

**GOD WITH US**  
**Part 4: The Life and Writings of Solomon**  
*Vision and Vanity – Ecclesiastes*

**Message 16 – Final Thoughts from Solomon**  
**Ecclesiastes 5:8-12:14**

**Introduction**

Much of Ecclesiastes consists of random sayings concerning life. It reads like the book of Proverbs, except that the sayings, lessons and observations in Ecclesiastes are related to Solomon's broader search for meaning and purpose. Thus, he relates all subjects back to the big question: What does life "under the sun" really amount to? He has already given us the basic answer: Life apart from God has NO ultimate purpose. On the other hand, when we acknowledge the reality of God and eternity, we can accept life as *a gift from God* and live aware of the fact that *we will meet God someday* and be held *responsible* for how we have used the gift of life. Yet, even with this 'eternal perspective' in mind, Solomon continued to see that life in this broken world is always filled with many puzzles and disappointments that cannot be understood.

***"No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it" (8:17).***

***"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" (11:5).***

**Observations about Wealth: 5:8-6:12**

Solomon was blessed with immense wealth. He found, however, that money brought many burdens to his life. No amount of money is ever enough (v.10). Ordinary laborers seem to worry less than rich people (v.12). Wealth can be lost in an instant through a poor decision or investment (v.13,14). Ultimately, you can't take your wealth with you when you die (v.15).

***"Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands" (5:15).***

Solomon saw it as a “great evil” when people have the ability to *amass* great wealth, but lack the ability to *enjoy* the fruit of all their labor. If a person goes through life with absolutely no *rest* in his/her spirit, better that he/she had never been born at all! Finding a degree of *enjoyment* in life is important, regardless of one’s financial situation. Thus, the refrain reminds us to enjoy life (and wealth, if we have it) as a gift from God:

***“When God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil – this is a gift of God” (5:19).***

Wealth does not have meaning in and of itself. Yet, when it is viewed as a tool to accomplish other purposes, then wealth has true meaning. The question is: What are you using your wealth to accomplish? Ecclesiastes teaches that it is perfectly valid to use some of your God-given wealth to enjoy life. At the same time, it is wise to use much of your wealth to advance purposes that are dear to the heart of God. How are you using your God-given wealth to advance the purposes of God in the lives of other people? Remember: You can’t take your wealth with you when you die; but you CAN take with you the results of the works of God that have been accomplished with your earthly resources.

### **Observations about Wisdom: 7:1-8:1**

Various sayings are grouped here, many related to the value of wisdom. Wisdom is more valuable than folly; yet not even a wise person will find completely satisfying answers to all the baffling mysteries of life. Sometimes, the most valuable wisdom will be found where you *least* expect it:

- Wisdom to be found at funerals:

***“It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart” (7:2).***

- Wisdom to be found in frustration:

***“Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart” (7:3).***

- Wisdom from the rebuke of friends:

***“It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools” (7:5).***

Solomon warns that it is *not wise* to overly romanticize the past (7:10). It IS wise to accept both good and bad in life:

***“Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other” (7:13,14).***

The above verse reminds us of the poem at the beginning of ch.3, and the central truth that *“God has made everything beautiful (appropriate) in its time” (3:11).*

One of the major lessons from Ecclesiastes is that we **MUST** learn the art of accepting **BOTH** the good and the bad aspects of life in this broken world. Things will never be perfect, until God makes all things new (Revelation 21). Are you learning to process negative aspects of life with God, asking Him to show you His eternal purposes in such things? Are you learning to accept the “bad” with the “good?” One of the chief signs of spiritual immaturity is when we want everything **OUR WAY** (i.e., “good”). This is the language of the child: Give me, give me, give me. The spiritually maturing person says: “Not my will, but **THY** will be done, Lord.” As Solomon put it: *“When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other” (7:14).*

*Why* is man’s life on this earth so difficult and confusing? Solomon agrees with the core assessment found from Genesis to Revelation. Mankind has turned away from God and now has a sin problem (sin = separation from God).

***“Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins” (7:20).***

***“This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes” (7:29).***

It stands to reason that if the core problem of mankind is sin and separation from God, then the foundation of all solutions to mankind’s problems is *reconciliation to God and redemption from sin*. This is precisely the message of the gospel: God can bring about new things in our lives **IF** we allow Him to enter into our hearts and begin to change us from the inside out. Solomon used a very simple phrase to describe what it means for a person to allow God to come in and be central to our lives: *“fear God” (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12,13; 12:13)*. To fear God means to reverence Him and give Him preeminence in your life.

