

All is Vanity

A Study on the Book
of Ecclesiastes

H.

About This Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

Looking for a group? Please visit www.heartofmarywf.com/groups to find a meet up near you.

Are you already in one but not listed on our website? Looking to start one? Please contact us for more information about our "HOM Ambassador" program. We have team members available specifically to help you grow a local group and lead other women through community, prayer, and devotion. Their support is available at all times. We also want to help you grow! We will advertise your group on our website & social media! And we have free resources for you as well. Please email us at heartofmarywf@aol.com

Note: All written content has been reviewed by a Catholic spiritual director to cross check that all statements align with the teachings and tenants of the Roman Catholic Church.

© 2016 Heart of Mary Women's Fellowship. The "All is Vanity" devotions, along with other bible studies, Marian Consecration, Catholic Talks, and other free downloads can be found at heartofmarywf.com,

The Ecclesiastes Team



Writer

*Jenna
Hadley*



Graphic Designer

*Rachel
Peñate*



Writing Director

*Michelle
Workman*



Photographer


*Regan
Ballin*

This journal can be printed and reproduced freely. This journal is not for sale or profit. If you would like to be an art, photography, or writing contributor, please contact us at heartofmarywf@aol.com



All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes: Day One

@heartofmarywf  heartofmarywf.com

Good morning Ladies and Happy Resurrection! For the next few days, we are going to be diving deep into the depths of Solomon's soul, as he reflects on the meaning of life. In this text, he calls himself "the Teacher" which have caused some question as to if Solomon truly wrote the book or not. It was not until I read through the Old Testament that I realized that Solomon was more than qualified to write such a book. Although he was not a Prophet, God granted him great wisdom, since that was what his heart desired more than anything else (1 Kings 3:5-14).

Ecclesiastes is written from the point of view of a Qoheleth - usually translated as preacher or teacher. Ecclesiastes challenges us to confront the contradictions of life. This is more than fitting for our Year of Mercy, as the very definition of mercy begs us to be benevolent and forgiving of those who may not deserve it.

In Chapter One, the preacher cuts to the chase in the second verse of the book: "All is vanity" Ecclesiastes 1:2

That statement is particularly powerful because the book of Proverbs (directly preceding Ecclesiastes) tells us a lot about what is to be considered vain or foolish,

but in no way describes everything. He then goes on about how the earth remains long after our parents, grandparents, children, and we return to dust. So... why work? Why strive to leave a legacy? Nothing we have done is so great that it would even be remembered (1:9-11).

**"Give your servant
a listening heart"
(1 Kings 3:9)**

The natural course for the Christian person to follow would be to return to wisdom, as Proverbs and many New Testament books are full of verses that teach us to seek this before all else. As women, we are called daily to bestow wisdom upon others whether it is to our children or our friends. The teacher breaks our spirit by ending this first chapter comparing seeking wisdom to seeking the wind:

"Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain." (1:18)

I have always jokingly compared that last verse to Spiderman's Uncle's famous line, "with great power, comes great responsibility" and would even argue that the perhaps, the writer may have known himself a little Bible before adding in that line. Like Spiderman, we see the world differently as we age, and especially once we gain the life experiences that shape our inmost being. To be more informed on anything is both a blessing and a burden, as it grants us the ability to assist more fully, but also feel more deeply. It appears that some of our greatest traumas afford us the opportunity to seek God's peace and strength and, later, help others who have gone through similar trials. If we only associate wisdom with pleasure, then it can surely be in vain but if we explore our hearts in discernment, we may be guided a different way.

– Jenna

Reflect: When has wisdom appeared to work against you? How could God be showing you that isn't so?

Act: Carve out time to spend with someone you consider wise.



In Chapter Two, the teacher seeks the value of pleasures and possessions, stating in detail what he's done to chase after earthly things.

He concludes by saying,

"All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

**Whatever you
do, do your
work heartily,
as for the Lord.**

It is so easy to get caught up in the latest and greatest of our lives. Whether it's name brand purses, perfectly manicured nails, or getting that fabulous moment into an Instagram square, all have the ability leave us feeling "meh," even once we've gotten what we wanted. The feeling of dissatisfaction dwarfed the people

of Israel on their journey from Egypt to Canaan. Even the Disciples felt dissatisfied when Jesus left a parable unexplained or changed the route of their missionary journey. But this is not something the Lord desires for us.

