

5. Read Ecclesiastes 4:14-15. How do the interpretive keys discussed in the sermon help you understand a passage like this?

SERIES: A Kingdom Established (Gospel Project)
SERMON 11: "Reflections on the Meaning of Life"
TEXT: Ecclesiastes 1:1-2, 12:14; 12:9-14
DATE: August 19/20, 2017

"Smoke, nothing but smoke. There's nothing to anything in life." (Ecclesiastes 1:2; The Message)

6. Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14. Why is the message of the author hard to accept (12:13-14)?

"People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall." (Thomas Merton)

7. How can you better arrange your life around God's kingdom priorities and around relentlessly cultivating love for God and for your neighbor?

CLEARING UP THE CONFUSION: FIVE INTERPRETIVE KEYS

1. The author and the Preacher are not the same person.
Ecclesiastes 1:1-2; 7:27; 12:9-13

The author's message differs from the Preacher's message.

8. Looking back over this week's sermon and study, what one thing is most important for you to remember and apply.

2. Hevel
Ecclesiastes 1:12-14

3. Most of the book is a thought experiment.
Ecclesiastes 1:14

Under the sun = life here on earth and life as if this is all there is and all there will be for us.

For the Preacher, God exists, but he believes that most of what God has said about life is not always true. He believes God has said that if we live well, life will go well, and we will be rewarded. Live badly and we will suffer. But that's not how it actually always works. Good people often suffer. Bad people often prosper. And that is the reality of life under the sun.

4. Every once in a while, the Preacher gets it partially right.

5. The author offers his own conclusion at the very end of the book.
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

The gist of the author's message is that this is not all there is.

WHY IS THE MESSAGE HARD TO ACCEPT?

Life under the sun is very immediate. God and eternity feel distant and living for them feels unnatural.

Our society is not only arranged in such a way that impacts our thinking; it's also relentlessly arranged to capture our love.

How am I arranging my life around God's kingdom priorities, and what in my life relentlessly cultivates my love for God and my neighbor?

THE ONE MISSING FACTOR

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

God sees everything we do and everything we say, and it matters to him.

Family Discussion Questions:

1. How does faith in Christ keep our family from giving in to a negative view of life?
2. How does we answer the question "What are we on earth for?"
3. What are some ways our family can look to Jesus for the answers to life's deepest questions?

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 Corinthians 15:17).
But because the resurrection is true, our life has purpose.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Please complete this study on your own, then bring it to your small group for discussion.

1. Looking back over your notes from this week's sermon, what particularly caught your attention, challenged, or confused you?
2. Why might people evade asking "deeper" questions about life, such as those found in Ecclesiastes?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. What are some examples of the fleeting and temporary nature of this life?
4. Read Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3 which deals with the problem of evil and suffering. What kinds of injustice or suffering in the world are most likely to get your attention?

BIG PICTURE QUESTION

Why can we trust God?