

The Book of Ecclesiastes, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: One Fate for All; Enjoy the Life God Gives

Ecclesiastes 9:1–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Help the class hear Solomon's stark sayings about death (9:5, 9:10) as honest observations of life under the sun, the limit of what the eye can see, and not as a doctrine of soul sleep or annihilation, reading them alongside the fuller New Testament revelation of conscious existence, resurrection, and judgment.

Lead the class to receive each ordinary day, with its food, work, marriage, and friendships, as a gift of God to be enjoyed wholeheartedly and not postponed, since none of us knows our hour (9:11–12).

Point the class forward to Christ, the wise One despised by men yet our true Deliverer, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

Question 1

Student Question:

In Ecclesiastes 9:1, what does it mean that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God, and how does that truth steady a believer who cannot yet make sense of life's events?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Solomon opens chapter 9 by reaching a conclusion he has been weighing: the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. To be in God's hand is the language of safekeeping and ownership. Whatever else is uncertain, the lives and labors of the godly are not loose in the universe; they are held. This is the steadying floor beneath everything else the chapter will say.

Yet Solomon adds, in the same breath, that man does not know whether it will be love or hatred awaiting him; all is before him. From his vantage point under the sun, the outward circumstances of life do not reliably signal God's favor or displeasure. A righteous person may meet loss and a wicked person ease, and you cannot read a heart's standing with God off the surface of a life.

Notice that Solomon does not abandon faith here. He holds two things at once: God is sovereign and the godly are in His hand, and yet life's events are not a clear scoreboard. Faith is not the ability to explain every providence. Faith is trusting the Hand that holds us even when we cannot trace its movements.

This is pastorally important. Believers often assume that if they are walking with God, their circumstances should turn out visibly well, and when they do not, they wonder if God has turned away. Solomon gently dismantles that assumption. Being in God's hand is a deeper and surer thing than having an easy road.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereignty over the righteous and their works (9:1) is a comfort, not a promise of comfortable circumstances.
- Outward prosperity or hardship is not a reliable measure of a person's standing with God.
- Faith trusts the One who holds us even when His providence is hidden from our understanding.
- Romans 8:28 deepens this: God works all things together for good for those who love Him, even what we cannot yet read.
- We must not flatter the comfortable as blessed nor judge the suffering as cursed (compare John 9:1–3).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it do to your worry to hear that your life and your works are already in God's hand?
- Where have you been reading your circumstances as a scoreboard of God's favor, and how does 9:1 correct that?
- How is trusting the Hand that holds us different from understanding everything that Hand allows?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where do you tend to look for security when life feels uncertain, and what would change if you rested in being held in God's hand rather than in your own control?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question turns the doctrine of 9:1 inward. Every heart anchors its security somewhere. For some it is money, for others health, control, reputation, or the approval of people. Solomon's word is that the only secure place is the hand of God.

The trouble with our usual anchors is that they all share the weakness chapter 9 exposes: they are under the sun, and time and chance happen to all of them. The savings account can vanish, the body can fail, the plan can collapse. To rest your security there is to rest it on what cannot finally hold.

Resting in God's hand does not make us passive. We still work, save, plan, and care for our bodies. But these become acts of stewardship rather than idols of security. The difference shows up most when those things are threatened: do we panic as though our whole world is in them, or do we grieve and yet remain steady because our world is held by God?

Help the class be concrete. The goal is not a vague resolution to trust God more, but the naming of a specific false anchor and a specific way to lean on the true one this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Everyone trusts something for security; the question is whether it can bear the weight.
- Created anchors share the under-the-sun fragility Solomon describes; only God's hand does not.
- Resting in God still uses means like work and planning, but as stewardship, not as idols.
- The test of where our security rests appears most clearly when that thing is threatened.
- Matthew 6:19–21 calls us to lay up treasure where it cannot be lost.

Discussion Prompts

- When you feel anxious, what do you instinctively reach for to feel safe again?
- What would visibly change in how you handle a setback if your security were truly in God's hand?
- Name one specific false anchor you want to loosen your grip on this week.