The teacher admits that although wisdom is better than foolishness (2:13), both lead to the same end, thus stressing the finality of death. This final chapter of all our lives ends the same — this should actually encourage us as believers! I write finality of death because the finality of life does not exist, as we are eternally living with Heavenly Father whether in this life or the next. This serves as a reminder that we are not to judge those who (seemingly always) act foolish.

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind. (2:24-26)

Solomon provides readers with a "best of" attitude regarding work. Paul reiterates the same point when he writes to the Colossians, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." (3:23) In addition to a better attitude, we can expect wisdom, knowledge, and happiness from the Lord when we follow this command.

– Jenna


Reflect: Have you ever felt dissatisfied with your work? How can you change your outlook on your work as "from the Hand of God"?

Act: Volunteer your time this week to helping someone in need.



All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes: Day Three

@heartofmarywf  heartofmarywf.com

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—

A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.
A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.
A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

I challenge you to read this three times in one day—in the morning, noon, and night. Each reading brought a new meaning to my circumstances and that was only in a 24 hour period!

I am guilty of looking for the quick answer for everything. Even in matters of the heart, I will throw open my Bible, find a verse or two on the issue that guide me, and make a decision. Wham, bam, thank you ma'am, no conflict for me — just a problem resolved. With that method sometimes making things worse, and with the guidance of my sweet husband, I feel God has told me that wisdom is gained while God desires and sees our obedience. Obedience is not just doing the right thing one time, but it is following the Holy Spirit with a praying and discerning spirit that allows us to know exactly the right moment and time to follow God's unique calling to our lives.

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. (3:11)

– Jenna

Reflect: How does our timing often differ from God's timing? Could God make our periods of discernment beautiful? How so?

Act: Before you make a big decision, pray for the obedience to follow God's will. on it.



All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes: Day Four

@heartofmarywf  heartofmarywf.com

I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind. (Ecclesiastes 4:4-6)

As most things in life, work started off as a gift from the Lord (Genesis 2:15) but was soon turned to a necessary evil as a result of the fall (Genesis 3:17-19). The fall tends to distort most good, God-given things as is the case with working just for the sake of one-upping your friends or keeping up with the Jones'.

**Move me, Lord,
my heart is
open to you.**

We are cautioned to search our hearts for intentions of our deeds and to also understand our limits, especially when work is taking us away from our relationships with God, family, friends, and the Church (Exodus 20:8).

A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

The teacher ties in the vanity and friendlessness in an interesting manner. I do not believe he means friendlessness to be synonymous with loneliness as he talks about the help that comes from friendship in verses 9 through 12. It is also a good reminder to be equally yoked to those whom we chose to spend our time with (1 Corinthians 6:14).

Verse 13 is noteworthy as the teacher writes that a wise person with no power is better off than a foolish king who cannot receive instruction. As we get older and have gained the experiences we discussed in Chapter 1, it can be easy to mark ourselves “expert” next to certain happenings. We must always be open to the wise counsel of our godly mentors, employers, and most importantly, the Holy Spirit itself.

– Jenna

Reflect: Do you surround yourself with likeminded friends? How can you work and make friends with Christians and non-Christians alike?

Act: Make an extra effort to peacefully coexist with someone you would not necessarily want to.



Verses 1 through 5 certainly advise us to be mindful of not only what we pray for, but how we pray for them.

The Lord delights in our humility (1 Peter 3:3-4) and in our symbiotic ability to look into the hearts of others as we seek the heart of God. Enough with the “if/then” prayers—if we truly think about it—we will never be able to fulfill our end of the deal to the fullest extent. We are taught that prayer is simply another form of communication between us, God, Mary, and the Saints. However, it is not much of a conversation if we do all the talking! I use Adoration to fully center myself amidst a busy and loud world in order to be able to actually take a hot second to listen!

**The Lord
delights in our
humility.**

There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. (Ecclesiastes 5:13)

I must note the Lord has not convicted me about exact tithing percentages, although my family and I support the Church monetarily. What He has convicted me

of, was being greedy. It's embarrassing to admit, but I was that college student who gave exactly \$1 during Sunday collections. When I began dating my husband he, too, was embarrassed and encouraged me to set aside an amount that made more sense (do you sense the pattern of my husband's gentle guidance here?!)

