

10 Studies in Ecclesiastes

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study 1

WHO AM I? WHY AM I HERE PSALM 139**Discuss**

Sometimes people discover that they were adopted as babies, so that their parents are not their birth parents. What questions might they ask? What might they want to do?

Introduction

Whether we were adopted or not, we all at some time have questions about our identity. Why was I born into my particular family, at that particular time? What would it be like to belong to a different family, or to be born in a different country? Did it all happen by chance? In Psalm 139, we find the writer, David, meditating on the origin and meaning of his life and discovering some answers.

1. GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING - PSALM 139:1-6

1. (1-4) According to the writer, what does God know about him (us)?
(*perceive = see and understand, discern = understand*)

2. (5-6) How does David respond to the fact that God sees, knows and understands his every thought and action?

- How do we feel about it?

(*to hem in = to surround, lofty = high, to attain = to reach*)

2. GOD IS EVERYWHERE - PSALM 139: 7-12

1. (v.7) What does David think about doing? (*flee = run away*)

- Can you think of another example of someone who tried to do the same thing? (Genesis 3:8-10)

2. (verses 7, 8, 9, 11, 12) When David thinks about running away, where does he think of going to hide?
(*depths = the deepest places, the dawn = the sunrise, hold me fast = keep me safe*)

3. (verses 8,10, 12) What would be the result?

Discuss

One person said that these thoughts made him feel afraid and anxious. Another person said they made him feel safe and secure. How could there be two completely different feelings? How do they make you feel?

3. GOD IS OUR MAKER - PSALM 139: 13-18

1. (13-16) How does David describe God's activity in causing him (us) to be born? (*ordained = planned*)

2. (17-18) What is the writer's response to the knowledge that God created him personally? (*vast = great*)

4. DAVID'S RESPONSE TO GOD - PSALM 139: 19-24

David's response to God is in two parts: first he expresses anger against God's enemies (verses 19-22), then he thinks about himself.

(bloodthirsty = violent/ enjoying harming people, adversaries = enemies, abhor = hate)

Discuss

1. Can you suggest why David was suddenly so angry?
 - Do you think that a Christian today could pray that kind of prayer?

2. (23-24) What did David ask God to do to him? What do you think his reason was? *(offensive way = actions which give offence to God, actions which displease God)*

REFLECTION

- What encouragement does this psalm offer to people who think that their life is worthless or has no meaning?

- What does this psalm tell you about your own identity, family background, and purpose for living? How do you feel about it?

study 2

EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS - TRUE OR FALSE? Ecclesiastes 1: 1-11

Introduction:

Miss O and Miss P were teachers who lived together in the same village and taught in the same village primary school. Whenever someone met Miss O and asked her how the school was getting on, her reply was always encouraging: the children were obedient and working hard, they got on well together, and the parents always did what they could to help the work of the school.

Whenever someone asked Miss P how the school was getting on, her reply sounded like she worked in a completely different school. She felt sure the children were not doing as well as they could, they talked too much and did not concentrate on their work, and the parents never did very much to help the school.

They both thought they were telling the truth. Why did they give such very different replies? What do you think the truth really was? Are you a Miss/Mr. O..... or Miss/Mr. P.....?

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes could be called a Mr. P

READ Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

1. (1) Who was the writer of this book? What did he call himself?

2. (2) What is the Teacher's view of life? (*utterly = completely*)

3. (3) In the Teacher's opinion, is there any meaning to human life and work?
(*labour = hard work, toils = works*)

4. The Teacher gives 4 examples from nature to support his view that life has no meaning. What are they?
 - v.4 (*generation = the group of people all born about the same time*)
 - v.5
 - v.6.
 - v.7

5. (8) What does the Teacher say about seeking new experiences?
(*wearisome = causing tiredness, causing boredom,*)

6. (9-10) What is the Teacher's view of history?

7. (11) What does the Teacher say about human mortality, to support his argument? Compare verse 4.
(*mortality = by nature going to die, remembrance = memory*)

DISCUSSION

1. Do you agree with the Teacher that seeking new experiences will not bring lasting satisfaction?

Can you give an example to illustrate this?

