

TODAY IN THE WORD

MAY 2004

Stand in awe of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:7

HEALTHY, WEALTHY, AND WISE?

“If I were a rich man,” muses Tevye, the main character of *Fiddler on the Roof*, as he contemplates his sorry lot in life. For years, men and women have echoed his sentiments. If only we were richer, wiser, more powerful, more attractive . . . then, certainly, we would be happy.



If we are honest, we realize this is not the case. In our study of Ecclesiastes this month, we will follow a frustrating search personified by King Solomon. He seems to have it all: he was richer than Bill Gates; beautiful women were at his beck and call; and he held the most powerful position in his kingdom. Yet, in the end, he evaluates his

success and labels it all “vanity” (קִנְיָן) or “meaningless” (Ecc. 1:2, נִוּן). Looking back at his success, he concludes that the pleasures of this world are profoundly unsatisfying, and mere “chasing after the wind” (2:11).

U.S. industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, once considered the richest man in the world, reached a similar conclusion. Carnegie writes, “The amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. No idol is more debasing than the worship of money. . . . To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery.”

This same problem troubles many of us today. Even as Americans increase their standard of living, experts do not see the overall sense of happiness increasing. We might ask: won’t we be happier as our bank balance increases?

“Not necessarily,” warns Richard A. Easterlin, an economist at the University of Southern California. He explains that as our individual wealth has increased, our perception of the amount of money we require to be happy also rises. Easterlin concludes: “There has been no improvement in average happiness in the United States over almost a half century . . .” It seems, that we are never truly satisfied.

Is it human nature? It seems that the more we get—the more we want. Certainly, for Solomon, a pressure to keep accumulating money and women marked his life. Yet, as he reflects on this pressure-filled life, he finds it marked by unhappiness: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” (12:8).

We have a tough challenge ahead of us. Modern-day advertising taunts us at every corner. It implies that happiness is ours, if we can pay the right price. If we have just a little more money, we can buy the right clothing, the right car, and the bigger house. Then we will be truly happy . . . or will we?

The conclusion of Ecclesiastes issues a stern warning and a wise direction. We are to “fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13).

Answer! Stowell

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Omnipotence

Why does God allow people to become sick? Why do we suffer at the hands of others or face personal tragedy? In his book entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Harold Kushner answers questions like these by saying that God allows such things because He cannot stop them. According to

Kushner, God has a limited ability to stop suffering.

Such an answer may relieve a certain amount of intellectual tension, but it falls far short of the biblical picture of God given in the Bible. The Psalmist declares, “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him” (Psalm 115:3). So is there anything that God cannot do?

The answer to this question is yes. There are many things God cannot do. God cannot sin (James 1:13). He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). He cannot disown or deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Theologian Charles Ryrie explains, “Omnipotence means that God is all-powerful and able to do anything consistent with His own nature.”

God does not use His power arbitrarily. His ability to act in accordance with His nature is unlimited—but so is His understanding (Psalm 147:5). Whenever He exercises His power, He does so to accomplish two fundamental ends: His own glory and our good.

Why Theology Matters

There is actually little comfort in thinking that God permits bad things to happen to good people because He is powerless to do otherwise. We may not understand the reason God allows some things to enter our lives, but we can always be confident that He is powerful enough to cope with them. God’s omnipotence is the basis for our confidence in prayer. If God “does whatever pleases him,” and our prayer is consistent with His will, then we can trust Him to act lovingly and faithfully on our behalf.

For Further Reading

To learn more about the subject of God’s omnipotence and how it relates to the problem of evil, read *Can God Be Trusted?: Faith and the Challenge of Evil* by John G. Stackhouse Jr. (Oxford).



MBI Today

NEWS OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS AT MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE
MAY 2004

Small Town... Big Plans for Ministry

by Lisa Ann Cockrel

The mountains that surround the Moody Northwest campus in Spokane, Washington, are a far cry from the skyscrapers that surround the Moody Bible Institute campus in downtown Chicago, Illinois. Just ask Zachary Rowan, an MBI missionary aviation major, who recently moved to Spokane to continue his aviation education after completing two years of Bible classes on the Chicago campus.

“Chicago is fun because of all the inner-city activities and the diversity. I really enjoy Navy Pier and Michigan Avenue. On the other hand, Spokane is a small city, but it offers a lot of outdoor activities like mountain biking, skiing, boating, and hiking. I like the opportunity to be outside and to enjoy nature.”

Zachary is currently taking Airframe and Powerplant classes and hopes to complete the MBI flight program within a few years. Then he hopes he'll be able to compare life in Spokane with that on his chosen mission field—Indonesia. “I became interested in Indonesia while I was in Chicago when some of the missionary kids I met showed me pictures of its people and land,” he explained. “Also, my fiancée Jeanne was

in Indonesia and her parents, Keith and Beth Parker, were missionaries with Missionary Aviation Fellowship there. Jeanne and I both hope to be on the mission field with MAF within the next 5 years.”

Zachary knew he wanted to be a pilot by the age of 15, but it wasn't until he was on a missions trip in Mexico when he was 17 that he learned about missionary aviation and decided to attend Moody. “I want to be a missionary pilot because I feel like I can share my life with others by meeting their physical needs and helping them meet their spiritual needs—through sharing the love of Christ with them and the missionaries I will be serving.”

Through the years Moody Aviation has trained hundreds of young people just like Zachary who are now serving on mission fields across the world.

If you'd like more information about missionary aviation or any of MBI's educational programs designed to equip Christian workers, go to www.moody.edu or call 1-800-DL-MOODY. ■





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Ecclesiastes: The Wisdom of Living for God

Every race has a finish line. The Boston Marathon ends in Copley Square. The Tour de France concludes at the Arc de Triomphe. And the Iditarod mushers race to the Burred Arch in Nome, Alaska.

On the course of the race of life, Ecclesiastes sets the finish line at the grave—which leaves us runners with very little hope.

So this month in *Today in the Word*, we'll see what a difference our finish line can make in how we run the race! Solomon had the luxury of testing out several different "life courses," and we'll learn from his hard lessons and detours.

But ultimately we'll see that eternity is our finish line and that the grave is just a checkpoint on the path of following Christ. As we study together this month, let's ask God to use His truth to transform our attitudes and our actions.

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Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David.

1 KINGS 3:3A



TODAY AT MOODY

Sound doctrine is foundational for the life of every believer. Our Theology department faculty—Louis Barbieri, Thomas Finch, Kevin Zuber, Bryan Litfin, and Michael McDuffee—build this basis for our students' ministry. Please pray for them today.

Read: 1 Kings 9:1–9; 11:9–13

TODAY IN THE WORD



Ecclesiastes begins with the identifying statement: “The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1) and ends with the wise admonition: “Fear God and keep his commandments. . . . For God will bring every deed into judgment” (12:13, 14). In between, we find repeated assertions that everything in life under the sun is meaningless. Scholars disagree over who wrote this book, but traditionally it has been attributed to Solomon. Even if he didn’t write it, the author seems to have him in mind. Today, we’ll try to understand how it would be possible for the world’s richest and wisest man to look at life with such sadness.

Solomon showed as much promise as any king could ever want. The first half of today’s verse reveals Solomon’s brightest point: he genuinely had a heart for God. But the rest of the verse shows the beginning of what would prove to be Solomon’s greatest weakness: he was careless with his worship.

Before building the temple, Solomon and the people of Israel worshiped in the high places, a pagan practice forbidden by God (see Deut. 12:1–6). In His grace, however, God provided an alternative. The first portion of our reading describes the fulfillment of God’s promise of His temple, a permanent dwelling place for His Name (1 Kings 9:3).

At this point in Israel’s history, they enjoyed the apparent

fulfillment of God’s promises for His chosen people. In addition to a glorious place of worship, Israel enjoyed peace (4:25), prosperity (10:27), and the greatest ruler in the world (10:23, 24). But chapter 9 also includes a stern warning from God: turn from Me, and I will make your nation “an object of ridicule among all peoples” (v. 7). Surely a leader of unrivaled wisdom like Solomon would not be foolish enough to disobey God so blatantly . . . but the second half of our reading proves otherwise.

In Chapter 11, the Lord proclaims judgment on Solomon for turning away. He stripped away the reign of Israel that had been conditionally promised to the line of Solomon (9:4, 5). For David’s sake, the Lord did allow the line of Solomon to rule over Judah—thus preserving the kingship of the Messiah in the line of David.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Seeing Solomon as the example of Ecclesiastes’ sorrowful description of life requires a thorough understanding of just where Solomon was coming from.

Try to put yourself in Solomon’s sandals today. Solomon had more than anyone under the sun, he lost it all, and he knew it. Before you move to tomorrow’s study, set aside an hour or so to read through the story of Solomon’s life in 1 Kings 1–11. If someone as wise as Solomon can fail, certainly we need to ask the Lord for help today and every day.

Read: Ecclesiastes 1:12–18

TODAY IN THE WORD



Growing up on the Mississippi, the mystery and wonder of the river

enthralled Mark Twain. In his book, *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain notes that after realizing his dream of becoming a steamboat pilot and learning to read every detail of the river and its banks, the mystery faded. He compares this loss of wonder to how a physician would see a beautiful woman.

“Are not all her visible charms sown thick with what are to him the signs and symbols of hidden decay? Does he ever see her beauty at all, or doesn’t he simply view her professionally, and comment upon her unwholesome condition all to himself? And doesn’t he sometimes wonder whether he has gained or lost most by learning his trade?”

Solomon’s field of expertise was life. He studied “all the things that are done under heaven” (v. 14). So if it’s true that much study yields a bland familiarity—a steamboat pilot can’t see the beauty of a river sunset and a doctor can’t appreciate the beauty of a woman’s face—then Solomon, an expert in everything, should be pitied above all, for he can’t see the beauty of anything!

Even though he admits in verse 16 that his knowledge and wisdom exceeded that of all the rulers Jerusalem had ever known, today’s reading shows the limited boundaries of the wisdom to which Solomon

refers. It’s the phrase that’s repeated over and over throughout Ecclesiastes: “under the sun” or “under heaven.” Solomon knew that he could not know God with the same comprehensive wisdom with which he understood life on earth. During his dedication speech for the temple, Solomon acknowledged that God exceeded the confines of even the highest heavens (1 Kings 8:27). So he understood that the world “under the sun” did not encompass the full glory of God.

