

1. I thought it would be best if I explained why I picked Ecclesiastes to teach next. It started as a suggestion. Then it became obvious as I prayed about it. For God to really make it obvious, as I was going through my coffee shop, the only song I know of in the last 50 years to quote from that book was being played in the background that morning. Therefore, I'm stuck with it right now.
 - a) OK John, I get the idea that God was leading you to study this book. What does that have to do with my life? Why should I follow along with you? To explain let me give the basic book premise: All we do in life without God's guidance is ultimately a waste of our time. A king with tremendous wealth, a lot of wisdom and had no wars to fight wrote this book based on his experience through those years. In other words, God gave him the wisdom, the resources and the time to find out if there is anything we can do in life apart from God that is beneficial to our lives.
 - b) Let me give my favorite quote on this book. First, know that King Solomon wrote it. The quote came from a Jewish radio commentator and bible teacher named Dennis Prager. He said, "Solomon needs a Prozac". If you don't know, that's a manufactured drug that helps people to calm down if they get too worried about something. While we don't know if the king got over worried about his life, I'm convinced that his conclusions about life that we will read in the final chapter of this book is right: All that we do in life that don't involve God in the process is ultimately a waste of time.
 - c) OK, John, assuming us readers are all Christians and assuming we accept your premise, why should I read through this lesson, let alone this whole study of Ecclesiastes? I hope to show all of us over the next bunch of lessons what it is we do or don't do in life that in effect just a big waste of our time. We're going to cover such diverse issues as to why we believe in God's existence in the first place to describing different things that most of us do in our daily routines that from God's perspective is considered a waste of our time.
 - d) Let me answer the basic question of why should we study this book another way: My goal is to show each of us, areas of our lives that are making a difference for our lives that will last for all of eternity and those things we do that are a waste of our time.
 - i) OK John, what if I like my time wasters? To use a simple example, let's say there is a particular television show we like to watch. We know watching that show has no affect whatsoever on our eternal destiny, but we want some downtime right at this moment. Can we still watch our favorite show, or some other thing we really love to do? Let me give each of us a Prozac and remind us that God has nothing against each of us having downtime. We all need our times of rest and that is not the purpose of this book or this lesson to condemn such times. My point is that if all we do in life is in effect downtime activities, we have then wasted our lives and more importantly wasted the most valuable asset God gives us, our time.
 - e) With that disclaimer stated, my simple goal in this lesson is to have each of us think about how we spend our time and how we can use it in order to make a difference in life. I am sure most of us or all of us want our lives to have meaning. We want to look back at our lives and realize that we have made a difference in the world. This book teaches us what it is we should avoid doing in order to accomplish that goal. This book is Solomon saying to us, learn from my mistakes and don't repeat them. Then we too can have our life make a difference no matter what is our lot in life.
2. With all that said, know that Chapter 1, which I'm covering in this lesson, is just eighteen verses. It is in effect an overview of this 12-chapter book. I believe Chapter 1 is telling us, "Don't waste all our time doing things that don't make a difference in the world". Oh, and if you don't know my lesson title by now, it is "why Solomon needed a Prozac and we don't, to appreciate life."

3. Since this is the first chapter in a multi-lesson study, I always find it best to give the "who, what, when and why's" of the book first, to give all of us of an understanding of what the book is about.
- a) First, let me start with my standard disclaimer. The chapter and verse numbers were not part of the original text, but were added many centuries later.
 - b) Next, it's time for my standard Hebrew Poetry statement: Poetry in the original Hebrew language does not have the last word or syllable rhyme like it does in English. This type of poetry is about one thought connecting with another thought. A famous example is the biblical expression, "spare the rod, spoil the child". (A paraphrase of Proverbs 13:24.) The point is the first thought is somehow connected to the second thought.
 - i) Another example is the repetition of a thought for emphasis. It is like in English when we say that something was very, very good. Saying the word "very" twice emphasizes the thought. We will see that repetition style in this book.
 - ii) Anyway, if you keep these simple rules in mind as you read through the poetry style that this book is written in, one understands the style of Hebrew Poetry even as it is translated into English.
 - c) With that said, let me talk about who wrote it. The author does not give his own name, but there are strong clues that it was Solomon. It was if the author wanted us to figure it out that it was him. At the same time the author is saying in effect, "It's the point I want to teach that is important and not who wrote it, so I'm keeping it anonymous." The clues that convince me this is Solomon, is the fact it was written by the "Son of David". Solomon was the son of David who was the next king. It was written at a time of peace in Israel. That lack of war would give a king time to reflect upon issues that are presented in this book.
