



# *A Quest for Meaning*

A JOURNEY THROUGH ECCLESIASTES

"I HAVE SEEN ALL THE  
THINGS THAT ARE DONE  
UNDER THE SUN; ALL OF  
THEM ARE MEANINGLESS, A  
*chasing after the wind.*"

-ECC 1:14

BY VALERIE FAUST: REAL TRUTH. REAL LIFE.

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## Introduction: A Quest for Meaning

*“Even if someone lived a thousand years – make it two thousand! – but didn’t enjoy anything, what’s the point? Doesn’t everyone end up in the same place? We work to feed our appetites; Meanwhile our souls go hungry.” – Ecclesiastes 6:6 – 7, MSG*

Is your soul hungry?

Do you ever look around this world, your workplace, your home – your life – and wonder, *“Is this really all there is?”*

Do you ever find yourself longing for meaning? For purpose? For a sense of deeper satisfaction and fulfillment? For a sense of joy that outlasts the many ups and downs of life?

Do you find yourself growing tired and weary – simply going through the motions of life? Or feeling jaded and dull – wishing for renewed enthusiasm and excitement? Searching for that thing that can reignite the spark in your life?

Maybe, you feel guilty. Guilty, because while on the surface you’ve achieved everything you hoped for – high paying job, great family, beautiful home – deep down there’s a sense that something is still missing. You still feel incomplete. And, perhaps, even a bit bored with the life you have – the endless meetings; the nonstop emails; another day the office; another workout at the gym. The unending loads of laundry, dinners to prepare, diapers to change, and toys to clean up. A never-ending stream of responsibilities and chores that leaves you feeling burdened and heavy-laden.

Or, perhaps, you haven’t yet achieved everything you’ve set out to in this life. And so, you spend your days constantly striving for more, more, more. For those things you believe will finally make you happy. Full. But instead, you are only left feeling exhausted – burnout slowly creeping in and taking over your spirit.

Or, maybe, you’ve given up on hope all together and resigned yourself to the mindset that *“This is just how things will always be.”* Dreams lost and buried under the hardships and disappointments of life.

Wherever you may be in life, I’m here to tell you there is hope. There is peace. Contentment. Joy. Renewed passion and enthusiasm. Purpose. There is rest for your spirit. ***Food for your soul.***<sup>1</sup>

It’s there, but it’s waiting for you to pursue it. To seek it with your whole heart.<sup>2</sup> To embark on a journey of the spirit. **A quest for meaning.**

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<sup>1</sup> John 6:35

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 29:13

## Our Journey

### *A note regarding the structure of this study.*

As we begin this quest for meaning, I wanted to share with you what to expect along the way. Over the next seven weeks, we will journey together with King Solomon through the book of Ecclesiastes. A book dedicated to Solomon's search for meaning and purpose in life. Practically, each week will consist of five separate days (with the exception of Week 1 which only has four) with the first three days focused on bible study. To that end, Days 1 – 3 will each include a recommended bible reading, teaching inspired by that scripture, and questions for reflection.

Next, the fourth day will be dedicated to worship and meditation. Too often, when doing studies like this, we get so caught up learning about God that we forget to *be with* God. And so, Day 4 is dedicated to slowing down, and simply being with Him. An opportunity to praise God for what He is teaching us that week and to savor His Word. A day devoted to the wisdom of Psalm 104:33 – 34:

**I will sing to the Lord all my life;**

***I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.***

***May my meditation be pleasing to him,***

**as I rejoice in the Lord.**

To that end, the structure of Day 4 will consist of three songs intentionally selected to highlight and reflect the lessons discussed in Days 1 – 3. It is my recommendation that you set aside the time to listen to each song ([available on our Spotify Playlist!](#)), truly reflecting on the message of the lyrics. Not only singing along, but making the song your prayer in that moment. Once you are done, there is space to record any insights or impressions that emerged during your worship time. Then, once you've completed your time of worship, there's space for you to enter a time of meditation.

Now, perhaps, Christian meditation is a new practice for you. Perhaps, the idea of it even makes you uncomfortable. If so, it might be because you are more acquainted with meditation as a new age tool – a method to quiet and empty the mind – than as an important spiritual discipline – a practice that allows “us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us.”<sup>3</sup> In this context, Christian meditation focuses on filling the mind with God's Truth and creating the emotional and spiritual space that allows Christ to construct an “inner sanctuary of the heart.”<sup>4</sup> Or, as Richard Foster describes in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, “Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey His Word.”

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<sup>3</sup> From *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Ultimately, meditation is the practice of quieting ourselves in the Lord's presence, so that we can be with and hear from Him.

In practice then, I recommend selecting a word, phrase, verse(s), or song lyric that either deeply resonated with you or challenged you during the past week. Next, ask God to reveal to you a deeper insight or understanding regarding your choice as you spend the next five minutes (or more if you like!), quietly pondering those words in your heart. If you find your mind wondering, don't get angry with yourself, simply let go of that which is pulling you away and re-center on the word, phrase, verse(s), or lyrics you chose. At the end of your meditation, there will be space for you to record any insights or impressions God laid on your heart.

Finally, Day 5 will be an opportunity for reflection, application, and prayer. Reflection regarding all the lessons from the past week – do you see any themes in emerge from your answers? Then, taking time to identify the relevant applications for your life – how do you want to incorporate these lessons in your life moving forward? And last, a time of prayer between you and God to share whatever is on your heart. Perhaps, it's thanking Him for the blessings you've received this week, the lessons you've learned, or the ways you've grown. Perhaps, it's offering your application and commitment up to Him, asking for His help to live out the lessons you've learned. Or, maybe, it's coming to Him with the hard question you've been wrestling with that week. Whatever it is, bring it to Him in prayer.

Ultimately, my prayer for you is that this journey will be a robust time of learning and growth in your life. Of not just reading my words, consuming my teaching, and answering my questions, but also spending time with the greatest Teacher of all.<sup>5</sup> Jesus Himself. “...***so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.***” (1 Corinthians 2:5) For ***He*** is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.<sup>6</sup> Amen.

#### **Please Note:**

All Bible verses are taken from the NIV translation except when otherwise noted.

New International Version (NIV)

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Also, all emphasis added – as indicated by bold, and bold & italicized font – is my own.

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<sup>5</sup> John 13:13

<sup>6</sup> John 14:6

## **Week 1: Day 1: Dust to Dust**

***“...for dust you are and to dust you will return.” - Genesis 3:19***

**READ: GENESIS 2:4 – 7 AND GENESIS 3:19**

Every year, about a month before Easter, devoted Christians celebrate Ash Wednesday. A day that reminds us of the temporary nature of this life and that sometimes it's good to feel small. To pause and reflect on the smallness of our lives in the grandness of this universe God has created. To remember the shortness of our days in the midst of HIS story. And to challenge us anew - what will we do with this one life?

**ARE YOU CONTENT WITH HOW YOU ARE LIVING YOUR ONE LIFE?**

Ash Wednesday also serves the purpose of preparing us for Lent. A season that invites us into a time of letting go. Of letting go of those things that no longer serve us. Of things that hinder us. So that we can prepare ourselves to truly celebrate Easter, the Resurrection, by focusing our lives on Jesus and running the race God has laid out for us.

...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. ***And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us***, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

It is my hope in life to run the race as faithfully as I can. To play my small part in His story. And while Lent is certainly a good time to reflect on these things, we would do well to do so even more often. That's why I'm committing through this study to examine my life and those things God is calling me to let go of in my pursuit of Him. To run the race unhindered. Untangled. Free.

Perhaps God is calling you to the same thing. If so, I invite you to join me for a journey through Ecclesiastes. A book that often gets a bad rep for being negative and pessimistic – dark and depressing – but in reality, holds great wisdom with the power to set us free to pursue true meaning in life.



**WHERE ARE YOU IN REGARD TO RUNNING THE RACE? ARE YOU ON THE SIDELINES? IN THE STARTING BLOCKS? PANTING FOR BREATH AS YOU STRUGGLE TO RUN? OR RUNNING CONFIDENTLY AND FREELY?**

**WHAT MIGHT GOD BE CALLING YOU TO LET GO OF AT THIS TIME?**

## Week 1: Day 2: A Request for Wisdom

*“God appeared to Solomon and said to him, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’ Solomon answered God, ‘...Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people...’ – 2 Chron. 1:7 – 10*

### **READ: 2 CHRONICLES 1:1 – 12**

It was roughly 970 BC when young Solomon, perhaps as young as 20 years old, succeeded his father, David, as King of Israel. Can you imagine what he must have been feeling as he prepared to lead a nation? Excitement? Anxiety? Fear? Grief over losing his father?

### **WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST RESPONSIBILITY? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?**

It is in the midst of this transition that God appears to Solomon in the middle of the night offering to bless him for his new role. And Solomon, displaying great wisdom already, responds not with a request for personal fame, glory, and riches, but for even greater wisdom to effectively lead God’s people. And then God, so pleased by Solomon’s request based in a desire to lead His people and not in personal pride or advancement declares: **“I will certainly give you the wisdom and knowledge you requested. But I will also give you wealth, riches, and fame such as no other king has had before you or will ever have in the future!”** (2 Chronicles 1:12) And so, Solomon becomes the wisest and richest person in the world.

### **WHAT WOULD YOU ASK FOR IF GOD APPEARED TO YOU TONIGHT?**

Fast forward then to about 935 BC. Now toward the end of Solomon’s life and reign, we find the wise King reflecting on his vast experiences over the years and the lessons he has learned. Because while he may have been the wisest man on earth, Solomon was still not perfect. His life, like any other’s, was marked by highs and lows, victories and failures – and even some foolish choices. And so, with the intent of sharing his wisdom and helping others learn from his experiences, Solomon shares what he has learned in his pursuit of meaning in life, and Ecclesiastes is written.

### **WHAT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS YOU HAVE LEARNED IN YOUR LIFE THIS FAR?**

## Week 1: Day 3: Worship & Meditation

### SONGS FOR WORSHIP:

- **“Into Dust” by Mack Brock**
  - “You are good, You speak life  
You are the Savior of the world  
But carry the weight of all my hurt  
You are the grace I don't deserve  
You are good, You speak life  
Into dust”
- **“Beautiful Things” by Gungor**
  - “You make beautiful things  
You make beautiful things out of the dust  
You make beautiful things  
You make beautiful things out of us”
- **“Once And For All” by Lauren Daigle**
  - “God I give You all I can today  
These scattered ashes that I hid away  
I lay them all at Your feet...  
Show me the love I say I believe  
Oh Help me to lay it down  
Oh Lord I lay it down”

### REFLECTIONS FROM WORSHIP:

**CHOOSE ANY WORD, VERSE, OR SONG LYRIC FROM THIS PAST WEEK FOR A 5 MINUTE MEDITATION.**

**WORD, VERSE(S), OR LYRIC YOU CHOSE:**

**DID GOD LAY ANY INSIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS ON YOUR HEART DURING YOUR MEDITATION?**

**Week 1: Day 4: Reflection, Application, and Prayer**

**REFLECTION:**

**REVISIT YOUR ANSWERS FROM THIS PAST WEEK (DAYS 1 – 3). DO YOU SEE ANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE?**

**WHICH INSIGHTS, IMPRESSIONS, LESSONS, OR QUESTIONS STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST?**

**APPLICATION:**

**HOW DO YOU WANT TO INCORPORATE THESE LESSONS IN YOUR LIFE MOVING FORWARD?**

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN COMMIT TO DOING DIFFERENTLY THIS NEXT WEEK? WHAT ACTION STEP WILL YOU COMMIT TO TAKING?**

**PRAYER:**

**OFFER TO GOD ANY THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON YOUR HEART AND MIND AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM AS WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.**

## Week 2: Day 1: Everything Is Meaningless

Tip: As we read through Ecclesiastes together highlight the word “meaningless” every time it appears.

