



# LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

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## FOUR-STEP METHOD

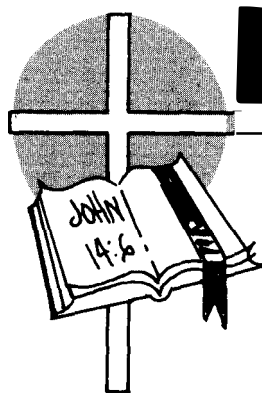
Living Way Bible Study suggests this four-step method:

1. PERSONAL - The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
2. SMALL GROUPS – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The Small Group Leader guides the group through the P.A. questions encouraging each to share their answers and add discussion.
3. THE MESSAGE – The lecture or message is given by a Pastor or lay person who has researched the material and presents the study giving personal experiences and complimenting, but not merely duplicating, the author's comments.
4. THE NARRATIVE – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the door as the student leaves the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the Small Groups review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has high-lighted as meaningful or important.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no PERSONAL APPLICATION questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting the Lecturer presents background information about the course using the INTRODUCTION lesson as a guide.

Each lesson should be stapled together using the number of the lesson in the right hand corner of the page. To keep the lessons in order check the Bible text listed at the top of each page. The PERSONAL APPLICATION questions are attached to the author's narrative and will be the home study for the next class session.

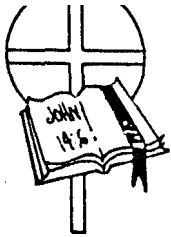
With this 4-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by this lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student a feeling of understanding and ownership for each section studied.



# LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY, INC.

**Rev. Erwin Kurth** - author of LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY courses on:

- THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW
- THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK
- THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
- THE BOOK OF EZRA
- THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
- THE BOOK OF ESTHER
- THE BOOK OF JOB
- THE BOOK OF PROVERBS
- THE SONG OF SOLOMON
  
- Graduated from Concordia Seminary - 1922
- Sixty-five years in the ministry with the LC-MS
- Areas of particular interest are: Christian Stewardship and Bible Study
- Conducted seminars and workshops in the U.S. and Canada on HOW TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL EVERY-MEMBER CANVAS. The Kurth-Zehnder Plan is still available in book form.
- Attended Biblical Seminary in New York City, NY.
- Fostered intensive Bible Study and taught Bible study classes wherever he served as Pastor. These include LC-MS churches in Montana, Nebraska, Minnesota, Brooklyn, NY, Fort Wayne, IN, Detroit, MI and California
- Conferred the Doctor of Divinity Degree from Concordia Seminary - 1960
- Guest speaker on the International Lutheran Hour
- Served as part-time Bible Instructor at Christ College Irvine, in Irvine, CA
- Author of CATECHETICAL HELPS (Concordia Publishing House)
- His life companion, Esther Pfothauer Kurth, has supported his ministry typing much of his longhand script
  
- our beloved author, Dr. Kurth, was called home to be with the Lord on October 22, 1989 at the age of 91 years



Ecclesiastes - Introduction  
Lesson 1

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

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ECCLESIASTES

Erwin Kurth

Preliminary Observations

The Greek word Ecclesiastes, translated from the Hebrew KOHELETH, means the Preacher or, better yet, the Teacher, one who imparts knowledge to an assembly.

How did that Greek title make its way into our English translations?

King Ptolemy II of Egypt (ca. 300 B.C.) was interested in adding to his library in Alexandria the literature of the Hebrews - what we today call the Old Testament. However, to make that literature accessible to the average reader, it had to be translated from Hebrew into Greek, the then popular language of commerce and culture. So he appointed seventy or seventy-two scholars to do the job. Because of the number of scholars chosen and the alleged number of days required to make the translation, it was called Seventy or, in Greek, Septuagint (LXX). Incidentally, this Greek translation of the Old Testament is used by the Greek Orthodox Church to this very day.