 - i) When you read about the life of Solomon in 1st Kings then you discover that he had a reputation as being the wisest man who lived at that time. God gave him that gift. He used that wisdom to write over 3,000 proverbs. (See 1st Kings 4:32.) Only a small portion of those became the book of Proverbs. It was that wisdom that led him to ask and answer a series of questions that became this book.
 - ii) What Solomon wondered in effect, "Is there any purpose to life, other than to live for God?" This book goes through different aspects of life and effectively asks the question: this view of life may make us feel good for awhile, but does it benefit our lives when we focus all our effort on such ideas? One thing to gather as one reads this book is that to enjoy life is not a bad thing. The underlying point is if that is all we care about is enjoying life, one does miss the true purpose of living.
 - d) Next is when: Solomon reigned roughly from 971-932 BC. Jewish scholars will argue that he wrote this book near the end of his life. He probably spent many years learning about lots of different subjects. He had many hundreds of wives and collected lots of stuff. (See 1st Kings 11:3.) He was also considered one of the richest men that ever lived. Imagine if one had a credit card with no limit and someone else paid the bills. Now imagine that one had all the time in the world to collect things and learn about them and contemplate life's meaning. That in effect is how Solomon spent many years of his life. In effect this book is a summary of what he learned from living that excessive lifestyle for many, many years.
 - i) That is another reason why people are convinced Solomon wrote it, because the lessons learned from this book fit well with the life lessons that he himself learned.
4. This leads me to talk a little about philosophy. As we go through Ecclesiastes, understand that it gets very philosophical in it's view about life. Without knowing why until very recently, I spent a lot of time as of late listening to different Christian philosophers debating against atheists and understanding how both groups view the world. Some of the points will become significant as we go through this book. A key point is the appeal of atheism (the belief that there is no God) is that if there is no God, then we are not accountable to anyone and we are free to do whatever we want. One of the things throughout this book and this chapter in particular is to understand why that particular argument falls on its face and why we should not live with that particular view.

- a) At this point, it is probably best if I just start the text. If you would like more background on the book, and don't want to do research elsewhere, I will add more background as we go through the text. In fact, Verse 1 leads to some more fact gathering, so let's start:
- 5. Ecclesiastes 1:1: The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:
 - a) As I said in the introduction, the author does not name himself by name, but just says that he is the son of David. The word "son" in Hebrew can mean literal son or it can also refer to a descendant. That is why some scholars argue someone else could have written this book. Since Solomon more than any other king of Israel had the time, the means and the wisdom to contemplate what is written here, he is the most logical choice as the author.
 - i) There are other clues as we go through the book, but I'm convinced that Solomon is the author at this point, and I write this lesson with that assumption made.
 - b) In my who, what, when and why's section, I never discussed where this was written. Solomon ruled over Israel from Jerusalem, that is the "where".
 - i) More importantly, why does the author want us to know that fact? I think it is to show us, the reader that Solomon knew who God was as a Jewish person. He had the time, the unlimited resources and the wisdom to think about these things.
 - ii) Near the end of this lesson, I'm going to discuss a little more about why Solomon mentioned being the king in Jerusalem and why that is significant.
 - c) Finally, let me discuss the word "teacher". The Hebrew word refers to anyone who at that moment is talking to an audience. It can refer to a rabbi (the Hebrew word for a teacher), or it can also refer to a politician or anyone addressing the crowd.
 - i) That reminds me, I never discussed where the word Ecclesiastes comes from:
 - a) That word comes from the Latin and originally the Greek translation of the bible. It essentially means "teacher" as I just described it. If someone ever asks you what does "Ecclesiastes" mean, you can say "speaker", but it refers to anyone addressing an audience and not just a religious teacher.
 - d) To sum up Verse 1, think of the author saying to us, let me address all of you as a public speaker at this moment. I also happen to be a son of David, of whom God promised that one day a king would come to rule over the world. In other words, let me address all of you, because I have the power, the wisdom, the knowledge and the time to consider all the things that I am about to address in this letter.
 - i) Solomon is not claiming to be "the" descendant who would rule over the world, just a son of King David, who was given the gift of wisdom by God Himself.
 - e) Before I move on, it might be helpful here to explain the difference between intelligence, knowledge and wisdom. Let me use my favorite illustration: Eating food.
 - i) Intelligence is about how fast we figure out that eating food satisfies our hunger.
 - ii) Knowledge is realizing that if we eat that food, we will no longer be hungry.
 - iii) Wisdom is the act of actually eating the food.
 - iv) The point is one can be very intelligent about how fast we figure things out. We might also have the right knowledge to do the right thing. But until we actually go and apply that knowledge to our lives, we don't have good wisdom.
