

RWA 2019 - Session 1`

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[0 : 00] Ecclesiastes, I think, is less of a book to be read and more a sparring partner to get in the ring with. It is a weighty read, it is a complex read, but I think, at its absolute core, it has one big, life-changing message for us.

And that's what I want to explore in this first session, the big thrust, the main point, the big question and the answer that makes sense of the entire book.

If we work hard in this session, then the remaining three sessions will be much easier for us, and I dare say a fair bit shorter, so don't despair.

I've been studying Ecclesiastes now since January, I've tried to read it every morning, I've been quite successful in that. I have copious notes, I think I could do a month away with the amount of material there is in this book.

So my aim in this, these are four sessions together, is to be like the referee during your speed dating with Ecclesiastes. That what I want to do is to introduce you to this book, hoping that you will go on many more dates together and have a long and happy life.

[1 : 23] That is my goal. I've resigned myself to the fact that you're not going to leave as a professor of Ecclesiastes, but I would like you to be really good friends, moving towards engagement, before a happy Ecclesiastes marriage at the end.

Ecclesiastes is a mind-expanding, deeply frustrating and awkward customer. It's like the first time you tried coffee, and you thought, why do grown-ups drink this stuff?

It is warm and bitter and dark and disgusting. And now, you're at the stage where you can't get up in the morning without it. That's what I think Ecclesiastes does to us.

The first time we read it, we're like, this shouldn't even be in the Bible. And then once we get into it, we find that it has so much to teach us about life, the world, and everything.

Ecclesiastes finds its home in the wisdom literature of the Bible. It goes alongside Proverbs and Job and Song of Solomon. And let's be honest, they're the bits of the Bible we don't understand the best.

[2 : 28] This is what Zech Eswine writes about the wisdom literature. Are you ready? Many Christians have grown up traveling the prophetic roads of the Old Testament and the Pauline highways of the New Testament.

The wisdom literature are trails far less traveled. The Song of Solomon seems like a side street with a brothel at the end of it. Job is like a long stretch of desert road with no lights and no petrol station or rest stop for mile after mile.

People get stuck easily there with no help. So we rarely travel beyond the first few verses. James in the New Testament is like a disjointed lane that doesn't seem to connect with the gospel road network that surrounds it.

And Ecclesiastes appears like a dark back alley where a crazed man dwells. He smells like he hasn't bathed and looks like it too.

And we pass by not turning down the alley or stopping anywhere close as he shouts at us that our lives are built on illusions and we are all going to die. Wisdom is hard.

[3 : 44] It's very hard. It seems almost illogical. But at its root, these books of the Bible are there to do one thing and this is what I think it is.

To help us live skillfully in a fallen world. The wisdom books help us live skillfully in a fallen world.

They help us navigate life. They help us understand the way of the world. They want to help us skillfully live in a way that glorifies God.

The Hebrew word for skillful living is the word hokmah. So bonus points if over every meal you mention the word hokmah.

Sounds great. It's like you're doing karate. And I think a way into this is the idea of the tree of life. Let me do some rudimentary drawing. The tree of life.

[4 : 46] You're so pleased. You paid so much to come on this weekend with artwork like this. The tree of life. Now let's be clear.

The tree of life first shows up in the Bible in Genesis 2 and 3. That it's in the garden of Eden alongside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And then do you remember how it goes after the fall that God removes Adam and Eve from the garden in case they eat from the tree of life and live forever and there'll be no way back.

And then the next place that the tree of life turns up is at the very end of the story. That in the new creation the tree of life is back there in Revelation 22.

So it's there in the first three chapters. It's there in the last two chapters. But where do we see it? In the middle. Somebody asked you where is the tree of life between the first creation and the new creation.

We'd all struggle wouldn't we? We'd go. Well maybe the tree of life is the law. Or maybe the tree of life is the cross. Maybe the tree of life is this or that.

[5 : 57] But I think the only references to the tree of life are in the book of Proverbs. So turn with me to Proverbs 3 verse 13. This is what Solomon says to us.

Proverbs 3 verse 13. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom and the one who gets understanding. For the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.

She is more precious than jewels and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand. In her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace.

She is, wisdom is, a tree of life to all those who lay hold of her. Those who hold fast are called blessed.

This is what Solomon is saying and it's life changing. How do we see the tree of life in a fallen world? We see it as people who grab hold of wisdom and live life skillfully in a fallen world in a way that brings glory to God.

[7 : 09] If you want another reference, flick over to 11 verse 30. Where else do we see the tree of life? Between Genesis 3 and Revelation 22.