**“*Meaningless! Meaningless!*” says the Teacher. *‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’*”**

**– Ecclesiastes 1:2**

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 1:1 – 11**

Often in life, our tendency is to think, “*If I only had more money, then I would be happy. If I only got that promotion, then I would feel fulfilled. If I could only travel to Europe, I’d be content. If only I were married... If I only had children...*” We view power, fame, fortune, success, and even relationships as the ultimate goals in life and the keys to making all of our troubles disappear. And yet, King Solomon, someone who *literally* had it all – wisdom, power, fame, professional & relational successes, and wealth beyond measure – begins his message with this dramatic declaration, “**Everything is meaningless.**”

### **HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE LIFE IS MEANINGLESS? WHAT IN LIFE IS WEARISOME TO YOU?**

Next, Solomon drives his point home by introducing many of the key themes he will explore more in depth in the pages to come.

- 1. v. 3 – 4: The Futility of Work:** To begin, Solomon highlights the problem of finding meaning solely in our work and the achievements that come with it by reminding us of our morality. “Generations come and generations go...” We are here, and then we are gone. No matter how hard we work, none of us will escape death. We will all leave this earth, and when we do, none of us can take anything we earn in this lifetime with us when we go.
- 2. v. 4 – 8: The Fallacy of Control:** Closely tied to the futility of work, Solomon reminds us that not only do “Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.” He then emphasizes this point by describing scenes from nature. The sun rising & setting. The winds blowing north to south & south to north. The rivers flowing to the sea without ever drying out. Taken together, these examples emphasize two things: first, the cyclical nature of life and the wearisome routines that make up our existence. “All things are wearisome more than one can say.” And second, the limited control we truly have as humans. We can only predict and report the weather – not control it. We can measure the length of days – not alter them. Despite how hard we work, and whatever professional success we achieve, we cannot control nature, time, or death. We

may be able to influence nature patterns, choose how we utilize our time, and seek to live a healthy lifestyle, but true control remains out of our grasp.

3. **v. 8: The Futility of Pleasure:** “The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.” So often, we seek pleasure and fulfillment through our senses, our experiences, and our things. Whether it’s regularly “living for the weekend” or seeing a new phone, car, or pair of shoes that we just *must* have – we find ourselves always wanting more. We finally save enough money to go on vacation, travel to our dream destination, return home, feel the pang of disappointment, and immediately begin dreaming about our next trip. We love delicious food and drink, so then we stretch our budget to the max trying every new restaurant in town. We swear we’re only going to watch one episode on Netflix but then binge the full season before we know it. We get the new smart phone. And then the next one. And the next one. And the next one. A constant compulsion for more, more, more.
4. **v. 9 – 10: The Fallacy of Uniqueness:** While it’s true we are all unique individuals, the problem arises when we seek to define ourselves and our value by how “special” or unique we are. With our focus on ourselves and the new perspectives, ideas, or discoveries we have to offer, our pride and ego grow at the expense of our humility and the wisdom of the past.
5. **v. 11: The Futility of Legacy:** “There is no remembrance of men of old...” Can you name your great great grandfather? How about your great great great grandfather? We literally wouldn’t exist without them, but most of us would be hard pressed to tell you their names – let alone their unique personalities or the accomplishments they achieved in life. I know I can’t. Or, consider the place you make your home: Do you know who built your house? Can you name the founder of your town? Many of us cannot because the reality is whether we seek to cultivate a legacy through our professional accomplishments, personal relationships, or children & families, one day, almost all of us will be forgotten. Sure, some of us may be remembered longer than others, but eventually the details of our lives will be lost to history.

**WHERE DO YOU TEND TO SEEK MEANING IN YOUR LIFE? WITH WHICH OF THE FALLACIES/FUTILITIES DO YOU MOST OFTEN STRUGGLE?**

Overall, it's important to note that none of these fallacies/futilities are inherently bad. It's not bad to: work hard, seek to make an impact, experience new things, develop meaningful relationships, or have a family. Many of these things are actually quite good. The problem begins, however, when we turn to these areas instead of God as our main sources of fulfillment, satisfaction, and meaning in our lives. Because when we do, the truth of Solomon's words becomes evident: "Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

**UNLIKE US, JESUS IS EVERLASTING, ALL KNOWING, AND ALL POWERFUL. HE CAN CONTROL NATURE & TIME AND HAS EVEN OVERCOME DEATH – HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?**

## Week 2: Day 2: Chasing After the Wind

Tip: As we read through Ecclesiastes together underline the phrase “chasing after the wind” every time it appears.

***“Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.” – Ecclesiastes 1:17***

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 1:12 - 18**

If the goal of chasing something is to catch it, then chasing the wind will never bring us the meaning we desire because it will never bring us the outcome we desire. And, while it may seem obvious that it’s impossible to catch the wind, Solomon tells us much of our quest for meaning in life is just as useless a pursuit. Instead of leading us to meaning, joy, and fulfillment – it leaves us exhausted and emptyhanded feeling bitter, cynical, and disappointed.

**HAVE YOU EVER CHASED SOMETHING YOU THOUGHT WOULD BRING YOU JOY AND MEANING ONLY TO BE LEFT FEELING EMPTY, BITTER, CYNICAL, OR DISAPPOINTED INSTEAD?**

Specifically, it’s important to note that Solomon is talking about our reliance on **human wisdom and knowledge** in these verses. A point the Amplified Bible really highlights:

I spoke with my heart, saying, “Behold, I have acquired **great [human] wisdom** and experience, more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed **a wealth of [moral] wisdom and [scientific] knowledge**. And I set my mind to **know [practical] wisdom** and to discern [the character of] madness and folly [in which men seem to find satisfaction]; I realized that this too is a futile grasping and chasing after the wind. (Ecclesiastes 1:16 – 17, AMP)

Why does this distinction matter? It matters because pursuing human wisdom vs. God’s wisdom is the difference between “chasing after the wind” and running, as we discussed on Day 1, “the race marked out for us.”

...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And **let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us**, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1 – 2)

Whereas “chasing after the wind” sees us frantically striving and grasping after an impossible goal and changing directions as often as, well, the wind – all races have clearly defined starting points, routes, and finish lines. In this instance, running “the race marked out for us” starts when we put our faith in Jesus



and involves following Him and His wisdom on a clear path purposely marked out to bring us even closer to Him.

**DO YOU MORE OFTEN FEEL LIKE YOU ARE “CHASING THE WIND” OR RUNNING “THE RACE MARKED OUT” FOR YOU?**

One of the first Bible verses I ever memorized emphasizes this same distinction between human wisdom and Godly wisdom. And, it also just happens to be written by King Solomon. In Proverbs, a collection of wise sayings and lessons, Solomon writes: “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and He will make your paths straight.*” (Proverbs 3:5 – 6) For it is only by following God’s wisdom and not our own that we can move from “chasing after the wind” in circles to running straight “the race marked out for us.”

Ultimately, the choice is ours to make. We can continue to seek after the wisdom – or even the madness and folly of this world – or we can focus our hearts and minds on Jesus and follow His ways. But only one way leads to meaning. Only one way leads to peace. To joy. To fulfillment. And while it still won’t be easy – it says to run with “perseverance” after all – it is worth it. It’s worth it because running the race is what brings us closer to Jesus, transforms us more into His likeness, and aligns our efforts and purpose with His.

**HOW MIGHT GOD BE ASKING YOU TO TRUST HIM – INSTEAD OF RELYING ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING – TODAY?**

### Week 2: Day 3: Pleasures Are Meaningless:

*“I said to myself, ‘Come on, let’s try pleasure. Let’s look for the ‘good things’ in life.’ But I found that this, too, was meaningless.” – Ecclesiastes 2:1, NLT*

#### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 2:1 – 11**

Have you ever looked at a celebrity and thought, “Wow! They really have it all. If only I could live like that – then I would be happy!”? But if being a celebrity with unlimited access to the “good things” in life is all it takes to be happy, then why do so many of our beloved celebrities continue to wrestle with loneliness, anxiety, depression, and/or addiction in their own quests for meaning? Elvis. Marilyn Monroe. Judy Garland. Whitney Houston. Amy Winehouse. Kurt Cobain. Anthony Bourdain. Robin Williams. Prince. Philip Seymour Hoffman. Cory Monteith. Brittany Murphy. Heath Ledger. Anna Nicole Smith. Chris Farley. Janis Joplin. Jimi Hendrix. The list goes on. Celebrities tragically lost to drug addiction or suicide despite achieving massive success and living lives of unlimited “pleasure.” Lives filled with the “good things” this world teaches us to desire: parties, vacations, drinking, fun hobbies, attractive sexual partners, cars, mansions, a working staff to meet all of our needs, and more. And yet, it wasn’t enough.

**HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SOMEONE YOU THOUGHT “HAD IT ALL” STRUGGLE WITH LONELINESS, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, AND/OR ADDICTION ON THEIR OWN QUEST FOR MEANING?**

After pursuing study, science, and human wisdom, Solomon, like many of our celebrities today, turned to the pleasures of “the good things in life” in an effort to find meaning and fulfillment – even engaging in behavior that is perhaps unexpected from a biblical hero, but all too authentic and realistic. Solomon tell us:

...I decided to cheer myself with wine...I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world. I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household....I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines.

**I had everything a man could desire!...Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure.** (Ecclesiastes 2: 3 – 10, NLT)

You see, the standard for the “good things in life” has not really changed much. And, Solomon was definitely someone who had it *all*. And yet, he declares it all not enough. “...it was **all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.**” (Ecclesiastes 2:11, NLT)

#### **WHAT PLEASURES AND “GOOD THINGS IN LIFE” HAVE YOU CHASED AFTER? WAS IT ENOUGH?**

It wasn't enough because a life spent in the pursuit of pleasure is never enough. There's always more to do or experience. Bigger houses to buy. New hobbies to pursue. More pleasures to enjoy. And the outcome is never what we hope for or desire. Yet, the temptation to pursue these things remains because it is one of the oldest around. And, it's based on one of our Enemy's most effective lies. His first lie. The lie that God's standards are too restrictive. They're too boring. And that they prevent us from having any fun. And so, if we would just focus on pursuing pleasure instead – pursuing the “good things in life” – then we will feel happy and fulfilled. Since the Garden of Eden, the Serpent has been whispering to us that God's rules are only holding us back.

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. “It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. **God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’**”

**“You won't die!”** the serpent replied to the woman. **“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God,** knowing both good and evil.”

The woman was convinced. *She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted* the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. (Genesis 3: 1 – 6)

The serpent convinced Eve that God's rules were holding her back from achieving her full potential – the potential to be like God Himself. So, if that were the case, why should she deny herself the pleasure of enjoying such a powerful and tasty treat? A convincing lie with devastating consequences.

After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve did not experience an immediate physical death – they experienced something worse. They experienced an immediate spiritual death. For the first time in

history, sin entered the world separating mankind from God. No longer could Adam and Eve walk and talk together with God in the cool evening breeze of the Garden. Instead a chasm was created between mankind and God that only God Himself could repair through the work of Jesus on the cross.

“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil...*All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature.* By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. *But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.* (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)” (Ephesians 2: 1 – 6, NLT)

**HAVE YOU EVER BELIEVED THE LIE THAT GOD’S STANDARDS ARE TOO RESTRICTIVE AND BORING?**

**WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?**

**Author’s Note:** Please note, this section is not meant to diminish in any way the real challenges faced by those struggling with mental health concerns and addiction. If you are struggling and are considering self-harm, please seek help today. Reach out to a trusted family member, mentor, pastor, minister, or friend. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Available 24/7, the Lifeline provides free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. 1-800-273-8255 (<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>)

You are deeply loved and valued by God.

