

EMBRACE LIFE

GOD'S WISDOM FOR TODAY FROM ECCLESIASTES

UNDER THE SUN

Leader's Guide & Answer Key

Small-group discussion is one of the most effective means for helping people think through the personal implications of Scripture. All participants should have a copy of *Embrace Life Under the Sun* and the question handout for the assigned chapter, so they can read through the material before each session. Encourage group members to read and think about the questions even if they don't have time to write out their answers.

Instructions for printing out the study questions: The questions for each chapter fit on a single 8.5 x 11 sheet, printed on both sides, and folded in half.

1. Download the PDF and click Ctrl + P (or File > Print).
2. Under **Page Sizing & Handling**, click the **Booklet** button.
For **Booklet subset**, choose "Both sides."
Sheets from should say "1 to 1," and **Binding** should be "Left."
3. Click the **Print** button at the bottom of the box.

If you prefer single sheets instead of a booklet, or if your printer doesn't do two-sided printing:

1. Download the PDF and click Ctrl + P (or File > Print).
2. Under **Page Sizing & Handling**, click the **Size** button, choose the "Fit" option.
(If you check the **Print on both side of paper** option, be sure to click on the **Flip on long edge** button.)
3. Click the **Print** button at the bottom of the box.

Using This Leader's Guide

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind as you facilitate group discussion:¹

1. Small-group discussion is most productive when there are ten or fewer participants and when the participants are arranged in a circle rather than in rows. Each person can then make eye contact with everyone else in the group.
2. A good way to begin the conversation is by asking group members to relate to the group one of the most significant statements they read in the material for that session. Then ask them to explain briefly why it was important to them. This is where some of the greatest benefits of the group time will come—as believers share with each other what God is doing in their lives (1 John 1:3). A participant hearing someone share the same principle that he's learning can be greatly encouraged that God is working in his life and that he's on the right track.
3. Work through the numbered questions in order, asking a different participant to answer each question. If someone indicates that he had trouble with a particular question, ask other group members what they put down for an answer and why.
4. Carefully guide the flow of the discussion. You shouldn't dominate the conversation, but you must motivate group members by restating contributions made, expressing appreciation for all input, and asking follow-up questions. If the discussion gets sidetracked, you will need to refocus it tactfully. You may also need to keep dominant group members from monopolizing the discussion, or you may need to privately encourage quiet participants to become involved.

In this guide suggested answers are shown in italics. In many cases, there are other correct responses to a question. Always encourage group members to base their answers on what the Bible itself says. The outlines and answers are provided for your convenience as group leader.

¹ These guidelines are adapted from Jim Berg's *Created for His Glory* leader's guide, available from JourneyForth, <http://www.createdforhisglory.com/resources.htm>.

CHAPTER 1

Why Do We Need Another Book About Ecclesiastes?

- I. Recognizing Solomonic authorship is essential.
 - A. Specific arguments for Solomonic authorship
 - B. Objections to Solomonic authorship
 1. Supposed lateness of Qoheleth's language
 2. Alleged incompatibility with royal position
- II. Seeing the big picture is crucial.
 - A. Unsuccessful attempts at describing the big picture
 - B. Better attempts at describing the big picture
- III. Describing how Solomon develops the big ideas is essential.

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. Why do you think Jaeggli decided not to call his book something like *Ecclesiastes for Dummies*?
Ecclesiastes is not easy to understand, but Jaeggli's intent is not to make it easy but simply to help us as readers do the hard work of thinking through what it means and how to apply it to our own lives.
2. What is often true of people who claim that someone other than Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes?
They accuse the anonymous writer of promoting wrong philosophies such as hedonism or existentialism. For example, Tremper Longman thinks the entire book (except for the last two verses) presents "dangerous, speculative wisdom" (p. 16).
3. Mention some of the reasons Jaeggli gives for believing that Solomon was the writer of Ecclesiastes.
 - *The writer claims that he "increased in wisdom above all who were before [him] in Jerusalem" (1:16), and we know from 1 Kings 3:11–12 that God had promised Solomon early in his reign to give him wisdom beyond that of his predecessors.*

