



January 28, 2018
“A Full Life on Empty”
Ecclesiastes 1
Pastor Gary Hamrick

The book of Ecclesiastes tackles some hard issues about life. Solomon wrote from the perspective of an older man who was looking back at his life. Throughout the book we read about his feelings of disappointment, frustration, and regret. Solomon became jaded and cynical in his later years due to a number of bad choices he made over the course of his life. This book is not just the depressing journal of an old king; it’s a reminder that someone like Solomon can have everything in life – money, fame, power, success, and relationships – and still not be satisfied, because God wasn’t in the equation. In today’s message, Pastor Gary provides an introduction to this book, and he focuses on three points: time is marching on, nothing is really new, and no one will really be remembered.

Historical Background

1. The Greek word for the title of this book is ekklesiastes, which means, one who calls or gathers the ekklesia [the church].
2. In Hebrew, the word is Qohe’leth, which means, the pastor or teacher/preacher.
3. Solomon was the writer of this book, and we know this to be true, even though his name is not mentioned, because he was the only son of David who was king in Jerusalem.
 - a. **Ecclesiastes 1:1** - *“... son of David, king in Jerusalem.”*
4. Solomon also wrote the book of Proverbs and the book Song of Solomon (Song of Songs).
5. Most Bible scholars believe that Solomon wrote Proverbs early in his life, Song of Solomon in his middle years, and Ecclesiastes at the end of his life.

6. Pastor Gary said: “[When] you look at how Ecclesiastes unfolds, you’ll notice that this is basically a guy who is looking at life in the rearview mirror, and he’s writing with a lot of regret. He’s looking at his life, and he’s looking at the conditions of his life, and he’s looking at the fruit of his life, and he’s looking at life experience, life success, life challenges, [and] life randomness. ... He’s basically going to [write], ‘I’ve been there, done that, got the t-shirt, lived my life to its fullest, and yet, I [am] empty.’ ”
7. There are two primary ways to understand the book of Ecclesiastes:
 - a. Solomon wrote the book as a way of venting, because he was disappointed with God and every aspect of his life.
 - b. Solomon wrote the book as a warning, so that others would learn from the mistakes and bad choices he made.
 - c. Pastor Gary said: “Because of the [way he concluded the book]... I believe that the [way to understand this book is that he wrote it as a warning.]”
 - i. **Ecclesiastes 12:9-14** - *“Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails – given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”*
8. Pastor Gary said: “[Solomon was] brutally honest, and [that’s what] I love that about this book. He’s brutally honest and he [was] altogether frustrated with life, [even] though he’s experienced everything to its fullest. ... [I’m] glad that this book is included in Scripture, because it expresses the sentiment of a lot of people. You see, Solomon didn’t have a question as to whether God existed; he was not an atheist. Solomon’s question was whether God mattered! [People ask this question]: If life is kind of unpredictable and there are random things, – [a] lot of which [aren’t] fun and happy – even for people who try to do the best they can, [and] even for Christians who try to honor God, and yet things unravel, and life has twists and turns and there’s difficulties and challenges and heartache, then what does it really matter that we follow God? It’s a very thought provoking book, because [Solomon laid] out the realities of life, and how [he] lived his life and the things that [he] experienced and how [he became] a bit jaded and cynical and confused and frustrated, and he even [expressed] some of that frustration about God. [I] think that this book is wonderfully practical because it’s going to touch

some of you right in that same [way].”

9. The word, meaningless (NKJV) or vanity (ESV), is used 38 times in this book.
10. The Hebrew word for meaningless/vanity, is hevel, which means, vapor, smoke, or mist, and it refers to something that is transitory, fleeting, or unsatisfactory.
 - a. It’s important to understand that this word doesn’t mean that life has no meaning; it means that life is hard to grasp.
11. How did Solomon come to this place in life?
 - a. It’s likely that Solomon became king about 900BC, when he was about 16 or 17 years old, and Josephus, a first century historian, wrote that he was 14 years old. ¹
 - b. The Lord appeared to Solomon and said, *“Ask for whatever you want me to give you,”* and Solomon asked for wisdom and discernment. ²
 - c. The Lord not only gave him wisdom, he also gave Solomon riches, long life, and death to his enemies!
 - d. Pastor Gary said: “Solomon [was] a blessed man, and he [had] wisdom beyond his years. [How] many of you understand that God can give you something [but you can] squander it? Solomon squandered [what God had given him]. He didn’t apply his own wisdom that he had received from God. [He] was a guy who wrote the book of Proverbs, and he didn’t even heed his own advice.”
 - e. Solomon made an incredibly bad decision when he entered into a political alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and to “seal the deal” he married Pharaoh’s daughter!
 - i. **1 Kings 3:1** – *“Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter.”*
 - ii. In making this alliance he demonstrated that he didn’t have full confidence and trust in the Lord, plus he married a woman who was a pagan worshiper!
 - iii. Unfortunately, he made alliances with many nations, and part of these deals required him to marry the daughters of the kings of these neighboring nations!
 - iv. **1 Kings 11:1-6** – *“King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter – Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, ‘You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.’ Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven*

