

ECCLESIASTES

**AS AN AUTHORITATIVE FOUNDATION FOR
TEACHING LIFE SKILLS TO YOUTH TODAY**

by

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Summary

Ecclesiastes has often been seen as a sceptic's view of life and because of its complex nature has not been studied thoroughly nor clearly understood. It is a very interesting book in the Bible because it addresses pertinent issues of life such as pleasure, fame, money, achievement, worship, satisfaction, work, justice, happiness and death. Each of these aspects affects the purpose and fulfilment of life.

Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, sought to examine life so that he could determine its real meaning, in order to teach these principles to others and leave a lasting legacy. He was a man who had the time, the money, the wisdom, and the authority to examine life thoroughly and he had the means to pursue his every desire. He came to the conclusion that any pursuit in life, apart from a relationship with God and submitting to His purpose, was transitory and did not bring lasting satisfaction.

These discoveries are the focus of Ecclesiastes and they direct one towards the understanding that life only has meaning in a relationship with God and living out His purposes. Solomon uses a unique form of "goad and nail" (Ecc. 12:11) in his writing style to capture the reader's attention and then direct them to a conclusive foundation of truth on which they can base their view of life.

I believe it is the "Gospel of the Old Testament" and an authoritative book for evangelising and teaching life skills to Youth today. This thesis is a thorough study of Ecclesiastes, so as to accurately determine the message that Solomon wanted to convey and then

apply those truths to Youth today.

As a book contained in the Biblical scope of wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes teaches life skills on how to understand, approach and live life meaningfully. This is an important topic for all people and especially for Youth who have their lives ahead of them and are seeking for meaning and purpose, so that they can live fulfilled lives.

However, because of the secularisation of our western society and the influence of Postmodernism, Youth are not receiving a true or realistic message on which to base their worldview. Much of what they have gleaned and believe is based on superficial thinking, feeling and presumption. Life's philosophies must be based on a solid foundation of convictions, which are based on absolute truth. This absolute truth is God's truth, as found in the Bible.

As God inspired the writing of the book of Ecclesiastes, it becomes one of those bases within the scope of the Scriptures that authoritatively addresses the issues Youth face when developing their life purpose. Before trying to teach Youth the truths of Ecclesiastes one must first gain their acceptance because they have been influenced to reject absolutes. Thus it is necessary to cause them to re-evaluate their philosophies of life before teaching them biblical truth. Positive Deconstruction is the proposed method of approach and re-evaluation. The proposed method of teaching Youth the truths laid out in Ecclesiastes is through interactive discussion. This is a form of discussion that involves them and causes them to think independently. This method can be used by parents with their teens at home, teachers with their learners at school and also Youth leaders at church.

Research also includes personal interviews with young people to determine their life goals and purpose.

Key Terms

Authoritative Foundation, Life skills, Youth, Postmodernism, Positive Deconstruction, Life Purpose, Transitory (*hebel*), God's Purpose, Fear of God, Gain (*yitron*).

List of Abbreviations

KJV: King James Version of the Bible

NASB: New American Standard Bible

NT: New Testament

OT: Old Testament

RSV: Revised Standard Version of the Bible

Am: Amos

Ac: Acts

1 Chr: 1 Chronicles

Col: Colossians

1 Cor: 1 Corinthians

2 Cor: 2 Corinthians

Dn: Daniel

Dt: Deuteronomy

Eph: Ephesians

Ex: Exodus

Ez: Ezekiel

Ezr: Ezra

Gal: Galatians

Gn: Genesis

Hb: Habakkuk

Heb: Hebrews

Hg: Haggai

Is: Isaiah

Jas: James

Jb: Job

Jdg: Judges

Jer: Jeremiah

Jn: John (Gospel)

1 Jn: 1 John (Epistle)

3 Jn: 3 John (Epistle)

Jon: Jonah

Jo: Joshua

1 Kgs: 1 Kings

2 Kgs: 2 Kings

Lk: Luke

Lv: Leviticus

Mal: Malachi

Mk: Mark

Mt: Matthew

Nm: Numbers

Phlm: Philemon

Phil: Philippians

Prv: Proverbs

Pt: Psalms

1 Pt: 1 Peter

2 Pt: 2 Peter

Rom: Romans

Ru: Ruth

Rv: Revelation

1 Sm: 1 Samuel

1 Thes: 1 Thessalonians

2 Thes: 2 Thessalonians

1 Tm: 1 Timothy

2 Tm: 2 Timothy

Zec: Zechariah

Curriculum Vitae of Douglas Forsyth

Douglas Forsyth was born in Johannesburg, South Africa on 5 October 1955. He matriculated from Northlands Boys High School, Durban, in December 1973 and two years later enrolled at the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit for a B.A. Education. On completing this degree in 1979, he taught at Krugersdorp High School for four years. In August 1983 he and his family moved to Dallas, Texas to study at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he graduated with a Master of Theology (Christian Education) in 1988.

On returning to South Africa, he accepted a position as associate pastor at the Weltevreden Chapel, an Independent Bible Church in Weltevreden Park. He was ordained for Pastoral Ministry in October 1988 and inducted as pastor of Weltevreden Chapel in 1991, a position that he has held until the present. He has been involved in the regional boards of Awana Youth Clubs, Night Watch Ministries, Harvesters Biblical Seminary and the Biblical Institute of Leadership Development. He has also served on, and chaired the Governing Body of Discovery Primary School and the International College of Bible and Missions. Pastor Forsyth has been lecturing at the International College of Bible and Missions for the past five years in Christian Education and Practical Theology and is a member of the executive Board of this institution

He married Anne Reid on 29 March 1980. Anne is a qualified Social Worker, a teacher at Discovery Primary School and also lectures at the International College of Bible and Missions. She also holds a Master of Arts Degree in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary. They have four children: Bryan, who is a youth leader at Weltevreden Chapel and working towards a BA Theology Degree at the International College of Bible and Missions; Jeffrey, Kerri and Kevin, who are all at Allen Glen High School and are involved in youth ministry at Weltevreden Chapel. The family resides in Discovery, Roodepoort.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	10
2. My Personal Journey with Youth and Ecclesiastes	12
2.1. Introduction	12
2.2. Personal Journey	12
2.3. Personal Conviction	18
3. Why Ecclesiastes as opposed to another book of the Bible?	19
3.1. Introduction	19
3.2. Authorship of Ecclesiastes.....	20
3.2.1. Identity of Author	20
3.2.2. Objections to Solomonic Authorship.....	22
3.2.3. Integrity of the Author	23
3.2.4. Ecclesiastes as an Authoritative Foundation	23
3.3. The Unity of the Book.....	24
3.4. The diverse message of Ecclesiastes	25
3.5. Ecclesiastes In Its Appeal To Young People.....	27
3.5.1. Issues Of Life on which Young People Focus	27
3.5.2. Presentation and appeal of Ecclesiastes	27
4. The Message of Ecclesiastes.....	30
4.1. Methodology.....	30
4.1.1. Reading	30
4.1.2. Observation.....	31
4.1.3. Mechanical rewrite of the book	33
4.1.4. Synthesis of the book – Charting	34
4.1.5. Interpretation.....	34
4.2. Exegesis of the book of Ecclesiastes	36
4.2.1. Ecclesiastes Chapter 1	36
4.2.1.1. Introduction.....	36
4.2.1.2. The Futility Of All Human Endeavours (Ecc 1:2-3).....	37
4.2.1.3. The Evidence Of Ceaseless, Repetitious Rounds In Nature (Ecc 1:4-7).....	38
4.2.1.4. The Evidence Of Ceaseless repetition Of Human Endeavours (Ecc. 1:8-11).....	39
4.2.1.5. Personal Investigation (Ecc. 1:12-15)	40
4.2.1.6. Personal Reflection (Ecc. 1:16-18)	41
4.2.1.7. Application of these Truths to Life Today	41
4.2.2. Ecclesiastes Chapter 2	43
4.2.2.1. Introduction.....	43
4.2.2.2. Solomon Tested His Heart with the Pleasures of Life (Ecc. 2:1–11)	45
4.2.2.2.1. Pleasure and Enjoyment (Ecc. 2:1–3).....	45
4.2.2.2.2. Sensual Pleasures (Ecc. 2:2-3).....	46
4.2.2.2.3. Creative Pleasures, Achievement and Accomplishment (Ecc. 2:4–6).....	46
4.2.2.2.4. Esteem Pleasures. (Ecc. 2:7-8)	47
4.2.2.3. Solomon Considered Wisdom and Folly in the Certainty of Death (Ecc.2: 12–23).....	47
4.2.2.3.1. He considered wisdom with reservations (Ecc. 2:12–17)	48
4.2.2.3.2. He Considered His Wealth With Disgust (Ecc. 2:18–23).....	49
4.2.2.4. Solomon Accepted Life As A Gift From God (Ecc. 2:24–26)	50
4.2.2.5. Conclusion.....	51
4.2.2.6. Application of these Truths to Youth Today	51
4.2.3. Ecclesiastes Chapter 3	55
4.2.3.1. Introduction.....	55
4.2.3.2. “Times And Seasons” and God’s Sovereign Control (Ecc. 3:1–8).....	57
4.2.3.3. Time and Eternity that Links Man to God (Ecc. 3:9–14).....	61
4.2.3.4. Time and the Inevitable Certainty of Death (Ecc. 3:15–22).....	63
4.2.3.5. Conclusion.....	64
4.2.3.6. Application of these Principles to Youth Today.....	65
4.2.4. Ecclesiastes Chapter 4	66
4.2.4.1. Introduction.....	66
4.2.4.2. Injustice in the Trials Court (Ecc. 4:1–3).....	67

4.2.4.3.	Envy and iniquity in Labour (Ecc. 4:4–8)	68
4.2.4.3.1.	The Hard Working, ‘Driven’ Man (Ecc. 4:4)	68
4.2.4.3.2.	The Lazy Man (Ecc. 4:5-6).....	69
4.2.4.3.3.	The Balanced Man (Ecc. 4: 6)	70
4.2.4.3.4.	The Independent and Lonely Man (Ecc. 4:7-8)	70
4.2.4.4.	The Importance of Companionship in Life (Ecc. 4:9–12).....	71
4.2.4.4.1.	Companionship in Working (Ecc. 4:9)	71
4.2.4.4.2.	Companionship in Calamity (Ecc. 4:10).....	71
4.2.4.4.3.	Companionship in Warmth (Ecc. 4:11)	72
4.2.4.4.4.	Companionship in Protection (Ecc. 4:12).....	72
4.2.4.5.	Trials in the Realms of Political Power (Ecc. 4:13–16)	72
4.2.4.6.	Application Of These Truths To Youth Today:	74
4.2.5.	Ecclesiastes Chapter 5	76
4.2.5.1.	Introduction	76
4.2.5.2.	Respect for God (Ecc. 5:1–7).....	76
4.2.5.3.	Respect for Others (Ecc. 5:8–9).....	79
4.2.5.4.	Respect for money (Ecc. 5:10–20).....	81
4.2.5.4.1.	Money solves one’s every problem (Ecc. 5:11).....	81
4.2.5.4.2.	Wealth brings total peace of mind (Ecc. 5:12).....	82
4.2.5.4.3.	Wealth provides complete security (Ecc. 5: 13–20)	82
4.2.5.5.	Conclusion.....	84
4.2.5.6.	Application of these Truths to Youth today	84
4.2.6.	Ecclesiastes Chapter 6	87
4.2.6.1.	Introduction	87
4.2.6.2.	Wealth without enjoyment (Ecc. 6:1–6).....	88
4.2.6.3.	Effort without satisfaction (Ecc. 6:7–9).....	91
4.2.6.4.	Questions with no answers (Ecc. 6:10–12).....	92
4.2.6.5.	Application of these Truths to Youth Today	94
4.2.7.	Ecclesiastes 7	96
4.2.7.1.	Introduction	96
4.2.7.2.	Wisdom is beneficial when applied to daily living (Ecc. 7:1–10).....	97
4.2.7.2.1.	Sober thinking is better than superficial frivolity (Ecc. 7:1-4).....	97
4.2.7.2.2.	Sincere correction is better than superficial flattery (Ecc. 7:5–6).....	100
4.2.7.2.3.	The easy way out is not necessarily the best way out. (Ecc. 7:7–10).....	101
4.2.7.3.	Wisdom is beneficial in giving a clear perspective of life. (Ecc. 7:11–18)	102
4.2.7.4.	Wisdom is beneficial in strengthening one to boldly face life (Ecc. 7:19–29)	107
4.2.7.5.	Application of these Truths to Youth Today	109
4.2.8.	Ecclesiastes 8	111
4.2.8.1.	Introduction	111
4.2.8.2.	Authority (Ecc. 8:1–9).....	112
4.2.8.2.1.	Wisdom and obedience to the legal authorities (Ecc. 8:2).....	113
4.2.8.2.2.	Disrespect toward Authority. (8:3a).....	113
4.2.8.2.3.	Defiance of Authority (8:3b)	114
4.2.8.2.4.	Discernment in Approaching Authority. (Ecc. 8: 5b-6).....	114
4.2.8.3.	Inequity and Justice (Ecc. 8:10–14)	115
4.2.8.4.	Acceptance of God’s Purpose (Ecc. 8:15–17).....	116
4.2.8.5.	Application Of These Truths To Present Day Living.....	117
4.2.9.	Ecclesiastes 9	120
4.2.9.1.	Introduction	120
4.2.9.2.	Death is an Unavoidable and Sad Certainty (Ecc. 9:1–10).....	121
4.2.9.2.1.	Facing Death Realistically (Ecc. 9: 1-2)	121
4.2.9.2.2.	Appreciation of life as a remedy for the certainty of death (Ecc. 9:3)	123
4.2.9.2.3.	Enjoyment of life as a remedy for the certainty of death (Ecc. 9:4-6)	123
4.2.9.2.4.	Appreciation and enjoyment of meals (Ecc. 9:7).....	124
4.2.9.2.5.	Enjoyment of every occasion (Ecc. 9: 8)	125
4.2.9.2.6.	Enjoyment of marriage (Ecc. 9:9).....	126
4.2.9.2.7.	Enjoyment of Work (Ecc. 9:10).....	126
4.2.9.3.	The Unpredictability of Life (Ecc. 9:11–18).....	127
4.2.9.3.1.	Human Abilities do not always Guarantee Success. (Ecc. 9:11-12)	127

4.2.9.3.2.	Opportunities do not always Guarantee Success. (Ecc. 9:13-18).....	128
4.2.9.4.	Conclusion.....	129
4.2.9.5.	Application of These Truths to Youth Today.....	129
4.2.10.	Ecclesiastes 10.....	131
4.2.10.1.	Introduction.....	131
4.2.10.2.	Adverse Results for Foolish Rulers (Ecc. 10:4–7).....	132
4.2.10.3.	Occupational Hazards For Foolish Workers (Ecc. 10:8–11).....	133
4.2.10.4.	Detrimental outcomes for foolish talkers (Ecc. 10:12–15).....	135
4.2.10.5.	Detrimental Effects of Foolish Leaders (Ecc. 10:16–20).....	137
4.2.10.6.	Conclusion.....	139
4.2.10.7.	Application of These Truths to Youth Today.....	140
4.2.11.	Ecclesiastes 11–12.....	141
4.2.11.1.	Introduction.....	141
4.2.11.2.	Living Life by Faith (Ecc. 11:1–6).....	142
4.2.11.3.	Enjoying life in accountability to God (Ecc. 11:7–12:8).....	145
4.2.11.4.	Learning about life from lessons of wisdom (Ecc. 12:9–12).....	150
4.2.11.5.	Fearing God As The Essence Of Life (Ecc. 12:13–14).....	154
4.2.11.6.	Conclusion.....	155
4.2.11.7.	Application Of These Principles To Youth Today.....	156
4.3.	Word and Phrase Studies.....	158
4.3.1.	The Meaning of הֶבֶל (hebel).....	158
4.3.2.	The Meaning of יִצְרוֹן (“yitron”).....	161
5.	Youth In Our Society Today.....	163
5.1.	Introduction and Methodology.....	163
5.2.	Our Society Today – a Postmodern Society.....	164
5.2.1.	Introduction.....	164
5.2.2.	Defining Postmodernism.....	165
5.2.2.1.	Deconstructionism.....	167
5.2.2.2.	Moral Relativism.....	168
5.2.2.3.	Pluralism.....	170
5.2.2.4.	Existentialism.....	172
5.2.2.5.	Conclusion to Definition.....	173
5.2.3.	Conclusion.....	174
5.3.	Characteristics and Culture of Youth Today.....	174
5.3.1.	Introduction.....	174
5.3.2.	Youth Culture and Characteristics.....	175
5.3.3.	Understanding Young People Today.....	176
5.3.3.1.	Introduction.....	176
5.3.3.2.	Defining Youth Today.....	177
5.3.3.3.	Sources of Influence in the Lives of Youth.....	182
5.3.4.	Major Concerns in Life for Youth Today.....	184
5.3.5.	Goals and Accomplishments for Youth Today.....	186
5.3.6.	The Postmodern challenge to Youth today.....	186
5.3.7.	A Challenge to Youth Workers.....	190
5.3.8.	The Importance Of Spiritual Formation For Young People.....	195
5.3.9.	Positive Deconstruction.....	198
5.3.9.1.	A Method Of Teaching Young People The Truth Of God.....	201
5.3.9.2.	The Process Of Positive Deconstruction.....	203
5.3.10.	Parenting Youth today.....	206
5.4.	Interviews, Questionnaire and Analysis Of Young People’s Goals and Ambitions Today.....	210
5.4.1.	Make up of the Group.....	211
5.4.2.	Career choices and Expectations.....	211
5.4.3.	Life Goals expressed in the interviews.....	211
5.4.4.	Influential people.....	212
5.4.5.	Perceptions Of What Makes Life Successful And Fulfilling.....	212
5.4.6.	Means To Achieving These Goals.....	212
5.4.7.	Spiritual Experiences.....	212
5.4.8.	Relevance Of The Bible To Life Today.....	213
5.4.9.	Conclusion and Application.....	213

5.5.	Application Of The Truths Of Ecclesiastes To Youth In Answer to their Needs	214
5.5.1.	Understanding God in Ecclesiastes	214
5.5.2.	Understanding Man In The Book Of Ecclesiastes	216
6.	Conclusion	222
7.	Bibliography	225
8.	Appendix A	230
9.	Appendix B	236
10.	Appendix C	237
11.	Appendix D	272

1. Introduction

Life is very important. Each person's life is very important because God is the giver and sustainer of each life. Life is unique, in that you only have this one life to live on earth. This is not a play nor is it even the final dress rehearsal where you can say: "Stop! Let us do that again." This is the 'real thing'. We cannot go back in time and change where we have messed up. We cannot undo what damage we have done through wrong choices in our lives. There are consequences for our actions and often these are beyond our control. Life is valuable.

Life has purpose and meaning. Life is inextricably attached to meaning and purpose and yet so many are confused and clueless as to what it may be. Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, refers to a study done by Dr. Hugh Moorhead, a philosophy professor who wrote to 250 of the best-known philosophers, scientists, writers and intellectuals in the world to gain their understanding of the meaning of life. Their responses were astounding. Warren comments that:

“Some offered their best guesses, some admitted they just made up a purpose for life and others were honest to say that they were clueless. In fact, a number of famous intellectuals asked Professor Moorhead to write back and tell them if he discovered the purpose of life” (Warren, 2002: 19-20).

This is an astounding example of some of the most intelligent members of society but it underscores that we need an authoritative foundation on which to base our understanding and convictions of life. No one can afford to base his or her life on a shaky foundation or a wrong premise. We only have this one life and it would be exceedingly sad to reach the end of it and realise that there was little in it that had meaning or usefulness. The discovery of a wasted life, when it is too late to make changes or amends, would result in eternal regret and remorse. Thus it is important to address the issues of life that make it meaningful and also those issues that would

rob it of its meaning.

People tend to question life and its meaning. What is the purpose, meaning and ultimate end of life? It is a common cry of people that there must be more purpose, satisfaction and joy in life than what they are experiencing. Furthermore there is in everyone a pursuit and longing for the ideal; that which is perfect or a Utopia, and yet none of these are fully realized here on earth. There is also the desire for understanding the spiritual side of man and the nature of eternity itself. Warren also states:

“The purpose of life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It is far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose” (Warren: 2002:17).

This is where my story begins, with this realization that in and of myself, I could not bring about my own fulfilment in life. I realized that I did not have the wisdom or understanding of the purpose or essence of life nor did I have the power or enabling to manipulate circumstances or events to bring it about.

As I proceed with this study, I mainly will use the 1973 New International Version of the Bible because it is an accurate rendition of the original Scripts and is an English translation that is easy to understand.

I will also refer to mankind as ‘he’ or ‘him’ in following the text in Ecclesiastes. Here the Hebrew term אָדָם (Adam) is used as the term for mankind, person or humanity without any discrimination against gender. The term is used in Scripture for a class of beings created by God without regard to gender. This is in no way a discrimination against the female gender, but is more a matter of simplified writing. Thus in most instances I will refer to “him or her” because the Truths of God are applicable to all people independent of their gender, culture or race.

2. My Personal Journey with Youth and Ecclesiastes

2.1. Introduction

My personal experiences in life's journey have caused me to look at life and evaluate it in such a way that I do not treat it lightly. I had rather a mixed up philosophy of life that was based on pleasure and feelings. I have made grave mistakes in my Youth and I have seen others do so with sad consequences. These consequences included teenage pregnancy, alcoholism and even murder. I do not want my life to be nebulous or a waste. I have encountered the truth of God's will in the Bible that I believe is true to life and appropriate to develop the right philosophy of life. I want to live life to its fullest potential for the glory of God and to impact the lives of others. This is what I believe is revealed in the Bible and especially in the book of Ecclesiastes.

2.2. Personal Journey

As a teenager growing up, I was constantly thinking that there must be more to life than what is seen and experienced. I had developed the philosophy that all my actions were to be based on my feelings of whether I felt like doing them or not. Thus, what I did, or did not do, was based on whether I felt like it or not. It was purely an Existential feeling that determined much of my conduct. There were things however, which I had to do, such as homework, whether I felt like it or not. This dawned on me one day in 1968 when I was in Standard 6 at Northlands Boy's High School, and I got into trouble for not doing what I should have done. I soon began to realize that there were obligations in life and that everything did not revolve around my feelings and desires. I began to see that principles in life were far greater than me, and my determination of them. I now realize how ignorant I was and how much I needed to have been taught a balanced true view of life. Today I recognise that this understanding is a Biblical view of life.

As a teenager I was caught up in peer pressure and did some outrageous things to gain the acceptance and recognition of my peers. I was soon to realize that simply doing the things that others were doing did not bring the satisfaction and fulfilment that was promised. It was simply going through the motions in a farcical manner to gain the approval and acceptance of my peers. My smoking and getting drunk on weekends at age fifteen, did not bring the satisfaction and recognition that it was said to do, but instead left me feeling hollow and fearful lest I be caught out by my parents or the law. This was compounded by the realization and deep seated fear that if I was to have died at that stage of my life, I would not have gone to heaven because I knew I would not have met God's standard. This put a damper on much of my fun and left me with no peace in life. I then embarked on a journey to find answers to life and its purpose and also address my concerns about the after life. For a period of three years I attended Church and read through the Gospels but this did not give me the peace I sought.

I found this peace when, for the first time, I understood that Jesus had died on the cross for my sin. It was in 1973, my Matric year, and I became a Christian, as I trusted in Christ for my salvation. As a result there was a total transformation in my conduct, philosophy of life, my experience of joy, satisfaction and purpose in life. From then on, the focus of my life was directed towards fulfilling the purposes in life as God determined them in His Scriptures, rather than what I would feel and desire. With the change in my philosophy of life to one that was Biblical, I began to evaluate every aspect of life in the light of this Biblical framework.

As this became a deep conviction in my life, I chose a career in education and after completing a Bachelors degree, I started teaching at Krugersdorp High School. I was given the subject, Religious Instruction, where I could focus on teaching pupils a Biblical philosophy of life. My deep concern was that they not repeat the same false reasoning that I had followed before becoming a Christian.

One of the greatest examples against which I evaluated this philosophy, was a close

family member who was a father figure in my life. He was a very successful businessman and he seemed to be successful in everything he attempted. He lived in a huge mansion most of which he had built himself. He drove luxury cars and even owned a number of Porsche 911 models, from one of which he removed the engine and rebuilt himself. He held the position of chairman in a certain company in the Anglo American Group and was managing director of others. He was a scratch golfer and was an honorary member of a golf club. He was very intelligent and held a degree in science from the University of the Witwatersrand. He was wealthy and was held in high esteem by his colleagues and yet it seemed to us as family members that he was not really happy and content with life. He had walked away from his first family because of a marriage failure and this caused a great deal of sadness and anger in the children of that first marriage. In the early days he had served as a Sunday School superintendent of a particular church but had left the church because he disagreed with the minister on an aspect of science and evolution, which they had discussed. Sadly he developed a brain tumour in October 2000 and died in November 2001. Shortly before he died he repented and trusted in Jesus Christ as his Saviour. At this time he expressed the regret that there was a time when he had turned his back on God and followed a path to pursue his own success without God. In my mind I was evaluating his life according to a Biblical philosophy of life. How could someone who had it all, wealth, position, power, pleasure, prestige, intelligence, achievement and ability, not be ecstatically happy and content in life? Why would he suddenly regard the path he had chosen decades before to be in vain when he was suddenly faced with death? When faced with death, do earthly things lose their importance, and does spiritual security become the most important aspect of life? I believe that these similar dilemmas were examined by the writer of Ecclesiastes and the conclusions he came to give us great insight into life so that we can understand a divine purpose therein.

The study of the book of Ecclesiastes has always been a fascinating one for me personally. I sat under the teaching of Rev. Ray van Pletzen at Weltevreden Chapel in 1981 as he preached through the book. What struck me at that time was how applicable the book was to our modern day, even though it was written many centuries ago. Here was a book of the Bible that was so true to life because it outlined the real struggles of man and gave plausible answers to them. These views were again confirmed as I listened to Dr. Chuck Swindoll teach a series of messages on a Christian radio station in Dallas, Texas on the book of Ecclesiastes, called *Living on the Ragged Edge*. Again the timeless principles outlined in Ecclesiastes were made appropriate to modern day life, with real answers to the dilemmas that we all face in this frustrating and challenging modern age. This was brought home more forcefully by the example of a businessman whom Chuck Swindoll encountered and he recorded that interview in his book *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Swindoll, 1985:119).

“Several months ago I had the occasion to look into the face of a frustrated, anxious forty-seven-year-old man. His past was strewn with the litter of the consequences of high-pressure competition. In the process of becoming “successful”, his relationship with his wife and children had completely eroded. They were like a group of strangers living under the same roof (his precise words), passing by each other like ships in the night. It must have been a hell-on-earth existence.

First there was the son who would no longer speak to him. Next the younger daughter had said to him rather bluntly, “I don’t like being with you anymore, Dad”, and his wife was afraid of him. Now keep in mind, he had made it to the top of his profession – six-figure salary, numerous perks, influential position, country-club membership, luxurious car, private jet . . . the whole package. He had everything – or so it seemed. But he had recently been caught stealing from the company – over \$15,000. The company chose not to indict him or take him to court on embezzlement charges. Instead he promised to pay back the money even though he was immediately dismissed from the organisation. He had lost his job, lost his reputation, lost the one thing that gave him identity, and the only thing he had been trained to do. And don’t forget his family was happier when he wasn’t around.

He had been working half days on Sundays, so that by the time they caught up with him he was working six and a half days a week. He admitted to me, “Had I continued it would have been a solid seven days

a week with at least twelve to fourteen hours a day. I was on my way. Your classic, driven workaholic.”

As he looked at me, tears were streaming down his face. He sobbed, “How do I build back a home? How do I relate to a son or daughter who doesn’t respect me and won’t talk to me anymore? How do I go back and do it over?” Mentally, he’s a very sick man. I was watching him personally disintegrate before my very eyes. It was frightening. He paced back and forth as he talked. A rather steady stream of profanity flowed from his tongue. One time, he reached up and literally swung in the doorway and hung there, full of anxiety, crying like a baby. What a pathetic sight! He had served a cruel taskmaster – success at any price. Now he was like a leopard cornered in a cage . . . dangerously near a complete breakdown.

I thought to myself, there stands a product of “the system”. He confessed, “I bought into it all the way down to the soles of my shoes, but I couldn’t handle it” (Swindoll, 1985:119).

Here again was another example of someone who had all that would be considered successful according to the philosophy of this age and yet it did not satisfy. If this was the case then the writer of Ecclesiastes certainly had a point to make in addressing our world and its philosophy today. So I decided to study the book for myself.

Ecclesiastes was also the first book that I preached through when I started my pastoral ministry at Weltevreden Chapel in 1987. It gave me an opportunity to study the book ‘first hand’ and to see for myself how exciting and appropriate the structure, unity and application really was. The response of the congregation was also one of amazement that such an ‘old’ book could be so true to modern day life.

Another real life illustration is described by Patrick Morley in his book’ *Man in the*

Mirror:

“The most surprising thing about Tom’s call wasn’t that he was crying, it wasn’t even that he was fifty-eight years old and crying. But his candour really got my attention - Tom is one of Florida’s most prominent attorneys.

“My life has no meaning - no purpose,” he began. “It’s as though I’ve been chasing the wind all these years.”

He attended a prayer breakfast we sponsored every Thanksgiving. For the next six months he could not stop talking about what he had heard. Tom found the message of Jesus intriguing and he called to say he was interested in the whole story. We made an appointment to talk about it.

As Tom unfolded the story of his life, the vast array of accomplishments on his résumé awed me. A man of stature, his list of credits revealed a list of Who's Who in the legal field. I would have imagined him to be a satisfied man were it not for the stream of tears that diluted the value of those achievements.

Tom did reach the pinnacle of professional success, yet still aches for a sense of purpose in his life. He attained the rung on the ladder that every young lawyer aspires to, but found the ladder only reaching up into the clouds of disillusionment. Success created more questions for him than it answered.

Tom spent a lifetime pursuing the god he wanted. Then, one day he woke up and realized that he didn't have the slightest idea who God really is. Aware of just how unfulfilled he was, and not knowing why, he had accepted an invitation from a friend to a prayer breakfast.

"Maybe God will have some answers," he thought.

What interested Tom most was the peace he saw in some of the men involved in the prayer breakfast. Over the six months that followed, he was surprised to learn these men attributed their sense of peace and purpose to a "personal" relationship with God through Jesus Christ" (Morley, 1997:81-82).

This true story accurately illustrates my premise in this thesis, that apart from a personal relationship with God, and the perspective and purpose that He gives, nothing else in life will ultimately satisfy a person, no matter how appealing it may seem initially. It is vital for young people to realize this, lest they spend their lives pursuing something which will not satisfy, and which will only bring frustration in the end; in the certain realization that their pursuit was in vain and they missed the whole purpose of life, which is knowing and honouring God.

2.3. Personal Conviction

It is no exaggeration to say that the book of Ecclesiastes has had a remarkable impact on my life and especially in developing my philosophy of life and in analysing world affairs in the light of its truth. I have greatly benefited from an intense study of this book and I would dearly like others to have the same benefit because I believe that God's will and purpose for life is clearly revealed in this book. I am especially concerned about our Youth, for if they could learn these lessons early in their lives they would not repeat the mistakes made by the writer of Ecclesiastes. This would save them from regrets and hurts through wrong choices and avoid the waste of time and resources used in personally searching for the true meaning of life through the 'school of hard knocks'. It is thus my personal conviction that the sooner we start reaching and informing the Youth with this message of God's purpose as outlined in Ecclesiastes and the rest of Scripture the better. However, for the sake of this study, I will contain myself to the book of Ecclesiastes.

3. Why Ecclesiastes, as opposed to another book of the Bible?

3.1. Introduction

Ecclesiastes is the record of a man who had the time, the money, the wisdom, and the energy to take a deep look at life and examine it thoroughly from the point of what is really true and meaningful. He did absolutely everything he felt like doing. If he felt like collecting something, he went out and got it. If he felt like building, designing or making something, he did it. If he felt like exploring pleasure, he did all that. If he felt like getting richer, no one surpassed him. If he felt like becoming famous and being recognized, that was his achieved goal. Deep down in their hearts, most people today, and especially young people with their zeal and idealism, would love to be in such a position.

This man kept an accurate journal about his exploits and the conclusions to which he came. Fortunately we have that journal today. We can read it, study it and learn from him so that we do not fall into the same trap of chasing after something, which does not satisfy; something, which has no lasting value and is fleeting. That man's name was Solomon and the accurate journal that he kept is now a book in the Bible, called Ecclesiastes. Warren Wiersbe makes an appropriate comment when he says of Ecclesiastes:

“It sounds like some sort of disease - No! It is more the remedy for one of life's most common diseases - missing the purpose of life” (Wiersbe, 1990: 7).

Ecclesiastes is really a Greek name for “one who assembles the people”. The author of Ecclesiastes identified himself, in Hebrew, as ‘Qohelet’ (1:1-2; cf. 1:12; 7:27; 12:8-10). The original Hebrew name Qohelet means “one who assembles and addresses the people for a spiritual purpose”. This one is the leader of the assembly, the teacher, and the preacher. Solomon was that man.

3.2. Authorship of Ecclesiastes

3.2.1. Identity of the Author

Nowhere in this book does the author give his name, but the descriptions he gave of himself and his experiences would indicate that the writer was King Solomon. There are also many passages in Ecclesiastes that strongly suggest that King Solomon is the author. The author identified himself as the son of David (Ecc. 1:1), King in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:1), and King over Israel in Jerusalem (Ecc. 1:12). While a son of David can refer to later generations, there were very few “sons of David” who ruled over Israel in Jerusalem. After Solomon the Kingdom of Israel was split into two, the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem, however, was the capital and the seat of the King of Judah from this time until its fall to its enemies in July 587 BC. (Dyre, 1985:1127). After this time there is nothing and no one who compares with the person and prosperity that is described in this book.

He claimed to have great wealth and wisdom (Ecc. 2:1-11, and 1:13). This correlates with God’s promise to Solomon to give him both wisdom and wealth in response to his humble prayer (1 Kings 3:3-15; 4:20-34 and 10:1; 6-9). In Ecc. 1:12-2:26, he said he was wiser than anyone who had ruled over Jerusalem before him (Ecc. 1:16). He was a builder of great projects (Ecc. 2:4-6), he possessed many slaves (Ecc. 2:7), he had greater herds of sheep and cattle than anyone else (Ecc. 2:7), he had great wealth (Ecc. 2:8), and a large harem (Ecc. 2:8). In short he claimed to be greater than anyone who lived in Jerusalem before him (Ecc. 2:9). All of these aspects correlate with Solomon’s splendour and achievements in 1 Kings 10:14–29. Donald R. Glenn furthermore concurs with this in his commentary:

“These descriptions have led many Jewish and Christian interpreters to identify the author as Solomon though his name is never explicitly used in the book.

Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes was generally accepted until the Age of the Enlightenment (17th century) when the use of literary and historical criticism and linguistic analysis led to its general abandonment by scholars of all persuasions” (Glenn, 1985: 975.).

Ecclesiastes appears to be the kind of book people would write towards the end of their lives once they had had time to thoroughly reflect on life’s experiences and develop convictions about the lessons they had learned. So often, as for example in Ecc 3:10, and 3:17, the author uses terms such as: ‘I have seen’ and ‘I thought in my heart’. This certainly seems to be a thorough examination of life over a long period of time, which greatly impacted his life and led to the development of many convictions. Glenn confirms:

Solomon probably wrote Proverbs (Prov. 1:1; 1 Kings 4:32) and the Song of Solomon (Song of Solomon 1:1) during the years he faithfully walked with God; and near the end of his life, he wrote Ecclesiastes. There is no record that King Solomon repented and turned to the Lord, but his message in Ecclesiastes suggests that he did. He wrote Proverbs from the viewpoint of a wise teacher (Ecc. 1: 1-6), and Song of Solomon from the viewpoint of a royal lover (Ecc. 3: 7-11); but when he wrote Ecclesiastes, he called himself “the Preacher” (Ecc. 1: 1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8-10) (Glenn, 1985: 975.)

This certainly makes sense to me as a student of Wisdom Literature and I would support Glenn’s thesis. It was not without purpose that the Sovereign God gave Solomon, “a wise and discerning heart so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be”. (1 Kings 3:12).

3.2.2. Objections to Solomonic Authorship

In objection to Solomonic authorship there are suggestions that the writer is a subject rather than a king because of the frequent references made to the problems of “official bureaucracy” (Ecc.4: 1-3; 5:8; 8:11; 10:6-7). Here are some plausible answers to this objection. Twelve times in Ecclesiastes the author mentioned “the king.” What must be kept in mind is that Solomon ruled over a great nation that required a large standing army and extensive government agencies. He carried on many costly building projects and lived in luxury at court (1 Kings 9:10-28 and 10:7; 2 Chronicles. 1:13-17). Somebody had to manage all this national splendour, and somebody had to pay for it.

Solomon solved the problem by ignoring the original boundaries of the twelve tribes of Israel and dividing the nation into twelve “tax districts,” each one managed by an overseer (1 Kings 4:7-19). In time, the whole system became oppressive and corrupt; and after Solomon died, the people begged for relief (2 Chron. 10).

He uses the title “teacher,” Hebrew ‘Qohelet’. As has been discussed, this is not a name but essentially a title to qualify his function in teaching according to the wisdom that God has given him (Ecc. 12:13). His unique style of Hebrew and use of Persian terms may point to a later period of history (Ogden, 1987:15). Another objection to Solomonic authorship would be the view that a number of authors participated in the writing of Ecclesiastes. This would include editors making changes or additions at a later stage. Such arguments would be attacks on the authority, authenticity and integrity of the book. Kaiser refers to three commentators who have proposed that two other writers, who were under the influence of Greek philosophical thought, made corrective additions to the basic document of Ecclesiastes. However, he counteracts their arguments by pointing out that:

“None of our present Hebrew textual traditions suggest any division of labour; instead the unity of the document is everywhere attested by all Hebrew manuscripts” (Kaiser, 1979:12).

3.2.3. Integrity of the Author

The integrity of the author is evident throughout the book. His honest search for what is meaningful is clearly seen. He says that what he wrote was, “upright and true” (Ecc. 12:10).

Warren Wiersbe points out:

“The word Koheleth carries with it the idea of *debating*, not so much with the listeners as with himself. He would present a topic, discuss it from many viewpoints, and then come to a practical conclusion. Ecclesiastes may appear to be a random collection of miscellaneous ideas about a variety of topics, but Solomon assures us that what he wrote was orderly (Ecc.12: 9).” (Wiersbe, 1990:14)

There are many references and descriptions to his research and investigation throughout the book. As an example he says; “I devoted myself to study and explore by wisdom all that is done” (Ecc.1: 13); “I have seen all the things that are done” (Ecc.1: 14); “I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge” (Ecc.1: 16); “I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom” (Ecc.1: 17). Solomon was certainly qualified to do this kind of study. He had been ruling as the king over Israel in Jerusalem (Ecc.1: 12). He had diligently applied himself to study and carefully observed the outcomes (Ecc. 1:13-14).

3.2.4. Ecclesiastes as an Authoritative Foundation

Ecclesiastes is a canonical book, which means that it is regarded as a truly inspired book of the Old Testament Canon. If this had not been the case it surely would not have been included in our

Bible. It also claims to be inspired, as the author states that this wisdom teaching is given by “one Shepherd” that is God (Ecc. 12:11).

2 Timothy 3:16 states that, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (KJV). God’s Word is as true, authoritative and applicable for mankind today as when it was written. This is also the view of Steve Chalk in his foreword of the insightful book of Nick Pollard: *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult*.

He says:

“I remain fundamentally convinced that the message of the Bible is more dynamic, life-changing and relevant than anything else I’ve ever heard or read” (Pollard, 1997:7).

Ecclesiastes is authoritative and addresses issues directly as opposed to the slogan that says, “all is relative and that is the only absolute left”.

3.3. The Unity of the Book

The quest here is to establish a basis of unity for the book of Ecclesiastes. If there is a unity from beginning to end it establishes the authority of the author because there is a continuation of his argument and intended purpose throughout the book. With additions of other authors, the question arises if they are in line with the original author’s intent. If they are not, then the authority of the book and the thrust of the argument is diluted or disjointed. The life experiences of wisdom, wealth and power, which are the basis of his argument in examining life, historically fit Solomon. The criticism that the book is only negative, sceptical and cynical is not accurate and reflects a superficial study of the book itself. The negatives, which are a realistic part of our fallen world, are balanced by many positive ethical and spiritual injunctions and admonitions. Walter Kaiser in his scholarly work on the book of Ecclesiastes points out the positive instances of

repeated exhortations of the “fear of God”; “receiving all the ‘good’ things of life as a gift from God”; “reflecting on the fact that God will judge the righteous and the wicked” and “remember that God currently reviews the quality of every man’s life-style” (Kaiser 1997:11). It is important to understand the author’s intention, purpose and scope in order to have a proper perspective of any book. In the book of Ecclesiastes this information can be obtained from the introduction or preface, the concluding chapter or epilogue, and surveying the contents to see how it all ties in to a theme. What one must especially notice are repeated phrases, words or topics for these will carry emphasis and thus importance.

3.4. The diverse message of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes answers many of the serious questions about life. It is an honest and critical look at life “under the sun.” This important phrase is used twenty-nine times in Ecclesiastes, and along side it, the phrase “under heaven” (Ecc. 1:13; 2:3; 3:1). This means purely from a human point of view without the perspective or intervention of the Divine Creator; as most common and secular people would see it. The author applies his own wisdom and experience to the complex human situation and tries to make some sense out of life. This viewpoint must be kept in mind throughout the study of Ecclesiastes: Solomon is examining life “under the sun.” In his *Unfolding Message of the Bible*, G. Campbell Morgan clearly summarizes Solomon’s outlook:

“This man had been living through all these experiences under the sun, concerned with nothing above the sun...until there came a moment in which he had seen the whole of life. And there was something over the sun. It is only as a man takes account of that which is over the sun as well as that which is under the sun that things under the sun are seen in their true light” (Morgan 1961: 229).

Ecclesiastes addresses the enigmas of life such as injustice, suffering loss and death, which bring confusion and hopelessness and drive people to despair and fatalism. Ecclesiastes is wisdom literature and thus, as with other Old Testament books of wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon) it is written to provide skill for living from God's Divine perspective. This book is relevant to life in the street today. This is what really works in life because human nature has not changed in millennia and God's purpose for mankind is consistent throughout all of Scripture and all of time.

3.5. Ecclesiastes In Its Appeal To Young People

3.5.1. Issues Of Life on which Young People Focus

There are specific issues that young people focus on during their exploring and defining the purpose of life. They are however not exclusively limited to Youth as they are issues that people tend to grapple with throughout life. Solomon addresses these issues in the book of Ecclesiastes but he adds a warning that in the end each person will be accountable to God for what they have done. Solomon says:

“Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your Youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment “ (Ecc. 11:9-10).

Ecclesiastes deals with the very issues of life that young people focus on in their goals for life, and how they seek fulfilment in them. These include fame, wealth, works, wisdom, achievement, position and sensual pleasure. It deals with questions regarding purpose, meaning, justice and satisfaction that concern young people.

3.5.2. Presentation and appeal of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is a basis because it is especially appropriate to Youth in its presentation and appeal. It does this by using the goad and nail method (Ecc. 12:11). This means that the author makes a statement that prods or goads one, calling for a response or reaction. That response or reaction induces serious thinking and at this point the author then makes a statement of personal experience or gives a list of searching questions which causes one to evaluate one's position and think for oneself. Thorough evaluation in the light of Biblical Truth leads one to develop

convictions by which to live and herein is the nail that fastens or secures the truth principle to life. Thus the Goad; which is a prod, causes one to react and respond. This Goad and Nail principle appeals especially to the inquiring minds of young people. Young people go through a stage of critical thinking where they question everything around them in an effort to see where they fit in and what they accept or reject.

Pollard uses the term, ‘positive deconstruction to “describe the process of helping people who are currently comfortable with their non-Christian beliefs to think again about them – and possibly to become uncomfortable with them, so much so that they want to find out about Jesus” (Pollard 1997:13). This process is primarily applied through a process of questions to cause young people to think and evaluate what they believe. Ecclesiastes is the thinking person’s book. It asks honest questions and seeks real answers. This is appropriate for Youth today (and older people for that matter) as they tend to live life based on feeling or desire instead of principle or conviction. But the Preacher did more than call an assembly and give an oration.