- *The writer claims to have been “king over Israel in Jerusalem.” Solomon was the only king after David who ruled over the united kingdom (Israel and Judah) from that city.*
 - *The “resumé” the writer gives in Ecclesiastes 2:4–9 matches Solomon’s accomplishments in construction, agriculture, wealth, and intellectual ability.*
4. When interpreting Ecclesiastes, why is it especially important to keep in mind the “big picture” of the overall theme and purpose of the book?
Looking at individual verses out of context can lead to conclusions that are inconsistent with a high view of Scripture (i.e., that the ideas expressed in the book are merely human philosophies).
 5. Are Solomon’s arguments in Ecclesiastes like the speeches of Job’s friends? Why or why not?
Some of Solomon’s statements do seem less than orthodox, but there’s a definite difference between Ecclesiastes and the book of Job. The writer of Job made it clear that the friends were expressing their own (traditional) understanding of Job’s troubles rather than God’s viewpoint. In contrast, Solomon claimed that the Lord personally gave him the words he wrote in Ecclesiastes (12:10–11).
 6. What makes Ecclesiastes difficult to analyze?
The ideas seem to appear in random order.
 7. Do you think Solomon used a meaningful structure in putting this book together? Is it possible to figure out what that structure is?
Solomon indicates in 12:9 that he put a lot of careful thought into how he constructed the book. Some commentators have applied the standard tools of literary analysis to discover a coherent structure in Ecclesiastes.
 8. Why does Jaeggli use a thematic approach rather than a verse-by-verse commentary?
He develops the key themes related to the big picture in order to show how the text applies practically to everyday life. The verse-by-verse approach tends to ignore the larger context.

CHAPTER 2

Proper Theology Is Foundational to Life in a Fallen World

- I. God created mankind.
 - A. Life is a gift from God.
 - 1. Life is our allotment from God.
 - 2. God intends for us to enjoy our allotment.
 - B. We must enjoy life within God's parameters.
- II. God has the right to control what He created.
 - A. He plans what will happen.
 - 1. God plans calamity for people sometimes.
 - 2. God always exercises overall providential control.
 - B. He plans when things happen.
 - 1. We should be content with the time we are currently experiencing.
 - 2. We should make the most of the opportunities we currently have.
 - 3. We should not shrink back from what seems currently distasteful.
 - 4. We should embrace times of widely divergent emotional experiences.
 - 5. We should discern when something is appropriate or not.
- III. God does not have to tell us what He is doing.
 - A. God gives man the ability to search for His plan.
 - B. Man cannot understand God's plan completely.
- IV. God judges all people.
 - A. God's judgment is a present reality.
 - 1. God evaluates our words.
 - 2. God evaluates our purity.
 - 3. God evaluates our attitude toward life.
 - B. His judgment is a future certainty.
- V. God deserves reverence.

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. Which names for God does Solomon use in Ecclesiastes and why?
He uses Elohim exclusively. This name emphasizes God's sovereignty in creating the universe and mankind, an idea Solomon wants the reader to keep in mind.
2. Is everything Ecclesiastes says about God based on what Solomon observed in creation (general revelation)?
No, Solomon's philosophy for living is based on what God has revealed about Himself through His Word (special revelation).
3. As you learn more about Scripture, are you ever frustrated by the realization that your thoughts continue to be focused more on pleasing yourself than on pleasing God?
Jaeggli says this is his own experience and suggests that it was Paul's as well (Rom 7:7-24). Our hope lies in Paul's declaration in 8:1 that there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ.
4. In light of our "tendency to invent plans that are contrary to God's will," how can we avoid despair?
by remembering that God has graciously given us the gift of life
5. How does belief in evolution prevent a person from having the view of life pictured in the diagram on page 36?
If you think human existence is due to a random accident of nature, it will make no sense to you to view life as the gift of a God who loves you and to whom you are accountable.
6. What verse does Jaeggli identify as the key verse of the book of Ecclesiastes? What are his reasons for choosing this verse?
Ecclesiastes 9:9 captures the core thought of the entire book. It expresses Solomon's advice to enjoy the experiences of life and includes the ideas that life is short and is best enjoyed with another person.
7. How would you describe "the joy of contentment"?
being happy with God's provision of material goods, personal abilities, position, and so on
8. As illustrated by the story of Suzie and the roses, what must you have in order to fully enjoy the gifts God gives?
a personal relationship with Him
9. Does God ever plan calamity for certain people? Why do you think He would do so?
"God has planned life so that those who are outside of a relationship with Him . . . experience frustration when disaster strikes" (p. 53). Perhaps He does this (e.g., not allowing a covetous person to enjoy the wealth she accumulates) to motivate people to seek Him. Or maybe it's a matter of judgment.
10. How can you strike a balance between "paralyzing pessimism" and "stupefying optimism"? (p. 57)

by reminding yourself that God is in control of everything and refusing to become dissatisfied with the way things are going in your own life or what's happening in the world

