

All Is Emptiness Apart From God  
Ecclesiastes 1-12

## MEMORY VERSE

ECCLESIASTES 12:13

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A wooden or metal rod to use as a scepter, a gift-wrap bow (placed on the end of the rod), a cassette of children’s worship music and a cassette player.

As many Ecclesiastes sun glasses from the template as the number of children in your class copied onto white card stock, clear tape or glue, string, scissors, markers and colored cellophane.

## ATTENTION GETTER!

### A King or Queen for a Moment

In today’ lesson we are going to learn about King Solomon. He was king over a very great nation at that time, Israel. He had everything that he could have possibly needed or wanted, but he still discovered that apart from God life was miserable! For this game you will need a wooden or metal rod to use as a scepter, a gift-wrap bow (placed on the end of the rod), a cassette of children’s worship music and a cassette player.

Have the children sit down in a circle. Play the music and have the children pass around the scepter until the music stops. Tell the children that whoever is holding the scepter is “king or queen for a moment.” They can give a command to the rest of the group and they all must follow it. For example, they could say, “stand up and hop on one foot while scratching your head,” or “make a silly animal noise and act it out.” The rest of the group has to follow the command of the king or queen. After everyone has had a chance to

give commands stop and ask them how it felt to be king or queen for a moment. What would it be like to be the king or queen over a great nation and to have everything you could ever want? What if you didn't have the Lord?

## LESSON TIME!

When Solomon became king of Israel, he asked God for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:7-12), and he became the wisest man in the world (1 Kings 4:29-34). His reputation spread throughout the known world and kings and leaders from other nations came to Jerusalem to learn from him.

But with all of his practical insight on life, Solomon failed to follow his own advice, and as a result, his life began a downward spiral. Then as he came near to the end of his life, he looked back with an attitude of humility and repentance. He felt bad that he gave his life over to wrong things.

As he writes about his experiences he gives us spiritual insights for our lives, hoping to spare his readers the bitterness of learning through personal experience that everything apart from God is empty, hollow, and meaningless. **True happiness is found in God alone.** Our lesson today reveals that life is meaningless apart from Him.

**ECCLESIASTES 1:2, 14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9**  
**Life leaves us empty**

**“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”**

**I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

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.

Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

The Psalmist wrote “In your presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:11b). Most people spend much of their leisure time pursuing pleasure in the hope of finding happiness. The Bible tells us that a life spent apart from God will only leave us empty inside.

King Solomon begins the book of Ecclesiastes with a declaration that runs as a theme throughout his book, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” In his opinion nothing is worthwhile; everything is futile.

Solomon had everything one could ever want in life. He had wisdom, power, riches, honor, reputation and God's favor, yet he was the one who discussed the ultimate emptiness of all that this world has to offer. In his book, he tries to destroy people's confidence in their own effort, abilities, and righteousness, and direct them to faith in God as the only reason for living. **True happiness is found in God alone.**

Solomon summarized all his attempts at finding life's meaning as "vanity and striving after wind" (2:1). When the wind blows by we can feel it, but we can't catch hold of it, or keep it. Everything we try to hold on to in this life is like the wind; it blows by us. Though Solomon tried to find satisfaction from the joy of accomplishment and had given himself over to pleasure in order to find the meaning of life, the final conclusion was that it was meaningless and a chasing after the wind.

## **Looking in the Mirror**

Solomon was a very wise man, but unfortunately he lost sight of the Lord in his older years. He began to look at himself and others instead of the Lord. The Bible tells us that we need to look at the mirror of God's Word if we want to understand what is really true in life (James 1:25). Let's play a fun game to remind us to "mirror" the Lord, not ourselves or others.

Have the children form pairs. Decide who will be the person doing the action and who will be the person "in the mirror." The person in the mirror has to mimic all of the actions of the other person. The children should sit down facing each other. They should look at each other in the eyes and not remove their eyes from one another's. Have the child doing the action begin and the other child mirror them. After a couple of minutes switch roles.

Next, gather the group together again and ask them if it was easy or difficult to be the mirror. Is it sometimes difficult to mirror the Lord? What are some ways that we can grow in mirroring Jesus?

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-14, 24, 25; 7:23-25; 8:16,17  
Life leaves us searching

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity.

I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?”

I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.

I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I

acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.

So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor.

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who succeeds the king?—Only what he has already done.

Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all.

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me.

As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep,  
who can find it out?

I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out  
wisdom and the reason of things, to know the  
wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and  
madness.

When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see  
the business that is done on earth, even though one  
sees no sleep day or night,

then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot  
find out the work that is done under the sun. 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.

