

1. Welcome to my final lesson on Ecclesiastes. My title for this lesson is, "practical wisdom". If you think about it, most of Ecclesiastes so far has been one discussion after another on the subject of how not to live one's life. The author, Solomon spent a lot of time explaining why it is a waste of a life to just spend it say, trying to get as much fame, money or power as possible. Remember that Solomon himself had all of those things and understood how unsatisfying they were to life.
 - a) Here in the final three chapters of this book, Solomon is now telling us since he spent so much time preaching on how not to live, he wants to give a little advice on how is the best way to live out the time that God has given us. It is practical wisdom on how to make the best of the time we have. So why should we listen to him? Because he's "been there and done that" far more than most of us can even imagine doing in one lifetime.
 - b) In these chapters we will get proverbs that teach us basically, "wise people live this way, while foolish people live that way". They are full of bits of wisdom for us to keep in mind as to how to best live out our lives. That is why I call it "practical wisdom".
 - c) In these final chapters, he looks at life like an old man realizing that his best years are now behind him. He is effectively telling us not to waste the most valuable thing we own, our time, doing things that don't make an eternal difference. He's not against having any time to say relax or spend time with loved ones. He is asking us to consider how we are using our time and to realize how precious it is.
2. With that said, these final chapters are mostly a bunch of proverbs to give us practical advice on how to live our lives to make a difference for God. The good news here is we are past Solomon's depressive attitude of "don't do this or that, as in the end that is a waste of the time that God has given us to live." These chapters shift the focus from a negative view of things that are a waste of time to the positive view of here are some practical bits of wisdom that we should all consider in order to live the type of wise life that God desires of us.
 - a) Let me explain these chapters another way: One doesn't get wisdom just from say getting older or by just living out one's life. One has to spend time acquiring wisdom and looking to God to get that wisdom. God gave us a bible so we can think about the stories and the proverbs in that book and consider how to apply them to our lives in order to acquire that wisdom in the first place.
 - b) The purpose of bible study is not to learn about ancient history. It is to learn principals to apply to our lives in order to make each of us wiser people. In this book, Solomon spent a lot of chapters saying in effect, "Don't live this way or that way, as in the end that's a great waste of one's life. That is why the most commonly used phrase in this book is translated "meaningless" in this translation or "vanity" in the King James Version.
 - c) The good news is we are done saying, "Don't do this or that". In these final three chapters, Solomon is now saying, "You want to live a life that has meaning? Great, study the points I lay out here in order to acquire wisdom and then we can live out a life that has meaning and can make a difference for God with how we live.
 - d) Suppose we think, my life already has meaning and I already do trust in God. Why read through this study? The answer is to remind ourselves of principals that we should apply to our lives. It is too easy to get distracted by the world and forget the principals that God wants us to remember to make a difference for Him with our lives. That's why we don't just read the bible once and move on. It is meant as a life long guide in order to keep our focus on Him and learn how to use our lives for His glory. With that said, we're ready for the practical wisdom that Solomon lays out for us in these three final chapters.

3. Chapter 10, Verse 1: As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
- a) As Solomon starts to approach the end of the book, he is now starting to explain how it is that God wants us to live out our lives. He does that by comparing and contrasting how the type of person who trusts in God lives (called "the wise") with someone who doesn't care about God (called the fool). Before I begin, doesn't Jesus clearly teach us not to call anyone a fool? (Yes it does, Matthew 5:22). Remember there is a big difference between calling a person a fool and simply recognizing foolish behavior when we see it. Solomon here is simply trying to give us examples of how to recognize such behavior.
 - i) With that said, Jesus point is that God wants us to focus on our own behavior and not just go around worried about the behavior of everyone around us as somehow being inferior to our own.
 - b) I state all of that first, because as we read Chapter 10, Solomon is saying to us that there is a way God desires that we live out our lives. To live His way requires learning how to get wisdom, which is what Solomon lays out in these chapters. A mistake many Christians do make is thinking wisdom is this magical ability to only say perfect things or think just the right thing. Instead, wisdom is simply to see situations as God may see them. It is about learning to do the right thing in all situations by trusting God to guide our lives.
 - c) With all that said, we can now focus on Verse 1. If you haven't figured it out by now, it is obvious Solomon likes to use word pictures that all of us can relate to. In the first half of Verse 1, he is thinking of perfume giving off a bad smell because of some dead flies in that bottle. Since Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, I'm sure that he became familiar with perfume and the scents of those women. His point has nothing to do with the smell of perfume. It's just as one little thing (dead flies) can ruin something bigger like the smell of nice perfume, so a little bit of wrongdoing can ruin someone's reputation.
