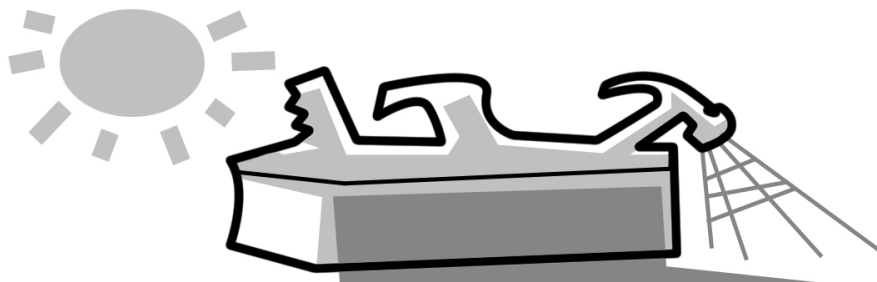


## More Life on Earth



### SABBATH—JANUARY 27

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Ecclesiastes 4.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Carry each other’s heavy loads. If you do, you will give the law of Christ full meaning” (Galatians 6:2, NlrV).

**AS WE BEGIN THIS WEEK, YOU’LL NOTICE SOMETHING INTERESTING.** It is something that Bible writers have discussed for many hundreds of years. Ecclesiastes starts to sound more and more like the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is a series of short sayings about practical (useful) knowledge for daily life. These proverbs are not always easy to understand.

For example, Proverbs 6:6 says, “Go to the ant, thou [you] sluggard.”<sup>1</sup> Words about a “naughty [bad] person” (Proverbs 6:12) follow. Then there is a warning about six things “that God hates” (Proverbs 6:16, NlrV). Next there are words about obeying parents (Proverbs 6:20). And finally there is a warning about the dangers of sinful women (Proverbs 6:24-35).

We can see some of this same style in Ecclesiastes 4. In this chapter, Solomon discusses many questions. They cover everything from the oppression<sup>2</sup> that causes many people to suffer to the meaning of life. Then there is the question of envy (jealousy) and questions about the purpose of work. Finally there are ideas of community and fellowship. Solomon’s sentences are often sharp, to the point, poetic, and without much explanation. But they discuss larger themes (subjects; ideas) that speak to us today. Let us take a look to see what God is saying.

<sup>1</sup>sluggard—a lazy person.

<sup>2</sup>oppression—pressure on people to do things against their will.

**SUNDAY—JANUARY 28****THE OPPRESSORS<sup>3</sup>  
(Ecclesiastes 4:1-3)**

**Rewrite in your own words what Solomon is saying in Ecclesiastes 4:1-3.**

Solomon is looking at life from a worldly viewpoint. His words are interesting when you think that a king is writing them. It would be different if a slave were complaining about suffering at the hands of his or her masters or if a poor person were suffering under the oppression of the rich. But here you have the richest and most powerful leader in the nation complaining about injustice and oppression.

**We like to think of oppression in connection with politics or wealth. But there are other ways people can be oppressed. What about husbands and wives, or parents and children? What about the use of religion to oppress and “use” others? Or what about employers and employees? Or sexual molestation? Is molestation or rape a form of oppression? What other kinds of oppression can you think of? Could someone be an oppressor without even knowing it? What principles<sup>4</sup> are found in the following verses that would protect**

**someone from being oppressive?<sup>5</sup> Mark 10:43, 44; 1 Corinthians 9:19; Philippians 2:3; 2 Timothy 2:24; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:11.**



**Jesus came to help others. So we should help others, too.**

If power is used correctly, it can be a great blessing. With power, one can guide others in the right direction. But power is also a very easy thing to abuse. It has been said, “The more power a person has, the more he abuses it.”—Adapted. Most of us, in one way or another, have power over others. How do we use that power?

**What power do you have? How well are you following the principles shown in the verses for today? What changes might help you make sure you are not abusing your power?**

<sup>3</sup>oppressors—people who cause other people to do things against their will.

<sup>4</sup>principles—basic rules of life.

<sup>5</sup>oppressive—to pressure people to do things against their will.

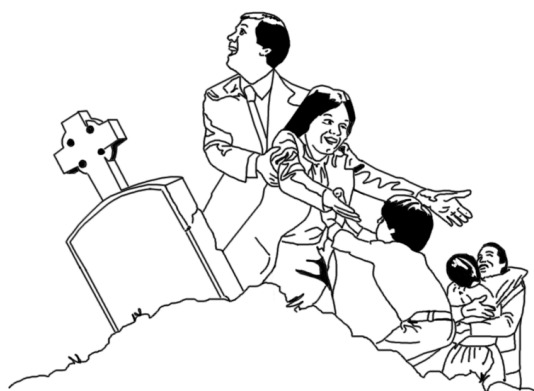
**MONDAY—JANUARY 29****IS LIFE WORTH IT?  
(Ecclesiastes 4:2, 3)**

“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem. That is suicide. Is life worth it or not? This is a fundamental (basic) question of philosophy.”<sup>6</sup>—Adapted from Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 3.

Ecclesiastes 4:2, 3 and the quote by Camus are worded differently. But they discuss almost the same question: Is human life worth the bother? We suffer from all the pain and disappointments of life. But we still die.

The answer depends upon your understanding of what life means. If one believes that nothing comes after death, you will have one opinion. If you believe this life is only a temporary stop on the way to something better, then you will have another opinion. In many ways, the answer to the question “Is life worth it?” depends on the question of death. Is death the end? Or is death only the end of the beginning?

