under the sun matters.

Relationships under the sun are precious. The food, drink, and honest labour that the Preacher repeatedly commends (**2:24; 3:12–13; 5:18–19; 9:7–9**) are gifts from the hand of God not distractions from it.

Ecclesiastes 2:24, *"There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labour. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God."*

The **Preacher does not say 'abandon your labour** and retreat from the world.'

He says that ***enjoy the good of your labour*** because it is from the hand of God.

The Christian who withdraws from the world in the name of eternal priorities has misread Ecclesiastes as badly as the person who invests in it with no thought of eternity.

Genesis 1:28, *"Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"*

The dominion mandate of **Genesis 1:28** has never been revoked.

God called human beings before the Fall, before redemption, as the design specification of humanity to engage with the created world to fill it, to subdue it, to exercise ordered stewardship over it.

The Christian at work is not departing from the sacred into the secular. They are exercising their God-given vocation in the world God made.

Work is not a consequence of the Fall!

Most Christians unconsciously assume that hard work is part of the curse — a penalty for sin.

*But **Genesis 2:15** says: 'The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it'*

Before the Fall.

Work is not the consequence of sin.

*Exhausting, futile, frustrated work is the consequence of sin (**Genesis 3:17–19**). But work itself is part of the original design. When a Christian works with full engagement and finds meaning and satisfaction in it, they are not being worldly. They are being human in the way God intended.*

B. The Eternal Horizon — The Necessity of the Vertical Reference

The Preacher's warning is not against work but against work disconnected from the vertical dimension.

Work that has become an idol rather than a stewardship.

The moment any achievement under the sun is asked to carry the weight of ultimate meaning, it becomes hebel not because it is evil, but because it is finite being asked to do the work of the infinite.

Ecclesiastes 3:11, *"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end."*

This verse is the architectural key to the entire balance.

God has put eternity in the human heart an inbuilt orientation toward something that transcends time, that satisfies permanently, that does not fade.

This eternity-shaped longing is what makes every worldly achievement feel insufficient not because the achievement is bad, but because it was never designed to satisfy the deepest longing. Only God can do that.

Matthew 6:33, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

Jesus does not say 'ignore these things.'

He says: seek first the kingdom, and these things will be added.

The vertical horizon (the kingdom of God) does not displace the horizontal horizon (food, drink, clothing, work). It reorders it.

The Christian is not choosing between the eternal and the temporal, but they are learning which horizon governs which.

Tension 1: Working Hard vs. Knowing it will all Pass Away!

The fear: 'If everything is *hebel*, if the sea is never full and there is no lasting profit under the sun (1:3–7) — **why invest fully in my work at all?**

Why give it everything when death will equalise me with the fool who gave nothing?'

The Ecclesiastes Resolution: The argument from *hebel* runs in the opposite direction from what this fear assumes.

The Preacher's conclusion from the brevity of life is **not** 'therefore invest less' but it is 'therefore invest differently and invest fully':

Ecclesiastes 9:10, *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going."*

The finite nature of the opportunity is the argument for maximum investment, not minimum investment.

Because the window of opportunity is brief.

Because the grave closes it.

Do it now, with everything you have, knowing that what is done for God in this window has permanent significance even when the window closes.

Colossians 3:23–24, *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,"²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.²⁵ But*

he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality."

Paul's instruction transforms the Preacher's observation: work heartily — not for the employer, not for the salary, not for the reputation — but as unto the Lord.

When the motivation shifts from human achievement to divine stewardship, the work changes in quality without changing in quantity.

The engineer who works as unto the Lord is not less productive than the engineer working for personal advancement. She is more productive — and she has a reason to do it with her whole heart that the ambitious engineer lacks.

Tension 2: Building for the Future vs. Leaving it All Behind!

The fear: 'Solomon built the greatest empire in the ancient world, and his son Rehoboam destroyed it in two years (**1 Kings 12**).

If I build a business, a ministry, a family culture, a career I must leave it to someone else.

Who knows whether they will be wise or a fool?

Ecclesiastes 2:18–19, *Then I hated all my labour in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. ¹⁹And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labour in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.*

The Ecclesiastes Resolution: The Preacher is **not** saying do not build. He is saying **do not build for yourself**.

The distinction is everything.

Solomon hated his labour because he had built for his own legacy. The Christian builds for God which means they can hold the outcome loosely, because it was never theirs to keep in the first place.

Psalm 127:1, *"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."*

The Psalmist makes the Preacher's point with precision: the problem is not building but it is building without God.

The house built with the Lord is not subject to the vulnerability the Preacher describes, because its security rests not on the wisdom of the next generation but on the unchanging faithfulness of the God who owns it.

The Secret of Sustainable Building.

There is a form of building that survives the transfer to the next generation — not because the next generation is wise, but because what was built was built on the right foundation.

*Jesus says: 'On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (**Matthew 16:18**).*

The Christian who builds their work, family, and ministry as a contribution to Christ's building project — rather than a personal monument — has solved the Preacher's problem.