Proverbs 11 verse 30. The fruit of the righteous, the fruit that comes from living skillfully is a tree of life. And whoever captures souls is wise again.

Wise people show, echo the tree of life. They show how life was meant to be lived. They relate to creation and the creator.

Well, one more where we're warming our fingers up. Proverbs 13 verse 12. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. But a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

That when our God-given desires are fulfilled through living skillfully, there is a tree of life. So exciting, isn't it?

[8 : 13] That's why I need these books. I need these books because they help me echo all that life was meant to be about from the beginning.

Let's be clear, as Zeke Swine told us, that these books are badly understood. And particularly when it comes to Ecclesiastes, many people have drawn completely the wrong conclusions.

Sidlow Baxter writes, This book of Ecclesiastes has been a much misunderstood book. Pessimists have found material in it to boast of their doleful hypotheses.

Skeptics have claimed support from it for their contention of non-survival after death. Besides these, many sound and sincere believers have felt it to be an unspiritually minded composition, contradictory to the principles of the New Testament, and awkward to harmonize with belief in the full inspiration of Scripture.

There are many people who think your Bible should only have 65 books in it, and that Ecclesiastes somehow slipped in under the radar as some kind of atheistic manifesto.

[9 : 23] And I want to say that's completely false. I want to cut right through that and say that Ecclesiastes is the most ferociously contemporary book you will read in your lifetime.

Somebody was telling me over breakfast that a man went into a nightclub and he started quoting Ecclesiastes to people. And they all gathered round him, hanging on his every word, thinking that he was so right, and that these words were really resonating with them.

The preacher, the main character, the teacher in Ecclesiastes, he's not a renegade, oddball, waxing lyrical about our pointless existence. The preacher is a wise and faithful teacher who has vital lessons to teach you about how to live skillfully in this fallen world.

Lessons that if we learn them, they will help us. It is incredibly practical. It is incredibly powerful. It is incredibly liberating.

It is incredibly wonderful. You see, Ecclesiastes is life in the raw. Life in the raw.

[10 : 44] It is getting right to the foundation of what life is all about. It cuts through the illusion and the facade. It cuts through the nonsense.

It cuts through the noise. And it says, reader, readers, St. Silas' group roots, this is life in the raw.

It cuts through pretense. Exposes the make-belief we often retreat into. And he holds our head and he makes us stare at life as it absolutely is in its most base form.

This weekend, hopefully, the preacher is going to grab you under the chin. And he's going to point at life and he says, This is life. And he'll go through your mind and all the things that you cling on to and cleave to.

All the little realities that you make for yourself and the little bubbles of existence. And he's going to pop them and say, No, this is life. And because this is life, this is how you should live.

[11 : 56] You see, we manufacture bubbles for ourselves. These drawings are copyright, by the way. We manufacture little bubbles of existence for ourselves.

We say, actually, if we have a great career, that'll be enough for me. I can be the master of my own career.

Or I can have a great relationship. That's too small a bubble to write the word relationship. Or if I can get loads of money, then life will make sense and I'll have meaning and purpose in my life.

Or if I can make a legacy for myself and really do something that really matters.

Even if I can keep my house tidy, which for students in 20s and 30s is a myth. If I can keep my house tidy and get it just how I want. Farrow and ball paint on the walls and calf kits and cushions on my make.com sofa, then I'll be the master of it.

[13 : 05] Mr. Ecclesiastes, the preacher, is a myth buster. And all he's going to do is go through this book and he's going to pop that one and he's going to pop that one and he's going to pop that one and he's going to pop that one. He's going to ruin your house.

He's going to say, No, this is life in the raw, people. He's a myth buster. Did anyone ever see that show, Mythbusters? A lot of boys nodding vigorously, a lot of girls going, I have no idea what you're talking about.

Mythbusters. They take a myth and they bust it, and Mr Ecclesiastes was the first myth buster. Takes the myths of your life, and he says they're absolute nonsense people.

On your handout, you'll see I've put a few final things before we get going. Here's some things that'll help us navigate well. Firstly, Ecclesiastes is brisket, not fillet.

It is hard. It's like that meat you try and you just have to keep chewing it. Like beef jerky. Like Wrigley's beef jerky.

[14 : 07] You've just got to keep chewing and keep chewing, and it's very flavoursome and it's very nourishing, but your jaw hurts and it takes a while. I love the Netflix series Barbecue Pitmasters, where they take huge hunks of meat, and the way they cook them is slow and low.

So they cook their rack of ribs for 36 hours. By the end, it's tasty and nutritious. It's the only time I've ever had passive meat sweats, where you want something and you're so hungry, and you want to chew your own arm.

