

(Through the Bible) Ecclesiastes

by Zac Poonen

The book of Ecclesiastes shows us that true wisdom and understanding come from God, not from human wisdom or knowledge, and that humility and dependence on the Holy Spirit are essential for understanding God's Word.

Duration: 57:11

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Ecclesiastes 7:8, Ecclesiastes 9:8, Ecclesiastes 10:1, Ecclesiastes 11:1, Ecclesiastes 11:4, Ecclesiastes 11:6, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Topics: "Eternal Wisdom", "Godly Living"

Description

This sermon delves into the book of Ecclesiastes, exploring the wisdom and insights shared by Solomon, highlighting the emptiness of pursuing worldly pleasures and the importance of seeking God's wisdom and guidance. It emphasizes the need for humility, the danger of relying solely on human intelligence, and the significance of listening to God, receiving correction, and living with integrity. The sermon encourages a focus on eternal values, the joy of wisdom, and the impact of our actions on others.

Transcript

Let's turn to the word of God in Ecclesiastes this morning. Ecclesiastes begins with these words. The words of the preacher, the son of David, that is Solomon, king in Jerusalem, vanity of vanities or futility of futilities or emptiness of emptiness.

Everything is empty. It's quite amazing that a book of scripture should begin with such words. Emptiness of emptiness, everything is empty.

What advantage does a man have in all his work, which he does under the sun? It's one of those difficult books in the Bible to understand. And yet, as we read it, we see why God has placed it in scripture. You see, Solomon was humanly speaking, the wisest man that lived as far as human wisdom was concerned.

The Lord told him when he asked for wisdom and understanding heart, the Lord said to him, as we considered in one Kings three and verse 12, 13, that he would have wisdom such as no one ever had before him or after him. And in the years when he had a little fear of God way at the beginning, I think that was the time when he wrote Proverbs and Proverbs demonstrates divine wisdom. Ecclesiastes demonstrates human wisdom, the wisdom, verse three, chapter one, verse three of the man who lives under the sun.

That expression under the sun comes very often. This man lived under the sun. Proverbs demonstrates the wisdom of a man who lives above the sun in the heavenlies, which is where we're called to live.

Then why has God placed the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible? The Bible describes not only divine wisdom, but also human wisdom. For example, a large portion of the book of Job is the speeches of a number of people who said things that were wrong. God himself said at the end to them, what you have said about me was wrong.

And yet a large section of the book of Job describes that. The Bible says in Psalm 14 and verse one, the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. So even what the fool has said is written in scripture.

So the book of Ecclesiastes has been written to show us however clever you may be. And here is the cleverest and the most intelligent man that lived on the face of the earth, writing, you'll still miss the way to find God if you depend on human cleverness. Jesus once said in Matthew 11 and verse 25, he said, I thank you, Father, that you have hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent, but you have revealed them unto babes.

What do babes have which clever and intelligent people do not have? Jesus himself said, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is a child. Humility. It's very difficult, very, very difficult to find a clever, intelligent person who is humble.

Almost every one of them is proud unless they have understood the Lord. It's not a crime to be intelligent, but it's wrong to be proud of our intelligence. What do babes have? All newborn babies, they're not proud.

So, Ecclesiastes is the writing of a man who tries to know God, but is proud of his intelligence. Now it's very interesting, I want to show you two passages of scripture which you may not have noticed. Even though Solomon was the wisest and the most intelligent man that ever lived, humanly speaking, yet, and even though he was the one who was going to construct the temple of God, yet we read these amazing words in 1 Chronicles and chapter 28.

1 Chronicles 28 and verse 11, David says to Solomon, he gave Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, buildings, storehouses, upper rooms, inner rooms, room for the mercy seat, and the plan for all that he had in mind, for the courts of the Lord, for the surrounding rooms, and 13, for the division of the priests, for the utensils, verse 14, how much gold, verse 15, to put for the lampstands. Now you wouldn't think that the most intelligent man on the face of the earth needs to be taught how much gold to be put in the lampstand, and how to construct the forks, verse 17. It's really amazing that the most intelligent man in the world has to be taught even how to make the forks in God's temple.

Why? Because David was a man after God's own heart. Solomon was a man who was clever up there in the head. And David said in verse 19, the Lord made me understand all this in writing by his hand upon me.