I have observed that young people for the most part tend to follow trends, friends, models, and cultural norms without doing personal and proper evaluation of their lives in the light of Biblical truth. (See fig 1)

An outline of levels of knowledge according to the degree of thought, evaluation and responsibility, presented by Ray van Pletzen, is as follows:-

	ABSOLUTES (e.g. Scripture)
	CONVICTIONS (Basis of Beliefs by which one lives)
	OPINIONS (Views which one holds and is prepared to voice)
PRESUMPTION AND PREJUDICE	(No substantial basis of knowledge)

(Fig. 1, R. Van Pletzen, unpublished notes)

As I have observed this structure of levels of knowledge to be true, I have noted that few people live their lives based on convictions and absolutes. Subsequently many seem to live lives based on opinion and presumption and even feelings, desires and emotions. The latter seems to be a superficial and flimsy foundation on which to base life. As life is so important, I believe that we need to have an objective, authoritative standard like Scripture rather than a subjective existential base on which to forge one's philosophy of life.

Ecclesiastes is also appropriate because it addresses the very issues of life that young people focus on in their goals for life and seeking fulfilment therein. These include fame, wealth, achievement, position and sensual pleasure. True and lasting satisfaction is not found in these things but only and ultimately in God.

The old adage, "Life is precious, don't miss it for the world", is true. For the most part people do want the world and as much of it as they can get. Their pursuit is motivated by the thinking that if they can get the world, or many of the things of the world, they will have a fulfilled life. This is not true. For the world and the things of the world, such as money, power, fame, sensual satisfaction, personal achievement, power, pleasure, personal pursuits, study and standing often replace one's pursuit of God, Who is the author of life, the source and the satisfaction of life. It is interesting that in the Bible, God warns us not to love the world or anything in the world (1 John 2:15). Furthermore the world and its desires will pass away (1 John 2:17). But on the other hand, the man who does God's will, lives forever. The sobering question posed by Jesus Christ is: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). People do this because they are ignorant of God's plan revealed in the Bible. This is especially true of young people today.

4. The Message of Ecclesiastes

4.1. Methodology.

The methodology used in the study of the book of Ecclesiastes assumes an understanding of the fact that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, that it contains truth that cannot be known to man unless he acquires it from outside of himself. For this reason it is necessary and beneficial for man to study it.

Several steps are used in this process of Bible Study, in order to allow the Scriptures to speak in the way that God intended. It is assumed that a literal, grammatical hermeneutic will be followed throughout. This means that all of Scripture is understood literally, within the normal bounds of literary study. It is also assumed that the passage only has one meaning and that is the one intended for the original readers to whom the passage is written. Traina points out that it is necessary to use an inductive approach rather than a deductive approach when studying the Bible. Deduction, is an approach “which begins with generalisations and moves for their support to the particulars” (Traina 1980:7) Induction, in contrast, demands that the student studies the particulars of Scripture and then draws conclusions based on what has been discovered during this study. Inductive Bible Study leads to an objective, accurate understanding of Scripture and prevents the student from forcing pre-conclusions onto a passage.

4.1.1. Reading

Reading is the first and perhaps the most important step in the process of effective Bible Study. It is necessary to see the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole before delving into the various parts. Reading the book in its entirety gives an overall picture of the thrust of the message that the

author wishes to convey. It also helps prevent the student from going off on tangents that would detract from the overall message of the book. It is also necessary to read the book several times before attempting to study it. With each reading an increased familiarity with the material will be attained and as a result there will be an ability to link thoughts and ideas without having to continually search through the pages

4.1.2. Observation

Observation is the second step in the process. It is at this point that the student does his own work with the passage being studied. Here the text is bombarded with questions that will provide not only obvious answers but also answers that are implied in the text. Traina says that, “Observation transcends pure physical sight; it involves perception.” (Traina 1980:31)

The student begins asking the six interrogatives. These are one-word questions, which include: Who? What? Where? Why? When? How? The purpose of bombarding the text with these questions is not merely to formulate the best question but to find as many answers as possible.

Once these questions have been asked and all the relevant answers, which are immediately obvious, recorded, the student will need to look for links within the passage. These links are found by looking for seven factors:

- **Explanation:** Ask what is meant by what is being said? And why has it been said in this particular way.
- **Significance:** Ask what is important about the issue being raised to the original readers and what is important about the issue to present day life.

- **Relationship:** Ask how this issue is related to the issue which preceded it and how is it related to the issues dealt with after it.
- **Implication:** Ask what else would derive from the term or relationship referred to here.
- **Reason or cause:** Ask why the incident or issue referred to in the passage, happened. Look for cause and effect factors.
- **Motivation:** Ask why any individuals mentioned in the passage acted in the way they did. What extenuating factors influenced the decisions made?
- **Composition:** Ask why the author recorded these facts or events in the way he did.

The above questions will move the student onto a deeper level of study. No longer will one be seeing only the obvious. In order to dig deeper it is necessary to look again for six things:

- **Things which are emphasised:** The amount of space giving to a subject may reveal its importance. It may also be true that the author has listed items in order of importance.
- **Things which are repeated:** Repetition is generally used in the Bible to reveal strong emphasis and importance. The things repeated may be terms, clauses, phrases, names of individuals or characters. Parallels or patterns may also emerge highlighting importance.
- **Things that are related:** Here the student may see a movement from the general to the specific. Questions and answers may be used. Figures of speech should be identified and understood within the context of the passage.

- Things that are alike: Identify similes and metaphors used which imply comparisons.
- Things that are unlike: Conjunctions reveal changes and comparisons that may be drawn within a passage.
- Things that are true to life: Here the student will identify with the Biblical characters. While the circumstances under which they lived were dramatically different from the circumstances in which the student will find himself, the principle embodied within the text remains applicable to all students at all times. As one identifies with the Biblical characters, they become more real and relevant to him or her.

4.1.3. Mechanical rewrite of the book

A mechanical rewrite is the process of rearranging the text so that the grammatical structure is revealed. The purpose of this rewrite is to reveal not only what the text is saying but also how it is being said. This process ensures that the main idea is revealed for the purpose of exegesis.

The process is begun by writing the main statement of a paragraph against the left margin of the page. Each subsequent sentence or phrase is written on its own line. Subordinate clauses are written below the phrase in the preceding line to which they are linked. Coordinate clauses, which are revealed by the use of conjunctives e.g.: and, but, either, or, neither, nor, for, therefore, are usually regarded as main clauses but may be logically subordinate to another statement in the paragraph, in which case they would be written below the relevant paragraph. When lists of names, places, actions or events occur in a paragraph they are tabulated in the mechanical rewrite.

In this way the main emphasis of the passage is highlighted and it is possible to focus on the study of the major issues without becoming bogged down in the descriptions of the minor details. This becomes the working document on which observations are recorded and links are demonstrated. Examples of this exercise are found in appendix C of this thesis.

4.1.4. Synthesis of the book – Charting

Once the student has exhausted all the questions and found as many answers as possible within the text itself it is important to put the text into workable form. Here the student will synthesise the book in the form of a chart.

This chart will become a major working document and should contain all the major facts within the passage in a concise form.

A successful chart must be clear, brief, and relevant to the text, understandable, simple and neat. It needs to be a tool, which anyone could pick up, and obtain an accurate overview of the most important facts of the book.

4.1.5. Interpretation

Interpretation is the next step of the process. It is only at this point that the student begins to depend on the work done by other scholars. This study of external resources is used to verify what the student has in fact gleaned for himself from the passages being studied.

The purpose of interpretation is to determine what the author meant when he communicated with the people of his day and to determine what God means as He communicates with us today.

The process of interpretation is to ask firstly, what does this mean? It is necessary at this stage to use tools that will reveal the meanings of words, phrases and thoughts, as they were used by

the original author. Dictionaries, lexicons, expository dictionaries and concordances are useful tools. All word studies must be carefully conducted within the context of the passage and the maxim: “context determines meaning” must be strictly adhered to. The second step is to ask: Why is this said? This question will ultimately reveal the purpose or reason for the passage being written for the original readers and also why God intended for the passage to be in the Bible for readers today. In order to find this purpose it is necessary to do background study. Commentaries, dictionaries, books of history and an atlas will all be helpful tools. The third question that needs to be asked is ‘what principle does this teach?’ The ultimate goal of interpretation is to discover the timeless truth that God wishes to communicate to His church, irrespective of the period in history.

Once all these steps have been followed, the student can be sure that he has principles that he can implement in his life to ensure that he is being shaped into the Godly individual that God desires he become.

4.2. Exegesis of the book of Ecclesiastes

Having done all of the above, the exegesis of Ecclesiastes is to determine a true and accurate understanding of the message of the book in its context, so that what is applied in this study is in line with the author's intent.

4.2.1. Ecclesiastes Chapter 1

4.2.1.1. Introduction

In his introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes the author identified himself (Ecc. 1:1), stated his theme that everything is “futile” or “transitory”(Ecc. 1:2), and then he defended his theme in reference to the perpetual cycles of generations of mankind and the cycles in nature (Ecc. 1:3-11). Authors of other wisdom literature in the Old Testament identified their books as their own (e.g., Solomon in Proverbs 1:1; 30:1; 31:1; Solomon in Song of Songs 1:1; David in Psalm 3; 4; 5; 6; 19). So does the author of Ecclesiastes. The author identified himself only by his titles: “the Teacher”, the “son of David”, the “king in Jerusalem”(Ecc. 1:1). As has been shown in chapter one, these titles plus other information in the book strongly indicate that the author was Solomon. As a result of this substantiation, Solomon is quoted and referred to without dispute throughout the rest of this thesis. What must also be noted is that in Ecc. 12:11, Solomon claimed divine authority for Ecclesiastes when he said that these ‘words of the wise’ were given by “one Shepherd” who is God. This has also been discussed in chapter one, but it must be emphasised, for the author's approach to the exegesis and application of Ecclesiastes is based on this foundation.

4.2.1.2. The Futility Of All Human Endeavours (Ecc 1:2-3)

After identifying himself as the author, Solomon declared emphatically that everything was futile or “meaningless” (Ecc. 1:2). Five times in this one verse, he used (הבל) hebel, the Hebrew word for “meaningless” (NIV) or better still the more general meaning, “transitory”. Four of those times are in a twofold repetition of a Hebrew superlative construction (הבל הבלים) which the NIV renders “Meaningless! Meaningless” and “Utterly meaningless.” Glenn so aptly points out regarding the word ‘hebel’, that Solomon uses it as a ...:

“...metaphorical term throughout the book to refer to what is without real substance, value, permanence, significance, or meaning. Here at the outset he applied this to everything, by which he meant all human endeavours, as is obvious from verse 3 and his argument throughout the book” (Glenn, 1985:979).

This sets the focus of the whole book, as Solomon looks for lasting satisfaction and true meaning in life upon the earth. I believe he also uses this statement as a goad to spur the reader on to reaction, contemplation and conviction. From the human point of view, life does not at first appear futile, but after a while the monotony sets in and it is easy for people to become pessimistic when they do not find the lasting satisfaction they expect to find. This is purely from a human point of view without acknowledging God and His purpose in each situation. However, life is “not in vain” if it is lived according to the will of God, and that is what Solomon teaches in Ecclesiastes.

Solomon introduced his thesis of the futility of human effort with a rhetorical question: “What does man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun?” (Ecc. 1:3). This is a good question for it is one that seeks to determine meaningful purpose in man’s primary activity on earth. It is a question that needs to be asked regularly for it goads one to meaningful evaluation of the activities of one’s life. Being a rhetorical question, Solomon is expecting a

negative response, that it is impossible for human efforts to have permanent value. He demonstrated this in a poem on the ceaseless rounds of generations (Ecc. 1: 4) and of nature (Ecc. 1: 5-7), followed by a poetic conclusion that nothing on earth gives permanent satisfaction (Ecc. 1: 8-11).

4.2.1.3. The Evidence Of Ceaseless, Repetitious Rounds In Nature (Ecc 1:4-7)

Solomon referred to the ceaseless rounds of generations (Ecc. 1: 4) and of nature (Ecc. 1: 5-7) and from them he concluded that people's labour, like these ceaseless rounds, produce nothing that is permanent or totally satisfying (Ecc. 1: 8-11). The impermanence of man is seen in contrast with the earth, the realm of one's labour, which remains or literally "stands" forever. Every person is a transitory being and this is validated by affirming the coming and going generations. This is a shocking realization to most people for they know that they too will die and become part of this generation 'chain'. On the other hand this is a wonderful 'wake up call' to reality, so that one does not just drift through life and miss the God-given purpose in one's life.

The second fact Solomon cited is the ceaseless rounds of nature (Ecc. 1:5-7) which seem to illustrate the ineffectiveness of labour. What he is emphasising is that mere activity in and of itself produces nothing of ultimate value. The sun and the wind are in constant motion but never arrive at any fixed resting place. The streams continually flow to the sea, yet the sea is never full. Thus all the activity of nature is monotonous. He emphasises this monotony by using expressions such as "round and round" and "ever returning" (Ecc. 1:6). He highlights the wearisome nature of it all by describing the sun as "panting" from exhaustion as it hurries after setting to its point of rising each day, without effecting any progress or reaching any fixed goal.

4.2.1.4. The Evidence Of Ceaseless repetition Of Human Endeavours (Ecc. 1:8-11)

Solomon then argued that what is observable in the rounds of nature is also true of all human endeavours. Nothing that happens or is done is really new (Ecc. 1: 9). Things only appear new, because people do not remember former actions, events, and accomplishments (Ecc. 1:10-11). Solomon did not intend by this to deny human creativity but to deny the complete newness of people's nature and accomplishments. Glenn illustrates this, when he explains:

“For example, man's journey to the moon and the discovery of America, though different, were both explorations of distant places, involving adventure and risk. And the invention of dynamite and of the atomic bomb shared the element of discovering an “explosive.” (Glenn, 1985: 980)

This is significant in its application because people want to come up with unique finds and achievements that have significant and lasting effect on humanity. They also want to be recognised for those achievements. Furthermore, life is inextricably linked to meaning, purpose and achievement, and to feel that one's achievements are not really new and have no lasting value, only highlight one's fallibility. We are a small part of a great plan and purpose; we are not the determiner of it.

Solomon says in summary that what is true in the realm of nature in its constant repetition is true of the activity of people and emphasises that all things produce only weariness and lack of satisfaction (Ecc. 1: 8).

Having stated his thesis of the futility of human achievement, and illustrated it through the example of nature, Solomon now demonstrates it with factual proof (Ecc. 1:12-6:9). This long section is united by the repetition of the phrase “meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” (Ecc. 1:14,17; 2:11,17) This statement is seen near the end of each section. As a summary

statement of each of these sections it is Solomon's verdict on the value of human achievement (Ecc. 1:12-15), human wisdom (Ecc. 1:16-18; 2:12-17), pleasure seeking (Ecc. 2:1-11), and toil or labour (Ecc. 2:18-6:9).

4.2.1.5. Personal Investigation (Ecc. 1:12-15)

Solomon began his personal investigation into the value of human achievement. As the King of Israel (Ecc. 1:12) and aided by his superior wisdom and knowledge (Ecc. 1:13; cf. 1 Kings 4:26-34), he made a thorough investigation, through exploration and study, into all kinds of human activities "under the sun" (Ecc. 1:14). Thus the realm of his study was here on earth, under heaven.

He concluded that they are all "a heavy burden" or "a bad or unpleasant task" (Ecc. 1:13). The same expression is used in Ecc. 4:8 as, "a miserable business" and in Ecc. 5:14 as "some misfortune" and thus futile or without any lasting satisfaction. In fact, he says that they are as useless as chasing after the wind, which is a graphic picture of someone expending a lot of effort, with no results gained, since no one can catch the wind by running after it. Solomon used this phrase nine times, all in the first half of the book (Ecc. 1:14,17; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,6,16; 6:9).

Solomon based this verdict on his observations, which had shown him that human achievements leave much to be desired. Human effort and action cannot remedy all the irregularities or counteract all the deficiencies observable in the nature of things (Ecc. 1:14-15) (Glenn, 1985:981).

4.2.1.6. Personal Reflection (Ecc. 1:16-18)

Solomon also argued that when he reflected (Ecc. 1:17) on his superior wisdom and vast experience (Ecc. 1: 16) by means of which he had conducted the preceding investigation (cf. Ecc. 1: 13) and had reached his sombre conclusion, he realized that it held little real advantage over madness and folly (foolish ideas and pleasures) (Ecc. 2:2, 13-14).

4.2.1.7. Application of these Truths to Life Today

It is a sobering exercise for young people to look at life realistically and evaluate where they are in relation to it. People realize that they are not in control of all aspects of life. They are a small part of a very large system. This then causes them to examine what part they play and where they fit into this system. They must seek to understand their value or significance and what contribution they may make. Life is inextricably attached to meaning and people will look for this in their existence and in what is around them.

When one looks at the cyclic pattern of life and death it is a shock to realize that mankind is part of this pattern. There is a beginning and an end. For most young people the shock is realizing that they too will die some day. On the positive side this has a wonderful effect of making young people realize that they must take life seriously. They must also realize that life has an outcome. The question must be asked: “What will be the outcome of my life?” This in turn will cause young people to think about their purpose in life and their accountability in death and eternity.

A third application is seen in mankind’s desire to understand the world. As mankind is made in the image of God, there is a desire to understand the environment in which he or she lives. There will also be the desire to control his or her environment, or adapt to it.

A fourth application is that people have a desire for achievement. They also enjoy

discovering things. Many want to come up with unique finds and achievements that have significance and a lasting effect on humanity. Furthermore, they want to be recognised for those achievements. In this way it is seen that life is inextricably linked to meaning.

4.2.2. Ecclesiastes Chapter 2

4.2.2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, Solomon recorded three stages in his experiments as he searched for a satisfying meaning to life. There are Solomon's experiments with the pleasures of life, followed by his realization of death, which causes him to hate life, and finally he comes to an acceptance of life as God's gift to mankind.

Solomon took up the challenge to put pleasure to the test and he came to the conclusion that pleasure has little value (Ecc. 2:1b). This is an astounding statement because for the most part, people seek pleasure as one of the greatest goals in life. This is especially true of young people who are discovering interesting and stimulating aspects of life during their stages of puberty and adolescence. Wiersbe is quite correct when he says:

“Today's world is pleasure-mad. Millions of people will pay almost any amount of money to “buy experiences” and temporarily escape the burdens of life. While there is nothing wrong with innocent fun, the person who builds his or her life only on seeking pleasure is bound to be disappointed in the end.” (Wiersbe, 1990:34)

King Solomon, in his search for “the good life,” examined everything from the noble to the absurd. He experimented with one thing after another; always applying the wisdom that God had given him (Ecc. 2: 3, 9). His quest was to find something good or worthwhile for men to do in the pleasures of life.

No sooner does he introduce the challenge of testing ‘pleasure’ to find out what is good, than he gives his conclusion that it was “futile” or “transitory” (the Hebrew word, “hebel”), because it was foolish and accomplished little or nothing of ultimate value. His question; “and what does pleasure accomplish?” (Ecc. 1:3) is again rhetorical, expecting a negative answer.

(Glenn, 1985: 980). This statement would cause the readers, who pursue worldly pleasure, to respond with amazement and with bewildering questions. Again, Solomon is using his Goad and Nail method to prod one to critical thinking before he gives the evidence and proof of his conclusion in Ecc. 2:11. He experimented with pleasure to determine its real value. This is something that most people do not do, for pleasure is simply to be taken and enjoyed. Most people would ask regarding pleasure; “How can it be anything but worthwhile”? What is interesting is that here the same Hebrew word for ‘worthwhile’ and ‘good’ is used, in respect to what people do (Ecc. 2:1, 2:3). This means that if it is not worthwhile it is not good and visa versa.

Solomon’s quest and experimentation to find what was worthwhile to do, was done deliberately and with caution, not blindly or in uncontrolled excess, for he says, “my mind still guiding me with wisdom.” (Ecc. 2:3, 2:9b). This experimentation included sensual indulgence in the form of trying to cheer himself with wine and with embracing a frivolous lifestyle. He wanted to test the effects of pleasure seeking and frivolity to see for himself if they were really worthwhile. Thus to have integrity in his experiment and subsequent conclusion, he could not lose control, but had to have his mind guiding him with wisdom. This is a real problem with Youth today especially in the areas of experimentation with alcohol and drugs. They are not cautious as Solomon was and as a result become dependent on these substances out of the sheer enjoyment of them, with devastating results.

What did Solomon do that was so pleasurable? These may be divided into three areas, namely; creative pleasures, sensual pleasures and esteem pleasures.

His creative pleasures included establishing magnificent buildings and vineyards (Ecc. 2:4; 1 Kings 7:1-11), elaborate gardens and parks (Ecc. 2:5) filled with trees (Ecc. 2: 5-6). His sensual pleasures included establishing a great entourage of slaves (Ecc. 2:7; 1 Kings 10:5) who were available to serve him, musicians to meet his tasteful needs, and a large harem (Ecc. 2:8; 1

Kings 11:1-3) to satisfy his fleshly desires. Moreover, his esteem pleasures included the development of his vast wealth that included his great herds and flocks (Ecc. 2:7) and his great treasures of silver and gold (Ecc. 2:8; 1 Kings 10:14-15, 27) with which he could buy anything his heart desired and indulge in every pleasure (Ecc. 2:10).

4.2.2.2. Solomon Tested His Heart with the Pleasures of Life (Ecc. 2:1–11)

Solomon had the means and the authority to do almost anything his heart desired. He says: “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure” (Ecc. 2:10). He decided to test his own heart to see how he would respond to two very common experiences of life: enjoyment (Ecc. 2:1–3) and achievement or accomplishment (Ecc. 2:4–11). This is significant because as the richest and most powerful man who had ever lived in Jerusalem (Ecc. 2:9; 1 Kings 10), he had the power and means to cover the broadest extent of such an investigation. There seems to be no limits to the extent of his research and thus his conclusions must be conclusive and convincing. This is so because of the combination of such factors as great wisdom, limitless power, privilege and freedom coupled with extreme wealth. Solomon could virtually do as he liked and then draw up his conclusions. What is so significant, however, is that he wrote this book under the inspiration of God (Ecc. 12:11), and so the lesson becomes authoritative.

4.2.2.2.1. Pleasure and Enjoyment (Ecc. 2:1–3)

The Jewish people believed that God made man to enjoy the splendour and provisions of His creation (Ps.104). The harvest season was a joyful time for them as they recognised God’s provision in their labour. Enjoyment was certainly not a strange concept to Solomon. In the conclusion of Ecclesiastes, Solomon admonished his readers to enjoy God’s blessings during the years of their Youth, before old age arrived and they no longer found pleasure in life because of

the demise of their bodies (Ecc. 12:1-7).

Eight times in Ecclesiastes, Solomon used the Hebrew word meaning “pleasure.” It is quite clear that he did not consider God a “heavenly spoilsport” who made certain nobody was having a good time. Often young people perceive God in this light because there are many restrictions in Scripture regarding conduct which God has determined is wrong and sinful.

4.2.2.2.2. Sensual Pleasures (Ecc. 2:2-3)

Solomon specifically mentioned wine and laughter as two sources of pleasure used in his experiment. King Solomon is described as having lived a lavish life in his banquet hall (1 Kings 10:21), eating choice food (1 Kings 4:22–23), drinking the very best wine, and being entertained (Ecc. 2:8b). But when the party was over and he examined his heart, it was still dissatisfied and empty. Pleasure and laughter were only transitory (hebel), like soap bubbles that quickly burst and leave nothing behind. This is consistent with his understanding for he wrote in Proverbs, “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief.” (14:13, NIV)

4.2.2.2.3. Creative Pleasures, Achievement and Accomplishment (Ecc. 2:4–6).

Next, Solomon became involved in all kinds of projects, hoping to discover something that would make life worth living. He started with great works (2:4–6), including houses (1 Kings 7), cities (2 Chron. 8:4–6), gardens, vineyards, orchards and forests (1 Kings 4:33), and the water systems needed to service them. In addition, Solomon also supervised the construction of the temple (1 Kings 5), one of the greatest buildings of the ancient world.

4.2.2.2.4. Esteem Pleasures. (Ecc. 2:7-8)

He not only had the sense of achievement and accomplishment in what he established, but he also had slaves (7a). He had two kinds of slaves: those he purchased and those born in his household. This gave him a sense of prestige and importance which is a rare kind of pleasure that mankind enjoys. The author of this thesis is not advocating slavery, but in Solomon's day it was considered a symbol of wealth. Besides this, Solomon accumulated wealth (7b-8a), in flocks and herds (1 Kings 8:63) as well as gold and silver (1 Kings 4:21 and I Kings 10). He was the wealthiest and wisest man living at that time, and yet, as he himself says, he was unhappy because activity alone does not bring lasting pleasure. There is a lesson in this for people today and especially for Youth as they aspire to these levels thinking that this will bring ultimate happiness.

4.2.2.3. Solomon Considered Wisdom and Folly in the Certainty of Death (Ecc.2: 12–23)

“Then I turned my thoughts to consider”(Ecc. 2:12), simply means that Solomon considered things from another viewpoint. What he did was to look at his wisdom (Ecc. 2:12–17) and his wealth (Ecc. 2:18–23) in light of the certainty of death. What good is it to be wise and wealthy if you are going to die and leave everything behind?

The certainty of death is a topic Solomon frequently mentioned in Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 1:4; 2:14–17; 3:18–20; 5:15–16; 6:6; 8:8; 9:2–3, 12; 12:7–8). Death is one of the obvious facts of life and it is a major goad in people's lives to reconsider their conduct in the light of eternity and their accountability to God. My conviction is this; only a person who has considered death and is in a righteous relationship with God through Jesus Christ is truly prepared to die.

4.2.2.3.1. He considered wisdom with reservations (Ecc. 2:12–17)

In spite of the fact that all men must die, wisdom is still better than folly. He concluded that there was indeed some advantage to wisdom. It is “better,” which is translated from the Hebrew word *‘yitron’*, often translated as “gain,” and refers to something excelling over something else. Wisdom and Folly are as different as night and day. The wise man sees that death is coming and takes the necessary precautions, while the fool walks in ignorance and is caught unprepared.

Being prepared for death, however, does not necessarily relieve one of one’s burden about life for it takes a person a long time to learn how to live, and then life ends. Where this does play an important part is in the quality of life one may have. Solomon carries on to say that both the wise man and the fool die, and both the wise man and the fool are forgotten (Ecc. 2: 16). This is true, for while Solomon’s fame has remained, having been recorded in Scripture (1 Kings 4:29–34; Matt. 6:28–30), most “famous” people who have died, are rarely mentioned, although their biographies are found in the encyclopaedias. Their names and achievements are remembered but the real person is not remembered.

Life seemed irrational and futile to Solomon, and yet it was still better than death. A better understanding of this statement would be, that Solomon found life repugnant or distasteful and therefore he was disgusted with life! “So I hated life!” concluded Solomon (Ecc. 2:17). He said he “hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous” to him (Ecc. 2:17). The word translated “grievous” is the antonym for the word translated “good” or “worthwhile” in Ecc. 2:1,3. (Glenn, 1985:982). This is significant because it brings out the contrasts of Solomon’s study and emphasises its breadth and conclusions. He had set out to find what was ‘good’ or ‘worthwhile’ to do (Ecc. 2:1).

4.2.2.3.2. He Considered His Wealth With Disgust (Ecc. 2:18–23).

Not only did Solomon hate life, he also hated the wealth and achievements for which he had toiled. He gave three reasons why he was disgusted with wealth.

Firstly, no one can keep his or her wealth forever (2:18). When one dies all is left behind. Solomon realised that one day he too would die and leave everything behind. What is more, his successor may be wise or foolish in the handling of his newfound wealth. Wiersbe quite aptly says:

“Money is a medium of exchange. Unless it is spent, it can do little or nothing for you. You can’t eat money, but you can use it to buy food. It will not keep you warm, but it will purchase fuel. A writer in *The Wall Street Journal* called money “an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider of everything except happiness”.” (Wiersbe, 1990:39).

An important truth to note here is that people who know and serve God are only stewards of their wealth, God is the Provider (Deut. 8:18) and the Owner (Psalm 24:1), and people have the privilege of enjoying it and using it for His glory. One day each one will have to give an account to Him of what they have done with His provision (2 Cor. 5:10).

Secondly, no individual can control his wealth once he has died (Ecc. 2:19–20). Solomon realised that one day he too would die and leave everything behind. In that instance one has no control over how it will be valued, used or abused. Here too there is a sense of disillusionment for what one toiled to gain and preserve may be squandered without much thought or sense of appreciation. It is sad to have to leave one’s wealth behind, but even worse that it might be left to somebody who will waste it. This is difficult to accept for the one who has worked hard to accumulate the wealth in the first place. Suppose the heir is a fool and tears down everything that has been built up? Solomon didn’t know it at the time, but his son Rehoboam would do that very

thing (1 Kings 11:41–12:24).

Thirdly, people do not necessarily enjoy their wealth in the way they should (Ecc. 2:21–23). Once wealth is gained, people try to protect it so that they can have the security and enjoyment of it. Often people end up worrying about what will happen to it, and in that way they are robbed of peace and it makes their lives miserable. They toil to get the wealth in the first place and then leave the wealth to somebody who didn't even work for it (Ecc. 2:21). On top of this there is the worry and many sleepless nights, yet their heirs never experience any of this. It all seems so futile. Thus Solomon says, "What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labours under the sun?" (Ecc. 2:22).

At this point, Solomon seems to be very pessimistic, but he doesn't stay that way very long. In the third stage of his investigation he comes to accept life, realising that it is a gift from God and that He is in control of all aspects of it.

4.2.2.4. Solomon Accepted Life As A Gift From God (Ecc. 2:24–26)

This is the first of six "conclusions" that Solomon comes to in the book of Ecclesiastes as he investigates life. Each conclusion emphasizes the importance of accepting life as God's gift to mankind and enjoying it within God's will. The other conclusions are found in Ecc 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:9–10. In conclusion, at the end of each argument, he will say, "Enjoy life and be thankful to God!" Solomon is not advocating, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." That is the philosophy of fatalism and hedonism, not faith. Rather, what he is advocating is to eat, drink and be merry, for life is a gift of God and must be enjoyed to the glory of God (Ecc 2:24–25). Solomon made it clear that not only were the provisions from God, but even the enjoyment of those provisions were from God (Ecc. 2: 24). Solomon considered it "evil" if a person had all the blessings of life from God but could not enjoy them. Thus he states:

“I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: God gives a man wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them ...” (Ecc. 6:1–2).

4.2.2.5. Conclusion

The thrust of this first section of Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 1:4–2:23) deals with the realistic problem of life “under the sun,” that is, only from the human point of view. It is interesting to note that God is not mentioned at all in this section. Solomon has presented four arguments that seem to prove that life is really not worth living: the monotony of life (Ecc. 1:4–11), the vanity of wisdom (Ecc. 1:12–18), the futility of wealth (Ecc. 2:1–11), and the certainty of death (Ecc. 2:12–23). His argument appears to be true if one simply looks at life from a human point of view. But when God is brought into the picture, everything changes. Life and death, wisdom and wealth, are all in God’s hands; He wants one to enjoy His provisions and respect Him in all of it.

4.2.2.6. Application of these Truths to Youth Today

There can be, and usually is, a great sense of pleasure in accomplishing great projects. The important question is: “What happens when the task is finished?” Solomon took delight in all his labour (Ecc. 2:10); but afterward, when he considered all his works, he saw that his pleasure was transitory and did not bring lasting satisfaction (Ecc. 2:11). It is often the case that the experience does not live up to the expectation. This sense of emptiness and frustration comes from unrealised expectations. This is especially true when one has built up one’s expectation in a sense of total fulfilment but they are not fulfilled. Wiersbe explains:

“The journey was a pleasure, but the destination brought pain. “Success is full of promise until men get it,” said the American preacher Henry Ward Beecher, “and then it is a last-year’s nest from which the birds have flown”” (Wiersbe, 1989: 36).

In application, many a young person may question how pleasure could possibly be wrong when they live in a world where pleasure is encouraged.

Firstly, pleasure-seeking usually becomes a selfish endeavour; and selfishness destroys true joy. People who live for pleasure often exploit others to get what they want, and they end up with broken relationships as well as disillusionment. People are more important than things, thrills and personal achievements.

Secondly, pleasure seeking leads to a discontentment with what one has. Perhaps many of the king's servants envied Solomon and wished to change places with him, but the king's life was not a 'utopia' and in fact, as he himself states, he was unhappy. If one lives for pleasure alone, enjoyment will decrease unless the intensity of the pleasure increases. This is called "the law of diminishing returns." One reaches a point of diminishing returns when there is little or no enjoyment at all, only bondage. An example is seen in people who imbibe alcohol. The more they drink, the less enjoyment they get out of it. This means they must have more drinks and stronger drinks in order to have pleasure; the sad result is desire without satisfaction. Instead of alcohol, substitute drugs, gambling, sex, money, fame, or any other pursuit, and the principle will hold true: when pleasure alone is the centre of life, the result will ultimately be disappointment and emptiness. This is a vital concern regarding Youth in most societies around the world today. It is of great and grave concern in our society here in Gauteng, South Africa.

There is a third reason why pleasure alone can never bring satisfaction: it appeals to only part of the person and ignores the total being, consisting of physical, emotional and spiritual entities. So often an illicit physical and emotional thrill leaves one feeling guilty and without peace, thus totally diminishing the pleasure of the experience. This is the major difference between shallow "entertainment" and true "enjoyment," for when the whole person is involved, there will be both enjoyment and enrichment. Entertainment has its place, but one must keep in mind that it only helps him or her to escape the hardships of life temporarily. True pleasure not

only brings delight, but it also builds character by enriching the total person without the sense of fear or dread in ultimately having to account to God for what one has done.

The question may be asked; “What is the value of wisdom since both the wise and the fool will die?” This may be the very question a young person would ask today and I believe it is another one of Solomon’s goads to spur one on to sober thinking. For one thing, the older generation can leave their wisdom for the guidance of the next generation. The big question is, will it be valued and followed? No parents want their children to make the same painful and devastating mistakes they have made.

Solomon asks, “What more can the king’s successor do than has already been done?” (Ecc. 2:12). This suggests that it is foolish for following generations to go through the same experiences and make the same mistakes when they can learn from their forefathers. The sadness is that this does happen. This is the very call and appeal that the author of this thesis is making. Here is a man who had all the necessary facilities and faculties to examine life thoroughly. He did that and came to the conclusions which we have in this book of Ecclesiastes. If people would apply these conclusions to life they would save themselves many disillusionments about life and save themselves from wasting their lives. Why go and make all the same mistakes that Solomon did and then have to bear the consequences? Life is too short and too valuable to follow that path. Thus the plea to heed what Solomon has to say about the choices that must be made in life.

Some great men of the Bible have wanted to die: such as Job (Job 3:21–7:15), Moses (Num. 11:15), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), and Jonah (Jonah 4:3). All of these men changed their minds in the end. Some young people, however, do seriously consider suicide and some do commit suicide. This is because they are disillusioned to the point that they feel there is no hope in their situation. Solomon speaks the same sort of ‘language’ as these disillusioned Youth, and these similar thoughts, and the identification of such frustration, act as a goad to grasp their attention. Then, as they read his argument and conclusions, they may develop hope and

convictions that come from seeing God's purpose and control.

The most important thing in life is to please the Lord and trust Him for one's provision. Solomon stated that God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness to the person who pleases Him. These three gifts enable one to appreciate God's blessings and take pleasure in them. In contrast to this, however, the sinner may heap up all kinds of riches, but he or she can never truly enjoy them because he has left God out of his life. In fact, his riches may finally end up going to the righteous. This is an astonishing concept and another of Solomon's goads to spur one on to sober thinking about possessions and accountability to God.

“To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God” (Ecc. 2:26).

This is not always the case, but God does make it happen that “the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22). Wiersbe notes:

“Apart from God, there can be no true enjoyment of blessings or enrichment of life. It is good to have the things that money can buy, provided you don't lose the things that money can't buy” (Wiersbe, 1990:41).

I agree with Wiersbe here, for if God is the giver of life and the One Who allows people to enjoy life, then surely He must be acknowledged and respected in all of this, failing which, He has the prerogative to remove His provision and the enjoyment thereof. Young people seek pleasure as one of the greatest goals in life but this is hollow for it does not bring lasting satisfaction nor does it develop maturity in one's character.

4.2.3. Ecclesiastes Chapter 3

4.2.3.1. Introduction

Solomon's first argument was that life was so monotonous with its repetitive cycles in nature. He emphasised that the earth was permanent but man was transitory (Ecc. 1:4–11). Now in Ecclesiastes 3:1–5:9 he examined this monotony. He discovered three aspects of life in chapter 3 that must be considered to understand fully this pattern in God's great plan and purpose. Once understood it would cause one to re-evaluate if life really is meaningless within the realm of time and purpose.

- He observed times and seasons and a sovereign God who was in control of those times and experiences of life (Ecc. 3:1–8).
- Then he observed time and eternity that linked man to God, Who has set eternity in his heart (Ecc. 3:9–14).
- Thirdly, Solomon observed a sad time and the inevitable certainty of death (Ecc. 3:15–22).

Men and women are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and as a result they have intellect, emotion and will. People have histories that are unique, and no two life stories are the same. Each person is unique in shape, colouring, personality, character, desires, hopes and purpose. In spite of this, each person is important and his 'personhood' must be respected because God says so in Genesis 9:5-6. People are accountable to God in life and they are finally accountable to Him in death (Hebrews 9:27). Warren Wiersbe comments appropriately when he says:

“If we as individuals are not unique, then we are not important; if we are not important, then life has no meaning. If life has no meaning, life isn’t worth living. We might as well follow the philosophy: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (Wiersbe, 1990:43-4)

The latter part of this statement is a hedonistic philosophy, which focuses only on the pleasures of life on earth and ignores accountability to God, both now and when one dies. Wiersbe is quite right in what he says, for, if our value as people comes from God, and we are accountable to Him at the end, we cannot ignore honouring Him in the way we live.

God has ordained certain “natural laws,” which are dependable and thus daily life has a routine and foundation of reliability. Without this, life would be utterly unpredictable and impossible. Not only are there times and seasons in this world, but there is also God’s sovereign control in our lives. He protects us and provides for us, even though we may not always fully understand what He is doing. We get this assurance from God making everything “beautiful in His time” (Ecc. 3:11). This applies even to the most difficult experiences of life. If we cooperate with God’s timing, and trust in His good purpose, life will not be meaningless.

In fourteen statements, Solomon affirmed that God is at work in all circumstances and individuals’ lives, seeking to accomplish His will. All of these events come from God and they are good in their time. Glenn points out that:

“By the word “activity” Solomon meant people’s deliberate, wilful acts. The Hebrew word for “activity,” always used of people, literally means “desire,” and then by metonymy “what one desires”. For these wilful acts people are held accountable (Ecc. 3:17). Each activity, wrote Solomon, has its proper “time” (point in time) and season (duration)” (Glenn 1985:983).

On the other hand, Loader explains that these activities are not a prescription of what people ought to do, but they are simply situations in which they find themselves. (Loader, 1986:34). This is an accurate assessment of the passage in its context.

4.2.3.2. “Times And Seasons” and God’s Sovereign Control (Ecc. 3:1–8)

Times and seasons are a regular part of life, no matter where you live. Solomon tells us that God orders time. “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecc. 3:1).

The list begins with a reference to the beginning and end of a person’s life (Ecc. 3:2), two events over which he has no control. Solomon continued by referring to the deliberate acts of one who begins and ends vegetable life in “a time to plant and a time to uproot” (Ecc. 3:2). He then takes and saves human life (Ecc. 3:3), and constructs and destroys buildings (Ecc. 3:5). Perhaps all these are suggested by the concept of birth and death in the realm of human living.

Birth and death are the first couplet that Solomon mentions (Ecc. 3:2). Today’s activities such as abortion, birth control, euthanasia (mercy killing), and surrogate parenthood make it look as though man is in control of birth and death, but Solomon said they are divine appointments, for God is in control. This is supported elsewhere in Scripture (See: Gen. 29:31–30:24 and 33:5; Josh. 24:3; 1 Sam. 1:9–20; Ps. 113:9 and 127; Jer. 1:4–5; Luke 1:5–25; Gal. 1:15 and 4:4.)

Psalms 139:13–16 states that God has woven people together in the womb so that their genetic structure is perfectly in accordance with what He wanted. This highlights His purpose for their lives and as a result their accountability to Him. One may foolishly hasten one’s death through suicide or euthanasia, but no one can prevent death when his or her time comes, unless God so wills it. The Psalmist says: “All the days ordained for me were written in your book” (Ps. 139:16, NIV). Life and death are ultimately in God’s control.

Planting and uprooting are the second couplet that Solomon announces (Ecc. 3:2). This was a common practice for the Jews since they were an agricultural people who appreciated the seasons. Even their religious calendar was based on the agricultural year (Lev. 23). While men may plough and sow, it is only God who gives the increase (Ps. 65:9–13). This is very important

to realise, for in the same way as no one can do farming independently of God and His provision in nature, so no one can live a fulfilled life apart from God and His purpose. “Uprooting” may refer either to reaping or to pulling up unproductive plants. Wiersbe confirms this idea when he points out that:

“A successful farmer knows that nature works for him only if he works with nature. This is also the secret of a successful life: learn God’s principles and cooperate with them.” (Wiersbe, 1985:45)

Solomon then deals with the difficult events of killing and healing (3:3). This is more likely a reference to what man does to plants and animals in the regular course of sustaining his own life. This is a further development on the previous couplet of planting and uprooting and fits the context well. However, Kaiser indicates that this could also refer to the condemnation of murderers by the state in the death penalty, which would be in accordance with God’s plan. He explains this view, by saying:

“... such action against murderers is favoured in Scripture not because men are sovereign or because society and the bereaved are somehow benefited, but because man is so vastly important to God - he is made in the image of God [Gen 9:6]. To kill another person is to kill God in effigy. Thus the only alternative that the state, God’s duly authorised agent in such a case, has is to show respect for God and the image of God in man by taking the murderer’s life” (Kaiser, 1979:63-64).

Kaiser certainly has a point in the much debated, moral topic of the death penalty, and this is something that people wrestle with in trying to understand just retribution in the enigmas of life. Nevertheless there are emotions attached to every event and Solomon also wrote of the human responses to those events. People experience weeping and mourning in the event of killing and death, and on the other hand there is the joy of laughing and dancing in the event of healing. This is the description of two opposite activities and the consequent emotions that follow

two activities by which joy is expressed (Ecc. 3:4).

Casting away and gathering stones was a popular topic in early Palestine (Ecc. 3:5). Palestine is indeed a rocky land and farmers must clear their fields before they can plough and plant. There are accounts of people hurting their enemies by scattering stones on their fields (2 Kings 3:19, 25). People also gathered stones for building walls and houses and this is the best understanding of the phrase as it refers to the gathering and rejecting of building materials. This relates these opposites both to the idea of building and to the thought of keeping and throwing away (Ecc. 3:3, 6). J. A. Loader brings out another interpretation of this passage which he says does justice to the context. He has outlined a very elaborate X- pattern or chiasmic structure for this poem in verses two to nine. He explains:

“There is an age-old Jewish interpretation of the book that correctly reports that ‘casting away stones’ refers to sexual intercourse. Gathering stones then means that a man abstains from intercourse with a woman. In each instance the imagery is clear [cf. “the time for making love and the time for not making love,” TEV]. Corresponding to this meaning is mention in the next line of the embrace, which is used as a tone down expression of the same thing (which in fact was the case in the near East). So the parallelism between the two lines of a verse, a parallelism maintained throughout the poem, is kept. It would have been odd if it had not been.” (Loader, 1986:36)

Embracing and refraining from embracing has always been and is a common activity in human experience (Ecc. 3:5). People in the Near East openly showed their affections by kissing and hugging when they met and when they parted. It could be paraphrased: “A time to say hello and a time to say good-bye.” This might also refer to the relationship of a husband and wife. This is a very natural part of life and yet it is filled with great emotion. Again it brings out the emphasis on both sides of a normal human occurrence in life.

Solomon then talks about: “A time to search and a time to give it up.” (Ecc. 3:6). He wrote about searching for a thing or giving it up as lost and about keeping a thing or throwing it

away. All the opposites in verses 5-6 seem to involve man's interest in things or affection for persons. This is a very common occurrence in life and it brings a person to realise that he is living in an imperfect world where things are lost and he is not all knowing but must trust God for His provision and protection.

Tearing and mending was Solomon's next topic of comparison (Ecc. 3:7). This probably refers to the Jewish practice of tearing one's garments during a time of grief or repentance (2 Sam. 13:31; Ezra 9:5). God expects us to sorrow during bereavement, but there comes a time when we work through that sadness and we must get out the needle and thread and start sewing things up! This is a very difficult and painful activity in life and yet it is one that most people face and not only once. Coping with, and making a healthy adjustment to, bereavement is one of the most important challenges in life.

Loving and hating are the most common and strongest human emotions (Ecc. 3:8). Are God's people permitted to hate? Scripture certainly tells the people of God to "hate what is evil and cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9). This is supported by Psalm 97:10 and expanded in Prov. 6:16-19 where Solomon outlines six sinful things that God hates.

