October to December 2013

Teenz RPG Series on

"Vanity of life without God"

A study of the book of Ecclesiastes

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." (Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang

On behalf of the Teenz RPG committee

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1 *Ecclesiastes 1:1-3*
Memorise Ecc 1:3

"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity"

WHAT IS ECCLESIASTES ALL ABOUT?

In life, we all strive to find meaning and fulfilment in the things that we do. Nobody wants to live an aimless, unfulfilled life, one full of regrets and laments. However, do we know how to find this fulfilment? Don't we want to have a meaningful life that brings glory to God?

The book of Ecclesiastes was a book written to address these issues. It asks the right questions about life, and then seeks to find the solution. We see Solomon as he asks: what profit does a man have in all the labours which he has in this life? Does it not all end in shame and misery? He thus brings us through his journey as he experiment with life and observes the way people around him life, all in a bid to try to find fulfilment in life. It is not a direct path that he takes, for he makes many mistakes along the way in his quest for meaning in life. Yet at the end of it all, he rightly concludes that above all, we must fear God and keep His commandments, for that is truly what man was made for.

Thus as we read the book of Ecclesiastes, we have a timeless commentary on the frailty of human wisdom, and the vanity of life here on Earth if it is lived apart from God. It is a book that is highly applicable for our current atheistic age, where men refuse to acknowledge God, living lives only in pursuit of worldly pleasures. Such was the experience of Solomon, and he thus wrote the book of Ecclesiastes as a reflective and retrospective look at the vanities of life that he has observed. This is a book that is filled with practical wisdom to guide a man in any age to know the true meaning of life, and to realize that a life lived apart from God is a meaningless life.

However, it is sad to see that in every age, so many people, even Christians, throw themselves headlong into the world, and chase after the things of the world. Such was the case in the time of Solomon, of John (1 John 2:15-17), and such is the case even more so in today's day and age.

As we study this book, the question that we would have to continually ask ourselves is this: Do I truly understand the meaning of life? And is my life a life of vanity, doing all things apart from God, or do I truly fear God, and desire to keep his commandments?

THOUGHT: What profit can I have in this life?

PRAYER: Lord, may this study of the book of Ecclesiastes be profitable to my spiritual life and my relationship with Thee.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2 *Ecclesiastes 12:8-10*
Memorise Proverbs 22:17

"because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge..."

WHAT DOES 'ECCLESIASTES' MEAN?

The title 'Ecclesiastes' as found in the English Bible, is a direct transliteration from the Greek name of the book, 'ekklesiastes' taken from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Greek Septuagint. This word 'ekklesiastes', is an accurate rendition of the Hebrew word qôheleth, which is the word that is in turn translated as 'preacher' in the book of Ecclesiastes.

This word, 'qoheleth' is what the author of the book titles himself, and occurs only in the book of Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Bible (a total of 7 times, Ecclesiastes 1:1,2, 12, 7:27, 12:8-10, and translated as 'preacher' each time in the English Bible). It comes from the root word in Hebrew 'qahal' which literally means 'to assemble, to gather together'. When it is used here in the participle form, the word 'qoheleth' can be rendered 'the one who calls and assembles people together'. In this light, we see that it refers to more than just a preacher, but to one who calls and assembles people together to come to listen to his message. Thus by using this term to title himself, Solomon is coming before the people, and calling upon them to hear his words, not as the decrees of a sovereign King, but wise words of an old man who has a message to share with people whom he cares about.

For all of us who come to read the book of Ecclesiastes, we too are sitting at the feet of the wise preacher who has gathered the people to teach them 'knowledge... many proverbs... acceptable words... words of truth' (Ecclesiastes 12:9-10). These are all descriptions given of the precious contents of the book of Ecclesiastes. There are certainly wise words of wisdom that we would do well to take heed to! To read the book of Ecclesiastes is to gather to avail ourselves to the wisdom of God, to be like one of the congregation who "bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge." Proverbs 22:17.

THOUGHT: What a privilege it is to gather with God's people to hear God's Word from God's servants!

PRAYER: Lord, may You place in me a deep hunger and thirst to know Your wise words of wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 1:1, 12
Memorise Ecc 1:1
"The son of David, king in Jerusalem"

WHO WROTE ECCLESIASTES?

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes is undisputedly King Solomon, the son of King David and Bethsheba. It is stated very clearly in Ecclesiastes 1:1, that it is 'the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.', and later in verse 12, the author describes himself as 'king over Israel in Jerusalem.' King David had only one son who became the legitimate king of Israel in Jerusalem, and that was King Solomon. These are facts of history that are clearly recorded for us in other parts of the Bible. Also, it is clear from the contents that the author was a person of great wisdom and wealth, who had experienced much in life, both whilst in close relationship with God, and also while one was backslidden and far from God. This is exactly what we read of in the life of King Solomon.

Yet there are numerous critics of the Bible who would claim otherwise. They reject Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes, and instead postulate that it was written much later, perhaps during the post-exilic period. They would point out that Solomon did not directly name himself as the author of the book, unlike what he did in his other two books. They also claim that the language used was different from that which he used in Proverbs and in the Songs of Solomon, and was also language which was not characteristic of that time period. They also assert that the historical situation described in Ecclesiastes do not reflect the circumstances in which Solomon ruled.

However, these are all the subjective opinions of scholars who chose to reject the simple interpretation of Scripture. If we take God at His Word, and sincerely regard the Bible is inerrant and infallible, the clear meaning of 'the son of David, king in Jerusalem' would be enough to convince one that this was indeed referring to Solomon. Furthermore, an author can and would employ a wide variety of styles when he is addressing different topics and issues. The theme and content of Ecclesiastes and Songs of Solomon differ greatly, and it is only natural for the style of writing to be different. Finally, the misery, poverty and evils that are described in Ecclesiastes do not portray a nation in turmoil in the political or social sense, but rather the frustration at the vanities of life and the wickedness and corruption of this world. Thus the simple conclusion is that King Solomon himself is the author of the book, and not a later king of Israel, or the work of some unnamed scribes who tried to pass off as a king.

THOUGHT: God says it, that settles it!

PRAYER: May You help me Lord, to have more faith in Your Word.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4 *Ecclesiastes 1 Kings 11*
Memorise 1 Kings 11:4

"and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God..."

WHEN WAS ECCLESIASTES WRITTEN?

By the providential hand of God, the life of Solomon has been recorded for us in detail in the books of 1 Kings and also 1 and 2 Chronicles. In knowing the details of the life of Solomon, we would be able to much better understand the words of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, and realize what he meant when he made declarations of his own wealth, wisdom and accomplishments.

Very briefly, some of the highlights of Solomon's life are as such: He was appointed as King of Israel after the death of his father David. He started out well, with the words of his father still ringing in his head. 'And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever. Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build a house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it' (1 Chronicles 28:9-10). At the very beginning of his reign, when the Lord appeared to him, he asked only for wisdom to rule the kingdom. The Lord was pleased with his request and granted it to him, along with a promise of great riches in life. (1 Kings 3:3-14). He then fulfilled his father's charge and built the temple of the Lord (1 Kings 6), and led the whole nation in a reverential and humble prayer in dedication to the Lord God (1 Kings 8).

However his heart soon turned far away from the Lord. He disobeyed the commandments of the Lord, and took to himself many wives from heathen nations, either for pleasure, or for political reasons. With them came various forms of idolatry, and in time he too went after their strange gods, and forsook the LORD God Jehovah (1 Kings 11:1-8). He was thus rebuked and chastised (1 Kings 11:14-40), and in all likelihood he repented, turned back to the Lord, and wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.

Thus he wrote this book as a record of his reflections on the life that he had lived, the observations that he had amassed through his years of experience. Yet it was not just to lament and regret, but it was to advise all of us not to repeat the mistakes that he had made, but to learn from him and to live lives that bring glory to God!

THOUGHT: Will there be things that I will regret of at the end of my life?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to always live a life that brings glory to Thy name!

WHY WAS ECCLESIASTES WRITTEN?

Why then did Solomon decide to write this book? What was his purpose for recording the mistakes of his life in such frank and open details? Again numerous liberal scholars have sought to discredit the book, and allege that it is no more than the writings or ramblings of a man apart from God. However, we should reject such unbelieving views, and must first realize that this book is inspired of God, and definitely part of the Biblical Canon. Therefore it is first and foremost written for 'doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...' (2 Timothy 3:16). With regards to the actual purpose of this book, Albert Barnes gives a good perspective:

> The author was evidently a man of profound faith in God, of large and varied personal experience, of acute observation of men and things, and of deep sensibility. Probably he was first moved to write by a mind painfully full of the disappointing nature of all things viewed apart from God: next by deep sympathy with fellow-men touched by the same natural feelings as himself, and suffering like him, though each in their several ways; and thirdly, by the evident desire to lead other men, and specially young men, out of the temptations which he had felt, and out of the perplexities which once entangled and staggered him.
>
> (Albert Barnes, Introduction to Ecclesiastes)

Thus we realize that the book of Ecclesiastes was the result of a sincere desire of an elderly man who has experienced life and all that it seeks to offer, tasted the vanity and futility of it, and now seeks to encourage men who come after him to not go down the same bitter path that he has gone. He addresses his reader lovingly as 'my son', as a loving father who has a deep care and concern for his child. He encourages them to realize what the most important things in life are. It is not of making books and acquiring human wisdom and knowledge, for which there is no end. Instead, we must above all things, to seek God, to fear God and keep His commandments, and not to seek after the vanities of life.

THOUGHT: Do I know what the most important thing for my life is?

PRAYER: Lord help me always to fear You and keep Your commandments.

WHAT IS VANITY?

The word translated as 'vanity' comes from the Hebrew word 'hebel', which literally means air, vapour or breath. It is used to signify the meaning as translated in Ecclesiastes, as that which is vain, empty, temporal and unsatisfactory. Out of 72 times that the word 'vanity' occurs in the Old Testament, 38 of them are found in this book. Thus more than half of the occurrences of this word are found in the book of Ecclesiastes. Understanding the meaning and significance of this word is key to our understanding of the book. The phrase 'vanity of vanities' the Hebrew is really just the same word repeated twice in a slightly different form. When it is expressed in this manner, it is used emphatically, where the thought is emphasized, meaning 'extremely vain' or 'the vainest'. What Solomon means, when he decries various things as being vain, is that these are empty, unsatisfactory and lamentable experiences that are really deceitful to the soul, for they seem to promise much, but deliver little. It shows how the things of this earth are but fleeting pleasures that will soon pass away.

This word thus represents the central theme to which the book of Ecclesiastes will compare life to. From the opening phrase in Ecclesiastes 1:2, Solomon states: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.', and all the way at the end, he concludes with the same thought: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.' (Ecclesiastes 12:8). Throughout the whole book, he will repeat this thought over and over again, as he brings up various experiences and observations that he had. One would be reminded of a similar statement that James would make, where he exhorts his readers to consider, 'Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away' (James 4:14).

We must realize that these statements are not the despairing cry of a jaded individual on the brink of suicide, but rather the right view of life that we should all adopt, when looking at the world and all the temporal pleasures that it has to offer. Solomon was viewing the world from a believer's perspective, having eternity's values in view. He realized that any worldly pursuit that man has is vain, being temporal, unsatisfactory, and useless. It is only through God, and living a life for him, can we break free from the vanity of life, and lead a fulfilling life in Christ.

THOUGHT: Is my life a life of vanity?

PRAYER: Lord may You help me to pursue the excellent things of Thee, and not the vain things of this world.

Ecclesiastes 1:14
Memorise 2 Peter 2:7-8
"behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit"

WHAT IS 'VEXATION OF SPIRIT'?

Another statement that we see repeated over and over again, and often used together with the word 'vanity', is the phrase 'vexation of spirit'. This phrase and the word vexation itself are unique to the book of Ecclesiastes, and occurs a total of 10 times in it. To vex something or someone, would be to anger, agitate, harass, or even to afflict. This is the thought put forth by Solomon here. He says that as he experiences and observes things in this world, not only does he consider them to be vain and empty, but often times his spirit is vexed, troubled by the futility that he sees in life apart from God. When we examine the word for vexation in the Hebrew, we see an even more vivid image. The word comes from a root word which means to feed or even devour. The picture presented here is one whereby a person's soul is fed upon or ravaged by the things that happen around him, causing anguish, grief and pain!

This is the godly response of a sanctified man, as he views the wicked, sinful and carnal world around him, he cannot rejoice and be enamored by it, but rather his soul should be vexed, and much troubled by the gross abominations that he sees around him. Even a worldly man like Lot, who in many areas of his life compromised, and loved the world, but because he was justified, the Bible describes his soul as being vexed continually by all the wickedness that he saw around him, as he stayed in the wicked city of Sodom. As Peter described him as '...just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)' (2 Peter 2:7-8).

That too was the response of Solomon as he viewed life and all the pleasures that it seemed to offer. As he gave himself up to experimenting all things under the sun, he was constantly frustrated by the wickedness and futility of it all. He could only conclude at the end of it all that it was but vanity, and also that his spirit was vexed.

Dear Teen, is that how you regard the world around us? Or are you so caught up and in love with the world that it seems so exciting, enticing and attractive? Realize that the temporal things of this world will not last. Do not waste your life chasing after these empty things, for it will only result in grief, disappointment, and a vexation of the spirit!

THOUGHT: Do the sins of the world cause vexation or exhilaration?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to flee the temptations of this world.

WHAT ARE THINGS 'UNDER THE SUN'?

Another key statement that is repeated many times is the phrase 'under the sun'. This phrase is repeated a total of 29 times in this book. Again it is a phrase unique to the book of Ecclesiastes, and was probably a term coined by Solomon himself. Based on the context of the whole book and the way that Solomon uses this phrase here, it is understood to refer to life here on Earth, as opposed to eternal life. These are things done under the sun, here on Earth, and not what is done beyond the sun, in heaven. It therefore refers to activities that men do apart from God, temporal works that exist only in the present, and have no eternal value. This phrase is synonymous to another similar phrase he uses less often 'under the heaven' (Ecclesiastes 1:13) or 'under heaven' (Ecclesiastes 2:3, 3:1), all of which refers to activities in this physical world, as contrasted against the spiritual, heavenly realm.

Therefore in the 3rd verse of the first chapter, he asks very directly, 'what profit hath a man of all his labour which he had done under the sun?' He thus sets down this statement and exclaims that all the works which man endeavours to do here on earth apart from God has no lasting value, no profit, and no eternal gain. This is because these things are all done on earth, for temporal gain, and is apart from heaven.

Such is the teaching of Christ as well, as he taught his disciples in Mark 8:36 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' In Solomon's vocabulary, Christ would say what shall it profit a man, if he gains all things under the sun, and lose his own soul? This is the central thought of the book of Ecclesiastes – that all of man's work is but vanity and vexation of spirit, if they are pursuits made under the sun, apart from God.

THOUGHT: Am I living a life 'under the sun' and apart from God?

PRAYER: Lord, help me set my affections on things above, and not on things of the earth.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM NATURE?

Continuing in his introduction, Solomon now gives a series of observations which he makes concerning life in general. He first looks at nature and the created world around him, and observes it's never ending cycle of life. It is interesting to note how astute and scientifically accurate his observations were, again a testament to his amazing God-given intellect.

He comments on the repetitiveness which he sees in the passing of one generation to another. The wheel of time just keeps turning, and waits for no man. The cycle of life will always continue as it is, as children become adults, and then grow old and die, and then another generation comes to take their place. In nature, there is also continual repetition – the sun which rises in the east and sets in the west, then rises in the east again the next day; the wind which whirls about continually, and never seems to end; the waters of the earth, which continue on in their cycle and never run out. In all this he sees nature as fixed, constant, never changing, for the earth abideth forever. No matter how many times the sun goes down, it will always rise, the wind will always blow, and the rivers always run.

But yet amidst the constancy, there is much movement, restlessness, for the sun ariseth, goeth down, hasteth; the wind goeth, turneth, whirleth continually, and the rivers run and return hither again. The verbs used are very active verbs, full of movement and activity. So much hustling about, shifting from place to place. This is how nature is, as it was created by God. Ever moving, but never changing. God in His creation placed all these physical laws in place that the natural world will always follow, and serves as a constant remind to us as to the glories of His creation.

In the middle of this whole cycle of nature, is man and his insignificant life. We last but for a single generation. With or without us, the world rushes on, and the earth continues to abide. Understanding nature in such a light really does help to put us into our place, and help us realize how unimportant we really are. Man in his delusions of self-grandeur thinks he is far greater than he really is. Compared to God's magnificent creation, we are but dust! Yet through it all, God has a plan and a purpose for our life – one that only be fulfilled when the life is lived for God.

THOUGHT: How often do I stop to marvel at God's creation?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank you for creating me and giving me life, that I can live it for Your glory.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10 *Ecclesiastes 1:8-11*
Memorise Genesis 1:31

"Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new?"

IS THERE ANYTHING NEW IN THIS WORLD?

As Solomon stands and considers nature, he sees that it is so full of movement, activity, as what he describes as 'labour'. In the midst of all this, man can never fully comprehend or explain all these movements. He can never finish seeing or hearing all of the works of nature. Before the mighty waves of the sea, the gusts of wind, and the heat of the sun, man is indeed so small, and so insignificant. Our lives here on Earth are so short, and we will experience only that many number of sunrises and sunsets, before our end comes.

Through all this, he observes that there is no end to it. Everything will just continue in the way they were, and there is no new thing under the sun. The mighty forces of nature is fixed, and nothing that happens can be considered to be something new, for nature has been around since the beginning of time, and has continued in its way ever since. Everything is fixed, and will continue in its daily pattern. There is no remembrance or record of what has happened in the past, and neither shall anything that is to happen be remembered. Man prides himself in the legacy that he would leave behind, by striving after all manners of accomplishments in his life. But really, compared to our Creator God, the awesomeness of nature and the rushing tide of time, even the greatest of men are but a footnote and a short sentence in the historical records of the world.

In light of all this, what is man? What great things can he do to effect any change at all in God's works of creation? Can he change the patterns of the weather? Can he alter the direction of the sun? Can he make wind to blow in the way he wants it to? For all the scientific advances that man has accomplished, he has yet to control nature. Indeed, there is no invention of man that has not already been seen in God's grand design of nature. In fact, for all our 'scientific advancements', we are only beginning to understand a small fraction of God's amazing works of creation. God in making this world had already planned and designed all things. Man is but slowly discovering nature, and learning to use it for his own purposes. But the essence of nature itself remains unchanged. Therefore man, and all his wisdom and pride, is but folly and futility, when compared with the might, power and constancy of nature.

THOUGHT: All things bright and beautiful, the Lord God made them all!

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me a humble heart to appreciate Your wisdom and glory.

IS WISDOM VAIN?

So to try to answer the question of 'what is the meaning of life', Solomon will now exercise the first gift that God has given to him, and that is his intellect or wisdom, to try to find an answer. He says he gave his heart over to seek and search out wisdom, concerning all things that are done under heaven - that is all the temporal things that are done here on the earth. In a sense he decided to become a researcher, to study life as it is, and try to understand it. This act, this restlessness of man, he says, is a 'sore travail' that God has given to man to be exercised (literally means depressed, afflicted or busied) with. What he speaks of here is the innate curiosity that man has in life and towards all things that he sees. Very unlike animals, we are creatures who want and need to know, and are not satisfied with just accepting and enjoying the things we see around us.

Yet at the end of his study, his conclusion was that all the works that are done under the sun are but vanity and vexation of spirit. Note that the wisdom being described here is not that of godly wisdom, but the worldly wisdom or just the intellectual pursuits of the unregenerate. The more he observed man and their works, the more he realized the futility and frustration that is evident there. Through human effort alone, the crooked can never be made straight. There are so many things out there that are wanting, that is deficient in some way or another, and nothing can be done to rectify it. There are just simply so many things wrong with this life and this world that the more one knows about it, the more frustrating and futile one feels. Human wisdom and human effort alone can do nothing at all. Education, culture, society can do nothing to fix the human condition. Man prides himself in his knowledge and understanding, and thinks himself to be great because of all his studies in the sciences and arts, and his great technological advances. Yet at the end of it all we must realize that we are but all crooked sinners, we are all found wanting. Only Jesus Christ and the Word of God can make all the wrongs right, and the crooked straight.

And so to answer the question, yes, wisdom is vain. But note that what we are speaking of here is the wisdom of the world – the intellectual pursuits of man. If that is all we hope for in this life, and that is what we take pride in, then Solomon would tell us, that it is a vain life!

THOUGHT: Which do I respect more, the wisdom of man or the wisdom of God?

PRAYER: Lord, may I always seek after godly wisdom, and not the wisdom of the world.

DOES WISDOM BRING GRIEF?