 - d) One's reputation is how other people see us. The point is not about being perfect. It's just that once one has a reputation for wrongdoing, it can outweigh whatever good things one has accomplished in their lifetime. For example, if someone is known for having an affair on their spouse, it can outweigh whatever else he or she has accomplished when it comes to how others see them. I'm guessing that Solomon was thinking about his father and all the damage to his life that began when he had one of the most famous affairs in history.
 - e) This proverb is not just for an affair. The point is any sinful thing that one can do in one's life can permanently ruin one's reputation. I know of some pastors who no longer have a major ministry because of publicly known "folly" in their lives. I'm sure there are examples from any other profession one is familiar with. The point is to think about our reputation before engaging in anything that is potentially sinful. Sometimes scandals in our life can't overcome whatever good what else one has done. Yes we can be forgiven from past sins, but we still have to live with the damage done by those actions. Therefore remember this has nothing to do with salvation, just about one's reputation to others around them.
4. Verse 2: The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.
- a) I know of some biblical literate Republicans who love to use this proverb to irritate their friends who are Democrats here in the United States. The bad news for conservatives is that politics is not what this proverb is describing.
 - b) To understand this proverb, consider that most people are right handed. With my sincere apologies to those who are left handed, the right hand is associated with strength. That is why Solomon's point is that wisdom will help us do what is right when we need to make big decisions. When I get asked what is the right thing to do in a particular situation, the first thing I ask people to do is pray over the decision. As I like to say, "Dear God, please bless it or block it". Then one should simply try to make the best decision one can with the information one has at hand. That is what applying wisdom is all about.

- c) Let me explain this verse one more way before I move on. Just based on the fact that one is trying to apply Godly wisdom to a situation doesn't always means one will make the right decision. What if that decision turns out to be disastrous? That is often God's way of saying, now let's try something else as I'm leading you down a specific path for your life.
 - i) In summary, this verse is saying foolish is to not seek God for His guidance when we have a tough decision to make. With that said, I'm ready for Verse 3.
- 5. Verse 3: Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.
 - a) Let me ask the logical question here: How can one tell if another person is foolish just by the way they are walking along the road? The answer can be as simple as seeing a person going in a way that could endanger his or her life and realize they is not doing something smart at that moment. This verse does not mean that we can look at every person we see on a road and immediately know his or her state of wisdom. It just means there are times when we see somebody do something that is not wise and it is obvious to everyone who is watching him or her.
 - b) I have a vivid memory of one time I was trying to carry too much and I noticed someone who was laughing at my behavior. Instead of complaining about them, I simply realized the mistake I made by trying to do too much. That doesn't mean I'm branded a fool for life. It just means that there are times in all of our lives when we do foolish things. Whether we realize it or not, it is obvious to others around us.
- 6. Verse 4: If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.
 - a) Here is another little bit of wisdom, "learning to stay calm when's one's boss is angry". I admit at my job there are times when I mess up, as I am human. I try to think in terms of how to remedy the situation as opposed to lashing out at whoever is angry at me. It is to keep in mind the concept that one can't change the past, just learn from it as to not repeat the same mistakes. The point is you can't fix anger with anger, especially when someone is ruling over us in some capacity.
 - b) This also reminds me of the importance of repeating back what someone says to you. In those times when someone is angry, a way to calm them is to repeat back their key words so that they know you hear them. After they have calmed down, now he or she are ready to hear suggestions on how to remedy the situation.
 - c) Let me pause for a moment and explain how these verses are connected. What Solomon is doing here is giving us practical bits of wisdom to apply to our lives so that we can live them out to make a difference for God. It's not that say, "Verse 3 leads us to Verse 4". It is more like, here are some tips on how to apply wisdom in different situations. With that thought in mind, let us move on to the next bit of practical wisdom, Verse 5.
- 7. Verse 5: There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: ⁶Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. ⁷ I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.
 - a) Sometimes one forgets that the writer of this book, was a king with essentially unlimited power, wealth and fame at that time. The bible records that leaders of other nations did travel to see Solomon's wealth, power and listen to his wisdom. (See 1st Kings 10:1-3).
 - b) My point is that Solomon in his experience probably met other rulers who he thought to be wise ones and others who he considered foolish because such rulers did not have any fear of God's judgment over their lives. I'm sure Solomon over the course of his lifetime met many wise people who were not elevated to positions he felt they should have been elevated to. In effect, that is what Verse 7 is saying as well. That sometimes those who are destined for leadership are put in low places while those who never should be raised up to be leaders are so. That's the meaning of the "slaves on horseback" reference.