Then, in 1604, in a conference of clergy and bishops under the presidency of King James, scholars were appointed to produce what it was hoped would become a generally acceptable English translation. They worked primarily with the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. However, they also consulted other translations, including the Septuagint.

Apparently they took a fancy to the Greek title Ecclesiastes in the Septuagint and did not translate it into English as the Teacher, the Preacher, or the Assembler, but retained it in its Greek form. (1611 A.D.)

Thus it is that we find the title Ecclesiastes in the King James Version (KJV) and in all subsequent English translations.

The Writer

Through the centuries Solomon has been esteemed the originator of Ecclesiastes either by penning the words himself or by dictating them to a qualified Teacher. His name is not specifically mentioned in the book, but the references "the son of David, king of Jerusalem" (1:1) and "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:2) could be applied to none other than Solomon himself. Moreover, he was the personification of wisdom and could verily say, "I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem" 1:16. See also 1 Kings 4:29-31,34.

Only Solomon was in a position to finance such enormous and expensive

projects as are enumerated in 2:4-10. His outstanding architectural accomplishment was building "a house unto the name of the Lord," (1 Kings 5:5) the magnificent, ornate "Solomon's Temple."

Solomon was a prolific writer. He produced "three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five" (1 Kings 4:32). Besides Ecclesiastes, he authored the Book of Proverbs, The Song of Solomon, plus Psalms 72 and 127.

Ecclesiastes is more readily understood if viewed "not as God's argument, but God's record of man's argument" (Henrietta Mears).

#### Solomon was Wise yet Foolish

A man of wisdom and great skill was he, but also a man of folly. In later years, he allowed his many wives -- married in some instances for the sake of political alliances -- to turn his heart after other gods. To please his wives he ordered the construction of many heathen shrines. This apostasy drew down upon him the anger of God (1 Kings 11:1-11).

#### Key Words in Ecclesiastes

The word "vanity" and the phrase "under the sun" occur 32 and 27 times, respectively.

The Preacher makes the point that, although earthly things are fleeting, they may yet be used with profit and joy, just so long as they are used according to God's will as expressed in the commandments. However, apart from God, life doesn't make much sense. It is "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (1:2).

#### The Secular Route does not Lead to Happiness

Solomon sought happiness all his life. After trying every conceivable means of obtaining it on the secular level, he reached the conclusion that true happiness cannot be obtained without God. The things "under the sun" do not satisfy. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:2). Man is too big for earth, for God "has set eternity in the hearts of man" (Ecclesiastes 3:11. NIV).

As St. Augustine expressed it, "Man was made by God; man was made for God; and man shall find no rest till he finds rest in God." Therefore Ecclesiastes commends that we live in reference to God: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). Also, we must realistically face the fact that judgment will follow, "for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

The lesson-point: If till now we have expended time and strength primarily to acquire things "under the sun," we surely ought to reshuffle our priorities. In the words of the divine Christ, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life which the Son of man shall give

unto you" (John 6:27). "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33). After that, all transient things will line up in proper order.

The Great Invitation of Jesus directs us where to go for inner tranquility. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Without Christ in our hearts, life "under the sun" is vanity and vexation of spirit, a striving after wind. It is without substantive and enduring value.

### Seeming Contradictions in Ecclesiastes

Dr. Walter R. Roehrs, in the Concordia Self-Study Commentary, calls attention to seeming contradictions of the Teacher:

- He negates life, yet affirms it.
- He finds life meaningless, yet urges piety.
- He deprecates wisdom, yet counsels wise living.
- He deplors the futility of life, yet considers it a good thing to be alive.
- He finds no evidence of a moral world order, yet warns against irresponsible behavior.