Not content with simple observation, more than to just seek and search out, Solomon now gave himself over to know experientially what life under the sun was. And so he deliberately considered this matter within his own heart, and harnessed his great wealth, power and intellect to embark on the next step of his experimentation. His curiosity expanded to desire to fully understand human nature, including the madness and folly of it. He probably desired to understand why man acts in the way they do, in the foolish, crazy and wicked acts that they commit. This was a conscious decision that he made, whereby he was not satisfied with just observing, but he wanted to experience it all for himself. There was probably an element of pride in this endeavour, for he described himself of one having 'great estate', and having 'more wisdom than all they have been before me'. He had everything a man could ask for, but he wanted more. He had this insatiable curiosity about life, and so he gave himself over to seek after not just wisdom and knowledge, but also the madness and folly of man. This was Solomon's problem. Despite all that he had, he was not satisfied, and kept thinking that there was something out there to be known, felt and experienced that would be able to give him the greatest fulfilment and enjoyment in life.

But at the end of it all, his conclusion was that it is all vexation of spirit. The more that he studied man, the more vexed he became as he observed their life under the sun, apart from God. This is especially so when one studies sinful man, in his madness and folly. Man's lawless nature and his propensity to sin is definitely not something for us to envy, but rather an increased knowledge of it can only bring much grief and sorrow to a righteous man's heart. This was the first of the many vanities that he observed in his life that provoked him to conclude that there is nothing better than to seek after God and His commandments.

May we too understand and be convicted to realize that the pride and pleasures of the world are nothing more than glamourized sin. The Christian would do well to stay far from any involvement with these things, for it can only bring much grief, and much knowledge of it only increases sorrow.

THOUGHT: Am I tempted to try to experience the sinful pleasures of life?

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to flee every temptation and the influences of peer pressure that come my way.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-2
Memorise 2 Timothy 2:22
"I said of laughter, it is mad"

IS PLEASURE AND LAUGHTER VAIN?

Solomon's next objective was then to seek after mirth and pleasure, to see what the world had to offer, and try to enjoy life as he observed in the sons of men. Again he communed with his heart, and decided within himself that he would now want to seek after the pleasures of this life.

Before he describes what he did exactly, he straightaway informs the reader that indeed the whole endeavour was vanity. He declared of laughter and of mirth and jesting, that it is 'mad', in that it is an activity that is devoid of wisdom, foolish and cannot fulfil. Indeed that is what we would realize about laughter, merry-making and revelry as well. A moderate amount to de-stress or to crack up a tense situation is good. However excessive jesting and laughter becomes a very vain activity, and fulfils nothing at all. We can try to seek all the entertainment that the world can offer; we can surround ourselves with the most humorous and fun-loving people; we can try to go out to enjoy all the fun that life can offer; but at the end of it, what does it bring?

Dear Teen, we may look around at the way our non-Christian friends live and seem to enjoy themselves. We may watch as they go out, party and have fun, and engage in activities which we know are sinful. What is our response to them? Are we sometimes tempted to join them? And do we feel like we are missing out on something if we do not try out these things for ourselves, at least once? You may think that we ought to at least experience what it is like being in a club, or to taste that sip of alcohol, or to watch that movie, and if we don't then we have never enjoyed true pleasure!

We would do well to take heed of Solomon's warning, that these sorts of pleasures that the people of the world indulge in is but vain life that will not grant any sort of long term fulfilment. Yes we may enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, but at the end of it all, it is but vanity and a vexation to the spirit, and brings nothing but sorrow, and shame. Furthermore, it grieves the Lord to see His children engaging with the filth and sin of the world. Surely, we do not want to disappoint God!

THOUGHT: Am I tempted by things that bring only short-term gratification?

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me the strength and the courage to resist temptation and the sins of the world!

Ecclesiastes 2:3-6
Memorise Proverbs 20:1
"Whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise..."

DO YOU ENVY HIS LIFE? (I)

From Ecclesiastes 2:3-10, Solomon gives us a summary of all he did, as he sought to experience all the pleasures that the world had to offer.

Firstly, in verse 3, he tell us how he gave himself over to wine, seeing that it is through drinking that he saw the people around him having fun. And so he joined in with the people in their merry-making, their wild parties and revelling. But Solomon was wise, in that he did not fully give himself over to drunkenness, but continued to retain his wisdom. Intellectually, he certainly understood the dangers of dabbling with alcohol, for he himself warned in Proverbs 20:1 that "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise". Yet he continued with his experiment, for his objective in the experiment was to try to understand how wine could be fulfilling in life, and whether it was a viable option of pleasure. Of course it was not and therefore in retrospect he describes this activity as trying to 'lay hold on (meaning to grab hold of) folly'. He thought that to be involving himself in these things, he could somehow harness this folly, grab hold of it, experience it for himself, and find joy and satisfaction from it. Of course it was not a successful endeavour. It is indeed a foolish thing to think that by drinking one can solve all their problems, and forget their fears, stresses and anxieties.

Next, verses 4-6 describe how he sought after accomplishments in this life. He became an engineer, building houses and vineyards, designing gardens and planting all manners of trees. He even devised an irrigation system to water his plants, and provide water for his gardens. These building projects are recorded in greater detail in 1 Kings 4-10 and 2 Chronicles 2-9. It was entirely a self-fulfilling endeavour, where he sought to achieve all he could in this life, to satiate his pride and to show forth his wisdom. If you examine the dimensions of his own house, you would notice that everything that he built for himself was larger than the temple of God. This was really telling of the pride that was in his heart, for he sought to glorify himself more than God! Remember also what David's wish was when he requested to build God a house: "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." (2 Samuel 7:2). For David, it was for the glory of God. For Solomon, it had become for the glory of self, where his own house of cedar far exceeded the house of the Lord.

THOUGHT: What brings you the greatest fulfilment in this life?

PRAYER: Lord, help me find the greatest joy by abiding in You!

DO YOU ENVY HIS LIFE? (II)

Next, in verse 7-8 Solomon describes how he also accumulated wealth and all the things associated with wealth for himself. He acquired servants, both male and female, great possessions of great and small cattle, where his herd was larger than that which any ruler in Jerusalem had before him. He also gathered silver and gold in abundance, along with whatever treasures that kings would seek out. With his wealth he also hired singers, organized choirs and orchestras to tickle his ears and entertain him. All these were the delights of men, exclusives luxuries that only the rich and powerful could afford. All this, he had in abundance, and he luxuriated in all the best things that money could buy.

And so through all this, he proved that he was indeed a great and capable king. The wealth that he accumulated became the envy of all the surrounding nations. His reputation spread far and wide, so much so that when the Queen of Sheba made a trip down to see his wisdom, she was so impressed with his kingdom and the way he administered it, that she gave him even more riches (1 Kings 10)! Yet through all this, he was guided only by the principles of his own carnal desires, for whatsoever his eyes desired, he acquired. If he saw anything that he thought would give his heart joy, he got it! Remember of course, that he was the king! With all the wealth and power of the nation at his disposal, we can only being to imagine what sort of luxury, opulence and carnal pleasures that would entail. Coupled with his great intellect and labours, he would certainly make for a successful self-made man, at least in the eyes of the world.

As we look at such a description of Solomon, do we tend to envy him? Do we wish that we had such a life, of all the gifts, opportunities and resources that he had? Do we sometimes also envy the success of the people around us and perhaps ask God why He did not give us more? But we must ask, was that really a good way to live? If we were given the chance to do all that our hearts desired, do you think that would really be a happy life to live? Remember that our hearts are sinful and desperately wicked! Like Solomon, we will most likely be seeking after the carnal sins of the world, and not the things of God. Don't envy him, but thank God that by His grace, we are kept from the pollutions of the world.

THOUGHT: Restraint is better than no constrains!

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to be content with all that You have blessed me with!

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16

Ecclesiastes 2:3-11
Memorise Matthew 6:24
"there was no profit under the sun."

DO YOU ENVY HIS LIFE? (III)

As Solomon surveyed the fruit of all the works which his hands had wrought, and the labour he had laboured, we can see this sense of despair and grief that he had, as he cried out, "behold, all is vanity and vexation of the spirit!" Despite all that Solomon had accomplished, and the seemingly good life that he lived, he still found no satisfaction in the life that he had. Instead, he realized that there was really no profit in all that he did.

Why did he feel this way? This was because he realized that he had been pursuing a life that is centred all on himself. It was a life that was lived under the sun, apart from God. All that he did was in accordance to his own will, and he did not do it to please God. In the process of it he transgressed numerous commandments of the Lord, and wasted all the blessings that God's grace had bestowed upon him. 1 Kings 11 also describes how he had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and these women turned his heart away from the Lord to seek after other gods. At the end of his life, as he returned to the Lord, he realized that these things which he once held on so dearly to, and thought could satisfy him, in so doing he had sorely disappointed his Lord. And so his heart was vexed, for he saw the futility of all such endeavours. This is the result of pursuing a life that is centred all on self, and not on God.

After reading such a description of life, are we still envious? Do we too desire such riches and wealth and accomplishments? Are we so proud as to think that we can be better than Solomon, that we can chase after the world but yet continue to maintain a close relationship with God? Realize that no man can serve two masters. It is either God or the world. The world will continue to pressure you to seek after the pleasures of the world. They will dangle all manner of attractions before you, and try to convince you that these things will definitely satisfy you and bring joy to your lives. We must understand that Solomon recorded all this for us not to show off, or that we would be envious of him, but it is so that we can learn from his life and not repeat the same mistakes. Solomon, with all his achievements and privileges, asks us to learn from him, and sincerely believe and realize that all these trappings of the world will never bring true joy, but only sorrow, grief, and vexation of the spirit.

THOUGHT: Can I more wise than Solomon?

PRAYER: Lord, may You guard my heart, and help me to serve the wholeheartedly.

Ecclesiastes 2:12-17
Memorise Philippians 1:21
"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain"

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVES OF DEATH?

And so at the end of Solomon's search for the meaning of life, he realizes one very important fact – this life here on earth is only temporal, and one day it must all come to an end. No matter what one does here on earth, it will all one day come to naught, and nothing will be remembered.

He discusses here first with reference to his search through human wisdom and understanding (1:12-18). He remembers how he tried to understand wisdom, madness and folly of man, through observations and then also through personal experience. He declares that he has really done all that he can in this study, and questions if any man after him can actually do more. What he has found is that wisdom is indeed vastly better, for a wise man goes through life with his eyes open, considering every step of his actions, whereas a foolish man can only grope in the dark, lost and not knowing where to go. But yet despite all the merits of wisdom, there is one thing that is certain and common to both – that is the certainty of death. And so the next logical thought is that even a life lived in apparent wisdom – that is wisdom of the world, is vanity. For no matter how well a man lives his life on earth, so much so that he understands everything there is to know about life, and is learned in all the ways of man, it is still vanity, for he will one day have to die, and there will be not even a remembrance of him. He will be laid to rest in his grave, no different from a fool.

His sad conclusion to this was that he hated life! He looked back at all the work that he had done, and it was grievous to him! Why? Again the same idea comes up – it is all vanity and vexation of the spirit. He may have been great and successful in the eyes of the world, but in light of impending death, everything lost meaning to him, and only gave him grief.

The reason why Solomon felt this way was because he had the wrong perspectives about life and death. It seemed that the life he lived then was just for pride and reputation's sake. He craved for the recognition from the world, and despaired that he would be forgotten after his death. However, as believers, we realize that there is all to hope for in this life, because we have the confidence that when we die, we will have eternity with God. Thus in this life we labour hard, not to please man, but to please God!

THOUGHT: Death is not the end. It is the beginning of eternity!

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to live this life with eternity's values in view.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19
Memorise 1 Cor 10:31
"Do all for the glory of God"

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVES OF LABOUR (I)?

Solomon was a thinker. The more he experimented and pondered over the meaning of life, the more he came to his senses. He was slowly coming to realize the truth, that anything done under the sun is but vanity and vexation of the spirit, and that there can be no true fulfilment apart from a life in God. It was a slow but painful process, but one in which God was guiding him to the light. This is why he would later also conclude that sorrow is far better than mirth (Ecclesiastes 7:4), for in the midst of his grief, he would also reflect, re-examine his life, and turn to God.

The reason for his sorrow and his hatred for his labour was this: for all the labour that he had done, the whole kingdom that he had built up, the houses, vineyards, orchards, irrigation systems, and all the wealth and riches that he had collected, it will all end with his death. And after his death, he will have to leave the results of his labour to someone else. Solomon would then have no control whatsoever on how he uses or abuses these things. As he came to this realisation, he was in utter despair, for suddenly he realized the futility of all his labour, and the emptiness of it all.

This is especially so in reference to the prophecy that was given to him concerning the succession of his kingdom. In 1 Kings 11, after he had gone after other gods, God told Solomon that after his death, his kingdom will be rent in two, and only one tribe will be given to his son, and the rest to Jeroboam his servant. That was the word of the Lord himself, and Solomon knew that to be a certainty. Thus he was grieved, for he knew that his kingdom, with all its wealth, authority, accomplishments and advancements will be left to underserving people who had not laboured for it. This is in direct contrast to his father David who saved up and prepared just so that he could give all that he had to Solomon for the construction of the temple. David's focus was on the glory of God, and the desire to serve Him. That is why he could happily leave behind the huge treasures that he had amassed for his son to build God's house. For Solomon, he could only look at the vain works of his hands, and feel hatred, for the focus of his labour was on self, and what benefit he himself could gain from it.

THOUGHT: Who am I labouring for?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to have a right vision of Your glory, and may all my labours be directed for that sake.

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVES OF LABOUR (II)?

This hatred of his labour, led Solomon to despair of all the labour which he had taken. He was sorrowing without hope! Note the repeat of the phrase 'under the sun', emphasizing that these were works which he had done apart from God. He despaired because of his own helplessness, and what he perceived to be the unfairness in life, of how a man who would labour hard in all wisdom and knowledge and equity, but yet another who had done nothing to deserve anything at all would receive all these works as inheritance. This Solomon saw as vanity and great evil!

In fact, so grieved was Solomon, that he said that not only were his days sorrow and grief, but even at night, his heart could not have rest. The reason for this grief was because the focus of his labour was all wrong. It was a very self-centred labour, where the focus was on the results of it, and how that can glorify himself. He was therefore very much fixated on how the fruits of his labour will be used, and whether the person enjoying it is deserving or not. And therefore he concludes, that such excessive labour, where one build and accumulates for the purpose of pride and recognition, is indeed vanity, and an empty waste of his life.

Yet for us we have to realize, that all that we have is from God, even the labour which we are enabled to do is solely by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10). Therefore we are never to take ownership of our own achievements and accomplishments, but rather to thank God and give all glory to God for them. What God gives, he also has every right to take away, and who he deems right to award your labour to, he has every sovereign right to do so. There is no need to despair and fret over who enjoys the fruit of our labour, for we are not labouring for ourselves, but we are labouring for God! Thus like Paul, we ought to have the attitude whereby we strive to 'labour more abundantly', and remember that we can only do it by God's grace. As we labour for the Lord, it is a joyful work, for we seek for heavenly rewards, which we know our all-wise father in heaven will certainly give us one day.

THOUGHT: Work for the night is coming!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a good Christian student, to be able to work hard, labouring for Thee.

ARE YOU CONTENT WITH YOUR LIFE?

Thus finally, at the end of these two chapters, Solomon makes his first positive mention of God, and directs his readers towards Him. After being vexed by the vanities that he observed in human wisdom and prideful endeavours, he realizes that happiness and joy can only be found in true contentment in the Lord. He exhorts man to eat, drink, and enjoy the fruits of his labour, for he had realized that all things are from God. Do note that what he exhorts us to do here is not to live a wanton hedonistic lifestyle that seeks to gratify the desires of the flesh, but rather to be content and satisfied with the blessings that God has given to man. He encourages all to labour in order to enjoy the fruits of their labour, to eat and drink, acknowledging that it is all the hand of God that provides. In the context of the verse he also discourages greed that we do not seek after riches and wealth but just to be content and rejoice over what we have – sufficient to eat and drink.

Note also that the phrase 'nothing better' doesn't speak of the absolute best thing that a man can do, but instead it is within the context of his hatred and despair, and with regards to a solution to his current sorrow. He saw that instead of lamenting and complaining, the best one can do is really to be content with what God has blessed us with. In so doing, we are bringing God into the picture, and understanding more of our purpose in life.

Again he asks the reader to accept it as coming from him, the one who had wealth in abundance, and was able to eat anything at all that his heart desired. He had all that man could every wish for, but there was a period of time in his life that he was not content. It was only when he could see things with God as the centre of his life, was he then able to truly have joy in his life.

Thus it is only when we know that all you have comes from God, would we be able to be content and enjoy life. As all that we have are gifts from God, we would then naturally know to enjoy them only within the bounds that he has set for us, and do them in a manner pleasing and honouring to Him. We would not take the gift and despise the giver, but instead honour the giver and in grateful praise thank and worship him with what you have.

THOUGHT: To be discontent is to be disgruntled with the One who has given me all things.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to be content in all areas of my life.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21

Ecclesiastes 2:26
Memorise Matthew 7:11
"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above"

DO YOU ACKNOWLEDGE THE GIVER?

Following on from the thought that he had with regards to being content and enjoying the life that God has given us, Solomon then exhorts man to trust in the wisdom of God. He guides us to acknowledge God as the one who sovereignly directs all things that happen in this life, for he knows how to dispense wisdom, knowledge and joy to those who are deserving of it, or those to whom he would desire to gift them these blessings. Likewise to the sinner, God would also know how to deal with him, and give travail to him, such that he will live his life in vain pursuit of all things under the sun and gather and heap up worldly possessions just like Solomon did. Yet, there will be times where God can also take all that the possessions that the sinner has gathered up, and then give it to one whom God decides is more deserving of such wealth. Does this seem like vanity? Does it seem unfair? Are we but pawns in the hands of a fickle god? To the unbeliever, yes it will seem so unpredictable, and appear to be 'vanity and vexation', for that was Solomon's conclusion then, when he had the wrong perspectives of life.

However for us, we know that all this will be done in such a manner, because it is God's divine prerogative to do as He wills, and will be done according to his infinite wisdom. He will never give wrongly, and therefore there is no need to fear death, to hate life, or to despair of your labour. If we acknowledge that God is the sole giver of everything that we have in this life, then we would know that the life that we live, and the labours that we perform, are all guided and controlled by Him. We would then realize that anything done under the sun, apart from God, is vanity. True meaning and happiness can never be found there. Rather, we remember the maxim, 'only one life to live, twill soon be past. Only what is done for Christ will last.'

May we all learn to acknowledge God as the giver of all things, and in light of that, to live a life pleasing and acceptable in His sight.

THOUGHT: Can I blame God and be angry with Him, when I do not seem to receive the things that I want in this life?

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to trust in You and to believe that all Your plans for me are always the very best.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22 *Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*
Memorise Romans 8:28

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven"

DO YOU TRUST IN GOD'S PERFECT PURPOSES?

After Solomon describes his fruitless quest for meaning in life, in trying to find true happiness through human wisdom, labour and riches, he concludes that it is all vanity and vexation of spirit.

He now launches into a second discourse, where he would describe his observations concerning life. This will run from Ecclesiastes 3-6. He observes the varied and often foolish ways in which the common man carries out their lives under the sun, and critiques and comments on various things which he observes in their lives.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, he first looks at life in general, and observes the cycle of life as a whole. Like he did when he observed the cycle of nature in chapter one, he now observes the cycles of life, and comes to a similar conclusion – that God is sovereign, and man is mortal. With his vast intellect, he looks across all the affairs of man's life, and realizes that no matter what man does in trying to prevent certain things or make certain things happen, everything and anything that happens is under the hand of a sovereign God. Everything has an appointed time and season, and everything that happens fulfils a specific purpose, not by chance, not by fate, but because of the will of God. God is the one who is in charge. He alone decrees how, when and where things happen. He alone also know why it will happen, and who will be involved. Yet we know that as things happen in accordance to God's purpose, it will always be the very best. His purposes are always perfect, and will never disappoint.

Dear teen, do you trust in God's perfect purposes? Do you realize that everything and anything in your life happens for a reason? If you are a child of God, we know that all things will certainly work together for good, because they happen at the exact specified season and appointed time, in accordance to God's purposes. There is no such thing as chance, luck, or coincidence or random happenings. God is always in control of your life, and everything that happens to it! Do you have the faith to believe?

THOUGHT: God never moves without purpose or plan

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the faith to believe that You always have a perfect plan!

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
Memorise 1 Thess 5:18
"A time to be born, and a time to die..."

DO YOU TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY?

