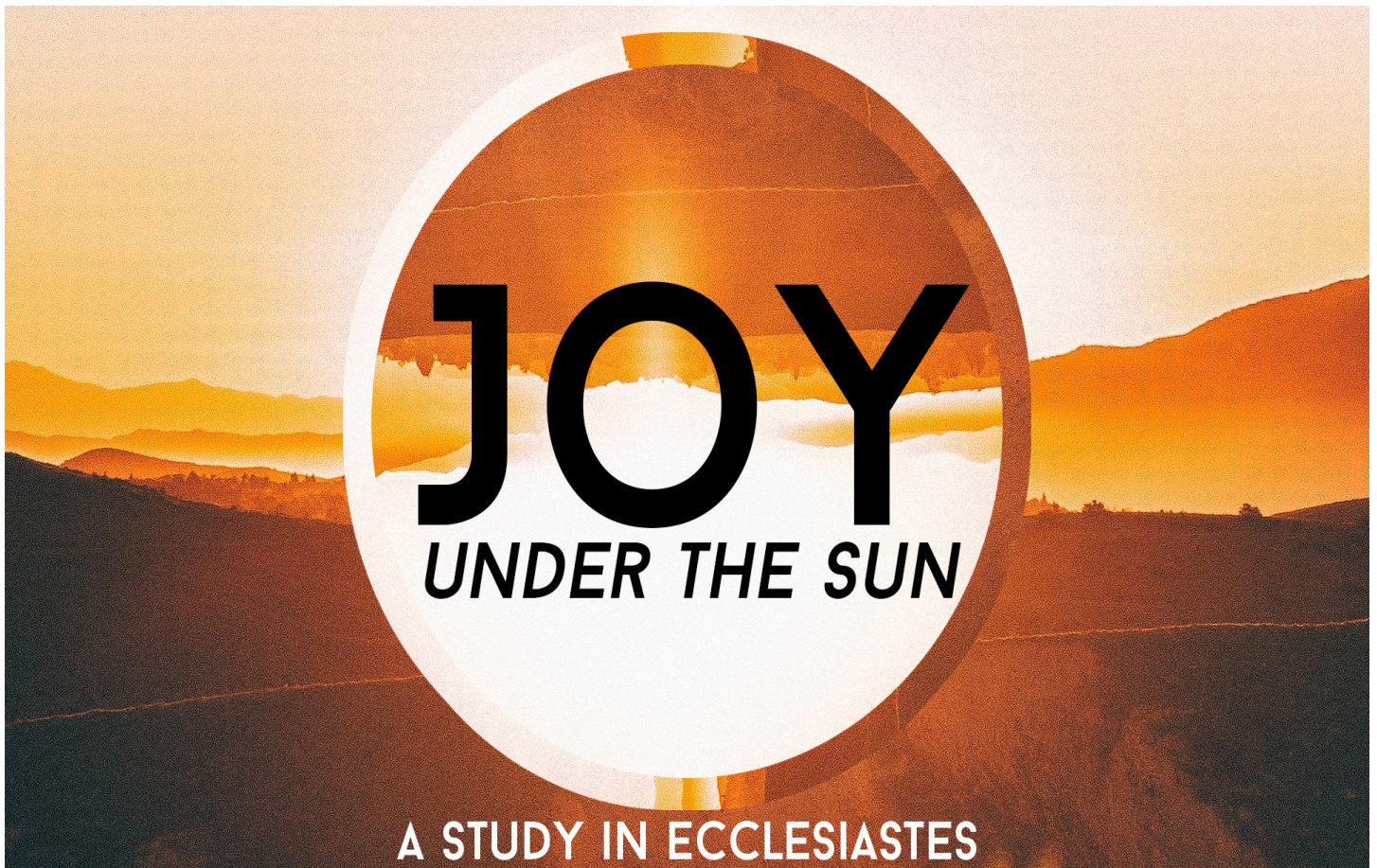


Rimrock Church

"A community being transformed by Jesus Christ."

