

A photograph of a lighthouse with a black and white striped tower, situated on a dark, rocky pier. The lighthouse has a black lantern room with a weather vane on top. Large, white, foamy waves are crashing against the pier and the base of the lighthouse, creating a dramatic scene. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

Leader

Guide

SENIOR ADULTS
FALL 2024
CSB

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” (pp. 38–47).

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

eBook

Bible Studies for Life is also available as an eBook.
You can order a copy at lifeway.com/bsflebook.

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

Social Media

Connect with the *Bible Studies for Life* community.
It's a place where we can encourage and learn from each other. Facebook.com/BibleStudiesforLife

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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This Leader Guide is designed for leaders of senior adults ages 70 and up. We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter, and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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Welcome

Welcome!

The study of God's Word is important. The fact that you're holding this book may mean you agree with that statement. I pray that you will be transformed as we look into God's Word together.

“Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching 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 teach the word of Truth.

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

Lynn H. Pryor

Team Leader, *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.

New Feature: Bonus Content. QR codes will provide you with additional content to enhance your groups Bible study experience.

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. Other valuable tools found in the Leader Pack:

- Promotional videos to introduce each study for this quarter
- Sample Twitter® and 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



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

- The Leader Pack also includes access to digital files including:
 - JPEG files of the two main study images that you can use with any presentation software (Promote the study by placing these images into an announcement slideshow or display the images during the sessions to reinforce the study topic.)
 - PDF files of each pack item (Create multiple posters, during your session display the image on a screen using any presentation software, or post these images on social media to promote the study.)

Additional Ideas

Additional discussion questions and teaching suggestions for leaders are available online at www.BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

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.)

Encourage them to join the conversation with others on our Facebook page (Facebook.com/BibleStudiesforLife); our blog (BibleStudiesforLife.com); or on Twitter ([@BibleMeetsLife](https://twitter.com/BibleMeetsLife)).

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.

Prayer Requests

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Prayer Requests

[illegible]

Prayer Requests

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Prayer Requests

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The Three Roles Your Bible Study Group Needs

By Dwayne McCrary

For me, nearly forty years of marriage has included the wearing of 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 the wedding vows. The key word is *explicitly*, since they are covered under words and phrases like cherish, better or worse, and plight thee my troth. The other hats come with wearing the ring.

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

Ten years ago, David Francis and Ken Braddy defined the roles we play when assigned a Bible study group in terms of teacher, shepherd, and leader. (You can download a free copy of their original work at www.lifeway.com/trainingresources.) These three roles can help us handle the expectations that come with saying yes to a Bible study group.



TEACHER

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

The phrase “ongoing goal” stands out in the Francis and Braddy statement. The idea here is that we do this task week in and week out. We are not a coordinator or part-time teacher; we are to be regular in carrying out this role. As a teacher of preschoolers as well as adults, I can understand the value of being there every week. Preschoolers get accustomed to the patterns we follow. Seeing the same face each week eases some of the angst when being dropped off by a parent. The 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 are the ones who must consistently fulfill the role if we want the class or group to gel and become a safe place to share and learn.

SHEPHERD

Most likely, before our first day with a class or group, we were presented with a ministry list, a set of people assigned to be in our group. This ministry list was assigned with the idea that we 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 will identify people who also had some type of relationship with us. As shepherds, we know the needs of the 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 the group time, knowing who we may call on to share an experience that illustrates the main point being examined that day.

We will naturally find it easier to shepherd those who are more regular in the group. But we cannot forget about those who rarely or never attend. There is a reason they are on the class 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 found. We are responsible as a shepherd assigned to a specific number of sheep who also have names.

LEADER

Carrying influence makes a person a leader even when they did not seek to be one. Teaching and shepherding automatically gives us influence, and we become a leader by proxy. We see this in how we help our class or group understand the mission of reaching, teaching, and serving.

