

## Weekly Worship Guide 2024 – Week 1

Prayer Focus: Personal Spiritual Growth

Memory Verse: “Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” – Numbers 14:9

<b>Shepherding Notes</b>	<b>Family Worship</b>	<b>Bible in a Year</b>
<hr/> Sunday <hr/>		
Service Review	Service Review	Service Review
<hr/> Monday <hr/>		
Ecclesiastes 1	Psalms 1	Jeremiah 1 Jeremiah 2
<hr/> Tuesday <hr/>		
Ecclesiastes 2	Genesis 1	Jeremiah 3 Jeremiah 4
<hr/> Wednesday <hr/>		
Ecclesiastes 3	Genesis 2	Jeremiah 5 Jeremiah 6
<hr/> Thursday <hr/>		
Ecclesiastes 4	Genesis 3	Jeremiah 7 Jeremiah 8
<hr/> Friday <hr/>		
Ecclesiastes 5	Genesis 4	Genesis 5 Jeremiah 9
<hr/> Saturday <hr/>		
Job 1	Proverbs 1	Jeremiah 10 Jeremiah 11

### December 31, 2023 Sunday Service Review

- What was the most encouraging part of the church service today?
- What was the primary text of Scripture that was preached this morning?
- What were some of the main points of the sermon?
- How did the sermon reveal the glory of Jesus Christ?
- Which application point or challenge was most personally relevant to you, and how do plan to implement change/growth in that area in your life?

## January 1 Shepherding Notes – Ecclesiastes 1

Perhaps you are wondering why our reading plan begins with the relatively obscure book of wisdom literature called Ecclesiastes. The outset of the year is the time when our aspirations tend to get reset and our goals are often stated (sometimes in the form of New Year's resolutions). We set benchmarks for our health, careers, family life, habits, and self-discipline. All of those can be good things. Ecclesiastes helps us to ensure that we are viewing all that we do, all that we pursue, and all that we accrue through the lens of eternal reality. God has given us this book of wisdom in order to help us rightly prioritize life with Him at the center.

### The Preacher

The book of Ecclesiastes was written by someone who refers to himself as 'the Preacher' (or in some translations 'the Teacher'). That word in Hebrew is קהלת (Qoheleth). It literally means 'a collector of sentences' and is an ancient Hebrew way of describing a scholar, a sage, or a philosopher. You will notice that he refers to himself as "Son of David, king in Jerusalem." Many take this to mean that Solomon is the author, and that would make sense being that Solomon had more experience of almost everything imaginable, and found it all to be unsatisfying. However, there are others who believe that this was written by a philosopher after the life of Solomon and this Preacher utilized the life of Solomon as an extended illustration as to why all of life's pursuits are ultimately vain and worthless unless properly ordered around God Himself. Either way, we are going to reference the life of Solomon often as we make our way through the book.

### Vanity

The chief refrain of the book will be the concept that we read in vs. 14. "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." The word 'vanity' is sometimes translated as 'meaningless' (NIV), or 'futility' (NASB). The Hebrew word literally means 'breath' or 'light breeze.' It is a reference both to somethings temporal and unsubstantial nature. Everything you do, pursue, or accrue is going to be spoken about in this book as nothing more than chasing wind – an impossible, pointless task.

### Under the Sun

Another refrain that you will find 26 times in this book is the little phrase, "under the sun." We naturally default to functioning as if this world is all that there is. Our schedule, calendar, and wish-lists are built without giving the Lord or eternity a single thought. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes is pointing out the absolute pointlessness of living an 'under the sun' life. He is calling us to lift our eyes to see life through an eternal perspective so that our lives might be spent doing that which is of true worth.

### Nothing is New

In his excellent book, 'Living Life Backwards,' David Gibson says, "Read Ecclesiastes 1:4-10 aloud and feel the lyrical tilt with its tidal ebb and flow. That's the point. Everything either goes around and around, or comes and goes; it rises and sets; what has been will be again; what has been done will be done again; what is present will soon be past... He doesn't mean no 'new' things are ever invented in the world, for clearly that is not true. He means there is nothing new we can ever discover to break the cycle and satisfy us."