- c) To put these verses another way: life is not fair. There are people who are in power that we are convinced never should be in power. There are those that we meet who we think should be given a greater role than they are.
 - d) If you know a little of the history of Solomon's father David, Solomon had a half-brother that attempted a mutiny against David as the king. David was forced to leave Israel, as a civil war was about to start between those forces loyal to David and those that were loyal to his son Absalom. I don't know how old Solomon was when this occurred, but I'm sure that Solomon was among the young men that had to leave Jerusalem when that occurred.
 - i) For those unfamiliar with that story, David's forces won, Absalom was killed and David returned to Jerusalem to once again rule as the king. I suspect it was at that time that Solomon may have seen his father walking out of town and maybe there were some slaves that left town on horses or mules. (See 2nd Samuel 16 to 18.)
 - ii) To put it mildly, Absalom was not a wise person. I wondered if Solomon had his half brother in mind as he wrote this proverb. My point is that Solomon had his own personal experiences that the bible records where he has seen those that do not deserve to be in power, are in power and he can relate to these verses.
 - e) OK, good for Solomon I suppose. I am not a king. How do I relate to this? It is that times do occur when we have to accept things we don't like about those in power. My younger brother loves to argue about politics. Personally I don't. I vote, but I don't waste my time arguing about things that are out of my control. I accept that there are things that I don't like, but I'm not going to waste my valuable time arguing over such things. Sometimes the price we pay for peace in our families is to let opinions go that we don't agree with. I hold the view that God did not call me to fix people, but to preach the good news of the Gospel message through these studies as an example. Only God can change people's hearts.
 - i) To say it another way, we can't argue people into the kingdom of God. All we can do is show love to others and teach God's love to them. I let God convict others of their sins and my job is to show love to them and show how to relieve them of that conviction by learning to trust God with their issues of the moment.
 - ii) Ok, time to stop preaching and let Solomon tell us how to live wise lives.
8. Verse 8: Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.⁹ Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. ¹⁰ If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success. ¹¹ If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.
- a) Speaking of practical wisdom, I present these four verses. Let me explain what each of these ideas mean and then I can explain how they apply to our lives.
 - i) If one digs a pit, say to catch a wild animal, one can slip and fall into that pit.
 - ii) The second reference is about tearing down a wall. The point is we don't always know what is on the other side of that wall. Solomon uses the example of a snake that is hiding on the other side of that wall.
 - iii) If one spends time cutting up stones, one can get cut themselves. If one spends time splitting wood, one can get hurt by that wood when one carries it.
 - iv) If one uses a dull ax, it takes more effort to cut what one is using it for.
 - v) The final one is the art of snake charming. This was a form of entertainment in the Middle East. Snakes do not have ears. They move based on the sound vibrations and the shaking of a snake charmer. However, if the snake bites the charmer before the snake is charmed, there is no profit for that entertainer.
 - b) So does all this mean that we have to be careful when we are working? Of course it does. Solomon's real point is about working "smarter" and not just working. It is about taking some precautions so the negative results listed for each of these activities don't happen. The wisdom here is about doing things right, and not just doing what has to be done.

- c) Suppose we are not doing any of these things at the moment. Let's say we don't spend any time splitting wood or rocks, let alone snake charming or digging pits. How do we apply all of this wisdom to our lives? The point is if we take a little time to think about how we do what we are called to do and not just do it, we can work smarter. It amazes me to see how people waste their time because they are not working "smarter". That also means we have to be willing to listen to others if they are willing to explain how to do our jobs better. Now think back to the previous verses about our rulers being angry with us. Again, we should repeat back what they say, but instead of getting angry at them, maybe we can all learn how to do our jobs a little more efficiently like these proverbs teach us.
- d) Speaking of a willingness to listen to others, that leads us right into Verse 12.
- 9. Verse 12: Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.
 - a) Solomon is saying that if an indication that a person is acting foolish is that they only care about what they say and not anyone else's opinion. But John, here both the wise person and the foolish person are speaking. How are we to tell who is right? Good question.
 - i) I suppose the answers are based on the actions that follow those words. Anybody can claim they are right in any situation. The key is to "walk the walk and talk the talk". From what I have observed in life, the people whose opinions I respect are not usually the one's saying whatever pops in their head, but usually spend time to think carefully about what they say. This is one of those sayings that become obvious over time as one watches people's behavior.
 - b) If one is still confused about how to tell if a person is saying foolish things, the next few verses should help with that issue:
- 10. Verse 13: At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness-- ¹⁴ and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming-- who can tell him what will happen after him? ¹⁵ A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.
