

# Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

## The Pursuit of Wisdom

- The preacher sets out on his first of three ventures in order to test whether any of these things can in themselves produce meaning and purpose.
  - Wisdom first
  - Pleasure second
  - toil/work third
  - The wise are highly revered in the world, so this pursuit comes first.
- Keep in mind “under heaven” is the key thought
  - All the knowledge that can be had
  - All the wisdom that can be found
  - The fullest extent of man’s understanding without a consideration to the wisdom that comes from God.
  - Effectively the Preacher will go after each endeavor as if there is nothing “above heaven”, and this life is all there is.
    - If that’s the case, can I pursue anything that will satisfy?

## 12-14 The Preacher’s Pursuit of Wisdom

Intent to pursue wisdom as a means to find purpose. Does wisdom hold the key to being fulfilled? (v12)

- His position permitted him to pursue wisdom
  - The preacher is in a position to pursue these things, as no one else really had been.
  - His ability to leave his affairs and business to others during this time is unparalleled.
    - We cannot take a sabbatical from our job, wife, kids, responsibilities, in pursuit of wisdom.
    - The preacher’s unique position allows him to do this.
- Applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven (13)
  - Set it within himself
    - To seek and to search out
      - Meant to convey that he went broad and deep with his search.
      - He left no stone unturned, no path not tread. He climbed every mountain, swam every stream so to speak.
    - All that is done under heaven.
      - Since his pursuit is wisdom, we must take that he is gaining knowledge and insight about the world
        - Learning all that he can to see what of wisdom will fulfill

- Great knowledge of relationships, economics, warfare, literature, song, and many other “fields” of study.
- He became a lifelong student on his quest to prove wisdom as worthwhile or not.
- Think of the greatest minds of the ages: Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, William Shakespeare, Aristotle, Marie Curie, Plato, Galileo, Isaac Newton.
- Shouldn't these people be fulfilled and content?
- The Preacher acknowledges the pursuit is placed in the hearts of man by God
  - The “unhappy business” we are busy with should bring us to the realization that the pursuit itself is lacking.
- “I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after the wind.” (14)
  - Here the preacher combines his phrases to declare the results of his efforts
    - Under the sun
    - All is vanity
    - Striving after the wind

#### 15 The Preacher 's Analysis of Wisdom

- The realization that despite high learning, education, and the acquisition of knowledge, change cannot truly be affected that lasts.
  - What is crooked cannot be made straight
    - From the lens of “under heaven” it doesn't seem as if there is much hope in pursuing wisdom to fix all the ills of the world
      - Advances in medicine, but cancers, diseases, and disorders
      - Greater understandings of psychology and “what makes us tick” but more violence, more depression, more sorrow
  - What is lacking cannot be counted
    - It seems something is missing or lacking from this world.

#### 16-17 The Preacher's Acquisition and Experiences of Wisdom

- he acquires great wisdom
  - To surpass all who were before him
  - Whether only King David or a few more, he's making it clear his knowledge is vast
- He experiences great wisdom
  - Not just acquiring knowledge and wisdom but experiencing it also.
  - He didn't stop at book learning, there was some practical learning and application with his venture into wisdom
- he went all the way to the top with wisdom
- He also applied his heart to know madness and folly

- He went to the opposite end of wisdom
- He stepped down to madness and folly
- To get the full scope of wisdom, but it still proved to be a vanity

## 18 The Preacher's Conclusion of Wisdom

- The more wisdom one has, the more frustrated one becomes
- The one who increases in knowledge increases sorrow.
  - With all of the information in hand and with all of the resources at his disposal, the Preacher concludes that wisdom, in and of itself, will only produce frustration and sorrow

The Preacher's pursuit of wisdom as a means to find fulfillment in life achieves its purpose in his realization that knowing more does not amount to being able to do more.

- The most intelligent person in the world cannot "straighten out what is crooked" for there is a fault in wisdom's pursuit:

When the Preacher's pursuit of wisdom proves fruitless, what are we to do?

1. Wisdom under the sun is limited so we must look above to Christ himself, the wisdom of God
  - a. Wisdom under the sun vs. wisdom from above
  - b. Wisdom in Ecclesiastes is the view from under the sun with limited human perspective which leads to frustration
  - c. 1 Corinthians tells us that Christ Himself is the wisdom of God.
  - d. The cross and resurrection proves that ultimate wisdom is not found in human searching, but in God's act of revelation in Christ through the cross and resurrection
  - e. True wisdom is not despair but hope
2. Wisdom under the sun reveals the futility of our efforts but in Christ we are a new creation, a new work, and our labor is not in vain
  - a. 1 Corinthians 15:58
3. Sorrow in knowledge vs. joy in truth
  - 1:18 tells us much wisdom bring much vexation, and increased knowledge increases sorrow. Knowledge of the world's brokenness brought only grief
  - John 8:32- "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"
  - The resurrection transforms sorrow into joy, because our deepest problem — death — has been overcome
4. Human limitations and divine revelation
  - a. "human effort can't straighten what has been crooked"
  - b. God has straightened what we could not. The crookedness of sin and death was made right in Jesus' resurrection. What we could not fix, Christ redeemed
  - c. Acts 13:9-10

## Icebreaker

What's a time when you thought knowing more about something would make life easier, but instead it made things harder or more complicated?

## Discussion Questions

- What kinds of things do people today study, research, or devote their lives to, hoping it will give them meaning?
- Verse 15 says, "What is crooked cannot be made straight." How do you see this truth play out in today's world despite all our advances in science, medicine, and technology?
- In what ways do human limitations remind us that we can't "fix" the deepest problems of life by ourselves?
- Why does gaining more knowledge often lead to greater frustration or sorrow rather than peace?
- How does knowing Christ turned the sorrow of Ecclesiastes 1:18 into the joy of John 8:32 ("the truth will set you free")?
- Where in your own life are you tempted to trust human wisdom instead of God's wisdom?
- How does 1 Corinthians 15:58 ("your labor in the Lord is not in vain") change the way we pursue learning, work, and daily life?