

## Season 9: Ecclesiastes

### Episode 2: Eternity Shapes the Rhythms of Life (1:1-11)

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**Felicity:** We're grateful to ten of those for sponsoring this season. And I've been reading this book, Little Pilgrim's Journey, and it's been a great hit with my whole family. We've been reading it in the evenings and my sons, who are six and seven, have then been requesting it over breakfast as well. They're loving the age old tale of pilgrim's progress that's been brilliantly adapted for kids and beautifully illustrated. Each chapter ends with a couple of helpful questions that guide conversation into gospel things and we're enjoying seeing how the story is full of Jesus and what it is to follow him. I'd highly recommend this set. Two books, beautiful and rich and very much worth your time. Grab your copies at [10ofthose.com](http://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're jumping in to Ecclesiastes, chapter one, verses one to eleven. It's wonderful to be here. Felicity, what's in your cup as we open our Bibles?

**Felicity:** Oh, I'm just going for the classic Yorkshire gray here. For any new listeners, this is my favorite. It's a mixture between Yorkshire tea and Earl Grey, actually, a cup of tea that I can only have when someone else is in the house, because I don't like to just waste two tea bags on one cup. So I make my husband, usually the other cup of Yorkshire tea, and then I have the Earl Grey and then you just add the Yorkshire tea tea bag into mine. It's kind of like a dipping in and out and dipping out. This delightful experience for me.

**Sarah:** With some milk.

**Felicity:** With milk, yes. No teapot, just tea bags. What are the details? A very pretty mug, actually. This is one of my favorites.

**Sarah:** Yeah. Good rim, that one, isn't it?

**Felicity:** Good rim.

**Sarah:** Nice and thin.

**Felicity:** I like a good thin rim.

**Sarah:** Yeah. Very good flisty. In our introduction last week, we were talking about the value of getting this book, Ecclesiastes, open with someone. Why? Why is it so valuable to do that? And particularly with this book of the Bible.

**Felicity:** I think last week we were talking about how this book really does deal with the reality of life and it presents quite a stark, quite a sobering kind of picture, which is very recognizable. And within that, then there are challenges just to what we do with life, like what we do as we seek to live out this life that God has given us. And if we are hearing those words with someone else, I think there's more opportunity for the Lord to minister to us. He ministers to us through His Word, but then also he will minister to you through that other person. And together you are being pastored together through the Word. And I think there is infinite value in that. When we're in this together, you and I, in Ecclesiastes, we have had different views and been able to speak truth in different ways to one another. And that has just been helpful to my heart and I think that is the huge value. Would you add anything to that?

**Sarah:** Yeah, spot on. It's life giving, isn't it? And I think you can kind of help to prod each other as well and to kind of just go a bit deeper on where it's applying in all of life because you're living life alongside one another and I think that's just gold dust, isn't it, really, for letting the Word go to work on our hearts? Well, let's get into it. As we say at the beginning of each season, we choose to pray before we press record. That's one of the decisions we make about how we spend our 20 minutes. So we have prayed already, but we just want to kind of say that because we're very aware that we need God to open our minds to understand these scriptures by His Holy Spirit, we cannot read His Word without depending on Him to be at work. So we have prayed to that end. And I'm now going to read from the

NIV. I'm going to read chapter one, verses one to eleven, the words of the teacher, son of David, King of Jerusalem. Meaningless. Meaningless, says the teacher. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north. Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full to the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear. It's full of hearing. What has been will be again. What has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, look, this is something new. It was here already, long ago, it was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

**Felicity:** Thank you, Sarah. What a beautiful start. Let me just say poetry in action. But Sarah, before we actually get into we want to dig into the text here. Can you just help us? I think there are two or three things that we need to just get our heads around before we dive in. Can you help us understand the important things?

**Sarah:** Well, let's start with the person who's writing it, the person who's kind of the author of this book. And it says they're a teacher, they're a Son of David and the King of Jerusalem. So this teacher, this preacher, he's obviously a leader whether it's actually the king or just someone kind of modeling themselves on king of Jerusalem. This is a believer writing to believers, exhorting them. And so that's just helpful. I think that this is written to a believing community gathering round to hear this word. It's a wise preacher king. So already we've got these flavors of Jesus somehow. We don't know how that's going to flesh out, but a wise preacher king is saying these things. The second thing to say is the word meaninglessness. In the NIV translation and in different translations, it's translated differently. It's translated as vapor or vanity. The word *hevel* used elsewhere in the Old Testament means breath or breeze, a kind of mist or a vapor. And I think as you go down to chapter two, verse eleven, or even chapter one, verse 14, we kind of see that description. It says meaningless are chasing after the wind. So that kind of just helps to explain the meaningless. So it's not that things actually have no purpose, but that they're insubstantial, like the steam on your cup of tea. Things are fleeting. They're like a breath. That's the depth of meaning that he's kind of coming across with the word meaninglessness.

