



Ecclesiastes

Life Under the Sun

Sample Lesson #1
and
Leader's Guide Answers

ONE

LIFE IS MEANINGLESS

Read Ecclesiastes 1;
other references as given.

Beginning in the fifth century BC, Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others) sought to understand the meaning of life. In the past twenty-six centuries, secular philosophers have produced various theories about the origin and meaning of life, but none have provided a conclusive answer. Stephen Hawking (1942–2018), the British physicist who was considered the greatest mind since Albert Einstein said, “Scientists will continue to climb the mountain of human understanding until they reach the peak. When they finally reach the apex and look over the other side, they will see that theologians have been there for centuries.”

The world’s philosophers have asked the right questions, but only God’s Word provides the right answer. The Bible says God has **given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, including an understanding of who God is and the meaning of life (2 Peter 1:3). God, however, doesn’t reveal the secrets of wisdom to the proud or the spiritually lazy (Psalm 10:4; Proverbs 2:1–10). We must be obedient to God’s Word and be diligent in our pursuit of wisdom to be the recipients of His truth (John 14:21; Proverbs 2:1–10).

In this first lesson the writer says that life (apart from God) is meaningless. The book of Ecclesiastes then proceeds to take its readers on a journey to discover the meaning of life. In the process, every worldly philosophy is exposed as empty and



Lombardi Time
Rule:

If the leader
arrives early, he
or she has time to
pray, prepare the
room, and greet
others personally.

ADD GROUP
INSIGHTS BELOW

vain. Before you begin this lesson and each lesson in this study, ask God to reveal Himself to you through His inspired Word.

1. From what perspective is the wise teacher approaching the question of the meaning and purpose of life (Introduction)?

2. a. Understanding the background and the writer's perspective is essential to understanding Ecclesiastes. What is the meaning of the teacher's use of the important phrase **under the sun** (Introduction)?

- b. Give three characteristics of wisdom literature (Introduction).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. a. How can Ecclesiastes help an unsaved person (Introduction)?

- b. How can the study of the book of Ecclesiastes help believers (Introduction)?



Zip-It Rule:

Group members should agree to disagree, but should never be disagreeable.

ADDITIONAL
INSIGHTS

4. In Ecclesiastes 1:1 Solomon identifies himself primarily as the teacher or preacher (NIV, “teacher”). The specific use of this word (Hebrew, *qopheleth*) in the context indicates he is introducing himself in the formal capacity as one who makes an official address or presents a teaching lecture. Rather than beginning with an introduction to his topic, he begins with a strong assertion (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

a. What is the meaning of the phrase, **Vanity of vanities, all is vanity** (Ecclesiastes 1:2; NIV, “meaningless”)?

b. What *do you think* is the answer to the question the wise teacher asks in Ecclesiastes 1:3?

5. Ecclesiastes is an important part of our inspired Bible (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21). Certain passages in the book, however, appear to contradict other portions of God’s Word.

a. How can the wise teacher say that the earth remains forever when the Bible emphatically teaches that the world will be destroyed (Ecclesiastes 1:4; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:1)?

b. Several evidences within Ecclesiastes indicate Solomon assumed the perspective of a natural man—one who possessed an earthly perspective—to prove that life without God is vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:4–11). List four evidences that the wise teacher wrote from man’s earthly perspective (life under the sun), rather than God’s perspective (Ecclesiastes 1:4–11).

1. _____
_____ (v. _____)
2. _____
_____ (v. _____)
3. _____
_____ (v. _____)
4. _____
_____ (v. _____)

6. a. What two things does the Bible teach about the natural man’s ability, or inability, to comprehend God and eternity (1 Corinthians 2:14)?

1. _____
2. _____

b. It is difficult for many Christians to focus their affections on the things of God. Even though they know the world is passing away, they still lust after temporal things. Take a moment to honestly examine your life. Do you live **under the sun**? Yes No

If you answered Yes, what is it that keeps you so bound to this world in your thinking and desires?

7. Beginning in Ecclesiastes 1:12 Solomon recounts his own experiences of trying to find meaning and happiness in life without God.

a. In the Bible the word *wisdom* denotes either (1) the fallible reasoning of fallen man or (2) the infallible wisdom of an infinite God (1 Corinthians 1:20–25; James 3:13–18). *Do you think* Solomon was searching for God’s wisdom or human wisdom in Ecclesiastes 1:12–17?

Why? _____

b. List three things the Bible says about human, or earthly wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:20–25, **the wisdom of this world**).