11. How should a person respond to Solomon's famous poem in Ecclesiastes 3:1–8?
 - *Be content with the particular time you're currently experiencing.*
 - *Be alert to take advantage of present opportunities.*
 - *Be determined to do what's right even when it's unpleasant.*
 - *Be willing to accept emotionally both the highs and lows of life.*
12. Why is the awareness that God has hidden certain things from humans crucial to developing a biblical philosophy of life? (p. 73)
Based on 3:10–11, God has given us the task of discovering "the wide sweep of God's work from the beginning to the end" (p. 76). But recognizing that there are limits to what God has revealed to us, we should respond with faith in Him concerning things we can't know (p. 81).
13. Does Ecclesiastes 3:18–19 indicate that Solomon thinks humans are no different from animals?
No, the whole of Scripture recognizes that humans are made in the image of God, but Solomon is emphasizing that because of sin humans often act like beasts and in the end die just as animals do.
14. Why does Jaeggli say that "all enjoyment must be within the parameters of God's Word"? (p. 92)
We should realize that God knows everything we think, say, and do, and that He will bring us into judgment.
15. What aspects of our lives does Solomon say that God will evaluate?
our words, our purity, and our attitude toward life

CHAPTER 3

Vanity Is the State of Life in a Fallen World

- I. The use of *hēbēl* in the Old Testament outside of Ecclesiastes
 - A. *Hēbēl* pictures what is unprofitable and insubstantial.
 - B. *Hēbēl* pictures what is transitory.
- II. The use of *hēbēl* in the book of Ecclesiastes
 - A. *Hēbēl* is a metaphor.
 1. Full and abbreviated metaphors
 2. Live and dead metaphors
 - B. *Hēbēl* pictures frustration.
 1. Frustration over what is profitless
 2. Frustration over what is unsatisfying
 3. Frustration over what is unjust
 - C. *Hēbēl* pictures what is transitory.
 - D. *Hēbēl* pictures emptiness.

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. What is so weak and worthless that the Old Testament often uses the Hebrew word *hēbēl* (vanity) to describe it?
an idol
2. Why do you suppose Adam and Eve chose to name their second-born son Abel, which is a form of *hēbēl*?
They knew that because of their sin they were going to die and that Abel would eventually die.
3. What can you conclude from the variety of nouns modern Bible versions use to translate the word *hēbēl*?
The term has a range of meaning that includes the ideas of uselessness, frustration, temporariness, and meaninglessness.

4. Ecclesiastes uses *hēbēl* as a metaphor, but which kind—full or abbreviated, live or dead? What difference does this make for the reader?
It's always an abbreviated metaphor because Solomon doesn't spell out the point of similarity. It's always live because the meaning depends on the specific context. This means that the reader has to carefully consider the context and decide how to interpret the metaphor.
5. Do you think it would be a good idea for Bible versions to just transliterate *hēbēl* as is sometimes done with the Greek word *agapē*? Why or why not?
Using the transliteration would make it obvious to English readers how often and where the term is used in Scripture. However, individual readers would then have to figure out what nuance of meaning best fits a particular context.
6. What is one reason God allow humans to experience so much frustration in this fallen world?
He wants to motivate us to find our ultimate satisfaction in Him alone.
7. How could Solomon, a man who knew and feared God, say that he “hated life” (2:17)?
*He was being honest about how frustrating and empty life is. He was not suggesting that this attitude should be the norm. A few verses later, he says that even though a person's work is *hēbēl*, he can find enjoyment in it as a gift from God (2:22–25).*
8. Was Solomon just a cynical old man to say that envy is what drives all human achievement (Eccl 4:4)? Why would he take such a negative view of human nature?
Solomon wasn't being cynical but realistic. His assessment of fallen human motivations is entirely consistent with Genesis 6:5.
9. What does the “crackling of nettles under a kettle” (Eccl 7:6, TNK) illustrate?
the frustration produced by something that is unprofitable
10. What are some of the ways Solomon tested his heart (i.e., experimented with various pleasures to see if they would bring true satisfaction to the human heart)?
drinking wine, constructing buildings, cultivating gardens and orchards, accumulating wealth (livestock and precious metals), acquiring large numbers of slaves, singers, and concubines
11. What did Solomon learn from his experiments?
*that all of it (everything) was *hēbēl**
12. How is Solomon's conclusion about all his experiences relevant to us today?
We should learn that nothing this world has to offer is ultimately satisfying.
13. As Christians, how should we respond to the reality that life in this fallen world is continually frustrating, transitory, and empty?
We should obey God's command to enjoy the simple pleasures He gives (Eccl 9:9).