2. To what extent do you agree with the Teacher that 'everything is meaningless'?
3. What do you think that Jesus would say to the Teacher?
4. How do you think a Christian would explain to the Teacher that believing in the good news of Jesus Christ and turning to Jesus in faith brings real purpose and meaning to life? (The following Bible verses might help you: John 10:10, Ephesians 1:3-6, Philippians 1:21-23, Colossians 3:1-4 etc. etc.)

study 3**WHERE CAN WE FIND FULFILMENT?****Ecclesiastes 1-2****Discuss**

In what ways do people today try to find fulfilment? What do you do?
(fulfilment = a sense of purpose and satisfaction)

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes describes his own search for meaning and fulfilment. In modern terms we could call his quest research for a Ph.D in Sociology or Psychology! (*quest = search*)

A. SEEKING FULFILMENT THROUGH WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE - Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

1. (12) What does the writer say about himself?
2. (13) What does he say about his life purpose?
3. (14-15) What was his conclusion?
4. (16) What did the Teacher achieve through his research?
5. (17-18) What was his conclusion about seeking fulfilment through knowledge and wisdom (education) ?

Discuss

Why does he call this search '*a heavy burden.*' (v.13) Do you ever have the same feelings as the Teacher as you seek to increase your knowledge ? How do you deal with them?

B. SEEKING FULFILMENT IN ALL POSSIBLE WAYS - Ecclesiastes 2: 1-16

1. (2:1-2) What did the Teacher try first? With what result?
2. (2: 3) What did he try next? What was his basic motive?
3. (2: 4-6) What did he turn to next?
4. (2: 7-8) What did he do after that?
5. (2:9) What was the result?
6. (2: 10-11) What fulfilment did he find? Was he satisfied?
7. (2: 12-14a) The Teacher then considered two kinds of life: the way of wisdom and the way of folly.

What did he conclude? (*folly = foolishness or unwise conduct*)

8. (2: 14b-16) He then changed his mind and said both are meaningless. What was his reason?

Discuss

- What advantages would the Teacher have over the average person in his search for satisfaction?
- How do people with fewer resources seek for satisfaction?
- Do you think that all will come to the same conclusion as the Teacher?

C. SEEKING FULFILMENT IN WORK - Ecclesiastes 2: 17-26

1. (2:17-18) What made the Teacher come to hate life?
2. (2:18-19) Why did he think that working hard was a waste of time and effort?
3. (2:19-20) What was the Teacher's emotional state? How was it affected by his search for fulfilment?
4. (2:21-23) What three reasons does he give for being so depressed?
5. (2:24-25) Now we find a complete change of mood again and the Teacher says *it is* possible to find satisfaction in life and work. What causes his change of mind?
6. (2:26) Where do fulfilment and satisfaction come from?

Discuss

1. Describe the contrast between seeking pleasure (2: 10-11) and finding enjoyment (2: 24-26).
2. In the record of the Creation, we read that God intended human beings to work with Him in managing His created world. (Genesis 1: 27-28). But the coming of sin brought punishment and made work a difficult and painful experience (Genesis 3:17-19). But Christians see work as a gift from God. What makes them able to do this and how should it affect the way they do their work?

study 4

IS ANYBODY IN CHARGE? Ecclesiastes 3: 1 - 22

Introduction

Are you interested in science fiction films or TV shows about journeys into space? Shows like Star Wars or Star Trek? Or maybe you are interested in the real thing and have thought a lot about what it would be like to be on the spaceship going to the moon? In any case, we know that one danger the astronauts face is the danger of being of being lost in space. Some people make the science fiction stories more exciting by making the astronauts lost in time as well. Have you ever thought what it might be like to be lost in space? Yet many people today talk about feeling trapped in time and space. They feel like they live in a world in which they have no control. Do you ever feel like that? If we do, is there anything we can do about it?

A. THE PROBLEM OF TIME - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Discuss

Describe the Teacher's view of time in verses 1-8.

- Does he mean that everything is already appointed by fate? (*fate = a power which controls what will happen and it cannot be changed*)
- Do you think that someone who feels trapped in time and space - who feels they have no control over their lives - would describe their feelings like this?
- What do you think of his way of thinking about time? Is it pessimistic or optimistic, both or neither?
- Do you find his thoughts helpful or discouraging?

B. THE PROBLEM OF ETERNITY - Ecclesiastes 3:9-14

1. (9-10) What makes the Teacher feel trapped and that life has no lasting satisfaction?
2. (11) What positive thing does he say about time?
3. (11) What negative thing does he say about time?
4. (11) The Teacher says that God has 'set eternity in the hearts of men'. What do you think he means? (*eternity = forever, time without end, infinite time*)
5. (12-13) How can we find true satisfaction in life? Where does this satisfaction come from?
6. (14) Does the Teacher think that the world is 'lost in time and space'?

