

## LESSON 8

# Finding the Wise Life

### Scripture Focus

Ecclesiastes 11; 12

### Key Verse

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

### Overview

Solomon completed his search for significance and meaning in life. After looking “under the sun” at all of the ways in which man tries to find meaning apart from God, he pronounced all of those ways futile. The truly meaningful life is one of reverencing God and of keeping His commandments wholeheartedly. The puzzles of life should not lead to despair but to a more complete dependence on God.

### Topic

Conclusion on life

### Theme

Fearing God gives meaning to life.

### Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine two ways to be a better steward of the life God has given.

### Outline

- I. Wisdom and Working (Eccles. 11:1–6)
- II. Wisdom and Rejoicing (Eccles. 11:7–10)
- III. Wisdom and Considering (Eccles. 12:1–8)
- IV. Wisdom and Focusing (Eccles. 12:9–14)

## Getting Started

Use the following activities to introduce this lesson.

### Puzzle of Life

Use again one set of the note card puzzles from lesson 1 (“work to eat, eat to live, live to work”). Set the cards on a table, and direct learners to put them in the appropriate three-word phrases that reveal the original secret of life.

### Materials

- Transparencies 1, 4, and 11
- Nine sheets of paper
- Note card puzzle from lesson 1
- Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 14 verse card from resource CD
- Lesson 8 case study from resource CD

**Ask:** Is this a realistic view of life? What question did Solomon set out to answer? (*“What profit can a person have for all of his effort in life?”*) What answer does this “secret of life” provide?

### Secret of Life

Make one new puzzle set of nine sheets of paper with these words, one to a card: Secret of Life—Fear God and keep His commandments. Ask nine volunteers to stand before the class and to distribute randomly one paper to each learner. Learners should hold their word cards toward the class, so everyone can read the words. Have the class work together to discover the real answer to Solomon’s question by directing the learners to stand in the proper order.

**Discuss:** How does this “secret of life” answer Solomon’s question?

## Searching the Scriptures

In this section of Ecclesiastes, Solomon concluded his discussion about meaningful life. Instead of despairing about life, he ended with a stirring, optimistic challenge. The wise person should recognize that life is unpredictable; nevertheless, he should throw himself wholeheartedly into life. Solomon encouraged his readers to celebrate life, particularly in view of the fact that death is approaching. Life apart from God is indeed empty, so it is vital to revere God and keep His commandments.

### I. Wisdom and Working (Eccles. 11:1–6)

In the final two chapters of his book, Solomon became quite direct in his counsel. After considering life by careful observation, he gave some clear instructions for finding and living the wise life.

In Ecclesiastes 11:1–6 Solomon gave wise advice about work. Since most adults spend a large portion of their lives on the job, this is a crucial subject for wisdom.

In verses 1 and 2 Solomon spoke of the importance of spreading risk by diversifying one’s efforts. In all human activity there is an element of risk since the effort must be made first. Compensation comes later.

Some people try to avoid the risks of life by taking no chances. However, Solomon would say to them that low risk brings low returns. He used a colorful picture to illustrate his point. Working is like a person’s casting a piece of bread on water. The bread quickly disappears below the surface, but days later it reappears.

Because it is impossible to predict how well one’s efforts will succeed or when misfortune might strike, Solomon wrote that it is best to divide one’s resources among several activities. If a person puts all of his energy, time, money and abilities into one venture and things fall through, he is left with nothing. Therefore the wise course is to prepare for a number of opportunities. This counsel is particularly applicable today, when many jobs are being



phased out because of the advance of new technology.

In verse 3 Solomon cited some general patterns in life. For example, dark storm clouds usually yield rain. However, sometimes even dark clouds may withhold rain as they pass overhead. Similarly, diligence usually leads to success (Prov. 12:24), but prosperity often eludes even the most diligent workers.

This uncertainty about outcomes could lead to an overly cautious approach to living. The farmer who keeps checking the weather conditions might never find the risk-free time to sow or reap (Eccles. 11:4).

