The Rise and Fall of the House of Solomon

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Explore why Solomon was selected as king and what made him wise.
► Define the key elements that led to Solomon’s demise.
► Examine the subject of compromising and what lessons can be learned about it from the Bible.

Preparing to Lead
Solomon’s story illustrates the continued relevance of the Old Testament with a modern-day challenge—materialism and the compromises that come with it. What led this wise man and one of Israel’s most promising kings from faith and trust in God to eventual idol worship? The story follows the progression of Solomon becoming a wise and faithful king, then moving farther and farther away from God. It looks at what happens when we habitually choose God as “less important.” It’s a lesson of how compromises can dangerously end up defining us if we do not continually focus our priorities on God.

Getting Started
A. Divide the class into small groups or pairs and give each a sheet of paper. Assign the groups one or two names of David’s sons, including texts: Amnon (1 Sam. 3:2; 13:10, 28, 29), Chileab (2 Sam. 3:3), Absalom (2 Sam. 3:3; 2 Sam. 13:20–38), Adonijah (2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Kings 1:5–8, 22–27), Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24, 25; 1 Kings 1:11–14, 34, 37; 1 Chron. 22:9,10). Have the groups write key highlights of each son’s life.
After the groups have presented these highlights to the class, discuss:
► According to inheritance laws, who should have been crowned king? Why wasn’t he?
► Why was Solomon chosen instead of one of his elder brothers?
B. Arrange beforehand for two volunteers to reenact 1 Kings 3:16–28. Show the class that you found something (breakable), and that you are trying to find the owner. Have the volunteers both say the item is theirs, with stories of how they got it and how important the item is to them. Tell the class that because both claim it, a reasonable solution is to give each half. Prepare to break the item and have one volunteer jump up shouting, “Stop!” Give the item to this volunteer. Have the class take turns reading 1 Kings 3:16–28. Discuss the “play,” the qualities of Solomon as a young king, and what made him wise.
Delving into the Word

A. Solomon’s story offers a lesson on the dangers of compromising one’s principles. Track what led Solomon from a life of faith to turning his back on God. Have the class take turns reading verses from the following texts and reflect on each before going to the next. Have a “note taker” jot down highlights from the passages on the flipchart/whiteboard:

► 2 Chronicles 1:8–12
► 2 Chronicles 2:11, 12
► 1 Kings 4:29–31
► 1 Kings 9:1–9
► 1 Kings 11:1–6
► 1 Kings 11:9–11.

Review the highlights and discuss:

► What can we do to ensure we don’t fall into similar patterns of compromise as Solomon did?
► Give examples of modern-day compromises we are faced with that may or may not lead us away from God. How can we tell if compromises are leading us away from God?

B. The Bible offers many examples on the dangers of compromising core beliefs. The lesson focuses on what happened when Solomon began compromising his faith. As a class or in small groups, explore biblical messages of what happens when we do or don’t compromise our beliefs: 1 Kings 11:2, 4, 9 ► Mark 12:28, 29 ► Matt. 5:5, 7–9 ► 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 ► Ephesians 6:10–17 ► Jude 20–23.

Read the following quote: The book Prophets and Kings says, “It is not the empty cup that we have difficulty in carrying; it is the cup full to the brim that must be carefully balanced. Affliction and adversity may cause sorrow, but it is prosperity that is most dangerous to spiritual life” (pp. 59, 60). Then ask: Do you agree or disagree? Why? How does this relate to life in developed countries versus developing countries? To life in urban versus rural areas?

Discussing the Ideas

1. When God asked Solomon what he wanted (1 Kings 3:5–9), how did Solomon’s response affect him as a king? What conditions did God lay down as important for Solomon to follow?

2. Was there any one moment when we can say Solomon turned away from God? Explain.

3. How can we know if we are or aren’t making the kinds of compromises in today’s complicated world that can lead to turning away from God?

4. How important is it today to follow the Ten Commandments? In relation to this week’s lesson, what is the difference between following the “letter” of the law versus the “spirit” of the law?

5. Are all compromises dangerous? Why or why not?

6. If you visit another country, what kind of compromises might you have to make? What is the difference between compromising to be culturally sensitive versus “fudging” on core beliefs?

Closing the Activity

Emphasize that compromising is necessary to live with others, to reach agreement with those around you, and to be a team player. However, when it comes to honoring God, compromise can be dangerous. It can lead us away from Him quickly, or it can be slow and seemingly uneventful. The Bible is full of characters who did or didn’t do well with compromising.

Distribute a copy of “Bible Compromisers” (see page 31). Encourage the class to complete this at home as a way to learn from examples in the Bible; or complete in small groups if time allows.

Jenny Sequeira, Salem, Oregon
The Bible is full of stories about compromising. Some characters did it well, some didn’t. Some of the stories focus on people remaining true to principle, despite the pressures surrounding them. Others center on the importance of balance and perspective . . . and people making compromises that actually help them sharpen their focus on God. Take a look at the examples below, and dig a little deeper into the lives of . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>What’s happening?</th>
<th>What issue is at stake?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Dan. 1:6–21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary and Martha</td>
<td>Luke 10:38–42</td>
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<td>Paul</td>
<td>1 Cor. 9:19–27</td>
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Nothing New Under the Sun?

Surveying the Source
Ecclesiastes 1.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
▶ Learn that life on earth deals with periods of meaninglessness and meaningfulness.
▶ Identify areas of their personal life that have lost meaningfulness.
▶ Learn practical ways to live meaningful lives as Christians.

Preparing to Lead
In his book *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck says, “Life is difficult.” Indeed, life’s journey on earth is a mixture of good, bad, and ugly experiences. Some people say that life is like Chinese food—sometimes sweet, sometimes sour. Solomon seemed to have found out that life was just that. As Christians, we often seem to forget that life is not about being happy. People will do crazy and dangerous things in order to be happy. What is the meaning of life? we ask ourselves. This week’s lesson can be an introduction to what life is and what life is not.

Getting Started
A. The 1776 United States Declaration of Independence famously asserts: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men.”

According to this declaration, the “pursuit of happiness” is an unalienable right of human beings. Ask your group the following questions:
1. What are some contemporary ways in which people pursue happiness?
2. Is pursuing happiness a justifiable quest? Explain.
3. Define happiness in your own words.

B. Eugene H. Peterson says, “Ecclesiastes is a John-the-Baptist kind of a book. It functions not as a meal but as a bath. It is not nourishment; it is cleansing. It is repentance. It is purging. We read Ecclesiastes to get scrubbed clean from illusion and sentiment, from ideas that are idolatrous and feelings that cloy. It is an exposé and rejection of every arrogant and ignorant expectation that we can live our lives by ourselves on our own terms.” He adds, “Ecclesiastes sweeps our souls clean of all ‘lifestyle’ spiritualities so that we can be ready for God’s visitation revealed in Jesus Christ.”*

Ask: What are “ ‘lifestyle spiritualities’ ”?
Delving Into the Word

A. Read Ecclesiastes 1 with the class in different versions of the Bible. Have each member read a verse as you go around the class. Using newsprint, a chalkboard, or a flipchart, list the things Solomon says are meaningless in life.

