

Secrets of the Good Life



Studies in Ecclesiastes

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Lesson 1

How Could He Fail With Such Potential?

A. Solomon's _____

1. His _____
2. His _____
 - a. As a _____ man (I Kings 3:16-27; 4:29-34; 10:1-7)
 - b. As an able _____ (I Kings 4:1-21)
 - c. As an ingenious _____ and _____ (I Kings 7-8; 9:10-19, 24)
 - d. As a man of _____ (I Kings 4:20-28; 10:14-29)
 - e. As a man of sincere _____ to Jehovah (I Kings 3:3-15; 8:12-9:9)

B. Solomon's _____

1. God's _____ (Deut. 17:14-20)
2. Solomon's _____
 - a. Multiplied _____ (I Kings 10:28)
 - b. Multiplied _____ and _____ (I Kings 10:21-23)
 - c. Multiplied _____ (I Kings 11:1-8)
3. God's _____—“stirred up” adversaries
 - God's displeasure (I Kings 11:9-13)
 - a. Hadad the Edomite (I Kings 11:14-22)
 - b. Rezon (I Kings 11:23-25)
 - c. Jeroboam (I Kings 11:26-40)
4. Solomon's _____—the occasion of Ecclesiastes

Conclusion: “Your potential does not lie in your _____ or your _____,
but in your _____.”

Lesson 2

Are You Getting the Point?

A. Solomon's _____

1. Not advocating _____ (a life of self-indulgence).
 - Six times Solomon says man should “Eat and drink . . . and enjoy good in his labor” (2:24; 3:12-13; 3:22; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7-9).
2. Not advocating _____ (a life of self-deprivation)
3. Not advocating _____ (a life of self-disillusionment)
4. Advocates _____ in life
 - a. Ecclesiastes was read at Feasts of Tabernacles¹, a time of joy (Neh. 8:9-12).
 - b. Joy is a prominent theme—mentioned 17 times.

B. Solomon's _____

- Ecclesiastes is a “cultural apologetic”²—a testimony of his God.

C. Solomon's _____

1. Ecclesiastes is a “personal apology”—a testimony of repentance later in life.
 - a. Solomon had it all, tried it all, lost it all, and in the end saw it all from God's perspective again.
 - b. 12:1-7 is probably a statement of personal testimony—he wasted his youth trying to make life work his own way and now looking back as an old man, regrets it.
2. Ecclesiastes is a collection of _____ and _____.

(12:11) “The words of the wise are like goads; and the collected sayings are like fastened nails—they come from one Shepherd.”³

 - a. **Goads:** “the disturbing _____ of men”⁴

“The fool lives only for the moment. He refuses to think about the solemn truths which come to everybody's mind from time to time, and makes short-term pleasure his single reason for living. The wise man, however, observes life carefully. He thinks about what he sees and experiences. He asks questions and tries to come to logical conclusions. He seeks long-range satisfaction, and wants his life to count for something.”

“This serious-minded person is a better citizen than the man who lives only for momentary thrills. But in some ways he also suffers more, for he squarely faces painful truths about life and reflects upon the meaning of pain, death, and eternity. These serious thoughts serve as goads in his life.”⁵

“. . . the goads Solomon includes in Ecclesiastes are the recollections, the concerns, the serious thoughts, and the guilt feelings which arise in the consciousness of one who is willing to face things as they are. Their stings are painful, and do not in themselves provide the answer to man's need. But they bring to light a person's sinfulness and helplessness, and thereby may get him started in the right direction.”⁶
 - b. **Nails:** “the _____ of God”⁷

¹ Kaiser, page 41.

² Kaiser, page 32.

³ DeHaan, page 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, page 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, page 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 8.

D. Solomon's _____—4 discourses (Secrets of the Good Life) with common conclusions

1. Discourse 1 (1:2-2:26) The Secret of Pleasure in Life
2. Discourse 2 (3:1-5:20) The Secret of Providence in Life
3. Discourse 3 (6:1-8:15) The Secret of Prosperity in Life
4. Discourse 4 (8:16-12:14) The Secret of Perseverance in Life

Conclusion: “Are you getting the point (goad)?”

Reflection (goats) without revelation (nails) produces _____.

Revelation without reflection produces _____.

Reflection with revelation produces _____.

Lesson 3

Are We Having Fun Yet?

Discourse 1—The Secret of Pleasure in Life (1:2-2:26)

A. Solomon's _____ (1:2-11)

1. Great _____
 - Vanity: all activities are *filled* with *emptiness*.
 - a. Nothing is profitable (1:3, 8).
 - b. Nothing is permanent (1:4-11).
 - 1) Life is _____.
 - 2) Life is _____.
 - Reflection on nature is designed by God to humble man. It shows God's glory by its sheer vastness in *size* and *power*.
2. Great _____
 - "Labor"—energy expended to make something happen
 - "Sore Travail"—"sorry task" (1:13): the sorry task (burden) is that God prompts man to seek but there is no apparent answer. This "restlessness" is a God-given goad!