From verses 1-8 Solomon launches into a poetic listing of 28 things that he sees a specific time and season of which man has no control over. These 28 things come in 14 pairs of contrasts. The contrasts here serve to describe the full gamut of our human experience: of life and death, joy and sadness, success and failures, positives and negatives. All things, be it good or bad, have their own time and purpose.

This passage is probably one of the more well-known passages in the Bible – and is one that even non-believers quote from. It is a list that everyone under the sun can easily identify with. Anyone who has experienced life would have witnessed the changing seasons of time, and have had good times and bad experiences in life. Everyone knows that these are the realities of human life, and they are the things that we will certainly have to face as we journey through our time here on earth. Indeed the human life is a rich and a full experience. There are so many things to do in life, and so little time to experience them all. What Solomon is saying here is that as we experience life here on Earth, realize that God is sovereignly in control of all these 'times', and whether good or bad, it will all happen as God intends them to. Just as we have no control over the natural universe, we also have no control over even our own lives. Yet all these events happen as they do, and they are not in contradiction to each other. All things come to pass in complete and perfect unity to the plan of God. We may not ever be able to fully comprehend God's mysterious workings, but we can rest assured that God is in control, and everything happens in its time, for its purpose.

Dear teen, are you able to see God's hand in every aspect of your life? Use these verses as a kind of checklist to see how God has purposed every event in your life. In the midst of all these varied experiences, are we able to thank God for each and everything that happens? We rejoice and thank God when we see births, times of healing; we enjoy the times of laughter, dancing, embracing. But how about when the sorrows of death overwhelm us, or the ravages of war affect us, or when we are hated for no fault of our own? Are we still able to thank God?

THOUGHT: When I am angry with life, who am I actually angry with?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see You sovereign hand in all things, and in everything, always be able to give thanks.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
Memorise Ecc 3:11

"He hath made everything beautiful in his time..."

ARE ALL TIMES GOOD TIMES?

Let us give a more detailed look at the list in Ecclesiastes 3. As you run down the pairs of contrasts, you would notice that the order is not always in one way, in that it is always the 'good' time first, followed by the 'bad' time. At least in our human perspective, we would always associate a time to be born as a good thing, and the time to die a bad thing. Likewise we would see a time to kill as something bad, and a time to heal as something good. We would then expect the list to be given in an orderly fashion, where it is always the 'good' then the 'bad' time, or vice versa. However we realize that that is not the case, for the order is often mixed up, with seemingly no pattern as to which would come first. Do you wonder why this is the case?

We must realize, that what we perceive to be bad things, are not always bad in the sight of God. We may not enjoy the experiences of weeping, mourning, silence and hate, but nonetheless, they are all things which have been done beautiful, in God's time. From our simple human understanding of things, we think that the best experiences are the ones that we enjoy, and make us feel happy and comfortable. However, we must realize that God does allow us to go through such trials and hardships for reasons known only to Him. There are times that people ask, "if God is a good God, then why does he allow war, killing, and even death"? We may not have a direct answer for such questions, but we can see clearly here, that such experiences in life are all covered under God's perfect divine purposes. They are that which have been decreed and ordained by God, and who are we to question them? If it were up to us, we may think that it would be best if everyone would not have to die, that there would only be good health and no killing; that people will only embrace and laugh and dance. But that really might not be the best plan. God in His wisdom, allowed for this whole wide array of human experiences, because He knows that that is the very best. It is not for us to categorise them into 'good' and bad' experiences, but we must with Solomon, realize that they are all made beautiful in God's perfect time.

THOUGHT: What we think to be good, may not always be good in the sight of God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to understand things from Your perspective, and in times that I do not understand, grant me the grace to humbly accept Thy will.

DO YOU TRUST IN GOD'S WORKS?

This next segment begins with Solomon asking the same rhetorical question which he asked right at the beginning of the book – that is what profit is there to a man in his labour? He then proceeds to reiterate the observations that he had made in the previous two chapters concerning his own experiences in seeking after happiness and true meaning in life.

First he speaks again of this travail which God hath given to the sons of men. From Ecclesiastes 1:13 that this is the desire within man to try to attain human wisdom and knowledge. Now after observing the cycles of life, he has an answer – and that is man can never fully understand or find out the works of God. God is the one who has ordained all things from the beginning to the end, and man can never understand it all. God is the only one who can know it all, and is sovereignly carrying out his perfect and beautiful plan amongst man. He is the one who has made everything, and they are all beautiful! He has 'set the world in their heart', in the sense that he has placed in man this interest and curiosity about the world, to have a desire to know of not just this present physical world, but the idea of eternity has also been set in their hearts. That is the meaning behind the word used for 'world'. Thus man has been granted this awareness of not just this present life, but also the life to come. Thus man has the innate knowledge that there is far more to life than this present, and that the only meaningful life can be found in knowing our creator, and living a life for Him.

Thus as we survey all of God's works, we must acknowledge that all of God's creation, and the intricacies of how this whole world, and all the interactions within it are indeed so vast that man can never find out the work that God has made from the beginning to the end.

Again, our only response can be one of humble submission to His perfect divine wisdom. We cannot hope to explain why God allows things to happen in a certain way, but what we can do is to have faith in His wisdom, and know that His works which God's wills from the very beginning to the end is all good and beautiful, arranged perfectly in His time!

THOUGHT: What fraction of God's works can I hope to understand?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the heart of humility that I may submit to Your perfect will in my life.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26

Ecclesiastes 3:12-15
Memorise Ecc 3:14
"rejoice, and to do good in his life..."

DO YOU EVER DARE TO QUESTION GOD?

In light of God's perfect sovereign wisdom, Solomon tells us that man's role is really not to question, to claim perfect knowledge of all these things. We can but simply accept His will and rejoice in the Lord, and endeavour to do good within the limits of what God has chosen to reveal to him. Man should also be content with whatever lot that God has chosen for him in life, and rejoice in whatever blessings God has given to him, and thus enjoy the fruits of his labour, since they are the gift of God. It is the same principle that he had repeated in the previous chapter, but in this context it is in light of the fact that we can never fully comprehend God's sovereignty, and therefore we should simply be content to rejoice in Him and to obey His law.

He states again in no uncertain terms that God is sovereign, and that man can do nothing at all to change the will and purposes of God. Whatever he does is fixed, and man cannot add nor take away from the works of God, for it is eternal, unchangeable, and immutable. All that man can, and must do, is to fear God with a reverential awe, and desire to do good before Him.

We cannot change the past, neither can we know anything about the future. But in both God is constantly and consistently in control, such that the past is no different from the now, and the future things already has been. God's sense of time is different from ours, and is not caught up in the worries of man over the changing courses of time. He is always in control, and always in the know. But yet what will be reckoned of man, is that concerning what he has done in the past. The world will continue in its relentless course, for time waits for no man. Yet at the same time God is interested in each and every individual. God sees and knows how all of us have lived in this present life, and God will 'require' (seek to find out. Ref. Ecclesiastes 3:18, 2 Samuel 4:11) your past, and you will be judged for it.

Thus knowing all this, we should never be led to question God or to blame Him for the way our life has turned out. Instead, we just focus on the life that we have to live, and do all in our power to rejoice and do good!

THOUGHT: To question God, we have to be either very foolish, or very brave (or foolhardy).

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the wisdom to change things that I can in my life, and a submissive spirit to accept the things that I cannot change.

DO YOU TRUST IN GOD'S JUDGMENTS?

So after considering the futility of man's life, especially in light of God's sovereign works, Solomon will now shift his attention back to the subject of death, and now also the life after death. He looked first at the courts of man, and again saw the futility of it, for how can sinful man judge one another (Ecclesiastes 3:16)? He saw a great injustice in the affairs of men, whereby wickedness was found in the place where judgment ought to be executed fairly, and he saw sin in a place where righteousness ought to be. He will elaborate more on these injustices and wicked acts of man in chapter 4.

In comparison to the corrupt human judges, he then mentions God the divine judge who will one day judge both the righteous and the wicked (Ecclesiastes 3:17). There will certainly a time set aside for this great event one day, where every purpose and every work will come under the divine spotlight of God's judgment. He will rectify all the injustices that he sees amongst the works of man. All that man does here under the sun, he will one day have to answer before the God Almighty. God will then bring to light all the wicked works of men, that they might see and realize that they are no different from beasts, in the carnal sins that they have committed.

For the unbeliever, this is a terrifying prospect, to know that one day, all their works will be made known, and will have to come under the searchlight of God's holiness. God, in all His perfection is one who is too holy to even behold sin! He will certainly judge the wicked. On the other hand, for the believer, for one who has been saved and cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promise of God's judgment is one of comfort and assurance. He knows that it is not his own sinful works that will come under judgment, for we have the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ with us. It is also a comfort to know that whilst there may seem to be many injustices and unfairness in this present world, God will make it right one day. God is not unaware of the affairs of man, and He will take action in time to come.

For us, we must be certain that on that day of reckoning, we will be judged as one who is righteous, and not wicked.

THOUGHT: Is the thought of God's judgment one that brings fear or joy?

PRAYER: Lord, may I always look forward to the soon coming return of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Ecclesiastes 3:19-21
Memorise Genesis 2:7
"So God created man in his own image"

WILL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN?

Continuing the line of thought concerning man as beasts, Solomon links the thought back to his current theme and that is the certainty of death and the subsequent judgment. The one common trait between man and beast is that they will both have to die, return to the ground, and become as dust once again. And so in this aspect, man is really no different or better from beasts, for they are both living creatures who will one day have their life taken away from the physical body, which will then rot, decompose and return to the earth. After that, only God knows and has control over the fate of man's soul, on where it goes after death, if it is to go up to join the Lord in heaven, or descend down into the pits of hell.

In saying this, Solomon is not equating man and animal as the same, nor suggesting that animals have a soul and may possibly be found in heaven. He is simply speaking about physical death, and the fact that death comes to us all. In fact, what he does allude to is the fact that the spirit of man is immortal, and does experience life after death. It goeth upward, whether to eternity in heaven or to face judgment and condemnation, only God knows. The spirit of beast on the other hand, not speaking of its immortal soul but of basically its vitality and life force, will simply go down to the ground, and ends there. Of all these mysteries concerning life and death and the afterlife, 'who knoweth'? Only God!

However, what we do know, is that God has breathed an immortal soul into man, as he was made after the image of God (Genesis 2:7). Animals only have a 'soul', in the sense of having physical life. They may have some emotions that seem to be almost human in nature, but that can never be equated to the soul that man has. It is the lie of evolution that tells us that man have evolved from animals, and therefore are no different from them!

There are some sincere, animal-loving Christians out there that may ask this question from time to time: "will my pet be in heaven?" Especially some who have pet dogs or cats that stay with them for years, and they go so attached to them that they sometimes love them even more than their own family and friends. To them, we must gently show them the difference from Scripture, that man, being made in the image of God, is far different from animals, who God only made for man to have dominion over.

THOUGHT: Man, not animals, were created in the image of God!

PRAYER: Thank you Lord, for making me, me!

Ecclesiastes 3:22
Memorise 2 Cor 5:8

"Who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WILL BE AFTER DEATH?

Thus in light of the previous verses, Solomon's conclusion here for carnal man, is that since death is indeed a certainty, and only God is sovereign over the fate of man's soul after death, man should just simply enjoy the fruits of his labour for the present. Also, he should not be overly concerned about the fate of his works after his death, for there is indeed nothing at all that he can do after death comes. He can never know the future, nor know what would happen to the fruits of his labour after his death. In fact, Solomon is preaching to himself (ref. Ecclesiastes 2:12-23), for because of his worry about his impending death, he hated life and despaired of all his labour. Solomon would never in his lifetime know what would become of his kingdom, of how it would be split and taken over by Jeroboam. None of us can ever know.

The focus of one's worry then should really not be about the physical things that we leave behind, but of the spiritual fate that we would face after death. For the man under the sun, he has absolutely no certainty nor assurance. True, no one will be able to bring us to see with our own eyes as to what shall be after death, but the Bible does allow our spiritual eyes to have a glimpse of eternity. Through God's Word, we can be brought to the future, and have a foretaste of the joys of heaven, and also be warned about the torment of hell.

For believers, we have a certainty that after death we will have life eternal in the arms of our loving God. Therefore more than to just rejoice in our works here on earth, we look up and forward, and are able to rejoice far more because we know that our future is certain, and secure.

Dear Teen, are you sure of where you will be after death? Our eyes may not have seen heaven or hell, but we can know for a certainty from the Word of God that these are real places! It is only when we know for sure that we are headed to heaven, can we then truly enjoy our life here on Earth, for we will know that our lives are in the hands of God, and He will always take care of us.

THOUGHT: How certain am I of my place in heaven?

PRAYER: Thank you Lord, for the assurance of salvation that I can have from Your Word.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3
Memorise Proverbs 28:3
"the tears of such as were oppressed..."

ARE YOU A BULLY?

And so, upon contemplating the sins of man and the coming judgment, Solomon in Ecclesiastes 4 now shifts his attention to the way that man interacts with one another, and sees much sin. One thing that we will realize that is common to all these sins of men is that it is the result of their self-seeking nature, where they desire to exalt self, and know nothing at all about the glory of God. They are those whom Paul describes as 'lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God' (2 Timothy 3:4)

The first thing he observed about the ways of man was their oppression of one another (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3). He looked at the wicked state of men in power of the world, and saw the way in which they had abused their power and authority, and oppressed the powerless, poor and weak. The oppression was so bad that tears were in the eyes of the oppressed, and there was no one to comfort them. They could only cry in their misery, and lament at the sad state of life which they were in. In fact, so bad was the oppression that they faced, that Solomon said that it was better to be dead that living, and better still, to have not been born at all! For those who had not yet been born had not experienced the evils of the world, and thus to Solomon that was better than those who were given the opportunity to experience life, for they would then have to also experience the sinfulness and evils of man. This really shows the extreme wickedness of man, and how this evil has pervaded the whole world. No one is safe from such oppressions. The only escape is death! Once you are living in this world, you are at risk of the sin and wickedness that surrounds us.

For us, we must ensure that we must never, even for the slightest bit, be one to propagate such wickedness. Realize that we do have a great power and influence over the people around us. If we are mean spirited, malicious bullies, we can make the lives of people so miserable that they rather die than to live through such torment. How many times have we heard of youths who take their own lives because of relationship or interpersonal problems? Sometimes, even in our jest, we might unknowingly hurt the feelings of those around us. An unkind, mean or even teasing word spoken out of turn can really cause great misery and grief, As Christians, we must always be conscious and aware of those around us, and ensure that our words and actions never cause hurt or harm to others.

THOUGHT: Am I a bully who has caused the tears of others?

PRAYER: Lord, may You guide my thoughts, words and actions.

Ecclesiastes 4:4
Memorise Proverbs 27:4
"Who is able to stand before envy?"

ARE YOU A COVETEOUS PERSON?

From the wicked men in power, Solomon then turns his eye to those who do an honest man's work, and earns himself an honest man's wage. As he does 'every right work', by working hard with his hands, he probably increases in riches, in stature and in success. However, the sad result of this is that this man becomes the object of envy of the people around him. Even though a man does everything in a right manner without corruption, yet he still does not receive the approval of man, for they become envious of his success. Worse still, they may begin to badmouth him, gossip about his motives and maybe begin to insinuate corruption or other sins.

If you are labouring under the sun apart from God, then yes this would be vanity and vexation of spirit to you. For if you work only for the approval and praise of men, and you try your best to do everything right, but yet you are envied and hated for it, then of course you will feel very dejected. But we realize that man's opinion is never what we are seeking after. If men envy and hate us because of our honest hard work, then so be it! In fact, we thank God that we can be a good witness and testimony for Him, and are counted worthy to suffer for His sake!

Dear teen, have you experienced such people before in your lives? How did you respond to their envy and possibly even hatred? You may be diligently doing your best in school, and try to follow all the school rules. You do well in class, and perhaps win the favour of your teachers. However because of that you are mocked by your classmates, and ostracized for being so 'goody-goody'. Remember that our aim in life is not to please men and win their favour. We are here to do the will of God and glorify Him! If we know that through our good works, God is glorified, then we can rest assured that God knows and will bless you.

However, we must be careful that we do not find ourselves on the other side, of one who envies others. Do you sometimes wish you had the things your friends have? Do you wish you were more intelligent, maybe more hardworking, more good-looking etc.? Does this envy that you have cause you to despise them? Be careful, for such a spirit is one of covetousness, and is nothing more than vanity and vexation of spirit!

THOUGHT: Covetousness is a silent but deadly sin of the heart!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live an honest, simply life that is pleasing to You.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1 *Ecclesiastes 4:5-6*
Memorise Proverbs 15:16

"Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail"

ARE YOU A LAZY PERSON?

In contrast to those that work hard, there are on the other extreme those that are slothful, and refuse to raise a finger to help even himself! The description given here is one who simply folds his hands together. This is a picture of one who is permanently sleeping (Proverbs 6:10, 24:33: "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep"), and refuses to get up to find himself food to eat. Lying there, he will get hungry, but because of his extreme sloth, he rather resorts to eating his own flesh, than getting up to work and earn a living!

Is this a description of some of us? How many of us can just laze the whole day away on the bed, or in front of the computer doing meaningless things? How many weeks and months of school holidays have we just whiled away in an empty pursuit of pleasure? We may not physically eat our hands, but realize that your life is being eaten away by your lazy inactivity.

Thus comparing these two states (the honest man who becomes the subject of envy, and the slothful man who wastes his life), Solomon then concludes in verse 6, that moderation is the best solution. He says that it is better to live a simple life, away from all the opulence and luxuries of the world, but yet working hard, having a handful of things to do, than to go all out in grasping after the world, for it will end only with travail and vexation of spirit. It is nothing wrong to work hard and earn money, and if the Lord blesses, sometimes a man may become very rich. However, he is to take it as it comes, and enjoy it with quietness, and not to show off and be very ostentatious about his wealth, such that he becomes the envy of others. The idea is similar to the advice he gives in Proverbs 15:16-17: "Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

Dear Teen, what are you doing with your life? Do you realize that each hour you have is a gift from God, and ought to be gainfully used for the Lord? Instead of wasting our time playing the latest mobile phone game, or lazing in bed, why don't you pick up a Christian book to read, or study a passage of the Bible? Or perhaps you could spend it in prayer with the Lord?

THOUGHT: How many hours have I wasted today?

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me be wise, and to redeem the time, because the days are evil.

Ecclesiastes 4:7-8
Memorise 1 Tim 6:10-11
"But thou, O man of God, flee these things"

ARE YOU BLINDLY AMBITIOUS?

Continuing his observation of man and his labour, Solomon sees a man who is a miser, who cannot get along with anyone else, and works only for himself. He has no family, no one that is relying on him for provision. Perhaps because of his blind ambition, and obsessive fixation on his work and the wealth it brings, he has alienated all the people around him. Yet despite the fact that he has no need for the wealth, he cannot stop working, and continues to store up riches and treasures for himself. This is indeed a common mind-set of many, where they work for the sake of money, and it seems they can never be satisfied no matter how much they earn. They do not actually need the money, for they have earned more than they can spend in a lifetime. Yet their eye is not satisfied with riches, and he never realizes that he has more than enough to live. Their inconsumable greed just keeps driving them on, much to the detriment of their soul. Through it all, their blind ambition has bereaved his soul (caused his soul to be in lack or want) or good. This means that the life he has lived is a worthless, meaningless one, devoid of any good at all. How sad! This is indeed vanity, and a sore travail.

Dear teen, is this perhaps the sort of attitude and mind-set that you are in danger of having as well? In our competitive society, our schools, teachers, peers, and sometimes even our parents have placed such an emphasis on ambition and success. The world's philosophy is that we must work hard and study hard in order to be successful in life, that we can get good high-paying jobs and enjoy the luxuries that money can bring. As Christians, we must be very careful, that we understand the motives behind why we work hard. We strive to do well in school, not because we are ambitious and want a great future for ourselves. Neither do we do it so that we can please our parents, show off to our friends, and win the recognition and accolades that the school and society can offer. Our main and only motivation is that we want to please and glorify our Lord! As Christians, our affections are not to be set on the things of the earth, but only on the eternal things of heaven. We must be able to separate and distinguish ourselves from the materialistic greed of the world, but seek godliness with contentment, which we know is great gain!

THOUGHT: Why do I want to work hard in school?

PRAYER: Lord, may You search my heart, and grant me the right motivations behind my studies.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
Memorise Heb 10:25

"It is not good that the man should be alone..."

ARE YOU A LONER?