Solomon closed his list of couplets by referring to these basic emotions, love and hate, and the most hostile expression of the latter, war, and its opposite, peace. It is significant that the list closes, as it began, with a set of opposites over which a person has little control. Life and death, war and peace, are beyond the control of the individual, and yet they are the part of life we have to face. Loader supports this view as he explains:

"This then is what human life looks like. On the one side is the pole of life and well-being (F - *favourable*) and on the other the pole of death and loss (U - *unfavourable*). Just as the poem continually moves like a shuttle from one extreme to another, so the contrasting occasions of life simply befall the people who are subject to them. The Preacher does not advise the reader how people can leap, as it were, from one favourable occasion to the other. And so he ends with a question to which he

expects a negative answer: the worker does not profit from all his labour because favourable and unfavourable occasions come over him as a result of fate, quite regardless of his wisdom. ... No matter how advanced the development of human capacities, science and technology may be, man cannot guarantee his own happiness.” (Loader, 1986: 37-8)

These are the realities of life. Events do not remain static and they are not always pleasant. There are contrasts, beginnings and endings to activities from which people learn and grow. All must experience these things in life for God has a good plan and purpose in it all.

Wiersbe summarizes this section by saying:

“Life is something like a doctor’s prescription: taken alone, the ingredients might kill you; but properly blended, they bring healing. God is sovereignly in control and has a time and a purpose for everything (Rom. 8:28). This is not fatalism, nor does it rob us of freedom or responsibility. It is the wise providence of a loving Father, Who does all things well and promises to make everything work for good.” (Wiersbe, 1985: 47)

This is an apt summary of this section of Ecclesiastes as we face the confusing realities of life and so desperately need perspective and understanding in it all. Suffice to say we do not always understand and yet we can face these realities with the assurance that God is in control and furthermore has a good purpose in it all. This is explained in the next section of Solomon’s argument.

4.2.3.3. Time and Eternity that Links Man to God (Ecc. 3:9–14)

Solomon changed his perspective at this point and no longer looked at life only “under the sun.” He brought God into the picture and this gave him a new perspective. In Ecc 3:9, he goes back to deal with the opening question posed in Ecc 1:3, “Is all this labour really worth it?” Again he uses the word profit or gain (yitron), as he seeks for true meaning and purpose in one’s labour

and toil. This is another reminder of Solomon's honest and thorough investigation into the essence of life. With his new perspective and in the light of "new evidence," Solomon gave three answers to the question.

Firstly, Solomon says that life is a gift from God and He makes everything beautiful or appropriate in its time" (Ecc. 3:10). As we experience pain, difficulties and confusion in daily living it may seem strange to say that life is a gift, but Scripture says that it is God's gift to us (Job 12:10, 14:5). We are confused and struggle to try and explain life's enigmas, but we don't always succeed. If we believe and accept life as God's gift, and understand that He has the power and goodness to work out His appropriate plan in it all, we will have a better attitude toward our difficulties and pain. If we grudgingly accept life as a burden, then we will miss the gifts that come our way. The common saying that "outlook helps to determine outcome" is true.

Secondly, man's life is linked to eternity, because God has put eternity in the hearts of men (Ecc. 3:11). Man was created in the image of God, and therefore he is different from the rest of creation. God also gave him the authority to rule over creation (Gen. 1:26–28). Furthermore, God having placed "eternity in his heart" gave man an understanding and desire for that which is perfect and eternal while he lived here in a sinful, fallen world. This would explain why nobody, including Solomon, who had everything, could be satisfied with his or her endeavours and achievements. It also helps to explain the enigmas of life (Ecc. 1:12–2:11), in that one longs for the ultimate but never reaches it this side of heaven. God accomplishes His purposes in His time, but it will not be until we enter eternity that we will comprehend His total plan (1 Cor. 13:12).

Thirdly, although man cannot fathom out the works of God from "beginning to end" that is, they cannot know the sovereign, eternal plan of God (Ecc. 3:11), life can be enjoyable now (Ecc. 3:12–14). Solomon mentioned this in Ecc 2:24 and was careful to say that this enjoyment of life is the gift of God (Ecc 3:13, 6:2). "The enjoyment of life" is an important theme in Ecclesiastes. Ginsburg points out that Ecc. 3:13 is a conditional sentence and correctly renders it

according to the Hebrew expression:

“If any man eats and drinks and finds satisfaction in all his toil, it is a gift of God” (Ginsburg, 1970:311-2).

He is right, for true satisfaction is not the result of man’s own ingenuity or good luck but ultimately God’s gift. The proper attitude for mankind is the fear of the Lord (3:14), which is not the cringing of a slave before a cruel master, but the submission of an obedient child to a loving parent. This theme is repeated as the true perspective in life, and it forms the thrust of Solomon’s argument in Ecclesiastes (5:7, 7:18, 8:12–13, and 12:13.) If one fears God, one need not fear anything else, for He is in control.

4.2.3.4. Time and the Inevitable Certainty of Death (Ecc. 3:15–22)

Solomon already mentioned the certainty of death in Ecc. 2:12–23, and he will deal with this subject several times throughout the rest of the book (Ecc. 4:8; 5:15–16; 6:6; 8:8; 9:2–3, 12; 12:7–8). Life, death, time and eternity are the vital building blocks that make up mankind’s existence in this world, and they must not be ignored. All individuals must at some stage, look ahead in their lives and realise that death is coming to all. Once this realisation is grasped the question must be asked: “What then?” This will cause people to realise that they have accountability beyond that of themselves and unto God.

Solomon added a new thought here: “... and God will call the past to account” (Ecc. 3:15). God keeps track of it and will, at the end of time, call into account what has been done in each individual’s lifetime (Ecc. 12:14). This ties in with verses 16–17 where Solomon witnessed the injustices of his day and wondered why divine judgment was delayed. How can God be in control when there is so much evil in our world, with the wicked prospering in their sin and the righteous suffering in their obedience? Solomon was not the first to raise that question,

and surely he will not be the last, for this is a continual enigma and question in life. However, he comforted himself with two assurances: God has a time for everything, including judgment (Ecc 8:6, 11); and God is working out His eternal purposes in and through the deeds of men, including the deeds of the wicked.

The assurance is given that God will judge when history has run its course. Solomon also gives the assurance that God is judging now (Ecc. 3:18). In his experiences of life and throughout his life, God is testing man. The Hebrew word means “to sift, to winnow.” God is revealing what man is really like; He is sifting man. For, when man leaves God out of his life, he becomes like an animal (See Ps. 32:9; Prov. 7; 2 Peter 2:19–20.). He lives like a beast and dies like a beast.

Solomon pointed out that men and beasts have two things in common: they both die and their bodies return to the dust (Gen. 2:7; 3:19). Being made in the image of God, man has a definite advantage over animals as far as life is concerned. The Bible says that death occurs when the spirit leaves the body (James 2:26, Gen. 35:18, Luke 8:55). In verse 21, Solomon indicates that men and animals do not have the same experience at death, even though they both turn to dust after death. Man’s spirit goes to God (Ecc. 12:7), while the spirit of a beast simply ceases to exist. One finds a similar contrast expressed in Psalm 49.

4.2.3.5. Conclusion

Solomon closed this section by reminding us again to accept life from God’s hand and enjoy it while we can (Ecc. 3:22). Nobody knows what the future holds; and even if we did know, we can’t return to life after we have died and start to enjoy it again (Ecc. 6:12, 7:14, 9:3.). Knowing that God is in sovereign control of life (Ecc. 3:1), we can submit to Him and be at peace. How can life be meaningless and monotonous for a person when God has made that person a part of His eternal plan? People are not insignificant insects, crawling towards annihilation.

“Faith learns to live with seeming inconsistencies and absurdities, for we live by promises and not by explanations. We can’t explain life, but we must experience life, either enduring it or enjoying it. Solomon calls us to accept life, enjoy it a day at a time, and be satisfied. We must never be satisfied with ourselves, but we must be satisfied with what God gives to us in this life” (Wiersbe, 1990:51).

4.2.3.6. Application of these Principles to Youth Today

In summary, Solomon affirms that human labour is without profit because people are ignorant of God’s eternal plan. Their entire focus is on the here and now, longing for the total fulfilment and satisfaction which God will only give in eternity. Life appears to be transitory, but whatever God does is forever, so when one lives for Him and lets Him have His way, life is meaningful and manageable. Solomon is not encouraging pagan hedonism, but rather the practice of enjoying God’s gifts, no matter how difficult life may be. Instead of complaining about what one does not have, one should enjoy what God has given and thank Him for it.

The verses in Ecc3: 15-22 give one the confidence that God is in control of life. The past does seem to repeat itself. God can, however, interrupt history and do what He pleases. His many miracles are evidence of this. A miracle is something that defies the laws of nature. This cycle in life is a pattern of life but God is able to overrule it. This is seen in the fact that Jesus came into the world and human life through a miraculous birth that defied the laws of nature. He died on a cross and rose again, defying the laws of nature. He thus conquered death and therefore He can make us a part of a new creation that overcomes death and lasts for all eternity (2 Cor. 5:17–21).

The purpose of all of this is that man may fear God (Ecc. 3:14-15). The fear of God is a proper biblical understanding of who God is and then responding appropriately with reverence and submission.

4.2.4. Ecclesiastes Chapter 4

4.2.4.1. Introduction

In his first examination of life “under the sun,” (Ecc. 1:4–11); Solomon concluded that life was meaningless and monotonous. In his subsequent examination he observed real people in real situations and he discovered that life was not that simple. This is where learning meets the ‘cutting edge’ in the realities of life. Solomon had the integrity to do this so that time and time again he could question and examine his subject from first hand experience. As a result he was confronted with some painful realities in life, like life and death, time and eternity, and the final judgment by God.

Warren Wiersbe puts it so well when he says:

“The ivory tower investigator will never have a balanced view of his subject if he remains in his ivory tower. Learning and living must be brought together” (Wiersbe, 1990:53).

Wiersbe’s comment is valid if one is going to have integrity in any real examination of life. This reality must be observed first hand and then examined against one’s frame of reference, which in this case is the creative purpose of God. This of course is found in the Bible.

In Ecclesiastes chapter four, Solomon visited four different places, where he observed people going through a variety of experiences. These included the realms of the trials court, the labour market, companionship and the realms of politics. He observed carefully, examined his observations and then recorded his conclusions. He concluded that while life may have seemed monotonous from one perspective it was anything but monotonous from the other. The reason for this was, that people, have no idea what problems they may face on any given day. This is also supported by what Solomon wrote in Proverbs:

“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth” (Prov. 27:1, NIV).

4.2.4.2. Injustice in the Trials Court (Ecc. 4:1–3)

Solomon went to watch a trial, and there he saw innocent people being oppressed by power-hungry officials. The victims wept, and what is sad is that nobody stood with them to comfort or help them. The oppressors had all the power and their victims were helpless to protest or get a just outcome. Solomon witnessed three tragedies:

- (1) oppression in the places of justice;
- (2) pain and sorrow in the lives of the oppressed people; and
- (3) a lack of concern on the part of those who could have brought comfort. (Ecc 4:1-3).

This should not have been the case, for the nation of Israel had a good judicial system, which was based on God’s Law (Ex. 18:13–27; Deut. 17; 19). However, taking human depravity and selfishness into account, the system could be corrupted by selfish, unjust officials, just like any other system. This indeed was the case, even in Israel with its good judicial system, for the prophets had continually lashed out against social injustices (Isa. 56:1; 59:1ff; Amos 1–2). Although Solomon had been a wise and just king (1 Kings 3:16–28), it was impossible for him to guarantee the integrity of every officer in his government. Thus he observed the system and saw the sad realities of life even within his government.

Solomon was so moved by what he saw that he declared that it was better to be dead than to be alive and oppressed (Ecc 4:2). In fact, he added that one was better off for never having been born at all. Then one would never have to see the evil works of sinful man.

4.2.4.3. Envy and iniquity in Labour (Ecc. 4:4–8)

The next area of examination was labour. Solomon went to watch various labourers at work. Here too he found disappointment for none lived up to virtues of honest, hard work as extolled in the Book of Proverbs. The saying that honest toil is a gift from God is true. Work is honourable, a God given task, for even the first person created, Adam, was given work to do in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15).

In this section Solomon considered four different kinds of men as labourers: the hard working, “driven” man; the idle, indolent man; the balanced man, and the lonely independent man.

4.2.4.3.1. The Hard Working, ‘Driven’ Man (Ecc. 4:4).

The skilfulness of a worker’s hand is only one aspect of his work. The other aspect is the attitude of his heart. One’s motive in doing something is very important. While others may not see our motives, God sees them, and we are accountable to Him for both what we have done and why we have done it. Solomon observed that the only reason these people worked hard at their jobs was to compete with others and make more money than their neighbours. Envy is a great motivator in one’s work but it is not a legitimate motivator before God.

The essential purpose of their work was not to produce beautiful or useful products, or to help people, but to stay ahead of the competition. This “selfishness factor” is the result of sin in the human heart. We covet what others have, and we not only want to have those things, but we want to go beyond and have even more than they have.

“Covetousness, competition, and envy often go together. Competition is not sinful of itself, but when “being first” is more important than being honest, there will be trouble.” (Wiersbe, 1990:56)

The real issue is that of attitude. When a heart is controlled by envy and rivalry, life becomes one of turmoil and nothing of value is really gained (Prov. 15:16).

4.2.4.3.2. The Lazy Man (Ecc. 4:5-6).

Solomon then moved from one extreme to the other as he encountered a man who had no ambition at all. It seems to be the case in society that where there is an overreaction to the ‘rat race’, man slips into laziness and indolence. As a writer of Proverbs (Prov. 1: 1), Solomon had no sympathy for lazy people who sat all day with folded hands and did nothing.

“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands to rest and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man. (Prov. 6:10-11).

Laziness is a slow, self-indulgent, comfortable path toward self-destruction. It may be pleasant to sleep late every morning, rest and relax and not have to go to work. On the other hand, it is unpleasant not to have money to buy the necessities of life. This principle is further dealt with by the Apostle Paul, where he stated firmly regarding the idle: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10, NIV).

When the two are compared, the hard working, driven man was motivated by competition while the idle man was motivated by pleasure. The former had productivity but no leisure time and the latter had all the leisure but was headed for ruin. The question arises: “Is there a middle ground between the two?” Neither of these extremes is really an option. Solomon replies in the affirmative as he outlines a solution of “the balanced man.”

4.2.4.3.3. The Balanced Man (Ecc. 4: 6).

Here Solomon encountered a man whose life was balanced for he had both productivity in his work and also time for quietness. He was not caught up in the rat race, but neither did he try to run away from the normal responsibilities of life. Here he describes the man as having “one handful of tranquillity” and the implication is that the other handful is of labour. This is better than having two heaped handfuls of toil and “chasing after the wind” (Ecc. 4:6). The obvious question is what profit is there in having both hands heaped with toil if it costs one’s peace of mind and possibly one’s health? This suggests that few people know how to keep life in balance.

4.2.4.3.4. The Independent and Lonely Man (Ecc. 4:7-8).

Then Solomon noticed a solitary man, who had no relatives or partners to help him in his business. He was so busy making a profit for himself, that he had no time to enjoy his profits. He came to the realisation that if he died, and he had no family to inherit his wealth, all his labour was in vain.

As a result he asked himself: “For whom am I toiling? Why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” (Ecc. 4:8) The big question is: Why do people rob themselves of the enjoyments of life just to amass more and more money? Most often this is done to ensure that their future is secure and then they can enjoy themselves. As it happens, however, men die suddenly. If this were to be the case, what future does such a man have, and where is the enjoyment? Therefore, this does seem to be such a purposeless pursuit for the independent, lonely man.

Solomon’s conclusion was, “This too is meaningless—a miserable business!” (Ecc.4: 8) God wants us to labour, but to labour in the right spirit and for the right reasons. Blessed are the balanced!

4.2.4.4. The Importance of Companionship in Life (Ecc. 4:9–12)

Solomon moves in his thinking from the independent, lonely man to consider the importance of companionship and helping one another in life. It is very important for people to do things together. Thus he drew the conclusion, “Two are better than one.” (Ecc. 4:9)

4.2.4.4.1. Companionship in Working (Ecc. 4:9)

Two are better than one when it comes to labour (Ecc. 4: 9) because two workers can get more done. They motivate each other and hold one another accountable. They also help each other to accomplish difficult tasks which one person on his own could not accomplish. They get a better return for their work even when they divide the profits, because they accomplish far more together than what two single people can accomplish.

4.2.4.4.2. Companionship in Calamity (Ecc. 4:10)

Two are better than one when it comes to calamity (Ecc. 4: 10).

“Roads and paths in Palestine were not paved or even levelled, and there were many hidden rocks in the fields. It was not uncommon for even the most experienced traveller to stumble and fall, perhaps break a bone, or even fall into a hidden pit (Ex. 21:33–34).” (Wiersbe, 1990:58)

It is wonderful to have a companion or friend who can help you in the event of a fall or calamity. Solomon is most probably referring to physical falls. The idea could also be applied to an emotional or spiritual stumble when one needs encouragement and restoration. (Gal. 6:1–2). How grateful we should be for Christian friends who help us walk straight.

4.2.4.4.3. Companionship in Warmth (Ecc. 4:11)

Two are better than one when it comes to warmth at night (v. 11). Nights in Israel are very cold especially during the winter months. If two travellers were on the road and having to camp out, or even stay in the courtyard of a public inn, they would need one another's warmth for comfort. The only way that one could be "warm alone" was to carry extra blankets and that would have added to the load being carried.

4.2.4.4.4. Companionship in Protection (Ecc. 4:12)

Two are better than one when it comes to protection, especially at night. "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves" (Ecc 4:12, NIV). It was dangerous for anyone to travel alone, day or night. Most people travelled in groups for fellowship and for safety. Wiersbe comments on the progression from one to three explaining the importance of friendship:

"Solomon started with the number *one* (v. 8), then moved to *two* (v. 9), and then closed with *three* (v. 12). This is typical of Hebrew literature (Prov. 6:16; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, etc.). One cord could be broken easily; two cords would require more strength; but three cords woven together could not be easily broken. If two travellers are better than one, then three would fare even better. Solomon had more than numbers in mind; he was also thinking of the unity involved in three cords woven together—what a beautiful picture of friendship!" (Wiersbe, 1990:59)

4.2.4.5. Trials in the Realms of Political Power (Ecc. 4:13–16)

In the structure of Ecclesiastes 4 this is Solomon's fourth "better" statement (4:3, 6, 9). He makes the statement: "Better a poor but wise Youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning" (Ecc 4:13). Solomon now teaches two truths. He first notes that political

power is not stable and secondly that popularity is very fickle.

The king in the story had aged and he refused to listen to his counsellors. On the other hand there was a wise Youth who may have come from prison or poverty to kingship. The point here is that the Youth had a difficult and humble start. This is a similar situation to that of Joseph in Gen. 39. Everybody followed the young and wise underdog and supported him in his leadership.

The implications of this story in its context are clear. The young man had a humble beginning but rose to prominence. He was poor, but he became rich. The old king was in a prominent position but was no longer effective or suitable for rulership. The old king was imprisoned in his foolishness and lost his throne. The key to this story is wisdom. Wealth and position do not necessarily guarantee success, and poverty and apparent failure are not necessarily barriers to achievement. However, even though the new young king had great support at the beginning, his popularity didn't last. Few things on earth are guaranteed to last as one expects.

“He can become the leader of millions of people, and be very popular.
But, then, the younger generation grows up around him and rejects him!”
(Ecc. 4:16, The Living Bible)

The new group of people came along and did not support the king, with the result that he was deposed. Once again, Solomon drew the same conclusion: it is all transitory and seems purposeless” (Ecc 4:4,8).

4.2.4.6. Application Of These Truths To Youth Today:

Injustice is a reality in every society because mankind is selfish, fallible and depraved. It is an aspect of life that must be faced and not denied. It is something that young people especially need to face, for they tend to be idealistic about life. Idealism without realism leads to disillusionment. The more they experience life, the more they see of the puzzling and painful realities. While it is a reality, it does not mean to say it must be excused. What can be done to change this? As Christian citizens, one must pray for all in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–6) and do what one can to see that just laws are passed and fairly enforced.

A second application is that all competition is not wrong. Traditional rivalry between teams or schools can be a helpful thing to develop healthy competition and spur participants on to their highest level of achievement. When rivalry turns into conflict, fighting and foul language, however, sin has entered the scene and destroyed the whole good purpose.

With regard to work and idleness, it is necessary to have a wise perspective. The hard working, driven man thinks that money will bring him comfort, happiness and peace but it is often the case that he has no time to enjoy it. The idle man on the other hand, thinks that doing nothing he will gain happiness and peace, but his life-style only destroys him. The balanced man enjoys both his labour and balances his toil with rest. Each person must make his own choices in life but those choices will have a cost and an outcome.

Solomon went all over the place and as he did he studied life and learned important lessons about the enigmas of life. He saw hardship but was not cynical about life. He never advises one to abdicate or retreat from life. There is no Utopia or safe and secure place where one is totally immune to the difficulties and hardships of life. Life comes with its trials and hardships and one must stand up and take it and, with God's help, make the most of it.

From this chapter four one also learns that people need each other. Solomon says that

“two are better than one” (Ecc 4:9). There certainly are some advantages to an independent life, but there are also disadvantages. These include a selfish focus and the absence of help and support when one gets physically frail. This chapter also emphasizes balance in life, for if one is totally set on gaining material wealth one could be missing quietness and other important things in life that money cannot buy. It is not wrong to enjoy the good things that money can buy, provided they are not gained at the expense of those things that money can’t buy. The Lord Jesus Christ was clear on this point when He said, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36–37).

4.2.5. Ecclesiastes Chapter 5

4.2.5.1. Introduction

Solomon, who was a wealthy King, knew a great deal about money and wealth and apart from what he included in the book of Proverbs (Prov. 10:22; 14:24; 15:6, 16, 17; 16:8; 19:4; 21:6; 23:4, 5; 27:23, 24; 28:8; 30:8, 9), he also included some lessons in Ecclesiastes, and primarily in chapter 5. This is an essential topic pertaining to life on earth, because most people see money, and especially a lot of money, as the key to having a meaningful life. Money, it is believed is the means to security, independence, pleasure and total fulfilment in life. However, Solomon warns later in Ecc. 7:12 that: “Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.” The implication is that money does not necessarily preserve the life of its possessor and can be a false sense of security.

Solomon then goes beyond the subject of mere money and deals with the values of life. These are the things that really count, and knowing this, Solomon issues the following warnings that relate to the values of life.

4.2.5.2. Respect for God (Ecc. 5:1–7)

In his research and observations, Solomon watched the worshippers come and go from the temple, and he noted that many of them were not at all sincere in their worship. Their acts of worship were thoughtless, impulsive, insincere and hypocritical. Thus he issues the warning to: “Watch your steps when you go to the house of God.” (Ecc 5:1). Why this warning and what does it mean? Solomon will explain that when one disrespects God in worship, by being insincere and hypocritical, one may incur His punishment with a loss of His protection and provision (Ecc. 5:6). God must not be treated in a thoughtless manner. Wiersbe explains that:

“The worship of God is the highest ministry of the church and must come from devoted hearts and yielded wills.” (Wiersbe, 1990: 64)

Wiersbe’s point on this matter is well stated and must be heeded even in our day and age.

The important thing is that the worshipper must: “Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools” (Ecc. 5:1). This means he or she must approach God with the sincere attitude of submission and obedience that He has revealed in His Scriptures. King Saul found out that sacrifices were no substitute for obedience when he tried to cover up his disobedience with pious promises (1 Sam. 15:12–23). Offerings without respect and submission in the heart become “the sacrifice of fools,” because only fools think they can deceive God. They think that they are doing good, but they are only doing evil. God knows this and responds with righteous discipline.

Then Solomon issued a warning about careless praying (Ecc. 5:2–3). When one speaks to God it is serious business and so one must approach Him with reverence and sincerity. A good example of this is the manner in which one would approach a ruler or king. Such a person would prepare their words carefully and show proper respect and behaviour. Approaching the throne of the Sovereign God is far more important and yet there is so much thoughtless and insincere prayer done by people who seem to know nothing about the fear of the Lord. The secret of acceptable praying is a prepared heart. This is what David expressed in Ps. 141:

“O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies.” (Ps. 141:1–4)

This is Solomon’s thrust in his warning. Solomon’s analogy to support his statement is recognised as true for he says; “As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words” (Ecc. 5:3). One may say that his admonition in modern day

speech would be: “Put your heart and mind into gear before you use your mouth”

Solomon’s third warning had to do with making vows to the Lord (5: 4–7). E. E. Ellis, in the New Bible Dictionary, clearly outlines the vow used in the Bible:

“A vow may be either to perform (Gen. 28:20) or abstain from (Ps. 132:2ff.) an act in return for God’s favour (Num. 21:13) or as an expression of zeal or devotion towards God (Ps. 22:25). It is no sin to vow or not to vow, but, if made - presumably uttered (Deut. 23:23) - a vow is as sacredly binding as an oath” (Ellis, 1996:1124).

God did not require His people to make vows in order to be accepted by Him, but they could express their devotion in this way if they wanted to do so. However, if they did make a vow, they were bound to keep it (Num. 30; Deut. 23:21–23). Solomon warned about two sins in this regard. The first was that of making the vow with no intention of keeping it. This was an expression of hypocrisy and lying to God. The second sin was making the vow but delaying to keep it, hoping to get out of it. When the priest or temple messenger came to collect the promised offering or gift, the person would say, “My vow was a mistake.” (Ecc. 5:6). God hears what people say and holds them to their promises, unless divine intervention prevents them from fulfilling what was promised. Often people make vows to impress others, or to try and “bribe” God to favour them when they are in difficult situations. God, however, is not mocked and those people will pay for their careless words. It is so appropriate what the Psalmist says:

“I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble” (Ps. 66:13–14; KJV).

When people rob God of the worship and honour due to Him and they make hollow promises, they are also robbing themselves for they incur His anger (Ecc. 5:6) and in turn they are deprived of His provision and blessing. Solomon’s warning is that God will “... destroy the work

of your hands.” This is a severe judgement as one sees all one’s hard work destroyed or amount to nothing. In this way it becomes a severe warning and a great deterrent.

4.2.5.3. Respect for Others (Ecc. 5:8–9)

As much as making a rash vow to God reflects man’s depravity, so does selfishness and oppression. Solomon again witnessed man’s selfish inhumanity to man, with corrupt politicians oppressing the poor. He had previously dealt with this issue in Ecc. 3:16–17 and 4:1–3, where he explained that government officials violated the law by using their authority to help themselves and not to serve others. This was a practice condemned by Moses in Lev. 19:15 where he said:

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.”

Solomon’s remark, “Don’t be surprised at this,” doesn’t mean that he approved of their unlawful practices, but he clearly understood the depravity of the human heart. This typical, but oppressive structure is described in Ecc. 5:8: “One official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.” This meant that the more senior officials put pressure on those below them to perform in such a way that it would benefit themselves and not necessarily the people. Thus they were watching, not to protect the poor and oppressed (Ecc. 4:1), but to find ways to squeeze revenue out of the officials under them. At the head of this whole system was the king who himself profited from the fields of the oppressed. Potentially, all the profit that a man worked for in the land could be taken or extorted by all these corrupt officials.

Ecc. 5: 9 is difficult to understand in this context and major translations do not all agree. It simply says: “The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.” Glenn rightly explains:

“Many commentators, arguing that Solomon would scarcely have depicted his own government in such poor light, have seen this passage as evidence that he did not write this book. But there is no evidence that Solomon was referring to any specific government. Like the other references in 2:18-6:9, (the hypothetical case in 4:13-16), Solomon was generalizing. Moreover, Israel’s demand that Rehoboam, Solomon’s successor (1 Kings 12:1-10), reduce his oppression suggests that the provincial governors under Solomon had made financial demands to support his opulence (1 Kings 4:7, 22-23). Solomon’s government could scarcely be excluded from the truth in Ecclesiastes 5:8-9”. (Glenn, 1985:988-9).

This is an honest and clear summation. On the other hand Wiersbe says:

“The general idea seems to be that in spite of corruption in the bureaucracy, it is better to have organized government and a king over the land, than to have anarchy. A few dishonest people may profit from corrupt practices, but everybody benefits from organized authority. Of course, the ideal is to have a government that is both honest and efficient, but man’s heart being what it is, the temptation to dishonest gain is always there.” (Wiersbe, 1990: 67)

This, too, is a very plausible explanation, for with man’s depravity, selfishness and greed, it permeates every structure of society. While one may not agree with it, it is a prevalent reality and cannot altogether be stamped out. Still, it means that injustices continue in this world and because of this nobody can depend on their profit as a means of security. Leupold offers an entirely different interpretation, as he explains:

“Such profit, however, does not lie in the corrupt and oppressive measures that are resorted to by officials high and low but is to be found only in the King, that is, the Lord God Almighty who has all such matters entirely under His control. Wherever the “Cultivated land” is, that is, where men are engaged in gainful occupation working the field, the best “advantage” of all is that there is one supreme King over it all” (Leupold, 1952:124).

Leupold’s explanation is also a plausible one because it too fits the context of verse 7, which suggests that the oppressed should consider their advantage that God is ruling over all

and not the corrupt officials.

4.2.5.4. Respect for money (Ecc. 5:10–20)

Money is inanimate for it has no life in itself, yet it can exercise a powerful influence over people through their perspective of it. One's perspective on money will determine one's attitude towards money, which will make the difference between it serving them or they serving it.

Solomon has already discussed “the futility of wealth” in Ecc. 2:1–11, and some of those ideas are repeated here. In this section Solomon wants to correct people's misconceptions about wealth, because of the illusions and dangers in serving money. The commitment to serve money will not bring lasting satisfaction. Wealth does bring a measure of satisfaction but it does not provide all that it presumes to provide. Solomon reminds the reader that those who love money never have enough and are never satisfied with their income (Ecc. 5: 10). People who love money think that it can do anything for them. They constantly think about getting more money and guarding it so that they don't lose it because it gives them a great sense of security. Money will not bring lasting satisfaction no matter how much one has, because, as he has already demonstrated in chapter 3, the human heart was made to be truly satisfied only by God (Ecc. 3:11).

Now Solomon seeks to explode certain myths about money. He will deal with the illusions of money solving one's every problem, bringing total peace of mind and providing complete security.

4.2.5.4.1. Money solves one's every problem (Ecc. 5:11).

For the most part, people need a certain amount of money in order to live in this world. Some are totally self-sufficient from the produce of their land, while others may be supported by other

people or organizations. The general thinking is that if people have sufficient money, they are able to solve all their problems. Money, in and of itself, is not the “cure-all” for every problem. It cannot buy happiness, God’s redemption, and eternal life, nor can it prevent one’s ultimate death. It does give a measure of pleasure and protection but this is not a total satisfaction. An increase in wealth can create problems that were never encountered beforehand. Solomon says that; “As goods increase, so do those who consume them” (Ecc. 5:11). Many expectations and demands are often made by others on one who has wealth. Furthermore, there is the difficulty of protecting what one has from criminals who would want to steal those possessions or exact by unjust means what one possesses.

4.2.5.4.2. Wealth brings total peace of mind (Ecc. 5:12).

Solomon said that possessing wealth is no guarantee of peace and sound sleep. In fact, he says that the labourer sleeps better than the rich man. The idea here is that the rich man ate too much and was kept awake all night by the resultant discomfort. Overindulgence is common for those who are wealthy, for it is difficult to be disciplined when one can have whatever one desires. It remains a debate as to whether this is a blessing or a curse. Another interpretation could be that the rich man is constantly concerned and worried about what he has, lest he lose it or it be taken away from him. This is a very realistic concern for those who have experienced comfort and wealth only to lose it and have to experience the hardships of poverty.

4.2.5.4.3. Wealth provides complete security (Ecc. 5: 13–20).

Here, Solomon presents a picture of two rich men. One hoarded all his wealth and ruined himself by becoming a miser. This is the disposition of selfishness and self-centeredness that robs one of joy. The other man made some bad investments and lost his wealth. What’s more, there was

nothing in the estate to leave to his son.

Solomon uses two verses to emphasise that as one comes into this world, with nothing in his hand (Ecc.5:15), so he departs. This is typical of all human beings in that we brought nothing into the world at birth, and we take nothing out of the world at death. This reality was expressed by Job after he had lost all he had:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised” (Job 1:21).

The same idea was expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 49 and this clearly supports what Solomon has said.

“Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendour of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him” (Ps. 49:16-17).

Solomon comes to the conclusion after much observation and reflection (Ecc.5: 13,18), that the man in this situation spends the rest of his days in the darkness of discouragement, defeat, and anger. The enjoyment of life has escaped him (Ecc.5: 17). This is a sad reality for anyone who is really looking for fulfilment in life and never dreaming that what he or she pursued as the ‘dream’ turned out to be the ‘nightmare’. What must be kept in mind is that Solomon is not advocating poverty over riches. This is supported by what he wrote in Proverbs 30:

“Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, who is the LORD? Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.” (Prov. 30:7-9)

This is a clear and pertinent warning against the love of money and the delusions that wealth can bring. On the other hand he realised that it is “good and proper” (Ecc.5: 18) to find satisfaction in one’s labour and to enjoy the good things of life that God has provided as His gracious gift.

4.2.5.5. Conclusion

Solomon had previously given this wise counsel in Ecc. 2:24, 3:12–13, and 3:22, and he will repeat it at least three more times before he ends his book. Herein lies the key to contentment. It is not pursuing something outside of God to selfishly gratify one’s own desires. It is also not seeking total fulfilment in the life apart from God, for He is the only one who can give mankind true fulfilment. This is clear from the kinds of gifts that he gives:

“Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work, this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.” (Ecc. 5:19-20)

These things include wealth, possessions and enjoyment, contentment in his or her situation in life and also in their work. Moreover God keeps such a person “occupied with gladness of heart” (5:20). These are the true pleasures of life, but they only find their fulfilment in the acknowledgement that God is the gracious supplier and there is no fulfilment apart from him.

4.2.5.6. Application of these Truths to Youth today

God must be addressed with sincerity and truth for as an Omniscient Sovereign, He knows all things and cannot be deceived. He knows all things including one’s thoughts and motives, and thus He is not deceived by mankind’s pretences. Thus Solomon’s admonition that

words be few and sincere. This is supported by Jesus' admonition that God must be worshipped in "spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), and "let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'" (Matt. 5:37).

In prayer, one should be cautious lest one use hasty words or too many words (Matt. 6:7). Both of these reflect an insincere and disrespectful approach to God. On the other hand if one prays only to impress people, one may receive the admiration of others but will not be heard by God (Ps. 66:18). In one's Youthful exuberance and sometimes, ignorance, this may be a pitfall.

God hears the vows and promises that people make and He holds them to their promises. That is unless divinely determined circumstances prevent one from fulfilling what was promised. If vows were made only to impress others, or perhaps to manipulate God, then there may be some form of discipline for those careless words.

People make empty vows because they think that proper sounding religious words is all that is required. It has more to do with making an impression on others and little to do with sincere hearts that authenticate those words. Their words are not sincere and thus their worship is not serious. They practice a self-made religion that neither honours God nor develops godly character. In the end it does more harm than good. Thus Solomon concludes this section with a strong admonition: "Therefore stand in awe of God" (5:7)

As has been noted, it is good to have the things that money can purchase, provided one does not lose the things that money can't purchase. These things include the blessing and favour of God. Solomon warns about the dangers of loving money and the disillusion about what money presumes to bring one in the way of peace, security, pleasure and a totally fulfilling life. Both Jesus and Paul respectively, outlined the dangers in this regard in the New Testament:

" Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

"For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Tim. 6:10)

It is important to see this emphasis in the New Testament because the timeless principle is carried from one era to another and also from culture to culture. It is true for this day and age and will be true for the next generation. God has planned it that way because the serving of money and materialism is in opposition to serving Him.

There are basically only three ways to get wealth: one can work for it, one can steal it, or one can receive it as a gift or an inheritance. Dishonest gain is not an acceptable way of gaining one's wealth. Paul says:

“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” (Eph 4:28)

If one focuses more on the gifts than on the One Who gives them, one is guilty of idolatry. If one hoards God's gifts and refuses to share them with others, one is guilty of selfish indulgence. But if one yields to God's will and use what He gives one for His glory, then he or she can enjoy life and be satisfied.

Each person will be accountable to God at the end of his or her life. It is a sobering thought to each one to realise that, he or she brought nothing into the world at birth, and he or she will take nothing out of the world at death. The time to start applying these principles is at the beginning of one's life so that there are no regrets at the end of one's life. One should sincerely pray in accordance with the Psalmist in Psalm 90, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 90:12).

4.2.6. Ecclesiastes Chapter 6

4.2.6.1. Introduction

There are different sayings that people use to express or describe futility. Solomon talked about “chasing after the wind.” Others talk about “pursuing pipe dreams.” So much time and effort can be expended in pursuing that which will not materialise and never satisfy.

Sometimes life seems to be futile, especially when one faces the disappointment of having put in a great deal of effort and not having achieved one’s goals. On the other hand one may achieve the desired goal but the achievement is without satisfaction and the desired fulfilment. At times of failure, bereavement, pain and despair, one may feel that life is so frustrating that is not worth living. In the Bible there are examples of some great people who became so discouraged with life that they either wanted to die or wished they had never been born. This includes Moses (Num. 11:15), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Job (Job 3:21; 7:15), Jeremiah (Jer. 8:3; 15:10), and Jonah (Jonah 4:3). What is it in life that causes great and godly people to seek death? When life doesn’t make sense, people become frustrated. If people cannot see a purpose in life, especially when they go through failure and deep suffering, they start to question God and even wonder if life is worthwhile. As has been stated in chapter one, life is inextricably attached to meaning and purpose, and when these ingredients are missing, people, may lose hope and seek an end to their lives. On the other hand, what is the remedy, and where can one find meaning in such times of despair? Solomon gave answers, in this sixth chapter of Ecclesiastes, to these important questions and the enigmas of life. He introduced this section by describing it as an “evil” (Ecc. 6:1) and a “grievous evil” (Ecc. 6:2) and this has the effect of grabbing one’s attention and seeking to find out what it is. This is another one of Solomon’s goals to get attention and then drive home a truth about life. Towards the end of chapter six he

asked five pertinent and searching questions about life. Each of these is a goad to arrest people's attention and, as will be seen, they are very pertinent to young people for they are some of the primary questions that they ask today.

In Ecclesiastes 6, Solomon observed and deduced three of life's enigmas: wealth without enjoyment (Ecc. 1–6), effort without satisfaction (Ecc. 7–9), and questions without answers (Ecc. 10–12).

4.2.6.2. Wealth without enjoyment (Ecc. 6:1–6)

How sad to have all the resources that one has ever wanted in life and yet not be able to enjoy them for one reason or another. Solomon opened the chapter with an interesting example:

“God gives a man wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil” (Ecc. 6:2).

There is a big difference between having one's possessions and enjoying one's possessions. This particular man had wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacked nothing his heart desired. What more could he want? He had everything except the ability to enjoy it. The deduction is, in that case, he might as well not have had anything. What would prevent this person from enjoying life? Perhaps it was a case of relational conflict in the home, or some kind of physical or emotional illness, or even death itself. The person described in verse 2 had no heir, so a stranger acquired the estate and enjoyed it. It all seemed so futile. What Solomon was describing is not totally foreign to him. Scripture records that God gave Solomon riches, wealth, and honour (2 Chron. 1:11), the very things described in this verse. Thus he could be referring to himself. For a person to have everything he or she desired would be fortunate indeed. For that

person not to enjoy these blessings of life would, however, be very sad.

There are examples of people who have worked hard and looked forward to a comfortable retirement only to have some disaster befall them. They became drained of financial resources or their physical strength so that they could not enjoy them. Solomon called this a “grievous evil” (6:2).

This is not the first time that Solomon used this phrase for, in Ecc 5:13-17, he used it twice, but in a slightly different way. Glenn points out that:

“Solomon called both of these a grievous evil (5:13, 16), a term similar to that applied in 6:2 to God’s not enabling a man to enjoy his wealth. The terms, though translated the same, are similar but not identical. In 5:13, 16 (*raah holah*) is, sick evil or depressing misfortune; the term in 6:2 is (*holi ra*) evil sickness or a malignant disease (Glenn 1985:990).

This explanation brings out the full force of the expression and one is able to understand the devastation of such a situation. Surely nobody would want to be in such a position. Still the question arises in one’s mind: ‘what is the answer?’ Wiersbe elaborates on this by pointing out that to Solomon:

“. . . it was a basic principle that nobody can truly enjoy the gifts of God apart from the God who gives the gifts. To enjoy the gifts without the Giver is idolatry, and this can never satisfy the human heart. Enjoyment without God is merely entertainment, and it doesn’t satisfy. But enjoyment with God is enrichment and it brings true joy and satisfaction” (Wiersbe, 1990:74-5).

This is the real issue and emphasises the thesis of Ecclesiastes, that:

“Life, in and of itself, is unable to supply the key to the questions of identity, meaning, purpose, value, enjoyment and destiny. Only in coming to know God can one begin to find answers to these questions” (Kaiser, 1979:17).

Kaiser is right, for apart from an understanding of God and His purpose in life, there is no real meaning or lasting satisfaction. One needs to know God and understand, that in all things, He has a good purpose in everything, both for now and all eternity.

In the second example, Solomon dealt with a hypothetical case, because nobody in a monogamous marriage could produce a hundred children, nor is anyone likely to live for two thousand years (Ecc. 6:3,6). What is interesting to note is that Solomon's son Rehoboam had eighty-eight children, eighteen wives and sixty concubines (2 Chronicles 11:21.). Solomon used hyperbole here in order to make his point: no matter how much you possess, if you don't possess the power to enjoy it, you might just as well never have been born.

In this example, the man had a large family, long life and prosperity. Again, this seems the height of blessing but the sadness is seen in the fact that his family did not love him, for when he died, he was not lamented. That's the meaning of "does not receive a proper burial" (Ecc. 6:3). His relatives didn't even weep when the man died but stayed around only to use his money. It is very sad to realize that often one's friends and family are only interested in what they can get from that person, rather than loving him or her for whom he or she is. This becomes the case when there is anger, mistrust and bitterness.

Solomon concluded that it would be better for that man if he had never been born, or that he had been stillborn. What a sadness to consider one's life in this light. There was a practice amongst the Jews, at that time, to leave a stillborn child unnamed. The reason for this was so that the child would not be remembered and the parents would thus be enabled to get over their sorrow much faster. It was considered a child without meaning; thus the statement: "It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded" (Ecc. 6:4). As broken-hearted parents have sometimes asked, "Why did God even permit this child to be conceived if it wasn't going to live?" So Solomon asked, "Why did God permit this man to have

a big family, long life and wealth if the man couldn't enjoy it?"

4.2.6.3. Effort without satisfaction (Ecc. 6:7–9)

Man's most basic efforts in life are to sustain his life. Solomon said: "All man's efforts are for his mouth" (Ecc. 6:7). Both rich and poor must labour to stay alive. For some, it is producing food and for others it is the earning of money with which to buy food. It is a continuous effort of providing for the necessities of life. For many people in the world the monotonous cycle of work, eat and sleep may seem to be all that they do. After all their labour, however, their appetites are never fully satisfied. Nevertheless, one must continue to provide for the necessities, but if this is all one is doing, then that person is merely existing, and that is not the whole purpose of life. When compared with the animals, people is not just fighting for survival as the animals do, but they are seeking a greater purpose for living. While many people enjoy both working and eating, life must not consist only of these two activities, for man was made in the image of God and therefore lives for a higher purpose, namely, the glory and honour of God.

In light of this statement, Solomon then asked two rhetorical questions: "What advantage has a wise man over a fool?" and "What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?" (Ecc. 6:8). The answer to both these questions is: "None." There is no advantage of the wise over the fool, nor is there any gain for the poor person if all he or she does is live to satisfy his or her appetite. These things in and of themselves just do not bring satisfaction to mankind.

Solomon then rounded off the argument by making a statement: "Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite" (Ecc. 6:9). What he is saying is, the reality that is seen is better than the roving of the appetite that feasts on the imagination. Wiersbe puts it this way:

"It's better to have little and really enjoy it than to dream about much and never attain it. Dreams have a way of becoming nightmares if we don't come to grips with reality" (Wiersbe, 1990: 68).

He is right for this is a call for realistic and honest living. Roland Murphy in the book, *Reflecting with Solomon*, explains the statement in these terms:

“Seeing is superior to desire because it implies some kind of possession. Vision is a kind of possession (cf. 11:9), a state of rest in contrast to insatiable desire. The one who sees something has an object in view, whereas the one who is locking into desire, by definition, has not attained the desire” (Zuck, 1994:288).