## Week 2: Day 4: Worship & Meditation

### SONGS FOR WORSHIP:

- **“Come Thou Fount” by Page CXVI**
  - “Let Thy goodness like a fetter  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it  
Prone to leave the God I love  
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it  
Seal it for Thy courts above”
- **“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” by Rachael Lampa**
  - “Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.”
- **“My Roving Heart” by All Sons & Daughters**
  - “Let worldly minds the world pursue  
It has no charms for me  
Once I admired it's trifles, too  
But grace has set me free  
It's pleasure now no longer please  
No more content afford  
Far from my heart be the joys like these  
Now I have seen the Lord”

### REFLECTIONS FROM WORSHIP:

**CHOOSE ANY WORD, VERSE, OR SONG LYRIC FROM THIS PAST WEEK FOR A 5 MINUTE MEDITATION.**

**WORD, VERSE(S), OR LYRIC YOU CHOSE:**

**DID GOD LAY ANY INSIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS ON YOUR HEART DURING YOUR MEDITATION?**

**Week 2: Day 5: Reflection, Application, and Prayer**

**REFLECTION:**

**REVISIT YOUR ANSWERS FROM THIS PAST WEEK (DAYS 1 – 4). DO YOU SEE ANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE?**

**WHICH INSIGHTS, IMPRESSIONS, LESSONS, OR QUESTIONS STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST?**

**APPLICATION:**

**HOW DO YOU WANT TO INCORPORATE THESE LESSONS IN YOUR LIFE MOVING FORWARD?**

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN COMMIT TO DOING DIFFERENTLY THIS NEXT WEEK? WHAT ACTION STEP WILL YOU COMMIT TO TAKING?**

**PRAYER:**

**OFFER TO GOD ANY THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON YOUR HEART AND MIND AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM AS WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.**

### Week 3: Day 1: We All Must Die

*“I said to myself, ‘This too is meaningless.’ For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!”*

*– Ecclesiastes 2:15 – 16*

#### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 2:12 – 16**

Like Solomon, all of us must wrestle with the reality of our mortality and the bigger question it points to – what do we believe about the nature of life and death? Is this life really all there is? Is there life after death? And if so, does our life here and now have any impact on that afterlife?

In these verses, we see Solomon once again focus on the nature of human wisdom and the conclusions it points us toward. Human wisdom, Solomon determines, is better than folly – a lack of good sense or foolishness – because “Wisdom is better than foolishness, just as light is better than darkness. **For the wise can see where they are going, but fools walk in the dark.**” (Ecclesiastes 2:13 – 14, NLT) Being wise helps us see things more clearly and allows us to work toward our goals more effectively and efficiently. It allows us to have confidence in our decision making and our goal setting. And, ultimately, it can help us achieve more in this lifetime. Yet, no matter how effective or efficient we are, Solomon realizes the truth – we cannot outsmart death.

Death is one thing in this world that does not discriminate. In the end, it comes for us all. No amount of wisdom can change that reality. We can do our best to make wise decisions to delay death, but not one of us is guaranteed tomorrow. With that perspective in mind then, Solomon rightly concludes that being wise or foolish ultimately makes no difference – we all die and are eventually forgotten.

#### **HAVE YOU WRESTLED WITH YOUR OWN MORTALITY? WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT THE NATURE OF LIFE AND DEATH?**

But what if that’s not the end of the story? What if there’s a different perspective to consider? What if this life is *not* all there is and our actions have eternal implications? Human wisdom may teach us that this one life is all that matters, but Jesus and God’s Word teaches us something different. First, through God’s Word we learn that: God created us for eternal life with Him; He desires this eternal life with us; and it is only made possible by Jesus’ own life, death, and resurrection.

*Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. **This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.** So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. **He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.** (Ephesians 1: 4 – 7, NLT)*

And second, our actions here and now have an impact on that eternal life – a point Jesus emphasizes multiple times when talking about his Second Coming, the establishment of His everlasting Kingdom, and the rewards we will receive at that time.

- “Look, I am coming soon! **My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.**” (Revelation 22:12)
- “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then **he will reward each person according to what they have done.**” (Matthew 16:27)

**HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL TO KNOW GOD WANTS TO SPEND ETERNITY WITH YOU AND THAT YOUR CHOICES NOW HAVE ETERNAL IMPACT?**

Overall, because of the eternal life offered to us through Jesus’ work on the cross, our lives here and now are given new meaning. The choices we make here and now matter. They have eternal impact. Starting, first and foremost, with the most important choice any of us will ever make. The choice to put our faith in Jesus Christ.

**If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “**Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.**” (Romans 10: 9 – 11)

Lives lived with faith in Jesus will never be put to shame. And because of that, they will *never* be meaningless.

**HAVE YOU PUT YOUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST? WHY OR WHY NOT?**



### Week 3: Day 2: Toil is Meaningless

*“What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.”*

*– Ecclesiastes 2:22 – 23*

**READ: ECCLESIASTES 2:17 – 26**

Has work related stress ever kept you up at night? Perhaps it's worrying about finding a solution for a certain problem, finalizing your big report, working with a troublesome co-worker, or providing for your family. Or, perhaps, you know what it feels like to be anxiously striving at work? To be working 45, 50, or 60+ hours a week desperately trying to balance all of your roles and responsibilities, check off your never-ending To-Do List, and feeling like the weight of the world – or at least your organization or team – is resting on your shoulders. **“Meaningless,”** Solomon tells us – our efforts spent striving for success are meaningless and only result in lives marked by anxiety, stress, worry, pain, grief, and exhaustion. A heavy burden if there ever was one.

And then, to make matters worse, Solomon reminds us that everything we're striving so hard to achieve in this life – we can't take it with us when we die. In fact, everything we've worked so hard to build and accomplish will be left behind to someone else to lead and manage when we are gone.

**I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.** And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. (Ecclesiastes 2:18 – 19)

Perhaps, if we're lucky, we'll get to choose the person we leave our legacy to, but either way, the fact remains – we are no longer in control. Our legacy is in their hands, and there are no guarantees of continued success. Meaningless.

**HAVE YOU EVER STRUGGLED WITH ANXIETY, STRESS, WORRY, PAIN, GRIEF, AND/OR EXHAUSTION AT WORK?**

But what if work didn't have to be this way? What if we didn't have to push ourselves to the point of burnout – crumbling under the weight of the stress and anxiety that we carry on our shoulders?

Thankfully, Jesus tells us there is another way:

**“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**” (Matthew 11: 28 – 30)

Rest. A lightened load. This is what awaits us when we put our faith in Jesus. When we exchange our effortful striving for grateful receiving. No longer striving for but receiving our meaning and provision from God. When we put our trust in Him as our true Provider – not our job or our company. As Jesus taught His followers, He also teaches us:

“So, don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but **your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.** (Matthew 6: 31 – 33, NLT)

Jobs and companies will come and go. But *Jesus* is forever.

#### **WHO OR WHAT DO YOU TRUST FOR YOUR PROVISION?**

When we make this shift to seeking God for our meaning and trusting Him with our provision, our work then becomes a gift we are able to receive. Not something we need to chase after. Yes, we continue to work hard and serve God with our best efforts, but we do so now from a state of gratitude instead of anxious striving. We are free to aggressively respond to the opportunities Jesus brings our way instead of worrying about forging our own path and thinking everything is on our shoulders alone. We are yoked together with Jesus.

Solomon understood this principle. That’s why, after lamenting over work done in human effort and striving as meaningless, he concludes:

A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and *find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness...*

(Ecclesiastes 2: 24 – 16)

#### **CONSIDER YOUR APPROACH TO WORK – ARE YOU ANXIOUSLY STRIVING OR GRATEFULLY RECEIVING?**

### Week 3: Day 3: A Time for Everything

*“He has made everything beautiful and appropriate in its time. He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun can satisfy, except God] – yet man cannot find out (comprehend, grasp) what God has done (His overall plan) from the beginning to the end.” – Ecclesiastes 3:11*

#### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 3:1 – 15**

“There’s a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven...” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) The cyclical nature of life has always been something that has challenged and fascinated mankind. The idea that there’s “a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance” is one that is both simultaneously comforting and challenging to many of us. (Ecc 3:2 – 4). It implies that we are part of a bigger plan that we cannot quite understand. That we are part of, in the words & lyrics of Elton John and Tim Rice, the “Circle of Life:”

*From the day we arrive on the planet  
And blinking, step into the sun  
There's more to see than can ever be seen  
More to do than can ever be done...  
**It's the circle of life and it moves us all**  
**Through despair and hope**  
Through faith and love  
Till we find our place on the path unwinding  
In the circle, the circle of life*

The duality of these couplets above – “despair and hope,” “a time to weep and a time to laugh,” etc. – truly express the full range of the human experience this side of eternity.

#### **WHAT DOES THE “CIRCLE OF LIFE” MEAN TO YOU?**

The reality is that, in life, we will face both positive and negative experiences. But, as Christians, we must remember that God is Lord over it all. And yet, this is exactly what we tend to forget. We often want to focus only on the positive half of the couplet, and forget that God is God at all times. The pleasant times and the hard times. We forget that God created *all* the seasons and even winter serves its purpose.

Now, trust me, I am not a fan of the winter cold, but I have learned to appreciate its value both in nature and in my own life. For example, did you know that winter snow cover helps regulate the annual

temperature of the earth's surface and that once the snow melts, the water helps fill rivers and reservoirs?<sup>7</sup> Or that farmers hope for the deep cold of winter because it helps kill and eliminate dangerous insects and pathogens from their crops? And finally, while crops may look dead during the winter to the untrained eye – there is a big difference between dead and dormant. Because while things might seem barren, dormancy is a vital part of the growth process. A time when the plant's energy is held in reserve, preparing for new growth. A time ripe for pruning and transplanting. And, ultimately, resulting in more buds and greater fruit production in the harvest season.<sup>8</sup>

A time of adjusting and regulating. Of refilling and restoring. Of eliminating and breaking free from those things holding us back, no longer serving us, or seeking to do us harm. A time to rest, mature, and prepare for new growth. These are the ways God is working in our lives during the winter seasons.

### **HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD WORKING IN YOUR LIFE DURING A “WINTER SEASON?” HOW SO?**

Finally, while God has a plan for time, Solomon also reminds us that God exists *outside* of time. He is not finite – He is everlasting. And because we are made in God's image, we all have a longing for eternity in our hearts as well. A longing not just for an everlasting existence, but the restoration of creation as it was meant to be. And so, we rejoice over Jesus' promise that while there may be a time for death, mourning, and tears in this lifetime, there will also be a time for new creation, rebirth, and everlasting life with Him.

Then I saw *a new heaven and a new earth*, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. ...I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. *He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.*” (Revelation 21: 1 – 4, NLT)

### **HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL TO KNOW YOU WERE CREATED FOR ETERNITY AND THAT JESUS WANTS TO ONE DAY “WIPE EVERY TEAR” FROM YOUR EYE?**

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<sup>7</sup> “Snow and Climate” <https://nsidc.org/cryosphere/snow/climate.html>

<sup>8</sup> “Why Farmers Want Cold Winters” <https://grist.org/sustainable-farming/why-farms-want-cold-winters/>

### **Week 3: Day 4: Worship & Meditation**

#### **SONGS FOR WORSHIP:**

- **“Still Rolling Stones” by Lauren Daigle**
  - “All at once I came alive  
This beating heart, these open eyes  
The grave let go  
The darkness should have known  
You're still rolling stones”
- **“Resting Place (To the Cross)” by I Am They**
  - “My faith has found a resting place  
Not in my work or deed  
I trust the ever living One  
His wounds for me shall plead”
- **“Seasons” by Hillsong Worship**
  - “I know  
Though the winter is long even richer  
The harvest it brings  
Though my waiting prolongs even greater  
Your promise for me like a seed  
I believe that my season will come”

#### **REFLECTIONS FROM WORSHIP:**

**CHOOSE ANY WORD, VERSE, OR SONG LYRIC FROM THIS PAST WEEK FOR A 5 MINUTE MEDITATION.**

**WORD, VERSE(S), OR LYRIC YOU CHOSE:**

**DID GOD LAY ANY INSIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS ON YOUR HEART DURING YOUR MEDITATION?**

**Week 3: Day 5: Reflection, Application, and Prayer**

**REFLECTION:**

**REVISIT YOUR ANSWERS FROM THIS PAST WEEK (DAYS 1 – 4). DO YOU SEE ANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE?**

**WHICH INSIGHTS, IMPRESSIONS, LESSONS, OR QUESTIONS STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST?**

**APPLICATION:**

**HOW DO YOU WANT TO INCORPORATE THESE LESSONS IN YOUR LIFE MOVING FORWARD?**

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN COMMIT TO DOING DIFFERENTLY THIS NEXT WEEK? WHAT ACTION STEP WILL YOU COMMIT TO TAKING?**

**PRAYER:**

**OFFER TO GOD ANY THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON YOUR HEART AND MIND AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM AS WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.**

## Week 4: Day 1: The Injustices of Life

*“And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment – wickedness was there, in the place of justice – wickedness was there.” – Ecclesiastes 3:16*

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 3:16 – 4:3**

The reality is evil and wickedness has invaded all of creation. Even those human institutions meant to uphold truth, righteousness, and equality have instead been marred by dishonesty, injustice, and prejudice. Solomon laments these circumstances in his time, and, unfortunately, we continue to lament them today. It seems as though one can hardly turn on the tv or read the news without hearing or seeing about another protest. Another injustice. Another failure of the system meant to protect us. Of course, there are many who take seriously their call to serve, protect, and uphold justice and do so with love and excellence, but there are also others who seem to use those platforms for their own gain – lording their power over those they are meant to serve.