Ongoing Bible study groups carry some responsibility in reaching people who are far from God. As the leader, we have to keep reminding our group of that responsibility. Otherwise, we will become comfortable with our Christian huddle to the exclusion of others. As we reach more people, there comes a point when we are unable to teach and shepherd effectively. That is one reason for planting a new group once 12 to 18 are attending the current one. Someone must lead the group to see the need for planting the new group and for apprenticing others who can teach/shepherd/lead. The more groups we plant, the greater the potential that we can 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, and therefore, we need others to come along side us if we are going to be successful. That is good news, but with a caveat. The three roles are interwoven. We can hand off a role, but those roles stay closely connected. All three roles are connected by assignment but also by relationship. All three require us to build relationships with all 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 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.

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 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.

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|---|
| Sept. 1 | Session 1 | Purpose Questioned (Ecclesiastes 1:1-14) |
| Sept. 8 | Session 2 | Purpose Abandoned (Psalm 8:1-6; 14:1-7) |
| Sept. 15 | Session 3 | Purpose Restored (Acts 3:14-26) |
| Sept. 22 | Session 4 | Purpose Lived (Galatians 5:16-26) |
| Sept. 29 | Session 5 | Purpose Expressed (Galatians 6:1-10) |
| Oct. 6 | Session 6 | Purpose Exemplified (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.

- | | | |
|---------|-----------|--|
| Oct. 13 | Session 1 | Cain and Abel: Family Responsibility (Genesis 4:1-12) |
| Oct. 20 | Session 2 | Abram and Lot: Family Rights (Genesis 13:5-11,14-18) |
| Oct. 27 | Session 3 | Isaac and Rebekah: Family Favorites (Genesis 25:24-28; 27:5-13) |
| Nov. 3 | Session 4 | Jacob and Esau: Family Rivalry (Genesis 27:35-37,41; 33:1-4,8-11) |
| Nov. 10 | Session 5 | Joseph and His Brothers: Family Jealousy (Genesis 37:1-4,18-24,31-34) |
| Nov. 17 | Session 6 | Joseph and His Brothers: Family Reconciliation
(Genesis 42:3-5,21-24a; 45:1-5) |



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 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.

LYNN H. PRYOR

Lynn 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.

GREGORY T. POUNCEY

Gregory wrote the commentary for the Bible studies on *Thrive: Living on Purpose*. He has previously pastored churches in Alabama, and now is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Clinton, Mississippi. Gregory and his wife, Cathy, have two sons and one daughter.

Purpose Questioned



THE POINT

Apart from God, life is meaningless.

LIFE CONNECTION

The world claims a lot of things will give us security, happiness, and a sense of well-being. Chase any one of these, though, and we discover they fail to deliver. We're still left with a feeling of futility. Solomon made that discovery centuries ago, but it's not the end of the story. When God is in the picture, we see life from an infinitely better perspective.

THE PASSAGE

Ecclesiastes 1:1-14

THE SETTING

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.

GETTING STARTED

GUIDE: Invite the group to turn to **page 3** of the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review the titles of the six sessions of this study titled, "Thrive: Living on Purpose."

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the question on **PSG, page 15** and ask **Question 1: What's something you get tired of doing over and over again?**

GUIDE: Refer the group to "**The Bible Meets Life**" (**PSG, page 15**) and use the author's comments about the hamster wheel to point to the question, "Why?"

SAY: Unfortunately, people don't always find the answers for the big "why" questions of life. However, the Bible provides a sure answer for all of them.

GUIDE: Introduce **The Point** on **PSG, page 15: Apart from God, life is meaningless.**

OPTIONAL INTRODUCTION: Refer to "Life Connection" on page 18 for an alternate introduction to the study.

PRAY: Begin the session with prayer. Ask God to help the group see that a life lived apart from Him has no hope, no meaning, and no purpose.

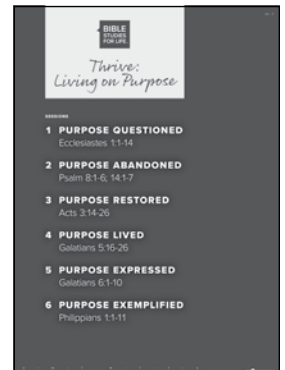
LEADER PACK: Display **Item 1: Thrive: Living on Purpose** poster to overview the study and reference session titles throughout the study.