**What is your answer to the question, “Is life worth it?” Use Bible verses to support your answer.**



Life is worth it!

**TUESDAY—JANUARY 30****ENVY (JEALOUSY)  
(Ecclesiastes 4:4-6)**

Solomon has said that one is better off to have not been born, rather than to live and see all the oppression there is on earth (Ecclesiastes 4:1). Then he jumps into another theme—“envy” (Ecclesiastes 4:4-6). But it is worthwhile to see what the Bible has to say about envy. Even one of the Ten Commandments deals with envy (Exodus 20:17). But Solomon goes deeper: *All toil and all skillful work is nothing but a person being jealous of a neighbor.* That is a negative attitude.<sup>7</sup> But there is some truth to it.

Envy is more than a human problem. Envy was really the first sin. “Satan was envious and jealous of Jesus Christ. When all the angels bowed to Jesus to praise His high authority<sup>8</sup> and rightful rule, Satan bowed with them. But Satan’s heart was filled with envy

<sup>6</sup>philosophy—the study of wisdom.

<sup>7</sup>attitude—how a person thinks and feels toward God, other people, or things.

<sup>8</sup>authority—influence that creates respect and trust.

and hate.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 18. When we start showing envy and jealousy, we are reflecting Satan’s character.

**Find three stories in the Bible where envy played a big part. What were the results of this envy? What lessons can we learn about the results of envy?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**What has been your own experience with envy? What steps can you take to overcome envy? By thinking about Jesus, how can you destroy envy before it destroys you?**

### **WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 31**

#### **LABOR (WORK) FOR WHOM? (Ecclesiastes 4:7, 8)**

Read Ecclesiastes 4:7, 8. In yesterday’s lesson, Solomon said all work and skill was nothing but envy. In Ecclesiastes 4:7, 8, he discusses

work. What do people work for? In this case, Solomon is talking about someone who is alone, who has no one to support or to pass on the results of his labor. Is he working only for himself? If so, why?

Ecclesiastes 4:7, 8 raise an important question about being human. Often, the most unhappy of all humans are the most selfish. But after a while, they see how small they are, how hopeless life is, how unimportant they are in the world. Such people find so little purpose to their lives. As humans, we were not designed to live only for ourselves. Instead, the whole purpose of selfless love is to live in order to help others. Jesus showed this in His life. Life is more fulfilling and joyful when one gives of oneself for others. And the good news is that you do not have to be married, or have children, to do this. By being with people, you can be a blessing to them. By blessing others, you receive a blessing for yourself.

**What message do the following verses have about living and working for others in today’s lesson? Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 10:45; Acts 2:43-45; Acts 20: 35; Hebrews 13:1-3.**



**Remember people in prison  
(Hebrews 13:3).**

**What things are important to you? How much time do you spend thinking only about yourself and your own needs? How well are you fulfilling Christian duty to live not just for yourself but for others?**

### **THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 1**

#### **COMMUNITY (Ecclesiastes 4:8-12)**

In Ecclesiastes 4:8-12, Solomon has moved toward another series of thoughts. He moves from living only for oneself to being better off in a community. Solomon is writing in poetic style, so he uses a few special examples of how much better two people are than one. His point is important: As humans, we were made for community. We were made to keep in touch with others. We were made to need others.

In 1998, a landlord entered the Bonn, Germany, apartment of a man named Wolfgang Dircks. The bank had stopped paying Dircks's rent bills. The landlord found a skeleton in a chair in front of a television. The television was broken. But it was still on. Christmas lights on his tree were still flashing. Near Wolfgang's chair was a television program guide from December 5, 1993. Wolfgang probably died that day. And nobody, for at least five years, missed him. Talk about the need for others!

**What point is Paul making in 1 Corinthians 12 that is the same point Solomon is making in Ecclesiastes 4:8-12?**

There is no established "one-man or one-woman physics." In the same way, there is no "one-man or one-woman Christianity." Of course, Christian faith means nothing if a person does not have a one-to-one relationship with God. That is very important. But out of that human-to-God relationship, a Christian also is to have a relationship with a community—the church.

It is common to hear people say, "I want nothing to do with organized religion." Well, what do they want? Disorganized religion? Of course not! Instead, what they really do not want is responsibility to a group that is bigger than themselves.

**How well do you relate to your local church? What can you do to be more active in using your gifts in your church? How willing are you to ask your church for help with something that you cannot do on your own?**

### **FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 2**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 261–265; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 29, 30.

A writer named Kurt Vonnegut once said, "What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, of course! But the most important thing is to create strong communities. In such groups the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured."—Adapted.

*Koinonia* is the Greek word for "fel-

lowship.” As humans, we were created for community and fellowship. But not just any kind of fellowship. After all, if you want human fellowship, you can go to a bar or to a football game and fellowship with others. The Bible idea of human fellowship is a fellowship that comes from a community of people who have promised God to love, care for, and help each other. Christian people share common views, common goals, common dreams, and a common purpose. But most of all, they care about each other and are dedicated to helping each other, no matter what their needs are. That is what Christian community should be about.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ As a class, discuss this question: How well does your local church work as a community? How well does it work together to meet the needs of its members? List the areas where your church is strong and where it is weak. What can you do as a class to help your local church fulfill its role as a community of believers who love God and each other?
- ❷ Read aloud and discuss your answers to the question, Is life worth it?
- ❸ Discuss power and how power is used. What invisible ways can someone abuse power? What problems can arise when someone does not use the power they have been given?