



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**ECCLESIASTES &
SONG OF SONGS**

Week 3

Power and Responsibility

Ecclesiastes 10:15-20

OPENING
up to the Word

Can you think of parts of the planet where wise, compassionate and effective leadership is lacking?

DIGGING
into the Word

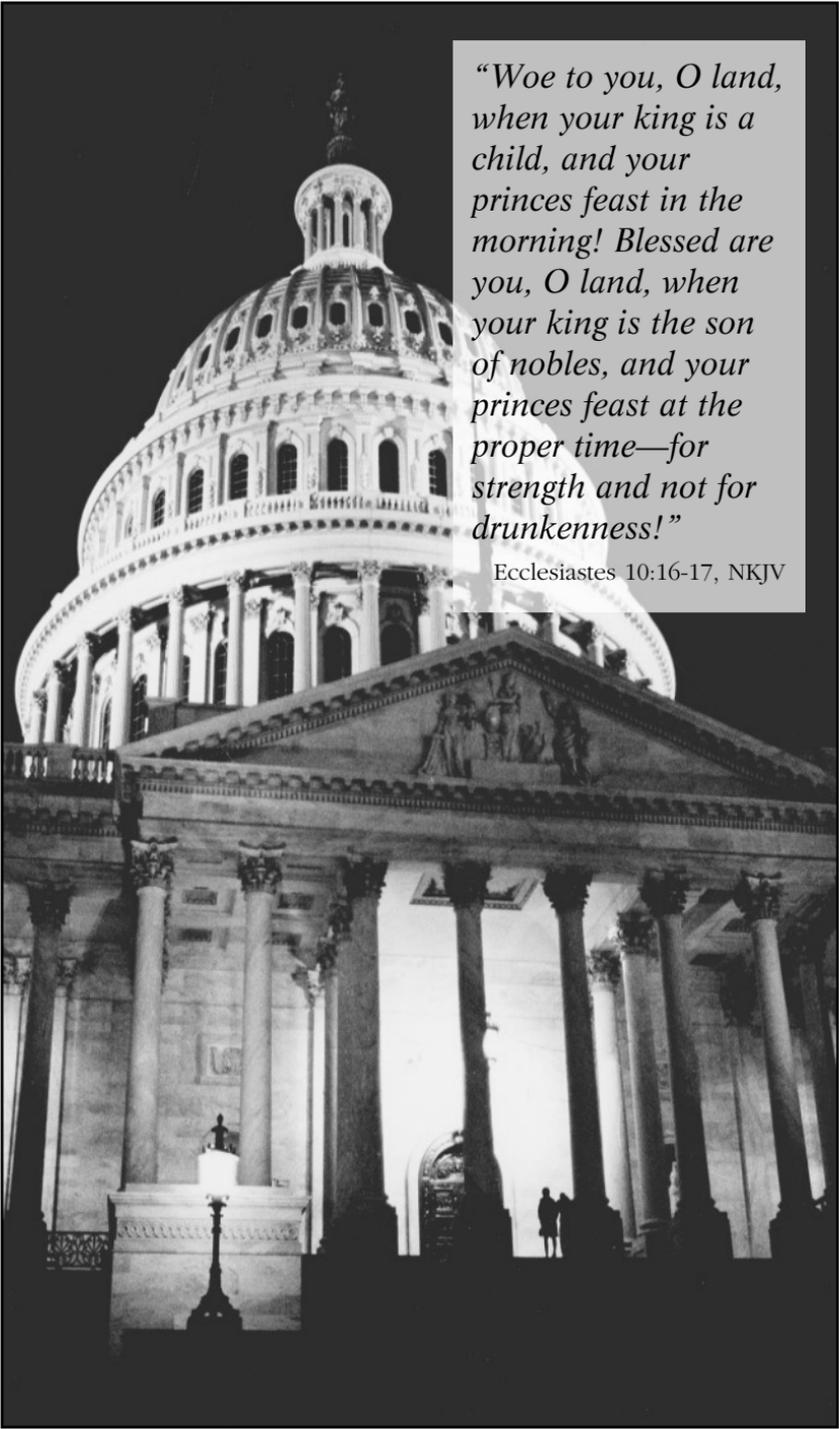
1. How does the fool exhaust himself?
2. What kind of leader is completely ineffective? What is the end result of continued laziness?
3. What is the “answer for everything”? Do you agree or disagree with the writer?
4. According to the writer, even thoughts are dangerous. Do you agree?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Can you recall a time when you made poor, foolish choices? How did you feel emotionally? Was it an exhausting, wearying experience (v. 15)?
2. How could more money solve some problems for you? How can *too much* money become a problem?
3. In your opinion, what makes a good leader? What makes a bad leader? How have you been affected by good and bad leaders?

