

## Season 9: Ecclesiastes

### Episode 10: Eternity Shapes our Purpose (9:1-12)

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**Felicity:** We're very grateful to 10ofthose for sponsoring this season. It's Jonathan Edwards, who is the more well known name, but he looked to his wife as a real, authentic picture of living faith. Sharon James, in her book, Sarah Edwards Delighting In God, pulls us into the story of her life and shows us a God remarkable woman who truly did delight in God. We hear from Sarah herself through her private journals and Sharon's beautifully crafted prose fills in the gaps and helps us see Jesus as we learn more of this woman in history, grab a copy at 10ofthose.com

**Sarah:** Welcome to Two Sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Sarah, I live in the UK. This is my sister Felicity, she lives in the States. And today we are in chapter nine of Ecclesiastes. We're rolling through it. I can't quite believe we're kind of coming to the beginning of a conclusion to this book, Felicity, but before we get there, I am sporting a lovely mug from our pop up shop, which has finally arrived. What have you got in your mug today?

**Felicity:** A beautiful mug, by the way.

**Sarah:** Thank you.

**Felicity:** I have a Yorkshire tea, just a straight up Yorkshire tea, because let's be honest about what time of day it is here in America. It is 630 in the morning and the only tea I can drink at 630 is Yorkshire tea. In fact, it's the first thing I do when I get up in the morning. I go and put the kettle on, hope that it's not too noisy for children to wake up, fill the cup and the day begins to feel a little more alive. Yes. But yes. I can't believe Ecclesiastes is nearly over. And we've been finding it very shaping and changing, haven't we? We pray that for our listeners as well. In particular, how has Ecclesiastes been shaping your prayer life?

**Sarah:** Yeah, that's a really helpful question, because our prayers do overflow from our heart, don't they? And I was just saying to someone this morning, I really do feel like Ecclesiastes has been massively shaping me and shaping my prayers, probably in really quite simple ways. I don't think it's anything dramatic, but the simple ways of, lord, help me to remember my limits today. Help me to remember that I don't need to push against you and what you've placed in this season, that kind of thing. Lord, help me to see the joys in today. So quite simple things, really. But actually, I do really think it's really shaping the way I'm viewing my days and my weeks more, having kind of journeyed through this. And we're not at the end yet, are we? But the momentum is here and it really has been doing a deep work in my heart and I'm just so enormously thankful for it. How about you?

**Felicity:** I know, I think that's right. I feel like Ecclesiastes has been well, it's been clarifying the lens through which I view the world and we're going to see a bit more of that today. Death is never far from the teacher's mention, but in that then it helps you to see life rightly. And I think that's been in my prayers has been quite a lot of. Lord, help me to see this day as you would see it. Give me eyes to see what you've put in front of me. And I think that are probably prayers against discontentment or kind of, oh, this isn't quite how I planned it to be, which I'm quite quick to go there, but actually trusting God is definitely in control. And therefore, I can almost, like, relax into this day ahead of me. And I think that's a heart issue to be able to do that. And so I've been glad to be prompted to pray for that and to come to the Lord in that. But talking of this wonderful book, Sarah, why don't you read for us chapter nine, verses one through to twelve.

**Sarah:** I'd love Tina. Let's go. So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands. But no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. All share a common destiny, the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good, so with the sinful, as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun. The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil. And there is madness in their hearts while they live and afterwards they join the dead. Anyone who is among the

living has hope. Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die. But the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished. Never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. Go eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. Always be clothed in white and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife whom you love. All the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun, all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. For in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there's neither working, nor planning, nor knowledge, nor wisdom. I have seen something else under the sun. The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned. But time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come, as fish are caught in a cruel net or birds are taken in a snare, so people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

**Felicity:** Thank you, Sarah. We're back to his theme. Death kicks off the chapter again and this time he kind of comes back round to it. And it feels like this passage is kind of framed by the stark reality of death. And then we have a whole big fat heap of joy in the middle, which is interesting in itself, like that kind of putting those two things next to each other. I don't think that's quite where I normally go. So as we walk through, interesting to see why that yeah, I think it is, isn't it?

**Sarah:** But I think I've been running on the fact that it's not just interesting, it could possibly be very painful to read in that and it's being mindful of that, isn't it, that this is actually really hard to read for anyone who is grieving, anyone who is dealing with this stark reality in the forefront of their life at the moment. But it is here and we're not going to skip it and we are going to dwell on it because there's a good reason why we need to sit in it. And the preacher thinks it's important for us to do that. And I think it's just worth saying that because I think the temptation can be, oh, Lord, I can't cope with this today. But we are going to cope with it, because actually it is the next part of ecclesiastes and it's important to do it.