So we see that just like God gave the plan of the tabernacle to Moses, not when he was 40, when he was full of the wisdom of Egypt, he would have modified it considerably, and the glory of God would not have rested on it. But he gave it to Moses when he was 80, after all that chaff of human wisdom had been taken out of his mind, and he was willing to submit to God's wisdom, and make that simple structure. In the same way, the pattern of the temple was given not to Solomon, but to David.

Solomon was only the contractor who built it, not the architect who designed it. Because God, when he gives his plan, he does not give it to intelligent people who got good brains, he gives it to humble people who got a good heart. Now if you're intelligent and also humble, that's fine.

But the primary thing is not your intelligence, it's your humility of heart. Let me show you one more verse in 1 Corinthians in chapter 3. This is an introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes. 1 Corinthians in chapter 3, it says, verse 18, there are many ways in which we can deceive ourselves, and this is one way.

Let no man deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, like Solomon, clever and intelligent according to this world, let him become foolish, so that he may become wise. Many of you are intelligent.

Thank God for the intelligence he's given you. I want to ask you, doesn't this verse apply to you? Are you intelligent according to this age? That intelligence is okay to study physics and science and mathematics. But when you come to scripture, it says here, become foolish if you want to become wise.

Have you understood what that means? It means lay aside your human cleverness and come to God and say, Lord in spiritual things I'm as stupid as a donkey. Please teach me. Because, verse 19, all the cleverness and intelligence of this world is foolishness with God.

And that's what the book of Ecclesiastes demonstrates. For it is written, God is the one who catches clever people in their cleverness. And verse 20, the Lord knows the reasonings of all the clever people in the world are useless.

You take the reasonings and the arguments of all the cleverest people in the world, put it all together and God says it's useless. It's foolishness. When it comes to spiritual things, it's the one who is humble who has got a great advantage.

And the person who is intelligent and clever and not humble has got a tremendous disadvantage. So when you go to study the scriptures, what is the greatest thing you need? Not intelligence, but humility. If it was intelligence, Jesus would have gone down to Jerusalem, to the Bible school that Gamaliel was running and selected his twelve apostles from there.

Why didn't he do that? Why did he go to the lakeside in Galilee to people who had never been to a Bible school? Who were fishermen and tax collectors and the type of people you should never choose. Because of humility. They were willing to learn.

I want to ask you, are you teachable? If you get offended by what I say, that is the clearest proof that you are proud. Only proud people get offended. A humble person says, Lord, teach me.

Particularly when your word says that you have hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent. Reveal them to babes. I want to be like a babe.

And Ecclesiastes demonstrates how you can have a lot of knowledge. It's like psychology. There's a lot of good things in psychology, but it's not divine wisdom.

And it's more dangerous when you have the good mixed with the bad than when you have the bad alone. If a man wants to poison someone, he mixes the good with the bad. A little bit of poison in a glass of milk.

Outright bad is easy to detect. And that's the danger in psychology. There's a lot of good things in it, but it's not divine wisdom.

Divine wisdom comes from the scriptures. And a lot of things that psychologists say who do not submit their mind to God's word, what they say is wrong. And if you follow them, you'll go astray.

Ecclesiastes, compared with Proverbs, we could say is like what we've been saying from the beginning. Cain and Abel. Cain was not an atheist.

Cain was a religious person. Solomon, Abel was a spiritual person. Through the ages, you have this conflict between the religious person and the spiritual person.

Saul was a man of the head, a religious person. David was a man of the heart, a spiritual person. The Pharisees were people of the head.

They had knowledge. Jesus emphasized the heart. It's not that the head is not important.

It's not that the brains are not important. But the brains, like I said the other day, must be like the wife under the headship of the heart and the spirit. And so, we could say this stream that began with Cain and Abel of religiosity and spirituality, and began with Nimrod and Abraham of Babylon and Jerusalem, continues through in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, and finally ends with Babylon and Jerusalem in Revelation.

Ecclesiastes is the words of a preacher, verse 1. A preacher who is preaching. He's interested in preaching. Many of you may want to become preachers in the days to come.

And what are most preachers interested in? In presenting a good sermon. And how do they present it? How do they prepare it? With a lot of study. That's good.

We need to use our mind. I study too. I've studied this book for 40 years.

But, many preachers have no preparation of the heart. And you can present a very accurate sermon with your head, and it doesn't go to people's hearts because it comes from your head. So, Proverbs deals not with preaching, but with practicing.

