

# “Striving After *the* Wind”



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ecclesiastes 6.*

**Memory Text:** “All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied” (*Ecclesiastes 6:7, NKJV*).

We do not require great education of the mind to understand that on this earth is no real and lasting satisfaction; that our pleasures are only vanity; that our evils are infinite; and, last, that death, which threatens us every moment, must infallibly place us within a few years under the dreadful necessity of being forever either annihilated or happy.

“There is nothing more real than this, nothing more terrible. Be we as heroic as we like, that is the end which awaits the noblest life in the world. Let us reflect on this, and then say whether it is not beyond doubt that there is no good in this life but in the hope of another; that we are happy only in proportion as we draw near it; and that, as there are no more woes for those who have complete assurance of eternity, so there is no more happiness for those who have no insight into it.”  
—Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*.

Pascal, writing in the seventeenth century, is in his own way expressing some of the sentiments that Solomon expresses in *Ecclesiastes*. This week we'll continue to follow more of Solomon's woes; that is, more of his musings about the frustrations, inequities, and injustices of life here in a fallen world.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 17.*

## Safest Place on Earth?

“ ‘They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, “Peace, peace!” when there is no peace’ ” (*Jer. 6:14, NKJV*).

In the 1930s some of the world’s best minds, concerned about the future, sought to find what they believed would be the safest place on earth. That is, what place on this planet would be the least likeliest location where anyone would be threatened by war? Using the best resources, the finest data, the sharpest analysis, these great minds found the ideal location, the safest place in the world in the 1930s. It was an island in the Pacific. Its name?

Okinawa.

The point? It’s simple. Our world is a fallen world. Sin, death, and suffering pervade the planet. The world, as it is, is not what it should have been. There’s nothing “under the sun” that we can totally rely on. Not even the ground beneath our feet, as anyone who ever suffered through an earthquake could tell you.

In one sense, though, that could be good. Why? Because this world, as it now is, is not our home. It’s a place scheduled for destruction (*2 Pet. 3:10-13*); everything here will pass away (*Luke 21:33, Rev. 21:1*). One of the greatest dangers we face is to forget this, to get so caught up in the world or to be so in love with the world that we end up perishing with it.

**Read** Psalm 115:1-7, Isaiah 44:9-17, and Isaiah 45:20-22. Even though these verses were written a long time ago, what’s the message for us today? What danger is the Lord talking about that we need to be careful of, as well?

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So much of the Old Testament was the story of the Lord trying to point His people away from the world, the practices and teachings and gods of the world, things that, in the end, could not save them. Even worse, not only could they not save them, they could not satisfy them either.

**What are some things in this world that make life here so hard? In what ways can these hardships be a blessing; that is, in what ways do they help you remember that this world is not your final home?**

## *I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .*

▶ **Key Text:** *Ecclesiastes 6:7*

▶ **Teach the Class to:**

**Know:** God wants us to be happy. Jesus' promise is "life . . . to the full" (*John 10:10, NIV*).

**Feel:** Counterfeit pleasures bring no lasting satisfaction.

**Do:** Our actions reflect the spiritual values we've embraced.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Joy and Enjoyment (*Eccles. 6:1-9*)

**A** In some parts of the world, materialism may be one of the greatest barriers to authentic spirituality. Read Matthew 6:24. Just how much does Jesus expect His followers to despise money?

**B** When do our appetites go from being life-sustaining to life-threatening? What are some modern behaviors that, in excess, threaten our spirituality?

### II. Making the Most of the Present (*Eccles. 6:10-12*)

**A** Two dangers threaten our contentment. One is living in the past. The other is waiting for some ideal situation before accepting life's challenges. Read Ecclesiastes 9:10 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. What would you like to do for God that you haven't done yet? What will it take to get you started?

**B** Read Ecclesiastes 6:12. How would you like to be remembered when you're gone? Which Christian values would help you accomplish that?

▶ **Summary:** The path to contentment is paved with acts of unselfish service through Jesus.

## *Learning Cycle*

▶ **STEP 1—Motivate!**

**Just for Teachers:** Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question: **Why is this lesson important to me?**

C O N T I N U E D 

## When Gold Rusts

The Great Depression began in October 1929, when the stock market in the United States dropped rapidly. Thousands of investors lost large sums of money, and many fortunes were wiped out; many people, both rich and poor, lost everything overnight. One wealthy businessman who owned three homes found himself and his family living under a bridge for almost two years; they survived by selling off various leftover clothes and other odds and ends. This was a family that two years before had taken an extended cruise and vacation in Europe.

**Read Ecclesiastes 6:1, 2.** What point is Solomon making? In what ways do you see this principle expressed with other things in the world? What should be the ultimate message here for us?

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We've all heard stories about people who have accumulated great wealth, only to lose it all one way or another. What makes this even more frustrating is that Solomon, of all people, knew that money couldn't buy happiness or peace of mind even when one gets to keep it. And then there's the great pain that comes when one loses it to others, as well.

And it's not just wealth either. How many people put great stock, for instance, in power or prestige or a good name, only to have it all lost? Again, this should tell us why we need to be careful about how much we love this world, for most things in this world will one day be gone forever.