This is a clearer definition of what Solomon is saying and it supports what Wiersbe said previously about the necessity of coming to grips with reality.

4.2.6.4. Questions with no answers (Ecc. 6:10–12)

Solomon had just dealt with two enigmas of life that bring so much frustration. He referred to those who have wealth without enjoyment and those who put in effort without satisfaction. However the point he trying to make is that true happiness is not the automatic result of making a good living. It is rather the by-product of God’s blessing, when one seeks Him and His purpose. The person who is devoted to a life of the pursuit of happiness, will be miserable, but on the other hand one who is devoted to a life of doing God’s will, will find happiness as well.

The third enigma that Solomon discusses is the person who required answers to all of life’s questions. Solomon was not condemning honest inquiry. Ecclesiastes is the record of his own honest enquiry into the meaning of life. What he is saying is that there are some questions about life that nobody can answer. This is not a call for just giving up and becoming ignorant or completely sceptical. It is however a call to understand the things that one can understand and to accept God’s sovereign prerogative to accept the things one cannot understand. For the most part man wants to understand his environment and its purpose. When the mind is able to understand

something it brings a measure of control and peace. A lack of understanding a problem leads to speculation and often presuming the worst. This can be terrifying. For example, when a doctor explains an x-ray to a patient he does not eliminate the pain or repair the broken bone. That comes later. The patient's understanding leads to an acceptance of what is expected and the time it may take for healing to take place. So understanding a matter brings a measure of peace and control. On the other hand, when one cannot understand a problem (for it may be beyond understanding), but can accept that God fully knows, understands and will, in His time, work out His good purpose, there comes the measure of peace and composure. One's inability to understand should cause one to look beyond oneself and trust in God.

Solomon touched on two statements and three questions that are often an enigma to people and highlights the limitations of human wisdom. The Preacher says; "Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known" (6:10). Solomon said that the nature and essence of everything that exists, including people, was foreordained by God long ago. Glenn points out that in the Jewish mind, naming something paralleled creating it. Thus what exists, was created by God, and He also named it (Isa. 40:26). Furthermore, knowing something paralleled setting it apart and appointing it, (Jer. 1:5) (Glenn, 1985:991). This emphasised that God has the prerogative to appoint certain things in life and nobody can argue with Him. Actually, Solomon said it was useless for a person to argue or contend about what is foreordained because God who had done it is too powerful for man. The more man argues with words against God, the less he accomplishes (6:11) This is further developed in Ecc.10: 12-15, where Solomon says that the fool multiplies words and achieves nothing at all.

Solomon then asked two very pertinent questions which should goad everyone considering them, to deep examination and contemplation. The questions are again rhetorical and call for the negative answers, "No one." The first is; "For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow?" (6:12). In all truth

apart from God, man is ignorant of what is best for him to do. Only God knows this and he has revealed it in His Scriptures. The second question is; “Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?”(6:12). Again, apart from God, man is ignorant of what will happen after his life, for only the all-knowing God knows this and he has revealed it in His Scriptures.

In conclusion all of what Solomon said, emphasised that man is transitory in nature. His days are few, and quickly pass like a shadow (6:12).

4.2.6.5. Application of these Truths to Youth Today

Solomon was not advocating that it is wrong to dream great dreams or have ambition to accomplish something in life. Rather he was calling for that kind of perspective that focuses on the right kind of things. Continually focusing on insatiable desires will never satisfy. Often, too, these desires that one wants satisfied are selfish, sinful and outside of God’s good will. Why spend all one’s energy on what does not satisfy? One must ensure that one’s goals are motivated by the glory of God and not purely seeking the satisfaction of one’s own desires and achievements. Paul said that true satisfaction comes when we do the will of God from the heart (Eph. 6:6). Jesus Christ as the perfect man and the Son of God, said; “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34).

In God’s good purpose there can be wealth with enjoyment and effort with satisfaction. The Psalmist supports this when he says; “Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11; KJV).

Clearly one must conclude that the ability to enjoy life comes from within and is not a matter of what one possesses. One must understand that God is in control of all things and that he is a good God with a good purpose, for apart from this there is no hope. Contentment and enjoyment is the gift of God, along with all else a person may possess. One must therefore trust

Him in what he gives or chooses to take away, realising that He knows what He is doing and will work out His good purpose in it all.

Solomon confronted his listeners once again, with the certainty of death and the futility of life without God. The illustration of the man with the large family, long life and prosperity on the one hand, and the stillborn baby on the other, both ended up in the same place, the grave. It is good to understand this, for when one comes to an end of one's self-sufficiency and resources, such a one is more ready to seek and acknowledge God, his Creator. In Ecc 12, Solomon finally points to "the conclusion of the matter" which is the whole purpose of mankind in acknowledging, trusting and honouring God (12:13).

Finally, only God knows what is best for man to do in his life, and He alone can tell what will happen to a person when he or she dies. All this, God has revealed in His Scriptures so that man can understand and believe in Him.

4.2.7. Ecclesiastes 7

4.2.7.1. Introduction

Solomon asked the question in Ecc. 6:12, “For who knows what is good for a man in life?” He continued to answer that question in a discussion on the importance of wisdom in Ecclesiastes 7 and 8. In these two chapters the word “wisdom” is used fourteen times. This repetition highlights the importance of the subject. Solomon pointed out in chapter 7 that although wisdom can’t explain all of life’s mysteries, it is very important to the quality and meaning of one’s life. These chapters are also characterized by the repetition of the phrase “cannot discover” (Ecc. 7:14; 8:17; and “who can discover” (Ecc. 7:24), another rhetorical question. The expected answer is that no one of himself can discover God’s plan for the future. This is another one of Solomon’s goals to prod people to action and to cause one to think about life and its purpose. He then outlined the argument of his investigation and gave concrete answers, which a person can apply as a conviction of life. The question then arises; what are the things that mankind cannot discover? This section also deals with human inability to discover or work out the plan of God. God’s plan is referred to as “what God has done” (Ecc. 7:13), “the scheme of things” (Ecc. 7:25), “all that God has done” (Ecc. 8:17). Solomon also pointed out that mankind is ignorant of the importance of adversity and prosperity in God’s good plan and in his own life (Ecc. 7:1-14). So the thrust of this section is; if mankind cannot work out what the Creator and Sustainer of life is doing then he or she needs to trust God to work out His good purpose as He sees fit.

The key to this section is found in Ecc.7: 13-14 where Solomon asked one to consider what God has done and to consider that God is the author of both adversity and prosperity. God uses both adversity and prosperity to work out his good purpose and mankind needs to understand this. Mankind’s philosophy of life is skewed, as he tends to only embrace prosperity

and shun adversity. Solomon said that adversity might have positive benefits and prosperity might have ill effects, but the effects of either depend on how one responds to them, whether wisely or foolishly. In verses 2-4 Solomon outlined the positive benefits of the greatest adversity, death, as apposed to the nebulous effect that the ‘easy life’ might have on one’s character development and understanding of life. In verses 5-10, he warned that both adversity and prosperity offer many temptations for one to abandon a wise lifestyle and live like a fool. Thus he declared what is better so that people may make the right choice. He used the word “better” eight times (Ecc. 7:1 [twice], 2-3, 5, 8 [twice], 10).

4.2.7.2. Wisdom is beneficial when applied to daily living (Ecc. 7:1–10)

Solomon used the word “better” eleven times in this section indicating that it is a key word. Applying wisdom in daily living first starts with an understanding of what is better, not from one’s present ‘feelings’ point of view, but from God’s long term purpose. In summary, this section, (7:1–4) could be entitled; sober thinking is better than superficial frivolity.

4.2.7.2.1. Sober thinking is better than superficial frivolity (Ecc. 7:1-4)

Solomon began this section with the statement that: “A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth” (Ecc. 7:1). This is another of his astounding statements to goad the reader to serious contemplation. A typical reaction to one hearing this would be: “Is that really true?” He then proceeds to show why this is true.

Glenn points out the importance of understanding the words and phrases that Solomon uses here.

“By using the Hebrew word for oil (perfume), which was both a symbol of joy (Ecc. 9:8) and prosperity (cf. Job 29:6) and a metaphor for reputation (cf. Song 1:3), Solomon combined the ideas of joy, prosperity, and reputation with the ideas of birth and death. So he suggested that it is better to come to the end of life with a good reputation (good name) than to have a joyful and auspicious beginning which, because of folly, might result in nothing” (Glenn 1985:992).

Glenn clearly encapsulates the emphasis that Solomon is making here. As has been said before, life is very precious and nobody in his right mind wants his life to be a waste, and so skill for living - wisdom - is what Solomon advocates.

Solomon’s statement that the day of one’s death is better than the day of one’s birth (Ecc. 7:1), seems absurd. This is not the case, however, because this statement must not be seen in isolation from the opening statement that a person’s good reputation (name) is like a fragrant perfume. Kaiser points out Solomon’s clever use of words is to emphasise what he is saying so that it will be easily remembered as it dances off the tongue.

“Solomon makes his point with various proverbs and with Hebrew words of similar sound (a figure of speech called paronomasia) in verse 1 (“name in Hebrew pronounced *shem*, and “perfume,” Hebrew *shemen*) and verses 5 and 6 (“song,” Hebrew *shir*; “pot,” Hebrew *sir*; “thorns,” Hebrew *sirim*, or, as we would attempt to reproduce this assonance in part in English, “As the noise of the *nettles* under the *kettle*”). A good reputation (name) has an influence (the aroma of the perfume) beyond its owner. The day of a man’s death also has a lasting influence, for afterwards his life can be held forth as an example if his name has merited it” (Kaiser, 1979:83).

Solomon was not contrasting one’s birth with one’s death, nor was he suggesting that it is better to die than to be born. As two significant days in human experience over which no one has control, life is lived between those two events. That period of living will determine whether that name leaves behind the lovely aroma of a good reputation or the putrid stench of a scandalous reputation. If a person dies with a good name, his or her reputation is sealed, and in that sense,

the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. For the baby who has just been born there has not been sufficient time to develop a good reputation through good character and conduct.

Thus a good name is based upon good character and conduct, which is attached to a meaningful, purposeful life. This is supported by what Solomon had said in Prov. 22:1: "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." Most people care about their reputation and want to be remembered for the good influence they had in life. This is partly what makes life meaningful. A good illustration of this is seen in the contrast between Mary of Bethany, who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume and Judas who criticised her as he considered it a waste (Jn. 12:4-5). Jesus said that wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, the name of Mary would be remembered for what she had done (Matt 26:23). Judas, however, is remembered as the "son of perdition" (KJV). Perdition means "waste" or destruction. Mary has become an example of sacrificial devotion to Christ while Judas has become a sinister example of a selfish, wasted life.

If given the choice, most people would rather attend a happy celebration than experience a sad and painful situation in life. Solomon advised, however, that sorrow can be more beneficial for the heart than laughter. The word "heart" is used four times in these verses and is a very important part of one's thinking and decision-making. Glenn explains:

"Reminding his readers that death is the destiny of every man, Solomon said that the living should take this to heart, or reflect on it. Continuing to comment on the heart (the seat of reflection and of moral decision and action; cf. Prov. 4:23), a word that occurs in each of these three verses, Solomon recommended (Ecc. 7:4) that people reflect soberly on the brevity of life (**the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning**) rather than be involved in foolish pleasure (**the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure**). It is in this sense that Solomon said a house of mourning should be preferred to a house of feasting, that is, sober reflection should be preferred to levity" (Glenn 1985:992).

Solomon therefore advised people to look at death as a reality of life and to learn from it. He did not advocate a preoccupation with death, because it would be contrary to all his other counsel. There is a danger, however, that people might try to avoid facing the reality of death and, as a result, not take life seriously. It was Moses who said in Psalm 90: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). One has to think soberly about life when one realizes that life has a time limit to it.

In the same vein, Solomon added that sorrow is better than laughter. Again he is not calling for people to be morbid but is advocating a balance between laughter and sober thinking that generally comes as a result of sorrow. The latter is preferable because it has a deep effect of building one’s character. Wiersbe explains that:

“The Hebrew word for “laughter” (7:3) can mean “the laughter of derision or scorn.” While there is a place for healthy humour in life, we must beware of the frivolous laughter that is often found in “the house of mirth” (v. 4). When people jest about death, for example, it is usually evidence that they are afraid of it and not prepared to meet it. They are running away” (Wiersbe, 1990: 86).

Wiersbe is quite right because joking and frivolous laughter is often used as a means of escapism, avoidance and abdication instead of facing the real issues of life and dealing with them.

4.2.7.2.2. Sincere correction is better than superficial flattery (Ecc. 7:5–6).

Solomon further taught counsels that a wise person’s correction will accomplish far more in one’s life than will the flattery of fools. He compared the superficial flattery of fools to the burning thorns in a campfire. Thorns were known for their explosive, quick heat but they were not used for good lasting fire when one was cooking. Flattery, by the same token, does not

positively develop one's character or conduct. However, because people are fickle and fallible, wise correction will have a very positive influence on those who are prepared to accept it.

4.2.7.2.3. The easy way out is not necessarily the best way out. (Ecc. 7:7–10)

Solomon now deals with four proverbs to explain that the easy way out is not necessarily the best way. Often the easy way out is difficult and painful. So he warned his readers that adversity and prosperity offer many temptations to abandon a wise lifestyle and to live like a fool. These are matters of the heart, which is the seat of reflection and moral decision.

Firstly he says that extortion and bribery often appear to be a quick and easy way to get things done (Ecc. 7:7). This only turns a wise man into a fool as he impatiently manipulates a situation for his own end. What is better is that one waits patiently and humbly for God to work out His will than to force a situation to have his or her own way through dishonest means.

Secondly he notes, “the end of a matter is better than its beginning”. (Ecc. 7:8) The end is better because then one is in a better position to form a right opinion about the matter. Was it worthwhile, meaningful or advantageous? A hasty and superficial evaluation might come to a totally wrong conclusion. Before the final outcome much may change either positively or negatively. Life is full of unexpected surprises, dramatic turns, and last second victories. One should wait until God's verdict has been presented to draw his conclusions about success and failure. The person who can do this can weather any storm which life may present. The point of the proverb is to stress patience, and trust in God's ability to work out His good purpose as and when he chooses so to do. Similarly, the end of a matter is not just the arrival at the conclusion but includes the process by which that end was achieved. Often people are so focused on the end result that they do not worry about what means they use to get there. People who use a sinful or foolish means often miss the end they are hoping to achieve. It is still most important to trust God

for the outcome as well as the whole process.

Thirdly, Solomon admonishes one not to be “quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools” (Ecc. 7:9). This is the arrogant indignation which a proud man feels when things do not go the way he perceives they should go. One who is quickly provoked is one who does not evaluate a provocation through the grid of God’s purpose and power. The heart of the prideful person imagines that he could manage things much more satisfactorily than the Lord has done. When anger settles in such a person’s lap, that attitude usually tends to involve a person in difficulties with others. This is not wise.

Fourthly, Solomon gives good counsel when he says that longing for the “the good old days” is not wise (Ecc. 7:10). When one faces difficulties and hardships in life and when changes that are uncomfortable and confusing take place, it is easy to long for “the good old days” that were better. Focusing on the past with longing does not help one deal with the present. Often it is escapism and avoidance from dealing with the harsh realities of the present. On the other hand it does not mean that one should not learn from the past. One can only understand the present in the light of the past and thus history is such an important subject. However yesterday is past and cannot be changed, one must therefore learn from it and live today in the will of God and not be paralysed by yesterday.

4.2.7.3. Wisdom is beneficial in giving a clear perspective of life. (Ecc. 7:11–18)

One of the marks of maturity is the ability to see life from God’s perspective. When one has God’s wisdom, he or she will be able to accept and deal with the changing experiences of life, without giving way to fear or submitting to sinful indulgence.

Wisdom is compared to money in Ecc. 7:11–12. Both wisdom and inherited wealth are good, but the advantages of the former far outweigh those of the latter. Wisdom is better than an

inheritance because money can lose its value, or be stolen. On the other hand wisdom keeps its value and cannot be lost, unless one deliberately abandons it and become a fool. That was Solomon's warning at the beginning of this chapter. The person who has wealth but lacks wisdom will waste his or her fortune, but the person who has wisdom will know how to use his or her wealth and even enlarge it. As money is a form of shelter (Ecc. 7:12) in providing protection from the harsh realities of life, so is wisdom like a shelter to those who apply it. Wisdom gives greater protection than money, because wisdom gives life to them that have it. The terms knowledge (*daath*) and wisdom (*chokhmah*) used here are practically identical. The terms have been varied for the sake of Hebrew parallelism. Solomon is stating that wisdom secures a person from the vices and passions which tend to shorten life. However the advantages of wisdom in giving life is not just limited to the realm of physical life but in the highest sense of godliness, piety and faith.

Wisdom in its essence is the understanding of God's purpose for life and considering what He has done (Ecc. 7:13). One cannot oppose what God has put in place nor thwart His purposes. Rather one needs to understand His purpose as revealed in Scripture and to yield his or her life to the will of God. Wiersbe clearly explains it is this way:

“If God makes something crooked, He is able to make it straight; and perhaps He will ask us to work with Him to get the job done. But if He wants it to stay crooked, we had better not argue with Him. We don't fully understand all the works of God (11:5), but we do know that “He hath made everything beautiful in its time” (3:11). This includes the things we may think are twisted and ugly.” (Wiersbe, 1990: 89)

Solomon continues to say that wisdom is beneficial because it gives one clear perspective so that he or she is not confused when good times change to bad times (Ecc. 7:14). Nor is one discouraged when times are difficult, or arrogant when things are going well. It takes wisdom and spiritual maturity to be able to handle prosperity as well as adversity in a godly manner. In His

wisdom, God sees fit to balance life by giving one enough blessings to keep one happy and enough burdens to keep one humble. This causes one to be yielded to Him. God is in control of all circumstances and He uses them for His own ends. He can even turn the burdens into blessings as the Apostle Paul so clearly says in Rom 8:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28, NIV)

God also does this to keep people from the arrogance of thinking that they know it all and that they can manage their lives by themselves. “Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future” (7:14).

Solomon then moves on to deal with how wisdom gives a clear perspective in understanding issues of righteousness and sin (Ecc. 7:15–18). This is again a serious question that has been asked many times and often causes the undiscerning to question God’s character. The problem may be summarised in a number of questions: “Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?” “Why do the good die young while the wicked seem to enjoy long lives?” and “Is this not contrary to the justice of God?” These questions again reflect the enigmas in life, which cannot be fathomed out by mankind’s own understanding. They are the exceptions to the rule of understanding God’s righteous retribution. Glenn calls for caution in interpreting these phrases.

“The word “in” in the phrases in his righteousness and in his wickedness can here mean “in spite of”. These phrases in his righteousness and in his wickedness argue against the common view that in 7:16 Solomon was warning against legalistic or Pharisaic self-righteousness. Such would have been a sin and would have been so acknowledged by Solomon who was concerned about true exceptions to the doctrine of retribution, not supposed ones.” (Glenn, 1985:993)

Glenn is right in showing these grammatical structural markers and this view better fits the context of the passage.

Nevertheless, the problem still stands. God did say to the people of Israel that if they were disobedient, they would “quickly perish from the land” (Deut. 4:25–26), but those who were obedient to Him would “live long in the land” (Deut. 4:40). In answer to this, what must be understood is that God did promise to bless the nation of Israel in their land if they obeyed His law. However, Israel’s promises cannot be taken as blanket promises by every believer outside of the context of God’s covenant people. On the other hand, the wicked appear to prosper from a human perspective but only God knows what is happening in the heart and mind of the person. The short view of things is the presumptuous view, but God will determine the end of the matter in His righteousness. Jesus said that it is no real profit for one to gain the whole world, but lose his soul in the end (Matt 16:26). This is the end of all who sacrifice the eternal for the temporal.

Solomon’s teaching in Ecc. 7:16–18 has been misunderstood by those who say that he is advocating “moderation” in everyday life. He did not say don’t be too righteous, but don’t be too great a sinner in the sense of overzealous righteousness and overindulgent sinfulness. What he does say is,

“Do not be over righteous, neither be over wise -- why destroy yourself?
Do not be over wicked, and do not be a fool -- why die before your time?
It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears
God will avoid all extremes.” (Ecc. 7:16–18)

It must be noted that destruction is the result of the over wise and death is the result of the over wicked. This will determine one’s understanding of it. Wiersbe notes;

“In the Hebrew text, the verbs in verse 16 carry the idea of reflexive action. Solomon said to the people, “Don’t claim to be righteous and don’t claim to be wise.” In other words, he was warning them against

self-righteousness and the pride that comes when we think we have “arrived” and know it all.” (Wiersbe, 1990: 91)

Wiersbe’s view is supported by that of Walter Kaiser, who also takes verse 16, “to be wise” as the Hebrew *Hithpael* form, which is reflexive and would render the meaning, “to be wise in your own eyes.” This is supported by what Solomon says in Prov 3:7: “Do not be wise in your own eyes”. (Prov 3:7). Kaiser continues to support this view by saying:

“The correctness of this interpretation can be demonstrated by its compatibility with verse 18. It is good, says Solomon, that men should take hold of “this,” namely, true wisdom that comes from the fear of God, rather than grasping “that,” namely, the folly of fools. It is the fear of God that is the best protection against either absurdity. Neither man’s folly nor a conceited and strained righteousness will serve as a guide or as a guise to mask the real need of men. They must come to fear Him. That is true wisdom. Wisdom is then not a self-imposed estimate of one’s own abilities. Indeed true wisdom will be a better protection against all these errors and excesses than ten rulers or sultans in a city (v.19).” (Kaiser, 1979:86-87)

Kaiser’s point is well taken and it certainly fits the context. However Glenn takes a different stand on the interpretation of these verses. He claims that a legalistic or self-righteousness is not meant here:

“These verses have generally been interpreted as teaching the golden mean or a moderate lifestyle, avoiding both overzealous righteousness and overindulgent sinfulness. And righteousness here is generally interpreted as referring to legalistic or Pharisaic self-righteousness. But this interpretation fails to relate these verses adequately to Solomon’s argument against the rigid application of the doctrine of retribution in God’s distributing adversity and prosperity. Moreover, the meaning of the verb *tiômm* from *mm*) must be correctly interpreted. Though almost universally interpreted in the sense of to destroy or ruin oneself, the verb in this form never means this elsewhere. Instead it means to be appalled or astounded (Dan. 8:27, appalled; Ps. 143:4, dismayed). This fits in nicely with Solomon’s argument here. He urged his readers not to be over righteous or over wise lest they be confounded or astonished. He meant they should not depend on their righteousness or wisdom to guarantee God’s blessing because they might be confounded, dismayed, or disappointed like the righteous people whom Solomon had seen

perishing in spite of their righteousness (Ecc. 7:15).

Also the fact that God did not punish in some cases (cf. 15b) should not be taken as a license to sin (do not be over wicked, v. 17); God might judge them and they might die before they had to (die before your time; cf. Ps. 55:23). Solomon closed his argument in this section by noting that it is good to follow both warnings and by recommending that one who fears God (cf. Ecc. 3:14; 5:7; 8:12; 12:13) should avoid all (or better, both) extremes (Ecc. 7:18). As in 2:14 and 3:19, the Hebrew word *kl* can mean either both or all. The two extremes to avoid are (a) depending on ones own righteousness and (b) becoming loose in ones living (being overly wicked).” (Glenn: 1985:994)

While this view differs from that of Walter Kaiser and Warren Wiersbe, it is nevertheless not incorrect because it is compatible with the context of the passage and the teaching of the fear of the Lord. Also it does not just succumb to an indifference to morality or the view of moderation in all things. Both of these latter views would be wrong.

In conclusion to this section, Solomon admonishes one to take hold of true righteousness and should not withdraw from true wisdom. The way to do it is to walk in the fear of God. This is what he had previously taught in the book of Proverbs; “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10)

4.2.7.4. Wisdom is beneficial in strengthening one to boldly face life (Ecc. 7:19–29)

Solomon’s opening remark in this last section seems to be an exaggeration; “Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city” (Ecc. 7:19). Eaton notes that it is difficult to decide if ten is used as an indefinite number or refers to a number of a city council. However the meaning of the verse is that the, “wisdom in the fear of the Lord is greater than the collective wisdom of a group of experienced leaders.” (Eaton, 1983:115). The wise person who fears the Lord, therefore does not fear anyone or anything else (Ps. 112) and in this way is not deflected from his or her course of conviction. Such a person walks with the Lord and has the perspective and boldness that is necessary to face the challenges of life.

Life is not easy however, and we must boldly face the problems in order to overcome. The

first of these problems is sin, as nobody on earth is sinless (Ecc. 7:20). There is no one on earth who “does right and never sins” (Ecc. 7:20). While this is true it should never be an excuse to succumb to temptation and never seek to submit to God in obedience. A part of wisdom in the fear of God is the ability to detect temptation, as a solicitation to dishonour God and then to reject it lest one does dishonour him and incur His discipline.

Another problem that people face is how to deal with what people say about them (Ecc. 7:21–22). Solomon’s counsel is that the wise person should pay no attention to gossip. This would imply what is said about one in gossip, because it can be very disconcerting and destructive. When one has seen this painful and destructive effect he or she would be more reluctant to be involved in this sinful practice.

Wisdom is also beneficial in understanding that no one can fully grasp the meaning of all that God is doing in this world (Ecc. 7:23–25). As has been said previously, knowing gives one a sense of control and peace in times of difficulty. On the other hand not knowing tends to make one feel insecure and dependent. However, even as powerful and beneficial and “most profound” (Ecc. 7:24), as wisdom is, it does not enable one to know everything about God. Solomon with all his wisdom could not understand all that exists and how God’s purposes are worked out in all of creation. The wise person knows that they do not know all the answers, and this helps them to rest in the sure fact that God does know and He is in control. What is important to note is the thoroughness of Solomon’s investigation

Finally, wisdom is beneficial in helping the wise person to understand the sinfulness of humanity in general (Ecc. 7:26–29). Solomon began with the sinful woman, a prostitute who traps men and leads them to death (Ecc. 7: 26). He had written extensively on this in the book of Proverbs (Prov. 2:16–19; 5:3–6; 6:24–26; 7:5–27). In his own experience, Solomon had been snared by many foreign women who enticed him away from the Lord and into the worship of heathen gods (1 Kings 11:3–8). He says that the way to escape this evil woman is to fear God and seek to please Him.

Solomon concluded this chapter by saying that all of humanity was bound by sin. He also pointed out that one man in a thousand was wise—and not one woman! The number 1,000 is may

be a reflection on His own situation as described in 1 Kings 11:3. Here it refers to the fact that Solomon had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines and these women led him astray. Solomon did not rate women as less intelligent than men. He spoke highly of women in Proverbs (12:4; 14:1; 19:14; 31:10-31) and in the Song of Solomon. What must be kept in mind is that women in that day had neither the freedom nor the status of today, and it would be unusual for a woman to have learning equal to that of a man. The important point here is that wisdom is determined by taking God's truth and by applying it to life.

4.2.7.5. Application of these Truths to Youth Today

There are many things difficult to understand in this world. There are also temptations in this evil world, which the person with godly wisdom will have the power to overcome. Solomon proves his point that wisdom is beneficial in daily living as it gives one perspective and boldness in the face of difficulty. One may not fully understand all that exists and also what God is doing, but he or she can have the wisdom to not fret or abdicate but to trust God to work out His good purpose as He sees fit.

It is very important for young people to realize that their integrity and reputation is vitally important. This good character must be protected rather than sacrificed for the sake of pursuing material gain, and especially ill-gotten gain. Some may pursue material gain at all cost, even the cost of their righteous standing and recognition by others. Apart from what people may say, what does God say with regard to one's conduct? This is important for He is the one, who blesses and prospers a person.

In God's eyes, it is the God honouring life that one lives and the accountability to him at death that is most important. Thus it is that the personal realization of one's mortality and the sober considerations in the times of sorrow that are the foundations of developing sober

character. The frivolous life has very little influence in developing good character for heart felt issues are seldom contemplated at such times. Hurt, suffering and sorrow often leads one to sober contemplation and resolve to change.

For young people, sincere correction and discipline is often painful and yet very beneficial. This is not often appreciated in those tender years of Youth. Solomon says that they have a greater impact on character building than superficial and insincere flattery.

Solomon also emphasises that the easy way out is not necessarily the best way out. It is the same as the proverb that states that, “the end does not justify the means.” The means to the end may be the most important lesson for here the development of character and perseverance takes place. For example a bribe or cheat is often an easy way out of a difficult situation but it is not necessarily the right way. Without learning to trust God in difficult situations, not much of eternal value is really gained

Another important application of these truths for young people is to realize the importance of holding one’s temper. When one quickly reacts in anger it is detrimental and there are often regrets. Anger is a very strong emotion and when emotional levels run high, sober thinking is often absent.

Lastly, Solomon admonishes his readers not to wish away the present and dwell in the past. This can be an abdication of facing the reality of the present and uselessly living in the memories of the past. The challenges of the present can be dealt with in wisdom and trusting God, for not only will the process be beneficial, but the positive outcome will be a another stepping stone for further development in life

4.2.8. Ecclesiastes 8

Understanding why a good God allows bad things to happen. Solomon explores the problem of evil in the world

4.2.8.1. Introduction

Solomon continued to investigate the benefit of wisdom, and especially in this section the problem of evil in the world. The enigma of evil in the world becomes more of a problem in the minds of people when they believe in a good and loving, sovereign God. The question arises, if God is good and almighty why does He allow evil in the world? If there were no God, then one would only have himself or herself, society or fate to blame for what happens in the world. This difficult question of why there is so much suffering in the world cannot be ignored but must be answered. Does God know about what is happening? If He does, does He care about the situation? On the other hand, one may ask, if God does know and care, does He lack the power to do anything about it? In answer to this question, some say that God is in the process of “evolving” and can’t do much about the tragedies of life. For some people this is such an enigma and a problem that they reject God altogether. Other people seek to solve this problem by saying that evil is only an illusion and one shouldn’t worry about it. No one can deny the reality of evil and nor did Solomon. Furthermore he did not deny the existence of God or limit his power by declaring that he was impotent to handle a particular problem in life. Rather, Solomon sought to solve the problem of evil by facing the reality of these issues and evaluating them in their proper perspective.

What is clear theologically, is that much of the evil in this world, is as a result of mankind’s fall or sin recorded in Genesis 3 and the resultant effect as outlined by the apostle Paul

in Romans 5: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). Solomon supported this view as he had noted in Ecc 7 that, “God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes”. (Ecc. 7:29)

Here again, in his pursuit of understanding wisdom and especially the problem of evil in life, Solomon now examines three important areas of life.

4.2.8.2. Authority (Ecc. 8:1–9)

Right at the beginning of this chapter, Solomon again uses two rhetorical questions as a goad to grasp one’s attention and direct it to the fact that only a wise man can evaluate situations properly and act accordingly. Because of his wisdom a wise person knows the explanation of things and how to act graciously so as to avoid brash behaviour, which would lead to his harm. Solomon had pointed out in Proverbs that; “a king delights in a wise servant, but a shameful servant incurs his wrath” (Prov. 14:35). Over the years throughout history bad and autocratic rulers have oppressed many good people in one way or another. Eastern rulers in that day held the power of life and death in their hands and they often used it indiscriminately. The people did not elect kings nor were they answerable to them. This however did not excuse immoral and unjust behaviour amongst the monarchies nor the people. Solomon had also said in the book of Proverbs that; “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Prov. 14:34). Righteousness among a group of people has a beneficial effect. “Exalt” means to lift up, and is used here in a moral sense. Sin among them has an adverse effect, for it is a disgrace and a reproach. Though people may seem to be getting away with sin, ultimately it catches up with them and shames them. (Buzzell, 1985:936)

4.2.8.2.1. Wisdom and obedience to the legal authorities (Ecc. 8:2)

Solomon opens with a strong admonition to “Keep the king’s commandment” (Ecc. 8:2). The reason for this is that one made an oath of allegiance to the king and to God. To disobey orders would mean breaking his or her promise to the ruler and to God, and that would have serious consequences. Solomon had already warned people about not breaking a vow to God in Ecc 5. This same warning is taught by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans,

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist, have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves” (Rom. 13:1-2).

This command is a universal truth given by God throughout Scripture, and thus it must not be ignored. As it was applicable then, so it is applicable today.

Solomon then set forth examples of proper protocol before a king. He emphasised that the king had great authority and “he will do whatever he pleases” (Ecc. 8:3). Therefore one must be cautious and respectful in approaching such a sovereign lest he or she incur his judgement. Proper procedure averts harm (Ecc. 8:5-9).

4.2.8.2.2. Disrespect toward Authority. (8:3a)

Here Solomon gives the warning not to defy or desert the sovereign: “Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence.” (Ecc. 8:3). This is a reference to one walking out of the king’s presence in anger or disgust because he or she cannot agree with his verdict on a particular matter. It can also have the meaning of resigning from his service for the same or a similar reason. This may not be a wise course of action because if the king is offended he may punish the

offender anyway.

4.2.8.2.3. Defiance of Authority (8:3b)

Solomon gives the warning not to be rebellious toward the king by standing up for a bad cause.

(Ecc. 8:3)

This bad cause would be anything that would go against the rule of law or in opposition to the sovereign personally. In its most severe form it would mean not to be involved in a plan to overthrow the king. The king's word would have more power than any word of one of his subjects (Ecc. 8: 4). Nobody could safely question the ruler's decisions because "the king can do no wrong." His word is supreme, and no one can say to him, "what are you doing?" Every subject should obey orders so that he or she might avoid punishment (Ecc. 8:5). After all, one's disobedience could lead to his or her death.

4.2.8.2.4. Discernment in Approaching Authority. (Ecc. 8: 5b-6)

Having affirmed that obedience to a king's command would avert harm, Solomon commended the value of wisdom, saying that the wise person would know the best course of action to take and when to do it. The impulsive person who overreacts and storms out of the room (Ecc. 8: 3) is only making the problem worse. Wisdom helps one understand people and situations and to figure out the right thing to do at the right time. He said; "the wise heart would know the proper time and procedure." (Ecc. 8:5) This is a reference to timing and judgment, which is the typical discernment of the wise.

Solomon once again jars the reader with the realization that no one knows the future and can determine what will happen in the future. This alone is in God's hands and mankind is

certainly at His mercy and discretion. This inability of mankind to control these events is further emphasised in his saying that nobody can control the wind or prevent the day of his death. (Ecc. 8:8). In light of this he now uses the comparison of the impossibility of one being discharged from the army when a war is on, to the impossibility of one who has practiced wickedness, being released from it. Practising wickedness has a grip on one that will not let go. And so the warning comes that one thing is sure: a day is coming when wickedness will be judged (Ecc. 8: 8b), and even kings will not escape (Ecc. 8:9). God's laws stand and at the end of each person's life, he or she will stand accountable. This truth is supported by what the apostle Paul said to the Galatians; "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." (Gal. 6:7).

4.2.8.3. Inequity and Justice (Ecc. 8:10–14)

In spite of what Solomon has just taught, he goes on to say that everything is not as simple as it seems. The reality is that there is still injustice despite the power of the sovereign and the laws that have been put in place. The tragic and astounding reality is summarized in verse 14: "righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve" (Ecc. 8:14). This statement is another goad to get one's attention and having thought it through, one has to admit that this is often true. Why is this the case? Because mankind is in a state of depravity, which means that he or she cannot please God, nor is there the desire to do so while in that sinful state.

In Ecc 8:10, Solomon spoke about some funerals that he had attended. Not only had he seen these people buried but also he had seen their hypocrisy while they were alive. They had frequented the temple ("the holy place"[Ecc. 8:10]) and had received much praise from the people, despite the fact that they had not lived godly lives. As Solomon reflected on the matter, he realized that the deceased had continued in their sin because they thought they could get away

with it. This he said had caused people to be “filled with schemes to do wrong” (8:11). Glenn explains:

“ Affirming that such a contradiction of the doctrine of retribution was meaningless (hebel; Ecc. 1:2) or enigmatic, Solomon lamented the fact that a wicked man could sin with impunity (commit 100 crimes and live a long time, Ecc. 8:12). According to Solomon, man’s failure to carry out retribution (to punish a crime . . . quickly, Ecc. 8:11) often leads to more wrongdoing: then the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong (Ecc. 7:29)”. (Glenn, 1985:997)

Although God is patient toward sinners and doesn’t always judge sin immediately (2 Peter 3:1–12), His mercy must never be used as an excuse for mankind’s rebellion. Solomon concluded that the wicked will eventually be judged and the righteous will be rewarded (Ecc. 8:12–13). As this is an absolute reality, it is better to fear the Lord and live a godly life. He says that one must understand that even though the evil person may live longer than the godly person, and may appear to get away with sin, the Day of Judgment will come and the wicked person will not escape. No matter how long or full the wicked man’s life may seem to be, it is only prolonged like a shadow and has no substance (Ecc. 8:13). Solomon may be suggesting that the long life of the wicked man is but a prelude to eternal darkness. Once again, one must concur with Solomon that it is wisdom that enables one to make the difference, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10).

4.2.8.4. Acceptance of God’s Purpose (Ecc. 8:15–17)

Solomon concludes this chapter with a contentment not to know everything (Ecc. 8:17). This however was not just giving up the search of meaning but an understanding that mankind is limited in his ability to fully discover the works of God. This is supported in Deuteronomy,

where the writer says:

“The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

Michael Eaton explains that Solomon was thorough in his research. He says:

“The Preacher’s quest was thorough, involving careful thought over his experience (wisdom) as well as observation (I applied my mind ... to see).” (Eaton, 1983:124)

This is the right thing to do when facing a dilemma, enigma or puzzling problem. Solomon certainly had integrity in the way he researched the meaning of life. This is again supported by what he had done in Ecclesiastes 7, where he said; “So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things.” (Ecc. 7: 25)

For the fourth time, Solomon exhorts his readers to enjoy life and delight in the fruit of their labours (Ecc. 8: 15; 2:24; 3:12–15; 5:18–20). Again this admonition is not the philosophy of the foolish hedonist to “eat, drink, and be merry.” Rather, it is the expression of faith in recognizing life as God’s special gift and to live it to the full in the fear of God.

4.2.8.5. Application Of These Truths To Present Day Living

No thinking person can honestly avoid the problem of evil in the world today because it is so prevalent. However, the question as to how a good God can allow evil to take place, must be answered. The answer, as Solomon has pointed out is found in the sovereign purposes of God which man cannot fully understand but must accept by faith. For those who have simply rejected God because they cannot comprehend this dilemma, they must be aware that Scripture says that

they will have to give an account to him one day (Ecc. 12:14; Heb 9:27).

For those who say there is no God, they have to answer the question: “Where does all the good in our world come from?” It’s difficult to believe that impersonal matter alone can produced the intelligent, relational and enjoyable things we have in our world.

An important question is whether it is right for a young person to be involved in “civil disobedience”? Is it right for law-abiding citizens to resist authority when they feel the law is not just? What must one do when the law of the land conflicts with Gods Law? Regarding matters of conscience and the law, one’s conviction will play a very important part. The Apostle Peter said: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Once one has determined if it is a matter of conscience based on Biblical convictions, then he or she has to decide how they will respond. This requires wisdom and humility, so that one’s testimony as a God honouring person is not marred.

As Solomon infers, it is the wise person who understands that there is a right time and way to do the things that one needs to do when tested regarding rights and convictions. One has the options of avoiding conflict, defying orders or even fighting back. Before one acts, he or she must first exercise wisdom and seek to discern what is right in God’s eyes and then proceed in the right way and at the right time. Those who are Christians can ask for the wisdom of God and receive it by faith (James 1:5; 3:17–18).

It must be understood that God is patient toward sinners and doesn’t always judge sin immediately (2 Peter 3:1–12). However, God’s mercy must never be used as an excuse for mankind’s rebellion. Solomon concluded that the wicked will eventually be judged and the righteous will be rewarded (Ecc. 8: 12–13), so it is better to fear the Lord and live a godly life.

How should the wise, young person respond to the injustices in this world? One should certainly address the issue according to his or her conviction. This takes courage and conviction. Secondly one should change what he or she can. Thirdly, one should do all we can to encourage

the passing of good laws and the enforcement of them by the relevant authorities. One must also pray unto God for justice. However, where there is no solution, one must realize that there will always be injustices in our world but it is not a reason for vigilant justice. One should not become pessimistic or cynical, but rather trust God and continue to do good.

God does not expect one to know the unknowable, but He does expect each one to learn all that he or she can about what He has revealed through His Scriptures and to trust Him in submitting to it. Solomon did not reject wisdom, but instead he concluded that it is important to the person who wants to get the most out of life. While wisdom cannot solve every problem nor explain every mystery, it can help one exercise discernment in making decisions.

4.2.9. Ecclesiastes 9

4.2.9.1. Introduction

Realistically facing the inevitability of death Solomon concluded in chapters 7 and 8, having reflected on all he had seen, that people are not captains of their own souls and masters of their own fate. He says that people and what they do are subject to God's sovereign will for they are "in God's hands" (Ecc. 9:1). This is true for both the day of their birth and the day of their death. It is also true for the period of life between those two days. He now deals more definitively with the subject of death.

Death is so repugnant because it is the removal of life and is so final. Loved ones, friends and family are taken away in death and one never again has the joy of relating to them or interacting with them, this side of eternity. As a result people avoid referring to death. They will not use the term, "death" but will use other terms and phrases that are not so 'shocking'. They may use phrases such as: "went home," "passed away," or "passed on." The pain of death is eased in using these expressions but in reality it really is an expression of denial. Death should not be treated lightly because it is a serious matter. It is also a reality that every person will face within his or her lifetime. By the same token it should never be treated flippantly because it carries with it a deep sense of loss and pain.

Solomon has dealt with this subject on numerous occasions in Ecc. 1:4; 2:14–17; 3:18–20; 4:8; 5:15–16; 6:6; 8:8). He will finally deal with the subject of death in Ecc. 12: 1–7. The reason why he dealt with the topic of death so many times is because the reality of death is an indispensable part of life. Taking death seriously makes one face life realistically. Solomon examined life so that he might understand God's pattern for a meaningful life. The only way one could have a meaningful life is both to understand the reality of death and be prepared for the

inevitability of death. In this chapter he comes to two conclusions: death is unavoidable (Ecc. 9:1–10) and life is unpredictable (Ecc. 9:11–18).

4.2.9.2. Death is an Unavoidable and Sad Certainty (Ecc. 9:1–10)

Having reflected on the fact that life and death are “in the hand of God” (Ecc. 9:1), and only He knows the future, whether “love or hate awaits him” (Ecc. 9:1). This is the idea of blessing or judgement that awaits the person after death. The teaching in the Epistle to the Hebrews supports this where it is clear that death is not an accident, it’s an appointment (Heb. 9:27), a destiny that nobody but God can change and then one faces God in judgement. However, Solomon is examining everything from the perspective of ‘under the sun’, that is on purely a human level without God’s revelation. Here it is impossible to tell what one’s standing with the Lord might be. Calamities do not necessarily mean that a person is some great sinner. Neither does material prosperity necessarily mean that one is a child of God. Outward circumstances are no criterion of inward disposition or of final judgment.

4.2.9.2.1. Facing Death Realistically (Ecc. 9: 1-2).

Solomon then says in his comparison between the righteous and the sinner, “As it is with the good man, so with the sinner.” (Ecc. 9:2). He continues to make this comparison right down the line:

“All share a common destiny-- the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.” (Ecc 9:2)

If this is so, the question arises as to why should one bother to live a godly life? After all, whether one obeys the Law or disobeys it, brings sacrifices or neglects to bring them, makes or breaks promises, he or she will still die just the same. In answer to this, Wiersbe appropriately points out:

“Yes, we share a common destiny on earth—death and the grave—*but we do not share a common destiny in eternity*. For that reason, everybody must honestly face “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26) and decide how to deal with it. Christians have trusted Jesus Christ to save them from sin and death; so, as far as they are concerned, “the last enemy” has been defeated (Rom. 6:23; John 11:25–26; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 Cor. 15:51–58). Unbelievers don’t have that confidence and are unprepared to die.” (Wiersbe, 1990: 107)

Wiersbe make the distinction clear and highlights a crucial part of what Solomon is saying in Ecclesiastes. Searching for the meaning of life is incomplete without the realization that life will end in death and every one is accountable to God. God in His grace has made the fear of death a catalyst for man to look beyond himself in his mortality and limitations, to ultimately find his purpose in Him alone.

The reality of death and the fear of death will either bring out the best in people or the worst in people; and too often it is the worst. In facing the death of others, people are confronted with their own mortality, and many people just can’t handle it. When death is experienced within a family, it reveals what is within those members. Bereavement, which is such a painful emotional state, most often reveals the hearts of people. At times like this underlying anger surfaces. Old hurts cause conflict and this must be dealt with to bring healing and reconciliation. Furthermore, Solomon says that: “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil,” (Ecc. 9:3) and that evil is bound to come out. People will do almost anything in order to escape the pain and reality of death. Many people seek to escape the pain and reality by getting drunk, fight with family members or going on extensive holidays to avoid dealing with these bitter emotions. At the end

of it all they still have to deal with the pain and work through the reality of death in their own lives. This they must do for they have to face the reality of their own death one day.

