**ECCLESIASTES**

**How to Find Purpose in a World Where Nothing Lasts**

**What you need to REMEMBER:**

The first of the Older Testament’s five books of wisdom and poetry is the book of Job which explores why even good and innocent people suffer harm. The biography of Job reveals that the when people of faith struggle through the human drama of pain, sorrow, suffering they are part of a greater drama that is playing out in the unseen spiritual realm. The book of Job also points out that the Almighty Creator doesn’t owe us an explanation regarding these things, He simply expects us to have faith that He is good even when He allows human suffering for purposes known only to Him.

The second book in this collection is the Psalms, a collection of sacred songs, poems, prayers and honest confessions that express the highs and lows of the human faith-journey. The psalmists teach us, by example, that God is big enough to handle our emotional honesty – in fact, He wants us to engage him with complete authenticity.

Proverbs is the third of these five books. A proverb is a short, pithy saying that is meant to convey a bit of wisdom. As such, the book of Proverbs is a compilation of wise teachings and soundbites that are meant to teach the us how to navigate our choice-filled world by a rightly calibrated intellectual and moral compass.

**What you need to KNOW:**

Next up is the book of Ecclesiastes. This fourth book in the wisdom/poetry section of the Older Testament explores whether purpose and meaning can be had in a temporal world where nothing seems to last.

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon who as a young man desired wisdom more than anything else. In return, God gave him not only great wisdom, but also immense power and wealth. For most of his reign, Solomon ruled the nation astutely and used his blessings to establish an impressive temple which functioned as the centerpiece of the nation’s devotion.

However, he didn’t finish well. His great blessings led to excesses and moral lapses. God reminded Solomon that the secret to continued blessing required faithful obedience. However, he foolishly married over 700 women, including many from surrounding nations in an attempt to create political alliances. As a result, his foreign wives brought their idolatrous worship practices into the palace itself. Thus, the idolatry that his father, King David, had so zealously pushed out of the nation was embraced and welcomed back in by Solomon’s foolish finish. Solomon, himself, tragically descended into apostacy in his old age.

The subject matter and negative tone of Ecclesiastes in a reflection of the trajectory of Solomon’s life and suggests that it was probably written as his zeal for the Lord was slipping away.

The book begins with this nihilistic summary of human existence: *“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” (1:2)*

What follows is an exploration of the futility of finding lasting satisfaction and significance through the human pursuits of knowledge, pleasure, wealth, and happiness. It also explores the many injustices and inequities that are part of human existence. Yet, bearing a measure of wisdom even in the end, Solomon finishes his treatise with these words, *“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 judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (12:13-14)*

A good thought to keep in mind as you take a walk through the Book of Ecclesiastes is a line from chapter 3, verse 11, which says, *“God has planted eternity in the human heart.”* The idea here is that humans are distinct from other creatures in that they have a sense of eternity hardwired in them. This makes mankind uniquely capable of understanding that there must be something more than what we see in our physical existence. As a result, we are able to consider and compare our temporal earthly existence in light of eternity. Ecclesiastes is a contemplative study on this subject.

Solomon points out that the successes and failures, the trials and pleasures, of this life ultimately do not matter for everything in this world is transient. Nothing in this life lasts. Yet, because a seed of eternity is imbedded in our hearts, we are prone to seek experiences, achievements, and relationships that will satisfy our desire for something that lasts. We think that something should last, but it never seems to work out that way, leaving us feeling unfulfilled, unsatisfied – ‘ripped off.’

But this book pushes us toward a different conclusion. It suggests that this experience in frustration is meant to create in us a deeper kind of wisdom. It’s meant to give us an outlook that prepares us and stirs within us a longing for a place where these desires can be satisfied.

This idea was best summarized by C.S. Lewis in the book Mere Christianity when we said, *“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. (People) feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find until after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same.”*

**GET GOING!**

**Continue your personal Walk Through the Bible by reading Ecclesiastes.**