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



5 MINUTES

NOTES



STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

Ecclesiastes 1:1-7

- 1** The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.
- 2** “Absolute futility,” says the Teacher.
“Absolute futility. Everything is futile.”
- 3** What does a person gain for all his efforts
that he labors at under the sun?
- 4** A generation goes and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.
- 5** The sun rises and the sun sets; panting,
it hurries back to the place where it rises.
- 6** Gusting to the south, turning to the north,
turning, turning, goes the wind, and the wind returns in its cycles.
- 7** All the streams flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full;
to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the verses, refer to “The Setting” on page 18 to establish the context of the biblical passage.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Ecclesiastes 1:1-7.

READ: Share the **Connection to The Point:** The Teacher saw everything in life as meaningless.

GUIDE: Refer the group to **PSG, page 17** and use the author’s comments to set the context for Solomon’s question (v. 3) and the images from nature.

Solomon began Ecclesiastes with an important question: “What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?” The key to understanding where Solomon is taking us in this book is the phrase “under the sun.” Life lived “under the sun” is life lived apart from God.

God has ultimately revealed Himself in Jesus Christ (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?”

As Christians, we can still struggle with the seeming futility of our day-to-day lives. The earth keeps going through its repetitive, natural cycles.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to the **Bible Commentary** to explain key words from vv. 1-7. Use these definitions to expand the meaning of the examples used for futility.

DISCUSS: **Question 2:** What are the pitfalls of pursuing what we’re most passionate about?

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

Alternate Question

How do you cope when you start to think that your life is meaningless?

Ecclesiastes 1:1-7 Commentary

The Teacher (v. 1). Teacher (*qohleleth*) may refer to “a speaker in the assembly.” The term is also translated in some Bible translations as “Preacher.” It is a title, not a proper name. The writer wrote not as a monarch and ruler over a nation, but as a teacher, one examining the meaning of life.

Son of David, king in Jerusalem (v. 1). The book has traditionally been attributed to David’s son Solomon. These identifiers, along with “king over Israel in Jerusalem” (v. 12), imply Solomonic authorship. Solomon was the only descendant of David who reigned over a united Israel, as the nation split in two after his death (1 Kings 12:1-17).

Absolute futility (v. 2). This is a translation of the double use of the Hebrew word *hebel* for emphasis, hence the use of the term *absolute*. *Hebel* means “breath” or “vapor.” It is used as a synonym for the wind (Isa. 57:13; see Eccl. 1:14). In the context of Ecclesiastes, *hebel* refers to the insubstantial and transitory nature of life.

Gain (v. 3). The word (*yithron*) is a commercial term which refers to “profit,” “gain,” or “advantage.” It has the sense of searching for real advantage or what is truly excellent in life. It comes from a verb (*yathar*) that means “to be left over” or “to remain.” In the end, no one finishes life having a net gain for all their striving, hard toil, and suffering.

Efforts (v. 3). The word (*amal*) refers to hard physical labor, usually in relation to the unpleasant factors associated with work. From a worldly perspective the **labors** of this life are vain and futile. They require exhausting work (toil) and yield drudgery, anguish, and misery; and such efforts ultimately do not last.

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 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.”²

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.

The earth remains forever (v. 4). The size and expanse of the world remain constant throughout all generations. People are born, live, die, and are forgotten, but the world stands unmoved and indifferent.

Panting (v. 5). Solomon poetically painted the sun as a racer—the sun rises, moves through the sky, and then sets. The word for *panting* (*shaaph*) can have either positive or negative connotations. It can be used of a woman in labor, who gasps breathlessly (Isa. 42:14). 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 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. 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.

STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

Optional Activity

See Bonus Content on page 27.