Discuss verse 2. Ask: How can “everything” be meaningless? Is Solomon overstating himself? Is he being too poetic? Is he letting his feelings do the talking? What is his point?

Ask: What do you think Solomon is trying to say in verse 13? Is God responsible for the meaninglessness of life?

What relationship does this text have with Genesis 3:17?

Solomon says in verse 18, “With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.” Ask: Why do you think this is true or not true? What about technological, medical, scientific discoveries? How does much sorrow come with these?

B. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon is sharing what he has seen, what he has heard, and what he has felt. He’s sharing his own story. Ask class members to share their own story. How do they see life?

What do they hear and feel about it? What questions do we have about life today?

(Encourage them to share the good, the bad, and the ugly of life. Everyone has a story that tells about life before Christ and after Christ.)

Go back to what M. Scott Peck says, “Life is difficult.” Ask the class to share their frustrations in the pursuit of happiness.

There are other biblical characters that had to deal with the struggles of life. Distribute the reproducible activity on page 32 and allow approximately 15 minutes for the class to complete it.

The name Solomon means “peace” or “peaceable.” It was only toward the end of his life that Solomon found peace and contentment. Ask: How did he find it?

Is chapter 1 a good place to start recognizing the meaninglessness of life?

Discussing the Ideas

1. How is reading Ecclesiastes a “cleansing,” “purging,” “repenting” experience?
2. Solomon lived a wasted life. How could he have avoided that kind of life?
3. How can we avoid a wasted life?
4. What things can we do to live a meaningful life?
5. How important is it for people to have a personal philosophy of life?
6. What can people do to live a purpose-driven life?

Closing the Activity

Tell your own story about your life. Highlight those areas of your life you’ve struggled with. Invite the members in your class to share their stories with friends at school, work, and community. Ask them to make a list on a sheet of paper of both the areas of meaninglessness and meaningfulness of their lives. Encourage them to learn how to tell their story. Solomon was ruthless in the way he did it. He was honest and truthful. He did not sugar-coat the realities of life. Tell your class members that non-Christians do not necessarily expect Christians to be perfect, but that they appreciate authentic people who share the good, the bad, and the ugly of life.


Sergio Torres, Miami, Florida, USA
Read about Paul in Romans 7:15–25. Then answer the questions below.

What do these verses say about how Paul lived life?

How is he a New Testament Solomon?

What similar issues did Paul and Solomon face?
“All That My Eyes Desired”

Surveying the Source
1 Kings 3:5–14; Prov. 3:13–28; Ecclesiastes 2; Heb. 11:6.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Discuss the meaning of wisdom and vanity.
► Examine their daily rituals and activities to see which ones may be taking their eyes off God.
► See the importance of seeking God.

Preparing to Lead
Solomon—also referred to as “the Preacher”—talks about his search for the meaning of life “under the sun.” He experimented with mirth and pleasure and found them to be vanity. He said that he messed around with wine and folly, while still using his wisdom. He withheld nothing from himself that he could see; and he used his wealth to accumulate all that his heart desired. But when he looked back, he found all to be vanity. Death came to both the wise and the fool, and he hated life. Doesn’t this sound like something written today? We search for what we feel will make us happy. We purchase what we want. We party with our friends. When we look back, however, we discover that happiness still eluded us. But wait! There is hope after all!

Getting Started
A. Either in groups or individually, have class members develop questions based on their study of the lesson for the instructor to answer. After a determined amount of time, have the students read the questions or list them on a chalkboard or flipchart. This activity will give a good idea of where the lesson discussion can start.
B. Divide the class into pairs or small groups, and have them discuss the following questions:
► Can accumulating material wealth be good? Why or why not?
► How can a person/groups of people use material wealth in positive ways?
► How can we keep ourselves from getting lost in the world’s view of accumulating material wealth?
► How can living simply help a person/groups of people live closer to God?

Delving Into the Word
A. Read and discuss Proverbs 4:7, 8. Discuss the meaning of wisdom:
1. What will getting wisdom do for us (Prov. 3:16–18)?
2. How can we get wisdom?
Bring out the following points:
1. The key to life is to get God’s wisdom.
2. The wisdom that comes from Him will bring all things into our lives that we need—pleasure, safety, happiness, and a relationship with Him.
B. Have one class member be a reporter and another King Solomon. Have the re-
porter interview Solomon using the following questions based on Ecclesiastes 2. Consider arranging for this during the week and giving the questions to the two class members who will be doing the role-playing so they can practice. The questions are:

1. Your royal highness, what do you find to be the main points of chapter 2?
2. Why did you want to explore the topics you cover in verses 1–3?
3. How great do you believe you became, and what stayed with you (verse 9)?
4. What conclusion did you reach in verses 12–16, and why?
5. Why do you believe that the best people can achieve is to enjoy what they eat, drink, and the work they do (verse 24)?
6. Who specifically do you believe is capable of achieving this (verses 24–26)?

**Discussing the Ideas**

1. Read Ecclesiastes 2:26. What do you think is essential to please God (Heb. 11:6)? How can you incorporate this into your daily life?
2. Read 1 Kings 3:5–14. Solomon was given the opportunity to make a wish. What did he ask for? Do you think that it was a wise choice? Why or why not? If given the same choice, what would you wish for?
3. Read Proverbs 3:16–18. What is wisdom? What are the benefits of wisdom?
5. Read Ecclesiastes 2:4–11. What did Solomon accomplish, and what projects did he undertake? What desires was he trying to satisfy?
6. After acquiring all his possessions, what were the end results (verses 11–17)? Where does true happiness come from?
7. What is it you need to do on a daily basis to keep your connection with God among the possessions you have accumulated?

**Closing the Activity**

*Say:* Solomon’s purpose for writing Ecclesiastes 2 was to show us that life holds all we could want and ask for. Yet He wants us to understand that possessions are nothing and bring no form of true happiness unless we have God in our lives. The ability to truly enjoy life is a gift from God. Therefore, He must become Lord of our lives.

Discuss with the students some things they may be doing with their time, items they have accumulated, or people who may be taking their eyes away from God, thus robbing them of developing an intimate relationship with Him. *Ask:* What will it take to for you to build a relationship with God, and what steps will you take to do that?

Distribute copies of the reproducible activity on page 33. Have the students at least begin this activity—perhaps even finish it—in class.