Question 3

Student Question:

Solomon says the same event happens to all, the righteous and the wicked alike (9:2–3), and it troubles him. Why does Scripture let this hard observation stand, and what does the rest of the Bible add that Solomon, looking only under the sun, does not say here?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Solomon states the hard fact plainly: one event happens to all, the righteous and the wicked, the clean and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who does not. Death comes to everyone regardless of how they lived. He calls this an evil among all things done under the sun, and it grieves him.

Scripture lets this stand because it is true. Death is the great leveler in this present age; the grave does not check a person's morality at the door. To pretend otherwise would be dishonest, and the Bible never asks us to deny what is real in order to feel better.

But notice Solomon's careful boundary: under the sun. He is describing what the eye can see in this life, where death ends all visible activity. He is not making a final pronouncement on

eternity. He simply does not have the full revelation yet, and he writes within those limits with integrity.

The rest of Scripture adds what Solomon does not say here. The same God who lets death come to all will also raise the dead and judge all (John 5:28–29; Hebrews 9:27). The leveling of the grave is not the last word; the dividing of the judgment is. So we read Solomon's honest grief and let the fuller light of Christ complete the picture.

Teach the class to honor both. We do not soften Solomon's honesty about death, and we do not let his under-the-sun horizon become our whole theology. The Old Testament was written for our learning (Romans 15:4), and the New Testament brings the rest of the story.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Death comes to all alike in this present age; the grave is the great leveler (9:2–3).
- Scripture is honest about hard realities and never asks us to deny what is real.
- Under the sun marks Solomon's horizon: what the eye can see, not the whole of eternity.
- The New Testament adds resurrection and judgment, where the righteous and wicked are finally divided (John 5:28–29; Hebrews 9:27).
- Hold both: Solomon's honest grief and the fuller hope of Christ, without letting either erase the other.
- Romans 15:4 reminds us the Old Testament was written for our instruction and hope.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it healthy that the Bible lets Solomon's grief over death stand without softening it?
- What does the phrase under the sun tell us about the limits of what Solomon is describing?
- How does the New Testament hope of resurrection and judgment complete what Solomon could only half-see?

Question 4

Student Question:

When you see the wicked seeming to prosper and the godly suffering loss, how does your heart respond, and how can the fuller hope of Scripture keep you from bitterness or envy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the previous one into the heart. When we watch the wicked prosper and the faithful suffer, something in us protests. The psalmists felt it too; Asaph nearly slipped when he saw the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73). The feeling is human and not, by itself, sinful.

The danger is what we do with it. Unchecked, that protest curdles into envy of the wicked or bitterness toward God, as though He were unjust or asleep. Asaph found his footing again only when he went into the sanctuary and considered the end of the wicked (Psalm 73:17).

The fuller hope of Scripture is the cure. If this life were all, the apparent injustice would be unbearable. But death is not the end of the account. There is a judgment, a setting right, a reward and a reckoning beyond the grave. That hope lets us release the demand that everything be balanced now.

Lead the class to honesty first and hope second. Pretending we feel no protest only buries it. Bringing it into God's presence, as Asaph did, and letting eternity reframe it is the path out of bitterness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The protest we feel at apparent injustice is human and echoes the psalmists (Psalm 73).
- Left unchecked, that protest hardens into envy of the wicked or bitterness toward God.
- Asaph found peace only when he considered the end of the wicked in God's presence.
- The certainty of judgment frees us from demanding that all accounts be settled now.
- Galatians 6:7–9 assures us that a person reaps what he sows, in God's time.

Discussion Prompts

- When have you felt the sting of seeing the wrong people seem to win? What did you do with that feeling?
- How does Asaph's turn in Psalm 73:17 model the way out of bitterness?
- What demand do you need to release, trusting God to settle accounts in His own time?