 - v) I have met lots of well education people with great amounts of intelligence and knowledge, but not wisdom. The goal of Ecclesiastes is to apply all of the great intelligence and knowledge that Solomon gathered over his lifetime and apply it to this book for us to understand how to have wisdom as we live out our lives.
 - a) That is why philosophy is the underlying subject of this book
 - f) All of this talk about wisdom and philosophy leads me to my final point about Verse 1.
 - i) It is that we should read Ecclesiastes not just about a bunch of ideas that say to us, "Don't let this happen to you". It is to understand that life is meant to be enjoyed. We can enjoy the different concepts taught in this book. At the same time having God in our lives makes us appreciate all the more what is being taught here.

6. Verse 2: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."
- a) For all of you fans of the King James Version of the bible, the word "vanity" is used and not the word "meaningless" as stated here. Other paraphrases use expressions like "a big waste of our time" or simply "time wasters". The general idea is something that is a waste of our time and has no significant meaning.
 - b) That term translated here "meaningless" is used 39 times in the original Hebrew language in this book. Remember that I said my favorite comment on this book is, "Solomon needs a Prozac". One gets the impression the entire book is Solomon saying, "Don't do this or don't do that" and then one will be happy. It is as if he is saying, "Don't get too excited to live for this or that concept, as it is a complete waste of one's time." My job over the course of this book is to explain why each of the topics taught in this book is meaningless. That does not mean we can't enjoy our life. It just means that without living a God centered life one cannot truly appreciate all the topics mentioned in this letter. To state the obvious, I will expand upon that thought as we go through this book. Hey, we're only on Verse 2.
 - c) Finally, let me say why "meaningless" is used three times in this verse. As I also stated in the introduction, it is like in English when we say something is "very, very, very good". To repeat a term like that more than once is done for emphasis. Now that you get the idea that Solomon is getting worked up about the idea that everything we do in life without the involvement of God is a waste of time, we can move on to explain the specifics.
7. Verse 3: What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?
- a) The first thing that Solomon brings up is work. No matter what type of government that one lives under, work is a necessity for society. Food has to be grown and harvested. We have to build shelters to live and survive. Solomon starts his great discussion about how we live out our lives with the basic foundation that hard work is necessary in order for people to live in the first place. If you think about it, this concept goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. God commanded that Adam "work the garden" that they lived in. After they ate the bad fruit, God commanded Adam that he had to work hard in order to get the food that one needs to survive. (Based on Genesis 3:17).
 - b) The point of this verse is not that work is a bad thing. It is necessary for a society to thrive let alone survive. What Solomon is saying is "if all you live for is to work, you will realize one day what a waste of life that is." To live only for work is the "vanity or meaningless" that Solomon is describing as the theme of this book.
 - c) You may say that is obvious. I have met way too many people who primarily live for the next deal to get done or the next paycheck to come in. Yes, we need income in order to enjoy our lives. Again there is nothing wrong with this in principal. It is the idea that if we only live to get more things we truly miss out on what God wants us to get out of life.
 - d) One of my favorite movie lines about the acquisition of wealth is from Gordon Gekko, the fictional character from the movie "Wall Street". One of his lines is that "I have never seen a painting that truly captures the beauty of a sunset". My point is that the best things this world has to offer can't be bought or sold like watching a beautiful sunset.
 - e) Coming back to Solomon, is his point that we should not be working? Of course not. His point is simply that there is more to live than the acquisition of wealth and things. If that is all we live for, we will end up like "Gordon Gekko", who in the movie spent his life only focusing on acquiring things for himself and those he financially supported.
 - f) While this thought seems like an obvious and oversimplified bit of wisdom, I have known way too many people who primarily live for such concepts. People wrongly think that if they just have a little more money, fame, or just stuff then they will be happy. Solomon is trying to tell us to have a little wisdom (not knowledge or intelligence, but wisdom) and apply this principal in order to appreciate all of the wonderful blessings God wants us to appreciate about life and not just focus on say, earning a living.

8. Verse 4: Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.
- a) I stated in my introduction that this book gets a lot into philosophy and based on my little speech about money, one can see that already. That thought about philosophy leads me back to what I said in my introduction about atheists. One of the arguments that one will hear from atheists is that the world always existed and always will exist. The essential argument of this verse is that life goes on as it always does and nothing ever changes.
 - i) To state what is obvious to most of us, the world had a beginning one day in the past and therefore, it must have an ending one-day in the future. Even someone who is an atheist must admit that life ultimately has no purpose if there is no God that guides our lives or judges the world one day if our world ends one day.
 - ii) That is why such atheists want to argue that things just go on as they do forever.
 - iii) So if Solomon is the "Son of David" ruling over the people that brought us the Old Testament in the first place, why would he argue that generations come and go?
