

All Is Emptiness Apart From God  
Ecclesiastes 1-12

## MEMORY VERSE

ECCLESIASTES 12:13

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.”

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A wooden or metal rod to use as a scepter, a gift-wrap bow (placed on the end of the rod), a cassette of children’s worship music and a cassette player.

As many Ecclesiastes sun glasses from the template as the number of children in your class copied onto white card stock, clear tape or glue, string, scissors, markers, and colored cellophane.

## ATTENTION GETTER!

### A King or Queen for a Moment

For this game, you will need a wooden or metal rod to use as a scepter, a gift-wrap bow (placed on the end of the rod), a cassette of children’s worship music, and a cassette player.

Have the children sit down in a circle. Play the music and have the children pass around the scepter until the music stops. Tell the children that whoever is holding the scepter is “king or queen for a moment.” They can give a command to the rest of the group and they all must follow it. For example, they could say, “stand up and hop on one foot while scratching your head,” or “make a silly animal noise and act it out.” The rest of the group has to follow the command of the king or queen. After everyone has had a chance to give commands, stop and ask them how it felt to be king or queen for a moment. What would it be like to be the king or queen over a great nation and to have everything you could ever want? What if you did not have the Lord?

Solomon was king over Israel, a great nation. Although he had everything that he could have possibly needed or wanted in his later years, he discovered that, apart from God, life was miserable!

## **LESSON TIME!**

When Solomon became king of Israel, he asked God for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:7-12), and he became the wisest man in the world (1 Kings 4:29-34). His reputation spread throughout the known world and kings and leaders from other nations came to Jerusalem to learn from him.

But with all of his practical insight on life, Solomon failed to follow his own advice; and as a result, his life began a downward spiral. Breaking the commandments of God, he found himself alienated from God, “the Fountain of Living Waters.” In his backslidden condition, he began a quest to find meaning and purpose “under the sun”—in this world apart from God and the spiritual dimension.

So, the focus of Solomon’s writings in Ecclesiastes is on the natural man, apart from God, searching for meaning and fulfillment in life. Denying the spiritual aspect—the need for man to know and be known by God—he was aware only of his natural body appetites and drives; thus, he searched to find reason and purpose through all types of “natural,” worldly experiences. He found himself on a crazy merry-go-round, always searching, but never able to find satisfaction and fill the emptiness inside. **True happiness is found in God alone.**

We have gleaned much from Ecclesiastes if we understand the conclusion of Solomon's search—"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity"—and we spare ourselves the bitterness of our own search for meaning apart from God. Everything apart from God is empty, hollow, and meaningless. **True happiness is found in God alone.**

ECCLESIASTES 1:2, 14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9  
Life leaves us empty

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

King Solomon had everything one could ever want in this world. He had wisdom, power, riches, honor, and reputation. Yet, he begins the book of Ecclesiastes with the declaration that will run throughout the book and ultimately be the conclusion of his search: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” In life apart from God, Solomon saw nothing as worthwhile; everything was futile (lacking serious value). Vanity actually means, “that which vanishes” or emptiness.

Solomon describes life as both empty and “grasping for the wind.” When the wind blows by, we can feel it; but, we can’t catch hold of it, or keep it. Everything we try to hold on to in this life is like the wind--it blows by us. Though Solomon tried to find satisfaction and meaning in life from the joy of accomplishment and the pursuit of pleasure, his final conclusion was that it was meaningless and a chasing after the wind.

## **Looking in the Mirror**

Solomon was a very wise man, but unfortunately he lost sight of the Lord in his older years. He began to look at himself and others instead of the Lord. The Bible tells us that we need to look at the mirror of God’s Word if we want to understand what is really true in life (James 1:25). Let’s play a fun game to remind us to “mirror” the Lord, not ourselves or others.

Have the children form pairs. Decide who will be the person doing the action and who will be the person “in the mirror.” The person in the mirror has to mimic all of the actions of the other person. The children should sit down facing each other. They should look at each other in the eyes and not remove their eyes from one another’s. Have the child doing the action begin and the other child mirror them. After a couple of minutes, switch roles.

Next, gather the group together again and ask them if it was easy or difficult to be the mirror. Is it sometimes difficult to mirror the Lord? What are some ways that we can grow in mirroring Jesus?

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-14, 24, 25; 7:23-25; 8:16,17  
Life leaves us searching

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity.