Question 5

Student Question:

What does the Preacher mean by saying a living dog is better than a dead lion, that the living know they will die (9:4–5)? How can knowing we will die actually be a gift to how we live?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Solomon's proverb is deliberately jarring: a living dog is better than a dead lion. In his world the dog was a despised scavenger and the lion the noblest of beasts. Yet the lowly creature still alive has something the magnificent one now dead does not: tomorrow. The living know that they will die, he says, but the dead know nothing more under the sun.

The point is not that life is grand and death is nothing. The point is that while we live we still have opportunity, awareness, and the chance to act, to love, to repent, to turn to God. Death, from the under-the-sun view, closes the door on all earthly doing. So even a humble life still in progress is more valuable than the grandest life now finished.

There is a hidden gift in knowing we will die. The beasts do not know it; only humans carry the awareness of their own mortality. That knowledge, rightly received, is not morbid. It is clarifying.

It tells us our days are numbered and therefore precious, and it presses us to live them well (compare Psalm 90:12).

Caution the class again on the phrase the dead know nothing more under the sun. Solomon means they no longer participate in or perceive the affairs of this life under the sun; the deceased have no further share in earthly events (9:6). He is not teaching that the soul is unconscious. The New Testament reveals conscious existence beyond death (Luke 16:19–31; Philippians 1:23). Read the verse for what it claims, not for what it does not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A living dog over a dead lion: even a lowly life in progress still holds opportunity that the grave ends.
- While we live we can still act, love, repent, and turn to God; death closes that earthly door.
- The awareness of our own death is a uniquely human gift that, rightly received, makes us wise (Psalm 90:12).
- The dead know nothing more under the sun means no further share in earthly affairs (9:6), not soul-sleep.
- Luke 16:19–31 and Philippians 1:23 reveal conscious existence after death, completing the picture.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Solomon call a despised living creature better than a magnificent dead one?
- How can remembering that you will die actually make today more precious rather than more grim?
- What does the careful phrase under the sun keep us from wrongly concluding about the soul?

Question 6

Student Question:

Is there a hard truth about your own mortality that you have been avoiding, and how might facing it honestly, as Solomon does, make you wiser and more alive rather than more afraid?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites honest self-examination about mortality. Our culture works hard to keep death out of sight and out of mind. We fill our days with distraction partly so we never have to look it in the face. Solomon refuses that evasion and quietly invites us to do the same.

There is a hard truth many of us avoid: our time is limited, our health is not guaranteed, and the people we love will not always be across the table. We push the thought away because it

frightens us. But avoidance does not buy us more time; it only robs the time we have of its weight.

Facing mortality honestly, in faith, does the opposite of what we fear. It does not paralyze; it focuses. It moves the urgent-but-unimportant to the side and brings the truly important into the center. It makes us readier to forgive, quicker to love, slower to waste a day on what does not matter.

For the believer, this honesty is held inside hope. We face death squarely precisely because Christ has gone through it ahead of us and out the other side. We are not whistling past the graveyard; we are walking through it with the One who holds its keys (Revelation 1:18).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our culture trains us to keep death out of sight, which empties our days of their weight.
- Avoiding the thought of mortality does not buy more time; it wastes the time we have.
- Facing death honestly clarifies priorities and softens us toward love and forgiveness.
- For the believer this honesty rests inside hope, since Christ holds the keys of death (Revelation 1:18).
- Psalm 90:12 prays, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Discussion Prompts

- What truth about your own mortality have you been keeping at arm's length?
- How might facing it honestly, in faith, actually free you rather than frighten you?
- What would you do differently this month if you truly numbered your days?

Question 7

Student Question:

In 9:7-9 Solomon commands us to eat our bread with joy, wear white garments, and love the spouse God has given. Why does he frame everyday enjoyment as something God has already approved, and what does that teach about how God means for His people to live?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the weight of death, Solomon turns to a surprisingly warm command: Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. Put on white garments and oil; enjoy life with the wife whom you love. This is not grim resignation. It is a call to gladness, and it comes as a command, not a guilty pleasure.