 - a) John's very loose translation: Do you want to know if a person is saying something wise or something foolish? Easy, watch the situation play out. This reminds me of a classic proverb that goes, "Some people have something to say and some people just need to say something". In a discussion with a group of people, I have found that the wise person is usually the one who lets everyone else speak first and then sums up the issue quite well in a few words.
 - b) OK John, you write these long 12-page studies. How are your words brief? Well, if my goal is say to get through the entire bible in my adult lifetime, I want to say enough to help people to understand the text and how to apply it to their lives. If I can say all of that in a shorter lesson, I'll do so. If I need more space, there is always the next lesson. I pick a length that I think is readable in one lesson and go from there.
 - c) Again, the key is not to see the length of one's speech, but to watch the actions that follow what one says. It comes back to the idea that if one wants to be wise, one has to be careful what one says. To see if someone else is speaking wisely, simply watch his or her actions. If one is acting foolishly those actions will follow foolish words. That's Solomon's point.
 - d) That leads me to Verse 15. In ancient Israel, the roads leading to major cities were always well marked. The idea here is that the actions of a foolish person become so obvious over time, it would be like someone who can't even find their way to town when the roads are clearly marked with signs as to which way to go. Again, the idea is not literal, but just to show the idea of how obvious foolish actions are over time. The modern equivalent is like signs on a highway saying, "five miles to this particular location".
 - e) Let me summarize this section: There are times when we don't know what to do next and we don't know what is the right advice to take in a situation. Let's say we don't have the time to figure out which advice is foolish? Then it's a matter of praying for guidance and letting God guide us as to what is the best decision to make at any given moment in time.

11. Verse 16: Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning.
¹⁷ Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time--for strength and not for drunkenness.
- a) This is Solomon complaining about when things are not right. One has to remember that he was literally born into a royal family so he is teaching what he is familiar with. So is he saying that a king should never come from a poor background? No, but he is just talking about getting proper training in order to be a king or anything else for that matter.
 - b) The second reference to "princes feasting at the right time" would be like a royal family who uses their power and success only to get drunk and stuffed with food early in the day so that their duties would be ignored due to their overly satisfied state of being.
 - c) Let me come back to the big theme here: Doing the right thing at the right time. Solomon is not saying, accept your lot in life, as that is what we are called to be. He is saying that whatever it is that God has planned for us, does not excuse us from not training for what it is that we desire to accomplish and at the same time not waste the time that is given to us by say getting drunk early in the day.
 - d) If God has called us to learn wisdom and apply it to our lives, then part of that wisdom is to train for whatever it is that we believe God has called is to. What if we never reach our goal of what we believe God calls us to do? For starters, enjoy the training time. What we discover at the end of our life is the "journey is the thing" and not the destination. When a person dies at a young age, first I remember that we lived in a "cursed world" and second I have learned that we have to make the best use of the time we have, whether or not we do reach the goals that we desire and we believe God has called us to live out in our lives.
 - e) In summary these verses are not just about whether or not one is a properly trained to say be a king. It is a bit of practical wisdom that we must prepare in life for what we believe it is that God desires us to do with our lives whether or not we actually reach that goal.
12. Verse 18: If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.
- a) To prove that Solomon is not just talking about kings and princes, the next verse here is warning all of us of the danger of being lazy. Solomon uses a simple example that all of us can relate to: If we are too lazy to fix where we live, the buildings that we live in will develop problems that again we can be too lazy to deal with.
 - b) In other words, Solomon believes that all of us should use our time to make a difference in this world for God, as He desires us to do so. In the previous two verses the warning is against those with power wasting their time or not getting the proper training. In Verse 18 the warning is against anyone being too lazy to seek work in the first place. Paul himself warned against those who refuse to work (2nd Thessalonians 3:10). I'm not talking about those who are trying to get a job but can't. The issue is about those who are too lazy to go try to find work in the first place. This verse is not about being too lazy to fix our house. The idea is about being too lazy to use our lives to go make a difference in the world in the first place.
13. Verse 19: A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.
- a) This is one of those verses that have to be read in context. By itself, this verse seems to be saying that people think just as one has fun at a feast and one can be merry drinking wine, so people think that money solves all problems. I recall my father acting that way about a lot of financially related issues, and I had to unlearn what he taught on that subject.
 - b) Meanwhile back to context: The previous set of verses focused on not wasting our lives doing things inappropriate or being too lazy to take care of problems. This verse is about those that think, "why should I do what is appropriate? I have money and that solves the problems I have to deal with in life." That is why the princes described earlier were just drinking away their lives and not doing their work. They thought money fixes everything.