But Solomon searched out all that he could, everything from wisdom and knowledge to madness and folly (v. 17). Tomorrow, we’ll look at Solomon’s summary of what all his understanding taught him. For today, let’s concentrate on the perspective with which Solomon was able to study “all the things that are done under the sun.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



When examined in small portions, Ecclesiastes might give us a snapshot of

wisdom that appears blurry or confusing. To take in the full impact of the wisdom of this book, it’s best to read it through in one sitting. Pay attention to the emotions in the words as you read. Have you ever felt the way the Teacher does about life? Think about what Christ adds to the picture, and how these perspectives and emotions might change. As you go through the day, consider how your outlook on life resembles or differs from the mindset of Ecclesiastes.

*For with
much wisdom
comes much
sorrow;
the more
knowledge,
the more grief.*

ECCLESIASTES 1:18



TODAY AT MOODY

Continue to uphold in prayer the work of these Theology professors: Bryan O’Neal, Gregg Quiggle, Bernard Walker, Richard Weber, and David Finkbeiner, as they train students to “keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience” (1. Tim. 3:9).

*What does
man gain
from all
his labor
at which he
toils under the
sun?*

ECCLESIASTES 1:3



TODAY AT MOODY

Dr. Larry Mercer, Senior Vice President of Media, invites you to lift up in prayer the ministry of Moody Broadcasting, as the Christian message reaches thousands of homes in the U.S. and across the world, through Internet transmissions.

Read: Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

TODAY IN THE WORD



In one of the first scenes in *The Lion King*, Disney's biggest hit movie of the 1990s, the king of beasts teaches his son that a good king must show respect for every creature, from the ant to the antelope. His son inquires, "But, Dad, don't we eat the antelope?" His father replies, "Yes, but let me explain. When we die, our bodies become the grass. And the antelope eat the grass. And so we are all connected in the great Circle of Life."

New Age philosophy? Certainly. But the author of Ecclesiastes would likely have dismissed this twentieth-century thought as "nothing new" and "meaningless." Today's reading takes us through the Teacher's summary observations and conclusions, and he doesn't seem to think the so-called "circle of life" is such a great thing. He categorizes the cycles of the earth as "utterly meaningless" (v. 2) and "wearisome" (v. 8). Take particular note of the description in verse 6, as the phrase "chasing after the wind" is repeated often throughout the book. Ecclesiastes paints the picture of life as a frustrating, circuitous course that ends right where it begins.

The rhetorical question about the profit of a man's labor (v. 3) and the hopeless conclusion about man being remembered after his lifetime (v. 11) bring a sobering poignancy when applied to the events that

followed Solomon's life. His projects were astounding and his rule was the greatest Israel ever knew. But after his death, Solomon's legacy became almost immediately irrelevant when his son, Rehoboam, rejected his father's advisors in favor of the counsel of his younger friends (1 Kings 12:8). It wasn't long before the throne of Israel was no longer his (1 Kings 12:20).

But remember, once again, that life isn't limited to this realm "under the sun." Tomorrow, we'll look at the perspective Christ brings to the words of Ecclesiastes. In the meantime, it's important to notice the deep need that resonates between the lines of this book. The author is almost crying out for something new to break the never-ending cycle and bring him to a place he's never been to see something he's never seen.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



This is a good place to remind ourselves that our purpose in studying Ecclesiastes is not to judge the life of Solomon—we want to turn the light of God's Word onto our lives and into our hearts!

Examine your own life in its totality for a moment. If you were to review all that you have done "under the sun" to this point, what has been meaningful and what seems more like "chasing after the wind"? Ask the Lord to set your heart on eternally meaningful things.

Read: Luke 3:1–18

TODAY IN THE WORD



“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight.” So begins the prophecy about the great lion in the book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis. When the children in the story entered Narnia, they discovered a land ruled by the White Witch, where it was always winter and never Christmas. But the mere mention of the name Aslan stirred the hope that the witch’s spell would be broken. The children cried, “Oh, yes! Tell us about Aslan!” . . . for once again that strange feeling—like the first signs of spring, like good news, had come over them.”

The preaching of John the Baptist excited similar feelings. Verses 1–2 in today’s reading list the ruling powers of the day, and it reads like a Who’s Who of the chief players in Christ’s trial and crucifixion. The sordid history of Israel between Solomon’s reign and the rulers in today’s passage bears evidence that the hopeless cycle described in Ecclesiastes 1 had gone unbroken for centuries. Remember Ecclesiastes 1:15: “What is twisted cannot be straightened.”

John made it clear in verse 5 of today’s reading that things were about to change and that the words of Isaiah 40:3–5 would be fulfilled. And in the same fashion as his Old Testament predecessors, John preached repentance to avoid the “coming wrath” (v. 7).

In his explanation of what the fruit of repentance should

be, John’s words shed light on the message of Ecclesiastes. He advised his listeners to live with other people’s interests in mind. Those that are able should give to those in need (v. 11), and those in power should stop abusing that power at the expense of others (vv. 12–14). Instead of analyzing what one man gains from his labor, John called attention to what one man is willing to give up.

Verse 15 shows us the mindset of the day as well—people were expecting the Christ to come. Remember the question of Ecclesiastes 1:10, “Is there anything of which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new?’” John clearly answered that question with a yes—he announced “the good news” the world had been waiting for (v. 18).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



John’s teaching showed a different perspective from that of Ecclesiastes.

Does your life show the others-focused mentality of which he spoke? Today, make it your mission to meet the needs of those around you. The message of Ecclesiastes holds true: a life spent trying to please oneself will never bear eternal, meaningful fruit. Let John’s words be the announcement of the coming of Christ into your decision-making today. Self-centeredness is the sign of twisted priorities—let Him make the paths of your heart straight!

The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God’s salvation.

LUKE 3:5–6



TODAY AT MOODY

Jon Gauger in Broadcast Promotion helps make Moody Radio listeners aware of the many services and ministries that are available to them. Pray that God will encourage Jon today.

*I denied
myself
nothing my
eyes desired;
I refused
my heart no
pleasure.*

ECCLESIASTES 2:10A



TODAY AT MOODY

Education in the new millennium is unimaginable without modern technology—and our Educational Resources department makes sure Moody classrooms are outfitted for excellence. Dr. Michael Kane, Vice President of Educational Resources, and his fellow staff ask for your prayers.

Read: Ecclesiastes 2:1–9

TODAY IN THE WORD



Estimates of Bill Gates's net worth range upwards of \$30 billion, his

house has about one and a half acres of total living space, and he continues to work feverishly to improve his business—Microsoft dedicated \$6.8 billion this fiscal year alone for research and development. Who can imagine being so wealthy, let alone the prospect of getting richer! If we were to compare any of our lives to Bill Gates's life, we probably wouldn't expect to find much in common.

And that can be our reaction when we read today's passage as well. It's easy to imagine the life of a king as some distant, fantastic dreamland that bears no resemblance to our own. But a closer look at this passage reveals a striking similarity to the life of a typical, everyday person . . . just carried out to an extreme degree.

Verses 1–3 summarize the search for the good in life through selfish measures, and verses 4–8 show the details of the three main categories of the search: projects, possessions, and pleasures.

The projects described here don't seem to resemble an ongoing job or trade as much as leisure projects. The house-building, tree-planting, and reservoir-constructing in Ecclesiastes might correspond to a new shed, some tomatoes, and a sprinkler system in your backyard—on a grander scale

than we're used to, certainly, but the intended result of personal enjoyment is the same.

Although we can't identify with the amount (or even the nature) of possessions listed in verses 7–8, everyone at one time or another has bought something with the hope that it would make life a bit more enjoyable.

The pleasures listed in verse 8 also appear quite foreign to us, but the phrase that ends the verse should be quite familiar: "the delights of the heart of man." Our culture is fascinated by delighting ourselves with entertainment. If you ever take in a television show, a movie, a sporting event, or a concert—if you enjoy anything from an ice cream cone to a nice hot bath—you've experienced the heart of this passage! The question is, does any of it really bring contentment?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Can you say, as verse 9 does, that your wisdom has stayed with you through it all? It's far too easy to use up our leisure time without thinking seriously about what we're doing.

Let's think today about our own search for pleasure. Why not take a moment to list the things you do for your own enjoyment? Consider the benefits of each activity. Ask God to help you decide which ones are worthwhile or if any of those activities should be eliminated.

Read: Ecclesiastes 2:10–26

TODAY IN THE WORD



Sixteen people working at an elementary school in Holdingford,

Minnesota—fifteen lunch ladies and one custodian—hit the jackpot with a winning lottery ticket last year, collecting about \$2 million each. Only two of them retired. Serving food to little children, and cleaning up after them, may not be the most glamorous work, but these women love what they do too much to quit. One of them said that the main drawback of winning the money was that “you get more headaches.”

Imagine that—they love being surrounded all day by hundreds of kids, but millions of dollars make their heads hurt.

Solomon could have appreciated that attitude. He says in verse 10 of today’s reading that the main reward of his labor, even more than the vast luxury his work produced, was the delight he got from working. He essentially repeats that sentiment in verse 24, noting that such happiness comes from God. But the rest of this passage reveals the far less optimistic conclusion that, in the end, there is no lasting earthly reward for all man’s labor (v. 11).

This view, though, produced more than a headache. He sees that although a wise man is better than a fool, death awaits them both (vv. 12–16). He then calls attention to the end result of great accomplishments, that a man must pass on

his work to a successor with no assurance of its continuation (vv. 18–21). This seems like a fitting attitude for someone who knew his kingdom would be stripped from his son (1 Kings 11:11–12). Solomon, it seems, finds no lasting reward for a life of painful, restless labor (vv. 22–23). Verse 17 stands out as a particularly harsh conclusion. What more could one man ask for than the life Solomon had enjoyed? If he “hated life,” what does that say about the worth of earthly pleasures?

The final three verses in chapter 2 provide an earthly synopsis of the worth of life—enjoying one’s own role in life is even more desirable than great wealth. The Teacher finally brings God into his perspective. He rightfully concludes that personal enjoyment still falls under God’s sovereign will.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Are you satisfied? If not, ask God to adjust your attitude and obedience. In

verse 24, the phrase is “find satisfaction in his work,” not “find satisfying work.”

As the Minnesota lunch ladies prove, a grateful attitude is more important than the perfect job. But verse 26 adds that “God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness” to the one who pleases Him. The luck of the lottery doesn’t satisfy—but thankfully, following God’s will and commandments does.

My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward of all my labor.

ECCLESIASTES 2:10B



TODAY AT MOODY

As MBI’s graduate students finish their spring semester today, Dr Joseph Henriques, Vice President and Dean of Moody Graduate School, requests your prayer support for the upcoming exams and for the new exciting year in the life of MGS.