The crucial phrase is that God has already approved what you do. The everyday joys of food, celebration, and marriage are not stolen pleasures to be enjoyed with a guilty conscience. They are gifts God has set on the table for His people. To refuse them is not extra holiness; it can be a kind of ingratitude.

Notice the picture of a full life: bread and wine for nourishment and gladness, white garments and oil for celebration and dignity, and a beloved spouse for companionship and love. God designed human life to include feasting, beauty, and faithful marriage. These are not distractions from godliness but part of how God means His people to live well.

This frames marriage in particular as a gift to be enjoyed: enjoy life with the wife whom you love. God's design from the beginning is the lifelong union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24), and Solomon treats that companionship as one of the chief sweetnesss God grants under the sun.

Teach the class that joy is not the enemy of reverence. The same God who is to be feared is the God who fills our table. Receiving His gifts with thanks is itself an act of worship (1 Timothy 4:4–5).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Eating, drinking, celebration, and marriage are gifts God has approved, not guilty pleasures (9:7–9).
- Refusing God's good gifts is not extra holiness; it can be ingratitude.
- God designed human life to include feasting, beauty, and faithful companionship.
- Marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman is among God's chief earthly gifts (Genesis 2:24).
- Joy and reverence belong together; receiving gifts with thanks is worship (1 Timothy 4:4–5).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Solomon frame everyday enjoyment as something God has already approved?
- Where have you treated a good gift of God as a guilty pleasure rather than receiving it with thanks?
- How does enjoying God's gifts with gratitude become a form of worship rather than a distraction from it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Which of these plain gifts, food, celebration, marriage and family, friendship, do you most often rush past or treat as ordinary, and what would it look like to enjoy it this week as a gift God has approved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes the gift of 9:7–9 personal and concrete. Solomon names food, celebration, marriage and family, and friendship as joys God approves. Most of us, in the rush of life, have one or more of these that we routinely treat as ordinary background rather than as gift.

The dulling usually happens not through rejection but through familiarity. The daily meal becomes fuel gulped over a screen. The spouse becomes a fellow manager of logistics. The friend becomes a name we mean to call. The gift is still there; we have simply stopped seeing it.

The remedy Solomon implies is attention and gratitude. To enjoy a gift as God has approved is to slow down enough to notice it, name it as His, and give thanks. That is a small discipline with large effects on the texture of a life.

Press the class toward one specific gift and one specific practice. A real meal eaten slowly and thankfully this week, an unhurried conversation with a spouse or friend, a celebration not postponed. The point is to actually live the verse, not merely admire it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Familiarity, not rejection, is what usually dulls us to God's daily gifts.
- Meals, marriage, family, and friendship can quietly slide from gift to background.
- Attention and gratitude are how we receive a gift as God has approved.
- Naming a gift as God's and giving thanks is a small discipline with large effects.
- Colossians 3:17 calls us to do everything with thanksgiving to God.

Discussion Prompts

- Which of God's daily gifts have you stopped truly seeing?
- What is one concrete way to receive that gift with attention this week?
- How could a simple habit of giving thanks change the texture of your ordinary days?

Question 9

Student Question:

Solomon urges, Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave to which you are going (9:10). Read carefully: how do we let this verse fuel wholehearted, present-day work and faithfulness without twisting it into a denial of conscious life and judgment after death that the New Testament plainly teaches (Luke 16:19–31; John 5:28–29; Hebrews 9:27; 2 Timothy 1:10)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. Solomon writes, Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave to which you are going. We must read this verse for exactly what it claims and refuse to make it say more. Its positive thrust is a summons to wholehearted, present-tense living: work hard now, love now, serve now, because the season for earthly doing is the span between birth and death.

The phrase in the grave to which you are going is under-the-sun language. Solomon is observing that death ends all earthly work, planning, knowledge, and labor. From the grave a person no

longer builds, no longer schemes, no longer carries on the projects of this life. That is simply true of the body in the dust and of one's participation in the affairs of this world. Solomon is not delivering a lecture on the conscious state of the soul.