- c) Ok then, suppose we don't have the money to throw at all our problems. Welcome to the club. Remember that Solomon had close to unlimited wealth yet he's saying what a waste of a life it is to just sit around "party all day" and say, don't worry, money will take care of all our problems. Solomon understood the idea that time is the most precious thing that a person can own, and whether a person is rich or poor, it's matter of not wasting one's time just because one has an "excuse" like money to try to solve one's problems.
 - d) To preach this concept another way: We may be able to figure out how to somehow get more money. One cannot get any more time to life. Make the most of one's time. When we make mistakes move on. All we can do is use whatever time we do have left to live as valuably as possible, which is to make a difference for God with our lives.
 - e) On that somewhat positive note, I'm ready for the last verse of this chapter.
14. Verse 20: Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.
- a) Ever heard the expression, "a little bird told me". Some believe that expression came from this bible verse. The idea is that if one spends a lot of time complaining about others who have more stuff (or fame or power) than us, word can get back to them of what we think of them. Even if our negative thoughts never reach those we are complaining about, that bad mood will affect those around us. Remember that we can't choose what happens to us in life, but we can choose our attitude about how to handle any situation. I can guarantee that if we live a life complaining about those who have what we don't, we and not "them" will be miserable and it won't have any affect upon those we are complaining about.
 - b) Solomon's point is not that "life is rough, deal with it". His point is that we need to focus on our attitude about things. We can't change what we can't change. We can change how we perceive life and our attitudes about whatever it is we have to deal with. That is why Solomon's last bit of practical wisdom in this chapter is to be careful about our attitude as it affects our behavior and how we interact with others around us.
15. Chapter 11, Verse 1: Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.
² Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.
- a) OK, what does "cast your bread upon the waters" mean? That literal translation is rarely used anymore. The modern paraphrased translations help us to understand its meaning. The idea is about the wisdom of spreading out one's investments. Remember Solomon was a king and Israel got a lot of its wealth by successfully trading with other countries. One also has to remember that Israel was an agricultural based society. Even today Israel is one of the biggest exporters of fruits and vegetables in Europe. That point here is those goods had to be transported to other distant places. There had to be a trust in merchants and transportation methods in order for everyone to make a profit.
 - b) Good for ancient Israel I suppose. Why should I care about that? Remember that these final chapters have to do with practical applications of wisdom. Part of having wisdom is about taking risks in order to earn money. What Solomon is teaching us is in effect not to put all of our eggs in one basket and be willing to take risks in life. Of course we have to plan carefully and hope for the best. The idea is to plan for our future even though we do not know what it holds.
 - c) Let me state this principal another way: Do I want Jesus to return today? Of course. Do I know for sure I'll be alive tomorrow? Of course not. Still, we should plan for our future and spread out the risks we take in life again, "to not put all our eggs in one basket".
 - d) So if the original text didn't have any chapter breaks, how does this "flow" with the text? Solomon was preaching in the last few verses about not being lazy and making the effort to do something with our lives. Then he explained the risk of just complaining about ones life. Now he is saying if we do "something" with our lives, wisdom is to spread our risks.

- e) What Solomon is getting at in this short chapter is that we shouldn't waste the valuable time God has given us. Yes we should honor God with our lives. Still, we (collectively) have to support ourselves financially. The point is if we do things in order to support ourselves, we should spread out our risks as there is a danger of just being too dependant upon any one "merchant ship" for our outcome. But as Christians, shouldn't we depend upon God for the results? Of course. Part of that wisdom that God is teaching us in these verses is the wisdom of spreading out our investments as much as possible.
16. Verse 3: If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. ⁴Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.
- a) Solomon is continuing to speak about the dangers of being lazy. His point in Verse 3 is essentially you can watch rain clouds travel and they will eventually let out their rain. We can watch a tree be cut down and it will just lie there. We can watch which way the wind is blowing. All of that may be interesting to observe, but we can't financially benefit from just watching those things. It may help to think like a farmer here. We can see rainstorms come or the wind blowing and we may say, based on this weather we should do this act today. However, there is physical labor that has to be done in order to reap (benefit) from what we have planted.
 - b) Remember that Solomon is giving us practical wisdom in these chapters. The purpose of them is to say, "If we are going to live for God, here are some tips on things one should do in order to have a productive use of one's life. In the previous set of verses, the idea was to spread out our risks. In these verses, verses, Solomon is saying don't just waste time to observe things. While that is interesting, work still has to be done. Of course there has to be a balance in life between work, time for worshipping God and time to rest. The point is if we ignore the time to work we don't benefit financially in life.