Close by singing “I Surrender All” (hymn number 309 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal), and by having each student say a silent prayer to God about making their relationship with Him stronger. After an appropriate amount of time spent in silent prayer, say a short, closing prayer.

Sheila Edens, Chicago, Illinois, USA
Design a bookmark: In the space at the very top of the outer box of the bookmark below, draw a picture symbolizing something that can help you keep your eyes on God. Then in the space in the center box, draw a picture symbolizing where you want your eyes to be in relationship to your faith in Him. When you are finished, cut out the bookmark.

Solomon’s eyes wandered away from God.
Where do you want your eyes to be?

Keep this bookmark in your Bible to remind you where your priorities are.
Materials
CD or other music player; a recording of “Turn! Turn! Turn!” (To Everything There Is A Season) by The Byrds; art materials (as much variety as possible, including paper, coloring pencils, glue, colored paper, material)

Of Being and Time

Surveying the Source
Job 7:1; Ecclesiastes 3; Heb. 11:25; 12:11.

Plotting the Course

The students will:
► Reflect on their use of time and what it says about their priorities.
► Consider the idea that life has a time for every purpose and what that might mean as they look to the future.
► Explore the picture of life painted by the writer of Ecclesiastes and what we can learn from his wisdom.

Preparing to Lead

Time so often seems to take us by surprise. When things take longer than we expect, time “disappears,” whether it’s an hour, an afternoon, or a lifetime. C. S. Lewis wrote, “For we are so little reconciled to time that we are even astonished at it. ‘How he’s grown!’ we exclaim, ‘How time flies!’ as though the universal form of our experience were again and again a novelty. It is as strange as if a fish were repeatedly surprised at the wetness of water.”* Except, Lewis suggests, if it were destined to live in a different environment—in the case of our habitation of time. It seems our unease with time constantly prompts us toward eternity.

Getting Started

A. Obtain or download a recording of the song “Turn! Turn! Turn!” (To Everything There Is A Season) by The Byrds. This song, written by Pete Seeger, is an adaptation of Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. Have class members read aloud Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, then play the song to the class. Ask students to reflect on how hearing these words set to music changed the way they think of these verses. Ask: What does the refrain of “Turn! Turn! Turn!” mean? Is it merely something the songwriter has added to the texts? Why would a songwriter choose to release a song like this as pop music, albeit a couple of generations ago?
B. Photocopy and distribute the 24-hour clock diagram (see p. 34). Ask students to color and label the different uses of their time on an average day. For example, this might include eight hours of sleeping, eight hours of school or work, time for traveling, eating, watching TV, talking with friends, etc. Have one completed reflecting your average day as an example. Briefly discuss their various responses to the questions. Point out that our use of time reflects our priorities.

Delving Into the Word

A. Divide the class into pairs or as many as 14 groups. Assign a couplet from Ecclesiastes 3:2–8 to each pair or group, and ask them to illustrate the facets of their assigned couplet.

After sufficient time for students to complete their works of art, ask each pair or group to present their art to the rest of the class, explaining their representation of “A time to . . .” Discuss what overall

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The word *Eternity*—in a distinct copperplate script—has become an icon of Sydney, Australia. It is a part of the city’s history and was embedded in the consciousness of Australia and the world by its inclusion in the fireworks marking the New Year’s Eve tick over to 2000. In the 1930s, a street person named Arthur Stace became a Christian and wanted to witness for his faith. Although he could barely write, Stace picked up a piece of chalk and wrote the single word on the footpath. The word appeared mysteriously across the city for more than 15 years before Stace was discovered. He continued this work until his death in 1967. It’s estimated he wrote the word *Eternity* more than 500,000 times on Sydney streets to prompt people to think that there is something more to life. The Bible is right. Despite our preoccupation with time, *Eternity* still has a resonance—indeed, God “has planted eternity in the human heart” (Eccles. 3:11, NLT).

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*C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms.*

**Nathan Brown, Warburton, Victoria, Australia**
Color the segments of the 24-hour clock below to show how much time you spend doing the following activities: eating, sleeping, studying, working, Bible study/prayer, recreational activities (sports, listening to music, etc.) Then answer questions 1-3.

1. What do you wish you could spend more time doing?

2. What are some important things you should add to your daily program?

3. What does your use of time teach you about your life and your priorities?
More Life Under the Sun

Surveying the Source
Ecclesiastes 4.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Discover how we can avoid a depressing view of life, like Solomon’s.
► View what leads to the meaningfulness in the context of human and spiritual relationships.
► Be able to distinguish when we are straying from God’s original intention for us and our relationships.

Preparing to Lead
The book Boundaries talks about two kinds of burdens in life. One is like a backpack. (Show the backpack.) We should be able to carry it ourselves, like the usual duties of life we are responsible for. The other is like a huge boulder, something we couldn’t possibly manage alone. (Show the large heavy object.) We need to each carry our own “backpacks” and allow others to carry theirs. However, when we encounter tragedy or great obstacles, we should be willing to receive or offer help. This is what healthy boundaries for healthy relationships is all about.

Getting Started
A. Bring any Asterix and Obelix book/poster to class. Briefly explain the background: The early Romans had a secret magic potion which gave them supernatural strength. Obelix fell into a cauldron of this potion when he was young, and received perpetual supernatural strength. Asterix had to take some every time they faced conflict with the enemy. When he was out of supply, Obelix helped him out. These two are often pictured with Obelix carrying along a huge menhir, just for fun. Have the class draw a picture of the Christian’s source of strength and how Christians help each other.

B. Ask the class to choose a relationship in their lives from one of the following categories. Then ask volunteers to share some of the challenges in those relationships, as well as moments of satisfaction:
► Work (with a boss or a colleague)
► Marriage/Friendship
► Parent/Child or Grandparent/Grandparent

Delving Into the Word
A. Give each person a sheet of paper and a pen. Have them divide their paper in two columns. In the left column, instruct them to write the following words: power, toil, the need for relationship, the generations (resistance to change and the rejection of values). Next, read to them Ecclesiastes 4. Tell them that while you are reading, they are to write behind the words the verse references that correspond to each word. When you are finished reading chapter 4, divide the class

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into pairs. Ask them to take each of the four areas and make a personal and spiritual application. Tell them to write these applications in the right-hand column. Then find other verses in Scripture that speak to each area (for example: In the world, we also see oppression. How is oppression present in my life both relationally and in my spiritual life? Perhaps in a dysfunctional relationship, personally speaking, or in the way the devil accuses me of my sins, in a spiritual sense [Luke 4:18, 19]).

