

A Practical Study of ECCLESIASTES

“Where Your Heart and Treasure Meet”

Study Number One –Is That All There Is?

Foundation for Mid-Life – Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

Well, as you're aware of the fact, my series on the book of Ecclesiastes is not the same as what most people write on the book of Ecclesiastes.

Most people take the three books that are written by Solomon and sequence them this way:

They saw Song of Solomon was written when he was young and in love.

Proverbs was written when he was really living a life that was in fellowship with God. It's wisdom.

Ecclesiastes is an old man that is bitter and resentful over life and he's getting ready to flick it in.

My thesis is this: Song of Solomon was written and is Solomon and Shulamith. It is his first love experience. It is the manual on physical and sexual love in the marriage relationship, and should be taught in light of that. And it's been bound by many years of allegorying, it's been allegorized into being something

else than what it really is.

I mean, God created love. God created sex and therefore He gives a manual of love between a man and a woman.

He writes Proverbs when he is old and he is musing. And he's looking back on a life that he has lived and he's got a right to write. He's getting close to the end and so he writes to the son. He gives wisdom. He gives insight.

And he writes Ecclesiastes when everything breaks loose. He writes it in the middle of his life when the pressures of the kingdom are about to blow him away; when the pressures of moral responsibilities, he can see deteriorating in his life.

He's got all the money he needs. He's got all the fame and all the power and the all the success. In essence he can write his own check as far as the rest of his life is concerned. But he's not a happy and fulfilled man.

He's going through the period of wondering, is it worth it? Is there any real meaning or purpose to life? And you've got to answer those questions effectively before you can run the last half.

And so I'm saying, let's try in this study—just for fun—to drop the book of Ecclesiastes into the mid-life. A lot's being written about it.

Jim Conway wrote a book on *Men in Mid Life Crisis* then his

wife Sally came along and wrote *How to Handle Your Husband When He's in the Mid Life Crisis*.

And from many different sources are coming books and materials on this very thing.

One guy humorously put it this way:

“You can tell that you’re at the beginning of a mid-life crisis when you’ve tried to put your foot in your shorts three times and you missed on all three.”

(source unknown)

Or you wake up face down on the pavement.

Or you put your bra on backwards and it fits better.

Boy that’s a classic.

You call a suicide prevention bureau and they put you on hold.

You see a 60-Minutes news team waiting in your office.

Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.

You turn the news on and they’re showing you emergency routes out of the city.

Your twin sister forgot your birthday.

You wake up and discover your waterbed broke and then you realize that you don't have a waterbed.

Your car horn goes off accidentally and remains stuck as you follow a group of Hell's Angels on the freeway.

Your boss tells you not to bother to take off your coat.

You wake up and your braces are locked together.

You walk to work and find your dress is stuck in the back of your pantyhose. That is a classic.

You call your answering service and they tell you it's none of your business.

You put both contact lenses into the same eye.

And your pet rock snaps at you.

Ogden Nash said it so well. He says:

“Middle age is when you're sitting at home on Saturday night and the telephone rings and you hope it isn't for you.”
(source unknown)

Someone said:

Middle age is that time in life when you hear two voices calling you. One is saying “why not?” and the other one is

saying “why bother?”
(source unknown)

I saw a great statement the other day. It says:

Our generation never got a break. When we were young they taught us to respect our elders. And now that we’re older they tell us to listen to the kids.
(source unknown)

And then I saw a great t-shirt:

I’m getting revenge. I’m going to live old enough to be a problem to my kids.
(source unknown)

When I was a boy I used to do what my dad told me to do. Now I have to do what my boy wants. My problem is, when am I going to get to do what I want to do?

I told my Aggie son when he came home from A&M last weekend when he wanted to borrow my car—my kids show up when the new cars come around. In the ministries I’m provided graciously by an Oldsmobile dealership in Fort Worth four cars a year for the ministry. And so the new one just came and naturally my son is waiting for the keys to take his sweetheart out for a date. That was two weeks ago.

The only problem is, whenever he takes that car, I get his. He has worked all summer on a little MG Convertible that I mean

flat hums. Here I am driving around Tyler with the roof down, enjoying my own private mid-life crisis, driving my little yellow MG Convertible. I told him, I said “Man, that is fantastic.”

