

**Ecclesiastes: Chasing the Wind**  
**Part 4: Managing Chasing the Wind**  
*Ecclesiastes 6:10-9:18*

**Wisdom: faith and obedience in context.**

**We need to hear what the author is not saying.**

**Be present.**

- *Psalm 16:11*

**Be moderate.**

- *Philippians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 16:14*

**God is God.**

- *Proverbs 9:10, 29:25*

**...and then we die.**

**...and then we die...so enjoy life!**

- *John 11:25-26*



## **Ecclesiastes<sup>1</sup>**

### **Chasing the Wind, Part Four**

### **Managing Chasing the Wind**

*(Gondola ride story with the pastoral staff.)*

Did you know that the top ten most common fears include:

- Acrophobia: Fear of heights
- Aero or aviophobia: Fear of flying
- Astraphobia: Fear of thunder and lightning
- Nyctophobia: Fear of dark places
- Claustrophobia: Fear of being trapped in a small space

We had half of the top ten most common fears in that dark and stormy confined box for seventy-minutes! Researchers say that when you add phobias together, it's not one anxiety plus one anxiety plus one anxiety; it increases anxiety exponentially. You'd think we'd have been in full on panic mode! I'll tell you what happened later. But if you think about those fears I mentioned, you realize that at the heart of every one of them is that we have no control over the circumstances.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is called "The Teacher" and is trying to help us deal with the fears and anxieties of this life; the stress that results when we realize that most of life is out of our control. Just when we think we've got a handle on things, it slips through our fingers like smoke. Still we spend our lives trying to find meaning in all these things and they leave us empty. It's all meaningless. That's a key theme of this book – the word is used 38 times. The author calls it "chasing the wind." Life is an enigma or a paradox – like smoke, it appears solid, but when you try and grab onto it you find there's nothing there. It's like how there's so much beauty and goodness in the world, but just when you start to enjoy it, tragedy strikes and it all goes up in smoke.<sup>2</sup> Or how we all have a strong sense of justice and fairness, but all the time bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. So life can be unstable and unpredictable, or, in the teacher's words, "chasing the wind," and so we are left with these fears and anxieties. How do we deal with that? It takes true wisdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Resources include: Stephen Bennet, *New Beacon Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes/Lamentations, A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, MO, 2010)

Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984)

Dennis Kinslaw, "The Book of Ecclesiastes," in *Job-Song of Solomon*, vol. 2, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968)

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ecclesiastes

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996)

<sup>2</sup> <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ecclesiastes/>

This book is part of the Bible's wisdom literature. It's wanting us to get wisdom. We are defining...

### **Wisdom as faith and obedience in context.**

Can you say that with me? Here's what that means: that we will continue to have faith in God and obey him, regardless of how good or bad things might look in our context, because we are trusting in God's context. God has the bigger picture that we can't see, and we know he loves us, so we will have faith, and we will obey him.

But when we read Ecclesiastes, it seems cynical and depressing and hopeless. How in the world could that encourage us to have wisdom? That's on purpose, because the key to understanding Ecclesiastes is that...

### **We need to hear what the author is *not* saying.**

If everything is meaningless and out of our control, it means there is something that IS meaningful and someone who IS in control. The teacher is trying to get us to fix our minds on God. Remember what we've been saying: fixing our minds on God fixes our minds. That's why we are spending this time in this book, because it seems our social and personal fears and anxieties are at an all-time high – at least in our country. Thankfully, God has the answer for our anxiety.

As I've been studying and preparing these messages, I will tell you the dilemma that pastors face: the Bible is so rich and deep and wide with meaning and story and hope; these words are packed with eternal value. There are twelve chapters in this book, and I could spend a month of Sundays in each chapter. So as a preacher, I either dive deep into every chapter, or I try to give us an overview and context of what God is saying to us. That second option is what we are doing in this series. So it works best if, after you hear these messages, you go home and read the sections that we are talking about. What we're really doing is making space for the Holy Spirit to speak to you as *you* do the slow read through these chapters. So please – don't cut off what the Spirit of God is wanting to say to you. Go home today or this week and read through these chapters we're talking about and use your notes as you do.

Alright. So today we are getting the overview of chapters 7-9 in order to find the answers to our anxieties. You can open your Bibles or Bible apps to these chapters because we will go through them in order.

In the first half of chapter seven, the teacher is continuing something we talked about last week, and that is to...

### **Be present.**

I won't go into this too much because you heard it last week. If you weren't with us, I'd encourage you to go to our website and watch that message. But the point is that we can't be in more than one place at one time. We can only be where we are at the present moment. We have memories of the past and dreams of the future, but we can only be fully

present right now. God is omnipresent; God is present in all times and all places. God is right now fully present in every moment in your past. He is also fully present right now in every moment in your future. So when we put our faith in God and live our lives in him, we can live fully present in each moment, confident that God will lead us to wherever is best for us in the future. Right now, you can get 100% out of life if you live it in him. When you do, then right now he has directed you in your past in him for this moment and is positioning you and preparing you for every moment in your future!

