

a search for
meaning

a study of Ecclesiastes

**a search for
meaning**

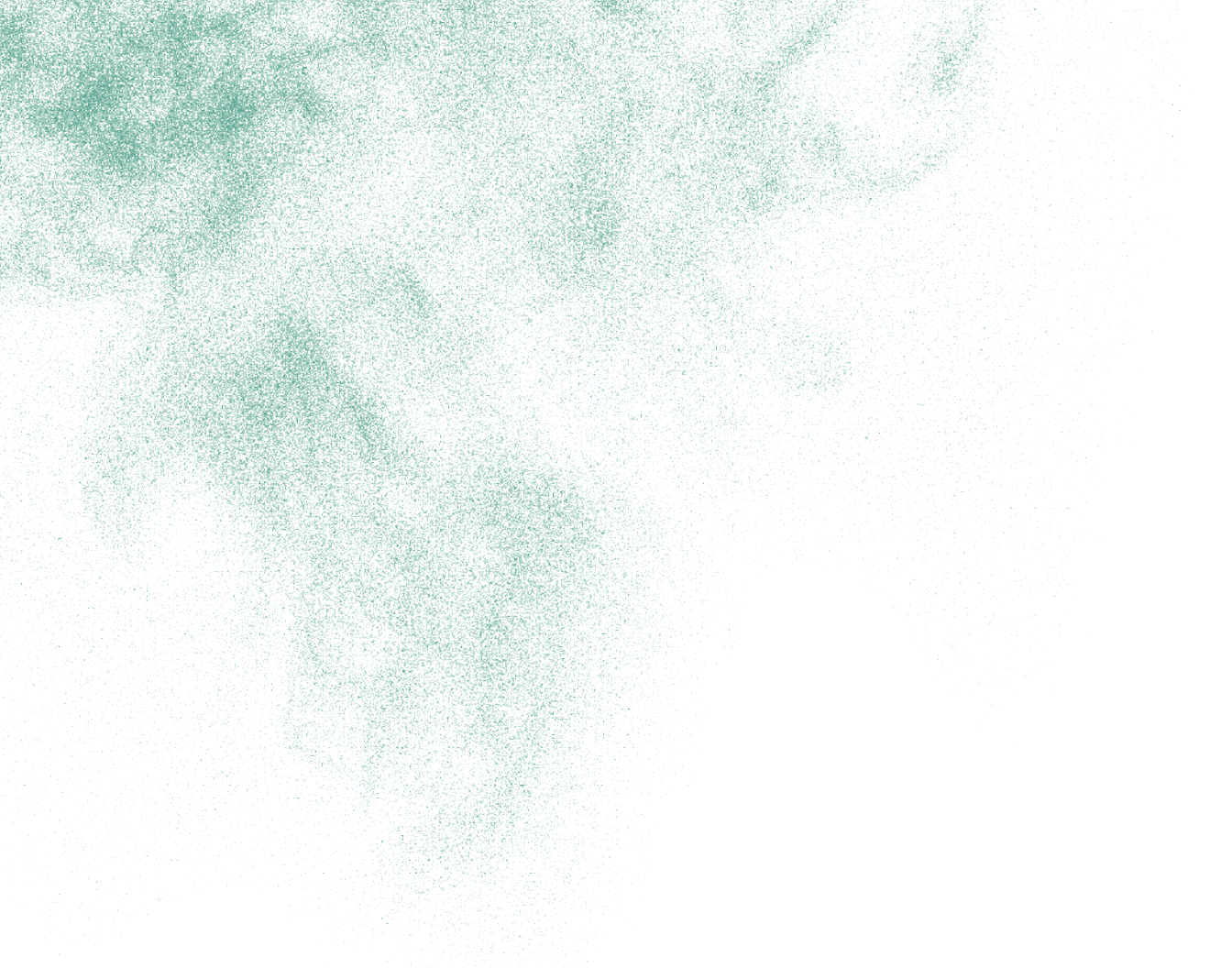
a study of Ecclesiastes

This book belongs to:

There is a world-famous experiment where a king spent years searching for meaning in pleasure, accomplishments, knowledge, power, and fame. He decided at the end of the experiment that everything he thought would give him meaning was “meaningless” and life was like “chasing the wind.” He wrote down all he learned in the book of Ecclesiastes, and if you are willing to be disturbed and challenged, you will learn how to find meaning in the mundane, the seasons of life, your work, your resources, your days, and even your death.