That's Ecclesiastes. Slow and low. Keep chewing it. Don't give up. It is nutritious, but it is complex protein.

Secondly, it is fluid, not rigid. One of the things that's so frustrating about Ecclesiastes is it doesn't chunk up nicely. The preacher, he kind of talks in waves more than he does in blocks.

So if you see somewhere in your handout, I've given you a rough outline how people have divided it up over history. No one agrees, because it's kind of wavy.

[15 : 20] He's going to talk about wealth, and he's going to talk about your wife, and he's going to talk about your job, and he's going to talk about pleasure. He's going to talk about riches, and he's going to talk about worship. And once he's done all that, he's going to mix it all up together.

And sometimes you don't know which way is up in the middle of Ecclesiastes. There are definitely distinct bits in Ecclesiastes, but it's a bit of a homogenous mass at times.

One of the clearest things, I think, is sometimes the preacher is talking about things that he's seen and things that he's observed. That he's seen stuff.

And then you get places like 5 verse 1, where he moves from observation to instruction. When he sings things like, guard your steps when you go to the house of the Lord.

But it oscillates. It's difficult. Thirdly, Ecclesiastes is observed, not illustrated. So in Proverbs, Solomon has this idea that it's good to work hard.

[16 : 28] That is his truth. And then he illustrates it. How does he illustrate it? He says, look at an ant. An ant works hard and is diligent. He has a truth. And then he illustrates it with a very brilliant metaphor, simile, illustration.

A lot of them to do with animals. He loves a lizard and a rock badger, does our Solomon. So he tries to show us what we're doing. Ecclesiastes works totally the other way around. He says, I saw this and I thought about this and I searched out this and I sought for that.

And then he draws some conclusions. He's a scientist. He's done some research. That's what makes it quite difficult and quite alarming that when we read it the first time, we think this seems to be totally opposite to everything I think about the life of faith.

Fourthly, Ecclesiastes is experienced more than it is understood. So Ecclesiastes is about kind of frustration and vexation.

It's about things not really kind of working out the way we want them to. And that's how Ecclesiastes makes me feel. As I read it, I feel frustrated and vexated and that it's not really working out the way that I really want it to.

[17 : 44] That, you know, onomatopoeia is a word that sounds like it's spelt. Is that right? This is like that, but with your feelings.

It makes you feel what it is talking about. It's a deeply frustrating book that is absolutely amazing. Ecclesiastes makes you feel Ecclesiastes-ish.

Fifthly, Ecclesiastes is clear on death to help us live. Ecclesiastes is clear on death to help us live.

So this time last year, I did Forum Scotland. It may have been a few, not quite a year ago. And the weather in Scotland was lovely.

And London was facing a storm. So I got on my little aeroplane. I think they just got it out of the Matchbox case before they put it on the runway. It was very small.

[18 : 48] I was flying from Edinburgh to London City. If you've ever landed in London City, terrifying. It's like this little postage stamp in the middle of the Thames. Going on in London was a storm with 96 mile-an-hour winds.

And we're in this tiny Matchbox plane, trying to land on a postage stamp in the Thames. My prayer life rocketed. I have never prayed like it before.

I have never prayed like it since. We had three aborted attempts to land on the runway. Even the most ardent atheist on the plane was conducting a prayer meeting.

People who had flown all the time were kicking themselves that they hadn't taken the time to listen to the safety demonstration. We were in serious trouble. I knew we were in trouble when the guy next to me fumbled in his pocket and got out his rosary beads and started very audibly saying, Hail Mary, Mother of Grace.

And I can tell you at that point, as a 37-year-old, I was not ready to die. I was not ready to die. I had grand plans for my life.

[20 : 00] I had great things that I wanted to achieve. I worried about Aileen, my wife, seeing my fished-out body from the Thames. I was not ready to die.

And I could tell you since January reading Ecclesiastes, I could now say I am ready to die. If my little plane trying to land again on the postage stamp in the Thames tomorrow night doesn't go very well, do not worry.

I am absolutely ready. And I owe nearly all of that to this book of Ecclesiastes. Because it's made me stare at life as it really is, and death as it really is.

Finally, by way of introduction, Ecclesiastes is Marmite, not marshmallow. Everyone loves marshmallow. End of a barbecue, someone says, who wants to do toasted marshmallows?

I've never heard anyone go, No! Marmite, on the other hand, it can go one of two ways, right? Some of you, Ecclesiastes will be like marshmallow.

[21 : 01] You will never taste anything like it. You will go home on Monday, you'll read Ecclesiastes. You'll find yourself having coffee with a friend and Ecclesiastes will just come out, ooze out of you.