Experience God ~ Embrace Grace ~ Engage Others



12200 West Highway 44
Rapid City, SD 57702
605-342-5373
rimrockchurch.com
office@rimrockchurch.com

Ecclesiastes 6:10-7:14

“**6** ¹⁰ Whatever exists has already been named, and what humanity is has been known; no one can contend with someone who is stronger. ¹¹ The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? ¹² For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone? **7** ¹ A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. ² It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. ³ Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. ⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. ⁵ It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools. ⁶ Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, ⁷ Extortion turns a wise person into a fool, ⁸ The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. ⁹ Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. ¹⁰ Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions. ¹¹ Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. ¹² Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it. ¹³ Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? ¹⁴ When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.”

Proverbs are short sayings that point to a truth or principle for living a wise life. Solomon was a master at pithy proverbs that can be remembered and applied to various life circumstances. In Ecclesiastes we are given a complex picture of life as “habel” (breath, vapor, temporary) which cannot be controlled or grasped in all its elusive qualities. The proverbs in this context help us see that they are not meant as absolute statements, rather invitations to think and consider the meaning of life from the perspective of the gift of God’s grace rather than selfish gain.

Chapter 7 roots Solomon’s proverbs in this context of the book of Ecclesiastes as the central message about worship in this life. In these verses we are again confronted with death and how the reality of death should affect the way we live and think in our life time. Solomon says, “it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart”. Jesus emphasized this same idea as a gateway to the blessed life by saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven”. In recognizing our limitation and need we can then turn to God and receive His grace. In this way death can become a teacher for how to live.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you thought about death? What happens when we ignore the reality of death? How does a healthy recognition of the reality of death help us live in the present moment?
2. When we realize life is temporary it helps us prioritize what is most important? What are your most important priorities in this season of your life?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 How does Jesus change the way we think and live with the reality of death as believers in the gospel?

Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

¹⁵ In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness. ¹⁶ Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise - why destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool - why die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes. ¹⁹ Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city. ²⁰ Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins. ²¹ Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you - ²² for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others. ²³ All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise" - but this was beyond me. ²⁴ Whatever exists is far off and most profound - who can discover it? ²⁵ So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. ²⁶ I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. ²⁷ "Look," says the Teacher, "this is what I have discovered: "Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things - ²⁸while I was still searching but not finding - I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. ²⁹ This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes."

This section of Ecclesiastes continues to reveal God's wisdom through proverbs. It is important to understand that proverbs are not declarations of absolute truth, but rather principles that help guide us in understanding God's wisdom in life. We should interpret proverbs differently than other parts of the Scriptures. Solomon, in these proverbs, helps us understand some powerful realities in this temporary (vapor, smoke) life on earth.

The first principle is that life is more complex than we can figure out or control on our own. We can't fully understand why some people seem to succeed in this life even though they are wicked and good people seem to suffer. Solomon invites us to place our trust in God and avoid extreme ways of living apart from God (v.18).

The second principle is that we need to understand that the curse has affected each of us individually. Solomon sums this up by saying, "indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous"(vs. 20). When we understand this reality we can then be free to listen to God and not get caught up in figuring out who is righteous and who is wicked. "We have all fallen short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23). This is the beginning of the fear of the Lord and our salvation as we place our trust in God.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you define God's wisdom? How does James 3:13-4:12 define wisdom?
2. What are some ways you have observed the affects of the sinful curse in your own life? How have you seen it in the world around you?
3. Based on the passage in James (3:13-4:12) what role does humility play in our relationship with God?
4. How does Jesus satisfy the penalty of the curse and make a new life possible for us (Romans 3)?

Ecclesiastes 8:1-15

¹Who is like the wise? Who knows the explanation of things? A person's wisdom brightens their face and changes its hard appearance. ²Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. ³Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. ⁴Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?" ⁵Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. ⁶For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery. ⁷Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? ⁸As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it. ⁹All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. ¹⁰Then too, I saw the wicked buried - those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise^[e] in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless. ¹¹When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. ¹²Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him. ¹³Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. ¹⁴There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. ¹⁵So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.

When we understand the message of Ecclesiastes, that life is a gift from God to be enjoyed and not about gain, then we can embrace humility. We don't have to have answers to all of life's complexity. We can rest in the wisdom that comes from God. We can find joy in trusting worship of the giver of every good gift! This revelation can brighten our faces (8:1).

With humility we can learn to live with honor and respect of those over us. Whether it's the government or our employer or someone who we are accountable to we can rest in God's supreme position over all things. This is why Solomon can say, "obey the kings command" (v.2).

