Ecclesiastes 12:9–14 | "The End of the Matter"
Preached on October 25, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 12, and we will be in verses 9–14. *[pauseee]*

We are finishing our series on the book of Ecclesiastes today, and what a journey it's been. *[pause]*

Today, Solomon will give us his conclusion to the book. *[pauseee]*

Most of you know who Sherlock Holmes is. *[pause]*

Sherlock is a fictional, genius detective, who solves even the most difficult cases. *[pause]*

The cases usually start out with some kind of crime, and you are thinking, "How is he going to solve this one?"

But as time goes on, Holmes starts investigating, looking for every little clue, implication, or deduction. *[pause]*

Like a puzzle, he puts the pieces together, until eventually he comes to a conclusion of who did it. *[pause]*

Once he has figured it out, he doesn't keep investigating forever, but he makes his conclusion clear. *[pausee]*

So also, Solomon is like that: he investigated life to see what brings lasting benefit. *[pause]*

He sought out how a person should live in this life that is so confusing, hard, uncertain, and filled with injustice. *[pause]*

Money, pleasure, popularity, and power all came up short on delivering what we truly want.

And now, after putting all of the evidence together, he has come to the conclusion of the matter. *[pauseee]*

What Solomon will do first is talk about the *method* of the book, and then the *message* of the book. *[pause]*

So what was the method of the book? We were given wise words, and...

I. These wise words are for our good, from our God, so don't keep looking for more! (9–12)

Look at verses 9–12. *[READ]*

Without a doubt, wise words were given to us in Ecclesiastes. *[pause]*

This wisdom wasn't kept inside, but we see that the author shared his wisdom with us—he "taught the people knowledge." *[pauseee]*

Aren't you thankful that Solomon didn't keep his wisdom to himself, but shared it? *[pause]*

Some of you likewise have wisdom, but you keep it all inside. *[pause]*

Some of you have been Christians for a very long time, and have gathered up a heap of wisdom, and those who are younger in the faith need your wisdom! *[pausee]*

Older women, you have raised children to adulthood, and have been married for decades…

Younger wives and mothers need the wisdom that you have gained to love their husband and children well. *[pause]*

Parents, your children need your wisdom. *[pauseee]*

Teaching wisdom to others is an act of kindness, do you see it that way? *[pauseee]*

In kindness, Solomon taught us knowledge through proverbs, but this was no slapdash thing.

Rather, we are told that Solomon weighed, studied, and arranged many proverbs with great care. *[pause]*

He didn't just all of a sudden throw this book together, instead, we see a methodical approach to his task…

He pondered what he would write, and studied hard to make sense of it all. *[pause]*

After that, he organized the material in such a way to be understandable and persuasive. *[pauseee]*

This shows us that to communicate the truth well, you cannot "wing it." *[pause]*

It takes time and work—you must think, study, and organize. *[pause]*

If you have ever taught a class, you know this is true—you must know your material and organize your material for it to be impactful. *[pausee]*

We are not to pridefully say, "I know it all, and will just tell them all that I know," when it comes to teaching others.

Instead, humbly recognize that you must put in the time and effort in order to communicate effectively. *[pausee]*

This is not to say that every time before you share wisdom with others, you must do this.

But if you are going to do any deep or long teaching, you need to prepare. *[pauseee]*

Parents, do some thinking and studying before having a deep or long time of speaking the truth to your child. *[pause]*

If someone asks to meet with you about a problem in their life, do some pondering, praying, and preparing in advance. *[pause]*

These things take effort, but it's worth it since it's for their good. *[pauseee]*

The author's diligence was also seen in his *selection* of words, for verse 10 tells us that, "The Preacher sought to find words of delight." *[pauseee]*

Solomon was very intentional about what words to use in his book.

He didn't just write the first thing that came to mind, but actually sought to find the best words to use. *[pauseee]*

So many times, we just speak or write whatever comes to our mind, but how often do you reflect upon what words to use? *[pausee]*

Before having that important conversation, do you ever consider what you will say?

Not *just* the general message, but some of the specific words. *[pauseee]*

Solomon sought out delightful and compelling words to use in his book. *[pause]*

He didn't want to be a dull lecturer, but actually wanted to be engaging—he wrote in memorable, effective ways. *[pauseee]*

Think about some of the most impactful things that have been said to you…

They usually aren't the things said in a dull way, but the things said in a compelling way. *[pause]*

These things get infused into our memory because they are memorably said.