B. Solomon's _____ (1:12-2:23)

1. His _____ (1:12-18)⁸
 - a. "He had been ruling as king over Israel in Jerusalem (v. 12)."
 - b. "He had diligently applied himself to this question (v. 13)."
 - c. "He had carefully observed all that pertained to this question (v. 14-15)."
 - d. "He had acquired more wisdom and knowledge than most other people (v. 16)."
 - e. "He found much grief and sorrow in things as they were (v. 17-18)."

"Wisdom when viewed apart from that wisdom which comes from the fear of God increases grief instead of bringing relief to the question of profit."⁹
2. His _____ (2:1-23)
 - He will come up with three goads (2:1-23).
 - a. He Labored at Expending _____ (2:1-11).
 - 1) He _____ (1-3).
 - 2) He _____ (4-6).
 - 3) He _____ (7-8).
 - 4) He _____ (9-11) — the right conclusion.
 - **Goad #1:** Pleasure doesn't _____ (1-11).

⁸Kaiser, page 53.

⁹*Ibid.*, page 55.

- b. He Labored at Exploring _____ (2:12-23).
- **Goad #2:** Folly doesn't _____ (12-13).
 - **Goad #3:** Knowledge doesn't _____ (14-19).
- He _____ (20-23)—the right conclusion.

Conclusion: Are you frequently bored and empty, or restless and agitated? Does your labor seem to you like you are “chasing after wind?” Do you despise the routine and constraints of life? Is all your activity merely the anesthetic to dull the pain of an empty life? Are you frequently depressed and discouraged? Do you often feel alone, rejected and abandoned? Do you look for action because you have a hard time when left by yourself? Are you afraid to be by yourself because your thoughts when alone are too painful?

If any of these describe your experience in life, you are being “goaded” by God to stop living the way you live. God is saying, “You big ox, don't you feel My goads? Get moving! Live life the way I designed it.”

Lesson 4

Do We Have to Take *Him* Along?

Discourse 1—The Secret of Pleasure (1:2-2:26) continued

- A. Solomon's Misery (1:2-11)
- B. Solomon's Mission (1:12-2:23)
- C. Solomon's Message (2:24-26)

24) There is not a good [inherent] in man that he should be able to eat, drink, or get satisfaction from his work. Even this, I realized, was from the hand of God.

25) Apart from Him, who can eat and who can have enjoyment?

26) For to the man who pleases Him, He gives wisdom, knowledge and joy; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and heaping up in order to give it to the one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.¹⁰

1. The Equation of Enjoyment (The Secret of Pleasure)

You can include what you wish in the multiplicand side of the equation, but God alone is the multiplier. He determines by what factor your contribution is multiplied, and thus, He alone determines the amount of enjoyment you receive out of your life.

| Your contribution | Ϸ | God's contribution | = | Result (amt. of enjoyment) |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------|---|----------------------------|
| (25 + 15 + 10 + 40 + 8) | Ϸ | 0 | = | _____ |
| (2 + 3) | Ϸ | 50 | = | _____ |

2. The Qualification for Enjoyment

(2:26) *To the man who pleases Him*, He gives wisdom, knowledge and joy.

- Revelation 4:11
- Matthew 6:33

Supporting Passages

6) Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. 7) Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. (Haggai 1:6-7)

4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5) I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time [that] their corn and their wine increased. (Psalm 4:7)

11) The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.

12) There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof [are] the ways of death.

13) Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth [is] heaviness. 14) The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man [shall be satisfied] from himself [*with the results of his ways*]. (Proverbs 14:11-14)

¹⁰Kaiser, page 43.

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh [but] in vain (Ps. 127:1).

3. The Principle of Enjoyment Illustrated: “A Boy and a Bike”

- **Impulsiveness:** spending your quarter and not saving it for a bike.
- **Despair:** depending on your quarter alone to buy a bike.
- **Pride:** thinking your quarter somehow bought the bike.
- **Humility** (spiritual maturity): understanding that nothing you enjoy is the result of any purchases you make with your quarter alone. God has to kick in \$99.75 every time for every purchase before it can be taken home and enjoyed. You have to take Him along to the store.

“The purpose of life cannot be found in any one of the good things found in the world. All the things we call the ‘goods’ of life—health, riches, possessions, position, sensual pleasures, honors, and prestige—slip through man’s hands unless they are received as a gift from God and until God gives man the ability to enjoy them and obtain satisfaction from them.”¹¹

Conclusion: Is your goal *your* enjoyment or *God’s* enjoyment? (Revelation 4:11) Are you expecting to get from life's *components* what only your *Creator* can give you? Do you really think *you* can “buy the bike” without taking Him along? When you experience despair, unfulfillment and restlessness, is it really possible for you to find enjoyment by increasing experiences and possessions; or do you need to stop and consider that perhaps your emptiness is because God is not in your equation? Do you depend upon Him only to help you add things to your side of the equation, or do you depend upon Him to add the enjoyment to what you already have?

¹¹*Ibid.*, page 59.