Others of you will go, Well, that is 48 hours of my life, I'm never going to get a wrong time. It can go one of two ways. The weirdest experience I had was very early on in my career, I was doing Ecclesiastes as a one-off in a church in Belgium, and I went to a family for lunch, and the dad loved it and the mum hated it.

The dad wanted me to stay forever, the mum couldn't wait for me to leave. One of them loved it and thought, That is where I am. The wife literally hated me and wished I wouldn't just stop talking, I wished I wouldn't just talk about death, but would die myself.

It was a weird time in my life and I'm fully expecting that to happen. And as we chat over coffee and lunch, some of you will go, This is the best stuff I've ever had.

You'll never say that. Some of you will say, That was absolutely fine. And others of you will say, My goodness, we've got some psychiatrists here, you should probably spend time with them.

[22 : 19] Okay, that is enough wiggling on the tea, we're now going to tee off down the fairway of Ecclesiastes. I'm just going to keep talking, somebody stop me when it gets too much, and then we'll just pick it up after coffee.

So, fine. Let me read Ecclesiastes 1 verses 1 to 3. The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, Vanity of vanity, says the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? Let's leave it there for a second.

The author is a guy called the preacher, if you're reading the NIV, the teacher. It's not exactly the best translation. The word in Hebrew is koaleth.

Let's all say koaleth together. Koaleth. Brilliant. So we've got chokmah, and we've got koaleth. We're a long way to our Hebrew degree. And the Hebrew word koaleth means one who gathers.

[23 : 25] And so it can be somebody who gathers people together to speak to them. That's where we get the preacher and the teacher. But it can also be someone who gathers things together, like a curator, like a collector, like somebody who collects matchbox toys and lends them to British Airways to fly to London.

And that's what I think he's doing in a dual web. He's gathered lots of wisdom about life. He's done lots of experiments. And then he's gathered lots of people to tell them what he's found.

That's what he's doing to us. Do you see also it says the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Who do we think that would be? We think it would be Solomon.

It may well be Solomon. Lots of people say it's definitely Solomon. I'm a bit more like it's probably Solomon. Might well be Solomon.

Sounds like Solomon. But I think there's other things in the letter that maybe suggest it isn't. So look at 116. 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 and wisdom and knowledge.

[24 : 41] Do you see the problem with it being Solomon is when he said I've got more than anybody before me he's really only talking about David as dads. And that doesn't seem really that impressive really. I outdid my dads.

My dad gave me a kingdom and I kind of added bits to it. Well, well done. Brilliant. Good. You inherited some stuff and you made some more stuff. 2 verse 7 would say the same thing.

I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. So I want to say it's Solomon-ish.

Solomon-esque. There's an entire genre of literature at this time in the nearest that would be pseudographic. Literature written as someone else.

that the author whoever he was probably Solomon might be Solomon maybe Solomon has written in a way that could and probably is Solomon.

[25 : 41] And then see in the book that there's a beginning frame narrator and an end frame narrator. So look at 1 verse 1 the words of the preacher the son of David king in Jerusalem that is somebody talking in the third person about someone else.

But then look down at 1 verse 12 Do you see how it slips into the first person? I the preacher have been king over Israel and Jerusalem. Do you see that shift? If you see that shift tell your faces and then that'll tell me.

These are the words of the preacher third person 1 verse 12 I the preacher Now flick up to the very end the bit that Ali read for us. 12 verse 9 besides being wise the preacher also taught the people Do you see we're back in the third person?

So we have this kind of frame narrator who does the beginning and the end and then 1 verse 12 we get the first person. Just flick to that end bit that Ali read to us stay there a second.

I think this bit functions like the blurb on the back of a book like an endorsement of why you should read this thing. So look with me at verses 9 and 10 Besides being wise the preacher also taught the people knowledge weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care the preacher sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

[27 : 09] The frame narrator is saying what the preacher has told you is truth. He's told you the truth. Do you see verse 12? My son beware sorry verse 11 the words of the wise are like goats and like firmly fixed nails are the collected sayings they are given by one shepherd.

