



**BIBLE  
STUDIES  
FOR LIFE®**

*Leader*

Guide

ADULTS • KJV  
FALL 2024

**THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE**

**NAVIGATING FAMILY CONFLICT**

# LEADING SOMEONE TO THE GREATEST DECISION OF ALL

One of the great joys of leading a group in Bible study is seeing group members deepen their walk with Christ. Everyone's walk with Christ begins with an initial decision to follow Him in repentance and faith. People may be in your group who have not made that decision yet. Take advantage of your time with them to talk about becoming a Christian.

As you tell your own story about coming to Christ, share these key truths:

1. We are all sinners, and each of us needs to acknowledge that truth before God. That acknowledgement involves repentance, which is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Refer to Romans 3:23, 6:23, and Acts 3:19.
2. The only way a person can receive the gift of forgiveness is by faith in Jesus as God's Son. Use verses like Acts 4:12, Ephesians 2:8-9, and John 14:6 when talking about faith in Christ.
3. Confessing your faith in Jesus Christ means both believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that He is Savior and Lord. Share Romans 10:9-10,13.

**Invite the person to pray a prayer similar to this:**

**"Dear God, I know I am a sinner and have rebelled against You in many ways. I believe Jesus died for my sin and only through faith in His death and resurrection can I be forgiven. I now turn from my sin and ask Jesus to forgive me and to come into my life as my Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I will choose to follow Jesus. Thank You, Lord, for loving me and for forgiving me. In Jesus name I pray, Amen."**

## **A Special Note about "Purpose Restored"**

(Session 3 of "Thrive: Living on Purpose.")

As your group studies and discusses this session, use it as an opportunity to lead unsaved group members and guests to faith in Christ. Use **"Restored and Made New"** on the inside front cover of the Personal Study Guide to connect the session with each member's own need to place their hope and trust in Christ and receive His gift of salvation. The inside cover is a guide for understanding how Jesus provides the one thing we truly need.

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## DON'T MISS THIS!

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### Social Media

Connect with a community of *Bible Studies for Life* users. Post responses to questions, share teaching ideas, and link to great blog content. [Facebook.com/BibleStudiesforLife](https://Facebook.com/BibleStudiesforLife)

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### eBook

*Bible Studies for Life* is also available as an eBook. You can order a copy at [lifeway.com/bsflebook](https://lifeway.com/bsflebook).

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### EXTRA!

Every week, you'll find additional discussion questions and creative teaching ideas to help you tailor each session to the needs of your group. You'll also find links to magazine articles and the *Family Connection* page for parents.

[www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](https://www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)

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### Family Connection

*Family Connection* helps parents connect with their students and kids by talking about what they're learning in their different Bible study groups. *Family Connection* makes it easy for parents to engage their children in spiritual conversation. *Family Connection* is available at [BibleStudiesforLife.com/FamilyConnection](https://BibleStudiesforLife.com/FamilyConnection).

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### Podcast

Get free weekly insights for every session of *Bible Studies for Life: Adults* with our podcast. Each 20-minute episode will help you get the most out of your upcoming study. Listen at the gym, on the drive home, or wherever is best for you. Just search "Bible Studies for Life Adults" on your favorite podcast app to start listening today.

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**Send questions/comments to:**  
Content Editor by email at [brian.gass@lifeway.com](mailto:brian.gass@lifeway.com) or mail to Content Editor for Bible Studies for Life: Adults, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707; or make comments on the web at [lifeway.com](https://lifeway.com).

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R. Brian Gass  
Content Editor

Lynn H. Pryor  
Team Leader, Adult Ministry

Dwayne McCrary  
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

John Paul Basham  
Director, Adult Ministry

Ken Braddy  
Director of Sunday School

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## WELCOME

The study of God's Word is important. The fact that you're holding this book likely means you agree with that statement—and that you're committed to teaching others God's Word as well. I pray you'll be transformed as we look into God's Word together.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Prayer should go hand-in-hand with reading God's Word. God speaks to us through His Word, and in turn, we speak to God about what we read and discover in that Word. I want to encourage you to pray as you study—and to encourage your group to pray as they study. Periodically throughout this Leader Guide, you'll find prayer prompts to encourage you to pray individually and as a group. We also included several individual prompts in the Daily Discipleship Guide. These prompts aren't labeled as such, but they're there: calls to pray about what you read, directions on turning a passage into a prayer back to God, and so forth. An example based on 2 Timothy 2:15 would be:

Father, help me to be diligent in teaching Your Word. Open my eyes so that I will correctly handle Your word of Truth.