Lesson 5

Who's In Charge Here Anyway?

or “Why Can't I Have a Little Say in Life?”

Discourse 2—The Secret of Providence (3:1-5:20)

- Discourse 1: *Life apart from God offers no satisfaction.*
- Discourse 2: *Life apart from God makes no sense.*

A. Some Broad Limitations for Man (3:1-15)

1. The _____ of Man (1-13)

a. **Goad:** God limits man's _____ of life (1-11a).

b. **Goad:** God limits man's _____ of life (11b).

“He [God] hath set eternity in their [men's] heart, but without giving man the ability to comprehend God's work from beginning to end.”¹²

“The key word in 3:11 is ‘eternity’: ‘God has put *eternity* into their heart’ (emphasis added). This quest is a deep-seated desire, a compulsive drive, because man is made in the image of God to appreciate the beauty of creation (on an aesthetic level); to know the character, composition, and meaning of the world (on an academic and philosophical level); and to discern its purpose and destiny (on a theological level). There is the majesty and madness of the whole thing.”¹³

Nail: He limits us to teach us _____—the answer isn't found in the *present* (3:11,14).

c. **Goad:** God limits man's _____ of life (12-13).

- “The meaning of life is not found in any one of its components.”
- Illustration of “Empty-Mart”

2. The _____ for Man

a. To _____ us now — “to fear before Him” (14-15)

- To _____ us in our _____
- To root out our pride—the effort to take God's place
- To unravel our self-confidence
- To put us in our place—as a creature under the Creator “The arrogant worldling is ‘in your face.’ The godly man is ‘on his face’ in humility before God.
- We look at the _____ when things don't make sense. God wants us to look rather at our _____.

Nail: He limits us to teach us _____—the answer isn't found in *me* (14).

- II Peter 1:2
- John 15:1-5
- Isaiah 55

b. We will also bow in _____ in the future— when “God requireth that which is past” [holds us accountable].

¹²DeHaan, page 55.

¹³Kaiser, page 66.

Conclusion: “Look (says the preacher [of Ecclesiastes]) at the sort of world we live in. Take off your rose-coloured spectacles, rub your eyes, and look at it long and hard. . . . [You will see that we think we pretty well have our act together.] And then something very painful and quite inexplicable comes along, and our cheerful illusion of being in God’s secret councils is shattered. Our pride is wounded; we feel that God has slighted us; and unless at this point we repent and humble ourselves very thoroughly for our former presumption, our whole subsequent spiritual life may be blighted.”

“Among the seven deadly sins of medieval lore was sloth (accidie)—a state of hard-bitten, joyless apathy of spirit. There is a lot of it around today in Christian circles; the symptoms are personal inertia combined with critical cynicism about the churches and supercilious resentment of other Christians’ initiative and enterprise. Behind this morbid and deadening condition often lies the wounded pride of one who thought he knew all about the ways of God in providence and then was made to learn by bitter and bewildering experience that he didn’t. This is what happens when we do not heed the message of Ecclesiastes. For the truth is that God in His wisdom, to make and keep us humble and to teach us to walk by faith, has hidden from us almost everything that we should like to know about the providential purposes which He is working out in the churches and in our own lives.”¹⁴

¹⁴Packer, J.I., *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973, pages 94-96.

Lesson 6

What about Double-Crossers, Dictators, and Death?

Discourse 2—The Secret of Providence (3:1-5:20), continued

A. Some Broad Limitations for Man (3:1-15)

B. Some Specific Frustrations for Man (3:16-5:17)

This section deals not with the broad sweep of creation and seasons but gives a closer look at the pain of human society. In the last lesson we saw that “He hath made everything beautiful in his time” (3:11). It is easy to grow impatient, however, with His seeming slowness in righting the wrongs of the world. Peter reminds us that “the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

1. The **Goad** of _____ (3:16-17)

Nail: God will _____.

2. The **Goad** of _____ (3:18-22)

Nail: The spirit of man goes _____; furthermore, (v.22) since you aren’t in charge of your future anymore than you are the present, learn to rejoice in the “beauty” of *this* “time”—something an animal cannot do.

3. The **Goad** of _____ (4:1-16)

a. The _____ is lonely (1-3) when there is no _____.

b. The _____ is lonely (4-8) when there is no _____.

“The fact remains that all too often much of our hard work and high endeavor is mixed with the craving to outshine or not to be outshone. Even in friendly rivalry this may play a larger part than we think—for we can bear to be outclassed for some of the time and by some people, but not too regularly or too profoundly. To feel oneself a failure is to discover in one’s soul the envy that Qoheleth detects here, in its pathetic form of resentments nursed and grievances enjoyed.”¹⁵

c. The _____ is lonely (13-16) when there is no _____.

Nail: _____ is better.

- _____ in the hard times.
- _____ in the cold times.
- _____ in the danger times.

4. The **Goad** of _____ (5:10-17)

a. They are never _____ (10).

b. They attract _____ (11).

c. They keep us from _____ (12).

d. They can bring much _____ (13-14).

e. They abandon us in the _____ (15-17).

