# Nothing



A Practical Study Guide on Ecclesiastes





The words of the Preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR | 5

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY GUIDE | 6

INTRODUCTION | 8

CHAPTER 1 | 10 Nothing

CHAPTER 2 | 20 Nothing but Smoke

CHAPTER 3 | 30 Nothing but Exhaustion

CHAPTER 4 | 40 Nothing but Shortcomings

CHAPTER 5 | 50 Nothing but Pleasure

CHAPTER 6 | 60 Nothing but Infoxication

CHAPTER 7 | 70 Nothing but Makeup

MY THOUGHTS | 92

MY PRAYER | 93

CREDITS | 94

FOOTNOTES | 95

CHAPTER 8 | 80 Someone

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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#### TIP 1 - Prayer and Journaling

"Prayer is the opening of your heart to God as to a friend."

The most important thing you can do as you begin this journey on the meaning of life is to invite God to be a part of it. Start every single chapter with a heartfelt prayer. Be honest with God about your expectations and your desires. Share your struggles and pain with Him. Call upon the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to what you need to learn on this important topic. Ask God to make an impact in your heart, so that this study results in growth for you. Make your prayer time with God special. Use silent prayer, keep a prayer journal, start a prayer group, use lettering to write down your prayers... the possibilities are endless. Choose a way that helps you best communicate with God.

Take an active and intentional approach to learning about Ecclesiastes. Use a journal or a notebook to write down what the Holy Spirit inspires as you read or listen to the text. Don't just take it in, but rather react and respond to the ideas that are presented. Turn them into your own words. Write down your conclusions and key takeaways, and also your questions. If you are the creative type, go ahead and practice lettering, drawing, composing...



#### TIP 2 - Icebreaker

Each chapter begins with an Icebreaker to help you connect with the main text. Use it as a way to get the conversation started and encourage everyone to actively participate.

# How to Make THE MOST OF THIS Study Guide



TIP 3 - Prayer of the Day

In each chapter, the aim of the prayer of the day is to focus your prayer time on the topic of the day. This short prayer after the main text should get you started and prompt you to invite the Holy Spirit to act in your life in a specific way. You can use it for silent prayer, group prayer, written prayer and lettering.

We need God, and the way we communicate with Him is through prayer. Start with prayer and end with prayer.



#### TIP 4 - Questions

The questions at the end of each chapter can be used for personal reflection or group discussion. We also hope they encourage you to ask more questions of your own. If in a group, always be respectful and loving towards others. Listen actively and respectfully share your own views.



#### TIP 5 - Personal Challenge

The Bible is all about application. It makes no sense to read it and not be affected or transformed by it. An action must inevitably follow. The *Personal Challenge* has the goal of helping you implement and put into practice a key idea from the text.



#### TIP 6 - Go Deeper

This section invites you to go deeper in the study. A journal, note-book or your phone notes app will come in handy. It will also be great to consult Bible commentaries and dictionaries. Ask for recommendations from your pastor, youth director or mentor.

The goal is for you to become an active learner in this study, so that you can get the most out of it. You can do this section on your own or with friends. You will find additional Bible texts to read as well as questions, suggestions for research, prayer prompts, and quotations for reflection.



#### TIP 7 - Activities

Every chapter includes one or two activities that can be used in a group setting as an interactive way of addressing key ideas in the text. They are great to use in youth groups, small groups, youth activities, field trips, etc. They can help you to introduce each chapter or be a group activity at the end.



any theologians live in ivory towers. Isolated from the real concerns of the people, they are preoccupied with pursuing topics so profound that they are of little interest to ordinary mortals. I have decided that this study guide will not be like that. I put on my work overalls and started chatting with people, all at the same time. Yes, with everyone! Well, at least with the opinions that everyone shares online. How did I do that? Quite simple! I asked ChatGPT¹ some questions about Ecclesiastes to get us started in this journey.

#### What can you tell me about Solomon?

Solomon was king of Israel and the son of King David. He is renowned for his wisdom. The Bible recounts the story of

Solomon's judgment involving two women claiming to be the mother of a baby, demonstrating his profound wisdom (1 Kings 3:16-28). He is also known for the construction of the First Temple in Jerusalem, which became the central place of worship for the Israelites. Solomon is a prominent figure in various religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

That is just scratching the surface, focusing on Solomon's clichés. Nothing on his conversation with the Lord asking for wisdom, nor on the mistakes of marrying a multitude of women, nor on his intense life experiences that led him to write Ecclesiastes. A book filled with reality and wisdom. A book that is still all the rage.

#### What do you think about Ecclesiastes?

Ecclesiastes is a book in the Bible that provides a very realistic and pragmatic view of life. Its main message is the fleetingness of life and the futility of seeking happiness in material things. It is a very deep and thought-provoking book that challenges readers to reflect on the true meaning of life.

Wow! Pretty good! Although something essential is missing: at the end of it all, Ecclesiastes puts the focus on God and reminds us that the key is to respect Him.

#### Explain "vanity of vanities"

The phrase "Vanity of vanities" is a key theme in the Book of Ecclesiastes, particularly in its opening verse (Ecclesiastes 1:2): "Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Understanding this phrase is crucial to grasping the overall message of Ecclesiastes. This imagery conveys something insubstantial, fleeting and elusive. In the context of Ecclesiastes, the author reflects on the fleeting and transient nature of human life, as well as the search for meaning and fulfillment in a world filled with injustice, suffering and inequality. The term "vanity of vanities" is used to summarize this reflection and to convey the idea that it is important to focus on what is essential and on what is truly important in life, rather than worrying about superficial or fleeting things.

Nothing to object. Nailed it.

### Can you expand on the phrase "for everything there is a season"?

The phrase "for everything there is a season" suggests that there is an appropriate time for every activity and experience. In other words, it means that it is important to be patient and wait for the right time to act or make decisions. This phrase reminds us that we cannot do everything when we want to, and that we must respect the timing of things so that they can happen in a natural and balanced way. It also teaches us to be aware that there is a time to sow, a time to reap, a time to rest, etc. In conclusion, "for everything there is a season" invites us to reflect on the importance of patience and wisdom in waiting for the right time to act.

Excellent, although it lacks perspective. Our reality is not only about the present (although that is the message we get from materialists); it is also about the projection into the future: the hope of a better world to come.

# I would like you to clarify "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments."

This phrase refers to the idea that the highest priority in life is to have reverential fear and respect for God, and to follow His rules and teachings. In this sense, all human inquiry and reflection should lead people to live a life in harmony with the divine precepts. This principle is based on the religious belief that reverent and respectful fear of God is the starting point for acquiring wisdom. In the biblical context, "fear" often denotes a sense of reverence, awe, and deep respect for God, rather than simple fear or terror. When one has this attitude of humility and surrender before God, one is more open to receiving His guidance and wisdom. Therefore, to become wise we must first have a reverent fear of God, and this will lead us on the right path to wisdom and help us make right and just decisions in life. The verse indicates that the ultimate purpose of human life is found in relation to God.

Yes! That is the worldview of the Bible. Nothing more to add... for now.

## SHALL WE BEGIN? —>

1



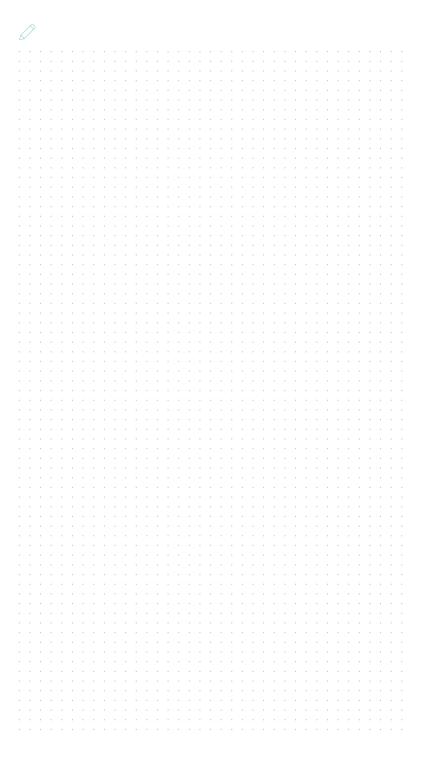
KEY TEXT:

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11

Icebreaker



## When someone mentions Ecclesiastes, what comes to mind?





**BUT POWER AND** 

ITS COLLATERAL

EFFECTS ENDED UP

CORRUPTING HIM.





# Yesterday

Sayings of the Preacher, son of David, king of Jerusalem.
"Nothing at all!", said the Preacher,
"Nothing at all!"
All is nothing.

THE PREACHER

(ECCLESIASTES 1:1, 2 VA<sup>2</sup>)

here has never been a wiser nor a more enlightened person on Earth. Nope, I'm not talking about Aristotle or Einstein; I'm talking about Solomon, the son of David, king of Jerusalem. His life begins within the palace and the court, with their intricacies and conspiracies, their bickering and quarreling, and—let's not forget—the multiethnic harem. Against this colorful backdrop, Solomon grows with the dignity of a prince; an aspiring monarch. However, unlike his colleagues on the other Canaanite thrones, he decided, early on in his reign, to summon the people before Yhwh. What a priceless decision!

But power and its collateral effects ended up corrupting him.



Sin has a numbing effect. It turns the uneducated into coarse and purely instinctive beings. It turns the educated into people who are capable of taking evil to its most deplorable extremes. And Solomon was considerably learned. It is not the time to give you a precise description of what happened in this period (we already have too many *inopportune* ideas); there is no need to sink deeper in the mud. What I can say is that, yes, his decisions saddened the Spirit greatly.

I would like to imagine Solomon sitting on his throne. His face—languid and emaciated by the passions that suck the life out of you—barely reflected the beauty of a godly man. The dissonance within his court reverberated within him at all times. "Spite" was the word that defined every one of his movements and thoughts. But there, in the depths of his heart, a spark was kindled. And he decided to heed the invitation of that minute<sup>3</sup> light of the Spirit. Solomon found God again and was persuaded to start practicing the trade of Preacher (Ecclesiastes).

What did a Preacher do? He was a kind of informant, someone who gathered the people to make plain what everyone should know. Solomon overcame his sin, embraced repentance and decided to put into practice the noble art of admonishing. As the saying goes, "Don't shoot the messenger." He joined the guild of divine messengers and was given a glistening pin that read "Preacher".

What did he preach about? Nothingness. Nothingness? Yes, that which is worth *nothing*, that which is *not* worth it; that superficiality which floods our lives with *meaninglessness*.

## Today

Never before in the history of the world have non-places occupied so much space.4

THE PHILOSOPHER

While traveling in Kyrgyzstan, on the highway from Bishkek to Tokmok, we stopped with some friends at a gas station that was in no man's land. We had entered Kazakhstan, but had never left Kyrgyzstan! Weird, right? It was the perfect excuse to talk about non-places. We had so much fun!

# THESE NON-PLACES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY FLUIDITY, FLEETINGNESS AND A LACK OF BELONGING.

What are *non-places*? They are places devoid of meaning, identity and social ties. For example, airports, train stations, shopping malls or highways. They are places that people go through quickly; places where people do not establish meaningful connections with their surroundings or with other people. These *non-places* are characterized by fluidity, fleetingness and a lack of belonging. This contributes to the sense of anonymity and alienation of the individuals who go through.

In our society, non-places are becoming increasingly common; they are taking center stage in people's daily lives. They represent the lack of spaces for gathering and belonging, which increases the fragmentation and loss of authentic human connections. These impersonal and depersonalized spaces reflect how precarious social ties currently are, where everything is ephemeral and superficial.

The most worrying aspect of *non-places* is that they colonize spaces. Our spaces. Classrooms merely become the way to land a good job (or so we think). Children are "parked" before their phones, numbed by *tiktoking*. In family dinners, the most common sound is the click of the phone's keyboard. Church is a time of transit that, by using emotionally "ecstatic" experiences, relativizes the profound and the transcendent and substitutes it for the merely stimulating.

And *non-places* lead nowhere because that which has no meaning, makes no impact and fosters no improvement.

How similar are we to Solomon's superficial and luxurious life! How much do we need to reflect on Ecclesiastes! We, the *surfers* of existence, should understand what the Bible and our surroundings propose in order to make decisions, decisions that will enable us to enjoy a meaningful life.

## **Tomorrow**

Solomon was that guy from the Bible, right?

YOUNG PERSON ADDICTED
TO CALL OF DUTY

The idea of "meaninglessness" from Ecclesiastes bothers us because we believe that we are on the pinnacle of knowledge. The truth is we perceive fragments of reality; most of it eludes us. We are barely aware of the "macro" reality of a cosmic conflict of such magnitude that it has universal and eternal consequences. On the other hand, it is very healthy to acknowledge that we don't need to have all the answers or have answers for everything. I'm not saying we should not delve deeper. But we should rid ourselves of the bitterness of being know-it-alls, of knowing all reasons, all methods and all solutions. We should not lose sight of a few matters:

- Meaningfulness. We are children of God and He has created us with a world of possibilities. Sin obliterates us and tries to denaturalize us, but God's love compensates for it. A simple prayer asking for forgiveness or saying thank you for His grace changes absolutely everything. Christ transforms our "nothingness" into His "everything." Christ gives meaning to our lives.
- Focus. We are distracted; we have spiritual ADHD. Our days fly by with study and work, love and heartbreak, deficit and surplus, materialism and spirituality. We need the focus of the Mission. The joy of the Good News of the Gospel cannot be diminished and we must share it with those who only have work to do, passions to master, debts to pay or things to possess. It is the Mission that Jesus gave us so that our lives as His followers make sense.
- Coherence. The best message, the one that makes a difference, is a coherent and meaningful life. The "nothingness" is not overcome by adding more "nothingness," but rather with Jesus' "everything." As a Christian—and this is a radically different way of thinking—I believe that Jesus makes up for what I lack. He strengthens me, He improves me, He amplifies kindness within me, He increases my capacity for wisdom, and, above all, He replenishes me. He complements those spaces I cannot reach and calms my mind. Christ makes me coherent.

Solomon was wise because he understood—and this is huge what his limits were. But he knew something else: God makes up for what we lack. That is why he was the wisest. He spoke of nothing so that you could understand the Who who can give you everything.



#### PRAYER OF THE DAY





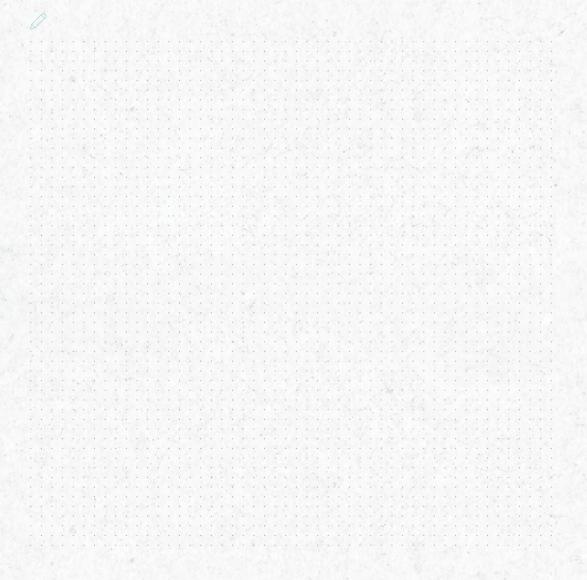
"No matter how
much we see, we are
never satisfied.
No matter how much
we hear, we are
not content."

**ECCLESIASTES 1:8 (NLT)** 

## QUESTIONS



- What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?
- 2 Solomon had a promising start, and yet "power and its collateral effects ended up corrupting him." What can someone do to avoid going through the same negative experience?
- In today's reading, Víctor describes "non-spaces". He adds, "The most worrying aspect of non-places is that they colonize spaces." What spaces are non-places colonizing in your life? (Think of all areas of your life: work, study, home, friendships, etc.) Is there reason to worry? Explain why.
- Where do you find hope in today's reading?
- **3** What do you expect to gain from this study on Ecclesiastes?