¹ 1 Kings 2:1-12

² 1 Kings 3:1-15

hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.”

- f. **1 Kings 11:9-11** – *“The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD’s command. So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.’ ”*
 - g. Solomon lived his life as though nothing had changed, which demonstrates how far away from the Lord he was!
 - h. Solomon’s life remains unmatched by anyone who has ever lived, and any list of his accomplishments would include the following: he accumulated massive amounts of wealth; he fortified and built up Jerusalem, as well as other cities and towns in the region; he built his royal palace, which took twice as long to build as it took to build the Temple in Jerusalem (a good indicator of his priorities); and he expanded the borders of Israel to their greatest distance.
 - i. **1 Kings 10:21-23** – *“All King Solomon’s goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon’s days. The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons. King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.”*
12. Pastor Gary said: “It’s possible to live a full life [just like Solomon] and [still] be completely empty. That’s the story of countless people in our world, [and] that might be your story [too]. ... [Living a full life without God] is hevel; meaningless [and] vanity. God is the only one who brings perspective and value and purpose and meaning. And when he’s not in the equation, you can have it all and accomplish it all and be as empty as empty can be. That’s [Solomon’s] story. [It’s] a wonderful wakeup call for some and [a] reminder to others, of the importance of having God at the center of your life.”

Time Is Marching On

13. **Ecclesiastes 1:4-6** - *“Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.”*
14. Pastor Gary said: “There’s a lot of life that is completely out of our control, but we still try to control it, [which frustrates us] because we can’t [control things]! ... We can’t change the past and we can’t predict the future. But [that’s] all the more reason that we need God in our lives, because we can give our past to God and we can trust God with our future.”

Nothing Is Really New

15. **Ecclesiastes 1:9-10** - *“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new’? it was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.”*
16. Pastor Gary said: “‘*Under the sun*’ is a phrase that Solomon used 58 times in the book of Ecclesiastes... And it’s very descriptive of his problem, because he talks about everything ‘*under the sun*.’ Meaning, [that] his complete obsession [was] the horizontal. ... He had no room for the vertical. God was not part of the equation. So, all of his observations and all of his frustrations [were] with the horizontal. [And for] good reason, because this is a messed-up world on the horizontal, which is why we need the vertical, because God has come to rescue us from such a messed-up world. We can’t fix it! We can’t even fix ourselves! ... The only real fix for any of us is Jesus!”

No One Will Really Be Remembered

17. **Ecclesiastes 1:11** - *“There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.”*
18. **James 4:14** - *“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”*
19. Pastor Gary said: “Now, for [those] of us who know Christ, we know that there’s eternal life past this earthly existence. But what James was saying was... ‘You’re here today and gone tomorrow.’ There’s a very short window of time called life. ... And then the question becomes - that all of us must [answer is], ‘Where does

God fit in to this short thing I've been given called life?' [Plus], how is his relationship with me going to give me the right perspective and purpose and meaning for life, that without him, I would not have?

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Ecclesiastes 1:1-11](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Spend time talking about the historical background and the introduction Pastor Gary provided in his first message from this book. (See #7 through #13 above)
3. Read and discuss [Ecclesiastes 1:4-6](#), and spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments. (See #15 above)
4. Read and discuss [Ecclesiastes 1:9-10](#), and spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments. (See #17 above)
5. Read and discuss [Ecclesiastes 1:4-6](#) and [James 4:14](#), and spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments. (See #20 above)
6. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).