May God richly bless your time with your Bible study group!

**Lynn H. Pryor**

Team Leader, *Bible Studies for Life*

# HOW TO USE BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## INVITE THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE

Because God is the guide for your study, invite Him to show you how to be the best facilitator for your group. Read the Bible passage several times with the Holy Spirit showing you its meaning and application.

## PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

Then read the Personal Study Guide. Its content provides the foundation and direction for the Bible discussion and study by your group.

## LEADER GUIDE

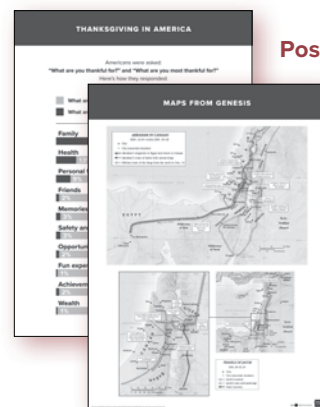
Follow the simple directives in the group plan. This plan will guide you in engaging your group in discussion around the Bible passage. Read the commentary to help you understand the passage. Share insights from the commentary as needed during the group discussion. Occasionally you will see a QR code in this book. Use your phone to open that QR code to see bonus digital content.

## LEADER PACK

The optional Leader Pack is designed to enhance the group experience, especially for visual learners. Pull in the Leader Pack items as referenced in the group plan.

The Leader Pack also provides access to a variety of digital files, including:

- JPG files of the two main study images that you can use with any presentation software (ie., PowerPoint). (Promote the study by placing these images into an announcement slideshow or display the images during the sessions to reinforce the study topic.)
- PDF file of each pack item. (Create multiple posters; during your sessions, display images on a screen using any presentation software; post images on social media to promote the study.)
- Email messages to post prior to your Bible study time to raise awareness and promote the session topic.
- An electronic version of the group plans that you can customize and print.
- Promotional videos to introduce both of the studies in this quarter.
- *Biblical Illustrator* articles that allow you to go deeper in your study.



Posters



Handouts



To learn how to best use these resources, watch this brief video.



## ADDITIONAL IDEAS

Additional discussion questions and teaching suggestions for leaders are available online at [www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra).

A twenty-minute podcast is available for each session, providing an overview and insights to help you prepare. Search “Bible Studies for Life Adults” on your favorite podcast app or go to [MinistryGrid.com/BibleStudiesforLife](http://MinistryGrid.com/BibleStudiesforLife).

## PREPARE YOUR GROUP MEMBERS

Encourage your group members to read the *Personal Study Guide* prior to the group meeting. (Some group members will prefer to read it after the meeting as a way to follow up and reflect.)

## FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER

The *Advanced Bible Study* is written for group members who desire more extensive commentary. It includes exposition of each session’s Scripture passage, an examination of key words, an introduction to the setting of the passage and biblical life and times, questions to guide the study, and interactive responses to help readers apply God’s truths to their lives today.



# The Three Roles Your Bible Study Group Needs

*By Dwayne McCrary*

For me, nearly forty years of marriage has meant wearing many hats, including, but not limited to, plumber, exterminator, cook, mover, and petroleum exchange engineer (better known as filler of the gas tanks). None of these titles were explicitly included in our wedding vows. The key word is explicitly, since they're covered under words and phrases like "cherish," "for better or worse," and "I pledge my word." The other hats come with wearing the ring.

Accepting the responsibility of leading an ongoing Bible study group may come with a variety of hats as well; some of them are expected, but not all. Walking alongside a grieving class member as he or she buries a loved one, especially a child or spouse, probably wasn't what we thought about when we said yes to leadership. Nor was setting up chairs or training another person to do what we do. Even if we didn't fully grasp it at the time we signed on to lead, these things come with the territory.

Ten years ago, in their book *3 Roles for Guiding Groups*, David Francis and Ken Braddy defined the roles we play when assigned a leadership position in a Bible study group as teacher, shepherd, and leader. (You can download a free copy of their original work at [www.lifeway.com/trainingresources](http://www.lifeway.com/trainingresources).) These three roles can help us handle the expectations that come with saying yes to leading a Bible study group.



## TEACHER

This role is the most obvious. Regardless of what else we may think we're to do, teaching seems to be at the top of the list. Francis and Braddy define this role as our ongoing goal of guiding group members to discover and apply biblical truth. They say that for this to happen, group members need to talk as much as we do.