**Read Matthew 6:19, 20.** (See also Luke 12:33.) It's easy to understand about not laying up treasure on earth, but how does one lay up treasure in heaven? As you formulate your answer, also write down the ways you are laying up treasure in heaven.

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

The story is told of a scientist who was often chastised for being old-fashioned and out of date because he often quoted from the Bible. One day he endeavored to explain why he believed in the Bible.

“There is a poor widow here who has lost her only son. She wants to know if she will see him again. Science shall give the answer, and I will put the Book away.” So he took the Book and put it on the seat behind. “Will this woman see her son again? Where is he? Does death end all? What has science to say?”

Here a long pause.

“We are waiting for an answer; the woman is anxious.”

Another long pause.

“The woman’s heart is breaking. Science must speak. Nothing to say? Then we must take the Book,” and here he reverently replaced it, and with great deliberation opened it and read: “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me . . . The dead shall arise . . . for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. O death, where is thy sting? . . . I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.”

Then, closing the Book, and patting it affectionately, he said, “We will stick to the Book!”—*Bible Illustrations: Book 2, A Treasury of Bible Illustrations* (AMG International, Inc., 1998.)

**Consider This:** How might this illustration have comforted Solomon?

**Central Concept:** A meaningful life in Christ will be one in which considerations about death will hold no fear or sting.

## ► STEP 2—Explore!

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question: What do I need to know from God’s Word?

## Bible Commentary

### Solomon and Jesus

*(Review Ecclesiastes 6 with your class.)*

The last verse of today’s chapter may indeed be the apex of the preacher’s

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## Family Matters

God created the family to be a blessing—parents loving each other while bestowing great love and affection on their children. The love and closeness and commitment created in a family has been and still continues to be one of the greatest joys that human beings can know.

Of course, Satan is real, and so is sin; the result is that families, while a source of great joy, also can be a source of great pain and sorrow.

**Look up the following texts. What kind of family turmoil is depicted here?**

*Gen. 4:1-8*

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*Gen. 37:19-36*

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*2 Sam. 11:1-4*

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*2 Sam. 13:1-14*

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*Matt. 10:35-37*

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*1 Cor. 5:1*

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Of course, most of those family situations depicted above were pretty pathetic. In Ecclesiastes 6:3, in contrast, Solomon is depicting what would be kind of an ideal situation: A man lives a long life and has many children, yet even that in the end doesn't satisfy the deepest needs. These "good things"—and they are good—still aren't good enough. God has created us with a longing for something that nothing in this world, even a large loving family, can satisfy.

"Creatures are not born with desire unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 121.

**Though, ultimately, our hope and security exist only in God, family is still important. What can you do to help strengthen your family bonds? Make an effort, through prayer, to deny yourself in order to give more of yourself to your family.**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

lament: “For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow” (*Eccles. 6:12, NASB*).

We have already been exploring some possible answers to this question. But when Jesus was here, He said (*Matt. 12:42*) that Someone greater than Solomon was with us.

*(Assign various class members the following pairs of verses. Ask them to find their Ecclesiastes verse and, when called on, to read it and give a brief summary of what it says. After the class is satisfied with the summary, have the member turn to the related words of Jesus and read them aloud. Then discuss as a class how each quote from Jesus agrees with, makes clear, or casts the words of Solomon in a new light.)*

**Set One:**

*Ecclesiastes 1:13 (NIV)*

“I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!”

*Matthew 11:30 (NIV)*

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

**Set Two:**

*Ecclesiastes 2:17 (NIV)*

“So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

*John 4:34 (NIV)*

“‘My food,’” said Jesus, “‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.’”

**Set Three:**

*Ecclesiastes 2:22, 23 (NIV)*

“What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.”

*John 17:4 (NIV)*

“‘I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.’”


**Set Four:**

*Ecclesiastes 2:24 (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.”

*John 6:27 (NIV)*

“‘Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to

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## A Long Life?

Imagine this imaginary scene. Two people from another world are talking. One says to the other, “You know, I just don’t understand the meaning of life. Here I am, getting old. I have had a good life, but now it’s coming to a close. Look at all those who came before me; look at all those who will come after. We’re here, and then we are gone. It all goes by so fast. I’ll be five thousand years old on my next birthday. It seemed like just yesterday I turned four thousand. What does it all mean?”

This imaginary paragraph captures somewhat of what Solomon is saying here in Ecclesiastes 6:1-7. In it, groaning over the inequities and unfairness of life, he uses another symbol, this time a stillborn infant (*compare to Ecclesiastes 4:1-3*), saying that it would be better to die like this rather than see the meaninglessness and suffering of life. Again, however negative, if you view this world as all there is, with nothing else beyond, then it’s hard to argue with the logic: What’s the sense of living a life that has no meaning?

**Read** Ecclesiastes 6:6. What point is he making?

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Life does go by fast; maybe, though, that’s a blessing for us in this fallen world. Would you like to live for five thousand years in a sinful world full of pain and suffering? However much we hate death, it’s a relief for the dead, if not for the living left behind.