17. Verse 5: As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. ⁶ Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.
- a) Solomon continues his theme of not being lazy about one's life. His point in Verse 5 is that no matter how wise we become, we can never fully understand how God works.
 - b) This reminds me of an old biblical principal that says, "There are things that God desires that we do know, and that is why we have a bible to study and a world to observe. Then there are things that are beyond our knowledge to comprehend and that is God's problem and not ours." Wisdom comes in knowing how to best use our time to know when to just observe and when to get down to the business of well, working.
 - c) That is why Verse 6 continues the theme of not being lazy. To put this in modern terms, if we just sit around the house all day, say watching television, we will eventually lose it if we can't afford to pay the electricity to operate that piece of equipment. Let me give a few extreme examples: What if someone is sick and can't work? What if one is so rich that one don't have to work? Of course if we are sick, we need time to recover. As to the "rich", if they wish to remain that way, they should use their assets and time wisely and not waste one's life just spending what they have.
 - d) While this is a common sense principal about not being lazy, it never ceases to amaze me to watch how many people I see waste away their lives doing things that have no eternal benefits or spend all their time being lazy and nothing to benefit themselves or society.
 - e) As we finish this short chapter, remember that Solomon who is probably an older man at this time is saying, life goes fast, make the most of it while one can. Just as there are those today who waste their lives, I'm sure there were those in Solomon's time as well. His main point in these verses is we can't figure all things out so quit trying and get back to work.

18. Verse 7: Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. ⁸ However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless.
- a) We are back to Solomon's favorite expression, "Everything is meaningless" or "vanity" for those who prefer the King James translation. His point is we can spend all day enjoying life on a sunny day. Solomon wishes that people enjoyed their lives as much as possible. The point is if all we do is enjoy our lives, "work" doesn't get done. I believe what he is getting at here, is about having balance in life. Yes we should take the time to appreciate the world that God has given us, and at the same time we should work hard in order to have the time to appreciate that life. That is why Solomon preaches against laziness and at the same time if possible "spreading out our risks" so we are not dependant upon any one thing for our success.
 - b) With that said, what does he mean by "days of darkness"? My answer is to live a while and one will figure that out. Times of recessions and depressions do come. Times when we are sick or injured or handicapped do come. When we get older, our bodies do not as well as when we are younger. OK John, you are depressing me, what is the point? It is to enjoy life while we can as not only is this the only time we will get, but there will also be "days of darkness" in the lives of all people sooner or later.
 - c) This leads me back to "enjoy them all" in Verse 8. Again, Solomon is saying to make the most of the time we don't know how much time we have and we don't know when a "day of darkness" will hit us. The practical wisdom here is about making the most of our time, as we never know how much time we have.
19. Verse 9: Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. ¹⁰ So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.
- a) John's very loose translation: Enjoy your youth while you can as it doesn't last forever. Also remember that God will judge our lives so while one is having fun as a young man or woman remember too that we will be judged for our actions. Statistically speaking, the older we get, the less likely we are to commit our lives to serving God. While we do see younger Christians making mistakes, I would rather see a younger person who has given their lives to serving Jesus and make those mistakes than one who just waste their lives completely and never do anything "eternal" with their lives.
 - b) Then Solomon gives another of his "meaningless" references at the end of Verse 10. His point is that one should enjoy one's youth while one can, but at the same time one has to remember that one is accountable to God with their lives and that is why wasting away one's youth is meaningless if one is not considering how God is viewing their lives.
 - c) What we have here is another "balance" statement. This is an older Solomon looking at those who are young and saying in effect, enjoy your youth while you can because it will be over before you know it. While you are having fun, just remember that you will be accountable to God for your life and how you use it. To waste it is again, meaningless.
 - d) Before I move on to the final chapter, let me pause and put this whole lesson so far into perspective of what Solomon is trying to get across to us. Most of this book is designed to teach us how not to waste the time has given us. By these final chapters Solomon is now saying, let me give some practical advise on how to use one's time and no longer preach on what is a waste of one's time. This practical set of chapters focuses on the idea of not wasting one's time. Some of our time is needed to earn a living and he gives some tips on how to earn it. Part of it is on how to appreciate youth and use it wisely. What he wants us to realize is time is precious and let's make the most of it before it is too late. With that said, I have fourteen verses left in this book. Let's finish Solomon's practical wisdom.