Roehrs adds: Yet these inconsistencies are bridged by remembering one's relationship to God and some resulting corollaries, "because any other explanation why things happen under the sun results in vanity of vanities." Admittedly, Ecclesiastes is a book of contrasts. We must bear that in mind if we are to understand it aright. Life itself is comprised of opposites. It is neither all good nor all bad, but a blend of both. As an example:

### Work is a Bane

Viewed from one angle, work is a bane. It is often exasperatingly difficult, enervating, boring, risky, and backbreaking, demanding the salt of one's blood. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread..." (Genesis 3:19). Or, as brother Ray (Radio Prison Ministry) used to say, "I go to work to earn the money to buy bread to get the strength to go to work again."

On the one hand, Solomon speaks of work as unprofitable:  
What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?  
(1:3; 3:9)

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun (2:11).

I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? (2:18,19, NIV 4:8).

All labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled (6:7).

### Work Is a Blessing

Viewed from another angle, work is a blessing. It fills a void, shields us against insufferable boredom, lends direction and purpose to life, and supplies us with the wherewithal to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Having something worthwhile to do imparts a feeling of accomplishment, a sense of self-worth, and the joy of providing for others. Our self-esteem is enhanced. Also, we don't carry about with us the burden of self. Our happiest moments are when we immerse ourselves in persons or causes greater than we. We are pleased and content when we are able to forget self, as we do in reading a book, watching a stage play, listening to a concert or opera, falling in love, and participating in corporate worship of Almighty God. At such moments of activity we forget that we exist, and that is a big relief. The simplest things in life afford the greatest satisfaction: food and drink, work and worship.

Furthermore, work heals. Elijah wailed out his woes under a juniper tree. He had himself on his hands with nothing to do. The angel of the Lord told him by implication to get going, to cease his self-pity, to plunge into work (1 Kings 19:1-8).

So then, when Solomon speaks of labor as being unprofitable, he is thinking of labor under the sun, unconnected with the God above the sun. If "this side" is all there is to life with no "yonder," the outlook is bleak, for then all our toiling and moiling eventuate into nothing more than a blank: death.

The Preacher points out the joy and benefit of work:

- My heart took delight in all my work (2:10b NIV).
- 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, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? (2:24,25 NIV; see also 3:13,22; 5:18,19; 8:15; 9:7-10). Note: The phrase "from the hand of God" is the open sesame to Ecclesiastes.
- The sleep of a labouring man is sweet (5:12).
- Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.... (9:10).

### Good Things on Earth Are Provided by God

The Preacher is not altogether pessimistic in his outlook on life. At times, he is an optimist of the first magnitude. Consider these sayings of his:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time ...to plant ...to heal ...to build up ...to laugh ...to dance ...to embrace ...to get ...to keep ...to sew ...to speak ...to love ...and a time of peace ... to rejoice, and do good in his life (3:1-8, 12).

...it shall be well with them that fear God (8:12).

Let thy garments be always white (dress well); and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest... (9:8-9).

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.... (11:9).

#### Get Yourself a Good Education

Another good factor the Preacher stresses in life "under the sun" is the acquisition of wisdom.

... wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness (2:13).

Everyone who lives ought to be wise; it is as good as receiving an inheritance and will give you as much security as money can. Wisdom keeps you safe - this is the advantage of knowledge (7:11,12, TEV).

... a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine (8:1).

Wisdom is better than strength ...better than weapons of war (9:16,18).

#### Bad Things Are Present Also

...one event (death) happens to them all (2:14-16; 11:8).

...a time to die ...to weep ...to lose ...a time of war (3:1-8).

And, moreover, I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there (3:16).

...all oppressions ...the tears ...and they had no comforter (4:1).

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase (5:10).

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily (the law's delay), therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil (8:11).

#### The Bottom Line

Fear God (reverence God), and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man (12:13).





Ecclesiastes - Chapters 1 & 2  
Lesson 1

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

PERSONAL APPLICATION

O Holy Spirit, who has called me by the Gospel, enlighten me with your gifts so that I may understand aright the message of Ecclesiastes. Amen.

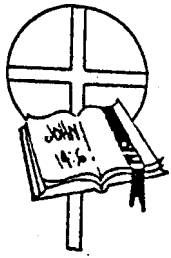
Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

1. Who gave the instructions in Ecclesiastes? (1:1,12) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Whose son was he? (2 Samuel 12:24) \_\_\_\_\_
3. What high office did his mother insist he should occupy? (1 Kings 1:15-17)  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What royal pronouncement did David make as to his successor? (1 Kings 1:28-31) \_\_\_\_\_
5. The moving tent or tabernacle was to be replaced by a magnificent temple. Why was David not permitted to build such a house unto the Lord? (1 Chronicles 22:6-8)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Why was Solomon given the commission to build the temple? (1 Chronicles 22:9-11) \_\_\_\_\_
7. What fatherly and official advice did David give his son in order that he might enjoy a prosperous reign? (1 Chronicles 22:12-13) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Solomon got off to a good start as king. When the Lord appeared to him in a vision, God said, "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon didn't ask for longevity of years, riches, or victory over enemies. What was it that he asked for? (1 Kings 3:5-9) \_\_\_\_\_
9. How did God demonstrate that he was well pleased with Solomon's choice? (1 Kings 3:10-14)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How did Solomon display wise judgment when confronted by a case in which no witnesses were on hand to testify? (1 Kings 3:16-28) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Turning now to Ecclesiastes, what was the theme or main line of thought which Solomon set forth? (1:2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Solomon set forth the theme in order to persuade men "under the sun" to focus attention upon God and the judgment to come. How does he express himself? (12:13-14) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Many things in life travel in circles. How is this the case regarding earth's population? (1:4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. How is this the case regarding  
- the sun? (1:5) \_\_\_\_\_  
- the wind? (1:6) \_\_\_\_\_  
- all rivers running into the sea, followed by evaporation and condensation? (1:7) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Examine the repetition in your everyday life. Is this repetition more apt to make you bored or thrilled? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Solomon never gave up seeking more wisdom. What did he find to be the end result of his learnedness? (1:12-18) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

17. He engaged in other activities also to find satisfaction. With which enterprises did he particularly busy himself? (2:1-11) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. If a person is not linked with God by grace through faith in Jesus and does not know the joy of being accepted as a child in the family of God but has to engender his own pleasure in the here and now, what disappointment may he expect?  
(2:15-16) \_\_\_\_\_  
(2:18-21) \_\_\_\_\_
19. Which primitive joys should you value, because these come from the hand of God? (2:24-26) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Ecclesiastes - Chapters 1 and 2  
Lesson 2

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

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ECCLESIASTES

Erwin Kurth

Evaluation of Life under the Sun

"The son of David, king in Jerusalem" had a religious upbringing, but, later in life, he got away from his moorings. He became increasingly enamored of earthly things and figured he could find solid satisfaction in wisdom, beautification projects, sensual delights, the accumulation of wealth and power.

But he wound up disappointed, thoroughly frustrated. He concluded that "life under the sun," if unconnected with God, is vain, meaningless, and useless. Contrariwise, "it shall be well with them that fear God" (8:12).

So, in his confessional outpourings called Ecclesiastes, the Teacher urges "that men should fear before him." (3:14); "fear (reverence) thou God" (5:7); "he that feareth God shall come forth of them all" (7:18); "but it shall not be well with the wicked...because he feareth not God" (8:13). He summarizes his exhortation on this wise: "fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil" (12:13,14).

In short, the aim and purpose of Ecclesiastes is "to make us truly religious" (Christ-like). This will come about if, through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, we focus attention primarily upon God and not upon self.

Life can be Like "Chasing the Wind"

"Vanity of vanities (twice vain and futile), saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." That is the final conclusion reached by the experimenter who tried everything he could think of to find life "under the sun" worthwhile. He ran the gamut from philosophy to hilarious entertainment. However, he wound up with a feeling of emptiness. What is there to show for all the hustle and bustle? What does it all add up to in the end? "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" (1:1-3). There are a lot of repeat performances in nature and in life (1:1-11).

1. The population on the earth goes in cycles. True, the good earth can provide sustenance for more than one generation at a time (although equitable distribution still remains a problem), but the good earth could hardly be expected to provide food and drink for all people who ever lived if they continued to live down to the present. One generation after another must be put under the ground to make room for generations to follow (1:4).
2. Also as regards the so-called rising and setting of the sun, which goes on day after day, year after year, century after century. The earthen sphere

cannot change its rotation of one thousand miles an hour nor its revolution around the sun of one thousand miles a minute. Both operations remain the same, times without number. How could it be otherwise? (1:5).

3. Is it any wonder, then, that there should be a certain sameness in human life? "Everything leads to weariness," says the seer -- "a weariness too great for words. Our eyes can never see enough to be satisfied; our ears can never hear enough." (What's new? is the perennial question). "What has happened before will happen again. What has been done before (good and bad) will be done again. There is nothing new in the whole world" (1:8,9 TEV).

Human nature remains wearisomely the same. As St. Paul expressed it: "They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity." Read Romans 1:28-32 for a description of how things were in Paul's day, and compare with the news of our day. "Is there anything whereof it may be said, 'See, this is new?' It hath been already of old time which was before us" (1:10).

#### What's New?

There certainly are things "new and improved" in the areas of medicine, antibiotics, surgery, the laser beam, astronomy, discoveries in outer and inner space (psychiatry), high technologies, the electronic explosion, computers, silicon chips, robots, means of communication via satellites, and almost instantaneous reporting from anywhere in the world. But human nature reacts to the new as it did to the old; it subverts the good into the bad (1:10). The airplane becomes a bomber. The splitting of the atom, supplying energy to replace diminishing fossil fuel, is used for thermonuclear warheads.

Events of the past repeat themselves in the present and will pop up again in the future, such as wars and rumors of war. Human nature is slow to learn from the mistakes of the past (1:9-11). History should serve as a guide. But no! Human nature does not change. Pride and prejudice, greed for profits and power, keep circling around in every new age as in the old (1:11). How utterly wearying! "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher...all is vanity."

#### Knowledge and Wisdom Should Prove Most Rewarding (1:12-18)

Solomon was "king over Israel in Jerusalem," capital of the vast Israelite empire extending from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:21). Intellectuals gravitated to his palace. Representatives of kings came to visit him (1 Kings 4:34). The Queen of Sheba put in her appearance (1 Kings 10:1-8). A spirit of inquiry was abroad.

"And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail (this compulsive drive to discover causes behind effects, to find answers to a multiplicity of 'Whys'), hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith." It is very frustrating that

For instance, "Becky" has been doing research on a problem in the laboratory of MIT for one whole year and has not come up with a solution. She is mightily interested in her work, pursues it with a vengeance, has eliminated any number of false leads but has not yet come up with a definitive answer. "Frustrating, as I look back," she comments wryly. Solomon couched it in these words, "I gave my heart to know wisdom...I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (1:16-18).

Unexplainable are many common. everyday manifestations. What is each Thing-in-itself? Life, love, light? Patriotism, self-denial, genius, time and space? The nature of tragedy? Sin, sorrow, and death? Matter and force? Ill will, stubbornness, sadistic and masochistic inclinations, meanness? As the proverb has it: "That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting (is not there) cannot be numbered (counted)" (1:15). Why must it remain so? Life is filled with baffling puzzles. For instance, "The microwave oven doesn't heat the air in the oven - it heats the food. An electronic transmitter within the oven, called a magnetron, generates high-frequency electromagnetic waves. These waves oscillate at about 2 1/2 billion times a second" (The Saturday Evening Post, March '84, p.18). Say it again, brother: "The more we know, the more the mysteries grow." This is also vanity.