**Felicity:** Yeah, that is really helpful because I think meaningless could suggest, oh, well, why are we even talking about it's totally meaningless. And it's not that, is it? Because the whole book is about that. So that would be that doesn't quite work. So it is insubstantial fleeting. Like, I heard someone talk about it as bubbles, like the bubbles that you can't quite catch, but you definitely see them, they're definitely there. You can't sort of keep a hold of them.

**Sarah:** Then the last thing is the kind of phrase under the sun. And I think from what we've been reading and what we kind of understand, it's this period of time now, living in life now everyone's experience under the sun. It's not that believers have a different experience of living in this world. We all have the same experience. Yeah. So we live under the sun today, glory, eternity tomorrow. Under the sun is our experience of life now, if that makes sense. Yeah.

**Felicity:** And I think that's really helpful in the sense that that is the same experience, that is the same reality, whether you're a believer or not a believer, because it's under the sun, isn't it? Like this life that we live.

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**Felicity:** Your perspective on that will be different according to what you think about God.

**Sarah:** But we still experience the same realities of brokenness and joys and everything in between as the book will kind of help us that's I think that's probably the kind of main things we want to kind of just headline with. Let's get into the poetry of this section, though. Felicity, what a start. Tell us what's filled your heart about reading this poetry at the beginning.

**Felicity:** What fills my heart about poetry?

**Sarah:** I mean, I know big question, keep it brief.

**Felicity:** But I think in terms of questions, I think so verse three is the kind of key question here. So what do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? That is the kind of overriding question. It's essentially the question of the book. But actually, here we have it, this is the question. What is the point of all this toil right here, right now? And I think verses four to eleven essentially answer the question. And the answer, if you were to summarize it, is nothing. What he's describing here, poetically, beautifully with poignancy, is that there is nothing new under the sun, that things come and things go. And that's true of the sea and the sun and the sand, and it's also true of humanity through life and death as well. So we see that verse five, you've got the sun rises and the sun sets and it hurries back to where it rises. Isn't that such a beautiful way of putting that? You've got the cycle of the sun and then as you go further down, it picks up on other cycles of a similar nature.

**Sarah:** I love the language. The language is cyclical as well, isn't it? And the way that he does it round and round the wind goes, the rivers return again. And I love that, the kind of human things where is it in verse eight and nine? The eyes, the ears, even speaking somewhere, it mirrors what happens in creation, doesn't it? If creation does this, if creation operates on these rhythms of life that come and go and go round again, why would we think that we do any different in that? Like, we're made as limited creatures with the same rhythms of life.

**Felicity:** And that is a really good thing to realize this cycle. That is true of creation, that is true of humanity, that is life. And that doesn't mean that it's all totally meaningless. That doesn't mean that there's no point to it. This is how it is. And I think a big part of this opening to the book is see how life is and there is nothing new under the sun. And that is not a kind of like, oh, throw it all in, that's it, it's all over it's actually. There's nothing new under the sun, so don't expect to break the cycle. Don't expect to be the one verse eleven who is remembered by former generations, because that is not how life works. And I think there's a sort of it's a bit of a kind of a jolt of reality, isn't it? But I think that is also just reassuring because it explains it. That's so true, isn't it? If you find a gravestone for someone 50 years ago, you can barely read the name and that's life. That's how it is.

**Sarah:** Yeah. It's very sobering, though, isn't it? That verse eleven kind of just like stops you in your tracks, doesn't it because I think you get to the kind of cycle of the cyclical nature of the poetry and you read it, and I really enjoyed reading it just then. And then suddenly it's like, well, full stop. Yeah, full stop death. And accepting death is his kind of first lesson in learning how to live. Like he starts in this way because this kind of almost kind of creates the tenor for the notes for what the book is going to be centered on, isn't it? That actually if you accept this, this humbling reality that we are just but a breath life goes around and comes around. Ashley yeah. That sets a perspective for listening to the rest of the wisdom in the book.