20. Chapter 12, Verse 1: Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"--
- a) Assuming one does not accidentally die young, most people reach an "old age". When one is young, anything over thirty or forty seems old. Worldwide, the average span of one's life is about 68 years (78 for Americans). The point is whether we only live to say the age of 10 or whether we live over 100 years, a day will come to all people when we say something like "I find no pleasure in them (that concept)". Again, Solomon is preaching about enjoying life while we can because yes, it will be over before we know it.
 - b) This is why I just summed up the whole book right before this verse. Solomon himself realized how much of his own life he wasted going after things that were in the end a big waste of time. Solomon is still considered one of the wisest men who ever lives and he is still complaining about how much of his life he wasted. I've yet to meet one person who is older that looks back at their life and realize how much time they have wasted doing things that don't matter. Yes there are times to relax and enjoy life. There are also times when one has to work hard. What Solomon is pounding in our head is "life is short, stop and consider that for a moment. Now think about how one is using one's time." Before we know it, we will reach a point in life where we can no longer enjoy it due to our age. That is why he is preaching so hard about making the most of one's time.
21. Verse 2: before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;³ when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;⁴ when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;⁵ when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.
- a) Sometimes it is best to read a bunch of verses together to see them in context. Solomon is realizing that before one knows it, life is coming to an end. Yes, this is depressing to read, but it is also necessary for us to take a few moments to consider this.
 - b) Let me give my "loose translation" and then explain how we apply these verses.
 - i) Verse 2 is saying that the older we get, the faster time moves on. We may say for example, it is already summer and it seems like we just had that same season.
 - ii) Verse 3 is about watching people grow old.
 - iii) Verse 4 is about realizing one's hearing isn't what it used to be when we are older.
 - iv) Verse 5 (part 1) focuses on being afraid of heights because as we get older, to fall hurts more than when we were younger and could bounce back quicker.
 - v) Verse 5 (part 2) mentions almond blossoms, which are white. It is a colorful way of saying "our hair turns white" when we are old. We can observe a grasshopper that loses its strength to jump and continue to live.
 - vi) Verse 6 then says by the time we experience all of this, know that our time left to live is short and death is coming relatively soon.
 - c) OK John, this is depressing to think about. Can I go watch some television and not think about this reality too much? ☺ Solomon's point is not to depress us, but to make us think about how precious life is and we should enjoy it while we can. If we get nothing else out of this lesson, we should remember that God exists and will judge us based on how we've lived out our lives. But aren't Christians saved no matter what? Doesn't God forgive us of all our sins? Yes, but if we're saved, the big question to ponder is what are we doing with that salvation? If we spend eternity with God, we might as well get used to serving Him now, and that is what He desires of us. We can get punished in this lifetime by not getting benefits we could have received by failing to properly applying wisdom that for example Solomon preaches here, and that is the point of this lesson.

22. Verse 6: Remember him--before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well,⁷ and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸ "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"
- a) OK, back to "practical wisdom": Solomon is saying spending our lives just chasing after things that don't eternally matter is a great waste of time. That is why Solomon mentions silver and gold in Verse 6. We can't take material things with us into the next life. That is why by Verse 8, Solomon is practically screaming at us, "all of that is meaningless".
 - i) Remember as a wealthy king, Solomon had everything he could ever imagine. He had literally 1,000 women in his life. He built great projects. He spent time trying everything possible in order to try to achieve happiness. He realized as he thought about his life what a waste most of it was, pursuing things that didn't matter. Yes one does need financial resources and that's why a portion of this book does spend a little time talking about not being lazy and proper ways to earn income. Still, if all one cares about is earning money (note the silver and gold references here), to live like that is a great waste of time, as Solomon is preaching here.
 - b) If Solomon is now an old man preaching what a waste of time his life is (an assumption I'm making about when he wrote this book), what should I get out of this book? What is it that God wants us to learn from studying Ecclesiastes? The key point is to not waste the most valuable asset God gives us, our time. In these chapters, we gives us good, practical advise on how we should use that time for things that eternally matter.
 - c) Suppose we got all of that. Where do we go from here? Pray for God's wisdom. A good prayer might be, "Heavenly Father, I don't know how You want me to use my time, but I do accept that my time is limited and I give You my most valuable asset (my time) so You can show me how to best use that time." Once we give what we value back to Him, I find that He does make it obvious to us over time how He wants us it for His glory. Then it is a matter of doing what one wants to do, realizing He will judge us based on how we live and use the time we have left. To explain this concept another way, we can't change our past, but we can learn from it to affect how we live from this moment forward.
 - d) With that positive thought in mind, I'm ready for the last six verses of this book.
