



One or the Other

Open it

1. If you were to do something extravagant, what would you do?

Daily Devotions

Day 1 — Today's Theme: Explore It

Read Ecclesiastes 9:1–18.

2. What comparisons (lots of opposites) do you see in 9:1–6?
3. What are some key words you see in 9:7–10?
4. Read 9:11–12. What does Solomon say happens to everyone and everything?
5. Read 9:13–18. Who was the “wise” one in this story?

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Death or Life

Read Ecclesiastes 9:1–6.

Remember last summer? (I know it seems like a lifetime ago!) Imagine a beautiful summer day on a lake. You're at a lake house for the day AND have a boat. You're speeding around in the boat and grab your phone to take a picture when suddenly the boat lurches on the waves and your phone flies into the water. You watch it sink. There's nothing you can do to save it. All is lost. There's no CHANCE you're going to recover your phone now...quite the hopeless feeling.

This passage in Ecclesiastes seems pretty hopeless too if death is the final passage into nothing. Life seems to slip away, just like that phone slips into the water. Yet interestingly enough, Solomon states that living is better because there is HOPE. In the Old Testament, Israel was WAITING for the promised Savior. That promise was their HOPE. They didn't clearly know what that Savior would look like, but they had HOPE that one day they would be saved. This HOPE was based on the prophecies of the prophets. They were living and waiting for a promise from God to be fulfilled. THEN...when Jesus came that promise became REAL and hopelessness in death was changed forever. DEATH no longer had a sting. DEATH¹, though still punishment for sin, became HOPE in the gift of Jesus' life. The sacrifice of Jesus' life for us by DYING in our place cancels the HOPELESSNESS in death. There is HOPE!!! Jesus changes everything!

Did you know YOU can have that same HOPE: Believing you are a sinner, that Jesus died in your place AND took your punishment for sin THEN rose again AND LIVES!

Romans 10:9, "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

6. Compare the living in 9:4 to the dead in 9:5, "*For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.*" How are they different from each other?

7. Compare the living in 9:4 to the dead in 9:6, "*Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.*"

8. What do you know about HOPE in death through Jesus?

¹ | Corinthians 15:55–57

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Which Comes First—Work or Play?

Read Ecclesiastes 9:7–10.

“When you play, play hard. When you work, don’t play at all.” — Theodore Roosevelt

Work vs play, play vs work. Playing is much more fun than working, but working is part of life. Sometimes, it feels like our time is only valuable if we are working, getting something done or accomplishing a goal and playing looks like we are lazy, not getting things done or don’t have our priorities straight. But it’s clear in the first week of Creation that God created, which was His work, and then He rested. Every day in the first week of the whole world, God worked and then said it was good and He was done for the day. He accomplished what He set out to do that day. He was done and waited for more work the next day. Finally, on the seventh day, He rested, not because He needed rest but because He created us to rest. He set that example for us so we would rest.

I know my activity leans more towards working than playing—ask my children. It seems I always have more to do today. I want to work and be diligent with the responsibilities given to me. But I want to enjoy the people around me. I need to take some of this to heart. Set my goals to be reasonable for the day. And set my goals of enjoying the people in my day.

When you work, work hard. Set a plan, work diligently, and be done. Then rest and play. Enjoy the work by being done with it.

Colossians 3:23: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”

9. What daily work do you have that never seems to end?

10. How do you know God wants you to enjoy life?

11. How can you create time to enjoy when your work is done?

12. How do you enjoy life?

Day 4 — Today's Theme: Chance or Hope

Read Ecclesiastes 9:11–12. (See day 1, #4.)

Besides Chutes and Ladders (the game that never ends and small children love to purposely slide down that incredibly long slide so they can keep playing...), one of my least favorite games is Monopoly. It happens to be one game we have multiple versions of. I find it to be a game of chance. There's even a stack of Chance cards! The chance that you'll land on the best spaces and the chance that you'll have the money to purchase it, is **not** a strategy. It's chance. Then there's the chance that someone will actually land on your property and then the chance that they will actually pay you rent. You're not smarter because by chance you collect the same color property. And after all that work, someone lands on Free Parking and gets all the money under the corner. No strategy, it's all chance. It's all luck and it lasts forever. It's exhausting. Don't get me started on Cheater's Monopoly.

I don't like things that are unpredictable. I follow a recipe so I know the outcome will likely be a good result. I don't like working hard and not gaining the benefits. I follow the rules if I want the right ending. I don't like doing what I'm supposed to do and better things happening to the guy who didn't do anything but be in the right place at the right time. However, the older I get, the more I realize life doesn't follow the rules. There are outcomes that don't follow the rules I thought were in place. It can feel like it all happens by chance. And yet...

Because of Jesus, my life is not a game of chance. God has a perfect plan. He created me for His glory, with a purpose, right in this moment. He knows if I am rich or poor, strong or weak, sick or healthy and he will still use me. Ultimately, those circumstances aren't important. My heart is what He's seeking. He wants my heart so I can be with Him in eternity. It might sound sad to talk about it, but I am going to die. We all are. There's no chance in that. It's a fact. And there's a plan. Knowing our bodies will die because of sin, God made a way to save us, to save **you**. His way is Jesus. When you believe in Jesus you don't have to live in that feeling of chance anymore. You are saved. You are sealed. No more rolling the dice and hoping for a chance to get it right. Now, you have hope. You have purpose.

Philippians 1:6, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

13. What kinds of things seem to happen by chance?

14. If God has a plan, where does chance fit in?

Day 5 — Today's Theme: Loud or Quiet

Read Ecclesiastes 9:13–18.

What does it take for someone's voice to be heard? For them to be the loudest, of course! I've worked in many settings with various age groups of people— children, teens, younger, older and families of all ages. One observation I've noticed is that people want to be heard.

It is interesting to listen in a room when people know each other. When left to visit with each other, the volume will increase as everyone starts talking, loud, louder, and really loud until they are often yelling at each other just to be heard. They are standing right next to each other yelling not because they are mad but because the other friends are talking too, and they all feel like they have to talk louder so everyone will hear them. Funny thing about that though is no one is hearing anyone because they are all talking at the same time. Loudest isn't best. It just gets in the way.

Ecclesiastes 9:17: “The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.”

What does it take for someone to hear God's voice? God isn't loudest. He doesn't yell at us. He whispers wisdom in our hearts. He is speaking, but are we being quiet enough to listen?

1 Kings 19:12 : “And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.”

15. What is “loudest” in your life?

16. Where or when or in what ways do you hear wisdom?