

## Day 1

August 21



*Pray | Ask God to help you live a life of significance*

A life lived for Jesus Christ is never meaningless.

The book of Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon, a man blessed by God with exceptional wisdom and insight. In this book Solomon shares his view on the purpose and significance of life on earth. He starts by presenting a very bleak view of nature and human existence on earth – repeating cycles of sameness, with little meaningful productivity, progress and permanence.

Our natural reaction is to protest: that is not right; we have made so much progress; we have bigger buildings, airplanes, iPhones, better medicine, less poverty. The list goes on and on. As we explore Ecclesiastes this week, we will see Solomon's response to our protests. Whether or not you are living a life of significance is ultimately determined by the bar you use to measure significance, and the bar you use will be determined by who or what you have made lord of your life.



*Read | Ecclesiastes 1:1-11, 1 Corinthians 15:58*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.*

What constitutes a life of significance to you? Take a few minutes to write down a description of the life of significance to which you aspire.

Reflect on the words of 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV), “*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.*” What steps are you taking to stay connected to God's purpose for your life, so that you too can *abound in the work of the Lord*?

C. S. Lewis describes the grim reality of living in our world this way, “*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.*” Take a moment to reflect on this perspective. Does your life, or the life of people around you, resemble this description? What can be done to change the situation?

## Day 2

August 22



*Pray | Praise God for being a just God.*

Injustice in the world is only tolerable because of God's final justice.

One key indicator of significance and progress in society is reflected in the way humans treat other humans. Solomon observes that wickedness is found in both the *place of justice* and the *place of righteousness*, indicating that human interactions are being driven primarily by selfish motivations from Satan, rather than love from God. Ultimately, Solomon concludes that there is no difference between humans and animals. Selfish gain and survival are the priorities for both. While this further confirmed that **all is vanity**, Solomon drew solace from the fact that, in the end, God will judge the actions of everyone, and the wicked will pay the price for their actions. We live in that same world, scarred by sin, wickedness and injustice. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to live in the hope that comes from God's promise of final justice, and to distinguish ourselves from the world by demonstrating Godly love and justice until Jesus returns to judge the world.



*Read | Ecclesiastes 3:16-22, 12:13-14*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.*

What kind of injustice in the world today is most likely to get your attention and draw you to take action? How can you respond in those situations in a way that demonstrates God's love and justice, and brings glory to God?

What is your reaction to Solomon's conclusion that humans and animals are all basically the same? Consider how things have changed from God's perfect creation in the Garden of Eden. *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* Genesis 1:26

How do thoughts of Jesus' final return and the judgment of the world make you feel? Are you excited, scared, something else? What was your first (gut) response? Take a few minutes to reflect on your response, and what it may be telling you about your relationship with Jesus Christ. If you have not yet made Jesus the Lord of your life, take this opportunity to reach out to a member of your small group or a Christian friend, and share your thoughts and heart.

## Day 3

August 23



*Pray | Pray for those who enslave and oppress fellow human beings*

Oppression results when Satan owns the heart of those who are in power.

Solomon identifies the plight of the oppressed as a vivid example of the lack of justice that characterizes life on earth. Power is the key factor in this situation. Those who oppress others have power on their side – those being oppressed have none. While power can be used for good or bad, Solomon makes it clear that our sinful human nature, governed by Satan, tends to use power for building up self, often at the expense of others.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to disrupt this cycle of corrupt power and oppression. Because love and bringing glory to God are our primary goals, the power we receive from our Lord must be used differently. We must intervene in situations where oppression is occurring – bringing the love of Jesus to bear for the benefit of both the oppressed and the oppressor.



*Read | Ecclesiastes 4:1-3, 1 Peter 5:8*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.*

Each of us possesses power in some situations. Make a list of the situations where you have power over other human beings. Are you using that power to demonstrate God's love and to bring greater glory to God? If not, what changes can you make in those situations?

In our passage today, (Ecclesiastes 4:2-3), Solomon indicates that he believes that it's better to be dead or unborn rather than to live in this state of meaninglessness and vanity. Think about yourself and your family, or a child who is in slavery somewhere in the world – do you agree with this statement?

It's easy to get so focused on our own lives that we don't even notice people around us who are oppressed or being taken advantage of. What can you do to be more aware of people around you who are being oppressed, and bring the light of God's love into that situation? Remember that God loves both the oppressed and the oppressor.

*Day 4*  
*August 24*



*Pray | Thank God for the Bible – the source of true wisdom*

True wisdom reveals vanity – human wisdom promotes vanity.

Not surprisingly, Solomon, a man blessed by God with exceptional wisdom, promotes wisdom as the key to transforming a meaningless life to a life of significance. The wisdom that makes that possible only comes from one source – one Shepherd – God. Solomon describes this wisdom using two analogies. The first is a goad, which is a sharp stick that was used to keep cattle on the right path. The second is a firmly fixed nail. The picture is one of solid and reliable truths, truths that are sometimes painful, but ultimately will keep us on the path to a life of significance.

We have an advantage over Solomon. We possess the Bible - the full collection of truths from God. We are called to immerse ourselves in the truths revealed in the Bible, and to apply those truths to every aspect of our lives. This is the only way to ensure you are living a life of significance; a life that is distinctive, bringing glory to God, and drawing others to Him.



*Read | Ecclesiastes 12:8-12, Colossians 2:8-10*

*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.*

Referring back to the scripture passages for today and using your own experience, how do you distinguish Godly truth from worldly truth?

Often the situations where Godly truths have been used as a goad – a sharp stick – in our lives are the times we remember best, and become an area of strength and influence for us. Think of an example of this in your life. How are you passing this lesson on to others in your life?

As followers of Jesus Christ we can get stuck in learning mode, and never move to action mode. Ecclesiastes 12:12 warns that “much study is a weariness of the flesh”. How are you taking what you’ve learned about God’s truth and putting it into action?

## Day 5

August 25



*Pray | Praise God for His gospel plan which gives our lives meaning*

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and a life of purpose.

Solomon concludes his thorough analysis of the purpose and meaning of life with a very simple conclusion on what it takes to ensure your life is a life of meaning and significance. Yesterday we saw that wisdom is the key, but how does one really get wisdom? In our passages for today, we see that fearing the Lord and keeping His commandments are the answer to that question. Solomon goes so far as saying these two things are *the whole duty of man*. Notice Solomon does not say *the whole duty of those who believe in God and love Jesus Christ*. This truth is for all humans. God created all humans in His image and with an inner desire for Him. Recognition and acceptance of that reality results in a fear (awe) of what God is, and what He has done through Jesus Christ. From that point our purpose becomes clear: to live a life that reveals these truths to everyone we encounter, so they too can live a life of significance, bringing greater glory to God.



*Read | Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Psalm 111:10*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.*

What are you on earth for?

In Proverbs 1:7, Solomon reiterates the words of the passages we read today. “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”. In your own life, what does “fear of the Lord” look like? Is it awe of the Lord, or is it something different? How has it produced knowledge and wisdom and purpose?

In our passage today Solomon emphasizes the importance of fearing the Lord, and keeping his commandments. In Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus reveals the two greatest commandments that should guide our lives. *“And he said to them, you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* Take a few minutes to reflect on how staying true to these commandments can lead to a life of purpose.

Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. ESV® Text Edition: 2016.