

A 5-DAY OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

BY LAURA BAILEY

Ecclesiastes

...aningless
...e Teacher, a son of David,
...n:

...aningless!"

have experienced much
knowledge." 17 "Then I ap
understanding of wisdom
ness and folly, but I learn
chasing after the wind,

For most people, women especially, the book of Ecclesiastes is not considered a book of hope and encouragement. When speaking to brothers and sisters of Christ, they often find the book discouraging, filled with despair and disappointment. I've always been drawn to the book of ecclesiastes.

IT MAY BE MY GLASS-HALF-FULL APPROACH TO LIFE; MY GLASSES ARE FAR FROM ROSE-COLORED, AND SUGAR-COATING HARD TRUTH HAS NEVER BEEN MY STYLE.



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I appreciate Solomon's unapologetic observations of life in a fallen world. While I find comfort and perhaps a bit of satisfaction knowing that "it's not just me," Solomon not only sees the difficulty humanity faces, he draws attention to it. However, I will concede that on the surface, especially if only sections of Ecclesiastes were read, the book can have more of a doom-and-gloom outlook.

If we cherry-pick Ecclesiastes' verses, or perhaps if someone only reads certain sections, then it could feel like a rant of a regretful, depressed man. However, the more I learned about Solomon's story, observations, warnings, and general life advice, the more I related to Solomon and his quest for lasting joy. If you have thought about studying Ecclesiastes but find the prospect daunting, let me encourage you with this 5-day overview to give the book another chance and discover how living with the proper perspective helps us live more peaceful, purposeful, and plentiful lives today.

DAY ONE

Read through the Entire Book of Ecclesiastes.

Before diving into the Book of Ecclesiastes, we must first understand who wrote it, who the original audience was, and what the setting was.

AUTHOR:

The book of Ecclesiastes is unique, written from two angles. Within the text is an author, the person who recorded the information, and then "the teacher or preacher." Most of the book (starting in Ecclesiastes 1:2-12:8) shares the teacher's words. However, the author does offer his conclusions and summarizes the main points in chapters 12:9-14.

Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:24-24). He took over reigning after David at a very young age. Most scholars put him around 20 at the start of his reign. In 1 Kings 3:5-14, we learn that the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream. The Lord says that Solomon can ask for anything, and Solomon responds by asking for wisdom and discernment. Pleased that Solomon didn't ask for wealth and honor, the Lord blesses him with both. God also says Solomon will have no equal in his lifetime as long as he keeps His commandments.



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AUDIENCE:

Ecclesiastes 12:12 tells us, "Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them." We know that the original audience was one of Solomon's sons. However, the wisdom is universal and applies to all God's children.

SETTING:

Solomon ruled from 970 B.C. to around 930 B.C. The book of Ecclesiastes was thought to have been written towards the end of his reign, around 935 B.C.

DAY ONE CONTINUED: REFLECT

- WHAT IS YOUR INITIAL OBSERVATION OR IMPRESSION ABOUT THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES?
- DID YOU READ ANYTHING COMPLICATED TO UNDERSTAND OR CONFUSING IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES?



DAY TWO

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-4, and Ecclesiastes 12:9-14.

The Book of Ecclesiastes shares insights as the teacher reflects on a full life. It's a personal narrative of things he did well, pitfalls, general observations, and lessons learned. The text has three main themes: time, death, and the idea that we can't control life.

THE BOOK CAN SOMETIMES BE REPETITIVE, AND ECCLESIASTES CAN FEEL DISHEARTENING FOR MANY, OFFERING LITTLE HOPE FOR "LIFE UNDER THE SUN."

However, Solomon's words aren't meant to discourage. Instead, he hopes that when we release the need to control, manipulate, strive, and hustle, when we lay down the way we think our lives "should be" and enjoy the life we have, we will experience lasting peace.



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DAY TWO CONTINUED: REFLECT

- WHY DO YOU THINK ECCLESIASTES REPEATS THE SAME THEMES?
- IS THERE A THEME THAT YOU STRUGGLE WITH ACCEPTING? WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS? DOES ECCLESIASTES 12:13 PROVIDE YOU WITH COMFORT OR CONFUSION?



DAY THREE

Read Ecclesiastes 1:2. Let's explore one of the book's key themes: humanity's quest for meaning. Let's look at this verse in a few different translations.

"MEANINGLESS! MEANINGLESS!" SAYS THE TEACHER. "UTTERLY MEANINGLESS! EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS." NIV

"VANITY OF VANITIES, SAYS THE PREACHER, VANITY OF VANITIES! ALL IS VANITY." ESV

"VANITY OF VANITIES, SAYS THE PREACHER, VANITY OF VANITIES! ALL IS VANITY." CSB



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The word "meaningless," as translated into English, is used 38 times in Ecclesiastes. But the original Hebrew word is Hevel, which means vapor or smoke. Solomon uses smoke as a metaphor for life. Think about smoke. It can take on different forms, be transparent, and be thick at times, making it hard to see. You might be tempted to grab or attempt to hold on to smoke when it's in a fog-type form. But what happens? Your hand slips right through.

