

# DECONSTRUCTING LIFE UNDER THE SUN

## Part 1 - Deconstructing Meaning

### INTRO

- As we approach the end of Summer, what were some of the highlights in your life from the past couple of months?

### READ

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-14 and 12:13-14

Ecclesiastes is a very different and challenging book to read. Because of that, we have summarized some important key ideas to help you read and understand the book for yourself. You can find them on the next page. For now, let's focus on the main purpose of this book: challenging our assumptions about the meaning of life and how we discover meaning in the first place.

The book of Ecclesiastes is a speech by someone called the Teacher (or Preacher) exploring the futility of our earthly pursuits and search for meaning in our lives. As we read the book together, let's be prepared to examine our hearts closely.

### REFLECT

#### 1. Life under the sun is meaningless

One of the main ideas repeated throughout the book is that everything in life is *hevel*, a Hebrew word that means a mist, breath, or vapour, and is usually translated as meaningless, vanity, or mysterious. But what is most important to remember is that the Teacher is analyzing life "under the sun". That is, he is analyzing only what is earthly and from an entirely earthly perspective. His conclusion over and over is that one can't find the meaning of life in this way and that nothing on earth is enough by itself to satisfy our craving for meaning. This is an important reminder that we

can't stake our happiness on anything that is merely earthly because nothing will be enough for us.

#### 2. What we need for life to have meaning.

Throughout the book, another idea emerges that, for life to have meaning, we need two things: (1) to make some sense of life, and (2) to know that what we do matters and makes a difference. The Teacher's despair at life's meaninglessness stems from his conclusion that from this earthly perspective, we cannot make sense of life and nothing we do matters.

#### 3. The end of the matter

But the Teacher doesn't end there. By the end of the book, he recovers a biblical view of the world. He remembers that we were purposefully created by God and that what we do matters so much that we will be judged for it. At this point, it is also good to remember that there is more to God's revelation in the Scriptures than what we find in Ecclesiastes.

*Qu: Have you ever been extremely disappointed by something in life? What did you learn about life in that situation?*

*Qu: What do you think would make someone conclude that life is meaningless?*

*Qu: Why is it sometimes important for us to deconstruct our assumptions about life? And how should we "reconstruct" after that examination?*

*Qu: Is the idea that we were made by God, and that we will be judged by him, a source of comfort for you? Can it be a source of meaning as well?*

### RESPOND & PRAY

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- What encouraged/challenged you the most from this discussion?
- Spend time praying for one another and those you know who need to hear the good news of salvation.

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### SIX KEY IDEAS TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND ECCLESIASTES

The book of Ecclesiastes can be difficult to interpret because it is so different from the other books in the Bible. Its unique style needs some explanation before we can begin making sense of it. We hope these six ideas will help you unlock many of the lessons we can learn from the book.

#### **1 - Ecclesiastes is a speech by *Qohelet* (the Teacher) about the meaning of life.**

The book has two “authors”. One is a speaker in an assembly (He is called *Qohelet* in the original Hebrew, usually translated as the Teacher or the Speaker). His purpose is to talk about how we can make sense of life’s meaning. The other author is an editor who wrote down the Teacher’s speech and also wrote a brief prologue (1:1) and an epilogue (12:9-14) to the book.

#### **2 - The book is not an explanation, but an exploration of what gives life meaning.**

Rather than just giving an answer to the question of life’s meaning, the Teacher goes on a journey to explore how we try to make sense of life. His journey is a winding road full of dead ends and it’s not before the book’s conclusion that we hear what he really believes about the matter.

#### **3 - The book is about understanding earthly life (under the sun) from an entirely earthly perspective.**

The Teacher’s method is to analyze only what we can see happening on earth (under the sun), and he limits himself to what we can experience and reason for ourselves. This point is really important for making sense of why the Teacher can’t find any meaning in life in his exploration. In other words, the Teacher’s intention is to show that we

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can’t make sense of life if we limit our scope and our methods to what is only “earthly”.

#### **4 - Life under the sun is *hevel*: a mysterious, formless, short-lived, mist or vapour.**

The way the Teacher makes this point is to call everything in life *hevel* – a Hebrew word that means vapor, mist, or breath. By that he means that earthly life is fragile, short-lived, and hard to make sense of. Many translations of *hevel* have been *vanity*, *meaningless*, or even *mysterious*.

#### **5 - The conclusion: there is more to life than what we see “under the sun”. We know that what we do matters because we’ll be judged for it. And it is possible to make sense of life because we were created on purpose and with a purpose by God.**

By the end of the book, the Teacher concludes that his earthly method only resulted in vanity or meaninglessness. But then he reminds us that there is more to what we see under the sun. We were made by God and will be judged by Him. That changes everything. Since we were made by God, there is some sense we can make of things. And since our actions will be judged by God, it must mean that they are not meaningless. Our actions make a difference, so much so that God holds us accountable for them.

#### **6 - Ecclesiastes is not all that God wants to tell us.**

Finally, the Teacher only hints at the beginning of an answer to the question about life’s meaning. God has revealed a lot more about life’s meaning than what we find in Ecclesiastes. Most important of all, through Jesus Christ he made a way for us to be forgiven and for life under the sun to be forever transformed. Because Christ took upon himself the guilt for our sins, we can face God’s judgment with confidence. And because of the

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resurrection, we know that life will be forever transformed and not be merely *hevel*. As we explore this amazing book, let us always allow our minds and hearts to drift back to Christ.

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