And on the basis of practicing, we preach. Now this is a very important difference. I want to show you one more verse to draw this contrast in Matthew 23 and verse 3. The difference between the Pharisees and Jesus, between religiosity and spirituality, is here.

Matthew 23, verse 3, Jesus said, The Pharisees are people who say things, but don't do them. At the same time, verse 3, He said to the disciples, Everything they say you can do because what they say is accurate. The Pharisees were the evangelicals and the fundamentalists of their time.

What they said was correct doctrine. But they did not live in their homes like they preached in the pulpit. They preached high standards in the pulpit, but they lived in another way in their relation to money and in their home.

Just like many preachers today, whose doctrine is right, but whose life is wrong. They preach, but do not practice. It says about Jesus, in Acts 1, verse 1, The first account I composed, O Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Though it refers to his life, I want you to notice that expression. He did and taught. He did not practice what he preached.

He preached what he had already practiced. He lived for 30 years and did without preaching. And then preached for three and a half years what he had done.

That is godliness. It's the Christianity of the heart. That's the contrast between Ecclesiastes and Proverbs.

And there are many good things in Proverbs and we can look at them. In the first two chapters, he's speaking basically about the emptiness of all knowledge, pleasure, achievements and labors. And it's obvious that right through the book, here is a man who does not know God, but he's not an atheist.

He speaks about God. But he never uses the covenant name of God, Jehovah, or Yahweh, whichever way you take it, in the whole book. Not once.

And that's unique. Proverbs uses it all the time. There's no covenant relationship with God.

It's an academic knowledge of God. Knowledge about the facts of God. Maybe accurate knowledge, but not the result of a heart relationship or a covenant relationship.

We read as you turn to the last two verses of Ecclesiastes 12. What is the conclusion of everything? The conclusion is fear God and keep his commandments because this applies to every person. You see, he's not teaching anything wrong.

But the reason for this, why should you fear God and keep his commandments? Is it because God is a good God? Is it because you love him and he's done so much for you? No, because, verse 14, one day God will judge everything. What is hidden, whether it's good or evil. You see, the man of the world can be frightened into doing good things out of fear of judgment.

This is how all false religions operate. All false religions operate on the principle of God is going to judge you, even those who say that you will be reborn into this world. So therefore be kind to the poor people and to the beggars now, because God will judge you and decide in what form you will be reborn into this world.

It's the fear of judgment, even in false religions. And it's the, in false Christianity too. It's like that, where the motivation for obedience is the fear of God's judgment.

You have a false Christianity. True spirituality is not motivated by the fear of judgment. Jesus did not obey the father because he was afraid the father would punish him.

He obeyed the father because he loved him. And Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments. That must be the motivation for our obedience.

That is not what Ecclesiastes deals with. And so because this was his basic principle in life, he felt, well, I must do what I can. And that was a sort of an indifferent attitude to life and a fatalism.

Okay, things are like that. And I'm not going to be surprised at anything that happens. It's obvious that this man never sees beyond this world.

He doesn't know anything about heaven. He doesn't know anything about eternity, even though he mentions eternity once here. And he was afraid of death.

And he decided to make the most of this life with a little bit of fear of God put in, just to be on the safe side. You see, here is a person who, as I said, tries to discover God through his senses, through his intelligence and through his reasoning without the help of the Holy Spirit. And if you do that, even if you say you are following Christianity, you will be as wrong as those people who are following other religions.

You can know nothing about God without the help of the Holy Spirit. It says the Holy Spirit reveals the deep things of God. 1 Corinthians 2, I don't have time to show you.

Read it sometime. Who is the one who knows the inner thoughts of God? No man, only the Holy Spirit. How can I know the inner thoughts of God? By my reason? By my using my intelligence to study? Do you know that the people who crucified Jesus Christ were people who studied the Bible every day? And studying the Bible, which spoke so much about the coming Messiah, when the Messiah came into their midst, they called him the Prince of Devils.

Why? I mean, if the Greeks and the Romans called him that, we can understand. They don't have the scriptures. If the Sadducees, who had wrong doctrine, who were like the liberals, called him that, we can understand.

It's the Pharisees, whose doctrines were correct. The fundamentalists, who looked at Jesus and said, He's the Prince of Devils. They were intelligent.

There was no shortage of intelligence. They were not humble. Their heart was not right.