The teacher gives us some practical advice on this; in the first four verses of chapter seven he essentially tells us not to sacrifice the past or present for the future. In other words, some people spend their life focused on what's next – so much so that they aren't able to live in and enjoy the present. Do you know what that's like? Maybe you are thinking about how great things will be once you get that new job or that new car or you can finally buy that house. Maybe you think you'll finally get to live well when you finish school, or you can retire. Maybe you think *then* you'll finally have arrived. It can happen subtly, and before you know it you've sacrificed the past and present for the future. This one's a tough one for me. Have you heard of Strengthsfinders? It's a tool you can use to find out what your operational strengths are, and one of my top ones is futurist. I'm a person who works well moving us toward a preferred future, a visionary. The trouble is, I can get so focused on the future that I stop being fully present now. Maybe you struggle with this too. It's not that we shouldn't pursue those things, but not at the expense of the past or present. We need to value the past and live in the present.

Then the teacher warns us not to sacrifice the future for the past or present. Sometimes we get stuck in the past; we reminisce about how great things used to be, and we get stuck there. We have a tendency to always think the past was better than it really was.

Churches get in trouble here. We want things to stay the way they used to be – things like music or programs or preaching styles or orange pews. So we get passionate and don't want to change, and we sacrifice the future – which is our young people coming to Christ – for the sake of a pew over a chair. Or an old hymn over a new chorus.

I don't want to sacrifice the past for the future, but neither do I want to sacrifice the future for the past.

One way I've seen churches do this is in how people could donate things the church needed in memory of loved ones. In principle, it's a wonderful way to remember a past saint in the church. It really is. But it can get out of hand. One of our sons is a pastor, and several years ago he was a youth pastor at a church and came across a microwave in the breakroom that had a plaque on it that said the microwave was given in memory of so and so. Here's the problem: that microwave now has an emotional attachment to it. How can you throw that away? You're throwing away the memory of so and so. We need to celebrate the past but not at the expense of the future.

Since I'm a futurist, can I share with you a dream I have? Since nearly my first day here, I've had a dream of turning the hallway by the quad – on the south end of our building here – it's just a hallway. I've dreamed of turning that into Heritage Hall. I would love for that to be a place where people can go and learn our story and celebrate our past. We haven't done it because it takes money and there are more pressing needs in our facility than that. But did you know that behind this curtain, on the back wall, there are two beautiful stained-glass windows that were given in memory of someone in our church?

Unfortunately, where they are doesn't work because of the lighting coming in the room for our worship and online campus. I want to move those windows to that hallway so we can enjoy their beauty!

The problem with memorials is that they can become parts of the past that we stumble over on our way to the future. I want to move those things to a place where we can celebrate our past, where future generations can learn the amazing West Valley Church story because God has done amazing things in this church over the 60+ years – including paying off a million-dollar debt in a year during a pandemic!

Pray with me and dream that dream with me, would you? Someday it will happen.

Anyway, even in your own life, don't sacrifice the future for the sake of the past. Be present in the moment! Amen?

Then the teacher tells us to...

## **Be moderate.**

This isn't the first time he's told us this, but here he's not talking about moderation in food or pleasure – he's talking about moderation in righteousness and wisdom. That's in chapter seven verses 15-29. This is very interesting, so let me try to explain it. Have you ever been around someone who's overly religious? Some people are hyper-spiritual; everything is spiritual, or they see a demon behind every bush – everything is spiritual warfare. I knew someone once who would pray about what to wear that day. It's great to have an ongoing conversational relationship with Jesus, but I don't know about that. Michael J. is a Christian comedian, and he talks about people who are "over-saved." Like when one person says to his friend, "I'm thirsty – are you?" and the Christian says, "I'm thirsty for the Lord!" Or one says, "Have you seen my keys?" "You need the keys to the Kingdom!" "I'm not driving a Kingdom...I drove a Toyota." He says, "When I say over saved, some of you already had someone in mind. But if you didn't, somebody probably had you in mind." "If you rebuke vacuum cleaners because it's a dirt devil..." you might be over-saved.

We're joking about it, but that's not exactly the kind of thing that the teacher is talking about. He's talking about someone who sacrifices love for the sake of their religion.

Years ago my wife worked with a lady who really had a hard life. We'll call her Susan. Susan's life was tough. She'd been divorced. She'd had miscarriages and I think she'd had an abortion. She'd had cancer and had a double mastectomy. She struggled with depression. She was not a Christian. So Shelly loved Susan and prayed for her and shared the Gospel with her, and Susan was beginning to have some hope. But there was another lady who worked with them both, and she claimed to be a Christian too, and she told struggling Susan that the reason all these things happened to her was because she was a sinner and God was judging her.