But if you want to see what it is like to go from the ridiculous to the sublime, he left on Sunday. On Monday it was Pearl’s turn to get the new car. And so I’m driving the old van. Now the old van has got a 106,000 miles on it. And I’m coming up close to the post office and all of a sudden there is a hesitation and the fuel pump has clogged and it exploded so loud that it blew the muffler out from underneath the thing and blew the radiator hoses off the front. And everybody said “My goodness! Did you survive it?”

As I’m standing there in the street seeing this steaming mass, I looked at myself. You know, that old van is a great picture of everything blowing apart. Somehow it gets clogged up and it just happens.

What is it that creates this sort of enigma that’s among us today? Why is it that people have a crisis? Well I want to say this first of all, the reason they didn’t have a crisis in the past generation is there wasn’t an option. I mean, when things got rough, you just had to tough it out—stick in there and stay with it. You didn’t have the option of grabbing for all the gusto because you only go around once in life.

You didn’t have the option that it’s macho to leave your responsibilities and go in some other direction. That’s only in

this generation that we face those kind of things.

If I don't like it I can leave. Or if I am not fulfilled, after all I'm the most important thing in this. We have become so selfish that we've ceased to be servants.

Now what makes a mid-life crisis so effective in really totally devastating an individual? Well first of all, a guy has four enemies.

Number one, Jim Conway says, his first foe is his own body.

I mean, by mid-life you're starting to slow down. The print's getting smaller on the page. Never enough light in the room is there? You begin to wear bifocals and trifocals. Boy my optometrist told me the other day "Man, you're getting mature." And I've got to wear those things now where you look in one direction to see it down there and you look out there and see in a different kind of glass.

And then you begin to play doubles in tennis instead of singles. But you know, you just don't have the same old zip anymore. The body starts to slow down and you don't like it.

I mean, the pretty girls now begin to say "Sir." It's, they don't even give you a second look. "Yes sir. No sir."

The second enemy to a guy is his work.

Someone said: "What men find in their 30s, they acquire in

their 40s, and throw away in their 50s.”

In a lot of ways, that’s the way it is.

Who wants to be president of Amalgamated Chemical anyway?! I mean, why?

And then the third enemy is the wife and family. “I mean, what happens to \$70,000 a year? Three cars, a house, a lake cottage—I feel like a big red apple. Everybody’s eating off of me and all I got left is the core.”

“Why don’t I just shuck the whole responsibilities, get a couple of sleeping bags and a couple of motorcycles and a young chick and tour the country?” And that’s flat what a lot of guys are doing in dropping out of society because they just can’t stand the pressure of all of these teaming responsibilities that they’ve put upon themselves.

And really the fourth enemy according to Jim Conway is God Himself.

Jim said as he was going through this, God looks like a mean old man with his long, bony finger hanging down over heaven saying “You despicable, lustful, disgraceful, selfish, lazy Christian!” And so nobody’s happy with him.

I was talking to one guy on the phone the other day. He said, “You know, I just wish I could make somebody happy just once. I just wish I could make somebody happy just once.” He’s

in the midst of all kinds of traumatic circumstances.

But what is life to the straight guy? You work 50 weeks so you can have a two week vacation. Huh? Every day you answer the bell. It's the same song, second verse, a little bit louder and a whole lot worse.

Now having set the stage for all of this, I would like for us to see how this fits in to a real mid-life crisis and how Ecclesiastes will just jump off the page at you when you put this kind of focus on it.

Somebody has said that when you face a mid-life crisis, there are probably five things that are true:

1. You've become selfish. You cease to be a servant of others. You start thinking of what it's costing you. And whenever you take your eyes off of the Lord and get them on yourself, you're going to face some real shaky ground.
2. You get weary in well-doing. You just flat get tired.
3. In the marriage relationship, it's a sorry intimate sexual relationship. It is deteriorated to the point where it is sound and fury signifying nothing.
4. Communication is broken because we're going opposite directions.
5. Love has really grown cold.

When you set those five things on the stage along with any kind of trauma at work and the pressures that come from just living, you've got a real problem.

Now who's the most vulnerable? When does a mid-life crisis happen? Well you can have it happen from 25 to 75. I was running with a guy the other day and he says "I had mine at 28." My goodness! Isn't this amazing that they can have it that early in their lives.

