

Small Group Guide – Week 24 Is Everything Really Meaningless?

The Church at Brook Hills

June 14-20, 2010

Ecclesiastes

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Ecclesiastes

“Both Job and Proverbs conclude that God creates and dispenses knowledge that renders life bearable and even enjoyable (cf. Job 38:1-42:6; Prov. 2:1-15; 8:22-36). Neither book claims that the world is always a friendly place for the righteous or the wicked. Rather they observe the power and wisdom inherent in creation and then probe the limits of revelation and experience to explain life's perplexing issues. It is within this canonical framework that Ecclesiastes must be interpreted” (House, 470).

The thesis of the book is that everything “under the sun” is vain, empty and meaningless. The Preacher even concludes that wisdom is not fully satisfying because the wise cannot comprehend all that the Lord does in the world.

“Perhaps more than anywhere else in Scripture – except the cross of Christ – Ecclesiastes presents the real effects of sin in our world” (Dever, 538). The world around us seeks to allure us with promises of meaning and success in things that are ultimately meaningless. It is a bad place for our investment. The Preacher spends most of the thirteen chapters showing us the bad news of the futility and meaningless of pursuing after things of this world before allowing us to see the good. Verses 12:13-14 “bring us the ultimate message of this book: only with God do we have a clear and true perspective that gives meaning to life” (Dever, 542). At the very end, the author summarizes the message of all of the Old Testament. He instructs the reader to fear God (calls us to a right relationship with God), keep God's commandments (brings to mind the law) and third he reminds the reader that God will judge every deed. We are to live in light of the future judgment that is coming.

“As we turn to the New Testament, we see that Jesus Christ is the one who redeems us from the vanity, the meaninglessness under which the Preacher suffered. Jesus redeemed us from the Preacher's meaninglessness world by subjecting himself to it...Jesus conquered the biggest fear facing the Preacher. He showed that for believers death is not the end of all meaning, but the entrance into the presence of God” (Longman, 40).

Study the Text . . .

It has been stated that Ecclesiastes is an essay in apologetics that defends the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternative (Eaton, 44).

- Read Ecclesiastes and write down all the different examples that the writer gives of vanity from wisdom to wealth.
- Read Acts 17:16-34. Is Paul's method of addressing the Athenians similar to Ecclesiastes? (neither alludes to God's commandments until the end)
- The word vanity or meaningless occurs 35 times in this short book. It refers to something insubstantial, temporary or passing. The author writes that everything “under

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the sun” is vanity. “Under the sun” refers to life that is apart from God. What then is not meaningless? What is a meaningful life?

- Ecclesiastes is alluded to in Romans 8:18-21. The word translated “futility” in Romans 8:20 is the same word used in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) to translate the motto word of Ecclesiastes “vanity.” What is the connection to Romans? How is meaningless and futility removed?

Group Discussion . . .

Begin by asking group members to share how they measure success? How do they measure success at work, at home (in their relationships with their spouses and children), and at church (in small group or even the church budget)?

- Do you agree with “the Preacher” that everything under the sun is vanity? What does “under the sun” mean? What is “vanity?”
- What “under the sun” are you most attracted to, and most tempted to believe that in it true life is found?
- Did Paul ever present the gospel in a manner similar to Ecclesiastes (where the sinfulness of the world is presented upfront and intensely and then followed by the gospel)?
- Why is it important for Christians to read Ecclesiastes?
- What is the truth that Ecclesiastes clearly presents to the reader? What or who are we to live for and how are we to live?
- Is everything “under the sun” really meaningless?
- Have someone read Romans 8:18-21, 1 Corinthians 15:58 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. According to these verses what is the purpose of life in this world?
- How does Christ bring meaning and life into a dead and meaningless world?
- What are the “false Christ’s, false Messiah’s, false hopes” that are most advertized and promoted today?
- “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (12:13). Who or what do you fear other than God at times? What’s the relationship between those things we pursue (vanities) and the things we fear?

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