Their head was right. And if that could happen 2,000 years ago, it can happen today. If we don't have a humble dependence on the Holy Spirit, to give us revelation, that's the word, revelation on the Word of God, we will go as astray as Solomon did in Ecclesiastes.

When Peter looked at Jesus and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus said to him, Blessed are you, Simon, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. That means your human cleverness and intelligence did not reveal this to you.

But my Father in Heaven, how is it an illiterate, unlearned person, I mean illiterate means in the sense of, not learned in the scriptures, unlearned in the scriptures like Peter, how is it he could understand who Jesus was, when people who study the Bible day and night, like the Pharisees, could not? The Holy Spirit, that's what makes the difference then, and that's what makes the difference today. So what am I emphasizing? I'm saying, if you want to understand God's Word, depend on the Holy Spirit. Otherwise you'll have a lot of good things, but you could go wrong.

So in chapter 1, basically, he's saying how he tried to find satisfaction in chapter 2 as well, through various forms of pleasure, getting more and more property, and making ponds of water, chapter 2, verse 6, and having a lot of slaves, chapter 2, verse 7, collecting a lot of silver and gold, and all that, and verse 10 says, everything that my eyes desired, I did not refuse them. And at the end of it all, he says in verse 11, thus I considered all my activities, and there was no profit under the sun. He goes on in chapter, he talks about the futility of hard work, all the fruit of my labor, verse 18.

I have to leave it to somebody who comes after me, and who knows whether he'll be a wise man or a fool. And he uses that expression, under the sun, verse 20, under the sun, verse 22, everything was vanity. Now he says something, which is interesting here, in verse 26.

To a person who is good in God's sight, God has given wisdom, knowledge, and joy. Now this is a correct statement. If you are good, not if you are clever, if you are good, in God's eyes, that means your heart is clear, and clean, God gives you an earthly task, of accumulating wisdom, divine wisdom, the knowledge of God, and the fullness of joy, that is found in the presence of God.

In thy presence is fullness of joy. But to one who is a sinner, what task does God give? He gives him the task of gathering, hoarding, collecting, money, material things, so that one day it can all be given, to the man who is seeking God's kingdom first. In eternity, the meek will inherit the earth.

There is no doubt about that. So you see, you are, all of us, are either in the business of pursuing wisdom, and the knowledge of God, and the joy of the Lord, which is our strength, or we are in the business of hoarding, collecting, gathering. And it's a very accurate description of a spiritual man, and a worldly person.

Now a religious person is actually the same as a worldly person. He's got Bible knowledge, not knowledge of God. And he spends his time hoarding and collecting.

Maybe he hoards and collects a whole lot of useless information in the world, which doesn't help him spiritually. Chapter 3, on to, we're at Chapter 6 almost, we could say broadly this is, he's just trying to prove that there's a time for everything. In verses 1 to 8, he says there is a time appointed for everything.

There's a time for every event under heaven. You see, here's a person who's a very sharp observer of nature, human nature, the world, circumstances, and after many, many years of observing with all his cleverness, intelligence, and observation powers, he says there is a time and a season for everything. Now, a lot of things here are true and false, just like I said earlier.

Psychology is a mixture of truth and error. Verse 2, to 8, there's a time to give birth and a time to die, that's right, time to plant, plant it, but then it says here there is a time to kill. For a spiritual man, there's never a time to kill.

He never kills. It says here in verse 8, there is a time to love and a time to hate. For a spiritual man, there's never a time to hate and there's never a human being to hate.

He loves all the time, every human being, irrespective of that person's attitude. Now, psychologists say that there are people who suggest this procedure. If you're angry with your father, the way to get it out is get a pillow and keep on hammering it and imagine that's your father and get all your anger out of your system and then you'll deal with your father okay.

Now, that's not God's way. That's a time to hate. God says no.

Love. Love your enemies. So here is an example of how worldly thinking mixed up with spiritual wisdom, this is characteristic of a religious man who is not led by the Holy Spirit.

And I believe that many of us are in danger of that. If you don't live in humility and brokenness before God, it's very easy to be led astray into, because a number of things we understand is right and a lot of things

sound right. Let me give you one example.

There's a lot of teaching in Christendom today on visualizing. They say visualize that even though there are only five people in your church, that you're going to have 50,000. That even though you're meeting in a little shack, you're going to meet in a great building.

Shut your eyes and picture it in your mind. If you're lame, just picture that you're walking and visualize if you only have a scooter, picture that you have a nice new car and trust God for it and you'll get it. Most of this is related to earthly things and this sounds in the years of so many believers who don't have discernment as though this is faith.