23. Verse 9: Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.
- a) As Solomon is wrapping up this book, he is thinking about the good things he has done with his life. He realizes that God did give him a gift for wisdom and he is using that gift to teach others how to be wise himself. He did that by writing Proverbs, Song of Solomon and this book to teach us on a practical level how to live wisely and please God with how we have lived out our lives.
 - b) Did Solomon make mistakes? Lots of them. If one reads parts of First Kings or even First Chronicles, one can read of ways that Solomon messed up his own life, by turning from what God desired of his life at particular moments. To put it another way, Solomon failed to apply biblical wisdom to his own life at times and suffered for those mistakes. What he is trying to say to us in this book is, "Learn from my life. Learn from my mistakes. Learn from "practical wisdom" that I have laid out in this book." Wisdom is not a magical act of just trusting that God is guiding us. It comes from studying the Word and applying it to our lives. That is what Solomon is laying out for us in this book. That conclusion is what Solomon is laying out here in these verses.
 - c) I told all of you readers that if you bear with me through some of the depressing aspects of this book, it does have a happy ending. That is what we are reading about here in these final verses. The benefits of applying Godly wisdom to our lives. Meanwhile, Verse 11.

24. Verse 11: The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails--given by one Shepherd.
- a) Let's start by asking, what is a goad? It's a stick with something on one end used to prod animals to keep moving. Think of spurs on cowboy's boots and one gets the idea.
 - b) The point is Solomon is saying, I have just given you a whole bunch of wise little sayings to contemplate in this book. They are designed to make us move in the right direction just as a goad is used to get an animal in the direction the owner wants that animal to go.
 - c) To put this concept another way, think of the "goad owner" as God wanting to guide our lives. Yes, it is a whole lot better to do what He desires before God "gets the goad out" to get us to go where He desires of us. Therefore, I encourage you to study the proverbs of this book let alone the whole bible and think about what they mean. Yes, applying these principals may hurt a little like a goad would hurt an animal, but the purpose of that goad is to get us to go in the right direction in life. So is it with these proverbs written here.
25. Verse 12: Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.
- a) So is this verse saying we should never read anything but the bible? Of course not. The point is that one can spend one's whole life studying and miss out on enjoying life. His point is study what is written in the bible, but don't add to it. This reminds me a little of what is written near the end of Revelation where it warns us not to add or take away any of the words written in that book as well. (See Revelation 22:18.)
 - b) So is Solomon being arrogant here saying in effect, "Read my book, but nothing else?" That comes back to the issue, is this God inspired or not? Solomon did get the idea that he was given a gift of wisdom by God (See 1st Kings Chapter 3). I believe Solomon also understood that this book was "God inspired" in that the principals of practical wisdom as taught through this book will help anyone grow closer to God and apply His wisdom to our lives.
 - c) I'm sure Solomon had a library of books as he had unlimited wealth. I think his point is in effect there is only so much wisdom one can gather from studying endlessly. Let's take the time to appreciate life and don't just endlessly study in books all day and all night.
 - d) OK, no more negative comments about Solomon. Let's just finish the book.
26. Verse 13: Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.
- a) In order to explain Solomon's conclusion, we have to come back to his premise: This book pondered what is the best use of the time that one has to live in this world? To answer the question, Solomon spent chapters discussing different ways one can live out their lives.
 - b) The main thing to get out of most of this book is how ultimately unsatisfying is the way most people live out their lives. Solomon's conclusion is that the whole (complete) duty of all men and women is to fear God and keep His commandments for our lives. To state the obvious, if we just stand there all day and think about not violating any of God's laws, we can't earn a living or accomplish anything. This is not a call to be perfect. This is a call to trust God in order to guide our lives because we will be judged based on how we live.
 - c) But again, aren't Christians saved no matter what? Yes, but at the same time, God wants us to be a good witness for Him. He wants to guide us to make a difference for Him. That is why we are judged and our eternity is based on our trust in Him for our lives.
 - d) So what laws do we obey? Does this mean we are in trouble if we ever disobey, say one of the 10 commandments? Remember that Jesus summed up the whole law by saying we should love God as much as possible and love others as much as ourselves. (See Matthew 22:27-30 on that point.) If we can keep that principal in mind, and we are seeking God in order to live as He desires, then we are living as He desires we live out our lives.

27. OK, I wanted to end this lesson on that positive note of letting God guide us so that we can make a difference for Him with our lives. With that said, let us pray for His guidance: Heavenly Father the most valuable thing You give us is our time. Help us to use it for Your glory. Guide our lives so that we use it to make a difference for You. We can't lose our salvation if we trust in Jesus as the complete payment of our sins, but we can waste that asset when we are not using it for Your glory. Help our lives to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.