

Solomon Reflects on the Meaning of Life

Summary and Goal

Solomon asked some intense questions in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and these questions find their resolution in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Knowing that God exists, we can experience a life of meaning, justice, and purpose, and we call others to seek answers to their questions by looking to Christ.

Main Passages

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Ecclesiastes 3:16–4:3

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Session Outline

1. Does life have meaning? (Eccl. 1:1-11)
2. Is there justice and goodness in this world? (Eccl. 3:16–4:3)
3. What are we on earth for? (Eccl. 12:9-14)

Theological Theme

Because God exists, life has meaning and purpose.

Christ Connection

Ecclesiastes raises questions about life that can be answered only in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declared that apart from the resurrection of Jesus, our faith is meaningless and there is no forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17). But because the resurrection is true, our life has purpose.

Missional Application

God calls us to discover the questions people in our culture are asking and then to answer those questions with the gospel.

Session Plan

Solomon Reflects on the Meaning of Life

? For Further Discussion

What are some reasons the Book of Ecclesiastes might be a less-than-familiar book for Christians?

What does it say about our God that He would inspire the Book of Ecclesiastes and preserve it for us in the Bible?

? For Further Discussion

Why might people evade asking “deeper” questions about life, such as those found in Ecclesiastes?

How might considering these reasons help us show love, grace, and compassion as we seek to share the gospel with others?

Point 1 Option

Read the “Voices from the Church” quote by William Lane Craig (leader p. 133; PSG p. 104), and ask the following questions:

- Why is it necessary for God to exist in order for life to have meaning?
- How is this truth useful for us in apologetics and evangelism?

Introduction

Highlight the uniqueness of Ecclesiastes (*see Pack Item 7: Wisdom Literature*). Use the life questions given to survey its content (leader p. 130; PSG p. 101).

- ? Take a moment to discuss the words of Tom Brady (*see “Voices from the Culture”* [leader p. 130; PSG p. 101]). How would you respond to a friend or neighbor who expressed a similar sentiment?

Summarize the session, saying that we should ask some of the same questions that Solomon did and understand that the resolution to them is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ (leader p. 131; PSG p. 102).

1. Does life have meaning? (Eccl. 1:1-11)

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. Remind the group that the Holy Spirit inspired these words to be in the Bible, and so we do not have the option of writing them off. Highlight verses 3-4 and the **impermanence** that Solomon saw in the world (leader pp. 131-132; PSG pp. 102-103).

- ? What are some examples of the fleeting and temporary nature of this life?

Comment on verses 5-7 and the general monotony of life, that there appears to be **no true productivity** in the world (leader p. 132; PSG p. 103).

- ? When have you felt like you were involved in work that was continual but unproductive? What were the circumstances?

Note the **lack of progress** that Solomon observed in verses 8-11 since nothing ever truly satisfies us. Explain that Solomon painted a picture of what reality is like if we push God out of our lives (leader p. 133; PSG p. 104).

- ? What are some signs that we have succumbed to a pessimistic view of life?
- ? How does faith in Christ help us through these trying moments?

2. Is there justice and goodness in this world? (Eccl. 3:16–4:3)

Read Ecclesiastes 3:16–4:3, which deals with the problem of evil and suffering. Acknowledge that we all long for peace and restoration. Explain that Solomon seemed to find comfort in the idea of God as judge, but because of the resurrection, we can find more comfort (leader p. 134; PSG p. 105).

- ❓ What kinds of injustice or suffering in the world are most likely to get your attention?
- ❓ What kinds of injustice or suffering are you most likely to ignore?

Use the excerpt from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* to show how we as Christians are to answer Solomon’s question about justice and goodness (leader p. 135). Encourage group members with 1 Peter 5:10-11 (leader p. 135; PSG p. 106).

- ❓ How does faith in Christ’s promise to make all things new give us strength to fight injustice or relieve suffering today?

3. What are we on earth for? (Eccl. 12:9-14)

Ask a volunteer to read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14. Speak of the many different philosophies and perspectives on life, stressing that unless they conclude that we were made for God and His commands, they are wrong. Cite Romans 1:22-23 to show that all people possess knowledge of God but suppress the truth (leader p. 136; PSG pp. 106-107).

