
LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

LEADER DETAILS:

- **TEXT:** Ecclesiastes 12:1 (supporting texts: Ecc.1:12-15; 3:18-20; Gen. 1:26-27, 31; 2:7)
- **MAIN IDEA:** We can rejoice when we remember God is our Creator.
- **GROWTH FOCUS:** I want my group to talk more than me this week! (again)
- **ICEBREAKER:** Do you prefer snow on the ground or snow in a cone? And why.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: (Full details at: emergence.church/digital-bulletin)

- **Marriage Workshop** – February 14th – 8:30am-12:00pm. For those who you are married, dating, or single. OVERFLOW SEATS still available.
 - **The Why**
 - An awesome, God-honoring marriage doesn't just happen but is cultivated with intentional investment. The hope is that this workshop will be a meaningful investment into current, and potential future, marriages.
- **Family Dedication** - February 19 and 22 in both Ringwood and Totowa.
 - **The Why**
 - The hope is that by publicly declaring their intent to raise their kids to love Jesus, parents/caretakers will be encouraged to hold to that commitment in the highs and lows of parenting.
 - A great opportunity for those families to invite family and friends to service, in the hopes they will hear and respond to the Gospel.
- **Student Ministry's Winter Retreat** - February 20–22. High Point Bible Camp – Pennsylvania
 - **The Why**
 - Every year, God works profoundly in the lives of students - in connecting with leaders, forming deep friendships with students, deepening their faith, and coming to faith – you don't want to miss it!
- **200 Club** – For those who are willing and able to **park 200 steps away on Sundays in Totowa**
 - **The Why**
 - Allow easier parking for visitors and those who struggle walking long distances.
 - A great way to serve, and to get some extra steps while you're at it.

GETTING STARTED:

- **Pray:** This helps get people's minds and hearts ready to head towards discussing God's Word.
- **Watch Community Extras Video** (length 4:16 - questions on the video are included below)

LAST WEEK'S GROWTH STEP FOLLOW-UP:

[Leaders: The hope is that these weekly actions steps, with checking back in, strikes the balance of some accountability on one end, but also people feeling embraced for wherever they are at in their journey of faith. So, this is a casual “hey for those of you who were able to apply these this past week, how did that go? Anything you’d like to share? If not no worries.” As opposed to “let’s all go around and share how we did at the growth steps” :)]

Last week's growth steps:

Outward Action: Try “casting” your faith one time this week.

Inward Prayer: For God to reveal and help you overcome obstacles in your heart and mind when it comes to sharing your faith with others.

SERMON DISCUSSION: (prioritize good discussion over answering every question!)

Series Intro: Ecclesiastes

For the next 5 weeks we will be in the book of Ecclesiastes. Ryan pointed out that to understand and apply God’s word correctly is to know what type (or genre) of literature it is. For example, we would read poetry, different than narrative, or prophecy, etc. The genre of Ecclesiastes is **Pessimistic Speculative Wisdom** literature.

Pessimistic – the author sees everything in an overly negative light (very North Jersey)

Speculative – The author is seeking out what is true – sometimes he gets it, sometimes he misses

Wisdom – There is wisdom to gain for the reader in the journey of the author, and in some of his conclusions along the way.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-15



How does knowing the genre of this book affect how we engage with this book?

Two important themes throughout the book are in the verses we just read. One of them is “vanity”, meaning meaningless, like a vapor, or absurdity. The other is “under Heaven” (or “under the sun”). One of the main points the author makes is that if all that exists is reality “under the sun”, then everything - no matter how good - is ultimately meaningless.



Do you agree that life “under the sun” is ultimately meaningless? Why or why not?

Reason to Rejoice: Created in the Image of our Creator

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1

Christians can find meaning and joy even in the hardest moments in life, because we know God our Creator, who exists “beyond the sun”. We see more reason to rejoice when we see how God created us.

Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:7

As Pastor Ryan pointed out, humanity is unique compared to the rest of creation because

- we were made in God's Image
- we weren't just spoken into existence but formed and fashioned by God's hands and filled with His breath. Psalm 139 says that God “knit us together” in the womb.

♡ How do those truths personally encourage you right now?

♡ How do those truths challenge how you currently view yourself or others?

A Tale of Two Errors

[leaders: This section will most likely bring up some hot-button cultural issues, which are important to work through. We want to encourage a tone that stands on the truths of God's Word, but with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). We want to be like Jesus, who walked in grace and truth. Depending on your group, you may need to encourage courage in sharing the truth or remind people that the lost (pejoratively “those people”) need Jesus as much as we did and still do.]

Ryan mentioned things go wrong when we either have too high or too low a view of humanity.

Too high a view: We put ourselves in the place of God to decide what's right and how we define ourselves (our gender, sexuality, morals, values, etc.).

[Leaders: People might have loved ones going through some challenges, and this next question may allow them to share and get support from the group]

♡ There are lots of examples in our culture, but where have you seen the negative effects of this in the lives of those around you?

♡ What is an area of my life where I find myself struggling to submit to God as creator?

Too low a view: We see ourselves or our fellow humans as nothing special, leading to devaluing of human life. (Ryan gave examples of Racism, Abortion, not equally valuing the foreigner, the orphan, the widow, those with special needs, etc.).

♡ We can point to a million examples out in the world, but where does what we say we believe about the value of every human life measure against our thoughts and lived actions?

Finding Freedom in Surrender

Pastor Ryan talked about how the areas in our lives that are most in pain are the areas where we refuse to trust God's design, while the areas where we surrender are where we experience freedom and rejoicing. When we refuse to surrender, we are like an eagle trying to swim, instead of gliding in the air like God intended.

[Leaders: If pressed for time, pick one that you feel best fits your group]

♡ Where have you surrendered to God, and what impact has that had on your life?

♡ God designed us and put boundary markers in good and pleasant places (Ps. 16:6) for our flourishing. Where is one area where you want to say, "God says no to this, and I'm going to trust it's actually for my good"? What would a small step of surrender look like this week in that area?

Closing note: The power to surrender starts with surrendering our lives to Jesus, the one who came from "beyond the sun" to reconcile us to our creator, to make straight what is crooked because of sin (Ecc. 1:15). And that surrender continues every day, as we yield more of our will to his, resulting in increasing rejoicing as we follow his perfect plan and design for us.

GROWTH STEP THIS WEEK

Outward Action: Show one act of kindness in Jesus' name to a fellow image-bearer of God, particularly to someone you naturally tend to not value the way God would want us to.

Inward Prayer: "God, help me remember you are my Creator when I'm tempted to _____ (fill in the blank).

PRAYER TIME

Remind the group about committing to praying for one person they want to see come to faith this year and pray for that.

Pray that we see God rightly as God, and ourselves as God intends us to.

Pray for courage to love people enough to speak truth even when it's unpopular, and grace and patience for those who are lost and deceived.