And while we rightfully respond with lament, this reality is not surprising. It is not surprising because sin corrupts the hearts of men and women. Corruption exists because we do. The pervasiveness of corruption, greed, and oppression is not God’s fault. It’s ours. It reveals the truth about man’s condition when left to our own devices. We desire to think of ourselves as good and self-righteous, but the reality is we are so easily corrupted by sin. Making us, as Solomon observes, hardly any better than the animals.

We think we are so civilized, but too often our animal instincts are revealed. The strong dominate the weak. The powerful take advantage of the vulnerable. We justify the oppression of the few as natural selection running its course. Even in small ways, our thoughts and emotions betray our virtue. We struggle with feelings of anger, greed, envy, jealousy, bitterness, and pride. We struggle with bias, judgement, and condemnation. And then, just like the animals, we die – returning to nothing but dust.

I said to myself regarding the sons of men, “God is surely testing them in order *for them to see that [by themselves, without God] they are [only] animals.*” For the [earthly] fate of the sons of men and the fate of animals is the same. As one dies, so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no preeminence or advantage for man [in and of himself] over an animal...**All came from the dust and all return to the dust.** (Ecclesiastes 3:18 – 20, AMP)

### **WHERE DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH SIN IN YOUR OWN HEART?**

And yet, we know from the creation story that this was not the plan. Our hearts were not to be so corrupted. In fact, we were made in the image of God Himself to be agents of God's Kingdom here on earth. To rule His creation with wisdom and justice.

Then God said, "Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image, according to Our likeness [not physical, but a spiritual personality and moral likeness]; **and let them have complete authority** over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, and over the entire earth, and over everything that creeps and crawls on the earth." So...*in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:26 – 27, AMP)

Because we were made in the image of God, we have a sense – a longing – that this is not how things are meant to be. Despite sin's corrupting influence, we have a longing for truth, righteousness, and justice to one day prevail because deep down God's original plan is written on our hearts. As Solomon declares, **"In due season God will judge everyone, both good and bad, for all their deeds."** (Ecclesiastes 3:17)

**WHAT IN OUR CULTURE OR SOCIETY CAUSES YOU TO LAMENT AND CRY OUT TO GOD FOR JUSTICE?**

Ultimately, in these verses, Solomon is highlighting the reality that life is often unfair. That too often, wickedness seems to win. But, as believers, the good news is we don't have to pretend everything is perfect. As Solomon models for us, following God is not about denying hardship. It's about taking our struggles to God directly. It's about crying out to God and lamenting all the ways sin has corrupted His creation. Because then we create space for Him to come and meet us in the mess. Meet us in the tears. And speak truth and comfort to our spirits.

**"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God...** The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become tired or grow weary...**He gives strength to the weary, and to him who has no might He increases power...those who wait for the Lord [who expect, look for, and hope in Him] will gain new strength and renew their power;** They will lift up their wings [and rise up close to God] like eagles [rising toward the sun]; They will run and not become weary, They will walk and not grow tired. (Isaiah 40, AMP)

**IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD'S COMFORT & STRENGTH DURING TIMES OF INJUSTICE?**



## **Week 4: Day 2: Envy & Loneliness Are Meaningless**

***“And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” – Ecclesiastes 4:4***

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 4:4 – 16**

“Keeping up with the Joneses” is hardly a new phenomenon. Envy – a resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck – has easily corrupted our hearts and desires throughout the ages. Instead of keeping our eyes focused on Jesus, His plan for our lives, and the blessings He provides, we get distracted by the blessings of those around us. Instead of being grateful for what we have, we focus on what *they have* – and in turn, what *we have not*.

Unfortunately, today, thanks in large part to social media, this tendency has only gotten worse. Now we no longer only hear stories about someone’s amazing vacation, accomplishments, or fun weekends with family and friends – we see their gorgeous, amazing, shiny photos in real time. Next, as we look at these beautiful photos, the best and brightest highlights of that person’s life, we inevitably begin to compare them to our “lowlights,” our struggles, hard times, and challenges. We compare our realities with their perfectly edited and polished online personas. The results? Feelings of envy, anxiety, and depression.

That is why, even though it can be a great tool for staying connected with loved ones who live far away, spending too much time on social media is not good for our mental health. In fact, numerous studies show clear “correlations between higher social media use and poorer mental health, including depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness and isolation, lower self-esteem, and even suicidality.”<sup>9</sup> Why? Because, we forget it’s easy to make life look glamorous all the time when you only zoom in on the good parts. When we crop out the bigger picture of life and its challenges and strive to present our lives in a perfectly polished way. But, in the end, it’s meaningless. It’s meaningless because it’s not real. And it can lead to a never-ending cycle of comparison and one-upmanship.

**WHO/WHAT TRIGGERS FEELINGS OF ENVY OR JEALOUSY IN YOU? HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA MAKE YOU FEEL?**

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<sup>9</sup> “New Studies Show Just How Bad Social Media Is For Mental Health” <https://bit.ly/2JLLVpX>

Too often then, this quest for one-upmanship leads to constant striving and overworking in an attempt to afford the status symbols we so desire to highlight. Paradoxically however, we often then find ourselves so trapped by the work, that we are unable to truly enjoy that for which we have labored so hard. We buy big beautiful homes that we never spend any time in because we work 60+ hours a week. We go on luxurious vacations and spend the whole time working on our phones. We buy gifts for our spouses, family members, children, and/or friends but are too busy to spend quality time with them. And so, before we know it, exhaustion and loneliness overcome us.

Once again, we need to pause and ask ourselves – what if it didn't have to be this way? Perhaps, we don't need to strive for as much. Maybe it's less about having more than it is about enjoying what we do have. And so, Solomon in his wisdom counsels us, **“Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.”** (Ecclesiastes 4:6) Because Solomon knew the truth:

**This is the case of a man who is *all alone***, without a child or a brother, yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, **“Who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?”** **It is all so *meaningless and depressing*.** (Ecclesiastes 4:8, NLT)

It was true over a thousand years ago, and it is true today – constant striving only ever leaves us feeling burned out and alone.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE ADVICE, “BETTER ONE HANDFUL WITH TRANQUILITY THAN TWO HANDFULS WITH TOIL AND CHASING AFTER THE WIND”? (ECCLESIASTES 4:6)**

Finally, we must remember that it is not good for man to be alone. All of us, men and women, were created in the image of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and so, we were created for relationships and community.<sup>10</sup> From the beginning, “The Lord God said, ‘***It is not good for the man to be alone.*** I will make a helper suitable for him.’” (Genesis 2:18) A helper. A partner. We were not meant to envy, judge, and compare ourselves with one another. We were meant to support, encourage, work with, and protect one another. To serve God and His Kingdom *together*.

***Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.*** If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble...A person standing

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:26, AMP

alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer.

(Ecclesiastes 4:9 – 12a, NLT)

And, most importantly, we were meant to work together with God at the center of our relationships.

Therefore, Solomon concludes, “**A cord of *three* strands is not quickly broken.**” (Ecclesiastes 4:12b)

God has designed us for community, and He promises to be in our midst when we seek Him together.

“**For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.**” (Matthew 18:20,

NLT) For it is only in community and relationship with Jesus that true meaning can be found.

**WHAT TYPE OF COMMUNITIES ARE YOU A PART OF? IS GOD AT THE CENTER OF ANY OF YOUR RELATIONSHIPS?**

### **Week 4: Day 3: Stand In Awe of God**

***“Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, stand in awe of God.”***

***– Ecclesiastes 5:7***

**READ: ECCLESIASTES 5:1 – 7**

**“Awe: noun 1. a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder.”**<sup>11</sup> When was the last time you stood in awe of God? When you reflected on His character, His power, His might, and all of the things He has done for you? To have praise burst forth from within because you are overwhelmed by His goodness and mercy? If we’re honest with ourselves, many of us would say, “Not recently.” Or “Not ever.” In our fast-paced culture, it’s so easy to rush through every day and never – or hardly ever – take the time to pause and reflect. To sit in God’s presence.

We might even go to church on Sunday without truly creating space to “stand in awe of God.” Between rushing to get to church on time, having to leave church early to get to the next commitment, volunteering for this or that ministry, daydreaming during the service, or mentally going over the 20 things we have to do when we get home – it’s easy to go through the motions without truly pausing to worship God. It was true in Solomon’s time, and it is true today. And so, Solomon tells us, our priorities are wrong. All the daydreaming and all the words and to-do lists rushing through our minds are meaningless. They will never bring us peace. Instead, we need to seek God first.

For in a multitude of dreams and in a flood of words there is worthlessness. ***Rather [reverently] fear God [and worship Him with awe-filled respect, knowing who He is].*** (Ecclesiastes 5:7, AMP)

**WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU STOOD IN AWE OF GOD?**

How then do we truly stand in awe of God? Solomon tells us it starts with being mindful of our attitude when we first enter God’s presence.

**Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen** rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. (Ecclesiastes 5: 1 – 2)

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<sup>11</sup> Google Dictionary

As we discussed, it's so easy to go through the motions of worship. For example, back in Solomon's time, different sacrifices were regularly offered at the temple – some for thanksgiving to God for all He had done and others for the atonement of sins. Unfortunately, however, many would go through the motions of making the sacrifices while lacking a true spirit of gratitude or repentance. They would walk into the Temple – God's dwelling place – repeating the right words, but not truly meaning them. And, too often, we do the same.

Today, thanks to the work of Jesus on the cross, God no longer meets with us only in the Temple – or the church building – He has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us. *We* are now His temple: “***Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit***, who lives in you and was given to you by God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NLT) That means that not only can we encounter God at church, but we can encounter Him any time. God is always with us. Especially when we seek Him with an attitude of gratitude, repentance, and praise.

Too often, however, when we do set aside time to be with God, we do all the talking. Instead of heeding Solomon's advice to “***Go near to listen,***” we go near to vent. Or worry. Or present request after request after request. And yes, absolutely, God wants us to bring our requests and confess our sins to Him – but prayer was never meant to be a one-sided conversation. Instead, we would be wise to listen as much as we speak – if not more! So many of us say we want to hear from God – that we want to know His plan for our lives – but we never make the time to truly hear from Him. The reality is, our not hearing from God is often less a matter of God remaining quiet than it is our not creating the space to listen.

**WHAT IS YOUR TIME SPENT WITH GOD USUALLY LIKE? DO YOU SPEND TIME LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE – OR DO YOU DO ALL THE TALKING?**

How then can we listen to God? The easiest way is by reading “the Word of God,” the Bible. And not just reading to consume it as quickly as possible, but reading to hear from God. To seek how God wants to speak specifically to you and your circumstances. To ask God to show you how its lessons apply to your life here and now. There's a reason the Bible is called a “living” Word:

***For the word of God is living and active and full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective].*** It is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as the division of the soul and

spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12, AMP)

If you approach the Bible this way, asking God to speak to you through it – you’ll be amazed at what He can do. Plus, we can also use the Bible to help us practice the discipline of meditation by choosing a single verse or phrase and reflecting on it in our minds. Savoring every word, and asking God to reveal a deeper meaning and application for our lives.