 - a) First, he is not saying that God does not exist. He is making the argument as to why we should appreciate whatever time we have on this earth. The idea is that sooner or later, no one will care what we did in our life. Even if we become someone famous like Solomon, most people won't think about us very much after we die and therefore, we should learn to appreciate life as much as we can while we are here.
 - b) Someone may wonder, what would Solomon think of seeing a man walk on the moon or people walking around with cell phones? Would he still make the claim that generations come and go and the world remain forever? He would be amazed at what people have accomplished. I still believe he would know that the greatest purpose one can have in life is to live to make a difference for God with one's life, no matter the technology. We'll get to that concept later in this book. In the meantime, I want to come back to Verse 3:
 - i) Let's look at Verse 3 in context of the previous set of verses. First Solomon said in effect that all of life is a waste of time. Then he said that it is a waste of time to only focus on making money. Now he says that life just goes on forever.
 - ii) What is the connection of this flow of verses? Is it just simply that while some people are more successful at others, life itself just moves on? In effect yes it does.
 - iii) What Solomon is trying to do is have us see life in the perspective of say a 1,000-year time span. No matter what we do, odds are good no one will think about us, say a thousand years from now. Even if we become famous enough that we are studied say in a history class, people may think about us for a few moments and then revert back to their lives. His point is essentially appreciate our life now while we can, because it goes very quickly and odds are pretty sure that no one will care about us eventually after we are dead.
 - c) Coming back to the verse, is it arguing that the world will continue as it is forever? No it is not. That is why one always has to read bible verses in context. The point in context is that while it seems like every day is just like every other day, there is a God that watches over the universe and watches over our lives and we are accountable to Him. I know that is true because that is the conclusion of the book that we will eventually get to.
 - d) Meanwhile, Solomon's gloomy outlook continues in Verse 5.
9. Verse 5: The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.
- a) To state the obvious again, Solomon is not being literally when he says that the sun is "rushing" to be seen again. Solomon is also not saying that the sun revolves around the earth. This is a word picture about watching time go by. It would be like saying, every day seems like every other day and nothing ever really changes in life. It is one more verse to prove that Solomon truly does need a Prozac and not worry so much. ☺
 - b) The question for us to ponder is that, if every day seems like every other day, then what are we doing with our time? How are we using our time to make a difference for God?

- i) I admit, even with all of this writing and running my own business, times do come when I get bored. I have found the best solution is to pray one's way through it. It is to ask God something like "What is it you would like me to do at this moment? I want You to be in charge of my life, so guide me as to what to do." It then amazes me how my perspective changes simply by reciting a simple prayer like that.
 - ii) Suppose that prayer doesn't work for me. Then ask yourself, if money was not a problem, how would you want to spend your time? For what it is worth, I love to ask that question to young adults. They will then usually mention traveling to see the world. Then I ask, once you get that out of your system, what is it you want to do all day? It is amazing to hear the answers. I then encourage them to work to accomplish their goal, even if it is only a little time per day or week. In effect it is the reminder that no one will live our lives for us. If there is a goal we want to accomplish, it is up to us and not someone else to do it for us. That may sound like simple and logical advice, but it is amazing to realize how many people never pursue after things they want to accomplish out of fear of failure or fear that they don't have the time or talents to accomplish that goal. What they don't realize is that most people who set such goals do usually accomplish them.
 - c) That little speech leads me back to this verse. The point is in effect, life does go on, and the question for us is what are we doing about it? Are we just watching time go by, or are we using the most valuable asset we have, our time to make a difference for Him in the world and in our lives? Now that I have all of us thinking, time for the next verse.
- 10. Verse 6: The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.
 - a) To understand this verse, first let's see it in context.
 - i) Verse 3 asks the question in effect, what good is all the work we do all day?
 - ii) Verse 4 then says, "generations come and go and the earth remains the same".
 - iii) Verse 5 then says in effect, another new day, but nothing changes.
 - iv) As you can see, Solomon does need a Valium. With that in mind Verse 6 is saying to us that the wind goes in a circuit, but in effect nothing ever changes.
 - b) My point here is all of these verses are saying in effect, life goes on and on, so what? That is why the conclusion of the book is that life without God is a waste of time. However, we won't get to that conclusion until Chapter 12.
 - c) You may find it interesting to note that Solomon is not just saying this stuff off of the top of his head. Scientists have concluded many centuries after Solomon wrote this that wind does move in a circular pattern. We don't know how Solomon knew this but he did. My point is that while the bible is not a science book, if it is read in context, one can learn facts about science that do stand the test of time.