And so Solomon's advice to all, is that it is better to invest in friendship and companionship, for two is better than one. From the very beginning God told man that it is "not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). One would be able to enjoy the fruits of his labour much better in the company of friends and family, than in the solace of himself. And when one falls, he has people around to help him up, to support him and to encourage him. If the people around him are envious of him and say or do malicious things to hurt him, his friends can support him and uphold him. The illustration given is that warmth is retained better when two lie together, but alone, this warmth is quickly dissipated. Therefore Solomon advises that two is better as one, and a three-fold cord, where each strand is intertwined one with another is a relationship that is not easily broken. Such tight bonds can only be found in godly Christian fellowship, where not just three, but a group of believers bound together in the bonds of Christ would indeed be a strong force to be reckoned with. If they were to stand together, the wiles of the devil, temptation, discouragement and other things that would tear a person down would not easily afflict them.

Do tote that this 'threefold cord' does not refer to a two-person relationship with God in it. The context does not suggest such an interpretation, though a strong bond of fellowship would certainly have to include God. Neither does the phrase 'two are better than one' refer specifically only to marital relationships, although such an application can be made.

From this, we can draw the application of the importance of fellowship in a believer's life. God has given us friends and family, and a whole church of brothers and sisters in Christ that we can rely on for strength and support. No man is an island, and no man can hope to complete the Christian race well without the help of others. You may feel shy, and feel that you have no friends in church. That is when we must take the proactive step to go out, to be friendly to others, and encourage them, before we wait for them to encourage us! We should learn to take the first step, to be the one to lift us your fellow.

THOUGHT: Have I ever truly enjoyed the blessings of Christian fellowship?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to encourage and be encouraged by my Christian brothers and sisters in Christ.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16
Memorise 1 Cor 9:25
"Better is a poor and a wise child..."

ARE YOU SEEKING AFTER POPULARITY?

It is likely, that in this next observation from Ecclesiastes 4:13-16, Solomon is actually speaking of himself, and possibly also looks ahead to lament on what will become of his kingdom. He first looks back at his own life, and acknowledges that he was much better in his youth, where he was poor, wise and humble, and sought the Lord for wisdom. As he aged, he fell away from God, and became an old and foolish king, who refused to take any advice at all from his subordinates, and the prophet sent by God (1 Kings 11), but instead tried to go against the will of God, to kill Jeroboam, the man whom God said would inherit the greater part of his kingdom. However it was to no avail, for Jeroboam fled into Egypt, away from the hand of Solomon. After Solomon died, he came 'out of prison to reign', and thus Solomon's son who was born in his own kingdom became poor, and had only the tribe of Judah who was loyal to him. The people of Israel thus all went after the 'second child', who was Jeroboam, and were men who walk under the sun, seeking wealth, prosperity, and had no qualms about worshipping the idols set up by Jeroboam.

In this all, Solomon observes the fleeting nature of popularity, pride and the desire to gain the recognition of man, for one moment a king is popular, the next moment he is hated. One moment, a man is in captive out of his own country, the next moment he comes out of his captivity to rule a nation, and the prince who was to rule becomes poor. Such is the cycle of life, where there is a time to rend, to sew, to laugh, to mourn, of war and of peace. There is no certainty or solace that can be found in chasing after fame and pride, and of all these power struggles there is not end, for one king will soon be forgotten, and another will rise up in his stead. Again Solomon concludes that such is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Dear teen, do you find yourselves chasing after the fleeting pride of popularity and worldly achievements? Do you regard things like getting that SYF gold, or that place in the Combined School's Team, or that National Schools competition medal something that we yearn after? Do we look up to those who have such achievements, and look down upon those who done? Realize that these things are but the vain accolades of men, and do not last. Instead, we ought to strive after wisdom, and godliness!

THOUGHT: A medal made by man, or an incorruptible crown?

PRAYER: Lord, may You guide me ambitions towards that of eternal things.

HOW IS YOUR WORSHIP? - CONDUCT

In this chapter, Solomon will put together the observations that he has made in the previous two chapters (of the sovereignty of God and of the wickedness of man) and then lay out some guidelines as to how we ought to worship God. In response to all that he has seen and experienced, Solomon now directs his readers to understand that since God is sovereign over all things, and man is wicked in all his ways, it is only right that man must come before God in proper worship. But even in this aspect, man is unworthy, and often does many things wrong. Thus Solomon observes the way they are, and gives some guidelines with regards to the proper conduct of worship. The house of God that Solomon was referring to here was of course the temple that he had built for God. Inside was the tabernacle, the only place which the children of Israel were to worship God in. For them it was a place of great sanctity, and they had to be very careful in their conduct when they would enter into the house of God. There were many rules and laws with regards to who could enter which part of the temple, and exactly what they were to do. Thus they had to carefully guard their footsteps as they entered, and to be ready to hear and be instructed by God's Word, rather than to rashly present an unworthy offering without any prior thought or meditation, for that is the evil sacrifice of fools.

For us, the application is clear. We no longer have the physical temple, but now we worship the Lord in churches. It is true that the physical restrictions and laws no longer apply to us, but we must remember that our conduct before the Lord in worship is just as important. We must be very careful when we goes into the house of God. We must guard our steps as we stand before the presence of the Almighty God. We must prepare ourselves properly, and be ready to hear the instructions from God, than to give the sacrifice of fools. We must learn to watch our conduct, to search our hearts and know how to worship the Lord rightly. What God requires of us is not so much our sacrifices and offerings, but a heart that desires to listen and then to obey. This is exactly the advice of Samuel to Saul when he tried to give a sacrifice to God which he was not commanded to do: 'Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams' (1 Samuel 15:22).

THOUGHT: How can I practically prepare myself before going to church?

PRAYER: Lord, may You give me a sincere heart of worship for Thee.

Ecclesiastes 5:2-3
Memorise Ecc 5:2
"Be not rash with thy mouth"

HOW IS YOUR WORSHIP? – SPEECH

As we worship God, we must also be very careful with what we says, and do not be rash to utter words which we would later regret. What God wants of us are certainly not rash actions or words, but simply a heart ready to hear God's words and do them.

God is high in the heavens, the eternal all-powerful God, whilst we are weak and mortal sinful beings on the earth. As insignificant and unworthy as we are, we have absolutely no right to ever have any association whatsoever with God. Yet it is only by the grace and mercy of God that we have this opportunity to come before Him to sing praises to His name. This is a privilege extended only to the blood-bought children of God. Therefore when we worship God, we must be very aware of this fact. Remembering who God is and what we are in contrast to Him will certainly place a healthy reverential fear within us. We will not be so quick to shoot off our mouth, but learn to keep silent before Him. As we sing at the start of every worship service, let us remember that "The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

The fool would be one who does not know how to guard his mouth. He blabbers at every opportunity, even if he has nothing useful or constructive to say. The comparison Solomon brings up is that just as a person who is involved in much business throughout the day, and thus when he sleeps his mind is still plagued by dreams and random thoughts, likewise one who spouts many words would show that he is a fool. Like a dream, they the fool's voice is confused, incoherent, very random, and best forgotten.

As the old saying goes – empty vessels make the most noise. When we come to the house of the Lord for worship, are we aware that we are in the very presence of God? Do we continue have that light-hearted flippant and jesting attitude, one that is only interested in entertaining self and others around you, instead of worshiping God? When we mouth our words of worship through the hymns we sing and when we read and hear the words of His Scripture, we are praising Him and listening to His Word. In light of that, are we then careful of the words that come out of our mouths?

THOUGHT: Do I mean the words that I say when I sing hymns to God?

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to control my speech, and never to be rash with my mouth.

CAN WE VOW VOWS? (I)

Specifically with regards to being rash with one's mouth, Solomon broaches the topic of making vows. The OT law concerning vows are very clearly spelt out in Numbers 30, and also Deuteronomy 23:21: 'When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee.' Solomon gives similar advice here, saying that if one vows a vow, he must certainly fulfil it. Otherwise, it is better to not vow in the first place, for if one vows a vow and does not pay it, it is the mouth causing the flesh to sin, you show yourself to be a fool, and it invokes the wrath of God.

Perhaps Solomon was again speaking from his personal experience. When God appeared to Solomon in 1 Kings 9:2-9 right after he led his nation in a prayer of supplication and dedication, a covenant was made by the Lord to Solomon. God told him that he if he would 'walk before me as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and will keep my statutes and my judgments: then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel forever…' but if he did not, and would go into idolatry, 'then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people…' Though it is true that it was a covenant made by God to Solomon, yet it can also be construed as a vow, for Solomon did indeed in the previous chapter exhort his people to 'let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statues, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.' (1 Kings 8:61).

This is a covenant or promise which Solomon broke, and he had to suffer the consequences, for it was prophesied to him that his kingdom will be rent into two, and his son will rule over only one tribe, whereas Jeroboam his servant would be given the reign of the greater part of his kingdom.

Dear teen, have there been similar promises of consecration and commitment that you have made to the Lord? It is not wrong to make vows out of a true heart of desire to please to Lord. Yet be warned, that we are expected to keep every covenant we make.

THOUGHT: Have I ever broken a promise before?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a person of my word.

CAN WE VOW VOWS? (II)

The law given for vows was not just for the Old Testament, but continues to the present. Even today, we must continue to heed such a warning, for God is the same God, who will hold us to our word, and therefore we must be careful not to foolishly declare things we do not mean. This is the testimony of my principal and also the founder of the BP Church in Singapore, Rev Timothy Tow. His mother dedicated him as a baby to be a full time servant of the Lord, and this is his testimony with regards to that:

"I was a rebellious son who broke my mother's vow. As a result, my mother's death was quickly followed up in five weeks by my seven month daughter's death. Realising the error of breaking my mother's vow, I thoroughly repented. By his mercies, He restored me to his favour. He has sustained me to this day in my service of him. Here is a lesson for every one of you who has vowed or solemnly promised before the Lord. See that you do not smother the words you had uttered before the Lord." (Timothy Tow, Lessons from the University of Life, 37) In writing his testimony, he was very frank and open to share that it was because he refused the will of God in his life, and did not want to fulfil his mother's vow, that he wanted to go to England to study law, instead of becoming a pastor. Therefore the Lord intervened, and took away the life of his mother and daughter, before he finally yielded and gave his life to the Lord.

Once we make a vow, there is no turning back, and God will hold you to your word. Just as God can bless you if you show yourself to be a man of your word, God can just as quickly destroy the work of your hands, and bring to naught all that you vainly strive to accomplish. Again the idea of dreams and words are brought up, and in this context to describe the fact that the fool who does not guard his mouth, but makes vain vows and promises would lead to divers vanities.

In our present day, we make membership vows when we get baptised and join a church. We make wedding vows when we get married. Pastors have ordination vows when they are ordained to the ministry. All these must be taken seriously, with all gravity, for they are vows made to the Lord!

THOUGHT: What other vows do Christians make?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be careful with every word I make before Thee.

Ecclesiastes 5:7
Memorise Proverbs 1:7
"But fear thou God..."

DO YOU FEAR GOD?

Solomon ends this section of his advice with an admonition to 'fear thou God.' This is an advice that had already mention once in Ecclesiastes 3:14, and will be mentioned two more times in Ecclesiastes 8:12 and 12:13. Indeed that is the attitude that we must have whenever we approach God, when we enter into his house for worship, and when we commune with him and vow vows. It is so important to have the right heart and mind-set when we come before the thrice Holy God. When we truly have the fear of God in our hearts, then we would naturally have the right reverential awe and respect in our worship of Him, and we would not make hasty or rash vows nor defer to keep them, for we know that we are standing before the Holy and Perfect God.

On the other hand, it is very dangerous to try to approach God with no fear or respect of Him. Some Christians think that they can approach God casually and flippantly, as if they were talking to their 'pal' on the street, or address God as 'daddy' or 'pops'. This shows a lack of understanding and regard for who God really is. This is certainly not the way we see men of God in the Bible approaching God, for they would always go with fear and trembling, realizing that God in His perfect holiness could strike them down at any time. Our modern individualistic culture has lost the respect for authority. Children nowadays address their parents (and even grandparents) by their first name. For many youths, it is 'cool' to rebel against authority, and very uncool to conform to the norms. Because of that, youths today no longer know how to fear God, and respect Him.

For us, we know that the fear of God is certainly something very important, and something that we constantly need to be reminded of. The right understanding of the fear of God will help us to worship Him, not just every Sunday in church, but also every day of our lives.

THOUGHT: What attributes of God should I meditate on to help me have a greater fear of God?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to fear You always, that I might live a life that is pleasing and acceptable in Your sight.

DOES GOD CARE FOR THE OPPRESSED?

Next, concerning the oppression of the poor which Solomon mentioned earlier, again he points us to view it with reference to the sovereignty of God. He tells man not to marvel or be surprised when they see wicked men oppressing others, for God is the one watching over all things. God sees and knows the plight of the poor and the wickedness of the oppressors. Solomon observes that over all these oppressors, there are human governments and authorities, who are the ones that are 'higher than they'. But above that, God also knows, and will judge. God is referred to here as the one that is higher than 'he that is higher than the highest' – the supreme authority, far greater and higher than any power on earth!

So for us we realize that oppression and abuse of power is part of life, and if we see such abuses in life, or if we ourselves are the victims of it, we rest in the fact that the highest authority is God, and he will work all things in his season and in his time. We marvel not, but take comfort in the fact that God is still on the throne. Furthermore, this earth that God has made is for all men to enjoy, and even kings must rely on this earth that God has made. Therefore it is fully within the power of God to humble kings and exalt the poor – something which Solomon will also speak of in the following chapters.

We must remember that God always regards the affairs of everything that happens in this world. God never loses control of matters, and neither is He ever taken by surprise. All the world governments, the multi-national cooperations, all the international organizations, are all subsumed under the sovereign hand of God. He knows exactly what each individual on Earth is going through. But also remember that His divine wisdom is far greater than ours, and does not always work things out the way we expect Him to. But this does not mean He does not care for the oppressed. In fact, the frequent mentions of the poor, oppressed and suffering in the Word of God shows that He truly does care, and in His own time and will, He will work out things according to His perfect plan.

THOUGHT: God cares. Do I care?

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the comfort to know that You know and regard every little thing that happens in my life.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11 *Ecclesiastes 5:10-12*
Memorise Ecc 5:12

"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver"

CAN RICHES SATISFY?

As much as Solomon exhorts man to worship and fear God, he knows that man will continue to worship riches and wealth, and so for the rest of this chapter, he returns to this theme and again shares his observations and exhortations concerning riches.

Firstly, from verses 10-12 he observes that no matter how much wealth one accumulates, he will never be satisfied with the abundance of wealth alone. In his greed he will always desire more, and he will love not so much the money itself, but will become addicted to the abundance and increase of it. Then as one labours for this wealth, and as his goods increase, he will definitely have to share his wealth, for he will have to employ men to take care of his business and manage the abundance of his wealth. And so because he loves his silver so much, it will be painful to part with his wealth, and see other people eat of the fruits of his labour.

Instead, Solomon sees that the sleep of a man who does an honest day's work, who collects a fixed salary has sweet rest, even if he eats only a little. However, for all the wealth of the rich man, because of the riches he has, and the headaches that are associated with it, he is not able to sleep, but is left worrying and fretting over the fate of his money. How true isn't it, and in our affluent and wealthy society, people seem to be so much more troubled and world-weary, than the man in the village who lives a simple but contented and joyful life.

Dear teen, which would you rather be? Do you still think that more money and more wealth will definitely result in greater happiness? The culture around us pressures us to strive for success, and always aim to get the best paying jobs and ascend rapidly up the social ladder. As Christians, we must not allow ourselves to conform to the world, and be like them in chasing after materialistic success. We must take heed to Solomon's warnings, to know that riches alone can never satisfy us. Instead, we seek after godliness with contentment, for then can we have the sweet sleep of a labouring man.

THOUGHT: Sometimes, all the money in the world cannot promise a good night's rest.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to stay apart from the materialistic ambitions of the world.

ARE RICHES ETERNAL?

Secondly, not only does the abundance of riches not satisfy, Solomon observes here that they are temporal, and will perish. God is in control of all things, and can at one moment decide to wipe out all the riches that man accumulates, and then he will have nothing left in his hand to give to his son. Quoting from Job (Job 1:21), he also sees that just as a man brought nothing into this world, neither shall he bring anything with him into his after-life. Such is the vanity of riches, for it is like the wind: temporal, fleeting, and does nothing to satisfy the soul. The man that hoards riches, does so to their own hurt.

And so Solomon asks again, what profit is there then to this man who labours for the wind? His life is one that is beset with sorrow, misery, and he will never be able to enjoy what he has gained. This is because he is a worldly man who labours for money's sake, and loves money more than anything else in the world. His priorities are all set on things under the sun, chasing them as a man chases wind. Such a mindset, Solomon describes as a sickness! All his days though he surrounds himself with riches, he can only 'enjoy' it in darkness and misery, plagued with sorrow and wrath. This also, is vanity and vexation of the spirit.

And so the point that Solomon is trying to make here, is that we must all realize that the physical riches of this world are all but temporal things that will only help us in our life here on the Earth. They have no eternal value at all, for when we die, we cannot bring one single cent away with us.

Rather, as Christians, we ought to live our lives seeking after the things that are truly eternal. We are never to lay up for ourselves treasures on this earth, where moth and rust will corrupt. Instead we must lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven – of a godly life filled with godly works done for the Lord, for these treasures can never be taken away from us. Realize that when you obsessively seek after achievements and success in this world, you become like the foolish man keeping riches to your own hurt, and are doing nothing more than labouring for the wind!

THOUGHT: What am labouring for every day?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see past the temporal attractions of this world, and help me to fix my eyes on the eternal glories of heaven.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT VIEW OF RICHES?

How then is one to regard his riches in this life? Solomon here repeats the same thought that he did earlier in Ecclesiastes 3:13 – that is man should be content, and enjoy what he has, knowing that this is the gift of God. He will know also that even the ability to eat and enjoy the things that he has also comes from God. His focus and priority should never be on the riches that he accumulates, but rather on the God who has given him these gifts. This is his portion in life, and so with thanksgivings he enjoys what he has. He is neither covetous nor lazy, not wanting more nor wanting to work less. This is a picture of a wise and godly man.

Thus with these verses he closes this segment, that man ought rather to worship God, and not earthly riches. God is always in control, and has the power to give and also the power to take away. Never assume that what you have is the result of your own talent or industry, but it is all the gift of God, and God's portion for you in life.

Therefore enjoy and be thankful for all that you have. Eat, drink and rejoice in what God has given you. With such a perception, man will thus be able to look beyond the oppressions and evil that he experiences in life, for God will grant him joy that comes from within and not from without. He will 'not much remember the days of his life', in that he will not live in regret, always looking back at lost opportunities or fretting over the 'misfortunes' that he has faced. Instead he trusts in the sovereignty of God, and finds joy and comfort in Him. Therefore a proper perspective of riches and a proper perspective of God will give one a proper perspective in life, and be able to have true joy that comes only from the Lord. Is this the perspective of riches that you have?

THOUGHT: The right view of riches is one that has God in the picture

PRAYER: Lord, I think you for all the bountiful provisions that You have blessed me with in my life. May You help me to enjoy them with hearts of thanksgiving and contentment, knowing that it is my portion from You.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-2
Memorise Ecc 6:2

"Yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof..."

DO YOU HAVE THE 'POWER TO EAT'?

In this last chapter of Solomon's observations concerning life, he will add a few more case studies and examples of the vanities of life, which will confirm the conclusions that he has already made, that indeed man under the sun can never find true happiness and contentment in life.

First he speaks of something which he has observed is actually common among man, and is something we realize is prevalent all around us as well. It is of a man to whom God has given riches, wealth and honour – everything that the world seeks after. And so everything that this man wants in his heart, God has granted to him. On the surface, at least for a period of time, it seems that he is living the dream! He has all that his soul desires, and he seems to have a life that should be envied by all around him. Yet he has a problem, in that whilst he has all the physical things on earth and also the honour from man, he cannot enjoy them, for he has no power to eat! Perhaps the problem is health, or old age, or maybe some other personal problems. Whatever the case, all the stuff he has will count for nothing! Eventually he will die, and so his wealth is given to a stranger. Someone else would enjoy the fruits of his labour, and eat the food that he was supposed to eat. Again a very sad end and a very stark illustration of how all the riches and honour in the world cannot satisfy, if God chooses not to allow you to enjoy them.

Dear teen, have you ever regarded the 'power to eat' as a gift and a blessing from God? We look at the lives that we have, and I am sure most of us can confidently say that we have been blessed materially by God. Yet in spite of all the things that we have, many times we are not appreciative of them, and are still discontent. It is only when the ability to enjoy them is taken away from us, like when we get a blocked nose and can't taste our food, will we learn to fully appreciate what we have not lost. Instead of waiting for that to happen, we ought instead to thank God for even the simple ability to eat, to breath and to enjoy life, for even those things, are a gift from God.