That overly righteous woman might have closed the door on this poor woman's hope for salvation. We don't know what happened because Susan moved away and so did we, and we lost touch. But please don't be that other person! In your righteousness, be moderate – be a real person who lives in the real world and loves people with the holy love of God in each moment. The Apostle Paul in the New Testament says:

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.  
(Philippians 4:5, esv)

Be reasonable! Why? Because Jesus is present in every moment!

That's exactly what that verse means and that's what the Teacher is trying to tell us. Don't be overly righteous and wear your spirituality like a badge of superiority. To be wise means you will be reasonable; be moderate in every moment. In another place the Apostle Paul says:

Whatever you do, do it with kindness and love. (1 Corinthians 16:14, tlb)

What do you think that word whatever means? It means whatever – in *everything* you do – do it with kindness and love! Right? One way of living brings anxiety and stress and trying to control – even if it's trying to control the behavior of someone else. The moderate, reasonable, loving way is not stressful or anxiety creating – in you or others.

Then the teacher reminds us that we can live this way because...

## **God is God.**

We talked about this last week too when we were talking about fearing God. Do you remember that? Fearing God is *not* about being afraid of him, it's about recognizing who he is, being in awe of him and his holiness and power and love. That's how we are going to be wise. Watch this: the Bible tells us:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10, niv)

Take a good look at that: the fear of the Lord – recognizing who he is and being in awe of him for it – that's the beginning of wisdom. Why? Remember we said that wisdom is faith and obedience in context. It's having faith because we know who God is and what he can and will do for us. We can trust him. So fearing him is the foundation of being able to be wise - to have faith and obey him no matter what our context is because we trust HIS context. And as we gain more of that knowledge of him and who he is, we gain more understanding for this life. The meaninglessness goes away and life gains meaning.

Remember last week we said that if we fear God we don't fear anything else, but if we don't fear God, we fear everything else. Doesn't that make sense? God's got us; he's got our circumstances. He knows the best way to go and the best thing to do even when we don't, so we don't have to be afraid of anything. That's why the Bible says:

Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.  
(Proverbs 29:25, niv)

Doesn't that sound like a solution to anxiety? That's what the Teacher is trying to tell us. If we don't fear God, we'll be afraid of all kinds of things. If we do fear God, we know we are kept safe.

Then the teacher wraps up this whole section of teaching in chapters 8 and 9 by reminding us...

## **...and then we die.**

Well that escalated quickly! The teacher is really a Donny Downer. We were just making positive progress and then he turns all morbid. What's that about? The teacher is reminding us that our time is short, so we need to make the most of it, again, being fully present in the Lord in every moment. That's why the Teacher goes on to say...

## **...and then we die...so enjoy life!**

Once again, the teacher comes back to this driving antidote to meaninglessness and the anxiety it produces: be present in every moment with God, living in the wisdom of faith and obedience in his context.

Here's the point of the teacher for us: the Teacher is telling us to make the most of every moment because this time is all we've got while we're on earth. But again, listen to what the Teacher is not saying: many scholars agree that the Teacher is pointing us to the reality of the resurrection and eternal life. If what we do in this life matters supremely while we are here, then it makes it even more significant because it has an impact on what happens in eternity. This is what Jesus, the Son of God, came to this earth for – to reveal God's love and plan for us, to die for our sin and to rise from the dead so that we could live abundantly here and forever in eternity when we trust him. This is exactly what Jesus told us:

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25-26, esv)

The question is, do you believe this? If so, it means that every moment matters. Live every moment with and for God, because it will not only be the source of abundant life for you – a life with meaning – it will impact your eternity. Life lived here in faith and obedience to God will even eliminate the anxiety that we all have about death!

My friend, if you do not believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, then you are missing out on the only ultimate solution to a full, rich life here and an amazing, indescribable life in eternity when you die.

THIS is what the teacher is telling us.

If you are a Christian now, listen: your moments matter. Not only in your life but in the lives of those around you. Your family and friends and small group need you to be present in the moment. Your friends who haven't met Jesus especially need you to be present in the moment, so you can show them what this life is like, and so you are open to the Holy Spirit as he prompts you in what to say and do. Your moments matter.

Living wisely in the moment in the presence of God, keeping your mind and heart fixed on him is the answer to all this anxiety and fear that we face that is all around us.

I told you earlier that there were 8 of us crammed into that little 5x8 box, hanging on a wire, buffeted by wind and rain and lightning, in pitch darkness for over an hour. The exact environment for 5 out of 10 of our most common fears. Do you know what we did? We laughed together. We played some games together. We told stories of encounters with God from our lives. We weren't afraid. We were fully present in the moment, because God

himself was packed in that little Gondola box with us. That time will be, at least for me, one of my favorite memories of the past that I will forever celebrate.

*Prayer*

*Benediction:*

*The LORD bless you and keep you (in this very moment); the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace (in every moment).” (Numbers 6:22-26)*