

A man with a beard and a white shirt is holding a wooden crate filled with purple grapes. The background is a warm, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

Personal

Study Guide

ADULTS • KJV

FALL 2024

THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE

NAVIGATING FAMILY CONFLICT

RESTORED AND MADE NEW

Home improvement and car restoration. These topics remain some of the most popular TV shows and YouTube channels. We love to see old houses and cars given “a new lease on life.” Many of us watch these shows to give us ideas on what we can do to restore something of our own. And many of us know that to make such a restoration, we’re going to need outside help.

We are flawed human beings. Because of sin in our lives, we need restoration. We don’t just need “a new lease on life,” we need a full restoration. However, to be restored to the life and purpose God created us for requires outside help. None of us are capable of doing this on our own.

Thankfully, God Himself has stepped in to give us the restoration we need. Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, took our sin upon Himself, dying on a cross to remove and forgive our sin. He rose again to give us a new, eternal life.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

This restoration is for you, but it calls for belief and trust. If you would like to have a new life in Christ, repent of your sins and put your faith in Him. Admit to God that you are a sinner. Turn from the sin that has kept you from God and accept Jesus’s gift of forgiveness. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Express your repentance and faith by praying something like this:

“Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I’m sorry for all the wrong I’ve done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for forgiveness and for new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus’s name, Amen.”

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith. Be baptized as an expression of your faith.

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Send questions/comments to: Content Editor by email at brian.gass@lifeway.com; 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 BibleStudiesforLife.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 may mean you agree with that statement. Or maybe you're holding this book because you're curious about the Bible or seeking answers. Either way, I pray that you will 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. Periodically, throughout this book, you'll find "prayer prompts" to encourage you to pray. They are not labeled as such, but they are there: calls to pray about what you read, directions on turning a passage into a prayer back to God, and so forth. An example would be:

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

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

Lynn H. Pryor

Team Leader, *Bible Studies for Life*

How This Study Supports the Discipleship Plan (see page 129).

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.

THRIVE: LIVING ON PURPOSE

Session 1 Purpose Questioned • Ecclesiastes 1:1-14

Session 2 Purpose Abandoned • Psalm 8:1-6; 14:1-7

Session 3 Purpose Restored • Acts 3:14-26

Session 4 Purpose Lived • Galatians 5:16-26

Session 5 Purpose Expressed • Galatians 6:1-10

Session 6 Purpose Exemplified • Philippians 1:1-11

INTRODUCTION

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's new and unusual to me. "*What is it?*" I'm not interested in simply knowing its name; I want to know what it does. What's 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.

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.

Session 7



Purpose Questioned

THE POINT

Apart from God, life is meaningless.

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.

QUESTION 1:

What's something you get tired of doing over and over again?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-7

¹ The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ² Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. ³ What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? ⁴ One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. ⁵ The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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.

“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?”

QUESTION 2:

Which of the images in these verses capture your attention?

I wouldn’t expect someone like King Solomon to feel like that. After all, Solomon was the wisest person in the world. God had given him “a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee” (1 Kings 3:12). Not only that, but God had also given him “both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto [him] all [his]

days” (v. 13). Solomon wasn’t stingy with what he had; he was quite generous with his wisdom. Consider all the wisdom he shared in the book of Proverbs, truths that are so encouraging and insightful on how to get the most out of life. That’s why I was initially surprised to read Solomon’s cry of futility. If Solomon, with all his wisdom and wealth, had given up on finding any purpose or meaning in life, what hope is there for the rest of us?

Solomon began Ecclesiastes with an important question: “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” (1:3). The key to understanding where Solomon is taking us in this book is the phrase “under the sun.” Life lived “under the sun” (v. 3) is life lived apart from God. It’s a life viewed through the lens of someone who believes there is nothing above the sun, in the heavens. To live life only with a perspective of “under the sun” is to live life with no regard for God, the One who is above the sun. And with no regard for God, we will miss finding any purpose or meaning in life.

Our world continually promises happiness if we accept what it has to offer. Too many of us chase the things of this world. We fill our lives and our minds with the stuff that's "under the sun," hoping to push out the thoughts of futility. We can attempt to mask it, but underneath it all is still that thought: "Vanity of vanities" (v. 1).

