

Lesson 10 4 January, 2014

An Eternal Perspective of Life

Lesson Scope: Ecclesiastes chapters 9 to 12

Lesson Focus

After searching out all of man's experiences, Solomon concluded that to fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty of man. This puts an eternal perspective on God's gift of life to us.

The passage selected from chapter 9 tells the reader to "go thy way" in life. Since life is a gift from God, we need to live it fully. We may not live licentiously, apart from God, but neither should we live a life of deprivation, refusing to partake of what He has given. Verses 9-11 indicate a way to enjoy life fully that is not vain. Much of life requires an investment for future return. This is true in any aspect of life, not just business. If we expect a spiritual return, we must invest spiritually. If we wish to see an "increase" in our children, we must invest the necessary time and attention.

The preacher spent much time seeking "what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life" (Eccl. 2:3). This reflects man's natural desire to find fulfillment in life. Many people are willing to spend large amounts of money and most of their lives in their pursuit of true meaning in life. However, man's fullest contentment in life can be realized only as he experiences a right relationship with his Creator.

Since life is a gift from God, and since many of the experiences in life are sent by Him to bless us, strengthen us, or provide for us, we need to embrace life fully. As mentioned in the lesson, this does not refer to a worldly approach, but rather to seeing the circumstances in life as opportunities and thanking God for each of them. As humans, we tend toward one extreme or another, and lifestyle is no exception. Just as we can "live it up" and throw propriety to the side, we can likewise view all as vanity and move through life in a melancholy manner, missing what God would have us enjoy.

This lesson contains concepts found in other lessons in this quarter, such as wisdom, stewardship, and a fear of God. Use these to drive

home the point that they all are part of the "duty of man." Take the opportunity to tie the lessons together and to show again the beauty of Scriptural unity.

Man finds true purpose for living only when he looks beyond the things "under the sun." Godly fear and practical holiness are essential to a life of present satisfaction and to hope beyond the grave.

Lesson Aim: To teach principles related to finding true meaning in life.

Theme Verse: [Ecclesiastes 12:13](#). Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Lesson Text

Present Opportunities

[Ecclesiastes 9:7-11](#) ⁷ Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. ⁸ Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. ⁹ Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that *is* thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. ¹¹ I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

[Ecclesiastes 11:1-2](#) ¹ Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. ² Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

[Ecclesiastes 11:6](#) In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall be* alike good.

Future Realities

[Ecclesiastes 11:9-10](#) ⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine

heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment. ¹⁰ Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth *are* vanity.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 ¹ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; ² While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: ³ In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, ⁴ And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; ⁵ Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: ⁶ Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. ⁷ Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 The words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. ¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

Questions for Study

Present Opportunities

1. Discuss the lifestyle of the child of God in light of Eccl. 9:7-11.
2. What thoughts and actions will ensure that the seed and bread are cast?
3. What are some blessings we enjoy from our seeding efforts even if we do not see results?

Future Realities

4. What is the secret of fulfillment as we ponder the inevitable changes

life will bring?

5. Why do the "words of the wise" (Eccl. 12:11) have power?

6. Discuss the everyday outworking of "the whole duty of man

Analyzing the Passage

Chapter 11 is an appeal to diligence and faith. Much of our work calls for the investment of time and resources for future returns. To "cast thy bread upon the waters" is to do what is right even when it seems unreasonable, in faith, anticipating that God will fully reward our work in time or in eternity.

To "give a portion" (Eccl. 11:2) carries the idea of benevolence. Seven is symbolic of completeness or perfection. Giving also to eight indicates an indefinite amount and could suggest the thought of benevolence or spiritual sowing without limit or with eternity in mind. In this regard, verses 1 and 2 are one in thought.

Chapter 12 has been called a literary masterpiece describing the challenges of old age and death. The weakening and deterioration in the body serves to increase our desire to move on to our eternal home. "Thou shalt say" (Eccl. 12:1), "Then shall the dust return," "The spirit shall return" (Eccl. 12:7), and "God shall bring" (12:14) reinforce the certainty of aging, death, and judgment.

These words of wisdom are as goads that pierce deeply into the mind and prod it along in the right direction (Eccl. 12:11). They are also as nails, which conveys the thought of being anchored in the mind.

Principles and Applications

Present Opportunities

1. God desires that men enjoy the fruits of their labors as they walk acceptably before Him (Eccl. 9:7). The fruits of honest labor are a blessing from God, given for our enjoyment. We must be careful that we enjoy them in a manner that is God honoring as well as consistent with good stewardship. It is not wrong to have nice things so long as we are not sacrificing needful things and are not living extravagantly.

2. Following God's plan for the home brings joy and satisfaction (Eccl. 9:9). We are to enjoy life with our families. The God-honoring family will bring lasting satisfaction, and children are one of the few things we are able to enjoy both in time and in eternity. God's plan for the home

includes a permanent relationship between husband and wife that in turn provides stability for each member of the household. As husband and wife work in unity, the children gain a proper view of God and the church. A well-established home also provides a place of refuge from the pressures and dangers of the world.

3. Working diligently for God brings true meaning to life (Eccl. 9:10). God has given each person abilities to be used for personal benefit and the benefit of others, including society as a whole. Additionally, these abilities should be used in God-honoring ways if we expect them to receive God's blessing. We must engage in each activity with all our might and diligence, and accomplish the task while we are able. We have no promise of tomorrow.

4. Walking by faith brings true meaning to life (Eccl.11:1). Faith gives depth to life and provides profound meaning that cannot otherwise be discovered. Actions taken now by faith may not yield results until days, years, or even decades later. But the fruit of those labors may go on for centuries. It is our place to walk by faith and allow that faith to move us to action. God will give the increase.