Discussing the Ideas

1. How is power often misused in family or work relationships?
2. Even if you have the power, when is it not good to help someone, and why?
3. How can we misuse work or works in a spiritual sense?
4. Explain why you think your taste in music differs from the previous generation and from the new generation.
5. Why is it good to train up the new generation for leadership? What are the challenges in doing so?
6. What were some of the mistakes Solomon made that may have lead to his depressive angle on life?
7. How can we prove that the idiom “Two’s company, three’s a crowd” is wrong?
8. Share some recent examples of good political/economic/social use of power that are similar to God’s original intention than to Solomon’s sad realizations? How can we help turn such instances into good trends?

Closing the Activity

Distribute the reproducible activity (see p. 35). Give a few minutes for class members to work on it. Close by mentioning the fact that the four areas discussed were originally intended for good, but that through sin and selfishness, they now have a way of making life meaningless.

Ask each class member to lay these areas of their lives at Jesus’ feet, and ask Him to sanctify them. Have a season of silent prayer to facilitate this. Ask them to keep a journal during the coming week to especially record how the Lord has helped them in these areas.


Penny Brink, Cape, South Africa
Mark the years/incidences on the timeline below when you have experienced burdens too heavy to carry on your own. Describe them briefly in the space provided, and mention who, if anyone, was there to help and support you through them.

**MY LIFE**

Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Kind of Burden</th>
<th>Who Helped Me</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>
Rich Man, Poor Man

Surveying the Source
Ecclesiastes 5.

Plotting the Course
The students will:

► Recognize what is of true value—that the world’s values are opposite to God’s.
► Decide to live lives that are not dominated by materialism and self-service.
► Contribute resources (such as money and time) to those activities that really make a difference to others.

Preparing to Lead
“Those who love money will never have enough. How absurd to think that wealth brings true happiness!” (Eccles. 5:10, NLT). People who always think they never have enough are pursuing those things that never satisfy. The unsatisfied life is one that wastes away before your eyes. It is meaningless and pointless, just like the gambler who tries so hard to gain money, only to waste it all on spinning wheels, rolling dice, and turning cards. Chasing material possessions as the way of finding meaning and purpose means wasted lives. The focus on the material can never provide long-term satisfaction.

Getting Started
A. Have class members try to write or perform other activities while looking in a mirror. Because everything is backwards, it’s almost impossible to do so. Explain that this illustrates the complete reversal of values between God and our world, that Jesus came to reveal that the values of His kingdom are totally different. (Read a few verses from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7.) Say: We live in “mirrorland,” and our values are the reverse of God’s. In Ecclesiastes 5 Solomon is speaking from experience when he confesses that his value system is “meaningless.”
B. Pass around the catalog, lottery ticket, and Monopoly money. Ask: If you were an archaeologist from a future time, what would you conclude from these “artifacts”?
Point out the obsession with things in the catalog, and how many spend a great deal of time absorbed by this. Discuss how the lottery ticket opens up getting “something for nothing.” (The church’s statement on gambling may even be used here—www.adventist.org). Also discuss how the Monopoly money illustrates how worthless even real money can be in the long term, and that in so many ways, pursuing it is “just a game”—but with deadly consequences!

Delving Into the Word
A. Have the students look up and rephrase the following biblical texts into materialistic philosophy: ►“Love does no harm to its neighbor” (Rom. 13:10,
and he is reflecting his own experience.

Ask:

So what lessons do we learn from both his words and the demonstration given by his life?

Tell the class:

The values God wants us to adopt are far from the way we usually think. We have much to learn about the way we should truly live. We need to experience the truth of God as revealed in Jesus if we are to be happy in this world and the next.

Jonathan Gallagher, Laurel, Maryland, USA
Match these quotes/proverbs to the verses of Ecclesiastes 5 (more than one verse may apply). What does this tell you about the relevance of Ecclesiastes for us today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Verse</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A closed mouth gathers no foot. <em>(Anonymous)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some people think they are worth a lot of money just because they have it. <em>(Fannie Hurst)</em></td>
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<td>We are all just prisoners here of our own device. <em>(The Eagles, Hotel California)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Were there no God, we would be in this glorious world with grateful hearts and no one to thank. <em>(Christina Rossetti)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>The most pitiful among men is he who turns his dreams into silver and gold. <em>(Kahlil Gibran)</em></td>
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<td>We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give. <em>(Duane Hulse)</em></td>
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<td>Small amounts of philosophy lead to atheism, but larger amounts bring us back to God. <em>(Francis Bacon)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>The great use of life is to spend it on something that will outlast it. <em>(William James)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step to knowledge. <em>(Benjamin Disraeli)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Man does what he can, God does what He will. <em>(Anonymous)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>In wealth many friends; in poverty, not even relatives. <em>(Japanese proverb)</em></td>
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<td>When money is seen as a solution for every problem, money itself becomes the problem. <em>(Richard Needham)</em></td>
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<td>Money often costs too much. <em>(Ralph Waldo Emerson)</em></td>
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<td>Be careful to leave your sons well instructed rather than rich, for the hopes of the instructed are better than the wealth of the ignorant. <em>(Epictetus)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself. <em>(C.S. Lewis)</em></td>
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Striving After the Wind

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Examine the difference between living in the moment and living a satisfied life.
► Understand and appreciate the danger involved in living a self-centered life.
► Consider whether it is good to learn from the experience and advice of others.
► Invite the Lord to give insight into their life and choices.

Preparing to Lead
Our purpose as Christians is to offer a testimony to people with whom we come in contact about the merits of a relationship with Christ. We often wrestle with the best way to do this. Sometimes our most powerful witness is simply the way we live. “The unstudied, unconscious influence of a holy life is the most convincing sermon [emphasis supplied] that can be given in favor of Christianity. Argument, even when unanswerable, may provoke only opposition; but a godly example has a power which it is impossible to wholly resist” (The Story of Redemption, p. 318).

Getting Started
A. Do the reproducible activity on page 37. When the students have finished, discuss their answers.
B. Divide the class into two groups. Ask each group to select a scribe and give that person a pen and paper. Tell them: Group 1 is going to make a list of activities that are examples of “living in the moment.” For example, any thrill-seeking behavior like bungee jumping would qualify. So would a spontaneous act such as a shopping spree. Group 2 is going to make a list of activities that contribute to a “satisfied life.” Some examples might be building and maintaining a koi pond or getting a permanent job or helping someone who needs it.

While the groups create their lists (allow five minutes), make two columns on either a chalkboard or flipchart. Mark one column “living in the moment” and the other column “satisfied life.” Then when the groups are finished working, write on the board in the appropriate column the items on each group’s list.

Ask the class as a whole to identify self-serving behaviors in the lists. Circle those. Then ask the class to identify those items which could bring service to God and others and underline those items. Normally, most self-serving acts show up in the “living-in-the-moment” column, while those acts that serve God and others appear most often under the “satisfied life” column. Ask for volunteers to share what significance they see in the two columns.
Delving Into the Word

A. Break the class into four groups, and give each group a copy of a current news magazine or social news publication like People.