Use this activity after making reference to the author's comments regarding the futility of the pursuit of things under the sun today.

Alternate Question

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

Ecclesiastes 1:8-10

8 All things are wearisome, more than anyone can say.

The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing.

9 What has been is what will be,

and what has been done is what will be done;

there is nothing new under the sun.

10 Can one say about anything, “Look, this is new”?

It has already existed in the ages before us.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Ecclesiastes 1:8-10.

READ: Share the **Connection to The Point**: This meaningless life made the Teacher weary and unsatisfied.

GUIDE: Refer the group to **PSG, page 19** and use the author's comments to show that the pursuit of things under the sun continues today.

DISCUSS: **Question 3: Where do you see evidence that people are experiencing weariness in our culture?**

SUMMARIZE: Refer to the **Bible Commentary** to explain these key words from vv. 8-10. Use the meanings to reinforce the truth that Solomon is seeking spiritual satisfaction.

Wearisome (v. 8). The primary use of this Hebrew word (*yagea*) means “to work until one is tired or exhausted.” 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.

More than anyone can say (v. 8). 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 appetites and desires.

Nothing new under the sun . . . already existed (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.

DISCUSS: **Question 4: What are some experiences in life that have caused you to say, “there is nothing new under the sun”?**

ENGAGE: Invite the group to complete the Engage activity (**PSG, p. 20**).

TRANSITION: Not only is life apart from God unsatisfactory, it also lacks true purpose.

Ecclesiastes 1:8-10 Commentary

Things (v. 8). The Hebrew term for *things* (*dabar*) literally means “words,” and has the meaning of “to speak.” It is used in reference to such things as commands, promises, and pronouncements. This was the word used to describe the Ten Commandments (lit. “ten words,” Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). Solomon used the term in this verse to refer back to the forces of nature (Eccl. 1:4-7). The cyclical, never-ending movement of the sun, the wind, and the water are examples of the seeming absolute futility of life.

Wearisome (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). The term’s most familiar usage is in Isaiah 40, where *yaga* emphasizes that while on their own people may grow weary, the Lord never grows weary and 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.

More than anyone can say (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.

The eye . . . seeing (v. 8). Solomon turned to the senses of sight and sound to see if he could find the meaning of life. But seeing the nature of life left Solomon unsatisfied as well.

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 appetites and desires. The examination of human life and nature left Solomon unfulfilled. His eyes could see, but this was not satisfying. Perceiving someone or something does not automatically lead to understanding who that person is or what that thing is. Seeing the nature of life 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.” 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 the world and life. They left Solomon wanting more.

What has been is what will 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.

Nothing new under the sun . . . already existed (vv. 9-10). Solomon was stating that nothing can 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 accomplishments and possessions are left behind.

STUDY THE BIBLE



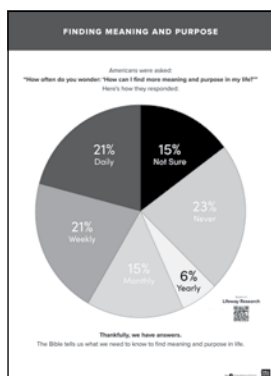
10 MINUTES

LEADER PACK:

Display Item 2:

Finding Meaning and Purpose poster.

Use this poster as a tool to create a conversation about how others respond to the issue of purpose and meaning in life.



Alternate Question

How does it change our perspective when we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"?

Ecclesiastes 1:11-14

11 There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them.

12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 I applied my mind to examine and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied.

14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Ecclesiastes 1:11-14.

READ: Share the **Connection to The Point:** The Teacher looked for purpose but only found futility.

RECAP: Refer the group to **PSG, page 21** and recap all the ways Solomon sought purpose only to experience futility.

Here was a man driven by exceptional wisdom and armed with the resources and means that come with being the king. He made it his mission to live life to the fullest. Yet in all he did—and he did a lot!—purpose and satisfaction eluded him.

He sought purpose in pleasure and “living the good life” (Eccl. 2:1-3).

