

WHAT DOES MAN GAIN
BY ALL THE TOIL
AT WHICH HE TOILS
UNDER THE SUN?

FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON,
AND A TIME FOR EVERY MATTER UNDER HEAVEN

LIFE UNDER THE SUN

THE END OF THE MATTER; ALL HAS BEEN HEARD.
FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS,
FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

HE HAS MADE EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN
ITS TIME. ALSO, HE HAS PUT ETERNITY
INTO MAN'S HEART, YET SO THAT HE
CANNOT FIND OUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE
FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END.

LIFE UNDER THE SUN

Group Participant Guide

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

Week 1 – What Are We Chasing?

OPENING QUESTIONS

- *When was the last time you achieved something you thought would finally satisfy you—but didn't?*
- *What's something our culture promises will bring meaning or happiness? Does it actually deliver?*
- *Have you ever felt busy, tired, and unfulfilled at the same time?*

READ THE TEXT

Read **Ecclesiastes 1:1–11** aloud.

- *What words or phrases stand out to you?*
- *What mood do you sense from the writer?*

DISCUSSION: WHAT IS LIFE “UNDER THE SUN”?

Question 1

“Vanity of vanities... all is vanity.”

- What do you think the writer means by “vanity” here?
- Does it sound more like anger, sadness, or disappointment?

Question 2

Verses 3–7 describe endless cycles—work, nature, generations.

- What feels exhausting or repetitive about life today?
- Where do you feel like you're running but not arriving?



Question 3

Verse 8: *“All things are full of weariness.”*

- Why do you think even good things eventually wear us out?
- Where do you see that playing out in your own life?

APPLICATION: WHAT ARE WE CHASING?

Question 4

Looking at verses 8–11:

- What are some modern versions of “nothing new under the sun”?
- How do we chase novelty hoping it will fix restlessness?

Question 5

- Why do you think God included a book like Ecclesiastes in Scripture?
- What does it tell us about how God views our questions and frustrations?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- *What am I currently hoping will finally satisfy me?*
- *If God removed that thing, what would it expose about my heart?*

PRAYER

Pray for:

- Honesty before God
- Courage to stop numbing restlessness
- A growing hunger for wisdom that comes from God—not just life under the sun



Group Participant Guide

Series: Life Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 — The Limits of Pleasure

Purpose of the Study: To help people see why pleasure has limits, how we unknowingly overload it with expectations, and why it cannot carry the weight of meaning.

CORE TRUTH TO CARRY

Pleasure can give moments—but it cannot give meaning.

OPENING

Opening Question

- What's something you looked forward to for a long time—but the feeling didn't last?
- What's a purchase, achievement, or season that didn't deliver what you hoped it would?

READ THE TEXT

Read Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 aloud.

- What words or ideas repeat?
- What tone do you hear in Solomon's voice?

DISCUSSION – DISCOVERING THE LIMITS

Question 1 - What kinds of pleasure does Solomon describe pursuing?

- Which of these feel especially familiar today?
- Which ones look different depending on your stage of life?

Question 2 - Solomon says, 'I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure.' Why is that detail important?

- What does it tell us about his conclusion?
- How does this challenge the idea that "more" would fix things?



Question 3 - What does Solomon actually say about pleasure? What does he *not* say?

APPLICATION

Question 4 - Where do we tend to ask pleasure to do more than it was designed to do?

Question 5 - How can you tell when pleasure has become overloaded?

Question 6 - Why is chasing pleasure exhausting over time?

- What does it demand from us?
- Why can it never finally satisfy?

REFLECTION

Questions for personal reflection:

- *What pleasure have I been leaning on for more than it can give?*
- *What expectation might God be gently exposing?*

PRAYER

Pray for:

- Honesty about misplaced hope
- Gratitude for God's good gifts
- Trust in God as the giver of meaning



Group Participant Guide

Series: Life Under the Sun
Week: Ecclesiastes 3:1–11

READ THE TEXT

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. **What patterns or repetitions do you notice in verses 1–8?**
 - What stands out about how the list is structured?
2. **Which of these “times” feel chosen—and which clearly are not?**
 - Birth? Death? Mourning? Healing?
3. **What emotions do the paired opposites create?**
 - Comfort? Frustration? Tension?
4. **What is noticeably missing from this poem?**
 - Any instructions? Promises? Explanations?
5. **In verse 9, what question does Solomon ask—and why does it matter?**
 - What is he really questioning?
6. **According to verse 11, what has God done—and what has He not done?**
 - What does God give?
 - What does He withhold?