The phrase “ongoing goal” stands out. The idea here is that we do this task week in and week out. We aren’t coordinators or part-time teachers; we’re to be regular in carrying out this role. As a teacher of preschoolers as well as adults, I understand the value of being present every week. Preschoolers get accustomed to the patterns we follow. Seeing the same face each week eases some of their angst when they’re dropped off by a parent. Patterns bring security and give the child a framework for the learning experience. The same is true when teaching adults. They also need that same type of framework and security. We may hand over the teaching role to an apprentice on occasion, but ultimately, we’re the ones who must consistently fulfill the teacher role if we want the class or group to gel and become a safe place to share and learn.

## **SHEPHERD**

Most likely, before your first day leading a class or group, you were presented with a ministry list of people assigned to your group. This ministry list was assigned with the idea that you would care for the individuals on that list.

Teaching and shepherding seem to go hand in hand. If we think about our favorite teachers over the years, we most likely identify people who also had some type of relationship with us. As shepherds, we know the needs of our individual sheep, which should make us better teachers. We can tailor the group Bible study time in light of these known needs. Our shepherding should also influence how we lead our group time, knowing who we can call on to share an experience that illustrates the main point being examined.

We may naturally find it easier to shepherd those who attend our group more regularly. But we can’t forget those who rarely or never attend. There’s a reason they’re on the ministry list assigned to us. In a triad of parables, Jesus pointed to a lost sheep, lost coin, and lost or prodigal son (Luke 15). Jesus pointed out the shepherd will search for that single lost sheep until it’s found. We’re responsible as shepherds assigned to a specific number of sheep who also have names.

## **LEADER**

Teaching and shepherding automatically give us influence, and we become leaders by proxy. We see this in how we help our classes or groups understand the mission of reaching, teaching, and serving.

Ongoing Bible study groups carry some responsibility in reaching people who are far from God. As leaders, we have to keep reminding our groups of that responsibility. Otherwise, we’ll become comfortable with our Christian huddles to the exclusion of others. As we reach more and more people, there comes a point when we’re unable to teach and shepherd effectively. That’s one reason to plant a new group once twelve to eighteen people are attending your current one. Someone must lead the group to recognize the need to plant a new group and apprentice others who can teach/shepherd/lead. The more groups we plant, the greater the potential to reach our communities with the gospel, which is our ultimate mission.

## **GOOD NEWS, KINDA**

None of us are gifted in all three of these areas; therefore, we need others to come alongside us if we’re going to be successful. This is good news, but with a caveat. The three roles are interwoven. We can hand off a role, but the three stay closely connected by assignment and also by relationship. All three require us to build relationships with the people included on our assigned ministry list. If we neglect one of the roles, the other roles will suffer. With God’s help, we can become the teacher/shepherd/leader that the people on our ministry list need and that our church needs to reach the communities in which God has placed us.

**Dwayne McCrary** is the manager of adult ongoing Bible studies at Lifeway.

10 BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

PRAYER REQUESTS



Lined area for writing prayer requests, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

## THE PATHWAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? LifeWay’s research reveals eight markers consistently present in the lives of believers who are growing spiritually. Each year, *Bible Studies for Life* engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

Visit [www.BibleStudiesforLife.com](http://www.BibleStudiesforLife.com) for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2025.

	FALL 2024	WINTER 2024-25	SPRING 2025	SUMMER 2025
LIVE UNASHAMED	Thrive: Living on Purpose			
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS	Navigating Family Conflict			
SHARE CHRIST		Looking Forward to Christmas		
SEEK GOD		The Heart of Worship		
ENGAGE WITH SCRIPTURE			All Signs Point to Jesus	
SERVE GOD AND OTHERS			Elisha: Seeing the Hand of God at Work	
OBEY GOD & DENY SELF				Character Counts
EXERCISE FAITH				Risk Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

## THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE

*How this study supports the Discipleship Plan:*

**Live Unashamed.** Knowing the purpose God has given us helps us live with confidence. When we are living out God's plan and desire for us, the reaction of the world around us is of little consequence.

Session 1	<b>Purpose Questioned</b> • Ecclesiastes 1:1-14
Session 2	<b>Purpose Abandoned</b> • Psalm 8:1-6; 14:1-7
Session 3	<b>Purpose Restored</b> • Acts 3:14-26
Session 4	<b>Purpose Lived</b> • Galatians 5:16-26
Session 5	<b>Purpose Expressed</b> • Galatians 6:1-10
Session 6	<b>Purpose Exemplified</b> • Philippians 1:1-11

## NAVIGATING FAMILY CONFLICT

*How this study supports the Discipleship Plan:*

**Build Relationships.** Among our human relationships, none is more important than the relationships within the family. By considering both positive and negative examples from the book of Genesis, we discover how to build relationships in a positive way that is Christ-honoring.