4.2.9.2.2. Appreciation of life as a remedy for the certainty of death (Ecc. 9:3)

However just being alive is a great advantage and so Solomon compared the lot of a live dog with that of a dead lion. He said that it is better to be alive and dishonoured than to be honoured and dead. The dog was the most despised animal (1 Sam. 17:43) and the lion was the most honoured animal (Prov. 30:30). The living at least, have the advantage of consciousness and hope, but the dead have no consciousness (“know nothing”) or hope of reward or enjoyment. Moreover, they never again express their love, their hate, and their jealousy on this earth, under the sun. With reference to the dead, Solomon added that, “never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.” (Ecc. 9:6). The word for part (לֶקֶט) “leq,” lot, portion, allotment) is the word he used elsewhere of life and its enjoyment. Death is so final and in death one is robbed of all activity, vitality, relationship and participation in life. It is a hard-hitting reality and that is what Solomon wants the reader to realize.

Thus the living have opportunities but the dead do not. The living have capacities for enjoyment (Ecc. 9:7-9), but the dead do not (Ecc. 9: 6).

4.2.9.2.3. Enjoyment of life as a remedy for the certainty of death (Ecc. 9:4-6)

What is the remedy to this reality? Solomon’s advice would be for one to enjoy life to the full realizing that this is God’s gift to one at this point in time. It is not a denial of death for, as has been noted, death has been respected and understood in a very realistic way in the previous

verses. This is seen against the background of the uncertainties of what the future may bring, whether adversity or prosperity (Ecc. 9:1-3), and in light of the certainty of death with the loss of all opportunity for enjoyment (Ecc. 9:4-6). Thus, Solomon again recommended enjoying life as God's gift (Ecc. 2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-19). Solomon's remedy of enjoyment is outlined in Ecc. 9: 7-10. This has been one of Solomon's reoccurring themes (Ecc. 2:24; 3:12-15, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15). His admonition begins with the word "go" (Ecc. 9:7). This has the meaning of getting up and going as a conviction and an action. It comes from the realization that death is coming, but God's gift of life is a reality now and He wants one to enjoy what he has given. This is not a call to a hedonistic life of sinful pleasures. Rather it is the call to God-ordained experiences of home life: happy meals (Ecc. 9:7), joyful celebrations (Ecc. 9:8), a faithful, loving marriage (Ecc. 9:9), and healthy, hard work (Ecc. 9:10). In short, these include both the basic necessities of life and some blessings that God graciously gives mankind.

4.2.9.2.4. Appreciation and enjoyment of meals (Ecc. 9:7)

Solomon says: "Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favours what you do." (9:7). Wiersbe points out:

"The average Jewish family began the day with an early snack and then had a light meal ("brunch") sometime between 10:00 and noon. They didn't eat together again until after sunset. When their work was done they gathered for the main meal of the day. It consisted largely of bread and wine, perhaps milk and cheese, with a few vegetables and fruit in season, and sometimes fish. It was a simple meal that was designed to nourish both the body and the soul, for eating together ("breaking bread") was a communal act of friendship and commitment." (Wiersbe, 1990: 110)

Here Wiersbe gives a clearer understanding of the importance of the meal in a family's life in those days. Family relationships were in those days, as they are now, the closest and most

important of all relationships. Thus the fostering of relationship and commitment around meals were essential, especially in the face of future uncertainty and the certainty of death. Solomon, as a wealthy king, sat down to very lavish, daily feasts (1 Kings 4:22–23), but in spite of the abundance of good food, it seems that these were not always enjoyable. This is brought out in his emphasis on love and peace as opposed to hate and strife around the meal. He says on two occasions in the book of Proverbs:

“Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife” (Prov. 17:1) and again, “Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred” (Prov. 15:17).

Harmony and love at a meal, and especially a family meal, is most important. However this is not the only reason, for this verse concludes with the understanding that one can only do this within the providence of God. Solomon says; “it is now that God favours what you do” (Ecc. 9:7). God’s favour is seen in His provision of allowing one to still be alive and being able to enjoy what He has provided.

4.2.9.2.5. Enjoyment of every occasion (Ecc. 9: 8)

In any area with a very hot climate, white clothing is preferred because white reflects the sunlight and so decreases the heating effect of it. White garments in the East were symbols of purity, and so were worn on certain special occasions. The oil was symbolic of joy. Together they signified purity and the joy of festive occasions. It was usually at weddings and ceremonies that people wore their white garments and anointed themselves with expensive perfumes instead of the usual olive oil. These occasions were few, so everybody made the most of them. But here Solomon advised the people to, “always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with

oil” (9:7). What he was meaning was that one should make every occasion a special occasion.

This would certainly be a joyful celebration of life in the face of the certainty of death.

4.2.9.2.6. Enjoyment of marriage (Ecc. 9:9).

Solomon saw a wife as a gift from God. He boldly said,

“Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord” (Prov.19: 14).

Thus marriage is good, involving a loving commitment between husband and wife that should last a lifetime. This too is supported by what Solomon said in Proverbs:

“He who finds a wife finds what is good, and receives favour from the Lord” (Prov 18:22).

There is great joy and stability in the home of the man and woman who love each other and are faithful to their marriage vows. Sadly, Solomon didn’t live up to what he taught and disobeyed God’s plan for marriage by marrying many women. He wrote Ecclesiastes later on in life, and with hindsight and wisdom he emphasised a monogamous pattern of marriage.

4.2.9.2.7. Enjoyment of Work (Ecc. 9:10).

The Jewish people looked upon work, as a gift entrusted to them, from God. Solomon encouraged people to work diligently. The idiom, “whatever your hand finds to do” means whatever one is able to do. Whatever a person is able to do, he or she should do it with all their might, which means that they must expend all their energies. It also has the meaning of doing it

while one still has strength, for the time will come when he or she will no longer be able to work.

The reason for this advice is that when death comes, all opportunities for work and service will cease. In death a person will have no further energies or abilities to work, nor would there be any “planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Ecc. 9:10).

4.2.9.3. The Unpredictability of Life (Ecc. 9:11–18)

4.2.9.3.1. Human Abilities do not always Guarantee Success. (Ecc. 9:11-12)

Solomon now turns from his discussion on the certainty of death and deals with the unpredictability of life. Someone wanting to counteract the certainty of death would want to enforce a certainty in the course of life. In reply to this Solomon points out that one cannot guarantee what will happen in life, because life is unpredictable. He supports this by recalling five examples that he has seen where human abilities were no guarantee for success (Ecc. 9:11). It is generally true that the fastest runners win the races, the strongest soldiers win the battles, and the wisest and most skilled workers get the best jobs. However it is also true that this does not happen every time. Sometimes these same gifted people fail because they are fallible humans and because of factors outside their control. Solomon has already shown that, “the wise heart would know the proper time and procedure” (Ecc. 8:5), but only the Lord can control “time and chance” (Ecc. 9: 11). As has already been pointed out, the word “chance” simply means occurrence or event. Kaiser explains that the Hebrew word (פגא); “*pegac*” simply means “occurrence” and comes from the verb “to meet” (Kaiser, 1979:103). It therefore has nothing to do with fate or chance, as these terms are known today. A person might say that they just happened to be in the right place at the right time, and they got the job. This, really, is an acknowledgement of God’s providence rather than their ability. On the other hand nobody can predict when trouble and

adverse circumstances will arrive on the scene and wreck all his or her great plans (Ecc. 9:12). Solomon explains that when they least expect it, fish are caught in the net and birds are caught in the trap. So men are trapped by “evil times” (Ecc. 9:12), sudden events that are unexpected and beyond their control.

4.2.9.3.2. Opportunities do not always Guarantee Success. (Ecc. 9:13-18)

Life is also unpredictable with regard to opportunities that one might have but not make use of. Solomon implies that one’s opportunities are no guarantee of success (Ecc. 9:13–18). He gives an account of a little city that was besieged by a powerful king but a wise man delivered it. It is not clear whether the wise man actually delivered the city, and then later he was not rewarded and his wisdom no longer accepted or whether he could have saved it, and was asked but nobody followed his advice. Glenn takes the former view and explains that, in 1 Sam. 25:31 “remember” conveys the idea of reward. His understanding of this section emphasises that wisdom is not rewarded with wealth or esteem. He says:

“Though wisdom had proven better than strength, that is, military might (7:11-12; 9:18; Prov. 21:22), that poor wise man received no benefit from his wisdom. His wisdom was despised and his words were not heeded, and he remained poor and unremembered (unrewarded with wealth or social esteem; cf. Ecc. 9:11).” (Glenn, 1985:1000)

Warren Wiersbe on the other hand leans towards the other explanation because it better fits the context with verses 16–18. He explains that the Hebrew allows for the translation “could have saved” rather than “saved” the city by his wisdom. He states that:

“The wise man spoke quietly and was ignored. He had the opportunity for greatness but was frustrated by one loud ignorant man. “One sinner

[the loud ruler] destroys much good” (v. 18, NKJV) is a truth that is illustrated throughout the whole of Scripture, starting with Adam and his disobedience to God (Gen. 3; Rom. 5). Achan sinned and brought defeat on the army of Israel (Joshua 7). David’s sin brought trouble to Israel (2 Sam. 24), and the revolt of Absalom led the nation into a civil war (2 Sam. 15ff). (Wiersbe, 1990: 114)

Wiersbe’s view is preferred because it better fits the context of the passage (Ecc. 9:11-12). Here a wise man had the answer for a very serious and threatening situation but the opportunity was missed. This view also best fits Solomon’s conclusion, where he says:

“So I said, Wisdom is better than strength. But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.” (Ecc 9:16-17)

4.2.9.4. Conclusion

Solomon comes to the conclusion that death is unavoidable and life is unpredictable. What course can one take in this regard? The safest and best course is to yield oneself into the hands of God and walk by faith in His Word. The believer does not depend on luck but on the providential working of God. The one who seeks to honour God does not live by explanations; but rather by the promises of God laid out in the Scriptures.

4.2.9.5. Application of These Truths to Youth Today.

Only God knows what the future holds, and what will happen tomorrow. There is security in knowing this. Mankind, however has the freedom to discern situations and make decisions, but there are always consequences for decisions made today.

One of the greatest challenges one faces is death. There is no consolation or confidence in trying to run away from the reality of death. This only comes from facing death realistically and trusting in Jesus Christ, who died as a substitute for sinners. Young people need to realize this early in their lives for in this way they will not only have a real peace and joy in life, but also be free from the continual fear of death. A hope that can be destroyed by death is no hope at all and must be rejected. On the other hand the realization of death's reality for each one should drive him or her to seek God and to take life seriously. Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who has sat at the deathbeds of many children and older people over many years, (Kubler-Ross, 1991:9), explains that positive lessons that can be learned from facing death realistically (Kubler-Ross, 1991:18-19).

Life is not easy, but this is not a call to a hedonistic life of sinful pleasures. Rather it is the call to trust in a sovereign God, Who is able to protect and provide for one in difficulties. A short sighted view of life may cause young people to think that life on earth is all there is and the only option is to live out one's pleasures to the full. This is carefree living with no realisation of the consequences of such a life style nor that one is accountable to God in death

With regard to marriage, Solomon never advocated the idea of "live-in couples" or "trial marriages." He considered that a wife was a gift from God (Prov. 18:22; 19:14). The Biblical teaching about marriage is one of a loving commitment that lasts a lifetime. In the challenges and difficulties of life, a marriage where the husband and wife love each other and are faithful to their marriage vows is great joy and stability.

Work and labour are considered honourable in Scripture. Solomon says that there is no work in the grave. Young people are encouraged to take this admonition to heart and make the most of the opportunities they have while young. One's work and especially the manner in which one has lived, will be judged, and he or she will receive a reward for God's glory (1 Cor. 3:10; Col. 3:23-25).

4.2.10. Ecclesiastes 10

4.2.10.1. Introduction

Solomon had concluded chapter 9 with a contrasting statement that one sinner can destroy much good (Ecc. 9:18). In other words, he was saying that a little folly can destroy the great value of wisdom. He continues this theme in chapter 10, as he reminds his listeners once again of the importance of wisdom and the danger of folly. He says that, “as dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour” (Ecc. 10:1). It is true that dead flies in perfume ruin it by giving it a bad smell. The main purpose of perfume is its smell so if that is ruined and replaced with a foul smell then it is rendered useless. So does a little folly, which ruins wisdom and honour and renders it useless. The word “folly” is used nine times in this chapter, thus emphasising folly as the main theme. He now explains the basic principle of how folly brings problems to those who do these foolish things. On the other hand the wise person will stay away from folly!

Having spelled out the principle of folly and wisdom, he now explains who is likely to fall into these categories. The difference is that the “heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left” (Ecc. 10:2). With regard to the heart, Solomon was not referring to the physical organ in the body, but to the “control centre” of one’s life, that governs his or her convictions and decisions in life. He has explained this in Proverbs where he said:

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil” (Prov. 4:23-27).

Thus it is clear that the heart is the centre of one’s decision-making process. This must be

directed according to righteous principles. It is fitting then that he says that a wise man's heart is inclined to the right; but a fool's to the left. To the ancients the right hand was the place of honour and power, the left of weakness and inferiority. The idea is that the wise man's heart leads him to what is right and proper; the fool's heart leads him astray, in the wrong direction. The wise person's conviction, like a guardian, helps him to escape snares and dangers in his daily life. The fool has no such conviction. It is evident in the fool's daily living that he or she is a fool by the decisions that are made and the conduct of their lives.

Solomon then applied this principle to four different fools and shows the outcome of their actions.

4.2.10.2. Adverse Results for Foolish Rulers (Ecc. 10:4–7)

When Solomon became the ruler of Israel, God graciously appeared to him and offered to give him whatever gift he especially wanted (1 Kings 3:5). He requested wisdom to rightly govern God's people. God was pleased with his request and promised to give him wisdom, riches and honour far greater than any other king (1 Kings 3:9-14). Wisdom is the primary ability that any ruler needs to govern well. It essentially boils down to knowing what is right and doing what is right. Solomon knew this and so he was able to evaluate other rulers in this regard. He noted that if a ruler is arrogant and proud, he might say and do foolish things that cause him to lose respect (Ecc. 10: 4). The picture here is of a proud ruler who is easily angered and takes out his anger on the servants around him. They in turn may respond with anger but anger accomplishes very little that is positive. For the most part it is detrimental to the person expressing it and also for those on the receiving end. Solomon had warned about this in the book of Proverbs:

“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Prov 25:28)

The meaning of this proverb is seen in the fact that a city without walls is vulnerable to attack by enemies and so is the angry person vulnerable to trouble that will come his or her way because of the anger. Thus servants must not act like fools and respond in anger for this will make things worse, as has been noted in Ecc. 8:3. It is more beneficial to control themselves and not walk out in a rage but to stay right where they are and seek to bring peace. Again this is the advice that Solomon had given earlier in Proverbs:

“A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it”
(Prov. 16:14).

On the other hand a leader who is too ‘soft’, he is also a fool (Ecc. 10:5–7). Such a ruler lacks conviction and character and tends to get things backwards. He puts fools in the high offices and qualified people in the low offices. The servants will ride on horses while the noblemen will walk. This is usually the case if a ruler has incompetent people advising him. Solomon’s son Rehoboam fell into this trap when he followed the advice of his Youthful friends and ignored the wise counsellors of his father’s era. The best balance in a ruler’s character is to be tough-minded but tender hearted.

4.2.10.3. Occupational Hazards For Foolish Workers (Ecc. 10:8–11)

In this section Solomon is dealing with occupational hazards that often accompany foolish workers. This applies to those people who attempted to do their work and suffered because they were foolish. As he is dealing with the theme of folly in this chapter he emphasises the negative effects in the activity of labour. He is not teaching that one must not be involved in hard work because there is the chance that one might get injured. That would contradict his teaching on “chance” and hard work. He had emphasized the importance of honest labour and the joys it can

bring. There are inherent dangers in any physical work but they could be averted by applying wisdom or prudence.

Solomon described one man who dug a pit, but fell into the pit himself. He lacked wisdom and failed to take proper precautions. He may have been digging the hole to trap someone in it. With reference to this verse Michael Eaton says:

“Vindictiveness has its own built in penalties. The imagery is similar in Jeremiah 18:18-22. The malicious endeavours of men, often wilful and requiring much trouble (digs a pit ... breaks through a wall), have a rebound which may be opposite (He ... falls in), unexpected (8b), and deadly (bitten by a snake).” (Eaton, 1983:135)

Scripture often uses this as a picture of just retribution or talionic justice. Psalm 64 is a good example of retributive justice. This however, is not the lesson in this instance here, for it does not fit the context of the following verses (Ecc. 10:9,10). Rather, he uses the idea of possibility coming from the word “may” in the NIV. Thus it is not a typical adverse result but something that may happen if one is foolish and does not take the necessary caution.

He describes another man who broke through a wall, and a snake bit him. Serpents often found their way into hidden crevices and corners, and the man should have been more careful. He was overconfident and did not look ahead. He then describes careless workers, who are injured cutting stones and splitting logs. This is more clearly understood in (Ecc. 10:10) where a man who tried to split wood with a dull axe. The wise worker will stop and first sharpen it. This is described as skill that brings success. The well known slogan says, “Work smarter, not harder!” This certainly is true and so aptly fits the content of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Snake charmers were common as entertainers in that day. Solomon described a performer who was bitten by the snake before the man had opportunity to “charm” it; with the result that he could not collect any money from the spectators (Ecc. 10:11). He was seen to be a fool because he presumed the snake was charmed. On the other hand he may have rushed and acted as though

the snake was charmed. He wanted to make his money quickly and then move to another location, but his presumption and haste was foolish and as a result he made no money at all.

Wiersbe comes to the conclusion that:

“The common denominator among these “foolish workers” seems to be presumption. They were overconfident and ended up either hurting themselves or making their job harder.” (Wiersbe, 1990:119)

While this is true, Glenn focuses more on the aspect of wisdom’s value being nullified because of bad timing. He says:

“Thus Solomon showed in this series of proverbs that though wisdom is valuable in dangerous and difficult tasks, its value can be nullified by improper timing.” (Glenn, 1985:1001)

Both of these views are acceptable as common sense views and because they do fit the context of the passage. The primary issue is that one cannot predict what is going to happen in each instance, but there is a greater likelihood of something going wrong when a person foolishly blunders on without due consideration or caution.

4.2.10.4. Detrimental outcomes for foolish talkers (Ecc. 10:12–15)

In this section Solomon pointed out four detrimental outcomes of foolish talkers.

Firstly, they speak words that cause hurt to the person themselves (Ecc. 10:12). The wise person will speak gracious words with due consideration of the situation and the hearers. The fool on the other hand exclaims whatever is on his mind and doesn’t stop to consider who might be hurt by it. Solomon had described the same idea in the book of Proverbs, where he said:

“The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.” (Prov. 10:32).

In the end, it is the fool himself who is hurt the most for he is “consumed by his own lips” (Ecc. 10:12). In the New Testament, hurtful gossip and selfish words are compared to a fire that causes much destruction (James 3:5–6). Again it was also Solomon who had pointed this out in Proverbs:

“He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.” (Prov. 13:3)

Secondly such fools speak words that are meaningless. Solomon says:

“ At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming - who can tell him what will happen after him? (Ecc. 10: 13-14).

What this person says doesn't make sense and the longer he or she talks, the worse it becomes. It would be far better for such a person to keep quiet, because all that he or she says only lets everybody know that they are fools (Ecc. 5:3). Solomon called it “wicked madness” for by the time such a person is finished talking, he or she has committed to statements that are worse than foolish for they are indicative of mental and moral depravity.

Thirdly, they speak many words that are hollow and meaningless (Ecc. 10:14). The fool is “full of words” without realizing that he or she is saying nothing. This often leads to sin as Solomon had said: “ When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise” (Prov. 10:19). James had pointed out in his New Testament epistle that the person who can control his or her tongue is able to discipline the entire body (James 3:1–2). Furthermore, Jesus had said,

“Simply let your Yes be Yes, and your No, No; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (Matt. 5:37).

Finally, they are speaking words that demonstrate their arrogance and ignorance (Ecc. 10:14-15). Foolish people talk about the future as though they either know all about it or are in control of what will happen. All they really demonstrate in the end is that they are foolish because as Solomon has so clearly said, nobody knows the future. The irony of this person's conduct is seen in his boasting about his future plans and his wearying people with his talk, but he can't even find the way to the city. Glenn explains:

“Besides being ignorant of the future, a fool is also ignorant of the most obvious; he does not know the way to town (10:3). This is a proverbial expression for extreme ignorance like the modern proverb, ‘He doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain’. This is why a fool finds his work such a chore (it wearies him)” (Glenn 1985:1002)

4.2.10.5. Detrimental Effects of Foolish Leaders (Ecc. 10:16–20)

Solomon now outlines the detrimental effect of depraved leadership on a country and then warns against criticizing such bad leaders. He initially deals with the king and his princes (Ecc. 10:16-17). He says; “Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant (Ecc. 10:16). Wiersbe explains:

“The suggestion is that this servant became king with the help of his friends (cf. 4:13–14). Now he was obligated to give them all jobs so he could remain on the throne. In spite of their selfish and expensive indulgence, these hirelings could not be dismissed, because the king's security depended on them” (Wiersbe, 1990:121).

Wiersbe certainly has a point that has been seen in the history of politics throughout the world. He explains that if the king is immature, the people he gathers around him will reflect that immaturity and take advantage of it. Immature leaders use their positions for self-indulgence from early on in the day. On the other hand a king who is a true nobleman, he will surround himself with princes who are disciplined and use their authority for the good of the country.

Mature leaders with integrity and wisdom use their authority to build the nation, while mere office holders use the nation to build their authority. They use public funds for their own selfish indulgence.

Solomon added that incompetent leaders are lazy, causing the ruin of the buildings with the sagging of rafters and the leaking of roofs (Ecc. 10:18). He uses the image of a house to symbolize the state. With incompetent and lazy rulers the house of state deteriorates. As a result, the organization starts to decline. In their undisciplined lifestyle, they are involved in partying and feasting, which depleted state funds. Again this is supported by what Solomon had said in Proverbs; “One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys” (Prov. 18:9).

Immature people enjoy the privileges and ignore the responsibilities. On the other hand mature people take their responsibilities seriously and use them to help others.

Solomon then dealt with leaders who are indifferent (Ecc. 10:19). For these unscrupulous leaders money is the answer to everything. It takes money to finance their lavish lifestyle. This they acquired by extortion and bribery as well as through exorbitant taxation. This is indeed a foolish attitude to have for it is typified by a selfish philosophy, which is so detrimental to many others. They are totally indifferent to the responsibilities of their office or the needs of the people. However God will eventually judge them, and His judgment will be just. In past years unscrupulous leaders of many developing nations have stolen government funds in order to build their own kingdoms. Sadly this has also happened to some religious organizations. The Apostle Paul in his epistle to Timothy quite aptly stated this attitude:

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Tim. 6:10).

Finally, Solomon warns against criticizing inadequate leaders and especially the

sovereign. He said in warning:

“Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.” (Ecc. 10:20)

The familiar saying: “A little bird told me” probably originated from this verse. Solomon warned against reviling the king even in one’s thoughts or cursing a rich man, who was usually a man in authority. The reason for such advice is that a report may get back to the king or the rich person. A bird may tell them, means that an unknown source may disclose one’s secret criticisms. In this way Solomon completes this chapter warning against folly. His admonition is to avoid folly and live by the wisdom of God.

4.2.10.6. Conclusion

This also concludes the second part of his discourse. He has reviewed the four arguments presented in chapters 1 and 2, and has decided that life was really worth living after all. The best thing we can do is to trust God, do our work, accept what God sends us, and enjoy each day of our lives to the glory of God (Ecc. 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10). All that remains for the Preacher is to conclude his discourse with a practical application, and this he does in chapters 11 and 12. He will bring together all the various strands of truth that he has woven into his sermon, and he will show us what God expects us to do if we are to be satisfied.

4.2.10.7. Application of These Truths to Youth Today

Anger is a very strong emotion and must be controlled and handled wisely, for unless this is done it may lead one into trouble. Whether one is a leader or follower anger can be detrimental because when one expresses anger it affects others. It is detrimental to the person expressing it and also for those on the receiving end. Similarly one should be cautious about righteous anger for not every religious crusader is motivated by love for God or obedience to the Word. His or her zeal could be a mask that is covering hidden anger or jealousy.

When speaking, the wise person will speak gracious words with due consideration of the situation and the hearers. The fool on the other hand exclaims whatever is on his mind and doesn't stop to consider who might be hurt by it. One may try to hurt others with lies, slander, and angry words, but in reality he or she is just hurting himself or herself. Solomon's admonition is true: "He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity" (Prov. 21:23)

With regard to leadership, mature leaders lead with integrity and wisdom, use their authority for the good of others and the betterment of the people as a whole. The unscrupulous use of public funds for their own selfish purposes is detrimental to others and eventually to themselves. They may have to account to others for what they have done with punitive results, but ultimately they will have to account to God. (Ecc 12:14). Youth sometimes outstrip their elders in spiritual zeal for age is no guarantee of maturity (1 Cor. 3:1–4; Heb. 5:11–14)

One must be very careful in his or her criticism or gossip. The reason for this advice is that there is a high degree of probability that the secret criticism will reach the ears of the one being criticised. This leads to embarrassment, trouble and broken relationships. The situation is especially serious when the aggrieved person is a superior in an organization. Even if one cannot respect the person in the office, one must respect the office.

4.2.11. Ecclesiastes 11–12

4.2.11.1. Introduction

In chapters 11 and 12, Solomon concludes the book of Ecclesiastes. He has examined life in order to determine what life is all about. As has been explained in the previous passages, he has investigated and experimented in many areas life on earth, purely from a human point of view. In his own words he referred to it as what happens “under the sun.” He came to the conclusion that life was not worth living. His arguments for this conclusion were: the monotony of life, the vanity of wisdom, the futility of wealth, and the certainty of death. He then reviewed his arguments in the light of God’s sovereign control and purpose and came to a totally different conclusion. He concluded that life has meaning and purpose as it is lived to the full as a gift from God for His purpose and glory. Firstly, he realized that life was not monotonous and purposeless but instead life was filled with God-given, challenging situations. Each situation had its own time and its own purpose in line with God’s purpose. Secondly, he realized that wealth could be enjoyed as a gift from God and used for His glory. Thirdly, he realized that even though man cannot fully understand and explain all things, God knows all things and He has a good purpose with everything under His control. Fourthly, he realized that although death is repugnant and final, this must motivate one to live his or her life to the full and make the most of the opportunities for they are God-given.

Now Solomon gives practical admonitions to his readers to follow. These admonitions are all based upon the conviction that life is given by God and it must be lived in accordance with His purpose as He has revealed it. This in turn is applied practically to daily living by the realisation that in the end everyone is accountable to Him. Thus the admonitions include living life by faith (Ecc. 11:1–6) and enjoying life in accountability to God (Ecc. 11:7–12:8). It also

includes learning about life from lessons of wisdom and God's truth (Ecc. 12:9–12), and fearing God as the essence of life (Ecc. 12:13–14) because it is to Him that one has ultimately to give account.

4.2.11.2. Living Life by Faith (Ecc. 11:1–6)

Solomon used two occupations to illustrate his point about living life by faith. The first is the merchant sending out his ships (Ecc. 11:1–2) and the second is the farmer sowing his seed (Ecc. 11:3–6).

A great deal of faith is required in both of these activities because neither the merchant nor the farmer can control the future or circumstances during which he is expecting his return. The ships may be sunk or robbed at sea and the cargo lost. For the farmer, bad weather, disease or insects might destroy his crop, and he would suffer loss. However, if the merchant and the farmer only waited until the circumstances were ideal, they would never get anything done! Life has a certain amount of risk to it, and that's where faith comes in. Faith is knowing God personally and trusting Him to work out His good purpose in His time

So with regard to the merchant, Solomon says,

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again” (Ecc 11:1)

Wiersbe paraphrased the verse and then explained its meaning as;

“Send out your grain in ships.” Solomon himself was involved in various kinds of trade, so it was natural for him to use this illustration (1 Kings 10:15, 22). It would be months before the ships would return with their precious cargo; but when they did, the merchant's faith and patience would be rewarded.” (Wiersbe 1990:127)

His interpretation fits well with the context of the passage and is supported by the view of Glenn, (Glenn, 1985: 1002-1003). Stout however brings out a different interpretation. He explains:

“On reading this verse we find two words which are clearly symbolic. Our problem is to discover whether these—”bread” and “waters”—mean, as has been taught, “charity” and “reward” or whether there is hidden here something more profound which will help us to see more clearly the marvellous harmony of the Bible and its oneness of purpose, to reveal the blessed Son of God. And since He is the central theme of the Book as a whole, we expect indeed to find Him here likewise.” (Stoute, 1950:223)

“(the) meaning of these two words—what they symbolize. (is) Bread speaks of Christ, waters of the Gentiles.” (Stoute, 1950:224)

Stoute’s interpretation tends to spiritualise the meaning and does not fit the context of the passage. The interpretation of Wiersbe and Glenn are preferred. Their view is also supported by Hubbard who says that this verse is “not about charity but wise investment” (Hubbard, 1994:324), and Eaton who says that, “bread is used in the sense of ‘goods’, ‘livelihood’ as in Deut 8:3; Pr 31:14” (Eaton, 1983:140).

In verse 2, Solomon states:

“Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land” (Ecc 11:2).

Continuing the discussion about merchants and investments this verse can be explained as making investments by seven or eight different means and in this way some of them are bound to bring a good return. It is the wise idea of not “putting all your eggs in one basket.”

All of this is underscored by Solomon’s emphasis in the first five verses that man is

ignorant of the future. He uses the phrase; “You do not know,” three times (Ecc. 11:2; 5-6); he also said, “You cannot understand” (Ecc. 12: 5). However, this should not cause one to be inactive in fear of failure or to despair but to bold action and diligent labour. The possibility of disaster should make a person careful in investing in numerous ventures. The farmer on the other hand is also on a venture of prudence and faith. He is at the mercy of nature and the falling of rain at the proper time to nourish the seed (Ecc. 11:3–6) for nobody can control the weather.

Solomon continues with the farming topic in verse 3, in contrasting the ever-changing clouds with the static nature of trees, which stand and fall in the same place. The clouds might bring rain to grow the crop but they might also bring a gale to topple the trees. Thus his admonition is that one cannot sit around waiting for ideal circumstances (Ecc. 11:4). One cannot wait for perfect weather or absolutely ideal circumstances. One must venture out in faith in God, even when the circumstances seem bad otherwise nothing will be achieved at all.

Again, that which is unknown comes into play in Solomon’s argument. He points out that just as nobody knows “the way of the wind” (Ecc. 11:5) or how “the body is formed in the mother’s womb” (Ecc. 11:5), so nobody knows the works of God as the creator and maker of all things. This is again an emphasis on God’s sovereign control and purpose in the affairs of mankind. Solomon had already explained God’s time and purpose for everything (Ecc. 3:1–11), and this coupled with the fact that one cannot know the future or the purpose of God in every situation, forces one to live by faith in Him. Therefore, the admonition is to use each day wisely (Ecc. 11:6), by sowing seed in the morning and working hard until evening. There is no room for idleness or inactivity but rather to diligently work in an unpredictable world, all the time trusting God to work out His good purpose as He sees best.

4.2.11.3. Enjoying life in accountability to God (Ecc. 11:7–12:8)

In this section, Solomon gives his last and final admonition to accept life as God's good gift and to live it in accountability to Him. This is a major emphasis in the book and he has repeated it throughout his argument (Ecc. 2:24; 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10), that one may remember, understand and develop convictions about this in life. This means that one is always aware that God knows all things, even one's actions, speech and attitudes and for these very things everyone will have to give an account to Him one day. This too is the essence of living a meaningful life in accountability to God.

In order that one may accept life as a gift and learn to enjoy all that God gives, Solomon gave these instructions to the Youth: "Be happy" (Ecc. 11:7–9), "banish anxiety" (Ecc. 11:10), and "Remember" (Ecc. 12:1–8).

Solomon's first instruction is to rejoice and be happy (Ecc. 11:7). This call to 'be happy' is not a carefree, irresponsible approach to life. Rather it is a call to live out to the full what God has given, when He has given it. It is a call to enjoy life when it may be enjoyed for there is the warning that there will be many days of difficulty, pain and finally death. This is brought out by the contrast between the light and darkness. As the sunlight is sweet because it brings warmth and clarity of day so is life, which it symbolizes. Darkness on the other hand is compared to the night of difficulty, pain and death. Eaton points out:

"The goodness of life is portrayed by light which, elsewhere in the Old Testament is used to denote 'joy, blessing and life in contrast to sorrow, adversity and death.'" (Eaton, 1983:144)

Thus it is important to enjoy life in one's Youth before the days of difficulty, pain and death come. Again he emphasises that everything is in a state of changing, deteriorating and passing and thus it is transitory (*hebel*). Young people are encouraged to develop healthy patterns

of living in enjoying life through what they see and experience (lit ‘hearts and eyes’), (Ecc. 11:9).

This is not an encouragement to go on some Youthful indulgence and satisfy their sinful desires.

This is a call to enjoy to the full what they can enjoy within the boundaries of God’s will.

Solomon brings this out in his caution where he emphasises accountability to God in “all these things” (Ecc. 11:9). Wiersbe explains:

“It is rather a reminder for young people to enjoy the special pleasures that belong to Youth and can never be experienced again in quite the same way. Those of us who are older need to remember that God expects young people to act like young people. The tragedy is that too many older people are trying to act like young people!” (Wiersbe, 1990:130).

Solomon’s second instruction is to “banish anxiety from your hearts” and to “cast off troubles from your body” (Ecc. 11:10) in an endeavour to live life to the full, for Youth is transitory and soon passes. What he means here is that happiness and joy in Youthful living do not happen automatically. Such happiness can be spoiled by worry over the repercussions of wrongdoing or sin. Normally young people, in their vigour and optimism, are not too worried about the future in general but only as it pertains to the repercussions of their actions. Thus this privilege of Youthful living must be balanced by personal responsibility. Sinful actions done in one’s Youth can have devastating results and this in turn may rob one of that joyful period of Youth. Solomon’s warning is that it all soon passes; it is transitory. Again, Warren Wiersbe explains with great insight why this is so important. He says:

“The phrase “childhood and Youth are vanity” does not mean that these stages in life are unimportant and a waste of time. Quite the opposite is true! The best way to have a happy adult life and a contented old age is to get a good start early in life and avoid the things that will bring trouble later on. Young people who take care of their minds and bodies, avoid the destructive sins of the flesh, and build good habits of health and holiness, have a better chance for happy adult years than those who “sow their wild oats” and pray for a crop failure.” (Wiersbe, 1990:131)

Solomon's third instruction is to remember (Ecc. 12:1–8) and this is repeated in verses 1 and 6. This instruction means more than just thinking about God. Barry Davis in a technical analysis explains:

“ ‘Remember’ (זָכַר) is the most appropriate choice for this solemn religious adjuration. Though the Qal form of this verb normally refers ‘to inner mental acts, either with or without reference to concomitant external acts’, the context of this passage (and of the entire book) implies that action subsequent to the mental activity must be undertaken. Readers are challenged to remember, not for the sake of reminiscing but for the purpose of revolutionizing their lives, bringing them into conformity with God’s eternal and sovereign plan.” (Davis, 1994:352)

Davis is quite right and his explanation again underscores that the context of the word determines its meaning and not purely its etymology. In the light of his explanation ‘remember’ is to be constantly thinking of God with a view to honouring and obeying Him. Glenn in turn, supports this view, as he explains:

“ The command, ‘Remember your Creator’ means to revere God, to keep His laws faithfully, to serve Him responsibly, remembering that because He created people, everyone owes Him his life. This meaning is obvious (a) from the preceding verses (Ecc. 11:9-10) on living joyously but responsibly, (b) from the final advice at the end of the book to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecc. 12:13), and (c) from the meaning of the verb remember (in Deut. 8:18 and Ps. 119:55 remember is parallel to keeping the Law; in Jud. 8:34 it is contrasted with self-reliance and worship of other gods; in Ps. 63:6 it is parallel to meditating on and faithfully following God)”. (Glenn, 1985:1004)

Glenn's argument is well substantiated and supported by the context and other Old Testament scriptures. He is quite right and it is vitally important to understand this admonition correctly. It would be so easy for young people to be caught up with the vigour and pleasures of Youth and neglect or ignore God and His requirements of godliness. This may then become a pattern throughout their lives until they reach the stages that Solomon warns about and it is almost too late to change. So young people are told to continually acknowledge and honour God while they are young before the years of frailty come when there is little pleasure in daily living

(Ecc. 12:1). Solomon in verses 3–7 then gives a very imaginative description of the demise of a person in their old age. Here there are two interpretations of this demise. One follows the picture of a house that is falling apart and finally turns to dust. Another follows along the metaphor of a house representing the various faculties of the human body in their decline. This view is supported by Kaiser (Kaiser, 1979:119), Swindoll (Swindoll, 1985:350), Eaton (Eaton, 1983:148), Wiersbe (Wiersbe, 1990:131) and Glenn (Glenn, 1985:1005). It also has substantiation in other passages of scripture where a dwelling is used as a biblical metaphor for the human body (2 Cor. 5:1–5; 2 Peter 1:13). Glenn explains:

“Though some interpreters have tried to explain this passage under a rigid adherence to one figure either the decline of an estate or the gloom of a household after the death of its head it seems that Solomon chose the various pictures to depict the declining physical and psychological powers of old age. Thus he referred to the days of misery (1) and the days of decreasing joy and increasing gloom (v. 2) as a time when the keepers of the house tremble (the arms and hands grow weak). Also the strong men stoop, that is, the legs grow bent and feeble. The grinders cease because they are few refers to the teeth becoming fewer, and those looking through the windows grow dim refers to the eyesight beginning to fail. The doors to the street are closed may picture the lips sinking in, due to the loss of teeth. When men rise up at the sound of birds suggests that old people get up early because of their inability to sleep. All their songs grow faint speaks of hearing that becomes impaired. Being afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets points up lack of vigour and the fear that makes older people afraid to venture out. The almond tree blossoms refer to the hair turning grey and white (almond blossoms are white). The grasshopper drags himself along speaks of the body being bent and ones walk being slowed; the grasshopper, normally moving about quickly, is an apt figure of the past liveliness of ones childhood and Youth. Desire no longer is stirred speaks of diminished appetites. The decline of physical powers culminates in death and man goes to his eternal home (, the grave; comments on Ecc. 11:8-9) and people grieve (mourners go about in the streets).” (Glenn 1985:1005)

This pictorial and yet very descriptive decline is another goad that Solomon used to get the readers attention. It forms a vivid picture in a persons mind and this continues to goad them to think about the reality of life’s mortality and the necessity to remember one’s Creator before death comes. Solomon continues along this vein as he describes death in another pictorial expression:

“Remember him before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:6-7).

Solomon in verse 6 describes a golden bowl, which in all likelihood is a lamp hanging from the roof on a silver chain. The chain breaks and the bowl breaks. The description is very apt as the “cord of life” is snapped and the light of life goes out. Kaiser more directly refers to the spinal marrow connecting the brain and nerves as the silver chord because it looks silver like. He also infers that the golden bowl is a reference to the brain because of its shape and colour. (Kaiser, 1979:121)

The picture of death is further developed with the description of a well. The wheel, which draws the pitcher from the well, breaks and the pitcher is shattered, no longer able to supply the life giving water. Water was an image for life in the ancient Near East (Ps. 36:8–9). The resultant steps of death are clear for spirit leaves the body, which begins to decay, and eventually it turns to dust (Ps 104:29). However the spirit does not turn to dust for this is the immortal part of man and was referred to in Ecc. 3:20 as it rises upwards and returns to God, who made it. Eaton says:

“The human spirit is the principle of intelligent, responsible life” (Eaton, 1983:150-51).

He is quite right but it is more than that for it is the eternal part of man, which when separated from the body at death continues to exist for eternity. The accountability to God at the end of life is a strong theme throughout the book and is finally developed in the conclusion of chapter 12. As he draws to a conclusion, for the last time in his book, Solomon says, “Meaningless! Meaningless! says the Teacher. Everything is meaningless!” (Ecc.12:8). The expression would be; “Transitory, Transitory! Everything is Transitory!” So the book closes where it began (Ecc. 1:2), emphasizing the hollowness of life without God. But this is not the end

for as he has so often said true understanding and meaning in life is found in knowing God and His purpose. This is more clearly expressed by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament where he admonishes Christians:

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

4.2.11.4. Learning about life from lessons of wisdom (Ecc. 12:9–12)

As a teacher of God’s truth, Solomon explains his aptitude, preparation, content and didactical method. He claims that as a teacher, he was wise (Ecc. 12:9); and this is true for God had blessed Solomon with wisdom (1 Kings 3:12). Solomon studied and explored many subjects, and his discoveries and conclusions he wrote down in proverbs, a format that could be understood and remembered. His goal in teaching the people was to impart knowledge in such a way so that people could understand the purposes of God and Honour Him. He has the wisdom and joy of this understanding and he wanted others to experience this joy too. He says he did his research and preparation was done thoroughly and with integrity:

“Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. (Ecc. 12:9-10).

Solomon’s teaching was structured and also methodical (Ecc. 12: 9). After studying a matter, he pondered it, which means he carefully weighed in his mind what it meant and how it applied. He then searched out the right words and expressions and carefully arranged his content in many proverbs. His whole approach was certainly scientific. Walter Kaiser explains this

process, and emphasises the authority and integrity of Solomon:

“There was careful composing, investigating, and arranging of proverbs and lessons he wrote. This was no haphazard sprouting of negative thoughts in negative language. On the contrary, Solomon deliberately searched for “pleasant words,” or “words of grace” (12:10). In no way can that be the work of a pessimist, nihilist, or Epicurean with an “eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-die” mentality. Few passages in the Bible tell us more about the literary method used by the writer. His descriptions remove all doubts about alleged hastiness of thought and expression. The result for the searching for the right words was that he communicated “words of truth” and not trite remarks. He wrote in “uprightness,” that is in perfect sincerity, without any pretence.” (Kaiser, 1979:123)

Kaiser’s remarks certainly are appropriate for this has been Solomon’s approach in his investigation throughout the book, as he wanted to win and keep the attention of his readers. Attention is vitally important for understanding to take place, and faith and convictions can only develop in the realm of understanding. He did not seek to manipulate his readers, nor did he seek to deceive them, for his approach was always to use words that were ‘upright and true’ (Ecc. 12:10)

Solomon’s integrity is further supported by his expressions in Proverbs 8 where he outlined his uprightness and truthfulness in his teaching:

“You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding. Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning all of them are right; they are faultless to those who have knowledge.” (Prov. 8:6–11.)

With regard to understanding, he compared his words to “goads” and “nails” (Ecc. 12:11).

A goad was a long, sharp stick or implement jabbed into an animal’s rump to prod it to action.

Solomon uses it in the metaphorical sense of prodding a person to sober thinking. Jesus also used

the goad in this way, when referring to Saul's stubbornness in resisting His conviction.