The good news is that Jesus is the one who breaks that cycle for us. He is the one who gives our life true meaning. Let's build our lives, and this year specifically, on the reality that building our own kingdom is nothing more than playing with sandcastles, waiting for the tide to come knock them down. But, taking part in the kingdom of God is of inestimable, eternal value.

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### **January 1 - Family Worship**

#### **Read Psalm 1**

Discussion Questions:

- What does Psalm 1 teach us about who we should spend time with?
- What does Psalm 1 teach us to delight in? (The law – meaning the good teachings of God.)
- What does it mean to be a tree planted by streams of water? What is that word picture trying to show us?
- What is chaff? How are the wicked people like chaff?
- How does Jesus relate to this passage? (He was the only perfectly righteous man who fulfilled this passage.)

Song: [Only A Holy God](#)

**Prayer Focus:** Personal Spiritual Growth in **WISDOM**

**Family Activity:** 'Play Favorites'

Ask a few questions about each person's 'favorites.' (Sample Questions: Who is your favorite Bible character other than Jesus? What is your favorite book of the Bible? What is your favorite song we sing at church? Etc.)

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### **Bible in a Year**

- Read Jeremiah 1
- Read Jeremiah 2

## January 2 Shepherding Notes - Ecclesiastes 2

Homer is often credited with the earliest version of the phrase, “death is the great equalizer.” He said it like this, “And they die an equal death — the idler and the man of mighty deeds.” He wrote these words roughly 750 BC. But, roughly 150-200 years earlier, the Bible had already made these claims powerfully through the book of Ecclesiastes. “How the wise dies just like the fool!” (vs. 16) This chapter provides us with a powerful examination of how the ever-present and ever-approaching reality of death renders all of our pursuits meaningless.

Reality check – you are going to die. Eventually you are going to be forgotten. Based on the average life expectancy in the United States, it is likely that you will outlive your own reputation. If that is true, then why do we do the things that we do? What is it that we are chasing? To state it simply and singularly: happiness. Blaise Pascal correctly observed that,

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they use, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of other avoiding it, is the same desire in both – to be happy. This is the motive of every action of every man, even those who hang themselves.”

What is it that you expect to make you happy? Chapter 2 presents three illustrations of failed attempts. The first looks at the indulgent aspect of King Solomon, who garnered to himself every imaginable opulent comfort of his day. His house, his servants, his storehouses that overflowed with gold; none of it satisfied him. Your possessions won’t ever make you truly happy. Ian Fleming was right, ‘The world is not enough.’

The next illustration was the aspect of Solomon’s life in which he committed himself to earthly wisdom. 1 Kings 4:31 tells us that, “...he was wiser than all other men...” and verse 32 adds, “He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.” This kind of wisdom is in reference to understanding cause and effect, and the nature of how the world works. There was a spiritual component lacking in his wisdom. Brilliant people are often miserable. Intelligence, great learning, degrees, letters after your name; they don’t make you happy.

The last example is of a man who loves his work. He is sold out to being excellent at his craft. He even rightly recognizes that it is a gift from God to be able to delight in seeing the work of your hands succeed and produce a living. (vs 24) But, this man has a restless heart. (vs 23) He is not satisfied.

Mick Jagger sang, “I can’t get no satisfaction. And I try, and I try, and I try, and I try...” Nothing on earth will satisfy you because it wasn’t designed to. C.S. Lewis saw in this fact an ontological argument for the existence of God. “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” It is Christ alone who satisfies. So we you are called to, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

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## January 2 - Family Worship

### Read Genesis 1

Discussion Questions:

- What existed before God created the heavens and the earth? (Just God)
- If we 'create' something, we have to use some sort of material. What materials did God use to create all things? (Nothing. He created everything out of nothing.)
- How did God create everything in Genesis 1? (By speaking)
- Can you think of anything else in the Bible that God 'creates?' ("Create in me a clean heart." Psalm 51:10 - Those who are saved are called a 'new creation' in 2 Cor. 5:17)

Song: [All Creatures of Our God and King](#)

**Prayer Focus:** Personal Spiritual Growth in **PURITY (mind, body, and soul)**

**Family Activity:** Book Order Challenge

See who can do the best at remembering all of the books of the Old Testament in order.