It's not. It's New Age teaching. New Age is a heathen conglomeration mixture of all religions.

Faith is not based on visualization. Let me tell you that. Read God's word, Romans 10, 17.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ or the word of God. Faith can only be based on what God has revealed. Abraham could not just believe that I'm going to have a son.

God told him he's going to have a son, then he could believe it. Otherwise, it's not faith. It's visualization which is not scripture.

You can't just believe for whatever you like. That's what I mean, how something sounds so similar. Positive thinking.

Am I against positive thinking? No. All I'm saying is that's not faith the Bible speaks of. That's psychology.

It's a good thing to be. You sort of think positively. It's good for business people and people who get depressed frequently.

But it's not the final answer. The final answer is the Holy Spirit revealing Christ to our heart. Now, it's very easy in our day and age to be deceived by all this and that's where Ecclesiastes has a message particularly for our century and our time.

The danger of depending on these things that is human reason. Okay. Verse 11 is the one place in Ecclesiastes where the word eternity comes.

It's true what it says here. He has made everything beautiful in its time. God has made everything beautiful.

I agree. He has also set eternity in their heart. That's right.

Like one godly man many centuries ago said there is a god-shaped vacuum in the human heart. A vacuum in the shape of God. It will never be satisfied till God comes there.

You'll be restless. We are restless until our souls find our rest in these at another. See, God has put eternity in our heart so that ultimately you will never find satisfaction in money, never find satisfaction in women, never find satisfaction in property, honor, position, being the president of the world's greatest country.

You'll never find satisfaction in any of these things because God has put eternity in your heart. And it says here, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning to the end. It's a

question of how we read it.

The margin says without which man will not be able to find out the work which God has done. Unless we give, I prefer to read it like that, unless we give primary importance to that God-shaped vacuum in our heart to those eternal things, we will never be able to find out what God has done from the beginning until the end. And if you don't find out, then I say, well, then, like it says in verse 12, I know there's nothing better for them than to rejoice, to do good in one's lifetime.

You see, psychologists don't tell you to do evil, and the religious man does not say you must do evil. No religion says you must do evil. Yeah, you must do good in your lifetime.

I want to turn further to verse 19. Now, see what he says here. Here's truth and error mixed together.

The fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies, so dies the other. You see, here's his understanding.

Men and animals both die, and they all have the same breath, and there is no advantage for man over the beast, for everything is empty. Verse 19, all go to the same place. A man and a dog both go to the same place.

What is that? He's thinking of this world. He's not thinking of eternity. He has nothing, no clue about eternity.

He says, they came from dust, they go back to dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast ascends downward to the earth? He says, who knows whether people say that the breath of man goes up and the breath of the beast goes down? Who knows that? He certainly doesn't. The wisest and the most intelligent man on the face of the earth is trying to understand God and religion.

He gets a few things right, and he gets a lot of things wrong. A book written in scripture to warn us not to seek God without the help of his word and without the help of his Holy Spirit, and to warn us about all the teachings of clever, intelligent people today, whether they call themselves Christians or not. If it's not founded in God's word, I personally don't want to waste my time listening to it or reading it.

Chapter 4, here are some good things. Verse 9 to 12, two are better than one. Absolutely right.

Because they have a good return for their labor. See, just like in marriage, there's a strength in husband and wife. They can accomplish more than if they serve the Lord individually.

A husband and wife working together can accomplish much more for God than if they worked separately. Even physically, they multiply, they have children, and more is accomplished than if they were alone. And spiritually too, Jesus said, where two or three are gathered in my name, two minimum, I am in the midst, whatever they bind on earth will be bound in the heavenlies.

That's Matthew 18. So two are better than one, we could apply it spiritually too. For, here's another reason, if either of them falls, the other one will lift him up.

It's wonderful if you have a fellowship where a brother is willing to lift you up when you're discouraged, and you can lift him up when he's discouraged. But woe unto him who is alone when he falls and he doesn't have anybody to lift him up. Furthermore, if two are together, they can be warm.

I believe we can keep the fire burning in each other's hearts when we have fellowship. You know, when a number of coals are together in a fire, it all burns, they all burn. But if you take one coal and keep it outside, even if it's the most, the hottest coal, it dies out.

It needs fellowship in the fire to keep burning. Don't think God has called you to live alone. He's called you to live in fellowship.