WINDOW
on the Word

*In this section, the Teacher tackles the issue of a **responsible society** saying that anarchy is a poor substitute for social order. However, a stable society is only possible when there is wise, compassionate and effective leadership. Verse 16 refers to a **king who was a servant**. That description makes it difficult to determine just what sort of king is being described. The word translated “servant” can also mean “child” (as it is in the New King James Version quote on the opposite page). The verse probably refers to someone who has suddenly come into power and who keeps his position by allowing deputies to do whatever they want, including feasting (partying) at all hours of the day or night (v. 17).*



*“Woe to you, O land,
when your king is a
child, and your
princes feast in the
morning! Blessed are
you, O land, when
your king is the son
of nobles, and your
princes feast at the
proper time—for
strength and not for
drunkenness!”*

Ecclesiastes 10:16-17, NKJV

The Good You Do Comes Back to You

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

OPENING
up to the Word

We get out of life what we first pour into it, according to verse 1. Has this always been your experience, or can you think of what seem to be exceptions to this rule? Does the good you do always come back to you?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Compare verse 1 with other “sowing and reaping” scriptures such as: Job 4:8; Galatians 6:8-9; Psalm 126:5; 2 Corinthians 9:6. Using your own words, re-write the first sentence to convey its meaning more clearly.

2. Which verse could refer to the modern financial concept of “diversifying a portfolio”?

3. Consider the meaning of verse 4 and rewrite the proverb in your own words.

4. What don’t we know? Is verse 5 a statement of faith or a statement of despair?

LIVING
out the Word

1. “Give and spend, and God will send,” said the 18th century writer Henry George Bohn. Do you agree? Would the writer of Ecclesiastes have agreed?

2. Verse 3 reminds people to first have a clear understanding of a situation before starting a venture. It can be very difficult to reverse course after one begins. Have you ever plunged into something only to realize you made a mistake? What was the outcome?

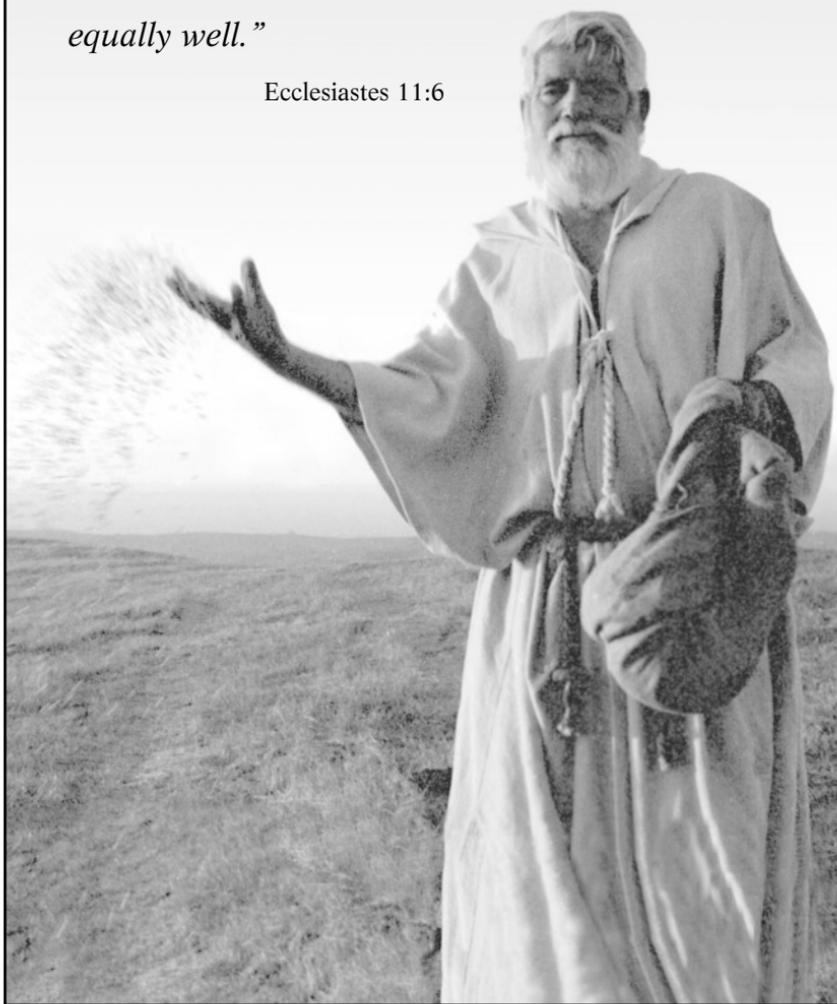
3. Some scholars believe verse 4 is a warning against being too cautious. Are you guilty of waiting until circumstances are perfect before acting?

