

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

### Ecclesiastes week 1

June 5, 2022

#### DAY 1 A JOURNEY WITH "Q"

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 1:1-2](#); [James 4:14](#); [Psalm 102:3](#)

**Reflection:** Ecclesiastes is one of the wisdom books of the Old Testament, but it sounds a lot different than Job or Proverbs. The voice of the book is "Q" (*Qohelet* in Hebrew- we'll call him "Q") and the book is his recorded reflections on his search to find meaning in life on earth, "under the sun." Q tries all the different paths and finds them all unsatisfactory. Ultimately, he will conclude that the one sure way to find meaning is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). But, his journey toward that conclusion is twisting and winding through the "vanities" of life. Our journey through the 3 parts of this study will follow the themes of his search, rather than a linear reading of the twelve chapters.

Who was Q? He may have been King Solomon, or more likely someone who wanted to associate himself with the wisdom tradition of Solomon. And right at the beginning of this book, Q makes his depressing point that all life is "vanity" or "meaningless." The Hebrew word used here is "*hevel*", which means smoke or vapor, or something that is an enigma. Our lives are temporary and we may seek to find the purpose and meaning to our lives for years and still find that it slips through our fingers as smoke cannot be held onto. We often are wondering "why did this happen to me?" "How do I find true enjoyment in life?" "What is my purpose?" "WHAT'S THE POINT?" There is a lingering feeling in all of us that life just doesn't work out the way we want it to. This study is our journey with Q as he explores life "under the sun."

**Ask Yourself:** What are some of the big life questions that I am currently wrestling with?

**Pause to Pray:** God, lead me to your answers, to your light of truth as I wrestle with my own questions, fears, and doubts. Let Ecclesiastes teach me more about you. Amen

**Take a Next Step:** Find a trustworthy friend with whom you can share the big life questions that you are currently asking yourself. Invite them to join you in this study!

Find more resources at [www.whoisgrace.com/READ](http://www.whoisgrace.com/READ).

#### DAY 2 UNDER THE SUN

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 1:3-7](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:18-20](#); [Luke 12:15-21](#)

**Reflection:** *What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?* (Ecclesiastes 1:3 ESV) is the question that frames the rest of the book. Q wants to know, "what am I worth?", and what follows isn't very encouraging. He basically says that the world keeps turning: the sun rises and sets, the water flows through the earth, and people come and go. Yet this question is what we are all asking, we work and we generate wealth/status/beauty/fame, all in the quest to figure out what we are worth. There are calculators online that can tell you your net worth based on the things you own and your education.

Ultimately, all of these things let us down because they are only temporary. At some point we all die and all of it goes away. That's not a cheerful thought!

The only one who is able to give lasting us worth is God Himself. But, for now, this is outside of Q's consideration because he is only looking at life "under the sun." This repeated phrase will come up again and again. Remember, as you read, Q's limited perspective of this temporal world.

**Ask Yourself:** Where am I looking to find my worth? What would happen if those things were gone from my life?

**Pause to Pray:** Ask God to reveal to you the things that you are depending on to give your life value.

**Take a Next Step:** Make two lists- "I am..." and "I have..." When you think you're done, go back and circle or highlight the most important things on the lists.

### DAY 3 WEARY

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 1:8](#); [Psalm 90:10](#); [Psalm 102:4-11](#)

**Reflection:** Weariness. This is the result of all our toil in life, according to Q. We get up at the same time each day, go to work, come home, eat dinner, watch TV and go to bed. Only to get up again the next day and do it all again! We finish the laundry only to have to start it all over again! The grass needs cut...again. The bills need paid...again. We run on the treadmill of life and then wake up one day to find that we haven't really gone anywhere. And yet, we are so tired. We need something to cut through the meaninglessness and give us hope and a desire for the future.

**Ask Yourself:** How have you experienced the weariness in life?

**Pause to Pray:** Tell God about how the routine of life feels weary. He hears and He cares!

**Take a Next Step:** Ask people in your life about the things that give them hope and purpose in life. Listen carefully- do they find hope in temporary or eternal things? Invite someone who has found lasting hope for a cup of coffee, and ask them about their hope.

### DAY 4 NOTHING NEW

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 1: 9-11](#); [Romans 8:18-25](#)

**Reflection:** *There is nothing new under the sun.* We all often pretend that there is something new to help snap us out of the weariness that we all experience in life "under the sun." A new diet, a new self-help book, a new job, a new relationship, a new gadget, a new toy, etc. The reality is that it's not really new. Fashion trends go in circles, coming back into popularity about every 20-50 years. New relationships that promise to be different than the old one ends up having the same problems, because relationships are hard! Because people (including you and me) are imperfect! We are groaning with all of creation for something more. What we long for is not something new. We long for something that is lasting and true.

**Ask Yourself:** What are some ways that you expect something in this world is going to satisfy your longing for new or better or more?

**Pause to Pray:** Ask God to reveal to you the ways you have substituted a poor replacement for truth and eternal satisfaction. Ask Him to reveal Himself as you journey with Q through Ecclesiastes.

**Take a Next Step:** Don't add anything "new" to your day or your week! Instead, look at the "fixes" you're already trying to make life better, to find more satisfaction, or to fill the gaps where you feel life is lacking. Which of these are really not working? How can you eliminate them?

## DAY 5 SOME HOPE

**Scripture:** [Matthew 6:19-21](#); [Matthew 11:28-30](#); [Romans 8: 26-27](#)

**Reflection:** To read Ecclesiastes is to wonder sometimes if Q has any hope! But, remember, Q's perspective is "under the sun." He lived and wrote before God became flesh and came to live among us. As followers of God living under the new covenant, we know that Jesus is the one who gives our lives purpose and meaning. He has died for us so that we can find enjoyment and hope in life. He encourages us to find treasures in heaven instead of on earth. He wants us to come to him with our burdens and weariness confident that He will give our souls rest. And He has given us the Holy Spirit so that we can come to Him even when we don't quite know how or what to say. Jesus can handle the hard things of life and He is inviting you to come to Him.

