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THE 66-BOOK GROUP BIBLE STUDY SERIES • BOOK 21 OF 66

קֹהֶלֶת

ECCLESIASTES

A 6-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

THE COMPLETE STUDY • WEEKS 1-6 • ECCLESIASTES 1:1-12:14
GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

Ecclesiastes: A 6-Week Bible Study

A 6-Week Bible Study • ESV® • 6 Sessions of 75-90 Minutes

LEADER GUIDE EDITION

Complete Participant Text + Interleaved Pacing, Hebrew Word Studies, Facilitation Probes & Pitfalls

Ecclesiastes: A 6-Week Bible Study

Leader Guide Edition • General / Mixed Group Track

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WEEK 1 OF 6

Week 1: Vanity and the Royal Experiment — Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26

Scripture Scope: Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

- **The title:** "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). "Preacher" translates the Hebrew Qoheleth, one who gathers or addresses an assembly. The speaker takes up the role of a wise and wealthy king like Solomon, whether Solomon himself wrote the book or the Preacher speaks in his voice.
- **The voices:** The Preacher reports what he has seen "under the sun," with repeated calls to enjoy God's gifts. A closing narrator (12:9–14) commends the Preacher and states the end of the matter.
- **Its form:** A wisdom inquiry, not a story. Reflections, poems, and short sayings are woven into a search for what lasts.
- **The structure:**
  - Title and thesis (1:1–11).
  - The royal experiment (1:12–2:26).
  - Time and eternity (chapter 3).
  - Toil and companionship (chapter 4).
  - Worship, vows, and wealth (5:1–6:12).
  - The limits and value of wisdom (7:1–8:17).
  - Death, enjoyment, and folly (9:1–10:20).
  - Bold generosity, youth, old age, and the closing words (11:1–12:14).
- **Why it matters:** Life "under the sun" cannot carry the weight of meaning we ask of it. Work, wisdom, pleasure, and even justice are real gifts, yet they are also hebel: vapor, fleeting, and at times frustrating. The way through is not cynicism but the fear of God, receiving daily gifts from his hand, and remembering the Creator who will bring every deed into judgment.

How This 6-Week Study Works

You may notice this study is shorter than our usual eight weeks. Even though we are 8weekbiblestudy.com, stretching Ecclesiastes to eight weeks would have left it thin on content, and we never want to trade quality for quantity.

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, this is a 6-week study rather than the series' usual eight weeks. Ecclesiastes has 222 verses, and its units are tightly argued, so six weeks follow the book's own turns without padding. Each week invites you to listen honestly to the Preacher together through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Ecclesiastes and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.

- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Ecclesiastes:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 6-Week Ecclesiastes Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**Vanity and the Royal Experiment** (1:1–2:26)	Vanity of Vanities (1:1–18) / The Royal Experiment (2:1–26)	Life in the Lord is not in vain; something greater than Solomon is here
2	**Time, Toil, and Companionship** (3:1–4:16)	A Time for Every Matter (3:1–22) / Two Are Better Than One (4:1–16)	The fullness of time; Christ the companion and the judge
3	**Fear God; the Vanity of Wealth** (5:1–6:12)	Guard Your Steps in the House of God (5:1–7) / The One Who Loves Money (5:8–6:12)	Treasures in heaven; let your words be few; God in heaven, we on earth
4	**Wisdom's Limits** (7:1–8:17)	The House of Mourning (7:1–29) / Who Can Find Out the Work of God? (8:1–17)	Wisdom from above; the only one who does good and never sins
5	**Death, Wisdom, and Folly** (9:1–10:20)	One Event Comes to All (9:1–12) / Wisdom Is Better Than Strength (9:13–10:20)	Death swallowed up; making the best use of the time
6	**Remember Your Creator** (11:1–12:14)	Cast Your Bread; Rejoice, O Young Man (11:1–10) / The End of the Matter (12:1–14)	The Creator who became flesh; the judgment seat of Christ

How to Use This Leader Guide Edition

This **Leader Guide Edition** is built on a synchronized two-edition architecture so you never have to juggle two separate books during your small group or mini-church gathering:

1. 100% Word-for-Word Participant Text Included: Every section, Scripture reading prompt, verbatim ESV anchor verse callout, teaching narrative, table, and discussion or reflection prompt appears here **word-for-word identical** to what your group members see in their Participant Study Edition. Section numbers and question labels match exactly, so leaders and participants can stay on the same page.

