

WHAT IS THE MOST *Important* THING IN LIFE?

THE SKEPTIC'S GUIDE TO LIFE WITH GOD: ECCLESIASTES · ECCLESIASTES 12 · FEBRUARY 11, 2024 · PASTOR MATT ERICKSON

*"Remember your Creator
in the days of your youth,
before the days of trouble come."
(Ecclesiastes 12:1)*

Stages of Life and Stages of Faith (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7)

Engaging this passage on various levels: literal, metaphorical, allegorical
The concept of stages of faith

A Return to a Theme (Ecclesiastes 12:8)

The meaning of hebel:

- literally: "vapor" or "breath"
- figuratively: "meaningless," "empty," "fleeting," or "vanity"

The beginning and the end:

- Starting with meaningless means one thing
- Ending with meaningless means another
- Second naivete, deconstruction, disentangling, and moving forward with faith

What Matters Most (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)

The editorial reflections on Qohelet

The editorial summary of Qohelet

A creed for reapproaching life amidst skepticism (12:13-14)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What would you say the most important thing in life is? Why?
2. This week we conclude our preaching series, "The Skeptic's Guide to Life with God," based in the book of Ecclesiastes. Whether you are on your own or with others, begin your study in prayer, asking God to speak to you, and then read Ecclesiastes 12 aloud.
3. Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 poetically explores the passing of time. At a literal level, this passage expresses the decay of a household or estate. At a metaphorical level, this passage speaks of our own human experience of aging, including in our bodies. In many ways this passage continues a reflection begun in 11:7-10, so you may want to read that

passage as well. How does the description reflect your own experience of life and the passing of time?

4. Several weeks ago, Matt referenced seasons as a way to think of our human life with God. What season best describes your current experience of life with God?
 - *Spring* – the season of new birth or spiritual awakening
 - *Summer* – the season of spiritual strengthening or vitality
 - *Fall* – the season of spiritual surviving or decline
 - *Winter* – the season of emptiness or spiritual deepening
5. In verse 8, the author returns to a theme that opened this book in 1:2. How might restating this theme after the journey through this book be similar to or different now at the end of the book?
6. The book concludes in verses 9-14 with a later editor's reflection and summary of Ecclesiastes. What stands out to you about these verses?
7. 12:13-14 offer a particularly profound summary of the book. What do you think this means?
8. What has God been speaking to you through this study and the entire sermon series? If you are with a small group, discuss that with one another and then pray about what you shared. If you are on your own, write it down, pray about it, and share this with someone during the next few days.

DIG DEEPER

- Memorize Ecclesiastes 12:13
- This final part of Ecclesiastes summarizes aspects of the entire book, particularly in verses 13-14. How would you summarize life with God in 1-3 sentences? Consider writing it down and sharing it with a friend.
- Consider reading one of the following books to continue wrestling with hard questions or growth through the stages of faith:
 - Greg Boyd and Edward Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*
 - J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*
 - Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*
 - Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*
 - A. J. Swoboda, *After Doubt: How to Question Your Faith without Losing It*