**READ:** Have a learner read Ecclesiastes 11:4. **DISCUSS:** What is the heart of the farmer's problem when he continuously puts off planting his crops? (Question 3)

To wait until life is ideal before acting is foolish, because those "ideal" times are rare. Waiting to work is a sign of wanting sovereign control of life. It is a lack of trust. Wise working means looking to God in trust rather than just looking at the circumstances. After all, there will usually be a "good" reason to wait for a better time!

**ASK:** What excuses might people give for not doing the work of the Lord? Which of them would you consider a sign of lack of trust in God? (Questions 4, 5)

Solomon did not recommend a careless approach to work but, rather, a trusting approach. The puzzle of life is that so many things are either unknown or unknowable to all except the Creator (v. 5). This weakness demands that we trust God and step into the unknown with full reliance on the Lord.

It is impossible to predict which activities will prosper and which ones will fail (v. 6). Therefore, Solomon recommended that his readers try several options. For example, a farmer cannot tell whether seed sown in the morning will produce better than seed sown in the evening. So, Solomon advised the farmer to sow his seed at both times.

## II. Wisdom and Rejoicing (Eccles. 11:7–10)

After describing in Ecclesiastes 11:1–6 how the wise person works, Solomon wrote in verses 7–10 about the need to rejoice. Both diligence and delight are crucial elements in the wise life.

In verses 7 and 8 Solomon compared death to darkness and life to light. He observed that life is good. It is important to remember that for every person the darkness of death is inevitable. Knowing that death is approaching, we should take life seriously and follow the counsel we find in chapter 12.

In Ecclesiastes 11:9 and 10 Solomon exhorted his primary reader, a young man, to focus on the enjoyable aspects of life. He advised that the time to start living is now. Eventually time, possessions and opportunities will end. No one can count on tomorrow; he must use what today offers. "Let thy heart cheer

thee in the days of thy youth,” Solomon counseled in verse 9.

As the wise person makes life pleasant today, he must always remember that God is evaluating what he does. Solomon did not recommend that we pursue happiness at the expense of forsaking God’s laws and values. God will judge those who squander life on things that displease Him.

**EVALUATE:** God will judge those who fail to enjoy life as He intended. **DISCUSS:** Why do some believers think that living with a staunch seriousness is more godly than living with a bubbling joy? (Questions 6, 7)

Just as it is possible to be too careless about life—living only for the pleasures of the moment—so it is possible to be too serious about life and thereby miss the joys that God has for us today. Living with a sour, poor-me outlook on life is wrong in God’s eyes.

The world falls to the temptation of pleasures apart from God, the kinds of unsatisfying activities that Solomon tried and discarded as futile. Committed Christians may well fall to the opposite temptation. They may be so fixed on investing for eternity that they lose sight of the fact that today is God’s gift too. In turning away from the unfulfilling practices of the world, they may also miss the joys that God intends for them in this life.

Christians can anticipate a wonderful future in Heaven; however, that prospect should not negate the joys of life now. Both the present and the future are gifts from God.

Solomon recommended in verse 10 that it is best to move past the puzzles and pains of life. Life is uncertain and perplexing, but it is also too short to focus on futility. During the fleeting years of youth, the wise person savors life.

### III. Wisdom and Considering (12:1–8)

In Ecclesiastes 12:1–8 Solomon described aging and death in beautiful poetic language. His purpose was not to despair of life but to bring life into focus. In gazing at the unstoppable advance of death, Solomon urged his readers to commit themselves to the eternal God.

**READ:** Have a learner read Ecclesiastes 12:1. **ASK:** What effects would grasping the wisdom of this verse have on a young person’s retirement years? What effects might it have for him or her in eternity? (Questions 8, 9)

Solomon began with the challenge in 12:1, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Solomon had tried to find fulfillment in life by his own efforts. Leaving God out of view, he had searched unsuccessfully for satisfaction down every avenue of life, but satisfaction had remained out of his reach. At last, Solomon concluded that he had wasted many precious years in his search, so he exhorted his reader to turn to God while he was still young—before the darkness of death set in.