2. Interleaved `[LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY]` Blocks: Immediately following each section, you will find a dedicated leader block containing:

- **Pacing & Time Targets** calibrated for a 75–90 minute session. Pacing targets appear in every Leader section header. If time runs short, shorten the Teaching Narratives rather than the discussion.
- **Hebrew Word Study & Ancient Near Eastern Research Quick-References** so you can explain terms naturally without lecturing, when they add something useful.
- **Question-by-Question Facilitation Probes** listed in question order, designed to move conversation past polite answers into honest reflection.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around** so you can gently redirect common rabbit trails back to the biblical text.
- **Additional Research Notes** appear when they add something useful.

3. Leader Flags: Numbered in reading order, they mark passages that need pastoral care or tend to raise hard questions. Ecclesiastes speaks honestly about emptiness, burnout, injustice, loneliness, the loss of a child, aging, and death. Some members will hear their own weariness in the Preacher's words. Do not let the book become a script for despair, and do not rush past honest questions to tidy answers. Remember that the book's refrain of enjoyment is a gift from God's hand, not a mood command. If anyone expresses hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm, follow up privately, involve a pastor, and connect them with help. In the U.S., call or text

988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Outside the U.S., use the appropriate emergency or crisis service for your location when there is any risk of harm.

4. Reading aloud: Assign readers ahead of time for the Guided Scripture Reading. Printed anchor verses are for quick reference; read the longer focal passages from an open ESV. Passages marked "in brief" are summarized or retold by the leader rather than read.

5. Facilitating well: Ask the printed question, wait, and let silence work. Use the probes to deepen, not to lecture. Aim for every voice to be heard at least once each session.

Week 1 Session Pacing at a Glance (75–90 Minutes)

Section	Focus	Time Target
Section 1.1	Opening: Vanity and the Royal Experiment (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26) (1.1 Q1)	**10 mins**
Section 1.2	Historical & Literary Context: Vapor Under the Sun (1.2 Q1–Q3)	**12 mins**
Section 1.3	Movement 1: Vanity of Vanities (Ecclesiastes 1:1–18) (1.3 Q1–Q5)	**22 mins**
Section 1.4	Movement 2: The Royal Experiment (Ecclesiastes 2:1–26) (1.4 Q1–Q5)	**20 mins**
Section 1.5	Canonical Horizon: Life in the Lord Is Not in Vain; Something Greater Than Solomon Is Here (1.5 Q1–Q3)	**12 mins**
Section 1.6	Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer (1.6 Q1–Q3)	**9 mins**
Total	**Full Week 1 Group Session**	**75–90 mins**

Scripture Scope: Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26 • **Focal Group Readings:** Ecclesiastes 1:1–3; 1:12–18; 2:1–3; 2:9–11; 2:24–26 (ESV) • **Session Pacing:** 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: Vanity and the Royal Experiment (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26)

Opening

Ecclesiastes opens with a startling line: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." The word means vapor or breath, like a mist that cannot be grasped. Then comes the question behind the whole book: "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" Generations come and go, the sun rises and sets, the wind circles, and rivers run to a sea that is never full. Nothing is new under the sun.

Then the Preacher, speaking as a king with everything at his disposal, runs an experiment. He tests wisdom, pleasure, laughter, wine, great building projects, gardens, wealth, and music. He withholds nothing from

himself. When he looks back on it all, his verdict is the same: vapor and a chasing after wind. Yet at the end of chapter 2 a different note sounds: to eat, drink, and find enjoyment in one's work is a gift from the hand of God.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26 (the title and thesis, a poem of endless cycles, the Preacher's search for wisdom, his testing of pleasure and great works, wisdom and folly meeting the same death, and the first word that enjoyment is God's gift)
Focal Passages	Ecclesiastes 1:1–3; 1:12–18; 2:1–3; 2:9–11; 2:24–26
Literary & Structural Anchor	"Vanity of vanities" is a Hebrew way of saying "the most vaporous thing." "Under the sun" frames life as seen from the earth, not a denial that God is above it. The Preacher speaks as a king: if anyone could secure lasting gain by wisdom, pleasure, and great works, he could. 2:24–25 introduces the book's other refrain: joy in work is received from God.
Big Idea	Nothing under the sun can secure lasting gain, but enjoyment of daily life is a gift from the hand of God.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Question:** Learn the book's key words (vanity, under the sun, gain, toil) and the Preacher's royal experiment.
HEART	**Find Lasting Gain:** See that in Christ, something greater than Solomon, our labor is not in vain.
HANDS	**Receive the Gift:** Take one step to stop chasing gain and to receive one daily gift from God with thanks.

Opening Frame: Vapor Under the Sun

Proverbs ended by calling charm deceitful and beauty fleeting. Ecclesiastes now takes up that same theme of transience and looks hard at the places where life does not follow the usual pattern. "The words of the Preacher" open with a thesis, "Vanity of vanities," and a question: what does anyone gain from all the toil under the sun? Then the Preacher reports a royal experiment, testing wisdom, pleasure, great works, and labor to see whether any of them can hold the weight of a life. This is a 6-week study, following the book's own turns, and it will end with the fear of God. The question for this week: what are we asking our work, pleasures, and achievements to give us that only God can give? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): What is something you worked hard to get or achieve that did not satisfy you as much as you expected?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.1 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 10 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 10 minutes. Opening and At a Glance, 3 minutes; Head, Heart, Hands, 2 minutes; Opening Frame, 2 minutes; Opening Entry Question, 3 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Briefly walk through the front matter before 1.1, especially the book's structure, the 6-week table, and the meaning of "vanity." Keep the icebreaker light; examples can be small (a gadget, a vacation, a promotion).
  - Follow-up probe for **1.1 Q1**: What was it? What did you expect? What did you learn?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not let the icebreaker turn into a gloomy conversation; the book is honest, not hopeless.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Ecclesiastes follows Proverbs in this series and comes before Song of Solomon. The Greek title Ecclesiastes comes from the word for an assembly, matching the Hebrew Qoheleth.

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: Vapor Under the Sun (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26)

Entering the World of the Preacher

1. Historical Background

The speaker calls himself "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). His experiment should be heard against Solomon's wisdom, wealth, and later unraveling (1 Kings 1–11), without forcing a strict historical identification in every line.

2. Cultural Setting

Other ancient Near Eastern texts include royal reflections on death, the limits of achievement, and advice to enjoy food and drink while one can. Palace building and royal parks were standard marks of kingship, so the inventory of chapter 2 would have sounded like success. The verdict of "no gain" is the shock.

3. Literary Structure of Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26

- **Title and thesis** (1:1–3)
- **A poem of cycles** (1:4–11)
- **The Preacher's project** (1:12–18)
- **Pleasure, works, and wealth** (2:1–11)
- **Wisdom and the same death** (2:12–23)
- **The first gift text** (2:24–26)

4. Key Themes

Hebel (vapor); "under the sun"; a royal "I"; gift, not trophy.

5. Theological Considerations

"Nothing new under the sun" does not mean that nothing is ever invented. It means that the human condition does not change into something new by a new project. Ecclesiastes is honest about life's frustrations but never abandons faith in God.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

Hebel is the book's leading word, used often. It means breath or vapor: fleeting, unable to be grasped, and sometimes frustrating, not simply "meaningless."

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: The Preacher's key word means "vapor" or "breath." How is life like a vapor, and how does that picture differ from saying life is "meaningless"?

1.2 Q2: The phrase "under the sun" appears again and again. What changes when we look at life only "under the sun," without looking to God above it?

1.2 Q3: Proverbs often describes how life usually works under God. Why do you think God also gave us a book like Ecclesiastes that looks at where life does not seem to work?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.2 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 12 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 12 minutes. Context summary, 5 minutes; discussion, 7 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).

- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - 1.2 Q1 sets the tone for the whole study. Make sure the group understands "vapor" before moving on.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q1**: What is vapor like? Where do you see it in life? How is that different from meaningless?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q2**: What does "under the sun" leave out? What happens when God is left out? How does faith change the view?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q3**: What does Proverbs teach? Where does life not fit? Why do we need both books?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not treat the Preacher as an unbeliever; he speaks of God throughout the book.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Psalm 39:5 says, "Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath," using the same Hebrew word. Proverbs 31:30 calls beauty "vain," preparing for this book.
- **Ancient Near Eastern Research Notes:** Egyptian harpers' songs and Mesopotamian wisdom texts reflected on death and urged enjoyment of life while it lasts. Ecclesiastes shares their honesty but places enjoyment as a gift from God and ends with the fear of God and coming judgment.

Section 1.3

Movement 1: Vanity of Vanities (Ecclesiastes 1:1–18)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Ecclesiastes 1:1–3** (focal passage) — The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem: all is vanity, and what does anyone gain by all the toil they do under the sun?
- **Leader summary of Ecclesiastes 1:4–11** — Generations come and go while the earth remains; the sun rises and sets, the wind goes around and around, and the streams run to a sea that is never full; the eye is never satisfied with seeing; there is nothing new under the sun, and people of the past and future are forgotten.
- **Reader 2: Ecclesiastes 1:12–18** (focal passage) — The Preacher, as king in Jerusalem, set his heart to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; he calls it an unhappy business; everything is vanity and a striving after wind; what is crooked cannot be made straight; and in much wisdom is much vexation.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:** The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
>
> **Ecclesiastes 1:3:** What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?
>
> **Ecclesiastes 1:9:** What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.
>
> **Ecclesiastes 1:14:** I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

Teaching Narrative: Vanity of Vanities

1. The Preacher (Ecclesiastes 1:1)

The voice of the book.

2. Vanity of Vanities (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

The thesis word. Hebel means vapor or breath: life under the sun is fleeting and cannot hold the weight of meaning we ask of it, which is not the same as saying life is worthless.

3. What Gain? (Ecclesiastes 1:3)

The book's question.

4. Endless Cycles (Ecclesiastes 1:4–8)

Retold briefly. Creation's repeating cycles, always moving yet never reaching completion.

5. Nothing New (Ecclesiastes 1:9–11)

The human condition and forgetting.

6. The King's Search (Ecclesiastes 1:12–18)

Wisdom that brings vexation.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (1:2). When have you felt this way, and what brought it on?

1.3 Q2: "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" (1:3). How would you answer that question if you looked only at life under the sun?

1.3 Q3: "A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever" (1:4), and "the eye is not satisfied with seeing" (1:8). Why do you think people are so often restless and unsatisfied?

1.3 Q4: "There is nothing new under the sun" (1:9). Do you find this statement discouraging or comforting? Why?

1.3 Q5: "For in much wisdom is much vexation" (1:18). Why can knowing more sometimes make life feel heavier rather than lighter?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.3 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 22 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 22 minutes. Guided Scripture Reading with brief retelling, 6 minutes; Anchor Verses and Teaching Narrative, 5 minutes; discussion, 11 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Have readers take 1:1–3 and 1:12–18. Summarize the poem of cycles yourself in a few vivid sentences.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q1**: When? What caused it? What helped you endure it, or what support would have helped?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q2**: What is gain? What lasts? What is left at the end?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q3**: What are we looking for? Why is it never enough? What would satisfy?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q4**: Why discouraging? Why comforting? What does it say about God?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q5**: What does knowledge bring? Why vexation? Where have you felt it?
- **LEADER FLAG 1: "All is vanity" (1:2)**
  - Teach hebel as vapor, not as nihilism or a shrug. The book will name God's gifts and will end with the fear of God. Do not let the opening line become a joke or a script for despair in the room.
- **LEADER FLAG 2: The emptiness of achievement (1:3; 2:11)**
  - This will touch people in burnout, retirement, job loss, or the letdown after a finished goal. Do not scold ambition; tell the truth that lasting gain cannot be stored in the project itself. If anyone expresses deep hopelessness, follow up privately, and have local crisis resources ready. In the U.S., call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Outside the U.S., use the appropriate emergency or crisis service for your location.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not answer 1.3 Q2 too quickly with a church answer; let the Preacher's question land first.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Genesis 3:17–19 records the curse on the ground and the toil of work; the Preacher's question of gain is as old as thorns. "What is crooked cannot be made straight" (1:15) returns in 7:13.
- **Hebrew Word Study:**
  - Qoheleth (קֹהֶלֶת), "the Preacher" (one who gathers an assembly), in 1:1, 2, and 12. In this movement it is the book's speaking voice, a wise man addressing a gathered people.
  - Hebel (הֶבֶל), "vanity" (vapor, breath), in 1:2 and 1:14. In this movement "vanity of vanities" is a superlative, "the most vaporous thing"; it means fleeting and ungraspable, not simply meaningless.
  - Tachat ha-shemesh (תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ), "under the sun," in 1:3, 9, and 14. In this movement the question of gain is asked from inside mortal life, as it is observed on the earth.
  - Yitron (יִתְרוֹן), "gain" or "advantage," in 1:3. In this movement the first question is not whether anything is pleasant but whether there is a lasting surplus.

