**Ecclesiastes 1**

**“Look Above the Sun”**

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

**Memory Verse:** Colossians 3:2 *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

**Lesson Focus:** This is the first chapter in a long journey we will take through Solomon’s head and heart exploring life away from God. In this lesson, Solomon makes some strong statements of how hopeless life appears “under the sun”. We will explore the background of how Solomon got to this place and challenge the kids to look “above the sun” to Jesus.

**Activities and Crafts:** Coloring Picture of Things to Focus On, Word Search of different terms from lesson, Make It Real Discussion for 3rd – 5th.

Craft for 1st & 2nd: Solomon’s Wisdom Puzzle

**Starter Activity:** Walking/Singing in a Circle: For 3rd-5th graders, do this activity before they come up on stage for the lesson. For 1st and 2nd graders, they can just do it in their classrooms. Have them get in a circle around the group of chairs or tables and start walking around in a circle. As they are walking have them sing, “This is the song that never ends”. Please join in with them. In case you don’t know how it goes:

“This is the song that never ends

Yes, it goes on and on my friend

Some people started singing it not knowing what it was

And they’ll continue singing it forever just because

This is the song that never ends….”

3rd-5th teachers: After a couple of rotations, have them follow you up on stage to begin the lesson.

**Introduction:**

We have been in the book of Ruth the last several weeks which is an historical narrative or story. In books like Ruth (i.e. Joshua, Judges, etc.), we follow characters through their experiences and learn life lessons from them. Ecclesiastes is a different kind of book that will challenge us to “THINK”.

Q: What does it mean to think?

A: It means we put our brains and our minds to work!

**Read Matt. 22:37**: We are to love God with our **minds.** Our brains are like a muscle. The more we use it and train it, the stronger it becomes. God has given us our minds/brains and would have us use them to think and search deeply about Him.

To get kids brains in “think” mode, we will introduce each lesson of Ecclesiastes with some sort of riddle or brain teaser. For this week:

Q: Which tire doesn’t move when a car turns right?

A: The spare tire

**Background:**

Important questions to establish context and background of any book of the Bible.

1. **What?:** The third of the four “wisdom” books along with Job, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon in the OT. Where the bulk of the OT calls us simply to obey and believe (“Thus says the Lord”), the wisdom books call us to think hard and humbly, providing us with practical instruction for daily living.
2. **Who?:** Most experts believe Ecclesiastes was written by king Solomon, the son of David.
3. **When?:** Many believe that Solomon wrote “Song of Solomon” in his youth, Proverbs in his middle-aged years when he was walking with the Lord, and Ecclesiastes at the end of his life after he had fallen away from the Lord. That would put this book about 900-950 years before Jesus Christ.
4. **Why?:** Does anyone remember the hand illustration for trusting in the Bible (see Psalm 119 lesson from 6/30-7/1)? The big finger represented how the Bible answers the big Qs of life. All of us ask this important question: “What is the meaning of life?” Ecclesiastes chronicles Solomon’s investigation of that question and shows us that there is no meaning in life apart from God.

**Bible Study:**

**Eccl 1:1-2**: The Preacher, Solomon, begins this book with a strong statement that characterizes the activity we did before we came up on stage. The word “vanity” is a big word that is the key word of this whole book and repeated many times. It means **pointless**.

Q: Who has ever seen a dog chase its tail? Solomon got to a point in his life where he thought all of his pursuits and efforts were like a dog chasing his tail: pointless.

But how did he get to have such a gloomy view on life?

**Read 1 Kings 10:23-24**: Solomon had everything you would want in the world: Power, riches, fame, and notice it says God had given him great wisdom. He was doing so great, but…

**Read 1 Kings 11:4-6**: Despite all that the Lord had given him and blessed him with, he turned his back on God. And in his old age, his kingdom began to crumble and it was from this perspective that most believe the book of Ecclesiastes was written.

Q: What does it mean to be “wise”?

A: To not only be smart and know things, but to use it well.

Q: What do you think of when you think of the term “wise guy”?

A: Someone who is proud and thinks they are smarter than everybody else.

Solomon went from being “wise” to being just a “wise guy”.

**Eccl 1:3**: Solomon asks a deep question. Let’s see if we can discern his meaning.

Q: What are some things that are “under the sun”?

A: Our homes, schools, families, cars, toys, basically everything we do and experience on earth is “under the sun”.

This term “under the sun” is repeated nearly 30 times throughout this book and is another key term of the book that expresses the idea of “worldly focus” or life apart from God.

If all we think about and live for is “under the sun”, life can indeed seem “pointless”.

