

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Reflections of the King | ECCLESIASTES

Introduction	02
Author, Date, Genre & Purpose	03
Reading Plan & Series Outline	04

TEACHING SUMMARIES			
Everything is Meaningless	06		
Life Lessons with Hugh Hefner	07		
This is Your Time	08		
Can't We All Get Along?	09		
In Awe of God	10		
The Getting of Wisdom	11		
You Only Live Once	12		
I Pity the Fool	13		
The Quick and the Dead	14		

INTRODUCTION

When Solomon, the son of the great warrior king, David, first sat on the throne of God's chosen nation, Israel, he asked God for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1v7-12), and became the wisest man in the world (1 Kings 4v29-34). He studied, taught, judged and wrote. Kings, queens, and leaders from other nations would come to him to learn and gain understanding and insight.

Solomon, with his deep wisdom, royal title and vast wealth was in a unique position, unlike any who had come before him, or any who would follow, to try to unearth the meaning and purpose for our lives. It became his great quest, and he would spend his life trying to grasp the ultimate reason for life on earth. Sadly, most of his experiences and journeys would lead him to dead ends.

Near the end of his life, Solomon, now an old, grandfatherly figure, would sit down and take stock of all he had seen and experienced, and, with an attitude of humility and repentance, share his learnings with the next generation.

Ecclesiastes is a very honest and very 'human' book. It has no quick answers, easy fixes or silver bullets - the wise dispense with these notions pretty quickly.

Author of the classic novel "Moby Dick", Herman Melville, called Ecclesiastes "the truest of all books" because of it's honesty in dealing with the reality of life on earth.

And, although it can often come across as negative and pessimistic, the whole book is filled with practical and spiritual wisdom.

In these reflections upon life, the king wasn't trying to destroy hope or joy. Rather, he was trying to lead people to seek true happiness in God alone. He encourages the pursuit of knowledge, knows the importance of relationships, nurtures excellence in work, and values pleasure. But, at the end of his life, he realises they only fulfil when put in there proper place. All of these temporal things must be seen in the light of the eternal.

I pray that as we study this book together, God will teach us all new and wonderful things. And that, whether at church, or in discussion around the dinner table with family, or alone with your thoughts, the Holy Spirit will show you great truths from Ecclesiastes and this unrivalled teacher, that you can apply directly to your own lives.

Yours, Garrett five 30 Pastor

AUTHOR, DATE, GENRE & PURPOSE

AUTHORSHIP

Technically we're not told who the author of Ecclesiastes is. Most would agree that we're meant to think it's king Solomon as there are clear pointers to it being him (1v1, 12). But many scholars would argue that the 'Teacher' is actually someone else, and we're only 'meant to imagine' it's Solomon.

With both of these views in mind, we'll be referring to this king and 'teacher' of Ecclesiastes, as Solomon throughout our teaching series at five 30.

DATE

 $I_{\rm f}$ we are to believe that this was indeed Solomon writing, then it would place the book at over 3,000 years old (935 BC).

Those who argue against it being Solomon though, say that the awareness of Greek philosophy and borrowing of Persian phrases would place it's date much later, at about 400 BC.

GENRE & PURPOSE

Ecclesiastes is a 'wisdom' book, however, unlike Proverbs, but more like the book of Job, it has a narrative edge.

A major theme of Ecclesiastes is determining how to go about 'knowing and finding truth' in a world that is so often confusing. It also seeks to confront the issue of suffering in the world.