 - d) OK John we get the point that life goes on and we should use our time to make in order to make a difference for God in this world. We get that. Now what? As I stated earlier, if one is not sure what to do, pray for God's guidance. Ask yourself what one cannot stand not to do, and do it or work toward the goal of doing that. What if we do know what it is that God has called us to do? Well, then what are you standing around here reading this for if you know that answer? ☺ Hopefully, this study will be of benefit to you as each of us continue to use our time to make that difference for Him.
 - e) Meanwhile, Verse 7.
- 11. Verse 7: All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.
 - a) Here is one of those statements that most people instinctively know is true, but we never consider how that works. Yes we know that steam rises from the ocean to form clouds and it is "God's way of bringing water to the earth". That statement alone is a wonderful reason why you can't argue that all of life as we know it is an accident.

- b) Stop and consider why Solomon is making all of these statements. We have a bunch of verses that say in effect, "life goes on as it always does". It obviously appears that he is getting very bored with life even after all of his studies on the way life works. Does that mean that the gathering of knowledge is a bad thing? Of course not. It just means that it is not an end to itself.
 - c) Let me try this another way: Information we consider very important now, will become trivia to us years from now. If I asked you to name, say the best baseball player from 30 years ago, or the number one song from say, 42 years ago, unless one is a student of that particular subject, one will not know the answer. Even if one spends a lot of time learning that particular subject, there is no end to that learning and more importantly over the long run there is no satisfaction to it. That is Solomon's point: It may be interesting to become an expert on a specific subject, but there is no limit to it and at the end of our lives, no one will care that we were an expert on that particular subject. Believe it or not, that thought leads me perfectly to Verse 8.
12. Verse 8: All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.
- a) John's loose translation: There is never enough for us to see or hear. Our eyes and ears never say to us, I've seen and heard enough for one day. Solomon is making his point that there is no end to learning. It is important to state that he is not preaching against learning. He is saying that learning of itself is not an end, just a means to accomplish a goal in life. Solomon is saying learn things and enjoy life, but don't consider learning an end to itself, as it never is. That is his point here.
 - b) One has to appreciate learning for what it is. For those who don't know, I have both an undergraduate and a master's degree from a major university. Much of what I learned there was practical, but a lot of it was also a waste of time. Life itself will teach you what was and was not valuable about college. I also know very good people in my profession that have never been to college. One can get educated formally or just by going through life. The greatest advantage of formal college is having that degree helps to sell one's self when applying for a job or selling one's services to others. Still, I have learned that it is not a requirement in order to either succeed in life or appreciate life for what it is.
 - c) As the verse states, there is no limit to what one can learn, see or hear. The point of this verse is that one can wear themselves out trying to learn all there is to learn, and never appreciate life or even enjoy the moment. Yes, once again, it is time for Solomon's Prozac: He needs to realize that one can appreciate all that one has learned and not kill himself trying to say, learn all that there is to learn in life.
13. Verse 9: What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.
- a) Speaking of verses where Solomon needs to appreciate life for what it is, I present Verse 9 to you. It says in effect, there is nothing new in life. If you recall earlier, I wondered what would Solomon think of seeing a man land on the moon or people talking on cell phones? Would he still say that there is nothing new if he saw technology as it existed today?
 - i) While technology allows us to communicate with people we are not able to do without such technology, we are still doing what people have been doing through out history, communicating with others. Even landing on the moon is traveling. People have been traveling to see new things since we have been on earth.
 - ii) While technology allows us to do things greater in scope than has ever been done in other times in history, we are still doing things that have been done since time began for people. In that sense, there is nothing new that people can do.
 - b) It is important to state again, that Solomon is not against trying new things. What he is doing is explaining to us different things we can do in our lives and he calls all of them in effect time wasters. Our job is to understand why they are time wasters.

- i) To explain that, think about how obsessed we get with trying the latest thing. We easily get bored and want to do something new or different. Stop for a time and look around at how many people are busy playing with their smart phones.
 - a) They are in effect wanting to get new information as they are bored with what they already know.
 - ii) So are you telling us to stop texting? Only if we are driving or trying to cross a street while we are doing that activity. Solomon's point is not that any of those activities are bad, it is just that none of them are going to make a difference for eternity based on doing them.
 - c) Let me approach this whole topic a different way: If we knew we only had say one more day to live, would we still be doing what we are doing right now? Let's say we are not allowed to tell anyone we are going to die tomorrow, how would we want to spend our last day living? What would we want to do with our time? That is in effect the main question that Solomon is asking in this book. He is not condemning any aspect of lives. What Solomon is saying is "Are you using your life for what really matters for eternity, or is our life one big time waster?"
 - i) On that convicting thought, it is time for the next verse.
14. Verse 10: Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago;
- a) As I read this, I keep coming back to my question of what would Solomon think of all the technology of our modern world. Would he still say, there is nothing new in the world?