Do you see these are loving words like a shepherd they're directing the course of the sheep they're words of truth they're words of delight verse 10 they're words that guide that the loving shepherd steers the sheep in a way that helps them.

verse 12 my son beware of anything beyond these of making many books there is no end and much study is a weariness of the flesh he says it's sufficient you don't need to add any more to this you don't need to try and smooth out the difficulties he says this book is sufficient I think this is a joke that you get to the end of the book of Ecclesiastes and you lie and understand that I could do with some more books to help me understand it there's more books written on Ecclesiastes than any other book in the Old Testament and they all say different things about different things it's very wearying going through them all sufficient and do you see verse 14 it is in sync with the rest of the Bible for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing whether good or evil verse 13 the end of the matter all has been heard fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man that's in sync with everything else in the Bible which makes me ask this question why at the end of Ecclesiastes do we need an endorsement why at the end of Ecclesiastes it's the only book in the Bible with a blurb on the back written by someone else this is the reason because you get to the end and you go that shouldn't be in the Bible and then you read the back and the frame narrator says that should definitely be in the Bible that the deficiency is not in Ecclesiastes it's in your understanding of Ecclesiastes because Ecclesiastes is true and it's loving and it's sufficient and it's these words of delight and these words of guidance these sharp nails that he hits you with and it is in sync with the rest of the Bible so if you've come to other conclusions you're the one who's wrong and the preacher is always right well I think it's reassuring anyway let's go back to verse 1 we haven't got out of verse 1 yet but we will do you see verse 2 vanity of vanity says the preacher some of you will have meaningless meaningless hands up if you've got vanity hands up if you've got meaningless anyone got anything else good we're all thoroughly orthodox

Bible readers vanity of vanity says the preacher all is vanity that word vanity I think is a little bit misleading the ESV translates it vanity which is unfortunate vanity suggests the idea of it being purposeless of it being dead-ended of it being futile but Ecclesiastes has a destination in view Ecclesiastes is not purposeless and dead-ended it's leading somewhere do you see verse 13 of chapter 12 it tells us where it ends the end of the matter all has been heard fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man that is not vanity that is purposeful also in Ecclesiastes the preacher will say some things are better than others wisdom is better than folly light is better than darkness he'll say a living dog is better than a dead lion what a lovely phrase that is living dog is better than a dead lion he'll say there are occasions in your life where being dead is better than having been alive living is better than death but there are some things it would be better if you'd never been born it's very real and honest about the state of life he also says something that I need to be very conscious of listening is better than speaking you're all doing very well and I am doing very badly the NIV translates it meaningless and that also is a bit unfortunate that there'd be no point writing a book on meaningless because by extrapolation a book on meaningless would be meaningless if this word literally meant meaningless you could write meaningless meaningless and that's the end of the book shortest book ever written just coin in the royalties it would be fine so if it isn't vanity and it isn't meaningless what is this word well it is the Hebrew word havel after three let's all say havel one two three havel very good chokmar koalev havel and the translation of this phrase havel is the word mist mist or vapor or fog or lynx africa lynx africa you know what it is you spray it and you can see it and it quickly dissipates that day

I did ecclesiastes in that church in Belgium I sprayed some links africa to make the point of vapor people in the first five rows started coughing uncontrollably and the smoke alarm went off I decided not to do that again it is a multifaceted metaphor what is the preacher saying vapor vapor all is vapor mist all is mist smoke smoke all is smoke fog fog all is fog lynx africa lynx africa all is lynx africa it's a multifaceted metaphor but I think it means four things to us saying everything in the world is a little bit foggy we don't see it clearly I picked up my Honda jazz from the airport yesterday thank you driving along and you know what it's like when you're in a higher car and you don't know how anything works the screen was all fogged up and I'm sure

[34 : 17] I was going to crash as we got onto the A89 but that is life isn't it it's like looking through a fogged up windscreen things happen that we're not quite sure of we know how things started we hope how things end but in the middle it's all a bit unclear things blindsides you things stop you in your path things go better than you expected things go worse than you expected why because we don't really see clearly life my life your life they'll be foggy like these windows through your sweat an awful lot I think it also says that life as a fog is in a bit of a state of flux you can't really control fog can you I used to live in Aberdeen the number of times I've sat in Aberdeen airport and couldn't take off because of sea fog incredible but you'd always have to be ready because they get little windows in the fog where you could take off so you just stand in line forever holding your incredibly heavy rucksack because you're too cheap to pay for a cabinet for hold luggage just be there they go oh there's a gap in the cloud and you oh no it's back it's kind of fluctuating it's here it's really hoping there would be a dense fog this morning it's what I was praying for this morning please let there be a dense fog in New

London because it would really add some atmosphere to our time also suggests life is fleeting fog is here one minute and gone the next the minute I turn the heat on in my car and put a walk from the windscreen totally gone like clouds they're here and then they're gone they're here one minute and gone the next did you know that Adam and Eve had two children Cain and that same word same route havel because perhaps in their knowledge they knew he wasn't really going to be around for very long fleeting finally I think it means life's a bit frustrating you know you're driving along you're on the 890 Aberdeen to Dundee you're doing 70 76 suddenly you hitch a patch of fog and you go down to like 15 you promised your friends you'd be in