Nail: _____

Conclusion: _____

¹⁵Kidner, page 45.

Lesson 7

Haven't I Heard This Before?

Discourse 2—The Secret of Providence (3:1-5:20), continued

A. Some Broad Limitations for Man (3:1-15)

- Man cannot control, comprehend, or enjoy life apart from God's providence.
- Life apart from God makes no sense.

B. Some Specific Frustrations for Man (3:16-5:17)

- Injustices, envy, loneliness, temporal power and possessions are all fickle.
- Life apart from God makes no sense.

C. Some Necessary Cautions for Man (5:1-9)

1. Be ready to _____ to God (1a).
2. Don't attempt to _____ God (1b-3).
3. Don't abandon your _____ to God (4-7).
4. Don't forget man's _____ to God (8-9).

D. Solomon's Conclusion (5:18-20)

- Once again, in light of life's fluctuations, Solomon issues a two-fold call to:
 1. _____
 - a. Though life is frustrating, man's portion is to labor.
 - b. Though life is frustrating, man's invitation is to enjoy it.
 2. _____
 - The point of the fluctuations is to unravel our self-confidence.
 - a. God providentially gives the results of labor.
 - b. God providentially gives rejoicing in labor.
 - Godliness—living as though God is all that matters.
 - Worldliness—living as though the world is all that matters.

“The conclusion remains the same (5:18-20). Man must get enjoyment, not possessions. And that capacity to enjoy, no matter how great or small, is a gift from God. It is much better to receive wealth as a gift from God, along with the God-given ability to enjoy it, than to see wealth as an end in itself. The condition for the reception of this gift is the same as it was in 2:26, and therefore it is not repeated. How sad that men can spend all their days working and sweating to receive the enjoyment that God offers as a gift if men will seek it in the manner that He, in His excellent and beautiful plan, has chosen to give it. Happiness, enjoyment, pleasure, and a knowledge of how the whole substance of life is integrated into a meaningful pattern in the plan of God are all linked in the living God. To know the 'eternity' of all things is, if we may rephrase John 17:3, 'to know Him.'”¹⁶

¹⁶Kaiser, page 77.

The Manna Principle of Life—Exodus 16

Manna: “What is it?” or “It is a PORTION”

1. Supernatural _____: It all comes from God.
 - a. _____ to get it.
 - b. _____ God for it.
2. Supernatural _____: It is for our good.
 - Manna was small and round, tasted like oil and was made daily
3. Supernatural _____: It must be governed.

It has to be gathered right and used right for it to taste right (God controls the enjoyment factor). This is true for every component of life. Those who fear God keep His commandments. The result is that life tastes right.

- a. Don't be _____ (gather it daily) vs. responsible labor
 - b. Don't be _____ (don't hoard it) vs. generosity
 - c. Don't be _____ (God takes complaining personally—Numbers 11) vs. gratefulness
- "Work hard to gather your gifts, but know that you can enjoy the gifts only by fearing the Giver." OR "Labor joyfully for life's gifts by fearing the Giver." How you view the gift is a reflection of how you view the Giver. Exodus 16:4—“Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, *that I may prove them*, whether they will walk in my law, or no.”

Lesson 8

Are You Sure You Know What's Good for You?

Discourse 3—The Secret of Prosperity (6:1-8:15)

A. Prosperity Isn't Always Good (6:1-12)

1. The _____ of Prosperity (6:1-12)

Good: Better to be stillborn than to have prosperity without _____ (1-6).

Nail #1: _____ is better than prosperity (7-9).

Nail #2: You can't always _____ what is good for you (10-12).

2. The Principle of Contentment (9)

a. Dictionary definition—_____ with things as they are

b. Scriptural teaching—Heb. 13:5; I Tim. 6:6-11 (don't be dissatisfied with clothes, etc. but with poverty in areas mentioned in text); Phil. 4:11-12

c. Discontentment built on a _____ view of God—"God isn't good or God isn't great because I don't have what I need to be happy."

d. Discontentment will lead you out of the will of God (cows leaning on a fence). Satan knows how to advertise; you cannot be happy without . . .

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1) Newer car | 4) Fewer wrinkles |
| 2) Whiter teeth | 5) Fresher breathe |
| 3) Closer shave | 6) Cleaner laundry |

e. God uses discontentment to provide _____.

- 1) Acts 6:1-7—people who *felt* it were chosen to *fix* it.
- 2) Acts 7:23-24—it must be fixed God's way in God's time

f. Carnal discontentment is motivated by _____ (Heb. 13:5).

g. _____ of discontentment—"If Only" Syndrome

h. Contentment isn't getting what you want but _____ what you have—back to key issue of enjoyment being a gift from God to those who fear Him.

B. Pain Isn't Always Bad (7:1-10)

- The key word here is "better."
- The key emphasis is "The Prosperity of Pain."

Nail #3: _____, though painful, are better than _____ parties (1-4).