Really, basically, you can say this:

It comes by old age and wanting to avoid it.

As I saw Ecclesiastes beginning to jump off the page, I just asked myself the question: You know, what is the stage that this sets? And I came up with 15 observations at this point from reading Conway's book and a bunch of the others and then doing Ecclesiastes.

1. Old age and wanting to avoid it.
2. 20-25 years of marriage.
3. Kids are grown.
4. Your job security's in jeopardy. Perhaps you're going to be replaced by a younger man or by a computer or something.

5. Success.
6. A need for new challenges and new opportunities, new experiences.
7. Facing failure and realize that you've got a lot of unrealized goals in your life that you set out in the beginning that you've not been able to perform.
8. Physical health is starting to fall apart. My heart's palpitating a tad. You've gotten overweight and you really don't care anymore. And you're just kind of blah.
9. Finding real meaning and purpose.
10. Weary of responsibility.
11. Tired of all the hassles.
12. Desire to be free of the gnawing problems.
13. Desire to start over in every area of your life and make a brand new beginning.
14. The futility of your present activity.
15. The frustration of getting older and not having made a million.

All of those things joined together to set the stage for a real problem.

Now what I'd like to do, having kind of given you this and I did this because nobody else has done it. I'm traveling new territory in this book and I set up what a mid-life crisis is so you can understand it. And then I want to show you how I believe Solomon's going through. So thank you for bearing with me in giving me this long introduction to set the stage for what we're going to do now as we look at the text.

Alright, let me set the stage for the text.

King Solomon is the third king of the kingdom in Israel. In 982 B.C. the kingdom divided and you had Israel in the north and Judea in the south. But before that, you had three guys who were king—king over the whole land.

Remember the people said "Samuel, we want to be like everybody else. We want to have a king." And so they got a guy 6 foot 10. They got Saul as their king. He was head and shoulders over everybody else. He blew it away. Finally ended up actually a suicide in the field of battle against the Philistines.

God took a man after God's own heart—David. And he was king. He took the kingdom, militarily and materially, and extended it to its greatest point because he was a man after God's own heart.

Then Solomon, David's son, took the reins at the time that the kingdom was the wealthiest—when it was extended to the nth degree. And it is under his leadership that the kingdom finally ends up divided. As you know the story of Solomon, he was a man who had a lot of wisdom but he did a lot of things too that made you kind of glad that he was finished when he was done.

Solomon is the author. He wrote Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

Now Solomon as the writer of this book and he's giving it to us, I think he is telling us what he's been through.

Now sometimes when you're studying a book, little phrases are going to jump out at you. Let me give you three. They'll always be in the text and you'll see them several times.

1. The first word is "VANITY"—or in my text on there, it's "meaningless." That occurs 37 times in these chapters—the word "meaningless."
2. You'll have the phrase "UNDER THE SUN" (S-U-N)—that will occur 29 times.
3. And then you'll have the phrase "I SAID IN MY HEART"—and I didn't even count the number of times that that's there.

1. “meaningless”
2. “under the sun” and
3. “I said in my heart.”

Every one of those things are things that are ingredients involved in a man or a woman who’s saying “Why am I here? What’s this all about? What is the meaning and purpose in life?”

It’s MEANINGLESS!—all of this stuff I’m doing.

It’s UNDER THE SUN!—eat drink and be merry for tomorrow I die!

And I SAID IN MY HEART—that’s when I got a moment of wisdom about what I think ought to be done in a situation.

So all three of those are big flashing lights to tell you that this guy is in a situation where he’s trying to find meaning.

Now what do you do when you’re trying to find meaning and direction in your life? Well you try a lot of different things, don’t you?

And really the book of Ecclesiastes is Solomon making a lot of experiments.

He’s going to try to find meaning through RELIGION.

He's going to try to find meaning through WOMEN.

He's going to try to find meaning through WINE.

Through MATERIALISM.

He's going to try to find meaning through WISDOM.

Through MORALITY and through all the rest of it.

A man in a mid-life crisis is at the point where he starts doing a lot of testing because time is running out.

You know, that's just like Tom Landry. When the Cowboys go into a ball game, they have a game plan for that particular team.