CHAPTER 4

Enjoying Life Is a Gift from God in a Fallen World

- I. Enjoyment of life is God's bestowal.
- II. Enjoyment of life helps to mitigate *hēbēl*.
 - A. Enjoying food and drink
 - B. Enjoying family relationships
 - C. Enjoying work
- III. The reality of death spurs us to enjoy life.
 - A. We have a short time to earn a reputation.
 - B. Old age creeps up on us quickly.

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. What is paradoxical about the truth Solomon presents in Ecclesiastes?
Life is always frustrating, temporary, and pointless, but it is a gift from God that He commands us to enjoy.
2. In what way does *carpe diem* mean something different for the Christian than it does for the nonbeliever?
For the Christian it means to joyfully embrace the gift of God, while the atheist merely tries to grab all the gusto he can before it's too late.
3. Jaeggli says that enjoying life is not an end in itself but a means to an end. What "end" or goal is he talking about (p. 148)?
having a personal relationship with the God who gives us life and the capacity to enjoy it
4. Do you think Jaeggli's commitment to abstaining from alcoholic beverages is repressive and legalistic? Why or why not?
Opinions will vary, but Jaeggli explains that he is not concerned about keeping rules (as if that could earn him favor with God) but about "applying Scripture to his life in a transformative manner" (p. 153). He explains that Christian standards of behavior that are based on accurate interpretation of Scripture are liberating rather than restrictive.

5. What are the implications of Jaeggli's view that enjoying life is actually a matter of worship?
On the one hand, if we spend our days in gloomy, self-centered negativism, we're sinning against God. On the other hand, when we appreciatively enjoy God's provision of daily pleasures (food and drink, family relationships, etc.), we honor Him and testify to others of His greatness and goodness.
6. What are some keys to enjoying our work in spite of its inherent frustrations?
We should focus on the positive aspects of our labor, realizing that work is not part of the curse but is, in fact, a gift of God. Also, we shouldn't fixate on how much or how little income we generate by our efforts but see money as a tool for serving God. We can find joy in providing for the needs of our families and in being a blessing to others by our giving.
7. What should cause you to have the "wise urgency" that Solomon advocates?
When we realize that our time here is inevitably short and that we will soon stand before the one who has ordained for us to accomplish certain things (Eph 2:10), we will be motivated to make the most of our lives.
8. Some commentators think the poem in Ecclesiastes 12:2-7 is an allegory about our bodily deterioration in old age, but what does Jaeggli think it's about?
He sees this passage as a description of catastrophic events associated with the eschatological Day of Yahweh.
9. Why can the book of Ecclesiastes function as "an extended gospel tract" (p. 198)?
It can help unbelievers realize that we have no hope apart from God's grace. Solomon's argument that life without God is frustrating and futile and that death is certain makes the forgiveness of sins through a personal relationship with Christ all the more attractive.

CHAPTER 5

The Fear of the Lord Is Essential to Life in a Fallen World

- I. The fear of the Lord throughout the Bible
 - A. It leads to an increasing knowledge of God's character.
 - B. It produces obedience to His Word.
 - C. It results in ethical behavior.
 - D. It expresses itself in love for God.
- II. The fear of the Lord in the book of Ecclesiastes
 - A. It involves submitting to God's sovereignty over time.
 - B. It involves exercising caution in making promises.
 - C. It involves having confidence in walking with God.

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. When Solomon gets to the end of his book, he boils down everything he's been trying to say into two imperatives. What are they?
Fear God and keep His commands.
2. To complete the thought of the final phrase of Ecclesiastes 12:13, some translations supply the idea of "the whole duty of man," while others opt for "applies to all." Which does Jaeggli prefer and why?
Neither. Jaeggli thinks the Hebrew text makes sense without adding anything else. He translates the phrase as "the totality of man" to convey that people should fear God with every aspect of their beings.
3. What's wrong with defining the fear of the Lord as simply a reverential awe of God?
That's just one aspect of a much deeper concept. The fear of the Lord involves having a relationship of increasing intimacy with God, who extends His love and grace to those who repent. In fact, "the fear of the Lord is synonymous with living the Christian life" (p. 192).
4. In your personal experience, how are grace and godly fear related?
Answers will vary, but Jaeggli says, "Grace and godly fear are not antithetical but complementary. It is by God's grace that He scares the living daylights out of us" (p. 194).