**Ask Yourself:** What is the hope of Jesus Christ? Do I live each day with this hope in front of me?

**Pause to Pray:** Bring all your weariness and toil in prayer to God. Look up and see Jesus!

**Take a Next Step:** Think about how you can invest more in treasures in heaven then take one small step towards doing it.

## DAY 6 DIG IN!

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 1:1-2:26](#)

**Reflection:** Grab your coffee, tea, or lemonade and settle into the first two chapters of Q's journey toward a meaningful life. Observe how often the word "vanity" (or "meaningless", depending on your translation) is used. Make note of the uses of the phrase "under the sun." Consider how often Q's thoughts resonate with your own or something a colleague has said.

**Ask Yourself:** How do Q's words reflect the angst and the weariness of the people I know and love?

**Pause to Pray:** Thank God for inspiring the author of Ecclesiastes and for including this raw book full of hard questions in the Bible. Share your hard questions with God!

**Take a Next Step:** Learn more about the wisdom books of the Bible. Consider checking out the Bible Project's Wisdom series videos. Find more resources at [www.whoisgrace.com/READ](http://www.whoisgrace.com/READ).

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

### Ecclesiastes week 2

June 12, 2022

#### DAY 1 Q's QUEST for WISDOM

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 1:12-18](#); [Genesis 3:1-7](#)

**Reflection:** Now Q turns to an explanation of the things that he has explored on his search for meaning "under the sun". The first thing he devotes himself to is wisdom. The book of Proverbs encourages us that seeking out wisdom will help us to succeed in life. Yet Q finds that earthly wisdom doesn't satisfy. Similarly, Eve took the fruit in the garden of Eden because it looked like it would make one wise. Both Eve and Q were both disappointed and found that all wisdom and knowledge in this world doesn't bring satisfaction. We can learn about anything we want to in our world today and get many degrees that say we are experts in that thing, but that doesn't guarantee us a good life. Often, we know what is right, yet we find ourselves doing what is wrong instead. Or if we do what is right, there are things outside of our control that send us down a path we would not have chosen. Q leaves us in a tension of knowing something about this world just isn't right. And so, his journey toward understanding and meaning will continue...

**Ask Yourself:** How have you used wisdom, knowledge, or education as a way to define yourself or to find meaning in this world? How has it let you down?

**Pause to Pray:** Ask God for the wisdom to see where you are wise in your own eyes, puffed up by your knowledge, education or achievements. Acknowledge that God alone is omniscient- all-knowing and wise. Humbly repent of your pride.

**Take a Next Step:** What is the prevailing wisdom of the day regarding things that are important to you and the decisions you need to make? [i.e. buying a car or house; deciding on a career change; managing your finances; etc.] Consider pausing to ask God for wisdom rather than relying solely on the wisdom of the world. The Bible has a lot to say about godly wisdom vs worldly!

#### DAY 2 TO BE WISE OR TO BE FOOLISH

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:12-16](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:11-12](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:12](#)

**Reflection:** There are 3 stops on Q's quest for wisdom that we will look at the next few days. First, he examines the idea that being wise is better than being foolish. There are definitely benefits to wisdom, such as dealing well with money, or earning favor among others. However, Q finds that the ups and downs of life still happen to those who are wise and to those who are fools. Both experience hardships and challenges in life that are beyond their control. Ultimately, both end up dying and leaving everything behind. There is a greater wisdom we are searching for that is beyond what can be found "under the sun."

**Ask Yourself:** How have you seen that wisdom is better than being foolish? How have you seen that both the wise and the foolish are the same?

**Pause to Pray:** Ask God to help you see the benefits of wisdom and how it can be used to bring meaning to life.

**Take a Next Step:** Make a list of the benefits of wisdom. Think about how you can grow in wisdom in one area. [Bonus! Find the old Sunday school song, “Don’t Build Your House on the Sandy Land” and consider its message about the wise and foolish.]

### DAY 3 A SEASON FOR ALL THINGS

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:11-12](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:14-15](#)

**Reflection:** The second of the 3 stops on Q’s quest for wisdom deals with the assumption that wisdom can understand the times and seasons. In some sense, it can. Through wisdom we can anticipate some of the changes in seasons and know generally what it will mean for our lives. For example, with spring comes rain and flowers and warmer weather and a time to plant crops. However, wisdom can’t anticipate a late season frost that kills the crops, or some other natural disaster. Similarly, neither the wise nor the foolish can anticipate a time of illness or mourning. Oftentimes, these things catch us by surprise and send us reeling. We grasp for something to hold onto. Q begins to hint at his ultimate conclusion, God is truly the only one who knows all the times and seasons and we can rely on Him alone when things happen that we don’t expect.

**Ask Yourself:** What is your first reaction when a difficult season comes into your life?

**Pause to Pray:** Ask God to help you turn to and rely on him in all the different seasons of life.

**Take a Next Step:** Identify which time or season you are in according to the list in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. What do you think God is doing in this season?

### DAY 4 REMEMBER THE WISE

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 9:13-16](#); [Exodus 1:8-10](#)

**Reflection:** The third stop on Q’s quest for wisdom examines the assumption that surely a wise man will be remembered for the great things he or she has done. For a time, this is true, we remember the things that happened in the recent past and how they impacted us. But, we are forgetful people. We forget the good and the bad things that happened, unless we create a way to remember them. This is why we have to study history in school. There are so many things that happened in the past that we would have no idea about if it wasn’t written down in history books. There are even more wise and impactful people who aren’t in those books and their lives have been forgotten about. Q gives an example of a poor wise man who saves the city, but is forgotten. We also see this with the Israelites in Egypt. Joseph saved Egypt and the Israelites during a severe famine, but his service to the Pharaoh is forgotten and the Israelites are reduced to slaves. There is no guarantee that a wise person will be remembered for the impact they made on the world.