#### GO DEEPER

- **1. Read** Ecclesiastes 1:1. What is the role of the "Preacher" in the book (see also Ecclesiastes 12:11)?
- 2. Read Ecclesiastes 1:2 in several Bible translations (for example, NKJV, NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB, CEB and MSG) and compare them with Víctor's translation at the beginning of this chapter. How do the different translations convey the meaning of verse 2?
- 3. Research the Hebrew word used in Ecclesiastes 1:2, "hevel" (you can use different Bible translations, dictionaries and commentaries, and ask your pastor or mentor for help). This word appears 38 times in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is often translated as meaningless, but it is literally "vapor" or "smoke". After your research, how would you define "hevel"?
- 4. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. What thoughts come to your mind after reading these introductory verses? What are your expectations and questions going forward?

- 5. **Reflect.** "LIFE AS A VAPOR. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were subjected to death and decay as a result of the fall. In Genesis 4, their firstborn son, Cain, kills their second-born, Abel. Abel, whose name in Hebrew, hevel, is in fact the word for vanity in Ecclesiastes, is born and dies within 6 verses" (Holcomb, Justin S. Ecclesiastes: Knowing the Bible, p. 14. Crossway. Kindle Edition). What do you make of this after reading Ecclesiastes 1:2?
- 6. **Reflect.** "The book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon in his old age, after he had fully proved that all the pleasures earth is able to give are empty and unsatisfying. He there shows how impossible it is for the vanities of the world to meet the longings of the soul. His conclusion is that it is wisdom to enjoy with gratitude the good gifts of God, and to do right; for all our works will be brought into judgment" (EGW SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, 1164).
- **7. Watch** these two videos by Bible Project (DISCLAIMER: this is a non-SDA resource):
  - a. *Ecclesiastes Summary:* https://bibleproject.com/ explore/video/ecclesiastes/
  - b. *Understanding Ecclesiastes:* https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/wisdom-ecclesiastes/



#### A Date with Yourself

We sometimes need a little "nothing" to focus on what is truly important in our lives. That is why today's challenge consists in spending ten or fifteen minutes doing *nothing*. You can think of it as a date with yourself. If doing nothing sounds stressful, try going out for a walk or spending that time in nature. What is important is that you try to face the *nothingness*... to think about the *everything*. When we manage to silence the "noise" of our responsibilities and daily stress, spending time doing nothing is a gift. In addition, if you spend these minutes connecting with God and allowing Him to speak to you, it will surely be easier for you to hear what He has to say.



Here is the soundtrack for this challenge:
Soundtrack 1
https://bit.ly/WOP25Soundtrack1



#### **ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **Activity Description**

The goal in this activity is to introduce yourselves to the group. Taking turns, each one of you will introduce yourselves, while abiding by these rules: you may not share your age, your nationality nor what you do for a living (whether it's working or studying).

Think about how you would define yourself without sharing information about your circumstances; focus on your character traits instead.

#### **Application**

Was that easy? What was the first thing that came to your mind?

At times, we are so immersed in our daily routines that we forget who we really are, why we do what we do and why we want to improve. Remember that circumstances do not define us; we decide what defines us.

#### **ACTIVITY 2: THE RELATIONSHIP LINE**

Materials: Measuring tape (or rope), sheets of paper, pens.

#### **Activity Description**

- Extend a measuring tape on the floor and write the word "acquaintance" at one end, and the word "friend", at the other end.
- Each participant must now think (more or less randomly) of ten people in their life and evaluate where they would put them along the stretched measuring tape (closer to "acquaintance" or closer to "friend").
- Finally, discuss the following questions:
  - How did you meet each of these people?
  - How has your relationship changed since you met? Have you gotten closer or grown further apart?
  - What steps can you take to grow closer and have a true and meaningful friendship with each person?

#### **Application**

Our lives are not only being filled by non-spaces; we are increasingly meeting more and more non-friends. Even though this concept sounds strange, this refers to acquaintances with whom we never have a deep relationship. With the rise of social media, we get to meet more people, but we often have a more superficial relationship with them, so we would not call them real friends.

Now that you have a mental map of your relationship with at least ten people, you may use it as a starting point to improve your relationships. Share these names with God and pray that your relationships may be filled with *content* so that they become genuine friendships. You may now grow your mental map by thinking of more people, following up and making sure you do not lose any friends along the way.

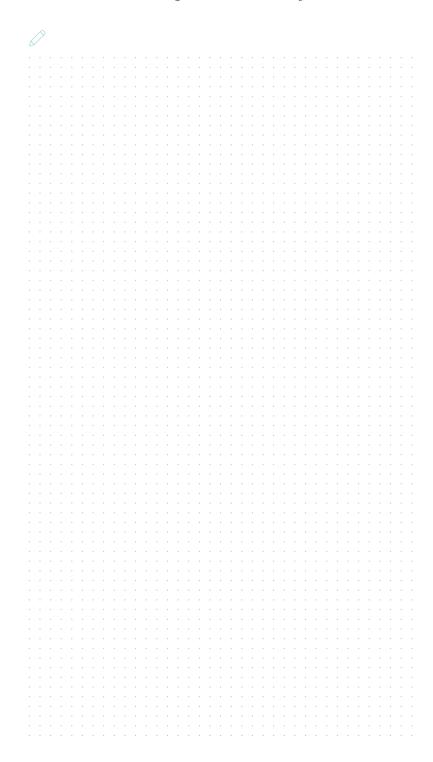


KEY TEXT:





# When someone talks about living "The Good Life", what do they mean?



# Yesterday

I have seen all the activities that take place under the sun. And, guess what, everything is fleeting; it is like chasing after the wind.

THE PREACHER

(ECCLESIASTES 1:14 VA)

olomon chooses an excellent simile to talk about what is superficial: the wind. What sense does it make to "chase after the wind"? How can one even grasp air? We use a similar expression nowadays when something or someone does not add up or make sense to us; "It's all smoke and mirrors," we say. What seems interesting ends up being completely irrelevant. So, when Solomon stops to analyze the activities that people engage in, he comes to the conclusion that everything is fleeting and meaningless. How would you *label* someone who chases after a gust of wind? You would probably think that there is something wrong with them

Among all these *superficialities*, the insignificance of life is the first concept Solomon explores. He provides a brief social analysis that shows us that there is much to improve in humans' quality of life. It was so then and it is so now. Those of us who practically *live* online are not always aware of what life looks like for most people. We are among the privileged few who have access to technology and a state of well-being. There are many out there, however, whose lives are hanging by a thread. If we would open our eyes, with sense and sensitivity, we would realize that life is fragile. That is Solomon's starting point.

Another superficiality that Solomon focuses on has to do with time. We cannot control time even if we spend our day entering data into *Microsoft To Do*. Humans tend to micromanage, to obsess over having everything under control. God's concept of time is different; He is fascinated by creativity, multiculturalism,



OUR KNOWLEDGE IS THE

SUM OF COPIOUS INFORMATION,

BUT IT WILL NEVER LEAD

TO WISDOM IF GOD IS NOT

A KEY FACTOR.



# Today

In such a world there are not many rocks
left on which struggling individuals
can build their hopes of rescue and on
which they can rely in case of personal
failure. Human bonds are comfortably
loose, but for that same reason frightfully unreliable, and solidarity is
as difficult to practice as its benefits,
and even more its moral virtues,
are difficult to comprehend.

THE PHILOSOPHER

Nowadays, the superficial would be associated with obsessing over image, physical appearance and having material goods. It can also manifest itself in giving excessive importance to branded clothing, mobile phones and accessories. Or in the need to constantly share an active and exciting social life on social media. In addition, superficiality can lead to prioritizing outward appearance and social

polychromy, and gifts. That is why there is a time for everything. He gives us juicy and colorful moments so that we can grow in everything. This idea clashes with our compartmentalized culture, enslaved by calendars. We perceive, consume and enjoy time from the perspective of an instant. Time is relative not only in quantity but also in quality.

And one last superficiality. Interestingly, Solomon questions the many "letters" (no, there is no biblical excuse for not studying). Humans are creatures that are affected by the *imbalance* of sin. Not only on a moral level, but also on a *perceptual* level. We are unable to fully understand because we cling to our biases. Our knowledge is the sum of copious information, but it will never lead to wisdom if God is not a key factor. For being a creature implies having a Creator; connecting these dots is what brings us understanding, hope and possibilities. Respect for God clarifies the meaning of life.



status over a person's inner qualities, such as intelligence, personality or morality. And it inevitably leads to uncommitted relationships, based only on the image one projects to the world.

Of course, superficiality is a cultural thing and it is influenced by the rules and values of the society in which we live. Therefore, we need to reflect on our own priorities and values so that we do not fall prey to the *irrelevant* and, instead, we seek more authentic and meaningful relationships.

Postmodernity (the world we live in) can be a complex and challenging experience for a young person. On the one hand, we encounter cultural diversity, globalization and rapidly evolving technology. This can be stimulating and exciting for a young person seeking to explore different perspectives and ways of life. On the

other hand, it can be challenging when it comes to dealing with the insecurity and instability caused by the disintegration of one's identity and the lack of a solid ideology. The lack of shared values and beliefs can lead to confusion, especially in a time when traditional institutions, such as family, religion and government, are in a state of crisis.

In addition, we are confronted with challenges as a result of rising social inequality, climate change and other global crises that disproportionately affect us. In this sense, this is not only a period of rapid and complex change, but also a time when greater awareness is needed to address the problems facing humanity.

In short, we live in a time of opportunities and challenges for a young person. It is important to be open to the diversity (with respect), the uncertainty (with ideology) and the complexity (with positivity) of these times in order to meet the challenges and build a more sustainable and empathetic future. To do this, we need to shed the superficial and delve deeper into what truly matters.

## **Tomorrow**

I just bought a gadget and it's already old.

YOUNG PERSON
THE DAY AFTER BLACK FRIDAY

Recently, on social media, someone asked how to become an *influencer*. The answer surprised me:

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is really disappointing. To become an influencer, you have to appeal to the most superfluous aspects of modern culture; you have to arouse the lowliest emotions in people and you have to sell sensuality. I will explain each of these points.

People do not like to think for themselves, they like to be fed with short, pleasant, simple and direct ideas (interestingly, Hitler wrote about this), so you need to be up to date with the latest trends, whether in the news, movies, fashion or any other kind of entertainment.

Following the same line of thought, short and blunt ideas also generate strong emotions in people, so taking a radical stance on a controversial issue will always win you followers, whether they are detractors or fans. You need to be able to stomach the hate comments you will receive.

Finally, not all influencers are sensual but they all sell sensuality in one way or another. Beautiful women dress up and show cleavage, handsome men take off their clothes and dance; others share money, travel, and luxury in one way or another. In general, they show everything that can awaken some kind of desire in us.

These are the factors I have discovered that influencers have in common.

This text begs the questions: What are the characteristics of the real influencers in history? What values did they have that we can incorporate into our lives? Here are some of their qualities:



Their actions could be common to others'. Many people think that to be relevant you have to be different. Even if that difference leads you to adopt outlandish—and sometimes ridiculous—attitudes. An influencer does not have to be snobbish or rude to stand out or attract attention. A relevant person emerges from normality and grows in values such as humility, generosity, commitment and empathy.



- Their actions had an impact on others. An influencer affects other people. Some people in history have had a negative impact, triggering wars, discrimination and hatred. Their stories are told based on what is not true (especially when it comes to nationalism) or out of sadness. Real influencers (it would be better to call them "prescribers") brought balance, coherence and peace to our world. Their goodness still abounds. Their stories are told with affection.
- Their impact has endured over time. There are people who seem timeless and then there are people who are mere "pastimes." Truly relevant action is not ephemeral but long-lasting. Evidently, this quality entails that you move away from what is fashionable, from "looking good," from "constantly changing your mind." You need to have ideas and ideals in order to live coherently according to your beliefs.

Now, of course, it is time to remember the greatest *prescriber* of all: Jesus.

- Normalcy. Jesus does not come into this world with cosmic fireworks; He is born as a baby in a Palestinian village. He does not grow performing miracles on a whim, but as a healthy and balanced boy. He does not think He is better than everyone else; He gets baptized in the Jordan River. He does not cook Michelin-starred meals, but lives on bread and fish. He does not die violently in battle, but allows Himself to be crucified. His resurrection does not take place amidst cheers and fanfare but in true and profound silence. It is so impressive when the ordinary becomes extraordinary! The ordinary becomes significant because faith is what makes everything normal again, as it was before sin.
- Impact. There has been no greater impact on this world than that of Christ. His influence not only created a global religion,

- but changed attitudes and structures. Solving problems with love (turning the other cheek) has freed us from tyranny and from the social addiction to violence. Knowing that salvation does not depend on personal works, but on the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus, frees us from the impossibility of merit and allows us to embrace tranquility within our souls.
- **Durability.** Jesus transcends status, race, gender, and even time. His life and message have remained relevant throughout the centuries because it is the Message of messages. In the gospel, we find the seed that sprouts and grows into a truth that is centuries old. Ultimately, it surpasses legends because it is not fiction; it is real.

An interesting model to stop chasing after the wind, don't you think?



#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

#### Dear Father,

Today I want to ask you to show me what areas of me life are nothing but smoke. I want You to be the great est influencer in my life so that I do not chase after the wind. I want to make good decisions in You. Give me the wisdom to differentiate between what is superficial and what is deep truth

## QUESTIONS



- What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?
- ② According to Víctor, Solomon focuses on three "superficialities": the fragility and insignificance of life, time, and the many letters (knowledge). Which one speaks to you the most today? Explain why.
- "Our knowledge is the sum of copious information, but it will never lead to wisdom if God is not a key factor... Respect for God clarifies the meaning of life." How so?
- Define the superficial in your own life. What could be "nothing but smoke"? Share it with God in personal prayer.
- Víctor shared someone's advice on how to become an influencer on social media. What do you agree with? What do you disagree with? Who is a true influencer for you and why?



#### GO DEEPER

- Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.
  - a. **Underline** and highlight what stands out to you and write down any questions that come to your mind.
  - b. **Choose** one of your questions to go deeper. Consult Bible dictionaries and commentaries (and ask your pastor or mentor for help).
  - c. **Reflect**. What is the Preacher telling us in this passage? What is his ultimate advice for us?
- 2. Reflect. Throughout chapter 2, the Preacher consistently repeats, "All was vanity and a striving after wind," as well as, "There was nothing to be gained under the sun."

  The Preacher has stated that he will explore wisdom and folly (1:17; 2:3, 12). What are his conclusions about wisdom and folly? How does the Preacher view wisdom and folly within this section, specifically in 2:13–16?<sup>2</sup>
- **3. Reread** Ecclesiastes 2:24 in different Bible translations.
  - a. In the context of today's passage, how should life be truly enjoyed, so that it does not end up being "vanity"?
  - b. How do you connect this passage with Matthew11:16-19? What do you learn about Jesus and His habit of "eating and drinking" with people?
  - c. What other examples of eating and drinking do you find in the Bible and what are their connotations? (Hint: Take a look at Genesis 3:4-6; Luke 22:14-20; 24:30, 31: Revelation 19:6-9: 22:1-2.)
- 4. **Reflect.** "In his search for understanding, [the Preacher] had indulged in whatever pleasures he wanted: he sought money, sex, and power, and obtained more of each of these than anyone else. Yet when he considered all he possessed and accomplished, he felt empty" (Holcomb, Justin S. *Ecclesiastes (Knowing the Bible)*. Crossway, p. 19. Kindle Edition)
- 5. Pray. In today's passage, the Preacher focuses on the limitations of wisdom and the emptiness of pleasure, wealth and work. Take five to ten minutes to think about the things in your life that leave you feeling empty. Write them down. Tell God about each one of those things in prayer. Ask Him to help you lead a fulfilling life with His guidance.



#### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

#### Be More Like Jesus

Think of one quality that you admire of Jesus and that you would like to have (you could choose humbleness, empathy, etc.).																											
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Try to implement it, starting today. In what circumstances will you put that quality into practice? What specific things can you																											
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You may need to leave things behind (like pride, selfishness):																											
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But everything we leave behind to be more like Jesus is vanity and superficiality. It is worth it to focus on Him because, as we have learned, He is the one and true Influencer.



Here is the soundtrack for this challenge Soundtrack 2 https://bit.ly/WOP25Soundtrack2



#### ACTIVITY 1: GOD IS IN CONTROL

Materials: Sheets of paper and pens.

#### **Activity Description**

In this activity, each person will create a list entitled "God Is in Control".

Draw a table with two columns:

- In the first column, we will write down some dreams, goals or hopes that never became a reality, no matter how hard we tried.
- In the second column, we are going to reflect on whether something good came out of these disappointments.Did we learn anything? Did something better happen?