Session 1	<b>Cain and Abel: Family Responsibility</b> • Genesis 4:1-12
Session 2	<b>Abram and Lot: Family Rights</b> • Genesis 13:5-11,14-18
Session 3	<b>Isaac and Rebekah: Family Favorites</b> • Genesis 25:24-28; 27:5-13
Session 4	<b>Jacob and Esau: Family Rivalry</b> • Genesis 27:35-37,41; 33:1-4,8-11
Session 5	<b>Joseph and His Brothers: Family Jealousy</b> • Genesis 37:1-4,18-24,31-34
Session 6	<b>Joseph and His Brothers: Family Reconciliation</b> • Genesis 42:3-5,21-24a; 45:1-5



## THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE

Antique stores. Not everyone is a fan, but my wife and I like to walk the aisles of an antique store. I may find something I can refurbish or repurpose into something else. I often get a harsh dose of reality when I see a toy I played with as a kid. My childhood toys are now antiques.

Occasionally, I'll see something that is new and unusual to me. "What is it?" I am not interested in simply knowing its name; I want to know what it does. What is its purpose? Knowing the purpose of some tool or instrument I pick up tells me so much. Knowing its purpose tells me why it was invented, who might use it, and how effective it was.

Too many of us go through life without purpose or ever realizing God created us with a purpose in mind. Life can be mundane and even carry a sense of hopelessness, but that was never God's intent for us. God created us with purpose, and when we discover that purpose in Christ, life takes on a meaning and richness the world can't offer. Over these six Bible study sessions, we're going to see the purpose for which God created us, how we can recapture that purpose, and what it practically looks like to live life with purpose.



### Study Introduction:

Here's why this six-session study is important.

### AUTHOR

**Lynn H. Pryor** is the team leader for *Bible Studies for Life*. He has been a part of the ministry of Lifeway Christian Resources for thirty years and has served multiple churches in middle Tennessee as a transitional, interim pastor. He provides a weekly blog that complements these studies at [lynnhpryor.com](http://lynnhpryor.com).

### COMMENTARY WRITER

**Gregory T. Pouncey** has previously pastored churches in Alabama and is now senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Clinton, Mississippi. Gregory and his wife, Cathy, have two sons and one daughter.

# Purpose Questioned

## THE POINT

*Apart from God, life is meaningless.*

## THE PASSAGE

Ecclesiastes 1:1-14

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life can often feel like a hamster wheel.

- The salesman clinches a deal, only to spin again on that wheel to find another customer.
- The fry cook sends out dish after dish, only to clean the grill and start all over again tomorrow.
- You mow the yard, only to have to do it all over again next week.
- You clean the house thoroughly, but before the cleaning supplies are put away, the dust has already started to return.

Do this long enough and you might gravitate to that one question that's a perennial favorite among three-year-olds: "Why?" While the kid directs his question to everyone else, as adults, we often ask that question of

ourselves. "Why am I doing this? What's it all for?" You can come to the end of your life with that three-year-old's "why" still reverberating in your head.

The whirl of the hamster wheel can blur your vision to the fact your life has purpose, but that purpose is only realized when you look to the One who gave you that purpose. As King Solomon found out, looking anywhere else for your purpose is meaningless.





5 MINUTES

## GET INTO THE STUDY

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 1**, the “**Thrive: Living on Purpose**” poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the focus of each session.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, play a video clip of someone repeating an activity over and over again. Then ask **Question #1**.

**NOTE:** A video option can be found at [BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](https://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra).

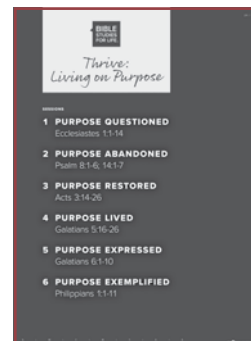
**DISCUSS:** **Question #1** on page 13 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **What’s something you get tired of doing over and over again?**

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to **The Bible Meets Life** on page 13 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of knowing that our lives have purpose by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**RECAP:** The whirl of the hamster wheel can blur your vision to the fact your life has purpose, but that purpose is only realized when you look to the One who gave you that purpose. As King Solomon found out, looking anywhere else for your purpose is meaningless.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **The Point** on page 13 of the PSG: **Apart from God, life is meaningless.**

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by thanking God for creating us with purpose. Ask Him to help us grow in our understanding of that purpose through this study.