## Observations about Leaders: 8:2-17 and 10:1-20

Many sayings in chapters 8 and 10 have to do with leaders (and followers.) Solomon gleaned these life-lessons from his own experience as the leader of the nation Israel.

- Opposing the leader:

***“Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases” (8:3).***

- Obeying the leader:

***Since a king’s word is supreme, who can say to him, “What are you doing?” Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure” (8:4,5).***

- Staying calm with an irritated leader:

***“If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest” (10:4).***

- The value of a noble leader:

***“Woe to the land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed is the land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time – for strength and not for drunkenness” (10:16,17).***

- Not secretly harboring hateful thoughts about the leader:

***“Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say” (10:20).***

God calls all of us to live UNDER authority and IN authority. But before we can be IN authority, we must first learn what it means to be UNDER authority. We learn to live under authority first in the home, then in school and in society. The most important lesson that Scripture teaches is to submit to authority whether you like that authority or not (see 1Peter 2:13-20). Jesus exemplified submission for us when He went to the cross (1Pet. 2:21-25). Increasingly, we may be given authority over others in the home, at work, at school and in society. The most important lesson for those in authority is to be a humble servant-leader to others. Jesus also exemplified this for us when He washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:12-17). Take some time to evaluate how you are doing living under authority and being in authority. Are there any specific lessons you can take away from Ecclesiastes?

## Observations about Death: 9:1-12

Solomon reflects on the certainty of physical death for every person, whether they have been good or bad. *Death is one of the major themes in Ecclesiastes.* Why? Because death brings into sharp focus the meaninglessness of this short, earthly existence if *there is nothing more afterwards.*

***“All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not” (9:1,2).***

Further, no one can predict the *time* of his/her death.

***“Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them” (9:12).***

Solomon’s repeated refrain seems very fitting in this particular context dealing with the certainty of death (and this refrain is a bit longer than the others at 3:12-14; 3:22; 5:18-20; 8:15):

***“Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun – all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (9:7-10).***

Solomon strikes a very delicate balance in Ecclesiastes between ENJOYING LIFE as a gift from God and LIVING RESPONSIBLY in light of eternity and divine judgment. If we go too far in the direction of enjoying life (hedonism) we fall into the trap of meaningless pleasure seeking, as Solomon did in chapter 2. This sort of life will, in the end, leave us feeling very empty. Yet, if we lean too far on the side of trying to be scrupulously responsible in everything (asceticism/self-denial) and living totally in light of eternity, then we will likely miss out on many of the pleasures of life that God has created for us to enjoy here and now. Life IS a gift from God! Where do you think you are falling on the balance between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any changes He might want you to make in striking a better balance in how you are living this life.

## Observations about Investing and Working: 11:1-6

Modern investment advisors talk about diversifying your investments in order to reduce risk and optimize gain. They also talk about including both foreign and domestic investments in your portfolio, for even greater balance. Solomon gave this same advice long ago:

***“Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return. Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land” (11:1,2).***

***“Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well” (11:6).***

When it comes to obtaining good returns on our investment and/or our work, Solomon seems to be putting two ideas together: 1) Life in this world is very unpredictable, often surprisingly disappointing. 2) If you “put all your eggs in one basket,” there is a better than average chance you will LOSE everything. Thus, he advises us to spread our investments and/or our work efforts around a bit, using several avenues simultaneously to obtain a decent return. If one or more investments fail (and they will), then hopefully the other things you are investing your wealth or your work in will succeed, offsetting your losses. How about you? Are you “betting everything on one horse?” Are you “putting all your hope in one venture?” Or, are you diversifying the investment of your time, talent and treasure on several worthwhile ventures?

## Finally . . . Fear God: 11:7-12:14

Solomon’s opening words in Ecclesiastes had one singular theme: *Life apart from God is totally meaningless (chs.1,2)*. Similarly, his concluding words center around one clear theme: *Life is short, so live with a healthy fear of God (chs.11,12)*. When Solomon opened the book of Proverbs (written early in his life) he stated that the *“fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7)*. Now, as he writes the final page of his wisdom literature, he comes back to this simple theme: The most important thing in life is to fear (reverence) God. Ultimately, this is the only way to live this life wisely and productively.