If they ever get to play again, I thank God for this strike because I've got more people in my Monday night class than I've ever had before. I told those people in Camden, Arkansas Monday I hadn't seen some of them for the 10 years I've been coming up there. And there they were. And I said "Thank God you're here tonight. I'm going to pack it all in and nail you to the wall."

Probably going to be my only shot but I'm going to get one more week. They're shutting it down again so I'm thrilled to death at the reprieve. It's really neat to have the Lord sovereignly work so many of these things out so that we get

the message, even to Monday night football audience.

Let's say that Landry comes to half-time, ok? The score is 21 to zip in favor of the other team. Alright, what choice does Landry have? You either stay with the game plan or you scrap it and you write a new one and go for all the marbles.

That's exactly what happens to a person sometime in his or her life. You've been nailed to the wall and you're behind 21 to nothing, it's time to scrap the game plan or to stay with it and hang in there and watch it produce because you believe in what you're doing and where you're going.

And so the choice is there. This is added to with the fact that as I'm coming down the backside of life, I'm at half-time and I'm heading into the last half, I don't want to miss anything.

And so I want to try everything. And I want to go for all the marbles. I want to be sure I don't miss a thing.

1. Now, the only reason Solomon has this problem is first of all, he's seeing life selfishly rather than socially. He's forgotten to think about the kingdom and he's started thinking about himself.
2. He sees life apart from God rather than controlled by God. God doesn't enter into the control of his life.
3. He sees the grave as the end. Everything is "under the sun."

And you remember, Paul when he's writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15 says "if you have hope only in this life, you are of all people, the most to be pitied"—most miserable when you leave life just "under the sun."

Swindoll wrote a good book called *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* and he describes what many of us experience in our lives. He says:

Competition requires high level performance. People demands...tempers flare; stomachs turn; ulcers bleed; hearts break; nerves unravel; minds low...financial strain, inflation, traffic jams, unemployment, unplanned pregnancies, failure at school, obesity, smog, surgery, loneliness, alcoholism, drugs and death. Subtract the support of the family unit, divide by dozens of different opinions, and you come up with a formula that [is] making of madness. Block all avenues of escape and you have an enormous powder keg with a terribly short fuse. (source unknown)

And that's the experience of so many.

Dobson, as he's writing his book *Straight Talk to Men and Wives*, has a chapter on this particular crisis. And he says:

You know when I hit the crisis? He says when I was sitting along with 250 of my peers, one of our guys had just died. And on that occasion they gave him a 5 minute eulogy and a 1 minute period of silence and then it was business as usual.

And I asked myself the question: Am I climbing this ladder? Am I living this life? And am I spilling my insides for a 5 minute eulogy and a 1 minute period of silence? And it's business as usual. When it all comes down to it, is that all there is?

You know Lord, if it is, it's hardly worth the effort.

Jeff Wells and John Lodwick have been buddies all through their years of schooling. They attended Dallas Seminary, went to the Northwest. They were going to be Olympic hopefuls until Carter had the boycott that took place. And that was a tragic thing because those guys had trained to be in the Olympics in 1980 and run the marathon.

And John, being interviewed after the boycott, said this: "This has shown us the futility of putting all of our eggs in a basket that won't last."

(source unknown)

If you go through a mid-life crisis, it's only showing you that you've been building your house on the sand. You are being tested for unworthy goals. You had a wrong set of values for your life and now you are reaping what you have sown.

It was Fred Allen who said: "You know, we sow our wild oats and then we pray for a crop failure when we meet the Lord face to face."

(source unknown)

And the chickens will come home to roost. And the mid-life crisis happens to the guy that drives himself like a workaholic, and neglects his family, who pours himself into all kinds of projects that don't really involve people. And he's never really close, he's a machine. And because of that, he faces this tragedy.

And I think Solomon, because of the pressures of the kingdom and everything else, actually tells you in this book what it's like to go through one.

Now let's look at the verses.

I've called study #1: Is That All There Is?

This is the foundation for the mid-life crisis.

v. 1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

That first verse you have THREE THINGS.

1. You've got his TITLE.
 2. You've got the FAMILY that he belongs to.
 3. You've got his POSITION.
1. Alright, what's his TITLE?

He's the "teacher."

He's the *coholeth*.