**TIP:** When helpful, use this “Notes” column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.

# STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

NOTES

## ECCLESIASTES 1:1-7

<sup>1</sup> The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. <sup>3</sup> What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? <sup>4</sup> One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. <sup>5</sup> The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. <sup>6</sup> The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. <sup>7</sup> All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Ecclesiastes 1:1-7 on page 14 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to explain the background for the book of Ecclesiastes.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use the “Fan” option (page 25 of this Leader Guide) to help the group relate to the example of the wind that Solomon gives.

**RECAP:** “Vanity of vanities” (v. 1). Ever said that? Maybe you’ve said it when work feels like “two steps forward, three steps back.” Or when a relationship goes south, or plans go awry. When life is not going like we’d hope, we can cry out in frustration, “What’s the point?”

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 14 of the PSG: **Which of the images in these verses capture your attention?**

**PRAY:** Invite the group to pause and reflect on the image each of them selected from the passage. Encourage them to silently pray and ask God to help them identify aspects of their lives that illustrate this truth. Ask Him for help in finding purpose in this area.

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 15 of the PSG. Solomon used three illustrations from nature:

- Life can seem like the repetitive cycles of the sun.
- Life can seem like the directionless flow of the winds.
- Life can seem like the never-ending flow of the rivers into the oceans.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 15 of the PSG: **Why do so many people feel unsatisfied, no matter how much they accomplish?**

**TRANSITION:** Without God, what we do in life can feel pointless. In the next verses, we see that without God, what we do in life also doesn’t satisfy.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*What are some things people should consider when choosing a path in life?*

## ECCLESIASTES 1:1-7 *Commentary*

**Connection to The Point:** The Preacher saw everything in life as meaningless.

**The book of Ecclesiastes.** Ecclesiastes falls into the category of the Bible's wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) and is a reflection on the meaning of life, specifically that a life without God, no matter how much one attains or acquires in this world, is ultimately without meaning. The English title is derived from the Septuagint's (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) title *Ekklesiastes*, which is a translation of the Hebrew *qoheleth*. Both terms refer to one who presides over an assembly.

**The Preacher (v. 1).** The exact meaning of the Hebrew term (*qoheleth*) is uncertain. It may refer to "a speaker in the assembly." The term is also translated in some Bible translations as "Teacher." It is a title, not a proper name. Although the writer was both a "son of David" and "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (v. 12), he wrote not as a monarch and ruler over a nation, but as a teacher, one examining the meaning of life.

**Vanity of Vanities (v. 2).** This is a translation of the double use of the Hebrew word *hebel* for emphasis. *Hebel* means "breath" or "vapor." It is used as a synonym for the wind (Isa. 57:13; see Eccl. 1:14). The word is also used to contrast the Lord, who is the believer's strength, fortress, and refuge in time of trouble, with those who follow "lies, vanity [*hebel*], and things wherein there is no profit" (Jer. 16:19). In the context of Ecclesiastes, *hebel* refers to the insubstantial and transitory nature of life.

**Under the sun (v. 3).** The Hebrew phrase appears in no other book in the Old Testament. This phrase corresponds to "under heaven" (Ex. 17:14; Deut. 7:24; 9:14); both phrases represent life in this world. *Under the sun* refers to what existence looks like from a merely earthly perspective without God, an afterlife, or a final judgment. Solomon's presupposition was that he had restricted the scope of his inquiry to only those things that were under the sun. Although he acknowledged the existence of God (Eccl. 1:13) and the wisdom in fearing Him (5:7; 7:18; 8:12), only in chapters 11–12 did Solomon's focus fully shift to an understanding that a meaningful life is one in which

a person has a relationship of fear of (reverence) and obedience to the Lord (12:13), living "in light of eternity."<sup>1</sup>

**Generation (v. 4).** The Hebrew term (*dor*), like the English word "generation," can refer to a period of time or to those living in a specific time period. The Hebrew term can also refer to the cycles of nature. The sun rises, sets, and rises again. Summer follows spring, winter follows fall. Water evaporates into the sky, returns as rain, then evaporates again. While commentators differ on its meaning in Ecclesiastes, the context allows for the term to refer to generations related to both humanity and nature.

**Hasteth (v. 5).** Solomon poetically painted the sun as a racer—the sun rises, moves through the sky, and then sets. The word for *hasteth* (*shaaph*) means to pant after, to long for, or to pursue, and can have either positive or negative connotations. It describes the longing of the psalmist for God's Word, who was eager to taste God's commands (Ps. 119:131). In Ecclesiastes 1:5, it could mean either the sun joyously rushes from sunrise to sunset, or that the sun toils from sunrise to sunset with no rest.