5. What is growth in our relationship with God dependent on?
diligently searching the Scriptures to learn more about His character (p. 196)
6. Scripture presents a progression in the concept of the fear of God. How would you describe this progression?
We go “from abject error to true heart devotion” (p. 202). A believer who’s growing in the fear of the Lord will find increasing delight in expressing love for God.
7. How would you answer someone who says that 1 John 4:18 teaches that the fear of God and the love of God are mutually exclusive?
John is talking about the fear of condemnation on the part of someone who isn’t trusting in Christ’s perfect righteousness. In contrast, “the fear of the Lord is a healthy fear that stems from knowing God’s character” (p. 207), and it gives us confidence on Judgment Day, as 1 John 4:17 makes clear.
8. What are three possible applications of the concept of the fear of the Lord in the book of Ecclesiastes?
 - *Submitting to God’s sovereignty over our circumstances (especially the timing of certain events)*
 - *Being careful about the promises we make to God*
 - *Having confidence that walking with God is ultimately the best way to live life*
9. Give an example of an unwise vow.
Jaeggli gives the example of a young man who felt pressure from his family to promise God that he would go into the ministry.

CHAPTER 6

Even Wisdom Has Limits in a Fallen World

- I. The function of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament Wisdom books
- II. The concept of wisdom in the Old Testament
- III. Wisdom in Ecclesiastes
 - A. Negative aspects of wisdom
 - B. Positive aspects of wisdom
- IV. Reflections in the New Testament on wisdom from Ecclesiastes

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. Jaeggli says that Ecclesiastes gives a broader perspective on wisdom than Proverbs does (p. 218). What does he mean by that?
Proverbs consists largely of short statements about how to live life, principles that are generally true. Ecclesiastes is a warning that emphasizes the inevitable frustration and futility of life, reminding us that the only way to live successfully is to walk in the fear of the Lord.
2. If biblical wisdom is not primarily the accumulation of intellectual facts about a certain topic or an understanding of how those facts are related, what is it?
Wisdom involves the application of knowledge and understanding. Basically, it's skill in applying Scripture to discern how a person should live (p. 222).
3. What are some benefits of wisdom? What do you think its greatest benefit is?
It can provide protection from danger and success in our life's endeavors, but the greatest benefit is that it allows us "to look at life from God's perspective and draw near to Him as we walk in the fear of the Lord" (p. 235)
4. Wisdom is certainly a beneficial trait to have, but it has some negative aspects or limitations. How so?
Even "people who possess wisdom are subject to hēbēl." Eventually, the wise die and are forgotten just like the foolish. In the meantime, having wisdom is no guarantee of success, and even the process of acquiring wisdom can be frustrating.

5. What New Testament passage most clearly portrays the idea of *hēbēl* and how the believer should handle it?
In Romans 8:18–25, Paul teaches that God’s purpose in subjecting the world to frustration and futility was to develop hope and perseverance in the hearts of Christians (p. 237).

6. “Life is like a field full of land mines. There’s a picnic table dead center and a sign that says, ‘Picnic area—Enjoy at your own risk’” (p. 219). What does Jaeggli mean by this analogy, and how does it summarize the meaning of the book of Ecclesiastes?
“In Ecclesiastes, Solomon teaches us that only those who walk in the fear of the Lord make it successfully through a life of hēbēl” (p. 219).

7. Based on this study of the book of Ecclesiastes, how do you think God wants you to change in your attitudes, your speech, your actions, or your habits?
Answers will vary, but the following quotation from page 235 may suggest some possible areas to consider.

“The words that Solomon has written have been ‘given from one Shepherd’ (Eccl 12:11). Just as life is a gift from God, so are the words that instruct us about how to live in a fallen world. Yahweh is our Shepherd (Ps 23:1), and we look to Him for protection against enemies and for the quiet waters and green grass that will nourish us. Ultimately the book of Ecclesiastes draws our hearts to the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. He lived His life under the constraints of *hēbēl*, just as we do. He understands that we were made of dust and to dust we return. He experienced the same kinds of frustration in life that we experience, although to a far greater degree than we do. He is thus qualified to be our sympathetic High Priest. Let us draw near Him in confidence (Heb 10:19–22).”



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