Assign each group one of the following verses, and ask them to find a news item that illustrates the message of the verse.

The verses are: Ecclesiastes 2:16; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Ecclesiastes 3:19; and Ecclesiastes 6:2.

If they cannot find an appropriate story, they may share an illustration of their own.

Discussing the Ideas

1. Why did King Solomon write down his experience in Ecclesiastes 6?
2. Why did he think the message was important?
3. Describe the character traits that develop when one lives apart from God. Do these traits bring joy? Do these traits improve relationships with others?
4. Solomon seems to hold a negative view. How does one change a negative point of view?
5. How does living for oneself affect one’s point of view?
6. Are there good things in life we overlook or take for granted? How would we feel if we spent more time appreciating the good things in our lives?
7. When our friends and loved ones give us advice, do they mean it for good or for ill? If for good, why do we often react as if they mean it for ill?

Closing the Activity

Refer to the reproducible activity sheet completed in the “Getting Started” section of this lesson. Ask each student to think of a personal spiritual lesson in the words of the saying on their own form.

Ask them to turn their sheet over and write down why they believe the person spoke those words to them and the good that was intended.

Have a moment of silent prayer during which each student thanks God for the kindness and good intent of the person who shared those words with him or her.

Close with a spoken prayer, including the sentiment “Our loved ones often try to spare us from hard lessons that they have learned the hard way. Open our ears to listen to You, Lord, as You attempt to lead us to the Source of true happiness.”

Fay Moore, Downsville, Maryland, USA
Often our friends or family members have a favorite saying that they tell us. One father was fond of telling his older child, “Don’t be a dog in the manger.” He said this when the child would take something away from the younger sibling just to prevent the little one from having it. A dog doesn’t eat hay. A dog doesn’t want hay; but sometimes it will lie in the hay manger and nip at a farm animal that is trying to eat the hay.

The message from the father to the older child was:

What is a favorite saying you have heard over and over from a family members or friend?

What message is in this saying for you?
God Made Us Upright. So What Happened?

Surveying the Source
Proverbs 26:12; Ecclesiastes 7; John 3:30; 1 Corinthians 1:22–24.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Recognize that God’s way and His wisdom are best.
► Realize that good things can result from suffering.
► Understand that though we lost our way through our own inventions, God made a way for us to return to Him through the Written Word and through Jesus, the Living Word.

Preparing to Lead
No matter how wise or intelligent humans appear to be, no human intelligence can compare with the wisdom of God. His Word says it best: “For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart’... For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength... He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’ ” (1 Corinthians 1:19, 25, 30, 31, NRSV).

Getting Started
A. During the week, find a simple IQ Test, such as the one found in The Psychologist's Book of Self-Tests or another resource, and make a copy for each student. (You may have to abbreviate the test so that students can complete it in 5–7 minutes.) Give each student a copy of the test and a pencil or pen. Have them complete the test and score it with the answer key. (Don’t ask them to share their scores.) Remind them that even if they scored high, such tests are not foolproof measures of intelligence, and that a high score isn’t necessarily a guarantee of success. Use this as a lead-in to a discussion on intelligence. Ask students to define intelligence. Contrast the idea of intelligence with wisdom. Ask: Is it possible to be intelligent, yet lack common sense? Share the thoughts in Preparing to Lead. Pray a prayer of thanks for God’s wisdom and guidance.

B. Ask volunteers to share examples of people (without naming names) whom they consider to be wise and why. They can either think of someone they have known personally or a current, historical, or biblical figure. After a few students have shared, ask for examples of people who were not wise (someone from the Bible, from history, a popular figure, or a personal acquaintance). Ask: How can we obtain true wisdom?
Delving Into the Word

A. Divide into groups of six to eight and take turns reading aloud the first chapter of Daniel. Then discuss and answer the following questions:

► What does this story tell us about the factors that play a part in obtaining wisdom? How much of a part does natural ability play? What role do our habits play? What part does God play?

► What lesson did the guard learn who was assigned to care for Daniel and his three companions? What impact do you imagine this lesson might have had on this guard’s life as a result of what he observed about these young men?

► What does this story tell you about God and what is important to Him? Why did God bless the four young men in this story with “knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.”

► What impact does this story have upon you personally? What lessons can you learn and apply to your own life as a result of the example these youth set?

► What does this story tell you about the importance of being faithful? What does faithfulness involve? How did Daniel and his friends show their faith?

B. Divide into small study groups, and have each group choose a leader. Using a concordance or topical Bible, have the leader assign group members to take turns reading texts that talk about wisdom. Some possible texts include: Deuteronomy 32:29; Job 28:12–20; Psalm 107:43; Proverbs 1:5, 7; 2:1–7; 9:9, 10. After sharing the texts, each group should collaborate to create a definition of wisdom based on the Bible texts they read. Have someone from each group share their definition with the larger group.

Next, find texts that describe what wisdom is not and take turns reading them aloud. Examples include Genesis 3:6, 7; Proverbs 3:7; 21:20; 28:11; Ecclesiastes 2:1–26; Romans 1:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 2:1, 2; 3:18–20. Now make a list of actions or attitudes that God considers to be unwise. When the groups have finished discussing, they should take turns sharing their list with the larger group.

Have students work individually to complete the reproducible activity on page 38.

Discussing the Ideas

1. How is the “Adam and Eve” scenario (choosing our own way instead of God’s) played out every day in our modern society? How can we avoid falling into the same trap?
2. What examples can you think of to illustrate how trials can actually be a blessing?
3. What do you think Solomon meant when he said, “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”?
4. In what ways does God remind us not to be “conceited in our own wisdom”?
5. As a society, do we sometimes place too much emphasis on intelligence and having a high IQ? Give a reason for your answer.

Closing the Activity

Close with this thought: All types of media bombard us with information on every subject imaginable. Yet, in spite of all the knowledge we have available, most of us are ignorant when it comes to a thorough understanding of God’s Word.

Let’s decide today to make studying God’s Word our primary objective, even if it means being ignorant about information the world considers to be vital.

Patricia Humphrey, Keene, Texas, USA
Look up the texts to find the answers to the following questions:

1. To what does Solomon compare wisdom? (Prov. 24:13, 14)

2. Solomon says that wisdom is better than what three things? (Prov. 3:13–15)

3. What is one thing a wise person will do? (Prov. 12:15)

4. Wise people are people who seek what or whom? (Prov. 28:5)

5. Fill in the blanks: God considers people who _______________ and _____________ Him to be wise. (Matt. 7:24)
Seeing Through a Glass Darkly

Surveying the Source
Proverbs 3:5, 6; Ecclesiastes 8; Isaiah 43:1–3; 55:8, 9; John 16:23, 24; 17:15; Romans 3:10, 11, 23; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 3:13, 14.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Discuss God’s timing versus human timing.
► Learn that God’s agenda for life ultimately gives joy and peace.
► Explore ways to live God’s agenda on a daily basis.