There's something about them that catches us like a hook, and doesn't let go. *[pauseee]*

When we teach others, we should not seek to merely communicate information, but we are to be engaging. *[pause]*

We shouldn't just check off the list that we said the right things, but we should seek out the best words to say what needs to be said. *[pauseeee]*

Now these 'words of delight' are not just to be flowery language that has no grounding in truth. *[pause]*

Some people go that route: they use engaging communication that covers up the lies beneath.

But we are not to say pleasant falsehoods, instead, we see that Solomon "wrote words of truth." *[pause]*

His words were delightful, but they were also truthful, and *both* of those things are important. *[pauseee]*

Pleasant words devoid of truth are only lies with lipstick. *[pauseee]*

Do not seek to speak delightful words without making sure those words are truthful words. *[pauseeee]*

The passage here has told us of the *content* of what was said, but what is the *consequence* of hearing these words?...

They goad us and firmly fix themselves in us. *[pauseee]*

Look at verse 11, "The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings." *[pause]*

This shows us that wisdom spoken to us is *for our good*. *[pause]*

As we studied Ecclesiastes together, did you ever think, "These words are for my good. I need to pay attention"? *[pauseee]*

When it comes to the Bible as a whole, do you approach the Word of God, as something for your good? *[pause]*

Any time that you read the Bible, know that you are doing something that will benefit you…

The Word can grow you, shape you, stretch you, encourage you, motivate you, and change you each and every time, if only you would listen. *[pauseee]*

We see here that one way that Solomon's wisdom is for our good is that it's like goads. *[pause]*

One lexicon describes a goad as: "The iron point of the stick by which the cattle are driven by someone from behind."[1] *[pause]*

Well that's what God's wisdom does in our lives: it's like a goad...

It jabs, pricks, and prods us to move in the direction that He wants us to go. *[pauseee]*

Our problem is that we want to move in the direction that *we* want to go, but what we need is the goad of God driving us where *He* wants. *[pauseee]*

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[1] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 230.

It's not always pleasant to be pricked by the wisdom of the Word, but it's good, for where He leads us is best. *[pausee]*

So many people feel the prick of God's Word, and push it away because it isn't a pleasant feeling. *[pause]*

They don't want to get out of their comfort zone, they don't want to do the hard thing.

But know that that prick is a good thing because it's directing you in the way of the Lord, and the way of the Lord is the way of joy and blessing. *[pauseee]*

The wisdom of the wise is also like nails firmly fixed—it gives us a certain stability in life. *[pause]*

Now we aren't thrown by every wind of trial or temptation.

Now we can withstand the hardships of life, the uncertainties, the ups and downs. *[pause]*

The wisdom of God is like firmly fixed nails that we can hold onto. *[pause]*

The wisdom of the world is like jello thrown up against the wall, it's not going to do any good trying to hold yourself up by that.

But God's Word is like nails firmly fixed on a wall, you can hang your life on those nails. *[pauseeee]*

This wisdom is "given by one Shepherd," who is God. *[pause]*

Solomon pondered, searched, arranged, and wrote, but God is the one who ultimately gave His Word to us. *[pauseee]*

In grace, God has 'given' us His Word—do you see it as a gift? *[pause]*

We can easily take the Scriptures for granted, but let's see it as a gift of our Shepherd, who wants to shepherd our hearts, goading them in His ways, and firmly fixing them upon His truth. *[pauseee]*

Look at what you have been given, and don't keep looking for more and more—that's the point of verse 12…

"My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh." *[pauseee]*

So many people are always looking for *more*.

They think that the answer to their problems will be found in that new book at the bookstore, or that new resource made. *[pause]*

Publishers are constantly spewing out new books promising answers, and people lap it up. *[pausee]*

This search for more leads to weariness.

And so the answer isn't to keep looking amid the many books that have no end, but to look to the Book given by the Shepherd. *[pauseee]*

Charles Spurgeon gives an illustration of a tailor, who was very successful in his trade, and was envied by all of the other tailors. *[pause]*

Before he died, he told everyone that he would tell the secret to his success.

So they gathered around to hear his secret, and finally, all he said was simply, "Always put a knot in your thread."[2] *[pauseee]*

Like those tailors, we are always looking for more or something new, when it's the simple truth that we need to know, remember, and trust. *[pause]*

Beware of looking for answers beyond the words of God, for we are told that He "has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness."[3] *[pauseee]*

Will you accept and trust what you've been given, or be constantly looking for more? *[pauseee]*

So far we have been told of the method of the book, but what is the message of the book?...