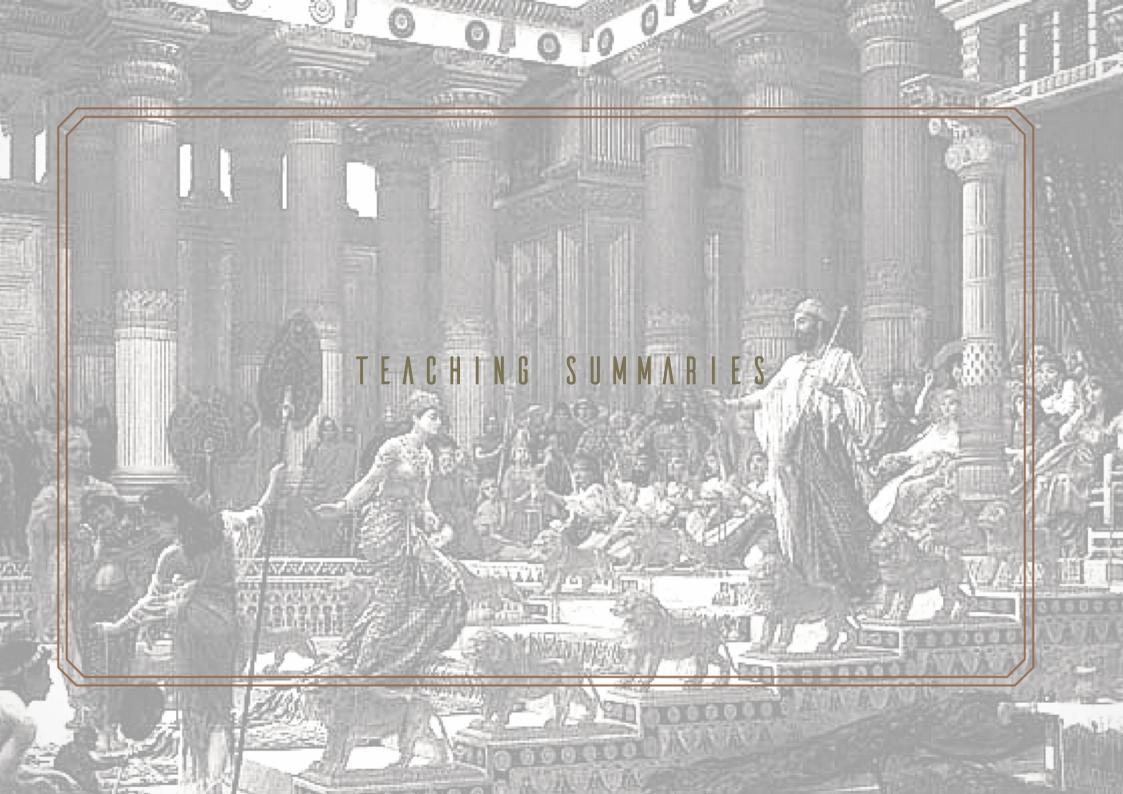
Like the rest of the Bible's Wisdom Literature, Ecclesiastes is concerned with imparting wisdom to the people of God (12v9–11) and teaching them to fear the Lord.

This book wants to validate the struggle to find meaning to life; and so the author takes the reader on a journey through one man's quest as he shares his strategies for finding purpose and slowly discards each new experience.

In particular, Ecclesiastes shows us the folly of trying to understand 'life under the sun' - a worldview without God present, and based solely on experience, reason and observation. In the end the 'Teacher' discovers that it's only when we stop and remember our Creator, and bring Him back into the story, that we can find a way forward through this perplexing life.

READING PLAN & SERIES OUTLINE

July 3	Everything is Meaningless	Ecclesiastes 1
July 10	Life Lessons with Hugh Hefner	Ecclesiastes 2
July 17	This is Your Time	Ecclesiastes 3
July 24	Can't we all get Along?	Ecclesiastes 4
July 31	In Awe of God	Ecclesiastes 5&6
August 7	The Getting of Wisdom	Ecclesiastes 7&8
August 14	You Only Live Once	Ecclesiastes 9v1 - 10v7
August 21	I Pity the Fool	Ecclesiastes 10v8 - 11v6
August 28	The Quick and the Dead	Ecclesiastes 11v7 - 12v14



O 1. EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS

ECCLESIASTES

THE BIG IDEA

Life without God is tiring, depressing, and, ultimately, leads to a pointless existence.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

What have you observed about the emptiness of the creation around us? (Rom. 8v18-22)

To what degree do you see this as being a'modern' problem?

Many consider that 'dissatisfaction with life' is a modern idea, linked to our preoccupation with consumerism. Would you agree with this?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

THE BIG IDEA

The pursuit of pleasure is a God-given aspect of our human nature, however, it was designed to find its fulfilment in God Himself.

In the end, we all face death as the ultimate leveller. Whether we are rich or poor, wise or foolish, believer or unbeliever, death takes us all.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

Pleasure, acclaim and possessions can be good. What are some practical steps we can take to pursue these in a Christlike way?