God has ultimately revealed Himself in Jesus (Heb. 1:1-4). From the perspective of the Christ-follower, the question changes to: "Apart from Christ, what do we actually gain from all we do in this life?" But even as Christians, we can still struggle with the seeming futility of our day-to-day lives. We live and we die, generations come and go, but the earth keeps going through its repetitive natural cycles. Solomon used three illustrations from nature:

- **Life can seem like the repetitive cycles of the sun.** "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down" (Ecc. 1:5). Up and down, and it always returns to its place in a hurry. Do you work hard all the time, but feel like you always end up back where you started?
- **Life can seem like the directionless flow of the winds.** The wind goes around and around without any apparent purpose or direction. Ever feel like, no matter how fast you go, you're getting nowhere?
- **Life can seem like the never-ending flow of the rivers into the oceans.** Rivers and streams continue to flow into the ocean without ever filling it. Does it often feel like the harder you work at some tasks you never get finished?

If you've ever felt like your life was pointless, hang on. It's about to get worse before it gets better.

QUESTION 3:

Why do so many people feel unsatisfied, no matter how much they accomplish?

ECCLESIASTES 1:8-10

⁸ All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

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. I've had the opportunity to see some incredible sights, such as the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and the Great Wall of China. Maybe you've seen the famous Monet paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the "Mona Lisa" at the Louvre. There's beauty all around us, but

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. I can be enraptured when I hear Gershwin, Mozart, or (to my wife's annoyance) an opera aria. But when the sounds fade away, what are we left with? We're left wanting more.

But maybe a new experience will be different.

Nope. Being new and innovative doesn't change things. As Solomon said, "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" (Ecc. 1:9). Let's not write off Solomon as someone endorsing the Eastern worldview. Eastern religions view history as repetitive, an endless cycle through thousands of reincarnations. They sadly view our lives as reincarnating over and over and over, and some believe even the whole of history will happen again. That wasn't Solomon's view. No, Solomon was simply stating the obvious: "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Don't let the advertisers fool you. Companies spend millions trying to convince us that their product is "new and improved," but nothing is fundamentally new. Book publishers sometimes rerelease a book with a new cover, and sales go up. Even people who already own the book will purchase the book with a new cover. Newsflash: It's the same book! We see this in other ways in culture. Many of our movies are simply a remak-

ing of the old. Many of today's fashion trends are recycled styles. Hold on to your old clothes; they'll eventually come back in style again.

To be clear: All these things we've been referring to are not necessarily bad. We can appreciate the security and freedom a good job provides. Parenting children through school, activities, and sports can be rewarding. Working on home improvement projects can provide a level of satisfaction in working with your hands to make differences you can see. Active involvement in church life or volunteering in the community can offer a tangible benefit. Yet, there remains a common cry as we pursue all these things: We're exhausted.

I used to love cycling. Where I lived meant riding up some serious hills. I endured the hard push to get up the hill because of the rush of going down the other side. For too many of us, life feels like we're constantly going uphill, and we never come to the crest. This takes us right back to where I started this study: the seemingly endless turning of the hamster wheel. 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!

QUESTION 4:

Where do you see evidence that people are experiencing weariness in our culture?

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.”

1.

2.

3.

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.”

ECCLESIASTES 1:11-14

¹¹ 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. ¹² I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

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.

That was Solomon's sad point in verse 11: "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." Apart from Christ, all the work we do in this life adds nothing new and is quickly forgotten.

I think all along Solomon knew his purpose wasn't ultimately found in these things. From his vast wisdom, knowledge, wealth, and experience, Solomon set out to expose the emptiness of a secular worldview by trying to find meaning to "all things that are done under heaven" (v. 13)—that is, apart from God. His conclusion? It's all meaningless, "vexation of spirit" (v. 14).

Let me say again that these different areas—pleasure, work, wisdom, possessions—are

not necessarily bad. God is a good God, and He allows these things into our lives out of His goodness. God is not an advocate of a joyless existence. But if we look to those things for our purpose, we ultimately lose our main purpose.

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.

QUESTION 5:

In your experience, what are some key ingredients of a meaningful life?

LIVE IT OUT

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.