Keep this list in a special place. The next time you feel discouraged, look at it and remember that even when things do not turn out as we expected, God is in control and by our side.

#### **Application**

We have all experienced disappointment and have suffered from situations that have drained us and broken our heart, but, after a while, God often helps us see a blessing that resulted from those situations. Other times, we will never find out why something happened or did not happen. Despite that, just as we have learned in this chapter, God is in control. God's wisdom is not controlled by our partiality, so it is perfect. We can trust in His wisdom and that He wants what is best for us.

#### **ACTIVITY 2: JESUS IG**

Materials: A smartphone or a computer and creativity.

#### **Activity Description**

Imagine that Jesus decides to create an Instagram account to connect with us. So, we are going to step in His shoes and create a post (it can be a reel, a picture or whatever you prefer) as if Jesus were the author:

- The main goal is to share the true heart of Jesus. So, the first thing you are going to do is organize your ideas and plan what you want to do with all your creativity.
- You may use different editing apps (for example, Canva for pictures, CapCut for videos, etc.). Use whatever is easier for you.
- Once you have finished your project, you can share the results on social media. Remember to tag @eudyouth!

#### **Application**

We all have a unique voice that can be used to give glory to God. May each one of us share His love and His truth through our actions and our words so that we may impact the lives of others around us.

3

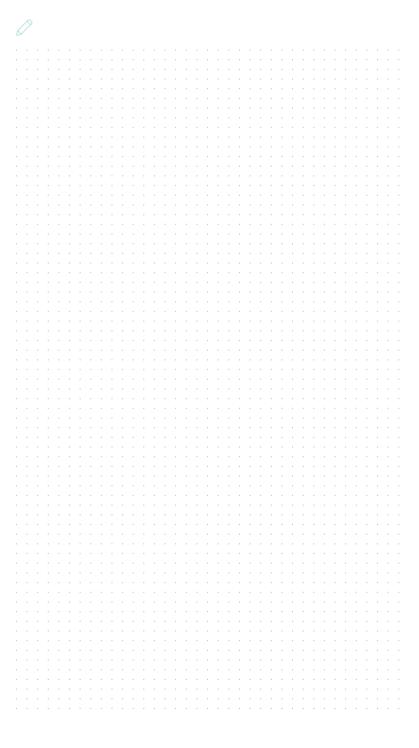
# NOTHING BUT EXHAUSTION

KEY TEXT:

Icebreaker



What was your first job and what was that experience like? What would your dream job be?





he day the temperature dropped in Eden and the first leaf withered marked the beginning of human struggle over time and work. Existence was now limited by an end that, whether we like it or not, affected us all. The fact that a single digit signals the moment you exist or not gives time a meaning it did not have before. Dates began to enter our vocabulary. At first, they were associated with memories; later, with kings, battles and victories. People observed how the days of their lives were shortened and how anxiety surrounded them. How to face the unexpected moment? Or, even worse, how to face the expected moment? There is pain in the unexpected death, but so much more in the expected one. Meanwhile, nothing but exhaustion as a result of our daily routine or an excess of stimulation. This is what Solomon concludes when he evaluates the consequences of the slavery of time and unsatisfying activity.

You only have to look around you to see stress everywhere. And, as stated before, our relationship with time and work has a lot to do with it. On the one hand, we have workaholics, those enslaved to exhaustion, those who live gagged to a TAG Heuer or an iWatch. On the other hand, there are those who immerse themselves in the ecstasy of escapism, those who play video games or watch hundreds of series in a state of addictive alienation, those who couldn't care less about macro-ideologies and those who avidly consume techno-novelties. In between, we find a huge number of "followers" of each group, sometimes without a clear reason why. The diagnosis is clear: we have a problem, a centuries-old problem, with time and with our activities.



# **Today**

In a word, GNP measures everything, except what makes life worth the pain of living it.<sup>1</sup>

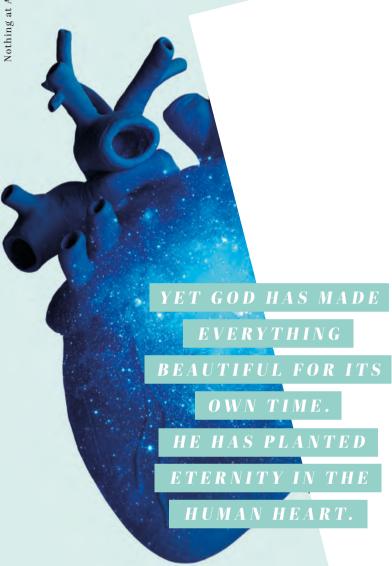
THE PHILOSOPHER QUOTING
THE POLITICIAN

Racing against time is our daily bread. Living in the present and losing our historical memory is here to stay. The war against aging is turning children into youth, adults into youth, and the elderly into stiff youth. We prefer what is synchronic<sup>2</sup> as opposed to the natural passage of time. Science has become so dependent on the latest research that it confuses what is relevant with what is trending. And trends are short-lived. Calendars are shared and flood our daily lives with a multitude of alarms and alerts (oh, how I miss the landscape calendars on the wall, so calm and serene!). Reality is now. Answer the phone now. Give an answer now. Make a decision now. Eat now. Speak now. Hand over the data now. Send the image now. And the step from now to now me is very small. Reality ends up being a me problem. I have to answer the phone. I have to give an answer. I have to decide. I eat. I speak. I give data. I am what I look like. I last as long as a short-lived now.

And in the midst of all this chaos, as a consequence of COVID-19, we arrive at the "Big Quit". That phenomenon by which more and more people are deciding to leave their jobs in search of new ones that will give them more flexibility, well-being and personal satisfaction. Many people have decided to reevaluate their priorities and seek balance because they are exhausted. Exhausted by the pandemic, exhausted by the lack of recognition and compensation.

They want a job that aligns with their personal values and goals. This has led many companies to rethink their talent retention policies and strategies by offering additional incentives and perks, such as better salaries, benefits and opportunities for professional growth and development, all in an effort to retain their current employees and attract new talent. They fail to understand that the problem is not earning more but living better. It is not about working at home, but about feeling at home. It is not about stimulating false excitement, but about having a faith that strengthens our hope.

I suggest that you quit the tyranny of time that prevents you from spending time in the quiet, in reflection. Stop the nonsense of consuming for the sake of consuming because this will enslave you to your job. Stop being a cog in the machine and become a whole person instead.



## **Tomorrow**

I just want to sleep.

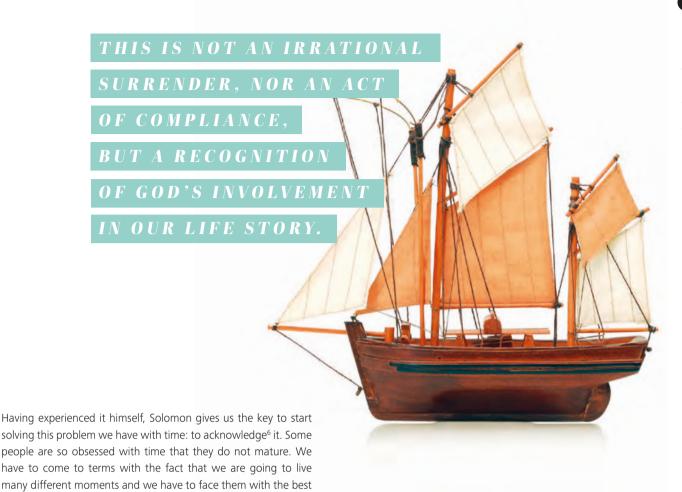
YOUNG PERSON IN AN ACTIVITY AFTER DRINKING TWO STRONG COFFEES

Ecclesiastes 3:11 is the conclusion of a priceless text. It appears in the chapter of the Bible with the most references to time (28 or, perhaps, 29). And it deserves that we pause for a moment to fully savor it:

For everything there is a season,<sup>3</sup> a time4 for every [enjoyable]5 activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace. What do people really get for all their hard work? I have seen the burden God has placed on us all. Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work

Ecclesiastes 3:3:1-11 (NLT)

from beginning to end.



But I trust you, O Lord ...(Yhwh); I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hand. (Psalm 31:14, 15 ESV)

of attitudes, whether we understand them or not. It is that simple. With this attitude, we will be able to say, together with the

Psalmist:

This is not an irrational surrender, nor an act of compliance, but a recognition of God's involvement in our life story. An attitude of intimacy and reflection. Like Ecclesiastes 7:14 (VA) says:

Enjoy the good moments as they come and reflect on the bad ones. Both are God's doing. You never know what will come your way.

Acknowledge and reflect. Recognize the multiple moments and visualize the storyline. Expand your view of time in order to see the landscape in which we find ourselves. Find the time and work that enable us to grow as people.

Now what? I suggest that you enjoy the moment.



#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear Father,

I acknowledge and accept that there is a time for everything. And I am also grateful that You have pure ternity in our hearts, because that gives me hope of an eternal future with You. Help me to face each day with wisdom, and to learn and grow in each season of my life...

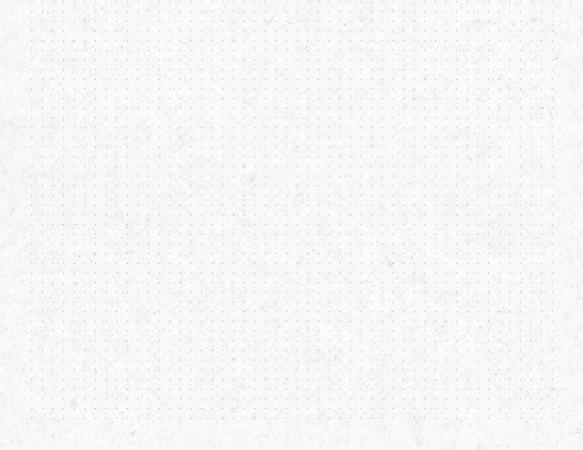
"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

**ECCLESIASTES 3:1 (NIV)** 

## QUESTIONS



- What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?
- 2 What things exhaust you? Share two examples.
- **3** To what extent are you "enslaved" to time? How healthy is your relationship with time and work? What do you struggle with?
- Victor says that "the war against aging is turning children into youth, adults into youth, and the elderly into stiff youth." What do you make of this? Why do we tend to avoid the natural passage of time?
- Focus on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Of this list, what pair of statements speaks to you the most in this season of your life? Explain why.





## GO DEEPER

- Write. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is a poem about the different seasons in life, "For everything there is a season" (v. 1 NLT).
   Take on the role of "Preacher" and write a poem yourself, expressing the seasons you have lived in your life so far, and the lessons you have learned.
- 2. Read Ecclesiastes 3:11.
  - a. What does it mean to you that "God has made everything beautiful for its own time" (NLT)?
  - b. What theological truth about God does Ecclesiastes 3:9-15 point to?
  - c. In the second part of the verse, the Preacher says that although God has put eternity in our hearts, we humans cannot see the whole scope of His work. What does this lead you to conclude?
- 3. Read and reflect on the following statements:
  - a. "For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity" (C. S. Lewis. (2013). *Image and Imagination*. Cambridge University Press, p. 352).
  - b. "All that is not eternal is eternally out of date" (C. S. Lewis. (1960). *The Four Loves*. New York: HarperCollins Publishing, p. 176).
  - c. "The formation of character is the work of a lifetime, and it is for eternity. If all could realize this, if they would awake to the thought that we are individually deciding our own destiny for eternal life or eternal ruin, what a change would take place!" (Ellen G. White. 1961. Our High Calling, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, p. 84).
- Remember God's promises.
  - a. What promises come to mind regarding having a positive outlook in every season of life (and also for the future)? (Hint: Matthew 6:34, James 4:13-15; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 2:10; Isaiah 55:11.)
  - b. **Write** down the promise that you want to personally recall today. **Memorize** it. You could also turn it into a song or a lettering project.
- 5. Reflect. What are your key takeaways from today's passage? Summarize them in one paragraph.
- **6. Pray.** Look back at the poem you wrote for point 1 and use it as the basis for your prayer time with God. Talk to Him about your current season in life, and ask Him for wisdom and strength to endure it and see "its beauty".



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

#### Deactivating the "Autopilot"

In today's text, we reflected about the implicit pressure we feel towards the passage of time in our lives. As humans, we often seek training in different areas to ensure that we find a job that helps us make ends meet. We start our educational phase at a young age. As we grow more and more independent, we learn more about our areas of interest (sports, music, hobbies...). However, it is not so common for us to learn *how* to manage our time efficiently. We are used to being told what to do and what not to do, but we are not always taught how to organize our day to day appropriately.

We encourage you to fill in the planner below to help quantify the amount of time you allocate to different areas in your life. Color in the time you spend doing each activity. This tool will visually show you whether you have a good balance or whether you need to adjust some areas.

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Reading the Bible				
Praying	, 4	6		
Studying or working				
Sports				
Friends	4. 2.			
Hobby #1				
Hobby #2				
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Here is the soundtrack for this challenge Soundtrack 3 https://bit.ly/WOP25Soundtrack3



#### ACTIVITY 1: MY LIFE IN JENGA

Materials: Jenga game

#### **Activity Description**

First Part: Knocking Down the Tower

- 1. Distribute the Jenga blocks among the participants. Each participant must have several blocks.
- 2. Ask each participant to assign an activity they spend time on to each block (one participant cannot repeat the same activity twice; they must be different).
- 3. Taking turns, each participant will put one or two blocks on the tower and say what each block represents. The goal is to do this quickly, so the tower becomes wobbly, and the next participant has a hard time putting their own blocks safely.
- 4. Continue playing until someone knocks down the tower.

Second Part: Building the Tower

We will follow the same procedure, but this time the goal is to build a stable tower using all the Jenga blocks.

#### **Application**

Reflect on how an imbalance in our activities and a lack of priorities may lead us to a state of chaos. However, if we follow the biblical principal of "everything in its own time," we well be able to manage our lives better. Explain that, just as they learned to put their blocks in perfect balance to prevent the tower from falling down, the Bible teaches us that there is a time for everything.

#### ACTIVITY 2: A WONDERFUL LIFE

**Materials:** Blackboards for each team (or writing material), a list of activities that will go on auction.

Examples of activities: childhood, playing with toys, praying, watching series/movies, reading the Bible, studying, traveling, spending time with your parents, being a missionary in another country, living with your children, working, having time to yourself, going to church, spending time with friends, favorite hobby...

#### **Activity Description**

- 1. *Preparation:* Divide the group in teams. In the auction, each team gets 80 years they can spend on the different activities or stages of life.
- 2. Rules:
  - Items such as childhood, working, traveling, etc. are available for auction.
  - Teams will decide how many years they want to spend on each item, by writing a number (of years) on a blackboard.
  - Teams will simultaneously show the number of years they are willing to "pay" for the activity.
  - The team that has written down the highest number of years for an item wins it and must subtract the corresponding number from their current total of years.

When every team runs out of years or there are no more items to be auctioned, each team will reflect on the results by analyzing the activities they will get to spend their life on according to what they won in the auction.

#### **Application**

Reflect on the decisions made by each group:

- / How did you balance out your time?
- What did you sacrifice and what did you prioritize?
- What does it mean to "lead a perfect life"?

Even though in the game we were not able to spend years on all the activities, in real life we do have the chance to spend our time on all that is important and valuable.