II. These wise words have given us a message: fear God and keep His commandments! (13–14)

Let's READ verses 13–14. *[READ]*

When a bunch of information is thrown at us, it can be overwhelming. *[pause]*

We want to have things summarized for us because we think, "So now what am I to do? What does it all come down to?" *[pause]*

Well Solomon doesn't leave us hanging, wondering what the conclusion is to his search—it is to fear God and keep His commandments. *[pauseeee]*

Everything else failed the test of bringing lasting profit…

Money wasn't the key, pleasure didn't bring lasting satisfaction, human wisdom can't save you from death, and popularity and power are fleeting. *[pause]*

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[2] https://www.sermonindex.net/books/lectures-to-my-students-by-charles-spurgeon-4-volumes/25.
[3] 2 Peter 1:3.

You can't rely upon your own righteousness or work or wisdom or control—life is too unpredictable for those to provide the answer. *[pause]*

Ecclesiastes cut away all of our imaginary views of life to give us reality in its fullness, and to show how limited the things of this world really are.

And by doing so, it has led us to God! *[pauseeee]*

Since money, things, work, and power cannot give me ultimate satisfaction, then I must look elsewhere.

I must look to the One who has everything in His hand, who makes all things beautiful in its time, and whose work endures forever.[4] *[pauseee]*

That's where the book leads us: we are to look to and live for the Lord—that's what matters for eternity. *[pauseeee]*

Many people live as though the whole duty of man is to seek your own personal joy and comfort. *[pause]*

"Do what makes you happy," or, "Follow your heart," are the mottos of our day. *[pause]*

People sacrifice church, their family, others, and the Lord on the altar of their own desires.

But here's the thing: in the end, that way of life doesn't actually produce the happiness they were pursuing. *[pause]*

In fact, they find that they are miserable because they lived for themselves, and found it empty in the end. *[pause]*

Life is not meant to be lived for self. *[pauseeee]*

Others see the whole duty of man as being successful or accumulating the most wealth. *[pause]*

They measure their lives by the measuring stick of earthly success.

And to them, if they are not earthly successful, they have been a failure—they have not done their "duty." *[pauseee]*

For those who lean more atheistic, they may think that the duty of mankind is simply to survive because there is no ultimate purpose in life.

And even some who aren't atheists have that mentality. *[pause]*

They think, "Life is brutally hard, so my duty is just to grit my teeth and bear it, that's what I'm to do." *[pauseeee]*

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[4] Ecclesiastes 9:1, 3:11, 3:14.

Lastly, some people think that the whole duty of man is just to do good things, without regard for God at all. *[pause]*

"As long as I make the world a better place, or show kindness to others, then I have done my duty," they think. *[pausee]*

Others believe that just the act of doing religious activities is what they are called to do.

And so they think that as long as they attend church, love their family, put some money into the offering plate, and do those kinds of things, then they have done their duty.

But are these things really our ultimate duty? *[pauseee]*

Did you notice a common thread that ran through each of these things?

God was not central, but Solomon is teaching us that we were made *by* God and *for* God. *[pauseee]*

We were made to have a relationship with our Creator, and that relationship is to be one of reverential fear. *[pause]*

This is not the fear that causes one to hide, but the fear that causes one to worship. *[pauseee]*

To 'fear God' is to have a right understanding of who God is, and who you are, which then impacts how you live. *[pause]*

When you truly understand that, then you understand that your whole duty is not to live for yourself, not just to survive, but to live for the Lord. *[pauseee]*

Do you understand that you were made to glorify God with your life? *[pause]*

Some see this as degrading, but actually, it gives your life utmost value…

You were made to know, love, and obey the Creator of the universe—you have a grand purpose! *[pause]*

Your life isn't purposeless, nor is your life's value based on how much wealth you can bring in, or the earthly success you can accrue. *[pauseee]*

This also shows that God infinitely cares about you, and how you live.

He didn't make you, and then disregard you forever, but He made you to be in relationship with Him. *[pauseee]*

Ecclesiastes may have started out with saying, "Vanity, vanity," but here at the end of the book, 'vanity' is not the final word, 'God' is. *[pauseee]*

Our duty is to orient our lives around God and His will, and since this is what we were made to do, then this is where true joy is found. *[pauseee]*

Joy is only found when God is central to your life, and life only makes sense when God is foundational to all you do. *[pauseee]*

You are to fear God, and when you genuinely do that, then you will keep His commandments.