 - i) One has to keep in mind that until the modern use of electricity, the speed that people traveled and communicate did not change for millennia. When this book was written, life did not change significantly long before or long after.
 - ii) Therefore, I ask the question again, "is there anything new", even with all of the technology we have had, say over the last century, let alone the last few years?
 - iii) One cannot deny that technology has added to our ability to communicate with others faster and even for the average person to learn new things very easily.
 - iv) What hasn't changed is our desire to endlessly learn. What hasn't changed is our desire to sin despite all of the technology we have today. What hasn't changed is human nature over thousands of years. While life spans are getting longer due to better eating and better technology, human nature has not improved over time.
 - b) This reminds me of something I have learned about the mental health profession. They can only do so much to help people. They can help people who want to change and who want to get better, but there are limits to how they can help people. Psychologists and similar professions can learn why people do certain things, but they can't fix our human natural tendency to do the wrong thing in life. This is why God in effect, reaches down to us and say, "Let Me help you to live the type of life that does make a difference for all of eternity." Those are the timeless principals that the bible teaches us. Here in Ecclesiastes, it is reminding us in many ways that life without God is in effect a big waste of time, as our human nature will still cause us to sin, no matter how much mental health we seek or how much technology we apply to our lives.
 - i) Time for disclaimers: I understand that our bodies are chemical and science has discovered lots of ways to help people cope when we are not mentally balanced. I am not one of those people who argue that the whole mental health profession is a waste of time and money. I am saying human nature does not change over time. I am also saying that God designed us with a need to worship Him and seek Him in order to use our lives to make a difference in the world. Without Him involved in our lives, our lives are a big "time waster" as Ecclesiastes teaches us. In that sense, there is nothing new in life, and that is Solomon's point here in this verse.

15. Verse 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.
- a) You may recall that I stated earlier that soon after we die, no one will care and life goes on. Even if we become famous enough where people study us historically, they will think about us for a little bit, and then go back to their own lives. Solomon's point here is that we need to consider what is and what is not important in life.
 - b) The flow of these verses is that Solomon wrote a whole bunch of verses that say in effect all of life without God is a big waste of time. Life goes on with or without us, no matter how important we may think we are, or how valuable we think we are. Even if one does amass a great amount of wealth, statistically speaking, it usually disappears soon after the death of that person. What Solomon is trying to tell us over and over again is the idea that life is precious. Use one's time wisely. No one is going to care about us after we are gone.
 - c) Even if we spend a lot of time studying and say, add to our technology, others may use what we created, but no one is going to care about us personally.
 - d) So are you saying we shouldn't try to make a difference in this world? Of course not. If anything, I would argue that just the opposite is true: God wants us to use our time in order to make a difference for Him in this world.
 - e) People often miss the main point of this book: It is not that life itself is bad, or to use our time to learn things or say build things is a waste of time. It is that we need to appreciate our lives as they are short.
 - f) It may help to know that for religious Jews, the book of Ecclesiastes is publicly read on dates that are associated with celebrations in Jewish synagogues. I heard that this book is usually read during the feast of Tabernacles. That is a time for Jewish people to celebrate and remember how God has blessed their lives. My point is Ecclesiastes is not designed to be a book to realize what a waste of time my life has been. It is designed for us to realize that having a God centered life is the best way to appreciate any and all things that we do in life. Ecclesiastes is designed to teach us how to have joy in life no matter what it is we enjoy doing.
 - i) On that positive thought, I'll move on to Verse 12.
16. Verse 12: I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 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!
- a) I want to come back for the moment to the question of whether or not Solomon was the one who actually wrote this book. After King Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was split into two kingdoms. No king ever ruled over united Israel again. My point is that if this book was written by another king who was a descendant of David, he would have said in Verse 12 that he was king over Judah (the Southern Kingdom) from Jerusalem. The kings that ruled over the northern kingdom ruled from a city called Samaria. My simple point here is just that verse 12 is another piece of evidence that points to Solomon as the author.
 - i) If that is not enough proof for you, remember that God gave Solomon the specific gift of wisdom. (See 1st Kings, 3:12.) The problem is that sometimes the area of life that is our strength, becomes our downfall. If you think about it, we usually ask God to help us in the areas of our life that we know are our weaknesses. We usually fail to ask Him to help us in areas we consider our strengths. Because Solomon understood he had the gift of wisdom, he in effect wasted that gift by spending a lot of years learning things trying to get wisdom without God's help.
 - ii) That is another lesson to be gathered from this book. Gathering knowledge in order to become wiser without God's help is a big mistake to be made in life. That is the mistake Solomon made and the one He is trying to prevent us from making by writing this book. That is why Solomon refers to all knowledge be it correct or not without God's influence a waste of our time and resources and something to be avoided in life. Meanwhile, it is time to get back to the verses themselves.