WINDOW
on the Word

*Verse 1 is perhaps the most quoted from Ecclesiastes—**Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.** This is not an invitation to give simply in order to receive a reward. Rather, it points to the reality that sincere generosity is rewarded in surprising and enriching ways. People who give of themselves and their resources find that when they are in need, they have a large circle of friends. Compare Ecclesiastes 11:1 to Jesus’ teaching in Luke 6:38.*

“Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.”

Ecclesiastes 11:6



Celebrating Life

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10

OPENING
up to the Word

Reflect on these words from Episcopal minister Phillips Brooks:

*Be such a man, and live such a life,
That if every man were such as you,
And every life a life like yours,
This earth would be God's Paradise.*

What elements and qualities would be part of a life that transformed the earth into paradise?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why does the writer declare that "light is sweet"?
2. What is the value of remembering "days of darkness"?
3. What advice is offered to young people? Is it something you agree with?
4. What warning is given concerning how one lives?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What life experiences do you view as most pleasant? Most sacred? Most frightening? Most satisfying?
2. Helen Keller, who was both blind and deaf, still declared: "I laugh and shout for life is good, Though my feet are set in silent ways." Think about ways in which you take life for granted and consider ways in which you could heighten the ability to truly celebrate the gift of life.
3. Are you making (or did you make) the most of your youth? Any regrets? Unfinished business? While you can't go back in time, are there steps you can take to correct some things?

Aging Gracefully

DAY 18

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

You are almost finished with the book of Ecclesiastes. Do you feel the writer would be in agreement with this statement from Benjamin Disraeli: "Youth is a blunder; manhood, a struggle; old age, a regret." How does faith in God oppose such a harsh view of life?

1. Read this chapter and underline statements that speak strongly to you.
2. The writer paints three pictures of old age. Paraphrase the first picture (vs. 1-2), the second picture (vs. 3-4) and finally the third picture (v. 5).
3. The Teacher who wrote this book had certain talents and a task before him. What were they?

1. In the first verse, the writer seems to imply that if we don't remember God when we are young, we probably won't remember God in our senior years. Do you agree with his assessment?
2. Do eternal values affect your living today? What would you do differently if you did not believe?
3. What are some effective ways to "remember your Creator in the days of your youth"?
4. You have just completed the book of Ecclesiastes. Now, reflect and think about those statements that had the most impact on you.

*Several Semitic phrases in this chapter may be difficult to understand today. The **golden bowl** (v. 6) is believed to refer to the cranial cavity and is a poetic expression describing the cessation of the mind at the time of death. The **broken pitcher** and **wheel** should be viewed together as a reference to the circulatory system and heart with the breakdown of blood pressure. The **silver cord** refers to the breaking of the delicate thread of life.*

OPENING

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Introduction to Song of Songs

Authorship: The opening verse ascribes authorship to King Solomon, yet his authorship has been debated for centuries. Some say he penned every word. Other scholars believe this little book is a collection of writings authored and edited by many people, including Solomon. While portions of the book don't seem consistent with the lifestyle of the super-polygamist Solomon, he may have been writing in an idealistic sense.

Date: This book could have been written or collected during Solomon's reign in the 10th century B.C. Others assign a much later date, saying it was compiled long after Solomon's rule.

Setting and purpose: Song of Songs was written for the people of God that they might celebrate God's gifts of love and sexuality. The very title, *Song of Songs*, is an ancient way of saying this book is "Top of the Pops." Song of Songs is a lofty designation, much as "King of kings" refers to the greatest King and the "holy of holies" was the most holy place in Israel.

Because this book is a collection of love poems, its appearance as part of the Bible has been heatedly debated. Some doubted that such a book belonged in the Bible, while others rushed to its defense. The Jewish Rabbi Akiba declared: "The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." Nearly 1,200 years later Bernard of Clairvaux, a Roman Catholic monk, shared Akiba's enthusiasm for the book and preached 86 sermons on the first two chapters—although he interpreted the passages dealing with sexuality allegorically.

Distinctive features: This is a highly poetic book. In ancient times poetry was a popular form of entertainment. Key people in this book include Solomon, the Shulammitte woman and various friends. The purpose is to portray the sharing of love between the groom (King Solomon) and his bride. This book affirms the sanctity of marriage and celebrates God's gracious gift of sexual intimacy. The book is a drama or play, and may have been a work of fiction designed for public performance.