You can keep warm and on fire if you seek fellowship. Another reason, verse 12, one person may be overpowered by somebody, but two can resist him. Resisting the devil.

We can apply all those verses spiritually and there's some tremendous truths there. Absolutely correct. And a three-fold cord, a cord of three strands is not easily torn apart.

I've often used that illustration for marriage. In marriage, if you have a husband and wife alone, that's not enough. You need three strands, a husband and wife and the Lord.

And if those three strands are there, it won't be broken. That's a solid marriage. Okay, here's something that's written about correction.

Very good instruction, verse 13. A poor, wise young man is much better than an old and foolish king who does not know how to receive correction. See, when a time comes in your life, and that usually comes after God has used us for some years, and we think we know so much that we become so proud that we don't know how to receive correction anymore, God save all of us from coming to that place.

I thank God for people younger than me who have corrected me. And I have received that correction and become a better man. If I've got a mark on my face, a black mark, I'm very thankful if somebody points it out to me so that I can wipe it off.

And it doesn't matter to me whether the person who pointed it out to me is a 20-year-old or an 80-year-old. What difference does it make? I'm very thankful. Be thankful for correction, because you can become a better person.

You can become more spiritual. And the danger is that when we become old, we're not willing to receive correction. Or if you become kings, you become kings.

A king is someone who, you know, comes to the place where he is an authority. Everybody's got to listen to him. Some Christian leaders are like that.

They are old, they are kings, and they are foolish. And sometimes in their churches, maybe someone who is young, but wise. Why? Because he is willing to receive correction.

Why did this old person become foolish? Because he stopped receiving correction, perhaps because he was a king, a leader. So that's another good word. Another verse I want to show you in chapter 4 is, he says in verse 4, I have seen that every labor and every skill in the world is done because of rivalry between a man and his neighbor.

Businesses improve because they are in competition with somebody else. And he says, everything on earth, skill, improvement, comes because of envy and rivalry. Now, unfortunately, a lot of that is true in Christian organizations, too.

One Christian organization goes and gets a good worker from another Christian organization by offering him a higher salary. It's rivalry. But in true godliness, that's not true.

This is the wisdom of the world. And a lot of these things are found in religious Christians, who are not spiritual. In true Christianity, there is no competition with any other brother, with any other church, with any other organization.

There is no rivalry at all. That's just impossible. Chapter 5, here are some good things, too.

In verses 1 to 6, 1 to 7, he's saying, when you go into God's presence, don't talk too much. Listen more. I wish all Christians would take that, repeat to that word.

It says here, verse 2, don't be hasty in word or in thought to bring up a mat in the presence of God, for God is in heaven, and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few. We must listen more to God than speak.

In prayer, we must listen more than we speak. Prayer is like a telephone conversation. In a telephone, there is a earpiece and a mouthpiece.

You speak, and you listen. You listen, and you speak. Most people, when they pray, they never give a chance to God to speak.

They keep on talking. That's not prayer. That's an insult to God.

Let me ask you, when you are telephoning someone who is much more mature than you and much more godly than you, who will speak more, he or you? Who? He. You have to be very proud to keep on speaking on the telephone to someone who is much more mature and much more godly than you. Then think when you are talking to God in prayer.

Don't you think you are fantastically proud to keep on talking, talking, and you never listen? How much time do you spend listening? Let me give you my experience. In prayer, to me, 90 percent is listening. Ten percent is speaking.

My heavenly father already knows everything I need, but still he wants me to express it, so I express it. He wouldn't give me this day my daily bread. But to me, most of prayer is silence, listening, listening to God.

Not silence with our thoughts wandering all over the world, but listening. And it doesn't have to be only on our knees. The Bible says pray always.

In other words, have the habit of listening always. Keep your antenna up of your walkie-talkie. You know these police with walkie-talkies? Always it's switched on.

Always listening to what headquarters is saying. To me, that's a beautiful picture of how a Christian should live. So, don't make vows to God, verse 4, which you can't pay.

Verse 5, it's better not to make a vow than vow and not pay. Don't make promises to God, which you can't keep. Say, Lord, I want to be devoted to you.

Please give me grace. Recognize that you cannot keep all those promises you're making. You haven't kept them in past years, you're not going to keep them in future.

Don't tell lies to God. Be careful. When you sing songs, don't say, take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold if you don't mean it.