Anyway, the teacher makes it clear that any wealth we may possess is a gift from above, and that gift is neither to be hoarded nor spent foolishly on purchases beyond our means or by gambling.

– Jenna


Reflect: Have you ever made a false promise to God? What became of that vow?

Act: Watch your use this week of the phrases “I promise” or “I swear”. Make a mindful effort to follow through on even the smallest commitments.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes: Day Six

@heartofmarywf  heartofmarywf.com

If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, "Better the miscarriage than he, for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity." (Ecclesiastes 6:3-4)

There is no easy way to read this verse, but perhaps no greater understanding than that of the Christian woman. Losing a child is not something I have personally suffered, but I have, in a small, small, way suffered alongside women as they have mourned that loss. I

It has been said, "there is no greater loss than that of a child" and I believe Solomon uses this powerful example to remind us of the frailty of our own lives. Enjoyment is not the final goal but rather the journey. We all begin our next life at the throne of God, with Jesus as either our advocate or as our adversary and although being joyful is not a commandment, it is stated clearly throughout the Bible that we should, "rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

**The joy of Christ
can surround
us, if only we
let it.**

Please do not confuse joy with happiness as happiness is fleeting but the joy of Christ can surround us, if we only let it.

— Jenna

Reflect: How can you find the joy in the journey of your life?

Act: Be a light of joy for someone who is having a hard time in his or her journey.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes: Day Seven

@heartofmarywf



heartofmarywf.com

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning;
better is a patient spirit than a lofty one.
Do not let anger upset your spirit,
for anger lodges in the bosom of a fool.
(Ecclesiastes 7: 8-9)

It is too easy to live in waiting for the next best thing. Whether it be marriage, children, or missions, our flesh has an uncanny way of keeping our eyes off the present. Verse 8 almost seems to give us an out to continue seeking, but as Christians, we know the end Solomon writes of is not a happy ending found here on earth.

Our generation, and, no doubt, our children's generation is one of instant gratification. When we aren't immediately satisfied, something must be wrong as patience appears to be a long-lost art. A common response to waiting is a buildup of anger, and I am right on top of the guilty list. A way of preventing foolish behavior is found in the verses below,

Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what God has made crooked? On a good day enjoy good things, and on an evil day consider: Both the one and the other God has made, so that no one may find the least fault with him. (7:13-14)



Because the sentence against an evil deed is not promptly executed, the human heart is filled with the desire to commit evil. (Ecclesiastes 8:11)

The theme of impatience is continued in this chapter, but is more geared towards the hearts of the mistreated. Impatience due to lack of justice causes a different type of malice within the heart-evil.

**“Charity must not remain shut up in the depths of the heart.”
(St. Therese of Lisieux)**

The media has no problem reminding us just how toxic those feelings are as parents and politicians alike rage for justice after their loved ones are affected by an awful tragedy. The Teacher understands our frustration when he writes in verse 14 when he says that even he does not understand why, sometimes, the righteous get what the wicked deserve, and vice versa.

However, while God's justice may appear slow, it is sure. Guard your heart against cynicism while you wait for the Lord's justice. Although it is usually easier said than done, a habit my family has adopted is praying for our enemies during our devotional time (Matthew 5:43-48).

– Jenna

Reflect: Have you ever applied your own version of justice before, instead of prayerfully giving it to the Lord? How did that situation turn out?


Act: Memorize Matthew 5:44 and apply it to your prayer life

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes: Day Nine

@heartofmarywf  heartofmarywf.com

Enjoy life with the wife you love, all the days of the vain life granted you under the sun. This is your lot in life, for the toil of your labors under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 9:9)

In Chapter 4, the author mentions the importance of friendship and now he discusses the importance of a spouse. Interestingly, he only mentions wife in the singular though it was well known that he had many wives. Some scholars believe that the wisdom Solomon gained led him to grasp the fulfillment and meaning of a monogamous marriage.

Unlike friendship, marriage is honored as a sacrament as it is a picture of God's relationship with the Church. God's faithfulness, intimacy, and affection towards the Church should be mirrored in your own marital relationship (Hosea 2:19-20).