Solomon advises young people to find joy in the gifts of youthfulness and adventure (11:7-10). Yet, they must do so without losing sight of God and eternity (i.e., fearing the Lord).

***“You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment” (11:9).***

He advises all people to develop a God-centered perspective on life before old age creeps in (12:1-8). This section has a somewhat dark and sad tone about it. It reads a bit like a funeral service. Recall his advice about the value of attending funerals – 7:2. He seems to be taking us poetically to a funeral service in these closing lines! Yet, this is a *good* way to end the book in Solomon’s mind, since there is *great value* in seriously pondering end-of-life realities.

At the same time, we wonder if the sadness in these final lines might have been guided by Solomon’s look back over his own life. Did he harbor regrets about how he had lived out his later years? Recall, he turned away from God toward the love of many women, and he filled Israel with shrines to all of their foreign gods. Ecclesiastes on the whole pictures Solomon as one who, having turned away from the true God, spent much of his later life wrestling and striving to make sense of life in general. His final words read like those of a man on his deathbed looking back and giving advice to others who still have time to make mid-course corrections (i.e., Don’t make the same mistakes I have made!)

***“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’” (12:1).***

***“Remember Him – before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (12:6,7).***

If you could make a one-degree turn in your life right now, what would it be? What change would you make, based on Solomon’s closing words? Take some time to process this question. It would be ideal if you could discuss your thoughts with a few other people, and actually come up with a game plan to implement some changes. Solomon would say: Don’t wait until it is too late for change! Make changes while there is still time to implement them and receive some reward/joy from those decisions. You don’t want to be lying on your deathbed muttering the words: “If only I had done . . .” “If only I had listened to . . .” “If only . . .”

Solomon's line of thought in Ecclesiastes is often difficult to perceive. At times he seemed positive and God-centered. At other times he was pessimistic, inwardly focused and despairing. Still other times he seemed to blend hope and pessimism – realizing that life IS very broken and painful because of mankind's sin problem, yet life also DOES HAVE meaning and purpose if we live in light of God and eternity.

When he comes to the conclusion of Ecclesiastes, he states the matter forthrightly, so that no reader can miss his final point:

***“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (12:13,14).***

FEAR GOD – OBEY GOD – YOU WILL ANSWER FOR IT.

In the final analysis, *all* of Solomon's unparalleled God-given wisdom led him to this simple conclusion about life: Put God first. Prove that you are serious about that by obeying His Word. And live in light of eternal judgment/reward for how you lived.

His greatest wisdom was found in his simple, final statement!

### **A final thought on living out the wisdom of Solomon:**

Since Solomon made his conclusion simple, let's make our final questions simple. 1) How are YOU doing at FEARING GOD (putting Him first in your life; worshipping Him in all things; maintaining your first love for Him; being reverent toward Him)? 2) How are you doing at KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS (reading and heeding His words in every aspect of your life; seeking His will instead of your own)?

It is clear that Solomon was a man of incredible insight and he gave the world lots of good advice. It is also clear that he was woefully unable to apply his God-given wisdom to his own life. This raises the question: If Solomon could not follow his own advice, how can we expect to succeed? The answer is simple: We can't . . . if we strive in our own power. If we strive in our own strength, we will end up like Solomon, stumbling constantly over our own lusts and worldly desires; or like the apostle Paul who tried to obey God in his own strength and failed, concluding:

***“Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at***

***work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:21-25).***

God has done two things to help us live well in this world. First, He sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins. Forgiveness is His gift to each of us. Second, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell those who believe and to help us overcome the power of sin.

If you are a Christian, then God has placed His Holy Spirit within you. As you learn to walk in step with the Spirit, HE will produce HIS fruit in your life (see Galatians 5:16-25). Then we will experience what the apostle Paul experienced in his own walk with God:

***“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20).***

The answer then is that we need to *learn wisdom from the words of God*, and then *receive power from the Spirit of God* in order to live it out. Wisdom without the Spirit leads to defeat. The Spirit without Wisdom leads to confusion. But when the Spirit of God teams up with the Wisdom of God, then we make progress in our journey of “fearing God and keeping His commandments.”

If you want to learn more about walking in the power of the Holy Spirit and achieving more victory over sin in your life, I would recommend two books to you:

*The Wonderful Spirit-filled Life* by Charles Stanley.

*Emotionally Healthy Spiritually* by Pete Scazzero.