**Weather (vv. 6-7).** The ancient Israelites were primarily an agrarian society. Dependent upon the land, water, and weather for their food, they understood the yearly growing cycles related to planting, tending, and harvesting their various crops. However, they did not have our modern, scientific understanding of the earth (v. 4), the sun (v. 5), the wind (v. 6), and water (v. 7). Nature was monotonously predictable but at the same time incomprehensible. The sun rose, the sun set, and rose again. The yearly seasons came one after another, then repeated. The wind moved in cycles, but the cycles themselves were seemingly random and without purpose, as the description of the wind "turneth about" and that it "returneth again according to his circuits" emphasizes. This is seen in the activities of streams as well. They ceaselessly flow into the sea, but the streams are never emptied, and the seas are never full. Both the wind and the water are ever moving, but seemingly never accomplish anything.

# STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

NOTES

## ECCLESIASTES 1:8-10

<sup>8</sup> All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. <sup>9</sup> The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. <sup>10</sup> Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Ecclesiastes 1:8-10 on page 15 of the PSG.

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from pages 15-16 of the PSG:

It's bad enough that what we do in life feels pointless, but the very pursuit of things will wear us out. No matter what we try to experience or own, we come away weary and unsatisfied.

- **No matter how much your eyes see, you won't be satisfied.** We've all seen things that took our breath away. There's beauty all around us, but all the glorious sights in God's creation and all the magnificent paintings, buildings, gardens, and wonders of the world will still leave us unsatisfied.
- **No matter what your ears hear, you won't be satisfied.** I don't know what you would consider music to your ears. Maybe it's the sounds of wildlife when you're out in nature, the patter of rain on the roof, or the sound of children playing. Or maybe it's actual music. But when the sounds fade away, what are we left with? We're left wanting more.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to further explain the meaning of the word "satisfied."

**RECAP:** We continue to ask the same questions of life that generations before us have. *What is life about? How does what I do matter?* Though the specifics of culture may change, generation after generation keep asking the same questions. And if we keep viewing life "under the sun," we'll keep coming to the same faulty conclusion: It's all futile!

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 16 of the PSG: **Where do you see evidence that people are experiencing weariness in our culture?**

**DO:** Direct the group to **Engage** with "And Yet" on page 17 of the PSG (page 25 of this Leader Guide) to give the group an opportunity to consider things that have left them feeling like life is futile.

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that without God, what we do in life is a miserable task.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*How has technology helped or hurt our level of weariness?*

## ECCLESIASTES 1:8-10 *Commentary*

**Connection to the Point.** This meaningless life made the Preacher weary and unsatisfied.

**Full of labour (v. 8).** The primary use of this Hebrew word (*yagea*) means “to work until one is tired or exhausted.” It comes from a verb (*yaga*) that describes the farmer’s labor in producing a harvest (Josh. 24:13), as well as the foolish pursuit of wealth that wears a person out (Prov. 23:4) and the person who wearies himself from spells and sorceries (Isa. 47:12,15). It can also describe those who grow tired in their pursuit of God (Lam. 5:5). The term’s most familiar usage is in Isaiah 40, where *yaga* emphasizes that while on their own, people may grow weary. Yet, the Lord never grows weary; He renews the strength of those who trust in Him (Isa. 40:28-31). In the context of Ecclesiastes 1:3-8, the term *yagea* summarizes the meaninglessness of both human life and the world itself—all is vain repetition.

**Man cannot utter it (v. 8).** This phrase is interpreted in two ways. First, the wearisome pursuit of life under the sun left Solomon wanting more of an explanation. Second, it could also be translated, “No one is able to speak.” Faced with the monotonous drudgery and seeming meaninglessness of life, Solomon had no words to say.

**Satisfied (v. 8).** The word (*saba*) means “to be full,” or “to have enough.” It also refers to being full to the point of overflowing, both literally and in reference to one’s desires. It describes how in response to the Israelites’ complaints during the exodus, God promised He would provide food for them, and they would eat until they were full (Ex. 16:12). Also, the psalmist wrote that he would be satisfied with being in God’s presence (Ps. 17:15).

The examination of human life and nature left Solomon unfulfilled. His eyes could see, but this was not satisfying. Seeing is only part of the process. Perceiving someone or something does not automatically lead to understanding who that person is or what that thing is. Seeing the nature of life and the world did not provide Solomon with the answers he was seeking.