**“Man cannot fully
find himself, except,
through the sincere
gift of himself.”
(St. John Paul II)**

Although the teacher reiterates our common destiny-death (Ecclesiastes 9:12)- it would be unwise to take it with the carpe diem attitude so commonly described in books and movies. Moses, David, and the Disciples all took a different approach to seizing the day-by letting go of their perceived direction of life, and totally and completely following the Lord.

- Jenna

Reflect: For married women: how can you work to make your marriage more like Christ's love for the Church? For unmarried women: What are some additional qualities in Christ's marital relationship with the Church that you would like to see in your own marriage someday?

Act: Read about a saint who practiced a carpe diem attitude for the Lord.



All is Vanity

Ecclesiastes: Day Ten

@heartofmarywf



heartofmarywf.com

Dead flies corrupt and spoil the perfumer's oil;
more weighty than wisdom or wealth is a little folly!
(Ecclesiastes 10:1)

I am the first to admit that I love putting my life on autopilot and just cruising along. It's easy to go to church and attend Bible study while things are going well and life is just easy. However, it is usually in the midst of those times when I think I know more than I really do and I mess up-big time. After being humbled (er...embarrassed) I retrace my steps and low and behold - I always messed up my autopilot by saying or doing something extremely foolish. I'm sure I'm not the only one whose 'wisdom' has been vulnerable to corruption.

Proverbs 11:2 states that while pride is paired with disgrace, humility and wisdom are also paired. The point of many downfalls usually occurs when our own pride takes over what God is actually doing for us. Our lives are not meant to be lived on autopilot.

Paul expands,

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5: 13-14)

**Taste and see
the goodness
of the Lord.**

We are not soulless mammals just scavenging for food — the food we should most prudently seek the ways of the Lord (Galatians 5:22-23, Hosea 14:9). Once we begin to practice discernment in our daily lives, there will be no room for careless mistakes (Ecclesiastes 10:8-9).

— *Senna*

Reflect: Has your life been on autopilot lately? How can you refocus on the Lord to gain true wisdom?

Act: Begin each morning in prayer as a reminder that you are actively living for Christ every day.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Just as you do not know how the life breath
enters the human frame in the mother's womb,
So you do not know the work of God,
who is working in everything.
(Ecclesiastes 11:5)

My mom always says, "The Lord works in mysterious ways." This statement would usually be made after I had come to her with one of those moments where I exhibited pure foolishness, or when He just threw a complete curveball in my life.

Now that I'm older, I'd like to think I'm wiser (hopefully...) but I am also able to more fully understand the limitations of my humanness. No matter how much I think I know neither myself nor any other can assess with 100% accuracy the heart of another. This knowledge challenges me to be open to mercy in times when I would have been very opposed to it.

**"God is working in
everything."
(Ecclesiastes 11:5)**

Rejoice, O youth, while you are young,
and let your heart be glad in the days of your youth.
Follow the ways of your heart,
the vision of your eyes;
Yet understand regarding all this
that God will bring you to judgment. (11:9)

In tune with verse five, this verse reminds me not to critique those who choose a different life path. The Church has very clear positions on hot topics — abortion, same-sex marriage, and contraception being only a few.

The fact of the matter is that many people will choose to lead these alternative lifestyles fully confident that they are called, sometimes even by God. Instead of harshly judging or arguing with family, friends, and coworkers, let God do the judging.

– Jenna

Reflect: In what situation(s) do you need to be reminded of your humanness and show mercy to others?

Act: Take the first step to healing a broken relationship.



Verses one through seven can be summoned up as, "Remember the Lord before nothing else matters." As frightening as it can be to realize (for the first or one hundredth time) that literally the only thing going to Heaven is our soul, we can also find great comfort in knowing that when our time approaches, our affairs will already be in order if we are baptized in Christ.

Being a daughter of Christ also enables us to fully enjoy each bit of life, even if our dog or favorite purse won't quite make it to Heaven with us.

The last word, when all is heard: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this concerns all humankind. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

It all comes down to that, ladies. The fear of the Lord — our key to meaning in this short chapter called the book of life.

– Jenna

**“Fear the Lord, you his holy ones;
nothing is lacking to those who fear
him.” (Psalm 34:10)**

Reflect: As it stands today, does your life have true and lasting purpose as a daughter of the King? How can your life reflect a healthy fear of the Lord?

Act: Make a list of 10 things you can do to actively keep God's commandments. Hang it somewhere that you will see often.