Table of Contents

From the Senior Pastor	7
How to Use This Series Guide	8
Introduction to Ecclesiastes	10
Week 1 Meaning in the meaningless	
Sermon Scripture & Notes	16
Life Group Discussion Guide	22
Week 2 Making the most of a time for everything	
Sermon Scripture & Notes	26
Life Group Discussion Guide	28
Week 3 The gifts of work and rest	
Sermon Scripture & Notes	32
Life Group Discussion Guide	34
Week 4 Wisdom on money and contentment	
Sermon Scripture & Notes	42
Life Group Discussion Guide	44



Week 5	Wisdom when life is complex	
	Sermon Scripture & Notes	52
	Life Group Discussion Guide	60
Week 6	Living and dying skillfully	
	Sermon Scripture & Notes	64
	Life Group Discussion Guide	68
Week 7	What matters most	
	Sermon Scripture & Notes	76
	Life Group Discussion Guide	78



From the Senior Pastor

Dear Mariners Community,

This world is filled with a lot of advice about what it takes to build a meaningful life, often with encouragement for you to pursue more. More money, more influence, more experiences, more relationships, more accomplishments, more work, more pleasure, more discipline. More! A famous king who had all these things, more than anyone in his time by far, and denied himself no earthly pleasure said everything he tried was “meaningless” and that everything we pursue in this life is like “chasing the wind.”

The book of Ecclesiastes is his message to us. King Solomon, the wisest earthly ruler in history, wrote down everything he had learned, and if we are willing to be disturbed and challenged, we will learn how to find meaning in our days, our resources, our work, and even in the end of our lives.

This series guide is designed to help you engage with the Scripture. Use it to take notes during the weekend messages, reflect on what God is teaching you, and dive deeper in community through your Life Group. I invite you to bring it with you each week and use it as a tool to grow in your faith.

I look forward to going through this impactful text with you over the next seven weeks. I pray you are encouraged in your journey with Jesus and that your joy in Him deepens.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Geiger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eric Geiger
Senior Pastor

How to Use This Series Guide

This series guide was created for you. It's filled with resources to enhance your own personal study of Ecclesiastes throughout our teaching series, *A Search for Meaning*. It's a resource meant to travel. Bring it with you to weekend services to take notes and follow along with messages. Take it to your Life Group gathering to go deeper into God's Word with others. Use it in your own time with the Lord as you process the wisdom and teaching of each message and passage of Scripture. We pray it inspires and encourages you in your own walk with the Lord every day.

Here is a breakdown of the different elements to guide you:

SERMON NOTES

Each week, there is space for you to take notes for the weekend message. It's a great way for you to follow along each week of the series and record how God is speaking to you through His Word.

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

These lessons are meant to be explored in the context of a Life Group. In Life Groups, we grow in our faith together and experience life as God intended—in community. We encourage you to join a Life Group and dive into each message with others during the week. Visit marinerschurch.org/joinagroup to learn more.

FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Following the Life Group Discussion Guide, you will see Family Discussion Questions created by our Mariners Kids and Youth teams. Each question is designed to equip you for intentional and meaningful conversations with your kids and students about the wisdom of Ecclesiastes and God's will for our lives.

ADDITIONAL CONTENT

Within these pages, you will find additional resources to inspire and encourage you in your faith.