Dundee ready for dinner you want to be going 76 but you're doing 15 it's deeply frustrating isn't it it's hard work just trying to keep your car on the road I think that's what this means it's very fleeting and frustrating and foggy and in the state of flux I like what Eugene Peterson says in the message smoke nothing but smoke there's nothing to anything it's all smoke this matter for you might see is picked up in James chapter 4 come now you say today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring what is your life for you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes instead you ought to say if the Lord wills we will live and do this or that finally verse 3 we are making serious progress what does man gain by all the toil of which he toils under the sun that is the big research project that the preacher is doing what does man gain by all the toil with which he toils under the sun this word toil is a word that means wearisome labour it is the word hamal we won't say that one that's not that important but the word gain is a massive word it's the word profit it's saying what does man profit from all the toil with which he toils under the sun and by profit it means what is left at the end what is the extra bit that you live 78 years in glasgow 58 years in glasgow and they bury you in the ground at renfrew cemetery on a february bleak day and there's 16 people gathered around your coffin crying and the preacher says what was the gain what was the profit what was the legacy what's the bit left over that's his question what do you gain what do you gain from all your wearisome labour what's your phd in 17th century scottish literature mean at the end of the den what's the ongoing legacy at the end of your life there's going to be great interplay in this book between the idea of gain and the idea of gift here's what I think is the massive massive headline take away life changing truth of ecclesiastes live your life as gift and not for gain live your life as gift and not for gain so Mr ecclesiastes will say friends do a phd in 17th century scottish literature do it but don't do it hoping to make a name for yourself don't do it hoping that you will write the quintessential book that in 300 years time they'll go they wrote this do it because God has given you the time and the ability and the skills and the aptitude to do it so do it don't do it to make a name for yourself do it because you've got time and ability

and skill to do it big message of ecclesiastes live life as gift it is the word hallack say the word hallack gift it's going to be translated gift reward portion lot in all those ways live life as that not for gain live in them now do what you do now because you can do it now don't worry about what happens 58 years old dead in Renfrew cemetery any questions about that I don't know it's everywhere else's fault right let's go 4 to 11 let's see if we can nail this before coffee this is a poem let me read it for us a generation goes and a generation comes but the earth remains forever the sun rises and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it rises 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 all streams run to the sea but the sea is not full to the place where the streams flow there they flow again all things are full of weariness a man cannot utter it the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing 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 is there a thing of which it is said see this is new it has been already in the ages before us there is no remembrance of former things nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after do you see it's a poem

I'm sure you do it's a poem about the endless cycle of things about the endless repetition the run and rerun life under the sun is like the tv channel Dave there's nothing new it is just repeat repeat repeat so verse five he does some astronomy the sun just in case you don't know what that is it looks like that you may never have seen it living in Scotland but I assure you it does exist it is not a myth he says the sun this is what happens to the sun day after day rises goes east to west sets goes underneath us that's how my rudimentary astronomy works rises again east to west goes underneath us rises east to west sets goes underneath us rises east to west sets goes underneath us you get the picture 365 and a quarter times every year round and round round and round day after day week after week month after month year after year decade after decade century after century millennium after millennium the sun is very happy going round and round and round and round that's life under the sun round and round what does the sun gain nothing repeat repeat repeat then look verse 6 etymology the study of the wind as with the sun so with the wind the wind is not as clever as the sun it only does two things blows to the north goes to the south blows to the north goes to the south blows to the north goes to the south there's some wind you're welcome and then sea hydrology all streams run to the sea sea is not full streams have been flowing into the sea for millenniums sea is not full to the place where the streams flow there they flow again this is the wonder of evaporation you live in Scotland this is what happens water comes down the mountain evaporates goes into a cloud gets dropped on the top of the mountain down the mountain evaporates falls on the mountain this is how hydroelectric power works if this wasn't the case hydroelectric power would not be sustainable it would be a total waste of time rain falls oh that was a waste of time is how it would go we made energy for a day and then the water ran out and the sea is full and everyone was dead and drowned repeat repeat repeat what does the wind gain nothing what does the rain gain nothing round and round and round here's the question if the sun doesn't gain and the wind doesn't gain and the water doesn't gain why do you think you can gain what have you got that the sun doesn't what have you got that the wind doesn't what have you got that the Amazon river and the Pacific ocean doesn't it goes round