**Ask Yourself:** What are the things that you hope to be remembered for?

**Pause to Pray:** Surrender your pride and desire to be somebody to God and ask Him how He wants to use the rest of your life for him.

**Take a Next Step:** Invest in something that gives the credit to God instead of yourself, like serving at your church or with a nonprofit.

## DAY 5 THE TRUE CONCLUSION

**Scripture:** [Proverbs 9:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:16-18](#); [Isaiah 11:1-3](#); [1 Corinthians 2:14-16](#)

**Reflection:** The true conclusion to this search for wisdom is that *“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”* (Proverbs 9:10). Jesus is the one prophesied about in Isaiah who has the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. It is through knowing him that we can discern how to live our lives with purpose and meaning. We have the Spirit of Jesus in us so that we can experience his wisdom and live to give God the toil and fruits of our lives. As we pursue knowing God and His wisdom, He will meet us there and guide us along the way. Things still won’t always be wonderful, because we live in a broken world, but we have access to the One who has the power to carry us through it all and keep us for eternity.

**Ask Yourself:** How have you experienced that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?

**Pause to Pray:** Ask God to give you wisdom through the Spirit for a decision or conversation that you will have today.

**Take a Next Step:** Consider learning more about how Jesus fulfills the prophecy in Isaiah by looking at His life in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

## DAY 6 DIG IN!

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 3:1-4:16](#)

**Reflection:** While you’re in the car or doing chores today, settle into chapters 3-4 on audio as you continue to follow Q’s journey toward a meaningful life. Observe how the repeated themes of “vanity,” the wise and the foolish, and “under the sun” come up.

**Ask Yourself:** How does Q’s evaluation of wisdom and times and seasons resonate with me?

**Pause to Pray:** Thank God for inspiring the author of Ecclesiastes and for including this raw book full of hard questions in the Bible. Share your hard questions with God!

**Take a Next Step:** Find more resources at [www.whoisgrace.com/READ](http://www.whoisgrace.com/READ).

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

### Ecclesiastes week 3

June 19, 2022

#### DAY 1 "Q" CONTINUES THE QUEST

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:18-23](#)

**Reflection:** We last left Q mulling over the fate of the wise and the fool alike, "How the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity (*hevel*) and a striving after wind." Remember, Q is embarked on a journey to answer the question, "what's the point?" And so far, he does not seem to be finding satisfactory answers. Wisdom appears to have some value, but the wise and the foolish will still come to the same end. So, what *is* the point?

Q is nothing if not persistent. His quest continues. He thinks perhaps work might be the point of our lives. Labor, toil, finding purpose, being useful. This must have some worth, some lasting value! After all, we spend so many hours of our lives working... Spoiler alert! Q's quest will not find a satisfactory end. But we can learn from his words.

**Ask Yourself:** How do I feel about my work? Is my personal significance bound up in the significance of my work? How much of my life is made up of work and toil?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, as I follow Q's quest "under the sun" keep my eyes looking up to you for meaning and significance...

**Take a Next Step:** Tally the time spent at work and in toil during your week. Beyond your paid job, consider household chores, yard work, serving others, etc.

#### DAY 2 THE QUEST FOR SUCCESS

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:18-23](#); [6:1-2](#)

**Reflection:** Once upon a time, there was a boy from a poor Dutch family living in New York City. Through hard work and toil, he multiplied 1 boat into a shipping and railroad empire. He gained for himself every advantage that wealth and success could earn him. When he died in 1877, "the Commodore," was the richest man in America. Had he lived, he would have watched his children and grandchildren live in luxury, build magnificent mansions, flaunt their wealth, and elevate their status to the highest in society. And he would have watched as everything he built disappeared- by the 1950s and 60s the money was all but gone, the mansions and buildings mostly sold or torn down. Cornelius Vanderbilt's rise was legendary. His descendants' fall, almost as brilliant.

Imagine Cornelius, cigar in hand, sitting down with Q. And Q asks, "*What did you gain by all the toil at which you toiled under the sun?*" (Ecclesiastes 1:3). The Commodore doesn't respond. He just blows smoke rings and watches them disappear...

**Ask Yourself:** Do you know anything about your ancestors' toil? What did they gain? How has it lasted? What does your work and toil gain for you? How will it last?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, guard my heart again working just for gain, just for success, just for wealth. Those are not the things that last. Teach me what is truly significant. Show me what will last...

**Take a Next Step:** If you're still in the work world- ask someone who has retired to reflect on their life's work. What did they learn about success and significance? If you are retired- sit down with a friend and talk about what you both have learned.

### DAY 3 COMPENSATIONS & SIGNIFICANCE

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:18-21](#); [4:4-8](#); [5:10-16](#); [9:5-6](#)

**Reflection:** What's the point of success? In his search for an answer, Q makes two stops. One is compensation, and the other is significance.

We work hard to earn compensation- we need money to meet our basic needs: food, shelter, clothing. And when we get them, we need more and more. We want more and more. So we work more and more. Why do we want more? Well, for one thing, because our neighbors have more! In Ecclesiastes 4:4, Q notes that envy drives our toil. We see what we don't have and we want it for ourselves. God warned his people about that in the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment (Exodus 20:17)! Envy and wealth become insatiable lusts. We're never content, never satisfied. We become greedy for more, and money, and work become our masters. And for what gain, Q wonders.

