

**THIS IS DEPRESSING:**

**Hope For Those Living In The Real World**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Our objective in this session is to examine the "up-side" of Ecclesiastes. Specifically, we will take a closer look at some of the positive statements Solomon makes about life, and explain how these fit together with some of the more pessimistic statements in the book.

**PAGE-BY-PAGE TEACHING GUIDE**

Page 60 The students should prepare this worksheet before coming to class. Begin class by going over each verse with your students and discussing their impressions. Emphasize that sometimes Solomon seems to have fallen into utter despair as he writes this book. Life just seems meaningless. You can also work in a discussion of the word "vanity" that appears frequently in Ecclesiastes. Wrap up this sheet by asking each student to select the one verse that is most depressing.

Page 61 The students should also prepare this worksheet before coming to class. This sheet should serve as a sharp contrast to page 60. Again, take each passage and discuss the student's impressions, i.e. what positive thing is Solomon saying about life in each one. Focus on his statements about being happy and enjoying our work. Emphasize that this sounds much different from what we see in other places.

It should take one complete class period to cover these two sheets. Have the student prepare the top of page 62 before coming to class.

Page 62 Begin your second class period by dividing your class into teams and have them share their thoughts on this question. You want them to try to explain why Solomon can seem so pessimistic about life at one point, and then turn around and speak so positively about it. Let the teams work for a while, and then have them share their thoughts with the class. Don't be too quick to provide an answer. Let them wrestle with this for a while. Explore their thinking. Then move to the next page.

Page 63 The grey box contains a brief answer to the question raised on page 62. Go over this section together and be sure the students get the point. Use the three scenarios in the right column to apply this point to their lives. Have the students read through these on their own and answer the questions. Then, wrap up class by discussing each story together.

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.

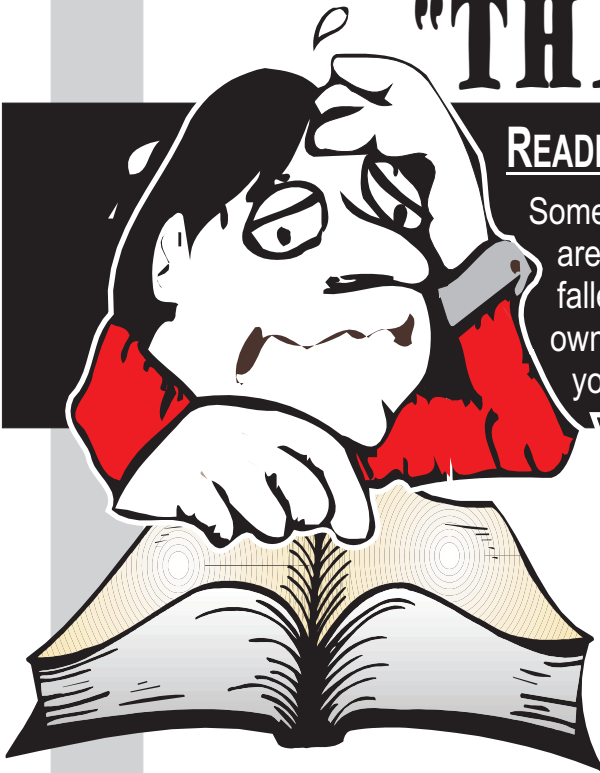
- Ecclesiastes 2:24

**LIVING IN  
THE REAL WORLD**



**Studies In  
Ecclesiastes**

# "THIS IS DEPRESSING..."



## READING ECCLESIASTES CAN REALLY BRING YOU DOWN!

Sometimes it seems that way as we read through this book. There are moments in Ecclesiastes where it seems that Solomon has fallen into utter despair and may well be on the verge of taking his own life. Consider the passages listed below on the left. Give your own summary of each one.

# VANITY

Vanity is a word that comes up constantly in Ecclesiastes. Solomon is constantly saying that all is vanity. Do a little research and see what you can learn about its meaning.

Ecclesiastes 1:2

Ecclesiastes 1:13

Ecclesiastes 2:11

Ecclesiastes 2:17-18

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

Ecclesiastes 5:16

Ecclesiastes 6:1-6

After reading these passages, choose the one you find most depressing.

Explain why you chose this one.

# ...OR MAYBE NOT!"



Sometimes it does appear that Solomon is completely depressed and ready to end it all as he writes Ecclesiastes.