Section 1.4

Movement 2: The Royal Experiment (Ecclesiastes 2:1–26)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Ecclesiastes 2:1–3** (focal passage) — The Preacher decides to test pleasure, but he finds that laughter and pleasure accomplish nothing lasting; he tries wine while still guiding himself with wisdom, to see what is good for people in their few days.
- **Leader summary of Ecclesiastes 2:4–8** — He builds houses, plants vineyards, gardens, and parks, makes pools, acquires servants, herds, silver, and gold, and gathers singers and every delight.
- **Reader 2: Ecclesiastes 2:9–11** (focal passage) — He becomes greater than all before him in Jerusalem and keeps nothing his eyes desire from himself; but when he considers all that his hands have done, all is vanity and a striving after wind.
- **Leader summary of Ecclesiastes 2:12–23** — Wisdom is better than folly, as light is better than darkness, yet the same death comes to the wise and the fool, and both are forgotten; he hates his toil because he must leave it to someone who may be a fool, and his days are full of sorrow and restless nights.
- **Reader 3: Ecclesiastes 2:24–26** (focal passage) — There is nothing better than to eat, drink, and find enjoyment in one's work; this is from the hand of God, for apart from him no one can eat or have enjoyment; to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Ecclesiastes 2:11:** Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.
>
> **Ecclesiastes 2:24–25:** There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Teaching Narrative: The Royal Experiment

1. Testing Pleasure (Ecclesiastes 2:1–3)

Laughter and wine under the guidance of wisdom.

2. The Royal Inventory (Ecclesiastes 2:4–8)

Retold briefly. Everything a king could gather.

3. The Verdict (Ecclesiastes 2:9–11)

Nothing gained under the sun.

4. The Same End (Ecclesiastes 2:12–17)

Wisdom is better than folly, but death comes to both.

5. Leaving It Behind (Ecclesiastes 2:18–23)

The sorrow of handing on our work.

6. From the Hand of God (Ecclesiastes 2:24–26)

Enjoyment as a gift.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: The Preacher says, "I will test you with pleasure" (2:1), and later, "whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them" (2:10). What do people today hope pleasure or possessions will give them?

1.4 Q2: After all his projects, he says "all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun" (2:11). Why can even meaningful achievements fail to provide lasting identity or ultimate satisfaction?

1.4 Q3: "There is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness" (2:13), yet the wise and the fool both die. How does death change the way we think about success?

1.4 Q4: The Preacher grieves that he "must leave it to the man who will come after me" (2:18). What do you hope to leave behind, and how much of it can you control?

1.4 Q5: "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God" (2:24). What everyday gifts from God's hand do you most often overlook?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.4 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 20 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 20 minutes. Guided Scripture Reading with brief retellings, 6 minutes; Anchor Verses and Teaching Narrative, 4 minutes; discussion, 10 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).

- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Have readers take 2:1–3, 2:9–11, and 2:24–26. Summarize the inventory and the despair of 2:12–23 yourself.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q1**: What do people chase? What do they hope for? What do they find?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q2**: What did he gain? Why empty? Where have you felt it?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q3**: Is wisdom still better? What does death do to success? How should that shape us?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q4**: What will you leave? What can you control? What can you trust to God?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q5**: What gifts? Why do we overlook them? How could you receive one this week?
- **LEADER FLAG 3: The royal inventory (2:1–11)**
  - Summarize the list of luxuries. Do not linger on it in a way that glamorizes it, and do not use it to sneer at people who have built or earned good things.
- **LEADER FLAG 4: Enjoyment as God's gift (2:24–25)**
  - This is not a license for self-indulgence, and it is not a claim that the depressed, the grieving, or the hungry have failed to "find joy." Apart from God no one can have enjoyment; the line teaches dependence, not a mood command. If anyone is struggling with depression, follow up privately and encourage them to seek help.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not turn 2:24 into a slogan for "eat, drink, and be merry" without God; the gift comes from his hand.
- **Additional Research Notes:** "So I hated life" (2:17) is one of the Bible's most honest lines; the Psalms and Job also give voice to such feelings. Psalm 127:2 says, "It is in vain that you rise up early," echoing the restless nights of 2:23.
- **Hebrew Word Study:**
  - 'Amal (עָמָל), "toil," in 2:11 and 2:18–24. In this movement work is named as labor that costs; the question is whether the cost is repaid by lasting gain.
  - Simchah (שִׂמְחָה), "joy" or "pleasure," in 2:1 and 2:26, with "find enjoyment" in 2:24. In this movement the same field of joy is first an experiment that fails and then a gift that God gives.