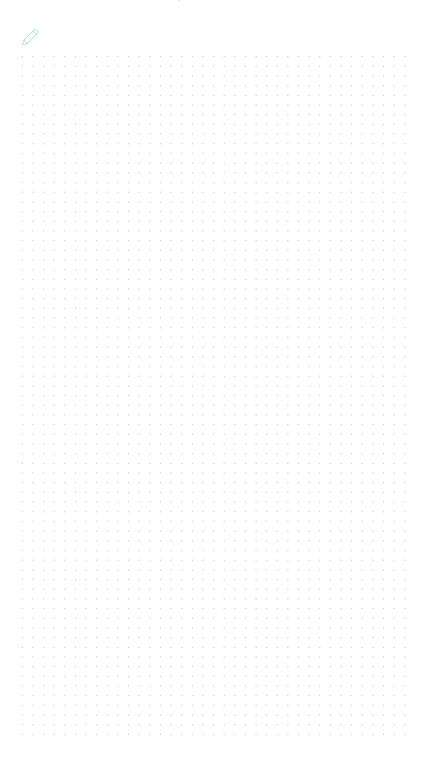
KEY TEXT:

FCCLESIASTES 3.16-4.3

Icebreaker



# If you could eliminate one thing from the world, what would it be?





isdom in Ecclesiastes has to do with what is right and what is just. The lives of the wise cannot be derailed by situational ethics or fallacies because goodness is what governs their existence. True openness of mind is linked to faithfulness, which makes the former great and deep. But Solomon points out that injustice is conspicuously present in this world (Ecclesiastes 3:16), that it is part of its structure (5:8) and that, while the righteous die quickly, the wicked live long (7:15). It looks like he is contradicting what he wrote in Proverbs, which makes us wonder:

- a. How can he talk about the steadfastness of the righteous when the lifestyle of the wicked has taken over the world (Proverbs 10:30)?
- b. Why are structures unjust when it is God who allows kings to rule (Proverbs 8:15)?
- c. Why do the righteous die sooner when it is righteousness that leads to life (Proverbs 11:19; 12:28; 21:21)?

The explanation is probably found in Ecclesiastes 3:15, which says that it is what it is for now, but God is keeping score of (or He is "chasing") what has happened. In other words, He will continue to consider and judge what is immoral. It is His way of reminding us that, in the end, there will be justice. Ecclesiastes focuses on only one part of our history, the one affected by the *irregularities* of sin. Proverbs shows us the big picture, a world in which there will be no more imbalance, no more injustice.

**Spoiler alert:** At the end of it all, on the New Earth, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4 ESV).



Perhaps this is why the prophets talk so much about justice: the justice that the Messiah would bring (Isaiah), that bears the name of Yhwh (Jeremiah), that forgives those who repent (Ezekiel), that judges the nations (Daniel), that changes structures (Amos), and that is an essential part of being a believer (Micah). This last prophet laid the foundation for how a child of God should act, "O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8 NLT). Three elements on which to build a new world. We may not achieve them perfectly now, but we *are* laying the foundation of a different reality.

It is now time to pause and analyze our worldviews and make changes where necessary. Doing what is right is connected to being prudent because we understand that we are human and fallible. (And yet, there is so much wisdom in those who know exactly who they are and unabashedly admit it!) What is right has a positive impact on the common good and social justice, and leads us to acknowledge that we *are* human. The wise create structures for improvement, consensus and growth. The wise are engaged with reality; they recognize potential and manage transformation. The wise project themselves onto others.

**Today** 

There is always the possibility of blaming a mistaken choice, rather than an inability to live up to the opportunities it offered, for the failure of the anticipated bliss to materialize.1

THE PHILOSOPHER

Shortcomings manifest themselves in a variety of ways, whether in the work, educational, social, or legal spheres. In the workplace, you may find that you are discriminated against when trying to get a job or in the way you are treated at work. People are marginalized because of their age, nationality or gender, which prevents them from developing professionally and feeling valued at work. In the educational sphere, you may face a lack of access to higher education or a lack of resources for training. In the social sphere, you may suffer from social exclusion, a lack of access to health care or housing, a lack of opportunities, or criminalization due to social prejudice. Finally, in the legal sphere, you may face a lack of equality before the law or a lack of access to justice because of social or economic barriers. In short, injustice manifests itself in different ways and areas of life, and it affects our well-being, our personal growth, and our sense of justice and fairness in the society in which we live.

But change is possible.

BUT, AS A GODLY PEOPLE,

WE CANNOT JUST

ACCEPT INJUSTICE. WE MUST

DOCUMENT IT AND BRING

ABOUT CHANGE.









It's your fault!

TEENAGER WITH ADHD

Every year on March 19th, in Valencia (Spain), a very original celebration takes place: the "Fallas". The word "falla" comes from "fallo" (Spanish for shortcoming or failure) or "mistake", hence the name of the celebration. For an entire year, the *Fallas* artists (the "falleros") make figures out *of papier maché* that represent the mistakes that have been made in the country. As you would imagine, a lot of them have to do with politics and social or environmental injustice. These "works of art" are installed in different squares of the city, drawing the admiration and comments of passersby. The evening of March 19th is the "nit del foc" (the night of the fire), the moment when all the *fallas* are burned. It is a symbol. A symbol that we must identify what is wrong and eliminate it.

Yes, there is injustice. But, as a godly people, we cannot just accept it. We must document it and bring about change. As much as possible, let us make the world a better place.

No, injustice is not always someone else's fault. We must speak up and do something. Micah's words echo in our hearts and we long for justice. But, how? Let me share some ideas. Let us start with those that Teresa Santiago Oropeza suggests when she speaks about injustice:

There are no easy answers to these concerns, and I do not wish to prolong this essay. I would simply like to point out that, in any case, there are certain conditions without which it seems impossible to me to make progress in the right moral sense; I will list a few. First of all, the creation and strengthening of the bonds of *solidarity*, based on the recognition of the evil caused by injustice, that is, leaving the protective sphere of passive injustice, because *social injustice concerns us all*. Second, to *acknowledge the value or dignity of every single* 

person regardless of their social or ethnic condition. Finally, we must be aware that the evil caused by social injustice must be repaired so as not to jeopardize the viability of society as we have understood it: as the place where we construct ourselves as human beings and citizens, according to Socratic teaching.<sup>2</sup>

Some practical ideas would be:

- Volunteer. Participate in programs that uphold human rights and fight against injustice. For example, become a member of ADRA.
- NGOs. Support organizations that promote social justice and equality.
- **3. Receive training.** Learn about these issues in order to create positive change in society.
- 4. Protest. Participate in public events that speak out about situations of injustice and propose ways to bring about change.
- Donate. Financially support organizations that seek justice and equity.

- **6. Make a commitment.** Personally support and act on behalf of marginalized and vulnerable communities.
- **7. Put yourself in their shoes.** Practice empathy and respect while promoting a culture of solidarity.
- **8. Make it a daily thing.** Take concrete actions in your daily life to promote justice: be a sustainable consumer, respect nature, strive for positivity, be kind, etc.

As Desmond Tutu said, "Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking, but in the end, it is worthwhile, because in the end there will be real healing from having dealt with a real situation. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing."<sup>3</sup>

Let's do it! Let's make this world a better place!





"I said to myself,
'In due season God will
judge everyone,
both good and bad,
for all their deeds."

ECCLESIASTES 3:17 (NLT)

# QUESTIONS



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## GO DEEPER

- 1. Read. Ecclesiastes 3:16, 17.
  - a. In a fallen world, people experience injustice and wickedness at the hand of others (3:16). How does verse 17 make this reality tolerable? What other passages in Scripture teach that the wicked and the unjust will one day experience God's ultimate justice?<sup>4</sup>
- Learn more about the concept of justice in the Bible.
  Do one (or all!) of the following:
  - a. Read chapter 2 of The Earth is the Lord's: Called to Care for Creation. Download here: https://bit.ly/WOP25downloads
  - b. **Watch** the video "Justice" by Bible Project: https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/justice/
  - c. **Read** the article "Justice in the Bible" by Timothy Keller: https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/justice-in-the-bible/
- 3. Reflect. "This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I'm interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, God will answer. You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am'" (Isaiah 58:6-9 MSG).
- I see all the injustice in the world.' But here is Jesus, the Son of God, who knows what it's like to be the victim of injustice, to stand up to power, to face a corrupt system and be killed for it. He knows what it is like to be lynched. I'm not sure how you believe in a God remote from injustice and oppression, but Christianity doesn't ask you to believe in that. That is why the Christian writer John Stott is able to say, 'I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the Cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?'" (Timothy Keller. (2010). Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just. New York: Riverhead Books, p. 187).
- 5. Pray the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

#### Let's Make this World as Good as Possible Now

We all know that God will ultimately bring justice to this world (Ecclesiastes 3:15), so what is our role in all of this? Should we not act? As mentioned before, we cannot let injustice slide. So, let's follow some of the steps shared by Teresa Santiago Oropeza:

- Strengthen the bonds of solidarity by understanding that we all have experienced some kind of injustice at some point. At the same time, we should be aware that we may also be the cause (whether actively or passively) of some kind of injustice.
- 2. Acknowledge the value or dignity of every single person regardless of their social or ethnic condition. Above all, people should be treated with dignity and respect. We need to go further, since this must first be reflected in our own thoughts (I acknowledge that, no matter who you are, you deserve my respect) and then it will show in our actions.
- 3. Be aware that the evil caused by social injustice must be repaired. We cannot remain indifferent; the least we can do is acknowledge the injustice and act, as much as possible, to make this world better now.

Let's try to put this into action now. Think of someone around you and try to understand what kind of injustice they may be facing in the different areas of their life (at work, at school/college/university, socially and legally). Acknowledge how these types of situations may affect that person's wellbeing and show them empathy. Think of specific things you can do to let them know you care.

Sometimes, treating people with dignity can bring about a huge change. Unfortunately, we don't always know all personal circumstances in detail, but our attitude can make a difference. God knows our reality, so He only asks us to do our best according to our possibilities. He will do the rest.



Here is the soundtrack for this challenge
Soundtrack 4
https://bit.ly/WOP25Soundtrack4



#### **ACTIVITY 1: THE PAPER FACTORY**

#### Materials:

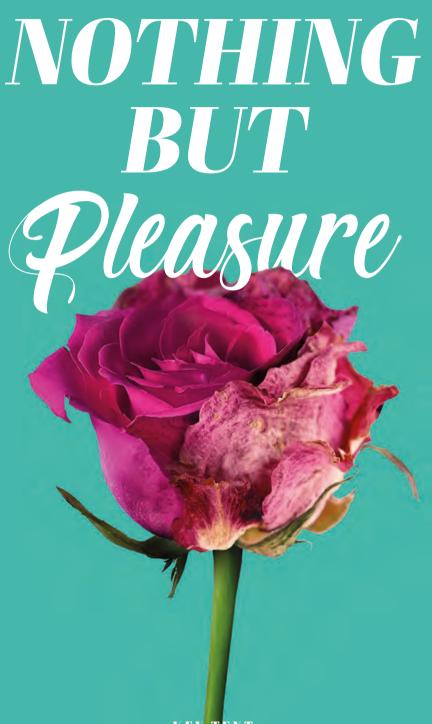
- Sheets of paper (some with weird shapes), scissors, pens and bags.
- / One five-euro bill (as a sample).

#### **Activity Description**

- 1. One person unevenly distributes the sheets of paper, pens and scissors into different bags (maximum number of sheets of paper per bag is five, the minimum is two; same with the scissors and pens: maximum 5, minimum 1).
- Make four or more groups (depending on the number of participants). Each group will randomly receive one of the bags.
- 3. The goal is to make as many five euro bills (see the sample) as possible, in ten minutes. The team that makes the most five-euro bills wins. The bills must be the same size as the model and must have a 5 at the front and at the back. They should also include each participant's name, since everyone has chipped in to make it. This will ensure all participants play a role in the game.
- 4. Groups may talk among themselves and even exchange material or give it away as a gift.

#### **Application**

The goal of this activity is to show how some people had more materials to begin with, which made it easier for them to reach the final goal and make more bills, perhaps even more than the rest of the teams. This situation draws our attention to the fact that the game was unfair from the beginning, since the bags were handed out randomly and no one could choose their starting conditions. The same happens with us: we cannot choose many of the circumstances in our lives, but just like in this activity, it is important to be realistic and to acknowledge the injustice we face. In fact, just like in this game, we are all given the opportunity to share what we have with others, as a *gift*. We *can* do something to reduce the inequalities we find in society. We invite you to pray to God so that He helps you identify those situations and gives you courage to be agents of change and action in the face of injustice.



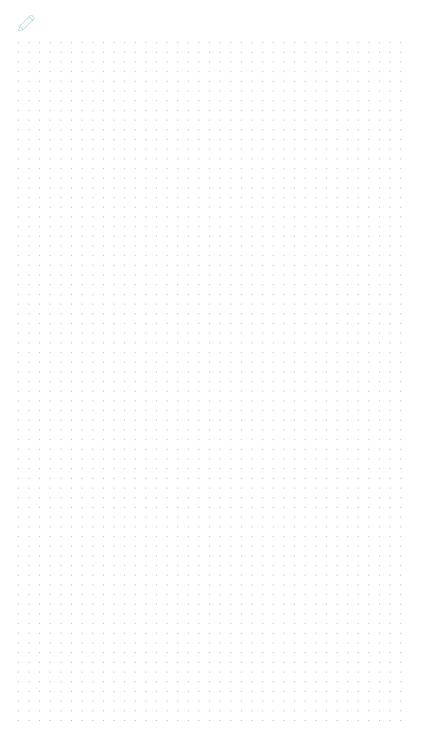
KEY TEXT:

ECCLESIA<mark>S</mark>TES 5:8-6:9

Icebreaker



# If someone gave you a million dollars, what would you do with the money?



# Yesterday

I said to myself:

"Come, try all pleasures
and delight yourself with what is good."

And, lo and behold, it was all
nothing again. I told laughter,

"You are delirious," and pleasures,

"What's the point?"

THE PREACHER

(ECCLESIASTES 2:1, 2 VA)

olomon crossed the line and got entangled. As 1 Kings 11:1-5 (MSG) says:

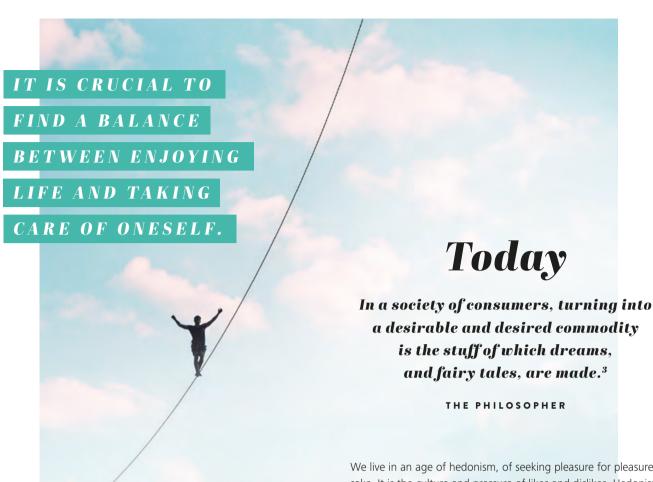
King Solomon was obsessed with women. Pharaoh's daughter was only the first of the many foreign women he loved—Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite. He took them from the surrounding pagan nations of which God had clearly warned Israel, "You must not marry them; they'll seduce you into infatuations with their gods." Solomon fell in love with them anyway, refusing to give them up. He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines—a thousand women in all! And they did seduce him away from

God. As Solomon grew older, his wives beguiled him with their alien gods and he became unfaithful—he didn't stay true to his God as his father David had done. Solomon took up with Ashtoreth...

He confused true love (Yhwh) with mere pleasure (Ashtoreth)<sup>1</sup> and lived a life of indulgence for several years, focusing only on what he wanted, no matter what moral rules he broke.

Unlike mere pleasure, love is an intense and exciting experience. It is what makes you feel alive and connected to another person on a deeper level. It is the force that makes you want to be close to that special person, share moments together, and do everything possible to bring them happiness. It is about respect, trust, and commitment.





Pleasure for pleasure's sake, however, is not the basis for a long-lasting and solid relationship, in which you both support each other, care for each other and help each other to grow as individuals. Pleasure for pleasure's sake is not the way to guide your actions and decisions in life. It is an experience that is not worth living because it does not bring happiness or fulfillment.

Solomon traded short-term pleasure for joy. This is what Ellen G. White says:

In gratitude Solomon acknowledged the power and the loving-kindness of the One who is "higher than the highest" (Ecclesiastes 5:8); in penitence he began to retrace his steps toward the exalted plane of purity and holiness from whence he had fallen so far. He could never hope to escape the blasting results of sin, he could never free his mind from all remembrance of the self-indulgent course he had been pursuing, but he would endeavor earnestly to dissuade others from following after folly. He would humbly confess the error of his ways and lift his voice in warning lest others be lost irretrievably because of the influences for evil he had been setting in operation.<sup>2</sup>

What a spectacular change! Quite an experience for him and a great opportunity for us.