Preparing to Lead
“Even in the midst of disappointment, surprise and mystery you will discover an amazing thing. You will discover how very reliable and trustworthy God is—and how secure you are in His hands. . . . Puzzling as the process may be to us, He stays with His plan. There is no need for us to know all the reasons, and He certainly doesn’t need to explain Himself. If we’re going to let God be God, then we’re forced to say He has the right to take us through whatever process He chooses.”*

Getting Started
A. Write the following phrase on the top of a flipchart, whiteboard, or chalkboard: Events I Don’t Understand
Ask the group to suggest events that have happened around the world that they cannot explain or understand why they happened. (Starter: Why God allowed innocent people to be raped and killed in the New Orleans disaster.) Have someone list them under the phrase above. Have the group discuss what bothers them most about these events.
B. Pair off in groups of two. Have each pair share with each other something that has happened in their lifetime that they could not understand or explain. Ask those who are willing to share how they dealt with the negative happening in their life. Ask: How many of you are still searching for answers?

Delving Into the Word
A. Print the following texts and questions on index cards, one to a card. Divide the class into small groups. Give each group an index card with the text and the discussion question. Have them discuss it among themselves. Have each group share their question and final answer they have decided upon.
   Ecclesiastes 8:5–7—What does Solomon mean when he says there is a proper time and procedure for everything? How does God’s time differ from our concept of time?
   Ecclesiastes 8:12—How can “good” people be more blessed than “wicked” people who seem to have it all?
   Ecclesiastes 8:14—Why are “good” people not always rewarded with “good” yet the “wicked” are often rewarded with good things?

*Copyright 2007 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Ecclesiastes 8:17—What is Solomon trying to convey to us about God?

B. Divide into small groups and give each group a different Bible translation to use. Write the following texts on newsprint or whiteboard or chalkboard. Ask a group to read aloud the verse from their translation. Then ask the other groups to read the same text in their translation and determine what additional or different insight their translation offers. Have them share their insight with the rest of the class.

Texts: Proverbs 3:5, 6; Ecclesiastes 8:14; Isaiah 55:8, 9; John 17:15.

Ask: What is the connection or relationship between these texts? Why is it important that we understand their relationship?

**Discussing the Ideas**

1. Because our time and God’s time are different, what fruit of the Spirit do we need plenty of (Gal. 5:22)?
2. How do we achieve patience to “wait on the Lord”?
3. If we live our lives on God’s agenda, what outcome can we expect?
4. What is the difference between joy and happiness (Eccles. 8:15)?
5. How do we know what God’s agenda is for our lives?
6. What do I do when I find out what God wants me to do and I don’t like His agenda for me?
7. How can I ultimately be happier doing what God has planned for me rather than following my own agenda (Phil. 3:13, 14)?
8. How can I live on God’s agenda in current world conditions (John 17:15)?

**Closing the Activity**

Point out that joy and happiness are not the same. Joy is a choice; happiness is a state of being dependant upon our circumstances. We can choose joy regardless of what is happening in our life. This joy is found in a close relationship with Jesus, living on His agenda.

Use the reproducible activity (see page 39) entitled “God’s Agenda—My Agenda.”

*Suggest that the students begin every day spending a few moments in God’s Word and prayer—listening for God’s agenda for them for that day. Then list their agenda. At the end of the day, compare what has happened during the day with what they had planned to happen. How did God overrule their agenda with His agenda? How did they view the day in retrospect?*

*Charles Swindall, Day by Day, p. 356.*

**Barbara Manspeaker, Luray, Virginia, USA**
Next week, spend time each morning listing your agenda. Then pray and study from the Bible. As you do, listen for God’s agenda for you. Close your devotion by listing His agenda for the day. At the end of the day, compare what happened with what you planned to have happen. How did God overrule your agenda with His agenda? How do you view the day in retrospect?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>YOUR AGENDA</th>
<th>GOD’S AGENDA</th>
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<th>TUESDAY</th>
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<tr>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>YOUR AGENDA</th>
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“Whatever Your Hand Finds to Do”

Surveying the Source
Ps. 39:4; Ecclesiastes 9; Mark 10:21, 22; 1 Thess. 4:13–18.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Have an understanding that death is one of the things that makes all people equal.
► Understand the process of resurrection within the context of the Second Coming.
► Understand that death shows us the futility of gathering too much in this life.

Preparing to Lead
It often takes death to motivate a person to live for eternity rather than for this world. This perspective gives us a wonderful opportunity to imbue this lesson with a greater understanding of why a Christian, while destined to the same fate as an unbeliever, need not fear death the way unbelievers do. It also gives us the impetus to teach the Second Coming, which is always the hope we have for those who have gone before us, and the hope our children will have for us.

Getting Started
A. As the students enter, have a coffin, or a box that might be made to look like a coffin (drape a cloth over it), in the front of the room. (If a church member has just died, this may not be a good time for this activity.) Have some appropriate music playing. This will make them think they should be somber. You, however, are to be upbeat. Seat them like you would in a funeral, but all the time be joyful. At some point, someone will ask you what is going on. Then simply say, “Nothing out of the ordinary. Why?” This can lead into a discussion of the appropriate Christian response to death.

B. Write the following on the board: “Top Ten Things to Do Before I Die!” Have the class list the top 10 things they are interested in doing before they have to leave this life. It will be interesting to see their responses. Chances are that what they say a great deal about will have to do with “loving others” more passionately. What a wonderful way to start a discussion about how today they can love like there is no tomorrow.

Delving Into the Word
A. Ask: In this life, what can we be sure of? After a few responses read the following two quotes: (1) “‘LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered, and that my life is fleeting away’” (Ps. 39:4, NLT). (2) “The only things you can be sure of are taxes and death.”

Explain that the second quote is true in the sense that death and taxes make us all
equal. Discuss how this statement is utterly false in the context of the Christian belief system. Mention that 1 Thessalonians 4:13–19 tells us how the “dead in Christ will rise first” (NKJV), and that this gives us hope for those who have gone before. While taxes and death are assured, so is salvation for those who choose to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. We have nothing to fear in death. However, this knowledge must inform our lives so that, however fleeting, we are constantly seeking others with whom we can share the good news of Jesus’ coming.

B. The lesson this week focused on Ecclesiastes 9 and Solomon’s predication. Have class members take turns discussing the ideas why they can’t. Let them know that Christ is coming for them, not what they own. However, the good news is that Christ is coming for them! And that has to be enough!