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads. Then I asked, who are you, Lord? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, the Lord replied.” (Acts 26:14)

Nails on the other hand were used to secure one thing to another. In the metaphorical sense it is the action of securing or stabilizing one's life on truth. This, as has been explained in the introduction, is the means of developing convictions in one's life, based on truth, God's truth. Both the goad and nail are necessary if people are to learn God's truth as they provide a guide and stimulus to godly living. In commenting on this, Matthew Henry clearly explains the use of the goad and nail in applying wisdom literature in teaching:

“They are of use, [1.] To excite us to our duty. They are as goads to the ox that draws the plough, putting him forward when he is dull and quickening him, to amend his pace. The truths of God prick men to the heart (Acts 2:37) and put them upon bethinking themselves, when they trifle and grow remiss, and exerting themselves with more vigour in their work. While our good affections are so apt as they are to grow flat and cool, we have need of these goads. [2.] To engage us to persevere in our duty. They are as nails to those that are wavering and inconstant, to fix them to that which is good. They are as goads to such as are dull and draw back, and nails to such as are desultory and draw aside, means to establish the heart and confirm good resolutions, that we may not sit loose to our duty, nor even be taken off from it, but that what good there is in us may be as a nail fastened in a sure place.” (Henry, 1996:809)

This is a very effective method of teaching. The “goad” prods people to pay attention and embrace the truth, while the “nail” secures this truth in their understanding and belief. It becomes the basis of conviction by which they live. It is a means to motivate students to study and then to “nail things down” so that the truths learned can be applied to life. Smith has an interesting interpretation of the ‘Goad and Nail’ method of teaching. He says:

The writer himself furnishes the clue in 12:11 to how he has written this book. He speaks of the two types of passages found in the book; the negative and the positive under the metaphors of the goads and the nails. The goads (the passages which view life negatively) are those which prod the reader to think, to evaluate. The nails (the positive, God-centered passages) are the fixed points of reference in the quest for meaning. (Smith, 1996:829)

This is a very interesting interpretation and it may have that jabbing effect on people to get their attention, because they tend to identify with the negative aspects of life, which are seen and interpreted apart from God's good purpose. Certainly the positive, God centred passages would tie in with the "nail" emphasis, because this is where convictions, based on God's truth, are developed

Solomon not only taught in such an effective way but he also claimed that his words were inspired by "One Shepherd" (Ecc. 12:11). Inspiration is that sovereign ministry of the Holy Spirit that enabled men to write the Word of God as God wanted it written, complete and without error (2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21). Charles Ryrie further elaborates on this process, explaining that:

"Biblical inspiration is that it is God's superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs. Several features of the definition are worth emphasizing: (1) God superintended but did not dictate the material. (2) He used human authors and their own individual styles. (3) Nevertheless, the product was, in its original manuscripts, without error." (Ryrie, 1972:38)

Continuing with the authority of Scripture, Solomon then gives a warning not to go beyond what God has written in His Word. He continues his warning in saying that there are many books, and compiling and studying them can "weary the body" (Ecc. 12:12). What he is saying is that one must not allow man's books, and the philosophies included therein, to replace God's wisdom revealed in His Scriptures.

4.2.11.5. Fearing God As The Essence Of Life (Ecc. 12:13–14)

Solomon has emphasised many times that life is the gift of God. No person gave birth to himself or herself, but they were given birth. The Bible also says that the very breath that people breathe is given to them by God (Job 12:10; Ps 104:29). Thus life is given and controlled by God and one day each person must give an account to God of what they have done with their lives. Knowing this, Solomon gives the final admonition and the culmination of his study of life. He says that the essence of life is found in fearing God, keeping His commandments and being prepared to face His final judgement.

The first of these admonitions is to fear God (Ecc. 12:13). This is not a new idea in Solomon's teaching, for in the Book of Proverbs he had repeatedly emphasised this very important attitude (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33). This attitude of the fear of the Lord has also been emphasised in Ecclesiastes, (Ecc. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12–13.) and it is the answer to one's questions about life and his or her dilemmas in life. Wiersbe gives a very clear explanation of this where he says:

“The “fear of the Lord” is that attitude of reverence and awe that His people show to Him because they love Him and respect His power and His greatness. The person who fears the Lord will pay attention to His Word and obey it. He or she will not tempt the Lord by deliberately disobeying or by “playing with sin.” An unholy fear makes people run away from God, but a holy fear brings them to their knees in loving submission to God” (Wiersbe, 1990:135).

Secondly, Solomon admonishes his readers to “keep His commandments” (Ecc. 12:13). God created mankind and He is the one who gave life as a gift to each one. As Creator, He alone knows how it should be lived and he wrote a manual for life, which is called the Bible. Solomon is saying that the wise person will seek to understand God's instructions and purposes in the Bible and seek to follow them. This, coupled to the fear of the Lord, essentially results in obedient, godly living.

The last phrase in verse 13 states; “for this is the whole duty of man.” What he means by

this is that this is the essence of all human living and thus it is the very purpose of life.

The crux and final reason for all of mankind's reverence for God, godly living and conduct is the realisation that he or she will stand before God in final judgment (Ecc. 12:14). Solomon had said this in chapter three; "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked" (Ecc. 3:17) and again in chapter eleven; "But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment" (Ecc. 11:9). The point is that all of mankind are accountable to God during their lifetime and ultimately at the end, after death. Many may seem to get away with sin (Ecc. 8:11), but their sins will eventually be exposed and judged righteously. Having a clear conviction about the inevitability of this final judgement and yet living life to the full with peace and a clear sense of God's purpose makes life truly worth living. This is the essence of the life God designed us to live

4.2.11.6. Conclusion

This is where Solomon draws his conclusion from all that he has examined in life "under the sun." Everything seemed fragmented, transitory and he could see no clear pattern or purpose. However, when he looked at life from God's perspective, everything came together into one meaningful whole. If people want to have a fulfilling and purposeful life they must begin with God.

In this book, Solomon has admonished people to enjoy life while we can; but He never encourages one to enjoy sin. The joys of the present depend on the understanding that life, as given and designed by God, is to be enjoyed. There is also the peace and security of the future, when one knows that he or she is not going to face His judgement against those who live independently of God.

4.2.11.7. Application Of These Principles To Youth Today

It is important for young people to realise that life is a gift of God and that every day as a gift, is to be used with thankfulness and purpose. There is also the realisation that mankind needs God's help to live life wisely.

Youth is a time for enjoyment, while one has strength and exuberance before the problems of old age start. While God is the giver of life with all its pleasures to enjoy, one must realise that it is always wrong to commit the pleasures of sin. However, the young person who enjoys life, within the will and purpose of God will have nothing to worry about when the Lord returns.

Life is made up of many ventures where one has no guarantees of particular outcomes. Here one has to trust God for His provision. It is the farmer, sowing various kinds of seeds in different soils, but trusting God for the harvest. Investments that are made today will yield those dividends tomorrow, but even that is not an absolute certainty. Life is essentially a gamble, but one where one who trusts God, he or she has the assurance that as a sovereign, gracious and righteous God, he will work out a good purpose that will not be disappointing in the end. Youth does not last long. Young people must put anxiety out of their hearts, for they only have a narrow window of opportunity. They must live life to the full, in recognition that it is God's gift to them, but always be aware that God will hold them accountable for any sinful attitudes and conduct. This helps to control one's behaviour.

It is also important for young people to lay a good spiritual foundation as early in life as this will help them both to be discerning in the difficult decisions in life and to have firm convictions when faced with difficult choices.

The authority of God's Word can be trusted for it always holds true as it is based upon His character. In this way one can secure his or her life on a solid foundation. One must not be

distracted by other philosophies, Solomon admonishes all not to permit man's books to rob one of God's wisdom. He says: "Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them [the words of the wise]" (Ecc12: 12).

The most important truth for young people to grasp and be convinced of, is that in life and at the end of one's life, he or she is accountable to God. God as a holy and righteous God holds each one accountable for how one has lived in light of His truth and revelation. This is called the "fear of God", which Solomon describes as the essence of mankind. It is the beginning and foundation of wisdom, which in turn is 'skill for living'. One must take life seriously and live it soberly, and this is done by applying the skills to life as they are gleaned from God's purpose revealed in his Word. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).

In essence the pinnacle of wisdom and skilful living is to live life to the full by faith in God through Jesus Christ, for therein is fullness of life. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12)

4.3. Word and Phrase Studies

4.3.1. The Meaning of הָבֵל (hebel)

The Preacher, after introducing himself in verse 1, makes this statement: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” This serves as parentheses for the entire book. It begins the book here in verse 2 and it concludes the book at 12:8 ahead of the postscript (Ecc. 12:9-14). What does this word mean? Furthermore what does this word mean in the context of the book of Ecclesiastes, since this is a major emphasis of the whole book? On the other hand what does this word mean in other Biblical books? As a professor of Old Testament at Masters Seminary, Dr. William Barrik, gives this outline.

“In different contexts the Hebrew word translated “vanity” in Ecclesiastes 1:2 has different meanings. The following chart reveals the variety of translations employed in the New King James translation:

Meaning	Reference
<i>Futile</i>	Psalm 94:11
<i>Futility</i>	Psalm 78:33
<i>Empty</i>	Job 21:34
<i>Nonsense</i>	Job 27:12
<i>Vapour</i>	Psalm 39:11
<i>Breath</i>	Job 7:16
<i>Idol</i>	Jeremiah 10:8

Other suggested meanings include the following:

Meaning	Reference
<i>Worthless idols</i>	Deuteronomy 32:21 (NIV, REB)
<i>Worthless</i>	Isaiah 30:7 (REB)
<i>Useless</i>	Isaiah 30:7 (NIV)
<i>No purpose</i>	Isaiah 49:4 (REB)
<i>Nothing</i>	Isaiah 49:4 (NIV)
<i>a puff of air</i>	Isaiah 57:13 (REB)
<i>a mere breath</i>	Isaiah 57:13 (NIV)
<i>a sham</i>	Jeremiah 10:3 (REB)
<i>Fleeting</i>	Proverbs 31:30 (REB, NIV)

(Barrik, unpublished notes on Ecclesiastes)

In summary the word **הֶבֶל** (hebel) means emptiness, futility, vapour, fleeting and that which vanishes quickly and leaves nothing behind. Different contexts within Ecclesiastes seem to present different meanings for this one Hebrew term. H. C. Leupold takes the position that “vanity of vanities” means “utterly transitory.” (Leupold, 1952: 41.) This is a clearer meaning that the NIV translation of “meaningless”, for Solomon’s exploits do have some meaning but the main idea is that there is no lasting value, fulfilment or satisfaction in these things here on earth.

In 3:16-19 it appears to focus on the painful condition that results from “having to live with many questions unanswered.” (Ogden in Zuck, 1994:229.) I agree with this statement as it reflects the frustration that Solomon feels in the context of the book. He will back this up by saying that only God knows the answer. In 6:1-2, Solomon deals with the matter of having material benefits but not being able to enjoy them. It is not talking about the meaninglessness of life, but of the frustration of not being able to enjoy the fruits of one’s labour.

A workaholic is depicted in Ecc. 4:7-8. Though he experiences success in his work he lacks any understanding of the purpose of all that work. This is what Graham Ogden again accurately observes that, “He never stops to ask the important question: ‘for what purpose am I doing all this?’” (1994:230)

A good example is found in Ecc. 8:14 where the Preacher observes that good things happen to bad people while bad things happen to good people. It is one of life's great enigmas for which none of us has the answer. I do believe however that God has a good purpose in all that he allows to take place in the life of each true believer (Romans 8:28)

I fully support Barrick where he says that,

“All of these situations are described by what is often translated as ‘vanity.’ None of them proclaim that life is empty and meaningless. However, all of them do express the inability of mankind to fully understand these realities of life. Such realities can be frustrating, puzzling, and vexing, but they do not make life meaningless. In fact, the message of Ecclesiastes seems to be that the individual who is wise will learn how to accept such realities and live happily in the knowledge that there is Someone who really does understand the reasons for the apparent inequities and sovereignly controls life's enigmatic twists and turns.” (Barrick, unpublished notes)

One more observation must be made about the phrase “all is vanity.” In the Hebrew language that phrase is made up of a mere two words. At the time Solomon penned the book of Ecclesiastes, Hebrew had no written vowels. The written text was composed of consonants. This phrase was not only assonant, its visible presentation was almost identical: הכל הכל (*hakkol hevel*). Look at it this way:

הַקֵּל	<i>everything</i>
הַבֵּל	<i>nothing</i>

In Hebrew, ‘everything’ is הַקֵּל, made up of the letters he, kaph and lamed. But the merest stroke of a pen can change everything if one were to take a pen and add the smallest of marks at the heart of this word—that is to say, an extra stroke is added on to the bottom right corner of the letter kaph, transforming that letter into a beth—an entirely different word appears: the word הַבֵּל, ‘a breath, transience, futility, nothingness’. (John Jarick, “The Hebrew Book of Changes: Reflections on *hakkæl hebel* and *lakkæl z’man* in Ecclesiastes,” *Journal for the Study of*

the Old Testament, (2000): 79.)

Life is just that way. The tiniest of deeds can cause one's entire existence to collapse like a house of cards. We cannot, at any time, make the mistake of thinking, "This decision or choice is insignificant—it's not going to affect anything." In one moment of selfishness or recklessness, or just plain inadvertence, our *everything* becomes *nothing*. Thus the meaning could be "Vanishing Vapours."

4.3.2. The Meaning of יִטְרוֹן ("yitron")

The term: 'yitron' means "gain" or "profit." It is used seven times (1:3; 2:11 ["gained"], 13 ["is better"]; 3:9; 5:9 ["profits"], 16; 10:10) in the book of Ecclesiastes and is not used anywhere else in the Old Testament. Ogden says that 'yitron';

"speaks of the profit or gain one might expect from commercial enterprise, the 'bottom line' which so interests the investor. However, 'that which remains over', in the context of Qoheleth does not appear to carry the material sense. The fact that Qoheleth actually creates a neologism, points towards its having a peculiar and circumscribed field of reference" (Ogden, 1987:23).

Here Ogden accurately captures the meaning of the word in a modern understanding of; "what is the bottom line?" In other words it is asking the question of what one gets out from what has been put in. It is really an investment question. However it is not limited to the commercial world as Ogden explains, but is far broader as it refers to life's investments and returns. It will remind the present day reader of what Jesus said when he posed the question; "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?" (Luke 9:25). This is the thrust of Solomon's argument through the book. In support of this picture, Glenn points out:

“Gain” refers literally to what is left over (a gain or a profit) or metaphorically to what is advantageous or of benefit. Though some things have relative advantage over others (e.g., light over darkness and wisdom over folly, 2:13), Solomon affirmed at the outset that people gain no ultimate advantage or profit from all their toil. .” (Glenn, 1985:980)

This is a very important word, as it is used here in Ecclesiastes, because it emphasises the search for gain or profit in mankind’s search for meaning in life. This is the main thrust of the message, as Solomon examines life and questions the usefulness or gain in those things that people pursue as a means to find complete satisfaction. Much effort and toil goes into the pursuit without much profit and so Solomon comes to the conclusion that it is all a “chasing after the wind.” In using the word so many times, Solomon is causing the reader to re-examine his or her purpose in light of what is really gained.

5. Youth In Our Society Today.

5.1. Introduction and Methodology.

This section of the study will deal with Youth in our society today. They are the target of this study and the ones to whom these truths apply. Our society today is influenced by Postmodernism and this has had a profound effect on our Youth. This philosophy, which has permeated our society, will be studied and explained with regard to the effect that is having on our young people. Characteristics of the Youth will be studied so as to accurately understand them as a prerequisite to effectively ministering to them. This will then be applied in practical ways as to how this ministry should take place.

The methodology will focus on the Positive Deconstruction method of reaching Youth for this best integrates their characteristics as Youth and the Postmodern frame of reference, in which they fit. I believe that this is the most effective method of teaching Youth today. It is not so much about content of the message but contact and connection with the Youth. The content of the Bible and specifically in this case the message of Ecclesiastes does not change because these timeless principles are for all generations. The contact with and ability to get through to Youth does change from generation to generation. This is because each generation is shaped and influenced by the prevailing philosophy of that age, and it is from this foundation that young people develop their worldview or conglomeration of worldviews.

A different methodology will be used for parents who are seeking to apply the truths of Ecclesiastes to their adolescent offspring. Their approach is the Biblical injunction of; “train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Prov 22:6). It is a different approach because it has had an influence in their children’s lives all along. Adolescence is not the time to start, but rather it is a continuation into a new phase of teaching and ministry.

The parent does not have to “break into” the young person’s life and develop a trust relationship as a base for ministry. The relationship is already established and it is accepted that the parent has a right to speak into the Youth’s life. However, Pollard’s method of Positive Deconstruction (Pollard, 1997: 31-41), will still work here, and in fact it is the preferred method of causing young people to discern and re-evaluate what they believe.

In this thesis, the term “Youth” and “young people” will primarily be used. However synonymous terms such “teens” and “adolescents” will also be used. These terms are interchangeable and apply to that group of people from ages thirteen to nineteen. It is a varied group depending on the development of the individual in a societal group. Young people mature at different ages and in different ways, but as they do they encounter many of the same challenges, problems and influences. It must be understood that they are in transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence and maturity of adulthood.

5.2. Our Society Today – a Postmodern Society

5.2.1. Introduction

When talking about “Youth today” one has to determine the era of that day and the prevalent philosophy which permeates the thinking and behaviour of the society. At the time of writing this dissertation, I am convinced that we live in a Postmodern society here in South Africa. Postmodernism is a further development from Modernism. Modernism is said to have lasted about 200 years from the fall of the Bastille during the French revolution in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent end of the Iron Curtain (Hulse, 2004:5). It was characterised by an emphasis on human reason, human ability and human achievement. In short the main emphasis was on rationalism and humanism. Both of these philosophies reject

supernaturalism and emphasise the individual's capacity for self – realisation through reason. The sad reality of Modernism is that it bypassed God and His revelation in the Bible and was influential in the collapse of morality.

As a modern South African society, we are greatly influenced by the Western world through the influence of television, books and magazines as well as the plethora of films on the local circuits. Music also plays a great part as well as fashion, which today, is focused on designer labels. As the Western world has moved philosophically from Modernism to Postmodernism, so have those societies that have been influenced by these philosophies. Both Modernism and Postmodernism have permeated our society and deeply influenced it with negative outcomes on the family and the individual.

5.2.2. Defining Postmodernism

According to the Bible and the Christian faith, God is sovereign. He is the one and only creator and sustainer of His creation (Gen 1:1; Col 1:16). He works out everything in His good purpose according to His will (Eph 1:11). This is what is called a “meta-narrative” and it conveys the idea of God's overarching purpose that gives meaning to everything in the universe. This means that God is in control of all the particulars of life and the pattern of a good purpose in everything is traced back to His good purpose. This is what God has revealed in the Bible and Ecclesiastes is a good example of this ‘meta-narrative’. As Pollard points out:

“One of the major pessimistic assumptions of Postmodernism is that there is no one, universal answer. To use a buzz-phrase of the Postmoderns, there are no meta-narratives. This, of course, has a major effect upon a generation that might otherwise be seeking answers. Many Postmoderns will say, “We are not seeking after truth. What's the point, if there is no truth to find?”” (Pollard, 1997:36).

Postmodernism rejects the idea of a meta-narrative. Its propose is rather, that each person develops his or her own reality or life purpose according to their experience and perception of things. (Hulse, 2004:3) This makes determining truth a very subjective process as opposed to determining truth by objective Scriptural truth. This process then becomes the basis of belief and conduct. In other words each person ultimately determines his or her own truth and is accountable to that truth. The problem with this philosophy is that one's truth will be limited to his or her experience and truth is far greater and more extensive than the individual.

As we have seen, Warren also states;

“The purpose of life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It is far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose.” (Warren: 2002:17).

I agree with Warren because mankind is not infallible, nor the individual the determiner of his or her own existence with absolute control over all circumstances. All people need to be accountable to God their creator, in their moral conduct throughout life and in death otherwise they will degenerate into a self-indulgent existence, that will rob them of the true meaning of life. The term “Postmodern” appeared in the 1970's. It was initially developed as an architectural term for designs that arose out of an attitude of complete freedom. It takes its source from any shape or form and then puts it all together as a unit or design. The term was popularised by Jean Francois Lytard with his publication of *The Postmodern Condition; A Report on Knowledge in English in 1984* In summary the Postmodern condition is a refusal to believe any explanation as to why mankind is on the earth. It seems that there has been such a reaction to the First and Second World Wars, Communism, the Cold War, Genocide in Africa, Cambodia and Yugoslavia, global warming, the Aids pandemic and the abuse of political and military power, to the extent that this

has caused disillusionment and cynicism. This has led to a philosophy that is against absolutes.

There seems to have been no answers to the previously mentioned situations which were so prominent over the past century, and so there are no answers' no absolutes.

Hulse explains that while the definitions of Postmodernism will vary, it is generally composed of four aspects." These aspects include: Deconstructionism, Moral relativism, Pluralism and Existentialism. (2004:6)

5.2.2.1. Deconstructionism

Deconstructionism is basically a language game whereby anything that is written will not convey the meaning that the author intended. The meaning is derived from the reader's own interpretation of what is written. In other words, in constructed sentences, words do not convey the meaning that they have usually conveyed but the reader reinterprets them according to his or her own frame of reference or feeling. It is a typical expression that is heard today: "I believe this phrases means 'this' to me." It is not a case of asking the question: "what was the authors intent or purpose in writing?" This has implications for the authority of Scripture, where there are now 'no absolutes' that one understands and to which one submits. Rather he or she determines the truth according to the way it is interpreted for the individual. This again means that the individual is the determiner of truth and there is then no authority beside what they have determined. People then become only accountable to themselves, or that truth to which they choose to submit.

This philosophy has been greatly influenced by the writings of Roland Barthes (1915 – 1980), Michael Foucault (1926 – 1984) and Jacques Derrida (b. 1930). Their idea was that human language did not refer to an objective world but a system of linguistic signs referring back to itself. They rejected the absolute truth of the Bible saying that since the original writers are not available to explain the intent of their writings one can give whatever meaning one would like to

their writings. This philosophy and teaching would rob the Bible of its authority and in effect God would “be silenced”. However this would also apply to every other book with the result that language loses its effect as a means of communication and no true learning could take place. In support of this Hulse clearly points out that:

“The absurdity of Deconstructionism is seen in the fact Christ has built his Church universally in over 220 nations and in over 1000 languages. If language cannot convey meaning, how is it that all these tribes and peoples of different languages have the same belief system, believe the same Bible and are worshippers of the Triune God? Deconstructionism is just another excuse to evade the truth.” (2004:11)

In response to this I agree with Hulse that Deconstructionism is a self-defeating argument and when taken to its literal conclusion is self-destructive. Today the Bible must be taught as the infallible Truth of God, which He has inspired and preserved down through the ages, for which there is adequate internal and external evidence. Young people need to be made aware of this lest they be robbed of the most valuable source, which lays out the purpose of God and the purpose of life.

5.2.2.2. Moral Relativism

Moral Relativism, like Deconstructionism, is based upon mankind’s interpretation of truth to suit him or herself. It means that people determine their own moral conduct, apart from the Scriptures as they reflect God’s holy and sovereign standard. God’s standard is prescriptive rather than selective. Moral Relativism is opposed to absolutes and especially the absolutes of God’s word, the Bible. The well-known Christian theologian and philosopher, Francis Schaeffer described an absolute as, “a concept which is not modifiable by factors such as culture, individual psychology, or circumstances but which is perfect and unchangeable. An absolute is the antithesis of

relativism.” (Schaeffer 1968:177)

Such a definition, which I firmly support, would be diametrically opposed to relativism. Moral relativism is supported by the belief that mankind evolved from animals and if people believe this, they see it to be contradictory to the Bible and therefore reject the Bible’s authority regarding creation and also its revelation regarding morality. Evolution has become a total philosophy, which rules out the existence of God. This kind of thinking would express the question; “If God is not my creator and sustainer, why must I be accountable to Him?” However if people have simply evolved from other life forms, then who has the right and authority to prescribe how they should think and live?

This is a dangerous philosophy because it rejects the objective, absolute truth of Scripture and opens the way for behaviour as the individual may determine it. The logical end of this would be anarchy where everyone determines his or her own behaviour or conduct by what is important to him or her.

Young people need to understand that God is the sovereign creator of the universe and each individual and ultimately each one will be held accountable to Him. Luke supports this in the book of Acts, where he records Paul’s speech at the meeting of the Aeropagus:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:24-28, NIV)

The moral consequences of evolution can be disastrous and totally out of all balance. Hitler tried to implement the idea of the survival of the fittest with regard to the Jewish race and

it almost led to their extermination. Whenever anyone takes an idea and makes that the base on which they can morally do as they please apart from Biblical absolutes, it leads to disaster and an imbalance of the situation. God's law enables people to regulate their conduct and their philosophies of life in that He as Creator has determined what is right and good, while man, because he is selfish and depraved cannot determine what morality is apart from God's truth.

5.2.2.3. Pluralism

Pluralism is seen in the context of a growing diversity of race, heritage, religion, and value systems. Pluralism in essence is a philosophy that says that all opinions have the same value and that all these opinions must be treated as equal and held by all as being equally important. No opinion or belief system must be criticised, rejected or devalued. This philosophy has been derived from the thinking that absolute values in religion have led to strife and war and persecution wherever they have been exercised. Examples of this are seen in the burning of Protestant martyrs by Catholic groups and the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland. Another example is seen in the fundamentalist Islamic attack of the World Trade Centre on 11th September 2001.

Thus the belief of Pluralism is to reject any absolute values within religion that would lead to a strong point of view or a fundamentalist position. Many people believe that religion brings about trouble and divisions. People are encouraged through Pluralism to be tolerant and never to criticise another's religion. The general opinion in Pluralism is that all religions might have some truth and comfort to offer. The main problem and overarching heresy according to Pluralism is to maintain that one's religious position is the only position that is right and all other religions are wrong. Thus in order to avoid any kind of conflict and division people are encouraged to not take a strong stand on their own religion but to be totally open and tolerant to

all religions, treating them equally. In this way all religions are regarded as equally important and must be respected equally. Here there is a great confusion between the respect of beliefs and the respect of people per se.

The author of this thesis fully affirms that people must be respected as those who have been created in God's image. However, not all beliefs and religions are considered to be true and therefore are not considered to be equal in value. There is without a doubt an exclusivity claimed within the Bible. Jesus is the one who alone claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one would come to the Father except by Him (John 14:6). Furthermore, Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in writing the book of Acts claims: "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In the light of what has been said, these two particular verses must either be taken as truth, which spells out the exclusivity of what God says or they must be rejected as not being true because they contravene the philosophy of Pluralism. This is a case of submitting to the higher authority or rather, the absolute. Thus where Pluralism as part of the Postmodern philosophy believes that every person is entitled to a belief system, and that nobody is allowed to assert his or her faith as being superior over any other faith, this is contrary to the Word of God as spelt out in the Holy Scriptures. In effect, Pluralism, taken to its literal conclusion would lead to a capitulation of any firm belief in any religion. It will also mean a bland mixing of all kinds of philosophies with no one truth being distinguished from error. Again this is a humanistic standard or one that has been determined at a human level, rather than what has been determined by a sovereign God at an absolute level.

5.2.2.4. Existentialism

An important part of Postmodernism is Existentialism. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is viewed as the father of Existentialism. While this philosophy was in existence long before Postmodernism it has become one of the four important building blocks of Postmodernism. Kierkegaard developed this philosophy in reaction to nominal Christianity in Denmark. He rejected the plain and nominal expression of Christian faith and put a great emphasis on the experience of the individual Christian. Hulse, explains,

“Existentialism is concerned with the nature of being and of existence. Authentic existence is resolute and makes choices; existentialist thinking is intended to involve the whole person. The objective realm is absurd and void of any human significance. Existentialism focuses on the inner experiences of the will and emotions and is essentially subjective. The Existentialist believes that there is no meaning in any one thing or in anything put together. In its extreme, the world becomes pointless and absurd” (Hulse, 2004:19).

Hulse is very clear with his definition in pointing out that Existentialism is another subjective view, which is opposed to any objective and absolute truth such as that of the Scriptures. While personal experience is vitally important in the Christian life, no one person's experience can be exalted above that of the authority of Scripture. The Existentialists believe that their personal experience is the determiner of truth, as that truth relates to them personally. The search for reality and truth thus becomes a search deep within oneself. This has often led to experimentation with different forms of stimuli. The drug-induced search for reality is one that has been greatly explored and widely proclaimed. In Existentialism, feelings are most important. Feeling-centeredness leads to the individual becoming the originator and determiner of truth.

5.2.2.5. Conclusion to Definition

Thus it may be seen that Postmodernism is built on the four pillars of Deconstructionism, Moral Relativism, Pluralism, and Existentialism. This philosophy of Postmodernism is most effectively communicated and broadcast through the medium of television. Television is not only extensive in its coverage of many subjects all over the world but it is also very powerful as an audio-visual medium impacting its audience. The entertainment industry is greatly influenced by Postmodernism, and in this way spreads this philosophy into every home through the medium of television. In this way young people and other family members are exposed to the philosophy of Postmodernism on a daily basis. There are many channels depicting Existentialism and Moral Relativism. These include visual and graphic images on murder, pornography, adultery, and also very biased and self-satisfying indulgences of many kinds. People are often exposed to this powerful form of communication for several hours a day. When one watches television, information is rapidly presented to one with a minimal amount of effort on the part of the viewer to interact, discern or examine whether this is really true. Thus a large amount of information seems to be thrust on the viewer in a short space of time. On the other hand when one reads a book, information is presented in a sequential manner whereby the reader must use active mental processes and concentration in order to understand the overall message. The reader can always stop, examine, and think about what is being received through the communication of the written word. This enables one to be more discerning. In this day and age greatly influenced by Postmodernism, it is interesting to note how many young people would rather spend hours watching television on many different channels, presenting many different subjects rather than reading a book. Reading takes effort and concentration, whereas watching television is very passive, while at the same time being entertaining. Thus the medium of television is powerful for it communicates its message through emotions, stimulations, and great impressions.

5.2.3. Conclusion

Thus it may be seen that Postmodernism as the philosophy of this age is very powerful. Not only does it appeal to the feelings, desires and subjective nature of young people themselves, but also being presented primarily through the media of television, it is very effective in influencing them in their world philosophy. The more exposure a young person has to this kind of information, the more his or her philosophy of life is developed by this information. It is very important to understand this philosophy, in order to understand where young people are in their focus on life and what they believe. Young people cannot be accurately understood apart from their environment and the prevailing influences that make up their view of life. Having now studied this prevailing philosophy or view of life of today's Youth, this study will now switch to understanding the characteristics of young people and how they personally react and respond to this kind of information.

5.3. Characteristics and Culture of Youth Today.

5.3.1. Introduction

As the author of this thesis, I believe that our young people are searching for fulfilment in life but they are running after things that will never satisfy. Koheleth says it a "chasing after the wind." Too often people realise this when they have pursued and caught their dream only to find it is empty. What is more, this dream is often gained at great cost of wasted time and energy and leaves a string of ruined lives in the process.

What has gone wrong with our society and especially our Youth? The spiritual bankruptcy of our young people is evident in the tremendous resurgence of hedonism, the drug

culture, Aids pandemic and lawlessness. This state of affairs is prevalent because of the choices they have made and the selfish and sinful paths they have followed in ignorance or defiance.

5.3.2. Youth Culture and Characteristics

Youth culture is the heart of their lifestyle. Youth culture may be defined as their habits, value system, beliefs and thought patterns in a particular location at a particular time period. In order to understand Youth culture it is important to examine these four main areas.

Two habits that characterise this present Youth culture include living for the moment and seeking thrills. Seeking thrills or thrill-seeking has been a pastime of Youth for many generations. Youth love taking risks because it gives them significance and standing amongst their peers. They also love being involved in adventure, which is an aspect of discovering life and their own achievements. A third major part of Youth habits include seeking pleasure. These habits of Youth culture can seem very superficial and also can have some very serious consequences, especially with regard to thrill seeking and taking risks through adventure. Many a young person has become pregnant or involved in substance abuse through the habit of seeking pleasure. Thus these habits of Youth may lead to failure, frustration and wasted opportunities.

A second important area of Youth culture is their value system. This value system is determined by peers and peer-pressure, which governs much of the thoughts, actions and associations of Youth. Through their peer group young people find identification and also a great sense of acceptance. Thus young people find their security in the group and as long as they conform to the expectations of that group they continue to find this acceptance.

A third important area of Youth culture is their beliefs. Beliefs of Youth culture tend to be idealistic and superficial. As young people are maturing from childhood into adulthood they tend to examine and want to find out for themselves what life is all about. In this process they tend to

reject what adults have to say and find things out for themselves. In this endeavour they lack maturity and experience and thus their beliefs tend to be superficial and idealistic. These thought patterns are shaped by young people's desire to seek fun and freedom. Nichols points out:

“Youth are seeking fun, but often find no happiness; freedom, but no liberty; moving, but nowhere to go. Since their habits, beliefs, and value systems are in a state of flux and are bombarded by the Existential humanism of today, it is no wonder teens are confused in their thinking. Gone are the absolutes, only to be replaced by the pressures of conformity. They are told to grow up, then told that they are not old enough to do so” (Nichols, 1981:147).

Youth characteristics may be divided into three major stages. These include firstly early adolescence, which would range between ages twelve to fourteen and secondly middle adolescence, ranging from fifteen to seventeen. The third stage would be late adolescence ranging in age from eighteen to twenty. Nichols outlines a comparison of the early and middle adolescents covering major areas such as physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual characteristics of these stages. (See appendix A).

5.3.3. Understanding Young People Today.

5.3.3.1. Introduction

Young people have always been a difficult group to define. They are a group of people who are in transition from childhood to adulthood. As a result they are neither children nor adults and yet fit in between the two groups in their developmental stages. This is quite obviously a time of transition and development. Young people experience physical, emotional and even psychological changes during this period. They begin to question life and examine the importance of life for them as individuals. They think about the future and their development

with regard to who they are and what they would like to be.

5.3.3.2. Defining Youth Today

The Youth of today are the youngest of five generations that co-exist within our world. There has been much debate about the correct dating of generations. Sociologists have sometimes fairly arbitrarily decided on dates of a generation beginning and ending at certain points determined by crucial events that happened in the world at that time. For example, the Second World War was a cataclysmic event that caused great changes within the way that people behaved before the war and after the war. According to Codrington and Grant-Marshall in their study entitled *Mind the Gap* they say:

“American sociologists decided that babies born from 1983 onwards would be called Millennials as they would end their schooling in the new century. As generations were born roughly twenty years apart, that meant the Xers were given 1963 for their birth date because it was a half-way date between 1942 and 1983 and is not significant for anything much more than that” (Codrington, 2004:17).

Codrington and Grant-Marshall believe that the current world population is divided into five generations. The first and oldest generation is called the GI's born 1900 to 1920. This generation is called the GI's because they are the generation that served during the First and Second world wars. The second generation is called the Silent Generation born 1920 to 1940. The name Silent Generation indicates the influence of both World Wars on this generation. The third generation is called the Baby Boomer or Boomer generation born 1940 to 1960. The fourth generation is called the GenX (Generation X) or Xer generation born 1960 to 1980. The youngest generation is called the Millennial generation born 1980 to 2000. (2004:19).

This Millennial generation is the focus of this study as they form the young people, teens

and adolescents that will be referred to in this study. George Barna in his scientific study on contemporary Youth culture, titled *Real Teens* gives a slightly different definition of the five generations.

According to Barna the first generation are called Seniors born up to 1926. The second generation called Builders, were born from 1927 to 1945, followed by the Baby Boomers born 1946 to 1965. The following generation are the Baby Busters born 1965 to 1983, and these are followed by the Mosaics, born 1984 to 2002 (Barna, 2001:12). Barna explains that Mosaic is a far better description of this generation than the Millennials. There was some confusion with naming this generation as the previous generation were called the GenX'ers and so following on from that the latest or youngest generation were to have been called the GenY's (Generation Y's). GenY was not an appropriate name for this generation and so because of their birth roundabout the start of the new millennium it was decided to call this group the Millennials. However, the members of this group found the name disturbing because it suggested that their defining characteristics were that they happen to be born around the turn of the century and because this was a very sterile name. As a result the name was chosen as Mosaic because it is colourful and accurately describes this generation. Barna continues to explain that the name Mosaic was appropriate because this generation has a life-style that resembles a combination of traditional and alternative activities. They are greatly influenced by the prevailing philosophy in the world at this time, which is Postmodernism. They are also a generation that tends to be more integrated racially than any other generation before them. Their core values are a mixture of feelings, facts, principles and experiences that they have encountered in their lives (Barna, 2001:17).

This generation of Mosaics or Millennials are very important for a number of reasons. Not only will this group become the next generation of adults who determine policy and culture for each nation but they will also be the leaders who will have a great influence over the rest of the population in their time. Young people largely define the values and leisure endeavours of

each nation. The economy of any country is substantially shaped by their choices, as they become the consumers to which much of the marketing strategy is directed. The nature of the family as the foundational unit of any society depends on how young people prioritise family and approach parenting. They are the ones who will have the greatest influence on the following generation. Lastly, the future of the church will be determined by the faith of this generation and their commitment to truth as it is believed and lived out and also as it is taught and exemplified to the following generation. This generation is a very important part of any society and thus the focus of this study is to instill the truth of God's Word as outlined in the book of Ecclesiastes in their hearts and minds.

These young people are growing up in a generation where there are many influences and especially the negative and devastating influence of Postmodernism, which is primarily controlled by Existentialism and feeling. As has been pointed out earlier in this study, Existentialism and feeling are very powerful influences and yet they are not determined by any truth per se. Each person essentially determines his or her own truth and so it leads to such divergent influences. These divergent influences however do not determine truth, but God's truth stands as an authority, which must be applied both to young people and to the older generation in order for purpose to be fully realised. The question is how can this generation of young people best be reached with Gods' truth so that they are impacted by the truth, so that they believe the truth and live by it in order to fully realise God's good purpose for mankind?

Barna in his study points out some clear generational attitudes that must be understood in order to accurately minister to and reach this generation. He says that they tend to be more upbeat and less cynical, sceptical and pessimistic. They also are more interested in developing meaningful careers and doing what must be achieved to best facilitate that career. In contrast with the previous generation they view education as a vital part of preparation for life, rather than a means of providing their worthiness and acceptability from parents or peers. They also consider

religion, spirituality and faith as a positive dimension of life, but neither central nor critical to the fulfilment of life. Barna also points out that this generation of Millennials tend to be less emotionally sensitive as they handle criticism, take jokes and understand the context of abandonment more readily. Furthermore they feel vitally connected to other people and to their culture and are able to be more pliable and fit in better than the previous generation (2001:23). These generational attitudes are a very important part of understanding this generation of young people and as a result must be taken into account when seeking to minister to them at their level.

The question is whether these attitudes are appropriate for them to experience what they are really aiming to experience, which ultimately is the fulfilment of life. An important point for this study is the consideration of religion, spirituality and faith being a positive dimension that is critical and central to the fulfilment of life. However the truth of God as laid out in Scripture and specifically in the book of Ecclesiastes is vitally important for any person to experience fulfilment in life as God has planned it to be. The task then is explaining, teaching and redirecting young people's attention to these truths so that they can understand them believe them and apply them to life.

The young people of the Millennial generation have essentially two key elements that must be incorporated into their experience. The first of these is relationships and the other is mass-media experience. Both of these elements have an influence on their whole orientation to life. To them routine is the enemy. They love ever changing, fast paced, unpredictable experiences. They do not like that which is slow or predictable as they consider this boring and meaningless. With regard to mass-media it is said that young people spend an average of six hours per day interacting with mass-media in its various forms. These forms may include television, TV or play-station. radio, playing cassettes or compact discs and also interacting on the Internet.

One of the most important influences in the lives of the millennial generation is music. It

is not so much the words or lyrics of the music but the beat and the tune that plays such an important part. For these young people music is much more than mere entertainment. It is really a life philosophy that they follow and brings in the cultural heroes and role models plus the whole music culture in which they want to be involved. As a result what is most popular is video music, which can be seen on television or via the means of compact disc or even on the Internet. It has been shown that young people use the Internet as much if not more than adults do. Young people also tend to stay online for longer periods of time than adults do (2001:32).

What is most important to young people is experience. This is the way that they determine and live out their reality. Barna points out:

“The result of this review of teen reality is that we begin to realise that while family, friendships and personal achievements are important, experiences are what rule their lives. In a fast pace, relativistic, information-drenched culture, with fluid relationships and ever-changing faith views, the constant that keeps life meaningful and invigorating is the latest and most satisfying experience. Events, adventures and unexpected encounters make each day a new and satisfying episode in their unfolding story. That which does not provide a fresh experience is deemed to be of lesser or no value” (2001:43).

From Barna’s research it would follow that in order to approach young people with the truth of God’s Word experience must be taken into consideration. This however ties in very well with the study of Ecclesiastes, for Solomon says that he had experienced all these things and yet was left empty. This must be emphasised so that they can understand what he himself had gone through in order to draw up these conclusions and understandings of life itself. This however may not suffice in their approach to life. This generation essentially wants to experience everything themselves and draw out the truths of life from those experiences. Solomon’s thrust in Ecclesiastes is that having had the position, power, possessions and the time to examine life, he was able to make these truth deductions under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His call

therefore is not for future generations to repeat those experiments and make the same mistakes lest their experiences rob them of fulfilment in life. His cry is that they would learn from his experience and so enjoy life as God designed it to be in an intimate relationship with Him and not in selfishly satisfying their own desires.

5.3.3.3. Sources of Influence in the Lives of Youth

There are many sources of influence in the lives of Youth today. These sources include parents, friends, siblings, teachers, beliefs or faiths, music, television, movies, prominent leaders, and the mass media such as the Internet. Of all these sources of influence it is surprising to note that by far the greatest source of influence on how Youth think and act are their parents. More than 75% of young people acknowledged that their parents had a great deal of impact on their thoughts and deeds. In studies that have been done no other individual or group of people came close to having that kind of influence in the lives of young people (2001:72).

While their friends played the second most significant part in their lives, many young people admitted that their friends were more for friendship than for influence. Teens generally admit that their friends influence what they do, where they go, what they wear and what they listen to but when it comes to how they think and act, their parents played the most important part. Other important people in their lives included their siblings, and their teachers. These two groups provide a great deal of security for Youth and are people whom they feel they can trust and confide in. This is vitally important for young people because those that they can confide in are the ones who provide emotional strength and stability in their lives. The Barna Research Group in co-operation with KidsPeace, a non-profit organisation working with young people did tests and exploration with regard to how teenagers feel in relation to four core needs, namely safety, love, power and trust and the provision of those needs by four core people groups, namely

parents, siblings, peers and teachers (2001:74). Their findings revealed that parents have the greatest influence over teenagers and Youth. Young people had clearly stated that parents provided them with love and safety but also did reasonably well in providing them with a sense of power and trust. These young people also felt that their parents were the best with regard to protecting them from sexual abuse and physical abuse, while at the same time providing love for them in all situations and encouraging them to pursue their dreams for the future. Teachers on the other hand ranked second to parents in the group of influence and they provided the young people with a sense of personal power and personal trust. Young people also felt that their teachers provided a measure of protection from sexual and physical abuse as well as motivating them to pursue their dreams. Siblings and peers have the same level of influence in young people. While siblings were the best at providing safety, they were the least effective in providing a sense of interpersonal trust. This is the same rating as peers. Barna points out the importance of parents and teachers where he says:

“Notice that even though teenagers face many of their lifestyle decisions on input and reaction from their peers, teens are substantially more likely to describe their parents and teachers as supportive than they are to describe their peers in the same way” (2001:76-7).

This is a very interesting observation for while teens seem to spend most of their time with their peers and even siblings, this time is taken up with superficial relational issues that do not provide the necessary security that these young people need. On the other hand both parents and teachers do not spend that quality and extended time with young people, and yet these young people feel that both their parents and teachers have a greater sense of concern for their welfare. This indicates that young people seem to trust adults for security and helping them to determine their purpose in life. Again this has implications on the study at hand for as will be pointed out later, both parents and teachers will play a very important part in teaching life skills to young

people through the truth principles laid out in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The important aspect of this teaching, though, is that it must be pertinent to the level and the understanding of young people.

5.3.4. Major Concerns in Life for Youth Today

Youth today have major concerns about their own welfare and purpose in life. The top rated issue for young people today relates to educational achievement. Most young people believe that if they can achieve a matriculation, a college diploma, or a university degree this will give them the opportunity to achieve their goals in life. Beyond the academic achievements, most young people are concerned about financial needs, then the stress and pressures of tasks in life and after that, issues regarding their friends. These concerns can be consolidated into three types of concern.

The first of these three is for young people to succeed in life. This is followed secondly by their need for physical and psychological well being. The third major concern is in the area of relationships. Young people today are concerned about the future and spend a great deal of energy thinking about their own future in particular. One of the main reasons why they spend so much time considering the future is that they are still working through basic issues pertaining to the purpose of life. Young people spend a major amount of their time in exploring the meaning of life, reflecting upon it and determining their own purpose in life. As has been pointed out in the introduction of this study, young people tend to ask some very important and basic questions. These include understanding who they are, why they exist, what they want out of life, and how to achieve a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Barna points out that:

“Three out of four teenagers (75%) concur that they are still trying to find out the purpose or meaning of their life. This journey is affected by the fact that most of them – 63% – admit that they do not have any

comprehensive and clear “philosophy about life that consistently influences their lifestyle and decisions.” Every day remains a period of discovery for them, a time to try new ideas, new behaviours and new relationships in their quest to solve the puzzle of life” (Barna, 2001:83).

Barna’s observation is so close to that of Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes. This seeking of purpose in life is typical of all mankind but it starts during these tender years of Youth. Nobody wants his or her life to be a waste. Life is inextricably attached to meaning and purpose. Essentially, all people want their lives to count and fit in with a purpose that is good and right. On the other hand that purpose may be determined by the situation that people find themselves in. For young people today this purpose is influenced by the prevailing philosophy of life and as has been pointed out, Postmodernism has a great influence on determining their philosophy of life. Most young people have decided that their main purpose in life is enjoyment and personal fulfilment. This was exactly what Solomon pursued in seeking to find out what life was all about in the Book of Ecclesiastes and he came to the conclusion that if that was the only goal it was *hebel*, hollow and transitory with no lasting value.