Question & Answer

Q *What does the Bible say about pregnant women? Does it permit the baptism of a pregnant woman? Wouldn't that be infant baptism? Also, are unborn babies caught up at the Rapture?*

A The Bible does speak about pregnant women but doesn't answer questions about the baptism of a pregnant woman, and it does not say what happens to her unborn baby at the Rapture. Pregnancy is not a problem demanding theological answers. A common-sense answer (that is theologically sound) is that the woman alone is baptized. Prenatal baptism does not take place. As for the Rapture, if unborn babies or stillborn babies go to heaven, as many of us believe, they will not need the vehicle of their mothers to get them there. The Rapture should not be visualized as millions of bodies hurtling heavenward, unchanged from what they were. See 1 Corinthians 15:35–58, noting especially verse 51: “We will not all sleep (i.e. die), but we will all be changed.” It will happen “in the twinkling of an eye.”

Q *Was John the Baptist a reincarnation of Elijah, or just Elijah come back to earth? The question is based on the*

words of Jesus in Matthew 17:10–13: “Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him. . . . In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

A No, John the Baptist was not Elijah returned to earth. He himself said flatly, “I am not [Elijah]” (John 1:19–21). The explanation of the apparently contradictory passages is that Christ did not intend to be taken literally. The angel who appeared to Zechariah to tell him that his aged wife would bear a son—to be named John—said that the son would “go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16–17).

With that in mind, Jesus corrected an inadequate understanding of a reference to Elijah in Malachi 4:6. John the Baptist was like Elijah, but he was not Elijah.

Q *We are told—based on Revelation 12:4—that one third of the angels joined Satan in his rebellion against God. Assuming that the remaining two-thirds have free will, what is to prevent them from sinning similarly?*

A Evidently, the assumption is correct: angels enjoy (or did enjoy) a certain freedom of choice. If not, how could angels have chosen to follow Satan in his rebellion against God? What's to prevent a second rebellion of angels? Here is a tentative answer. First, there is no other Satan—no angelic being like him to lead other angels astray. Second, those who resisted Satan initially, seeing the calamitous effects of his seduction, would be immunized against additional temptation by him. Besides, in heaven there is the immediacy of the power of God's love and majesty. Angels adore Him.

We know that in the eternal state we shall not sin. John explains that "we shall be like [Christ] for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-3). Evidently, union with Him *in His presence* will ensure freedom from the possibility of sin. Our natures will be changed, fixed in such a way that we shall be forever pure—as He is pure.

Maybe something like that happened to the angels who did not sin.

Q *My Christian husband died recently. Does he see us or know what is happening to the family?*

A Scripture does not answer this question clearly. However, we have a little material on which to base the belief that he *may* know something. (Note that I say *may* know, not *does* know.) First, Moses and Elijah went from heaven to the Mount of Transfiguration in order to speak with the Lord about His impending death. They had deeper insights into His mission than did the disciples. Were they the only ones in heaven with that knowledge? Possibly not.

Second, Revelation 6:9-11 notes the concern of some who were murdered for their faith. They wanted to know when God would avenge their blood. They were not given a complete answer; they were told only to wait "until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed." Thus, they were assured that justice would be done—according to God's timetable.

Heaven might not be heavenly if the ransomed of the Lord knew *everything* that happens on earth. On the other hand, everybody in heaven sees things *from God's perspective*. If He who is Love can cope with the knowledge of tragic events in the families of His people on earth, so can the family members already in heaven. When all is said, we do not know how much they know about happenings on earth.

*The Rapture
should not be
visualized as
millions of
bodies hurtling
heavenward,
unchanged from
what they were.*

*“Where,
O death, is
your victory?
Where,
O death, is
your sting?”*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:55



TODAY AT MOODY

Thank you for supporting with your prayers Arvid Bush, manager of Moody's Computer Operations department, who keeps back-ups of all computer systems and oversees maintenance and repair of all the Institute's computers.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:55–58

TODAY IN THE WORD



For just under \$200,000, an Arizona foundation will arrange for a person's remains to be preserved by cryonics, a chemically treated freezing process, immediately after death. The funds are also designated to pay for the revitalizing procedure, which will commence as soon as three scientific advances have been discovered: a cure for whatever caused the person's death, a way to stop the aging process for all mankind, and an antidote for the poison used to preserve the body.

The company has only been in operation since 1972, but had the procedure been available in Paul's day, he probably wouldn't have wasted his money. Since the sting of death is sin and the power of death is the law (v. 56), Paul knew that no scientist could ever produce the remedy for either.

Throughout chapter 15, Paul discusses the reality of the resurrection of Christ and, through Him, the assurance of the resurrection of all who believe in His name. Today's reading delivers the powerful conclusion to his argument in this chapter. Quoting the prophet Hosea, Paul pronounces death powerless (v. 55).

From what we've studied so far in Ecclesiastes, death has been shown as the great equalizer that conquers all men, rendering their labor on earth meaningless. But Paul claims

triumphantly in verse 57 that through Jesus Christ, God gives us victory over death. We see in verse 58 that the promise of escaping death should dramatically alter our approach to life.

The assurance of life after death shouldn't just make us feel better, it should make us live better, too! But when Paul talks about giving ourselves to "the work of the Lord," what exactly does he mean? Paul used a similar phrase earlier when discussing his work as an apostle. He said to the believers in Corinth, "Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?" (9:1). Throughout chapter 9, he makes it clear that his main task was simply to preach the gospel. So we certainly have to believe that Paul's charge to us in today's reading urges us at least to continue preaching the gospel. That kind of labor will never be in vain!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Even if you have a job that isn't directly related to preaching the gospel, you can still give yourself "fully to the work of the Lord." Paul did!

He explains in chapter 9 that although he had the right to earn a living from his efforts for the Lord, he refused that right (v. 12). Following Paul's example, many missionaries go overseas in "tent-making" ventures, working full-time jobs to fund their work for the gospel. You can do the same thing right where you live!

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

TODAY IN THE WORD



In the 1960s, thousands of years after it was written, the meaning of today's reading changed—and all it took was seven small words. The song, "Turn, Turn, Turn," made popular by The Byrds, set portions of today's reading to music. The only additional lyrics were the repetition of the word turn and the concluding phrase, "I swear it's not too late." What had previously existed as a bittersweet catalog of the conflicting activities of life became an optimistic cry of hope against the evils of war.

Of course, a simple song can't really change the meaning of Scripture, but if you hear the words "turn, turn, turn" echo in your head every time you read today's passage, you know how powerfully our culture can affect our perceptions. Although many people try to manufacture hope in the repetitive cycle of life without God, we must resist the temptation to follow the world's lead and instead take a fresh look at the categories of life listed here.

As we read through the seasons, it's impossible to miss the emotional symmetry running throughout it. The first half of verse 2 sums up man's existence in stark fashion, and the verses that follow categorize our lives in similarly simple, powerful terms. We gain life, and then we lose it. We give life, and we take it away (vv. 2, 3). Our lives alternate between order and

disorder (vv. 3, 5–8). Our emotional expressions run full circle (vv. 4, 5, 7, 8).

Ecclesiastes is very realistic in its observations of life. The Teacher hasn't left anything out of the human experience here, at least nothing from the strictly human perspective.

Notice what's not in this list. A time to worship. A time to pray. A time to follow God. They can't be included on this list because there is no appointed time for them to be omitted. Our interaction with God shouldn't be so seasonal. But without any interaction with God, it's hard to read this passage optimistically. "Every activity under heaven," if limited to this list, leaves us wanting, because every good thing seems to be cancelled out with bad. The net result, then, is zero meaning.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



If we were the authors of our existence, we might choose to eliminate half of this list. How great would life be if there were no time to die, to weep, to mourn, or to hate? But we are surrounded by positives and negatives, so let's relate it all to God. Look at the good as God pouring out His grace on you. And view the bad as evidence of your need for God. Remember, Solomon eliminated as many negatives as he could—but he positively forgot that he needed God!

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1



TODAY AT MOODY

Edward Cannon, Executive Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer, welcomes your prayers today for his service at MBI. Ask the Lord to use his talents and administrative experience for the development of all Moody's ministries.

*I know that
everything
God does
will endure
forever.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:14A



TODAY AT MOODY

The lives of many Moody students and alumni reflect the loving care and love for God instilled by their parents. Today's Mother's Day presents an opportunity for us to honor all the mothers in the Moody family and ask for God's blessings on their lives.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:9–22

TODAY IN THE WORD



Peter Pan, the title character in J. M. Barrie's play and novel, told Wendy that he ran away the day he was born. He explained, "It was because I heard father and mother talking about what I was to be when I became a man. I don't want ever to be a man. I want always to be a little boy and have fun. So I ran away." If only Solomon had thought of that!

Today's reading actually resembles Peter's "just have fun" philosophy, the chief difference being that Ecclesiastes doesn't provide the escape clause of Neverland. The primary direction given to us in chapter 3 is to enjoy life and be satisfied (vv. 12, 13), and that's the second time Ecclesiastes makes that point (2:24). But we need to understand that idea in its context. The end of today's reading brings up for the third time the issue of enjoying one's lot, but with a qualifier—no one knows what comes next (v. 22).

Likewise, we can miss the point of verse 11. It's natural to single it out as a warm, sentimental statement about the glory of each and every part of creation. But this passage really emphasizes the humility of all creation. It is God who dictates the seasons of life, and He alone understands the eternal plan. The labor of man is subject to change and death, but what God does lasts forever (v. 14). That is the unmistakable distinction between God and man.

And so it follows that, although men won't remember the rulers of the past (2:16), God keeps record of all man's deeds, and will judge them righteously, unlike the fallen system of this world (vv. 15–17).

This passage really showcases Ecclesiastes' unique but disturbing blend of secular thought and spiritual understanding. Verses 19–21 emphasize the inevitability of death by comparing the fate of man to that of the animals. But the passage on the whole also portrays God as an involved ruler over His creation. The message of Ecclesiastes is this: for life to have meaning, we must do more than simply acknowledge God's existence while pursuing human ambitions—we need to be part of His work that "endures forever."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Few people in the world illustrate how our actions can have enduring meaning quite as poignantly as our mothers. A mother's love is an important channel of God's grace in our lives, and a mother whose example leads her child to faith in Christ has taken part in a wonderful, never-ending accomplishment. So what better gift to give your mother, no matter where she might be, than to rededicate your life to following Christ, bringing honor to her and glory to God. (Of course, flowers are a nice touch, too.)

Read: Hebrews 12:1-5

TODAY IN THE WORD



Near the end of the third century AD, Saint Anthony's parents died and he inherited a rather large fortune. But rather than enjoy the pleasures such riches would give him, Anthony took the opposite approach. He gave away all he had and withdrew himself completely from the world and all its pleasures. The converted emperor Constantine had popularized Christian faith and put an end to the rampant persecution of the church. Although some of his practices may have been extreme, Anthony stood out in an era of comfortable Christianity. He became one of the first monks to impose a level of suffering on himself. He withdrew from the routines of a typical daily life, not to escape the responsibility and pain, but to resist the delights of "under the sun" living.