THOUGHT: Having the 'power to eat', does not mean we must focus all our powers on just eating!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank you for the life that You have given to me, and the ability to enjoy it.

Ecclesiastes 6:3-6
Memorise Matthew 19:1
"There is none good, but one, that is, God"

HAVE YOU 'SEEN GOOD'?

Next we have a picture of a man who is blessed with many children and long life. Perhaps he had many wives, and many children through them. Maybe he was also particularly virile, which in their culture (and ours as well) is a sign of blessing from God. Nonetheless it seems he lived a long and fruitful life, for these things are what man would commend each other for at the end of their lives.

However, despite how he appears to have the good life, at least in the eyes of man, Solomon says that an untimely birth is better than he! In verse 6, Solomon employs a hyperbole to reinforce his point, in exclaiming that even if a man lives for a thousand years twice over, he still will not find satisfaction! The reason is, in his life here on earth he never sought God, and never did come to a saving relationship with Him. This is the crux of the issue that Solomon is trying to emphasize – that if his 'soul is not filled with good', then there is really no point in his existence at all. This is because for all the years that he lived here on earth, it was an empty existence, apart from God, and simply a life of vanity and darkness. The only 'good' that the soul can see and experience, is the goodness of God. That is the only satisfaction, enjoyment and fulfilment that man on this earth can have. It does not matter how many children he left after him, or how long he lived, or what sort of burial he had. In fact, the extreme example that Solomon gives is that even with the many children that he has, yet no one cares about him after his death, there is no remembrance of him, and thus no burial even. After his death his fate is fixed, and he will have an eternity in darkness and sorrow. Solomon then even goes so far as to say that a baby who was stillborn (untimely birth) is better than this man, for he has not seen the evils in this world, and has more rest than the man who lived an empty and meaningless life on the earth.

Dear teen, from this we can see how important it is for us to see, know and experience the goodness of God in this life. Specifically, this refers to your salvation. Without the saving knowledge of God, life is meaningless. So many people in the world are chasing after their dreams, but in the process lose their eternal soul. How about for you? Have you seen the ultimate perfect good, of our Lord Jesus Christ?

THOUGHT: What better goodness is there than the knowledge of Christ?

PRAYER: Thank you Lord, for saving my soul!

IS YOUR APPETITE FILLED?

The third example is of a man who labours, but his focus is not on God, but on his own fleshly desires and appetites. Solomon says that for this man, his appetite can never be filled, for man will eat one day, and the next day he will be hungry again. A man can eat the best food that life can offer, but the next day his appetite will return, and needs to be fed once again. And so if a man's labour is to satisfy on the mouth, it will be to no end.

Indeed to this end, the fool and the wise are the same, in that they must both labour to feed their mouths, with an appetite that can never be fully satiated. Likewise the poor, who knows how to conduct himself in life, and earn an honest living, his fate is the same, in that he too has an appetite that he has to continually try to fill.

Therefore the focus of man's labour should never be just for the fulfilment of our physical needs, for that is an appetite that can never be fulfilled. So what Solomon encourages here is a life of contentment, for that is true wisdom. It is far better to have eyes content with that he can see before him and rejoice in what the Lord has blessed him with, than to have eyes that wanders about with desire, always desiring things that he can never attain. This is an important lesson that we all must learn. If our minds and desires are constantly seeking for the physical things of this world, it is an appetite that will never be filled. However, if our desires are focused on the things of God, and always fixed on thoughts of the things above, this is the right spiritual desire that the Lord will delight in feeding. As a preacher once quipped, 'better want what you have, than to have what you want'. Remember, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want!

THOUGHT: A life of covetousness is always vain, but a life of contentment will never vex your spirit.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to turn my eyes from coveting the temporal things of the world, and to fix them upon Thee and Thee alone.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU?

And so finally in conclusion to this segment, the same idea repeats itself – that man under the sun can never find true meaning in life. After all that Solomon had observed concerning life, and the way in which man under the sun lives his life, and struggles through the many aspects of his time here on earth, he realizes that they are all things that increase vanity. The life of man under the sun is therefore described as a vain life spent as a shadow – living in darkness and never being enlightened by the truth of God's Word.

By way of a review, Solomon goes back to the thought which he had in chapter 3, in that God is ultimately sovereign over everything in life. He says that 'that which hath been is named already' – that all things are fixed by God and set in their ways. Anything done apart from God is vain. Man is also known in his wicked ways, it is a known fact that he is inherently sinful. Thus who is man in comparison to God? Can he contend or argue with the One who is mightier than he? God has already established all things as they are, and so there is no way that we can argue with Him about it. Oh what a foolish sight it would be, for puny, sinful man to go up against the almighty perfect God, and question His will! Thus who knows that is best for us to do? Only God knows what is best for man in this life, and not only that, in his life after the sun as well. Man left to himself is lost and vain, and understands nothing of the present or the future.

Dear teen, do you sometimes feel like you are misunderstood, or that the people in authority around you don't seem to care about what you want? Are we tempted to think that of God as well? Are we upset and discontent with certain things in our lives, that lead us to question whether God cares? Remember that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked. What we think is best for us, may sometimes be the very worst thing! God in His perfect wisdom has ordained all things, for the good of his children. He does not want us to waste our lives in vanity, as in a shadow, but wants us to walk in the light of His truth, to live lives that are pleasing and glorifying to Him!

THOUGHT: What is think is best for myself, may not really be the best.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to trust in Your wisdom, and never try to rebel against You and question Your perfect ways.

DO YOU SEEK AFTER A GOOD NAME?

And so in response to all that Solomon has experienced and observed, he now launches into a poetic exhortation on his advice for man in this life. He draws from his vast wisdom and personal experience, and gives little snippets of advice on many different areas in life.

The literary style here in chapters 7 and 10 is similar to how he wrote in the book of Proverbs, where it is more of Hebrew poetry, and a series of counsels, wise sayings and statements. Some statements will be linked to the next, while others stand alone. Some will also be quite surprising, and others will be rather difficult to comprehend. But they are all alike the word of God, and therefore profitable for our study.

Firstly, in Ecclesiastes 7:1 Solomon speaks of the importance of seeking after a good name. This refers to the testimony that one would have while he lives here on earth. It is definitely important for a man, especially a Christian to maintain a good name, and value that far more than any ointment that will be used to anoint him at death.

But the next statement is surprising, for he then declares that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. Why is this so? Because it is normally at one's death, that men will reflect and look back at the life that the deceased has lived. If he has maintained a good testimony, then he will have a positive encouragement. But if all he has at the funeral is precious ointment, then men will just marvel at his wealth, but it is useless. This is compared to the day of one's birth, whereby it is all rejoicing and excitement, but no contemplation nor retrospection. There is a whole life ahead of him, and he could either use the life for good to serve the Lord and cultivate a good name, or it could be a life in vain and useless for the Lord.

Dear teen, do you care about the reputation and testimony that you carry. Do you realize that by calling yourself a Christian, you bear the name of Christ with you? What sort of name do you have? Is it that of a godly faithful Christian, or is it one of a notorious, rebellious teen?

THOUGHT: How will people describe me at my funeral?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be conscious and aware of the testimony that I ought to bear for You.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Ecclesiastes 7:2-6
Memorise Ecc 7:3

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting"

DO YOU SEEK AFTER SORROW?

Continuing with the theme of death and life, Solomon then says that it is better to attend a funeral service (house of mourning), than to a celebration party (house of feasting). This is because only at a solemn funeral, where one contemplates the deep things of life and death, that one will sanctify his soul, be sober and sincerely think about the meaning of life. Therefore he says in verse 3 that sorrow is better than laughter, for in this sorrow, the heart is refreshed, as it is drawn closer to God.

This does not mean that man ought always to be in a melancholic depressive state, but that the wise man will more often be in the state of reflection, contemplation and in the 'house of mourning'. The foolish man on the other hand will only want to seek after all forms of entertainment, amusement (interesting to note that the word 'amusement' literally means a-muse, that is to say a lack of thinking) and mirth, not desiring to reflect and consider his own life.

And so it is better to hear the rebuke of a wise man who is constantly reflecting on his life and drawing close to God, than to heart of the laughter, jokes and merrymaking of the foolish, for their sound is compared to the crackling of burning sticks under a pot – noisy, temporal, and will soon be burnt up!

As youths, we are often seeking after times of partying and merrymaking. We are constantly craving for that next exciting event, or that next time where we can meet up with our friends for a good time of jesting and entertainment. In the midst of all these fun, do you ever pause to reflect and contemplate about your life? Do you spend time in quiet meditation to draw near to the Lord? Do you have moments of solemn sobriety whereby we mourn over our sins and our waywardness, and come penitential before the Lord to ask for forgiveness of sin? It may not seem natural for a youth to seek after sorrow and the house of mourning, but this is the wisdom of God that tells us to do so!

THOUGHT: Quiet contemplation is better than noisy revelry.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to reflect upon my life, to understand the seriousness of sins, and the importance of repentance.

DO YOU SEEK AFTER PATIENCE?

The next set of counsel that Solomon gives, is concerning our patience with regards to the things that happen in the world. In verse 7 he first speaks of oppression and bribery, and how that can cause distress and corruption even to a wise man. We realize that such things do happen in the affairs of men. The question then is, how do we react to them?

The perspective that Solomon puts forth, is that we are to be patient in spirit, and quietly wait for the end of the matter, and not hastily jump to angry conclusions, nor to question God in the process, for that is how the proud in spirit would react. Rather we understand that the end of things is always better than the beginning, for at the end of a matter we would have the wisdom of a retrospective view on the incident, and then we would be able to see and understand the hand of God in the whole thing. Pride on the other hand would often be hasty to react with anger and indignation, for a proud man imagines himself to be the most important, and expects all things to suit his purposes and his needs. He will also be one that will be quick to look back at the former days (like those who always like to reminisce about the 'good ol' days) and declare that those were better, and then question God on why the present is as such. It is not wise to make such comparisons, for the wise will know that God is always sovereignly in control, and all things happen according to His perfect providential plan. If all things are ordained by God, how can we say one was better than the other? Rather we are to patiently and wisely inquire into the matter, wait upon the Lord, and seek his will.

Conventional wisdom may say that patience is a virtue that only comes with age and experience. However, as teens and youths, we too can cultivate this important spirit of patience. This can come when we meditate on God's Word, and learn to view the world through the eyes of God, and not through our the lenses of our own prideful impatience. We have to constantly remind ourselves that God is in control of all things, and we are to simply wait upon the Lord, knowing that He will always do what is best!

THOUGHT: Just because I am young, doesn't meant I cannot learn to be patient!

PRAYER: Lord, may You teach me to be patient in spirit, and to humbly wait upon Thee.

Ecclesiastes 7:11-12
Memorise Proverbs 9:10
"wisdom giveth life to them that have it"

DO YOU SEEK AFTER GODLY WISDOM?

Prior to this, most of the mentions of wisdom that Solomon had made was with regards to worldly wisdom – that of human intellect and understanding. Though he did commend such wisdom, he also decried the extent of its use, for often times if this wisdom was applied wrongly, or indiscriminately pursued, it only lead to vanity and vexation of the spirit. However, now as we come to Ecclesiastes 7, we realize that the wisdom that Solomon now speaks of, is not the human wisdom that he spoke of earlier. This wisdom here is describes as one that gives profit to them that can look beyond the things of the earth, and contemplate the higher things in life, for he is able to 'see the sun'. Therefore wisdom here is exalted, and seen as one that gives a good life to them that truly have life – that is a follower of God. And so this wisdom is commended, for it would be most useful to one who has gained an inheritance (referring to physical, material wealth), for both wisdom and money are seen in a positive light. One who is armed with a right understanding and perspective in life will be able to best know how to use his wisdom and also his wealth, and they will be as a defence to him. This gives us a balanced view of wealth and riches, for it should not be categorically viewed as a negative thing. Money used wisely for the right reasons can be harnessed for good. Yet above all, wisdom is the very best thing, and is the pre-requisite that we all must seek for in order to live this life well.

Dear teen, do you know what the difference is between godly wisdom and the worldly wisdom? As Christians, we must constantly seek after godly wisdom, the sort of wisdom which Solomon says begins with the fear of the Lord. When we have such godly wisdom, then the decisions that we make will be in line with God's will, and will be pleasing in His sight. The lives that we live, and even the thoughts that we have will be godly. Is this what you desire?

THOUGHT: There is a world of difference between wisdom of God and wisdom of the world.

PRAYER: Lord, may You place in me the desire to seek after godly wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-15
Memorise Ecc 14
"Consider the work of God..."

DO YOU CONSIDER THE WORK OF GOD?

True godly wisdom will always direct man towards God, and consider his works. It will give him the right perspectives in life, for he will know that God is sovereign, and that He is the only one who can make the crooked things straight, and set right any wrong in the world. Therefore it will teach the mind to rejoice in the day of prosperity, but more importantly to be reflective and contemplative in the day of adversity when difficulties come upon him. He will realize that all things happen because of the hand of God, and prosperity is balanced out by adversity, so that man can stop to realize the goodness of God, and not to always trust in self, and indulge in the pleasures of life. So man, even in all his wisdom, cannot find anything after him, meaning to say that he can never find out the future. That is God's domain, and for us our role is simply to trust in God, and take anything that happens to us in life as the working out of God's divine providence.

In this, man would therefore understand why there are times when a just and righteous man would perish, whilst the wicked man continues in his ways and has a prolonged life. It may seem 'unfair', but remember that this is all the prerogative of God and in his sovereign will. We can never question God.

Such an understanding will save us from a lot of angst and despair in this life. When we are able to fully 'consider the work of God' in all that we do, to realize that God alone is sovereign in this world, then many things will be set in the right perspectives. Always have a Biblical worldview as you consider everything that happens in your life and in this world, from the smallest most mundane incident that you encounter, to major world events like the U.S Presidential elections, or the decrees of the United Nations in declaring war against a nation, God is always in control!

THOUGHT: Is there ever an instance where I can legitimately question God?

PRAYER: Lord, may You guide me to always have You in the centre of my life, that I will always consider You first in all that I do.

ARE YOU 'RIGHTEOUS OVER MUCH'?

In light of God's works and the seemingly unpredictable way (of course only from our human perspective) in which he deals with man, Solomon thus exhorts us to be moderate in our ways, and not to swing to any extreme. Whist we cannot control the world around us, the one thing that we have can affect is our own lives. In this, Matthew Henry explains:

In the acts of righteousness govern thyself by the rules of prudence, and be not transported, no, not by a zeal for God, into any intemperate heats or passions, or any practices unbecoming thy character or dangerous to thy interests." Note, there may be over-doing in well-doing. Self-denial and mortification of the flesh are good; but if we prejudice our health by them, and unfit ourselves for the service of God, we are righteous overmuch. To reprove those that offend is good, but to cast that pearl before swine, who will turn again and rend us, is to be righteous overmuch. "Make not thyself over-wise. Be not opinionative, and conceited of thy own abilities. Set not up for a dictator, nor pretend to give law to, and give judgment upon, all about thee. Set not up for a critic, to find fault with everything that is said and done, nor busy thyself in other men's matters, as if thou knewest everything and couldst do anything. (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Ecclesiastes 7:16).

Therefore the righteousness and wisdom that Solomon speaks of here is not true righteousness or wisdom, but only an apparent façade of it. One might have the right intentions, but if it is carried out the wrong way, it can be destructive instead of edifying. Thus careful moderation is required here.

Likewise, seeing that the foolish and wicked prolong their days, we are also not to try to emulate them, and lead wanton lives of sin, for that is also wrong, and would definitely invoke the wrath of God.

Solomon thus exhorts all to take his advice, to strongly take hold of it, for this is the word of God. And thus all who fear God shall be able to rightly understand the truths that he recommends, and live a life that is pleasing before God. He will then be able to rise above all, to come forth from all the confusion that man sees in life, and with true godly wisdom, be able to live life right and well in this wicked world, under the sun.

THOUGHT: There can be a wrong way of trying to be righteous.

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me the wisdom to know how to exercise godly moderation in all my ways.

DO YOU SEE THE STRENGTH OF WISDOM?

In this last section of Ecclesiastes 7, godly wisdom is again extolled here. It is described as being far superior to the might that any army can muster, stronger than ten mighty men in the city. It is said here to give strength, spiritual strength in order that a man can face the spiritual struggles that he faces. Wisdom would then give understanding, and guide him to how he should react best when there be people who come against him to curse him. It will not be with the physical arm of the flesh that he retaliates, but rather with humble wisdom. The real battles that we face in this life are never battles of flesh and blood, but of a spiritual nature, for we are in a spiritual warfare, facing spiritual foes.

We must acknowledge that no matter how wise and how just we are, we are still sinners, and our wisdom cannot always prevent us from falling into temptation. There is not a single man on earth (save the Lord Jesus Christ) who can claim to be perfectly sinless. Therefore in order to live justly, we need wisdom far more than the arm of the flesh. Wisdom, coupled with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is what every believer needs in order to stay away from sin.

One such example of the need for wisdom above physical might is when there is occasion that one, even a subordinate curses you, be not quick to react and respond with physical retaliation. Instead true wisdom would give true strength, to be able to humble one's heart, to realize that we are all sinners. Often times before we react to the judgments of others, we must first ask, have we also judged others in the past? Have we also spoken a word out of turn before? Or the rebuke that the servant gives, is it true? Such restraint, self-control and humility can only come from one who has true godly wisdom.

THOUGHT: The strength of wisdom can stop a war!

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to always exercise godly wisdom in the difficult situations that I would face in life.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25 *Ecclesiastes 7:23-25*
Memorise Romans 11:33

"How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out"

CAN WE KNOW ALL THINGS?

For all the good that Solomon extolled about wisdom, yet we must realize that wisdom does have its limitations. For the rest of Ecclesiastes 7, Solomon will warn about some limitations that wisdom has, and that if we try to rely on just wisdom, without the help of God, then we will still fail.

Solomon now gives a warning, that wisdom alone is not everything in life. It does have its limitations, and thus as we seek godly wisdom to live life here on earth, there is something far greater and better that we must seek, and that is to please God, and go to him always. For if we rely on just our own wisdom, we will still fall short, for the tendency will still be to rely on our own thinking and understanding.

This is the testimony of Solomon himself, as he again laments on his own quest that he had to apply his own wisdom to try to understand man in his folly, foolishness and madness. He tried to prove it using his own wisdom, declaring that amidst his search, he will continue to be wise. Yet we know from his testimony that he had failed, and fell deep into sin amidst his search for the meaning of life. There are many things in life, that we just cannot understand and fully comprehend, and are best left to the domain of God. It is an arrogant thing to say that we are clever or experienced enough to tackle a given problem at hand, and see no need to seek the Lord or ask the advice of others. Wisdom is useful and good, but must always work in concord with other avenues that God has provided for our learning and guidance in life.

Ultimately, we must all acknowledge that we are not God. God alone know all things, for He is the creator of the universe, and the one who has decreed all things to come to pass. We, on the other hand, are but puny created beings. The things of God are far off and exceeding deep, whereas our minds are exceeding limited. We can but cry with Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33)

THOUGHT: Only God can know all things.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to understand the things I need to know, and to humbly submit to Thee in the things I cannot understand.

DO WE SEE SIN AS MORE BITTER THAN DEATH?

And so in Solomon's quest to seek to better understand the things of this world, and the mysterious ways of God, he stumbled and fell deeply into sin. And what was the cause of Solomon's fall? It was because of his weakness for women (1 Kings 11). Because he married many women from the heathen nations, he went after other gods, and thus fell from the Lord. He thus acknowledges here that despite all his wisdom, he was not able to withstand the snares of the women, and so he fell into sin. In Proverbs 7, Solomon gives a good treatise of these manifold snares and temptations of the strange women. She is the temptress whom he describes here as one whose heart is snares and nets. She is depicted as one who is full of traps, and a foolish man can so easily be snared in, and be trapped and fall into sin. This is probably what happened to Solomon time and time again. In fact, he so loathed this weakness of his that caused his downfall, that he says he finds it more bitter than death!

And so more than just wisdom, we need a desire to please God in all that we do, and only then can we escape from the snares of sin. Not just this weakness for women, but all sins in our life. More than anything, we need God, and have a sincere desire to please God in all that we do.

May the Lord grant us such a conviction and hatred for sin as well, to regard our falling into the snares and temptations of the devil as being more bitter than even death. Often times our problem is that we take sin too lightly. We fall into sin and temptation, and then without batting an eyelid, we just carry one with life as if nothing wrong had happened. We fail to remember that we had just offended the Almighty God, and caused great injury and grief to Him. We do not see the seriousness of sin, and how it is like falling into a trap set by the Devil. Instead, we see sin not as being more bitter than death, but regard it as an enjoyable part of our lives! We need to ask the Lord for forgiveness and help to be more strongly convicted of our sin.

