

## **“Chasing Wisdom” Ecclesiastes Series**

### Chasing Wisdom and Grasping the Wind

**Opening Question:** *“People are happier and better off if they have naive, unrealistic ideas about how life works.”* Debate in favor of and against this statement. Vote as a group to decide which argument is more convincing.

**Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-15 & 9:11.**

#### **Background:**

- There are two voices speaking in Ecclesiastes, the book’s anonymous author and the hardened critic Qohelet, translated into English as “the Teacher.” **The author** (who only speaks twice—in Eccl. 1:1 and Eccl. 12:9-14) challenges us with Qohelet’s teaching and helps contextualizes it for us. **Qohelet** is likely the Israelite king Solomon (see 1 Kings 1-11), widely regarded as Israel’s most successful ruler and the wisest man of his age. Solomon is also the primary author of the biblical book of Proverbs, but that book was written in an earlier, more idealistic season of life.

#### **Explore Together:**

1. What is the Teacher’s central claim about life? Put it in your own words.
2. What legacy do you want to leave behind? For how many years into the future would you like your achievements to be recognized and remembered?
3. In what ways have you felt to be the victim of random chance? The beneficiary of it?
4. According to the Teacher, what are some unreliable foundations upon which to construct your sense of meaning and purpose? Why?
5. What are we supposed to do with this bleak perspective on life? What is God’s role in the Teacher’s monologue?

#### **Apply It:**

- ◆ Qohelet warns that we are wearing ourselves out in a hopeless pursuit of things that we cannot ultimately attain and which—even if we did—would not in the end satisfy. Take a moment to reflect on the ways that you are seeking to find meaning and purpose apart from God. Acknowledge those things to God and invite him to teach you again this year how to live well. Close by praying together as a group.

## Ecclesiastes 1 (ESV)

1 The words of **Qohelet** [the Teacher, lit. “the one who gathers people“], the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 “**Vanity** of vanities,” says Qohelet, “vanity of vanities! All is vanity. 3 What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? 4 A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. 6 The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. 7 All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. 8 All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? It has been already in the ages before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

12 I, Qohelet, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and look, all is vanity and a striving after wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted...

9:11 Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

הָבֵל hevel — “vanity”

- Used 38 times in Ecclesiastes
- Literally “vapor,” “breath,” “smoke”
- Figuratively 1) “temporary,” “fleeting”; 2) “enigma,” “paradox”