Discuss

1. How does the knowledge that God is in charge of time and eternity bring meaning to life?
- How can we use this knowledge when we feel trapped and have no control over our lives?

- If God is in control, does that mean that we are not responsible for the things that we do?
- What are the consequences in society when that society does not acknowledge the authority of God?

C. THE PROBLEM OF WICKEDNESS AND INJUSTICE - Ecclesiastes 3:15-22

1. (15) What does the Teacher notice about human history? What does he think God will do?
2. (16) What does the Teacher observe happening in the law courts and places where people should be able to expect justice? (*under the sun = in the world as man sees it, outside of God's control and goodness*)
3. (17) What is God going to do about the wickedness and corruption in the world?
4. (18) The judgment may be in the future, but what is God doing now?

Discuss

1. (verses 18-22) What is the test? What are the desired results of the test? (*This test is based on the world view that human life is only physical and biological*)
2. Many scientists today are saying the same thing as the Teacher says in verses 20-21. Do you think the Teacher really believed this? What do you think his purpose was when he wrote it?
3. What is the Christian answer to the Teacher's conclusions based on the physical view of the world? (*It is important to remember that the Teacher did not have the full knowledge about spiritual life and life after death which was brought to us by Jesus and is explained in the New Testament.*)

study 5

ATTITUDES & VALUES FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Ecclesiastes 4:4 - 5:7

Discuss

Have you ever heard somebody say: *If that person is a Christian, then I don't want to be a Christian?*

- What is the usual reason for such a statement?
- What does it tell us about the speaker's idea of what a Christian should be like?
- Do you think it is fair that people should expect the attitudes and values of a Christian should be different?

In this section of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher explores some everyday values and attitudes.

1. TWO EXTREME ATTITUDES - LAZINESS & WORKAHOLISM. 4: 4-8

1. (4) What motivates many people to work hard and even become 'workaholic'? (*alcoholic = dependent on or addicted to alcohol, so workaholic = addicted to work in an unhealthy way*)
2. (5) How does the fool 'ruin himself'? (Note: In the Bible *the fool* means the person who tries to live life without God)
3. (6) What does the Teacher recommend as the best attitude to life and work?
4. (7-8) The Teacher describes the life of a workaholic. Why was it particularly sad?

Discuss

- Do you agree with the Teacher's view in verse 6?
- Why do most people agree that it is unhealthy to become 'workaholic'?
- Why do so many people become 'workaholic'? How can we avoid falling into this extreme way of life?

2. INTERDEPENDENCE IS BETTER THAN INDEPENDENCE. 4: 9-12

1. (9,11) Why is it good to be in partnership?
2. (10) What is the value of friendship?
3. (12) What example is given of the value of being involved with other people?

Discuss

- Some people are proud of being independent. Do you think that being independent is good or bad?

- From what you have learned of what it means to believe in Jesus, do you think it is right for a Christian to want to be completely independent?
- Some people are too dependent on others and other people are too independent. What are you? How can we grow towards becoming more *interdependent*?

3. THE PURSUIT OF POWER. 4: 13-16

1. (13) What kind of king is described here?
2. (13-15) What would happen when a young man came along to compete for the king's power? Why would people want to follow the young man?
3. (16) What would the people's attitude be to the younger man later on?

Discuss

- Can you give some examples to illustrate the insecure nature of prestige and power? (*prestige = having a good reputation for cleverness, skill, wisdom etc. based on past success or achievement*)
- Why are prestige and power so insecure?
- Do you think the Teacher is advising us not to be ambitious? Do you think it is wrong for a Christian to be ambitious?

4. NO RESPECT FOR GOD. 5: 1-7

1. (1) What should be the attitude of people when they go to church? What should they *not* do?
2. (2-3) What should people be careful about when they approach God?
3. (4-5) If we make a promise (vow) to God, what should we be careful to do?
4. (6-7) How can we avoid making God angry with us? What attitude should we have when we worship Him? (*awe = respectful fear and wonder*)

Discuss:

- In what circumstances might people make promises to God which later they might not want to keep?
- In this study we have been thinking about negative attitudes such as laziness, workaholism, unhealthy independence, foolish ambition and lack of respect for God. How do you think that a relationship with God should influence our lives and change our negative attitudes and values to make life more meaningful?
- How can we enter into that kind of a relationship with God?

study 6**LIVING UNDER AUTHORITY****Ecclesiastes 8: 2-17****Introduction**

Have you noticed how some people are rebels by nature? When children are told to do something they often ask 'Why?' or 'Why should I?' or even say, 'No, I don't want to, why should I?' An important part of our training is learning to obey. Usually the rules are for our own good or for the good of a group. Can you think of an example?