**Eccl 1:4-8**: Remember the walking and singing in circles that we did at the beginning? That is what life “under the sun” is really like. The sun, the wind, the waters, the whole created universe goes on like a machine, running its course, and there is nothing we can do to change it.

v. 8: Notice what he says about the eye and the ear of man.

Q: What do you think he means when he says the eye is not satisfied with seeing and the ear with hearing?

A: It doesn’t matter how much you see, hear, or get, you ALWAYS WANT MORE!

Movies/TV: Isn’t there always another show to watch?

Music: Isn’t there always another song that we want to listen to?

Video Games: Isn’t there always another level that we want to finish?

Phones: Isn’t there always another text message to send?

Our desire and longing for things “under the sun” goes on and on without end never being satisfied. For Solomon, we read that it was his wives, for he had hundreds of them and they turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:4)

Q: Who remembers what Edmund from The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe wanted more than anything else? (Turkish Delight) Once he had it, was he satisfied? No! He was willing to do anything, even betraying his family, to get more.

That is what happens when our heart is fixed on things “under the sun”.

**Eccl 1:9-10**: Solomon asks us to think about whether anything is really new.

Q: What about smartphones? They are “new” in the sense that no one had them 100 years ago. But are they “new” in the sense that they actually improve people’s lives?

Raise your hand if you think they make you smarter. (Ask them why they think that.)

Raise your hand if you think they make you dumber. (Ask them why they think that.)

I would agree with Solomon, that even inventions like smartphones, while maybe cool and fun, are not anything “new” in that they keep people even more focused “under the sun” on “pointless” things (i.e. video games, emojis, etc.)

Technology changes, but people haven’t changed. Solomon wrote this book almost 3000 years ago and here we are today still wrestling with the same issues!!

**Eccl 1:11**: Finally, Solomon points out how our lives “under the sun” are brief and will be forgotten.

Q: Who knows who LeBron James is? In 1000 years, will anybody know who he is or care?

Q: Who knows who Justin Bieber is? In 1000 years, will anybody know who he is or care?

Q: Who knows who Donald Trump is? In 1000 years, will anybody know who he is or care?

A: Probably not!

We live, we die, and most of us are forgotten.....if our focus is only “under the sun”.

This book of Ecclesiastes is gloomy and shows us the bleakness of life “under the sun”.

**Key Point:** **It is not until we see/experience the emptiness of life without God “under the sun”, that we learn to look “above the sun” to Him where we will find true satisfaction, joy, and meaning.**

**Read Luke 9:25:** Jesus teaches us that if we gain the whole world, if we set our eyes and our heart on things of this world to satisfy us, we will destroy ourselves. This is because nothing in this world will satisfy us.

Our memory verse teaches us to look “above the sun” to Jesus. Look to Jesus every day! Welcome Him into everything you do! Make Him the treasure of your heart.

**Lesson Theme: “Look Above the Sun” Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:1-11**

**Memory Verse:** Colossians 3:2 “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

**Teachers/Parents:** In our lesson today we talked about Smartphones and how while they are “new” technology (Eccl 1:9-10), they typically keep man focused “under the sun”. ~3000 years have passed since Solomon wrote this book and man is STILL LOOKING for that “new” thing! Technology changes, but man hasn’t changed! Discuss with your kids what purpose Smartphones serve. When are they good? When are they bad?

**An excellent resource on Smartphone management: https://axis.org/smartphones**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Read Matthew 22:37 and Romans 12:2**. We are to love God with all of our minds and let them be “renewed”. Ecclesiastes is a book that causes us to THINK. What are some ways that we can love God with all of our **minds**?
2. **Read 1 Kings 8:61**. This verse reflects Solomon at the height of his reign as king of Israel addressing his people. Good advice, but did he follow his own advice? (**Read 1 Kings 11:4-6)** What did God do about it? (**Read 1 Kings 11:11**)
3. **Read 1 Corinthians 10:12**. Solomon was standing tall, but he did not take heed and fell. What are some things we should daily do to take heed so we don’t fall? (i.e. pray, read Scripture, engage with church community, etc.)
4. What are some things that we regularly do “under the sun” that can seem “pointless”? (Eccl. 1:2-3) (i.e. maybe making our beds, cleaning our room, weeding because they always get messy again)
5. We must look outside ourselves for those answers from #4 to have meaning. If making your bed or cleaning your room brings joy to your parents, does that not begin to provide meaning/purpose to those seemingly “pointless” activities?
6. Solomon reminds us that our eyes and our ears are never satisfied (Eccl. 1:8). What are some things that our eyes and ears may enjoy, but we need to be careful that they don’t become all that we are living for?
7. Solomon’s view on life is very gloomy at this stage of life. **Read Colossians 3:1-4.** This describes looking “above the sun” to Jesus. How does this truth guard us against having a similarly gloomy view of life?