

Tips and Tricks:

The sermon notes are designed to be used as a guide for discussion. Don't feel like you have to use every question. Some questions will take a while to work through and others will be over in a few seconds.

1. Don't teach the lesson. The sermon was just preached. Just ask the questions and let everyone else talk.
2. Let other people ask questions. It's OK to go "off topic" for a while. Sometimes those conversations are more interesting anyway!
3. Have fun. Don't forget to laugh and crack up. Relationships, not curriculum, are the heartbeat of our ministry. Remember: We have to build a relational bridge strong enough to hold the truth!

Agenda for Group Time

1. Ice Breaker - Lighthearted ice breaker question (10 minutes)
2. Discussion - Bible study, sharing and application. (25 Minutes)
3. Prayer - Pray together (5 minutes)
4. Planning - Remember to talk about what's coming up.

Icebreaker: What's a song that tends to get stuck in your head?

The Meaning of Vanity

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." (Ecc. 1:2)

Question: The word there is "smoke" or "vapor." Think about your breath in cold weather. Why is the Preacher saying our life is like that?

Question: The preacher says that there's nothing new under the sun. But there's Stanley Cups, Apple Watches, new seasons of Great British Bake Off! What is he talking about?

- We all meet the same fate
- All of us will probably not be remembered
- None of us really have any control
- Even my Crocs will probably be forgotten

Discussion: What is the difference between something being vanity and meaninglessness? Is the Preacher saying life has no meaning?

Discussion: What is your response when you've had moments of great disappointment where you've asked yourself "what is all this stuff actually for?"

*V8 — All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.*

Question: What are some everyday examples of the insatiable and unutterable weariness of this life?

- The unending stream of news, social media posts, instagrams, emails, and updates (see v8b)

- The wormhole of videos, reels, shorts, memes, etc. I get sucked into when I'm procrastinating or trying to unwind (see v8b)
- I spent 3 hours watching tv last night after work and I can barely remember what I watched (see v11)
- Our family's schedule that makes me feel less like a dignified image bearer and more like a hamster on a hamster wheel (see v3)
- The fact that the laundry never ends. The dishes never stop coming. The groceries are always gone (see v5).
- Other:

Question: This feels like a lot of pessimism. How do we make sense of a book like this being in the Bible?

- Oh, the Preacher isn't serious. He's just playing devil's advocate.
- I think the Preacher is on to something...

The Gospel of the Preacher

Discussion: Have you ever had a time where someone did something really dramatic in order to get your attention? How is the Preacher doing that to his readers/hearers?

Question: The Preacher is saying that life is beautiful and confusing and tragic, but no matter what — **life under the sun is short.** The key to living well is _____.

- Doing more.
- Changing the world
- Living in light of our end
- Maximizing pleasure and minimizing discomfort

"There are lots of ways of being miserable but there's only one way of being comfortable, and that's to stop running around after happiness." (Edith Wharton)

Discussion: Think about Wharton's quote and compare it to how the Preacher refers to life as "smoke" or "vapor" — it's temporary and elusive. Does this mean that we'll never be happy?

- It sure sounds that way with all this talk of death, insecurity, and the risk that my circumstances could always change.

- It means that the meaning of life can't be the pursuit of happiness

Discussion: One writer said that we often live our lives thinking of ourselves like phoenixes (always rising from the ashes and overcoming obstacles) and less like sheep. What does he mean by this?

Discussion: What does God want from you? What are lies that we believe about what God actually wants from you?

Discussion: We said at the beginning of the sermon that reckoning with the facts of our short life under the sun can either free you or enslave you. How can this message free you? What are you going to do in light of the message God has given to the Preacher for us?