## But hang on...

if we keep reading we will find something else. Solomon will also make some very different statements that take a much more optimistic view of life. For example, note this reading from **Ecclesiastes 5:**

- (18) Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.
- (19) Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.
- (20) For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

This Solomon sounds much different from the one we met in those other passages. But this is not the only time he sounds more positive. Statements like this are scattered throughout the book. More examples are given on your right. Read these passages and briefly explain what Solomon is saying in each one.

## POSITIVE POINTS IN ECCLESIASTES

### Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

Summarize Solomon's more positive message about life in this passage.

### Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

Summarize Solomon's more positive message about life in this passage.

### Ecclesiastes 3:22

Summarize Solomon's more positive message about life in this passage.

### Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

Summarize Solomon's more positive message about life in this passage.

### Ecclesiastes 8:15

Summarize Solomon's more positive message about life in this passage.

### Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

Summarize Solomon's more positive message about life in this passage.

# “I DON’T UNDERSTAND THIS GUY...”

## Consider his own words:

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

- Ecclesiastes 1:2

I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot.

- Ecclesiastes 3:22

How can Solomon say that everything is vanity, then turn around and tell us to be happy in our activities? How can he be so down on life at one point in the book, and then turn around and tell us to be happy and enjoy life in other places? It just doesn't seem to make any sense.

## **ON YOUR OWN:**

In the space below, do your best to explain these statements of Solomon that seem to conflict each other. Look at the two listed above and explain how both can be true?

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## **TEAM PROJECT:**

When you get to class, have the teacher divide the group into several teams. Share your answers to these questions. Use your combined ideas to come up with one team response.

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## FIGURING OUT SOLOMON'S WORDS

To understand these statements which seem to conflict with each other, we must return to Solomon's purpose in writing this book. He is searching for meaning in life. He wants to know what he might do with his time on this planet that really does matter, 1:3.

One thing Solomon makes very clear is that you will not find meaning in ordinary places men look. To be specific, you will not find real meaning in riches, worldly knowledge, political power or fame (chapters 1-2). In the end none of these things have true profit because, when we die, we lose them all. This is why Solomon seems so negative at times. He realizes that much of what he has spent his life doing really doesn't matter. This was deeply frustrating to him.

But the same principle applies to us. If we spend our lives pursuing earthly riches and success, then one day (just like Solomon) we will realize that our lives have been wasted. If we want to find true meaning and purpose, we will have to look somewhere else. This is the ultimate point Solomon is trying to make in this book, 12:13-14.

However, while earthly achievements cannot give meaning to our lives, there are some limited benefits they supply. Solomon tells us to be happy in our activities (3:22) and to enjoy ourselves in all our labors (5:18).

For example, imagine for a moment that you really want to buy a new car. But you don't have the money for it. So, for several years you sacrifice and save. When the time finally comes and you are able to get it, you feel good about achieving that goal. You stand in the driveway and gloat over that new car. **AND THAT'S OKAY!** We should feel good about achieving goals; we should enjoy that moment of satisfaction. But remember, that moment of satisfaction will fade and the car we love today will one day end up at the junk yard. For that reason, this earthly achievement cannot give any true sense of purpose to our lives.

Here's the point: don't try to make earthly riches and success provide more for our lives than they can. They will give us moments of pleasure and satisfaction. Solomon tells us that we should enjoy these moments. **BUT THEY CANNOT GIVE TRUE MEANING TO OUR LIVES.** We will have to look somewhere else to find this!

## DO WE GET IT?

But do we really get this point that Solomon is trying to make? Do we really believe that earthly treasures and accomplishments cannot give real meaning to our lives? We may say that we do while sitting in this class; but, do we really live this way every day? Read each story below and decide if each person gets the principle Solomon is trying to help us see.



Kathy believes that her relationship with God is really important. However, she also believes in the value of a good education. So, she does not worry too much about her lack of involvement with the congregation she attends, nor is she concerned about skipping Bible class to study for tests. She believes she will have more time to focus on God when she finishes college.

Does she get it? \_\_\_\_  
Explain:



Darren realizes that this new job will be a great promotion and pay a much higher salary. But he also realizes that his new work schedule will require him to miss a lot of worship services. He will also be away from his family quite a bit. So, he decides to turn down the promotion.

Does he get it? \_\_\_\_  
Explain:



Rick and Heather both work as much as they can. They accept every hour of overtime that comes their way. They spend almost every waking moment working because they are trying to save enough money to buy a house. They don't worry about the spiritual things they are neglecting along the way. They believe that when they finally get in a house, they will be completely satisfied and have more time to focus on spiritual things.

Does they get it? \_\_\_\_  
Explain:

