

## CHASE

### "THE FINAL WORD" ECCLESIASTES 12:1-14

#### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Single-mindedness** – I focus on God and his priorities for my life. Matthew 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

What is the meaning of life? This has certainly been the most oft-asked question in the history of mankind. And, there has never been a short supply of answers; especially from those who are of the world. Countless have sought meaning in personal achievements, the accumulation of wealth and/or possessions, an increase of power or fame, or the endless feeding of one's flesh through hedonistic living. Christianity however, rooted in God's Word, provides some expectantly clear, straightforward answers. So, what is the meaning of life? Perhaps the answer will become a bit clearer if we initially rephrase the question..

The *Westminster Confession of Faith Shorter Catechism* begins with the question: "What is the chief end of man?" This is followed immediately with the wise response, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." Scripture provides ample evidence for this "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31; emphasis mine). Or again, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father

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***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.***

– Proverb 1:7

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through him" (Col. 3:17; emphasis mine). Note how these contrast with two of the primal reasons cited in Romans 1 for the condemnation that awaits the alienated from God: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:21; emphasis mine). Clearly, glorifying God and worshiping him with a heart of thanksgiving is central to the answer of our initial question.

Is it possible that some of what makes Ecclesiastes hard for us to swallow is that it exposes the same reality in our lives that it did for "the Teacher" (Ecc. 1:1); that is, the searching for meaning in life apart from the aforementioned biblical precepts? Is our life continuously preoccupied with bringing glory to God via our obedience to him and worshipful praise and thanksgiving of him? Or, if we are honest, do our strongest affections lie elsewhere (i.e. - family, work, wealth, comfort, etc.)? Many of these endeavors are necessary and even quite wholesome and good! But we must recognize that they are all, ultimately, fleeting - here today, gone tomorrow. As such, they should never serve as a substitute for what should be the true meaning of our life.

Only a life consecrated to the glory and honor of God with praise and thanksgiving to Him, through his Son, will bear eternal fruit. Ecclesiastes concludes with: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). This sits at the heart of biblical *single-mindedness* and answers the age-old question regarding the *true* meaning of life.

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## For Discussion

We have all heard the phrase, "No one ever says on their deathbed, 'I sure wish I spent more time at the office.'" While somewhat humorous, it does shed light on the value of living a "regret-free" life. In light of today's passage and the Core Competency *Single-mindedness*, what would God have for you to do, *from this day forward*, so that you might leave this life with no regrets?

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

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"-  
2 before the sun and the light  
and the moon and the stars grow dark,  
and the clouds return after the rain;  
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;  
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;  
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.  
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,  
7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from,  
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.  
8 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.  
"Everything is meaningless!"

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. 10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails--given by one Shepherd. 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.

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.

14 For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
including every hidden thing,  
whether it is good or evil.

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Circle each occurrence of "remember" in this passage indicating *command*.
- \* Underline "your Creator" in v. 1.
- \* Box each occurrence of "before" in this passage.
- \* Identify numerically the figures of speech you see in vv. 2-5.
- \* Identify numerically the figures of speech you see in v. 6.
- \* In the margin next to v. 8 write (1:2).
- \* Circle each verb in vv. 9-10.
- \* Identify and box the two similes in v. 11.
- \* Highlight or bracket vv. 13-14.

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## day 2

## EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. In what general sense is the Teacher's exhortation, "Remember your Creator" time sensitive?
2. What does this imperative mean to you personally/practically?
3. What do you infer is meant by "keepers of the house"? (Try to answer before consulting notes on p. 6.)
4. What do you infer is meant by "strong men stoop"?
5. What do you infer is meant by "grinders cease"?
6. What do you infer is meant by "doors...closed"?
7. "Broken bowl" and "shattered pitcher" seem to be describing the same thing. What is it? Now read back through vv. 6-7. How do these images contribute to your appreciation of what they describe?
8. Identify each action step the Teacher took in his search for wisdom.
9. How might words of wisdom be like "goads" or "firmly embedded nails"?
10. Put the "conclusion of the matter" in your own words.
11. **Discussion:** How should the words in v. 14 be of benefit to us today in a world where evil so often goes unaddressed?

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## day 3

# EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

We have come to the final chapter of Ecclesiastes. The Teacher brings his opus to an elaborately painted, albeit dreary, end with his reflections on human mortality. But, there is even more to be surveyed than this. In all likelihood, the last six verses appear to be the work of another who has provided some personal comments regarding the Teacher. Additionally, he shares some profoundly important concluding thoughts of his own that he wants his son (v. 12) to be mindful of as a youth moving into adulthood.