***Blessed is the one*** who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and ***who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.*** (Psalm 1:1 – 3)

Ultimately then, may we not only talk to God regularly but also seek to quiet our minds, let go of our daydreams, and meditate on His Word. May we create time and space in our lives to regularly “go near to listen” for Jesus’ voice and “stand in awe of God.”

**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE –WHAT DO THEY REVEAL ABOUT GOD THAT IS AWE-INSPIRING?**

Psalm 146 & 147:

Colossians 1:15-23:

Revelation 1:1-18:

## Week 4: Day 4: Worship & Meditation

### SONGS FOR WORSHIP:

- **“Soar” by Meredith Andrews**
  - “Creator, Keeper, Life-Breather  
Your name is greater than anything I've faced  
Sustainer, Savior, Stronghold-Breaker  
Your name is greater than anything I've faced...  
I will wait, God, I will wait on You  
I'm gonna run and not grow weary  
I'm gonna walk and not grow faint  
I'll rise up on wings like eagles to soar”
- **“Oh, How Good It Is” by Keith & Kristyn Getty**
  - “Oh, how good it is when the family of God  
Dwells together in spirit, in faith and unity.  
Where the bonds of peace, of acceptance and love  
Are the fruit of His presence here among us.”
- **“Not In a Hurry” by United Pursuit**
  - “I'm not in a hurry  
When it comes to Your spirit  
When it comes to Your presence  
When it comes to Your voice  
I'm learning to listen...  
You are speaking”
- **“Awesome” by Charles Jenkins**
  - “My God is awesome  
Savior of the whole world  
Giver of salvation  
By His stripes I am healed”

### REFLECTIONS FROM WORSHIP:

CHOOSE ANY WORD, VERSE, OR SONG LYRIC FROM THIS PAST WEEK FOR A 5 MINUTE MEDITATION.

WORD, VERSE(S), OR LYRIC YOU CHOSE:

DID GOD LAY ANY INSIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS ON YOUR HEART DURING YOUR MEDITATION?

**Week 4: Day 5: Reflection, Application, and Prayer**

**REFLECTION:**

**REVISIT YOUR ANSWERS FROM THIS PAST WEEK (DAYS 1 – 4). DO YOU SEE ANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE?**

**WHICH INSIGHTS, IMPRESSIONS, LESSONS, OR QUESTIONS STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST?**

**APPLICATION:**

**HOW DO YOU WANT TO INCORPORATE THESE LESSONS IN YOUR LIFE MOVING FORWARD?**

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN COMMIT TO DOING DIFFERENTLY THIS NEXT WEEK? WHAT ACTION STEP WILL YOU COMMIT TO TAKING?**

**PRAYER:**

**OFFER TO GOD ANY THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON YOUR HEART AND MIND AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM AS WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.**



## **Week 5: Day 1: Riches Are Meaningless**

***“Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!” – Ecclesiastes 5:10, NLT***

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 5:8 – 6:12**

Oprah Winfrey once said, “Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never ever have enough.” Because, just like Solomon, Oprah, one of the richest people in the world today, has learned that wealth alone is never enough. That when we seek after wealth to make us happy and find meaning, we only become caught in a vicious cycle of always wanting more and then striving to achieve more. We get stuck expending endless effort to satisfy our ever increasing wants and desires. We get caught in the “rat race.”

A rat race is an *endless, self-defeating, or pointless pursuit*. It may also refer to a competitive struggle to get ahead financially...The *term is commonly associated with an exhausting, repetitive lifestyle that leaves no time for relaxation or enjoyment*.<sup>12</sup>

When we are constantly chasing after the newest and best thing – the latest tech, the fastest cars, the biggest houses, the trendiest clothing, etc. – we only end up exhausted and burned out. We can even try rebranding our striving with positive sounding words like “earning,” “grinding,” or “hustling.” But ultimately, we can chase after all the promotions, status symbols, prestige, and success we can dream of, and still be left feeling empty. Because, the truth is true joy and meaning will always elude us when all we focus on is money and wealth.

### **HAVE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW EVER BEEN CAUGHT UP IN THE “RAT RACE”?**

Now, please note, the Bible never tells us that money itself is bad or evil. Rather, “...the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” (1 Timothy 6:10a, NLT) It’s when we give money the prominence in our lives that only God should have. When we turn to money as the source of things that can only truly come from God – comfort, security, provision – and then, seek wealth at all costs. That’s when, “...some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.” (6:10b)

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<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rat\\_race](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rat_race)

In spite of such warnings, however, many of us still try to justify our love of money. It's not really about greed we say, it's about being able to provide for myself and my family in the future. A common justification, Solomon sadly reminds us that hoarding wealth provides us no guarantees for our future. "I have seen a grievous evil under the sun... **wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left** for them to inherit." (Ecclesiastes 5:13 – 14) The Great Depression. The Great Recession. Natural disasters. Accidents. Injuries. Unexpected job loss. Events that have seen many individuals' life savings wiped out through no fault of their own.

Then, even if, we are lucky enough to hold onto our money all through our lives, Solomon tells us two more truths remain. First, we can't take any of it with us when we die.<sup>13</sup> And second, a focus on accumulating wealth and riches often sucks the joy and love out of our lives now.<sup>14</sup>

We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. **We can't take our riches with us**...All their hard work is for nothing—like working for the wind. **Throughout their lives, they live under a cloud—frustrated, discouraged, and angry.**  
(Ecclesiastes 5:15 –17, NLT)

For an example of the pursuit of wealth leading to a frustrated, discouraged, and joyless life, look no further than the iconic character, Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*. A character whose very name and catch phrase – "bah humbug!" – has become synonymous with greed, misery, and loneliness. A cautionary tale regarding the perils of a lifetime dedicated to financial and business success – to the rat race. A lifetime only spent chasing after gold and riches.

**HAS A LOVE OF MONEY OR THE PURSUIT OF WEALTH EVER CREATED A "SCROOGE"-LIKE SPIRIT IN YOU?**

Now, once again, we must ask the question: what if it didn't have to be this way? What if – instead of living in pursuit of wealth and constantly striving for more, more, more – we lived in pursuit of a relationship with God? What if we jumped out of the rat race and stepped into God's race? Fixing our eyes on Him, serving Him, and trusting Him to provide for our and our families' needs. Solomon puts it this way:

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<sup>13</sup> See also Ecclesiastes 6:2, NLT

<sup>14</sup> See also Ecclesiastes 6:3 – 6, NLT

It is good for people to eat, drink, and *enjoy their work* under the sun during the short life **God has given them**, and **to accept** their lot in life. And it is a good thing **to receive** wealth from God and the good health to *enjoy* it. To *enjoy your work* and **accept** your lot in life—**this is indeed a gift from God**. God keeps such people so busy *enjoying life* that they take no time to brood over the past. (Ecclesiastes 5:18 – 20, NLT)

When we keep our focus on pursuing a relationship with God, we can trust Him to provide for our needs. We move from a mindset of striving to abiding in Him. Instead of lives marked by earning, grinding, and hustling, let us live lives of accepting, receiving, and enjoying the blessings God has provided for us. Only then will we continue to work hard, but with a sense of peace and joy that comes from knowing everything good in life is a gift from Him.

**INSTEAD OF “EARNING, GRINDING, AND HUSTLING,” WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO “ACCEPT, RECEIVE, AND ENJOY YOUR WORK” INSTEAD?**

## Week 5 Day 2: Wisdom for Life

*“There’s nothing better than being wise, knowing how to interpret the meaning of life. Wisdom puts light in the eyes, and gives gentleness to words and manners.” – Ecclesiastes 8:1, MSG*

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 7:1 – 8:1**

As Christians, we are called to live a life marked by Godly wisdom. And yet, so often our tendency is to only seek out fun, easy, and pleasurable experiences – experiences that distract us from wrestling with the challenges of this life and pursuing God’s wisdom. So, in an effort to avoid anything that causes pain or discomfort, we seek out things like laughter, feasting, and parties instead. Distractions allowing us to cultivate a carefree and worry-free veneer in the midst of the realities of life.

And yet, Solomon reminds us that is *not* reality. No one gets to be happy and carefree all the time. Hardships and struggles will come to us all. And while it’s certainly not fun, our challenges often create fertile soil for some of the most profound growth in our lives. Those things that are hard, sad, and/or uncomfortable often refine our character, help us mature, and empower us to learn and grow.

Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. *After all, everyone dies* – so the living should take this to heart. *Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us.* A wise person thinks a lot about death, while *a fool thinks only about having a good time.*

(Ecclesiastes 7:2 – 4, NLT)

Now, Solomon, is not saying that that it is bad to ever enjoy laughter, parties, and good times, but he *is* saying that living a life focused *only* on the pursuit of those things is wasted. Why? *“A fool’s laughter is quickly gone, like thorns crackling in a fire. This also is meaningless.”* (Ecclesiastes 7:6, NLT) When we only live our lives in pursuit of pleasure, the memory of our lives quickly fades away after we are gone. Like thorns being burned up until only smoke and ash remain – remains that are quickly blown away by the wind – we leave nothing meaningful or substantial behind.

**HAVE YOU EVER PURSUED PLEASURE TO AVOID OR IGNORE THE HARSH REALITIES OF LIFE? HAS GOD EVER WORKED THROUGH A HARD EXPERIENCE IN YOUR LIFE TO HELP YOU GROW AND MATURE?**

In contrast, the wise recognize that this one life is all we have to make a difference. That we are only kidding ourselves when we act like we are invincible and going to live forever – as if we can outrun death and ignore the sinfulness of this world and the sorrow it causes. While “YOLO!” has become a rallying

cry for living big, taking risks, and pursuing pleasure at all costs, the wise know it really means something deeper. **“You Only Live Once.”** Or in Solomon’s words: **“Everyone dies.”** (Ecc. 7:2, NLT)

In fact, the reality that we only get one life to live is actually what gives this life its meaning. Knowing we only get one chance makes everything more significant. It makes us consider: how do we want to be remembered? What difference do we want to make with our one life? What type of relationships do we want to build? How do we want to love and be loved? What legacy do we want to leave? And most importantly, how does God want me to love and glorify Him? How does he want me to love and serve others? For:

Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this...***you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.***’ The second is equally important: ***‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*** No other commandment is greater than these.”  
(Mark 12:29 – 30, NLT)

And so, if we truly stop to consider our mortality, it should lead us not to the pursuit of selfish desire and folly, but to the pursuit of God’s wisdom, meaning, and purpose for our lives.

### **YOLO!: HOW DO YOU BELIEVE GOD IS CALLING YOU TO LIVE YOUR ONE LIFE?**

Ultimately, however, no matter how wise we become, we must remember that we are not in control, God is. And, we cannot make God do what we want – no matter how good or righteous we are. The reality is that sometimes life this side of eternity is unfair. And, if we go into serving God with the mindset that it will protect us from bad things ever happening to us, we will be sorely disappointed. Because sometimes, the good die young and the wicked seem to prosper. “I have seen everything in this meaningless life, including the death of good young people and the long life of wicked people.” (Ecclesiastes 7:5, NLT) And so, Solomon also goes on to warn us against two extreme responses that often stem from such unfairness: 1) self-righteousness, and 2) wickedness & foolishness.

***Do not be excessively righteous*** [like those given to self-conceit], and ***do not be overly wise (pretentious)*** – why should you bring yourself to ruin? ***Do not be excessively or willfully wicked*** and ***do not be a fool.*** Why should you die before your time? (Ecclesiastes 7:16 – 17, AMP)

You see, Solomon wisely observed that some people, in response to the harsh realities of life, set out to be perfect as a means to manipulate God’s favor and blessing. They believe that if they are good enough,

God will have to reward them. But, instead of leading to peace and freedom from suffering, their self-righteousness and quest for perfection only leads to a judgmental, unloving spirit that lacks grace and mercy. At the other extreme, however, some determine that if life is going to be unfair, they might as well do whatever they want and look out only for their own best interests. But, for them, instead of pleasure and fun, this type of life only leads to risky behaviors, immorality, and loneliness. Either way, neither extreme is healthy because both redirect our focus from serving and loving God to pursuing our own comfort and desires.

