

Life Above the Sun Devotional: Week 1

Week 1 Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-3. *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. 3 What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?*

Devotional. The “have nots” assume the “haves” have a happy life. How could a person with the money to do whatever they wanted not be happy, right? Well, listen to the words of some famous rich people from the past...

Henry Ford: *“I was happier when doing a mechanic’s job.”* John D. Rockefeller: *“The care of \$200 million is enough to kill anyone, I found no happiness in it.”* Andrew Carnegie: *“Millionaires seldom smile.”*

Now, I know what some of you are thinking... *“Lord, make me rich and I’ll prove I can be happy!”* Nice try. Later in the book, in Ecclesiastes 5:10, Solomon gives a reason why wealth doesn’t produce happiness: *“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income”* (NIV).

All the effort to gain wealth only leads to more effort to gain more wealth, and it leads to exhaustion. Why have to have more wealth? Because once you receive it, the temporary pleasure of it wears off and so you think you need more to find satisfaction.

This is Solomon’s point at the end of v. 3, there’s no gain when life is done “under the sun”. It’s crucial to understand that phrase or you won’t understand the point of the book. Life “under the sun” is an attempt to find meaning, purpose, and happiness in the things on the earth. And it’s an impossible pursuit. Why? Because meaning and purpose and joy can only be found “above the sun”. When God is the center of our life, and our pursuits are eternal not temporal, then and only then, can we experience life and life to the full.

Prayer. “Lord, may I pursue you above all things, may the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of your glory and grace.”

Week 1 Tuesday

Read Ecclesiastes 1:4-7. *4 A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. 6 The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. 7 All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.*

Devotional. Did you know that the earth speaks? No, not in an audible, recognizable language. But it does speak. Psalm 19:1 says, *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”*

The moon, stars and sun tell us something about the glory of God. His mountains remind us that He's immovable, and the feeding of His sparrows remind us that He cares for us more than the birds, so we never have to doubt His provisions (Matthew 10:29-31).

Creation can also speak to us about the harsh realities of life on earth. In today's passage, the sun, wind, and streams reveal these realities.

Tommy Nelson put it this way... *"In these verses, Solomon describes the natural world as a machine that keeps going perpetually. The sun rises, the winds blow, the rivers flow, and the water evaporates from the sea and rains down from the sky to fill the rivers. Nature is not heading toward a climactic point but is performing an endless cycle of the same thing every day."*

While there is beauty in the sun, refreshment in a gentle wind, and the feeling of calm from a flowing river, there is also the reality that these examples from creation reveal an endless cycle of monotony.

So listen to God through creation. Listen as it tells you how glorious and good God is. And listen as it reminds you that there's more to life than an endless cycle of monotony. The "more" is friendship with God and eternal bliss.

Prayer. "Heavenly Father, thank you for creation. Thank you for the reminder that you are glorious and good and that life is an exciting adventure when lived for you."

Week 1 Wednesday

Read Ecclesiastes 1:8-11. *8 All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already in the ages before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.*

Devotional. Today's passage says, *"What has been is what will be"*. Remember in the 80's saying that you couldn't believe people wore bell bottoms in the 70's? Well, guess what came back into style in the early 90's? Bell bottoms! And then you thought, well that won't happen again. I'm sorry to inform you that a new trend in fashion for 2021 is... the bell bottoms.

How about short shorts for men in the 80's? Yep, back in style. Mom jeans? Yep. Scrunchies? Yep. Puffy sleeves? Yep. Bike shorts (not for actually biking), unfortunately... yep. Well, you get the point.

As Solomon put it, there is nothing new under the sun. But, "above the sun" (aka, with God), here are some things that are new everyday... "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."
(*underline added*)

The steadfast love, mercy and faithfulness of God are available fresh every morning. Are you kidding me? We who know God personally, through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, are to be the most joy-filled people on the planet!

Messed up this week? Through repentance, the slate is wiped clean and you get a new opportunity to get it right. Failed to be faithful in serving God? Well, He remains faithful and He gives you new opportunities to serve Him well. Every day is a new opportunity with Jesus!

Prayer. “Thank you merciful Father, that every day your mercies are new. I can lean on your steadfast love and faithfulness, and daily be renewed.”

Week 1 Thursday

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-15. *12 I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. 14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.*

Devotional. I sure wish I had known Ecclesiastes 1:13 when I was a kid. When mom nagged me to do my homework I could have just pulled this verse out and said, “King Solomon was the wisest man on the planet, right? Then we should apply what he says, right? Ok then, he said it’s an unhappy business to apply ourselves to gaining wisdom. So why learn anything in school since it’s going to make me unhappy?”

Ok, probably not the right interpretation of the verse. So what is? Why would Solomon say that the pursuit of wisdom is an “unhappy business”? I mean, Proverbs 16:16 says, *“How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!”*

Well, it’s probably a good time to remind us that we have to pay attention to when Solomon uses the phrase “under the sun” (as he does in v. 14). It’s a reminder that he’s talking about something from a perspective that doesn’t look above and beyond life on earth.

Understanding that, we see that what’s being said is that striving for the kind of wisdom that doesn’t lead us toward God and eternal thinking is an “unhappy business”. It just leads to having more understanding of the meaningless of life.

The pursuit of wisdom must be fueled by the desire to know God in a deeper and more intimate way. It must be fueled by a desire to learn how to advance God’s kingdom. Essentially what we need to ask ourselves is this... “Am I pursuing wisdom to better pursue God”?

Prayer. “God, wisdom begins and ends with you. May I pursue wisdom and knowledge, not to build up me, but to more intimately know you.”

Week 1 Friday

Read Ecclesiastes 1:16-18. *16 I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." 17 And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. 18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*

Devotional. When I was reading v. 18, "*For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow,*" a phrase popped into my head: "The more knowledge you have the more life hurts."

I remember loving the Harlem Globetrotters. I couldn't believe that they could not only do all of those tricks, but they could win nearly every game. And then someone told me the games were rigged. That newfound knowledge hurt!

Now, in reality, there was no real emotional damage done to my soul to discover this truth. But I think what Solomon is possibly saying is that when you become "worldly wise" you lose a bit of innocence and you see how dark and evil the world can be and how life really won't bring you joyful bliss. Because it can't.

It can't, but He can. Joy is rooted in a heavenly relationship that leads to a heavenly home. We can experience partial joy in a relationship with God now, but there is always, this side of heaven, a "holy discontent" for a world filled with peace, joy, righteousness, and goodness.

And that day will one day come. We bring those qualities in our time on earth to those around us through the power of the gospel in our lives. But we also remind ourselves that the world won't be permanently fixed, here and now.

When that day does come, *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* (Revelation 21:4)

So as you discover that "The more knowledge you have the more life hurts," may it not lead to despair but may it break your heart to the point of sharing the gospel with others. And may it remind you, heaven is where our home is.

Prayer. "Lord, break my heart when I learn of the pain and hurts of others. And Father, thank you for the joyful anticipation of a world without pain and sin."