5. True meaning in life is found when we labor for the good of others and leave the results with God (Eccl. 11:1-2, 6). Consider how a tiny seed grows into a large, useful plant. Laboring for the good of others is like planting that seed. Spiritual growth is similar to natural growth in that the seed must be planted on prepared soil and then cultivated, watered, and cared for until it bears fruit. We may not see our seed grow into a plant while on earth, but the results will be apparent in eternity.

Future Realities

6. Making present choices in light of eternal consequences brings true meaning to life (Eccl. 11:9-10). Each choice we make will have an effect on us and on those around us. It will ripple through the masses of people, and it will ripple through the remainder of our lives. Each choice opens new opportunities, and likewise closes or prevents others. It is imperative, therefore, that we make choices with eternal consequences in mind, lest we close an opportunity for ourselves or someone around us.

7. Beginning to serve the Lord in our youth will bring true purpose for living (Eccl. 12:1). It is ideal to commit ourselves to the Lord in our youth. Many major life decisions are made in these early years that set a

course for life. If we have passed our youth without such a commitment, we must begin right now. Establishing service to the Lord early in the Christian race will establish good spiritual patterns that will serve us well the remainder of our days.

8. Heeding godly wisdom will establish our paths (Eccl. 12:11). God is faithful in directing the steps of those who diligently seek to follow Christ. Godly wisdom establishes right thinking patterns that lead to right speech and action. These will strengthen us spiritually and cause us to seek like-minded friends with whom to continue our walk.

9. To find true meaning in life, we must have a proper fear of God (Eccl. 12:13). A proper fear of God, a primary emphasis of this study, involves a proper respect for Him and an awe of His holy attributes. We approach Him boldly, yet with reverence and awe that such a God desires to fellowship with us.

10. To find true meaning in life, we must keep God's commandments (Eccl. 12:13). If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. God, who created us, knows best what will provide satisfaction and fulfillment in our life. These include a daily recommitment to walk in His paths, constant communication and thanksgiving, alms and service to others, fasting, and avoiding what He determines is not good for us.

Answers to Questions

1. Discuss the lifestyle of the child of God in light of Eccl. 9:7-11.

The child of God should embrace the blessings and opportunities God gives. We need to walk with God, apply stewardship principles, and meet the needs of our families and others. God accepts work that produces fruit; therefore we can fully partake and enjoy the fruit of labor. We should enjoy life, avoiding both wasteful spending on one hand and penuriousness on the other.

2. What thoughts and actions will ensure that the seed and bread are cast?

We should consider the needs of our fellow men. Concern for their spiritual well-being should motivate us to action. Concern for the wellbeing of our own souls and of our families will motivate us to maintain a lifestyle consistent with God's commands and Biblical standards, which then can become seeds to those observing our daily lives. Active participation in church life, including outreach, will also spread the seed.

3. What are some blessings we enjoy from our seeding efforts even if we do not see results?

Spreading seed takes preparation, which provides us with a fuller understanding of God's Word and the reasons behind why we do what we do. Seed spreading takes endurance and steadfastness, spiritual qualities that will serve well during tests of faith. Spreading seed can also produce the satisfaction of a job well done.

4. What is the secret of fulfillment as we ponder the inevitable changes life will bring?

We must rest in God, knowing that He will provide. As we grow older and face some of the changes described in chapter 12, we can look back on our own experiences in life and be secure in the knowledge that He will always give sufficient grace to face any circumstances in life. We need only to remain faithful and lean on Him.

5. Why do the "words of the wise" (Eccl. 12:11) have power?

The words of the wise are succinct, well-chosen, immediately applicable, memorable, and God centered. Consider the teachings of Jesus in contrast to the teachings of the rabbinical leadership of His day.

6. Discuss the everyday outworking of "the whole duty of man."

Fear God. We do this with reverence and respect, as we discussed in the previous lesson. We fear Him because He will be there for the final Judgment, which we wish to pass through favorably. This leads us to the second part of our duty: Keep His commandments, honor our parents, obey government authority, seek a Scriptural church and actively support it, raise our children for the Lord, and spread the Gospel. Many details on these points could be discussed as time and interest permit.

Important Teachings

1. God desires that men enjoy the fruits of their labors as they walk acceptably before Him (Eccl. 9:7).

2. Following God's plan for the home brings joy and satisfaction (Eccl. 9:9).

3. Working diligently for God brings true meaning to life (Eccl. 9:10).

4. Walking by faith brings true meaning to life (Eccl. 11:1).

5. True meaning in life is found when we labor for the good of others and leave the results with God (Eccl. 11:1-2, 6).

6. Making present choices in light of eternal consequences brings true

meaning to life (Eccl. 11:9-10).

7. Beginning to serve the Lord in our youth will bring true purpose for living (Eccl. 12:1).

8. Heeding godly wisdom will establish our paths (Eccl. 12:11).

9. To find true meaning in life, we must have a proper fear of God (Eccl. 12:13).

10. To find true meaning in life, we must keep God's commandments (Eccl. 12:13).

Summarizing the Lesson

Ecclesiastes might be seen as a negative Bible passage when viewed from the standpoint of natural man. But with the spiritual eye, we can see how God works with men to bring them to a point where their actions rise above vanity and produce meaningful results. All this can be positive if done in a right way, but the right way can be found only with an eternal perspective.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13).

Research Guide

1. Meditate on the Scriptures under "Fear of God—Reverence" and "Fear of God—A Motive of Obedience" in Nave's Topical Bible.
2. Read the chapter titled "Obedience" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.
3. Consider Romans 12:1-2 in light of this lesson.