**The ear . . . hearing (v. 8).** All that Solomon heard neither satisfied him nor gave him the answers he sought. The

Hebrew term for *hearing* (*shama*) generally means “to hear.” It can also be used in the follow ways—of listening to someone in the sense of paying attention (Job 33:1; Ps. 81:11), of obeying God’s commandments (Eccl. 5:1), of God hearing and answering someone’s prayers (Gen. 16:11; Judg. 13:9; Ps. 10:17), of hearing with understanding (Gen. 11:7) and listening critically. The words Solomon had heard, even from those considered to be wise (Eccl. 8:1), failed to provide a meaningful explanation of the nature of life. They left Solomon wanting more.

**The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be (v. 9).**

While the actors may come and go on the world stage and nations rise and fall, at the most basic level life and nature are cyclical, repetitive, closed systems. The cycles repeat over and over again. The sun rises, the sun sets, and the sun rises again. People are born, they live, they die, and others are born and repeat the same process. In this basic sense, nothing changes.

**There is no new thing under the sun . . . It hath been already of old time, which was before us (vv. 9-10).**

Solomon was not stating that technology could not advance and improve how we live life. But new inventions cannot break the cycle of sin, suffering, and death. Furthermore, people of every generation pursue the same things—fame, power, wealth, happiness, and so forth—and these things remain for the most part elusive. Even those who achieve such goals at the end of their lives find having those things changes nothing. Death still comes and all of one’s accolades, accomplishments, and possessions are left behind.

Even with all the advances and improvements by humanity in how we live, the central issue in life remains the same—sinful people need the love and forgiveness of God found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Apart from God, human experience and history for the most part consist of repetitive lives of toil, anguish, drudgery, and futility. “The past, the present, and the future are filled with oppression, hard work, and loneliness (4:1-12). There is nothing to look forward to.”<sup>2</sup>

# STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

NOTES

## ECCLESIASTES 1:11-14

<sup>11</sup> There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

<sup>12</sup> I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. <sup>14</sup> I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Ecclesiastes 1:11-14 on page 18 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** One way many people try to bring meaning into their lives is by building a strong reputation and leaving a legacy. We want to be remembered! I was always proud of my father. As a mechanical engineer, he had multiple patents in his name that were used in the oil field. However, my father has been gone for over twenty-five years, and while his contributions are still used, I daresay no one in his field likely remembers his name. Thankfully, my father didn't look to these outward contributions for the source of his purpose or significance.

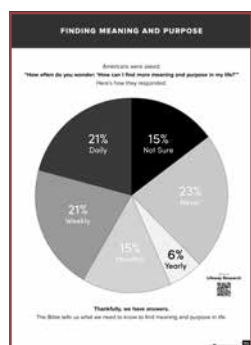
**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to explain what Solomon meant by "sore travail."

**RECAP:** Some of you might be feeling a little down with all this talk about futility and meaninglessness. Why are we focusing on such a negative topic? The good news is that our bad news helps point us to our ultimate hope. We might question our purpose, but we can find our purpose! That's the whole point of this study.

The good news is that our perspective is not limited to what is "under the sun." Our heavenly Father, who is above the sun, created this world through Christ and for Christ (Col. 1:15-17). All God created is good! Therefore, we can enjoy this world, and we can have confidence that history is moving toward God's appointed end. As we will see in the sessions that follow, as we seek Christ, all we need will fall into place.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*What makes a "miserable task" a miserable task?*



**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 18 of the PSG: **In your experience, what are some key ingredients of a meaningful life?**

**GUIDE:** Refer back to **The Point** for this session: **Apart from God, life is meaningless.**

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 2**, the "Finding Meaning and Purpose" poster. Summarize the pie chart for the group.

## ECCLESIASTES 1:11-14 *Commentary*

**Connection to the Point.** The Preacher looked for purpose but only found futility.

**No remembrance (v. 11).** The term *remembrance* (*zik-karon*) can refer to a memorial in the sense of a memorial day (Ex. 12:14), a memorial action (13:3-10), a memorial object (such as stones, Josh. 4:1-9), or a memorial in the sense of a record (Mal. 3:16). Finally, as used in this verse, it may refer to the mental act of remembering.

One's ancestry was important in Hebrew culture. It provided for one's identity as a child of Abraham and a member of God's covenant community. This is seen when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush and identified Himself as "the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6). One of the constant themes God emphasized to the Israelites was to remember Him and what He had done for them, so that they would not forget and go after the false gods and goddesses of the nations around them (Deut. 8:1-20).