What a stark contrast to what we've studied in Ecclesiastes! In terms of personal satisfaction, Anthony's approach was an attempt to mirror Christ's suffering and sacrifice. Today's passage compels us to make such an attempt ourselves.

Hebrews describes the life of a believer as a race, an interesting picture in light of Ecclesiastes' cyclical metaphors. Even a race held on a circular track in an arena has a finish line, a point when the race starts and stops. As verse 2 points out, the prize awaits us after the race is over.

The portrait painted here is of Christ, who ran a course none of us could duplicate. He,

the supreme King over all creation, did not enjoy a life of ease, peace, and luxury. He faced shame, opposition, and suffering throughout His ministry, especially on the cross (vv. 2, 3). Ecclesiastes might have directed Him to enjoy life on earth while it lasted, but Hebrews makes it clear that Christ's ultimate joy was yet to come (v. 2).

The command to us, then, is to persevere and cast aside anything that might slow us down or stop us altogether (v. 1). Ecclesiastes is right in saying that we should have a grateful attitude and appreciate and enjoy the good things God gives us. But our own satisfaction shouldn't be the goal we're running toward. Our eyes should be "fixed on Jesus." His example gives us the added encouragement we need when the less-enjoyable seasons of life come our way (v. 3).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



You don't need to follow Anthony's example of giving away all your possessions and moving into a cave somewhere, but you can adopt a similar mindset. Take a mental inventory of everything you own. What do you have that exists primarily for personal enjoyment? Consider selling those items and giving the proceeds to your church. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and your home for any "extras" that hinder you spiritually—and ask for the resolve to give them up in order to run the race of the Christian journey.

*Let us run
with perseverance
the race
marked out
for us.*

HEBREWS 12:1B



TODAY AT MOODY

Financial integrity has always been a Moody's hallmark. Richard Campbell, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, thanks the Lord for His faithfulness to MBI and invites you to pray for God's provision and our good stewardship in the next fiscal year.

“Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise,” says the Lord.

PSALM 12:5



TODAY AT MOODY

The work of Eleanor Ehresman, Emily Ferguson, and Wayne Harder from Treasury Management requires organizational skills and attention to detail. We are thankful to God for placing MBF's financial management in their capable hands and ask for your prayers for them.

Read: Ecclesiastes 4:1–8

TODAY IN THE WORD



F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, serves as a modern-day Ecclesiastes. Jay Gatsby epitomized the reckless extravagance of the Roaring Twenties as well as the hollow dreams that left America as a whole unsatisfied. He amassed enormous wealth to impress another man's wife—and he never really experienced genuine love, only affectionate greed. As Fitzgerald assessed, “No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart.”

In the book, Gatsby died alone, but sadly he's not alone in his pursuits. At the outset of today's reading, the Teacher bemoans the evil oppression that pervades this world and the suffering it causes (vv. 1–3). Look at the extreme terms used to describe the hopelessness of the situation! Verse 4 gets at the reason behind the sad state of affairs—greed. Notice that it's not just personal desire, either. It's a matter of wanting what someone else has. At its extreme, greed causes oppression. At the very least, though, it results in meaningless labor (v. 6).

The image of the hands in verses 5–6 provides a gripping mental picture. To fold our hands and rest would be laziness, to grab everything within our reach would be greedy, but to take only what we need without seeking something more brings peace and satisfaction.

Verses 7–8 point to a good test of satisfaction—is there anyone to enjoy life with? A life of envying one's neighbor only promotes alienation and loneliness. The questions that the man asks are remarkably probing. For whom am I doing all this (v. 8)? “Myself,” would be quite an empty answer, and the Teacher can find no good motivation for such an existence.

Regrettably, not nearly enough people make that realization, which is why verses 1–4 resemble the reality of our world so closely. But we can rejoice in the verse of the day—the Lord did not sit idly by without acting. He did rise up in answer to the groans of the needy and He does provide comfort to those who suffer! The question is, are we satisfied with the answers we have in Christ? Do we strive to gain what belongs to others, or do we share the eternal treasures of His love?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's passage shows how our outlook on life involves more than just ourselves—so this is a good time to search out your life for any signs of greed. Does the statement in verse 4 apply to any part of your life? Try asking yourself the question in verse 8: “For whom am I toiling?” Make a concerted effort today to turn the focus of your attitude outward—work to serve others and share the love of Christ!

Read: Ecclesiastes 4:9–16

TODAY IN THE WORD



During the reign of Nicholas II, the last czar of Russia, Vladimir Lenin was arrested multiple times for his radical conduct, but he emerged as a powerful new leader after the October Revolution. After Lenin died, Joseph Stalin, son of a shoemaker, took the Soviet helm. All three rulers had one thing in common—their popularity waned completely by the end of their lives, but their spirit of tyranny lived on. It was out of that state of oppression that renowned author Alexander Solzhenitsyn fled the KGB. His friend, the famous musician Mstislav Rostropovich, risked his career and life to give Solzhenitsyn asylum, where he was able to continue writing in peace for years.

The second half of today's reading takes us through a power-shifting scenario much like the one Russia endured, and it shows us just how fleeting public support of a leader can be. The old ruler can succumb to stubborn foolishness (v. 13), to the point where he can be overthrown by an imprisoned foe or succeeded by a poor commoner from his own land (v. 14). The masses may be swayed by the hope a new leader brings (v. 15), but before long the newness wears off and the ruler's approval rating plummets (v. 16).

Verses 9–12 show that the fleeting approval of many is far inferior to the loyalty of one

friend. When two join together, their work is more efficient (v. 9), they can rescue each other from downfall (v. 10), and they can keep each other safe and warm (vv. 11, 12). The history of Russia illustrates the point here—Solzhenitsyn gained more from the love of one friend than any Russian ruler ever received from the near-absolute power they wielded.

Many people interpret the “cord of three strands” in verse 12 to mean two friends and God, but we must be careful here not to think of ourselves and God as equal parts in the equation. God is much more than just a third strand in our human relationships—He is the all-powerful, unbreakable, indestructible ruler of all!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Yesterday we learned that greed and envy lead to oppression and loneliness—today we concluded that any popularity gained from such selfish ambition is easily lost, but the love of friendship offers a more lasting reward.

It's better to be a good friend than a great king. If you have plans of advancement at the office, in a group or club, or even at church, make sure you prioritize your friendships over popularity. Thank God for your friendships today, and work to preserve them.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9



TODAY AT MOODY

As we continue to pray for the Treasury Management department today, please mention these additional staff members during your time with God: Marilou Logan, Stanley Pawlowski, Julie Vinlasaca, and Carol Walters. May the Lord's hand always guide them in all situations.

*Greater love
has no one
than this,
that he
lay down
his life for
his friends.*

JOHN 15:13



TODAY AT MOODY

Thank you for lending your prayer support to the leadership role of our Trustees as they come to the MBI campus for their Board meeting today. Please refer to the beginning of this issue if you want to mention specifically their names in prayer.

Read: John 15:9–17

TODAY IN THE WORD



In his poetic play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, T. S. Eliot writes, “A Christian martyrdom is never an accident. . . . A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr. . . . So in Heaven the Saints are most high, having made themselves most low, and are seen, not as we see them, but in the light of the Godhead from which they draw their being.”

It takes far more than an “under the sun” mentality to give up one’s life as a martyr. Even the friendship described in Ecclesiastes 4 doesn’t go that far. Truly sacrificial love and humility comes from an expanded, eternal point of view—the kind evidenced by Jesus and the Twelve, almost all of whom died directly because of their love for each other and for Christ.

Today’s reading shows the chain of love all the way from the Father to the Son to those who obey the Father’s commands (vv. 9, 10). But the love doesn’t reach its final destination in us—Jesus commands us to pass it on (v. 12)! And when He calls for us to love each

other, He’s not talking about words or empty affection. The greatest way we can show our love is to give up our very lives (v. 13).

Then Jesus goes on to say that being His friend means obedience to God (v. 14). And we aren’t just obeying blindly like servants who have no idea why—we obey as friends who share in the mission and the joy of our master (v. 15). And how meaningful it must have been for the disciples to hear Jesus say, “I chose you” (v. 16)! We can claim that encouragement, too, as well as the assurance that our work for Christ will bear “fruit that will last” and that the Father will meet all our needs (v. 16). Jesus then reinforces His charge to us: love each other (v. 17). But He didn’t just say the words, He showed us how with His death on the cross.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



You may not have to die for your friends or for Christ—He didn’t expect us to plan our own deaths. But you do have a say in adhering to the full obedience that’s expected of a friend who remains in Christ’s love (vv. 10, 14).

Obedience and love really go hand in hand. Love is commanded by Jesus, and an attitude of true selfless love fosters a commitment to obedience. Ask the Lord to fill your heart with love for others. Lay down your own desires in favor of obedience to Him.

Read: 1 Kings 3:4–15

TODAY IN THE WORD



After reading the first four chapters of Ecclesiastes, one might assume that

Solomon didn't have much experience relating to God—he talks about God in somewhat impersonal terms. So it's important that we remind ourselves that God spoke directly to Solomon on a number of occasions. In tomorrow's reading, Ecclesiastes speaks rather candidly about the proper approach to God, so today we'll try to learn how someone with firsthand access to God could possibly come to the conclusions offered in Ecclesiastes 5.

Today's reading is the first account of the Lord appearing to Solomon, this time in a dream (vv. 5, 15). Solomon had just offered one thousand burnt offerings (offerings for an individual's sin) at Gibeon, the most important of the high places (v. 4). Even though the method he used was forbidden (see Deut. 12:1–6), God still graced Solomon with an offer to give him anything he wanted (v. 5).

Solomon pleased God with his request for wisdom and discernment to rule the Lord's people (vv. 9, 10), so God granted his request and added even more rewards to Solomon's blessing (v. 13). But there was one stipulation. God reminded Solomon to stay on course with His ways (v. 14). As we've learned in our earlier studies, and as Ecclesiastes seems to indicate, Solomon didn't live up to that command.

Even so, Solomon emerged from his dream with a response of zealous commitment to God. He sacrificed even more burnt offerings and fellowship or peace offerings and threw a great feast to celebrate (v. 15). These fellowship offerings were a way of showing a desire to draw closer to God, and they could be offerings motivated by thankfulness, or they could come as the result of a vow (Lev. 7:12, 16). In another grand display at the dedication of the temple, Solomon followed up a lengthy, heartfelt prayer (1 Kings 8:23–53) with a fellowship offering of 22,000 cattle and 122,000 sheep and goats (v. 63). With Solomon, it seems, everything had to be enormous! But as his later decision to worship other gods shows, his heart needed to be more focused.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's reading is a lesson in quality over quantity and endurance over

extravagance. Solomon's interaction with God tended to be dramatic, and his responses were splendid. But his commitment to God wavered.