Ultimately, we are called not to extremes but to pursue a life of wisdom that holds both righteousness and pleasure in balance with one another. ***“Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes.”*** (Ecclesiastes 8:18, NLT) Instead, one who fears God recognizes that while no one is perfect, ***“Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.”*** (Ecclesiastes 7:20, NLT), God has created us in His image to reflect His glory: ***“God made men and women true and upright; we’re the ones who’ve made a mess of things.”*** (Ecclesiastes 7:29, MSG) And so, we’re called to return to Him, seek His wisdom, and find the meaning of life only He can provide.

**HOW DO YOU TEND TO RESPOND TO THE UNFAIRNESS OF THIS WORLD? DO YOU TEND TOWARD SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND RULE FOLLOWING OR TOWARD SELF-INDULGENCE AND FOOLISHNESS?**

### Week 5: Day 3: No One Can Control the Wind

*“I realized that no one can discover everything God is doing under the sun. Not even the wisest people discover everything, no matter what they claim.” – Ecclesiastes 8:17*

#### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 8:2 – 17**

Even the wisest and most powerful people will never be as wise and powerful as God. As one of the most powerful people to ever live, King Solomon reflects on his great authority and rule over many while still recognizing the great limitations even he has. “Since *no one knows the future*, who can tell someone else what is to come? As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so *no one has power over the time of their death*.” (Ecclesiastes 8:7 – 8) The reality is – no matter how much wisdom and power we amass in this lifetime – there will always be things we don’t understand and things outside of our control.

Because of this, all of us will inevitably wrestle with some hard questions in life. Why do the wicked seem to prosper? How do they keep getting away with it? Where is the justice?

I have seen **wicked people buried with honor**. Yet they...are **now praised in the same city where they committed their crimes!** This, too, is meaningless. *When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong.* (Ecclesiastes 8:10 – 11, NLT)

In life then, when it seems as though the wicked regularly “get away with it,” we tend to respond in one of two ways. Either we then decide that we too can then “get away with” bad behavior, or we become angry that justice hasn’t been served and determine to seek revenge on our own.

**HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TEMPTED TO SIN BECAUSE YOU SAW SOMEONE ELSE GET AWAY WITH IT? OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TEMPTED TO SEEK REVENGE FOR AN INJUSTICE THAT WENT UNPUNISHED?**

Either way, in the midst of our apathy or frustration, we forget that a lack of immediate punishment from God is not a license to continue sinning, but rather an invitation to repentance. That God being slow to anger is an expression of His love and mercy.

Above all, you must understand that **in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires**. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he [Jesus] promised?...But do not forget this one thing, dear friends...**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise**, as some understand slowness. *Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* (2 Peter 3:3 – 9)

It is God's desire that none should perish and all come to a saving faith in Him. And so, He is abounding in grace and compassion. That being said, however, while He may be incredibly patient with us, offering opportunities for repentance time and time again – He *will* one day carry out His justice. And while we may struggle with His timing and His patience, vengeance it is not for us to take into our own hands. We must trust that He will not let the sinful deeds of the unrepentant go unpunished forever. For God promises us multiple times:

- ***Do not take revenge***, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ***"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*** (Romans 12:19)
- For we know him who said, ***"It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"*** and again, ***"The Lord will judge his people."*** It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:30)
- ***The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.*** (Nahum 1:3)

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT GOD BEING PATIENT AND SLOW TO ANGER WHILE ALSO PROMISING HIS JUDGMENT IN THE END?**

So, while it may seem as though those who do evil continue to get away with it, the truth is they will be held accountable for their actions. Whether in this life or the next, justice will be served. And even in this life, those who regularly and intentionally walk outside of God's will for their lives will never know the peace, joy, and contentment that can only be found in God alone. Their lives will always lack a deeper meaning. They will never be fully satisfied.

Even though a person sins and gets by with it hundreds of times throughout a long life, I'm still convinced that ***the good life is reserved for the person who fears God, who lives reverently in his presence***, and that ***the evil person will not experience a "good" life. No matter how many days he lives, they'll all be as flat and colorless as a shadow – because he doesn't fear God.***

(Ecclesiastes 8:12 – 13, MSG)

In the end, while life this side of eternity may be unfair – "...the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve."<sup>15</sup> – it is good to give thanks for the

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<sup>15</sup> Ecclesiastes 8:14



blessings we do receive. Because, when we do – when we acknowledge that “every good and perfect gift is from above”<sup>16</sup> – that’s when we receive the ability to truly enjoy life and all the blessings God has given us.

I commend the enjoyment of life, because *there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them* in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 8:15)

**WHAT BLESSINGS HAVE YOU RECEIVED FROM GOD? WHAT ARE YOU GRATEFUL FOR?**

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<sup>16</sup> James 1:17

## **Week 5: Day 4: Worship & Meditation**

### **SONGS FOR WORSHIP:**

- **“Be Thou My Vision” by Audrey Assad**
  - “Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise  
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always  
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart  
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art”
- **“One Life to Love” by 33 Miles**
  - “You only get just one time around  
You only get one shot at this  
One chance to find out  
The one thing that you don't want to miss  
One day when it's all said and done  
I hope you see that it was enough  
This one ride, one try, one life to love”
- **“You Are Good” by Gateway Worship**
  - “Your kindness leads me to repentance  
Your goodness draws me to Your side  
Your mercy calls me to be like You  
Your favor is my delight”

### **REFLECTIONS FROM WORSHIP:**

**CHOOSE ANY WORD, VERSE, OR SONG LYRIC FROM THIS PAST WEEK FOR A 5 MINUTE MEDITATION.**

**WORD, VERSE(S), OR LYRIC YOU CHOSE:**

**DID GOD LAY ANY INSIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS ON YOUR HEART DURING YOUR MEDITATION?**

**Week 5: Day 5: Reflection, Application, and Prayer**

**REFLECTION:**

**REVISIT YOUR ANSWERS FROM THIS PAST WEEK (DAYS 1 – 4). DO YOU SEE ANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE?**

**WHICH INSIGHTS, IMPRESSIONS, LESSONS, OR QUESTIONS STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST?**

**APPLICATION:**

**HOW DO YOU WANT TO INCORPORATE THESE LESSONS IN YOUR LIFE MOVING FORWARD?**

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN COMMIT TO DOING DIFFERENTLY THIS NEXT WEEK? WHAT ACTION STEP WILL YOU COMMIT TO TAKING?**

**PRAYER:**

**OFFER TO GOD ANY THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON YOUR HEART AND MIND AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM AS WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.**

## Week 6: Day 1: A Common Destiny for All

*“This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all.*

*The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil...” – Ecclesiastes 9:3*

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 9:1 – 12**

As we read through the book of Ecclesiastes, it’s important to remember some context for Solomon’s writings. Specifically, we need to remember that Solomon lived and reigned not only long before Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, but also over 200 years before Isaiah and Jeremiah would make their bold prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. This means that in Solomon’s time, the theology of the Messiah was not yet fully formed, and the concept of a bodily resurrection was vague at best. Even when Jesus did arrive on the scene a thousand years later, the Sadducees and Pharisees – two groups of prominent Jewish leaders – still disagreed about the nature of the Messiah, the afterlife, and the resurrection of believers. And so, Solomon’s observations in this chapter, and a few other places of Ecclesiastes, can only be partly accurate because He only saw part of God’s plan. A plan that was brought to fulfillment and completed in Jesus Himself: **“...God’s mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** (Colossians 2: 2 – 3, NLT)

With this in mind then, Solomon is correct when he observes that life is not fair and that believing in the God of the Bible provides no guarantees for our health, wealth, and happiness *in this lifetime*. “...Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don’t.” (Ecclesiastes 9:2, NLT) And similarly:

The fastest runner doesn’t always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn’t always win the battle. *The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don’t always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time. People can never predict when hard times might come.* Like fish in a net or birds in a trap, people are caught by sudden tragedy. (Ecclesiastes 9:11 – 12, NLT)

### **HAVE YOU EVER BELIEVED GOD “OWES” YOU ETERNAL HEALTH, WEALTH, AND HAPPINESS?**

But what Solomon couldn’t fully see yet, is that God cares about so much more than our health, wealth, and happiness. He is about a deeper, more meaningful work. He cares about our *eternal health* and so offers us *eternal life* in Jesus. He cares about our *eternal wealth* and so offers us an *eternal inheritance* –

the riches of His Kingdom given to us through Jesus. And, He cares less about momentary happiness than He does *eternal joy*, so He offers us *eternal hope* found in knowing Jesus as our Savior. In fact, Jesus himself acknowledges the suffering we will face in this world but promises:

***“In the world you will have tribulation and distress and suffering, but be courageous [be confident, be undaunted, be filled with joy]; I have overcome the world.”*** [My conquest is accomplished, My victory abiding.] (John 16:33, AMP)

Next, as Solomon continues to reflect on the unfairness of life, he laments two evil things. First, death as the ultimate evil and equalizer, and second, the evil that lives within our hearts. ***“This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil...”*** (Ecclesiastes 9:3) And he is right to lament them both as grievous evils because death and decay are the direct result of sin in this fallen world – sin that has infected all of creation. ***“For the wages of sin is death...”*** (Romans 6:23)

There’s a reason our grief is so vast when we lose the ones we love or we see someone lost in the prime of life. God is eternal, and since we are made in the image of God, we were created for eternal life in community with God and those we love. And so, whether we are fully conscious of it or not, every time we feel grief from the pain of death it’s because our spirit within is crying out, “This isn’t how it was meant to be!”

...with eager hope, ***the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay...*** And ***we believers also groan***, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, ***for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering.*** (Romans 8:20 – 23, NLT)

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU THAT “IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE” WHILE KNOWING GOD HAS PROMISED US ETERNAL LIFE, AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE, ETERNAL JOY, AND ETERNAL HOPE?**

Overall, it is because of sin that all of these troubling realities Solomon has been observing are true. And the worst part? It’s our fault. We’re the ones who caused sin to enter God’s creation. In choosing to use our free will to disobey God’s commands, we caused the Fall in the Garden of Eden and the curse it brought upon all creation.

Perhaps then, you are wondering: why would God ever give us free will to begin with? If God is all knowing and He knew what would happen – why would He allow it? A good question, and one C.S. Lewis ponders in his famous book, *Mere Christianity*:

**Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.** A world of automata – of creatures that worked like machines – would hardly be worth creating. **The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other** in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. *And for that they must be free.*

So, in the end, God grants us the responsibility and privilege of free will because while it is what caused sin, death, and decay to enter our world, it's also the only thing that allows for true love, relationships, meaning, and joy to exist.

**WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIVILEGES DOES FREE WILL OFFERS US?**

## Week 6: Day 2: Eat, Drink, & Be Merry

***“Eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God approves of this!”***

***– Ecclesiastes 9:7, NLT***

### **REVIEW ECCLESIASTES 9:1 – 12**

In verses 7 – 10 of chapter 9, in the midst of his laments regarding the unfairness of life and the death that awaits us all, Solomon once more encourages us to “eat, drink, and be merry” and enjoy the gifts and the work God has given us to do.

***Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a cheerful heart [if you are righteous, wise, and in the hands of God];*** for God has already approved and accepted your works. Let your clothes always be white [with purity], and do not let the oil [of gladness] be lacking on your head. ***Live joyfully with the wife whom you love*** all the days of your fleeting life which He has given you under the sun—all the days of vanity and futility. For this is your reward in life and in your work in which you have labored under the sun. ***Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might...***(Ecclesiastes 9:7 – 10, AMP)

In fact, these verses mark the sixth time<sup>17</sup> Solomon provides such an exhortation. **Six times.** I think it’s fair to say then, that as we near the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon is making a final attempt to make sure we don’t miss one of his most important points. A point so important because it reflects the truth of what we were created for.