- ❓ What are some different answers the world gives to the question “What are we on earth for”?

Talk about how Christians have a tremendous opportunity to offer hope to our world because we know why we are here. Further explain that we don’t simply offer ideas to the world but a Person—King Jesus (leader p. 137; PSG p. 108). Show from Colossians 2:8-10 that ultimate meaning and purpose are found only in Christ (leader p. 137).

- ❓ What are some unique ways Jesus provides a better answer than the world to life’s deepest questions?

Conclusion

Restate that the Bible doesn’t shy away from hard questions, which shows us the uniqueness of Christianity and the glory of Jesus (leader p. 137; PSG p. 108). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission”* (PSG p. 109).

Pass out cards from Pack Item 9: Restless for You to help group members recall the meaning of life, for both for ourselves and unbelievers who need Jesus.

❓ For Further Discussion

How are God’s absolute justice and promised judgment a source of comfort for the suffering?

Why is justice necessary for our actions to matter?

Point 3 Option

Ask groups of 3-4 to read the “Essential Christian Doctrine” *General Revelation* (leader p. 137; PSG p. 107) and to discuss what this doctrine means for us as we share the gospel with others. After a couple of moments, call for groups to share their reflections and responses.

Christ Connection:

Ecclesiastes raises questions about life that can be answered only in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declared that apart from the resurrection of Jesus, our faith is meaningless and there is no forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17). But because the resurrection is true, our life has purpose.

.....
Missional Application: God calls us to discover the questions people in our culture are asking and then to answer those questions with the gospel.

Expanded Session Content

Solomon Reflects on the Meaning of Life

Voices from the Culture

"Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what is.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think...it's gotta be more than this. I mean this can't be what it's all cracked up to be. I mean I've done it. I'm 27. And what else is there for me?"¹

—Tom Brady, New England Patriots quarterback

Voices from Church History

"You are matchless, O Lord. So our praise of You must rise above our humanity...You awaken in us a delight at praising You. You made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its place in You."²

—Augustine (354-430)

Introduction


Ecclesiastes. Of all the books in the Bible, this one is perhaps the most unique. We might even say that although Ecclesiastes is listed 21st in our Bibles, this book should be the first one we read. Before we get into Genesis or Romans or the Psalms, perhaps we should spend some time reading the words of Solomon in this great and mysterious book.

Why is Ecclesiastes so important? Because it poses the questions that the rest of the Bible answers. It leads us to grapple with meaning, purpose, and value. It confronts us with questions we may never have thought to ask, but should:

- Does life have any meaning?
- Why are we here?
- Does what we do really matter?
- Is history going anywhere?
- Is there any justice in the world?
- Is there anything beyond the grave?
- Why do things seem random and purposeless at times?
- Will anything satisfy the ache and longing at the deepest level of our hearts?

These questions (and more) come rushing at us as we thumb through the pages of Ecclesiastes. In this book, Solomon reflected on all the things he had seen *under the sun*, a phrase that occurs 32 times in the book. And it's that phrase that offers us a clue into the book's meaning. Solomon's goal was to show us the futility of life under the sun—if this life is all there is. If we look for worth and value in pleasure, wealth, possessions, fame, wisdom, power, or success, we will wander in futility all the days of our lives.

Look up from your Bible and into our world and you'll see millions of people living out the reality of Ecclesiastes. We see a world that has never been more connected, more entertained, or more comforted and yet never more isolated, more bored, and more depressed.

-  Take a moment to discuss the words of Tom Brady (see "Voices from the Culture"). How would you respond to a friend or neighbor who expressed a similar sentiment?

Session Summary

In this session, we are going to align ourselves with Solomon and ask some of the same questions he asked. As we pose these questions together, we should look for their resolution in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Knowing that God exists, we can experience a life of meaning, justice, and purpose, and we call others to seek answers to their questions by looking to Christ.

1. Does life have meaning? (Eccl. 1:1-11)

The opening verses of Ecclesiastes introduce us to the question “Does life have meaning?” Solomon began by lamenting the fact that when he looked out at the world, it all appeared to be meaningless and futile:

¹ The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

² Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

³ What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

⁴ A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

⁵ The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.

⁶ The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.

⁷ All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

⁸ All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

⁹ What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has been already in the ages before us.

