



“Leveling the Human Playing Field”

FUEL

Small Group Plan

There's a film with a long title, *“Who is Harry Kellerman and why is he saying those terrible things about me?”* It begins with the main character, Harry Kellerman, sitting on the roof of a building writing a suicide note. The note says, *“There was time when I thought I would live forever. But I found it necessary to change those plans.”* How many are like Harry? Assuming they will live forever, never talking or even thinking about death. In our text this week Solomon says that death is unavoidable. It is not an accident. It is an appointment. Remember Hebrews 9:27 (NRSV) *“It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment.”*

As we have seen so far in our study, Ecclesiastes 1-6 have been chapters of tearing down. Solomon described life under the sun, life without God. And it really didn't matter if that life was wealthy productive or enjoyable. Solomon experienced it all personally and described it as empty and meaningless. With a very specific personal confession he tore down the old. And then, in chapters 7-8, he began some new construction. He began to build a more solid foundation mentioning "wisdom" almost twenty times. Was an old theme from a more faithful time in his life.

Six chapters of tearing down, two chapters of laying foundations, and then chapter 9, the final turning point before the positive emphasis of the last 3 chapters.

Solomon wants to make sure we are building on hard reality. So just in case we are holding on to some illusion about life under the sun, he confronts us in chapter 9 with the great spoiler, death. This is not the first time the subject of death has come up.

1:4

Generations come and generations go

2:14

*The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness;
but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.*

3:19

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both

5:16

*As a man comes, so he departs,
and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?*

6:6

Do not all go to the same place?

8:8

No One Has Power Over The Day Of His Death.

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- How have you observed people discuss or avoid the topic of death?
- Solomon gives three human responses or reactions to death:

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

ESCAPE

Ecclesiastes 9:1-3

¹ *So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.* ² *All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.* ³ *This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.*

- Since death is our common “destiny” (vs. 2, 3), why do so many avoid the topic?
- What are we afraid of and why?
- How does the fact and fear of death bring out the best and worst in people?
- Does death create problems or reveal them? Explain.

ENDURE

Ecclesiastes 9:4-6

⁴ *Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!* ⁵ *For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.* ⁶ *Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.*

- Remember the old motto, “Where there’s life, there’s hope”? Is this what Solomon is trying to say in verse 4?

- Why would some, rather than avoid the topic of death, endure? And what does this endurance look like?
- What is the difference between enduring and living life in spite of, and wearing the cheerful mask as a cover up, avoiding the unavoidable? Where is the balance between hope and honesty?

ENJOY
Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

⁷ Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. ⁸ Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

- This Has Been One Solomon's Recurring Themes:

2:24-25

*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?*

3:12

*I know that there is nothing better for men
than to be happy and do good while they live.*

5:18

*Then I realized that it is good and proper
for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction*

8:15

*So I commend the enjoyment of life,
because nothing is better for a man under the sun
than to eat and drink and be glad.*

- Solomon's list of priorities: Happy Meals
Family Celebrations
A Loving Marriage
Hard Work
- Contrast With Today's List: Fast Food
Full Schedule
Prenuptial Agreements
Get-Rich-Quick Schemes
- What other differences would you add to the two lists?

- Solomon says – Enjoy your family (vs. 7-8)
White was a color of celebration in ancient times. How can meal time be a time of joy for families
- Solomon says – Enjoy your marriage (v. 9)
Is this Solomon's confession? How can a strong marriage change life "under the sun?"
- Solomon says – Enjoy your work (v. 10)
How would you describe the satisfaction of a job well done?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- Woody Allen said, *"I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."*
- C. S. Lewis told of a time when his wife asked a friend if she had thought much about death. She said, *"Oh, no. By the time I reach that age, science will have done something about it."* George Bernard Shaw once noted, *"The statistics on death are quite impressive: one out of one people die."*
- Describe the difference between the way younger and older people view death?
- Which of the three, escape, endure or enjoy, is the best way to approach the reality of death? Explain.
- As we lose loved ones and face our own mortality, describe the benefit the believer has over the unbeliever.
- It's been said that "You can't take it with you." What can't we take, what can we take, and how does this contrast impact the way we live?
- Close in prayer thanking God for the confidence we have as believers, as we all move closer to the end of life here, and the beginning of life in heaven.