4. Why might we still grieve for someone who has died, even though we are Christians?
5. Should we, or should we not, fear death? Give reasons for your answer.
6. How should we relate to the things we own?

On a whiteboard or butcher paper have people list five things they each hold dear. Challenge them to go without those things for one week. Ask if they think they could do it. You will probably get every rationalization in the book as to why they can’t. Let them know that Christ is coming for them, not what they own. However, the good news is that Christ is coming for them! And that has to be enough!

Timothy Gillespie, Loma Linda, California, USA
William Wordsworth wisely wrote, “The world is too much with us” (*Lyrical Ballads*, 1798). How true it is that the very things we own often own us. Sometimes, the things we have cannot fill our hearts.

On a scale of 1–10, rate how hard it would be for you to give up the items listed below:

**HOW HARD WOULD IT BE?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>Car</td>
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<td>Phone</td>
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<td>Favorite clothes</td>
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<td>Gaming system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreational vehicles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vacations</td>
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<td>Sabbath</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ten Commandments</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Your job</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
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</table>

You might have many thoughts about what your total score means. But just remember: Which of these can you take with you to heaven?
Dead Flies and Snake Charmers: More Life Under the Sun

Surveying the Source

Exod. 16:7, 8; Numbers 12; 1 Kings 2:13–25; Prov. 24:17; Ecclesiastes 10; Matt. 5:43, 44.

Plotting the Course

The students will:

► Consider the wisdom versus the foolishness of all choices made.
► Recognize that making wise choices can come naturally through repeated practice.
► Seek assistance from the Lord in the small choices as well as the large.

Preparing to Lead

The Christian walk is all about making choices, from the major one of choosing to follow Christ to the daily ones thrust upon us by the enemy. Even those in positions of authority and advantage, such as King Solomon, can make foolish choices.

Wisdom does not occur naturally; it is developed by choices over time. The more practice we have in making good choices, the easier it should be for us. The good news is that we don’t have to guess what the wise choices are. Help is provided through Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Getting Started

A. Bring to class a closed container: glass bottle with cork, sealed plastic bag, etc. Inside will be a very bad smelling item such as a dirty sock or rotting piece of food. Pass the container around and ask each member to smell and try to guess what the item is. Ask: What defects in a person’s character would give them an offending odor? What attributes would make them smell pleasant to those around them? List defects and attributes on the whiteboard or flipchart.

B. Hand out a blank piece of paper to each class member. Ask them each to draw a simple maze. Include an opening for the beginning, several dead ends, and an opening for the finish. Label the beginning “dilemma” and label the finish “success.” The class may exchange mazes to run through or draw the path through their own. Point out that the dead ends in the mazes are the results of poor choices made on the journey. Ask: What kinds of journeys require choices? In what ways can poor choices limit us?
Delving Into the Word

A. On whiteboard or flipchart, list the characteristics of a foolish person. Have a volunteer read Ecclesiastes 10:5, 6. Explain that there have been many foolish leaders in the course of earth’s history. They may have practiced making foolish decisions and mistakes before they got into positions of authority; or they may have acquired that claim to fame as they settled into their position. Break your class up into small groups to discuss the following questions. After about 15 or 20 minutes come back together to share answers: ▶ How do foolish people make it to “high places”? ▶ What response should we have to those in authority whom we believe to be foolish? ▶ What is your responsibility for putting wise people in positions of power and keeping foolish ones out? ▶ In what ways can you minister or witness to foolish people?
▶ Leaders do not work alone. Their success depends upon their support staff. What situations can you think of from the Bible where a leader’s support staff was not what it needed to be? ▶ Who are the influential people in your life? Are they encouraging you to make wise decisions?

B. Have someone read Proverbs 3:13, 17 and Ecclesiastes 9:18. Explain that some people don’t seem to be happy unless there is conflict going on in their lives. They enjoy stirring up trouble for themselves and others. Ask: Is this real happiness? Science is proving more every year what Solomon already stated in Proverbs 17:22—that “a merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” Would a merry heart be involved in such conflict? Discuss the following: ▶ In what way is finding wisdom the way of pleasantness and peace? ▶ Can only peaceful people be considered happy and wise? List examples from the Bible that support or contradict that position. Who would be more likely to be considered wise, a younger or older person? Explain. ▶ What does it mean to be wise beyond your years? Ecclesiastes 9:18 talks about one sinner destroying much good. Can a sinner be considered a weapon? If so, what would be the target, and how would the outcome change if the sinner were wise or foolish?

Discussing the Ideas

1. How would seeing yourself as Jesus sees you alter any decisions you might make?
2. How does having a good name or reputation enable you to be a better witness?
3. In what ways can you be considered a wise talker, wise walker, wise viewer, etc.?
4. What are some examples of obvious choices versus those that fall into “gray areas”?
5. Describe how someone’s bad example could lead another to make bad choices.
6. What should our response be when we are the victim of poor choices?

Closing the Activity

Distribute the flowchart handout (see page 41) to each class member. Ask them to take a few minutes to fill it in. The dilemma section on the flowchart can be from their personal experiences or one they make up. When finished, ask for volunteers to share their dilemmas and conclusions. Ask the following for them to think about: ▶ If the choices were from real-life experience, would they choose to do it differently next time? ▶ What part did God play in their decision-making? ▶ What part does He play now?
FLOW CHART

DILEMMA

WISE CHOICE
CONSEQUENCE

WISE CHOICE
CONSEQUENCE

FOOLISH CHOICE
CONSEQUENCE

FOOLISH CHOICE
CONSEQUENCE
The Way of the Wind

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Examine and share in Sabbath School their views of God’s character.
► Recognize, celebrate, and appreciate God’s gifts in them and in others.
► Share God’s presence in their life by witnessing to three others this week.

Preparing to Lead
Being a follower of Christ means allowing Him to work in and through my life and to be a witness for Him. Before I can share with others, I need to be filled first. If I am empty, there is nothing to share. By having an intentional plan to fill my own life with His presence, and by developing a clear plan to share Christ with others, I fulfill the gospel commission in everyday life. This week’s lesson focuses on the gifting and free grace Christ has given to us, and the opportunities we have or can find to freely share His grace and goodness with others.

Getting Started
A. Hand out the blank shield forms (see page 42). Have each class member fill in the quadrants with artwork of some kind (no words!) as follows (stress that this is not an art contest):
   1. A picture of who God is as I understand Him.
   2. What is God’s gift to me, personally? How has He gifted me? (Examples can be shown by music note, a smile, or some representation of that gifting.)
   3. How can I work to develop that gift?
   4. How I can share, or use, His gift in witnessing to others?
   Discuss what was drawn by having each member explain what they drew and why they chose that symbol or symbols. Pay particular attention to No. 4.
B. Invite each individual to put the name of each member of the class on one 3 x 5 card. Then behind each name write on it: “I think God has gifted you in the following ways.” (List one or two ways for each person.) Then collect the cards and share them with the group. After that, give the cards to the person whose name is at the top of each one.
   Discuss how this makes each person feel, if they agree with the observations of their classmates, and how each person can use their gifts as part of their personal Christian witnessing.