- b) These verses say that Solomon was a king over a country (Israel) and that he devoted a good portion of his life to studying human nature and whether or not there is anything people can do with their lives that makes a difference that last longer than their lifetime.
 - i) One of Solomon's conclusions is the last sentence of Verse 13. It reads, "What a heavy burden God has laid on men!" First, notice that Solomon accepts the idea that God does exist. He is arguing that we are still accountable to Him no matter what we do or don't do with our lives and that is a burden we all must bear.
 - ii) OK, so what is that burden that God lays upon us? What I have been preaching this whole time, to use our time wisely in order to make a difference for Him. The burden is to figure out how God wants us to use our time and resources. God says to us in effect, "I am well aware of how your life is going at this moment. I know of the problems you have to deal with and the things you are stuck with now."
 - iii) The secret to dealing with life is to have God in the middle of the process. It is to ask God, "Here am I, right now in this situation. Make it obvious to me how I can use my life to make a difference for You. I accept that You are in charge of my life. Make it obvious to me how not to waste my time in life."
 - iv) I am positive that God can't resist a prayer like that. When we acknowledge that He is in charge, over time He does begin to use our lives to make that difference for Him in this world. Our world will no longer be boring or just go along as it has in the past. That is what this book is teaching us.
 - v) Meanwhile, we still have five more verses left to go:
- 17. Verse 14: I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.
 - a) There is a classic reference to the idea that Greek's desired to understand the world, while it took the Romans to govern the world. That is why the privileged Roman class would hire Greeks to teach their children about life. I say that because I think Solomon would have made a great Greek philosopher along the lines of Aristotle and Plato. As I stated in the introduction, he spent a lot of time just observing and thinking about how life works. As we jokingly say today, the man had too much time on his hands.
 - b) That thought leads me back to this verse. Solomon spent a lot of time just thinking about all the things that people do all day. He realized that in the end, no matter how much pleasure one gets from those things, in effect, without God they are meaningless.
 - i) That reminds me to explain the difference between happiness and joy. If one just got, say a million dollars for no particular reason, one may be happy for a time. If one just had heard wonderful news about something, one may be happy. The idea of joy is something completely different. Joy is about appreciating life no matter if or not something special just happened.
 - a) Think of joy is our all around attitude.
 - b) Think of happiness as being based on our circumstances of the moment.
 - c) All of that leads me back to Solomon here in Verse 14. He is saying that the things people do all day can make them happy at times, but without living a God centered life one does not experience joy. I am reminded of how atheists view life. They believe they can have joy because they don't believe they are accountable to a god that exists. However, if one thinks about it, ultimately if there is no god, life will eventually becomes meaningless.
 - i) Think about it logically. If our sun runs out of energy one day and life on earth comes to an end that way, then all that we do as people is eventually meaningless.
 - ii) I believe that is Solomon's point here. He is not against enjoying life. He is telling us that no matter what is our lot in life, no matter how much happiness we do get based on whatever we do all day, that may bring us happiness at times, but true joy only comes from living a God centered life. That is the underlying point of this verse and what Solomon is teaching in this book.

18. Verse 15: What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.
- a) I admit, I was confused as to what Solomon meant by "twisted", so I researched the word that is translated "twisted" here. I think a better translation is "inscrutable". That describes something that is impossible to understand. It is describing something beyond fixable.
 - i) I think it is Solomon's colorful way of saying that each of us are born with a "sin disease" and it can't be fixed. Think about this verse in context: In the previous verse Solomon said that anything we do in life without God's influence is utterly meaningless. Now he is saying those things can't be fixed.
 - b) This reminds me, there have been scholars that did not want to include this book as part of the bible because there is a lack of any hints about Jesus. Are they wrong! Here in this verse, is the reminder that without God's help, life is in effect a waste of time. (More proof that Solomon really needed a Prozac here!) My point is without God rescuing us from our sinful state, all of us are "twisted beyond help" or "inscrutable". The point is that all of us do need a Savior to save us from this condition.
 - i) This leads me back to the point that all people are born with a "sin disease". It is the concept that all of us, without God's influence will choose to sin. I believe that is the observation Solomon made by spending a lot of time just watching people. That included very religious people as well as everyday people.
 - ii) Solomon is not arguing against doing good things. He is just saying that without God's power in our life, ultimately we are just wasting our time.
19. Verse 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."
- a) To understand this verse, one has to understand what Solomon thought of Jerusalem.
 - i) This was not just any city. This was not just the capital of Israel. It was the place where God Himself was "centered" on earth. Yes of course I believe God can be found anywhere at any time. Still, it is strange to consider the fact that the same God who created everything we can perceive has said in effect, that this little piece of real estate that we call Israel is His and Jerusalem is it's capital.