¹¹ There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

Further Commentary

C. S. Lewis captured the grim reality of living as if this world is all there is: “The universe is a universe of nonsense, but since you are here, grab what you can. Unfortunately, however, there is, on these terms, so very little left to grab—only the coarsest sensual pleasures. You can’t except in the lowest animal sense, be in love with a girl if you know (and keep on remembering) that all the beauties both of her person and of her character are a momentary and accidental pattern produced by the collision of atoms, and that your own response to them is only a sort of psychic phosphorescence arising from the behaviour of your genes. You can’t go on getting any very serious pleasure from music if you know and remember that its air of significance is pure illusion, that you like it only because your nervous system is irrationally conditioned to like it. You may still, in the lowest sense, have a ‘good time’; but just in so far as it becomes very good, just in so far as it ever threatens to push you on from cold sensuality into real warmth and enthusiasm and joy, so far you will be forced to feel the hopeless disharmony between your own emotions and the universe in which you really live.”³

Further Commentary

"*Hevel* ["vanity, futility"] may originate in the sound of 'breath' (Isa. 57:13). It may have produced a verb (*haval*) that occurs five times, once used as 'keep up empty talk' (Job 27:12). *Haval* denotes 'become worthless' (Jer. 2:5) or 'place false hope' (Ps. 62:10). The causative means 'make worthless' (Jer. 23:16). 'Breath' as transient and apparently insignificant underlies all metaphorical uses of *hevel*. It can indicate 'vapor' (Ps. 39:5) or 'mist' (Prov. 21:6), but the idea of little worth is always present. *Hevel* connotes 'fraud' (Prov. 13:11). It signifies 'empty' (Job 27:12), 'worthless' (Jer. 10:3), 'meaningless' (Ps. 94:11), 'futile' (Job 21:34), 'fleeting' (Prov. 31:30), or 'in vain' (Zech. 10:2). It describes man (Ps. 62:9). This key word in Ecclesiastes suggests 'futility' except at Ecclesiastes 9:9. 'Absolute futility' is literally *futility of futilities* (Eccl. 1:2). The plural often denotes 'worthless idols' (Deut. 32:21) since context clarifies what the *hevel* is."⁴

—Duane A. Garrett,
HCSB Study Bible

Talk about an introduction! If Solomon planned to get our attention, he's done it. What are we to do with these words? We could immediately write them off as some pessimistic, glass-half-empty view of the world. But the Holy Spirit inspired these words to be in the Bible. We don't have the option of writing them off. So let's look at the world the way Solomon did for a few moments and find out what he meant here. When he looked out at the world, he saw three main things that led him to the conclusion that life is futile.

There appears to be no permanence (vv. 3-4).

First, Solomon saw no permanence in the world. Nothing seems to last. We get up and work a job for 30 or 40 years, and then we die. Generations come and go, but the world seems to take no notice of them. Most human beings seem to make no lasting impact on the world; as soon as one generation thinks they have things figured out, they grow old and die.

Life is like an endless treadmill that one generation runs on for a while before getting replaced by another. Ideas and innovations come and go, but nothing appears to last. Achievements and advancements happen, but is the world really any better? Solomon's answer was a resounding no!


 What are some examples of the fleeting and temporary nature of this life?

There appears to be no productivity (vv. 5-7).

The next thing Solomon mentioned was the sun, the wind, and the streams and how they seem to produce no results. The sun rises and sets day after day. The wind blows on an endless cycle. The streams flow into the same place over and over and over. What do they have to show for this? Nothing. There is no productivity to anything.

Solomon later applied this to our daily lives. Think about your day. We sleep in our bed, then make it up, and repeat the process. Our hair grows, we cut it, and it grows back. Our clothes get dirty, and we wash them—only to get them dirty again!

Monotony is everywhere. There are so many areas of life that achieve no real results and produce virtually nothing of any importance. Is there any end result to all of this? Again, Solomon's answer was no.



 When have you felt like you were involved in work that was continual but unproductive? What were the circumstances?

There appears to be no progress (vv. 8-11).