He is the preacher.

He is the communicator.

2. Secondly, what's his FAMILY?

He's the "son of David."

He is in the Messianic line.

He has qualified as a king.

3. What's his POSITION?

He is "king in Jerusalem."

Now let me tell you, many times you will go and hear people speak and you'll hear what they have to say because of where they've been or what they've experienced. And you like that because you know they know what they're talking about. Well, I want to tell you, this guy knows what he's talking about.

I mean, he's at the top of the ladder as far as power is concerned—prestige, money, things that are available to him—he can really talk to us. And we learn here in this first verse why he has a right to speak.

Now you have no problem hearing his message when you get to verse 2.

v. 2 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.

“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

Now when you read that verse, what do you discern?

“Everything is meaningless.” It is there for **FOUR TIMES**.

To Solomon, this is what it is. When it’s all said and done, here it is.

What does it mean “meaningless?” It’s kind of like taking the cotton candy in your mouth—it disappears when you put your mouth on it.

It’s like when we were kids, we always get this bubble stuff and fill the air with bubbles. But every time you reached out to try to touch one, you know, it disappeared in thin air.

It’s a bubble that pops. It’s cotton candy that disappears when you try to bite into it. There’s no content.

Life is as empty as possible. It’s utter futility. It’s emptiness.

Verse 3—I want you to notice three things that sets the stage and I said “Is that all there is?” Here’s the foundation for the mid-life crisis. Alright, there are going to be three things.

Number one is in verse 3:

v. 3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

There is a KEY QUESTION.

What he's saying right now is where he is, what is the gain in everything I'm doing? That's the first question.

There's a KEY PHRASE: "under the sun."

What is the gain from all of this?

Luke 12:19, 20 went right there.

Luke 12:19, 20

And I will say to my soul, "Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease. Eat, drink and be merry." But God said unto him, "Thou fool. This night thy soul shall be required of thee. And whose shall those things be?"

There's no gain in all of that.

Now, he's going to take that question. What is the gain in all that I'm doing? And he's going to illustrate it in the next three or four verses.

This just falls together so incredibly and so easily you just can't believe it.

Look at verse 4.

v. 4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

I mean, we just work. We just live our three score and ten and generations come and generations go and the earth just stays here. People come on the scene and they pass off. What's the gain from all of that?

What does a man gain from all of his toil? We rake the earth. We plant the earth. We build dams. We build lakes. We develop contours. It just keeps going.

One day I was sweating like crazy in the backyard, pushing the lawnmower. We've got a big lot to mow. And I thought to myself, life is like mowing the lawn. You no sooner get done with it but you've got to plan on doing it again.

The women don't say that though. They say, no, life is like washing dishes. Especially when you've got teenage kids around the house. You never get them all washed.

There's always dirty dishes coming out of the bedroom or somewhere else. Glasses sitting around. Life is like washing the dishes. It is monotonous. It is a routine that never seems like anything is really accomplished. That's what life is like to

most people.

Verse 5.

Now watch him use NATURE.

What is the gain from all this? “Generations come and generations go.” Now he’s going to use nature in **THREE WAYS**.

v. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

First of all he’s going to say:

“The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.”

I mean, on a 24-hour schedule. It just rises in the east and it sets in the west. Up it comes and down it goes. That’s his first one.

Now look at verse 6.

v. 6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

What’s he saying?

Life is like a treadmill. Life is like a giant merry-go-round. You get off where you get on and you haven't been anywhere. You just cannot express the utter futility, the monotony of the daily routine.

Now he uses one more nature illustration—verse 7.

v. 7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

What's he done?

He uses the SUN.

He uses the WIND.

He uses the RIVERS and the STREAMS.

v. 8 All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

He says:

“All things are wearisome, more than one can say.”

Then he turns to the BODY for his next illustration:

“The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of

hearing.”

You see the monotony of it all—in the sun and in the wind.
And you see it in the human body.

I can never SEE enough.

I can never HEAR enough.

It is all so meaningless and so wearisome.

My son-in-law Mark collects little comic strips sometimes. And he was hearing me expound this and he brought me this little *Animal Crackers*, which is just really neat.

This is the cow.

In the first frame this is what the cow is saying: “What a drag I graze from dawn until sunset.”

