

Week Four
Conversations with God

ECCLESIASTES, PART I



READ

Depth of insight, along with wisdom, often comes through experience. We experience life and gain insight into life. Interestingly, though, this depth of insight and wisdom not only comes as we experience our own lives, but it also comes as we listen to the lives of others. Wise is the person who asks questions, who listens, who observes the lives of others, not to judge, but to gain wisdom and insight. Even wiser is the one who takes time to sit with those who have experienced more of life and simply ask, “What have you learned?” or “What would you do differently?”

Our daily Scripture readings this week provide this opportunity.

Ecclesiastes reads much like a personal memoir. It’s our opportunity to sit down with King Solomon and ask, “What have you learned?” and “What would you do differently?” The vantage point of a king provides a unique perspective. As king of Israel, Solomon was able to do and experience what most only dream of doing and experiencing. His life abounds with the kind of successes many spend their entire lives attempting to achieve but often miss. Reading Ecclesiastes is a bit like planning a journey to a distant country and talking to someone who has not just dreamed of going there, but who has gone there and come back. We are able to ask, “Would you go again?” and “Should I go too?”

This week, you’ll read the first six chapters of Solomon’s memoir. As you read, listen for the overarching story of Solomon’s quest for the meaning of life, but also listen for wise proverbs and words of insight along the way. As you incorporate your Scripture reading into your conversations with God, reflect on your own personal quest for purpose and meaning in life. Consider the parts of Solomon’s story that remind you of your own story and talk to God about wisdom you’ve gained along the way.

MEMORIZE

Scripture memory is a bit like doing spiritual push-ups. Some will take to it naturally. Others will struggle. If you’re in the struggle category, you’re not alone, but don’t miss this opportunity. Engaging this exercise is well worth the effort. This week’s passages are both profound and succinct. As you memorize them, consider how Solomon’s life might have read differently had he fully embraced these truths from a young age. No doubt Solomon was familiar with both. One comes from the Ten Commandments, and the other was penned by Solomon’s father, King David.

This week’s memory verses:

You shall have no other gods before me (Exodus 20:3).

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple (Psalm 27:4).

MEDITATE

As you read Solomon's story, consider reflecting on your own unique story in your daily conversations with God. What part of Solomon's journey could you map over a portion of your own journey? Did you reach similar conclusions? Or what paths might Solomon have completed that you are currently partially down? Is there wisdom you can gain from this person who has been to the end of that path and come back? Just as Solomon was able to better understand his past experiences with the benefit of hindsight, we too can gain fresh insight into our own story by revisiting past events and circumstances from our current vantage point in life.

On days when you have extended time to talk with God, consider using one of the following suggestions to guide your reflection:

- ▶ Grab a journal and write a summary of the major seasons of your life (e.g., childhood before parents' divorce, childhood after parents' divorce, adolescence, college years, etc.). Reflecting on each season in turn, ask God to give you new insight into significant events, salient emotions, or relational dynamics of that time. Journal these insights as God reveals them to you.

- ▶ Pull out some old pictures or bring other nostalgic or symbolic items into your time with God. Use these as tangible reminders of a previous season of life. Invite God into this space with you as if talking with a good friend. Talk to God about the memories, the lessons learned, the good experiences, and the hard experiences. Ask God, "What have I learned?" or "What can I learn from these now?"

As always, remember that your conversations with God should be highly personalized to your own situation, while listening to God's voice through Scripture and by his Spirit. What is most important is that you continue to cultivate an authentic relationship with God through daily connection. Talk to God about what is truly on your heart and do so in a way that is most natural for you. If you find it helpful to reflect on your own story with God, do so; if not, as always, blaze your own trail.