We live in an age of hedonism, of seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake. It is the culture and pressure of likes and dislikes. Hedonism constantly demands that our desires and pleasures be satisfied through the enjoyment of intense sensory and emotional experiences. Fun, adventure, freedom, and experimenting without limits are just the tip of the iceberg for those whose lives depend on this constant stimulation. Perhaps it is a way to escape from one's daily routines and responsibilities; or an opportunity to enjoy the present and explore what life has to offer. However, pleasure for pleasure's sake has negative consequences, such as a lack of responsibility, the neglect of one's own health, and the constant addiction to fleeting pleasures that ultimately lead to dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial to find a balance between enjoying life and taking care of oneself in order to live a fulfilling and satisfying existence.

Nowadays, the formula seems to be "pleasure=sex", but, as in Solomon's time, this is the wrong formula. Consider this statement by Volkmar Sigusch:



I will always remember her sad demeanor and her disheveled appearance. She had lived life intensely. Drugs had left her with the scar of being too slow. Her past loves and heartbreaks, which included several arranged yet unwanted abortions, weighed on her every day. The senseless pleasures of her youth had taken their toll. A spark that lasted a second led to years of darkness. I was a young pastor with zero relational resources (because these things cannot be solved with Systematic Theology or Bible languages); I was unable to share true love, the love of Christ, with her. I still regret it. Because the consequences of superficial love can only be healed by the tender love of the Holy Spirit. Yes, we will continue to remember what we have experienced, but we will also have the comfort of forgiveness and the desire for others to also encounter Jesus. It is like Ellen G. White says:

The true penitent does not put his past sins from his remembrance. He does not, as soon as he has obtained peace, grow unconcerned in regard to the mistakes he has made. He thinks of those who have been led into evil by his course, and tries in every possible way to lead them back into the true path. The clearer the light that he has entered into, the stronger is his desire to set the feet of others in the right way. He does not gloss over his wayward course, making his wrong a light thing, but lifts the danger signal, that others may take warning.<sup>5</sup>

I do not know where you are in life. I do know that wherever you are, you can focus on Jesus because He will always be there for you. Without a doubt.





It's good because I like it.

YOUNG PERSON WHO
IS ALL ABOUT LIKES



Liking something does not make it a good thing. In fact, there are many things that we like that can potentially harm us. I suggest that we learn to enjoy what is healthy. Let us exchange "pleasure for pleasure's sake" for the pleasure of what is good for us. Here is a list of activities that you can start doing today (you probably already do some of them).

- Exercise regularly: go out for a walk, swim, jog, run or hike in nature.
- **2.** Eat a balanced and healthy diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains.
- Prioritize your rest by making sure you get enough hours of sleep every day to fully recharge.
- Stay in touch with family and friends to deepen your connection with them.
- 5. Reflect on life and talk to God as the true Friend He is.
- **6.** Avoid addictions to tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sex without context, video games, mobile devices, and consumerism.
- Maintain good personal hygiene and work on a balanced personal image.
- 8. Read, learn new things, and keep your mind active and alive.
- **9.** Enjoy hobbies and activities that bring you joy. Here are some examples: gardening, cooking, playing music, and painting.
- **10.** Look for passages in the Bible that will help you become a better person. Then try to put them into practice.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

#### Dear Father

Thank you for creating me with the capacity to enjoy pleasure. Help me to (learn to) enjoy what is healthy and good for me. Help me to seek the holy pleasures available to me in this world...

Enjoy life!

"Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have.

Just dreaming about nice things is meaningless—like chasing the wind."

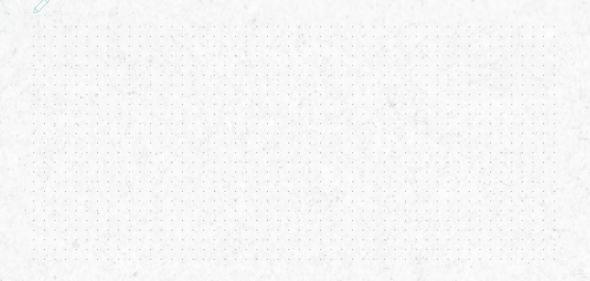
**ECCLESIASTES 6:9 (NLT)** 

## QUESTIONS



- What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?
- ② On a scale of 1 to 10, what impact does each of the following statements make on you? Explain why.
  - a. "Pleasure for pleasure's sake is not the way to guide your actions and decisions in life."
  - b. "It is crucial to find a balance between enjoying life and taking care of oneself in order to live a fulfilling and satisfying existence."
  - c. "The consequences of superficial love can only be healed by the tender love of the Holy Spirit."
  - d. "Liking something does not make it a good thing." \_\_\_\_\_\_
  - e. We should "learn to enjoy what is healthy." \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the greatest lesson you learn from Solomon's experience with pleasure?
- Read and comment on the following statement:

"Imagine you meet God face-to-face in the judgment. You immediately sense that He is not happy about something. He looks straight into your eyes and says, 'You didn't have enough fun. I gave you an incredibly beautiful world and surrounded you with sights, sounds, smells, and flavors. I equipped your body with sensory receptacles and your mind with perceptual powers and emotional capacities. I made you with the ability to experience astounding enjoyment, and you made yourself into a killjoy in My name. You led yourself to believe that pleasure is wrong when I'm the One who built the pleasure system of creation as a gift to you. You starved your body and soul of holy pleasures, and as a result, you fell continually into unholy pleasures, which are really no pleasures at all. I placed you in the middle of a gorgeous paradise, and you didn't taste, touch, smell, or look upon and experience much of it at all. In this, you have sinned greatly. What do you have to say for yourself?" (Ty Gibson, "The Sin of Unenjoyment." See the full article here: https://bit.ly/WOP25downloads).





#### GO DEEPER

- Reflect. "Those who pursue wealth are never satisfied; it is far better to learn to be content with what you have and enjoy life."
- 2. Read Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11 and 5:10-6:9.
  - a. Underline and highlight what stands out for you.
  - b. What does the Preacher conclude regarding the destructive nature of greed?
  - c. **Compare** with Philippians 4. What do you learn by comparing these texts?
  - d. How can we avoid being never-satisfied lovers of money
     (5:10) yet still enjoy the gifts of God discussed in verses
     18–20?<sup>7</sup>
- **3. Read** the article "The Sin of Unenjoyment" by Ty Gibson: https://lightbearers.org/blog/the-sin-of-unenjoyment/
- 4. Make a list of things that you enjoy that fall into the category of "holy pleasures" (see point 3 above) or "pleasures that are good/healthy for you" (Víctor Armenteros).
  - a. Why do they give you joy?
  - b. How can you make sure you take time to enjoy good pleasures to keep away from unhealthy pleasures (which are not really pleasures at all)?
- 5. Reflect (honestly).
  - a. What are some ways that you have sought pleasure in the past that have left you feeling dissatisfied?
  - b. Are you currently pursuing pleasure for pleasure's sake that you know deep inside is not good for you (e.g., any form of addiction, or using your time unwisely)?
    - If the answer is yes, what is it that you are pursuing? Name it! How can you break the cycle? Think of people you can ask for help (a family member, a friend, a mentor, your pastor, etc.) and reach out to them.
- **6. Reflect.** What does it mean to you to be "rich" in Christ (see Ephesians 3:8 and 2 Corinthians 8:9)? Is that how you feel?
- 7. Ask yourself: When I consider how I spend my time, energy, and money, where am I hoping to find meaning and purpose in life?8
- 8. **Pray** for the gift of contentment and for wisdom to choose pleasures that are good for you in the long run and in God's sight. Include your insights from points 4 and 5 above in your prayer.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

#### Taking a Turn for the Better

For the next 24 hours (at least), pay attention to all the negative habits that have crept into your daily routine, and try to avoid them. Simply eliminating them will prove to be difficult, so try substituting them with more positive habits instead. If you need help to keep yourself accountable, you may download an app on your phone to help you monitor these new routines and review them weekly. If you prefer, you may print a weekly or monthly planner that will help you reach your goals. At the end of this challenge, reflect on the changes you have made and how that has made you feel.

#### WEEKLY PLANNER

Monday	Tuesday
Wednesday	Thursday
Friday	(All properties and the
	Notes
Here is the sour	
	WOP25Soundtrack5



#### **ACTIVITY 1: SHARING HABITS**

#### **Activity Description**

- / Divide the group in teams of four to eight people.
- Each person in the group will share a negative habit in their routine that they would like to change as well as a positive pleasure they are proud of.
- Each group will choose one of the positive routines shared and will put it in practice during the following week, substituting one of their negative habits.

#### **Application**

Reflect on how we all have negative and positive "pleasures" in our daily routine and how we can serve as an example and an inspiration to others so that they can include new positive habits in their routines.

#### **ACTIVITY 2: POSITIVE BRAINSTORMING**

Materials: Sticky notes and pens.

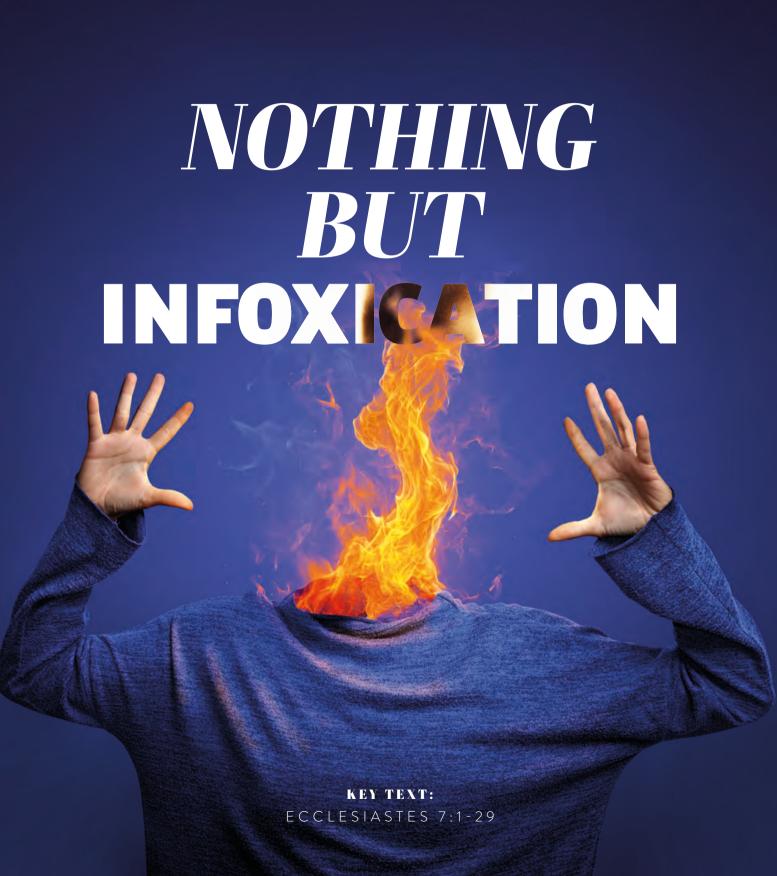
#### **Activity Description**

- Distribute the sticky notes and pens among the participants.
- Choose a wall on which you can stick the sticky notes and make a mural.
- Each participant will think of several positive habits they would like to incorporate into their routine and will write them down on their sticky notes.
- Create a mural as a "positive brainstorm" with all the participants' ideas by sticking the sticky notes on the wall. Each participant will then choose the ideas that personally stand out for them.

#### **Application**

In addition to making us feel better, positive habits help us fully develop and reach our full potential as people. Reflect on how God has created us, on what advice for our wellbeing we find in the Bible and on how some new traditions in society are in fact not positive for our lives. You can use the brainstorming ideas to implement new habits in your daily routine. You will soon discover that these new habits do not only make you feel better, but they are also truly liberating.

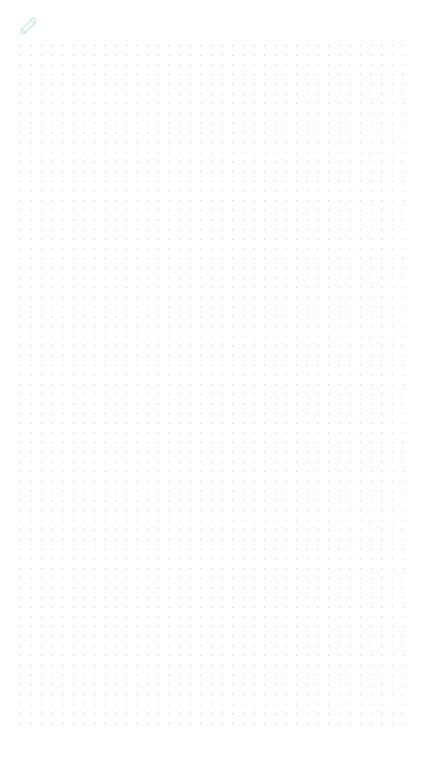




Icebreaker



# Who is the wisest person you know? Why did you choose that person?



# Yesterday

...then I saw all the work of God.

Man cannot comprehend the work that
has been done under heaven!

No matter how much he seeks, he will not
understand; the wise man may claim
to understand, but he doesn't.

THE PREACHER

(ECCLESIASTES 8:17 VA)

he following was said about Solomon:

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. 1 KINGS 4:29-34 (ESV)

What a paradox for the wisest man who has ever lived to say that the importance of knowledge is relative. How can we explain this? It is probably because Solomon distinguished between knowledge and wisdom. He began in wisdom, by placing himself in God's hands, but a life without God led him through disappointing experiences and a guilt-ridden knowledge of the world that made him feel restless. He lived *infoxicated*.

God put the desire for repentance in his heart, and he found wisdom again. This is what Ellen G. White says:

Solomon's later writings reveal that as he realized more and still more the wickedness of his course, he gave special attention to warning the youth against falling into the errors that had led him to squander for nought Heaven's choicest gifts. With sorrow and shame he confessed that in the prime of manhood, when he should have found God his comfort, his support, his life, he turned from the light of Heaven and the wisdom of God, and put idolatry in the place of the worship of Jehovah. And now, having learned through sad experience the folly of such a life, his yearning desire was to save others from entering into the bitter experience through which he had passed.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, being wise means seeing the world, its people, and its possibilities through God's eyes. Having God's vision changes everything because it gives us certainty and confidence. We can have all the data in the universe and still comprehend nothing. We can observe without understanding. Wisdom that is grounded in the Eternal has no limits, and it is offered to us for free.



WE CAN HAVE ALL
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NOTHING.



IT IS DIFFICULT

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DISTINGUISH

TRUE FROM FALSE

INFORMATION.

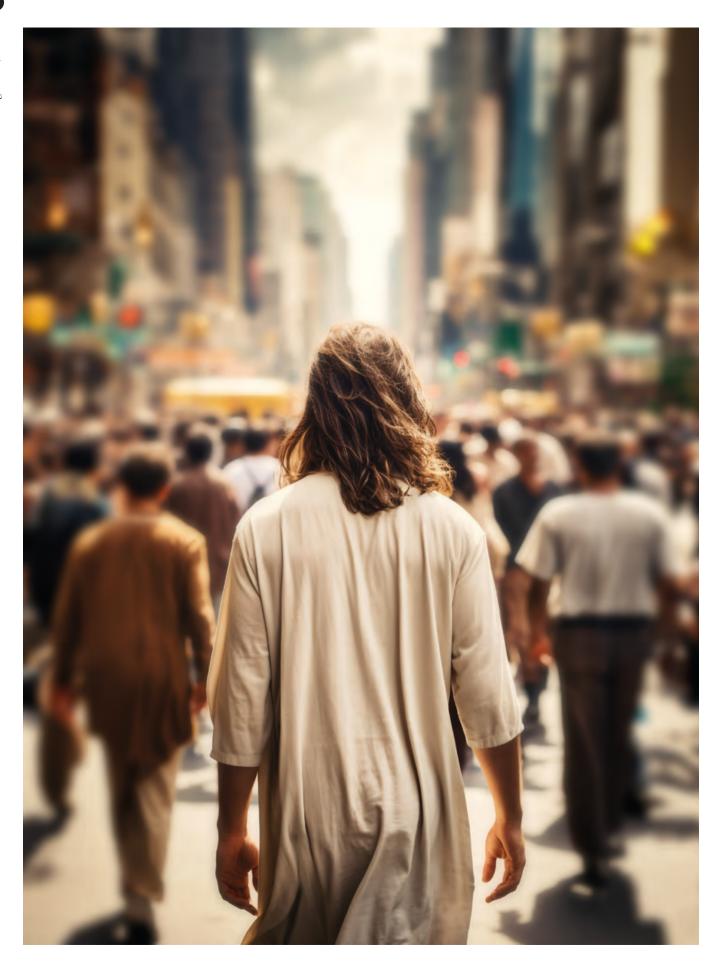
# Today

The tendency to forget and the mind-boggling speed of forgetting are unfortunately seemingly indelible marks of contemporary liquid modern culture. Because of that affliction, we tend to stumble from one explosion of popular anger to another, nervously and perfunctorily reacting to each one separately as it comes, instead of trying seriously to come to grips with the issues they signal.<sup>2</sup>

THE PHILOSOPHER

Infoxication is a problem that is becoming more and more common in the digital age we live in. Having access to so much information online, on social media, news blogs, and so on is overwhelming. It is difficult for us to distinguish true from false information. We are overexposed to negative news, which affects our mood and our mental health. In addition, constant exposure to social media makes us compare ourselves to others, which leads to dissatisfaction and low self-esteem.