Frame number two: “And I do this in order to have the strength to get up the next day and graze from dawn until sunset.”

Frame number three: “This vicious cycle is making me nervous and frustrated.”

Frame number four: “I think I’ll take a break and buy myself a pack of gum.”

Oh, well said. What is your treadmill?

It is summarized in FIVE WORDS:

1. you WORK—right? Tomorrow morning you've got to work—go to the pit. Why do you work?
2. to get MONEY. Why do you want money?
3. so you can buy FOOD. Why do you want to buy food?
4. so you can gain STRENGTH. Why do you need strength?
5. so you can WORK.

So it's work, money, food, strength and work!

It's a life of quiet desperation, no matter how you look at it, you're running around in circles.

And that's what he's saying. It is a meaningless round of activities. What am I gaining from this?

Verse 9. This is...I just can't believe what he's saying here. This book is set back there in the Old Testament and has been so dull and so boring until you put it in this context. It's unreal. You're going to see it every week. It's just going to jump off of the page at you. You don't even have to make it work.

v. 9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

I tell you, when you're running around in circles, there's nothing new on the landscape.

I get teased over the fact that I like to run a lot. And I get teased, secondly, that I do most of my running on a track.

When you get hit by a car you run on the track. And you buy yourself a lap counter. And if it means running around that track 40 times to get your ten miles in, you're going to run around that track 40 times.

But I have found that many of those runs that I see the same spots on the track and nothing is new. Because I'm running around the track—in circles. And when I continue to run in a circle you never see anything new. You never break out of your orbit.

I was listening to Grady Nutt's tape the other day. You know, he's the prime minister of humor. He was talking, in the end of his tape, about the fact that his whole life was an experience of going to church and being roasted like a weenie over a fire. Burn, sinner, burn! As if he was hung over hell.

And he said that's all he ever learned. He said it was circle after circle after circle.

He says you can take goldfish and you could put them in a little bowl on the table and they'll swim in circles. You can take those same goldfish and you can put them in the vastness of a pond and they'll continue to swim in their tight little circle, never discovering the vastness of the pond.

And it's so easy when you get frustrated with work and with food and with material things, and strength to run in tight little circles and never break out of the orbit to discover the vastness of God out there—who loves you and has something abundant and fulfilling for you as an individual.

The danger of the crisis is to having life just being one round of activity after another. Same song, tenth verse, a little bit louder and a whole lot worse.

He says: "What will be, will be again."

v. 10 Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

And I thought of that little phrase: "So what else is new?"

The second thing that frustrates him is there's nothing new.

The first thing:

1. there is NO GAIN.

Secondly:

2. there is NOTHING NEW.

There's no gain when you're running around in circles and secondly, there's nothing new in this kind of existence.

And then the last thing is in verse 11:

v. 11 There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

And the third thing to top it all off is:

3. nobody's going to remember what I did.

There's no gain. There's nothing new. And nobody's going to remember what I did anyway in the next generation, so why all the hassle?

Now I tell you, those three things set the stage for having a real testing time in your life.

There is no gain. There is nothing new. And there is no remembrance of me and I'm getting older.

Now the rest of the verses just illustrate that.

v. 12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

v. 13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

Isn't that tragic? That is not a Christian.

“What a heavy burden”—shame on him. He’s telling you where he is.

1 Peter 5:7

Cast all your care upon him, for he cares for you.

Psalm 55:22

Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you.

The Lord Jesus says:

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come unto me all ye weary and heavy-laden, you’ve got heavy burdens on you, take my yoke upon you and learn of me. For I am meek and lowly of heart and you shall find rest for your souls.”

The apostle Paul goes through so much and he calls it just the opposite. He says:

2 Corinthians 4:17

These light afflictions are but for a moment and they are earning an eternal weight of glory.

It's like trouble and heavy glory. And you say "But he doesn't know what I'm going through."

Well, read 2 Corinthians 4 and 2 Corinthians 11, you realize he is. It's just how you relate to all of this that you get your perspective.

In the next verse you have all three of the phrases together.

So verse 14 is a critical verse.

v. 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

"I have seen all the things that are done under the sun;"—there is one—"all of them are meaningless,"—there's number two. And the third one is—"a chasing after the wind."