### The Principal Component of Wisdom

We now ask, What is the chief ingredient of wisdom?

Answer: Reverence for God (also termed "fear of God"). See Ecclesiastes 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:13; 12:13,14. Solomon had previously searched out, in The Book of Proverbs, the quintessence of wisdom; for example: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). This theme, "Fear the Lord," appears again and again in Proverbs. (As extra study you may want to underscore these passages in your Bible: Proverbs 1:7,29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26,27; 15:16,33; 16:6; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 31:30).

Job had intoned the same theme: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (28:28). "The wisdom that is from above" is to be given precedence over worldly wisdom because it is "pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy" (James 3:17).

Years after Solomon, Isaiah wrote of the Coming One, the Messiah, saying, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (11:1,2). Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy. St. Paul confirmed it by saying, "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ (is) the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Jesus holds the answers to the four great problem-questions of the human race:

1. Whence have I come? - the question of origin.

"All things (visible and invisible) were made by him (Jesus);  
and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

2. What may I know?- the question of truth.  
"I am the way, THE TRUTH and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6).
3. What ought I to do? - the question of morality.  
"If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).  
"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him , and we will come unto him and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).  
"Faith...worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6).
4. Whither am I going? - the question of destiny.  
"I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

Anyone who acknowledges these truths and believes in Jesus as Savior possesses the indispensable prerequisites of wisdom.

#### All is Vanity (2:1-17)

Solomon tried other avenues to find happiness. Mirth, pleasure, and laughter certainly have a place in human life, but they are not ends in themselves. Judging from some commercials, the great desires are: fun, frolic, frenzied activities, wild excitement, boisterous laughter, giddiness, and side-splitting jokes. But silliness in itself does not satisfy. "This also is vanity" (2:1,2).

The seer went in for wine-tasting -- an art in itself. He could safely do so because he was interested mainly in its flavor, smoothness, and bouquet, not in its effects as an escape mechanism (2:3). He kept himself busy with building-projects and beautification programs: houses, vineyards, gardens and orchards, trees of many kinds, swimming pools, ponds and reservoirs plus irrigation channels (2:4-6). He needed a large working force to run the household and attend to the needs of VIP's - Very Important Persons - who came to visit him. So he got him servants and maidens. These were so content with their employment that, after getting married, they desired nothing better for their children than a job with Solomon. He also raised cattle, more than any of his predecessors (2:7).

The Queen of Sheba was duly impressed when she came to pay her respects. She saw the food that was served at his table, the living quarters for his officials, the organization of his palace staff and the uniforms they wore, the servants who waited on him at feasts, and the sacrifices he offered in the Temple. It left her breathless and amazed. She said to King Solomon, "What I heard in my own country about you and your wisdom is true! But I couldn't believe it until I had come and seen it all for myself. But I didn't hear even half of it; your wisdom and wealth are much greater than what I was told. How fortunate are your wives! And how fortunate your servants, who are always in your presence and are privileged to hear your wise sayings! Praise the Lord your God!" (1 Kings 10:5-9 TEV).

Besides all this, he amassed a vast fortune in silver and gold and acquired "The peculiar treasure of kings," viz., a harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). He also sponsored the fine art of music, establishing royal

orchestras and choirs. He could truly say, "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. He found great satisfaction in all his regal activities, for there is joy in the pursuit of a goal more so than in the attainment. The thought that haunted him was the brevity of life. All too soon he would have to bid adieu to life. "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity" (2:8-17).

"You Can't Take it with You" (2:18-23)

That's what bothered Solomon. Legend has it: Alexander the Great decreed that when he died and lay in his casket, his hands should be exposed to public view so that everybody could see he was leaving this world empty-handed. "Yes, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I shall leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity" (2:18-23).