1. Funerals make you conscious of your _____ (1).

2. Funerals make you conscious of your _____ (2-4).

- A wise man will react to death by _____.
- A fool will react to death by _____.

Nail #4: _____, though painful, is better than the _____ of fools (5-6).

7) He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. 8) Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. 9) Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning (Prov. 9:7-9).

“9:7-8a. A mocker (see comments on 1:22), who is wicked, is unteachable. When someone corrects him he responds in an attitude of hatred by lashing out with insulting verbal abuses (9:7-8a). . . . When corrected, a wicked person hurls back the rebuke by defaming his would-be counselor. Such a mocker is hardened in his ways. 9:8b-9. On the other hand a wise person appreciates rebuke because he learns from it. Rebukes can be helpful to the one who is willing to learn from them (15:31; 17:10; 19:25; 25:12; 27:5-6). By being teachable (cf. 10:8a; 12:15b; 14:6b; 15:32b; 21:11b) one becomes wiser (cf. 1:5). As elsewhere in Proverbs a wise person is a righteous person. Godly character should underlie one’s mental sagacity.¹⁷”

Nail #5: _____, though painful, is better than _____ revenge (7-10).

- See Romans 12:17-21 for help in overcoming evil with good.

Conclusion: *“Don’t judge what you see by what you see. Judge what you see by what the Bible says about what you see.”* Dr. Bob Jones, Sr.

When you judge what you see by what the Bible says about what you see, you possess the **Secret to Prosperity** in God’s economy: _____ (stay tuned for the answer).

¹⁷Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983.

Lesson 9

If You Know So Much, How Could You Forget the Batteries?

Discourse 3—The Secret of Prosperity (6:1-8:15), continued

A. Prosperity Isn't Always Good (6:1-12)

B. Pain Isn't Always Bad (7:1-10)

C. Wisdom Is Always Profitable (7:11-8:15)

Nail: Wisdom is better than _____ (7:11).

“God-given wisdom is the key to redeeming the multifaceted experiences of life. . . . [Solomon] wants to emphasize that wisdom is ‘a good thing, which benefits those who see the sun’ (7:11). How, in a nutshell, does this work out? Well, says Qoheleth, it is a shelter—like, for example, money. You all know how having money can shelter you in a most practical way from nasty things like hunger and cold. Wisdom is like that, only more so, for it ‘preserves the life of its possessor’ (7:12). The point is that wisdom is a species of wealth that transcends the under-the-sun world and reaches to heaven. Or, rather, true wisdom reaches *from* heaven, from the Lord, and equips the believer with the resources to live a full and God-honoring life.”¹⁸

1. Wisdom gives _____ or spiritual vitality (12).
2. Wisdom teaches how to respond to life’s _____ (13-14).
3. Wisdom allows you to weather life’s _____ (15-18).
 - By keeping you from self-_____ (16a).
 - By keeping you from self-_____ (16b).
 - By keeping you from self-_____ (17).
4. Wisdom comes from the _____ of the Lord (18b).
5. Wisdom allows you to see your own _____, not just those of others (19-22).
6. Wisdom allows you to escape the _____ of sin (23-26).
7. Wisdom allows you to see man’s real _____ (27-29).
8. Wisdom fundamentally _____ a man (8:1).
 - His face _____ (i.e., he is visibly gracious).
 - His face _____ (i.e., he is visibly gentle).
9. Wisdom teaches you how to deal with _____ (2-8).
 - Be attentive to the _____ of your king, especially since you gave him your word
 - Don’t be quick to _____ off (3).
 - Don’t be _____; remember he rules (3b-4).
 - Learn to wisely handle the _____ (5-7).

¹⁸Keddie, pages 86-87.

- Recognize the ruler's _____ (8).
 - a. He cannot imprison your spirit.
 - b. He cannot rule death.
 - c. He cannot stop the battles of life.
 - d. He cannot make a wicked life turn out right.
- Nonetheless, people are going to get _____ by their kings (9).
- Sometimes the wicked are even _____ and honored because the king doesn't handle evil-doers correctly (10-11).
- Understand that ultimately _____ is wisely settled by God (12-14).

Conclusion

God will give _____ and _____ (8:15) and wisdom to those who fear Him (7:18; 8:12).

“True wisdom is never divorced from the words and work of God. Qoheleth is a theocentric antiabstractionist. For him, wisdom does not derive from age, intelligence, or experience *in themselves*, but from the interaction of the directive, revealed truth of God and the responsive human mind and heart.”¹⁹

¹⁹Keddie, page 91.

Lesson 10

Why All the Unsolved Mysteries?

Discourse 4—The Secret of Perseverance (8:16-12:14)

- No new arguments here—just more applications of the same. We are back to human limitation and intentional mystery. Nonetheless, mystery is not an occasion for *despair* but for *dependency*.

A. Unsolved Mysteries: Goads (Ch. 9)

Mystery #1: Why does _____ seem so unpredictable (1)?

