

Just a Breath | The Nature of Life

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

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*It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for this is the end of all mankind,
and the living will lay it to heart.*

—Ecclesiastes 7:2

*Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties.
After all, everyone dies—
so the living should take this to heart.*

—Ecclesiastes 7:2 NLT

*... it is appointed for man to die once, and after that
comes judgment,*

—Hebrews 9:27

**I. The bad news of death is actually good news for our soul.
(Ecclesiastes 7:2; Heb. 9:27)**

II. Embracing the Reality of Life (1:1-11)

*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in
Jerusalem.*

—Ecclesiastes 1:1

*A. We tend to live as though we'll never die. (1:1)
Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*

—Ecclesiastes 1:2

*Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!*

—Psalm 39:5

*O Lord, what is man that you regard him,
or the son of man that you think of him?
4 Man is like a breath;
his days are like a passing shadow.*

—Psalm 144:3-4

*B. Life is short no matter how long you live. (1:2; Ps.
39:5; 144:3-4; James 4:13-14)*

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go
into such and such a town and spend a year there and
trade and make a profit"— 14yet you do not know what
tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist
that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*

—James 4:13-14

*What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?*

—Ecclesiastes 1:3

*A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.*

—Ecclesiastes 1:4

*There is no remembrance of former things,
nor will there be any remembrance
of later things yet to be
among those who come after.*

—Ecclesiastes 1:11

*The sun rises, and the sun goes down,
and hastens to the place where it rises.
6 The wind blows to the south
and goes around to the north;
around and around goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.
7 All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,*

there they flow again.

—*Ecclesiastes 1:5-7*

*All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they flow again.*

—*Ecclesiastes 1:7*

*All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.
9 What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun.
10 Is there a thing of which it is said,
“See, this is new”?
It has been already
in the ages before us.*

—*Ecclesiastes 1:8-10*

*What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?*

—*Ecclesiastes 1:3*

*C. This life will never deliver on what it promises. (1:8-11;
Mark 8:36)*

*There is nothing better for a person than that he should
eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I
saw, is from the hand of God*

—*Ecclesiastes 2:24*

*What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?*

—*Ecclesiastes 1:3*

*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world
and forfeit his soul?*

—*Mark 8:36*

III. God entered this broken world in order to give us what this world could never give. (John 16:33)

in the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

—John 16:33b

Study Questions

1. We are all going to die. We don't know when or how we'll die, but death is definitely a certainty for all of us. For most of us, this sounds like bad news; however, the reality of death can be good news for our soul. Do you agree? Explain. Read Hebrews 9:27. Discuss how embracing the reality of death can shape the way we live.
2. As we kick off this series, spend a few moments describing your thoughts on the book of Ecclesiastes. If you've read it before, what's been your understanding of the message of this book? As a group, wrestle through Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 1:2-3. What most shocks you about his words? Is there anything that encourages you? Also, discuss how understanding the word vanity as 'breath or vapor' might change your entire perspective of Ecclesiastes. Compare this understanding to James 4:13-14. Again, how might embracing the brevity of life affect the way you actually live your life each and every day.
3. Solomon makes the point (Ecclesiastes 1:3-11) that this world can never satisfy our heart's deepest longings. Why do you think our tendency is to look to this world to satisfy us? Explain. Identify a time when you believed this world could make you happy but eventually it left you empty. Be specific.
4. Wrap up your group time by discussing how this first chapter of Ecclesiastes points us to the Gospel? In other words, how does "life under the sun" (as described by Solomon) make us aware of our need for a Savior? Explain. Finally, talk practically about how "losing your life" (see Mark 8:34-36) is the first step to actually experiencing the life God has for you.