



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ecclesiastes 11 & 12 | April 9, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we conclude our Lenten series Chasing After the Wind.

After hearing that common refrain throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, we finish our series by engaging Solomon's conclusion in the book's final two chapters.

II. Connecting with One Another

What's your favorite ending to a book or movie? Why?

III. Study the Text

- a. Before engaging this week's text, spend some time reflecting on the previous five weeks, where we addressed the futility of chasing after wisdom, pleasure, wealth, achievement and power. What struck you in those studies and/or sermons? (To recap, turn to Ecclesiastes 1.12-18, 2.1-11, 2.12-26, 4.1-12 and 4.13-16 – study guides can be downloaded at gspc.org/recent-messages)

How has recognizing the futility of wisdom, pleasure, wealth, achievement and power prompted you to instead chase after the disciplines of solitude, fasting, simplicity, guidance and service?

- b. Read Ecclesiastes 11.7-10

Just as creation began with God separating light from darkness, Solomon now engages the importance of light. One commentator explains, "'To see the sun' is to bask in the warmth and joy that life offers. Such is joy's foundation, the vitality of life. But it cannot last, for the 'days of darkness' will inevitably arrive. Yet that, too, paradoxically, is cause for joy, according to the sage."

What do you make of that explanation? Do you agree? Why or why not?

- c. Reread Ecclesiastes 11.9-10

What do you make of this advice? Does it sound like the kind of advice Christian parents would give their first child who is heading off to college? Why or why not?

Moses declared, "You will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not follow the lust of your own heart and your own eyes." (Numbers 15.39) Does Solomon contradict this? (engage this question before continuing)

It has been concluded, "the joy Solomon commends is the sure knowledge that God will judge one's conduct. But this theme of judgment is designed not to temper the

command to enjoy life but to underscore and direct it... Divine judgment is not a corrective but an incentive, the very foundation of the sage's command to enjoy. As Solomon notes elsewhere, enjoyment is a gift of God (2.24-26, 3.12-13 and 5.18-20)... Solomon the old sage, much like a typical grandparent, provides the necessary balance to the harsh admonitions of the parental voice in Proverbs."

Does this reframe that imaginary scene of Christian parents saying goodbye to their first year college student?

- d. Recall the first question of the Westminster Catechism: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

What would Solomon as this "sage grandparent" think about this question?

- e. Read Ecclesiastes 12.1-8 slowly and carefully, pondering each line

As Solomon's reflections begin with creation, they end with death. William Brown writes, "The remarkably diverse settings conveyed in this concluding section are designed to convey both the terror and inevitability of death in all areas of life. In rapid succession, Solomon hops from cosmos to corpus, from household to funeral setting, accompanied by numerous symbolic images that remain shrouded in mystery."

What do you think he was trying to depict in these verses?

verse 2:

verse 3:

verse 4:

verse 5:

verse 6:

verse 7:

If you're working through this study guide in a group, spend some time discussing your theories. Be sure to include how you *feel* reading these verses (not just what you *think*).

- f. Read Ecclesiastes 12.9-10

Some wonder whether Solomon wrote these last six verses of Ecclesiastes – or whether it was another author who offered this "conclusion of the matter."

What if it wasn't Solomon himself? Would that change the value or importance of these verses? Why or why not?

- g. Verses 9 and 10 set Solomon's teaching in a positive light. Would you agree? Is this a happy book? Is it positive in some other way?

Can something be positive even if it doesn't immediately make us happy?

Has this book "imparted knowledge" to you? If so, what?

Is it "upright and true"? If so, how?

h. Read Ecclesiastes 12.11-12

Despite being “wise,” “upright,” and “true,” Solomon’s words aren’t exactly easily digestible.

The author could have used the gentler images of a rod and staff, but chose otherwise: “Such images are drawn from the art of animal husbandry: ‘goads’ were designed to herd domesticated animals, such as oxen; ‘nails’ were implanted at the end of sticks as prods. The ‘shepherd’ or ‘herder’ is evidently any teacher of wisdom... Pain is part of the process of learning, analogous to the forceful training of animals... The ‘goads’ and ‘nails,’ in short, are the painful verbal instruments by which the purveyors of wisdom redirect the learner on the right path, rugged as it is.”

How have you seen this to be true of your learning experiences?

i. Read Ecclesiastes 12.13-14

Our five week series has engaged what *not* to do: Stop chasing after the wind! Why, then, do you think these last two verses instruct the reader of Ecclesiastes on what *to* do?

How do these verses fit in with all that’s come before them?

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up all those who will lead in Easter worship next Sunday – that God would prepare their hearts and minds to lead God’s people in celebrating the good news of the resurrection,
- b. Ask God to draw all people unto Him this Holy Week – and ask him to direct you to invite those you know to join in worship,
- c. Pray for our high school students and adult advisors who are heading to Mexico over Spring Break.