It's something you never can get ahold of.

v. 15 What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

In spite of man's grandest efforts, some crooked matters will

remain unstraightened.

v. 16 I thought to myself, “Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.”

v. 17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

v. 18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

As I look at that passage, the three things that bind it together are:

1. What is the gain?
2. There’s nothing new.
3. And nobody’s going to remember me.

Those are the three things that set the stage but here are the five lessons that I got out of this study.

Lesson #1...You can just turn your front page over and write on the back and then you’ll have them in your notes, if you’d

like to do that.

Lesson #1: Everything is meaningless without Him.

Everything is meaningless without Him. When you fail to take God into account, everything you're doing is meaningless.

It is what is above the sun that really counts, isn't it?

He's always talking under it.

Lesson #2: A man receives no gain for his labor when it is for selfish ends.

A man receives no gain for his labor when it is for selfish ends.

Can I give you a couple of verses along that line?

Philippians 1:21

For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 3:7, 8

I counted everything but lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

A man receives no gain for his labor when it's for selfish ends.

Now the third one is going to be tricky and I'm going to spell it

as we go along.

Here's the third lesson.

Lesson #3: There's nothing new under the sun (S-U-N), but coming to know the Son (S-O-N) makes all things new.

There's nothing new under the sun (S-U-N), but coming to know the Son (S-O-N) makes all things new.

And you can put 2 Corinthians 5:17 there with that if you want to.

Lesson #4: Though man doesn't remember us, God never forgets.

Though man never remembers us, God never forgets. Your life is a computer print-out. You're going to see it all on video when you get there.

God is just going to file it in the slot. The day of your birth till the day of your death, God never forgets.

We must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Though man does not remember, God never forgets.

Lesson #5—especially if some of you hear tonight without a personal relationship to Jesus Christ:

Lesson #5: Life is one gigantic frustration filled with futility.

Life is one gigantic frustration filled with futility without a relationship to Jesus.

Life is one gigantic frustration filled with futility without a relationship to Jesus Christ.

I trust that, as we bring this time to a close and we have time to reflect and think for just a minute, we would realize how vulnerable we are at this point.

What is the answer?

The little hymn writer puts it so well:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

(source unknown)

Get your eyes off yourself! With Peter you're going to sink in the waves the minute you start looking at the circumstances around you. And get your eyes back on the Lord.

The key to getting through rough times is to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. And to run with patience the race that's set before you.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, this book has been back here in the Old Testament for so many, many years. Looked on as a book which is the speculations of a natural man but really it seems to fit so well to what we're talking about in a mid-life crisis. I pray as we go from week to week, we will marvel at some of the statements that are so relevant and so practical and they just step off of the page and speak to us. And I pray that we have had the appetite wetted enough to have a deep desire to continue to study and see how this book all fits together. And that ultimately we will find the real answers to meaning and purpose in life. Thank You for each one who's come and thank You for the encouragement that is ours by the fact that they're here. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Study Number One –Is That All There Is?

Foundation for Mid-Life – Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

NOTES

v. 1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

v. 2 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

v. 3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

v. 4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

v. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

v. 6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

v. 7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

v. 8 All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

v. 9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

v.10 Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

v.11 There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

v.12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

v.13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

v.14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

v.15 What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

v.16 I thought to myself, “Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.”

v.17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

v.18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-18 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. Go through the eighteen verses and underline the word “meaningless” and the phrases “under the sun” and “a chasing after the wind.” This will help to understand what the author is trying to express.

3. What is the key question that is asked in verse 3?

4. How does Solomon describe life in verses 4-7?

5. What one word in verse 8 is a contributing factor in the mid-life crisis?

6. Why doesn't Solomon see his own life as making a vital contribution, according to verses 9-11?

7. What are some of Solomon's conclusions, according to verses 12-14?

8. Summarize Solomon's reflections in verses 16-18.

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Everything is meaningless without Him.

LESSON #2: A man receives no gain for his labor when it is for selfish ends.

LESSON #3: There is nothing new under the sun but coming to know the Son makes us a new creation in Christ Jesus. “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” We look forward with great anticipation to a new heaven and a new earth.

LESSON #4: Though man does not remember us, God never forgets. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

LESSON #5: Life is one gigantic frustration filled with futility without a relationship to Jesus Christ.