At the same time, it is important to encourage children to be curious and to ask questions. When the child asks 'Why should I?' the parent or teacher has the opportunity to give a good reason.

Discuss

It is not wrong for the child to ask 'Why should I?' but it is wrong when the child disobeys after being given a good reason. It is also wrong for the parent or teacher to refuse to give a good reason but instead demands blind obedience. Do you agree?

A. THE TEACHER ENCOURAGES OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY Ecclesiastes 8: 2-10

1. (2) What does the Teacher think is the most important reason to obey authority (the king)?

2. (3-4) What advice does the Teacher give about relating to authority?

3. (5-6) What advice does he give about seeking help from authority when in trouble? (misery)
(*procedure = method*)

4. (7-8) The Teacher mentions some ways in which human authority is limited. What are they?

Discuss

- Think of one life situation in which you live under authority. What is your biggest struggle in living under this authority?

- How has this source of authority brought positive benefits to your life?

- In what life situation do you exercise authority? What is your biggest struggle in exercising authority wisely in this situation?
(*exercise authority = have and use*)

B. UNJUST USES OF AUTHORITY Ecclesiastes 8: 9-14

1. (9-10) What wrong use of authority is described here?

2. (11) What injustice is described and what are the results of it?

3. (12-14) How does the Teacher answer the problem of injustice?

Discuss

- The Teacher seems to be saying that we should always accept the unjust use of authority and not try to improve the situation? Do you think he would say the same thing in our day and age?
- Does the fact that we know God will judge and punish unjust rulers mean that we should not try to improve things?

C. LIVING UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF GOD Ecclesiastes 8: 15-17

1. (15) The person who knows that his life has come from God lives under God's authority. What are the benefits of living under God's authority?
2. (16) What did the Teacher try to do? (*applied my mind = I concentrated on; I made it my job to....*)
3. (17) What was the result of the Teacher's research? What conclusion did he come to?

Discuss

- Human wisdom is very limited. How does knowing this fact encourage us to respect and trust God?
- Do you think there might be times when it would be right to disobey someone who has authority over us?

D. JESUS' ATTITUDE TO AUTHORITY Luke 20: 20-26

Note: At the time of Jesus people lived under Roman government and hated having to pay tax to the Romans.

1. (20) What did the people who spied on Jesus hope to do?
2. (21-22) What question did they ask him? (*partiality = favour*)
3. (23) What did Jesus understand about them? (*saw through = he understood; duplicity = deceitfulness*)
4. (24-25) What did Jesus ask them? How did they answer? (*denarius = a Roman coin; inscription = title, name; Caesar = the Roman Emperor*)
5. (25-26) What was Jesus' answer? What was the result?

Discuss: Jesus said we should give to the government what belongs to the government and give to God what belongs to God. What did he mean?

study 7

THE DIFFERENCE THAT DEATH MAKES TO LIFE Ecclesiastes 9: 1-12

INTRODUCTION: Sometimes a person is given the bad news that they have a terminal illness and that they will probably die within a few months. What difference do you think that such bad news would make to them?

In the book of Ecclesiastes the Teacher records the results of his observations of the world in his search for a meaning and purpose in life. In chapter 8 verse 15, he comes to the conclusion that the best thing to do is to enjoy life and live under the authority of God because it is God who gives us life.

1. ALL HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON - Ecclesiastes chapter 9 verses 1-3

1. (1) What does nobody know?

2. (2) What is the common destiny which all share? (*destiny = future*)

3. (2) The Teacher mentions 6 pairs of opposites - what are they?

4. (2) What people is he talking about? (*take oaths = make promises to God*)

5. (3) What is the same destiny which overtakes all? (*overtakes = catches up with*)

Discuss: Most of us don't like to think about our future death, why do you think the Teacher is emphasising it so much?

2. IS THERE ANY HOPE? - Ecclesiastes chapter 9 verses 4-6

1. (4) Does anyone have hope for the future?

2. (5-6) Even though we know we must die, what can we still hope for?

Discuss: How can the knowledge that we must die affect our priorities and life values:

- a) for the worse?

- b) for the better?

