

Reading Schedule for June 12-18, 2017

We have enjoyed a full week of readings in the Book of Ecclesiastes. There is no doubt that Solomon is comparing human wisdom with God's guidance. We are sure to gain godly wisdom as we read this book and meditate on God's truth. We know that Solomon was said to be the wisest man who ever lived, and we will read some of his practical counsel that he gives for everyday living. This is sure to be beneficial to us.

June 12 – Ecclesiastes 5:1-7: “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” (v.2) This reminds me of what David said in Psalm 46 – “Be still and know that he is God.” We often rush to tell God what we want him to do and how difficult life is, but here Solomon is encouraging us to move toward God with reverence. The word that he uses in verse 7 is “awe.” Jesus was upset that the Pharisees used many words in their prayers to God. Our many words are not what will move God. Pursuing God is as much about listening as it is talking. How might God speak to you? How might he use His Word? How sensitive are you to his nudges? Do you know what the whisper of God sounds like? It is good to slow down and appreciate the greatness of God. Do you agree? How so?

June 13 – Ecclesiastes 5:8-20: “Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God.” (v.19) Again Solomon compares the pursuit of riches for happiness compared to the gifts of God that point us to the Giver. We can then rejoice in the good things that God gives us because they are not pointing back to us, but pointing towards him. When we take pride in our possessions and embrace the pleasure of money, we can be led astray. If we built our identity on these kind of things, we will surely crumble under the pressure of accumulation and achievement. But if we have these gifts in proper perspective, they will draw us nearer to God. Is that how you understand these verses? Would this be the key to contentment? What stands out to you?

June 14 – Ecclesiastes 6:1-12: “The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?” (v.11) As I have been reading some of the things that Solomon has been saying in this book, I have been reminded of a principle in James that I try to live by. “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” (James 1:19) I do a lot of talking, and that can be a detriment to me. With our words we try to influence people, and sometimes try to impress people. The impact of fewer words that are well thought out is well documented. Some of the greatest statements that people have made are very short and concise. The most impressive speech that Winston Churchill ever gave was, “Never give up.” He said that three times and sat down. Solomon says wisdom from God helps us manage our words. I think that is worth contemplating. How do you respond to this chapter on Solomon's practical wisdom?

June 15 – Ecclesiastes 7:1-14: “When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.” (v.14) I am drawn to the statements that Solomon shares about God. He gives God the credit for bringing both good times and bad times across our path. Good times help us appreciate God's goodness to us. Bad times cause us to depend upon him. Difficulty reminds us that we cannot

predict the future. Oftentimes, the hardest seasons of life are the ones that help us the most. When life seems uncertain and uncontrollable, don't despair, God is in control and will bring good results out of your struggles. Do you agree? What proverb do you respond to in these verses on wisdom? Why?

June 16 – Ecclesiastes 7:15-20: “‘Look,’ says the Teacher, ‘this is what I have discovered: “Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things—while I was still searching but not finding—I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.”’ (v. 27 & 28) This statement from Solomon is needing explanation. The Book of Proverbs often personifies wisdom as a responsible woman. The point of Solomon's statement is not that women are unwise, but that hardly anyone, a man or a woman, is upright before God. Solomon found that goodness and wisdom were almost as scarce among men as among women, even though men were given a better chance of education in his culture than the women were. In effect, the verse is saying, “I have found only one in a thousand people who is wise in God's eyes. No, I have found even fewer than that!” Does that make sense? What else got your attention?

June 17 – Ecclesiastes 8:1-17: “. . . then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.” (v.17) I like Solomon's confession in this verse. If anyone could understand the world's wisdom, you would sure think it would be the wisest man. But no one can fully comprehend God. There are always more questions than answers. But the unknown mystery of much of life does not have to cast a shadow over our lives. We can trust God with our lives and find joy and meaning as we live by faith. The Apostle Paul said we live by faith, not by sight. I think that is what Solomon is getting at in these closing verses. Don't let what you don't know about the future destroy the joy God wants to give you today. Can I hear an Amen?!

June 18 – Ecclesiastes 9:1-18: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.” (v.10) I thought of a verse in the New Testament, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” (Colossians 3:23 & 24) I want to keep in mind that I am serving God, not this world. Ecclesiastes can give you the impression that nothing is really worth pursuing because it is all meaningless in the end. However, the opposite is true when your heart is to serve God and please him all the days of your life. God is giving us the breath in our nostrils, sustaining us with his gracious right hand so that we can give our all. In the New Testament, we are called to be living sacrifices, which seems like an all-out effort to the glory of God. That is how I am thinking of this verse. What does it mean to do all that you do for the glory of God? What else did you notice in this chapter?

Prayers: Pray for Fathers and the crucial role that Dads play for their children and grandchildren.