But Solomon noted that ultimately most people, their deeds, and the memories of them are forgotten with the passing of time. Few are those who make such a mark under the sun that they are remembered and memorialized. But even such *remembrance* is in the end forgotten; the physical memorials may remain (for a time), but the significance of the people and events behind such memorials mean little or nothing to *those that shall come after*.

**Of former things . . . with those that shall come after (v. 11).** Again, Solomon emphasized the repetitive cycle all people are caught in. As generations come and go, the memory of former things fades away.

**I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem (v. 12).** Solomon, king of the united monarchy of Judah and Israel (reigned 970–930 BC), had the advantages of great wisdom, education, power, and wealth.

**I gave my heart (v. 13).** The Hebrew word literally refers to the internal organ which pumps blood but is also used in reference to the totality of a person's inner being, as well one's emotions, mind, and will. This clause describes the focused and intentional manner with which Solomon

sought for the meaning of life—he had set his heart (his whole being) on this search.

**Sore travail (v. 13).** The writings of ancient wisdom and philosophic literature considered the search for wisdom to be the highest calling in life, by which a person gained lasting fulfillment and significance.<sup>3</sup> However, Solomon labeled such a search a *sore travail*. The word *sore* (*ra*) can be translated as "bad" or "disagreeable"; in the ethical sense it means "evil." The search for the meaning of life in wisdom was a hopeless task because the answer was not to be found there. Because the meaning and purpose of life are found only in the context of God and a relationship with Him, wisdom and philosophy—which leave God out of the equation—can and do mislead; but they are also evil as they redirect the focus of one's life away from what God intends life to be in relationship with Him.

**All is vanity and vexation of spirit (v. 14).** Using the same Hebrew word for *vanity* (*hebel*) as in verse 2, Solomon again acknowledged that all human pursuits apart from God are ultimately without lasting meaning and significance. Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon noted the futility of searching for meaning and purpose in the pursuit of such things as wisdom and knowledge (1:12-18; 2:12-17), wealth and possessions (2:4-11; 5:10-20), pleasure (2:1-3), work (1:2-9), and politics (4:13-16; 5:8-9). These pursuits easily can and do become idols unto themselves. Solomon used the same term in reference to all the pleasures this life has to offer (2:1). In the end, they are all "vanity" (*hebel*) because they fail to satisfy.

The term *vexation* (*reuth*) means "to long" or "to strive." The pursuit of the things under the sun is vanity and wearies people's spirits. Only one who has a saving relationship with God (12:13-14) through Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18; 14:6) will find true meaning in life.

# LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

NOTES

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to page 19 of the PSG: What will you do this week to view life from a Christian worldview, a view from above the sun, where our Creator God dwells? Choose one of the following applications:

- **Read further.** Block out some time to carefully read the rest of Ecclesiastes. As you meditate on Solomon's words, consider what the Lord is teaching you.
- **Search your heart.** Take some quiet time away from the rush of life and ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart with the question: What am I looking to apart from God for meaning in my life?
- **Share the gospel.** We are surrounded by people with no purpose. Point them to Christ, the One who gives purpose to our lives.

## WRAP IT UP

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate **The Point** for this session: **Apart from God, life is meaningless.**

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use the **"Song"** option (page 25 of this Leader Guide) to help the group reflect on **The Point**.

**PRAY:** Thank God for blessing us with lives that are meaningful. Ask Him to help us share that truth with others.



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ENGAGE

**And Yet.** List three things that have happened in your work, relationships, home life, or finances that have left you feeling like life is futile. Write a sentence about each on the left. Then write the hope you hold onto on the right.

My Circumstance

**Example:** “My children don’t seem to know God, and it strains our relationships.”

My Hope

**Example:** “And yet, God is their Creator, and He knows them completely. I can trust Him to do what needs to be done in their lives.”

1

2.

3.

NOTES

BONUS CONTENT

**FAN ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, bring a small industrial fan to your group. If possible, a fan that will move back and forth automatically. Wind is a major image in this passage. To illustrate the idea of “pursuing the wind” to your group, have the fan blowing over your gathering during your meeting. (You can also bring small bags and challenge your group members to “catch the wind” from the fan whenever it blows their way.)

**SONG ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, play a song about life being meaningless without God. Then close in prayer.

**NOTE:** A video option can be found at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

1. Stephen R. Miller, “Ecclesiastes, Book of,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 455.  
2. Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 72.  
3. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 289.