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### Bible in a Year

- Read Jeremiah 3
- Read Jeremiah 4

### January 3 Shepherding Notes - Ecclesiastes 3

In 1959 Pete Seeger lifted the words of Ecclesiastes 3 and placed them into a song he called, "Turn, turn, turn." (In 1965 it was popularized by the Byrds.) The rather subtle point being made in that song is not stated in what was included from Ecclesiastes, but rather what was left out. If you compare the lyrics of the song to the Scripture, you will find that Seeger removed the phrase, "a time for war." This was owing to his hippy-esque anti-war sentiments. As usual, the musical adaption misses the point of the Bible passage entirely.

The theme of this poem is time. The word time is mentioned 30 times in the first 11 verses. It isn't instructing us to do any of these things. The poem is simply stating that these seasons of life are part of our reality. Rousas Rushdoony writes, "In ancient paganism, humanistic man sought to govern time by means of rites whose purpose was to control time and nature. In fertility and chaos cults, men believed they could make nature fruitful again, wipe out past history and sins, reverse time and order, and generate themselves, nature, and history." Through various pagan practices, the nations were attempting to force 'seasons' to change. Whether it was an effort to change the literal weather, or their circumstances, people had the delusional concept that they could somehow mystically alter the forces of time to bend toward their desired outcome.

The question is, are we modern people really that much different? Are you able to control times of war and peace – even through practical means like voting or volunteering? Are you able to control when times of mourning will come? Or times of sowing and reaping, birth and death? The key point is that "He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time." (vs. 11) He is the one who controls time. Vs. 14 adds, "I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him." Phil Ryken puts it this way in his book, 'Why Everything Matters.' "Everything in this time-bound universe is under the authority of God in heaven. The sovereign God rules over time and over what happens in time... Nothing happens outside the will of God." Reader, today you can rejoice in the fact that you are not in control. God is. And He has promised that He works all things together for the good of His people. On the one hand, this means that you and I should stop freaking out when we feel as though we have no agency to change our circumstances. On the other hand, it means that we have the ability to go directly to the One person who does control everything and ask.

Final note: When God made Adam and Eve, he created them with life in them that would have continued if sin had never entered the picture. Mankind is designed to be eternal. We are 'immortal' in the sense that our souls will exist forever somewhere. Verse 11 reveals that all people are instinctually aware of this reality on a heart level.

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## January 3 - Family Worship

### Read Genesis 2

#### Discussion Questions:

- How was God's creation of Adam different from all of the other parts of creation?
- How was Eve's creation different than any other part of creation?
- So far, God has called all of His creation good. In verse 18, what does God say is the only thing that is 'not good?' How did God fix it? What does this teach us about the heart of God toward man?
- What is the one and only rule that God gave in this chapter?
- What does verse 24 teach us about marriage? (1 man, 1 woman, till death parts them)

Song: [Oh Lord, My Rock and My Redeemer](#)

**Prayer Focus:** Personal Spiritual Growth in **FAITH (that your faith might be strengthened)**

**Family Activity:** Bible Pictionary

If you have at least 4 people, divide into two teams. If not, every person is on their own team. Each person takes turns drawing one scene from anywhere in the Bible. Try to get your team to guess before the other team.

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### Bible in a Year

- Read Jeremiah 5
- Read Jeremiah 6



## January 4 Shepherding Notes - Ecclesiastes 4

### Envy Based Toil

It never ceases to amaze me that there are professional leagues for almost every sort of competition imaginable. The USLMRA is a lawnmower racing organization. The WETF is the World Egg Throwing Federation. And who could forget the annual hot dog eating competition at Coney Island? I don't have to tell you, it is self-evident that people are naturally competitive.

Chapter 4 opens with an examination of the envy-trap. The Preacher tells us why most people work hard. "Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor." This is more than just keeping up with the Joneses. This is the internal desire to prove our worth or value by making more money, having more stuff, getting better grades, getting a better position, or making a better point. Our motives matter to God. 'Under-the-sun' living looks like attempting to validate ourselves and prove ourselves to others by making a name for ourselves with our toil. Not coincidentally, that was the exact same heart that we find in the people who were building the Tower of Babel. (Gen. 11:4)

The alternative is to "work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." (Col. 3:23-24) If your ultimate goal in toil is just to garner personal esteem by being more affluent, accomplished, or acclaimed than your neighbor, then your motive for work is identified by the Preacher as not only being evil, but also useless.

### Two are Better Than One

Another major theme in chapter 4 is the point that isolation, or independent living is not good for anyone. Sidney Greidanus explains this very well in his book, 'Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes.' He explains:

God created human beings for companionship. In Paradise God declared, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." (Gen. 2:18) God created humans as social beings. They are made to work together and help each other. "Israel is called out of Egypt to model for the world the way in which a righteous community should function." God gave Israel many laws requiring care for one's neighbor, the climax being, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev 19:18) The Teacher echoes this law in Ecclesiastes 4 by calling solitary living "vanity," futile, and useless by illustrating that "two are better than one." Jesus acknowledged this wisdom by gathering disciples around him and sending them out "two by two" (Mark 6:7). Jesus also reiterated the love commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). The early Christians gave expression to this love commandment by being together and having "all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

Dear reader, dedicate yourself to the life of the church this year. Life was designed to give and to serve one another. And the New Testament teaches us that this is to be done particularly within the household of faith. (Phil. 2:1-4, 1 Cor. 12-13, Gal. 6:10)

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## January 4 - Family Worship

### Read Genesis 3

#### Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the sneaky ways the serpent lied to Eve?
- Where was Adam when Eve was being tempted? (vs. 6)
- What is the promise of Genesis 3:15 pointing to? (Jesus would come and crush the head of the devil. This happened when Jesus died on the cross for our sins.)
- How did Adam's sin effect all of us? (Romans 5:12 – it caused all of us to be born as sinners.)
- When Jesus was tempted by the devil many years later, did He fall like Adam and Eve? (No, He is the only perfect man who has ever lived.)

Song: [He Will Hold Me Fast](#)

**Prayer Focus:** Personal Spiritual Growth in **BOLDNESS (to obey and proclaim Jesus in all aspects of life.)**

**Family Activity:** Vocabulary Challenge

Starting from the youngest to the oldest, see who can accurately define the following words:

- Temptation (The process of the world, the flesh, and the devil trying to convince you to reject God's way.)
- The Fall (The sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3)
- Sin Nature (The effect of the fall on every single person who has been born from Adam's line. We are all born as sinners by nature, and sinners by choice.)
- Bonus challenge: Protoevangelium (This is a Latin word that means 'first gospel.' Genesis 3:15 is the first time God promised that the Messiah would come and make right what Adam and Eve had broken – so that verse is called the 'Protoevangelium.')

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### Bible in a Year

- Read Jeremiah 7
- Read Jeremiah 8

## January 5 Shepherding Notes - Ecclesiastes 5

### Money

What is your relationship to money? Everyone has to have money in order to live. But, not everyone lives to make money. What is the Preacher getting at in verse 12 when he says, “Sweet is the sleep of a laborer whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep?” The first person that is mentioned is the type that works with his hands. He comes home filthy and in desperate need of a shower. Whether he can afford a steak, or just beans and rice, he can go to bed and sleep sweetly. Why doesn’t that work for the rich man? Clearly the illustration is that the rich man is not tired out from a hard day of manual labor. But, what is the point behind this saying? I think Zack Eswine gets it right in his book, ‘Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes.’ “The rich without God is up at night because of his wealth and what it takes to keep it.”

The Preacher takes aim at both institutional/political problems with wealth (vs. 8-9) and personal idolatry of money (vs. 10-15). The institutional/political problems with wealth only exist because of the selfish, greedy, discontent people who run them. The system is not the problem, the people are the problem. People who love money are controlled by it. Jesus noted that you must determine if you are going to serve God or money (Matt. 6:24). Having money is necessary. Serving money is idolatry. Loving money produces many evils. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Tim 6:10)

Do you love money? How can you even tell? Let’s be honest, we are bad at self-evaluating this sort of thing. Here are some questions to ask. Are you generous? Are you faithfully giving to the church? Are you quick to want to help when a need arises? Do you spend money you don’t have? Are you more likely to scheme of ways to get more money for yourself, or do you spend more mental energy considering how to prepare yourself to be used to bless others? Regardless of the dollar amount in your bank account, the heart of a believer should be to use money as a way to honor God and love others.