Take my voice and let me sing always, only for my king. I hope so. If you mean it, it's okay.

But if you don't mean it, don't tell lies to God. Don't say, all to Jesus, I surrender. Okay, good.

But it says here, be careful when you're saying something. I believe Christians tell more lies to God on Sunday morning than on any other day of the week. Because they're singing such a lot of things which they don't mean.

Oh God, nobody in the world is as much to me as you are. Some of these fantastic songs written by godly people, you can sing it even if you haven't reached that. Say, Lord, this is my longing.

Then at least you're on it. But if that is not even your longing, when it comes to that verse, keep quiet. Let the others sing it.

Let the other liars sing it, and you be honest. There may be one or two honest people among them who sing also. So, it's very good practical advice there.

Verse 10. Chapter 5, verse 10. He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.

And he who loves abundance, nor he who loves abundance with income. This also is empty. There was a godly man who said that God has made enough in this world for every man's need.

But not enough in this world for even one man's greed. That means a greedy man will never be happy. No matter how much he makes.

Has he become a millionaire? He wants more. He who loves money will never be satisfied with money. I tell you that.

That's why Jesus said you cannot love money and love God. Why? What is the reason? Verse 11. When good things increase, when your salary increases, your expenses increase too.

Absolutely right. So, what's the advantage except that you can look at that what's written in your paycheck. Oh, I earned so much.

But by the end of the month, there's hardly anything left. So, the ordinary working man will not earn so much. Verse 12.

His sleep is pleasant whether he eats little or much. But the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep. Now, we all know that.

If you eat plenty at night, rich food, you can't sleep properly. And the simple man, he's healthier. There's a lot of practical advice here.

Very, very good. I don't have time to explain everything. I'm trying to give you a little appetizer.

You know, when you go to restaurants sometimes, some good restaurants, they have what's initially called an appetizer. It's not the main meal. It's just something to make you have an appetite.

You know, it's like supposing I keep a bowl of salted peanuts here. And I give you just two to eat. And then I go away.

In a few minutes, that whole bowl will disappear. Because you've got a taste of... If you don't have a taste, you may not touch it. But once you get a taste of two or three salted peanuts, boy, you can't leave the rest there.

And what I'm hoping to do in these studies is to give you a little taste. Not to give you the whole meal, because the Holy Spirit wants to teach you himself. So that you can go and discover things yourself from the Holy Spirit after you got this appetizer.

Chapter 6, verse 1. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is prevalent among men. A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing. All that he desires.

But God hasn't given him the ability to eat from them, but somebody else enjoys him. This is vanity and severe affliction. Maybe he loses his health.

He's got such a lot of money, but he's not allowed to eat this, not allowed to eat that. There's a lot of people pursuing money today in the world. Young people who go into all types of professions where their goal is to make a lot of money.

They work hard, perspire, ruin their health, destroy themselves, and they have accumulated their money. Like somebody said, they spend the first half of their life ruining their health, accumulating wealth, and then they spend the next half of their life spending that wealth to regain their health, which they lost in the first half of their life. A lot of it's happening in the world today.

You know, people who work long hours, business people, working, even they have no time for God because they want to make money. So, there's a warning against that here. In chapter 7 to 9, there's a lot of practical advice on how to live in this world.

A good name, verse 1, is better than a good ointment. Good. And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth, if the one has lived for God completely and completed one's course, but not otherwise.

Otherwise, it is not. But the man of this world doesn't understand that. Chapter 7, verse 8, here's a truth, the last part of verse 8, patience of spirit is better than pride of spirit.

Now, I want you to remember that Solomon had a lot of correct understanding. The only thing he didn't very often practice was what he preached. Here's another good verse, verse 10.

Don't ever ask, why were the former days better than these? That's not from wisdom. For us, we must say, the future is going to be better than the past. Don't always look back to the past and say, oh, I had it good in those days.

If you follow the Lord, it can be even better in the future. And here's one of those foolish bits of advice that the wise, clever man of the world says. If you follow the verse 16.

Don't be too righteous and don't be too wicked. You'll destroy yourself. You know, in the world, they say, you have to learn to adjust a little bit.

What they mean by adjust is compromise, tell a lie, give a little bribe. And that's a very popular word in many circles, adjust. Don't be too righteous and don't be too wicked.

A little bit of wickedness is okay. And see, this is the, you know, you have to tell a few black, sorry, white lies in order to get out of this world. Many things like that.