[46 : 35] and round and round and round don't live for gain do you see how it's personalized personalized verse 10 is there yes verse 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 there are quite a few doctors here have you ever had somebody come into your office say I went on holiday to Papua New Guinea I saw loads of new things but I went blind halfway through because my eyes went I've just seen enough or the guy who goes to concerts all the time I was listening to deaf lepers opening set was amazing then I heard nothing else because my ears just went do you know what I've heard this before round and round verse 4 it's the same with you generation goes and a generation comes but the earth remains wherever here's the game we're going to play

I'm going to count to three and I want you to shout the first names of your parents you ready one two three okay we're going to shout them because this is young people who need to be enthusiastic one two three brilliant going to do it again and I want you to shout the first names of your maternal grandparents one two three very good count to three paternal names of your grandparents paternal grandparents first names one two three okay after three I want you to shout the all eight names of your great grandparents first names one two three great crying great crying great crying and then after three we're going to shout the names if we know them of our great great grandparents all 16 of them what two three it seems to go a lot quieter doesn't it and yet when they were alive their names really meant something to them but they're in the

Renfrew cemetery and the next generation remembered them maybe a little bit generation after that less some endeavours folk will make a massive family tree and tapestry to hang on the dining room wall but then the people who own that tapestry will die and then it will go into the skip and they will be lost forever do you see it there's no gain really there's no gain at all you know this cycle in your life you go to bed you get up you have a shower you get dressed you have breakfast you clean your teeth you go to work you come home you go to bed you get up you have a shower you get dressed you have breakfast you clean your teeth you go to work you come home go to bed get up have a shower get dressed have breakfast clean your teeth go to work come home go to bed there's no way of stopping it how long would you have to clean your teeth before your teeth were cleaned forever how much breakfast would you have to eat before you never had to have breakfast again.

Obviously you could have so much breakfast you died and then you would have no opportunity. These are God-given rhythms in life. Do you see there's no game? There's no bit left over at the end.

It's just repeat, repeat, repeat. It's true of everything. What do people want where it is so cyclical and repetitive? Well, they want novelty, don't they?

[50 : 24] Isn't that our world? We're obsessed with novelty, new things. Verse 9 and 10 says, 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. Is there a thing of which it is said, See, this is new, do you see?

I've got it, this is novelty. And the preacher says, It's not novelty, mate, you're deluding yourself. It has been already in the ages before us.

We're kind of trying to live for novelty. We're in this cycle. And we think, well, if I change this, it'll all be the same again. If you're the pastor of a church, you see this. People are happily married.

They have an affair. Why? Because it's novelty. And they divorce that wife. And they marry that wife. And then the cycle starts all over again.

[51 : 22] And they go, That's a novelty. There's no novelty. It's all been what it's always been. You call this in counselling circles, doing a geographical.

Life is not working out in Durham. So I'll move to Edinburgh. There's a massive problem with that. That we tend to take ourselves with ourselves. And the cycle just starts again.

It's a slap in the face, isn't it? It's round and round. This living life in the loop, the loop. Don't really go anywhere. It can feel quite depressing.

I want to say it's not depressing at all. It's incredibly freeing. Why? Because it says, it pops the illusion. The preacher grabs me by the face and says, This is life.

It's round and round. So rather than trying to gain at the end, live life as a gift. Live life now.

[52 : 28] Do what you can now. Don't worry about tomorrow or when you're dead, what will happen. Live in the present. Don't spend all of your efforts trying to invest your life for a legacy and totally miss your life when you're in the middle of it.

Pops that illusion. Now, obviously, there are people who are remembered. Francis Bacon, both because he was a brilliant scientist and had a very wonderfully delicious name.

Einstein remembered. Alex Ferguson will be remembered. Alexander the Great would be remembered. If you call yourself the Great, probably be remembered.

But that is a byproduct of their life, not because they thought, this is what I really want to do. If you spend all of your life trying to gain and that is your goal, you will lose.

We're all trying to win a life. We're all trying to work to make a name for ourselves. And Ecclesiastes says, that's like chasing after the wind.

[53 : 37] Chasing after the wind makes a dog chasing its tail look like a very industrious way to live. Chasing nothing. It will just run through your hands.

It's disconcerting, isn't it? You won't gain. So stop trying and start living, is what the preacher will say. We're going to look after coffee, and then how should we live?

Jesus says exactly the same thing, doesn't he? What does it profit a man to gain the whole world? You live this life, and you gain, just imagine it, you gain the whole world.

You put your Monzo card in the ATM, and you press the button that says available balance, and for the first time in your life, it's in the black. And it actually says available balance, the whole world.

The whole world. And Jesus says, that's what you're living for.