On the other hand, post-truth has taken root in our society. It is a troubling phenomenon that negatively affects the way we perceive reality and make decisions. The manipulation of information leads to the distortion of truth and the propagation of lies. In this sense, it is important to be critical and cautious when consuming information, by looking for reliable and verified sources before forming an opinion.



OUR ROLE MODEL

IS NOT MESSI,

MUSK, OR BEYONCÉ,

BUT JESUS.

In an environment that is increasingly saturated with biased information, how can we foster critical thinking to discern between what is true and what is false? There are certain "secular" measures we could apply, such as limiting the amount of time we spend online, following reliable sources of information, checking facts before sharing news, and taking care of our mental health by staying offline every once in a while. However, as followers of Jesus, we must also consider some *divine* proposals.

- a. Have a genuine spiritual relationship that connects you to the truth. Psalm 25:10 says, "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies." We are invited to not only have an intense and committed relationship with God (His covenant), but to also share it with others (His testimonies). A healthy relationship with God will gradually lead us to the truth. Verbalizing what we believe in will strengthen us in the truth.
- b. Look to Jesus. Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Our role model is not Messi, Musk, or Beyoncé, but Jesus. A close reading of the Gospels gives us first-hand access to the truth.
- Enjoy the truth with your people. In his old age, John enjoyed learning about how Christians walked in the truth (3 John 4). Our communities should not only grow in truth, but also feel nourished by it. After all, truth is centered on a person we love (Jesus), and that is truly satisfying.

## **Tomorrow**

#### Hmm... What was I gonna say?

YOUNG PERSON IN A CONVERSATION

Infoxication is giving us Dory Syndrome (Dory is the little blue tang<sup>3</sup> with a bad memory in the movie "Finding Nemo"). Our neurons are barely able to retain information because they are so overstimulated. It is time to let go of the obsession with data and go on an information diet. It would be good for us to fast intermittently from our phones; or limit our sweet, spicy or sour TV series; or reduce our WhatsApp groups. Maybe it is time for us to learn how to say no. No to data and yes to people.

Let us talk more about and with people, for they are the most precious gift God has given us on this planet. God adorned this world with light, shapes, forms, and colors until He finally reached the pinnacle of His creativity: human beings. They were designed in freedom, in complementarity, in equality, and in happiness. He gave them the ability to choose how, where, and when to grow, and He gave them free will to do so. He placed in their hearts the ability to share and to realize that, in the union called "a couple," they would find their wholeness. He gave them eyes to see and understand that we are all as diverse as we are equal; we have exponential forms and equitable opportunities. He gave them the ability to dream and to make manifest the fullness of joy that rules the universe when it vibrates with divine harmony. For people possess things; they cannot be possessed. People are not to be counted (as if they were mere statistics); they count. People are not just bodies; they have feelings too. People are not to be manipulated; they are to be rooted for.



My proposal to you is that we shout together, "No!" No to the messages that normalize the acid word, the black eye, the scratch on the skin. No to the actions, whether real or virtual, of those who think they can possess others, who hinder the growth and eliminate the opportunities of those around them. No to the abuse of the innocent by using status, power or religion to manipulate. No to violence in any and all of its forms. No to remaining passive because of religious fear or excuses. No to the treatment of human beings as objects. No to the tyranny of information. No!

And, of course, let's shout even louder, "Yes!!!" Yes to the message that brings comfort to our hearts. Yes to the loving gestures of those who show unconditional respect. Yes to a religion that promotes the innocence that allows you to grow in harmony. Yes to peace. Yes to action, because that is how we make the world a better place. Yes to people. Yes to leaving confusion behind and living the freedom of truth, the freedom of Jesus. Yes!



## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear Father,

The amount of information I am exposed to can feel overwhelming at times. It is hard to tell what is true and what is false. So, I ask for Your wisdom to know what to say yes to and what to say no to.

Help me make wise choices that are a blessing to people...

# QUESTIONS



In which areas of your life do you feel infoxicated? Explain why.  Victor invites us to focus more on people instead of things. What are some (as an individual, as a group of friends, and as a church) can be a blessin Think of at least two ideas you can put into practice.  According to Victor, in this era of infoxication, we need to develop critical what to say "yes" or "no" to.  What are you saying "no" to today?	The state of the s
(as an individual, as a group of friends, and as a church) can be a blessin Think of at least two ideas you can put into practice. According to Víctor, in this era of infoxication, we need to develop critical what to say "yes" or "no" to.	The state of the s
what to say "yes" or "no" to.	
What are you saying "no" to today?	l thinking to
What are you saying "yes" to today?	



## GO DEEPER

- Read Ecclesiastes 7.
  - a. **Underline** and **highlight** what stands out to you.
  - b. How do verses 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 18 and 20 answer the question, "Who knows what is good for man?" (Ecclesiastes 6:12)?
- 2. Focus on Ecclesiastes 7:1.
  - a. Why would the Preacher say that "a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (NKJV)?
  - b. Consider what the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary says about this text:

    "The day of death. The parallel nature of the second clause to the first is clear when it is realized that the person who lives honorably and attains to a good reputation need have no fear of death. At birth, his life lay ahead, and he knew nothing of its pitfalls, disappointments, sorrows, and defeats. A ship sets sail and leaves the harbor, with little intimation of the perils that may be encountered on the voyage. Upon entering the harbor at the conclusion of a safe ocean crossing, a vessel is welcomed with rejoicing."

"One's birth. One's birth is the beginning of a brief seventy years (Psalm 90:9, 10), but death may be the prelude to an eternity in the new earth (Luke 20:36; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55), of rest (Revelation 14:13), of supreme content (Revelation 7:16), and of eternal glory in contrast with the present afflictions (2 Corinthians 4:17)."

How does this affect your response to point a. above?

- Focus on Ecclesiastes 7:11–12. The Preacher compares wisdom and money. In what ways are the two similar? How would a fool act? What would you say is the Preacher's general rule about wisdom?<sup>4</sup>
- 4. Focus on Ecclesiastes 7:20, 29. What do you learn about human nature? How do these verses speak into the heart problem of sin that we have as humans? What is the solution? (Recall Genesis 3:15 and John 3:16).
- **5. Summarize.** What are your key takeaways from Ecclesiastes chapter 7? Write them down in one paragraph.
- **6. Pray.** Choose one Bible verse that stands out for you from Ecclesiastes 7 and use it as the basis of your prayer today.



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

#### The First Thing You Do

Today's challenge is about building the habit of reading the Bible in the morning, *before you pick up your phone*. You may start by doing this challenge for one week, then another, and then an entire month. It is up to you.

This practice is beneficial in many ways. We do not only start the day with the King of the universe, but we also allow our brain to wake up at its own pace. In this way, each morning we will remember that our value comes from God, and we will help our brain to focus and retain its capabilities.



Here is the soundtrack for this challenge:

https://bit.ly/WOP25Soundtrack6



#### ACTIVITY 1: DATABASE

Materials: a notebook and index cards (to store information).

#### **Activity Description**

For this activity, we are going to create a database of our loved ones. You may probably wonder why. The answer is simple: this will help us focus on getting to know the people we care about better.

For each person that we want to get to know better, we will use a couple of pages (or more), and we will write down the information in different sections:

- / Favorite food
- Food they dislike
- / How did they meet Jesus?
- / Hobbies and interests
- What do they look forward to in the New Earth (what would they like to do there)?
- (Add as many sections as you like.)

#### **Application**

This activity helps us to focus more on others, by learning more about them, instead of just focusing on ourselves. This list will help you choose a nice gift for that person or give you hints on what to do when they are having a bad day. In the same way, Jesus knows each one of us intimately and perfectly; that is why He knows what we need and what we don't need. If we learn to see others the way Jesus does, with love and forgiveness, it will be much easier for us to represent Him in this world.

#### **ACTIVITY 2: NEWS BULLETIN**

Materials: internet, a notebook or sheets of paper, pens.

#### **Activity Description**

Look for a news item that catches your attention. It may be on a topic of your choice. You may also look for a social media advertisement post.

Next, analyze and summarize the news. Write it down on the sheet of paper. Underline the keywords.

Now look for those words (or related topics or concepts) in the Bible. You may access the Internet to help you, or even ChatGPT (just make sure you double check the facts).

Reflect on and answer the following questions:

- What does the Bible say about these words?
- / How do the people in the news behave?
- Does God agree with what is going on?
- / Would Jesus react in the same way?
- What do you think Jesus would think or say upon seeing the news?
- You can also think of your own questions!

#### **Application**

Analyzing what we read and receive every day (which is approximately seven hours according to the world average) is very important. Our lives as reborn Christians must be led by what God says. If we don't trust His Word, promises and decisions, nothing will be worth it. It is good to train our brain to analyze every input we receive and contrast it with the Word of God. Solomon reached this conclusion himself towards the end of his life. Knowing many things is irrelevant if we don't have God's wisdom.



# NOTHING BLIT

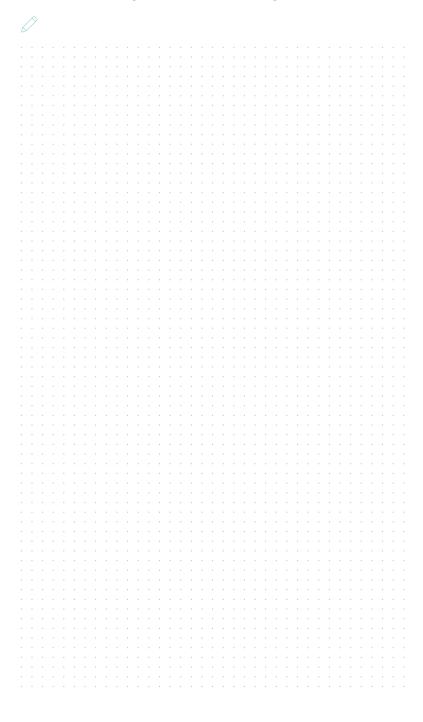
KEY TEXT:

ECCLESIASTES 8:1-9:12

Icebreaker



If you were going to be stuck on a deserted island for twenty years but could have five other people (living or dead) with you, who would you choose and why?



# Yesterday

Enjoy the good moments as they come and reflect on the bad ones. Both are God's doing. You never know what will come your way.

THE PREACHER

(ECCLESIASTES 7:14 VA)

olomon strips the world of its fancy makeup, so that we can begin to build something solid out of our superficial reality. We have been accustomed to history being embellished by those in power, those who could actually "afford the makeup," and who made it disdainfully clear to the masses that their *glamour* was unattainable and that they had to accept their lowly existence. Interestingly, today we prefer to evade ourselves in enhanced virtual realities instead of facing our everyday world.

I must say that "the wrinkle is beautiful" because it implies much more than we think or imagine. "Wrinkles" embarrass teenagers who see a new pimple on their face, stigmatize those who suffer from hypothyroidism under the dictatorship of the "perfect weight," and make those who see their "receding hairline" obsess over finding the right hairpiece. "Wrinkles" are mutable and, by definition, unsatisfying. Rubens' Three Graces would be so frustrated if they realized that—after making such remarkable efforts to accumulate cellulite—they had a "surplus" of beauty. But "wrinkles are beautiful" because they place us in a reality in which we can begin to grow.

Solomon describes the superficial to help us in our journey of self-discovery.



THE WRINKLE IS BEAUTIFUL.



SUPERFICIALITY

SEDUCES US, BUT

DEPTH-IN CHRIST-

ENABLES US TO

EXPERIENCE TRUE LOVE.

# Today

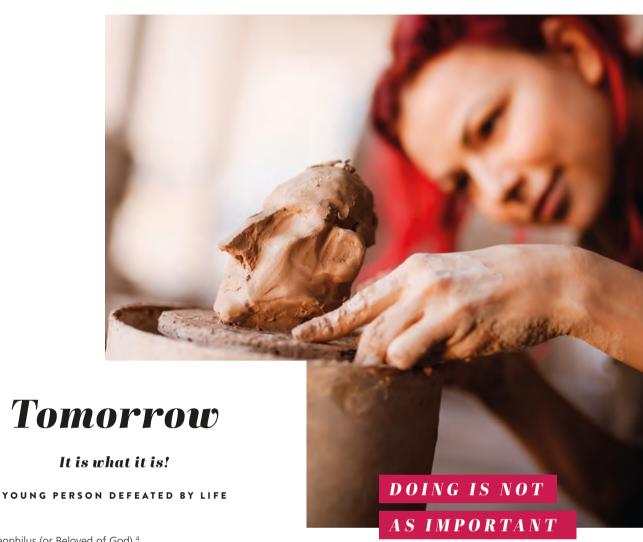
Don Quixote was not a conqueror—he was conquered. But in his defeat, as Cervantes showed us, he demonstrated that "all we can do in the face of that incluctable defeat called life is to try to understand it."<sup>2</sup>

THE PHILOSOPHER

In 1992, Rigoberta Menchú Tum was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. This woman of K'iche' Guatemalan roots managed to cross the borders of pain, marginalization, and nothingness to grow as a person. This is one of her poems:

I crossed the border with dignity. My sack is full of so many things from this rainy land: I carry the millenary memories of *Patrocinio*, the *caites* that were born with me, the perfume of spring, the scent of the mosses, the caresses of the cornfield and the glorious callouses of my childhood. I carry the *güipil colorial* for the party upon my return. I carry the bones and the rest of the corn. Yes, I do! This sack will return home, no matter what.<sup>3</sup>

She extracted the best from her memories and decided to forget the rest—to leave it all behind—because we should not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by the seeming nothingness of life. Superficiality seduces us, but depth—in Christ—enables us to experience true love. Therefore, we can, and we must, face reality, if we want to overcome.



Dear Theophilus (or Beloved of God),4

I hope with all my heart that you are well when you read this letter. Theo, it has been a long time since I have seen the sparkle in your eyes; you don't smile much and you look sad. I know you have been through a lot.

Sometimes, I think you have misunderstood things; the things that hurt you keep you from seeing the horizon. However, I still insist that you look up and also from above (you will need your imagination for the latter). You need to see things differently. At the end of the day, you are not responsible for Redemption. You already put all your heart into it and that is enough for the Lord to look at you and be satisfied.

I know that you love the Word and that you approach it with a desire to find out what God likes and to allow it to change your life, day by day. So I want to give you a gift: I want to unpack some of its contents for you that will give your heart rest and allow your eyes to see things in a new way. Many people read the book of Ecclesiastes from its seemingly pessimistic perspective. They approach the text without seeing the big picture. Ecclesiastes describes seven major problems of human nature, but it does not stop there; it proposes solutions.

Work. First of all, it makes it clear that both human work and human effort are futile (1:12-2:22). The text offers us life. There is nothing better in this world than seeking vitality. Solomon reminds us that it is vital for us to see the positive in what we do, although doing is not as important as the desire to continue contributing. This attitude of vitality, the text explains, has only one source: God. In the end, it is God who puts things back in place when people put themselves in the right place: before Yhwh. Theo, when you place yourself before God and you enjoy the life He has placed in your heart, you will be happy. Look beyond the obstacles and fulfill the mission; enjoy the mission!

AS THE DESIRE

CONTRIBUTING.

TO CONTINUE

**Opportunities.** The text invites us to admit that we do not know God's intentions; we do not know why He continues to allow evil in the world (3:1-15). There is a time for everything, and by enjoying each time, we lean into its greatness.

