



**“Sobriety Test”**  
**FUEL**

**Small Group Plan**

In the first six chapters of Ecclesiastes Solomon describes human existence without God, life in the shadowland, life under the sun. But beginning with chapter seven his focus changes. Before, he had only glanced upward, but now he begins to look above the sun. One sign of this change is his frequent use of the word “wisdom.”

I like the description by Charles Swindoll:

*Funny thing about us humans, we tend to run faster when we have lost our way. And when we do, wisdom waits, refusing to keep pace with our frantic, maddening race to find happiness.*

And after all, what do we gain by searching every corner of shadowland? Does it bring fulfillment? Does it produce happiness? Is it, in any sense, a wise search? No, and wisdom waits at the border of shadowland. It waits for us to exhaust our time, resources and relationships. It waits for us to come out, having discovered that wisdom is better.

**OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...**

- Why do so many humans run faster when they are lost?
- What are they looking for? What are they running from?

**LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...**

***THE INSIDE IS BETTER THAN THE OUTSIDE***  
***Ecclesiastes 7:1-4***

<sup>1</sup> A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. <sup>2</sup> It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. <sup>3</sup> Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. <sup>4</sup> The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

- What is the purpose of perfume? What is it covering up?
- Why does Solomon mention the “heart” four times?
- In what sense will our heart (inside) survive our death?

**REBUKE IS BETTER THAN PRAISE**  
**Ecclesiastes 7:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> *It is better to heed a wise man’s rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.*

<sup>6</sup> *Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless.*

- What is the value of having a wise critic (cf. Proverbs 27:6)?
- How and why does foolishness cancel out the positive joys of “song” (v. 5) and “laughter” (v. 6)?

**COMMITMENT IS BETTER THAN SHORTCUTS**  
**Ecclesiastes 7:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> *Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.* <sup>8</sup> *The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.* <sup>9</sup> *Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.*

- Solomon lists some shortcuts, “extortion” and “bribery.” What foolish shortcuts would you add to the list? Explain why.
- How would you describe commitment?
- Why is it better than the shortcut?

**TODAY IS BETTER THAN YESTERDAY**  
**Ecclesiastes 7:10-12**

<sup>10</sup> *Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions.* <sup>11</sup> *Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.* <sup>12</sup> *Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.*

- Someone once said, “The good old days are a combination of a bad memory and a good imagination.”
- Do you agree? Explain.
- We can **learn** from the past, **prepare** for the future, but only **live** in the moment. Why do some avoid the moment, hiding in the past or dreaming of the future?

## USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- **The Inside Is Better Than The Outside ...**  
What can we do to nurture our hearts, our character, the inside?
- **Rebuke Is Better Than Praise ...**  
How have “the wounds of a friend” helped you?
- **Commitment Is Better Than Shortcuts ...**  
What helps you to remain true to your commitments in spite of the difficulties they will bring to you?
- **Today Is Better Than Yesterday ...**  
What does a life look like that is living for today?
- Close in prayer asking God for a picture of life above the sun.