He sought purpose through the pursuit of knowledge (2:14-16).

He sought purpose in achievement and in making something of himself (2:4-6).

He sought purpose in his possessions and what he owned (2:7-8).

He sought purpose in making a name for himself (2:9).

He sought purpose in making the world a better place (4:1-3).

He sought purpose in the pursuit of justice (8:14).

SUMMARIZE: Refer to the **Bible Commentary** to explain these key words from vv. 11-14. Use their meaning to show Solomon’s intentional pursuit of purpose and wisdom and the conclusion of his search.

DISCUSS: **Question 5:** In your experience, what are some key ingredients of a meaningful life?

Ecclesiastes 1:11-14 Commentary

No remembrance (v. 11). The term *remembrance* (*zikkaron*) can refer to a memorial in the sense of a memorial day (Ex. 12:14), a memorial object (such as stones, Josh. 4:1-9), or a memorial in the sense of a record. In this verse, it may refer to the mental act of remembering.

In Hebrew culture, one's ancestry provided for one's identity as a child of Abraham and a member of God's covenant community. 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, even when memorialized. 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 who will come after*.

Of those who came before . . . by those who follow them (v. 11). Again, Solomon emphasized the repetitive cycle all people are caught in. As one generation is born and grows to adulthood, past generations die and slowly fade from memory.

I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem (v. 12). Solomon (reigned 970–930 BC) had the advantages of great wisdom, education, power, and wealth.

I applied my mind (v. 13). The term for *mind* (*leb*) means “heart.” 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 searched for the meaning of life—he had set his heart (his whole being) on this search.

Examine and explore (v. 13). The term for *examine* (*darash*) means “to seek.” The word *explore* (*tur*) means “to search out with care” or “investigate.” Solomon was making an intentional study in his quest for the meaning of life.

Miserable task (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.⁴ However, Solomon labeled such a search a *miserable task*. 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.

Keep them occupied (v. 13). The term *occupied* (*anah*) encompasses all the pursuits of humans, including moral, ethical, and religious activities. It also includes Solomon's pursuit for wisdom and understanding. Solomon did not despise education and human pursuits. He merely recognized that they had their limitations in a life that does not include God.

Futile, a pursuit of the wind (v. 14). 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. In the end they are all “futile” (*hebel*) because they fail to satisfy.

Like chasing after the wind, all things done under the sun are a never-ending pursuit that leaves the pursuer unsatisfied and empty-handed. 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.



5 MINUTES

Magazine Excerpt

Refer the group to the article "Jordan River Rules" (PSG, pp. 24–25) from *Mature Living* by Robert Morgan to provide an alternate biblical perspective from the book of Joshua.

LIVE IT OUT

REVIEW: Live It Out (PSG, page 23). Encourage the group to follow through this week with at least one of the 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.

If we fall into the trap of seeing life merely from a secular viewpoint, life will feel like an endless, monotonous hamster wheel. Reset your perspective and view life from above the sun.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: Apart from God, life is meaningless.**

GUIDE: Remind the group that Solomon's pursuits for significance, meaning, and purpose were all "under the sun" which is a life lived apart from God. However, believers can find their purpose.

PRAY: Lord, thank You for providing the answers to the big questions in life. Help us to seek Your wisdom in searching for our purpose and meaning. Encourage us to look for purpose in life through the lens of our relationship with You.



SCAN ME

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Engage

The teacher in this passage states that all pursuits outside of God are futile and ultimately miserable. In the space below, record some things in your life that you have come to realize are without purpose or meaning that you should eliminate from your life.

Bonus Content (Optional)

Optional Activity: Bring two key-chain lasers (or flashlights). Keep one and give the other to someone else who will try to chase your light with theirs. Direct your light around to various places in the room. Make it challenging, but let them occasionally “catch” the light. Do this for 30-60 seconds, and then discuss as a group how life can keep us “chasing” the next shiny thing, trying to keep up with others. Remind them that without God, all the things we chase—even if we “catch” them—will not bring joy or meaning.

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