

Reading Schedule for June 5-11, 2017

It seems like a long time since I have read through the Book of Ecclesiastes. There is a message in this book for you and me. I anticipate some heartfelt contemplation as Solomon expresses truth that will help you to loosen your grip on the things of this life, and deepen your connection with God. I anticipate us being in this book for a couple of weeks as we turn up the wisdom quotient of our lives.

June 5 – Ecclesiastes 1:1-11: “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.” (v.10) This is an interesting statement to me. As I have progressed through life, I believe this more and more. When I was younger, I thought that my ideas were much better than those who were older than me. But I think the truth is only packaged differently, but still the same essential reality was true. The only pursuit that really brings satisfaction is knowing God and honoring him with my life. Solomon will say that a hundred different ways as we read through this book. Isn’t it interesting that Solomon is someone who had wisdom, power, riches, honor, reputation, and even God’s favor, yet he pointed to many of these things as empty. His purpose in this book is to make people realize that their confidence in their own efforts, abilities, and righteousness was meaningless. If they perceived that a new idea would make them happy or successful, they were moving in the wrong direction. These words are meant for you to take an honest look at your life to see what you really value. How do you respond to these first several verses of this intriguing book?

June 6 – Ecclesiastes 1:12-18: “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.” (v.18) I think it is interesting that Solomon says even wisdom does not make you truly happy. In fact, the more you understand about life and yourself, the heavier life becomes. Solomon is suggesting that human wisdom and our own capabilities of reasoning is a vain pursuit. We will not be able to straighten that which is twisted. He was the smartest guy on the planet and he found it empty. How does this short reading challenge your thinking? How does he define wisdom?

June 7 – Ecclesiastes 2:1-11: “I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.’ But that also proved to be meaningless.” (v.1) We may think that human wisdom is empty, but when it comes to pleasure, that seems so important. This is one of the subtle ways that the world gets a grip on us. We pursue pleasure and a sense of satisfaction by what we have or do. Solomon wrote in Psalm 127:1, “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.” Ecclesiastes is a record of Solomon’s testimony about all his pursuits. He summarizes them by saying it is “chasing after the wind.” Think about what you consider worthwhile, where you place your time, energy and money. Will you one day look back and decide that these too were “chasing after the wind?” As you contemplate these verses, how is God speaking to you?

June 8 – Ecclesiastes 2:12-26: “A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God . . .” (v.24) These words are confusing to me because he previously said that our toil is meaningless. But here, he suggests we find satisfaction in our work. Solomon goes back and forth in this book, primarily focusing on our selfish pursuits, versus our

God-directed pursuits. I think he is encouraging us to take pleasure in what we are doing right now, and enjoying it because it comes from God’s hand. True enjoyment in life comes only as we follow God’s guidelines for living and focus on pleasing him. Is that how you understand these words? How did God speak to you through this interesting text?

June 9 – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” (v.1) You know these words. They are very familiar to you. Simon & Garfunkel sang a song about them. Isn’t it interesting that all these experiences can be appropriate and even inevitable at certain times? I think Solomon is encouraging us to accept the different seasons in life. We may not think that it is ever appropriate to tear down, but sometimes things have to be scattered. The Psalmist said that you might be weeping in the night, but find joy in the morning. This causes me to contemplate God’s timing in the various seasons of my life. When life has been difficult, I sometimes question God. But Solomon is telling us that God has purpose in all the seasons of life as we trust him. He is encouraging us to embrace God’s timing, rather than resent it. This will make us stronger, and help us grow in our relationship with the Lord. Do you agree? How do you respond to this familiar text?

June 10 – Ecclesiastes 3:9-22: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” (v.11) This is also a very famous verse that says so much about the image of God in each person’s soul. From the beginning, we were set to be with God for all eternity. Augustine said that no one would find peace until they have experienced God’s presence filling their soul. There is a God-sized vacuum in each of us, and only the Lord can fill it. That is what I think this means. We have a spiritual need, eternal value, and only God can truly satisfy. I think the statement is, “We will be restless until we rest in Thee.” Too often people cover over their spiritual need and accept substitutes that Solomon is saying do not truly satisfy. This verse is worth contemplating. How is God speaking to you through it?

June 11 – Ecclesiastes 4:1-16: “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” (v.12) This paragraph, beginning in verse 9, is one that I utilize in wedding ceremonies as often as I reference 1 Corinthians 13 about love. I think it is very encouraging to see how a partnership in marriage can help one be stronger. God meant for us to be connected in relationship, and he designed marriage for our happiness and companionship. But he didn’t want us to do marriage without him, so there is this interesting phrase about a cord of three strands. It is not completely certain that that means you, your spouse and God, but it surely could. We want Christ to be the center of our marriages as Christian couples. But some have suggested that that means there is even more strength with three, showing that relationship, teamwork and support are necessary for one to succeed in this life. That’s the way that God made us. How do you respond to this interesting paragraph about two are better than one?

Prayers: Pray for those who serve in our schools as they conclude this school year. This can be a very challenging time of year as students are anxious and hard to lead.