And Q knows that our needs run beyond the basics that money can purchase. As humans, we have a deep need for purpose and significance. We need to know that our existence, our work, that we somehow matter in this world. We will climb the ladder, work long hours, give until we're empty, volunteer our time, donate our wealth- all for a measure of mattering. And for what gain, Q wonders.

After all, everything "under the sun" is a "striving after wind." It cannot be held onto. It does not last.

**Ask Yourself:** How hard do I strive? For what, exactly, am I striving?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, examine my heart and my motives. Shine your light on any envy or greed...

**Take a Next Step:** As you read news headlines, scroll social media, or go about your work today, be observant. Take note where compensation and significance seem to be the motivation behind peoples' work.

### DAY 4 Q'S CONCLUSION

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 4:5-6](#)

**Reflection:** The Hebrew words used in Ecclesiastes 4:5-6 reveal profound imagery. Q has wrestled with the *hevel* of work and toil. And he's pausing to reflect.

The fool folds his yad. The image is of a person folding their arms. They are done with work. They prefer to be lazy. The consequences will be that they will always be hungry.



Two *chopen* full of toil. This image is of grabbing fistfuls. These types of people are workaholics. This is highly valued in the American culture. Yet, Q has demonstrated that is a striving after wind.

Better is a *kaf* of quietness. This handful is the image of an open palm. Just one hand though. The other is down. So, one hand is at work and the other at rest. Not grasping and not lazy. This worker knows when to work and when to rest.

Life “under the sun” is no picnic. So, what does it mean to both work and rest? Q doesn’t go that far. He doesn’t explain how that works. He simply exposes the problems of lazy living and workaholic striving. In his view “under the sun,” he cannot solve the problem.

**Ask Yourself:** Which of the images best describes your relationship with work? Which describes the family you grew up in? Your spouse or a good friend?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, teach me how to work hard and to rest...

**Take a Next Step:** Look at your schedule this week. How will you work hard at your job, in your home, etc? Where do you see opportunities to rest?

## DAY 5 THE TRUE CONCLUSION

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 4:5-6](#); [Matthew 11:25-30](#)

**Reflection:** Yesterday, Q left us wondering how we can both work hard and rest here “under the sun.” We’ll leave Q behind for today, and continue our journey with Jesus.

Somehow, in this world of hard work and striving, we can find rest in Jesus. We get to choose- try to shoulder the burdens of life alone. Or, yoke ourselves to Jesus. we’ll still find that life is hard work, but we will no longer be trying to bear the weight by ourselves. This is the key to *kaf*- one hand open and ready to work, one hand at rest.

This is possible because Jesus took on all the burdens of this life, including the greatest burden, death. He took all of that on himself on the cross. For us. So that we don’t have to endlessly strive as Q did. Jesus stood up under all the weight of the world so that we could find success, significance, and rest as His children. Sons and daughters of the King. Unlike the heirs to Cornelius Vanderbilt, we’re heirs to an everlasting fortune- eternal life in the presence of our Father. Praise God!

**Ask Yourself:** How will you unburden yourself from the weight of work, success, and significance?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, you are greater! In you, I can work with significance. In you, I can rest with peace.

**Take a Next Step:** Share with a trusted friend how you will transfer the weight of work, of success, of significance onto Jesus. Ask them to check in with you regularly to see how you’re doing.

## DAY 6 DIG IN!

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 5:1- 6:12](#)

**Reflection:** Q's quest continues! Follow along as he continues to search for meaning "*under the sun.*" Highlight that phrase when you see it and look for the repeated themes of wealth, wisdom, and folly.

**Ask Yourself:** What emotions do you sense in Q? How do you feel as you read his reflections? From where you sit right now, what do you see around you that is "*hevel*" (vanity- a vapor- an enigma)?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, thank you for the honesty of Q's words. So much about life is just vapor. But, thank you too for the promise of more made possible through Jesus...

**Take a Next Step:** Reflect on your journey so far with Q. Choose a method to track what you're learning- sketch a picture of his meandering path as he searches for meaning, start a tally sheet of repeated phrases/themes (*under the sun, wisdom, hevel, wealth, toil, etc.*), or journal what you're learning in your own words.

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

### Ecclesiastes week 4

June 26, 2022

#### DAY 1 PLEASURE ISLAND

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:10](#)

**Reflection:** In 1940 Pinocchio came to the big screen. A puppet named Pinocchio wants to be a real boy, and the movie is his quest for his dream. Along the way, he finds himself at Pleasure Island, a theme built to serve "stupid, little boys" who are disobedient and play hooky from school. Here the boys are free to do whatever they please, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, fighting, wrecking the place, and other deeds that good children wouldn't do. Food, alcohol and tobacco are freely available on the island and the boys are also free of the law and any parents or cops who could stop them from being naughty. Essentially, the island is designed to be the perfect paradise for bad boys. However, unknown to the boys, Pleasure Island actually serves as a trap. Once the boys have spent enough time being bad, they begin to succumb to a horrific curse that exists over the island which turns them into donkeys because they have been behaving like destructive animals.

During this scene from the movie a food barker can be heard yelling, "Right here, boys! Right here. Get your cake, pie, dill pickles, and ice cream. Eat all you can. Be a glutton. Stuff yourselves. It's all free, boys. It's all free. Hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry!"

Q was not familiar with pleasure island, and nor are we in a literal sense, perhaps. However, in his quest to answer the question "what's the point?" Q does apparently run headlong after the pursuit of pleasure. And in light of how hard this life is, this is an option. Forget the difficult tasks of being responsible, working hard, and doing good, and just run headlong after what feels good.

**Ask Yourself:** What kinds of pleasure tempt you? How does the scene from pleasure island both resonate with you and repulse you?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, open my eyes to discern how my life is a pursuit of temporary, even destructive pleasure...