[54 : 50] Forfeiting your soul, not living for now, not living to the glory of God, trusting the Lord Jesus. It's all loss. It's an absolute epic fail. Let's be clear, none of us really set our ambitions on the whole world.

There's no one here, that when they went to their jobs fair, and they said, what would you like to be when you grow up? You said, I'd like to be the world king. There's lots of people investing their lives for a little slice of it.

Isn't that? Just want this little corner for me? This is life in a fallen world. What was the reason Adam and Eve fell? They wanted to know everything.

They wanted to own everything. They wanted to control everything. And they wanted to make a name for themselves that would be remembered.

And that's the way we're all still living, really. I want to know everything so I make this little world for myself. That I know everything about.

[55 : 49] I know where everything is in my model two up, two down, with fire and ball paint and cathkits and furnishings. I know it all. I'm in control of it. What do we want?

We want to invest our lives so we have a name that lasts. Adam and Eve did it. That's what they did at the Tower of Babel. That's what we're all still doing today. I want to be remembered and thought well of.

I want to know everything. I hate those questions. Why did that happen? I want to reason it away. Do you see Ecclesiastes is a myth buster.

He says you're a fallen person in a fallen world. You can't know everything. You can't see everything. You can't control anything. You literally can't control anything. You were sharing a room last night with somebody.

And they started snoring. You couldn't control. You could. You could smother them. But that was just a little worse thing. You just can't control it. I think as we come into land on this first bit, the world just goes round and round.

[56 : 59] You come and you go. There's one thing that happened in the world that was new. Where God the Creator entered His creation.

Where the Lord Jesus came and was incarnate. I'm not very good at Spanish, but I love chili con carne.

We had it last night. What does chili con carne mean? It means chili with meat. That's exactly what Jesus did. It was God with flesh. Incarnation.

Carne. Same word. God in flesh. He entered the world. And things went radically differently. Because everywhere He went, He broke the norm.

Ill people became well. Dead people became alive. Demon-possessed people were freed. The wind was stilled. The storms were stopped.

[57 : 57] Somebody did. 5,000 people on the hillside did eat till they could eat no more and they were satisfied. And then He died.

And He wasn't forgotten. Because He raced to life and the cycle was broken. And whoever believes and trusts in Him, the cycle will break.

Not in this fallen world, but in the world to come. Do you see, in this world there is no gain. But with the Lord Jesus it is all gain forever and ever.

And that's where I think Ecclesiastes is so helpful to us. There is one who broke the cycle. And His name is the Lord Jesus. And so whilst life in this world is frustrating and difficult and cyclical.

Exhausting and weary. Looking to Him we find life and hope and joy and meaning. And we join in His legacy which at the end of the day is the only legacy that actually matters.

[59 : 03] And it's trusting Him is the only actual way to win a life. Because He won for us. Why don't I pray? Then we'll have some coffee. And then we'll come back for more repetition and meaninglessness.

Father God, thank You so much for the Lord Jesus. Lord, we cannot express how grateful we are for Him. Father, we thank You so much for this mind-bending book of Ecclesiastes.

And we're so sorry for the way that we are and have been investing our lives for gain. Father, the life that we have is a gift from You. We don't deserve it.

It's all because of Your mercy to us. The air we breathe we don't deserve. The porridge we ate we didn't deserve. The weekend we're on we don't deserve.

The houses we live in. The jobs that we have. The friends that we have. The church that we have. Father, it is all a gift from You. So Father, would You change us that we stop trying to use this gift to gain for ourselves.

[60 : 12] And that we would enjoy it with great thankfulness. And great joy. And great gratitude. That we wouldn't hold on to stuff with both hands.

That we would cling to the Lord Jesus who broke the cycle for us. Father, help us and bless us. And continue to help us plumb the depths of this incredible book we pray.

Amen. Amen. Great. Fantastic. That's a wonderful first session. I think you've ruined chili con carne for me. Yeah. Not very fun.

And end tea and coffee plans. There'll be tea and coffee now. Right.

Let's stand and sing our final song. Six or anything? Yes.

[61 : 10] You're welcome. Thanks for entering this TF. You're welcome. Thanks for watching.

We'll be here. Let's stand and think we'll be here. You're welcome. Thanks for watching. Thanks for watching. I think we were coming to the Summit Parkville expansion system. Well this is our brand new world. We are all in host Accepting 12 era News, Assistant wanted to witness the Mid- Clockwork ■■■■■■■■. But this is the Almighty & What are the falan editions of 36 option.

Doesn't progress not to Democrat ■■■. Look at all once orwah in December años. I don't have a very smallesz■ city, clarified on a larger multimodal columnist a trip. Thank you.