Learn to recognize the opportunities that life offers you. Some of them will be clearly positive; embrace them with positivity. Others will have the appearance of negativity; embrace them with positivity. This attitude is a divine thing.

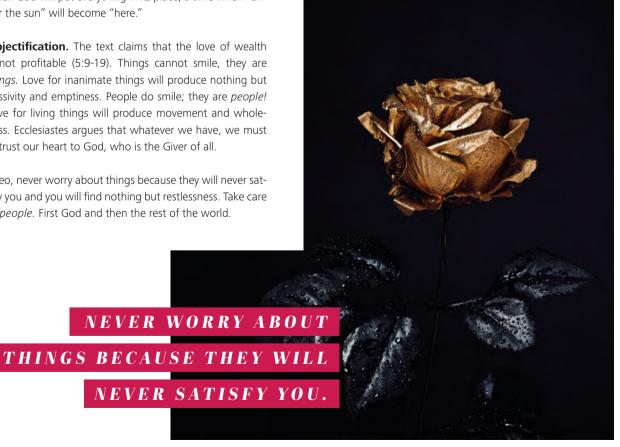
We—in reality—cannot change God's plans. In fact, if we knew them all in detail, we would approve them all because they are the best option. Thanks to Jesus, we know that God is a God of infinite kindness, and we cannot even imagine the things He has in store for us. We must accept that this life is short and that death is inevitable. But, Theo, we need not worry because we have the promise of life beyond, in eternity. Look to the right horizon and you will find peace.

- **Justice.** Ecclesiastes confronts us with the injustice we see in this world (3:16-22). It is interesting that Solomon distances himself from the situation with a "there;" he does not identify himself with the social reality that surrounds him. He does, however, trust that there will come a time when God will put everything in its place, a time when "under the sun" will become "here."
- **Objectification.** The text claims that the love of wealth is not profitable (5:9-19). Things cannot smile, they are things. Love for inanimate things will produce nothing but passivity and emptiness. People do smile; they are people! Love for living things will produce movement and wholeness. Ecclesiastes argues that whatever we have, we must entrust our heart to God, who is the Giver of all.

Theo, never worry about things because they will never satisfy you and you will find nothing but restlessness. Take care of people. First God and then the rest of the world.

Role models. People are hard to figure out (8:10-15). It seems that sinners are the role models as opposed to the righteous, who are mislabeled as lazy, radical, or extreme. The wicked do well while good people have a hard time. And we hate that; it makes our lives bitter. Well, this reaction, which is perfectly normal, should be overcome with a dose of celebration, because by praising the God of joy, we highlight other role models.

> Theo, we are Christians, so we should not react according to what others do, but according to our principles. We love because we live in Love, we are kind because we are inspired by Kindness, we are joyful because we believe in Joy. That way we confront the "role models" with our Role Model, and we do it cheerfully.





**Eternity.** From our perspective, we are on our way to our final destination (9:1-10). Whether you are a believer or not, our first existential boundary is death. To live with this fact is to live in reality, to share reality, and to know how to face it. How? With an attitude of eternity. True trust in God (and we have said this many times) goes beyond death, but (and we do not say this enough) this trust must already place eternity in our hearts because the Kingdom of God is already here. That is why Solomon invites us to enjoy what is to come, starting today.

Joy. Ecclesiastes encourages us to practice joy because human life is short (11:7-12:7). A positive attitude, says Solomon, must begin "before". Before we get old, before we get sick, before we feel weak, before we can no longer sing, before the dust returns to the ground. We must experience the joy that flows from a moral balance and from physical and attitudinal youth.

Theo, bitterness does not reflect the character of Christ. It is true that He suffered like no other, but He learned, day by day, to find joy in His Father, to smile at all times because He knew in Whom He believed. I am not asking you to be a minimalist; I am asking you to learn to live with hope "before" the days of great pain and darkness arrive

We live in difficult times and we are in need of Christians who show the greatness of God, who have experienced the satisfaction of Christ's true character. Christians who reflect joy in such a way that makes others want to imitate them. We've had enough gloomy faces! We've had enough pouting! Let us enjoy the existence of God within us (with excitement); having Christ in our hearts (with joy); having the Spirit inhabiting us (with encouragement); cherishing every moment (with delight); celebrating our friends (with hubbub); offering solutions (with relief) and having everybody find out (with rejoicing).

Nothing? Not at all! Everything! Theo, how can I put this? Stop looking at yourself and start looking at Him. Don't you feel like imitating Him?

I have shared all of this with you because I love you and I want you to grow in Christ Jesus.

A big hug!



#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

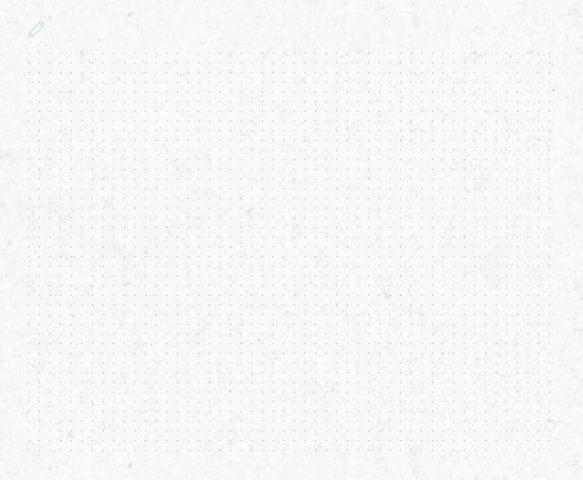
# QUESTIONS



U	wnat stood out for you from to	aay's reaaings v	nye		
2	"The wrinkle is beautiful." Who	at does this stater	ment mean to y	ou in light	t of today's
	reading?				

W	hat are your key takeaw	eays from each sectio	on of Theo's letter?	
<b>a.</b>	Work			
b.	Opportunities			
c.	Justice			
d.	Objectification			
e.	Role models			
f.	Eternity			

• "Bitterness does not reflect the character of Christ." What things tempt you to be bitter or act bitterly towards others? How does Jesus' example help you to handle these situations?





## GO DEEPER

- **1. Read** Ecclesiastes 8:1. How does it contrast with the mood in Ecclesiastes 7:25-29?
- **2. Read** Ecclesiastes 8:2-5. **Summarize** what it teaches about the correct attitude toward a governing authority.
- 3. Read Ecclesiastes 8:6-9. What human limitations are high-lighted here?
- 4. Read Ecclesiastes 8:10–13. The Preacher returns to the concept of those who fear God. In 3:16; 4:1; and 5:8, he has already pointed out that people do not always get what they deserve in this life. What is the Preacher's solution to the reality that sometimes evil seems to prevail and bad things happen to the righteous? How does he arrive at this solution? What should our response be to these things?<sup>5</sup>
- **Read** Ecclesiastes 9:7-9. How should we live in light of the fact that death is a reality?
- **6. Reflect.** "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV).
- 7. Reflect. "The wicked may sin massively a hundred times over and yet live a long life. This is admittedly puzzling if God is good and just and truly governs the universe. Yet Qohelet resists the conclusion that wickedness pays. He continues to affirm that it will go better with the person who fears God than with the person who does not (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13), and he explicitly states that the days of the wicked 'will not lengthen like a shadow,' by which is probably meant that the life of the wicked is a fleeting and insubstantial thing that does not last long."6
- 8. Pray. Write down a prayer as if you were writing a letter to God, following the structure of Theo's letter in today's reading:

a.	Work				7
b.	Opportunities				
C.	Justice				
d.	Objectification				
e.	Role models				
f.	Eternity	'sy			
a	lov				



## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

#### **Acts of Kindness**

The goal of this personal challenge is to foster mutual support and to share positive attitudes based on joy, encouragement and trust in God to help others who are going through difficulties. So, the proposal is that, for an entire week, you do small acts of kindness for someone around you, whether from school, work, church or family. Also, try to do acts of kindness in different areas; this will help you be more aware of other people's needs. For example:

- Acts of kindness related to keeping someone company: visit someone, call someone on the phone, take a friend to the doctor so they don't go alone...
- Acts of kindness related to acts of service: read a story to a child, collaborate with ADRA, clean the stairs of your house...
- Acts of kindness related to small gestures: share sweets with your classmates or work colleagues, make a bookmark with a Bible verse for your Sabbath School friends, buy a souvenir for a family member when you go on a trip...
- Acts of kindness related to words: acknowledge the good work of your colleagues, write a thank you letter to a former teacher, say you are sorry when you make a mistake...



Here is the soundtrack for this challenge
Soundtrack 7
https://bit.ly/WOP25Soundtrack7



#### **ACTIVITY 1: THE LETTER**

Materials: writing materials.

#### **Activity Description**

Write yourself a letter and re-read it one year from now.

Imagine you could give advice and words of encouragement to your future self. What would you say? What would you like to do by then? Where would you like to be? What personal challenges would you like to overcome by then?

#### **Application**

Solomon reflects on and writes about several of the big problems of human nature, but he does not only describe them; he also provides solutions. Remember that, whenever you go through a difficult or bad time, the Bible is full of examples of fortitude; strategies that worked in the past, which you can apply today; and messages of hope and resilience that will help you keep going.

# ACTIVITY 2: SELF-CARE AT THE ECCLESIASTES SPA

**Materials:** writing materials, sticky notes, mobile phones, water and tea, instruments... and creativity!

#### **Activity Description**

In this activity, you will enjoy some self-care activities at the "ECCLESIASTES SPA."

Make several groups. Each group must think of a self-care activity they can offer that will provide both personal and spiritual benefits. Once you are ready, go through the different SPA stations (spend about five minutes in each station).

Here is a list of suggested groups and activities for this self-care moment:

- Group of chain massages
- Group of Bible verses
- Group of making tea and sharing what we like the most about Jesus
- Group of music and summer camp songs
- Group of online Christian sticker designs
- Group of friendship bracelets

#### **Application**

Personal and spiritual self-care is a topic that appears in the Bible. Finding different moments and social activities that are positive in our lives can be fun and healing. Pray to God and ask Him for creativity to incorporate positive self-care routines that are fulfilling and help you get closer to Him.

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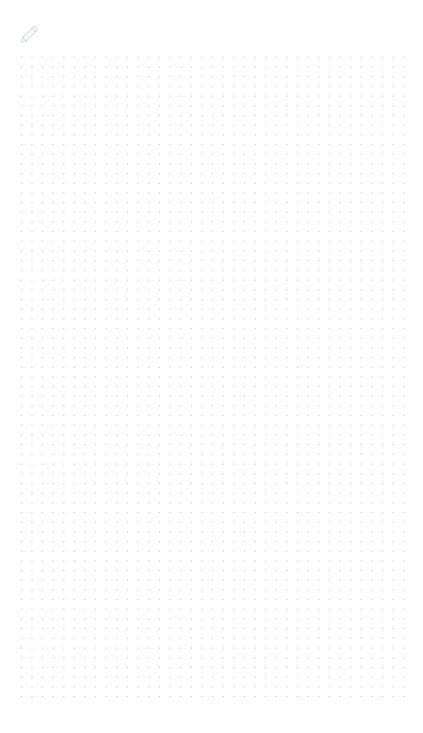


**KEY TEXT:**FCCLESIASTES 11·7-12·12

Icebreaker



If you had only six months to live, and you had unlimited resources, what would be on your bucket list of places to go, things to do, people to see?



MAYBE WE



THINGS.

# Yesterday

At the end of the day, this is the message: All has been said and done. Respect God, keep His commandments, because that is the making of a person.

#### THE PREACHER

(ECCLESIASTES 12:13 VA)

would have loved to be in that class (that's how I imagine this last part of Ecclesiastes' sermon). Sitting next to the wisest man in history, I would have expected him to sum up all that knowledge and life experience.

Going through my notes, I would have noticed that there were other educated men who also talked about wisdom. Job declared, "Behold, to respect the Lord is wisdom, and to turn from evil, intelligence" (Job 28:28 VA).

The Psalmist confirmed this, "The beginning of wisdom is to have respect for Yhwh; all those who practice His commandments know it; He deserves to be praised at all times" (Psalm 111:10 VA).

Solomon himself spoke about this several times when he compiled some proverbs. First, he said, "The beginning of wisdom is respect for Yhwh; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7 VA). And then he declared, "Respect for Yhwh is the beginning of wisdom, and understanding of the Most Holy, intelligence" (Proverbs 9:10 VA).



So, when he said, "At the end of the day, this is the message: All has been said and done. Respect God, keep His commandments, because that is the making of a person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13 VA), I would not have been surprised. Wise people agree that respecting God is the first step in having the right relationship with Him. And, as a result of that respectful relationship, it becomes natural to follow His advice. These two factors make people whole. Why is that? Because by respecting God, we relate to Him as He is, a person. It begins with a relationship of me-You instead of me-That.1 We exchange something for Someone. And when we get to know Him, the rest comes naturally.

Maybe this thing called religion is not so difficult. Maybe we overcomplicate spiritual things with superficial things. As Jesus said, it is as simple as loving God and loving others (Matthew 22:37-40).

# HE IS THE SOURCE OF TRUTH AND WISDOM AND THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE STORY OF

OUR REDEMPTION.

# Today

## The truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear.<sup>2</sup>

THE PHILOSOPHER

The concept one has of God varies according to the religious tradition in which one was raised. For a Catholic, God is the creator of the universe, infinite love, and the source of truth and goodness. For a Muslim, God is the only being worthy of worship and obedience, merciful and compassionate. For a Protestant Christian, God is loving and protective, always present and ready to listen and help. And for an Adventist? In addition to what other denominations say, God is perceived as a figure of moral and spiritual authority, who guides and protects His followers. In times of trouble or uncertainty, we turn to our faith in God to find comfort and hope. We pray, we reflect, and we seek guidance to face the challenges of life and find a more meaningful purpose. God is a source of inspiration and strength for many, who find comfort and meaning in their relationship with Him. He is the source of truth and wisdom and the main character in the story of our redemption. He is the axis that holds everything together. He is Someone we can see clearly in Jesus. In that moment, we become His and nothing becomes everything; we are made whole in His salvation. In the words of Ellen G. White:

Religion consists in doing the words of Christ; not doing to earn God's favor, but because, all undeserving, we have received the gift of His love. Christ places the salvation of man, not upon profession merely, but upon faith that is made manifest in works of righteousness. Doing, not saying merely, is expected of the followers of Christ. It is through action that character is built. "As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Not those whose hearts are touched by the Spirit, not those who now and then yield to its power, but they that are led by the Spirit, are the sons [and daughters] of God.<sup>3</sup>

Such a God deserves our respect and, of course, our obedience. We know that He is so good that we gratefully place ourselves in His hands.

# **Tomorrow**

Worthy is the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb!

YOUNG PERSON IN WORSHIP

This happened not only to Solomon, but also to many other people. It is interesting that the most intelligent people in the world at the end of their lives—think similarly to the Preacher. Socrates made it fashionable to say, "I only know that I know nothing," and we still say that today. Thomas Aguinas, one of the greatest theologians to walk this earth, said the following about his own knowledge: "Omne foenum" (a Latin expression meaning "all is straw"). In other words, what he knew was not that much. What about Einstein? He said, "I want to know how God created this world. I'm not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thoughts; the rest are just details."4 What a spectacular sentence! The details prevent us from seeing what is truly important. Marilyn Vos Savant has been described as the most intelligent woman to ever live. She is said to have coined the phrase, "The greatest achievement is not to be the smartest, but to be the wisest."5 Interesting coincidences, don't you think?

When we realize that "we know nothing," God is there to help us understand something. He reveals Himself in our innermost being. As the Psalmist said, "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart" (Psalm 51:6 ESV), because God loves to communicate with us "in depth" and He wants us to be "wise" beyond our IQ. "The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). When we see that what this world offers—with its riches and illusions—is straw, we realize that it is nothing compared to what God has in store for us. This is what Daniel realized when he contemplated the judgment, "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35 ESV). In the end, the superficial will disappear and a new world will emerge from the depths of Christ's sacrifice.