The author of this thesis believes that God has designed mankind to seek purpose and meaning in life but that that purpose and meaning can only be found in an intimate relationship with God and understanding His purpose as He is the creator and sustainer of life and all mankind. As people grapple with these issues and see the realities and hardships in life, they are driven to the fact that only God can provide this sense of satisfaction and purpose. There remains an inner conflict for young people as to how to make life meaningful and this is clearly seen in a struggle between two alternatives that focus on living for leisure on the one hand and living for career success on the other hand. While these pursuits are not wrong in and of themselves, where they are pursued to the detriment or exclusion of a relationship with God and understanding His purpose, they will never satisfy.

5.3.5. Goals and Accomplishments for Youth Today

With regard to goals and accomplishments Youth have stated that their qualifications and academic achievements are top of the list. This determines their future with regard to employment and provision of finances so that they can achieve their goals in life. The second primary goal in the lives of young people is their physical health, and this is followed in the third place by close personal relationships. These three goals and accomplishments are vitally important in the lives of young people and tie in with their desire for satisfaction and pleasure in life, accompanied by a real sense of achievement. On top of this many young people have expressed the desire to make a difference in the world and have a meaningful influence in the lives of other people. This again ties in with what Solomon says in the Book of Ecclesiastes that just gratifying selfish desires does not truly satisfy. He outlines the importance of having a meaningful impact in the lives of others as well.

5.3.6. The Postmodern challenge to Youth today

Youth today live in a Postmodern world. This is the prevailing philosophy of life that exists in the Western World and those countries influenced by the Western World. Barna gives a very clear definition when he says:

“Postmodernism is a philosophy that stands in opposition to the scientific rationalism of the modernist era. Modernists believe that a person found meaning through personal growth and achievement; Postmoderns contend that all striving is worthless and in vain since there is no meaning to be gained and no absolute truth to be understood. Modernists esteem knowledge and excellence; Postmoderns would set their sights on comfortable survival and self-satisfaction. Relying on science and other tools, moderns seek to understand the order of reality and operate within those boundaries. Postmoderns claim there is no

grand design, that all is based upon chance and people therefore need not recognise the limitations and boundaries that circumscribe the world of the moderns. The world of the Postmodern is a universe that is decentralised. There is no ultimate authority beyond oneself; moral anarchy rules the day. How can the world survive in such a state of consistent chaos and selfishness? Moderns argue that there must be reason and intellectual honesty to create rules of fair play and to facilitate the potential for healthy co-existence. Postmoderns turn inward and suggest that the best decisions are based upon human will and emotion: autonomous people will do what is best and work out the rough edges of those choices” (Barna, 2001:94).

What is clear according to this definition is that the Postmodernists experience of life is based purely on subjective experience and emotion. There is an absence of truth, for they believe that reality can only be determined by feelings and experience. For them knowledge has no value in and of itself, except for what can be applied to life practically and thus giving personal fulfilment. This is the kind of philosophy that has greatly influenced our Youth today and thus it is very difficult to communicate truth, especially Biblical truth to them. Their tendency would be to question what is truth and furthermore to question if the Bible is even true. This however is not a major problem for those seeking to teach the truth of God to Youth today. It is clearly taught in Scripture that God is the One who opens the minds of people to understand His truth by the power of His Holy Spirit and thus the task does not depend upon the human agent totally (1 Cor. 2:10,14).

One advantage that Postmodernism does afford a Bible teacher is that conversation is very important to Youth in the Postmodern experience. Communication is most important to Postmoderns and especially Youth influenced by this philosophy. This communication must of course be genuine and from the heart, it must be honest and authentic. The young people of today like to use stories as these form a crucial part of their communication especially when there is a personal confession or tale that cannot be denied or explained away. This again emphasises the very subjective nature of Postmodernism and the Youth of today. That being the case, personal

testimonies about God's work within the life of a believer will have a great impact on the minds and the hearts of young people. The book of Ecclesiastes being a story of one man's personal search for truth and satisfaction will also have a great impact on the lives of these young people.

Postmodernism also favours interactive discussion because this affords the young person an opportunity to participate. Youth today tend to shun factual and linear lectures as the least effective method of influencing them in their thinking. Their goal in communication is not knowledge, insight or discovery. It is participation, acceptance and a sense of belonging. That being the case, it again affords one the opportunity to teach these young people the truths of Ecclesiastes. Solomon's primary approach in conveying this truth to people is through a goad and nail method. As has been discussed this is the method whereby questions are asked and statements made to goad the person into thinking and reacting so that the mind is captured on that particular subject. As the young person or even older person begins to respond to the question or the comment even negatively or positively, this would cause him or her to think and that is exactly what Solomon wants to achieve. When the thinking process has had time to progress Solomon comes out with a statement that redirects that thinking to an aspect of truth and then he secures his truth or nails it down so that it can be applied to life. This is Solomon's whole approach in the goad and nail method that he uses to teach the truths of Ecclesiastes. These very questions can be used among the Youth for interactive discussion, which they so much enjoy and in which they can participate and have their say. It is true that as people participate in discussion they think first before they begin to speak lest they be seen to be foolish or stupid. The process of thinking and organising the thoughts into response or interactive discussion is one of the most effective teaching or learning methods available today. This is the method that the author of this thesis will use as a means to teach the truth principles coming out of the Book of Ecclesiastes to contemporary Youth today.

Spirituality is very important in the Postmodern world but it is essentially personal. To the

Youth of today in a Postmodern society faith is centred on a person who possesses faith and not on the being in whom that faith is based. This again makes faith very Existential. In other words it makes each person's faith based entirely on his or her own experience and not on absolute truth itself. There are contradictions between Biblical Christianity and Postmodernism. Biblical Christianity recognises that moral absolutes are determined by God and expressed in the Bible. Postmodernism on the other hand encourages each individual to determine what is right or wrong for themselves based on their feelings and past experiences. Biblical Christianity also acknowledges the existence of one true God who created all things, who lives in holiness and eternity, is all-knowing, all-powerful and everywhere present. Postmodernists on the other hand encourage people to define their own understanding of God based upon their experience and perceptions. Thus Postmodernism would encourage people and especially Youth to rely upon themselves as the ultimate source of meaning and purpose and value. This may seem to be a huge obstruction to the whole goal of this study in seeking to teach the Youth of today the truth principles coming out of the book of Ecclesiastes. However this is not necessarily the case. When young people and older people for that matter find that they are not satisfied and cannot fully satisfy themselves in their own selfish pursuits they will seek to find the truth. This is exactly Solomon's thesis in the book of Ecclesiastes, where he points out that he has sought to find that satisfaction in pleasure, in materialism and in fame and fortune and that those things never fully satisfy. In reply Solomon says again and again that true satisfaction and meaning in life is only found in a relationship with God and in understanding and submitting to His good purpose. Young people initially may not believe this but as they seek to find that satisfaction in other means, and are not satisfied they will turn back to what they have heard and even try to go the path that Solomon has outlined.

In the light of this, the approach that the author of this thesis will take will be one of seeking to interact with Youth listening carefully to the underlying base of their ideas, their

dreams and their reactions to opportunities. This approach will use dialogue and a system of questions to help them explore their own philosophy more thoroughly. This will cause them to really define what they say they believe and then having defined that, to seek to put it to the test to see if it really is true and does work. By injecting questions for interactive discussion this would cause them to re-evaluate what they say they believe and then to apply truth statements coming out of Ecclesiastes, which they then would meditate upon and examine in the light of their daily experience. There must be no confusion or vagueness in the approach but simply a means of asking questions in order to determine what is really true. Redirecting Youth to the truths of Scripture is one aspect of the approach from the human point of view. The other aspect is the work that God does in enabling one to understand that truth and believe that truth and ultimately put their faith in Him alone. Thus the approach is both human and divine, for without the divine enabling of God to understand and believe these truths, the objective of teaching young people the truth of God can never be realised.

5.3.7. A Challenge to Youth Workers

Effective ministry of Youth workers to the Youth of today starts with understanding their world, their world-view, a philosophy of ministry that corresponds to what they are facing and having to deal with on a daily basis plus providing the necessary resources to effectively minister to this group. Any Youth worker who is seeking to be effective in ministry must make the effort to enter the world of teenagers. Without doing this, the Youth worker will have limited influence and also limited effectiveness in ministry. Entering the world of the teenager or the young person is essential to connect with them where they are. This is the process of what is called “frame of reference”. The Youth worker enters into the young person’s frame of reference in order to identify with them, relate to them and then proceed with them into what he wants them to learn

and to know about God and His Word. Youth workers must also understand the cultural context of the young person. This may require speaking their language or understanding their language essentially to communicate with them, but it also means reading their magazines, watching their favourite TV programmes and movies and talking to them about their experiences and also their challenges. It is seeking to experience life from their perspective. Once this is understood the Youth worker will be able to understand the challenges, the fears, the joys and the aspirations that these young people are facing. This would enable him or her as a Youth worker to be far more effective in ministry and apply biblical truths accurately to those areas that are a challenge to young people.

Not only must Youth workers or Youth ministers enter the world of the young person but also understand the young person's world-view. This will be a common world-view amongst a particular cultural group and it will be necessary not only to understand this world-view but also to know how to apply answers from biblical truth to this world-view. It must be emphasised that it takes a long time to understand the world-view of a particular cultural group and especially a group of young people where what they say they believe is not clearly defined. Young people tend to believe different world-views or philosophies of life, which they hold in tension even though they are contradictory to one another. Here Youth workers must not get confused but must seek to understand what is in the mind of young people even though it does not make sense. What must be remembered is that young people are growing to maturity and have not at this stage worked through each philosophy logically to accept what is good and reject what is bad. This takes perseverance on the part of Youth workers. While Youth workers are seeking to understand the world and the world-view of these young people, the young people themselves will seek to challenge the workers and test their commitment to the cause and especially to them as young people. Young people in their insecurity tend to challenge adults and those in authority, including the Youth workers with a view to determine if these older people really believe what they say

they believe. It is vitally important for Youth workers to set an example, for this will be key to the young people accepting and believing the message that they bring. The message is always related to the life that is lived. The old adage “more is caught than taught” is true. The influence and the leadership of Youth workers are an extension of whom they are rather than simply of what they have to say. Thus it is important for Youth workers to know exactly what they believe and to live that out on a daily basis before young people.

In application to teaching the book of Ecclesiastes Youth workers will have to have a thorough understanding of the book and its application to young people. This is important because there are many seeming contradictions within the book. In his or her determination to find out what is true, the young person will seek to challenge the truth of the book by picking up on these seeming contradictions.

Secondly young people will also seek to challenge the commitment of Youth workers to this truth and see to what extent they will hold to this truth when challenged or questioned. The Youth workers may not know all the answers but they certainly need to be genuine and authentic in admitting that they are not perfect but willing to find out the answers to the questions being posed to them.

A third important aspect of effective Youth ministry is having a philosophy of Youth ministry that is effective. Many well-equipped and well-intentioned Youth workers have entered Youth ministry with much zeal but have fallen out of this ministry, either because of being challenged and not been able to carry the challenge, or because they have approached it in the wrong way and found their approach to be ineffective. What is important here is not losing sight of the challenge of identifying with the young people while keeping in dynamic balance the commitment to the truth of Scripture. Youth workers need to have a clear conviction and vision as to why they are involved in Youth ministry and how their efforts can fit into making an impact into this Youth cultural group. Youth workers also need to have a hope and a motivation with

regard to what the outcome may be, for in most cases the fruit of their labour is not quickly seen. Another element of effective Youth ministry would include having the right resources or seeking to obtain those right resources. These resources would include a safe and comfortable place to meet. The definition of safe and comfortable would essentially be determined by the young people themselves. A formal church building may be safe but may not be comfortable to them for they would feel ill at ease in such a formal setting. Other resources would include the means of transport to places where young people like to congregate. These could be sports venues, shopping centres or culturally accepted places with they can identify. Resources may also include materials such as mass or multi-media, software and hardware; depending on the affluence of the Youth groups themselves. In many cases simply having a Bible or a copy of the relevant passages available is essential for doing the kind of study that a Youth worker may want to do.

All these aspects, entering the world of young people, understanding their world-view, having an effective philosophy of ministry and the right resources in order to minister are vitally important to effectively minister to young people. This however is only one side of the task, for the rest follows in the performance of this ministry. Ministering in a Youth culture also requires personal involvement, a deep commitment and godly example and then also the willingness to learn through experiences. Personal involvement is not so much telling teens what they need to know and do but a willingness to get involved in their lives and help them through the difficult and tough challenges of life. Youth workers need to show that they genuinely care for those to whom they minister and this depth of caring must be seen as something that is genuine and real, for if it is false or faked the Youth worker will be rejected. Youth workers must also be prepared to be vulnerable. This would include sharing their own times of testing and failure with a view to allowing the young people to identify completely with their humanity. This will express an authenticity to the young people, which is something that they eagerly embrace. Constant loving contact is vital for Youth workers to show that they really care for the young person. As Youth

workers totally identify with the young people to whom they are ministering they will be able to learn the ways of this group and how best to approach them. This may include asking many questions and being willing to learn through the responses to those questions. Again this is an important aspect of involving young people in a process through interaction, which is the primary way in which Youth of this age learn. George Barna has pointed out:

“The most effective way to teach young people is to engage them in the process. Talking at them may work well if our objective is memorisation or regurgitation, but experience has amply demonstrated that teens absorb principles and values best when they have the chance to participate in developing a deeply-rooted comprehension and application of those elements” (Barna, 2001:154).

Here Barna is quite right since young people love to be involved in the process. Even if it is a matter of answering questions they love to think and express what they feel or understand. This ties in with the study of Ecclesiastes where many searching questions are asked as goads in order to cause the person to think, react and respond. This serves the young person in two ways. Not only does it enable them to participate in the process of learning what is right and true for them as they develop their philosophy of life, but it also enables them to interact with others. Effective ministry to a Youth culture not only involves personal involvement and a willingness to learn through experience but also includes a godly example. Youth workers will need to be a consistent godly example to these young people. This will enable the young people to see the genuineness of the life as it is forged by truth. What must be remembered is that young people are constantly testing events and people to find out what is true. Where they see a consistency of what is taught and what is lived they gladly embrace it as being authentic and true. A good and godly example is important but that in itself is not sufficient. This example must be shown or demonstrated over the long run. This calls for a deep commitment, which is the last aspect of an effective ministry to the Youth culture. Youth want to know that people are prepared to persevere

with them and not give up on them when the going is difficult. The sense of constant trust and acceptance is very important to young people of today.

In conclusion, not everything that young people embrace as effective and meaningful to them will be acceptable to the older generation. The form of this ministry must be made distinct from the function of the ministry. With regard to form young people may enjoy loud music, active games, interactive discussion and even plays and skits. This form may not be as appealing to older people but nevertheless it is on the level of understanding and involvement of young people. The function however is the essential part of the ministry. This includes deep honest consistent loving relationships. This is where true connection is made with the young person. Getting young people to embrace the truth of God's Word which is also moral truth is conveyed through the avenue of loving and godly people. The love, support and godly example of the Youth workers cannot be underestimated. Added to this is the realisation that only God can make the truth of His Word understandable to any person. The Youth workers may do all in their means to seek to enable young people to understand God's truth and to submit to it but they cannot achieve this entirely on their own. They must realise that God is the one who convicts the young person about what is wrong and right and furthermore brings understanding and conviction to the hearts and minds of these young people. Thus it is important to teach the truth and model the truth and at the same time be trusting God to bring about the results that only He can achieve. This is very important because the ultimate goal of Youth ministry and any ministry for that matter is life change in accordance with God's truth and in a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

5.3.8. The Importance Of Spiritual Formation For Young People

Many problems that young people experience stem from a lack of identity. They are uncertain

about who they are and what is happening in their own bodies. At this stage they experience rapid physical changes in their bodies and this can lead to great confusion. Added to these changes are emotional changes that they experience and these too can be very confusing. Other situations also expose young people to a myriad of opinions and not knowing which ones to choose, adds to the confusion. As a result young people experience a great deal of stress and this may lead them to substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, and even suicide. When a young person lacks a sense of identity they seem to be tossed to and fro to the influences of others and this often manifests itself in destructive behaviour. The important question in this regard is how a young person may develop a solid identity of who they really are and what they need to be. Smith points out:

“There are two primary ways young people develop a sense of who they are: imitation or integration. Imitation is the process of adapting to one’s surroundings by patching together the beliefs and behaviours of others. Adolescents try to develop a sense of who they are by attempting to look, act, think, and sound like someone else. On the other hand, integration is the process of testing, separating, and discriminating between several types of beliefs and behaviours until one discovers that which is genuine and real. This process involves intentionally weighing the merits and drawbacks of many different viewpoints and perspectives. It involves interaction with others, personal reflection, and a freedom to explore” (Smith, 1994:251).

Smith has made a very accurate and pertinent observation. Young people who primarily use imitation as a means of developing a sense of who they are will end up with a fragile and ultimately an unsatisfying self-concept. What is more beneficial is the path of integration. This is the path where the young person forges a strong sense of what is real and true. It is also a process of evaluation and discernment with the result that the young person not only embraces what they have evaluated as true but have also leaned a process of discerning what develops character within them.

One of the deepest truths about any person is his or her identity: “Who am I?” This is one of the most pertinent questions that young people continually ask. Spiritual formation is a process

involving the development of a person's understanding of their true identity. Once this identity is understood the person begins to live on the basis of that identity. For young people this gives them a sense of security and purpose in life. Christian spiritual formation is coming to an understanding of who a person is as God created them to be. This is the basis of true identity as God's creative purpose is revealed in Scripture. The book of Ecclesiastes with its wisdom emphasis and skill for living is an authoritative basis for young people developing a true identity. This enables young people to question important aspects of living and to make up their own minds through the process of integration in order to discover what life really is all about. Ecclesiastes is so appropriate for this exercise as it is a means of examining the man-made philosophies about life as apposed to God's divinely designed purpose for life as revealed in Scripture.

Youth is a stage of self-centredness. Young people are preoccupied with what others may think about them. This makes them particularly vulnerable, for the feedback that they get from others may either be true or false. Smith points out:

“They need the eyes and ears of trusted people who can help them develop a proper identity. Like the carnival mirrors that are bent out of shape, thus reflecting a distorted image, the surrounding world projects a distorted image to adolescents. The church has the ability to restore a true and accurate self-image. Distortion can hold many in spiritual bondage; the truth can set them free” (Smith, 1994:253).

Thus it may be seen that spiritual formation is a process of coming to the truth with regard to who the individual is and living out that truth in daily life. Here Scripture plays a very important part because it is the only truly accurate reflector of whom we are and what we need to be. This is supported by what Paul says in the book of Romans where he admonishes, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

5.3.9. Positive Deconstruction

When seeking to reach young people with the truth of God it is vitally important to spend time with them and to build meaningful relationships with them. This would enable them to trust the one who is seeking to reach them and thus open their minds and their hearts to receive what is being said. However this may not be sufficient, for one might have to go back and deconstruct those theories and philosophies of life that young people have believed. Young people do not enter a situation with their minds as a blank slate but over the years in seeking to find true meaning as they emerge from childhood into adulthood they have adopted many philosophies of life and world-views that inform their present philosophy of life. It is vitally important to help them think about these ideas and beliefs that they have picked up and to question whether they are really true lest they form a barrier to the truth that they are about to receive.

As has been shown, in the Youth culture clothing and music play a very important part. Clothing and music however are more the outward expression of the inward understanding or desire. These are more superficial and peripheral to the real deep issues that are addressed by young people's underlying world-view. Nick Pollard makes a very important observation as he quotes Steve Chalke where he says,

“Most Youth workers are very good at understanding contemporary Youth culture in terms of clothes, music, language and behaviour. All of these are important, but, if the church is to deal with causes rather than just symptoms, we need specialist help in identifying and responding to the underlying world-views which so many young people are absorbing unconsciously” (Pollard, 1997:31).

World-view is simply the way people view the world around them. As has been pointed out young people look at the world and they ask fundamental questions such as “Who am I?” “Where am I going?” “What is the purpose of life?” As they give answers to these questions,

those answers combine together to form their world-view. World-view on the other hand may be the way that some people view the world from a predetermined perspective. They would see it not as a conclusion that has been derived from many fundamental questions, but rather as the point from which they start. It may be a philosophy that they have already adopted or developed and they see the world through this particular philosophy or grid. In other words their world-view is the spectacles through which they view the world and interpret everything that is happening in the world in the light of their particular philosophy. There is however a very important and fundamental question to ask regarding world-view. Is this world-view right or wrong? Does it accurately relate to life in which the person finds himself or herself? Pollard points out that this is an important way of approaching people with regard to their world-view. He says,

“If we are going to help people to change their world-view, then, we must try to help them step outside their feedback loop (in as much as that is possible), to ask some difficult questions, and to explore alternative interpretations. And we need to be prepared to do the same ourselves” (Pollard, 1997:35).

What must be understood is that here is not just one particular world-view that a young person may adopt. There are many different world-views and even a combination of world-views formed into some sort of mosaic that each person may develop with a commonality within the group. The Biblical world-view or Christianity is just one of the world-views on the list. A major driving force behind young people adopting these world-views or a combination of these world-views is the fact that many of them are very attractive. They promise to offer personal fulfilment, self-actualisation and even pleasure without requiring any kind of moral responsibility. As has been pointed out in this study before, some of these life philosophies or world-views may be contradictory and yet young people seem to hold them in dynamic tension without examining the validity of one against the other. This may be because the young person wants one aspect of this

world-view as it satisfies a particular need without having to adopt the whole view lock, stock and barrel. On the other hand the young person has never really been challenged to question whether this is beneficial to their whole living and whether it might have negative consequences in the long run.

These are the deep issues that must be dealt with in ministering to young people and teaching them the truth about God. The way to approach this is by first examining what they believe and allowing them to examine what they believe. This must be followed by examining whether it is true and applicable to life or not. Thirdly once the fallacies of a philosophy of life have been understood and realised, the truth of God's Word must be introduced with clarity and conviction, and this is where the focus of this study plays such an important part. This was Solomon's approach in the book of Ecclesiastes with his system of goads and nails. As a reminder, he used a goad to prod people to question things regarding life issues. He then would bring in a truth that would substantiate what he has been saying and this would be a secure platform on which life could be based. Pollard does the same thing by examining or causing young people to examine their own philosophy of life, and once they have understood that it is not truth, to re-direct them to the truth of God. He says,

“This is God's message for all time, and it is not for us to chop it around or water it down. Nor would it be right just to give in to the culture and try to present the Gospel in ways, which don't require people to think. We are called to something far more than just life on the surface.

There is, however, something we can do. We can find ways to help today's generation to think about their world-views so that, in turn, we can then help them to think about the life and teaching of Jesus. If they are currently comfortable with their hotchpotch of different world-views we must help them to become uncomfortable with it. We must encourage them to step outside their world-view feedback loops and to ask themselves the difficult questions. Perhaps then they will be interested in looking at Jesus. To this end I offer you the approach I call “positive deconstruction” (Pollard, 1997:41).

Pollards system of positive deconstruction is very pertinent and will work best in ministering to young people of this age. This is the methodology that the author of this thesis will adopt in seeking to teach young people the truth of God through the book of Ecclesiastes.

5.3.9.1. A Method Of Teaching Young People The Truth Of God

Positive deconstruction is not a method of apologetics. Apologetics is really giving a reason in defence of one's faith. This can be a very important part of positive deconstruction but it is not the essence of this method. Rather it involves a lot of time questioning young people and enabling them to question what they really believe and why they believe it. Ultimately it is getting them to discover the inadequacies of the world-view or life philosophy that they have adopted. Thus, as Pollard points out, it is helping young people to deconstruct or take apart what they believe in order to examine it carefully and analyse whether it is really true. This is not a process of simply deconstructing or pulling apart some philosophy to discard it but to do so in such a way as to examine its merits. Thus he entitles this method, *Positive Deconstruction* because the process is positive in that in discovering the useless and detrimental aspects of a particular world-view, they may be discarded and replaced with some biblical truth. Pollard says,

“The process of positive deconstruction recognises and affirms the elements of truth to which individuals already hold, but also helps them to discover for themselves the inadequacies of the underlying world-views they have absorbed. The aim is to awaken a heart response that says, “I am not so sure that what I believe is right after all. I want to find out more about Jesus”” (Pollard, 1997:44).

This is a very sound and plausible approach with young people today. Young people love to be involved in the process of communication and arguments. They love to be recognised and involved in examining and determining what really is meaningful in life. Pollard uses an

excellent illustration to explain his method of positive deconstruction. He talks about having bought an old car, which had a very sound chassis and bodywork but that the rest of the car including the engine, gearbox and suspension were broken and worn out. This rendered the car fairly useless. What he then did was to purchase another car of exactly the same make and model. He then proceeded to dismantle both cars putting the good parts such as the engine, gearbox and suspension of the second car into the old car that he had first purchased so as to make one good car out of both cars. He points out that this was positive deconstruction not a negative deconstruction. Those parts, which were worn out and broken, were discarded after they had been dismantled from the original vehicle first; they were then replaced with the good parts so that in the end he had a good vehicle. This is the same approach in using positive deconstruction with young people regarding their world-view and the truth of God (Pollard, 1995:45). This is a good illustration and clearly explains what is done in a spiritual sense of ministering to young people.

There is however a warning lest one would make mistakes in this regard. The one danger is that someone may feel that this is not needed. In today's culture with the many influences that young people face and especially with regard to Postmodernism, it is vitally important for anyone seeking to reach young people with the truth of God's Word to identify with them where they are particularly with regard to their thinking and their philosophy of life. If one cannot relate to young people and their frame of reference it is very difficult to gain their attention, which first must be secured in order to bring understanding through the Word of God. The other mistake that one might make is thinking that positive deconstruction is the only thing that is needed. This too is a fallacy, for positive deconstruction is only a method, although a very effective method of reaching young people with the truth of God. There are many other methods that may be used. Again as has been pointed out it is not purely a human endeavour but also God who by His Holy Spirit brings understanding of that truth to the hearts and minds of young people. Pollard says,

“I do not believe that positive deconstruction is the simple key that will make evangelism easy. But, if combined with earnest prayer, clear Gospel proclamation, reasoned apologetics and genuine relationships demonstrating practical love, positive deconstruction will help us to find evangelism slightly less difficult” (Pollard: 1997:46).

5.3.9.2. The Process Of Positive Deconstruction

Pollard outlines a four-step process in his method of positive deconstruction. The first step is to identify the underlying world-view that the young person has adopted. The second step involves analysing it to determine exactly what elements it contains. The third step is affirming the elements of truth that the world-view contains, and then fourthly discovering the errors within this world-view.

In identifying the particular world-view, Pollard states:

“Most people seem unaware of the world-views they have absorbed, which now underlie their beliefs and values. That is why it is so rare for people to articulate a world-view. Normally they will simply express a belief or live in a certain way, without knowing or even thinking about the world-view from which their belief or behaviour derives” (Pollard, 1997:48).

Pollard is quite correct and clear when he says that most young people have adopted elements of different world-views and incorporated them into their own world-view, without being able to define exactly what those different world-views are.

The first step is to interact with the person and find out through a method of questions what he or she believes, and why they live the way they live. This is to identify their underlying world-view. It is necessary in doing this to have an understanding of a wide range of world-views. This is necessary in order to identify important elements that make up a particular world-view. One cannot find these elements if one does not know what he or she is looking for. This is

what is called a pattern-matching process. Again this is necessary because most major world-views do not exist in a pure form, but for young people today, they adopt different world-views into a combination of what suits them and with what they like to identify. Thus bits and pieces of different world-views are absorbed into a particular culture. Some of these world-views, ideas or even combinations are still taught in academic institutions today, but most of these ideas originate in television productions, fashion houses and recording studios, and this is what young people today adopt to make up their own world-view. Each world-view does have an element of truth in it and the idea is not to totally disregard the world-view. The point here is simply to identify what world-view is adopted so that the young people can understand what they really believe and why they believe it. The process then continues in analysing this world-view so that the young person can see what it really means.

The second step in the process of positive deconstruction is to analyse the world-view. This step involves determining if this world-view is true. In order to do this one has to employ the three standard philosophical tests of truth. They are coherence, correspondence and pragmatic tests (Pollard 1997:53). This means addressing the world-view with three basic questions that correspond with coherence, correspondence and pragmatism. Coherence is asking the question, does it make sense? Secondly, correspondence asks whether it correspond with reality? Thirdly, pragmatism asks, does it really work? With regard to coherence a statement that is true will make sense. On the other hand something that is incoherent cannot be true and thus it will not make sense. With regard to correspondence, this question is based on the theory that if a statement is true, it will line up with reality. Truth statements must properly align themselves or correspond with reality. With regard to pragmatism the theory is that if a statement is true it will work in reality. This means that the truth functions properly in the real world whereas untruth or errors do not. When one analyses a world-view in the methodology of positive deconstruction it is important to use all three of these questions because each one on its own does not achieve the

desired goal. This is the minimum requirement in determining whether that particular world-view is true or not.

Having just addressed step two in analysing the world-view, step three must now be employed. Step three involves affirming the truth that might be contained in a particular world-view. It must be understood that not all non-Christian world-views are wrong. Many of them contain elements of truth and these need to be affirmed. The goal of this exercise of positive deconstruction is to affirm the truth and expose the untruth or error. Christians do believe that God's Word is true because He inspired the writing of His Scriptures. However He also created the universe and thus God set truth principles in place within His creation. Within world-views people have adopted many of these truths within creation and mixed them with humanistic error and so develop their own philosophy of life. Thus it is important to retain the truth and expose the error in an endeavour to direct the person to what is truth as God had determined it both in creation and in accordance with His Holy Scripture.

Step four involves discovering the error. As the particular world-view is analysed and the truth within that world-view affirmed so the error must be pointed out. Essentially this error becomes clear when it is seen that it does not make sense, it does not correspond with reality or it does not work. It is also blatant when it is seen not to line up with Scripture as God's truth.

Having laid out his method of positive deconstruction, Pollard expresses his conviction with regard to Postmodernism. He says,

“I am certain that such a sell-out to Postmodernism is a great mistake. People do have world-views and they will continue to hold them. As we have already noted, when thinking about Postmodernism, the world-views that people hold are selected on a “pick-and-mix” basis. They are muddled up and inconsistent. But they are still there. Similarly, people still think. We are rational beings. Some Postmodern theoreticians may argue for the death of rationality (although, strangely, they do this in a rational way). If we are created in the image of God, however, all of us, Christian or non-Christian, modern or Postmodern, will continue to

think. So we cannot accept the speculative conclusions of Postmodernism (1997:72).

Pollard is quite right for people are rational, discerning beings created in God's image and thus there will be a continual search for meaning and purpose in life.

5.3.10. Parenting Youth today

Parents can and do play an important part in the lives of their teenage and adolescent children. These young people really desire the attention of their parents and especially their parents' willingness to listen to them. The pattern over the years for young people is that they have been listening to their parents for the first twelve years of their lives and as they become teenagers they desire their parents to hear what they have to say. Here parents can play a very important part in the lives of their young teens and older adolescents by giving the time to listen to what they have to say. The important question is what should the parents be listening for?

Firstly parents should be listening to their young people with regard to the comments and questions that they are asking regarding a search for meaning in life. Barna points out;

“Most young adults go through a search for significance, seeking to discern meaning, purpose and truth in life. Because their cultural context has made life incredibly difficult and has removed most of the anchors and guideposts that formally made sense of reality, teenagers are in a highly experimental mode and want exposure to as many variable options as may exist” (Barna, 2001:146).

This is a very significant statement for parents to hear and to understand that even at this stage they still play a significant part in the lives of young people. Parents at this stage may not be able to force their own worldview or philosophy of life upon young individuals but they certainly can provide key insights that will help their children to see their lives from a different point of

view. Here too parents can ask pertinent questions that will enable the young person to examine their own thinking and philosophies that they are developing as to whether these really are true. It is vital for young people at this stage to be questioning their own values and questioning whether the philosophy of life that they are developing is really in touch with reality. It is important thus for young people to be discerning and to learn to be discerning at this stage.

Secondly parents need to be listening to young people's comments and questions about values. Values express what is appropriate, worthwhile and meaningful in life. As has been pointed out young people are trying to define who they are and what really matters in their lives. Their values will be core to this whole approach of determining such matters. Here again parents can play a very important part not only in expressing what they believe is right and true, (and they need to be bold enough to do that), but also by exemplifying that in their daily living. Here parents must indeed practice what they preach. In cases where parents say one thing but live another the young person is quick to pick up on the hypocrisy and will tend to dismiss what the parent has to say and rather follow what the parent does. On the other hand young people who see a contradiction between what is preached and what is practised may tend to reject both the speaking and the action and simply follow their own idea. In this case the parent has lost the platform to influence the child with regard to appropriate values.

Thirdly parents need to be sensitive in listening to what young people have to say regarding the family. Young people have that desperate need for belonging. They want to feel part of a family that knows them, loves them and looks out for their interest. They may make disparaging comments about their family and even their parents to their peers, but deep inside they have a need for belonging and certainly the family plays an important part of this security in their lives. Thus a healthy family can provide a great deal of security for young people. The healthy family can also have the greatest influence in the life of the young person with regard to their physical development, emotional growth, intellectual development and spiritual maturation.

While many young people grow up in one parent homes or broken homes as a result of divorce, the importance and powerful influence of a home where both father and mother love each other cannot be stressed enough. Barna points out how important this influence is in the lives of young people. He says,

“In a study we conducted several years ago, one of the most powerful lessons we gained was that a huge gift to children is for their parents to remain married. Adults have many justifications for dissolving a troubled marriage. But apart from situations in which abuse is involved, the long-term positive effect of a husband and wife staying together through the myriad joys and conflicts of marriage sends a compelling message to young people about commitment, loyalty, love and sacrifice. Perhaps more than anything else we studied, staying married provides kids with a permanent, treasured gift” (Barna, 2001:148).

Fourthly parents should listen to their young people with regard to their comments and questions about faith. Young people have many questions about faith, beliefs and especially the faith of their parents. Young people rarely embrace a Christian faith if their family treats their faith only as a Sunday morning experience and not really the focal point of their lives. On the other hand where there is a genuine commitment to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and this is seen in the lifestyle and conversation of the parents, their young people tend to embrace this faith as it is seen to be authentic and real. Young people are much more likely to accept what has been modelled to them as a lifestyle in all genuineness rather than that which is jammed down their throats. Genuine expressions of faith such as forgiveness, love, kindness and encouragement make deep impressions on the hearts and minds of young people.

Thus parents can play a very important part in the lives of their young people growing up in their own homes. As has been seen these areas play an important part, such as looking for meaning, defining values, a connection with the family and also a connection with their faith. Parents need to be sensitive, available and attentive to what their teens are saying. They must

listen to the questions that they are asking so that they can give plausible answers. Thus they will be able to help these young people to develop a philosophy of life that is real, practical and appropriate. Essentially what Christian parents want to do is to influence their young people to such a degree that they would have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. There can be no greater joy for Christian parents to see that truth embraced by their teens as the focus of their lives.

It is vitally important for parents to understand what their teenage and adolescent children have to deal with on a daily basis. At this stage of life they are very self-conscious especially about their physical appearance. In this regard they have tremendous emotional swings. They may feel great one day and the next want to die because of an embarrassing situation that they have faced. What may be considered, as unimportant aspects to adults is very important on the other hand to young people. This is especially so with regard to how they are perceived or understood in the eyes of their friends and others. One moment they are trying to be “cool” in order to draw attention to themselves and gain acceptance, and the next they feel so embarrassed for having made a fool of themselves. They often chide themselves for doing immature and irresponsible things.

The Bible does not say anything about teenagers, yet it does aptly describe stages of Youth. The main emphasis in reference to Youth in the Bible and especially in the book of Proverbs is the admonition to get wisdom and live wisely. The Hebrew word for wisdom is *gokma* and this refers to skill for living. In other words, wisdom in the Bible is a reference to life skills. This is a particular emphasis in the book of Proverbs chapters 1 to 8. However, other books of wisdom literature also emphasise the importance of wisdom in skill for living. Paul Tripp in his book *Age of Opportunity* points out the importance of wisdom relating to world-views. He says,

“Proverbs doesn’t give us an encyclopaedia of do’s and don’ts, or rights and wrongs. What Proverbs gives us is two world-views, wisdom and foolishness. Here we find two ways of living: the right way of the wise that gets its direction from the truth of God, and the way of the fool that gets its direction from human perspective and desire” (Tripp, 2001:81-2).

5.4. Interviews, Questionnaire and Analysis Of Young People’s Goals and Ambitions Today.

The aim of this exercise was to interview 8 young people of various ages and cultural backgrounds, to determine what their desires and goals in life are, and why they think that achieving these goals would bring fulfilment. I primarily focused on High School students over the age of eighteen, and those who have just completed their schooling. This group also comprise church and un-church Youth. Names and intimate details of the respondents have been changed to protect their identity and confidentiality. The initial; questions focused on what career the young people would like to follow once they had completed school. The reason for this question was to gain their interest and cooperation and to see where their interests lay. Two questions followed with regard to the reason for following such a career and what kind of lifestyle they expected from it. The reason for asking these questions was to determine their motives and desires in following a particular career. A fourth question focused on determining their goals for life and also the people who influenced them in making these choices. This was further clarified with a question on what they considered was necessary in life to make it successful and fulfilling. This was followed by a direct question about what they wanted out of life at the present time and in periods of five years over the next ten years. The young people were then questioned as to how they expected to achieve this fulfilment in life. The last section of the interview focused on their church background and religious experiences, and whether they considered the Bible as an important source of addressing all these issues in life.

5.4.1. Make up of the Group

The group of young people was made up of five learners (between the ages of 18 and 19) and three students (between the ages of 19 and 21). Three of the respondents were female and five were male. Their cultural backgrounds included: Black, Cape and English Coloured, Portuguese, Indian, Afrikaans and English. They ranged from middle to high socio-economic groups. Their religious backgrounds included Hindu, non-religious, traditional Christian church and Evangelical. All have grown up and been schooled in the South African context. The primary area of residence was Weltevreden Park.

5.4.2. Career choices and Expectations.

Career choices ranged from law, medical, finance, conservation to musician. Reasons given for choosing these careers are mainly idealistic in nature and include: seeing justice done in the world, looking after their environment, making lots of money to be able to travel and having good opportunities for advancement in the future. The expectations that were expressed include; happiness and fulfilment, wealth, excitement, fame, and achieving a comfortable lifestyle.

5.4.3. Life Goals expressed in the interviews

The desired life goals that these young people have, include: Security of owning their own home, having a fixed income, being a good person and helping others, fame in sport and other talents and abilities. To be successful and healthy and having a family and lots of friends. Others wanted

to make a lot of money, be content with life and stay true to family and friends. One respondent wanted to be close to God and another was happy to accept whatever comes. There was no significant difference between their short and long term goals.

5.4.4. Influential people

Most respondents said that the influential people in their lives are first parents and family members, then friends and high profile people including political figures, entertainers and sports stars.

5.4.5. Perceptions Of What Makes Life Successful And Fulfilling.

Responses to this question were varied and include the following characteristics: Persistence and diligence, encouragement, love and a good upbringing, money, education and the right contacts, good self image and respect.

5.4.6. Means To Achieving These Goals

Most respondents felt that hard work was the key to achieving their goals. One felt that faith in God was vital and two felt that being true to themselves was the key. It is important to see the emphasis placed on diligence in this area

5.4.7. Spiritual Experiences

Some of the respondents have active Christian lives, the Hindu respondent ardently follows a

Hindu lifestyle and some respondents expressed indifference to any spiritual activity.

5.4.8. Relevance Of The Bible To Life Today.

Five of the respondents said that they feel that the Bible is relevant, one said no because they wanted to experience life for themselves without the influence of the Bible and two were undecided.

5.4.9. Conclusion and Application

What is very interesting here is to see the similarities in conclusions to those that have been outlined in the studies on Youth. The respondents said that the most influential people in their lives were parents and family members, then friends and high profile people. These interviews bear out the importance of parents as examples and security in the lives young people. Parents and family members are of primary importance to young people today. However peers do play a very important part, especially in those areas of identification and belonging. The interviews also emphasise the need young people have for meaning and purpose in life. None of the young people interviewed wanted to live a nebulous meaningless life. By the same token most of them felt that they would have a happy, fulfilled and a comfortable life if they could only have wealth, excitement, fame, and achievement. This is exactly what Solomon says will not bring ultimate satisfaction and yet is it the goal of most young people let alone older people as well. Thus this study and thesis is seen to be appropriate in its pursuits to teach Youth the important wisdom or skills for living coming from Ecclesiastes. Although most said that they considered the Bible to be important as a guide in life it seems clear from the responses that most do not understand the Bible and thus there is a need to teach the Youth in this regard.

5.5. Application Of The Truths Of Ecclesiastes To Youth In Answer to their Needs.

It is vitally important for young people to understand the truths of Ecclesiastes so that they can apply them to their own lives. These important truths may be grouped into two sections. The first section is with regard to God, His character and control. It is very important for young people to understand God as a person, not some vague deity that is removed from the reality of life on earth and has no concern about people and their conduct upon the earth. The other section of application has to do with mankind and his or her conduct. Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes emphasises that humans are mortal and yet they have attributes that enable them to relate to God. Solomon also emphasises people's moral conduct regarding sin and their work and ultimately their death. He furthermore outlines people's responsibilities with regard to using the faculties that God has given them. Young people need to understand that mankind is responsible in the exercise of those abilities that God has given with regard to God Himself, others and themselves within the realm of life.

5.5.1. Understanding God in Ecclesiastes

Young people need to understand, firstly about the character and control of God. This will enable them to have a correct understanding regarding their responsibilities and attitudes because a sovereign and holy God requires that. Solomon has outlined many of these characteristics in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon outlines God's sovereignty or overall rulership and control in explaining that God was the creator of all things. God's name, '*Elohim*' is used forty times in the book of Ecclesiastes. No other name for God is used in Ecclesiastes. Solomon emphasises the transcendence of God and His sovereignty throughout the book. In Ecclesiastes 5:2, Solomon

emphasises that God is in heaven. This is a description of God's transcendence. Furthermore God's sovereignty is seen in Solomon's explanation that He is the Creator (Ecc. 12:1) and the Maker of all things (Ecc. 11:5). God is also seen as the Creator of mankind, giving him life (Ecc. 8:15) and a spirit (Ecc. 3:21) and also setting eternity in his heart (Ecc. 3:11). God's sovereignty and control is also seen in His planning and timing of all things (Ecc. 3:1-8). He is referred to as making everything beautiful in its time (Ecc. 3:13). This emphasises God's creative control and His divine appointment of timing within every event. These truths highlight the fact that God is supreme and that there is no one else greater than Him. In people's understanding, God would also be the controller of all events pertaining to their lives. They would thus need to trust Him personally for their provision, protection and future. As God is the one who makes everything beautiful in its time, this would give young people confidence in His good purpose which is emphasised throughout the book.

This idea is further supported by God's control of the rising and setting of the sun, the cyclic movement of the wind, the flowing of the rivers and also the evaporation of water to form clouds (Ecc. 1:5-7). In Ecclesiastes 12:11 God is referred to as the Shepherd, and this is a term used of God in other Old Testament books (Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Gen. 49:24). Solomon also emphasises God's activity in life and specifically in the lives of people. Ten times God is said to give and ten times God is said to do. God is the one who gives mankind wisdom, knowledge, and happiness (Ecc. 2:26) and He also gives mankind wealth, possessions, and honour (Ecc. 5:19; 6:2). God also gives people opportunity to enjoy food and work and yet they cannot fully understand God in all of this. God's sovereignty is also seen in what He does, for what He has done will endure forever (Ecc. 3:14) and cannot be altered (Ecc. 7:13).

God is not seen as some impersonal force. In contrast Solomon describes His personality in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon says that he hears (Ecc. 5:2) and he can be pleased (Ecc. 2:26) or angered (Ecc. 5:2-6). He is also described as being holy (Ecc. 5:1-2) and He despises

man's actions that are sinful (Ecc. 5:2). God is described as exercising His justice against wickedness. Though this justice and the punishment of the wicked may seem delayed, Solomon assures us it will eventually be carried out (Ecc. 8:13). Solomon explains that even though God's actions cannot be fully understood, some of His motives for His actions are explained. These motives include testing man to show him his finiteness (Ecc. 3:18) and causing people to fear Him (Ecc. 3:14). All these truths about God are consistent with the rest of Scripture and thus the validity of Ecclesiastes as a book of the Bible is proven.