- “He loves me; He loves me not. . .”
- Notice the fatalism of Hindu writer, Omar Khayyam. He reflects the only possibility if there is no personal God. “In his dismal view we are:

But helpless pieces of a game he plays
Upon this checkerboard of nights and days;
Hither and thither moves, and checks and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.”²⁰

- God always acts consistently with His purpose for us: _____.

Mystery #2: Why does _____ seem so unpredictable (2- 10)?

- “Even if you win the rat race, you are still a rat!”
- Yes, death hits us all, but while you live there is hope. You only go around once, so you’d better go around right! The brevity of life is a spur to enjoy the gifts and labor for the Giver. Put death to shame by how you live!
- “The world for the most part derives contentment *from* things, whereas Christians bring contentment *to* things.”²¹

1. _____ (7)
2. _____ (8)
3. _____ (9)
4. _____ (10)

Mystery #3: Why do _____ seem so unpredictable (11-12)?

Advantages/assets are not the determinative factors. Success is not automatic for:

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. The swift | 3. The wise | 5. The skillful |
| 2. The strong | 4. The understanding | |

²⁰DeHaan, page 121.

²¹Quote and next four headings are from Keddie, pages 123-124.

Remember God's Equation of Enjoyment (Lesson 4)?

| Your contribution | | God's contribution | Result (amt. of enjoyment) |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------|----------------------------|
| (25 + 15 + 10 + 40 + 8) | × | 0 | = _____ |
| (2 + 3) | × | 50 | = _____ |

_____ is the critical multiplying factor. The apparent unpredictability is designed, again, not to bring us to *despair* but to *dependency*.

Mystery #4: Why do _____ seem so unpredictable (13-18)?

1. Wisdom is better than _____.
2. One _____ man can have much influence.
3. Wisdom is not always _____.
4. One _____ man can have much influence.

B. Persevere Wisely in this World of Mysteries (Ch. 10)

1. Fools on _____ (1-3)
 - a. Folly starts _____ (1).
 “Yet only a small mistake makes the smelly of his folly great than the fragrance of his wisdom.”²²
 - b. Folly starts in the _____ (2).
 - c. Folly in the heart will show up in the _____ (3).
 “The fool has no way of disguising what he is, except perhaps by total silence (*cf.* Pr. 17:28). Even then, his general bearing would probably give him away. But in fact he is too full of himself to refrain from airing his views to everyone he meets. To judge from Proverbs, his fine phrases will sound incongruous (Pr. 17:7), his tactless remarks impertinent (Pr. 18:6); and when you talk to him he is not really listening (Pr. 18:2). If he has a message for you he will get it wrong, and if he comes out with a sage remark it will misfire (Pr. 26:6). You can fortunately sense his approach by the efforts of all and sundry to slip away (Pr. 17:12).”²³
2. Fools in _____ (4-7)
 - a. Don't ever leave a discussion with a “king” in a _____.
 - b. Foolish rulers often “put their foolish favorites into office over those more qualified.”²⁴
3. Fools in _____ (8-10)
 - Every situation has its risks, but the fool doesn't notice it (Prov. 1:20-33; 4:18-19; 14:12; 23:3).

²²Eaton, page 133.

²³Kidner, page 89.

²⁴Kaiser, page 107.

4. Fools in _____ and Competence (11-19).
- a. A man unskillfully using words (blabber) is as dangerous as an unskillful snake charmer (11).
 - b. A fool starts with himself (12) and ends up in a dangerous rage (13).
 - c. He is totally unpredictable (14).
 - d. His moral and spiritual sloth wears on everyone and makes him totally incompetent even in everyday matters (15).
 - e. The results of his sloth are seen in the disintegration around him of everything truly important (18).
 - f. His philosophy is that money is the answer to everything—so party (19)!

5. Fools in _____ (20)

“The section closes with a practical word of advice. Neither the king nor the leadership of a nation (*the rich*) must give rise to foolish anger in the wise man’s life. The verse challenges us to remain calm in days of national sloth, immaturity and indulgence, and calls for a submissive approach to authority, giving an expedient reason for obedience [i.e., *the walls have ears; a little bird told me*]. . . . [We should] take our life day by day from the hand of a sovereign God.”²⁵

²⁵Eaton, page 138.

Lesson 11

What's a Mortal to Do?

Discourse 4—The Secret of Perseverance (8:16-12:14), continued

A. Unsolved Mysteries: Goads (Ch. 9)

B. *Persevere Wisely* (not foolishly) in this World of Mysteries (Ch. 10)

C. *Persevere Boldly* (not fearfully) in this World of Mysteries (11:1-6)

1. [In light of life's mysteries] get on with the _____ of life (1).

2. Be _____ generous and prudent (2).

3. Acknowledge life's _____ (3), but . . .

4. . . . don't _____ to inactivity (4).

- Watch out for the “paralysis of analysis.”

- Life's uncertainties cannot be met with . . .

- a. _____ (with more control): _____.

- b. _____ (retreat): _____.