**Take a Next Step:** Watch the scene from Pinocchio and share with a friend over coffee how you react to it.

#### DAY 2 Q'S QUEST FOR PLEASURE

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:1-8](#)

**Reflection:** Q is looking for meaning in life "under the sun." He's looking for it everywhere he turns- and he keeps hitting dead ends. Wisdom and work have turned out to a *hevel*, a striving after wind. So, he sets off on a new path- unbridled pleasure. "*I kept my heart from no pleasure*" Q reflects. Because if pleasure is the one thing worth living for, then Q had better go all in. Like any good hedonist, Q pours himself a glass of wine and starts brainstorming.

What does he know about himself? What does he know brings pleasure? What has he seen and observed? Pleasure is the ultimate pursuit of what feels good and the avoidance of all things unpleasant. From his wine-infused brainstorm session, Q sets out to accumulate wealth and goods, to build, to plant, to indulge, to enjoy, and to party. Surely, pleasure will make life “under the sun” more meaningful!

Does any of that sound familiar? Perhaps the “have it your way,” “just do it,” “you do you” mantras of our day aren’t all that new. Perhaps, like Q, we just continue to strive after the wind...

**Ask Yourself:** What gives you pleasure? In what ways do you plan for pleasure? Where are you on the scale of living to work vs living for pleasure?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, show me the ways in which I love for my own feelings of pleasure, apart from You...

**Take a Next Step:** Evaluate your list of pleasures. Are any of them harmful to you or to others? Ask a trusted friend to hold you accountable to “quitting” that pleasure habit.

### DAY 3 Q’S CONTINUED QUEST FOR PLEASURE

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:4-11](#)

**Reflection:** Go, Q, Go! These verses are a whirlwind of pleasure-seeking. Q is building, investing, planting, designing, maintaining, buying, amassing, growing, earning, partying, and sleeping around. He now has houses and vineyards, gardens and parks, pools and forests, slaves and flocks, silver and gold, singers and concubines. He has it all! Maybe today he would have purchased a professional, sports team, hired the most famous architect to design a home with a billion-dollar view, dated countless models and celebrities, donated to all the trendy non-profits, and had a hospital and a dog park named in his honor. Wow! Honestly, for the just-your-average-blokes among us, this seems like a bit much. Or maybe we’re secretly jealous. We’d love to know what it feels like to toss aside all of life’s drudgery and just fling ourselves headlong into the pleasure of fame and fortune, red carpet events, fawning fans, personal jets, and infinity pools.

Q built his own kingdom. And “under the sun,” perhaps the most we can hope for. Work hard so that we can have our own little kingdoms, as full of pleasure as possible. Perhaps that is the best that this life has to offer. Maybe that’s the point.

And yet, Q muses, as many celebrity memoirs have done, *“then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”*

Like Vanderbilt’s descendants learned, pleasure is *hevel*, a vapor... it does not last.

**Ask Yourself:** In what ways are you building your own kingdom? What have you acquired, accumulated, achieved, added, etc.? What pleasure do those things bring you? How do they leave you still wanting more?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, at every turn there are opportunities for me to strive for more and better, to be endlessly seeking satisfaction. I don’t want my life to be just a striving after wind! Show me a better way...

**Take a Next Step:** Before you add something to your life this week (on your schedule, to your closet, in your relationships), pause and consider your motives. Do you need this for your good and others' or are you seeking to build your own kingdom?

#### DAY 4 Q'S CONCLUSION

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 2:24-25](#); [3:12-13](#); [3:22](#); [5:18-20](#); [7:14](#); [8:15](#); [9:7-10](#); [Romans 1:20](#)

**Reflection:** Q's headlong pursuit of pleasure- Run faster! Try harder! Take that path! Go after that shiny thing!- has ended as unsatisfactorily as his other pursuits. *Hevel*. Vapor. A striving after wind.

But wait, you have surely noticed as you have read chapters 1-6 that there are a few moments when Q will just turn his own musings on their head and offer a seemingly light-hearted alternative. A version of this refrain is scattered throughout the book- *There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil*. (Eccl 2:24).

Sounds a lot like *carpe diem*- seize the day! But look closer, there is nothing here about chasing after pleasure or making a plan to build your kingdom around pleasure. At every dead end, Q seems to find himself in these simple moments- a meal with friends or satisfaction in today's job well done. These aren't things that you can grab with two hands and expect them to define the meaning of your life. These moments are just as much vapor as the striving for wisdom, work, and pleasure are. And yet, he finds something in these brief moments. Again and again, for a moment, joy is before him.

Q knows this glimpse of joy is a gift from God. For the briefest of moments, "under the sun" is infused with the light of heaven. While he cannot hang onto them or contrive them or control them, he can enjoy the moment. For Q, this is as good as it gets...

**Ask Yourself:** Reflect on the day or the week- where did you see glimpses of joy in ordinary moments?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, thank you for the grace you have given to the world. Thank you that all of us experience glimpses of heaven in ordinary moments...

**Take a Next Step:** Pay attention to moments of joy today!

#### DAY 5 THE TRUE CONCLUSION

**Scripture:** [Luke 6:46-49](#); [1 Corinthians 13:12](#); [James 1:17](#)

**Reflection:** Q saw glimpses of heaven in the fleeting moments of joy that he shared with friends or in a job well done. These moments cannot be grasped, and they do not in themselves answer Q's deep question- what's the point? They do, however, point to a greater joy that has not yet been fully realized. It is a joy that is promised to us, waiting for us. It is our eternal inheritance.

While we live "under the sun" we're living as if in a fog. The vapor and striving of *hevel*. But, one day, the *hevel* will clear and the fog will be lifted. And what we now have a glimpse of will be fully revealed to us. We will return to the paradise of God's garden. His Kingdom will be one of everlasting joy and pleasure in his presence.