5.5.2. Understanding Man In The Book Of Ecclesiastes

It is important for the reader to note that because God created mankind, giving him life, and placing a desire for eternity, in his heart, mankind is ultimately responsible to his Creator, and he or she will never find complete satisfaction in anything upon this earth apart from God Himself. Young people need to know that their accountability is ultimately to God and not to themselves or even their peers or group to which they belong. This accountability touches the realm of thoughts, attitudes, and conduct. Understanding mankind's character helps young people to answer the vitally important questions that they ask, namely "Who am I?" and "What is life all about?"

In their stage of youthfulness, many young people are idealistic and carefree. An accurate understanding of mankind according to Ecclesiastes helps young people to be realistic and responsible. As Solomon describes his investigation into life he describes the faculties that mankind has and can employ. Mankind is a thinking creature and he can be guided by his mind (Ecc.2: 3) so that he can understand (Ecc.1: 7) and investigate (Ecc.1: 13) aspects of life. He is also able to observe things (Ecc.1: 14; 2:12) and reflect on what he has seen (Ecc.1: 16; 2:12; 8:9) with the result that he can draw conclusions (Ecc.2: 14, 17; 5:18) in order to understand his

environment and himself. This appeals to young people because they want to know what life is all about. They enjoy investigating aspects of life in order to understand life and so create an environment that is secure and in which they feel happy. Solomon shows in the book of Ecclesiastes that this is a vital part of being human and a necessary part of being happy and secure in the world that God created for us.

As young people discover aspects about themselves pertaining to their physical, emotional and spiritual makeup they become interested in seeing how these areas develop. As these areas in their lives develop, they enjoy expressing themselves and further developing these faculties. Solomon also explains the emotions that mankind expresses. These include joy (Ecc.2:10; 11:9), hatred (Ecc. 2:17-18; 9:1), love (Ecc.9:1, 6, 9), and also such negative emotions as despair (Ecc.2:20), envy (Ecc.4:4), sadness (Ecc.7:4), and anger (Ecc.7:9). As young people understand these emotions in the book of Ecclesiastes they are able to identify with the accuracy of this book as it applies to them in their own emotional makeup.

On the physical side, Solomon emphasises that mankind is mortal and subject to death (Ecc.3:19-20; 6:6; 9:5). He describes life on earth as being short with only a few days (Ecc.2:2; 6:12) and then death is certain. As God has appointed a time for everything under heaven so he has appointed a time for each person's death (Ecc.3:2). Nobody knows when this time will come (Ecc.9:12) nor can they influence when it will occur (Ecc.8:8). Death is described as being final and the dead person descends to the grave where there is no more opportunity to participate in the activities of life (Ecc.9:5-6). Those who die will eventually be forgotten (Ecc.1:11; 2:16; 9:5). When a person dies his spirit returns to God (Ecc.3:21; 12:7) and he or she enters the grave (Ecc.9:10) This is a sobering realisation for any young person because it makes them realise that life on earth is limited and the length of that time cannot be determined or guaranteed. Furthermore it serves to make one realise that he or she must use the time that they have and live it to the full as God has intended it to be lived (Ecc.11:9). However, as they live out their lives,

they must understand that their every action is under the view of God and they are accountable to Him. The accountability includes every act, which is in public or in private, good or evil, and God will ultimately judge them either with reward or punishment (Ecc.12:14). This makes young people realise that their conduct is not only scrutinised by people with regard to their approval or disapproval, their acceptance or rejection. Solomon also clearly implies that in life there is indeed satisfaction (Ecc.2:24) and enjoyment. (Ecc.4:8).

An inevitable activity in life is work. Solomon also uses words such as labour and turmoil to describe work. As young people grow up they need to understand that work is a vitally important part of life and as Solomon describes it in Ecclesiastes many people find no end to their labour (Ecc.2:2; 4:8; 8:16). Solomon says that labour often brings pain (Ecc.2:17, 23) and he describes it as *hebel*, which carries the idea that it does not bring lasting satisfaction and the fulfilment that one expects it to bring. Labour also does not produce lasting profit or gain (Ecc.1:3; 2:11; 3:9) nor does one have control over the fruit of his or her labour. An individual may work very hard to build up wealth and gain many possessions but when they die they have no control over how those possessions will be cherished or squandered (Ecc.2:19, 21, 26).

Ecclesiastes also teaches that mankind is sinful. Sin is ultimately rebellion and disobedience towards God. Young people need to know and understand this, for as Solomon points out, most people are ignorant of God's ways (Ecc.3:11; 8:17; 11:5). Furthermore individuals feel that they can get away with sin because punishment is not immediate (Ecc.8:11). Sin is a major problem in life and brings hurt, disillusionment, and ultimately judgement. Sin as an act of defiant selfishness is directed towards God and towards fellow humans. In Ecclesiastes the sinful acts directed towards God include disrespect in worship (Ecc.5:1-2), insincerity in promises, and unfulfilled vows (Ecc.5:4-5). Mankind's sinful acts expressed towards others include oppression of the poor (Ecc.4:1; 5:8), greed (Ecc.4:8; 5:10), anger expressed towards others (Ecc.7:9; 10:4), and various other injustices committed against others (Ecc.3:16; 4:1; 5:8;

7:7). Young people need to understand that it is not without reason that God describes these activities as sin and deserving of punishment. These selfish activities bring pain and sadness to others and will ultimately bring judgement upon the perpetrator.

Young people must also clearly understand man's finiteness as described by Solomon in Ecclesiastes. This is seen in the fact that man is bound to the earth (Ecc.5:2) and ultimately will die some day (Ecc.3:19-20). Furthermore mankind does not know God's ways (Ecc.3:11; 8:17) nor can any human know or control the future (Ecc.6:12; 8:7; 9:1, 12). This brings the realisation that people are not the captains of their own fate, nor the master of their own souls. In realising this young people will of necessity need to trust God for His protection and provision both in the present and in the future. Another important aspect of sin that young people need to understand is that sin has consequences. Solomon explains that sin brings much trouble (Ecc.8:13) and can undo a great deal of good (Ecc.9:18; 10:1). Sin ultimately leads to death (Ecc.7:17; 8:13) and ultimately God's judgement and punishment of sin (Ecc. 3:13; 11:9; 12:14).

When dealing with the first aspect of mankind's responsibility in life, Solomon encourages his readers to enjoy life, accepting it as a good gift from God. Furthermore people are encouraged to accept their lot in life and be happy with simple pleasures such as food, warmth, and doing good to others. These are the joys, which God gives as a by-product, of life and are not intended to be pursued as an end in themselves, for as Solomon says, they never will bring satisfaction on their own, because God never intended them to do that. Understanding this truth will make young people realise that to pursue things such as comfort, wealth, pleasure, fame, and enjoyment, are only hollow and wasteful pursuits. God's intention is that He becomes the focus of man's attention, pursuit, and worship.

A second responsibility of mankind is to be wise. Wisdom, which is described as understanding and applying life from God's perspective rather than from man's, is a major focus in the book of Ecclesiastes. While wisdom is better than foolishness (Ecc.2:13) it does not

prevent death (Ecc.2:12). What wisdom does do, is cause one to reflect seriously about life and death (Ecc.7:5) and thus the wise are able to preserve life (Ecc.7:11-12) and have a quality of life which the foolish person does not have. This will encourage young people to see the importance of the wisdom of living life as God intended it to be lived. Solomon says that human wisdom, which is wisdom that is acquired by intellectual pursuits is not sufficient. Godly wisdom enables a person to trust God and His ways and in this way experience rest and contentment (Ecc.8:5). Wisdom is not considered to be a magic solution to all of life and it does have its drawbacks (Ecc.1:18). Nothing can guarantee a perfectly safe, content, and happy life; one must simply trust God day by day.

A third responsibility of mankind is to be diligent. Because of the uncertainties in life (Ecc.9:11-12) people are exhorted to work hard (Ecc.9:10) and not resort to laziness (Ecc.10:18) which causes all kinds of problems around them. Mankind is also encouraged to work hard in light of the fact that people do not know what the future holds (Ecc.11:2; 5:5-6). This is an important truth for young people to grasp because the tendency to live life by feelings and desires instead of by principle and conviction is all too prevalent today.

The most important and final responsibilities regarding people upon the earth are in their relationship towards God. People are encouraged to approach God with respect and sincerity (Ecc.5: 1-2). Any promises or commitments made to God must be done with absolute sincerity and with careful thought. Once the person has made a vow or promise to God, God holds the person to that promise. Breaking one's promise to God could mean discipline and withdrawal of the substances or pleasures of life. Young people are especially admonished to remember God in their Youth, before the days of trouble come and they find that they no longer have any desire to seek God or the pleasures in life (Ecc.12:1,6).

As Solomon has pointed out in his conclusion of Ecclesiastes, the essence of being human and living a fulfilled life is found in the phrase; "fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecc

12:13). Since this is true, one must ask the question, what happens to those who do not follow this counsel? They follow their own feelings, desires and convictions, which are not necessarily God's purposes. This is exactly what Solomon has been dealing with in the thrust of his argument. Tripp in his insightful book, *Age of Opportunity* states;

“Most teenagers do not live with the “fear of God before their eyes.” Their private universe tends to be dominated by the things that they are convinced they need, or by fear of man issues (desire for peer acceptance or fear of peer rejection), or by identity issues (Am I ugly? Am I a “geek”? Do people find me attractive? Will the parts of my body ever match one another?). Not only does God not dominate the scene, he is not there at all! He is not their reason and their goal. Whatever their profession of faith, God does not exist in the functional world where they live daily.” (Tripp, 2001:217).

While this is true it is very sad. Solomon, however does admonish people to fear God. This command is expressed five times in the book of Ecclesiastes (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). The fear of God is a true biblical recognition of who God is, and in the light of this, responding accordingly to Him in worship and obedience, love and trust. Solomon says that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov.1:7; 9:10). This means that an accurate, true, biblical understanding of God is the foundation that one needs in order to live life skilfully. Living life skilfully means that one will live according to God's design and as a result will fulfil his or her purpose in life. This will bring a sense of pleasure and fulfilment.

6. Conclusion

Here are the problems that have been analysed. Young people who have their lives ahead of them are seeking for meaning and purpose, so that they can live fulfilled lives. They do not want their lives to be a waste but to live life to the full, because life is precious in that each person is only given one life on earth. Life is also inextricably attached to meaning and purpose. However, because of the influence of Postmodernism and the secularisation of our western society, Youth are not receiving a true or realistic message on which to base their worldview. Their worldview is the philosophy of life that will guide down the path of life, to this expected fulfilment. Sadly however much of what they have gleaned and believed is based on superficial thinking, feeling and presumption. Life is too important to have such a shaky foundation, especially when one is setting out on such an important journey. Life's philosophies must be based on a solid foundation of convictions, which are based on absolute truth. This absolute truth is God's truth. As creator and sustainer of the universe, He would be the one who designed life and would know best how it should be lived. Indeed He does know how life should be lived and having inspired the writing of the book of Ecclesiastes, it becomes one of those bases within the scope of the Scriptures that authoritatively addresses the issues Youth face when developing their life purpose.

What is more, Solomon is a wonderful example of one who has already walked the path and made all the mistakes, so that he could declare from empirical investigation that it is all '*hebel*' a 'chasing after the wind' He was the one person in history who could perform such a study, for he had the authority, time, wealth, fame and wisdom to embark on such an investigation into life. It is as if he says; "Listen I have been there, done that and got the T-shirt, so please listen to me and do not go and make the same mistakes". However, Ecclesiastes is not only what Solomon found in his research, but it is also an inspired book of the Bible so that the

conclusions he comes to are the authoritative truths that God would have people, and especially young people believe. The best way to get them to believe this is through a thorough study of the book and to teach it to them through interactive discussion. This can be done by parents with their teens at home or by Youth leaders at church. It can also be done at school where teachers are aware and equipped to do this. What must happen though, and especially with older teens or adolescents, is to follow the method of Positive Deconstruction, advocated by Nick Pollard. This is the means of getting young people to re-examine the fallacies of what they believe and then they will be open to consider the truth from God's perspective. The perspective that Solomon gives in the book of Ecclesiastes is important for these reasons. It is not an isolated perspective because other books of wisdom literature, such as Proverbs also have the same focus on wisdom as God-given skills for living today. These truths must be read, taught and understood by young people in their search for meaning in life, so that they might have a true and balanced perspective.

We really do have the answers that are real and fulfilling because they come from God's Truth. What are the Pastoral implications? How can this be implemented in the Churches' discipleship programme or in the schools and throughout the Education Department? How can one equip other generations to apply these life skills in all areas of society? What is needed is to compile a study or workbook on Ecclesiastes that can be used by parents or educators and even young people themselves. This however cannot be done in this study but will become the focus of a future study.

At the time of writing this thesis I am the father of four adolescents who have confirmed many of my conclusions by their attitudes, conversations and conduct. My wife and I are seeking to teach and implement these truths in these four precious lives so that they will be God-honouring and fulfilled people in their generation.

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8. Appendix A

Developmental Changes in Young People During Adolescence (A Chart compiled by Charles H. Nichols)

PHYSICAL

A. *Early Adolescence*

1. Body development is rapid and irregular, causing awkwardness and self-consciousness.
2. Body contour starts to show signs of adulthood, causing difficulties if body over- or underdevelops.
 - a. Girls tend to develop narrow shoulders, larger bust, broad hips, and curved legs.
 - b. Boys tend to develop broad shoulders, narrow hips, muscular build, and deeper voices.
3. Internal organs also develop rapidly, which results in energetic people who tire easily. There are rapid lung development, large heart capacity, and active glandular changes.
4. General health is good, but posture is a problem.
5. Physical capabilities of reproduction (puberty) heighten sex drives.

B. *Middle Adolescence*

1. Body development has taken on adult features with boys usually gaining the height advantage.
2. Body contours are even more pronounced, which can cause greater trauma for those who develop irregularly. (A physical overdeveloped individual can have as many problems, if not more, than a physically underdeveloped person.)
3. Internal organ growth starts to level out, although acne is still a major glandular problem.
4. General health is good, although sleeping and eating habits are generally poor.
5. Sexual feelings and drives are more active and intense in boys than in girls, although once aroused the sex drive of girls tend to last longer.

C. Principles for parents and teachers

1. Create an acceptance of the physical makeup. You accept them the way they are. Share Psalm 139:13-16.
2. Develop spiritual attitude toward the body (Rom 12:1-3; 1 Cor.6:19).
3. Develop a concept that the body is a vehicle for worshipping God.

MENTAL

A. Early Adolescence

1. There is a problem with distinguishing between the real and the imaginary because of the imaginative process carried over from childhood.
2. There is a tendency to be critical and make snap judgements because of developing abstract thought, independence, and lack of experience.
3. Junior high Youth tend to be inquisitive and curious because new reasoning powers are developing.
4. They are often hesitant in expressing themselves or answering questions, but that is due more to a fear of failure than lack of knowledge.
5. This is the time to link Bible truth in chronological order, since their ability to group the meaning of the historical past is improved.

B. Middle Adolescence

1. They are “why,” “what,” and “how” oriented, because their minds are maturing.
2. Because of broader experience, they are developing interest in various career fields.
3. Because they have a sharpening ability in abstract thought, senior high students like to debate and discuss.
4. They are thinking independently, and they challenge ideas and concepts previously accepted.

C. Principles for parents and teachers

1. Work with their interests, not yours.
2. Teach the difference between improper criticism and honest evaluation.
3. Use their ability to think and ask questions as positive teaching tools.
4. Be honest about your own knowledge.

SOCIAL

A. Early Adolescence

1. This is a period of expanding social experience and contacts, thus it is a socially demanding time.
2. This period is marked by immature behaviour and teasing because they want social recognition but do not know how to get it.
3. Junior high Youth are marked by a craving for status and acceptance.
4. Discipline becomes a real problem because social acceptance is more valued than authority structure.
5. Parental problems start to arise because of the natural drive from dependence to independence.

B. Middle Adolescence

1. Parental problems become more acute. They especially abhor “over-protection” and “apron strings.”
2. Deeper friendships develop, especially in the dating or “going steady” process.
3. Conformity to the group gets stronger, especially in dress, language, and fads.
4. High school Youth desire to be popular and want leadership positions, especially among their peers.
5. They do show social concern, especially to those who are going through struggles.

C. Principles for parents and teachers

1. Provide information, interpretations, and example to help develop scriptural social attitudes.
2. Give them qualified approval and acceptance. (Accept the person, not necessarily the action.)
3. Present Jesus Christ as the ideal social man.

EMOTIONAL

A. Early Adolescence

1. Self-concept is very important, especially in evaluating actions of others toward them.
2. Emotional instability is extremely high because of the changing glandular conditions. Emotional responses will be greatly varied, will hit extremes, and will change rapidly.
3. This is a period of crushes, especially on older Youth and adults. Those crushes will pass quickly if not encouraged.
4. Emotions are generally expressed through outbursts that tend to be more physical than verbal (withdrawal, hitting, and similar actions).
5. Discouragement and feelings of guilt and frustration are felt strongly because of lack of emotional control. This usually results in temporary withdrawal from activities and people.

B. Middle Adolescence

1. High school Youth tend to become self-centred, often thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to.
2. Emotional control is improving but moodiness is still a major problem. (Their moods last longer than when in early adolescence.)
3. Fear, anger, and love are usually the strongest emotions displayed, and they are interlaced in an intricate network.
4. Greatest emotional needs are acceptance and security, without which they develop either an inferiority complex or an aggressive attitude.

5. Their feelings run deep, which often causes misunderstandings, confusion, and frustration.

C. *Principles for parents and teachers*

1. Judge emotional responses at the proper age level.
2. Show emotional consistency and maturity yourself.
3. Share scriptural values of sex, love, and other emotional responses.
4. Take time to be with Youth so you know their emotional needs.

SPIRITUAL

A. *Early Adolescence*

1. Because of the natural individual differences in young teens, they will differ in spiritual readiness and understanding.
2. Junior high students' lack of maturity and discernment gives them a mixed sense of right and wrong.
3. Because they have a desire for acceptance, they are sensitive in conscience.
4. Major moral problems for young teens seem to be profanity and stealing.
5. They are able to make and understand total commitment.

B. *Middle Adolescence*

1. Because of their questioning minds, fifteen to seventeen-year-olds start to doubt spiritual things and want to question why and how.
2. Because of their idealism, they want reality and genuineness in their Christianity.
3. They desire clear, biblical, spiritual leadership that demonstrates practical Christianity.
4. They are asking three basic questions: Who am I? Where do I fit in? Is it worth it?
5. Youth at this age want and need to be challenged spiritually.

C. *Principles for parents and teachers*

1. Get *them* into the Word of God. (Do not spoon-feed.)
2. Channel their efforts into outreach ministries.
3. Help them develop biblical principles and godly habits.
4. Be there to help them and be an example”

(Nichols, 1981:148-151).

9. Appendix B

TODAY'S YOUTH - THEIR PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Name: _____ Age: _____ years Sex: male / female

Cultural background: _____ Religious background: _____

Academic achievement: _____ Area of residence: _____

What career would you like to follow when you have completed school?

Why do you want to follow that course? _____

What are your expectations from this occupation or lifestyle? _____

What are your goals for your life? _____

Who as examples or models have influenced your life? _____

What do you need in life to make it successful and fulfilling? _____

What do you really want out of life? Now? _____

In 5 years time? _____

In 10 years time? _____

How do you expect to achieve this? _____

What is your church or religious experience? _____

Do you feel that the Bible is important in addressing these issues of life? YES / NO

Why?

Why not?

10. Appendix C

ECCLESIASTES MECHANICAL REWRITE (NIV)

ECCLESIASTES 1

- 1:1 The words of the Teacher,
son of David,
king in Jerusalem:
- 1:2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."
- 1:3 What does man gain
from all his labour
at which he toils
under the sun?
- 1:4 Generations come
and
generations go,
but
the earth remains forever.
- 1:5 The sun rises
and
the sun sets,
and
hurries back to where it rises.
- 1:6 The wind blows to the south
and
turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.
- 1:7 All streams flow into the sea,
yet
the sea is never full.
To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.
- 1:8 All things are wearisome,
more than one can say.
- The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor

the ear its fill of hearing.

1:9 What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new

under the sun.

1:10 Is there anything of which one can say,
"Look!
This is something new"?
It was here already,
long ago;
it was here before our time.

1:11 There is no remembrance of men of old,
and
even those
who are yet to come
will not be remembered by those
who follow.

1:12 I,
the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

1:13 I devoted myself to study
and
to explore
by wisdom
all that is done

under heaven.

What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

1:14 I have seen all the things that are done
all of them are meaningless,
a chasing after the wind.

under the sun;

1:15 What is twisted cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted.

1:16 I thought to myself,
"Look,
I have grown
and
increased in wisdom
more than anyone
who has ruled over Jerusalem before me;
I have experienced much of wisdom
and

knowledge."

1:17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom,
and also
of madness
and
folly,

but
I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

1:18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge,
the more grief.

ECCLESIASTES 2

2:1 I thought in my heart,
"Come now,
I will test you with pleasure
to find out what is good."
But
that also proved to be meaningless.

2:2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish.
And
what does pleasure accomplish?"

2:3 I tried cheering myself with wine,
and
embracing folly
--my mind still guiding me with wisdom.

I wanted to see what was worthwhile
for men to do
under heaven
during the few days
of their lives.

2:4 I undertook great projects:
I built houses for myself
and
planted vineyards.

2:5 I made gardens
and
parks
and

planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

2:6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

2:7 I bought male and female slaves
and
had other slaves
who were born in my house.
I also owned more herds
and
flocks
than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

2:8 I amassed silver
and
gold for myself,
and
the treasure of kings
and
provinces.

I acquired men and women singers,
and
a harem as well--
the delights of the heart of man.

2:9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

In all this
my wisdom stayed with me.

2:10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.

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

2:11 Yet
when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and
what I had toiled to achieve,

everything was meaningless,
a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.

2:12 Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom,
and also

madness
and
folly.

What more can the king's successor do
than what has already been done?

2:13 I saw that wisdom is better than folly,
just as light is better
than darkness.

2:14 The wise man has eyes
in his head,
while
the fool walks
in the darkness;

but
I came to realize that the same fate
overtakes them both.

2:15 Then I thought in my heart,
"The fate of the fool
will overtake me also.

What then do I gain
by being wise?"

I said in my heart,
"This too is meaningless."

2:16 For
the wise man,
like
the fool,
will not be long remembered;
in days to come
both will be forgotten.

Like the fool,
the wise man too must die!

2:17 So I hated life,
because the work
that is done
under the sun
was grievous to me.

All of it is meaningless,

a chasing after the wind.

2:18 I hated all the things I had toiled for
under the sun,
because I must leave them to the one
who comes after me.

2:19 And
who knows whether he will be a wise man
or
a fool?
Yet
he will have control over all the work
into which I have poured my effort
and
skill
under the sun.

This too is meaningless.

2:20 So my heart began to despair
over all my toilsome labor
under the sun.

2:21 For a man may do his work with wisdom,
knowledge
and
skill,
and then
he must leave all he owns to someone
who has not worked for it.

This too is meaningless
and
a great misfortune.

2:22 What does a man get for all the toil
and
anxious striving
with which he labours
under the sun?

2:23 All his days
his work is pain
and
grief;
even at night
his mind does not rest.

This too is meaningless.

2:24 A man can do nothing better
than to eat
and
drink
and
find satisfaction in his work.

This too, I see, is from the hand of God,

2:25 for without him,
who can eat
or
find enjoyment?

2:26 To the man who pleases him,
God gives wisdom,
knowledge
and
happiness,
but
to the sinner
he gives the task of gathering
and
storing up wealth
to hand it over to the one
who pleases God.

This too is meaningless,
a chasing after the wind.

ECCLESIASTES 3

3:1 There is a time for everything,
and
a season for every activity

under heaven:

3:2 a time to be born
and
a time to die,

a time to plant
and
a time to uproot,

3:3 a time to kill
and

a time to heal,

a time to tear down
and
a time to build,

3:4 a time to weep
and
a time to laugh,

a time to mourn
and
a time to dance,

3:5 a time to scatter stones
and
a time to gather them,
a time to embrace
and
a time to refrain,

3:6 a time to search
and
a time to give up,

a time to keep
and
a time to throw away,

3:7 a time to tear
and
a time to mend,

a time to be silent
and
a time to speak,

3:8 a time to love
and
a time to hate,

a time for war
and
a time for peace.

3:9 What does the worker gain
from his toil?

3:10 I have seen the burden

God has laid on men.

3:11 He has made everything beautiful
in its time.

He has also set eternity
in the hearts of men;
yet
they cannot fathom
what God has done from beginning to end.

3:12 I know that there is nothing better for men
than to be happy
and
do good
while they live.

3:13 That everyone may eat
and
drink,
and
find satisfaction in all his toil
--this is the gift of God.

3:14 I know that everything God does
will endure forever;
nothing can be added to it
and
nothing taken from it.

God does it
so that men will revere him.

3:15 Whatever is has already been,
and
what will be has been before;
and
God will call the past to account.

3:16 And
I saw something else
under the sun:

In the place of judgment--
wickedness was there,

in the place of justice--
wickedness was there.

3:17 I thought in my heart,
"God will bring to judgment
both the righteous
and
the wicked,

for there will be a time
for every activity,

a time for every deed."

3:18 I also thought,
"As for men,
God tests them
so that they may see
that they are like the animals.

3:19 Man's fate is like that of the animals;

the same fate awaits them both:

As one dies,
so dies the other.

All have the same breath;

man has no advantage over the animal.

Everything is meaningless.

3:20 All go to the same place;
all come from dust,
and
to dust
all return.

3:21 Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward
and
if the spirit of the animal goes down
into the earth?"

3:22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man
than to enjoy his work,

because that is his lot.
For who can bring him to see
what will happen after him?

ECCLESIASTES 4

- 4:1 Again I looked
and
saw all the oppression
that was taking place
under the sun:
- I saw the tears of the oppressed--
and
they have no comforter;
power was on the side of their oppressors--
and
they have no comforter.
- 4:2 And
I declared that the dead,
who had already died,
are happier
than the living,
who are still alive.
- 4:3 But
better than both is he
who has not yet been,
who has not seen the evil
that is done
under the sun.
- 4:4 And
I saw that all labor
and
all achievement
spring from man's envy of his neighbor.
This too is meaningless,
a chasing after the wind.
- 4:5 The fool folds his hands
and
ruins himself.
- 4:6 Better one handful with tranquillity
than
two handfuls with toil
and
chasing after the wind.
- 4:7 Again
I saw something meaningless
under the sun:

4:8 There was a man all alone;
he had neither son
nor
brother.

There was no end to his toil,
yet
his eyes were not content with his wealth.

"For whom am I toiling," he asked,
"and
why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?"

This too is meaningless--
a miserable business!

4:9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their work:

4:10 If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But
pity the man who falls
and
has no one to help him up!

4:11 Also,
if two lie down together,
they will keep warm.
But
how can one keep warm alone?

4:12 Though
one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

4:13 Better a poor
but
wise youth
than an old
but
foolish king
who no longer knows
how to take warning.

4:14 The youth may have come
from prison
to the kingship,

or
he may have been born
in poverty
within his kingdom.

4:15 I saw that all
who lived
and
walked
under the sun
followed the youth,
the king's successor.

4:16 There was no end to all the people
who were before them.

But
those who came later
were not pleased with the successor.

This too is meaningless,
a chasing after the wind.

ECCLESIASTES 5

5:1 Guard your steps
when you go to the house of God.

Go near to listen
rather than
to offer the sacrifice of fools,
who do not know
that they do wrong.

5:2 Do not be quick
with your mouth,
do not be hasty
in your heart
to utter anything before God.

God is in heaven
and
you are on earth,
so let your words be few.

5:3 As a dream comes
when there are many cares,

so the speech of a fool
when there are many words.

5:4 When you make a vow to God,
do not delay in fulfilling it.

He has no pleasure in fools;

fulfill your vow.

5:5 It is better not to vow
than
to make a vow
and
not fulfill it.

5:6 Do not let your mouth lead you
into sin.

And
do not protest
to the temple messenger
"My vow was a mistake."
Why should God be angry at what you say
and
destroy the work of your hands?

5:7 Much dreaming
and
many words are meaningless.

Therefore stand in awe of God.

5:8 If you see the poor oppressed in a district,
and
justice
and
rights denied,

do not be surprised at such things;

for
one official is eyed by a higher one,
and
over them both
are others higher still.

5:9 The increase from the land is taken by all;
the king himself profits from the fields.

5:10 Whoever loves money never has money enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

This too is meaningless.

5:11 As goods increase,
so do those
who consume them.
And
what benefit are they to the owner
except to feast his eyes on them?

5:12 The sleep of a laborer is sweet,
whether he eats little
or
much,
but
the abundance of a rich man
permits him no sleep.

5:13 I have seen a grievous evil
under the sun:
wealth hoarded
to the harm of its owner,

5:14 or
wealth lost
through some misfortune,
so that
when he has a son
there is nothing left for him.

5:15 Naked a man comes from his mother's womb,
and
as he comes,
so he departs.

He takes nothing from his labor
that he can carry
in his hand.

5:16 This too is a grievous evil:

As a man comes,
so he departs,
and
what does he gain,
since he toils for the wind?

5:17 All his days he eats in darkness,
with great frustration,
affliction
and
anger.

5:18 Then I realized that
it is good
and
proper
for a man to eat
and
drink,
and
to find satisfaction
in his toilsome labor
under the sun
during the few days of
life God has given him--
for this is his lot.

5:19 Moreover,
when God gives any man wealth
and
possessions,
and
enables him to enjoy them,
to accept his lot
and
be happy in his work--

this is a gift of God.

5:20 He seldom reflects on the days of his life,
because God keeps him occupied
with gladness of heart.

ECCLESIASTES 6

6:1 I have seen another evil

under the sun,

and
it weighs heavily on men:

6::2 God gives a man wealth,
possessions
and
honor,
so that
he lacks nothing
his heart desires,

but
God does not enable him to enjoy them,
and
a stranger enjoys them instead.

This is meaningless,
a grievous evil.

6:3 A man may have a hundred children
and
live many years;

yet
no matter how long he lives,
if he cannot enjoy his prosperity
and
does not receive proper burial,

I say that a stillborn child is better off
than he.

6:4 It comes without meaning,
it departs in darkness,
and
in darkness
its name is shrouded.

6:5 Though it never saw the sun
or
knew anything,

it has more rest than does that man--

6:6 even if he lives a thousand years twice over

but
fails to enjoy his prosperity.

Do not all go to the same place?

6:7 All man's efforts are for his mouth
yet
his appetite is never satisfied.

6:8 What advantage has a wise man over a fool?

What does a poor man gain by knowing
how to conduct himself before others?

6:9 Better what the eye sees
than
the roving of the appetite.

This too is meaningless,
a chasing after the wind.

6:10 Whatever exists has already been named,
and
what man is has been known;

no man can contend with one who is stronger than he.

6:11 The more the words,
the less the meaning,
and
how does that profit anyone?

6:12 For who knows
what is good for a man in life,
during the few
and
meaningless days
he passes through
like a shadow?
Who can tell him what will happen
under the sun
after he is gone?

ECCLESIASTES 7

7:1 A good name is better
than
fine perfume,

and

the day of death better
than
the day of birth.

7:2 It is better to go to a house of mourning
than
to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny
of every man;
the living should take this to heart.

7:3 Sorrow is better
than
laughter,
because a sad face
is good for the heart.

7:4 The heart of the wise
is in the house of mourning,
but
the heart of fools
is in the house of pleasure.

7:5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke
than
to listen to the song of fools.

7:6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot,
so
is the laughter of fools.

This too is meaningless.

7:7 Extortion turns a wise man into a fool,
and
a bribe corrupts the heart.

7:8 The end of a matter is better
than
its beginning,

and
patience is better
than
pride.

7:9 Do not be quickly provoked
in your spirit,
for anger resides

in the lap of fools.

7:10 Do not say,
"Why were the old days better
than
these?"

For it is not wise to ask such questions.

7:11 Wisdom,
like an inheritance,
is a good thing
and
benefits those
who see the sun.

7:12 Wisdom is a shelter
as money is a shelter,

but
the advantage of knowledge is this:
that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

7:13 Consider what God has done:
Who can straighten what he has made crooked?

7:14 When times are good,
be happy;
but
when times are bad,
consider:
God has made the one as well as the other.
Therefore,
a man cannot discover anything about his future.

7:15 In this meaningless life of mine
I have seen both of these:
a righteous man perishing in his righteousness,

and
a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

7:16 Do not be overrighteous,
neither
be overwise--

why destroy yourself?

7:17 Do not be overwicked,
and
do not be a fool--

why die before your time?

7:18 It is good to grasp the one
and
not let go of the other.

The man who fears God
will avoid all extremes .

7:19 Wisdom makes one wise man
more powerful
than
ten rulers in a city.

7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth
who does what is right
and
never sins.

7:21 Do not pay attention to every word people say,
or
you may hear your servant cursing you--

7:22 for you know in your heart
that many times you yourself
have cursed others.

7:23 All this I tested by wisdom
and
I said,
"I am determined to be wise"--
but
this was beyond me.

7:24 Whatever wisdom may be,
it is far off
and
most profound--

who can discover it?

7:25 So I turned my mind to understand,
to investigate
and

to search out wisdom
and
the scheme of things
and
to understand

the stupidity of wickedness
and
the madness of folly.

7:26 I find more bitter
than death
the woman
who is a snare,
whose heart is a trap
and
whose hands are chains.

The man who pleases God will escape her,
but
the sinner she will ensnare.

7:27 "Look," says the Teacher,
"this is what I have discovered:

"Adding one thing to another
to discover the scheme of things--

7:28 while I was still searching
but
not finding--
I found one upright man
among a thousand,
but
not one upright woman
among them all.

7:29 This only have I found:
God made mankind upright,
but
men have gone in search
of many schemes."

ECCLESIASTES 8

8:1 Who is like the wise man?

Who knows the explanation of things?

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

8:2 Obey the king's command, I say,
because you took an oath before God.

8:3 Do not be in a hurry
to leave the king's presence.

Do not stand up for a bad cause,
for he will do whatever he pleases.

8:4 Since a king's word is supreme,
who can say to him,
"What are you doing?"

8:5 Whoever obeys his command
will come to no harm,
and
the wise heart will know
the proper time
and
procedure.

8:6 For there is a proper time
and
procedure for every matter,
though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him.

8:7 Since no man knows the future,
who can tell him what is to come?

8:8 No man has power over the wind to contain it;
so
no one has power over the day of his death.

As no one is discharged in time of war,
so wickedness will not release those
who practice it.

8:9 All this I saw,
as I applied my mind to everything done

under the sun.

There is a time
when a man lords it over others
to his own hurt.

8:10 Then too,
I saw the wicked buried--

those who used to come
and
go from the holy place
and
receive praise in the city
where they did this.

This too is meaningless.

8:11 When the sentence for a crime
is not quickly carried out,
the hearts of the people
are filled with schemes
to do wrong.

8:12 Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes
and
still lives a long time,

I know that it will go better
with God-fearing men,
who are reverent before God.

8:13 Yet
because the wicked do not fear God
it will not go well with them,
and
their days will not lengthen
like a shadow.

8:14 There is something else meaningless
that occurs on earth:

righteous men
who get what the wicked deserve,
and
wicked men
who get what the righteous deserve.

This too, I say, is meaningless.

8:15 So I commend the enjoyment of life,
because nothing is better for a man
under the sun
than
to eat
and
drink
and
be glad.

Then joy will accompany him in his work
all the days of the life
God has given him
under the sun.

8:16 When I applied my mind
to know wisdom
and
to observe man's labor
on earth--
his eyes not seeing sleep
day or night--

8:17 then
I saw all that God has done.

No one can comprehend what goes on
under the sun.

Despite all his efforts to search it out,
man cannot discover its meaning.

Even if a wise man claims he knows,
he cannot really comprehend it.

ECCLESIASTES 9

9:1 So I reflected on all this
and
concluded that the righteous
and
the wise
and
what they do
are in God's hands,
but
no man knows whether love
or
hate awaits him.

9:2 All share a common destiny--
the righteous
and
the wicked,

the good
and

the bad,

the clean
and
the unclean,

those who offer sacrifices
and
those who do not.

As it is with the good man,
so
with the sinner;

as it is with those who take oaths,
so
with those who are afraid to take them.

9:3 This is the evil in everything that happens

under the sun:

The same destiny overtakes all.
The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil
and
there is madness in their hearts while they live,
and
afterward they join the dead.

9:4 Anyone who is among the living
has hope--

even a live dog is better off
than
a dead lion!

9:5 For the living know that they will die,
but
the dead know nothing;
they have no further reward,
and
even the memory of them
is forgotten.

9:6 Their love,
their hate
and
their jealousy
have long since vanished;

never again will they have a part

in anything that happens

under the sun.

9:7 Go,
eat your food
with gladness,
and drink your wine
with a joyful heart,
for
it is now that God favors what you do.

9:8 Always be clothed in white,
and
always anoint your head with oil.

9:9 Enjoy life with your wife,
whom you love,
all the days of this meaningless life
that God has given you

under the sun—

all your meaningless days.
For this is your lot in life
and
in your toilsome labor

under the sun.

9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do,
do it with all your might,
for
in the grave,
where you are going,
there is neither working
nor
planning
nor
knowledge
nor
wisdom.

9:11 I have seen something else

under the sun:

The race is not to the swift
or
the battle to the strong,
nor
does food come to the wise
or
wealth to the brilliant
or

his words are no longer heeded.

9:17 The quiet words of the wise
are more to be heeded
than
the shouts of a ruler of fools.

9:18 Wisdom is better
than
weapons of war,
but
one sinner destroys much good.

Ecclesiastes 10

10:1 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell,
so
a little folly outweighs wisdom
and
honor.

10:2 The heart of the wise
inclines to the right,
but
the heart of the fool to the left.

10:3 Even as he walks along the road,
the fool lacks sense
and
shows everyone how stupid he is.

10:4 If a ruler's anger rises against you,
do not leave your post;
calmness can lay great errors to rest.

10:5 There is an evil I have seen
under the sun,
the sort of error that arises from a ruler:

10:6 Fools are put in many high positions,
while
the rich occupy the low ones.

10:7 I have seen slaves on horseback,
while

princes go on foot like slaves.

- 10:8 Whoever digs a pit
may fall into it;

whoever breaks through a wall
may be bitten by a snake.
- 10:9 Whoever quarries stones
may be injured by them;

whoever splits logs
may be endangered by them.
- 10:10 If the ax is dull
and
its edge unsharpened,
more strength is needed
but
skill will bring success.
- 10:11 If a snake bites before it is charmed,
there is no profit for the charmer.
- 10:12 Words from a wise man's mouth
are gracious,
but
a fool is consumed
by his own lips.
- 10:13 At the beginning
his words are folly;
at the end
they are wicked madness--
- 10:14 and
the fool multiplies words.
No one knows what is coming--
who can tell him what will happen after him?
- 10:15 A fool's work wearies him;
he does not know
the way to town.
- 10:16 Woe to you, O land
whose king was a servant
and
whose princes feast in the morning.
- 10:17 Blessed are you, O land

whose king is of noble birth
and
whose princes eat at a proper time--
for strength
and
not for drunkenness.

10:18 If a man is lazy,
the rafters sag;
if his hands are idle,
the house leaks.

10:19 A feast is made for laughter,
and
wine makes life merry,
but
money is the answer for everything.

10:20 Do not revile the king
even in your thoughts,
or
curse the rich in your bedroom,

because a bird of the air
may carry your words,
and
a bird on the wing
may report what you say.

ECCLESIASTES 11

11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters,
for
after many days
you will find it again.

11:2 Give portions to seven,
yes to eight,
for you do not know
what disaster may come
upon the land.

11:3 If clouds are full of water,
they pour rain upon the earth.

Whether a tree falls to the south
or
to the north,

in the place where it falls,
there will it lie.

11:4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant;
 whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

11:5 As you do not know the path of the wind,
 or
 how the body is formed
 in a mother's womb,
 so
 you cannot understand
 the work of God,
 the Maker of all things.

11:6 Sow your seed in the morning,
 and
 at evening
 let not your hands be idle,

 for you do not know which will succeed,
 whether this
 or
 that,
 or
 whether both will do equally well.

11:7 Light is sweet,
 and
 it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

11:8 However many years a man may live,
 let him enjoy them all.
 But
 let him remember the days of darkness,
 for they will be many.

Everything to come is meaningless.

11:9 Be happy, young man,
 while you are young,
 and
 let your heart give you joy
 in the days of your youth.

Follow the ways of your heart
and

whatever your eyes see,

but
know that
for all these things
God will bring you to judgment.

11:10 So then,
banish anxiety
from your heart
and
cast off the troubles
of your body,
for youth
and
vigor are meaningless.

ECCLESIASTES 12

12:1 Remember your Creator
In the days of your youth,
before the days of trouble come
and
the years approach when you will say,
"I find no pleasure in them"--

12:2 before the sun
and
the light
and
the moon
and
the stars grow dark,
and
The clouds return after the rain;

12:3 when the keepers of the house tremble,
and
the strong men stoop,

when the grinders cease
because they are few,
and
those looking through the windows
grow dim;

12:4 when the doors to the street are closed

and
the sound of grinding fades;

when men rise up at the sound of birds,
but
all their songs grow faint;

12:5 when men are afraid of heights
and
of dangers
in the streets;

when the almond tree blossoms
and
the grasshopper drags himself along
and
desire no longer is stirred.

Then man goes to his eternal home
and
mourners go about the streets.

12:6 Remember him--
before the silver cord is severed,
or
the golden bowl is broken;

before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,
or
the wheel broken at the well,

12:7 and
the dust returns to the ground
it came from,

and
the spirit returns to God
who gave it.

12:8 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.
"Everything is meaningless!"

12:9 Not only was the Teacher wise
but also
he imparted knowledge
to the people.

He pondered
and

searched out
and
set in order many proverbs.

12:10 The Teacher searched
to find just the right words,
and
what he wrote was upright
and
true.

12:11 The words of the wise are
like goads,
their collected sayings
like firmly embedded nails--
given by one Shepherd.

12:12 Be warned, my son, of anything
in addition to them.

Of making many books
there is no end,
and
much study
wearies the body.

12:13 Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God
and
keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.

12:14 For
God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good
or
evil.

11. Appendix D

Horizontal Chart of Ecclesiastes

ECCLESIASTES

The theme stated	The futility of all human endeavours	Personal reflection and an understanding of futility	Solomon tests his heart with pleasures	Solomon considers wisdom and folly in the certainty of death	Solomon accepts life as a gift from God	Time's and Seasons and God's sovereign control	Time and Eternity that links man with God	Time and the inevitable certainty of death	Injustice in the trials court	Envy and equity in labour	The importance of companionship in life	Trials in the realms of political power	Respect for God	Respect for others	Respect for money	Wealth without enjoyment	Effort without satisfaction	Questions without answers	Wisdom is beneficial when applied to daily life	Wisdom is beneficial for giving a clear perspective of life	Mystery and Acceptance of God's purposes	Wisdom is beneficial in strengthening one to boldly face life	Authority	Inequity and Justice	Mystery and acceptance of God's purposes.	Death is an unavoidable and Sad certainty	Life is unpredictable	Adverse results for foolish rulers	Occupational hazards for foolish workers	Detrimental outcomes for foolish talkers	Detrimental outcomes for foolish leaders	Living life by faith	Enjoying life in accountability to God	Learning about life from lessons of wisdom	Fearing God as the essence of life
1-3	1-4-11	12-18	2-1-11	12-23	24-26	3-1-8	9-14	15-22	4-1-3	4-8	9-12	13-16	5-1-7	8-9	10-20	6-1-6	7-9	10-12	7-1-10	11-18	15-17	19-29	8-1-9	10-14	15-17	9-1-10	11-18	10-1-7	8-11	12-15	16-20	11-1-6	11-7-12-8	12-9-12	13-14
Human endeavours, pleasure and wisdom are transitory in the light of death					Life, death and eternity are in God's sovereign control			Human sinfulness, selfishness and loneliness are devastating			The need for respect in man's regard for God, others and money			Wealth, effort and questions are unrewarded and unresolved.			The benefits of wisdom in daily life					Death is certain and life is unpredictable		The adverse and detrimental effects of foolishness			Trusting God in the activities of daily life		The foundation of truth and accountability to God						
Conclusion: Enjoy life and work because God gives wisdom knowledge and happiness (2:24-26)					Conclusion: Enjoy work for God gives satisfaction so that man may honour Him (3:13-14,22)			Conclusion: Be satisfied with life because God gives wealth, possessions and enjoyment. (5:18-20)						Conclusion: Enjoy life and be glad because God gives life. (8:15)					Conclusion: Enjoy the life that God gives. (9:7-9)		Conclusion: Avoid foolishness because it robs you of life.			Conclusion: The essence of life is knowing, trusting and honouring God (12:13)											
<p>The futility of human effort to find lasting satisfaction on earth apart from God The importance of knowing trusting and honouring God to find true fulfilment in life.</p>																																			