 - ii) That concept is not stated anywhere blatantly in the bible, but it is implied. The idea of land ownership in Israel is based on the concept that God owns this land and we Israelites are just using it. For those of us with a real estate background, we would say the Israelites have a leased fee interest (think of a tenant) in the land of Israel and not a fee simple (like a homeownership interest) interest in it. Many Old Testament bible verses show that God considers Israel "His land". See Second Chronicles 7:20 as a good example of that principal.
 - b) I give that background, because Solomon realized that he was king over the place that God considers His "home on earth". Remember that Solomon was only the third Israelite king over Jerusalem. There were other foreign kings that ruled there before the Israelites have conquered that city. Solomon's point is that he believed he had more wisdom than any king that has ever ruled from that location and that included his father David.
 - c) Solomon did not mean that as an insult to David. It is just the realization that God gave Solomon a special gift of both knowledge and wisdom. Solomon's greatest strength also became his greatest weakness. Because Solomon had that gift of both great knowledge and wisdom, it also hurt him because he realized after many years of studying people and things, that no matter how one lives out their lives without God, it is eventually a waste of one's time. It may at times bring happiness but there is no true joy without living for God.
 - d) OK John, you are preaching to the choir again. All of us reading this already are trusting in Jesus for our salvation. Tell me why should I care about any of this if I already know this is true? For starters, it helps us to explain to others why we choose to live the way we do live. It reminds us when we do fail, that we still can trust in God despite our failures. More importantly, it reminds us how we should be using our most valuable asset to live.

20. Verse 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.
- a) Verse 17 is in effect a preview of Chapter 2. Much of that chapter explains what a waste of time it is to just seek pleasure all day in order to have joy in life. Since I'm near the end of this lesson, I'll cover that further in the next lesson.
 - b) To explain this verse, visualize trying to chase after wind. It is describing something that is impossible to do. Along the same lines of thinking, Solomon is saying here that trying to understand what is wise as well as what is a waste of time is ultimately meaningless.
 - i) Yes, Solomon really does need a Prozac and I promise that is the last time I'll use that joke in this lesson.
 - ii) It is as if Solomon realized that while the gift of great wisdom has its benefits, it also has its cost: That cost is the realization that spending one's life trying to get the importance of wisdom as well as the significance of folly (that describes a lack of good sense) is in itself ultimately a waste of time.
 - iii) It is Solomon saying in effect that living the life, as a philosopher is ultimately a waste of time if one is not living a God centered life. One may learn lots of things about a lot of different subjects, but without living a God centered life there is no joy in that lifestyle to have the privilege to spend all day just thinking about the way that life works.
 - c) OK John, so Solomon realized what a waste of time it is to just sit around and think all day about how the world worked. Why should I care? Part of the answer is so that we too don't waste our lives thinking and living the same way. I am not condemning the science of philosophy. I have learned a lot from Christian philosophers and even how non-Christian philosophers view the world. I just need to realize like Solomon that with all of that knowledge, is the reminder that ultimately if that knowledge is not being used for God's glory, it is a waste of our time to study it.
 - d) If you want to take something away from this lesson, it should be the idea that not only should we pray for God's help in the areas of our lives where we struggle, but also in the areas we consider our strength. We often fail to give God our strengths because we think we have that area covered. Solomon's great failure for many years was to not turn over to God what was his strength (his wisdom) and that caused Solomon for many years to turn away from God until near the end of his life when he wrote this book.
 - e) While that would be a great way to end this lesson, I still have one more verse to go.
21. Verse 18: For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.
- a) Speaking of Solomon realizing that relying upon his wisdom alone was his great mistake in life, I present Verse 18. This is Solomon saying, in effect what I just said. Solomon got the idea that God gave him the gift of great wisdom and knowledge. Because he refused for many years to give that gift back to God (by praying something like, God, this gift is your responsibility, help me to use it to make a difference for You), Solomon did waste much of his life. If you study Solomon's life in 1st Kings, he spent many years collecting things and learning things without following biblical advice. His conclusion is in effect this book we are studying. That conclusion is that even if one has a gift to understand how the world works, without living a God centered life, that too is a waste of time.
 - b) On that strange thought, let me turn this whole thing over to God in my closing prayer.
22. Heavenly Father, help us to remember that whatever gift You have given to each of us, belongs to You and not to us. Help us to take whatever talent and gift You have given us and give it back to You so that we can use those gifts to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to realize what are our special gifts as You said all believers have them. (See Ephesians 4:8) Help us to give you our "strong suits" as well as the areas of life where we do struggle. Use us, faults and all so that we can use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.