How would you help a non-Christian friend see the meaninglessness of pursuing pleasure as an end in itself? (2v11)

How has your life experience shaped your view of death? What is the Bible's view of death?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

O3. THIS IS YOUR TIME

ECCLESIASTES 3

THE BIG IDEA

You will never know what to do with your time until you know the God who created it.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

To what degree should we view the events in our lives occurring according to 'God's timing'? Do you think everything works that way? If so, should we just relax and allow things to happen as they will?

The average working week has actually decreased in hours worked over the past 40 years (Australian Labour Market Statistics, Oct 2010).

Why then do you think we appear to be much busier today than in times gone by?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

THE BIG IDEA

Envy is the root cause of all loneliness. Kill the root and replace it with love.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

If God is really in control of everything, how are we to view the injustices of life (3v16-22)?

What would you say to a colleague at work, a friend at university or a family member who challenges you about your belief in the essential goodness of God and His good purposes in our lives? (Romans 8v28)

Has envy ever affected the way you live your life? If so, what steps did you, or could you take in order to rectify this?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

O5. IN AWE OF GOD

ECCLESIASTES 586

THE BIG IDEA

Careless religion destroys our ability to truly worship.

And depression and darkness will follow the man or woman who looks to work and wealth for ultimate satisfaction.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

How can we show our concern for God's holiness in the life of the church - particularly in worship? What specific changes might need to be made to our worship service in order to bring it more into line with the Bible's emphasis?

What is the best antidote for crookedness (5v18–20)? How can this be applied in our lives?

Solomon seems very concerned about the future (6v12). What is your attitude towards your future and all you that you will leave behind?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

O 6. THE GETTING OF WISDOM

ECCLESIASTES 788

THE BIG IDEA

Solomon has great wisdom, but in every way, he comes second to the one who is the personification of wisdom - Jesus Christ (Proverbs 8v22–31; John 1v1–14) - and in the seeming foolishness of His Gospel.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

Consider what God has done for you (7v13–15). Consider what sin has done to you (7v19–29). In what ways does this make you any wiser?

It is pretty obvious that life is not fair! Some people seem to sail through untroubled, while others face one problem or tragedy after another.

How do you engage with friends and neighbours who believe that 'what goes around comes around'?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

07. YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE

ECCLESIASTES 9V1 - 10V7

THE BIG IDEA

If there is nothing more to life than living and dying, then it follows that the slogan: YOLO (You Only Live Once), must be correct. However, this will inevitably lead to despair, emptiness and futility

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

The 'YOLO' worldview appears to be really attractive to our culture, why do you think this is?

Evaluate John Lennon's words in the song, Imagine: 'Imagine there's no heaven / It's easy if you try / No hell below us / Above us only sky / Imagine all the people / Living for today.'

- What worldview do those words grow out of?
- Since the lines were penned, many have assumed that this is a good recipe for peace and unity in society. Is it?
- If this song was reality, what would the implications be for truth, beauty, and goodness?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

08. I PITY THE FOOL

ECCLESIASTES 10V8 - 11V6

THE BIG IDEA

The fool's own actions may prove to be his undoing (v. 8a). His foolishness may unleash all kinds of hidden dangers (v. 8b). He may be destroyed by the products of his own labour (v. 9). Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai (Esther 7), and Frankenstein's monster destroyed its creator.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

A fool's tongue soon gives him away (vv. 11–14). Read James 3v1–12. How controlled is your tongue?

What are the key elements of leadership found in 10v16-20?

Examine the five pictures of foolishness in 10v8–10. Think of instances in your own life that parallel these. What preventative steps could be taken to avoid these in future?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

O9. THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

ECCLESIASTES 11V7 - 12V14

THE BIG IDEA

Godly fear is the beginning of wisdom. It is not the cowering fear of someone who has been abandoned in a meaningless life 'under the sun', but the reverent submissiveness of one who has truly found reconciliation with his Creator.

THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked" (3v17). People may seem to get away with sin (8v11), but their sins will eventually be exposed and judged righteously. Those who have not trusted the Lord Jesus Christ will be doomed forever.

- Discuss Solomon's view of judgement. What do you agree/ disagree with?

"The eternity of punishment is a thought which crushes the heart," said Charles Spurgeon. "The Lord God is slow to anger, but when he is once aroused to it, as he will be against those who finally reject his Son, he will put forth all his omnipotence to crush his enemies."

- Again, what do you agree/disagree with here? What are your concerns with this view?

What is the Good News that the Gospel brings to bear on this?

NOTES: KEY TEACHING POINTS

