

Reading Schedule for July 9-15, 2018

Most of this week we will be reading in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Our wise king named Solomon begins to point people to the deeper meanings of life. Even though we don't always understand what God is up to, he is the source of life. This will lead us to Solomon's marvelous conclusion about what really matters. He has looked at life and expressed the emptiness of pursuing things that are temporary, and now he compares them to the ability and strength of God. God is the maker of all things. God is the one who brings judgment. He encourages them to remember the creator. He lifts up God as the One who is big and must be feared. This is what makes life meaningful and creates stability.

July 9 - Ecclesiastes 8: "Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him." (v.12) This short statement has deep meaning to it. To fear God means that life will go better now, and will be forever rewarding with God forever, even though Solomon admits that sometimes the wicked people get away with things, and good people are seemingly punished with various difficulties in life. But he admits that he is only looking at it from a finite point of view. God can be trusted and will bring about the right outcomes that are just and good. I told you that Solomon was beginning to point to the reality that God brings meaning and stability to life. How do you respond to this chapter about fearing God?

July 10 - Ecclesiastes 9: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten." (v.5) I wanted to pick a verse that talks about the certainty of death. We all share a common destiny means that we all eventually die. Solomon's statements about death are rather negative. He just means that after you die there is nothing you can do to add to what was meant to be done while you were alive. Whatever good you wanted to do, you could no longer do. Whatever gifts you wanted to enjoy you could no longer enjoy. Whatever people God put in your path, now is the time to love them, while you are still alive. He is considering the uncertainties of the future, and the certainty of death. Solomon recommends enjoying life as God's gift. Share this love with your wife and give your best through your work. You and I have one life to live, and he is challenging us to live it with purpose and passion. How do you understand his message about the certainty of death?

July 11 - Ecclesiastes 10: "If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success." (v.10) This chapter reminds me of the Book of Proverbs. The way that Solomon is writing about life in these verses really highlights words of wisdom to live by. Steven Covey wrote that an important habit in life is sharpening the saw. Solomon is saying with a dull ax, hardly anything can happen. In other words, if you lack skills, you should sharpen them through training and practice. Sharpening the ax means recognizing where a problem exists, acquiring or honing the skills to do the job better so as to live life more fully with greater depth and insight. God will help you sharpen your saw so that you are more effective in life. Take the time to improve. Reflect on how the Lord has made you and what it means to live with the purpose that

God has given you. Does this make sense? How do you respond to this chapter on wisdom?

July 12 - Ecclesiastes 11: "Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun." (v.7) You might get the impression that Solomon is a pessimistic guy that is ending life with a sense of depression. But here he points to enjoyment and being happy. The sunlight of the day represents the energy for living. In Proverbs, Solomon told us that a cheerful heart is good medicine. Throughout Scriptures, we see that a thankful attitude, with hope and optimism is appropriate because life is a gift to be used with a sense of purpose. The Apostle Paul told us to dwell on what is good and noble and right. I see Solomon moving in that direction as he is wrapping up this book about life. How do you respond to Solomon's wisdom? What makes you optimistic?

July 13 - Ecclesiastes 12: "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind." (v.13) This is the verse that I have been waiting for you to read. He says that the conclusion of the matter is to fear God and follow God's ways. It may have appeared that he was overly pessimistic as he wrote this book. But actually he was contrasting a life that fears God versus a life lived for oneself. We should search for purpose and meaning in life, but they cannot be found in human endeavors. We should acknowledge the evil, foolishness and injustice in life, yet maintain a positive attitude and strong faith in God. The fact is, all people will stand before God one day and be judged by him. Our relationship with God makes all the difference. Put God first. Realize that life is a gift from God, and endeavor to make an impact for good in this life. How do you respond to this concluding chapter?

July 14 - Song of Songs 1: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine." (v.2) You may be surprised that I am suggesting we read this book as well. Solomon wrote this love story and it was purposed by God to be included in the Book. His vivid description of a love relationship begins with a picture of love itself. We can enjoy love because God created it as a gift to us and a delight for all our senses. Originally these words were set to music. Music is often used to express love and affection for another. What do you learn about love in this first chapter?

July 15 - Song of Songs 2: "His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me." (v.6) There will be various phrases in these chapters that will refer to touch. Meaningful and affectionate touch is very important to love. There are times that sexual affection is referred to in these poems. But oftentimes, the language is about the gentle touch that affirms love in a tender way. Embraces refers to sharing a hug. A hug can lead to a deeper sense of intimacy between a husband and a wife, for example. The closeness that two people can experience is a gift from God. You can be inspired by this book because the expression of love was so endearing to the relationship of this couple. Showing affectionate words is a very important part of a love relationship. How do you respond to the interaction between the lover and the beloved in this chapter?

PRAYER: Pray for this amazing opportunity we have again this year to share the Gospel in the open air at the Marion County Fair.