3. CAN WE ENJOY LIFE KNOWING THAT WE MUST DIE? - Ecclesiastes 9 verses 7-12

1. (7-8) What does the Teacher encourage us to do? What reason does he give?

2. (9-10) The Teacher encourages us to enjoy our family, social and work life. What reason does he give?

3. (11-12) How do the factors of time and chance affect our lives?

Discuss

There is a saying: *Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die*. It means that if we are going to die we might as well live for ourselves, for our own pleasure and enjoyment. Do you think that this is what the Teacher means?

4. THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

The Teacher lived about 900-1000 years before Jesus. At that time they did not have the full revelation from God that we have in the Bible today. Jesus came to bring us fuller knowledge of God and eternal life.

- **Jesus promised eternal life to all who believe in Him - John 11: 25-26**

1. (25) What did Jesus call Himself? How do we know it is true?
2. (26) What did Jesus say would happen to a believer who dies?
3. (26) What did Jesus promise to all those who live and believe in Him?

- **Jesus promised a home in Heaven - John 14: 1-3**
(1-2) What was Jesus going to prepare for His followers?

(3) How would they get there?

- **Paul looked forward to going to Heaven - Philippians 1: 22-23**
(22-23) If Paul could choose between living or dying, what would he choose?

(23) How did he describe death? Why would he choose to die?

- **Jesus sets us free from the fear of death - Hebrews 2: 14-15**
(14-15) What two things did Jesus do by his death for us?

Discuss: What difference should these promises make to the way we live our life and face death?

study 8

LIVE WISELY AND AVOID FOOLISHNESS Ecclesiastes 9: 13-10: 20

Introduction

“Use some common sense child!” How often did your parents say that to you? Parents often despair of their children ever learning to exercise (use) common sense. But in this section the Teacher is dealing with the problem of living foolishly. In the Bible a ‘fool’ is a person who denies the existence of God and ‘folly’ (foolishness) is a lifestyle which neglects God. In these verses the Teacher identifies foolish behaviour and encourages us to avoid it.

Discuss

At what times in our life are we most likely to exercise poor judgment or make a bad decision?

A. SOME EXAMPLES OF WISE AND FOOLISH BEHAVIOUR (Ecclesiastes 9: 13 - 10: 1)

1. (9: 13-16) List the contrasts mentioned in these verses.

2. (9: 13-16) Who was wise and who was foolish?

3. (9: 17) Whose advice should be listened to? Whose advice is more often listened to?

4. (9:18 - 10:1) In a dangerous situation which could lead to war, what would wise people do? What might a foolish person do? Can you think of a modern example?

B. THE DANGERS OF A FOOLISH LIFESTYLE (Ecclesiastes 10: 2-20)

1. (10:2-3) In these verses, what do you think is the point of the Teacher’s words about the fool?

2. (10:4) In a time of crisis (like falling out of favour) what might a foolish person do? What is the wise thing to do?

3. (10:5-7) What kind of error (mistake) should people in authority be careful not to make?

4. (10:8-11) What common situations are described here that call for good judgment?

5. (10:12-15) How can words betray a fool?

6. (10:15-20) What are the consequences of a foolish lifestyle?

Discussion

1. From the situations described in chapter 10 verses 8-20, can you find any general principles for our practical guidance?
2. Is there anything we can do to ensure that the people who have authority over us exercise their authority with wisdom?
3. What can parents do to encourage their children to live wisely?
 - Children often think that a wise lifestyle is 'boring'. Is there anything we can do to correct this wrong attitude?
4. Some people seem to be naturally wise and others seem to be naturally foolish. It seems to be a matter of temperament.
 - Is there anything we can do to change our nature? (Compare 2 Corinthians 5:17)
 - Remembering the definition of foolishness as 'a lifestyle which neglects God' what should we do in order to be sure of avoiding foolishness?
5. James, the brother of Jesus, writes 'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.' (James 1:5) In what area of your life do you currently need wise attitudes or actions?

study 9

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO LIVE? Ecclesiastes 11:1-12: 8**Introduction**

A common English saying is “*Variety is the spice of life.*” It means that different countries, different languages, customs, books, foods, peoples etc, etc. all add flavour to life. We certainly agree that people are different. One example is that some enjoy adventure and taking risks while others are more cautious and careful. What kind are you? Are you a risk-taker? Or are you a safe stay-at-home? What kind is the most fun to go on holiday with?

Have you ever done anything which involved taking a risk? How did you feel? What was the outcome? Would you do it again?

A. BE ADVENTUROUS AND GENEROUS (Ecclesiastes 11: 1-6)

1. (1) ‘*Cast your bread upon the waters.*’ What do you think the Teacher is advising us to do? What reason did he give?
2. (2) What is he encouraging us to do here? What reason does he give?
3. (3-4) What do you think is the point of his words in these verses?
4. (5-6) The Teacher tells us to work hard and take the opportunities that come to us. What was his reason?

Discuss

Remembering all that the Teacher has said in the previous chapters of his book, why do you think the Teacher is telling us to be adventurous and take risks?

- Isn’t he contradicting himself?
- “Boldness comes from facing the reality of life and death from the reality of God.” Does this sentence help us to understand the Teacher’s thinking?

B. ENJOY LIFE WHILE YOU CAN Ecclesiastes 11: 7-10

1. (7-8) The Teacher says we should seek to enjoy life every day. What was his reason?
2. (9-10) What should we remember as we seek to enjoy life?

Discuss

In the middle of encouraging us to enjoy life the Teacher suddenly reminds us of coming judgment:

- Why does he do this?
- Is it possible to enjoy life knowing that one day we will be judged by God?

C. TURN TO GOD NOW WHILE YOU CAN (Ecclesiastes 12: 1-8)

1. (1) What does the Teacher advise us to do? How does he speak of God?

2. In verses 2 - 5, he uses metaphors to describe the physical deterioration of old age. (*metaphor = something used as a description of something else e.g. death is sometimes spoken of as 'passing away.'*) Can you find the metaphors and put a meaning to each one of them? (*Continue round the group letting each person find a metaphor and a meaning*)

3. (6-7) The Teacher uses *four* metaphors for death. What are they? What does the Teacher advise us to do?

Discuss:

1. Why should the fact that we face old age with its increasing physical weakness encourage us to turn to God in our youth?

2. Sometimes people try so hard to be safe and secure that they fail to enjoy life and fail to accomplish anything worthwhile.
 - Look at Mark 8:34-37 to see what Jesus says about preserving life and losing life.

 - What is he encouraging us to do? What will the result be?

study 10

LIFE WITH MEANING AND PURPOSE Ecclesiastes 12: 8-14

Introduction

The Teacher sums up life as most people live it with the one word *meaningless* (see 12:8).

- If you were asked to sum up life with one word, what word would you choose?
- Do you think that the Teacher means that life is always meaningless?

A. REVIEW OF THE TEACHER'S MESSAGE IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

Discuss

1. What is your impression of the Teacher's message? Can you sum it up in a brief statement?
2. What method did the Teacher use in his search for meaning in life?
3. Based on the last study (11:1 - 12:8), what were the Teacher's priorities in life?
4. How has the Teacher's perspective on life been helpful to you?

B. A SUMMARY OF THE TEACHER'S METHOD Ecclesiastes 12: 9-12

1. (9-10) How did the Teacher prepare his work? How would you describe the Teacher? What was the Teacher's evaluation of his own work?
2. (11) The Teacher used two illustrations to describe the teaching of wise people. What were they?
(*goads = pointed sticks used to prod animals to make them go in the right direction; embedded = deeply fixed in something; firmly embedded nails = nails hammered in firm and deep*)
3. (11) Where does true wisdom come from? Who does the Teacher mean when he talks about *one Shepherd*?
4. (12) What does the Teacher warn against?
5. (12) What does the Teacher say about *much study*?

Discuss

1. Can you suggest the Teacher's reason for using the two illustrations in verse 11? What can we learn from this about:
 - how to recognise good teaching?
 - how to be a good teacher?
2. Can you suggest why the Teacher warns against additions to the teaching?
 - What are the dangers?
 - Who might want to add something?

3. What do you think was the Teacher's reason for calling God *Shepherd*?
 - Do you know of any other places in the Bible where God is called *Shepherd*?

C. CONCLUSION: HOW TO LIVE WITH MEANING AND PURPOSE Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14

1. (13) What two things does the Teacher tell us to do in order to live with meaning and purpose?
2. (13) What place should these two things have in our list of priorities?
3. (14) The Teacher's words in verse 13 can be summarised as: *aim to live a life that pleases God*. What reason does he give?

Discuss

1. What does it mean to *fear God*?
 - What else or who else are we tempted to fear more than God?
 - How can we fear God *and keep his commandments*?
2. How does verse 14 make you feel?
 - Can you see anything in it for encouragement?
 - Jesus came to save us from our sin and from the judgment of God. Look at John 3: 16-18.