For now, as we live in the “not yet,” we look for His grace in the moments of joy sprinkled throughout our days. And we seek to point all people to His goodness, His grace, His great salvation.

**Ask Yourself:** How do my life’s pursuits reveal my own kingdom versus the Kingdom of God?

**Pause to Pray:** Thank you, God, for the gifts of grace and joy and your presence. May your Kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...

**Take a Next Step:** Celebrate God’s goodness and grace! Find a friend or two and share a meal while expressing gratitude and joy for His good work.

## **DAY 6** DIG IN!

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 7:1- 8:17](#)

**Reflection:** You’re quite familiar with Q’s quest by now! Observe his patterns of search and despair. Notice those repeated phrases and themes. Look for those brief glimpses of joy.

**Ask Yourself:** How is Q’s quest the timeless quest of humanity in every era of time?

**Pause to Pray:** Thank God for the raw honesty of this book. Ask God to help you see Q’s quest in your own life and in the people around you. Thank Jesus for being the answer to the question, “what’s the point?”

**Take a Next Step:** Find more resources at [www.whoisgrace.com/READ](http://www.whoisgrace.com/READ).

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

### Ecclesiastes week 5

July 3, 2022

#### DAY 1 CELEBRATE EVERY DAY

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 11:7-10](#), [12:1-8](#); [Psalm 16:7-11](#); [Psalm 68:3](#); [Psalm 118:24](#) and [Philippians 4:4-7](#)

**Reflection:** After Q has exhausted his attempts to find meaning “under the sun” by seeking wisdom, success, and pleasure, he turns his attention to the reality of our physical aging and how inevitable it is that our time on earth will come to an end. Q’s realism about growing old and the fleeting nature of all earthly pursuits leads him to issue advice to a young person; He prescribes celebrating each day as it comes and acknowledging God in all that we do. He finds that death’s certainty offers us lessons on how to live our current life well.

Ecclesiastes 11:8 tells us *“if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all.”* This instruction to rejoice, enjoy, and take pleasure in all the times of our lives is not a fanciful wish, optional extra, or unrealistic suggestion. The scriptures reveal how this is possible. The Psalms contain many declarations of joy and celebration in the days of the faithful and Philippians 4:4-7 commands rejoicing, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. What do you think is the common thread joining these declarations of rejoicing and finding joy?

**Ask Yourself:** What brings you the most joy? How do you most commonly celebrate? What does it look like for you to rejoice in the Lord?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, I thank You today for *today!* I thank You for all the ways that You are at work in my life and in the lives of the ones I love. Help me to share these testimonies freely with whoever You place in my path. As I seek You each day, help my heart to REJOICE in You and your presence. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Challenge yourself to share a story of God’s goodness with someone today. Describe some details of beauty and blessing that life with Him reveals. Take a little time to meditate on how He is present in every situation.

#### DAY 2 REMEMBER THAT LIFE IS FOR LIVING

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 11:7-10](#), [12:1-8](#); [Lamentations 3:19-27](#); [Matthew 6:25-33](#)

**Reflection:** After going into great detail about how ‘everything is meaningless,’ Q instructs us to seize the day and enjoy our lives now, before our time runs out. He seems to know that this way of living might be challenging in the midst of everyday life circumstances because verse 11:10 cautions us to *“remove vexation (or anxiety) from your heart, and put away pain from your body.”* The older we get, the more difficult we may find it is to fully embrace life. Time and trials begin to weigh us down, and fears and frustrations distract us. What can we learn from Lamentations 3 and Matthew 6 to help us live our *whole* lives to the fullest, as Q suggests?

**Ask Yourself:** In what kinds of situations or seasons do you find it most difficult to rejoice? Are there current circumstances holding you back? How can you start to embrace your one earthly life more fully?

**Pause to Pray:** Yahweh-shalom, you are my peace. Help me to remember in the midst of \_\_\_\_\_ that you will provide all that I need and that my hope rests in you. Help me to fully engage in this life that you gave me and to rejoice in it every single day. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Spend a little time thinking about any areas of your life where fear or frustration may be limiting your joy. Ask God to show you a step that you can take to remove that barrier.

### DAY 3 REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 11:9](#) and [12:1](#); [Deuteronomy 8:18](#); [James 1:17](#); [2 Timothy 2:22](#); [Titus 2:11-14](#)

**Reflection:** As much as Q encourages us to live our one life to the fullest, he continues to point out that we should also live that life well – keeping in mind that God will hold us accountable for all that we do “under the sun.” The solution? Enjoy your life by living it *for* God! Enjoy your life by living it *with* God! He instructs us to “*remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.*” (Ecc 12:1) By this he means to remember, call to mind and to speak aloud who God is and consider Him in all the activities of our lives. If we intentionally remember that it is God who gives all good things and we involve Him in all aspects of living (actions, decisions, work, home, relationships, challenges... ) our days will be sweet and we will have nothing to fear in the coming judgment. Q wants us to build our lives on things of lasting value, not meaningless vapor. Based on today’s reading, what do you think are some things of lasting value?

**Ask Yourself:** How much of your time and energy are you investing into things of lasting value? Are there any areas of your life that you have not recently considered God in?

**Pause to Pray:** Read [Psalm 63:1-8](#) and let it be an inspiration for your prayer today.

**Take a Next Step:** Make an honest assessment of your typical day’s schedule. Are there any areas that you need to invite God into? Ask Him to show you any ‘meaningless vapor’ and commit to making changes that He guides you toward.