5. Face your limitations, and while leaving the _____ to God (5), . . .

“The life of faith does not remove the problem of our ignorance; rather, it enables us to live with it. Faith flourishes *in* the mystery of providence; it does not abolish it.”²⁶

6. . . . _____ hard (6).

“Faith in Christ does not relieve anyone of hard work; it only makes it possible to get on with the job in a joyful spirit that expects God's blessing, whatever the immediate outcome may be. . .

. . . Our confidence is not, please note, in some mystical assurance of success in all we do; it is rather a confidence in the Lord himself and an assurance, by faith, that whatever happens, there will be a blessing in it for us.”²⁷

D. *Persevere Joyfully* (not passively) in this World of Mysteries (11:7-10)

1. Enjoy the _____ of youth (7). . .

“The twofold description implies that life is not only good in itself but that it is to be savoured with enthusiasm, as one might enjoy honey.”²⁸

“Life, rightly understood and prayerfully lived, is a joy *in itself*.”²⁹

2. but remember, first, they don't last _____ (8). . .

²⁶Eaton, page 143.

²⁷Keddie, pages 147-148.

²⁸Eaton, page 144.

²⁹Keddie, page 149.

3. . . . and secondly, you are _____ for your choices (9).

“*Know* here is far more than intellectual perception; it is that grasp of truth which corrects and moulds the life. It ‘has an element of acknowledgment. But it also has an element of emotion, or better, of movement of the will’. The Preacher’s use of a command, not merely a statement, implies that there is a danger of indifference to or neglect of God’s kingship and judicial activity.”³⁰

4. Therefore, (to _____ your time of youth). . .

a. . . . put away your anger at life’s _____.

“The ‘vanity’ of the world easily induces in us ‘vexation’, which hinders the joyful life of faith. The danger is that ‘vexation’ over the enigmas and irritations of life will grip the ‘heart’ and that disillusionment will lead to cynicism. . . . If we are to live a life of joy, we must learn to cope with cynicism at its root.”³¹

b. . . . and, don’t _____ your body while you live (10).

“The expression ‘put away evil from thy flesh’ is not primarily a warning against sins of lust, but it is advice not to suffer pain unnecessarily. This is indicated both by the context and by the use of the Hebrew word *ra’ah*, which denotes physical and material calamity or misfortune. . . . This obviously refers to the hardship and suffering He brings as a consequence of sin.”³²

³⁰Eaton, page 146.

³¹Eaton, pages 146-147.

³²DeHaan, page 146.

Lesson 12

How Do You Remember Not to Forget God?

Discourse 4—The Secret of Perseverance (8:16-12:14), continued

- A. **Unsolved Mysteries: Goads (Ch. 9)**
- B. ***Persevere Wisely* (not foolishly) in this World of Mysteries (Ch. 10)**
- C. ***Persevere Boldly* (not fearfully) in this World of Mysteries (11:1-6)**
- D. ***Persevere Joyfully* (not passively) in this World of Mysteries (11:7-10)**
- E. ***Persevere Reflectively* (not carelessly) in this World of Mysteries (12:1-8)**

1. Passionately _____ your Creator (1a).

“To *remember* Him is no perfunctory or purely mental act. It is to drop our pretense of self-sufficiency and commit ourselves to Him. Such at least is what, in Scripture, it demands of man in his pride or his extremity. At its best and strongest, remembrance can be a matter of passionate fidelity, a loyalty as intense as the psalmist’s towards his homeland:

‘Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,
If I do not set (you) above my highest joy!’

When remembrance means as much as this, there can be no half measures or temporalizing. Youth and the whole span of life are not too much to pour into it. It is in this spirit that we are made to face once more the fact of our mortality.”³³

Resources

Balancing the Christian Life by Charles Ryrie
Designed to be Like Him by Dwight Pentecost
Knowing God by J. I. Packer
Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis
Pursuit of Holiness by Jerry Bridges
The Knowledge of the Holy by A. W. Tozer
Things I Have Learned by Dr. Bob Jones, Sr.
True Spirituality by Francis Schaeffer

Changed into His Image and Created for His Glory by Jim Berg

2. Passionately pursue your Creator _____ in your youth (1-2)!

- Time doesn’t heal; it _____!

“Qoheleth’s intention is not to titillate our morbid fantasies, still less to plunge us into a gloomy frame of mind, but rather to encourage us to anticipate the future and its trials realistically and be in the spiritual condition to face them head-on and win. Summer is the time to prepare for winter—and old age is our physical winter. It can also be a devastating spiritual winter if our hearts are unprepared. . . . As the outward crumbles away, the inner person needs more than a party hat and the illusion of youth and beauty!”³⁴

- Meditate upon 2 Corinthians 4:16-6:2 for Paul’s perspective.
- When there is a lull in the battle, you don’t party; you reload!
- When the snow melts on the farm, you don’t sunbathe, you get into the fields. You cannot cram on a farm, and you cannot cram in life. They are bound to the law of the harvest: you reap what you sow!
- Youth is a time to lay the foundation for marriage and parenting. It is a time of preparation spiritually, financially and physically. It is time to invest, not a time to spend.