1. _____

_____ (v. _____)

2. _____

_____ (v. _____)

3. _____

_____ (v. _____)

8. a. The wise teacher said increased (earthly) wisdom and knowledge leads to increased grief and pain (Ecclesiastes 1:18). *Why do you think* this is so?



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ADDITIONAL
INSIGHTS

- b. What kind of pain, physical or mental/emotional, *do you think* he was referring to in Ecclesiastes 1:18?

9. It's been said that man has only two problems: he doesn't know who God is, and he doesn't know who he is in relationship to God. When a person does not understand God, he cannot comprehend the true meaning of life. What must happen before an individual can personally know God and comprehend the things of God (John 3:1-8)?

If you are not sure what it means to be born again, turn to the back of this study guide and read the Final Exam. It will explain how to be born again.

10. What is the most important truth you learned from Ecclesiastes chapter 1?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Lesson 1: Life Is Meaningless

1. The wise teacher presents life from the perspective of a natural (unsaved) man who is attempting to find meaning and happiness in life apart from God. He addresses the general public, whose view of life is limited by what they can see, touch, and understand. The wise teacher meets them on their ground and proceeds to convict them of their vain attempts to find meaning in life. Ecclesiastes is a critique of secularism and secularized religion.
2.
 - a. The phrase “under the sun” means the writer is viewing life from an earthly viewpoint devoid of an eternal perspective.
 - b.
 1. Wisdom literature addresses the practical aspects of life.
 2. Wisdom literature makes frequent use of questions without providing immediate answers.
 3. Wisdom literature addresses some of man’s most complex questions.
3.
 - a. Ecclesiastes helps unsaved people in general realize that life without God leads only to vanity and emptiness.
 - b. Ecclesiastes helps Christians understand the confusion that those without Christ live with on a daily basis. By understanding the mindset of the unsaved, the believer’s heart, often cold and uncaring about the lost, is warned with an increased compassion for their plight. The believer is motivated to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ so they can escape their emptiness, understand the meaning of life, and experience the joy of knowing Jesus Christ.
4.
 - a. Everything in life that’s not centered on God leads to emptiness. Life without Christ cannot provide lasting satisfaction or fulfillment.
 - b. Answers will vary. A possible suggestion: There is no enduring satisfaction and fulfillment (profit) in life if man focused his energy entirely on self-centered goals.

5. a. The wise teacher wrote from an earthly perspective. From man's perspective, it appears that the earth will last forever. When viewing life from a human perspective, the earth appears to be an immovable, eternal object. Man appears to be in a continual state of turmoil and transition from one generation to the next.
 - b. 1. He compared the transitory nature of man and the passing of endless generations to the apparent permanence of the earth (Ecclesiastes 1:4).
 2. He spoke of the sun rising, setting, and hastening to the place where it rises again (Ecclesiastes 1:5). When he spoke of the sun rising and setting, he was speaking in "geocentric" terms. Meteorologists use this same language when they say the sun is rising and setting during the day. When they do this, they are speaking from the perspective of the law of observation. It is the earth that is actually rotating, but from man's perspective, it looks like the sun is rising and setting. The wise teacher said the sun hastened to the place where it rises again. When life is viewed from man's perspective, it's almost as if he thinks no one is on the other side of the earth—another indication of a man-centered perspective on life.
 3. He spoke of the wind turning toward the south, the north, and completing its circuit as if it acted on its own volition. From man's perspective, the wind's chaotic and unpredictable manner doesn't seem to be controlled by an omniscient God (Matthew 8:27).
 4. He spoke of rivers running into the seas/oceans, but they never seem to be full (Ecclesiastes 1:7). Man can't see the evaporation of the seas which causes water to eventually return to land.
6. a. 1. The natural man cannot receive the things of God.
 2. Man cannot comprehend the things of God.
- b. Answers will vary.
7. a. The wise teacher spoke of human wisdom because it leads to emptiness, grief, and sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1:17–18). God's wisdom leads to peace and joy.
 - b. 1. Human wisdom has been exposed as foolishness by God (1 Corinthians 1:20).

2. Human wisdom is incapable of helping us know God (1 Corinthians 1:21).
 3. Human wisdom is inferior to God's wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:25).
8. a. Human wisdom can identify the great questions of life, but it cannot provide tangible answers to the critical questions in life (How was the world created? What is the meaning of life? What happens after death?). Human wisdom sees the problems, but it isn't able to find the answers. Having unanswered questions is always a painful and frustrating endeavor, especially when those questions and answers are at the core of man's existence and the meaning in life.
- b. Mental/emotional.
9. He must be born again (born of the Spirit).
10. Answers will vary.