Delving Into the Word
Both options can use the same biblical study texts.
A. Have students look up the following texts and read them aloud:
   ► Matthew 6:16–19 and Luke 6:38—Sharing what we have been given with others rather than hoarding it for ourselves.
   ► Luke 12:16–21—Bigger and more is not the answer . . . being rich toward God.
is the answer.

► Romans 8:32—God shared the greatest gift with us... His Son.

► Matthew 10:8—Freely we have received, and we are to give the same way.

► Romans 12:1, 2—We are to be transformed by God’s grace, not conformed to the greed of the world.

► 1 Timothy 4:11–16—As young believers, we can set the standard for others.

Discussing the Ideas

1. How does the way you view God affect witnessing?
2. What are specific ways I can “fill my life” with His gifts?
3. In what ways can we show appreciation to others for the gifts God has given them?
4. Where is the line between appreciating and enjoying the gifts God has given us and egoistic pride? Where is the line between appreciating the gifts others have and envy of those gifts which can be jealousy?
5. How would you respond to a person who says, “God never gave me any gifts. I am nobody, and I can’t do anything.”
6. Is “accountability” a positive or negative concept for you? Explain. (See Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10.)
7. How can being accountable to God for what we do, who we are, and the use of our gifts reduce anxiety? Why do some people feel increased anxiety about that accountability?
8. What does it mean to “freely give”? How can some giving have “hooks” and harm in them?

Closing the Activity

Bring out a large, empty brown grocery bag. Have the top folded so no one can see that it is empty. Pass out small brown bags to each class member. Tell the class that you have something for them to take in their bags that will help them share Christ with others this week. Open your large bag to show that it is empty. Make the connection that we cannot share what we have not received.

Close with a short discussion of what they can put in their bags from the study today that will help them “freely share” the grace and gifts God has given.

Richard Stenbakken, Loveland, Colorado, USA
In one of the following quadrants of the shield draw:

1. A picture of who God is as I understand Him.
2. What is God's gift to me, personally? (How has God gifted me? For example, draw a musical note, a smile, etc.)
3. How can I, or am I, working to develop that gift?
4. How can I share, or use, His gift in witnessing to others?
The Conclusion of the Matter

Surveying the Source

Ecclesiastes 12.

Plotting the Course

The students will:

► Understand the temporal nature of that which is earthly and human.
► Re-examine priorities and values in their lives.
► Appreciate God’s grace to sinful humans.

Preparing to Lead

“Unlike the animals, who seem quite content to simply be themselves, we humans are always looking for ways to be more than or other than what we find ourselves to be. We explore the countryside for excitement, search our soul for meaning, shop the world for pleasure. We try this. Then we try that. The usual fields of endeavor are money, sex, power, adventure, and knowledge.

“Everything we try is so promising at first! But nothing ever seems to amount to very much. We intensify our efforts—but the harder we work at it, the less we get out of it. Some people give up early and settle for a humdrum life. Others never seem to learn, and so they flail away through a lifetime, becoming less and less human by the year, until by the time they die there is hardly enough humanity left to compose a corpse.”

Getting Started

A. Share the following details concerning King Solomon’s wealth: As one of the world’s wealthiest men, he was admired and respected all over the world. When Queen Sheba visited him, just the gold she brought him as a gift was worth US$54 million by today’s standards. (Besides the gold, she brought him other valuable gifts as well.) Even during the building of the temple, his income was about US$300 million. This temple was worth US$56 billion! Yet all that’s left of it are the Colossae of Memnon—two statues built as an entrance and as symbolic “guards” to the great temple. Beyond these statues today lie leveled ground. There is not a hint of the glory, power, and wealth of King Solomon—a perfect illustration of the total meaninglessness of worldly and human assets. (A picture of the Colossae of Memnon can be found at http://www.flickr.com/photos/moochy/96036508/.

B. Print the pictures directed by the links in the reproducible activity handout, “During Days of Glory—After Days of Glory” (see p. 43). Also duplicate enough of the activities for your class to keep for future reference. Using the pictures, discuss the temporal glory of human life and earth.
Delving Into the Word

A. Divide the class into two or three groups, depending on the number of people in your class. Have each group read 1 Kings 11:1–13, then identify the obsessions of Solomon that may have resulted in his ramblings of Ecclesiastes. Using other characters from the Bible, also have each group discuss the role of God’s grace and mercy when a person’s hindsight turns 20/20. After about 15 or 20 minutes, reconvene the groups to have them share and discuss their findings.

B. Divide the class into an appropriate number of groups based on the size of your class. Say: God must have seen some merit in Solomon’s ramblings for Ecclesiastes to be included in the Bible along with other divinely inspired writings. What about Ecclesiastes reflects the human writer and what reflects divine inspiration?

After about 15 or 20 minutes, reconvene the groups to discuss their insights. Also share and discuss the following quote: “God gave Solomon wisdom and unparalleled opportunity to observe and explore every avenue of early life. After much research and experiment, Solomon concluded that on the whole, humanity found little solid happiness in life, and in his own heart he found an unutterable yearning for something beyond himself. Thus the book, in a way, is humanity’s cry for a Savior.”

Discussing the Ideas

1. By asking the question “What is life about?” Solomon is addressing the question “What makes life satisfying?” How can you use Ecclesiastes to get people you know to start thinking about what life is really about?

2. Blaise Pascal, a 17th century mathematician and philosopher, said, “If I believe in God and life after death and you do not, and if there is no God, we both lose when we die. However, if there is a God, you still lose and I gain everything.” Should belief in God be a gamble based on the odds of winning? Explain. What examples from the Bible and your personal life can you give to someone with such a reason for believing in God?

3. Every generation prefers to learn lessons the hard way—through their own experience—rather than from the mistakes and success of the older generation. Of what value then is the Book of Ecclesiastes to the present generation?

Closing the Activity

Say: What about Ecclesiastes can we apply in our personal lives when few of us have the same concerns Solomon had—millions of dollars, thousands of enemies/ hundreds of wives/special friends! Here is the similarity between Solomon’s life and ours and the lesson we can apply from His life: There is plenty in life that is futile, negative, and that might make one consider suicide. However, as Christians we have a choice of investing our time, energy, and ourselves in things that have eternal value.

Next, have someone read 1 Timothy 6:11–21. End by saying: Be inspired by these verses to find meaning for yourself and to bring meaning to those whose lives touch yours.


Fylvia Fowler Kline, Benepa, Napal
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