Because young people may give little thought to the future, Solomon drew a vivid picture of aging in verses 2–5. He made clear that as a person approaches death, his physical capacities and activities decrease, and a sense of loneliness increases.

The trembling “keepers of the house” probably refer to extremities that grow weaker. The “strong men shall bow themselves” is a picture of weakening legs. The “grinders cease because they are few” is an obvious reference to losing teeth, and the phrase “those that look out of the windows be darkened” is most likely talking about a reduction in vision (v. 3).

Verse 4 continues the picturesque language. The “doors shall be shut in the streets when the sound of the grinding is low” is a picture of lips drawn in against toothless gums. The phrase “and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird” relates the trouble we have sleeping as we age. A loss of hearing is attested in the phrase “all the daughters of musick shall be brought low.”

The phrases “when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way” relate the fear the keeps older people from wanting to leave the safety of their homes. Graying hair is delicately compared to the flourishing of the almond tree which has white blossoms. The “grasshopper shall be a burden” tells of the absence vigor. And finally, our “desires” wane as we age (v. 5).

Ultimately the golden bowl of life will shatter. The body will return to dust, and the spirit will return to God who gave it (vv. 6, 7). Thus, human life comes full circle. God created it; humans live it; and then the Creator claims it.

**ASK:** How has the aging process in your life affected your perspective on life? **DISCUSS:** What do these aging processes mean for the person living without Christ? What do these aging processes mean for the believer who never lived for Christ? (Questions 11–13)

Human life from start to finish is God’s gift. God always intended human life to be a blessing. In making man in His own image (Gen. 1:26, 27), God created the potential for man to fellowship with Him. By fashioning a lovely world and giving man intellectual, artistic, and emotional capacities, God enabled man to enjoy fulfillment and satisfaction in fellowship with Him.

In Ecclesiastes 12:8 Solomon echoed the conclusion he reached when observing life apart from God: “All is vanity.” When a person does not remember his Creator but tries, instead, to live without God, life is empty and futile. However, Solomon’s positive message in Ecclesiastes is that life does not have to be meaningless. Instead of wasting it on meaningless activities and achievements, man should trust God and live to please Him.

#### IV. Wisdom and Focusing (Eccles. 12:9–14)

In his epilogue to the book, Solomon brought together his key points. In verse 9 Solomon reaffirmed his credibility as a teacher of wisdom. His various efforts to find significance and satisfaction apart from God—“under the sun”—

may have caused some readers to doubt his reliability. However, Solomon stated that he remained a wise teacher who taught others knowledge. In his search he did not abandon God's wisdom. In fact, Solomon's observations and skills enabled him to write numerous proverbs. In his proverbs, he sought to take what he had seen in life, put it into concise, memorable statements and then use it to teach people God's way.

Potent proverbs reflect two qualities (v. 10). First, their words are attractive, understandable, and convicting. As a skilled wise man and writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Solomon molded truth into this powerful format.

Secondly, good proverbs declare the truth. They measure life according to the standard of what pleases God. These wise words can motivate people to live in God's wise way (v. 11). They can arouse those who are spiritually lazy, and they can serve as hooks on which to hang life.

**ASK:** Which proverbs have helped to comfort you? Which ones have helped to guide you? (Questions 14, 15)

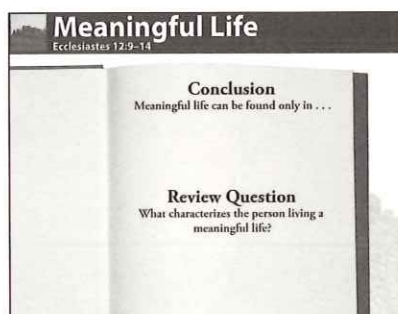
Through his painful efforts in observing life, Solomon learned that there is no end to human ideas. His search for truth had taken him down many rabbit trails and had led only to frustration. So, he warned his readers not to follow his futile steps (v. 12).