THOUGHT: Is sin bitter to you? Or is it a sweet enjoyment?

PRAYER: O Lord, may You convict my heart to help me realize the seriousness of sin, and the need to flee every temptation.

CAN WE MAKE MAN RIGHTEOUS?

Finally, as Solomon surveys man in general, he also realizes that man in his wisdom alone, also cannot make man righteous. As he sought to understand man, and experience their ways, the one conclusion that he came out with, is that among a thousand, a truly righteous and upright man who seeks to please God and flees from sin is a rarity, and can hardly be found. And a woman, that is amongst the woman 'whose heart is snares and nets' he could not find a single righteous one. He is not making a comparison between the genders, and trying to say that men are generally more righteous than women. The point is that a truly righteous person is indeed a great rarity, for it is not wisdom alone that makes a man righteous, but it is the work of God.

Thus the one good thing that he did realize, is that only God can make a man upright, and it is God alone who can lead man to him. Man in his sin and wickedness have sought out many inventions, that is ways and methods of seeking pleasures and sinning against God, but God is the one who can intervene in the hearts of man to make him upright. No amount of wisdom in man can make such a change, only God can.

Therefore the message for us in this chapter is clear – we would do well to learn from the wisdom of Solomon, in the advice he has given to always make the right choices and seek better things (Ecclesiastes 7:1-10), and we should also seek out godly wisdom of our own (Ecclesiastes 7:11-22), but realize that wisdom does have its limitations (Ecclesiastes 7:23-29), and ultimately the one whom we must seek is God, and sincerely desire to please him in all that we do. Only then would we be able to withstand sin in our lives, and be counted as pleasing to Him.

THOUGHT: What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

PRAYER: Lord, I thank you that despite my sin and unrighteousness, You chose me, called me, cleansed me and gave me this new life in Christ.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-5
Memorise Romans 13:1
"The powers that be are ordained of God."

HOW SHOULD WE REGARD AUTHORITIES?

Continuing in this section is Solomon's advice concerning life. After his discourse on the importance of seeking after better things and seeking after wisdom, he now shifts his attention back to a theme that he had touched upon earlier - that of authorities. He remembers the injustice that he had witnessed, but yet at the same time he knew that submission to kings and authorities is indeed the will of God. Thus his advice is now with regards to how a believer ought to interact with the authority of human governments, and will later then compare that in light of our submission to the sovereign God.

Whilst Solomon ended the previous chapter with a section on the limitations of wisdom, he reminds us again that wisdom is indeed a good virtue to seek after. A wise man would be one who understands the interpretation or solution to any situation that he finds himself in, and would know how he ought to rightly conduct himself in his land, in his interaction with the human authorities that God has place him under. It will make 'his face to shine', as how Moses' did after he spoke with the LORD, in reflecting the glory and goodness of God.

Now Solomon comes to a new topic which he discusses, that is the subject of human government. In a way similar to Romans 13 and Titus 3, Solomon exhorts the people to keep the king's commandment, and to view them as the oath of God. This means that we see our submission to authority as not to submit for submission's sake, but to do so because in so doing we are obeying God. To 'be not hasty to go out of his sight' is to show respect, to stand before the presence of the king, and not show your dissatisfaction and ill-regard by turning your back on him.

Thus Solomon exhorts them to be respectful to the king or human authority that God has placed in the land, even though he does whatever he pleases, and often times they might be wrong or unrighteous acts. However note that if it is an evil thing that he does, and commands you to sin as well, in this instance we must not retreat but rather hold our ground, and make sure that our obedience to the king does not lead us into an evil thing.

THOUGHT: When I submit to the government, I am submitting to God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to have the right healthy respect for all authorities around me.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-5
Memorise Romans 13:2

"A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment"

HOW SHOULD WE OBEY?

Kings and governments wield a great power and authority over his nation, and no man may question his rule or his decisions. There would be occasions where they are in such positions of authority whereby no one can even question his decisions. Yet we will not always agree with such decisions. Especially when these leaders do not act out of the interest of the people under their charge, but are instead do things out of selfish motives. How are we to react and respond under such circumstances?

Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes 8:5 that a wise man would know how to be humble and submit and obey the word of his king, or any authority above him. This is because for his heart would know when is the best time to speak up or to keep silent, to give judgment or to withhold it. He is discerning, and will always choose the course of action that shows respect to the authority, but is yet the right decision that glorifies God. He will always keep the kings commandment, and so the promise is that you shall 'feel no evil thing', in that you should never be in a position to 'feel' or to know and experience any evil thing, for it is with wisdom and discernment that he conducts himself, and it is unlikely that the authority will react badly against you. However if you rebel, speak up without respect and do all to oppose the authorities, it is likely that there would be repercussions against you. Instead, the wise person would know how to rightly submit, and respectfully disagree when necessary.

Yet despite all the apparent power that human authority has, there are many limitations to their power. Therefore although they have authority here on earth whilst they are in power, they are still no different from mortal man, and are limited in their ways, and thus we take comfort in the fact that God is still and always in control.

Dear teen, how do you interact with the authorities over you? We have parents, teachers in school, even student leaders that are placed over us. Are we one to constantly fight and rebel against authority, for we hate to be told what to do? Realize that that is now the way of the wise, for God has instructed us to obey respectfully, for if you resist such authority, you are resisting the ordinance of God! (Romans 13:2)

THOUGHT: When I obey my parents, I obey God.

PRAYER: Lord, place in my a submissive and respectful spirit.

CAN WE PREVENT DEATH?

We realize that no matter what a wicked king may do, God is still the one who controls time and judgment. Just as we saw how a wise man would know how to discern time and judgment, God in His perfect wisdom is the one who orders and arranges every time and every judgment. Man on the other hand, can never know what shall be on the morrow, neither can he control life and death. And therefore to a man who does not know God, this is described as the misery of man. He lives in constant fear and anxiety, and is frustrated by the many things that he cannot control or predict.

No matter how much power and authority is vested to him, that he be a king or a ruler of kings, he is still limited by his mortality, and has no power to keep life, or to prevent death. This 'war' between life and death is a daily battle that will never end. Try as they might, no amount of wicked ways can deliver one out of this struggle. Man may plot and scheme and invent all sorts of methods to try to extend their lives, sometimes even at the expense of other lives. Yet we know that such methods will never work, for our lives are in the hand of God, and He alone wields the power to take and to give life.

Thus we realize that all of our lives are in the sovereign hand of God. He alone has the power in the day of death. The implication of this ought then to be of great comfort and assurance to the believer. As long as there is a purpose for our time on earth, we will be allowed to remain alive to fulfil the purpose that God has for us. However the moment that God says that our time is up, and our work on earth is done, then we would not want to remain one second longer here. It is not up to us to try to extend our time here, but simply to trust in God who is the one in control of our life and death. We ought to heed the advice in James 4:13-15: "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

THOUGHT: If God is in control of death, does that mean I can be reckless with my life?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to treasure each moment I have, for we know that the time that we have is from Thee, and should be used for Thee.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE WICKED RULERS?

Looking beyond death, he knows that God's judgment is also sure. As Solomon sees the wicked rule of man, how there are occasions where one man rules over another in corruption and wickedness, he makes certain observations.

Firstly, such a wicked rule is carried out to the hurt of the ruler. Solomon may well be referring to the wicked king Saul here, for he was one to rule over God's people, and can be said to have come and gone from the place of the holy. He was buried, and the memory of him was despised in the hearts of the people, and therefore soon forgotten. He speaks of those who have stood in positions of authority, even in the holy city and throne of God, and exercised authority in God's name. Yet they were wicked men, and this indeed is a vanity. It seems to be such a great injustice, that wicked men prosper and wield so much power in this world. Their rules are characterised by selfishness, and are never for the good of those under him. Ultimately their end will not be good, for although they might seem to a have it good in this life, Solomon knows that their end is in God's hands.

There are some countries today that continue to be oppressed by such wicked rulers who have no regard for God, or God's people. In fact, Christians in some countries today continue to face persecution, for they are imprisoned for preaching the gospel, and some are even put to death! When we hear of such news, we feel this deep sense of anger and injustice. However, here we are reminded that they will have their end, and God is ultimately the one in control.

Likewise we may face certain injustices in our lives, of course to a much lesser extent. We may sometimes face unfair treatment, or are wronged by people in authority. How will we react and respond to such situations? Will we get angry and try to seek our own revenge? Or will you heed the advice in Romans 12:19 that tells us, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

THOUGHT: Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be wise in responding to times in which I am unjustly or unfairly treated.

WHY DO MEN SIN SO MUCH?

Secondly, he observed that the reason why these rulers act in such a manner, is because it seems that they are not judged immediately for their sins, and thus they continue to do evil. Not only that, but their heart is fully set in them to commit such evil. Even though a sinner sins a hundred times, his days seem to be prolonged, and it seems justice is never served. This same problem continues to afflict man, for they just wantonly continue in their sin, without any fear at all. Is this how we are as well?

But Solomon assures us that it definitely shall not be well with the wicked, and that his judgment is sure, because he did not fear God in his life, and therefore his end will not be good. But on the other hand, those that fear God, it is promised that their end shall be good. Although it is not directly mentioned here, we know that the difference between 'it shall be well' and 'it shall not be well' is the difference between heaven and hell.

Therefore though the wicked prosper on earth, and though we are to be subject to their evil rule whilst we are here on earth, we take comfort in the fact that their end is sure, and if they continue on in their wicked ways, God will surely judge one day, and vindicate his own chosen people. Their lives might seem to be prosperous and successful in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God, it is but a vain shadow – a pitiful existence in the absence of light, a life that is not real but just one that is groping in the fleeting darkness of sin.

For now, we are but to wisely submit to the rule of human governments and authorities, and understand that time and judgment are all in God's hands. Yes the world may sometimes seem as a very unfair place, and the human tendency is always to fight for our rights and expect equal treatment, we know that that is really not what the Christian ought to fight for. Our goal in this life is not to succeed in life, as what the world desires; neither is it to make our life on earth so comfortable that we dread death. We must always remember that above all, our duty is to fear God and to keep His commandments, and then everything else in life will fall into place. Whilst God may not judge every sin immediately, be warned, that our sin will surely find us out!

THOUGHT: Does the lack of immediate judgment cause me to sin more?

PRAYER: Lord, help me always remember Your holiness and justice, that I may not sin against Thee.

IS LIFE FAIR?

And so amidst the apparent injustice and unfairness that we see happening upon the earth, where the just men suffer the fate of the wicked, and the wicked seem to receive blessings, we realize that God is in control. Yes from our perspectives, with our human understanding, it just doesn't seem right. We feel that meritocracy should be the best way to govern things, and that good should always be rewarded, and evil punished. However we know that in this world, things do not always happen the way we think it should. Instead, often the opposite is true. We see sinful men becoming successful in life through their dishonest and immoral ways. We see righteous, honest men persecuted and abused because of their kindness. Sometimes, these things even happen to us! It seems to go against the grain of what we would normally expect to happen, and that is why Solomon describes this as a vanity.

As we observe how judgment is delayed to the wicked, or power is abused by the kings, we must realize that there is a higher authority whom we serve and worship, and He is the only one in control of all things under the sun. Therefore whilst we are here on earth, again there is nothing better for man to do than to enjoy the fruits of his labour, and all that God has given to him on the earth. Solomon tells us that he thus commends mirth to us, that we simply thank God for all that we have, and enjoy all the things that He has blessed us with. Although this is something that he had previously derided (Ecclesiastes 7:4, that the heart of fools is in the house of mirth), he is not changing his mind about it now, but he tells us to enjoy life only in the light of God's sovereignty. It is certainly not wrong to be joyful and to enjoy the things of this life, for that is the blessing that God has given to man in the days of his life.

Thus he is telling us that although many things in this life do seem wrong and unfair, we do not spend our time questioning the acts of God, or complaining about our lot in life. We simply be content, and wait upon the Lord and his righteous acts, which he will certainly do one day. Our duty is simply to fear God, and enjoy him forever.

THOUGHT: Life is always fair, for the God who controls it is fair.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be content in this life, and to trust in Your sovereign ways.

WILL WE EVER UNDERSTAND?

In submitting to God's will, we acknowledge our limited wisdom, that indeed as much as we try to understand all things that happen on the earth, there are many times when we simply cannot understand or explain the mysteries of life. Solomon in all his wisdom tried his best to know and understand the affairs of man, but he never could. (A parenthetical statement is inserted here, describing the business of man that it continues on unceasingly, not stopping for sleep, day and night. The idea here is that man's affairs on earth are so much, and beyond a single man's comprehension.) He could only acknowledge that a man cannot find out the work of God, even though he labours his utmost to seek it out.

Furthermore, the moment you think you understand, that is when you show how little you really know. There are some people who profess to be 'know-it-alls', who always seem to have a theory and explanation for everything. They always have a prior experience to draw from, and exert that since they think so, then it must be true. Realize that man with all his limitations can never understand and comprehend all the works that are done under the sun, much less the works of God!

As students, we study a wide array of subjects, and learn about many things. At the end of our secondary school education, we would have a broad understanding of history, geography, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, literature, music, languages, etc. We may then be tempted to think of ourselves as being rather clever and well-educated, being able to understand so many things about the world around us. However, realize that through all these studies, we are but only lightly scratching the surface! And beyond all these studies that man makes of the world around us, there are the secret things of the work of God that man can never hope to begin to comprehend.

Therefore all we can do, is again, to humbly submit to the authority of God's will. Acknowledge that He is sovereign and all-wise, and rest secure in His divine providence.

THOUGHT: It takes humility and wisdom to be able to say "I don't know"

PRAYER: Lord, I stand amazed by Your infinite knowledge and wisdom. Help me to humbly submit to thee, knowing that You are the infinite God who knows all things.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

Ecclesiastes 9:1-3
Memorise Hebrews 9:27
"And it is appointed unto men once to die"

WHAT IS THE 'ONE EVENT UNTO ALL'?

Continuing the thought from chapter 8, Solomon in Ecclesiastes 9 again speaks of the sovereignty of God, and makes a summary statement to declare that everyone's works, whether you are righteous or wise, are in the hand of God. No man can fully comprehend it all. To the worldly man, it seems God is unpredictable and fickle, for one moment good things happen to us, and we think He loves us, and the next moment troubles come and we think that he hates us. And so if we don't fully understand God, and as we go through the varying human experiences, it will result in a rollercoaster ride of conflicting emotions. It is a wild jumble of seemingly random excitement, joy, sadness, depression etc.

But amidst the varied human experience, there is one thing that is common to all men, and that is death. It does not matter how you lived this life, whether you were righteous, wicked, good, clean or unclean. It does not matter if you were religious (one who sacrificed) or one who did not worship God; to both the good and to the sinner; to the one who swears rashly and the one who fears and respects an oath, they will all go to the dead. Such is the nature of life, and it cannot be denied.

But beyond this one thing that comes unto all, there is an evil among it all, and that is the fact that in their life, many are full of evil, and persist in their sin while they life. In facing their impending death, they show now fear or concern, but just recklessly waste their lives, full of evil. This is the 'evil among all things' – the sin of man.

But for the believer, this must not be so. Whilst we are still alive, we must cherish it, and live this life for God. We are also well aware that after death, there is the day of reckoning whereby God will judge us. The only way in which we can be spared of this judgment, is if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only though His shed blood that we can be cleansed from our sins, and stand holy and righteous before God.

THOUGHT: If we live in sin, we die in sin

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to have the right perspectives about life and death, knowing that You are in control of all things.

WHY IS THERE HOPE FOR THE LIVING?

But despite the certainty of death, Solomon tells us that there is still hope for the living. Those that are dead are lost and gone. They cannot enjoy the fruits of life anymore, and neither can they know anything anymore. The fleeting human experiences of love, hatred and envy are now perished, and they can't be brought back to life anymore. They no longer have any reward or portion in life, and they will soon be forgotten. This death is permanent, and there is nothing at all that man can do to prevent it.

On the other hand, for those who are living, they still have time to enjoy life. More importantly, they have an opportunity to seek after God. Even the vilest of men still have the opportunity to repent and turn back to God. He can still make his life worthwhile and experience all the joys that life has to offer. This is why a living dog, though he be despised and ostracised by society (1 Samuel 24:14), is better than a dead lion, which is a symbol for strength, majesty and authority, the most noble of all animals (Proverbs 30:30).

Thus knowing that death comes to all, and that after death man has no more opportunity to know anything, the living must take heed and realize the futility of their life under the sun, and seek after God. We must submit our lives to Him and through Christ have hope for eternal life.

Dear teen, if you are reading this, it means that you are still alive. It means that you are of the living, and there is still much hope in your life! If you do not trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour yet, then there is still hope. But do not delay, for we never know when our time on earth will be over. For those of us who are Christians, we must also cherish the life that God has given to us, and do all we can to make it a life that brings glory and pleasure to the Lord. We have only one life to live. What will you make of it?

THOUGHT: *"Two little lines I heard one day, Traveling along life's busy way; Bringing conviction to my heart, And from my mind would not depart; Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last."*

– CT Studd

PRAYER: Lord, help me to cherish this life that You have given me, and always to live it for Thy glory.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE? (I)

Therefore for the believer, while we still have life, we are not to mourn and fearfully await the day of our death. Don't waste the life that you have, but we should rather enjoy our life here on earth while we still can. This is because life is a gift of God, and he has made provisions for us to live joyfully in Him. In the following verses Solomon gives us guidelines on how we should live our lives, and enjoy all that the Lord has given to us.

Firstly, in verse 7 we enjoy the provisions that God has given to us, to eat, drink and be merry, for if we labour honestly, God accepts our work and will thus reward us with sufficient provisions, and ability to satisfy our hearts with them. This is the simple joy of Christian contentment. We must always remember that God is the provider of all things. We must never covet what we don't have. Whatever God has set before us, we give thanks to the Lord, don't complain, but instead have a merry heart of rejoicing.

Secondly, verse 8 speaks of our appearance, that it always be decent and in good order. Clean garments and ointments are seen as tokens of joy that would be brought out on a day of celebration (Isaiah 61:3, Psalm 45:7). If we truly understand the value of the life that we have, and the joys of salvation, then every day of our life ought to be spent in celebration of what the Lord has done for us. The ointment can also refers to scented oils which the Jews would use as perfumes or ointments to refresh themselves (Esther 2:12, Mark 13:3-5). A deeper meaning can be sought here, and that it speaks of the purity of life, and that we must always endeavour to live our lives unspotted by the blemish of sin (Revelation 19:8). Such a life will thus bring refreshment to the Lord, and will be a sweet savour to Him acceptable in His sight.

Through these little simple steps, we can and should live a life that is pleasing to God. It may require some shifts in our attitudes, it may require certain tweaks to our lifestyles. Are we prepared to make these changes, if we know that these will improve our relationship to God, and bring more glory to Him?

THOUGHT: Am I willing to change for God?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live a life of contentment and joy, knowing that all things I have are from Thee.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE? (II)

Thirdly, in verse 9, Solomon encourages all of us to enjoy the sanctity of marriage, and to enjoy the wife (note, singular) whom one loves. This is God's gift to man whilst he is on earth, that he would enjoy the companionship and joy that a healthy family life would bring. Implied in this is also the warning against the sins of adultery, envy and lust. Only your wife whom you love would be the one that satisfies you, and not an adulterous relationship, or any sins related to fornication (lust, pornography, prostitution etc.). Note however, that this marriage relationship is only one that we have whilst we are here on earth, for it is given under the sun and only for our days of vanity. It is our portion in this life, and what God has given us to enjoy and provide companionship in our journey through life. Christ also taught, that in our resurrection, we "neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." (Matthew 22:30). Nonetheless while we are yet on earth, we enjoy the blessings of a godly relationship, in love, fidelity and morality.

Finally, verse 10 exhorts us to enjoy the privilege of labour, and to do it well, for this also is the will of God. So whatever work that God has given us to do, we do it with all our might, for again labour is an activity which we can only have whilst we are here on earth. Beyond that, in the grave we will have no more opportunity to do so. Therefore every task that has been set before you is indeed a privilege that we have, and we must never waste our time away in laziness or procrastination. Instead we must face it with vigour, zeal and enthusiasm, knowing that we are doing it all as unto the Lord.

Basically what Solomon is telling us is that the elements to fulfilment and contentment are really right before our eyes. We do not need to keep looking around or outside to be happy. God has given us more than sufficient for us in this life to be able to live joyfully. As our sovereign God He is in control of all things, and in order to live life right, we must simply submit to His sovereign will.