**What** do these texts have to say about the problem of death? What hope is found in them for us? *John 5:28, 29; 6:54; 10:28; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 21:4.*

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Using either some of the texts above or any other ones you find, write out your favorite texts about eternal life, just one after another, in a paragraph. Use as many as you like. Then read it aloud and pray over those promises and claim them for yourself. Also, be prepared to share them with the class on Sabbath.



Learning Cycle CONTINUED

eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.’”

**Set Five:**

*Ecclesiastes 3:17 (NIV)*

“I thought in my heart, ‘God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.’”

*John 5:28, 29 (NIV)*

“ ‘Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.’ ”

**Set Six:**

*Ecclesiastes 4:1 (NIV)*

“Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter.”

*Luke 4:18 (NIV)*

“ ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.’ ”

**Set Seven:**

*Ecclesiastes 5:2 (NIV)*

“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”

*Matthew 7:7 (NIV)*

“ ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’ ”

**Set Eight:**

*Ecclesiastes 5:19, 20 (NIV)*

“Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.”

*Luke 6:20 (NIV)*

“Looking at his disciples, he said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for

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## More Griping

In the last six verses of Ecclesiastes 6, Solomon continues his laments about the fate of humanity. He expressed in another way (*vs. 7*) what he has been saying all along, that there is no ultimate and lasting satisfaction in this life. It's a truth, of course, that we know too well.

**Ask yourself, Why is this true? Why is it that the things of this world don't satisfy us?** See also *Gen. 3:19; Ps. 104:29; Isa. 57:12, 13; John 8:34; Rom. 7:5; Eph. 2:12.*

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The British poet Alexander Pope once wrote about how “pleasures are ever in our hands or eyes,” and yet, when we do them, they cease to bring us the pleasure we imagine. It's only “in prospect” of doing them that they seem so great; in reality, they don't give us what we ultimately hope they would.

Verses 8-12 of Ecclesiastes 6, though difficult, are again talking about the general futility of life itself. We aren't satisfied with what we have; if we are wise or foolish, what does it matter; we can't fight those stronger than us; so often words are meaningless; and, finally, who knows how to live our short lives here? And yet, given the context of what he is talking about (a life lived apart from God), he makes a lot of sense.

**Though we don't know exactly what Solomon meant by the question, What advantage does a wise person have over a foolish one? he answers the questions for us in Proverbs.** See *Prov. 1:5-7; 3:35; 10:1, 14; 12:15; 14:1, 3; 15:7; 17:10-12; 21:20.*

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**Meanwhile,** how does Jesus show the difference between the wise and the foolish? *Matt. 7:24-27, 25:1-13.*

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According to what you have studied today, were your actions in the past 24 hours those of a wise person or those of a fool? What changes might you need to make?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

yours is the kingdom of God.’ ”

**Consider This:** What conclusions can be drawn from this comparison between Solomon’s words and Jesus’ words?

### ► **STEP 3—Practice!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

**Thought Questions:**

- 1 How do we truly feel about death? Are we ready for it to claim us today?
- 2 Pastor and author Gary Preston has written, “In light of what Ecclesiastes has said, I think it would not be contradicting him to suggest that twice a week for the rest of our lives we ought to begin the day by looking in the mirror and saying, ‘I am going to die someday—maybe today.’ What a difference that would make in our lives!”—“The Great Spoiler,” *Discipleship Journal*, issue 019 (Jan./Feb. 1984). What difference do you think that would make in your life?

### ► **STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question: **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

Follow the directions in the Wednesday portion of the lesson and, using either texts from this lesson or any others you find, write out your favorite texts about eternal life, one after another in paragraph form. Use as many as you like. Then read them aloud and pray over those promises and claim them for yourself. Be ready to share these with others when the Lord gives you opportunity.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1026; Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 223, 374, 375; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 258–262.

“But the great study and ambition of the world is to obtain material, temporal advantages, to the neglect of spiritual good. Thus it is with some members of the church. When at last they shall be called to render their account to God, they will not only be ashamed but astonished that they did not discern the true riches, and have not laid up treasure in the heavens. They have bestowed their gifts and offerings upon the enemies of truth, expecting a time to come in this life when they would receive the returns for what they have invested.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 134.

“Every family is a church, over which the parents preside. The first consideration of the parents should be to work for the salvation of their children. When the father and mother as priest and teacher of the family take their position fully on the side of Christ, a good influence will be exerted in the home. And this sanctified influence will be felt in the church and will be recognized by every believer. Because of the great lack of piety and sanctification in the home, the work of God is greatly hindered. No man can bring into the church an influence that he does not exert in his home life and in his business relations.” —Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 549.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read aloud the paragraphs put together at the end of Thursday's lesson. Share your thoughts after they are read.
- 2 Have some in class share their own experiences with how fleeting and untrustworthy things are in this world. What can you learn from these accounts?
- 3 As a class, discuss this question: As Christians, we all know that things of this world are only temporary; and yet, why is it so easy for us to get so caught up in them, even to the point of risking our souls? Also, talk about what the solution to that problem is.