In a moment of deep introspection, you may feel that nothing is worthwhile. The anxiety over time or work; the influencers who run out of gas at the slightest pressure; the excess of information that is *infoxicating*; the generalized social injustice; the emptiness of enjoying pleasure for pleasure's sake, which leads to objectification... we feel none of this is worth it. True enough! But is

nothing worthwhile? One thing is: looking to Jesus. In Jesus we find hope and rest, truth and wisdom, justice and redemption, fullness of joy and a fulfilling relationship.

Solomon's last lesson (the one in which he taught us that the most important thing is to trust in God by respecting and obeying Him and abiding by His counsel) ends with the first lesson of Jesus, the "stone" that has been growing in our hearts for centuries, in Matthew 5:3-11. If Solomon was wise, what can we say about Jesus (the Source of all wisdom)! Allow me to adopt a Gen Z style because this lesson is worthwhile; everyone needs to know this.

Happy are the "good-for-nothings" because they are the true citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Happy are the "gloomy" because they will have good vibes. Happy are the "laid back" because they will inherit the New Earth.

Happy are the "hungry" for righteousness, because they will eat their fill.

Happy are the "lovey-dovey" because they will be BAE.

Happy are the "innocent" because they will see God clearly. Happy are the "hygge practitioners" because they will be called children of God.

Happy are the "bullied" for being legal, because they are the true citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Happy are you when you are trolled, canceled and hated because of Me. No cap! Stay alive and LOL. Heaven FTW!<sup>6</sup> Remember that, in the past, our fam was also bullied like this.

Years later, James would realize that Jesus' message was filled with wisdom from above because "it is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17, 18 ESV). Solomon could not have said it better himself.

Whoever you are, good-for-nothing (someone in need), gloomy, laid-back, hungry, lovey-dovey, innocent, hygge practitioner (peacemaker), or bullied, you have access to the best this world has to offer while you wait for the New Earth: true happiness—happiness in Christ.

Like the Preacher, I invite you to overcome the nothings of this world and live intensely in the wholeness of Christ. What do you think? Dope, right?!



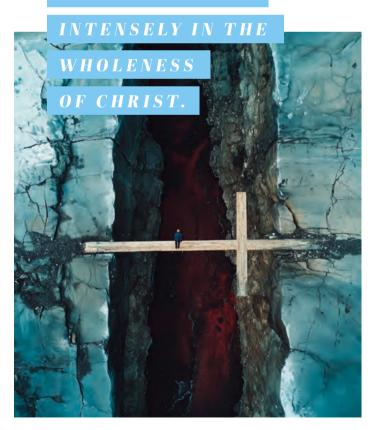
## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear Father,
I want to live a meaningful life. I want to respect
You and keep Your commandments. You are worthy
of my praise. Give me wisdom that is pure, peaceable,
gentle, impartial, sincere, full of mercy and

OVERCOME THE

NOTHINGS OF THIS

WORLD AND LIVE



# QUESTIONS



- What stood out for you from today's reading? Why?
- ② Solomon's ultimate advice is for us to "respect God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13 VA). What do you make of that? How does this impact your definition of what religion is all about (see James 1:27; 2:14-17; and 3:17, 18)?
- The truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear" (Zygmunt Bauman). What are your thoughts on this statement?
- This is our last chapter. What are your key takeaways from this journey through Ecclesiastes?





## GO DEEPER

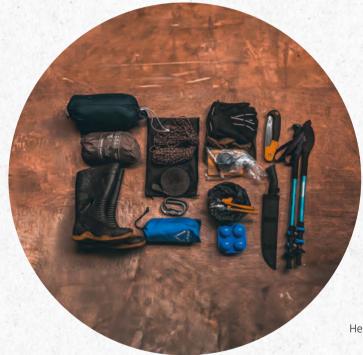
- 1. Read Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7.
  - a. What should motivate us to embrace wisdom?
  - b. What is proper rejoicing or enjoyment of life?
  - c. **Focus on** Ecclesiastes 11:9-10. How does its message compare with 2 Corinthians 5:10; 7:1; Colossians 3:5-14? What are your conclusions?
- 2. Read Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.
  - a. How does Ecclesiastes 12:13 build upon, amplify, or reinforce the earlier message of Ecclesiastes 3:14, 5:7, and 7:18?8
  - b. What is the Preacher's ultimate conclusion? **Paraphrase** it in your own words.
  - c. What are the most important connections between the message of Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 and the message of the entire Bible?<sup>9</sup>
- **Research** the word translated as "fear" (God) in Ecclesiastes 12:13. Use Bible dictionaries and commentaries or ask your mentor or pastor for help.
  - a. Reflect on the following explanations of the term "fear God," taken from the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary:
    - Deuteronomy 4:10: "To 'fear' God is to regard Him with profound and reverent respect (Ex. 19:10-13; 20:20) and to have proper regard for His will (Deut. 8:6; Prov. 3:7; Eccl. 12:13; Isa. 11:2, 3; 33:6).
    - Deutoronomy 6:2: "The Hebrew word 'to fear' means 'to stand in awe of,' 'to reverence,'
       'to honor.'"
  - b. Reflect. "Do you take God seriously? When you can't figure Him out, do you still fear Him? For either you will fear the Creator or fear the creation; it takes the greater fear to dispel the lesser fear. God is God, and we are not. Fear Him without terror; fear Him with honor and reverence. Fear Him and do what He says. As it is with fear, so it is with faith: 'Faith, if it has no works, is dead' (James 2:17).... Do you take God seriously? If you do, you'll keep His commandments. And you'll take seriously what He said about Jesus. God Himself declared from heaven: 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!' (Matthew 17:5)."10
- 4. Reflect. "But while the knowledge of science is power, the knowledge that Jesus came in person to impart is still greater power. The science of salvation is the most important science to be learned in the preparatory school of earth. The wisdom of Solomon is desirable, but the wisdom of Christ

- is far more desirable and more essential. We cannot reach Christ through a mere intellectual training; but through Him we can reach the highest round of the ladder of intellectual greatness. While the pursuit of knowledge in art, in literature, and in trades should not be discouraged, the student should first secure an experimental knowledge of God and His will" (Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 19.2).
- Read chapters 1 to 6 of Prophets and Kings, which focus on Solomon's life and reign.
  - a. You may use the following rubric<sup>11</sup> to write down your key takeaways from each chapter:
    - The Word. Choose one word that summarizes and embodies what this chapter means to you. (It may be a word from the text that stands out for you or a word that you come up with.)
    - **The Point.** Summarize what the point of the chapter is in 2-3 lines. What is it all about?
    - **The Person.** What do you learn about God's character in this chapter?
    - The Prayer. What would you like to pray for in light of this chapter?
    - **The Practice.** What practical applications do you take from the text? How are you going to put what you learned into practice?
    - **The Promise.** What promise/s do you want to recall after reading this chapter? (Also consider other Bible verses related to the topic.)
- **6. Look** for other Bible verses that talk about wisdom. You can start with Proverbs 1 and James 3.
  - a. What other verses did you find?
  - b. **Choose** your favorite verse(s) and keep them at hand:
    - Create a bookmark
    - **Do** some lettering
    - **Compose** a song or a poem
    - **Create** artwork and hang it somewhere visible
    - Write them down on your bathroom mirror
- 7. Pray about your key takeaways from this study on Ecclesiastes. Talk with God about how you want to live your life meaningfully moving forward. (You may use page 93 to write down your prayer.)



"Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, 'Life is not pleasant anymore.'"

ECCLESIASTES 12:1 (NLT)





Here is a list of ideas for you to pursue as a final challenge:

1. Take some time to review all the chapters. Use page 92 to write down your thoughts as a conclusion to this journey. What has impacted you the most? What are the next steps for you?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- a. How has the Holy Spirit used my study of Ecclesiastes to enrich my understanding of the gospel?
- b. In what aspects of my own character would I like to grow as a result of the study of Ecclesiastes?
- c. How have I grown in my understanding of God's love and character through the study of Ecclesiastes?

We have now reached the end of this study on Ecclesiastes. It has been a thought-provoking journey, which has probably made us question many things in our lives. What is truly meaningful? What is futile? How can we live our lives in wisdom?

It is now time to be intentional about our next steps. Don't walk away from this study without making it real and meaningful to you and your circumstances.



- 2. Did you run out of time to complete any of the Personal Challenges or the Go Deeper sections? Now is a perfect time to go back and do it. You can even turn a personal challenge into a weekly, monthly or yearly goal.
- 3. We only had eight chapters to go over Ecclesiastes. You may still have questions. You may still need to go over it again.
  - Use a Bible Study Guide such as Knowing the Bible: Ecclesiastes, A 12-Week Study, by Justin S. Holcomb, or Ecclesiastes (Lifechange), by The Navigators, to dig even deeper. If you prefer, ask your pastor, a friend or a mentor to recommend a similar resource. The important thing is to use a study guide as a tool to help you get the most out of the text.
- 4. Talk to your pastor or mentor and use this study as a prompt to organize Bible study groups, Q&A sessions, talks, one-on-one conversations, etc. to keep on discovering more about God, wisdom and the meaning of life. Do not keep your questions and thoughts to yourself. There is growth in sharing with other people.
- 5. Learn from the wisdom of others.
  - a. Now is the perfect time to choose a book on Ecclesiastes and the topics it addresses, and take the time to read it, either by yourself, with friends, with your significant other or with your spouse. Make sure you actively read it, highlighting what stands out for you and writing down your own comments and takeaways.

Here are some suggestions:

- W. Milton Adams, Carolyn Byers, John Metrinko, and Cynthia Stigora. (2010). Simply Ecclesiastes: Finding Hope When All Seems Meaningless. Simple Church Bible Study Guide. Simple Church.
- Jacques Doukhan. (2006). Ecclesiastes: All Is Vanity. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Association.
- Gerhard Pfandl and Ángel M. Rodríguez. (2006). "Reading Psalms and the Wisdom Literature", in Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach, ed. George W. Reid, vol. 1, Biblical Research Institute Studies. Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, pp. 176-178.
- Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs. (2022). Nampa, Idaho, Hagerstown, Maryland: Pacific Press Publishing Association; Review and Herald Publishing Association.

As with anything you see or read, apply the principle of Paul: "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Make up your own mind about this important topic, asking for guidance from the Holy Spirit.

- b. In addition to books, you can also listen to podcasts, sermons, etc. about the topic. Here are some examples:
  - Podcast: "The Professor's Disillusionment", Gospel In Life, by Timothy Keller. Available at: https://podcast. gospelinlife.com/e/the-professor-s-disillusionment/
  - Podcast: "Hevel", by Bible Project. Available at: https://bibleproject.com/podcast/ ecclesiastes-part-1-hevel/
- 6. What (hard) questions do you need to personally address as a result of this study? Do it now.



#### ACTIVITY 1: URBAN TRIBE

Materials: writing materials.

#### **Activity Description**

Urban tribes are cultural movements, generally youth, that share fashion, language, and a series of habits and aesthetic tastes.

For this activity, make groups. Each group will research the characteristics of current urban tribes and classify them as positive or negative.

Once you have done this, reflect on the following:

- Do you believe young Christians could also be considered an urban tribe?
- What are the positive aspects of the young Christian "tribe"?
- Is there anything negative that could be improved?
- Is there any positive element from another urban tribe that could be incorporated in the young Christian lifestyle? If yes, which one/s?

#### **Application**

Acceptance and belonging are two elements that are essential for our development. We all like to feel that we "fit" in a group, that we belong there. The problem is that trying to be accepted at all costs may lead us to adapt without reflecting on whether these new habits are positive or negative. Solomon was aware of this, and he reminded us that we should closely and critically examine all aspects of our lives. Once we have done that, we should only keep the habits that bring us closer to God.

#### ACTIVITY 2: SOCIOGRAM

Materials: writing materials, phosphorescent markers.

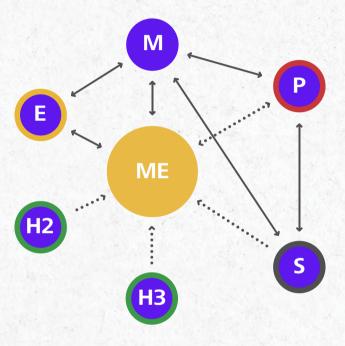
#### **Activity Description**

A sociogram is a visual representation of a person's relationships within an organization and it helps to see and explain existing social interactions.

Each person will prepare their sociogram with six people from their surroundings. Follow the instructions below:

- 1. Draw a circle in the middle to represent you ("me") and six circles around it to represent each of the people you choose. Write down their names in the circles.
- 2. Join the middle circle "me" with each of the other circles, using a line. This line will be:
  - / Solid: if your relationship is positive.
  - Dotted: if there are things in your relationship that could be improved.
  - Arrows: use arrows to indicate if one person interacts more with the other, or if the relationship is balanced.
- **3.** Reflect on the level of *intensity* of each relationship and represent it using the thickness of the line that connects you with that person:
  - Draw a thick line if you have an intense relationship.
  - Draw a thin line if your relationship is sporadic.
- 4. As a last step, analyze if the other circles are also connected between them and repeat the steps with each of those circles, this time focusing on how you perceive those relationships.

Reflect on your final drawing. What do you see? What would you like to change in this relationship map?



#### **Application**

Our relationships with other people create a social network that is full of emotions and intensity. Logically, there are people we are closer to than others, and we have represented this in the sociogram. But your drawing is not finished yet. You will now use the phosphorescent marker to color in the middle circle "me", which represents you. The Lord has called us to be a light for others. To "paint their lives" and make their lives easier with joy and hope. May all our relationships be filled with that authentic light that comes from the Lord, and may we always reflect His character and His love on other people's lives.

"That's the whole story.
Here now is my final conclusion:
Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty."

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NLT)

# MY THOUGHTS

What are your key takeaways from this journey through Ecclesiastes? How will you apply them in your life?

# MY PRAYER

What do you need to pray about now? Write down your prayer below.

#### Nothing at All, or Not: A Practical Study Guide on Ecclesiastes

Original Title: *Nada de nada, o no. Guía práctica de estudio de Eclesiastés*©2025 Youth Department of the Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Note: The original manuscript was written in Spanish and translated into English. The English text version served as the template for translation into all other languages.

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#### **English Standard Version (ESV)**

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VA: this indicates that the Bible text was translated by the author, Víctor M. Armenteros.

This resource is recommended to be used as the Youth Week of Prayer for 2025.

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#### HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 93. Retrieved from egwwritings.org.

1 ChatGPT: I am a virtual assistant "designed to assist with a wide range of tasks,

#### CHAPTER 1

- sun) except for chapter 4
- <sup>2</sup> VA: this indicates that the Bible text was translated by Víctor M. Armenteros.
- Inc., p. 102. Zygmunt Bauman is called the "prophet of the 21st Century". He was

#### CHAPTER 2

#### CHAPTER 3

- The word 'et is a reference to a moment or situation that is propitious
- is derived from this word. Even though many versions translate it as "to do", hepes actually means "to like", "to please", "to enjoy", "to relish".

  6 To acknowledge it: in other words, to accept and embrace it.

#### CHAPTER 4

- filosófica" in Isonomia. Revista de Teoría y Filosofia del Derecho, p. 49. Retrieved from: https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3636/363657667003/html/

#### CHAPTER 5

- Publishing Association, p. 78. Retrieved from: https://egwwritings.org/book/b88. Zygmunt Bauman. (2007). Consuming Life, Malden, MA: Polity Press, p. 13.
- <sup>4</sup> Volkmar Sigusch. (1998). "The Neosexual Revolution", in Archives of Sexual

- 8 Question taken from the YouVersion Bible app plan, "Ecclesiastes",

#### CHAPTER 6

#### CHAPTER 7

- This is the name we give to any young Christian who cares about godly things. From *Theo*=God and *philus*=love, Theophilus means "loved by God."
- (Knowing the Bible), Crossway, p. 62. Kindle Edition.

  The Navigators. Ecclesiastes (LifeChange), p. 86. Kindle Edition.

#### CHAPTER 8

- about the relationship between people and God. See Martin Buber. (1984). Yo y tú. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión.
- https://egwwritings.org/book/b150 https://www.livescience.com/65628-theory-of-everything-millennia-away.html



Ecclesiastes is undoubtedly a book written for our times. It talks about the things that seem important to us, but are not. It makes us think about what is really significant in the universe. And in the end, we discover that everything is connected to God and our relationship with Him.

These eight chapters will encourage you to reflect on your relationship with the world and with the people we find in it. It will be a great opportunity to pause and think, think with a sense of perspective.