THOUGHT: Do I consider the labours of school work as a privilege from the Lord?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to seize every opportunity I have to serve Thee, honour Thee and obey Thee with my life.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 9

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12
Memorise Proverbs 19:21
"but time and chance happeneth to them all"

DO YOU EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED?

Solomon ended the previous segment with an exhortation that we must do our best in all the tasks and labours that have been set before us. In this next segment, he gives us a disclaimer, a qualifier of sorts to that previous statement. He tells us that even though we do our best in everything that we do, we must never expect results from it. That is not the motivation as to why we work hard. Solomon is warning us, that we are never to assume that all things will happen the way we expect it to, just because we put effort into it. Our sense of justice and right and wrong would lead us to assume that the swift will always win the race, or that the strong will always win the battle, or that the wise will be able to earn riches, or gifted man be exalted. This is generally what happens in life. However, there are times when the opposite is true. Somehow the untalented, lazy and foolish are the ones who succeed. When such things happen, the unbeliever, the one who does not acknowledge the existence of God, will put it down to factors they call luck, fortune, coincidence, opportunity etc. But we know that in all things, God is in control. God is the one who ordains a time to every purpose under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3:1), and He is the one who decrees all things. The reason why we work hard is simply then for obedience and testimony's sake. In submitting to the will of God, we also realize that life will not always go the way we expect it to. We can labour all we can, as our human responsibility, but we can never expect what will happen on the morrow, but rest in the comforts of God's providence.

In verse 12, another few scenarios are further presented, to reinforce the idea that God also is the one that control's man's time, and he himself knows nothing of it. He goes through life not knowing what will happen next, and when his time will come. In our youth, we feel we have this aura of 'indestructability', that death is something very far removed from us. However we know that our lives are in the hands of God, and any moment He can chose to take it away from us. And so Solomon describe the frailty and uncertainty of life through these analogies: Just as a fish is suddenly caught in a net, or a bird in a snare, so will men suddenly be caught unawares, and life might take a sudden turn in a direction we never expect it to. Again, this is a lesson for us to submit and trust in the will of God for our lives, for He is the only one in control.

THOUGHT: In life and in death, God is always in control.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the faith to always except Your will in all things.

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18
Memorise Proverbs 19:8
"Wisdom is better than strength"

WHAT IS THE USE OF WISDOM?

As a sort of illustration to his previous point, but also as a conclusion to this segment, Solomon shares a story of a wise man in a city, and how his wisdom was both useful and despised at the same time. In this contradiction, will be able to understand a bit more about what the role of wisdom really ought to be in light of God's sovereign will.

He tells of a small city with very few fighting men that were attacked by the forces of a great king. He had come and lay siege to the city, and even begin to build bulwarks (either siege engines to destroy the walls or ramparts to scale them) against it the city. It would seem that all hope was lost for this small city. However, through the wisdom and ingenuity of a certain poor wise man in the city, he was somehow able to suggest a solution to save the city from destruction and deliver it from the siege. Truly, "wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty which are in the city" (Ecclesiastes 7:19). Some commentators have suggested that this could be a reference to the incident in 2 Samuel 20, whereby a single woman saved the city of Abel from the army of Joab by delivering the head of the traitor Sheba to them. Yet despite the valuable contributions that he made to the city, this poor man was not remember for his contributions. The city continued to thrive in peace, but the man received no recognition or reward for what he had done.

So upon recounting this incident, Solomon concludes that yes indeed wisdom is good, for it trumps physical strength. However, it does not earn the man any recognition but instead he is still despised. They still look down upon him for being poor, and they care not for his words, they ignore his counsel. Amidst the business and bustle of the city, few stop to hear the words of wise men. They care more for the words of the rulers, the ones in power, though they be fools. This is the way the world is, for they will look at things like status, fame, popularity, image etc. They judge by outward appearances, and care not for what is truly important. True wisdom is despised in this world, for it cannot bring the physical things that the world craves for. But as believers we realize, the purpose of our exercise of wisdom is not to win the praise of men, but only the praise of God. If in our wisdom we do things rightly before God, then we have done well.

THOUGHT: We exercise wisdom, for it brings glory to God

PRAYER: Lord, help me to rightly exercise wisdom, for the right reasons.

Ecclesiastes 9:18
Memorise Ecc 9:18
"one sinner destroyeth much good"

WHAT IS THE LIMITATION OF WISDOM?

In parallel to the previous line in verse 16, a similar thought is given in verse 18: that yes indeed wisdom is better than the physical weapons of war, but one sinner, like the one that rules amongst fools, will undo the good that wisdom can bring. Thus whilst wisdom is good to have, it does have its limitations, for it cannot overcome the problems and the effects of sin. An example of this would be how a single man Achan, through his sin caused the downfall of Israel's army (Joshua 7). Indeed for all the good that wisdom brings, it cannot bring righteousness, for that can only come through Christ. Instead, we realize the terrible destructive nature of sin. Sin is so heinous, so grievous in the sight of the Lord, that a single sin can destroy any good that wisdom can bring about. Man in his wisdom can build up empires and achieve great success, but all it takes is for a selfish, greedy and wicked individual to tear everything down through his sinful motives.

So what then is the right perspective of wisdom? Does this mean that we should then reject wisdom, for it does not bring us fame or acknowledgement from man? Definitely not, for our exercise of wisdom is not for our benefit, neither do we look at the results. Does it also mean that we forsake wisdom, since the fruits of our wisdom could potentially be brought down by sin? Again we know that is not the case, for we cannot control the acts of others, but we can control ourselves. Just because someone else might potentially harm our work, does not mean we stop working. We must value wisdom with a proper perspective. Wisdom comes from God, and it is a gift that God gives to man in order that he might seek out more godliness. It is not something that we do because we think there are some intrinsic physical benefits that can be had from it. Yes, true godly wisdom may be ignored by fools, and sinners would seek to destroy it, but if God is pleased with it, then we must continue to seek after it! Furthermore Solomon also states that wisdom is better than weapons of war. Whilst it cannot directly prevent sin, a godly exercise of it, can and will bring much good to man.

THOUGHT: I will strive to be as the wise, not for the praise of men, but for the praise of God.

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me the right perspectives of wisdom, and help me to earnestly seek after the godly wisdom that comes from Thee.

ARE YOU WISE IN YOUR TESTIMONY?

In Ecclesiastes 10, Solomon will give a series of very practical day to day illustrations of the importance of wisdom. He sets forth the acts of a wise man, and contrasts them with that of the fool, and logically concludes that wisdom is indeed far better.

The first example that Solomon gives is one with regards to a man's testimony. Just like a little leaven leavens the whole lump, a dead fly in ointment (sweet smelling perfumes) will rot, and send forth a bad smell. Likewise just a small blemish, a small sin, can cause one to lose his testimony and witness before men. And so wise men will do all he can to uphold his testimony, to not allow dead flies into his ointment. He will exercise great caution in his conduct, his speech, and even his thoughts, so as to not allow even small sins to enter into his life.

His heart is kept in his right hand, just as Christ is seated on the right hand of God – a place of authority, glory and honour. One's right hand is also generally the master hand, and therefore the correct, useful place to be. A wise man would have his affections and thoughts ready, available, sure and steady. However it is said that a fool's heart is in his left, opposite of what the right hand is. A right handed person would find it very awkward and unwieldy to use his left hand to do things. This is not to say that the left hand is inferior, but it is just to draw a contrast. The fool therefore is described as one who has his heart and thoughts in a mess, handicapped and unable to do anything useful at all. The fool, in his walk and in the manner that he lives, therefore shows to the world that he is a fool. The world can easily identify the foolish man, for he will do foolish things, and he has no testimony to speak of.

Dear teen, are you as the wise, or as the fool? Are you circumspect in your ways, careful to always maintain a good and faithful testimony for our Lord? Or are you reckless and careless in your ways, just doing whatever you want, and not having a care or thought of how people will perceive you? Do you realize that when you live in such a manner, you show to all that you are a fool, and you bring shame to the name of Christ?

THOUGHT: To be circumspect, is to inspect your circumference.

PRAYER: Lord, may You grant me wisdom in all my ways, that I will be an effective witness for Thee, and never bring shame to Thy name.

ARE YOU WISE IN REGARDING AUTHORITY?

Next, advice is given to the wise man with regards to how to respond when there are wicked and inept rulers placed over you. These are situations that everyone will probably face in life, of having authorities place over you that you do not agree with. How should we respond? Solomon advises that if and when the ruler or king comes up against you in anger, probably in an unjust manner whereby he cannot be pacified, Solomon exhorts him to hold his ground, and not retreat from justice. If he yields to the anger of the king, he is encouraging his sin. This advice given here is similar to the one given in Ecclesiastes 8:3, in that we do not be hasty to flee if an evil act or sin is committed.

However, when looking at a foolish ruler, Solomon observes a great evil here, whereby in the folly of his poor administration, a reversal of roles can sometimes be observed, whereby foolish men will be placed in positions of dignity, the rich condemned to low places; servants will be exalted to high positions on horses, and princes will be relegated to the role of servants, walking upon the earth. This could be the result of corruption, or simply poor judgment or lack of foresight of a fool, where he cannot discern the merits of his subjects, and raise foolish men who please him to high positions, and capable men who are the victims of backbiting he demotes to low places.

This is certainly something that nobody likes to witness or experience. Yet it is again something we see all around us. We see governments of the world making decisions that seem so out of sync with the people's desires. We see corruption in high places. And we also see the righteous, honest and well-qualified leaders ignored or persecuted. Are we to be surprised? Are we to respond with anger and resentment? Are we to stage and uprising and seek to overthrow the government? It is in times like these that wisdom has to be exercised. Yes it is certainly not right for things like this to happen. Yet we must continually seek God's will in our lives, and not just respond according to our own sense of justice and fairness. If the leaders compel us to sin, we cannot yield and condone such deeds. At the same time we must realize that the Christian's duty is not to right all the social wrongs that he sees, but in all things to glorify God.

THOUGHT: Above all, we must seek to obey God and not man

PRAYER: Lord, help me to wisely submit to authorities placed above me.

Ecclesiastes 10:8-10
Memorise Proverbs 20:4
"wisdom is profitable to direct"

ARE YOU WISE IN PRACTICAL THINGS?

Next we see a description of foolish men who do things to their own destruction. The descriptions are almost comical, as we see some of the silly, futile things that man does when he does not exercise practical wisdom. Solomon observes these sort of things going on about him, and he lists them out to illustrate an important principle. He observes a man who digs a pit and falls into it; he disturbs a bush and is bitten by a serpent; he tries to shift stones and is hurt by it; he chops trees and places his life in danger. These are examples of folly in the very practical things in life, where a bit of common sense would solve ones problems. Probably it was the manner in which all these mundane activities were wrong, as is revealed in verse 10, for if an axe-head is blunt, instead of continuing to try to chop the tree and use up more energy in the process, simply sharpen the edge and the whole process will become much easier.

This is the common sense in life which wise men would have, and thus having wisdom, it will be profitable in his life to direct his ways. The problem is one of laziness and procrastination, for a simple remedy would make things much better, but they cannot be bothered to do so.

Dear teen, is this how we sometimes live our lives? We seek just the convenience and enjoyment of short-term gratification. We procrastinate and put off important tasks, simply because it is easier to laze around and wait for deadlines to come before we finally get down to work. We cannot be bothered with doing simple things daily, like getting our filing done, or packing our rooms, or revising out work, simply because we find doing things like watching the TV, playing some games or surfing the internet so much more enjoyable for the present. Such behaviour is no different from the man who will not take the time to sharpen his axe before he goes out to chop wood. A small effort at the beginning would have saved him so much problems, but in his folly, he neglected to do so, until it was too late. This is much like how we neglect our revisions, until shortly before the final examinations, and then we start to panic and regret the many hours we had wasted before. May we all learn this simple but important lesson of having practical wisdom in the small things in life.

THOUGHT: Short-term gratification, or long term success – the choice is ours to make

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the wisdom and discipline to live right!

ARE YOU WISE IN YOUR SPEECH?

Next with regards to speech, again Solomon draws a contrast between the way of the foolish and the wise. Firstly the fool is described as a babbler, whose tongue has to be controlled like how a snake charmer controls a snake. If left without control, the lips of a fool will bit like a serpent, causing grievous harm to others, and swallow himself up – meaning to say he will say things which cause his own hurt and leads to his own destruction. Thus he is a man who does not know how to control his tongue, or when is the right time to say the right words. His words of his mouth is foolishness, and all he speaks are but 'mischievous madness'. But yet he is a man full of words. As the proverb goes 'empty vessels make the most noise'. The way he works, is also wearisome to the people around him, for he does not even know how to get to his place of work, but yet babbles away as if he knows much.

In contrast the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, and he is everything that the fool is not. He speaks few, controlled words of wisdom, and through his speech he is able to edify and encourage others. Out of his mouth exudes grace, kindness and humility. He is cautious in his speech, and does not foolishly and recklessly speak words out of turn. As James also says, 'if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body' (James 3:2).

It takes a certain amount of discipline and godly wisdom to ensure that our speech is like the wise man and not the fool's. How many times have we, in a moment of rashness or carelessness, spoken a word out of turn that hurt others, or caused misunderstandings? How many wonderful friendships, familial relationships or even marriages have been destroyed, because they could not bridle their tongue? All these happened, because the people involved were not wise in their speech. May we all learn to control our tongues (and our keyboards), to be careful and wise before we say any word at all, for in so doing we maintain our testimony for the Lord.

THOUGHT: The things I type online are my 'virtual speech' which I must also be careful about.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to have the words of a wise men, that are gracious, careful and honouring to Thee.

ARE YOU WISE IN YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

The next scenario that is present here is again one of the rulers of the land. He compares foolish rulers who are only interested in selfish indulgence, with wise rulers who know how to rightly conduct themselves. A land is blessed, if a land is ruled by the wise, but woe unto the land who is ruled by fools.

The foolish ruler is likened to a child, petulant and self-gratifying in his ways. He knows nothing but greed, drunkenness, laziness and a love for pleasure. He will cause his nation to decay, to collapse like a decaying building. This happens because he spends all his time in indulging in himself, and not in the administration of his kingdom. They 'eat in the morning', for self and pleasure is all they care about. Their foremost priority is personal enjoyment, and will put aside all other duties to attain it. They are slothful, and do not care if the whole kingdom decays and collapses around them, for all they care about is feasting, laughter, merry making and money.

In contrast, the wise ruler knows when is the right time to eat, and does so not for greed or pleasures sake, but for the right purpose of sustenance. Thus he has his priorities right, for he does not seek the temporal pleasures of this world, but knows best how to rule his kingdom. Yet Solomon again adds a small footnote in verse 20 to remind us that no matter how your king or ruler may be, they must still be regarded as the powers ordained by God, and we must be careful not to curse the king and the rich who abuse their riches. Also, we never know when someone is listening, and will report your act of subordination to the king.

Thus as we compare these two sorts of rulers, we ask ourselves – which category best fits us? Are we like the slothful ruler who shirks responsibilities and is only interested in pleasing himself? Or will we be like the wise son of nobles who would eat at the appropriate times, fulfil his responsibilities well, and not allow his kingdom to decay? Dear teen, what sort of student, son and sibling are you? Do you care more for yourself or the people around you?

THOUGHT: An irresponsible man is a foolish man

PRAYER: Lord, help me be a hardworking, responsibly student, and not a slothful, selfish fool.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17

Ecclesiastes 11:1-2
Memorise Ecc 11:1

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days"

ARE YOU GENEROUS?

And so as Solomon builds up to the conclusion to this book, he draws some final contrasts between the fool and the wise, and exhorts men to seek to be as the wise, and not as the fools. And so he begins this second last chapter with commands, of practical wisdom to live responsibly and with generosity in life, for our life is in the hands of God, and we know not what shall be on the morrow.

The first exhortation he gives in Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, is about living generously. He uses an illustration that was common in their agrarian society to help us to understand this point. What does it mean to cast our bread upon the waters? Commentator Matthew Henry explains:

"Thy bread-corn upon the low places (so some understand it), alluding to the husbandman, who goes forth, bearing precious seed, sparing bread-corn from his family for the seedness, knowing that without that he can have no harvest another year; thus the charitable man takes from his bread-corn for seed-corn, abridges himself to supply the poor, that he may sow beside all waters (Isaiah 32:20), because as he sows so he must reap, Galatians 6:7. We read of the harvest of the river, Isaiah 23:3. Waters, in scripture, are put for multitudes (Revelation 16:5), and there are multitudes of poor (we do not want [lack] objects of charity); waters are put also for mourners: the poor are men of sorrows. Thou must give bread, the necessary supports of life, not only give good words but good things, Isaiah 58:7. It must be thy bread, that which is honestly got; it is no charity, but injury, to give that which is none of our own to give; first do justly, and then love mercy. "Thy bread, which thou didst design for thyself, let the poor have a share with thee, as they had with Job, Job 31:17. Give freely to the poor, as that which is cast upon the waters. Send it a voyage, send it as a venture, as merchants that trade by sea. Trust it upon the waters; it shall not sink."'

It is an advice to 'invest' in good works, knowing that this is God's desire for you. Likewise, verse two advises us to be generous to the people around you (7 and also to 8), for you do not know if today is your last day on earth, and thus there is no reason to hoard excessive wealth. It speaks of liberal giving, not just to one or two, but to the many around you.

THOUGHT: All my money is God's money, not mine!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be generous with the resources that You have blessed me with.

ARE YOU A WORRIER?

Solomon continues to describe the unpredictable nature of life, where man can never know the future. We can never understand the way clouds function, where or when a tree will fall, when the wind blows or when the clouds will rain, or even the miracle of life, of how a baby grows in the mother's womb. All these are the works of God, and we do not waste our time questioning them to try to understand that which man can never know.

The man that stands there observing the wind and regarding (looking and considering) the clouds will never get down to work to sow and reap. He will worry if the winds would blow away his seeds, or the rains affect his harvest, and never find the right time to start work. This is an illustration about life in general, for if we spend our time worrying about the job that lies ahead, we will never get down to it. If we always wait for the perfect opportunity to start, we will never get started. There are truly many things out of our control, and solely within the domain of God's sovereignty. We simply do our part and trust in His Will. This applies to all areas of our life, in our work, our duties. This is especially so for our ministries as well and our service to God, for we serve, evangelise, pray, study the word of God, and leave all the results to God. Our duty is simply to do all that God wants us to do, to please him and glorify him in all that we do.

We ought to heed the advice of Jesus at the sermon on the mount, when He asked, 'which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his statue?' (Matthew 6:27). This really shows the foolishness of worrying over things that we cannot change. No amount of observing the wind and the clouds will change anything. Instead we ought to just get down to the sowing, and trust in the Lord to provide the right weather for the crops to grow. Even if the rains do not come, we can still rejoice and give thanks, knowing that it is God's will that the harvests do not do well this season.

THOUGHT: Why worry when we can pray?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to realize that excessive worry and inactivity is a sin, and that we ought rather to trust in the Lord.

THURDAY, DECEMBER 19

Ecclesiastes 11:6
Memorise Ecc 11:6
"for thou knowest not whether shall prosper"

ARE YOU LIVE A RESPONSIBLE LIFE?

Thus the advice given is for man to live a responsible life, to sow the seeds of harvest at the right time, and wait upon God to prosper. For the farmer, he is to sow his seed in the morning, and never withhold his hand from the labours that he is appointed to do. In contrast, the fool will spend his time observing the winds and the clouds, worrying about the right time to sow, but never actually doing it.

The results of our labour are wholly in God's domain. He alone is the one who can choose to send the rain, or withhold the clouds. No amount of worrying or planning is going to change these things. Furthermore, the results might not always go the way that we expect it to, for we know not whether we shall prosper, in this or that. He may choose to send a bumper harvest one year, but then send a famine and drought another yet. Or he could chose to give us year after year of plenty, or year after year of less.

But no matter what, we are assured that God's plan is always the best for us. No matter what happens, we just need to continue sowing the seed, to do our part, and leave the rest to God. This is what faith and the responsible life entails. The things we cannot control, we leave it to God. However, for the areas in our life that we can do something about, we do it to the best of our abilities, to be responsible, productive and wise.

Dear teen, do you spend a lot of time fretting over things which are beyond your control? Sometimes in the midst of our worrying, we forsake even our own basic responsibilities. We may not know what questions are coming up for the examinations, but on our part, our duty is simply to study. We do what we can to ensure that we know the content of the syllabus, and then the rest is up to the Lord. It may so be that the questions that come out are exactly the topics that we are not so confident in. Or it could be that the few areas where we studied harder were the ones that came out in the exam! We may spend all our time pondering over all these possible scenarios, but at the end of the day, it will make no difference. Rather, we ought to just be responsible for the things we can control – that is all that God requires of us.