As it happened, Rehoboam, son and successor of Solomon, did prove to be unwise, and thus the worst fears of Solomon were realized (1 Kings 12:1 ff). Rehoboam, instead of speaking kindly to the people and promising them tax relief, told them, My father "beat you with whips; I'll flog you with bullwhips" (12:11 TEV). The ten tribes in the north preferred not to be chastised with scourges, so they seceded and set up Jeroboam as king. Only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to "the house of David." Thus the kingdom was divided and remained so, with predictable intermittent clashes between them. If Solomon had been able to speak from the grave, he could have said, "I told you so! All my labor and vexation of heart, days of travail and nights of restlessness -- how did it all end? In an unworthy son and the breakup of the kingdom. This is also vanity" (2:22,23).

Work is a Blessing (2:24-26)

If he had to do it over again, Solomon would have gone right back into work. "There is nothing better for a man than that he should" engage in such basic activities as to "eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor." He was not advocating what later was termed Epicureanism in the sense of "Eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19) for tomorrow we die. No; Solomon counted these gifts as coming "from the hand of God" (2:24).

The message for us is:

Work, for the night is coming,  
Work through the sunny noon:  
Fill brightest hours with labor,  
Rest comes sure and soon.  
Give every flying minute  
Something to keep in store;  
Work, for the night is coming,  
When man works no more.

But remember this: Only what's done for Christ will last.



Ecclesiastes - Chapters 3 and 4  
Lesson 2

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Before you start the day's work, offer a prayer to God.

Heavenly Father, who works ceaselessly in governing and preserving the universe, grant to me, this day, a joyful willingness to work while it is day, and to continue my service of love to you. Amen.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

1. Life consists of times that are good and times that are not so good. Which good times are listed in 3:1-8? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Which trying times in your life do you recall as you scan the list in 3:1-8? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Which inevitable moment must each mortal face? \_\_\_\_\_
4. If you are like most people, you'd rather be busy than idle. What benefits do you derive from being busy? (3:9-13) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Why should we accept certain happenings in life instead of whining over them? (3:14-15) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Because of the universality of sin, what undesirable situations arise within human society? (3:16) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Who will have the final say-so in meting out justice on the righteous and the wicked? (3:17) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Man is the foremost among visible creatures because he has speech, reason, an immortal soul, dominion over every living thing, and was made in the image of God, (i.e., in holiness). Yet there is a level on which man has no preeminence over beasts. On which level is that? (3:18-20) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What is an excellent way of spending time while sojourning on earth and awaiting the great translation into heaven by grace through faith in the risen Christ? (3:22) \_\_\_\_\_

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

10. Name instances of oppression from history, past or present, which cause the oppressed to become weary of life. (4:1-3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



11. According to 4:4, if a person worked hard, perfected his skills, rendered good service, and became successful in business, what kind of feeling would he be apt to arouse in the less ambitious? \_\_\_\_\_

What usually motivates the world to work hard at becoming a success? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think a Christian should work hard to be successful? (3:13) \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

12. If we apply verse 4:5 to losing weight, what method would this be? (see various translations) \_\_\_\_\_

a. How is this method practiced to the extreme in our society? \_\_\_\_\_

13. What does 4:6 say to you? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Why was self-denying labor and the desire to accumulate more wealth pointless in the case of the man described in 4:7-8? \_\_\_\_\_

15. A climber would not attempt to assault a mountain-peak by himself. Why not? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Give personal illustrations of the blessings of having a Christian friend to support and strengthen you. (4:9-12) \_\_\_\_\_

17. Place the verse or verses in front of the statement to which they apply. (4:13-16).

\_\_\_\_\_ A young but capable head of state (or president of a corporation) is better than an old man who is not open to advice and warnings.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is not possible to please all the people all of the time.

\_\_\_\_\_ Some people never profit by their past experiences.

18. List a number of the Teacher's expressions of wisdom (chapter 3 and 4) that you would like to apply to your life. \_\_\_\_\_