Imagine if you had all the money and power you could ever want. How would you use your wealth and power? Solomon used his wealth and power to search for life's meaning as an experiment (2:1-11). He first tried pursuing pleasure (vs. 1-3). He began grand public works programs, bought slaves, had many wives and concubines, set his mind on complex matters, became extremely wealthy, organized musical groups and supported the arts (vs. 4-10). But none of these things gave him the satisfaction he was seeking (v. 11).

Some of the pleasures Solomon sought were wrong and some were worthy, but even the worthy pursuits left him empty. All the pleasure money could buy couldn't bring him happiness (5:10). But the world tells us to demand happiness, do all we can to attain it, and make personal satisfaction our chief goal in life.

Solomon as he was writing about his own life discovered that his great wealth, power, position, wives and accomplishments did not



make him happy. His search for happiness left him empty. Even Solomon in his great wisdom concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun (8:16, 17). With access to the entire world's wisdom, the wisest man would know very little. There seems to always be more questions than answers to life.

Solomon, the wisest man in the world, confessed how difficult it had been to act and think wisely (7:23-25). He emphasized that no matter how much we know there will always be mysteries we will never understand. Even human wisdom will leave us empty and void of knowing the true meaning of happiness. Our intellect will not satisfy our desire for fulfillment in life. **True happiness is found in God alone.** Solomon tells us that even his great wisdom could not offer the satisfaction he was seeking (1:18). Wisdom in itself brought grief rather than satisfaction.

**ECCLESIASTES 3:11-15; 5:18 - 6:2; 12:13,14**  
**Life leads us to trust God**

**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.**

**I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives,**

**and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.**

**I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.**

That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.

Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.

As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.

For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

As we come to the conclusion of our lesson today, we need to examine the observation that Solomon discovered in his search for

life's meaning. We can never be completely satisfied with earthly pleasures and pursuits because God has created us in His image and has planted eternity in our hearts (3:11). All of us have a spiritual thirst that only God can satisfy.

God has arranged our world in such a way so that we could see our need for Him. Solomon's search brought him to the conclusion that first, "there is nothing better for a man than to be happy and to enjoy himself as long as he can;" and second, "that he should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of his labors, for these are gifts from God" (3:12, 13). If any one eats and drinks and finds satisfaction in all his toil, it surely would be a gift of God, yet this is conditional. To enjoy life is also a gift from God (5:18, 19).

Solomon gives us the answer to life's great question "What is the purpose of life?" It is simply that we should fear the all-powerful God (3:14). Fear does not mean to cringe in terror, but to respect, revere and stand in awe of God because of who He is. **True happiness is found in God alone.**

To have purpose in life starts with whom we know, not what we know or how good we are. We have been given a God-given purpose in life and unless we fear Him and give Him first place in our life, we will never be satisfied. How can we replace a God given thirst in our life for Him with something temporal?

Solomon saves us the heartache and trouble in life by giving us his final conclusion of how we can truly be happy. "Fear God and obey His commandments" (12:13). Those of us who lack purpose and direction in life should turn to God, respecting Him and following His principles for living. None of us are exempt from this responsibility for God will review every person's life to determine how he or she has responded to Him (v. 14).

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon shows us that we should enjoy life, does this mean that we do not need to obey God's commands. No

matter what happens in our lives, we must work toward the single purpose of knowing God. **True happiness is found in God alone.**

Happiness is an elusive goal because people and circumstances change quickly. True and lasting happiness, however, comes from God. In Him we find hope and joy to last a lifetime. You would have to agree with the conclusion of Solomon's search. True happiness cannot be achieved but received through a right relationship with God. End your search with Him, and you will find endless joy.

## **Ecclesiastes Sun Glasses**

For this craft you will need as many templates as the number of children in your class copied onto white card stock, clear tape or glue, string, scissors, markers and colored cellophane. Before class copy the sunglasses template onto white card stock. Make enough copies for all of the children in your class. Pass them out to the children and have them cut out the three pieces for the sunglasses. Allow the children to color or decorate their glasses as they wish.

Next, tape the sides of the glasses to the front. Poke a hole through the holes indicated on the sides of the glasses. Place string through the holes (long enough for the children to wear the glasses around their necks). Cut out the areas for the eyes. Cut colored cellophane in large enough pieces to cover the holes. Tape or glue the cellophane to the glasses.

Share Ecclesiastes 11:7 with the class and talk about how important that Jesus is to us as the Light of the world. Life is meaningless apart from Jesus!

## **PRAYER**

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to give their lives to the Lord in order to find true happiness. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.