**TESTIMONY:** In what endeavors to find meaning in life have you, like Solomon, followed after? (Question 16)

Solomon's readers, too, could study books reflecting human thoughts and get no closer to understanding life. They, too, could study until they became weary, but their studying would not yield the secret to satisfaction. If Solomon with all of his skills, opportunities, and efforts could not find life under the sun, it would be foolish for anyone else to try.

At last Solomon gave the crucial truth that he had learned (v. 13a). The whole duty of mankind can be summed up in one command: "Fear God, and keep his commandments" (v. 13b).

**TRANSPARENCY:** Display transparency 11 with the bottom half covered. **ASK:** If this was the last page of the book of Ecclesiastes, how would you phrase the conclusion to the book? (Question 17) (Record the learners' answers on the transparency.)



Meaningful life can be found only in humble, obedient submission to God. Those who seek satisfaction through any other means will be terribly disappointed. Just as Proverbs says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (9:10), so Solomon's search brought him to this fundamental fact.



**TRANSPARENCY:** Display transparency 11. **ASK:** What characterizes the person living a meaningful life? (Record learners' answers on the transparency.) (Question 18)

Solomon ended his challenge with the reminder that God will evaluate all that we do (Eccles. 12:14). No person, act, word, or thought will escape His attention. Created by God, all people are responsible to reverence God and to live by His standards.

Solomon learned this: The wise person grasps life as a gift from God to be enjoyed. He aligns all his actions and attitudes with God's unchanging righteous standard.

## Making It Personal

### Ecclesiastes Summary

**Transparency:** Display transparency 4 to help the learners remember the themes of Ecclesiastes. **Ask:** Which theme(s) do you especially appreciate? Why?

### Personal Testimony

**Testimony:** How has your life been changed as a result of studying the book of Ecclesiastes? (Question 19)

### A Better Steward

**Ask:** What are two ways that you can become a better steward of the life God has given to you? (Question 20)

### Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the Principle for Life and Love for this lesson: Find meaning in life by fearing and obeying God.

### Memory Verses

Distribute copies of the Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 14 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verses.

### Themes of Ecclesiastes

1. Life is enigmatic, for it leaves many questions unanswered.
2. Enjoy life, but be accountable to God.
3. True meaning in life cannot be found in the temporal, earthly sphere.
4. God created humans with an eternal hunger.
5. The prospect of death urges a wise investment of life.
6. Only God gives joy in the treadmill of human existence.

Use the case study for lesson 8 as desired

### Principles for Life and Love

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|---|---|
| 1. Recognize the need to have a Christ-centered life.   | 8. Find meaning in life by fearing and obeying God. |
| 2. Break out of the circles of life by living for God.  | 9.  |
| 3. Find true enjoyment in life by surrendering to God.  | 10.   |
| 4. Trust God with your life—even the difficult aspects. | 11.   |
| 5. Recognize the folly of living for money and things.  | 12.   |
| 6. Show wisdom by submitting to God.                    | 13.   |
| 7. View life with godly optimism.                       |   |

## LESSON 9

# Learning to Love

### Materials

- Transparencies 1 and 12
- Song of Solomon 8:7 verse card from resource CD
- Lesson 9 case study from resource CD

### Scripture Focus

Song of Solomon Overview

### Key Verse

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned” (Song of Solomon 8:7).

### Overview

Song of Solomon focuses on God’s ideal for human love. Throughout history many interpreters have viewed this book in different ways. Although the book does point indirectly to God’s love for His people, it is best to recognize that the primary emphasis of the book is to teach how to love within the context of marriage.

### Topic

Loving God’s Way

### Theme

God’s way of loving is a good and sacred gift.

### Desired Learner Response

The learner will desire to learn more about loving God’s way.

### Outline

- I. Authorship and Date
- II. Unity
- III. Interpretation
  - A. Allegorical
  - B. Typical
  - C. Dramatic
  - D. Literal
- IV. Purpose
- V. Literature
- VI. Theme and Outline

## Getting Started

### Love Timelines

Distribute paper to learners and instruct them to draw a timeline that