Nothing is new under the sun. The eyes and ears never seem to be satisfied. Every new invention or gadget that comes down the pike never really satisfies us. Sure, they may entertain us for a little while, but they do not change the monotony and the impermanence of the things previously mentioned. Generations still come and go. The sun continues to rise and set. The latest product that people stand in line for will do nothing to alter the world as it is. Therefore, it is all futile, according to Solomon.

When we consider this perspective on the world, we must conclude that Solomon was spot on—insofar as God is left out of the picture. Remember, he was showing us a picture of life without God. There is no reference here to loving, obeying, and treasuring God. When He is not the center of our lives, we must conclude that all of life is futile. All that you do, all that you achieve, and all that you gain in this life is nothing unless God is the greatest reality of your life.

The picture Solomon painted here is reality—if we push God out of our lives. But when God is at the center of our lives as our King and treasure, all of life is filled with meaning and purpose. All that we do matters. If Jesus is who He said He was and if He truly is raised from the dead and reigning over all things, then everything we do matters. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58). Without Him, everything we do is in vain. With Him, everything we do has meaning and value and purpose.

-  What are some signs that we have succumbed to a pessimistic view of life?
-  How does faith in Christ help us through these trying moments?

2. Is there justice and goodness in this world? (Eccl. 3:16–4:3)

As we move further into the Book of Ecclesiastes, the second question that we see Solomon grappling with is the issue of justice in the world. As he looked out and observed, he saw more injustice than justice, more pain than prosperity.

Voices from the Church

“What is true of the universe and of the human race is also true of us as individuals...If God does not exist, then you are just a miscarriage of nature, thrust into a purposeless universe to live a purposeless life.”⁵

—William Lane Craig

Further Commentary

“The text makes four assertions: (1) God desires people to see that they are in some sense like ‘animals’; (2) people and animals share the same fate in that both return to the dust; (3) nobody knows if the spirit of a human rises at death while that of an animal descends to the earth; and (4) we ought to enjoy the life we have. While these verses may appear to be a categorical denial of afterlife, such an interpretation would miss the mark. Once again Ecclesiastes asserts that humans are mortal; it is in that sense that they are like the animals...Ecclesiastes does not deny afterlife but does force the reader to take death seriously. In this the book echoes the psalmist’s prayer that he be taught to number his days (Ps. 90:10-12). It is not the biblical believer who denies the power of death but the unbeliever. Since humans are truly mortal, two conclusions follow. First, neither possessions nor accomplishments are eternal, and we should properly use and enjoy them while we still see the light of day. Second, because we are by nature dependent and contingent, our hope of eternal life must be founded in God and not ourselves (Eccl. 12:7,13-14). For the Christian this means that immortality is in the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:12-19).”⁶

—Duane A. Garrett

¹⁶ Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. ¹⁷ I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. ¹⁸ I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. ¹⁹ For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. ²¹ Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? ²² So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?

^{4:1} Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. ² And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. ³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

The struggle we see here is one that we all encounter. Theologians and philosophers refer to this as the problem of evil and suffering. Each of us has to face the fact that the world is not as it should be. The curse of sin has now fractured and ruptured what God made good, rhythmic, and beautiful. The result is pain, poverty, suffering, oppression, and death. Solomon saw this and observed that it is better to be dead, and better still not even to exist!

All of us long for things to be set right, for things to be put back in their proper place. We lament, with Solomon, that when we search for righteousness, we often find wickedness in its place. We long for peace, for restoration, and our only hope is that God will bring everything into judgment (v. 17).

Solomon seemed to find some comfort with this idea of God as judge. But we can find even more comfort because we know what Solomon did not know. We know that because God raised Jesus from the dead, He will raise us. And not only us, but the whole of creation will be renewed and redeemed. He will wipe away every tear. He will set all things right. He will make all things new. He will make a new heaven and a new earth. He will put an end to sin, Satan, and death.

- ❓ What kinds of injustice or suffering in the world are most likely to get your attention?
- ❓ What kinds of injustice or suffering are you most likely to ignore?