### DAY 4 DEATH COMES FOR US ALL

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 12:1-8](#); [Psalm 89:47-48](#); [Psalm 103:13-18](#); [1 Corinthians 15:19-26](#)

**Reflection:** In Ecclesiastes 12, Q gives a poetic description of the onset of old age, as a person approaches the time of their physical death and prepares to go “to his eternal home.” We don’t often like to think about it, but life is fleeting and physical death is inevitable for us all. This may seem hard or depressing, but within the text, we see a foreshadowing of the truth that there is more to our lives than our physical “under the sun” experience. Q’s references to ‘eternal home’ and the spirit returning to God may demonstrate a belief that death is not the end. Even if the writer didn’t see it himself, his words present an unwitting prophecy of the saving work of Jesus to come. This is particularly interesting because the book of Ecclesiastes was written more than 500 years before the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which would ultimately deliver us from the power of death and make a way



for us to join Him in His eternal home. Based on the words of Q and those of Paul in 1 Corinthians, where is our ultimate hope and what role does death play in our story?

**Ask Yourself:** How does the reality of eventual physical death make you feel? How does that impact your faith journey?

**Pause to Pray:** Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to deliver us from the eternal power of death! Help me to spend my time here 'under the sun' wisely and grant me comfort as I face \_\_\_\_\_ in the meantime...

**Take a Next Step:** Spend some time journaling about the purpose you feel for your time on earth and exploring any fears you may have about the reality of death. Be sure to reflect on the hope of Jesus and the love of God as you do so.

## DAY 5 HOW THEN WILL YOU LIVE

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 12:2-5](#); [James 4:13-15](#); [1 John 2:15-17](#); [1 John 2:28-29](#); [Hebrews 3:12-15](#)

**Reflection:** Life is short! Q has spent twelve chapters describing how fleeting life and the things of the world are, and yet he encourages us to live that life fully, to the end. He compels us to enjoy life and serve God *while we can* – don't put it off until another day, don't waste precious time. In other words, our certain death should invigorate our current life. What guidance do the scriptures provide to motivate us to live a God-centered life now?

**Ask Yourself:** How often do you consider the fleeting nature of life when making decisions about how you will spend your time and where you will invest your energy? Are there any areas that you might need to consider more carefully?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, I thank you for your everlasting love. Teach me how to abide fully in your purpose and your plans for me, even now. Reveal to me any ways in which I have fallen in love with the world and wandered away from you. Please lead me in the way I should live. All glory and honor and praise to you! Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Are you procrastinating on anything God has asked you to do? Take some time to confess this to God and then ask Him to help you make a plan to get started.

## DAY 6 DIG IN!

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 9:1-18](#), [10:1-20](#)

**Reflection:** Spend some time continuing to read sequentially through Ecclesiastes, chapters 9 and 10 today. Maybe try reading the passage aloud with a friend. As you read, look for the two statements of an 'evil' done or seen under the sun. What implications may these two observations have on our expectations for daily life?

**Ask Yourself:** Have you ever found yourself feeling that life is 'unfair' when something did not go the way you expected it to? Did this impact your relationship or conversation with God in any way?

**Pause to Pray:** Thank God for giving us nuggets of wisdom through the book of Ecclesiastes. Ask Him to help you trust your days to Him and release any earthly expectations that you may be holding too tightly 'under the sun.'

**Take a Next Step:** Choose a portion of today's reading and determine to memorize it. Start by writing it out and placing it somewhere you will see it easily throughout the day.

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

Ecclesiastes week 6

July 10, 2022

### DAY 1 SEEING THE BEAUTY

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 12:9-14](#); [Psalm 51:6](#); [Psalm 1:1-2](#); [Psalm 119:9-16](#)

**Reflection:** After describing all of Q's explorations and musings, the writer of Ecclesiastes offers us a mini-commentary on the book. Through this we learn that Q's observations are meant to bring us four things: delight, pain, reverence and preparation. Over the next four days we'll take a look at pain, reverence and preparation. Today let's consider his intention to bring us Delight.

Although our current perspective might find the book gloomy or pessimistic at times, Ecclesiastes 12:10 says that "*the Preacher sought to find words of delight.*" It continues on to state that "*he wrote words of truth.*" Those two statements aren't necessarily separate ideas. The composition of the book in its original form brought delight because it was simultaneously beautiful and true. It was beautiful in the way it expressed ideas poetically, but also beautiful *because* it was true. Psalm 51 tells us that God delights in the truth. The writers of Psalms 1 and 119 share that they delight in God's law and statutes, which are clear statements of God's truth, and that they love to meditate on these things. So, by nature, we are created to appreciate truth in our inmost being. Q understood this and sought to delight his students by seeking truth and writing about it.

**Ask Yourself:** What sections of the book of Ecclesiastes do you find the most difficult to appreciate? Which do you find the most encouraging? Are there any that you would describe as delightful?

**Pause to Pray:** Thank God for making His truth accessible and delightful. Ask Him to grant you greater insight as you take time to meditate on His word.

**Take a Next Step:** Look back through the earlier chapters of the book. Choose a short section of wisdom statements that grabs your attention and spend some time meditating on its truth and beauty.

### DAY 2 THE TRUTH HURTS SOMETIMES

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 12:11](#); [Psalm 23:4](#); [Proverbs 13:24](#); [Acts 26:14](#)

**Reflection:** Q's observations are meant to bring us certain types of pain. Ecclesiastes 12:11 refers to the words as goads and '*like nails firmly fixed*'. The imagery here is un-mistakenly related to that of a shepherd leading a flock. A herder would typically carry a goad – a stick with a pointed end - or a rod with sharp nails on the end. These instruments were used to prod the animals in the direction that they needed to go, whether toward fresh pasture, clean water, or the overnight protection of a pen. Any animal wandering off would feel the corrective poke of a goad to get them back on track.

Q's words bring corrective guidance like this. We may not always like it, and the truth may sometimes hurt, but its intention is only for our guidance and our good. Why do you think that God brings this imagery into his conversation with Saul in Acts 26?