For those who identify a love of money, you need to know that “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.” (vs. 10) It is like the salt water in the ocean when you are really thirsty. It gives the appearance of satisfaction, but the result is that you will end up thirstier than before. How can you stop loving money? Replace that love with a greater love, a love for Jesus. We have a great Savior who has shown us how to live in relation to money. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” That is the gospel. Arguing from the greater to the lesser, if Jesus was willing to lay down the riches of heaven, how much more should we hold loosely the fading and temporary wealth that this world provides?

## January 5 - Family Worship

### Read Genesis 4

#### Discussion Questions:

- Why did Cain hate his brother? (1 John 3:12)
- How did God warn Cain?
- Why is violence and murder a bad thing? (God alone can decide when our lives are supposed to end. To do that ourselves is putting ourselves in the place of God.)
- What does it mean in verse 10 that Abel's blood was crying from the ground? (Abel's blood obviously didn't speak, but it did send a message. His blood was crying out for justice.)
- Many years later, the blood of Jesus would be spilled by people who had wicked hearts just like Cain. What kind of message does the blood of Jesus send? (Hebrews 12:24 – A better word! His blood provides mercy for everyone who believes.)

Song: [How Vast the Love](#)

**Prayer Focus:** Personal Spiritual Growth in **LOVE (for God and for others)**

**Family Activity:** Memory Verse Challenge

Starting from the youngest to the oldest, see who can accurately quote our weekly memory verse: **Numbers 14:9**

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### Bible in a Year

- Read Genesis 5
- Read Jeremiah 9

## Shepherding Notes Track

- Read Job 1

### Family Worship

#### **Read Proverbs 1**

- What is wisdom?
- Which verse in this chapter can you apply today?

#### **Prayer Focuses:**

Christlikeness – (Sample – Lord, please help me to honor you by responding to temptation like Jesus did, not like Eve. Please help me to love you more than I love my own desires for earthly satisfaction.

Tomorrow’s Church Service – (Sample – Lord, please allow the church to worship well tomorrow. Let our flock rest well tonight so that we will have the energy to fellowship and hear the Word of God well.)

**Family Activity:** Quiz over this week’s reading: (Points are for fun. Use them if they are helpful, discard them if not. (answers on the reverse side of this page.)

20 Points – Is Psalm 1, the blessed man is compared to what part of nature?

20 Points – What does the blessed man of Psalm 1 meditate upon day and night?

10 Points – What was the first thing that God spoke into existence?

30 Points – What day did God create the sun?

10 Points – What did God do on the seventh day?

20 Points – What was the one command the Lord gave in the Garden of Eden?

30 Points – Who was God speaking to when He gave the Protoevangelium?

10 Points – Who killed Abel?

20 Points – What cried out to God from the ground in Genesis 4?

30 Points – What was the name of the son that was born to Adam and Eve after Abel died?

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### Bible in a Year

- Read Jeremiah 10
- Read Jeremiah 11

**Answers Key:**

20 Points – Is Psalm 1, the blessed man is compared to what part of nature?

**“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.”**

20 Points – What does the blessed man of Psalm 1 meditate upon day and night?

**“his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”**

10 Points – What was the first thing that God spoke into existence?

**Light**

30 Points – What day did God create the sun?

**Day 4**

10 Points – What did God do on the seventh day?

**Rest**

20 Points – What was the one command the Lord gave in the Garden of Eden?

**“of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”**

30 Points – Who was God speaking to when He gave the Protoevangelium?

**The serpent (or the devil/Satan)**

10 Points – Who killed Abel?

**Cain**

20 Points – What cried out to God from the ground in Genesis 4?

**The blood of Abel**

30 Points – What was the name of the son that was born to Adam and Eve after Abel died?

**Seth**

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