If you've noticed that your experience with God is less dynamic than you might expect, take heart. It's more important to stay true to His Word than to amplify your emotions. Focus your heart on Him alone and ask Him to tune out all that might distract you.

Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord.

1 KINGS 8:62



TODAY AT MOODY

Dr. Charles Dyer, Senior Vice President of Education, welcomes your prayers as he prepares for the MBI Commencement tomorrow, when he will greet Moody's new graduates—ready to serve Christ around the world.

*Oh, that
you would
rend the
heavens and
come down,
that the
mountains
would tremble
before you!*

ISAIAH 64:1



TODAY AT MOODY

We invite you to pray for Moody's graduate and undergraduate students on this important day in their lives. As the MBI graduates receive their degrees during the Commencement, let us thank the Lord for His work in their lives and send them off with a blessing.

Read: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

TODAY IN THE WORD



In her short story, "Greenleaf," Flannery O'Connor draws a parallel

between realizing the truth about God and being charged by a bull. The character Mrs. May, who had dismissed religious people as simple, suddenly finds herself squarely in the path of a bull's ferocious horns. As the beast pierces Mrs. May's heart, O'Connor writes, "she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable."

Sometimes God's revelations to us can be striking, perhaps coming too late in life to take advantage of the truth. Solomon may have fit into that category. Verse 1 in today's reading is a vast departure from Solomon's grandiose approach to offering sacrifices. This is a strong warning against taking God and His glory too lightly.

Verse 2 puts us in our place, drawing the distinction between our confinement under the sun and God's elevated presence in heaven. It doesn't seem like Solomon to do anything in a limited way, but verses 2 and 3 give wise counsel against multiplying our words to God.

The last section of this reading seems to come from the point of view of someone who learned the hard way not to leave vows unfulfilled. If any of Solomon's numerous fellowship offerings were the result of a vow, he would have likely regretted the unbridled enthusi-

asm with which he made them. James repeats this wise advice when he warns against swearing by heaven, earth, or anything else (James 5:12).

There is an important contrast between the approach to God in chapter 5 and the lavish exploration of earthly pleasures detailed throughout the earlier chapters. Our interaction with God is distinct from our entertainment, possessions, and labor—whether you're a pauper or a king, God is the same. He cannot be scaled up or down according to our desires. The final statement in today's reading holds true for all people: "stand in awe of God." Regardless of the merits of our personal pursuits, nothing about God is meaningless. Many words aren't necessary in His presence—His glory speaks for itself! Awe is quite certainly appropriate.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



As you plan to attend church tomorrow, now is a good time to prepare your heart for corporate worship. Before you go to bed tonight, quietly reflect on the great things God has done in your life, His glorious attributes, and His unfailing promises.

Take the time to search your heart for any sinful attitudes or thoughts and confess them to the Lord. When you enter church tomorrow, give God your undivided attention and "go near to listen" to what He has to say.

Read: Hebrews 4:14–16

TODAY IN THE WORD



Haley Mills was an established child star at the time, but her escort to

Disneyland one day had even more clout. As she was ushered past thousands of guests waiting in endless lines, one security guard attempted to stop the duo from proceeding. He yelled, “Hey, who do you think you are, Walt Disney?” Imagine his shock and embarrassment as Mills’s escort turned around and said, “As a matter of fact, I am Walt Disney.” Needless to say, the guard let them through.

Special relationships with people in high places garner all sorts of special access. And our relationship with Christ gives us immediate access that even a king would envy. Today’s reading in Hebrews reveals that, with Christ as our high priest, we enjoy benefits even Solomon couldn’t call his own. Our high priest has ascended higher than any Old Testament priest ever could (v. 14)!

But our access comes not just from Christ’s lofty position in heaven, but also from the common experiences Jesus went through on earth (v. 15). We have a high priest who can relate to our weaknesses and has overcome all our temptations. Because of that unique relationship, we can “approach the throne of grace with confidence” to receive help whenever we need it—whether it’s grace when we suffer or mercy when we stumble (v. 16).

This doesn’t negate, however, Ecclesiastes’ warning about the appropriate awe the presence of God should stir within us. It simply adds another dimension to the picture. “Under the sun” thinking puts primary stress on our sin without considering the redemptive power of our heavenly high priest. Our inclination toward faithlessness makes any oaths we might make to God very risky. But Christ’s priesthood is confirmed with an oath straight from God that can never be broken (Heb. 7:20–22).

Even as king of Israel—and even with God speaking directly to him multiple times—Solomon in all his riches never enjoyed such a relationship. Today, we should stand in awe of the amazing privileges we’ve gained through the death of our High Priest on the cross.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Is there some temptation in your life you’re afraid to bring to Jesus, some sin

you’ve never had the courage to confess? Jesus can sympathize with whatever you’re facing! You can approach His throne with boldness and claim His grace and mercy in your time of need.

Ask Him for both the strength to confess your sins and the power to resist and flee temptation as it inevitably arises in the future. Don’t be afraid to set foot in His throne room!

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy.

HEBREWS 4:16A



TODAY AT MOODY

Representing such a big organization as Moody locally and nationally is not an easy task, and our Public Relations department keeps a busy schedule. Heidy Hartley, Vice President of Public Relations and Corporate Services, requests your prayers for her staff.

MONDAY

*The sleep
of a laborer is
sweet, whether
he eats little
or much.*

ECCLESIASTES 5:12A



TODAY AT MOODY

Education at MBI includes practical application of classroom knowledge and hands-on learning through Practical Christian Ministry. Would you pray for our PCM staff: Gloria Alicea, Donald Martindel, Unity Olivencia, Roberto Rivera, and Nathan Strand?

Read: Ecclesiastes 5:8–17

TODAY IN THE WORD



In the late 1980s, a revolutionary anti-depressant drug hit the market, and by the early '90s, the name *Prozac* entered the popular vocabulary of American culture, along with *yuppies*, *thirtysomethings*, and *workaholics*. The drug was intended to treat a chemical imbalance that caused clinical depression, but it became a fashionable cure for anyone with a priority imbalance for whom success, career, and money just wasn't enough to bring happiness. Fulfillment in a pill.

Ecclesiastes diagnosed that condition long ago. We read in our passage today that oppression, injustice, and denial of basic human rights is to be expected because the sickness of greed is widespread, and even the king is not immune (vv. 8, 9). The basic problem is inherent in their desires: a love affair with money can never be satisfied (v. 10).

Verse 11 points out an additional problem with wealth: the more you have, the more people tend to turn up at your doorstep wanting their share. This type of friend doesn't offer any of the benefits mentioned in chapter 4—shared labor, rescue, warmth, protection—all they bring is superficial acceptance that fades just as fast as the money that they're spending.

The next observation stands out as the sole positive point in this passage. A hard day's work yields a good night's

sleep (v. 12). But the sheer accumulation of riches brings insomnia. The next verses give us some idea why—wealth, whether it's hoarded or lost altogether—seems to be a grievous evil either way (vv. 13, 14). In the end, riches really do not matter, because, as the saying goes, you can't take it with you (vv. 15, 16). If you're ever in danger of making money too much of a priority, verse 17 should instantly cure that line of thinking. An existence marked by "great frustration, affliction and anger" isn't worth pursuing. A pill might alleviate those symptoms for awhile, but no pharmacy can change the end result!

Let's remember that these aren't the sour-grapes observations of someone who never had riches—Ecclesiastes represents the laments of a king who knows firsthand how shallow and grievous earthly wealth actually is.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Once again, Ecclesiastes reveals that so much of life depends on attitude and desire. What is your attitude toward money? A good test is to ask yourself this question: do I have enough money?

If your answer is no, there may be no amount of money that could make that no a yes. It's time to re-prioritize. If you are satisfied with what you have, ask yourself another question: who doesn't have enough? Try to meet their needs today with a generous, creative gift of compassion!

Read: Ecclesiastes 5:18–20

TODAY IN THE WORD



A recent survey of American households attempted to discover the relationship between income and happiness. They polled people at varying income levels from very poor to extremely rich. The results came as some surprise to the group conducting the study. The only connection found between an increase in money and an elevated sense of happiness came at the poverty line. Families who had trouble meeting their basic needs—clothes, food, a warm home, etc.—were generally less happy than other families. But from that point on, even as the income level increased, the satisfaction level stayed the same.

If you've been following along with the study so far, you shouldn't be surprised at all by those findings. Today's reading marks the fourth time that Ecclesiastes has come to the conclusion that it is good for us to enjoy what we have and find satisfaction in our work (cf. 2:24; 3:13, 22). The fact that it has been repeated so often makes the point worth driving home again. We've already gone over the idea that attitude and obedience play a major part in determining satisfaction and happiness. The previous passages, like today's, have also made the point that the ability to enjoy what we have comes from God (vv. 19, 20).

But today's passage adds a new wrinkle. It is God who gives

a man his wealth and possessions (v. 19). It's not a new idea that everything we have comes from God, but in this context it's particularly noteworthy.

Up until now, we might have read into the passages that it is impossible to have abundant wealth and be satisfied—that somehow, only people of moderate means truly appreciate what they have. But this passage makes it clear that the abundance comes from God, therefore wealth cannot be dismissed as inherently evil. The numbers in our bank account don't really matter, but it's the attitude of gratitude that brings enjoyment. What a rich reward not to be consumed by regrets about yesterday and worries of tomorrow—God can keep us “occupied with gladness of heart” (v. 20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Isn't it interesting how concerns about money can distress us? Whether it's retirement or a new job, welcoming a new baby into the world or sending him on to college, building a new home or downsizing—all those issues can fill our minds with oppressive worry.

If you have any concerns, or if you know of someone going through such a transition, verse 20 is an excellent verse to memorize. Work at intentionally being glad because of what God has given you.

Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

PSALM 37:3



TODAY AT MOODY

Please bring before the Lord today, as you pray, the staff of Moody Publishers headed by Greg Thornton, Vice President of Publications. Praise God for this ministry that spreads faith, hope, and love and edifies the church through the printed word.

*Yet I tell you
that not even
Solomon
in all his
splendor was
dressed like
one of these.*

MATTHEW 6:29



TODAY AT MOODY

For the next few days, please continue to keep in your prayers the staff of Moody Publishers—specifically, the Business Management department—Bethany Fisk, Harrison Gunter, Ann Hackler, Jonathan Jones, and Mattie Hill.

