

A man with a long, full white beard is seated in a dark, upholstered chair. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt. His hands are clasped in his lap, holding a pen. The background is a dimly lit room with a wooden shelf above him holding a teapot and other items. The overall mood is contemplative and quiet.

JOURNAL

CHASING THE WIND

Ecclesiastes & the Vanity of Life



INTRODUCTION

If ever there was a book to tackle with a journal, pen and prayer, Ecclesiastes is it!

The writer of this book tells us that he applied in (his) heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly (1:17), and as we read along, we will find ourselves caught up in this work.

This will be a challenging task, however, because Ecclesiastes is a raw and uncompromising text. Some people love it straightaway, coming away from reading it as if they've just met their new best friend – someone who finally gets their grappling with meaning and purpose. Others on the other hand, come away feeling rather flat and despondent, a little overwhelmed by the searing honesty of the book. If that's you, don't panic! Remember as you read that God is good, that God loves you so much that He willingly died for you, and that He has given us Ecclesiastes because he wants us to be awake to the realities of life. Talk about the experience with someone you trust, and take some time to pause, think, and reflect.

To help you do this, we have prepared this Journal. In here you'll find the key passages for each week, which will form the basis of our teaching on Sunday. Alongside these you'll also find some other passages that speak to the themes of each week; reading these will help you see the layers of complexity in the book. At times this will be a little confusing; there are some passages that seem to conflict with others. But that's where the beauty of this book lies, because, like a good story, it all ties up in the end

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." – Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

REFLECTIONS:

How is this passage surprising or confronting?

How is this different to what the world says about this?

What does God want me to see?

Where is the comfort in this passage?

How does Jesus give meaning and comfort on this topic?

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What does this text tell me about God?

What does this text tell me about myself?

How does this text show me how to be more like God?

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Creation: What does this passage tell me about God's design for humanity?

Fall: How does this passage demonstrate the way sin spoils that design?

Reconciliation: How does this passage hint at what Jesus has done to recover us?

Re-creation: How can I apply this passage to my life now, so that I can be like God again?

THE VANITY OF VANITIES

FINDING MEANING IN THE REALITY OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 1:1-14

- 6:10-12
- 2:24-25
- 7:29
- 11:8-9
- 12:1-14

THE VANITY OF PLEASURE

FINDING MEANING IN THE GIFTS OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 2:1-17

- 7:2-4
- 8:15 and 9:7-10 and 1:8
- 2:24-25
- 3:12-13
- 5:18-20

RESPOND:

Our instinct for happiness sees us pursuing pleasure in the things around us – and yet, while many of these things are from God, we have a tendency to worship *the gift* rather than the *Giver*. To help us reflect on this, organize a feast with your friends or your Gospel Community. Take time to celebrate the joy of God's good gifts, but also take time to look beyond them, to the God who gives them.

THE VANITY OF WORK

FINDING MEANING IN THE PURPOSE OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 2:18-26

- 4:4 and 7-8
- 3:9-13
- 3:18-22
- 5:18-20
- 11:1-6

THE VANITY OF TIME

FINDING MEANING IN THE LIFE OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

- 9:9-12
- 6:6 and 10-12
- 5:18-20
- 11:8-9
- 12:1-8

RESPOND:

Time is constantly marching onwards, carrying us towards our end – and yet we live as if we can defy time. To remind yourself how fleeting time can be, take some time this week to take photos of clocks and time pieces. Take a moment to consider what you're doing with the time God is giving you.

THE VANITY OF JUSTICE

FINDING MEANING IN THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 3:16 – 4:3

- 2:15-21
- 3:16-17
- 8:10-15
- 9:1-3 and 11
- 12:13-14

THE VANITY OF RELIGION

FINDING MEANING IN THE FEAR OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

- 7:1-5 and 26
- 8:10-13
- 9:1-3a
- 9:7-10
- 12:13-14

THE VANITY OF AFFLUENCE

FINDING MEANING IN THE JOY OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

- 2:1-17
- 4:7-8
- 5:13-17
- 6:1-2
- 2:24-25

RESPOND:

One of the repeated refrains of Ecclesiastes is the frustration of working hard all your life, but having nothing enduring at the end of it – nothing to take with us. How does this future reality reshape the way we live in the present? To help you meditate on this, visit your local cemetery. Find the biggest tombstones, and consider the reality that these people are no longer living, and their prestige is ‘lost’. Alternatively, you might visit a statue or monument, or read a biography or obituary; what did these people give their lives to? What has endured, and what has passed away with them?

THE VANITY OF HAPPINESS

FINDING MEANING IN THE SORROWS OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14

- 2:24-25
- 3:12-13 and 22
- 5:18-20
- 9:1-3
- 9:7-10 and 11:8-10

THE VANITY OF PRIDE

FINDING MEANING IN THE HUMILITY OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

- 2:24-25
- 3:9-13 and 18-21
- 5:1-7 and 18-20
- 8:16-17
- 12:1-14

THE VANITY OF LIFE

FINDING MEANING IN THE LOVE OF GOD

READ:

Ecclesiastes 11:8 – 12:14

- 2:24-25
- 3:9-15
- 6:1-6
- 8:14-17
- 1:1-14





CITY
ON A HILL