The Intentional Parenting at Mariners Church Podcast

There are a lot of voices telling us how to raise our kids well, but the best parents aren't perfect—they're intentional. The *Intentional Parenting at Mariners Church Podcast* is for parents who want their homes to be centered on Jesus and His Word. Join us for encouraging conversations with experts and everyday parents, inspiring teaching, and more as we become more confident as parents. Scan the QR code or visit marinerschurch.org/parenting to learn more and see additional parenting resources.



INTRODUCTION TO

Ecclesiastes

The Bible is never shy about confronting painful truths or hard questions. The book of Ecclesiastes faces the issue of how we can find meaning in life in light of the seemingly futile nature of everything. It will not allow the reader to retreat into superficial answers. It does not answer this problem by comforting us with hollow slogans. To the contrary, its motto is “Everything Is Futile.” But by forcing us to face the futility of human existence, it guides us to a life free of empty purpose and deceitful vindication.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF WRITING

Author: According to 1:1 and 1:12, the author was David’s son and a king over Israel from Jerusalem. Also, 12:9 speaks of the author as a writer of proverbs, so Solomon appears to be the author. Many scholars believe that Ecclesiastes was written too late in Israel’s history for this to be true, and they want to date the book at least five hundred years after Solomon’s time (later than 450 BC). However, strong evidence attests that the book does come from the age of Solomon. For instance, it displays a great knowledge of literature from early Mesopotamia and Egypt.

One example is that the book shows an awareness of the “Harper Songs,” poetry from Egypt that is much older than the age of Solomon. Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 is similar to that poetry, and it also resembles a portion of the famous Epic of Gilgamesh from Mesopotamia. It makes sense that Solomon, who had close contacts with Egypt and whose empire stretched up to the Euphrates River, would know and reflect on such texts. It is doubtful that an anonymous Jew writing five hundred or more years later, when Egyptian and Mesopotamian glory had faded and when Judah was a backwater nation, would have had access to these texts or could have understood them. By contrast, Ecclesiastes shows no similarities to the Greek philosophy that flourished in the fifth century BC and later. All of these conditions point to the traditional view that Solomon authored this book.

Background: Ecclesiastes is Wisdom literature, meaning that it is in the part of the Bible especially concerned with helping readers cope with the practical and philosophical issues of life. It has roots in the Wisdom literature of Egypt and Babylon. Books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are the biblical answer to the search for truth. Proverbs is basic wisdom, giving the reader fundamental principles to live by. Ecclesiastes, by contrast, is for a more mature reader. It engages the question of whether death nullifies all purpose and meaning in life.

MESSAGE AND PURPOSE

Ecclesiastes shows us that since we and our works are futile—that is, destined to perish—we must not waste our lives trying to justify our existence with pursuits that ultimately mean nothing. Put simply, Ecclesiastes examines major endeavors of life in light of the reality of death. The book warns us about the pursuit of several different purposes in life.

1. Intellectual accomplishments. Ecclesiastes affirms that wisdom helps us cope with life, but it denies that acquiring knowledge as such is meaningful. Ultimately, the wise person and his works, like the fool and his deeds, perish.
2. Wealth and luxury. Wealth does not give life purpose. Those who pursue riches sometimes waste their lives in bitterness, anxiety, and toil. Money does matter, and Ecclesiastes affirms that we need a strategy for maintaining a basic level of prosperity. But wealth of itself is a fraudulent substitute for true contentment.
3. Politics. Political power is inherently corrupting, and the worst evils in the world are committed by cruel or incompetent people with power. At the same time, government is necessary. Ecclesiastes counsels the reader on how to survive in a world of political competition, and thus how to have a stable, peaceful life.
4. Religion. Zeal for religion also comes in for criticism in Ecclesiastes. Its two warnings are that we should not try to impress God, and we should not wear ourselves out with irrational excess.

Positively, Ecclesiastes recommends that we do two things in light of the brevity of our days.

1. Enjoy life. This is not a philosophy of hedonism, nor does it involve neglect of other duties because there is a time for everything under the sun. But a life without enjoyment is no life at all.