INTERPRETATION & CLARITY

- The “times” in verses 1–8 describe **life as it comes**, not life as we plan it.
- The poem shows us that **life includes both beauty and pain**, often beyond our control.
- Verse 11 holds two ideas in tension:
 - God makes things beautiful *in their time*
 - God places eternity in our hearts *without giving us full understanding*

Translation: We are aware that life should make sense...but we never have enough perspective to fully explain it. That tension is intentional.



APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which “season” in this passage feels closest to your current life right now?
 - Why that one?
2. Where do you feel the most frustration with timing—God’s or your own?
3. How do you usually respond when life feels out of your control?
 - Anxiety? Anger? Distraction? Overworking?
4. What does this passage challenge about our culture’s obsession with control, planning, and optimization?
5. How does verse 11 explain why success, pleasure, or stability never fully satisfy us?

RESPONSE QUESTIONS

1. What is God inviting you to release control of right now?
2. Where might God be asking you to trust Him—not with answers—but with timing?
3. How does this passage reshape the way you pray about your current season?
4. What would it look like to be faithful—not frantic—in the season you’re in?

PRAYER

Pray:

- thanking God for His sovereignty,
- asking for trust in His timing,
- and for faithfulness in whatever season people are walking through.



Group Participant Guide

Series: Life Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 4

OPENING QUESTION

Where do you see people most tempted to *go it alone* today?

SECTION 1: The Pain of Oppression & Isolation

Read Ecclesiastes 4:1–3

Observation Question: What stands out to you about what Solomon sees?

Discussion Question: Why do you think Solomon says the oppressed are better off dead or never born?

Application Question: Where do you see this kind of loneliness or power imbalance today?

SECTION 2: The Trap of Rivalry & Self-Driven Success

Read Ecclesiastes 4:4–6

Observation Question: What motivates much of the work Solomon sees?

Discussion Question: How does rivalry shape people's lives today?

Key Contrast Question: Why is "one handful with rest" better than "two handfuls with toil"?

Personal Reflection: Where are you tempted to measure your life against others?

SECTION 3: The Emptiness of Going Solo

Read Ecclesiastes 4:7–8

Observation Question: What's tragic about this man's situation?

Discussion Question: Why do people keep pushing even when it's costing them relationships?



SECTION 4: The Gift—and Limits—of Companionship

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

Observation Question: What benefits of companionship does Solomon name?

Clarifying Question: What *doesn't* this passage say about relationships?

Application Question: Where have you experienced the help—or lack—of community in your life?

BRINGING IT TOGETHER: WHAT SOLOMON IS SHOWING US

Transition Question: If even good relationships can't fully heal the brokenness we feel, what does that tell us?

RESPONSE & NEXT STEPS

Personal Reflection

- Where am I tempted to isolate?
- Where am I striving out of rivalry rather than trust?
- Who has God placed in my life for mutual support—and am I leaning in?

Concrete Next Step (Choose ONE)

- Reach out instead of withdrawing.
- Invite someone into your life this week.
- Be honest instead of self-sufficient.



Group Guide (Participant)

Series: Life Under the Sun

When Worship Goes Wrong

Text: Ecclesiastes 5:1–7

Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Listen for:

- Repeated warnings
- Commands (what we are told to do or not do)
- God’s posture vs. human posture

Observation: What Does the Text Say?

1. Guard Your Steps (v.1)

Question: What does Solomon mean by “guard your steps when you go to the house of God”?

Follow-up: What does this suggest about the connection between our weekday lives and Sunday worship?

2. Listening vs. Speaking (vv.1–3)

Question: Why does Solomon say it’s better to “draw near to listen” than to offer many words?

Make it Personal: What does our prayer life tend to reveal about what we think God is for?

3. Vows and Promises (vv.4–6)

Question: Why does Solomon take vows and promises so seriously?

Key insight: God would rather have **honest obedience** than **emotional promises**.

4. The Summary Warning (v.7)

Question: What is Solomon’s final warning in verse 7?



Interpretation: What Is God Revealing?

What does this passage teach us about:

- God?
- Ourselves?
- Worship?

Application: Where Does This Confront Us?

1. Personal Reflection

Question: Which warning in this passage do you most need to hear right now—and why?

2. Worship Beyond Sunday

Question: How might someone faithfully attend worship yet still ignore what God is saying?

3. Prayer Check

Question: How would our prayers change if we truly believed God is holy and we are accountable?

Response: How Should We Respond This Week?

Practical Step

Choose **one intentional response**:

- Begin prayer times by silently listening before speaking
- Stop making spiritual promises and focus on faithful obedience
- Confess areas where worship has become routine or self-focused

Closing Thought

God is not asking for more words.
He is asking for reverent hearts and obedient lives.