Read: Matthew 6:19–34

TODAY IN THE WORD



According to 1 Kings 10:14, King Solomon received 666 talents of gold annually, which calculates to about 23 metric tons. At today's prices, that amounts to an income, just in gold, of about \$300 million a year. His throne was inlaid with ivory and outlaid with gold. The interior of the temple he built was completely covered in pure gold. His palace was constructed out of fine cedar beams and a precision-cut, high-grade stone foundation. He employed thousands of men for seven years to build the temple, and it took thirteen years to build his marvelous palace.

According to today's verse, however, God outdid him in seven days without spending a penny. In Ecclesiastes, we've studied verse after verse of conclusions that everything under the sun is meaningless; enjoy what God's given because it won't last. Jesus goes one step further, essentially concluding that worrying about such things is a waste of time—the richest, most resourceful man in all the world can't compete with lilies or grass (vv. 28–30)! So let's set our mind on higher things (v. 33).

Looking back to the beginning of today's passage, we see that Jesus gets at the heart of the issue with the question, "Where is your treasure?" Earthly treasures fade away, but heavenly treasures never diminish (vv. 19, 20). It's really

a matter of having your heart in the right place (v. 21).

The illustration of the eye as a lamp is an excellent test for determining where your heart is. What do your eyes seek after? Do you tend to scan for a flashy new car or a bigger, nicer house that tempts you toward envy? Or are you constantly looking for new opportunities to serve God and deliver compassion? Those are telltale signs of who your master is, God or Money. Verse 24 says that you can't serve both.

Verse 25 is such a great complement to Ecclesiastes' repeated assertions to eat, drink, and be satisfied with life. Jesus says not to worry about those things—He takes care of the birds, and He'll take care of us (vv. 26, 27)! In the end, Solomon and Jesus come to a similar conclusion—worrying doesn't help at all (v. 34).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



What do your eyes say about you?

When you see others, you might be tempted to look first at the material things like their clothes, their car, or their home. But that kind of first look tends to tempt us either to judge or to envy.

Try instead to look at their eyes and remember that they are the lamp of the body (v. 22). Make a conscious effort to look at people and think of how you can meet their needs instead of where they bought that outfit. You'll be surprised at how your whole outlook can change!

Read: Ecclesiastes 6

TODAY IN THE WORD



Shakespeare's Hamlet had issues. In quite possibly the most famous solilo-

quy in any play, he asks the question, "To be, or not to be?" He had reached the point that many people come to when he wondered if it was better to suffer the pains of life or to end them altogether. But for Hamlet, the rub was the unknown. The uncertainty of "what dreams may come" during the sleep of death was enough to stop him from ending his life. But the inability to bear the suffering that life brought kept Hamlet from enjoying one second of his existence.

Hamlet, in effect, was fighting the same inner struggle as Ecclesiastes in today's reading. Verse 12 is the key verse in this chapter, because it essentially asks the question, "What's the point of living, and what comfort can you find when you don't know what comes next?"

The chapter starts out with an "about face" from the point we left off. The previous verses discuss enjoying a worry-free life. But if God doesn't enable a man to enjoy life, look out (v. 2)! It's meaningless, but it's worse than that. The passage makes the case that it would be better not to have lived at all than to live a long, productive life without joy.

Next comes a string of observations on the subject. First, we have a sobering revelation about human motivation that brings to mind Jesus' pow-

erful statement in John 6:35: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry." But without Christ, our appetites are never satisfied. Verse 8 raises an interesting question about the worth of wisdom, conjuring the ironic picture of a homeless man with excellent manners. Verse 9 speaks of longing for things that are distant from us by time or space. For example, during a cold winter, Chicagoans often wish they could fly to Florida or turn the calendar forward to June. Such longing, though, is meaningless.

Then we take a step back and view how powerless we are against God's plans. No one can contend with the sovereign power of God (v. 10). The more we discuss life without Him, the less meaningful it all seems (v. 11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



If you ever need motivation for witnessing, this passage is a good source. Thoughtful people who don't know Jesus Christ as Savior are tormented by the reality of this passage. They, like Hamlet, find no meaning in the suffering of life—and they are frightened by the horrible unknown future that awaits them after death. You have the message of hope and light that their souls long to hear. Share it with someone today! No endeavor could be more meaningful than to lead someone to saving faith in Jesus.

For who knows what is good for a man in life?

ECCLESIASTES 6:12A



TODAY AT MOODY

As you pray for Moody Publishers Business Management, you bring encouragement to Duane Koenig, Richard Peterson, Thinh Pham, and Maryanna Pieleanu. "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11).

*Wisdom,
like an
inheritance,
is a good
thing and
benefits those
who see
the sun.*

ECCLESIASTES 7:11



TODAY AT MOODY

Again, join us in prayer for the staff of Moody Publishers Business Management: Jeffrey Reynolds, Victor Rivera, Edgar Santiago, and Gerald Wit. Ask the Lord to bless their commitment to Him and their dedicated service.

Read: Ecclesiastes 7:1–14

TODAY IN THE WORD



Yesterday, Ecclesiastes posed the question, “What is good for a man in life?” Today’s reading is an implicit answer to that question, as today’s verse indicates. Wisdom is a good thing, and this passage is filled with pearls of wisdom that hope to form a string of meaningful truth. The struggle, though, is that this inspired wisdom from God is intentionally limited to the parameters of “under the sun” thought. This is, in essence, wisdom for the here and now without a thought given toward eternity. But the wisdom it offers for us today is still powerful.

The comparison of a good name to fine perfume is a piece of poignant poetic imagery—a reputation has a way of lingering like an odor, good or bad. It also marks the first of seven “better than” statements that offer wise guidance for our choices. The mood of the passage shifts immediately, as mourning is counted better than laughter (vv. 1–4). Before we dismiss that notion as the depression of someone detached from God, consider that James reinforces the same sentiment in his epistle (James 4:9). A sober attitude is the fruit of a humble heart.

Rebukes are generally not our favorite thing to hear, but wise correction is better than foolish reinforcement (vv. 5, 6). That’s a difficult truth to accept sometimes, but again, humility is important. Verse 7 refers back to the issue of money and accep-

tance—a love for either can be used against even a wise man through bribes or extortion. Verse 8 gives us an insightful contrast between proudly beginning a project and patiently enduring until the end. Part of that patience is having the humility to be slow to anger—notice what a key factor humility is in wise living.

Verse 10 is intriguing. How many times have you heard someone refer back to “the good old days”? Even at the time of this writing, that was a mistake in judgment. Then comes a profound statement about the difference between money and wisdom—smart decisions can prolong your life (v. 12). The passage ends with an important note about good and bad times—God’s hand creates them both, so on this earth, we aren’t assured of an easy life (v. 14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



There is a strong connection between Ecclesiastes and the book of James. Both of them focus especially on the here and now in different ways. While Ecclesiastes looks to answer this world’s questions without looking into heaven, James commands us to put our heaven-bound faith into practice on earth. We will study the book of James later this year, and you can get a head start. Set aside some time to read through all of James and compare it to what we’ve read so far in Ecclesiastes. It will be good preparation for tomorrow’s study.

Read: James 3:13–4:17

TODAY IN THE WORD



Robert Louis Stevenson gripped the world with his horrifying tale of human duality, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In it, he personifies the division between good and evil with his title characters, Dr. Jekyll as the good side, and Mr. Hyde embodying the evil. The essential downfall of the experiment, however, was that Hyde's evil was an inextricable part of Jekyll's being. In other words, Hyde was all evil, but Dr. Jekyll was never completely good.

In light of today's reading, Ecclesiastes appears to portray a similar struggle going on inside Solomon's heart. He has a keen awareness of the fallen "wisdom" of this world that consists of envy and proud selfishness. He also cites much of the heavenly wisdom found in today's passage in James. But the tone of Ecclesiastes seems to indicate that Solomon never fully embraced the wisdom of God, and so he was brought down. Can we not sympathize with this battle for control of our hearts between the wisdom of the devil and the wisdom of God?

This passage is an indictment against greed, and it's particularly humbling to see how greed and a thirst for pleasure even enter into our prayer life (4:3). Then in verse 4, that incriminating word, *adulterous*, makes unmistakably clear what is at stake with the choices we make as believers. Staying true

to God is a matter of fidelity, and entertaining relationships with worldly behavior, or other gods in Solomon's case, is unacceptable. Because we aren't the only ones who can be envious—the Holy Spirit owns the deed to our hearts, and He is not interested in sharing with the world (4:5). Even when we stumble, though, there is hope. Again, humility is key—there is grace awaiting the humble (4:6).

Once again, we need to be reminded that the wisdom of Ecclesiastes is quite meaningful for us, even when we escape the "under the sun" mindset. The repeated assertions that the future is unknown and life is short are reinforced here in the New Testament. We have no assurance of tomorrow, and a properly humble person has a grip on their mortality—our life is "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (4:14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



One thing we can say about Solomon: he was honest about his struggles. With insight from James, we can see that Solomon fought through an intense battle between the glorious pleasures of kingship and the humble reality sewn into every sinner's heart. Before God, we must acknowledge that we're fallen and that we're subject to His command. We have a choice. We can either go on ignoring His sovereignty, or we can display our submission through a "good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom" (3:13).

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

JAMES 4:10



TODAY AT MOODY

To conclude our prayers for Moody Publishers, let's lift up to the Lord the Acquisitions department staff—Elizabeth Newenhuyse, Amy Peterson, Michele Straubel, Mark Tobey, and Elza Mazon—as they work with the authors expanding the scope of our publishing ministry.

*There is not
a righteous
man on
earth who
does what is
right and
never sins.*

ECCLESIASTES 7:20



TODAY AT MOODY

We value the service of our Procurement Services staff and ask you to pray for Kenneth Dinwiddie and Veronica Brownlee who provide Moody ministries with all the necessary supplies. And join us in congratulating Veronica on her 30th anniversary of service at Moody.

Read: Ecclesiastes 7:15–29

TODAY IN THE WORD



By this point in our study of Ecclesiastes, you may have asked yourself, “If Solomon had so much wisdom, how could he possibly turn to other gods? Isn’t that the most foolish thing anyone could ever do?” But today and tomorrow we’ll see that wisdom, even for the wisest of people, has its limitations, especially when the perspective is limited to this earth.

For instance, how can a wise men make sense of the fact that righteousness sometimes can lead to death, while some wicked people enjoy long lives (v. 15)? Such a question leaves an “under the sun” mind with two possible answers: either a) righteousness has no immediate or long-lasting benefits over wickedness, or b) righteousness is impossible to obtain.