So what if it's a wicked king, government, employer? Solomon addresses this concern by reminding us that God will bring everything and everyone to account. "Yet, because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow" (vs. 13). This is a poetic way of saying, their "day of justice is coming". When we trust God we can find freedom and joy. We won't get caught up in the injustices of those over us. We can say with Solomon with gladness of heart, "then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun" (vs. 15). This is why Ecclesiastes is ultimately a book about the joy that is possible through the gift of God!

Discussion Questions:

1. The book of James is a wonderful parallel book to Ecclesiastes in the New Testament. Both books highlight humility as the gateway to wisdom and a relationship with God. How would you define humility? How does humility impact our relationship with God and others?
2. What is the connection between humility and joy? How have you experienced the most joy in your life?
3. Read Hebrews 12:2. How does Jesus perfectly model humility and joy even in the face of injustice?

Ecclesiastes 8:16-9:3

¹⁶ When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth - people getting no sleep day or night - ¹⁷ then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

⁹ ¹ So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. ² All share a common destiny - the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. ³ This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.

One of the themes in Ecclesiastes is that we are not gods, but we are mere mortals. God is God and we are not. When we try to live as if we can control or make our own way apart from God we will not gain anything and only reap the wind and death. The alternative reaping is to worship in trusting fear of God and receive life as a gift from God.

When we humbly accept our place in relationship with God, we can understand Solomon's conclusion that it is foolish to try and answer some questions in life (v. 16-17).

Wisdom and joy in life are found in resting and trusting that we are all in God's hands (9:1). When we discover this place of wisdom there is freedom in life and death. In these verses Solomon repeats the truth (we must need this message because it is repeated so often in Ecclesiastes) of the reality of death that will affect everyone. This is our ultimate wake up call to the fact that we are not gods and we need to have a relationship with the heavenly Father. This is why Jesus came to earth to save us from sin and death and give us eternal life in Him!

Discussion Questions:

1. How does realizing God is God and you are not help you release the impulse to try and control things that are beyond control?
2. Realizing some questions can't be answered is frustrating, but according to Solomon can also be liberating. How so?
3. Read Romans 9:14-16; 11:33-36. How does Paul come to a place of trust and rest with God even when there are questions that can't be answered?

Ecclesiastes 9:3-18

³ This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. ⁴ Anyone who is among the living has hope - even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! ⁵ For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. ⁶ Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. ⁷ Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸ Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun - all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. ¹¹ I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. ¹² Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. ¹³ I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: ¹⁴ There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. ¹⁵ Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. ¹⁶ So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. ¹⁷ The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. ¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

One of the themes in Ecclesiastes is the reality of the curse. The world is not as it should be and evil is always lurking in the human heart and in all of creation around us. Solomon recognizes the terrible reality of the curse and how it affects human beings. He says, "the hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live". If we are honest, we know this is true if we look at our own hearts. We know its true when we open our newspapers and see the evil acts people commit every day. Not only is there evil in the human heart and in the world, but the curse has also brought death. In the book of Romans Paul expresses this truth this way, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Because of the curse this life under the sun is a temporary life. There is an expiration date for every living thing.

The message of Ecclesiastes is to take the curse seriously, but also recognize that there is hope and joy. The hope and joy of this temporary life under the sun is found in the gift of God for those who receive it. At the end God's story (Revelation 20:14-15) we are told that "death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

If we finish the verse in Romans 6:23 the good news is that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord". The good news is that God destroys the curse of death and He gives the gift of life in Jesus Christ! "Will we receive the gift of life from God?" This is the question Ecclesiastes is asking.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it so easy to ignore evil in our own hearts and in the world around us? What evidence of the curse do you see in your life and the world around you?
2. How can death be a teacher for us in how to live our temporary life?
3. Read John 11:25-26. How does Jesus change the way we think about death? What is the gift that God gives allowing us to truly live in this life and the life to come?