Reading outline:

Day	Text	Theme
19	Song of Songs 1:1-7	What's in a Kiss?
20	Song of Songs 1:8-17	A Lover's Praise
21	Song of Songs 2:1-13	The Season of Love
22	Song of Songs 2:14-17	Open and Honest Communication
23	Song of Songs 3:1-11	Seeking and Finding
24	Song of Songs 4:1-7	You Look Like a Goat...and Other Compliments
25	Song of Songs 4:8-16	Marriage Refresher
26	Song of Songs 5:1-8	Marital Dreams and Nightmares
27	Song of Songs 5:9-16	Friends and Lovers
28	Song of Songs 6:1-13	Receiving Help From Friends
29	Song of Songs 7:1-13	Marital Maturity and Freedom
30	Song of Songs 8:1-14	Leaning on Your Lover

*“Let him kiss me with
the kisses of his mouth
—for your love is more
delightful than wine.”*

Song of Songs 1:2



Photo by Barry Stahl—PTM

What's in a Kiss?

Song of Songs 1:1-7

Think back to your most romantic moment. What made it that way? Why do romantic moments occur? What age group is most likely to have such a moment—teenagers, people in their 20s, the middle aged, seniors?

1. Describe the woman who is speaking in these verses. What kind of work did she do (vs. 5-6)? What makes her feel self-conscious?
2. How is the king portrayed? What conclusions can you arrive at concerning his physical, emotional and spiritual qualities?
3. Is this woman simply available to her man or is she assertive? Aggressive?
4. The reference to a veiled woman in verse 7 is the woman's way of saying that although she is in love with the king, she does not want to be mistaken for a prostitute (See Ge 38:13-15). She is not looking for just any man. Rather, she has committed herself to the man of her dreams and wants to know where he can be found.

1. It has been said that a kiss can be a comma, a question mark or an exclamation point. Are these valid distinctions? What do they mean?
2. All of us have some area of our lives about which we are self-conscious. What is that for you? Does it affect your relationship with your spouse, friends and family?
3. Scholars note that this love poem is unlike other ancient literature in that the two lovers meet as equals. How would you describe your marital relationship—as two equals or unbalanced? Mismatched? Would changes be helpful?

The **tents of Kedar** cited in verse 5 refer to an area south of Damascus where Bedouins frequently roamed. Their tents were commonly made of black goat skins.

DAY 19

OPENING
up to the Word

DIGGING
into the Word

LIVING
out the Word

WINDOW
on the Word

A Lover's Praise

Song of Songs 1:8-17

OPENING
up to the Word

When was the last time you praised your spouse?
When was the last time your spouse praised you?
How does praise make you feel? Think back to one
of the most delightful compliments paid to you by
your spouse.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. This passage contains two responses to the woman who is speaking in verses 1-7. The first response (v. 8) is from female friends. How do they reassure the woman and build her confidence? The second response (vs. 9-11) is from her lover. How does he refer to her? How does he describe her? Finally, what is her response to him?

2. Do you detect a change in the confidence level of the woman from verse 6 to that of verses 12-14 and 16? What accounts for the change?

LIVING
out the Word

1. In verse 9 the man compares his lover's beauty to that of a beautiful purebred horse that pulls Pharaoh's chariot. To what would you compare your spouse's beauty? Put your romantic imagination to work here!

2. What one thing does your spouse do that increases your confidence when you are feeling overwhelmed or discouraged?

3. In verse 16, the woman uses, for the first time, her pet name for Solomon—"my lover." She will use it 27 times in this book when she speaks to him or about him. What are some common affectionate expressions used by husbands and wives today? Which are your favorites?

WINDOW
on the Word

The word translated **darling** appears for the first time in the Bible in this book (v. 9). The original Hebrew can also be translated as "dearest" and "love." The word will be used nine times in the Song and is used each time by the man to refer to his beloved. **Henna** (v. 14) is a Palestinian shrub whose leaves were used to produce a bright orange-red cosmetic dye, used to color the hair, hands and feet. The henna blossoms also emitted a delightful fragrance.

The Season of Love

DAY 21

Song of Songs 2:1-13

What season did you fall in love with your partner? Is there an “ideal” season for romantic love? What season are you in? Spring—the freshness of new growth? Summer—lazy, carefree days filled with fun? Fall—many changes and transitions on the horizon? Winter—cozy and warm by the fire?

1. What is the woman’s assessment of herself? How does her self-evaluation compare to the evaluation her lover has about her?
2. What phrases and words convey to the woman how special she is to her lover?
3. Go through this section and list the metaphors drawn from nature: animals, birds, trees, flowers, mountains. Some scholars feel this description hints of a return to Eden (Ge 2:18-25) because of its simplicity, purity and equality.
4. From your reading of this section, during what season of the year is this love story taking place?

1. In verse 1 the young woman responds to her lover’s compliments by saying she is rather plain and even unworthy of his affection. Are her comments evidence of an inferiority complex, or is it normal for new lovers to ask for reassurance? Do you minimize or deflect praise that is sincerely offered to you?

2. The images and symbols used in this section to describe each other are pastoral and agricultural. Write a love letter praising your partner’s physical and spiritual beauty using images and symbols that are meaningful to you.

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