I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?”

I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.

I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.

So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor.

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who succeeds the king?—Only what he has already done.

Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all.

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise”; but it was far from me.

As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?

I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.

When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night,

then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

Imagine if you had all the money and power you could ever want. How would you use your wealth and power? Solomon used his wealth and power to embark on an endless quest for life’s meaning. First, he tried pursuing pleasure (vs. 1-3). Then, he began grand public works programs, bought slaves, had many wives and concubines, set his mind on complex matters, became extremely wealthy, organized musical groups and supported the arts (verses 4-10). But none of these things gave him the satisfaction he was



seeking (verse 11). His search for happiness left him empty. His great wealth, power, position, wives, and accomplishments could not fill the void he had inside.

Some of the pleasures Solomon sought were wrong and some were worthy, but even the worthy pursuits left him empty. All the pleasure money could buy could not bring him happiness (5:10). Yet, the world tells us to demand happiness, to do all we can to attain it, and to make personal satisfaction our chief goal in life. Though many people spend all their energy pursuing pleasure in hope of finding happiness; happiness does not come by direct pursuit. Only God can fill the emptiness inside. The Psalmist wrote, "In your presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever" (Psalm 16:11b).

Even Solomon, in his great wisdom, concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun (8:16, 17). With access to the entire world's wisdom, the wisest man would know very little. There seems to always be more questions than answers to life. Human wisdom will leave us empty and void of knowing the true meaning of happiness. In fact, wisdom apart from God brings grief rather than satisfaction. Our intellect will not satisfy our desire for fulfillment in life. **True happiness is found in God alone.**

**ECCLESIASTES 3:11-15; 5:18 - 6:2; 12:13,14**

**Life leads us to trust God**

**He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.**

**I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives,**

and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.

That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.

Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.

As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.

For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

What did Solomon discover through his long, painful search for life's meaning? Life apart from God is empty and meaningless--it cannot deliver satisfaction. The quest for happiness is an elusive goal. God would spare us the painful and bitter experiences that Solomon endured in order to come to his truthful conclusion: "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

God created man for fellowship with Himself. He has a vacuum inside that only God can fill. He will never be satisfied apart from God; for his thirst is a spiritual one. In Romans 8 we read, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope." We are wise if the emptiness and driving thirst we experience causes us to look beyond life "under the sun" (the things this world can offer) and to the one who created us. Jesus came to restore the relationship of man to his Creator. In John we read, "...Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37,38). Jesus promises us an abundant (full, rich) life if we will embrace Him: In John 10:10, Jesus states: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." **True happiness is found in God alone.**

Though much of Solomon's writings in Ecclesiastes are the flawed conclusions of a man relating to life apart from God, chapter 12:13 is a good conclusion, "Fear God and keep His commandments." Those of us who lack purpose and direction in life should turn to God, respecting Him and following His principles for living. None of us are exempt from this responsibility, for God will review every person's life to determine how he or she has responded to Him (verse 14).

Solomon was right: true happiness cannot be achieved. It must be "received" through a right relationship with God. End your search with Him, and you will find endless joy.

## **Ecclesiastes Sun Glasses**

For this craft, you will need as many templates as the number of children in your class copied onto white card stock, clear tape or glue, string, scissors, markers and colored cellophane. Before class, copy the sunglasses template onto white card stock. Make enough copies for all of the children in your class. Pass them out to the children and have them cut out the three pieces for the sunglasses. Allow the children to color or decorate their glasses as they wish.

Next, tape the sides of the glasses to the front. Poke a hole through the holes indicated on the sides of the glasses. Place string through the holes (long enough for the children to wear the glasses around their necks). Cut out the areas for the eyes. Cut colored cellophane in large enough pieces to cover the holes. Tape or glue the cellophane to the glasses.

How we see life is important. Just like a pair of sunglasses will make us see differently, what we believe will make a difference in how we see life and the conclusions we make. Solomon writes Ecclesiastes from the perspective, the outlook, of a natural man seeking meaning only in this life, "under the sun." As Christians, we see life from a different perspective (outlook). Taking into

account the spiritual dimension of man, we realize that the thirst man has is for God. Those who embrace a relationship with God through Jesus Christ will find life rich with meaning and purpose.

## **PRAYER**

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment and surrender of their lives to the Lord in order to find true meaning and happiness. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.