2. Fear God. This is an honest humility before God arising from an awareness of our weakness and sin. It includes awareness of our dependence on him and a remembrance of the fact that he is our judge.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE BIBLE

Ecclesiastes must be read with care because some of its verses, if read in isolation, seem to contradict other biblical teachings. It seems to deny the afterlife (3:18-22), to warn us against being too righteous (7:16), and to recommend a life of pleasure (10:19). But the real purpose of Ecclesiastes is to force us to take our mortality seriously and thus to consider carefully how we should live. Ecclesiastes knocks away all the façades by which we disguise the fact that life is short and all our accomplishments will pass away. In this sense, Ecclesiastes anticipates the NT teaching that only God's grace, and not excessive zeal, saves us.

The self-sufficient and eternal God lovingly creates a perfect creation with humanity as His crowning work. Falling for Satan's temptation, humanity rebels and sin enters the world bringing death, pain, and strife. Instead of giving up on humanity, God promises that from the womb of a woman will come the One who will crush Satan's head.

God pursues Abram (who is renamed Abraham), a man from an idol-worshipping family who has no children with his wife, and promises that he will be the father of many nations. God promises land to Abraham and assures him that all nations will be blessed through his offspring. God continues to be faithful to this family. He restates the promise to Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob (who is renamed Israel). A famine strikes the promised land, so Jacob and the family move to Egypt where one of his sons, Joseph, is already there to provide for them.

The family becomes a nation while living in Egypt, but also becomes enslaved to the Egyptians. God raises up Moses to lead His people to freedom. During a tenth plague, God strikes dead the firstborn son of everyone living in Egypt, but "passes over" Israel as they put the blood of lambs on their doorposts. After miraculously rescuing His people, God gives His people the law. He also instructs them to build a tabernacle and offer sacrifices so He may dwell among them.

God brings His people, through their leader Joshua, into the promised land. When God's people worship the gods of the nations surrounding them, God disciplines them through the attacks of surrounding nations. God raises up judges (or rulers) to rescue His people and call them to repentance. They beg for a king to be like other nations, and God gives them Saul. God then raises up a new king, David, and promises that his kingdom will never end. The family that turned into a nation is now a kingdom. David's son, Solomon, builds a temple to replace the tabernacle.

CREATION AND FALL

PROMISE AND A PEOPLE

RESCUE AND LAW

LAND AND KINGDOM

2000 BC

1400 BC

1000 BC

LIFE AND WORKS OF KING SOLOMON

STRUCTURE

Ecclesiastes does not have the kind of structure we usually look for in a book of the Bible. At first glance it seems to move to and fro among various topics in a way that seems almost incoherent. It has no simple hierarchical outline, and it often jumps rapidly from one topic to the next. But a closer look reveals a structure that alternates between two perspectives: that of human existence apart from God and that of existence lived before God. If Ecclesiastes were music, it would be seen as antiphonal. The resolution of the tensions that permeate Ecclesiastes is found in the affirmation that the most important thing in life is to “fear God and keep his commands” (12:13).

Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

Solomon takes foreign wives and allows their foreign gods to clutter the land. His son continues the line of rulers and the kingdom is divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Prophets confront the people but they persist in their idolatry. The Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom is carried away into Babylonian captivity. When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.

EXILE AND RETURN

600 BC



A descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David, Jesus is the One who crushes the head of Satan, will bless all nations, and reigns forever. Jesus, the God-Man, enters humanity through the womb of a virgin, perfectly obeys the law that we could never obey, dies as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and rises from the dead, conquering Satan, sin, and death. He inaugurates His eternal Kingdom and secures salvation for His people.

JESUS

AD



After His ascension to Heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus.

This good news is known as the gospel. In the midst of intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ and their response to His grace.

A NEW PEOPLE

AD 30



A time is coming when God's people—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who have been rescued by Christ—will enjoy Him and His rule forever in perfect harmony. Satan will be crushed, the effects of sin will be reversed, and all things will be made new.

A BETTER BEGINNING