Christ is the builder. The Christian is a co-labourer. What Christ builds endures.

Tension 3: Pursuing Excellence vs Avoiding the idol of Achievement!

The fear: Ecclesiastes says wisdom, achievement, and reputation are all hebel.

But Paul says to excel in everything and bring glory to God.

How can I pursue excellence at work without the pursuit itself becoming an idol?

Ecclesiastes 1:16–18, *"I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." ¹⁷And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. ¹⁸For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."*

The Preacher's problem with wisdom is not wisdom itself but wisdom pursued as an end.

The grief that attaches to wisdom comes when the wise person expects wisdom to deliver what only God can deliver: ultimate satisfaction, permanent security, transcendent meaning.

1 Corinthians 10:31, *"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*

Paul resolves the tension by relocating the motivation: the standard is not excellence for its own sake, but it is the glory of God as the aim of all activity.

The Christian professional who pursues excellence for God's glory is not chasing the same thing as the secular professional who pursues excellence for personal reputation, even if the visible outputs are identical.

The difference is the why.

The why determines whether the pursuit is worship or idolatry.

Achievement as Idol		Achievement as Stewardship	
Purpose:	personal significance and recognition	Purpose: glorify God and serve others	
Standard:	comparison with others, competitive	Standard:	faithfulness to the assignment God gave
Response to success:	pride, craving more	Response to success:	gratitude, deflecting glory to God
Response to failure:	identity collapse	Response to failure:	recalibration, learning, trust
Motivation:	'I must prove myself'	Motivation:	'I have been given this capacity to steward'
End state:	Ecclesiastes 2:11 — 'no profit under the sun'	End state:	Matthew 25:21 — 'Well done, good and faithful servant'

Tension 4: Being Present in the World vs. Being Transformed by Eternity!

The fear: **If I keep eternity in view, will I become so heavenly minded that I am of no earthly use?**

Will thinking about the judgment and the passing of all things make me passive, disengaged, or detached from the very people and responsibilities God has placed in my life?

Ecclesiastes 11:1–2, *"Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days. ² Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth."*

The Preacher's prescription for living in uncertain times is the opposite of passivity: cast broadly, invest widely, sow generously.

Because the future is uncertain and belongs to God, the wise person does not consolidate and withdraw. They distribute and engage. Eternal perspective produces maximum present engagement, not minimum.

Hebrews 11:13–16, *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*

The patriarchs who confessed themselves 'strangers and pilgrims' were not passive, withdrawn, or disengaged.

- **Abraham built, planted, and fought.**
- **Joseph administered Egypt.**
- **Moses organised an entire nation.**

The eternal perspective did not make them less engaged with the present, but it gave them freedom to engage with it without being controlled by it.

They held the world loosely enough to use it fully.

The most practically engaged people in human history have often been those with the most vivid eternal perspective.

William Wilberforce spent 20 years fighting slavery in Parliament — not despite his convictions about eternity but because of them. 'God Almighty has set before me two great objects,' he wrote, 'the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.' *Eternal stakes produced maximum earthly engagement.*

Tension 5: Enjoying the Present vs. Storing up Treasure in Heaven!

The fear: 'Jesus says to lay up treasure in heaven, not on earth (**Matthew 6:19–21**).

The Preacher says enjoy your food and your work as gifts from God (**2:24; 9:7**).

These seem to contradict each other. **Should I enjoy the present or sacrifice it for eternity?**

This is not a contradiction. It is two complementary truths about the same reality.

Jesus warns against laying up earthly treasure because earthly treasure does not last that it is *hebel* in the Preacher's language.

The Preacher commends the enjoyment of ordinary gifts because they are from God's hand, which is precisely what makes them non-hebel. They are received in relationship with the Giver.

1 Timothy 6:17–19, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

Paul's resolution is the most direct synthesis available.

God gives all things to enjoy!

But the mode of reception is trust in the living God, not trust in the riches themselves.

The Christian who receives a good salary with gratitude to God and a loose grip who gives generously, and shares freely is simultaneously enjoying the present (**1 Timothy 6:17**) and laying up treasure in heaven (**6:18**).

The two are not in competition. The grip determines everything.

Study Questions.

Question	Discussion Focus
Pascal called the human soul a 'God-shaped vacuum.' Where do you feel that vacuum most acutely in your own life?	Personal and honest reflection — the entry point into the study.
Ecclesiastes was written by the man who had everything. What does this tell us about the sufficiency of human resources to answer the meaning question?	The experiment argument — why Solomon's testimony matters.
The Preacher uses the word 'under the sun' 29 times. What decisions in your own life are you currently making entirely 'under the sun' — without reference to God or eternity?	Self-examination — bring the framework into daily life.
Which of the six contemporary philosophies in the table resonates most with people in your community? How would you use Ecclesiastes to answer it?	Contextual application — equipping for conversations with seekers.

Question	Discussion Focus
The book ends with 'Fear God and keep His commandments.' After reading this overview, does that conclusion feel like a defeat or a discovery? Why?	Frame the journey — what posture will each person bring to the coming weeks?