Prayer Prompt

- Thank God for revealing who He truly is
- Confess careless worship or empty words
- Ask for hearts that listen, obey, and fear the Lord rightly



Group Guide (Participant)

Series: Life Under the Sun Ecclesiastes 7:1–18

OPENING QUESTIONS

- When was a hard season in your life more shaping than an easy one?
- What's harder for you — dealing with pain or surrendering control?

SECTION 1 — SORROW FORMS YOU (vv.1–6)

Read Ecclesiastes 7:1–6.

Observation

- What contrasts stand out?
- Why would mourning be “better” than feasting?

Personal Reflection

- What do you run to when life feels heavy — reflection or distraction?
- Are you wasting suffering? Or letting it form you?

SECTION 2 — LIMITS & CONTROL (vv.7–14)

Read Ecclesiastes 7:7–14.

Observation

- What does oppression do?
- What does verse 13 mean?
- What's the point of verse 14?

Personal Reflection

- Where are you trying to “straighten” something God hasn't?
- What makes you impatient right now?
- Do you actually believe God is at work in both good and hard seasons?



SECTION 3 — AVOIDING EXTREMES (vv.15–18)

Read Ecclesiastes 7:15–18.

Observation

- What feels confusing here?

Personal Reflection:

- Which extreme are you more prone to — control through morality, or casual compromise?
- How does fearing God correct both?

GOSPEL CONNECTION + RESPONSE

Ecclesiastes exposes:

- Your limits
- Your control issues
- Your self-righteous tendencies
- Your escapism

Jesus enters all of it.

- He was a man of sorrows.
- He trusted the Father in adversity.
- He did not grasp control in Gethsemane.
- He endured the ultimate crookedness — the cross.

Under the sun: Life is crooked.

In Christ: Crookedness is redeemed.

The answer to control is not better discipline. It's deeper trust.

FINAL QUESTIONS

- What hardship is God using to shape you right now?
- What are you trying to control that you need to surrender?
- Where are you tempted toward self-righteousness?
- What would fearing God look like this week?

KEY TRUTH TO REPEAT

You are becoming someone.

Wisdom asks: Who is this shaping you into?



GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Series: Life Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 9:1–10

OPENING

- Why do you think people avoid conversations about death?
- Do you think our culture overestimates or underestimates how much control we have over life?

READ ECCLESIASTES 9:1–3

What do you notice?

- What is repeated?
- Who experiences “the same event”?
- What assumptions about fairness are being challenged?

Think About It

- Why is it difficult to accept that righteous and wicked people both die?
- Where do we assume we deserve better outcomes?
- What false security do people place in being “good”?

READ ECCLESIASTES 9:4–6

What stands out?

- What contrast is made between the living and the dead?
- Why is a “living dog” better than a “dead lion”?
- What advantage does the living person still have?

Think About It

- What are people tempted to postpone spiritually?
- Where are you assuming you’ll have more time?
- What would urgency look like in your life right now?

READ ECCLESIASTES 9:7–10

What commands are given?

- What areas of life are mentioned?
- What reason is given in verse 10?



In Solomon's day:

- White garments were worn at celebrations. Oil symbolized refreshment and joy.

Think About It

- Why can it be hard to enjoy ordinary gifts from God?
- What is the difference between gratitude and distraction?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

If life is temporary:

- How should that affect your marriage?
- How should that affect your work?
- How should that affect your obedience?
- How should that affect your priorities?

What needs attention now — not later?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Ecclesiastes shows us:

- Death comes to all.
- Timing is not ours to control.
- Opportunity is limited.

The rest of Scripture shows us:

- Death is tied to sin (Hebrews 9:27).
- Jesus faced death and defeated it.
- The outcome after death is not the same for everyone.

Reflect

- Are you living as though you will always have more time?
- If death exposes what matters, what would it reveal in you?
- Are you prepared to meet God?

PRAYER

Ask God for:

- Wisdom to use your days well
- Gratitude for daily gifts
- Urgency in obedience
- Confidence in Christ



GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Series: Life Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 10

Main Idea Small foolishness carries real weight — so pursue steady, humble wisdom under God’s authority.

Walk Through the Passage (Observation)

1. Small Folly Has Weight

Read Ecclesiastes 10:1–3.

- What image does Solomon use in verse 1?
- Why would “dead flies” outweigh perfume?
- What direction does wisdom take a life? What direction does foolishness take it?
- How does a fool eventually expose himself?

2. Foolishness in Leadership

Read Ecclesiastes 10:4–7.

- What situation is described in verse 4?
- What feels upside-down in verses 6–7?
- Why do you think Solomon includes this observation about rulers?

3. Carelessness Has Consequences

Read Ecclesiastes 10:8–11.

- What pattern do you see in these examples?
- What happens when someone acts carelessly?
- What is the point of sharpening the axe?

4. The Fool’s Mouth

Read Ecclesiastes 10:12–15.