The Teacher begins with the bold imperative, "Remember your Creator." In doing so "he indicates quite distinctly the right that God has to man, the benefits which God has conferred on man, and man's consequent duty to recognize and act according to his entire dependence upon God" (Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 244). What follows (vv. 2-5b) are descriptions of mankind's universal, impending mortality that "rank among the finest of the world's literature" (J. Stafford Wright, *Ecclesiastes*, EBC, 1192). "[The Teacher] shows a proof of his rare skill in this that he knows how to make careless youth reflect upon what they usually overlook until it has come upon them. The highly poetic pictures challenge attention. Their enigmatic form is not so difficult...to discourage investigation but is sufficiently skillful and artistic to...[arrive] at an interpretation" (H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, 275). However, this evocative figurative imagery has yielded widely divergent interpretive conclusions. On this, Wright provides a healthy perspective. "It may be asked how the idea of [illumination] can be held when there are so many possible interpretations of individual pictures. The answer is that, while attention to detail is important, the total description is what matters; and whatever the interpretation of phrases, the whole picture of decrepit old age is conveyed clearly" (1194).

After providing intoxicatingly rich word pictures, the Teacher provides us with following sober results. "Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets" (v. 5c). "Eternal home" carries no spiritually sentimental fervor.

Rather, it speaks of the tomb, the grave, the ground (v. 7) where the body must go and "out of which there is never a return to this earthly life" (Hengstenberg, 250). The Teacher briefly restates his warning for us to remember our Creator (v. 6a), followed by still more poetic imagery relative to death. Verse 7 contains a clear allusion back to Gen 2:7 and especially 3:19 - "for dust you are and to dust you will return." This phrase is followed with "the spirit returns to God who gave it." As in v. 5, this passage is not a sentimental gloss attesting to a "reunion" with God and man, and therefore not a contradiction of his rhetorical doubts in 3:19-21 (see especially NET Bible trans.). Rather it is simply an affirmation that all life comes from God. The Teacher forms a thematic *inclusio* with a virtual restatement of his opening words in 1:2 - "Meaningless! Meaningless" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"

Verses 9-14 form the second half of chapter 12 and consists of two epilogues (9-12; 13-14). Opinions vary as to whether these last few verses were written by the Teacher himself or one, possibly two (one for each epilogue), later "frame narrators" (Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT, 277). The position here favors the latter. The first epilogue goes to great lengths to affirm the activities and efforts of the Teacher as well as the depth and breadth of his work. "He is praised for achieving compositional integrity and elegance" (James Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 190). This is followed by two similes to describe the aforementioned "words of the wise" by comparing them to "goads" and "firmly embedded nails." "Goads" are the pointed sticks used to keep cattle moving in the right direction, and so serve to represent moral guidance and stimulus in human affairs. "Embedded nails" introduces "a picture of that which makes something fixed and immovable, a symbol of the stabilizing and sure character of wise teachings" (Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, vol 14, 344). Verse 11 ends by affirming both divine inspiration of biblical proverbs and the fact that all wisdom comes ultimately from Yahweh, the One Shepherd over Israel (Ps 80:1). Verse 12 concludes the first

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epilogue with a warning from father to son of the dangers of syncretism between godly wisdom and godless worldviews. Failure to heed this warning will likely distort one's faith, weaken one's conscious dependency upon God and even foster a cynical disposition toward God - essentially calling his goodness into question.

Verses 13-14 comprise the second epilogue, which also advances the previous admonitions given from father to son. "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." This statement serves as the wellspring for all divinely inspired wisdom. And, finally, the son can take comfort amidst the seemingly disjointed

realities and perplexing antinomies of life because "God will bring *every* deed into judgment... whether it is good or evil" (emphasis mine).

You know the ol' saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." While believers today should all have resolute confidence in their eternal destiny and security based upon the revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ, we are still called to walk by faith, trusting in God's promises; knowing that there will come a day of reckoning, reward and an eternity of unspeakable joy for those of us whose hope and satisfaction are in Him.

### *The Message of the Passage*

*Earthbound pursuits will all end at one's passing. Searching for meaning and purpose in them will prove unwise and unprofitable. Instead, fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man..*

day **4**

**EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

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# notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **remember Creator** "Creator" [acknowledges] that God is both the ultimate agent of our origins and the one to whom each of us is ultimately held accountable. This phrase serves as "a warning against mindless self-indulgence and profligacy during the days of one's vigor. To forget the Creator of youth is to invite bitter regrets and an empty existence in old age. To remember the Creator is to follow the path of wisdom and extend the joy of life" (Garrett, 340).

v. 1b-6 While all agree these verses describe both the inevitability of physical decline in one's old age and subsequent death, scholarly perspectives regarding grammatical nuances and literary devices vary widely. Restraint from dogmatic assertions should be avoided. "The caution which should always be employed in expounding figures and parables is to not pass beyond the [original] thought intended. [This] is especially necessary in connection with this passage" (Leupold, 275).

v. 1 **days of trouble** (Lit. "evil days") "This adjective does not refer here to ethical evil, but to physical difficulty, injury, pain, deprivation, and suffering" (tn, NET Bible, 1187).

v. 2 **the light** One commentator asserts, "In the Scriptures 'light' is quite generally a symbol of joy and, when it is sent by God, a token of favor. All of these [sun, light, moon, stars] are used to designate every kind and class of joy, great and small" (Leupold, 276). v. 2 clouds return Just as one trouble (i.e. - the rain) of old age passes, more troubles loom on the horizon.