Solomon desires that we understand the fleeting or temporary nature of life. Life is unpredictable, unstable, and uncertain. If we think we can control our circumstances, as the teacher says, it will be like chasing the wind.

DAY THREE CONTINUED: REFLECT

- HOW DOES USING A DIFFERENT WORD IN EACH TRANSLATION CHANGE THE MEANING OF THE TEXT FOR YOU?
- CONSIDERING THE ABOVE IDEA, WHAT MESSAGE IS SOLOMON TRYING TO CONVEY ABOUT THE NATURE OF OUR TIME ON EARTH?



DAY FOUR

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11-14. Today's study will focus on the tension believers feel while living on earth and waiting for their eternal home.

Solomon remarks that the "Lord has made everything beautiful in His time," emphasizing His time. What little control humans may think we have over our lives results from a gracious, merciful God who allows us to act within his sovereign will. We live in a "now and not yet" reality.

But if you feel like even though you are confident you are a new creation, something is still missing, then you are right—it is! As we read over Ecclesiastes 3:11, while in Christ, we are new, but we are not wholly restored until I go to be with my Lord and Savior—God created us for eternity!

SO, HOW DO WE WAIT WELL AND MAKE THE MOST OF OUR TIME ON EARTH?

Solomon tells us that there is nothing better than for people to be happy, to do good, to enjoy themselves, to eat good food, to spend time with friends and family, and to thank God for the many blessings He bestows on our lives—the "glimmers of Heaven."



DAY FOUR CONTINUED: REFLECT

- HOW DOES KNOWING GOD CREATED YOU FOR ETERNITY CHANGE HOW YOU LIVE TODAY?
- OUR CHIEF PURPOSE IN LIFE IS TO GLORIFY GOD. IS YOUR LIFE A REFLECTION OF THIS TRUTH? IF NOT, WHAT CHANGES DO YOU NEED TO MAKE?



DAY FIVE

Read Ecclesiastes 12:11-14. In most Bibles, this section of Scripture is called "the conclusion of the matter." Solomon's main point in writing the book of Ecclesiastes is found in these last few verses.

The narrator writes this section of the text, which is his observations or summary of Solomon's words. He remarks that Solomon was wise, and like a shepherd whose goal is to protect and direct his flock, Solomon's words are meant to do the same for us.

The book of Ecclesiastes offers sage wisdom on living a godly life, providing ample examples of how we tend to get distracted and divert from God's will. These last few verses of chapter 12 tell us exactly what God requires of His children: fear God and keep his commandments. Look at the NLT's translation of verse 13, "That's the whole story. Here is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty."

**MOST OF US UNDERSTAND
WHAT IT MEANS TO KEEP GOD'S
COMMANDMENTS;
THANKFULLY, THEY ARE
PRESENTED TO US IN THE BIBLE.
BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO
FEAR GOD?**



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We are to have a reverent fear of the Lord, submitting to his authority as Sovereign, Savior, and Sustainer of the world and humanity. We understand that the Lord has the ultimate say over our lives and that He holds our fate, not man. Many of us are more concerned with what "mere mortals" think about us than God, the ultimate judge, thinks. These last few verses are a final wake-up call, begging us to ask, "Whose favor are you seeking, man's or God's?" Only the Lord's will matter for eternity.

DAY FIVE CONTINUED: REFLECT

- **SOLOMON WANTS HIS READERS TO UNDERSTAND THAT EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. HOW IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP?**
- **ARE YOU LIVING UNDER OR ABOVE THE SUN (LIVING WITH AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE VS. TEMPORARY?)**

Ecclesiastes is a profound book; we merely scratched the surface over these five days. Let me encourage you to take time to study through the book of Ecclesiastes.

Read the book in multiple translations, linger over the verses, let your mind and heart wrestle with the text, and ask, "What does this text tell me about God?" Pick up a devotional or Bible study to guide you as you live in light of eternity.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LAURA BAILEY

Laura Bailey is an author and Bible teacher who encourages women to understand what they believe, why it matters, and how to apply biblical truths to their lives. Her recent book, [*Embracing Eternity in the Here and Now*](#), explores how the timeless truths of Ecclesiastes help us live more peaceful, purposeful, and plentiful lives today.

She lives in Upstate South Carolina with her husband and three young girls, where she serves as director of women's ministries at her church. Her passion is teaching the Bible to women, equipping them to live with an eternal perspective. Invite Laura to speak at your next event or learn more: www.LauraRBailey.com connect on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