**Felicity:** Yes. And that is right. That is so right. That that is the starting point for how we then think about life as a whole. And just to bring it back to the fact that it is poetry, he didn't have to write it so beautifully. The fact that we have this basically a mini poem here captures the beauty of the fleeting life. So he could have just summarized it like you're going to die full stop.

**Sarah:** Yes.

**Felicity:** Exactly. But I think the fact that we have the beauty of the poetry suggests helps us to begin to see that there is going to be something in this life that is being described here. It's not just a full stop and it's over. There is more to it. It's not going to be breaking these cycles. You're not going to be remembered beyond this generation or whatever. But there is something more to what it is to live this life.

**Sarah:** Yeah, that's really helpful, I think. Yeah. As we kind of drive this to our hearts as well. I think there's something refreshing about kind of acknowledging the limits, acknowledging life's, repetitiveness acknowledging the cycles and the rhythms, because I think I am always very tempted to battle against that and pretend that life's not like that and try and do something out of the ordinary or try and just break through of those rhythms that I've got to clean again tomorrow. Yeah.

**Felicity:** What's the cleaning tip? That means I don't have to do it again.

**Sarah:** But that is just part of the rhythms of life, isn't it? And I think this is kind of a freeing thing to just kind of see myself in the bigger rhythm of life. That the circle of life, the cycle of

life. Why would I think I'm any different? Why would I think that our life will kind of not have those rhythms? And I think it's been a reminder of my limitation, but also my creatureliness. And that's a good thing, isn't it?

**Felicity:** I think that is exactly it in our created rather than the creator. And in that recognizing that we can then have a greater level of contentment, maybe satisfaction even.

**Sarah:** Oh, it feels like you're bringing in the spoilers or getting it too quick.

**Felicity:** Too quick?

**Sarah:** Yeah. I feel like you don't want to get there too quickly because I think what this does as an introduction, it makes you sit uncomfortably with the idea of death and eternity, doesn't it? And that life is going to your life will end and probably no one will remember you at some point like great, great great grandchildren down the line. And I think, yeah, I see it kind of you're wanting to go to the contentment level, but I think you just do need to sit in this and kind of, to use our phrase from last week, marinate in this and just pray through this, actually, Lord, am I content with this truth? Am I content with this reality? And can I let this kind of shape my heart this week?

**Felicity:** That's so true. I was speeding on ahead to sit here, be sobered by what we read here. I think you're right that allowing that to apply to our hearts, allowing that to, like, praying that in and saying, Lord, show me where I don't believe.

**Sarah:** This to be true. Yes. Whilst also acknowledging the fact that we are wanting to work out in this series how we're going to see Jesus and what does Gospel hope do to this wisdom? And we don't really know what to do with that right now.

**Felicity:** We're hoping to work it out as we talk.

**Sarah:** Is that fair? I think that's a fair picture. But we do have gospel hope. But again, I think sometimes you can skip to that too quickly almost without just sitting in the literature that is right in front of us. I don't know.

**Felicity:** No, I think that's right. Because the danger is you get there too quickly and you sort of flatten it out and then what's the point in reading all of this? There's something that's happening as we sit in this and hear what is being said right here, right now. And shall I pray that we would be able to do that?

**Sarah:** Please do. Yeah.

**Felicity:** Father, we thank you for this word that these are right words and true words and they're what we need to hear. And we pray that you'd give us soft hearts to them. Please, would you open our eyes to see lives, our life as it is described here. Help us to see where we're pretending that it's not like this. And we pray that you'd help us to grasp this reality and to trust that what you're saying is right. And we pray this in your name.

**Sarah:** Amen. Amen. Thank you, Felicity. What a joy. I am really excited and also quite daunted.

**Felicity:** It's good to be chatting about it. It's definitely wrestling, but chatting through wrestling? No. Wrestling through chatting. Something like that.

**Sarah:** Yes, something like that. On that note, in our show notes, you'll find a link to questions that you can chat through with someone else over a cup of tea. Do make the most of those. We hope they're helpful just to kind of further the conversation. We know it 20 minutes is just the starter of what we do in our episodes, so you'll find all the links to that in our show notes and on our website as well. And we look forward to catching you next time for the next part of chapter one and into chapter two. We'll see you then.

**Felicity:** See you then.

**Sarah:** Bye bye.

**Felicity:** This season is sponsored by Tenofose.com. You close.