This is the wisdom of the world. Okay. Here's another verse.

Your sisters will get really angry with Solomon for saying this. In chapter 7, verse 28 and 29, he says, I'm still seeking something I haven't found. He says, I found one wise man among a thousand men, but I've not found a single wise man.

He says, I found one wise woman among a thousand women. What does that mean? Does it mean that men are wiser than women? Well, I feel sorry for you if you believe that because I don't believe it. God made man and woman and he didn't make a mistake.

My point is this. When he says, I didn't find one wise woman among a thousand women, who is he referring to? He's referring to his 700 wives. 700 wives and 300 concubines.

What type of women did he have? Naturally, you can't find wisdom among all those flirtatious women that he got married to, but there are many, many godly women who are much wiser than some of you men. I'll tell you that. Okay.

Chapter 8, verse 1. The last part of verse 1, it says, A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his serious face to beam with joy. It's a wonderful verse. The more wisdom you have, the more wisdom it will be seen in your face, radiating with the joy of the Lord.

Verse 11, punishment does not come upon evil people immediately. That's why they keep on doing evil. That's true.

Very true. That if punishment came immediately, we would stop committing many sins quicker. You read that, verse 11 to 14.

But it goes on to say, But even if a sinner extends his life a hundred times, I know it'll finally come to finally go well with those who fear God and those who fear him, verse 12, openly. Chapter 9, verse 8, is a wonderful verse, which we could apply spiritually to our life and our ministry. Let your clothes be always white.

That means that your conscience be always clean. And don't let oil be lacking on your head. Don't ever live without the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 9, verse 13 to 18. It says, The small city which was delivered, not by a powerful king, but by a simple wise man. Yet no one remembered that wise man.

Verse 18, Wisdom is better than strength, better than weapons of war. Don't beat down a man to win him. There's a wise way of winning him.

Have you heard that story of the, the sun and the wind that had a competition? It's one of the parables. I don't know if it's Aesop's parables. The sun and the wind had a competition.

And they said, Okay, there's a man having a coat, wearing a coat down on that road. Let's see who can make him take his coat off. He's the stronger.

So the wind went first and blew and blew and blew and blew. And the more the wind blew, the man clutched his coat even tighter. And you know what the sun did? The sun just became hotter and hotter and hotter and hotter and the man took off his coat immediately.

So who won? Wisdom is better than strength. Be warm and be good to people in love and kindness. That's the way to win them.

Chapter 10, verse 1, it says here, dead flies make a perfumed ointment to stink. A little bit of foolishness can ruin your entire testimony for wisdom, just like if one lizard falls into a good chicken curry. Only one lizard, one act of foolishness can destroy your entire reputation.

That's why we need to be humble and ask God to protect us. Verse 4, it's a beautiful translation in the Living Bible. When your boss gets angry, don't quit your job.

Don't hand in your resignation. Practical advice. Verse 8, if you dig a pit for others, a serpent, he who digs a pit may fall into it and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.

Don't seek to do evil to others because you can harm yourself. Another good bit of advice, verse 10, sharpen your axe. You can do more if your axe is sharp.

Keep your conscience clear. Get to know God's word clearly. Let the sword of the spirit be sharp in your hand.

If your knowledge of God's word is like a blunt sword, you'll have to labor much more. Jesus spoke one word sometimes. He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.

Solve the problem. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God. Solve the problem.

One word, if it's sharp, can accomplish a lot. And another verse, chapter 11, verse 1, give generously to others. Verse 3, where the tree falls, there it lies.

Once you die, you cannot change anymore. And verse 4, don't wait for perfect conditions to serve the Lord. Take every opportunity.

Be instant in season, out of season to serve the Lord. Acknowledge verse 5, that you don't know how God works in every area. Verse 9, a good preacher is one who will teach his people with wisdom, knowledge, he will think, he will search out, he will arrange his message carefully, and he will speak in a pleasant, interesting way.

Verse 10, the words of truth, excellent words, verse 9 and 10, for preachers. And thus we come to the conclusion, verse 13 and 14, fear God and keep his commandments. So there you understood what Ecclesiastes deals with, good and bad, and showing us that with or without God, we may still come to an understanding of certain things correctly, but it will be a mixture of right and wrong, and the total effect will be like it says there, one lizard in a plate of curry, everything is spoiled.

We must be careful to live in humility. Let's pray.

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