Verse 16 includes a tough statement to process, but it helps to look at it together with verse 20—no one can be truly righteous, let alone overrighteous, and it’s hard to imagine anyone being overwise, either, especially to the point of self-destruction. Overwicked or foolish, that’s easier to picture (v. 17). But the verses may be speaking more about self-perception than an actual state of being—a person with a proper view of God seeks after wisdom and righteousness, but falls short of thinking of himself as supremely good or wise (v. 18).

Overall, this passage offers a realistic look at one man’s search for wisdom. After an

interesting admonition not to hold other people’s speech to a harsher standard than your own (vv. 21, 22), this wise man admits that even he falls short of ultimate wisdom (v. 23). He seeks to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly (v. 25).

Perhaps the struggle for the perfect mind is so difficult because of its connection to the body. Verses 26–28 seem to point to the allure of women as this one man’s downfall. Although God made us in His image, we are drawn away from God by our own desires (v. 29). But notice the glimmer of hope in verse 26—the “man who pleases God” doesn’t have to fall prey to temptation. It seems that wisdom isn’t the only key to avoiding sin—Ecclesiastes hints at the need for a special divine relationship.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Beneath the surface of today’s passage lies the difference between wisdom and righteousness. Part of wisdom is recognizing one’s own sinfulness, but the remedy doesn’t come through wisdom—righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (Rom. 3:22).

Do you believe in Him? Or are you going through life depending on your own wisdom? Take it from Ecclesiastes, wisdom is not enough. Put your faith in Jesus, today! Ask a pastor or Christian friend to help you with your questions.

Read: Ecclesiastes 8

TODAY IN THE WORD



Eliot Ness, the well-known lawman who brought Al Capone to justice, never

enjoyed financial success. Even as his crime-fighting career continued after such a remarkable achievement, he and his family had to settle for common means. How humbling it must have been to see the criminals he chased enjoy riches beyond his wildest dreams. He died before his one chance at commercial gain, the publication of his book, *The Untouchables*.

King Solomon, through all his exposure to foreign rulers, must have seen many cases of wicked, powerful men enjoying prolonged reign over their kingdoms. And with an “under the sun” mentality, it’s hard to see the value of living righteously when wicked men are rewarded with prosperity. Today’s reading is a product of observing life through that lens—justice isn’t always carried out “under heaven” (v. 11, 12).

But the beginning and the ending of today’s reading offer an insightful look into wisdom. Verses 1 and 17 both point to the fact that even a wise man can’t explain everything about life—but his wisdom still allows him a positive outlook! Even if he disagrees with the king, a wise man can still act appropriately with respect and obedience (vv. 2–6). But not even the king has ultimate power (v. 8). Death is the great equalizer that brings an end to a wicked man’s glory days (v. 10). Even if the wicked-

ness continues for years, life will be far more enjoyable for the man who does good (vv. 11–13).

But “under the sun” thinking strikes again. The undeniable fact remains that sometimes the good suffer while the wicked revel in pleasure (v. 14). So for the fifth time in Ecclesiastes, we’re told that “nothing is better” than to eat, drink, and be merry (v. 15). It’s almost as if to say, “enjoy it now, because I can’t make sense of life beyond that”—no one can comprehend life (v. 17). That’s a lesson in humility for anyone who claims to have a pat answer for everything—life isn’t always so easy to understand. Some mysteries go beyond our capacity for reason. Expanding our horizons beyond this life allows us to see the bright light of Christ’s work in our lives and our world.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Have you ever been under the authority of someone with whom you dis-

agreed? If not a king, perhaps a boss or even a church leader? Verses 2–6 are quite valuable for anyone in such a situation. When a person in authority has the power to make decisions with or without your approval, it’s best to seek “the proper time and procedure” for any action you might take instead of making a rash, emotional decision. Ask God to show you the appropriate course of action with a prayer for wisdom today.

*Wisdom
brightens a
man’s face
and changes
its hard
appearance.*

ECCLESIASTES 8:1B



TODAY AT MOODY

Pastors’ Conference starts today on our campus. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit would touch the heart of every participant, would comfort and strengthen them and build up their faith. Pray also for MBI President, Dr. Stowell, as he greets the pastors.

*I will destroy
the wisdom of
the wise; the
intelligence of
the intelligent I
will frustrate.*

1 CORINTHIANS 1:19



TODAY AT MOODY

Sports and fitness play an important role in the life of the Institute, as God has blessed Moody with a first-class sports ministry facility, the Solheim Center. Today we'd like to pray for its staff: Sheldon Bassett, David Owens, and Josie Scott.

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16

TODAY IN THE WORD



In the baseball fantasy *Shoeless Joe*, by W. P. Kinsella, Ray followed the command of a mysterious voice to turn his cornfield into a baseball field. His act of faith brought results, as baseball players from the past appeared out of thin air to play there. Ray considered it an amazing accomplishment, but his neighbors were sure he was crazy—they couldn't see the players! A marvelous revelation to Ray was viewed as complete nonsense by everyone else because they couldn't see the entire picture.

The same can be said of Ecclesiastes—a limited outlook makes the world look meaningless. Today's reading gives us the picture of "foolishness" to everyone with an "under the sun" mentality, and that picture is Christ crucified (1:23). Here we learn that the approach of Ecclesiastes is similar to Greek thought at the time, both seeking meaning through wisdom while the Jews looked for miraculous signs from God (1:22). But what miracle, what wisdom is there in the perfect Son of God being slaughtered?

Paul goes on to describe God's paradoxical way of defeating wisdom with foolishness, strength with weakness (1:27, 28). In fact, the church is filled with less-than-impressive people whom God used for His glory (1:26, 29). Paul is a perfect example of God's strength shining through weakness (2:1–5).

And although Ecclesiastes found no promise of anything new, Paul makes it clear that God has something in store for us that has never been seen, heard, or even imagined (2:9). Only His Spirit has revealed it to us (v. 10), and of course people without the Spirit can't know it (2:11). It's a spiritual language, and nothing under the sun can enable anyone to understand it (2:13). Solomon may have asked for wisdom from God, and he certainly got it in abundance. But not even his wisdom could produce spiritual communion of the nature we enjoy, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. No man's wisdom, not even Solomon's, compares to the unparalleled gift we have received—the mind of Christ (2:16)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's passage teaches us to boast, not in our own power, but in Christ who is our "righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1:30). On one hand, that means we should practice humility. But on the other hand, we also need to open up our minds to the possibilities—God can use you to accomplish His work, no matter what limitations you've experienced. Not only can God overcome the weaknesses of fallen people, they are His vessels of choice! Ask the Lord for courage to do what He asks and for His glory to outshine your sin.

Read: Ecclesiastes 9

TODAY IN THE WORD



According to an old French legend, the walled city of Carcassonne came

under siege during the Middle Ages. As the story goes, the people trapped inside had run almost completely out of food, and although the city walls kept the powerful army at bay, starvation seemed imminent. One person came up with the idea to take the one remaining pig in the city and stuff it with all the grain they had left. They threw the animal over the wall for the attacking army to see—and the troops gave up hope of ever wearing down such a “bountiful” city and finally passed them by.

Some storytellers claim the city was named for the hero in this story, but it’s likely that if the legend has any basis in reality, the truth behind the heroism has been lost forever—no one from that time is around to verify the facts! And that’s the point Ecclesiastes hammers home in today’s reading. The fight against death is a hopeless battle, no matter how skilled or well-known the warrior may be (vv. 11, 12).

Verses 13–15 take us through an account of a poor but wise man that saved his entire town against a mighty army—and he received no glory, no recognition. We never even find out his name. But then again, we never learn the identity of the powerful king either. In time, though, they all passed on at their appointed time. Under the sun, they both share

the same destiny—beyond the sun is another matter altogether.

Ecclesiastes recognizes the futility (v. 3) and the finality (v. 6) of the maddening desires of men, and that’s a pivotal realization for anyone who lets earthly things unsettle their hearts. Our disputes, our jealousy, our rage, and even our love—all of that disappears. After the grave, there’s nothing left for any of us to do in this world. Verses 7–10 give familiar advice: don’t let life pass you by without experiencing the joy God’s creation offers. Even if the joys of the earth are temporary, don’t miss the fact that God gave them to us (v. 9). We shouldn’t give earthly matters priority over the pursuit of His kingdom, but we should appreciate everything—even the little things—that are placed into our lives by the hand of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today, Ecclesiastes asks a probing question: who can know man’s destiny?

That’s something we should all consider. We’re not even assured of tomorrow, because our lives are in the hands of God (v. 1). How easy it is to get lazy or pass up opportunities when we “know” we can get around to it the next day, the next week, or in a year or two. You don’t know what your future holds, but God has given you this moment, right now. Don’t waste it!

*Whatever
your hands
find to do, do
it with all
your might.*

ECCLESIASTES 9:10A



TODAY AT MOODY

Please include in your prayers today the names of Records Management employees Abigail Austin and Scott Pinnow. They safeguard Moody’s history! Ask for the Lord’s help as they carry out a wide range of responsibilities in MBI’s archives.

*And the dust
returns to the
ground it
came from,
and the spirit
returns to
God who
gave it.*

ECCLESIASTES 12:7



TODAY AT MOODY

As Pastors' Conference concludes today, Timothy Ostrander, Senior Vice President of Operations, asks the Moody family to thank and uphold in prayer all the employees of his division who worked behind the scenes before, during, and after the conference. They helped make it possible!

Read: Ecclesiastes 10:1–12:8

TODAY IN THE WORD



An entire performance of Rossini's opera, *William Tell*, lasts about six hours—more than most human voices, or ears, can endure. But its overture (basically the symphonic synopsis of the story) is likely the most well-known piece of music of its kind. It has four parts, all of which are fairly popular: the sunrise on the cello, the storm on the drums and brass, the peaceful pastoral scene by the English horn and flute, and the galloping call of the trumpet—the tune that gave the Lone Ranger his theme.

The four-part construction resembles the four seasons as it summarizes the entire six-hour epic through its full circle of emotions in a matter of minutes. Today's passage does much the same thing for the book of Ecclesiastes. It's a string of wise sayings and observations that, in a sense, guide us through the author's entire view of life "under the sun."

There are too many quips and phrases in this passage to cover them all today, so let's focus on a few. What political conservatives would love to use as a verse to condemn liberals (10:2) is really a statement noting how the wise man and the foolish man head in completely opposite directions. That theme runs throughout this passage.

Scattered along the way are some very good pieces of advice. Remain calm in the face of anger, even when its source is a powerful leader (10:4). There

may be great temptation to storm away from an outburst, but calmly continuing in your duties can quiet the waters. Along the same line of respectful humility, don't show disrespect to your superiors, even when you think you're alone. In fact, we shouldn't let hatred enter our thoughts—such attitudes have a way of making themselves known (10:20).

