

Striving After *the* Wind



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*).

W e 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?

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?

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?

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.

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

Gen. 37:19-36

2 Sam. 11:1-4

2 Sam. 13:1-14

Matt. 10:35-37

1 Cor. 5:1

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.

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?

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.*

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.

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.*

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.*

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

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?

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.

Good Life From Bad

Maria Medina grew up in Chile with an abusive alcoholic father. She had to quit school at 15 to work. The next year her mother fled her husband, taking Maria with her. Maria became pregnant at 18, but instead of marrying the baby's father, she decided to raise the child alone. She did not want to risk giving her child the same kind of life she had fled. She, her new baby, her mother, and her brother shared a small apartment, managing the best they could.

When she was 21, an Adventist neighbor gave her some tracts about God and offered to study the Bible with her. Maria loved reading the Bible. At last she realized that God loves her. She joined the Adventist Church and was overjoyed with her new relationship with God. As she learned of the power of forgiveness, she realized that she must forgive her father for what he had done. She prayed a lot about it, and then she visited her father. "Father," she said, "I forgive you for what you have done to me and to our family. I want to live without hate in my heart, so I forgive you."

"How can you forgive me for all the bad things I did to you and your mother?" he sobbed. He had lost everything the family had because of alcohol, and he still drank. He had tried to quit and was drinking far less than when the family lived with him.

Maria shared her new faith with her mother and brother, who are deaf. It was difficult for them to form bonds of friendship with others, but eventually they accepted the Adventist faith and joined the church.

When her son Hector was seven, he developed a high fever. The doctor found that Hector had a heart condition and feared that he would not survive. Hector needed emergency surgery to repair his heart, and Maria asked the church members to pray throughout surgery. Soon he could live a normal life. Maria took her son's case to the pastor and asked the church members to pray.

Today Hector is studying for the ministry at Chile Adventist University. He has two brothers, and Juan, 16, also wants to become a minister.

Maria rejoices that God has brought so much good into her life, which started out so bad. She loves to sing praises to God and share her faith with others.

Mission offerings provide materials and evangelistic outreach to lead people such as Maria to Christ. Thank you.

MARIA MEDINA *lives in southern Chile, where she shares her faith with all who will listen.*