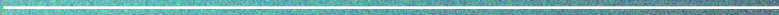


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# Living and dying skillfully

*Ecclesiastes 9:1-10, 11, 12:1-8*

## ECCLESIASTES 9

### 9 ENJOY LIFE DESPITE DEATH

Indeed, I took all this to heart and explained it all: The righteous, the wise, and their works are in God's hands. People don't know whether to expect love or hate. Everything lies ahead of them. <sup>2</sup> Everything is the same for everyone: There is one fate for the righteous and the wicked, for the good and the bad, for the clean and the unclean, for the one who sacrifices and the one who does not sacrifice. As it is for the good, so also it is for the sinner; as it is for the one who takes an oath, so also for the one who fears an oath. <sup>3</sup> This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: there is one fate for everyone. In addition, the hearts of people are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live; after that they go to the dead. <sup>4</sup> But there is hope for whoever is joined with all the living, since a live dog is better than a dead lion. <sup>5</sup> For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything. There is no longer a reward for them because the memory of them is forgotten. <sup>6</sup> Their love, their hate, and their envy have already disappeared, and there is no longer a portion for them in all that is done under the sun.

<sup>7</sup> Go, eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already accepted your works. <sup>8</sup> Let your clothes be white all the time, and never let oil be lacking on your head. <sup>9</sup> Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of your fleeting life, which has been given to you under the sun, all your fleeting days. For that is your portion in life and in your struggle under the sun. <sup>10</sup> Whatever your hands find to do, do with all your strength, because there is no work, planning, knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

### 11 INVEST IN LIFE

Send your bread on the surface of the water,  
for after many days you may find it.

- <sup>2</sup> Give a portion to seven or even to eight,  
for you don't know what disaster may happen on earth.
- <sup>3</sup> If the clouds are full, they will pour out rain on the earth;  
whether a tree falls to the south or the north,  
the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.
- <sup>4</sup> One who watches the wind will not sow,  
and the one who looks at the clouds will not reap.
- <sup>5</sup> Just as you don't know the path of the wind,  
or how bones develop in the womb of a pregnant woman,  
so also you don't know the work of God who makes everything.

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## ECCLESIASTES 12

- <sup>6</sup> In the morning sow your seed,  
and at evening do not let your hand rest,  
because you don't know which will succeed,  
whether one or the other,  
or if both of them will be equally good.
- <sup>7</sup> Light is sweet,  
and it is pleasing for the eyes to see the sun.
- <sup>8</sup> Indeed, if someone lives many years,  
let him rejoice in them all,  
and let him remember the days of darkness, since they will be many.  
All that comes is futile.
- <sup>9</sup> Rejoice, young person, while you are young,  
and let your heart be glad in the days of your youth.  
And walk in the ways of your heart  
and in the desire of your eyes;  
but know that for all of these things God will bring you to judgment.
- <sup>10</sup> Remove sorrow from your heart,  
and put away pain from your flesh,  
because youth and the prime of life are fleeting.

# 12

## THE TWILIGHT OF LIFE

So remember your Creator in the days of your youth:

- Before the days of adversity come,  
and the years approach when you will say,  
"I have no delight in them";
- <sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light are darkened,  
and the moon and the stars,  
and the clouds return after the rain;
- <sup>3</sup> on the day when the guardians of the house tremble,  
and the strong men stoop,  
the women who grind grain cease because they are few,  
and the ones who watch through the windows see dimly,
- <sup>4</sup> the doors at the street are shut  
while the sound of the mill fades;  
when one rises at the sound of a bird,  
and all the daughters of song grow faint.



# Life Group Discussion Guide

## Lean In

Are you someone who lives in the moment or tends to plan things out well in advance?

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## Look Down

How does this passage redefine what it means to live wisely in a world marked by mortality? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Look Out

How does our society define a “successful life,” and how does that differ from the Teacher’s vision? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Look In

How does knowing your life is relatively short shape the way you use your time?

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# Family Discussion Questions

## Questions for Kids

What does it mean to remember God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why is it important to start now, even when you are young?