**Felicity:** Yeah, really helpful and really compassionate to those who are reading. And I think what he's really saying is death comes for everyone that's the reality isn't. And that's very much an Ecclesiastes thing. We're not in control. Like whether you're righteous or unrighteous. That's what he says. The righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean. It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter whether you're Christian or not Christian, whether you're following the Lord or not. The stark reality of life is that death is 100% the thing.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I think that's really helpful to see that, isn't it? So it's certain, 100% certain. Verses one to six really help us to see that. But the end of the passage, verses eleven and twelve, it helps us to see that the timing of it is uncertain.

**Felicity:** Yes. And I think, as you were saying, it is painful and death is it always is just a hard hit, for sure. I think it's also reassuring that this is in the Bible. This is the reality that we see before us, along with where Ecclesiastes has been going frequently. It presents the world as it is. And again, that is a reassuring thing that God sees and he knows. So when it happens, when death comes, that is not a surprise to God. And I think that's a comfort in the pain.

**Sarah:** Yeah, because it expands your lens, it grows your perspective, and it reminds you that you are so much smaller than the rest of the picture, aren't you? But he knows the picture. And I love this phrase in verse four, it says, Anyone who is among the living has hope. And it's kind of like then with a kind of comedic line as well, isn't it? Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion. Yes, that's true. Anyone who is among the living has hope. And actually that is true as we look with gospel lenses on this. That is true, isn't it? Because anyone who has breath in them has the capacity in some way to be able to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and to find their hope in him. And I don't know whether that's kind of going too much to Jesus too quickly, but there's a real kind of anchor of hope in that verse, isn't there?

**Felicity:** Oh, for sure, for sure. And I think, yeah, whether he's intending to go there or not, I think that's just the reality as a Christian reads this, that when we read the words life and hope, Jesus is kind of front and center in our thinking. And that's really helpful to then look at this and think, okay, well, what then does it mean to live this life? Well, I think he's saying at that point, well, you have got a life to live. Like, God has given you this life. Now, we don't know the timing of how long it's going to last, but he has given us this life to live. And that's the thing, isn't it? This gift of life, this life under the sun and the next chunk of verses. So what is it? Seven through to ten, we have this kind of well, what is it then to live this life? The life that we don't have control on, we don't know when it's going to end, but what is it to live this life? And again, we have this almost surprising emphasis on joy, on gladness, of heart, of it's interesting, that phrase. Well, verse seven, go eat your food with gladness, drink your wine with a joyful heart. For God has already approved what you do. And I love that, that he brings in that, this life that God has given us, God has approved what we are to do. We're free. I think there's a freedom in that to live the life that God has given us, to look at what we have before us, and therefore to kind of just get on with it, live it, not in a kind of heartless way of because death is still sad, like life is still hard, for sure. But also, what is it that God has given you? What have we got in front of us? It's been a good prompt for me, I think, this week, just to have eyes to see what is before me.

**Sarah:** And I think that's been kind of a prompt that's been growing through the book, hasn't it? Like it's a thread that kind of feels like it's enlarging enlarging as we go through and gathering more momentum to really spot the joys in each day. And I think as we were saying and how it's been impacting our prayer lives but just that actually here. Okay, so you might be going through a really hard day today but actually what does it look like to just eat your food with gladness? Like, can you sit down and genuinely be thankful for the food that's in front of you? If that's the only thing that brings joy to your heart then that is still a gift and it's a good thing, isn't it? Likewise the encouragement to enjoy your spouse, enjoy the gift of your marriage. Marriage might be hard, but what are the joys you can see and press into them? Because actually these days are fleeting and this is your lot, this is what you've been given. And also work. It says, yeah, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might and to kind of work heartily because yes, we're not toiling, but also here he's saying no, do it because it's what you've been given. To do. And you can work hard. You can work mightily in tension with these days are fleeting and death is uncertain in terms of when it's going to happen.

**Felicity:** And that is maybe just quite a helpful perspective on work because work can feel hard and kind of abrasive sometimes. And actually here we have, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. And that has just come after the enjoy what God has given you. And so this work that we have, that purposefulness and whatever our work is, whether we're in the home, whether we're going out to work, whether we're struggling to find actually what is it to put our hands to what we've got in front of us, and that there is an element of satisfaction in that. And I think we've heard that before. And I think as part of this kind of reflecting on things, that's a helpful attitude to have towards what we do.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I think it's interesting that he does start this saying he's reflecting and concluding this is the beginning of his conclusion, isn't it? And yet there's quite a lot more to go. We're not at the end.