Sally Lloyd-Jones paints a beautiful picture at the end of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. She paraphrases the end of the Book of Revelation this way:

One day, John knew, Heaven would come down and mend God’s broken world and make it our true, perfect home once again. And he knew, in some mysterious way that would be hard to explain, that everything was going to be more wonderful for once having been so sad. And he knew then that the ending of The Story was going to be so great, it would make all the sadness and tears and everything seem like just a shadow that is chased away by the morning sun. “I’m on my way,” said Jesus. “I’ll be there soon!”⁷

This is our answer to Solomon’s question about justice and goodness! We need not despair or lose hope. Our God will act on our behalf. He will bring about the glory of His righteousness and justice. In the meantime, we are to hold to the words of Peter: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 5:10-11). All dominion and power ultimately belong to God, and in His time He will bring about the perfection and peace for which we all long. Let us wait with patience and endurance for our God to act.

- ❓ How does faith in Christ’s promise to make all things new give us strength to fight injustice or relieve suffering today?

3. What are we on earth for? (Eccl. 12:9-14)

Of all the questions that we are prompted to ask as we read the Book of Ecclesiastes, this one is the most important—“What are we on earth for?” Solomon concluded his book by warning us of all the other voices we’ll hear in the world, but only One matters.

Voices from the Church

“What creation needs is neither abandonment nor evolution but rather redemption and renewal; and this is both promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is what the whole world’s waiting for.”⁸

—N. T. Wright

Voices from the Culture

“When, in the resulting chaos, men see themselves as flotsam without recognizable obligations or hopes of due reward, then justice becomes a chimera.”⁹

—Honor Matthews

Further Commentary

“The Preacher’s message is summarized in two points which concern the greatness of God and the Word of God. The Hebrew emphasizes the words ‘God’ and ‘commands.’ The ‘fear’ of God is the realization of his unchanging power and justice (3:14). It delivers from wickedness and self-righteousness (7:18) and leads to a hatred of sin (5:6f.; 8:12ff). If it is the ‘beginning of wisdom’ (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10) it also is ‘the end,’ the conclusion; no progress in the believer’s life leaves it behind. Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1). The reader is urged to ‘keep his commandments.’ The order of the two points (‘fear’...‘keep’) is significant. Conduct derives from worship. A knowledge of God leads to obedience; not vice versa. This is the only place in Ecclesiastes where the ‘commands’ of God are mentioned. The body of the book has simply placed two alternative views of life over against each other and the life of faith has been commended. Now in the epilogue, almost as an aside, it is pointed out that such a life will have implications. It must not be restricted to the Mosaic law. It refers to all that is known to be God’s will. The last phrase reads literally: ‘For this is the whole of the man.’ Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, however, the ‘whole of the man’ is a Hebrew idiom for ‘every man’ (cf. 3:13; 5:19). The sense, therefore, is ‘This applies to everyone.’”¹¹

—Michael A. Eaton

⁹ Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

What are we on earth for? Attempts to answer this question are at every turn. This text reminds us that countless opinions are offered up regarding this issue (v. 12). Think of all the different philosophies and perspectives on life and why we are here. Talk shows, magazines, blogs, and websites bombard us with advice and counsel on how to live. But unless they conclude that we were made for God and His commands, they are wrong and should be rejected. Deep down, every human knows that they were made for God.

Consider the words of atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell:

“The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain—a curious wild pain—a searching for something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite—the beatific vision—God—I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found—but the love of it is my life—it’s like passionate love for a ghost. At times it fills me with rage, at times with wild despair, it is the source of gentleness and cruelty and work, it fills every passion that I have—it is the actual spring of life within me.”¹⁰

Amazing! Even a man who refused to acknowledge God’s existence felt this overwhelming longing to know and enjoy God. Why is that?

Romans 1 reminds us that all people possess knowledge of God. The problem is not that we lack truth and knowledge; we suppress truth. Paul wrote, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:22-23). This is a grim commentary on humanity. God made us to know Him and walk in His ways, but instead, we shun Him and create our own path to joy and meaning. We essentially know why we are here, but we refuse to act on that truth.



What are some different answers the world gives to the question “What are we on earth for”?

As Christians, we have a tremendous opportunity to offer hope to our world. We know why we are here! We know why we were put on this earth. We know the path to ultimate meaning and purpose. We have a living Savior who came to give us abundant life and overflowing joy (John 10:10; 15:11).

We don't simply offer the world ideas, information, or a philosophy. We offer the world a Person, a Person who died and rose again. We offer living hope, living water, and living bread in a reigning King named Jesus.