³³Kidner, pages 100-101

³⁴Keddie, page 158.

3. Passionately pursue your Creator now because your _____ is running out to serve God unhindered by infirmity (3-8).

- The analogy is of a decaying old house.

| | |
|---|---|
| “the keepers of the house shall tremble” | the arms and hands tremble with feebleness |
| “the strong men shall bow themselves” | the legs are bent |
| “the grinders cease because they are few” | the teeth can no longer chew well |
| “those that look out the windows be darkened” | the eyesight is dimmed |
| “the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low” | the ears cannot hear well—even the noises of daily activities are not heard |
| “he shall rise up at the voice of the bird; all the daughters of musick shall be brought low” | sleep is interrupted early but he cannot hear the songs of the birds (daughters) |
| “they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way” | he fears falling when climbing or even stumbling while walking |
| “the almond tree shall flourish” | his hair turns white |
| “the grasshopper shall be a burden” | he shuffles along at an awkward gait |
| “desire shall fail” | appetites are diminished |
| “man goeth to his long house, and the mourners go about the streets” | he goes to his eternal home and a funeral procession follows |
| “the silver cord [is] loosed, . . . the golden bowl be broken” | the silver cord holding the golden lamp bowl breaks and shatters the bowl |
| “the pitcher [is] broken at the fountain; . . . the wheel [is] broken at the cistern” | the rope and wheel above the cistern break and the drawing pitcher shatters at the bottom of the well |

Conclusion

“So, in verse 8, with the experience of the whole book behind us, and finally with this chapter’s haunting pictures of mortality to enforce the point, we come back to the initial cry “*Vanity of vanities,*” and find it justified. Nothing in our search has led us home; nothing that we are offered under the sun is ours to keep.”

“But we are forgetting the context. This very passage points us beyond anything ‘under the sun’, in the words, *your Creator*, and it invites response to Him. It also points us to the present, as the time of opportunity. Death has not yet reached out to us: let us rattle its chains and stir us into action!”³⁵

**You can keep from “forgetting”
by persevering reflectively
in this world of mystery.**

³⁵Kidner, page 104

Lesson 13

Can You Run That By Me Again?

Solomon's Review and Conclusion of the Discourses (12:9-14)

A. His Qualifications (v. 9)

- He belonged to an order of men called _____ vs. "the people."

B. His Motive (v. 9)

1. He "taught"—His interest was _____, not professional wisdom.
2. He taught "knowledge."

"The *knowledge* he taught must be understood as more than accumulation of facts. It is closely related to discipline, skill and righteousness (Prov. 1:1-6; 12:1). Its starting-point is the 'fear of the Lord' (Prov. 1:7). Although taught by men such as the Preacher, and acquired by effort (Eccl. 2:21), it is nevertheless a gift of God (Prov. 2:6) and morally conditioned: 'to depart from evil is understanding' (Job 28:28). Ultimately it is fellowship-knowledge, that comes in the context of knowing a person (Prov. 2:5)." ³⁶

C. His Skill (v. 9-10)

1. He "gave good heed"—pondered with honest and cautious _____.
2. He "sought out"—thorough and diligent _____.
3. He "set in order"—skillful and artistic _____ of his findings.
4. He used "acceptable words"—_____ words.
5. He was "upright"—necessary balance between upright and pleasing.

"To be upright but not pleasant is to be a fool; to be pleasant but not upright is to be a charlatan." ³⁷

D. His Content (v. 10-11)

1. "Words of truth"—limited himself to revealed truth—not irrelevant dark musings, nor pessimistic ramblings; presented to his audience as goads and nails
2. From "One Shepherd"—claimed divine inspiration from the Shepherd known so well by his father, David

E. His Warning (12)

A large body of wisdom literature was then in the "making" in the East. Much pagan thought was available to the "wise men" of the day. The truth will not be found in those "books," however. There is no need to search "beyond these" (a better translation than "and further, by these")—referring back to the words from the Shepherd. A search beyond these through the "no end" of books available will simply be a "weariness of the flesh."

³⁶Eaton, page 153.

³⁷*Ibid.*, page 154.

Application: What was once the domain of only qualified “wise men” is now available to any believer (Hebrews 1:1-2) who wishes to point other men to fellowship-knowledge of God, who will apply himself to the same diligent, balanced search (Proverbs 1-2) and who will limit himself to the “words of truth” given by One Shepherd rather than wearing himself out by pursuing the wisdom of the world.

F. His Conclusion (vv. 13-14)

There are two things left that matter, and they apply to all men:

1. The Reality of _____
2. The Response³⁸
 - a. _____ God: an awareness of His _____ and power.
 - 1) The fear of the Lord is _____.
 - 2) The fear of the Lord is _____.
 - b. _____ God.

³⁸For a more thorough understanding of the “fear of the Lord,” I recommend two audio tapes by Pastor David Shumate, Faith Baptist Church, Greenville, SC, entitled “The Fear of the Lord.” The two messages were preached 10/23/95 am and 10/23/95 pm.