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## Questions for Youth

Years from now, what do you hope to see when you look back at your life? \_\_\_\_\_

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Have you said "I Believe" and placed your faith in Jesus? How does this change the way you live each day? \_\_\_\_\_

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RHYTHM  
REMINDER



Share Your Story



# Living and Dying with Wisdom

**By Eric Heard**

*Prayer & Stewardship Pastor*

As I began to write this article, I received the heartbreaking news of a close friend's sudden passing. This news left me deeply saddened, particularly for his widow and the family who now face the challenging journey of grief. Yet, there's also a profound comfort in knowing that my friend is free from suffering, with "...an eternal body made for us by God Himself and not by human hands" (2 Cor 5:1, NLT). The truth is, my friend is more alive today than ever before. He will never again experience pain, illness, or death, and most importantly, he is now in the presence of God, with whom he walked for decades.

Tomorrow, I will reach out to my friend's widow, and our Mariners Memorial Team will begin planning a Celebration of Life that will honor his memory while also providing comfort and strength to his family and friends. Our Memorial Team has compassionate and professional people dedicated to helping families honor their loved ones, the God who created them, and to help others recalibrate their lives in light of these experiences.

At Mariners Church, we value the idea that *Intentional Environments Inspire Courageous Decisions*. Our Chapel and Worship Center were designed for moments like these, where the loss of a loved one can lead to personal reflection. We hope that each attendee leaves positively impacted, ready to make courageous choices in their own lives. I've lost count of how many times people have approached me after a Celebration of Life to express how much they needed to be there. Recently, a gentleman shared that he felt he had wasted his life on trivial pursuits and recognized the need to make difficult choices to align his life with his true purpose. This sentiment echoes the wisdom found in Psalm 90:12: "Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts."

As we explore the Book of Ecclesiastes as a church, we must acknowledge its practical and insightful reflections on the human experience, touching on themes of life, death, and the search for meaning. In a world often characterized by uncertainty and fleeting pleasures, we need the sobering perspective that Solomon offers. We must ask ourselves: what are we doing that holds significance in this one and only life God has given us? It doesn't have to be grand; it simply needs to be meaningful.

I will never forget one memorial where we honored the life of a 57-year-old man who lived courageously for God, his family, and all those who knew him. At one point in the service, seven high school students from his neighborhood, friends of his son, approached the platform to share their memories. Tearfully, they recounted how this man would often barbecue for them, and as they prepared to leave, he would say, "I love you," using their names. Initially, they would brush it off, prompting him to insist even more fervently, "I really love you." This was his legacy—a profound impact on young lives who needed to experience a father's love.

Ecclesiastes opens with a striking declaration: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." This phrase encapsulates the transient nature of life that many of us grapple with. The Hebrew term, *hevel*, often translated as vanity or vapor, suggests something fragile. Life's pursuits—wealth, pleasure, power—are ultimately fleeting. This recognition is not meant to bring despair but rather to foster a deeper engagement with the present moment. Imagine how differently we would live if we knew we had only 24 hours left.

This is why I appreciate memorials; they awaken us from complacency and remind us, as James states, "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes" (James 4:14). Over the years, I have engaged countless individuals at memorials who are sobered by the reality of death and the truth that their lives on this Earth are finite. This awareness compels us to prepare for that day, to live intentionally, and to live skillfully.

Often, a moment at a memorial triggers a powerful response from attendees. At one memorial, a daughter bravely shared how she had been estranged from her father for over 15 years. Bitterness had taken root, and she wanted nothing to do with him. Unbeknownst to her, her father was in hospice care and nearing death. During my pastoral visit, he expressed a desire for reconciliation. I urged her to fly out immediately, and to her surprise, upon entering her father's room, she found he had written a heartfelt letter of confession, seeking her forgiveness. In turn, she confessed her own shortcomings. Just two hours after their reconciliation, he passed into glory, leaving her with a cherished memory of what truly matters in life. This loving act profoundly impacted everyone present at the memorial.

As a pastor, my passion lies in guiding individuals toward a deeper spiritual connection. This pursuit includes directing people to Scripture, participating in communal worship, and practicing kindness and service. When people align their lives with their spiritual values, they often experience peace and fulfillment that transcends life's uncertainties, aiding in their healing from grief.

Living and dying skillfully, as illuminated by Ecclesiastes, invites us to embrace life's fleeting nature while seeking wisdom, meaning, and community. It encourages gratitude and mindfulness, reminding us to cherish each moment and engage deeply with our spiritual journeys. In a world filled with uncertainty, this ancient wisdom offers timeless guidance, helping us navigate the complexities of existence with grace and purpose. As we reflect on these teachings, my hope is that people feel more equipped to live fully and face the reality of death with hope and peace—something we strive for in our Memorial Ministry at Mariners Church.