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: Life in the Lord Is Not in Vain; Something Greater Than Solomon Is Here

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

The Preacher's search for lasting gain under the sun points to Christ, something greater than Solomon, in whom our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:15–21)

Jesus says life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, and tells of a man who built bigger barns and lost his life that night. Ecclesiastes 2 is that parable at royal scale.

2. Something Greater Than Solomon (Matthew 12:42)

Christ is the true Son of David, whose works are not vapor.

3. Labor Not in Vain (1 Corinthians 15:58)

In the Lord our labor is not in vain. Christians do not escape toil, but their toil is gathered into resurrection hope.

4. Fullness of Joy (John 15:5, 11; 1 Timothy 4:4–5)

Apart from Christ no one has true enjoyment, and in him joy has a lasting source that life under the sun cannot provide. Daily food and drink become gifts received with thanksgiving.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

> **Ecclesiastes 2:11:** Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: Jesus said, "for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15), and God told the rich man, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you" (Luke 12:20). How does this parable echo the Preacher's royal experiment?

1.5 Q2: Jesus said, "something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). How is Jesus greater than the king who tried everything under the sun?

1.5 Q3: Paul writes, "knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). How does the resurrection answer the Preacher's question, "What does man gain"?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.5 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 12 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 12 minutes. Canonical Horizon teaching, 5 minutes; discussion, 7 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Assign participants to look up Luke 12:15–21; Matthew 12:42; 1 Corinthians 15:58; and John 15:11 ahead of time.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q1**: What did the rich man do? What did he lose? How is it like Ecclesiastes 2?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q2**: What did Solomon have? What does Jesus give? Why is he greater?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q3**: Why is labor not in vain? What does resurrection change? How does it affect your work?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not use the Canonical Horizon to dismiss the Preacher's questions; let Christ answer them, not erase them.

- **Additional Research Notes:** Jesus says, "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11), and Paul writes, "For everything created by God is good" (1 Timothy 4:4), when received with thanksgiving.

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	The Preacher asks what lasting gain there is under the sun and finds that wisdom, pleasure, and great works cannot secure it.
HEART	In Christ, something greater than Solomon, our labor is not in vain, and joy has a lasting source that life under the sun cannot provide.
HANDS	Faith stops chasing gain for its own sake and receives daily gifts from God's hand with thanks.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: Where are you most tempted to look for lasting gain under the sun?

1.6 Q2: What is one ordinary gift (a meal, work, friendship, rest) you could receive this week as from the hand of God?

1.6 Q3: How could knowing that your labor "in the Lord" is not in vain change the way you approach your work this week?

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, we heard the Preacher's thesis and his royal experiment, and the first word that enjoyment is God's gift.

Transition: Next week the Preacher reflects on time, eternity in the human heart, oppression, and companionship.

Week 2 Overview — Time, Toil, and Companionship (Ecclesiastes 3:1–4:16): Movement 1, A Time for Every Matter (3:1–22), covers the famous poem on time and God's eternal work. Movement 2, Two Are Better Than One (4:1–16), covers oppression, envy, loneliness, and friendship. The Canonical Horizon traces the fullness of time and Christ the companion and judge.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Ecclesiastes 3:1
- Ecclesiastes 3:9–15
- Ecclesiastes 3:16–17
- Ecclesiastes 4:1–6
- Ecclesiastes 4:7–12

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

> **Closing Group Prayer**
>
> God above the sun, you give every good gift. We confess that we have chased gain, pleasure, and achievement as if they could fill us. We pray for those among us in burnout, disappointment, or weariness. Thank you for daily food, work, and friendship as gifts from your hand. Thank you for Christ, something greater than Solomon, in whom our labor is not in vain. Teach us to receive joy from you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.6 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 9 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 9 minutes. Application and questions, 5 minutes; Looking Ahead and Focal Readings, 2 minutes; Concrete Step and Closing Prayer, 2 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Mention that next week includes the poem on time, which will touch the grieving; it will be handled with care.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.6 Q1**: Where? Why? What would it look like to let go?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.6 Q2**: Which gift? When? How will you give thanks?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.6 Q3**: What work? What changes? How will you remember it?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not end on emptiness; end on the gift and on Christ.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Next week's key verse says God "has made everything beautiful in its time" (3:11), extending this week's theme that enjoyment comes from God's hand.