Paul's Letter to the Colossians reminds us not to look to anything besides Christ for ultimate meaning and purpose: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority” (Col. 2:8-10). Only in Christ does the fullness of God dwell. Only in Christ do all other idols and so-called gods lose their power and appeal. Only in Christ do we discover why we are here. We discover that what we've been searching for in pleasure, approval, power, and comfort is actually found in Him. He is better and He is enough.

Jesus really is better. He speaks a better word. He tells a better story. He offers a better answer to why we are here. Let us give our lives to helping the world know and trust this God who made us for Himself and who alone provides the answer to why we are here!



What are some unique ways Jesus provides a better answer than the world to life's deepest questions?

Conclusion

In this session, we saw that the Bible doesn't shy away from hard questions. God wants us to grapple with issues of meaning, purpose, and justice in the world. And when we do, we'll see that these questions help us see the uniqueness of Christianity and the glory of Jesus Christ our Savior. This, in turn, makes us even more conversant with the culture around us as we seek to offer answers to the deepest questions people are asking. Let us boldly but winsomely offer the world the hope it so desperately needs.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Ecclesiastes raises questions about life that can be answered only in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declared that apart from the resurrection of Jesus, our faith is meaningless and there is no forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17). But because the resurrection is true, our life has purpose.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

1. General Revelation

General revelation refers to God revealing Himself through His creation (Ps. 19) and through the human conscience (Rom. 2). Knowledge about God through general revelation is limited because it only communicates general knowledge about God and His character. We can look at the vastness and fine-tuning of the universe and recognize that God is all-powerful and wise, or look inward to our innate sense of right and wrong and know there is a moral lawgiver in the universe. General revelation is not sufficient for understanding how to know God or be saved, but it provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held accountable for suppressing God's truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1-2).

Voices from the Church

“The knowledge and wisdom that we find in Christ, and in Christ alone, are not to be treated casually or flippantly or presumptuously. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God as revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4-6) is a treasure of infinite worth and value. Ponder it deeply. Pray for it daily. Plunder its riches. Protect it from defilement. Penetrate its mysteries. Prize it above all earthly wealth, all human wisdom, all fleshly gain.”¹²

—Sam Storms

Additional Resources

Solomon Reflects on the Meaning of Life

References

1. Daniel Schorn, "Transcript: Tom Brady, Part 3," CBS News [online], 5 November 2005 [cited 20 October 2015]. Available from the Internet: www.cbsnews.com.
2. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine: Modern English Version* (New York: Revell, 2005), 15-16.
3. C. S. Lewis, *Present Concerns* (London: Harcourt Inc., 2002), 76.
4. Duane A. Garrett, in *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 1088, sidebar.
5. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 76-77.
6. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 1993) [eBook on WORDsearch].
7. Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 348.
8. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2008), 107.
9. Honor Matthews, *The Primal Curse: The Myth of Cain and Abel in the Theatre*, quoted in *The Cruelty of Heresy*, by C. FitzSimons Allison (New York: Morehouse, 1994), 15.
10. Bertrand Russell, quoted in *The Philosopher: Their Lives and the Nature of Their Thought*, by Ben-Ami Scharfstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 312.
11. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, vol. 18 in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 176-77.
12. Sam Storms, *The Hope of Glory: 100 Daily Meditations on Colossians* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 154.
13. Leroy Gainey, "Excels in Multicultural Community," in *Sunday School That Really Excels*, ed. Steve R. Parr (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 146.



Get expert insights on weekly studies through Ministry Grid at MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject. Grow with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog at LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry.

Study Material

- "Ecclesiastes"—Chapter 18 from *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens* by Michael Williams
- "How I Learned to Live Joyfully"—Article by J. I. Packer; find a link to this article at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Ecclesiastes in a Positive Light," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Sermon Podcast

William Lane Craig: "Facing Life Without God"

Find a link to this at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

Tip of the Week

Respect for Other Cultures

Increasingly, our communities are becoming multicultural, and hopefully this will be reflected in our churches and groups as a testimony to the unifying power of the gospel. As teachers, we must respect diversity, discover new ways to help all people groups find their worth in Christ, and bring all believers together in one spirit, faith, and common confession.¹³