**Ask Yourself:** When was the last time you submitted to the Bible's teaching even though you didn't like what it said? How did the pain of the truth help you to change direction? Are there any situations that you are currently feeling the prodding of God's re-direction but you have not yet turned around?

**Pause to Pray:** Yahweh Rohi, you are my Shepherd. Thank you for loving me enough to discipline me. I pray that you will continue to lead and guide me in \_\_\_\_\_. Help me to heed the direction of your truth...

**Take a Next Step:** As you continue to read scripture during your chair time this week, pay attention to any passages that 'rub you the wrong way.' Ask God for revelation about how His truth might be leading you to change course.

### DAY 3 THE BEST KIND OF FEAR

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 12:13](#); [Proverbs 9:10](#); [Proverbs 28:14](#); [Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)

**Reflection:** As we near the end of the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, we finally encounter Q's primary observation and conclusion – the whole duty of man is to "*Fear God and keep His commandments.*" The term 'fear' is used two different ways in the scriptures; one is related to the fear of being hurt and the other refers to reverential awe, amazement and wonder, particularly before the greatness of God. It's this reverential awe that Q is referring to. It turns out that the meaningful life that Q was seeking could not be found in anything 'under the sun.' It can only be found in our relationship with and service of God.

The Proverbs tell us that those who fear the Lord are blessed and that those who 'harden' their hearts face trouble. This same truth could be found in God's covenant relationship with the Israelites, long before they entered the promised land. How do these examples relate to the truth that Q proposes?

**Ask Yourself:** Have you ever found yourself afraid of being hurt by God? Why do you think you felt that way? Have you ever experienced the fear (reverential awe) of the Lord? How did that feel different?

**Pause to Pray:** Almighty God, you are holy and awesome and I praise you today for \_\_\_\_\_. Continue to teach me to regard you with the 'right' kind of fear. Let my heart be soft and open toward your truth, that I might grow in relationship with you each day. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Perform a little heart-check. Spend some time in prayer asking God to show you any areas in which your heart is hardened and unable to receive God's truth. Share what you learn with a trusted friend in the faith and pray together for healing and forgiveness.

### DAY 4 MOTIVATION MATTERS

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 12:13](#); [Matthew 22:36-40](#); [John 15:10-11](#); [1 Peter 1:13-25](#)

**Reflection:** Ecclesiastes 12:13 instructs us to do two things; the first is to '*Fear God*', which we started talking about yesterday. The second instruction related to reverence of God is to '*keep His commandments.*' On the surface this sounds like simple obedience. However, like truth and delight (see Day 7), fearing God and keeping His commandments are interrelated.

With obedience to God, motivation matters. If we obey because of a fear of punishment (being hurt), as opposed to obeying with reverential awe, our experience will be unsatisfying and our hearts will be hardened toward him. In contrast, a heart softened toward the things of God will reside in His love and be blessed. A servant that obeys out of reverential awe acknowledges that nothing of this world has saved him; God and God alone is worthy of praise.

**Ask Yourself:** What type of situations tempt you to obey God out of any motivation other than reverential awe? What are those other motivations? What type of situations do you find it difficult to obey God's commands regardless of motivation?

**Pause to Pray:** Confess any misplaced motivations that you may have and receive His forgiveness. Ask Him to purify your heart as you seek to follow Him in true obedience of His commands.

**Take a Next Step:** Read [Matthew 22:36-40](#). Prayerfully consider how faithfully you are keeping the 'greatest' commandment. Is there room for improvement? Ask God for help!

## DAY 5 A LIFETIME TO PREPARE

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 12:14](#); [Psalm 9:7](#); [Romans 2:1-16](#); [1 Peter 4:1-11](#)

**Reflection:** The fourth intention of Q's observations is to highlight the importance of preparation. While we are living our one, crazy life 'under the sun' we need to be aware that *"God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."* (Ecc 12:14).

There are so many hard and horrible things going on in our world today, many without apparent consequence. We get frustrated, we don't understand and sometimes we want to take matters into our own hands to fight or attempt to redeem. But that isn't our job and it will never work.

But God. God has established His throne for justice. In the end, God himself will put all things right.

The thing about justice, though, is that it doesn't just apply to the 'other guy.' We all need to be intentional about preparing to meet him. Thankfully, Jesus has made a way for us to be redeemed and if we spend our time 'under the sun' fearing God and keeping His commandments, we will receive eternal life through Jesus Christ.

**Ask Yourself:** How ready are you to encounter God's righteous judgment? Is there anything in your heart and mind that needs some preparation?

**Pause to Pray:** Merciful Father, I thank you for scriptures that tell us the truth and help us to live in a way that honors you. Forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_. Please continue to guide me in the way I should go...

**Take a Next Step:** Part of preparation for living ready involves lightening our load. Schedule time with a trusted faith partner (pastor, spouse, small group leader, friend...) and confess any thoughts or behaviors that are holding you back. Seek God's forgiveness and receive it!

## DAY 6 DIG IN!

**Scripture:** [Ecclesiastes 11:1-10, 12:1-14](#) (ESV) and [Ecclesiastes 11:1-10, 12:1-14](#) (AMP)

**Reflection:** Read or listen to today's chapters twice; first in the translation you typically use and then a second time in another translation. (The Amplified Bible may offer some interesting insights.) Reflect back over the book as a whole and think about how all the chapters before helped the writer arrive at his concise conclusion.

**Ask Yourself:** How has this book transformed your perspective on the activities of life and the passing of time? Is there anything you are feeling prompted to change in your daily life as a result?

**Pause to Pray:** Thank God for His creativity and persistence in pursuing His people. Ask Him for continued guidance and the willingness to follow each day.

**Take a Next Step:** Spend some time with someone who is older than you and talk about how getting older has changed his/her perspective on life. If they have not yet met Jesus, look for an opportunity to share His good news with them.