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

¹As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. ²The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. ³Even as fools walk along the road, they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are. ⁴If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great offenses to rest. ⁵There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: ⁶Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. ⁷I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves. ⁸Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. ⁹Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. ¹⁰If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success. ¹¹If a snake bites before it is charmed, the charmer receives no fee. ¹²Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, but fools are consumed by their own lips. ¹³At the beginning their words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness - ¹⁴and fools multiply words. No one knows what is coming - who can tell someone else what will happen after them? ¹⁵The toil of fools wearies them; they do not know the way to town. ¹⁶Woe to the land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. ¹⁷Blessed is the land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time - for strength and not for drunkenness. ¹⁸Through laziness, the rafters sag; because of idle hands, the house leaks. ¹⁹A feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry, and money is the answer for everything. ²⁰Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

We can either live this temporary life under the sun foolishly or wisely. The wise life is marked by the fear of God and the enjoyment of His gifts. The foolish life is full of mishap and a bad smell (v.1).

What kind of life will we live? We only have one to live so how we live matters. Let's make it count.

As you read the proverbs in Ecclesiastes you will begin to notice a common thread. Joy is found in the fear of God in how we live. The greatest danger in this temporary life is to waste what we have been given - to foolishly throw away God's gift. The foolish person walks aimlessly through life with no orientation towards God. This aimless life is characterized by foolish actions and words that reveal a heart that has never truly considered the depth of death or the possibility of seeing life as a gift from God. This is the shallow or superficial life; always concerned about things that do not ultimately matter. The proverbs awaken us to see the superficial in light of meaning and the depth of what really matters in this life. This way we open our hearts to God's wisdom which gives us *joy under the sun*.

Discussion Questions:

1. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God'. How does the knowledge of God change the trajectory of our lives?"
2. If God is the source of wisdom how should we define wisdom? How have you seen wisdom manifested in your life or the lives of others?
3. Read James 1:2-8. What should we do if we lack wisdom? What is God's promise to those who seek His wisdom in their lives?

Ecclesiastes 11:1-12:8

¹Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return. ²Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. ³If clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. ⁴Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. ⁵As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed^[a] in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. ⁶Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well. ⁷Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. ⁸However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. ⁹You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. ¹⁰So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless. ¹²Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" - ²before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; ³when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; ⁴when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; ⁵when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets. ⁶Remember him - before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, ⁷and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"

As we come to the end of the book of Ecclesiastes we must pause. It is important to stop and consider what is being revealed to us in the message of this book. So many people miss it! They live as if life is meaningless and miss out on the gift of God that brings so much joy to this life!

In these final chapters we are given one final chance to get it. Will you live life in vanity? Will you foolishly waste your one life to live?

Only you can answer that question for yourself. This question is not meant to bring sorrow or guilt. Rather it is an opportunity to wake up and begin to live today with joy. Don't try to fix yesterday. Today we have ample opportunity to live in God's wisdom. It is not too late to awaken your heart to the reality of God. He is the Creator and maker who is making all things beautiful in their time. "Remember Him... before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl broken; before the pitcher is shattered as the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from and the spirit returns to God who gave it." God gives life! Let's look to Him before death comes knocking on our door.

Discussion Questions:

1. Take time to examine your own heart and life at this moment. Have you allowed false worship of idols to creep into your life? Are you trusting other things outside of God to bring you happiness? Are you making foolish choices apart from God that have damaged your relationships with others? Are you trying to control your circumstances and others? Are you enjoying the gifts that God has given you?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 13:5-10. Why is it important to examine our faith and know where we are in our relationship with Jesus? How is this different than guilt or shame vs.9-10? How does this examining help us live in freedom and joy?

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

⁹Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. ¹¹The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails - given by one shepherd. ¹²Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body. ¹³Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. ¹⁴For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

The concluding words of the book of Ecclesiastes help us understand two truths. The first truth is that the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal God to us (2 Peter 1:20-21). The editor of the book of Ecclesiastes understands this and makes sure we recognize God's revelation through Solomon (v.11-12).

The second truth is the thesis statement of the entire book. "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment" (v.13-14). Ecclesiastes is ultimately a book about worship. Solomon tried worshipping other things outside of God. He found all these false gods empty and meaningless. As Solomon repented and began to understand that life is ultimately a gift from God, He began to experience the joy and hope that can be experienced in this temporary life under the sun. When we realize that we are not God and we can't know or control everything in our life; we can be awakened to the fear of God who does control all things. When we trust Him and follow His ways of wisdom, we can have joy. This is the conclusion of the matter. Let's live with joy under the Lordship of the Son!

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you seen God use the book of Ecclesiastes in your life? Which truths have shaped and transformed your heart?
2. Read Romans 12:1-2. How is worship part of the transformation God wants to do in our lives?