v. 3 Due to the complexity of the Hebrew grammar and ancient literary devices there within, "many interpreters concentrate on the symbolic content of [these] expressions. They envision a body [analogously] described by a house[hold]" (Crenshaw, 186) or community. "Verse 3 and part of v. 4, in a metaphor, liken man to a house, a thought that is not uncommon in the Scriptures, cf. Isa 38:12; Job 4:19; II Cor. 5:1, 2; II Pet. 1:13ff" (Leupold, 278). Provan rightly sees apocalyptic overtones in the Teacher's concluding comments and "moves on to interpret verses 3-5 as for the most part a generalized description of advancing old age, using the analogy of a community facing the end times" (Iain Provan, Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs, NIVAC, 214). If so, four types of people could be identified that "represent the totality of the community - everyone, whether servant or noble, male or female" (215).

v. 3 **keepers** (Lit. "guardians") To the extent this passage intimates (hints at/implies) the demise of a homestead, the "keepers" could refer to male servants, trembling at their inability to guard against/avert the coming storm (i.e. death). Relative to the deterioration of one's body, the "keepers" could refer to the arms that, once strong, now tremble (shake) in weakness.

v. 3 **strong men** If intimating a homestead (see above), the "strong men" could refer to the landowners, stooping down in "fear and consternation" (Longman, 270) over impending death. Relative to the deterioration of one's body, "strong men" could refer to "the major muscle groups of the legs and back" (Garrett, 341).

v. 3 **grinders** If intimating a homestead (see above), the "grinders" could refer to the female servants known for grinding wheat into flour. Relative to the deterioration of one's body, one would be hard-pressed not to see the "grinders" (which are "few") as the loss of teeth.

v. 3 **those looking** If intimating a homestead (see above), "those looking" could refer to women of leisure, contrasted with the women "grinders," experiencing the same "fear and consternation" of the "strong men". Relative to the deterioration of one's body, an inescapable allusion to the increased loss of eyesight is in view.

v. 4 **doors** Some hold this to refer to the mouth. It is more likely, however, a reference to ears. Not only is eyesight mentioned above (3c), but the faculty of "hearing" follows in the rest of v. 4.

v. 5 Regarding 5b, "two interpretations are attractive: (1) it describes the rapid growth of spring, when almonds blossom, locusts eat so much that they can barely drag themselves along, and caperberries burst from growth; or (2) it characterizes the deterioration of the human body in three aspects - the hair turns white, the limbs are stiff and creak, and sexual desire fades. The first of these views emphasizes the stark contrast between the deterioration of a house and the fresh birth of nature. Human beings die and nature is unconcerned, indeed it mocks the decay of unfortunate inhabitants of earth. The second view focuses on the gradual encroachments of age. Naturally the latter view takes the language figuratively" (Crenshaw, 187).

v. 6 Images abound in v. 6, as do modern interpretations. "There is a danger when interpreting [this passage] to make the general pictures...too specific by attempting to fix the meaning [by metaphor, allegory, etc] of "cord, bowl, wheel, pitcher, fountain, and cistern" (Leupold 283-84). Here "life is compared to precious objects, which 'breaks' at death and [is therefore] rendered useless" (Longman, 283). Says another, "all the symbols of the verse picture death as coming suddenly" (George Aaron Barton, The Book of Ecclesiastes, ICC, 192).

v. 13 **Fear God** "to respect, honor and worship the Lord" (Longman, 282; See also Pr 1:7).

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### Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

**Special Note to Parents:** On August 25 and September 1, PantegoKids will be in a series titled Rose Knows: Joshua. We will be studying the life of Joshua to see how God called him to be strong and courageous as he led the Israelites into the promised land. Kids will be learning valuable lessons on how they can live courageously in a new school year.

It's finally here! For many kids the last days of summer are here and school bells will be ringing very soon. The new school year can bring new anxieties to children. Will I know anyone in my class? Will I like my teacher? Will she like me? Is it going to be hard? Will I have a lot of homework? Each year brings unknown changes but also opportunity. Have a discussion with your child to ask him about his goals for this year. Does he want to do better in math? Are there a certain number of books she hopes to read? Make a list of goals for the school year and then make a plan to meet those goals. Post them somewhere so everyone can see them and help hold one another accountable. Remember to take the time and pray over the goals asking God to make your child strong and courageous as he enters the new year trusting that God will be with him wherever he goes.

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Joshua 1

1. Who did God choose to lead the Israelites after Moses died?
2. What command did God give Joshua in verse 8?
3. What great promise did God give Joshua in verse 9?

#### What Do You Think

1. How do you think Joshua felt when God chose him to lead His people?
2. The Israelites had been waiting for over 40 years to enter the land that had been promised to them. How do you think they felt when they were finally getting to go there?

#### What R U Going To Do

The people were likely excited but maybe a little nervous. You may be feeling that way about the new school year. Reread verse 8 and list the two words the Bible says will happen when you know and obey God's Word.

### MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Faithfulness - Sticking with God, no matter what, makes me a winner

Memory Verse

Joshua 1:8 - Do not let this Book of Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC \_\_\_\_ and Verse \_\_\_\_\_. Family completed **Say** \_\_\_\_\_ **Think** \_\_\_\_\_ **Do** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.  
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Wendy Hollabaugh** (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).