And this means that everything you do should be judged by the standard of the Word of God, for it's in His Word that we learn of what He requires. *[pausee]*

If you live as though you were master of your life, then God's Word gets disregarded for what you want.

But if you live, as though God were master of your life, then God's Word trumps everything else. *[pauseeee]*

People think, "Well God wants me to be happy, so He would want this," or they say, "I can't help what I feel."

But a person who fears God and keeps His commandments says, "What does God say? *That's* how I am to live." *[pauseee]*

The question is not about what you feel is right, or what others are doing, or what is acceptable in society, it's about what the Lord has said. *[pauseee]*

The book ends with a reminder that you are accountable to God for how you live.

Verse 14 says, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." *[pauseee]*

Many people do not take God into account when they make decisions, when He is the most important person to take into account when you make *every* decision. *[pauseee]*

Yes, I am accountable to my workplace for what I do, and to the government for what I do in some regards, and to my family.

But I must always remember that I am *ultimately* accountable to God for what I do, and since you are ultimately responsible to Him, then what He wants ought to eclipse everything else. *[pauseeee]*

"A long time ago, so the story goes, several English nobles in all their best clothes were on a fox hunt, and they came to a closed gate. *[pause]*

A poor looking young man sat near the gate. *[pause]*

'Open the gate, lad,' said the leader. *[pause]*

'No,' said the boy, 'this property belongs to my father, and he told me to leave it shut and open it for no one.' *[pause]*

The leader testily replied, 'Open the gate, boy. Do you know who I am?' *[pause]*

'No, sir,' said the boy. *[pause]*

The leader proclaimed, 'I am the Duke of Wellington.' *[pause]*

The boy replied, 'The Duke of Wellington is a hero in this country, and he would not ask me to disobey my father.' *[pause]*

The riding party went on its way."[5] *[pauseeee]*

That boy understood that his father's authority mattered more than anyone else's. *[pause]*

His reverential fear of his father led him to do what he was told, even when pressured to not do so.

And likewise, our Heavenly Father's authority should matter most to us: our duty is to fear God and keep His commandments. *[pauseee]*

This passage shows us that…

God has spoken to us for our good through His Word: live as before God!

God has spoken to us in grace: He has not remained silent. *[pause]*

He's not only given us the book of Ecclesiastes, but the whole canon of Scripture. *[pauseee]*

As you read the Bible, you see that it is beaming with wisdom.

It's arranged wonderfully, filled with delightful, truthful words. *[pause]*

These words aren't merely given for God to show off or something like that, but they are given *for our good*. *[pauseee]*

They are meant to goad us onward in His ways, and firmly fix us in faith. *[pause]*

Do you know and believe His Word, or are you looking for more outside of it? *[pauseee]*

When we zoom out of Ecclesiastes to the whole testimony of Scripture, we see that Jesus is the fullest expression of His Word, for He is called, "the Word."[6] *[pause]*

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[5] J. Michael Shannon, https://www.preaching.com/sermon-illustrations/illustration-obedience/. (Slightly edited).
[6] A reference to John 1:14.

In Christ, we see the wisdom of God, we hear His delightful words, and we hear the truth, for He is "the truth."[7] *[pausee]*

When your eyes are opened to see Christ for who He is, you are goaded onward to faith in Him, so that you are firmly fixed on Him, receiving forgiveness and eternal life. *[pause]*

He is our true Shepherd, who not only gave us wisdom, but has given us life because of His shed blood on our behalf.

So beware of looking *beyond* Him, for you have all that you need *in* Him. *[pauseeee]*

Live as before God, Christian. *[pause]*

He made you, but here's the thing: He has also purchased you through the shed blood of Christ. *[pause]*

We rebelled against God, choosing to sin against our Creator.

And this led to alienation from Him and being under condemnation.

But in grace, God sent Christ to redeem us from sin and death. *[pause]*

Now through faith in Him, we have forgiveness and eternal life. *[pauseee]*

We belong to God! *[pause]*

As 2 Corinthians says, "He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."[8] *[pause]*

Will you live for the Lord, knowing not only that He made you, but redeemed you? *[pause]*

Our response of obedience is not merely out of duty, but it's a response of love for His grace, who saved sinners, such as us.

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[7] A reference to John 14:6.
[8] 2 Corinthians 5:15.