Chapter 11 presents the conflict of two prevalent ideas of the book: enjoying life in our youth and being aware of the coming darkness (v. 8). Then chapter 12 slows down with a poetic description of life on earth coming to a gradual halt (vv. 2–5) followed by a crescendo of prophetic doom (vv. 6–8). The cries of "Meaningless!" are desperate and mournful. But as the dust settles, we know that God has something more to say.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



It may be difficult to spend time each day thinking about life in such broad, sweeping strokes. Now might be a good time to clean the palate, so to speak.

Take some time today, maybe with some instrumental music playing in the background, to collect your thoughts. This month may have been filled with great joy, great sorrow, or relative tranquility. Try to clear your mind of all the anxieties and distractions. Don't let mental busyness clutter your heart. Prepare your soul for a meaningful conclusion to this study.

Read: John 1:1–14

TODAY IN THE WORD



Did someone say
meaningless?

Throughout this month, we've seen the world from the "under the sun" mentality, and the conclusions that life is chasing after the wind, a burden laid on men, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless. It's a tough but important message for someone living under the delusion that earthly pleasures are enough to satisfy. But for someone who is discouraged by the hopeless tenor of Ecclesiastes, today's passage is a refreshing source of truth and the "true light," Jesus Christ.

We start out with "the Word," and there's no hint of the separation from God that marks Ecclesiastes. The Word was not only with God, the Word was God (v. 1). Ecclesiastes bemoans existence under the sun—without the Word, the sun and everything under and above it wouldn't even exist (v. 3). He is the source of life and light for all mankind (v. 4). But here's what causes the frustrations of Ecclesiastes—man couldn't comprehend the light of the Word (v. 5). John the Baptist had an announcement to make: true light was coming (vv. 6, 9)!

Problem solved, right? Not completely. Even though life under the sun without God is meaningless, the world preferred the vain darkness and rejected the true light (vv. 10, 11). It's hard to believe that anyone toiling under the frustra-

tions of earth would deny themselves "the right to become children of God" (v. 12). For those who believe in Him, what a life—they will live as children born of God (v. 13)!

And verse 14 is full of encouragement for us. The Word, through whom the world was created, became a man and lived here under the sun. And those who met Him saw not a chasing after the wind; they saw "the glory of the One and Only" (v. 14). They saw not a burden laid on their hearts, but a man full of grace. And they witnessed not meaningless words, but a man full of truth! Ecclesiastes is a challenging book to read, so it's important for us to be reminded of the hope we have in Christ. We could never hope to escape the "under the sun" world, so the Word came down from the Father to us!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



For those who believe in Christ, this passage is a benchmark for us in

light of the lessons we've learned this month. Not only are earthly pleasures of no ultimate consequence, but when we choose to pursue them instead of the kingdom of Christ, how can we say that we truly "recognize Him"? And this passage tells us what we're missing—grace, truth, and life! Make the commitment today to live like a child born of the Father.

*The true light
that gives
light to every
man was
coming into
the world.*

JOHN 1:9



TODAY AT MOODY

Thomas Shaw, Vice President of Student Services, requests your prayers for the students of Moody Aviation who have their Commencement today. We praise God for these young men and women whom He has called to His service in missionary aviation.

*The words
of the wise
are like goads,
their collected
sayings like
firmly embed-
ded nails.*

ECCLESIASTES 12:11A



TODAY AT MOODY

Please add to your prayer list Stephen Ross who manages Moody's Internal Audit. We appreciate his contribution to the stewardship of the Institute's finances and the accuracy of all fiscal operations.

Read: Ecclesiastes 12:9–12

TODAY IN THE WORD



Sometimes truth is like a refreshing drink of cold water on a hot summer day. Just when we feel like the heat of the world will overcome us, God's Word brings encouraging reminders to us that energize and motivate our weary souls. Yesterday's passage in John 1 was a great example of that effect.

Other times, though, the truth is not so kind and painless. Sometimes we feel God's truth penetrate our hearts like the horn of the bull in "Greenleaf" (see May 15). His wisdom is piercing, and our conviction stings. Ecclesiastes is filled with that second type of truth, which makes it a particularly difficult book to absorb. But if we want the truth to make a permanent impression in our lives, we need it to be powerful and sometimes even painful.

Hopefully the Teacher has imparted his knowledge to you this month, and we're reminded in verse 10 today that his words are appropriate and valid. We normally take that as a given in the Bible, but Ecclesiastes is full of passages that we'd like to explain away without too much consideration. We might think to ourselves, for instance, "Yes, life is meaningless . . . without God," and then we move on. But we need to examine our lives—how many times in the day do we act as if God were completely distant? That's when Ecclesiastes thinking shows up,

and that's when we need Christ to charge our lives with meaning!

We don't always look forward to hearing wisdom that comes from God, because it is like goads, sharp instruments used to prod and drive oxen (v. 11). His wisdom may secure us like well-driven nails hold wood, but we're not always quick to put our hearts under His hammer!

So we turn to other sources of wisdom, don't we? Walk into any bookstore, secular or Christian, and you'll find no shortage of books waiting to direct and drive your life in every conceivable direction. But the Teacher tells us to beware such sources (v. 12). There are many gimmicks that promise to give you the secrets to successful life, but none stand the test of time like God's Word has!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



At the beginning of the month, we recommended that you read through Ecclesiastes in one sitting, to take it in as a poetic expression of human emotion and heaven-sent wisdom. This would be a good time for you to repeat that reading, this time with a fuller understanding of its implications in your life. Think about how your perception of this book has changed since the month began. How has this book changed you? Ask the Holy Spirit to make those changes permanent in your life.

Read: Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14

TODAY IN THE WORD



King David was about to die. It was time to charge his son, Solomon, with the responsibility of leading his people, God's people, as their new king. He said to Solomon, "So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go" (1 Kings 2:2, 3).

Perhaps Solomon should have written that down before testing out everything under the sun! Because the "conclusion of the matter" in today's reading (v. 13) bears a strong resemblance to the words Solomon received early in life. After all he went through, all the wisdom and experience of the world had only substantiated what he was told at the beginning. Solomon learned the hard way that David's advice was exceedingly wise. We don't have to make the same mistake, so let's continue learning from the words of Ecclesiastes.

Verse 13 is a big statement that we need to understand fully: Fear God and keep His commandments. That is our duty in its entirety. At the very least, utmost obedience and respect is expected of us. But the wording is still a bit detached. Fear, obey, duty—these are all good words for us to keep in mind, but we are more than God's military battal-

ion. Where does love fit into this picture? Actually, His most important commandments to us are to love Him and to love each other (Mark 12:29–31)! So love and obedience are the same thing. Remember, Jesus called His disciples more than just servants—we are His friends because we share in His business (John 15:15).

The final verse of this book is a stern warning for every person. God will hold us accountable for our actions. Nothing is hidden from His sight. How fitting that the conclusion of the matter in Ecclesiastes—after such an intentional focus on the strictly earthbound experience—has an eye for what is yet to come, God's final judgment after our days under the sun are through.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



Today's passage is an application in and of itself, and it couldn't be clearer: "Fear God and keep His commandments." Although it shouldn't be, this practice often becomes a seasonal cycle in our lives—obedience, sin, correction or judgment, repentance, and back to obedience where the cycle resumes. But that's not what God wants from us. Seek God's help in this! Make it a point several times each day to ask Him to help you obey. Such attention to obedience is a sign of respect and love that fosters a compliant heart.

*Fear God
and keep his
command-
ments, for this
is the whole
duty
of man.*

ECCLESIASTES 12:13B



TODAY AT MOODY

Robert Gunter, Vice President and General Counsel, serves all the ministries of the Institute with professionalism and dedication. Ask the Lord to bless him and his family as they go to church today.

MONDAY

*When Christ,
who is your
life, appears,
then you also
will appear
with him
in glory.*

COLOSSIANS 3:4



TODAY AT MOODY

Concluding our prayer journey this month, we'd like to invite you again to consider prayerfully the message of Ecclesiastes, think about its author's quest, and thank Jesus that "the old order of things has passed away" in your life and He is "making everything new" (Rev. 21:4-5).

Read: Colossians 3:1-17

TODAY IN THE WORD



The television show, *This Is Your Life*, offered its guests an entertaining, nostalgic look at all the wonderful things they had accomplished and all the people whose contributions made that person into the success they had become. Many people would come to tears of joy as they relived the greatest memories of their time here on earth.

In Colossians 3, though, Paul changes the direction completely. Instead of *This Is Your Life*, Paul says that Christ is your life (v. 4). And those things of the past, all the passing events that attracted the focus of Ecclesiastes, really have become meaningless. Our eyes are on the new life we're living in Christ (v. 10).

It all begins with our thoughts and our attitudes. So we are to put our hearts and our minds where our Lord is (v. 1). We are raised with Him, and our thought life should follow suit. We need to stop digging up our old selves and all the evil practices we are prone to (vv. 4-9). Remember, these are the things that bring God's wrath on men, from the flood, to the enemies of Israel, to the coming judgment on this world (v. 6). How meaningless would it be to be raised from that spiritual death—and yet constantly trying to return to the grave instead of enjoying the righteousness of Christ?

Growth is a process, and we read that our new self "is being renewed in knowledge" in the image of God (v. 10). Notice a couple of other points. First of all, this new self is just that: something new! It answers the cry of Ecclesiastes. But notice, too, that knowledge is part of the process—wisdom is a means to make us more like Christ; but without Him and His Spirit, that wisdom is unattainable (1 Cor. 2:13, 14).

The closing verses render a reversed image from the snapshot of greed in Ecclesiastes. Love, compassion, forgiveness, praise, gratitude—those are the marks of a truly meaningful life in which the Word of Christ dwells richly.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY



So what do we take away from this month of studying the questions and conclusions of Ecclesiastes and the revelations of Christ in the New Testament? How do we put it into practice in our lives? Verse 17 says it all: "Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." That's whatever we do, whatever we say, done to His glory, resulting in a life of thankfulness. Obedience is the best thank-you for God's most meaningful gift!

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UPCOMING SCHEDULE

Eastern Washington & Western Montana Estate Planning Seminars
Featuring Moody Broadcasting's Mike Kellogg

MONDAY, MAY 24, 2004

10:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Moody Northwest
611 E. Indiana Ave
Spokane, WA 99207

TUESDAY, MAY 25, 2004

7:00 p.m.

Venture Inn
443 US Highway 2 W
Libby, MT

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2004

7:00 p.m.

Hampton Inn
1140 Highway 2 W
Kalispell, MT

THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2004

7:00 p.m.

Doubletree Edgewater
100 Madison
Missoula, MT

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What kind of plans have you made?

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