**Felicity:** I feel like Paul took some lessons from know Paul often says I'm just starting the end and then there's another three chapters and here we have it.

**Sarah:** I know, but I think what is helpful in the beginning of the conclusion is that it's pulling together the threads that we have started to see through the whole book, isn't it? And it's really reinforcing those that actually yes, eternity really does shape all of life, but in that fleeting life that we have, seek the joy, seek to live heartily with the life you've been given, and seek to do that in relation to the Lord fearing him. And I think that's just really encouraging, isn't it?

**Felicity:** Okay, so that's the perspective that we've been hearing. And as you say, he's drawing together the threads of what he's been talking about in this slightly cyclical book because he's been coming back round to these things and again and again. And as we've been saying, we've been feeling our hearts as they've been marinating in this book, being shifted and changed. What is it looking like in the nitty gritty, like, in the reality of life as we

walk away from here? How is it changing not necessarily what we do, but how we think? We're already touching on this, but let's just push it home a bit more.

**Sarah:** Yeah, I think for me, thinking through actually, yeah, these days are fleeting. And that doesn't mean that I think my instinctive reaction before reading and studying this book would be like, oh, quick, I've got to really make the most of every moment, and I really got to kind of make the most of every single second. And my temptation is to still do that. But actually, this chapter even has forced me to kind of slow down a bit and go, okay, this day is fleeting, and I don't know what's around the corner, but I think I am more prepared for it than I was at the beginning of Ecclesiastes. And reading chapter nine now helps me to see that that work has been happening in my heart. And so, okay, Lord, help me to make the most of my day, but enjoy and really seek the joys and seek for others to see the joys as well. That's been my comment. Like, I've been hanging out with a couple of different people today, actually. Where are the joys? Like, encouraging others to see those as well, which I don't think my language would have reflected that having not been in this chapter this week.

**Felicity:** That's so helpful. What a good prompt. I need to do that more. I hadn't thought about making that more of a thing to ask others, but I would agree that I think that I have felt more freedom to accept the day as it is. And I'm on a learning curve at the moment where I am in this whole new phase of having no children at home because everyone's at school. And that's been quite a challenge to me to know what to do with my time and whether I need to redeem every minute of my time because I usually only have, like, a couple of hours a day. And now I've got the whole school day, and I'm roller coasting along from racing through it to then like, oh, I can just stop. And I think this book has been helpful in the heart that I come to that with. Like, Lord, thank you for this day. Show me what it is to enjoy this day and not just enjoy it for my own benefit, but with remembering my creator, remembering the life that he has given me, what it is to do good and to live well and to kind of have my eyes on him. Okay, what does it look like to do this day? And I think that's been a really helpful mindset. So I don't think it looks massively different, but I think that my attitude in it. I'm praying more for that gladness of heart and I think it's the eyes to see, isn't it? That lens that we've been talking about.

**Sarah:** But I think also coming back to verse four and anyone who's among the living has hope, I just think that's a really helpful reminder for my mind and my heart as I walk into the school playground this afternoon. As I engage with people in the shops this weekend, as I just live life where we are just a reminder that, gosh, everyone I encounter there's the potential of them having hope that's beyond this world and is resurrection. Hope. And would that give me courage, Lord, to share? Would it give me courage to just move one step closer in friendship and just kind of move towards people in love? Because if we can extend that hope, if we can extend the hope that goes beyond this grave that we see so starkly here, then what a gift to be able to extend that to others.

**Felicity:** Love that, Sarah. Yes. Amen. Why don't I pray for us that we would have eyes to see?

**Sarah:** Yes, please.

**Felicity:** Heavenly Father, we praise you so much that you are the God of hope, you're the God of life, and that you give us this life under the sun, that it all comes back to you. And so Father, we pray that you would give us eyes to see what you have given us. We pray that you'd give us eyes to see the people before us, help us to love well and to share this hope and to just enjoy because we have what you have given us. Father, we pray that you'd clarify our sight, that we might honor you more and more or in this for your glory. Amen.

**Sarah:** Amen. Well, as we said, this is the beginning of his conclusion. But don't worry, we're not at the end yet. We've got some fairly confusing wisdom coming up next time, so be sure to tune in for that. In the meantime, we would love you to leave a rating and a review wherever you listen to your podcasts. It really does help to spread the word and it really encourages us as well. So we'd really, really appreciate you doing that. Thank you so much. For tuning in. We look forward to seeing you next Friday when we'll be in the second half of chapter nine all the way through to halfway through chapter eleven. See you then. See you then. Bye bye.

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