**WHAT ARE THE COMMON THEMES PRESENT IN SOLOMON’S MESSAGE THESE SIX TIMES? (SEE: ECCLESIASTES: 2:24 – 25, 3:12 – 13, 3:22, 5:18 – 20, 8:15, AND 9:7 – 10)**

Sadly however, due to a legalistic and judgmental spirit that has shifted the focus of our faith from a relationship with Jesus to a religion focused on man’s traditions, many have the impression – or even the experience – that being a Christian is nothing but a life filled with strict rule following, denying oneself of any pleasures, and living a miserable life marked by guilt. But the reality is, that is not what we were created for. We were created to: enjoy God’s creation; live in perfect intimacy with God and meaningful community with one another; and find satisfaction and fulfillment in the work God grants us. In fact,

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<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiastes: 2:24 – 25, 3:12 – 13, 3:22, 5:18 – 20, and 8:15

these three aspects of Solomon’s exhortation align with God’s purposes for humankind as told in the Creation story.

1. ***“Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a cheerful heart...”***

- In Genesis, God is shown entrusting his Creation to the care of humans, and the bounty of it for their pleasure. His Creation was meant to be enjoyed.
  - ***Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food...”*** Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!” (Genesis 1:29 – 31, NLT)

2. ***“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love...”***

- The partnership between husband and wife was woven into the fabric of creation. From the beginning, God declared it was ***not*** good for man to be alone. Man is meant to live in community first with God Himself, and second with others – with the relationship between husband and wife specially blessed and ordained by God.
  - Now the Lord God said, ***“It is not good (beneficial) for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [one who balances him – a counterpart who is] suitable and complementary for him.”*** ...So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam; and while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made (fashioned, formed) into a woman, and He brought her and presented her to the man. Then Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man.” ***For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*** (Genesis 2:18 – 24, AMP)

3. ***“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might...”***

- Because we are made in the image of God, the ultimate Creator and Cultivator, we were designed to continue cultivating His Creation. Work itself was not a punishment. Even before the fall, we were designed to work. Just as God declared all He Created “good” and humankind as “very good,” we are meant to take the “good” raw materials He provided for us and transform them into things that are “very good.” We are meant to turn eggs into omelets. Grapes into wine. Trees into wood planks and then homes. We are meant to work – to continue learning, growing, and creating new things for God’s glory.
  - “The Lord God took the man and ***put him in the Garden of Eden to work it & take care of it.***” (Genesis 2:15)



- Or in another translation: “So the Lord God took the man [He had made] and *settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it.*”
  - And remember, it was right after this that woman was created as a partner to man – to share in his work equally!

**HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT CHRISTIANS WERE ONLY GUILT-RIDDEN, RIGID, JUDGMENTAL RULE FOLLOWERS? WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE 3-PART PURPOSE OF MAN AS PRESENTED IN ECCLESIASTES 9:7 – 10 AND THE GENESIS CREATION STORY?**

And finally, while we are called to more than a life of only rigid rule keeping, this directive is not a license to simply do whatever we want and live life only indulging our own desires. Even in the garden of Eden, God set loving boundaries for his creation: “*But the Lord God warned him, ‘You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden – except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.’*” (Genesis 2:16, NLT) And die we surely did. A spiritual death that only Christ’s own death on the cross was able to undo. And so, while the life God gives us is meant to be enjoyed, it also meant to be lived in loving obedience to Him. Or, in Solomon’s words: “*Let your clothes always be white [with purity], and do not let the oil [of gladness] be lacking on your head.*” For when we do, when we live our lives as God intended, we will find them filled with more meaning than ever before.

**HOW ARE YOU CULTIVATING AND ENJOYING GOD’S CREATION WITHIN HIS LOVING BOUNDARIES? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE BOUNDARIES GOD SETS FOR US?**

### Week 6: Day 3: Wisdom Is Better Than Folly

***“So even though wisdom is better than strength, those who are wise will be despised if they are poor.”***

***– Ecclesiastes 9:16, NLT***

#### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 9:13 – 10:20**

Unfortunately, in this world, wisdom is not always valued as it should be. Instead of valuing wisdom, our culture tends to value things like money, power, and prestige. We value what’s popular over what’s true. What’s easy over what’s best. Quantity over quality. And the pursuit of pleasure over that of righteousness. Until, that is, our hour of desperation. When the calamity strikes. When our backs are pressed up against the wall. When we can’t see any possible way out of the mess we have created. Or the circumstances that have overtaken us. Then, finally, we cry out for wisdom. For truth. For justice. We cry out for help.

Here is another bit of wisdom that has impressed me as I have watched the way our world works.

There was a small town with only a few people, and a great king came with his army and besieged it. ***A poor, wise man knew how to save the town, and so it was rescued.***

(Ecclesiastes 9:14 – 15a, NLT)

And then, despite receiving the deliverance we cried out for, we are so quick to once again turn our backs on wisdom after the threat has passed or the problem is solved.

***But afterward no one thought to thank him.*** So even though wisdom is better than strength, ***those who are wise will be despised if they are poor.*** What they say will not be appreciated for long.

(Ecclesiastes 9:15b – 16, NLT)

**WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST IN LIFE – GOD’S WISDOM, TRUTH, AND JUSTICE OR WHAT THE WORLD SAYS IS VALUABLE (POPULARITY, WEALTH, POWER, PLEASURE, CONVENIENCE, ETC.)?**

For how often have we treated God the same way this town treated the poor wise man? How often have we tossed God’s wisdom aside and simply slipped back into our old habits and behaviors after the threat has passed? Because God’s wisdom may not align with what our culture declares is popular, we discard and ignore Him. Until, perhaps, trials and tragedies once again bring us to our knees and we cry out in anguish – *“God help us!”* Only to start the cycle over once again after the storm has passed. Renewed prosperity blinding us to our continued need for God.

## HAVE YOU EVER CALLED OUT FOR GOD’S HELP IN THE HARD TIMES WHILE IGNORING HIM DURING THE GOOD?

And yet, despite our pride and our foolishness, Jesus longs for us to truly return to Him and repent of our ways. Even though we constantly reject the wisdom, truth, righteousness He offers, and waste the gifts and blessings He has given us, He desires us to find our way back to Him. He longs for us to find our way home.

Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the inheritance.’ Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. **There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.**

“When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, but I’m starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.’”** So he got up and went to his father.

*“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. **We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!**’ And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:11 – 24, CEB)*

## WHAT DOES THE PARABLE ABOUT THE FATHER & PRODIGAL SON REVEAL ABOUT GOD’S LOVE FOR US?

## Week 6: Day 4: Worship & Meditation

### SONGS FOR WORSHIP:

- **“Christ is Risen” by Matt Maher**
  - “O death, where is your sting?  
O hell, where is your victory?  
O church, come stand in the light  
Our God is not dead, He's alive, He's alive  
Christ is risen from the dead  
Trampling over death by death  
Come awake, come awake  
Come and rise up from the grave”
- **“Today Is the Day” by Lincoln Brewster**
  - “Today is the day You have made  
I will rejoice and be glad in it  
Today is the day You have made  
I will rejoice and be glad in it”
- **“Isn’t It Love” by Andrew Peterson**
  - “And when I think about that prodigal son  
I've got to smile when I see the old man run  
And I know that You love us the same  
'cause the sun came up today  
Just as if we deserved it  
Just as if every one of us fools was worth it  
Truth is that we'll never be perfect, but You love us just the same”

### REFLECTIONS FROM WORSHIP:

**CHOOSE ANY WORD, VERSE, OR SONG LYRIC FROM THIS PAST WEEK FOR A 5 MINUTE MEDITATION.**

**WORD, VERSE(S), OR LYRIC YOU CHOSE:**

**DID GOD LAY ANY INSIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS ON YOUR HEART DURING YOUR MEDITATION?**

**Week 6: Day 5: Reflection, Application, and Prayer**

**REFLECTION:**

**REVISIT YOUR ANSWERS FROM THIS PAST WEEK (DAYS 1 – 4). DO YOU SEE ANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE?**

**WHICH INSIGHTS, IMPRESSIONS, LESSONS, OR QUESTIONS STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST?**

**APPLICATION:**

**HOW DO YOU WANT TO INCORPORATE THESE LESSONS IN YOUR LIFE MOVING FORWARD?**

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN COMMIT TO DOING DIFFERENTLY THIS NEXT WEEK? WHAT ACTION STEP WILL YOU COMMIT TO TAKING?**

**PRAYER:**

**OFFER TO GOD ANY THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON YOUR HEART AND MIND AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM AS WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.**

## **Week 7: Day 1: The Uncertainties of Life:**

***“Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant. If they watch every cloud, they never harvest.”***

***– Ecclesiastes 11:4, NLT***

### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 11:1 – 6**

God cares about our entire lives – including our work. Sometimes, however, we forget this truth, and we begin to compartmentalize our lives with God over here at church on Sunday, and me on my own at work the rest of the week. Whether learned through wrong teaching or wrong assumptions on our part, many of us have the tendency to believe that God only cares about our spiritual lives – maybe our family and relational lives as well – but the rest of it is outside of His interest and authority. And yet, this is not the case. A deeper reading of God’s word reveals to us that not only were we created to work, but that God cares deeply about the work we do. To that end, the Bible is not only filled with great wisdom and profound spiritual truths, but also practical wisdom for our everyday lives – including our business ventures. It is this kind of practical business advice that Solomon turns his attention to in these verses.

**HAVE YOU BEEN TAUGHT THAT GOD CARES ABOUT YOUR WHOLE LIFE? THAT HE CARES ABOUT YOUR WORK? OR DID YOU GET THE MESSAGE THAT HE ONLY CARES ABOUT YOUR SPIRITUAL AND/OR RELATIONAL LIFE?**

Next, reflecting on life in this fallen world, Solomon once again reminds us that there will always be uncertainties in life. That when it comes to making decisions and taking risks, there will never be a *perfect* moment. And yet, so often our tendency is to wait for the perfect conditions. The perfect time, opportunity, or person. There will never be, however, a perfect time to start the business God is calling me to start. There will never be a perfect moment to start tithing 10% of my income. There will never be a perfect person to partner with on a project. A perfect moment to invest in a new business. A perfect moment to transition careers or make a fresh start. Some good moments, perhaps. And, likely, some that are better than others. But, if we sit around waiting for everything to be *perfect*, we’ll never make a move. Or in Solomon’s words, ***“Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant. If they watch every cloud, they never harvest.”*** (Ecclesiastes 11:4, NLT)

Instead, we can only try to make wise decisions based on the information we have. Because in life and in business, there’s no such thing as a sure thing. We don’t know which way the winds will blow. There are

no guarantees. “As *you do not know the path of the wind*, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, *so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.*” (Ecclesiastes 11: 5) Our intelligence and understanding will always be limited. We can never anticipate *everything* the future holds.

**HAVE YOU EVER NOT DONE SOMETHING YOU FELT GOD CALLING YOU TO DO BECAUSE YOU WERE WAITING FOR THE “PERFECT” MOMENT? HAVE YOU EVER MISSED OUT ON SOMETHING WAITING FOR EVERYTHING TO BE PERFECT?**

In light of these realities then, Solomon offers us some two-tiered practical advice – advice that has lasted throughout the centuries and is still popular even today. First of all, Solomon advises “don’t put all your eggs in one basket,” and second, to never “rest on your laurels.” Or, in his words:

1. *But divide your investments among many places, for you do not know what risks might lie ahead.* (Ecclesiastes 11:2, NLT)
2. *Plant your seed in the morning and keep busy all afternoon, for you don’t know if profit will come from one activity or another—or maybe both.* (Ecclesiastes 11:6, NLT)

Ancient reminders from Solomon to diversify our investments as a way to mitigate risk and to always be working hard at whatever God brings us to do instead of resting on our past success or believing we have it all figured out. Biblical wisdom that has proven true time and time again. Wisdom that has lasted throughout generations. Wisdom that has even become deeply rooted in our secular philosophy and the common idioms of today. Wisdom with its roots in God’s truth.