- How does Solomon describe the fool’s speech?
- What progression do you see in verse 13?
- What assumptions does the fool make about himself?



5. National Folly & Private Speech

Read Ecclesiastes 10:16–20.

- What happens when leaders are immature?
- What distinguishes wise leadership in verse 17?
- Why the warning about private speech in verse 20?

Reflection (Application)

Now move from what the text says to where it presses on you.

1. Where are you most vulnerable to “small” foolishness?
 - Words?
 - Integrity?
 - Reaction to authority?
 - Laziness or lack of preparation?
2. How do you typically respond when leadership or circumstances feel frustrating or unfair?
3. Where in your life do you need to “sharpen the axe” right now?
4. What does your speech reveal about your heart lately?
5. Are there attitudes or conversations you would not want repeated publicly?
6. What would steady, humble wisdom look like in your current season?

Be specific.

Gospel Reminder

Ecclesiastes shows how easily foolishness spreads — through small compromises, careless words, and immature reactions.

Jesus is the perfectly wise King.

Because of Him:

- Our foolishness can be forgiven.
- Our hearts can be reshaped.
- True wisdom can grow in us.

Prayer

Ask God for:

- Guarded speech
- Integrity in small things
- Patience under frustration
- Humility to grow
- A heart shaped by true wisdom



GROUP GUIDE- Participant

Series: Life Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 11:1–12:8 - *Don't Waste Your Life*

Introduction

Solomon is bringing Ecclesiastes toward its conclusion. After exposing the emptiness of life lived “under the sun,” he now asks a pressing question:

How should we live the short life God has given us?

This passage reminds us of two realities:

- Life is a gift
- Life is short

Solomon’s message is simple: Don’t waste the life God has been given to you.

Walk Through the Passage

Read Ecclesiastes 11:1–2.

What kind of life do these verses encourage—cautious holding back, or generous action?

Read Ecclesiastes 11:3–6.

What warning does Solomon give about waiting for perfect conditions before acting?

Read Ecclesiastes 11:7–8.

What two realities about life does Solomon hold together in these verses?

Read Ecclesiastes 11:9–10.

What encouragement and warning appear together in these verses?

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1.

What do you think it means to “remember your Creator”?



Read Ecclesiastes 12:2–7.

What stage of life do the images in this section seem to describe?

Read Ecclesiastes 12:8.

How does this statement summarize what Solomon has been teaching throughout Ecclesiastes?

Personal Reflection

Which part of this passage challenged or stood out to you the most—and why?

Reflection

Where do people today tend to delay obedience or wise action while waiting for better circumstances?

Solomon reminds us that life is both a gift and temporary.
How should remembering that life is short shape the way we live?

What does it practically look like to “remember your Creator” in everyday life?

Solomon says that God will bring every life into judgment.
How should that reality affect the way we live today?

What is one way you can live more intentionally for God this week?

Closing Prayer

Pray for:

- Wisdom to use our time well
- Courage to obey God now instead of delaying
- Hearts that remember our Creator daily
- Gratitude for the life God has given



GROUP GUIDE – PARTICIPANT

Series: Life Under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 12:9–14

Main Idea

A life lived rightly is one that fears God, obeys His Word, and lives in light of coming judgment.

Read the Passage

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9–14

Walk Through the Passage

Verses 9–10 — The Preacher’s Purpose

- What do we learn about the Preacher and his intent in these verses?
- Why does it matter that these words are described as *truth* and *upright*?

Verse 11 — The Power of God’s Word

- What images are used to describe these words? (goads, nails)
- What do those images communicate about how God’s Word works in our lives?

Verse 12 — The Warning

- What warning is given here?
- How do people today go beyond God’s Word in ways that lead to confusion or exhaustion?

Verses 13–14 — The Conclusion

- What is the “end of the matter”?
- What does it actually mean to *fear God*?
- Why is judgment included in the final conclusion?



Discussion Questions

- Where are you currently being led more by your feelings or culture than by God's Word?
- In what area of your life is God's Word trying to *correct* you right now?
- What would it look like this week to actually *obey* what you already know God has said?
- Do you live with an awareness that your life will be judged by God? Why or why not?

Call to Action

Get specific. Don't let this stay general.

One area this week where I will fear God and obey Him is: _____.

Gospel Reminder

- We have all failed to fear God and obey Him.
- That's why we need Jesus.
- Jesus lived perfectly, died in our place, and rose again.
- Through repentance and faith, we are forgiven and given a new life to actually walk in obedience.

Obedience isn't how we earn life—it's the result of being given life in Christ.

Close in Prayer

Pray for:

- Hearts that fear God rightly
- Courage to obey
- Awareness of eternity
- Dependence on Jesus