THOUGHT: I can't change God's will, but I can change mine!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to rest secure in Your promises, and to willingly and joyfully obey Your will.

ARE YOU MINDFUL OF THE FUTURE?

Though there are many things in life that we cannot control and predict, there are certain things that we know for a certainty. Two ideas are highlighted here, and that is the fact that we will grow old and die one day, and that after that we will have to face judgment. As Hebrews 9:27 clearly states: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"

And so in the final segment in this chapter, Solomon reflects on the subject of life in general, and gives advice to young men on the conduct of their life, especially in light of one's certain death and judgment.

He commends the youth, for they have the life, energy and vigour to enjoy the days under the sun. He says truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun – describing the enjoyment of life and all that the world has to offer. He is saying that yes indeed this world is an enjoyable place, and in it are many wonderful things to see, taste, touch and feel. Yet as we live, we must constantly be mindful of the fact that the days of darkness (old age) will be coming. Darkness here is contrasted with light, and describes the future days where the body begins to degenerate, and is no longer able to enjoy the light. Those days that come will be days of vanity, for Solomon himself at this point of time, in his evening years, was experiencing the ravages of old age.

Thus as we live our life here on earth, we must always be mindful of the fact that our time here is temporal. Our youth and vitality will not last forever. As youths, we are sometimes rather short-sighted in our view on life, in that we are only interested in the present, right here, right now. We seek for instant gratification that does not last. May we all heed the warnings of Solomon, that we do not make the same mistakes that he made in indulging in sin and falling away from the Lord. Let us, in our youth, be ever mindful of the future, and in light of that, serve the Lord every day of our lives.

THOUGHT: The greatest joy can only come when we do God's will.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to look beyond the present, and constantly ask why Your will for me is.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10
Memorise Ecc 11:9
"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth"

ARE YOU MINDFUL OF YOUR YOUTH?

The young man here is exhorted to rejoice, and to experience the joys that life has to offer. He is to follow the desires of his heart and eyes. However, in the midst of all that, he must continue to be very careful that the desires that he has must be in line with what God wants. It does not speak of the carnal desires of the heart, but rather the desires of a sanctified heart that is aware of God's judgement. Thus the 'ways of thine heart' that we are to walk in, must be a walk that is aright with God, for all that we do in this life must be accounted for some day. Solomon reminds us that we will all have to stand before the throne of God in judgment. This therefore this gives us the boundaries in which we can enjoy our lives. He exhorts us all to put aside sorrow (grief and anger) from our heart, and evil from our flesh, to not waste our youth in these vain things, but to enjoy all things as unto the Lord.

One's youth can be a great time of blessing, but can also be a time of foolishness and vanity. If our life is lived for the Lord, there is a great cause for rejoicing. With energy, time and youthful exuberance on our side there are really many things that we can do for the Lord. There aren't that many responsibilities to bog us down, and not many obligations that take up our time. If you set your mind to it, you realize that the list of things that you can do in service for the Lord is endless! However, if you persist on just living for self, indulging in the pleasures of this life, then that is vanity, vexation of the spirit, and time spend in darkness. It would be a wasted life, one not rejoicing in the things of God, but in the things of the world. This is a life that brings only grief and sorrow to our Lord. We must therefore choose the way of the wise men, to trust in the Lord, and live our lives fully for him.

THOUGHT: What is the cause for my rejoicings every day? Is it Christ? Or is it sin?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank you for the youth that Thou has blessed me with. But in the midst of my youth, help me to enjoy it within only in the way that You want me to.

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR?

We are therefore exhorted in our youth, in the vibrancy of life where we still have health and strength, to remember our Creator, the Lord God. What does it mean to remember our Creator? To remember is to not forget but be constantly mindful. In our minds and our hearts, God must constantly be at the forefront. We remember the fact that He is the creator of the whole universe, and the one is in sovereign control of all things. We remember all the works which he has done for us in our life, chief of which is how he had chosen and ordained us to salvation, and give us our Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins. We must remember that all that we have in this life is from God, and that nothing we have is through our own merit, but all of the grace of God. Remembering all these, one would thus respond with a heart of gratitude, and desire to do all we can to serve the Lord, and please him in all that we do.

The message here is very simple: don't waste your life! Youths have a great advantage. We have time, opportunity and ability to serve the Lord. We must do so while our eyes are still able to see the light, and the gloom and affliction of sickness and old age has not set upon us. Clouds that return after the rain block out the sunshine, and following the previous metaphor of light and darkness, describe how the vitality and pleasures of youth are clouded out by the calamitous storms of life that will come with age and time. These thoughts are further elaborated in the subsequent verses.

Thus in our youth, we must always be mindful that God must be at the centre of our lives. He must take the first and foremost place in our hearts. We must constantly remember Him, and have Him as the very first consideration in all the choices that we make, in even the thoughts that you make. This is what it means to remember, and to never forget!

THOUGHT: How can I make God the centre of my life?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank you for the life that You have given me. Help me to live this life for You, to always remember You and never to forget.

WHAT IS OLD AGE LIKE? (I)

In the next few verses, Solomon will talk about a time after youth that ultimately ends in our death – the time of old age. He says so in light of the advice gave to the youths in Ecclesiastes 12:1. He told them that as long as we are still young, we must do all we can to remember the Lord and serve Him, for there will come a day whereby age will catch up, and all the ailments, aches and pains will come, and it will no longer be so easy to remember and serve the Lord anymore.

He employs a lot of imagery to describe what this period of old age will be like: The keepers of the house are like the arms that will weaken and begin to tremble. They no longer have the strength to do things like they used to. Similarly, the legs who were once like strong men, will begin to bow themselves, unable to support the weight of the body. Simple tasks like walking up and down stairs will become a huge struggle, and even standing up for long periods of time will cause the legs to bow themselves over. The teeth will cease from grinding, and many will fall off. Eating will no longer be an enjoyment but a chore. Those that look out of the windows are as the eyes which shall be darkened, as cataract, long-sightedness and other diseases of the eyes cause the eyes to grow dim and lose their effectiveness.

The doors in the streets are like the mouth which serves as the doorway to the body. They shall be shut up, as both speech and eating are impaired. Appetites will wane, because as the grinders which are few will also find it hard to chew things. The old man will not be able to enjoy a good night's sleep, but will wake up easily, rising up at the voice of the bird. Though he is woken up easily by sounds, he also cannot enjoy the sounds, for his hearing is also affected, in that the daughters of music are brought low.

Through the first two verses, we already see an image of a man whose physical capabilities are seriously affected, and many of the things which he used to enjoy and take for granted are gone. Dear teen, does this not teach us to cherish and appreciate your youth and health while you still have it?

THOUGHT: What aspect of old age do I fear the most?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to understand the plight of the elderly people around me, and may You use me to encourage their hearts in the midst of the difficulties.

WHAT IS OLD AGE LIKE? (II)

The description continues in verses 5-7: The old man will be afraid of heights, for he will fall easily. In fact, there will be many other things that he will fear because of his weak and frail body. He will go from being that carefree reckless youth to a careful, timid old man. The almond tree shall flourish with the white blood of the almond flowers in early spring. This describes his head of white hair, which are further signs of his age. His back will begin to hung, like that of a grasshopper that is always crouched over. His fleshly desires will wane, as his appetites decrease. He will no longer be able to enjoy many of the things which he used to enjoy. Eventually, he will go to his long home of eternity. This describes the day of his death, where the mourners will go about his streets at his funeral.

But how will he die? Verse 6 gives a variety of means whereby an old person can pass away: The silver cord, which refers to the spinal cord in the back may be loosed, as the whole nerve centre of the body breaks down. The golden bowl could be a reference to his skull could be broken. The pitcher speaks of his internal organs, which could be broken and no longer be able to function. The wheel of the cistern could be the heart which pumps blood to the whole body. There are many ways which a body would stop functioning, but all will lead to the same fate. The physical body will return to the earth as it was, and the eternal spirit will return to God.

It may be a very depressing and even morbid topic to consider, especially to go into such vivid detail. However Solomon does so to bring about an intended effect. He wants to shock the readers to awaken from their complacency, and to be faced with the realities of life. In our youth we hardly think of sickness, ill health and old age. We seem to think that we have years ahead of us, and that there is still time to enjoy all the pleasures of this life. Solomon therefore exhorts all of us to remember the Lord while they still can, for old age, ill health and finally death will soon catch up, and you will have no more opportunity to serve the Lord. As an old man, he was probably beginning to feel all these effects, and thus exhorted all the young around him to take heed, to learn from his mistakes, and to cherish the life that God has given you!

THOUGHT: Why do the young always wish they were older, and the old wish they were younger?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to always treasure my youth!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25

Ecclesiastes 12:8-10
Memorise Ecc 12:10

"acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth"

DO YOU TREASURE THE WORDS OF TRUTH?

And so in closing, Solomon reiterates what he said right at the very beginning. Having presented his case through his experiences, observations and instructions concerning life, he now reiterates his main thesis: That if a life is lived under the sun apart from God, it is vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

Solomon now gives a sort of an epilogue, where he gives us a description of his ministry as the preacher. With the wisdom from God, and now having gained a right perspective to life, he taught the people, encouraged them in the Lord, and penned all these proverbs for the instruction of the people. His words, as those which were recorded for us in Proverbs, Songs of Solomon and this book itself, are words of truth, that were recorded for our instruction. These are words which Solomon had sought out carefully and deliberately. They were not just the mere ramblings of a jaded old man, but were indeed upright words of truth, that leads us into the righteousness of God. Throughout the book, we have seen how the arguments of Solomon would direct a man away from seeking after vanity of the world, but to live a life of joy and contentment, in the fear of the Lord.

Also, more than being just the words of man, these are divinely inspired Words of God, given to us from 'one shepherd', who is none other than the Lord. These are truths given to us, which all believers must live by. These words are described as goads and as nails, placed in our way to prick us and prod us in the right direction of life. It is His truth that guides us and goads us in the way that we should go. Thus by studying the book of Ecclesiastes and also the rest of the Bible, we are admonished, and taught the right way of life.

Dear teen, do you realize that what you hold in your hands, are the words of truth? Not just the book of Ecclesiastes, but all Scripture are words of everlasting truth given to us by God. The Bible stands apart from any other work of literature that the world has, for it alone has the claim to be words of perfect truth. All other books have been written by man, and therefore can never claim to be 100% perfect. The Bible, on the other hand, is written by God, and will always be right, never wrong. Will you desire to live by this book?

THOUGHT: We can never go wrong following the truth!

PRAYER: Lord, help me always to love, cherish and live by Your Word.

Ecclesiastes 12:11
Memorise Ecc 12:11

"The words of the wise are as goads...give from one shepherd."

HAVE YOU BEEN GOADED?

A goad is a basically a long staff with a pointed end, used by farmers and shepherds to guide their sheep and cattle. The end is sometimes headed with iron, like the people of Israel had in 1 Samuel 13:21, whereby they had a file to sharpen it. It was also used as a weapon by Shamgar to slay 600 men (Judges 3:31). When the shepherd, armed with a goad leads his flock and directs them in a certain direction, there would be some sheep that try to go off the part, or wander off towards danger. What the shepherd would do would be to prod the sheep with his goad, to make it experience pain as it tried to go off in the direction it should not be going, and in so doing to goad it back into the right path.

Thus when Solomon describes the words of the wise as goads, it is clear what this illustration means. We are all like sheep going astray, wandering off into the world, thinking that there is something there to be enjoyed. The book of Ecclesiastes will then stand as a goad in our way, provoking us to reflect on our ways, to prod us back into the right path, to direct us to the right fear of the Lord.

Dear teen, as you studied through the book of Ecclesiastes, have you been goaded? Have you been provoked to return to the path of righteousness, and away from the sin and vanity of the world? As you heard all the experiences and observations that Solomon shared, have you been goaded to realize how vain and empty the foolishness of the world is, and how important it is to submit to the sovereign Almighty God? His experiences that he shared are meant to push us, to maybe at times even to hurt us, so that we would not make the same mistakes that he had made in his life, and return to the Lord. Yet these hurts and provocations are not the grievous wounds of an enemy, but the gentle prodding of a loving shepherd who cares for our souls, and desires nothing more that we love the Lord, and live lives that are pleasing to Him.

THOUGHT: Better to be goaded and suffer temporarily, than to be led astray and lost forever.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to respond to the goading from Thy Word with humility and repentance.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27

Ecclesiastes 12:12
Memorise Ecclesiastes 12:13
"Of making many books there is no end..."

WHY IS STUDY A WEARINESS OF THE FLESH?

Coming to verse 12, Solomon makes a rather intriguing statement that carries the line "much study is a weariness of the flesh". Many students would like to cheekily quote this verse, and then use it as a valid excuse to not study. They say after all, Solomon the wisest man in the world agrees that studying brings nothing but weariness, and there is no end to learning and making book, so why study at all! How are we to rightly interpret this verse, and what message is Solomon trying to give us?

We see him addressing the reader in a most tender fashion, 'my son'. He says that it is only in light of all that he has already mentioned that 'by these' things which he has said, we are to be admonished and enlightened. He had shared many things throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, all directing us away from the sins and vanity of the world, and towards the wisdom of God. The 'many books' that he speaks of here, are the humanistic studies which he himself had engaged in, as he sought to find meaning and fulfilment in his life apart from God. When we live that way, in the vain pursuit of knowledge simply for personal satisfaction, then yes, it truly will bring weariness to the flesh and vexation to our spirit. So many people in the world have sought after knowledge and intellectual understandings of things as their highest goal, and they think that by getting degrees, publishing papers and researching deeply into the realms of science and technology, they can improve lives and bring satisfaction to their souls. However, they do it for themselves and not for God, and they will soon realize how empty their lives are. In the context of this verse, Solomon was probably speaking of the worldly philosophers of his time, who also liked to right books and debate and argue over the meaning of life. To him, such intellectual godless pursuits were meaningless, and bring nothing more than weariness.

In contrast to that, we know that the study of God's word is profitable, sweet and refreshing to the soul. We can ignore the books of men, the writings of man, but we are never to ignore the words of truth. Yet it does not mean we must all quit school and enter into Bible College. For you as students, your role at the present is to study, but we do it not for self or pride's sake, but only because we obey God, and want to glorify Him!

THOUGHT: Studying is wearisome only when we do it apart from God

PRAYER: In all my studies, help me to study for Thy glory!

Ecclesiastes 12:13
Memorise Ecc 12:13

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God"

DO YOU FEAR GOD?

In Ecclesiastes 12:13, we come to the final summary statement of the book. Solomon describes this as the conclusion of the whole matter – that is to fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. This is really the conclusion that he had been driving at through the whole book. As he shared his experiences and observations about the world, he was drawing his readers to come to the same conclusion as him. As we studied through the whole book, we should have been goaded to this direction as well, to realize that if we live our lives apart from God, under the sun, then it is a meaningless, futile, vain life. It would be a life wasted, and one that does not bring pleasure to God. However, if we live our lives in the fear of the Lord, and obey Him in all that we do, then we will fulfil our duty as children of God, as one who remembers his creator in all that he does.

This idea of the fear of God is one that has been running throughout this book, and appears in these various verses: Ecclesiastes 3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12, 13, and finally in this verse, Ecclesiastes 12:13. It describes the reverential awe and respect that we have for God, because of who He is and all that He has done for us. Throughout the Bible, men is also continually exhorted to fear God, for when we truly come before God with a reverential, respectful awe and holy fear, our lives will be set right before him. This healthy fear of God can only be had when we fully understand who God is. When we realize that He is the almighty sovereign God who is in control of all things. It comes when we yield ourselves to His control, and trust in His will. When we are able to acknowledge that there is a time and purpose to every thing under the heaven, and that it is God who has made everything beautiful in his time, we show that we understand God's sovereign will in all that we do.

It is so important for all of us to have this fear of God. Solomon places this idea first in the duty of men, for he knows that if we have this fear, then all other aspects of our life will naturally fall into place. When we fear Him, we will want to live lives glorifying to Him, and we would want to keep His commandments. Thus what we all must do is to actively cultivate this fear of God in our lives.

THOUGHT: Do I really fear God? Is it evident in my life?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to fear Thee in sincerity and truth.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 29

Ecclesiastes 12:13
Memorise 1 John 5:2

"and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

DO YOU KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS?

When we fear God, we will naturally have a desire to please Him. As a subject in the king's court who loves and respects His lord and master would go so far as to sacrifice his life for his liege, so should we be like His humble subjects, ready and available to do His will. But we may ask, 'Where can God's will be found?' We don't have to look very far, for it is all recorded in the book before us, in the Bible, the Holy Word of God. This whole book is the law of God, and within it are His commandments, precepts, judgments, ordinances, sayings and testimonies which we all must keep. If we say that we love God, we would then have a desire to keep His commandments (1 John 5:2). The word 'keep' here denotes this idea of guarding, taking heed to, to observe carefully. It is like a watchman who stands by the city walls to ensure that no one would breach the defences of the city. Likewise, when we are told to keep God's commandments, we are to carefully learn it, apply it in our lives, and actively watch to ensure that we never break it. This is therefore our solemn duty that God has charged us with. We must never let our guard down, but always be watchful, sober and vigilant, and do all we can to sure that we are responsible in the discharge of this duty.

Dear teen, is the command to keep God's commandments something that you take seriously? Do you actively take steps to ensure that the life you live, the things you do, the places that you go to, and even the thoughts that you have are all done in accordance to God's Word? Do you desire to please Him, to hate sin, and to walk holy before Him? If we truly understand this, then our lives would certainly change, for we will become more and more sanctified by His word, and our lives will become less and less like that of the world. When that happens, then we will truly be able to have fulfilment and satisfaction in life, for it is no longer a life lived under the sun apart from God, but it is a life lived wholly for Him! It will no longer be a life of vanity, but a life where we bring pleasure and glory to God.

THOUGHT: Keeping God's commandments requires active effort on my part.

PRAYER: Lord, may You help me to have a solemn and reverential fear for You, that I would want to keep Your commandments and serve Thee in all that I do.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 30 *Ecclesiastes 12:14*
Memorise 2 Cor 5:1

"For God shall bring every work into judgment"

DO YOU KNOW OF GOD'S JUDGMENT?

We come now to the very last verse in the book of Ecclesiastes. After spelling out man's duty on earth in the previous verse, that is to fear God and to keep His commandments, Solomon now gives us the reason why we must do so. He tells us the motivation for fulfilling our duty, is because of the sure judgment of God. He speaks with a certainty, warning us that there will certainly come a day where God shall bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing that we do, whether it be good or whether it be evil. This is a warning that comes to both believers and unbelievers alike. We know that when we leave this earth, there will be a day of reckoning whereby we all have to stand before the throne of God, and give an account of all that we have done in our lives.

For the unbeliever, this place of judgment is the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20), where they will be judged according to their works. They will certainly not be able to meet the mark, for they are lost in sin, and their names are not written in the book of life. They will therefore be cast into the lake of fire for eternity. For the believer, the judgment is slightly different, for we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ as described in 2 Corinthians 5. Here, we are also judged according to the things which we have done, whether it be good or bad. All the things done in secret, be it secret sins or quiet good deeds for Christ will be revealed. However, we are assured that when we stand at this judgment our salvation has already been secure by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We no longer have to face the punishment for our sins, for that has been born by Christ. The judgment here is in order that we may receive rewards for works which we have done for Christ. If we do not want to be ashamed at this day of reckoning, we will want to live our lives holy and acceptable before Him, that we may receive his commendation at the day of judgment.

Thus having a healthy fear of God and a good knowledge of His righteousness and judgment will certainly motivate and guide us to take heed of His commandments and keep them to the best of our abilities. There is certainly nothing better than to establish a right relationship with God, that that is the only lasting thing that we will have after our life on this earth is done. Anything else under the sun is vain and temporal and will be brought into judgment by God.

THOUGHT: Judgment can be terrifying, but also rewarding. Which is it to you?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live with eternity's values in view!

WILL YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR CHRIST?

As we come to the close of this study, may this poem by CT Studd provoke us to truly reflect on our lives, and goad us to fear Him and keep His commandments.

Two little lines I heard one day, Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart, And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one, Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet, And stand before His Judgement seat;
Only one life,'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice, Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave, And to God's holy will to cleave;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, a few brief years, Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its clays I must fulfill, living for self or in His will;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

When this bright world would tempt me sore, When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way, Then help me Lord with joy to say;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep, In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife, Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Oh let my love with fervor burn, And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone, Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one, Now let me say,"Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call, I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life,'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.

THOUGHT: Will my life count for Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, help me not waste a single moment of my life, but may every day be a day lived for Thee.

Notes

To: *The RPG Ministry*

Calvary Pandan B-P Church
201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337
Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.sg

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