**HAVE YOU EVER PUT ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET OR RESTED ON YOUR LAURELS? AND/OR HAVE YOU EVEN SEEN SOMEONE ELSE ACT THAT WAY? WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?**

## **Week 7: Day 2: Remember Your Creator While Young**

***“Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken...For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” – Ecclesiastes 12:6 – 7, NLT***

**READ: ECCLESIASTES 11:7 – 12:7**

In these verses, Solomon reminds us that the gift of youth and the opportunities it brings us to enjoy God’s creation is a gift to be celebrated. That the energy and enthusiasm youth provides us to enjoy life and work hard is a blessing. Which is why, so often, when we’re young, we feel as though the whole world is at our fingertips. The possibilities are endless. But, with all those opportunities stretched out in front of us also comes many temptations to turn away from God and His ways. To pursue the ways of the world instead. And so, Solomon reminds us that even though we may feel invincible in our youth, we are not, and it is wise to submit our lives to God’s leading at an early age.

***Young people, it’s wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it.*** Do everything you want to do; take it all in. ***But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do.*** So refuse to worry, and keep your body healthy. ***But remember that youth, with a whole life before you, is meaningless.*** (Ecclesiastes 11: 9 – 10, NLT)

**HAVE YOU EVER SPENT PART OF YOUR LIFE LIVING APART FROM GOD? HOW DID IT FEEL?**

Solomon knew the truth – youth and life apart from God are meaningless. And so, Solomon sets out to explain to us the importance of remembering our Creator and following Him.

**Don’t let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, “Life is not pleasant anymore.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:1, NLT)

A point that Solomon goes on to reinforce not once, not twice, **but seven more times** in these verses. Seven more times he admonishes us to, “Remember Him...” Why? Because, once again, Solomon understood that a relationship with God is the only thing that gives life in this world lasting meaning. Everything else apart from Him is only temporary – only God and His Kingdom are eternal. What we do for Him has eternal ramifications. So, we must, **“Remember him before the door to life’s opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades.”** (Ecclesiastes 12: 4, NLT) If we want our lives in this world to truly matter – to truly make a difference – then we must live them in service to Him.



**HOW DOES REMEMBERING GOD BRING MEANING TO OUR LIVES? HOW HAS IT BROUGHT MEANING TO YOUR LIFE?**

Ultimately, we are all headed to the same destination. Our bodies will one day return to dust and our Spirits to the God who created them. And, when that happens, we will have to give an account. We will be held responsible for how we spent this life. For the choices we made. The things we did and didn't do. For the ways in which we stewarded the gifts and talents we were given – or rather, didn't. Whether our lives were spent in service to ourselves or to God. Whether we pursued the idols of this world or lived our lives rooted in Him. Whether we lived lives chasing after the wind or running the race He set out for us.

**HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW YOU WILL HAVE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT TO GOD ONE DAY?**

### Week 7: Day 3: The Conclusion: Fear God & Keep His Commands

*“When all has been heard, the end of the matter is: fear God [worship Him with awe-filled reverence, knowing that He is almighty God] and keep His commandments, for this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, every hidden and secret thing, whether it is good or evil.”*

*– Ecclesiastes 12:13 – 14, AMP*

#### **READ: ECCLESIASTES 12:8 – 14**

As we reach the end of Solomon’s quest for meaning, he begins his conclusion by reinforcing his original point. **“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless!’** (Ecclesiastes 12:8) Ultimately, after reflecting on so many of the ways we regularly seek meaning in this life – through our work and achievements; the accumulation of power and wealth; the pursuit of pleasure and the “good things in life;” a desire to express our uniqueness and leave a legacy; the idolization of youth and worldly wisdom & knowledge – Solomon once again declares it all meaningless. Why? Because throughout his journey, Solomon realized the Truth. Without God, everything is meaningless.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? ARE YOU CONTENT WITH THE RELATIONSHIP? OR COULD IT BE IMPROVED?**

Without God nothing matters. Because, without Him, our lives are inconsequential – here and gone in the blink of an eye – nothing but smoke fading away in the breeze. “Everything’s smoke. We all end up in the same place – we all came from dust, we all end up as dust.” (Ecclesiastes 3:20, MSG) All of our striving, all of our work, all of our effort to make an impact, make a difference, leave a legacy – futile. Pointless. Vain. **“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher. “All [that is done without God’s guidance] is vanity (futility).”** (Ecclesiastes 12:8, AMP)

Only God can offer our lives lasting meaning. As we’ve seen over the past few weeks, because God is eternal and He created us for eternal life, our decisions – our lives here & now – matter. They are no longer smoke. They have eternal consequences. With this perspective in mind then, all of our choices become infused with meaning and our lives with purpose. The purpose to love and serve God and to love and serve others.<sup>18</sup> Everything changes once we recognize the Truth – that God is calling us into a

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<sup>18</sup> Mark 12: 28 – 31

relationship with Himself. A relationship with the Creator of the universe. The Creator of time, matter, and existence as we know it.

How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is!...*Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love*, to be made whole and holy by his love. *Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ.* (What pleasure he took in planning this!) (Ephesians 1:3 – 5, MSG)

## HOW IS GOD CALLING YOU TO LOVE & SERVE HIM AND LOVE & SERVE OTHERS?

So yes, as Solomon observed many times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, in this fallen world we will have trouble. There will be times when life seems unfair and nothing makes sense. When trials and tribulations seem to outweigh blessings and celebrations. When bad things happen to good people and evil is seemingly rewarded. When our questions seem to outweigh the answers. But in those times, we must remember – life was never meant to be this way. And, it will not always be this way. **“For God will bring every act to judgment, every hidden and secret thing, whether it is good or evil.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:14, AMP) One day, every action under the sun will be called to account. For God *will* come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end.<sup>19</sup>

But, until that time, all we can do is lean into our relationship with Him. To bring our honest and hard questions to Him and lay them at His feet. Remembering that while it's good to bring our questions to Him, the reality is, we may not get all the answers we seek in this lifetime. Because, the truth is, our finite minds cannot even begin to fathom all of the answers this side of eternity. In His own words, God tells us:

**“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** (Isaiah 55:8 – 9)

You see, God is so much bigger and more powerful than we could ever hope to be or even comprehend. And yet, while we may not be able to know all the answers to life's toughest questions this side of eternity, we can know *The One* who has all the answers. The King of Kings. The Lord of Lords. The

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<sup>19</sup> Nicene Creed

Alpha & Omega. The Almighty One.<sup>20</sup> Jesus Christ.

**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES IN SCRIPTURE - HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE DESIRES A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU?**

Revelation 19:16:

Deuteronomy 10:17

Revelation 1:8:

In the end, when all is said and done, it's only in knowing Jesus that our spirits truly rest and rejoice. Only in knowing Him can we experience ever-lasting meaning, purpose, and life.

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<sup>20</sup> Revelation 19:16, Deuteronomy 10:17, Revelation 1:8

## **Week 7: Day 4: Worship & Meditation**

### **SONGS FOR WORSHIP:**

- **“Day by Day” by The Porter’s Gate**
  - “Server, you remind us of our Savior's bowl and towel  
Teacher, you are raising up a child to be kind  
Lawyer, give us hope that justice one day will surround us...  
Carpenter, you frame a house for those who need protection  
Laborer, you lift a heavy burden for the weak  
Leaders, build a city that all children may rejoice in”
- **“Anchor” by Bethel Music**
  - “And I will remember Your promise forever  
My Strength, my Defender  
I can count on You  
You are my Savior, My Hope and my Shelter”
- **“Revelation Song” by Kari Jobe**
  - “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty  
Who was and is and is to come  
With all creation I sing praise to the King of kings  
You are my everything and I will adore You  
  
Filled with wonder awestruck wonder  
At the mention of Your name  
Jesus Your name is power, breath and living water  
Such a marvelous mystery”

### **REFLECTIONS FROM WORSHIP:**

**CHOOSE ANY WORD, VERSE, OR SONG LYRIC FROM THIS PAST WEEK FOR A 5 MINUTE MEDITATION.**

**WORD, VERSE(S), OR LYRIC YOU CHOSE:**

**DID GOD LAY ANY INSIGHTS OR IMPRESSIONS ON YOUR HEART DURING YOUR MEDITATION?**

**Week 7: Day 5: Reflection, Application, and Prayer**

**REFLECTION:**

**REVISIT YOUR ANSWERS FROM THIS PAST WEEK (DAYS 1 – 4). DO YOU SEE ANY COMMON THEMES EMERGE?**

**WHICH INSIGHTS, IMPRESSIONS, LESSONS, OR QUESTIONS STAND OUT TO YOU THE MOST?**

**APPLICATION:**

**HOW DO YOU WANT TO INCORPORATE THESE LESSONS IN YOUR LIFE MOVING FORWARD?**

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN COMMIT TO DOING DIFFERENTLY THIS NEXT WEEK? WHAT ACTION STEP WILL YOU COMMIT TO TAKING?**

**PRAYER:**

**OFFER TO GOD ANY THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON YOUR HEART AND MIND AND SEEK HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM AS WE CONTINUE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.**

### Final Thoughts

***“Jesus replied to them, ‘I am the Bread of Life. The one who comes to Me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in Me [as Savior] will never be thirsty [for that one will be sustained spiritually]!’” – John 6:35, AMP***

Congratulations on making it to the end of this study! I pray this quest for meaning has helped you examine your life – your work, your relationships, your interests, your desires, your hopes and dreams – drawn you closer to Jesus, and inspired you to continue living your life with your eyes fixed on Him. For meaning isn’t *something* we find – it’s **Someone**.

Someone who loves you and desires a relationship with you all the days of your life. For, it is only in Jesus that we find the food for which our soul so desperately longs. It’s only in Him that our soul’s hunger can ever be satisfied. Day by day, morning by morning, Jesus invites us to know Him deeper, build our lives on Him, and receive from Him **“our daily bread.”**<sup>21</sup> Bread that does not spoil nor rot. Bread that fills our souls. ***The Bread of Life.***

**FINAL REFLECTIONS: READ OVER YOUR MEDITATION INSIGHTS & PRAYERS FROM THE LAST 7 WKS.**

**ARE THERE ANY THEMES AND/OR LESSONS THAT STAND OUT?**

**ARE THERE ANY PRAYERS THAT HAVE BEEN ANSWERED?**

**HOW HAS GOD BEEN AT WORK IN YOUR LIFE DURING THIS SEASON OF STUDY? WHAT NEW MEANING HAVE YOU FOUND?**

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew 6:11



## **About the Author**

Valerie Faust is a dynamic speaker, author, and mentor. After serving for three and a half years as a Campus Minister with the CCO, the Coalition for Christian Outreach, at Duquesne University, Valerie embarked on her quest to start a public teaching ministry. A ministry dedicated to empowering men and women to believe and trust God (Spiritual Formation), embrace

His calling on their lives (Purpose Discovery), and equip them for the good works He has prepared in advance for them to do (Leadership Development).

Before working with the CCO, Valerie began her career with the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, a faith-based nonprofit focused on raising up leaders in the workplace with a biblical worldview. Then, after earning her Masters of Organizational Leadership from Geneva College, a prominent Christian school, Valerie launched Blossom & Flourish: Growing Girls to Greatness, an organization providing leadership training and confidence building workshops and curriculum for middle school and high school girls. With both faith-based and secular programs available, Blossom & Flourish has provided training for over 600 young women throughout western PA.

Valerie also has her B.A. in Communications and Business from the University of Pittsburgh where she was a member of the Varsity softball team, and, thanks to an athlete's ministry on campus, truly began to understand what it meant to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Today, Valerie lives in Pittsburgh, PA with her amazing husband of ten years, Morgan, and their spoiled cat, Nike. She loves Jesus, quality time with her family and friends, travelling and exploring the beautiful world God created, drinking red wine, eating delicious food, hosting dinners, parties, and small groups in her home, making homemade pizza with Morgan, reading a good book and highlighting every page, practicing yoga, watching *The Office*, and singing along to her favorite music.

Overall, Valerie loves learning about God's Truths and communicating them to others in a way that is authentic, practical, and engaging. Her purpose is to share her life experiences and the lessons God has been teaching her with you in hopes that, within them, you will find messages of Truth and encouragement for you as well.