We must therefore not build a doctrine of soul sleep or annihilation from 9:5 and 9:10. To do so would be to take an honest observation of life under the sun and force it to overturn the clear, fuller revelation God gave later. That is not how Scripture interprets Scripture. The dimmer light of Old Testament wisdom is completed, not contradicted, by the bright light of the gospel.

And the New Testament is unmistakable. The rich man and Lazarus were both conscious beyond death (Luke 16:19–31). All who are in the tombs will hear Christ's voice and come forth, some to the resurrection of life and some of judgment (John 5:28–29). It is appointed for man to die once, and after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). To depart and be with Christ is far better (Philippians 1:23). Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

So let this verse do its real work. Because there is no working in the grave, work with might now. Because the door of earthly opportunity closes at death, walk through it today: reconcile, serve, obey, love. And let the gospel add what Solomon could not: death is not the end of the person, only the end of earthly labor, and beyond it stands the living Christ who has conquered the grave.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 9:10 is a summons to wholehearted present-day work, not a lecture on the state of the soul.
- In the grave to which you are going is under-the-sun language: death ends earthly work and labor.
- Do NOT build soul sleep or annihilation from 9:5 and 9:10; observation must not overturn fuller revelation.
- Scripture interprets Scripture: Old Testament wisdom is completed, not contradicted, by the gospel.
- Luke 16:19–31, John 5:28–29, Hebrews 9:27, and Philippians 1:23 teach conscious existence, resurrection, and judgment.
- 2 Timothy 1:10: Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.
- The right application is urgency: because the grave ends earthly opportunity, obey and serve today.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the phrase in the grave to which you are going show that Solomon is speaking of earthly activity ending, not the soul ceasing?
- Why is it a mistake to build a doctrine of soul sleep from 9:5 and 9:10, and how does the New Testament guard us?

- What earthly opportunity, to reconcile, serve, or obey, is Solomon urging you to seize today while you still can?

Question 10

Student Question:

Solomon shows that the poor wise man who saved the city was forgotten, yet wisdom is still better than strength (9:13–18). Name one specific way Jesus, the truest wise One who was despised and forgotten by men yet delivered us, is reshaping how you measure a life well lived.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Solomon closes the chapter with a small, almost forgotten story. A little city was besieged by a great king, and there was found in it a poor wise man who by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man. From this Solomon draws his verdict: wisdom is better than strength, though the poor man's wisdom is despised.

The world measures a life by power, wealth, and reputation, by lions, not by overlooked dogs. The poor wise man had none of the visible markers of greatness, and so he was forgotten even though he had saved everyone. Solomon insists, against the world's scale, that his quiet wisdom was worth more than all the king's noisy strength.

This question asks the class to let Christ recalibrate how they measure a life well lived. Jesus is the truest poor wise One. He came without earthly status, was despised and rejected by men, and was forgotten by the very world He came to save. Yet by His wisdom and His cross He delivered not a city but His people from death itself.

The world still does not honor His way. The wisdom of the cross looks like weakness and folly to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18–25). To follow Christ is to accept being undervalued by the world's scale, content that the deliverance He works and the approval He gives outlast every forgotten name.

As the capstone, push for the specific and personal. Not merely that Jesus changes our values in general, but one concrete way He is reshaping how this person measures success, significance, or a life worth living, this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The world measures life by power and reputation; Solomon exalts overlooked wisdom (9:13–16).
- The poor wise man saved everyone yet was forgotten, showing wisdom outvalues strength.
- Jesus is the truest poor wise One: despised, rejected, and forgotten, yet our Deliverer.
- The wisdom of the cross looks like folly to the perishing but is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18–25).

- Following Christ means accepting the world's undervaluing, content with His lasting approval.
- Capstone: name a specific way Jesus is reshaping how you measure a life well lived.

Discussion Prompts

- Why was the poor wise man forgotten, and what does that reveal about how the world measures worth?
- How is Jesus the truest fulfillment of the despised wise one who nonetheless delivers?
- Name one specific way Jesus is changing how you measure a life that truly counts.